

TAKE THE LIMITS OFF

LET GOD HAVE HIS WAY

MODUPE KUMAPAYI

Take the Limits Off

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To my mother Fadekemi let me say, Thanks, mum, for submitting to God’s revealed will for my life and giving me endless support. I don’t want to imagine how my story would have been if you hadn’t. You continue to be a sterling example for me in the matters of faith. I can only pray that I become a woman of faith too.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to **Tiara Oluwa**, a very special little boy who reminds me so much of myself and is destined for greatness. Also to every child out there I dedicate this book; you're all special in your own way and destined to do great things too!

CONTENTS

The Day the Journey Started

6

Break Free and Fly High

9

1. Abraham and Isaac

10

2. Jochebed and Moses

21

3. Jephthah and His Daughter

27

4. Manoah, His Wife and Samson

34

5. Hannah and Samuel

39

6. Mordecai and Hadassah (Esther)

47

7. Zacharias, Elizabeth and John

57

8. Joseph, Mary and Jesus

66

9. Zebedee, Salome and their sons
James and John

74

10. Mary and John Mark

80

11. Eunice and Timothy

86

12. Fadekemi and Modupe

90

The Road Ahead

95

THE DAY THE JOURNEY STARTED

THE idea for this book dropped in my spirit 25 March 2023, but I didn't actually sit to write anything on my laptop until the morning of 27 May 2024. I knew it was Children's Day but didn't connect it with the title nor the theme of this book until I had begun to write on my laptop. You should have seen the look on my face when I finally made the connection! It was hilarious. What do you think? Was it a coincidence that I began writing this book about children on Children's Day? I don't believe in coincidences. What, or rather, Who I believe in is a very intentional and very detailed God. What did David say about Him again, he said: *"You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your book!"* (Psalm 139:16, TLB).

God knew!

I was only just figuring it out.

He already planned it that I would write this book on this day for His good pleasure, to guide parents and for the good of children all over the world.

After the excitement from discovering all of that subsided, self-doubt took over. I asked the Lord, "Why would You even ask me to write this book? I am not a parent yet; who would read this and pay heed to the guidance and recommendations that You would be leading me to share?"

In case you think I received an answer from the Lord, you're right, that is if you consider silence an answer. No assuring or encouraging words followed; instead what followed was light

shed on the general theme of the book. I knew God wasn't in the mood to coddle me. And just like that I set fear aside, embraced courage and got busy!

I know the title of this book can paint a false image in the mind of the reader, one where children are in confinement and the book provides guidance on a way to escape that confinement. But that's a pretty extreme picture! I'd provide the accurate image. Taking the limits off and releasing children means removing restrictions or obligations and pressure from children/wards so that they can become available and prioritize other activity; by this I mean God's original purpose for their lives. Are you intrigued yet?

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I am talented in... but my parents made me do...." Or, "I could have been... but my parents had... expectations of me." Here's another one: "I missed my calling in.... My parents didn't say anything; they didn't have to, I just didn't do what I felt led to because I couldn't let them lose face amongst their peers."

If you haven't heard all three sob stories, at least you've heard one of them or one that's closely linked to them. These sob stories are usually one told by adults who talk about their lives in hindsight. And one thing all these sob stories have in common is regret traceable to actions or inaction of parents. And every day the number of adults sentenced to living in regret increases. But your children don't have to join the number.

A wise person once said, sometimes breaking the generational curse can be as simple as doing things differently (better) than those before you. Did you ever think of that? Another wise person said, there are two ways God delivers people, ether through prayer or through knowledge! I like that one especially. Combined together, these wise sayings reveal

what I hope God does with this book in your hand! Break generational curses by revealing information that'll prompt and guide you to do things differently with your children/wards.

Without further ado, let's get into it! We'll be exploring some Bible characters and learn from them a thing or two about releasing children! Please keep your minds open! But first, read Hebrews 6:12,

*"Then, knowing what lies ahead for you, you won't become bored with being a Christian nor become spiritually dull and indifferent, but you will be anxious to **follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their strong faith and patience**" (TLB).*

Let's see some of ***"those who receive all that God has promised them...."*** The list makes up the various sections/chapters in this book.



Break Free and Fly High



1

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC



THERE are different reasons people become parents, some “accidentally” became parents. I use the word ‘accidentally’ not because any child is a mistake but because the parents weren’t married and prepared for such responsibilities, yet the “mantle” fell on them due to their poor choices. Others became parents because it was something they thought should come after being married, so they planned for it and worked towards it, and thankfully God obliged them. Then there are those who became parents or guardians because they adopted or chose to be parental figures in someone else’s child’s life. This was the case with Abraham, formerly called Abram.

Though Abraham was married, he and his wife Sarah (formerly called Sarai) were childless. However Abraham had a brother called Haran who had died young, leaving behind his children, one of whom was called Lot. Abraham and Lot had a relationship that Nahor (Abraham's other brother) and Lot didn't have (See Genesis 11:26-32). Their relationship from my view was special and was somewhat symbiotic. While it lasted, Lot may have filled the childless void that Abraham had; and Abraham in turn filled the void of the father Lot had lost. That was a fine arrangement, but it would only be temporary.

One day God speaks to Abraham. He gives him instructions, but the conversation doesn't end without God giving him a promise of a reward, one that hints at a long time desire of his, to be a father (See Genesis 12:1-3). By this time, Abraham had been married and childless for a while and was seventy-five years old, and Lot would soon be leaving him, because issues will arise between his uncle's herdsmen and his, and separation will be inevitable (See Genesis 13:1-13).

Perhaps I'm moving on too fast, because before Lot leaves, God does show up again, telling Abraham about gifting a land to his descendants (again, hints at him being a father – see Genesis 12:7); and after Lot leaves, God shows up again, telling Abraham about gifts for his descendants, again hinting that Abraham will become a father! (See Genesis 13:15-18) Is it just me or do you also

see how God shows up severally at perfect timing? He knew Abraham and Lot would part and He was on ground, ready to give Abraham something to look forward to, a promise that'll ease the pain of losing Lot before the separation happened, and after the separation happened.

Lot leaves but ends up a casualty of war; after a rescue mission spear-headed by his uncle, Abraham, they reunite, but again, this is also short-lived (see Genesis 14). One day while Abraham is learning to cope with the absence of his nephew after their recent separation, God shows up again, this time in a vision, promising great blessings upon Abraham. This time though, Abraham is not in a receptive mood; his concern is not having a child of his own, specifically a son! What's the point of having great blessings/wealth without having a child/a son to pass it on to? Abraham made his case with God, who makes a promise to Abraham that he will indeed have a son of his own who will inherit everything he owns. For this promise, see Genesis 15:1-17.

But it was Abraham God spoke to and reassured, not his wife Sarah. Abraham failed to share his encounter with Sarah, or perhaps he did and she was not in the least bit reassured; maybe she was initially but after a while got tired of waiting for the miracle to happen, so she decided to take matters into her own hands, to marry off her handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham to bear him a child. Her thinking must have been that a child by her servant

ultimately belonged to her. That decision was not just rash, it cost Sarah so much emotional pain afterwards.

Giving her maid to Abraham as a second wife so the couple could have a child in the family ended up backfiring on Sarah. Hagar did become pregnant, revealing to the world that all along it was Sarah that had struggles with infertility, not her husband. But it doesn't even end there; the maid seeing that she could do something her mistress couldn't, suddenly became saucy, impudent and rude. She became proud and arrogant towards Sarah. If a happy wife equals a happy life then an unhappy wife means what? You guessed right: the homefront turns into a mess! So it became for Sarah. Of course she was bemused and pissed. She took harsh actions against the pregnant Hagar, forcing her to run away. After some divine intervention, Hagar humbled herself under her mistress, and the tension between Sarah and Hagar died down, allowing Abraham to finally welcome a son at age eighty-six. He named the child Ishmael as instructed by the angel of the Lord (See Genesis 16).

If Abraham thought the son whom God had promised him was Ishmael, he was wrong because thirteen years after Ishmael was born, God speaks to Abraham again. This time He opens with telling Abraham to obey Him and live as he should. It was a hint that the silence of God all those thirteen years was because God was displeased with the move Sarah and Abraham made in taking matters into their own hands? I believe so.

After the instruction that seemed more like a reprimand, God talks to Abraham about His pledge and covenant with Abraham, which includes the promise of a child through Sarah. He reaffirms that Sarah will become a mother and give Abraham a son. Hearing this Abraham appears to worship God but was laughing in disbelief inside him at the ridiculousness of it all! Yes, Abraham laughed first! He even tried to correct God, like God had made a mistake by mentioning Ishmael to him. But God makes it very clear: Isaac would be born and with him and his descendants God will have a covenant forever (See Genesis 17).

Abraham would hear those words from God one more time; Sarah too would hear it because in the very next chapter – Chapter eighteen – Abraham and Sarah have three very distinct visitors who tell them to expect a son together! Indeed so it came to pass the very next year; by then Abraham would be a hundred years old and Sarah ninety! This time Abraham doesn't laugh, perhaps because this is his second time hearing this and was contemplating God as serious about what He had said. But Sarah laughs! (It's her first time hearing it, and let's be honest it was really physically impossible.) She also tells a lie to cover it up. Anyway, their seemingly impossible and ridiculous miracle does end up happening, just as God had said! (See Genesis 21:1-6.) Yet, before that happens, and though he had just heard good news concerning a son that he'll soon welcome with his wife, upon hearing that Lot might be in

danger one more time, we see Abraham negotiating with God, hoping to help preserve his nephew and his family.

While Lot's family would miss a family member, it seemed Abraham's was finally complete with the birth of Isaac. But before Abraham could dare to dream of a united homefront and a chance to raise both of his sons side by side, something goes wrong. Sarah noticed something, took offence and insisted Abraham took a drastic action to appease her. It seemed unfair but surprisingly when God intervenes, He seems to support Sarah! (See Genesis 21:8-13.) But was He really? The way I see it, God seems more to be brokering peace and setting the stage for His purpose in the life of Ishmael and Isaac.

Verses 12-13 read, *"But God told Abraham, "Don't be upset over the boy or your slave-girl wife; do as Sarah says, for Isaac is the son through whom my promise will be fulfilled. And I will make a nation of the descendants of the slave girl's son, too, because he also is yours"* (TLB). God had revealed His purpose for Isaac's life but had only made a promise concerning Ishmael, though unknown to Abraham, this had already been revealed to Hagar, Ishmael's mother; and it seemed the training ground for this life's purpose of his would be carried out outside his father's house (To learn about Ishmael's purpose, read Genesis 16:9-12; 21:20-21.) Abraham seemed content in knowing there was a promise concerning his first born son, and does as the Lord instructed (See Genesis 21:14). Little does he know that

that's just training for him in the test that was about to present itself to him.

With Hagar and Ishmael out of the way, Sarah and Isaac have Abraham's undivided attention, and Isaac, all of his father's love; not forgetting his father's hopes now rested solely on him. There would be many spoken and unspoken expectations of Isaac. Being an "only" child has its perks but also its downside. I'm sure Isaac at an early age would have known all about what I'm talking about.

Life had returned to normal, but God, taking no permission from Abraham decides to step in and disrupt everything! On one day that seemed like every other day, only it wasn't, God shows up with an absurd instruction, He tells Abraham,

"Take with you your only son-yes, Isaac, whom you love so much-and go to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will point out to you!" (Genesis 22:2, TLB)

From the words God spoke, not only was it all an absurd instruction, it seemed God had already answered some of the questions Abraham had. Yes, God knew Isaac was his only son (Ishmael was gone), and he had pinned all his hopes and expectations on the boy. Yes, God knew Abraham loved Isaac a lot, so He wasn't trying to make this easy for Abraham at all. Again, yes, God was asking

Abraham to release his son to Him to fulfil a different purpose than the one originally revealed, and even though it will mean harm will come upon the boy. Abraham was in a tight spot.

‘What rotten destiny I have,’ I imagine Abraham must have thought! First, Lot had left, then Ishmael had left too, and now it seemed Isaac was destined to leave too. Not only will he never get to be the father he so desperately wanted to be, but now his biggest fear might end up coming true! (See Genesis 15:2-3). Or, maybe I’m projecting; and Abraham doesn’t even think this way at all. But if he was human, he had to have thought this way, letting go of whom, not even what you love is never easy; yet God doesn’t shy away from making such demands of us. Parents are not excluded. Yet this demand, as Abraham will show us, is not an impossible one to meet!

Early morning the next day after God had made His demand, Abraham got up, made preparations and started off to the place God told him to go, obviously divulging nothing to Sarah but giving her a reason to embark on the trip, something Sarah was perhaps not new to. I find it hard to believe he does this by his own strength, instead I see God supplying grace for what He had called Abraham to do. By making up his mind to obey, Abraham gets access to the grace that’s been made available for such a task as this. The journey to the place of sacrifice took three days; those three days were more than enough time for Abraham to change his mind. But if there’s an internal

dialogue as there usually is between the flesh and the spirit when God doles out an instruction, we see that Abraham's spirit does win over the flesh. Truly grace was sufficient for him.

Abraham gets to the place of sacrifice in one piece and tells his servants to wait behind; this is necessary, because, if they caught wind of what he was about, they might hinder Abraham from carrying out God's revealed will, or do a quick dash home to tell Sarah her long awaited son was about to be sacrificed. And, if I guess right, Sarah, despite her age, is sure to cover the distance in a sprint to claim her son, no matter Abraham's confessions of faith in God for another son. So in order to hide it from those servants, Abraham tells them to stay back, declaring by faith that he and Isaac will return. He seems certain God would raise Isaac back to life, who knows what was going on in his mind?

And as if the internal dialogues and struggles over the flesh wasn't enough, Isaac starts to ask questions! Abraham deals with Isaac's questions in faith, and doing a great job at it as Isaac believed him, but only for a short while because everything that happens next would have distorted whatever positive image Isaac had of his father.

One minute his father was reassuring him of God's provision; the next, his father was tying him up, laying him on the altar over the wood: he was going to be the sacrifice! Isn't it instructive that Isaac does not exercise his youthful energy to fight off his aged father at this point?

Who remains docile in the face of sudden death! What made Isaac stay calm through it all?

What happens when God asks a father to give up his son, his only son to do His revealed will? Two things happen if all goes well: one, the father's faith comes into full maturity as he obeys; two, the son's faith officially begins. That's when he stops to see his earthly father as his all in all, and makes room for God who is, in the true sense, his first Father, One who is deserving of his devotion and the topmost priority in his life.

And that's what happened that day! Abraham's faith came into maturity as he had passed the test of faith and obedience to God! And when God delivered Isaac from being killed at his father's hand (for that is how it would have seemed), his positive view of God must have changed drastically, as God stops being just the God of his father to him, but now his own God, the One who showed him mercy and showed up in the nick of time to deliver him and even provided a substitute for him! Read Isaac's deliverance in Genesis 22:10-13. Even though we know, God had no intention of truly letting Abraham murder his son. The experience for sure changed both father and son. I'm not even going to try to imagine the conversation that ensued on their way back home. Did Sarah even ever find out? Who knows!

While all of that seems important, the most important thing must be that Abraham and Isaac emerged from the episode different persons, and all for their own good.

Abraham's faith and obedience was now perfected. Parents learn too that God does ask parents to release their children to His will, and that it's possible to obey such instructions. Isaac on his part was young and might not have understood what God's purpose for his life was yet, but now that he had been introduced to God, he becomes better disposed to doing God's will as the first singular important thing required in fulfilling his divine destiny – to be the ancestor of a people God had chosen for Himself: the Israelites.

God's plan worked. He became known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Isaac was not only introduced to God, though his father dies, his own faith doesn't die with him, Isaac had a relationship with God and fulfilled his divine destiny. Through Isaac and his descendants God's promise to his father, Abraham, was fulfilled. To read more about Isaac, read Genesis chapters 24-28 and 35:27-29.

2

JOCHEBED AND MOSES



WHEN baby Moses was born, his mother noticed something about him; it was that he was an unusually beautiful boy. But that was what she could see. What was hid from her eyes was that her unusually beautiful baby boy also had quite an unusual destiny; but all of that would only be made known many years later. Meanwhile a lot was going wrong around the Hebrews his kinsmen at the time he was born. His family, in fact the entire tribe, was in Egypt. His father, Amram, and mother, Jochebed, were of the tribe of Levi (See Exodus 2:1). The tribe of Levi, along with the other eleven tribes: Reuben, Simeon, Judah... were descendants of Jacob, the second son of Isaac; all twelve tribes had moved to Egypt with their

father Jacob to be with Joseph who had become governor in Egypt.

After the days of Joseph, and down the succeeding decades and centuries, the Hebrews had grown to be an unweilding multitude to the Egyptians who now hated and subjected them to hard bondage. By cruelty, the king of Egypt or Pharaoh felt no obligations to the descendants of Jacob or Israelites in general. It didn't matter that the Israeli's were living in his land; their rising population bothered him, and his worries weren't somewhat put to rest until he came up with an evil plan, to cruelly diminish the strength of the Hebrews by eliminating their male children at birth. He projected his fears unto his people and convinced them that the Hebrews were better off as slaves, lest they pose a threat to the nation.

His people listened to him and the freedom the children of Israel once enjoyed was taken from them. *"The Egyptians made slaves of them and put brutal taskmasters over them to wear them down under heavy burdens while building the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king"* (Exodus 1:11, TLB). But that wasn't all; while the Egyptians were busy making the Hebrews' slavery more bitter, their king, was no longer just insecure, paranoia was now in the mix, and in order to make himself feel less threatened he wanted all the Hebrew baby boys killed as soon as they were born. This was the instruction he gave to the Hebrew midwives. Thankfully they feared God and didn't obey the king; they let the boys live, not just the

girls. When the king discovered the midwives weren't dancing to his tune, he commanded his people to throw new born Hebrew boys into the Nile river (Read Exodus 1).

The midwives, Shiprah and Puah, had played a huge role in giving baby Moses a chance at life, and his mother had taken it a step further by hiding him in their home for three months. Whatever her reasons were, this was a very courageous thing she did. But she could only hide him for so long before she was found out. The king's decree still stands, and now she realizes she's come to the end of her rope and must exercise her faith by literally letting go of her unusual child so that God could protect him in ways she couldn't anymore. And she does just that. *"She made a little boat from papyrus reeds, waterproofed it with tar, put the baby in it, and laid it among the reeds along the river's edge. The baby's sister watched from a distance to see what would happen to him"* (Exodus 2:3-4, TLB).

What then happened to the child? God honoured Jochebed's faith and in a scene that looked like something that could only happen in a movie, God preserved the little boy's life. Who would have thought that the king's daughter would go to bathe in the river at that time? And that she would see the little boat and be so curious about it that she would ask for it to be brought to her? Or that she would open it, see a baby crying and there would be room for the baby in her heart? Then, even though it was clear to her the origins of the child, she yet takes interest

in caring for the child so much that she employs the services of a young Hebrew girl who unknown to her is the baby's sister so she could get a wet nurse for the baby, and paid the wet nurse, who happens to be the child's biological mother. It's just altogether amazing! (Read Exodus 2:5-9.)

However the reunion between mother and child would have been bitter sweet. Bitter because she knew that their time together would be short; at a set time not very far away, she would have to give him up, not temporarily but permanently. It is a sweet reunion too because she knew that at least he would get a chance to live without fear of being killed. Knowing that her time with the child was short, Jochebed would have savored every second spent with her little one. And as the day she would turn him over to his new mother drew closer, only her knows all the feelings she felt, the number of times she cried, and perhaps all the escape plans she might have tried to come up with, just so she wouldn't have to part with him. Yet, despite the bond she had with her son and all the love she had in her heart for him, and perhaps her hatred for the seemingly unfortunate time he was born where the circumstances forced them to be apart, when the time came for her to meet with Pharaoh's daughter again, God gave her the strength required to release her son and give him a chance to live. Thankfully Pharaoh's daughter had not changed her mind about wanting the baby!

As can be expected of most mothers, instead of just strength to release the child, she must have preferred that God gave her a chance to live with her son. But God does sometimes overrule our desires in order to provide what is needed instead of what we want. It's hard but it's always for the best. The little baby blessed with divine beauty and an unusual destiny needed a different parental figure in order to live; and the new family he would live with, coupled with the resources that would be made available to him, were necessary prerequisite for his destiny (See Acts 7:20-22). Of course Jochebed would know this when the full picture emerges many years later, assuming she lived that long to see it; but in that initial moment, she would have been too blinded by grief to see that larger picture.

She probably went home thinking about her loss, for her hands which had cradled a baby were now empty, even the name she had given her baby – a name only God and her family knew – was now no longer recognized; her baby boy now has a new mother and a new name; he also has a new life, and she isn't going to be a part of it (Read Exodus 2:10). Yes, Jochebed must have thought she had suffered a loss; but was it truly a loss? Not every loss is a loss; some are gains! In fact, in her case, it was a gain in disguise. She was able to preserve her son's life (through God's intervention), and the baby boy got a chance to fulfil his divine destiny, which was to become God's secret weapon against Egypt and Pharaoh; this too would be a gain for all Israel in the future.

I know on the surface the Jochebed-Moses-Pharaoh's daughter story serves as a beautiful message to encourage releasing children for adoption. But that's not all. It also passes another special message: the one I'm hoping to pass across. Their story opens our eyes to the limitations many parents have concerning their children as it relates to their future, not only about them surviving, but thriving in their destiny. It also reveals a need for parents to be willing to share their roles/authority over their children with certain individuals God will send into the lives of their children in order to help them fulfil their God-given destiny. And not forgetting the inevitable act of releasing their children to receive the advice and guidance of other mentors. I used 'mentors' for lack of a better word.

You see, sometimes the bravest thing you can do as a parent is to acknowledge your limitations, especially concerning your children; and the best role you can play in the preservation, revealing and fulfillment of your children's destiny is to release them to those who can do more for them than you are able to do. Sometimes "those people" is God, sometimes it's another human being God sends who is willing and able to do more for the child than you can.

Did Moses become who God destined he would be? For sure he did! And, first, thanks to his mother for being so brave and full of faith! (Read Exodus 3-15. Also, note that the first five books of the Bible are authored by Moses.)

3

JEPHTHAH AND HIS DAUGHTER



IF there was one pain Jephthah was familiar with, it was the pain of rejection. Even though it was his father that had decided to lay with a prostitute, he was the one that paid for that error in judgment. His brothers who were legitimate sons of their father never accepted him, and how could they? It would be like betrayal to their mother, the legal wife who their father had stepped out on; and as if that wasn't enough, they made sure to drive him out of the country too! And should he dare ask of his inheritance on his way out, his half brothers reminded him he was the son of a whore, and not entitled to anything that belonged to their father (Read Judges 11:1-2). Jephthah knew all too well how a father's wrong decision could alter the life of his child, and I can imagine him making a mental note to become a better father than his father was.

Though the Scripture on him opens with Jephthah as a great warrior from Gilead, he didn't become one

overnight. After being driven out of the country with no inheritance (no thanks to his begrudging half-brothers), Jephthah found someplace else to live, the place was called the land of Tob. And as a way of sustaining himself, he became a bandit. He however didn't do this alone, even if he probably started alone; soon he found himself attracting a certain group of people the Scripture describes as "malcontents". He was the leader and they were willing followers (Read Judges 11:3). Together they were a band of malcontents. It wasn't quite like the family Jephthah had longed to fit into; but his family had rejected him, and these collaborators in banditry had accepted him. What was he to do? Jephthah chose to make do with what was available rather than do without.

But it seemed God was determined to make someone honourable out of Jephthah (and his men) even though He chose to do so working quietly behind the scene.

A short time after Jephthah's band was formed and was in operation, some things happened and in quick succession too. The Ammonites began to war with Israel, and suddenly the leaders of Gilead were seeking Jephthah out! News about him now being a brave and experienced fighter with his own men had no doubt reached them. They sought him out begging him to come and lead their army against the Ammonites! (See Judges 11:4-6.) Though Jephthah must have felt good on the inside at the thought of being needed, he wasn't about to let it show. So, he responded the way anyone who had been treated the way he was would. He said to them:

“Why do you come to me when you hate me and have driven me out of my father’s house? Why come now when you’re in trouble?” (Judges 11:7, TLB)

Judging by Jephthah’s response, it’s either his half-brothers were part of the leaders of Gilead or they had at the time employed the help of the leaders of Gilead in running him out of the country; whichever was the case, they were humble now. After Jephthah’s words to them, they affirmed the obvious, that they needed him; they even presented to him two amazing offers, either of which if accepted would help him become whom his half-brothers and even inhabitants of the country could respect. After making sure they were not trying to bait him in and then use and dump him, Jephthah accepted both offers! And just like that, Jephthah went from being rejected by his half-brothers to becoming accepted by the leaders of Gilead, from being chased out of the country to being begged to return, from leaving with no inheritance to becoming king; and from being a bandit to becoming commander-in-chief! (See verses 8-11a.)

But Jephthah had been sought out for a reason. After all the formalities had been completed, he got to work dealing with the issues that arose with the Ammonites. Though a warrior, Jephthah doesn’t rush into anything; he starts out by sending messages to the king of Ammon, with the aim of finding out why Israel had been attacked. The reply he got shed light on the matter and also revealed

the king of Ammon's demand. Jephthah, still surprisingly, doesn't launch a counter attack yet; instead he takes the pain of explaining to the king of Ammon why he couldn't make such demands, and why his demands wouldn't be honoured, but the Scriptures record that the king of Ammon paid no attention to Jephthah's message (See verses 12-28).

Jephthah had tried a peaceful approach but it seemed a war was unavoidable. But just before Jephthah would lead his army to attack the army of Ammon, two things happened. First, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah to prompt and empower him to ride out to war; the second thing is captured in verses 30-31. *"Meanwhile Jephthah had vowed to the Lord that if God would help Israel conquer the Ammonites, then when he returned home in peace, the first person coming out of his house to meet him would be sacrificed as a burnt offering to the Lord!"* (TLB).

In case you're not familiar with the story and you're wondering what happened after Jephthah led his army against the Ammonites, you can read all about it in verses 32-33. In a shocking turn of events, when Jephthah returned home, his daughter – his only child – ran out to meet him, playing on a tambourine and dancing for joy. As expected when he saw her, he tore his clothes in anguish!

"Alas, my daughter!" he cried out. "You have brought me to the dust. For I have made a vow to the Lord and I cannot take it back" (Verse 35b).

Family was what Jephthah must have wanted most! If he didn't fit in with the family he was born, surely he could make a family of his own, so he must have thought. And though I imagine him wanting quite a number of children, especially sons, God had given him just one child, and a female too. Still he loved her and was thankful for her. He only needed to tweak his dream a little, and through her he could get a son-in-law and grandchildren! If God willed, there might even be boys amongst his grandchildren! But right that moment his dream was evaporating before his eyes! And just like that he had become somewhat like his father, a villain in his child's story! What he desired was out of his reach; what he feared the most had come upon him. And it was because of something he had said in the heat of the moment, a word he couldn't take back!

Again, though Jephthah was the one who took the action when he uttered his pledge to God, it seemed it was his daughter that would really pay for her father's "error in judgment". She was either going to be a burnt offering or never become married, remaining so in the service of the Lord all her life. Yet upon hearing what her father had done, she responds courageously. She encourages him to do as he had promised the Lord, since God had done His part by giving him great victory. She asks for some time to "roam" and weep for her dreams of being a married woman that would never be realized. Of course her father

agrees, and her courageous act of submitting to her new destiny was recognized by the people, especially young girls who commemorated it yearly (See verses 36-40).

Though Bible scholars are divided on whether Jephthah's daughter was offered as burnt offering or consecrated to perpetual virginity, I believe that it was the latter rather than the former. Our God wouldn't have allowed her to be a burnt offering let alone delighted in such a sacrifice, just as He didn't Abraham sacrificing Isaac on mount Moriah. (Read His laws on such matters in Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31-32; 18:10-12).

At the end of the story we are left with Jephthah whose family line would end with his daughter, his family destitute of any heir and a young lady whose dreams concerning her life had been exchanged for another one, one she didn't bargain for, yet was willing to accept. On the surface the story looks to have ended sadly, but was it really sad?

Jephthah's vow turned out in my opinion to be the most rewarding of all his decisions. I know I must have raised some eyebrows now. But let me explain. If Jephthah had not made the vow, sure his daughter would have gone ahead to get married and have children, and Jephthah's family line would have continued, and then what? It's the predictable life going forward, that might have been all that she'd be able to do. What Jephthah's vow and fulfilment did was do more for his daughter. Sure she wouldn't get married and have children of her own, but

being dedicated to God the way she was by her father, and her submitting to it gave her the chance of being an example of total submission and commitment to the worship and service of God, not only in her time but even till date! I can't read about her and not admire her! And I'm sure I'm not the only one who admires her and is inspired by her. Imagine not having full understanding of what had transpired between your father and God, and yet agreeing to the terms and sticking by it. Such courage deserves admiration and emulation!

I'm not sure there are parents out there like Jephthah who "mistakenly" dedicate their child(ren) to God; but I do know that there are parents who, like Jephthah, would continue to be faced with the choice of releasing their children and foregoing the dreams they've built around them. Why? It's because their children are destined to be dedicated to the service of God. And if you're that parent, go ahead and release your child(ren). One thing you can be sure of is that it will be for greater good! To read more about Jephthah, read Judges 12:1-7 and Hebrews 11:32-34).

4

MANOAH, HIS WIFE AND SAMSON



THE child Samson was living proof of God's mercy; and I'll tell you why. For the nation Israel, he was to serve as a judge and deliverer. And for his parents, he would bring an end to their prolonged childlessness. But that's me spilling the end from the beginning. Let's go back to the very beginning, shall we?

When the Scriptures open on Samson's story, we are told the nation of Israel had sinned. They were worshipping other gods, and God had decided to let them face the consequences of their action. He chose to discipline them by allowing them be conquered by the Philistines, who kept them in subjection for forty years. But God being both a just God and a compassionate Father couldn't turn away from the people completely; so He decided it was time to rescue His people from their oppressors. And there was one person He was going to send into the world for this sole purpose. That would be Samson. As the time

drew near for God's plan to unfold, He sends an Angel to a certain woman to deliver a very special message (Judges 13:1-2).

Before this woman became Samson's mother, she was the wife of Manoah who was of the tribe of Dan, her name is not mentioned but we know that she and her husband lived in the city of Zorah, and she had no children. But that was about to change. For the Angel of the Lord did locate her and said to her, *"Even though you have been barren so long, you will soon conceive and have a son! Don't drink any wine or beer and don't eat any food that isn't kosher. Your son's hair must never be cut, for he shall be a Nazirite, a special servant of God from the time of his birth; and he will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines"* (Judges 13:3-5, TLB).

This is one of the times I wish I could go back to Bible time and see for myself the look on her face upon hearing such news! The Angel was saying that an end had come to her struggles with infertility; there would be arrival of a new addition to her family, a son who was to be a life-long Nazirite, a special servant of God with a very specific purpose! What! Such news could not be kept to one's self, especially when you have a partner! By the way, did I mention that this woman believed the message from the Angel? She believed him wholeheartedly, probably made the job of the Angel easier too. And as expected she runs over to her husband to share the news with him. She gives him details of the encounter and he too believes (See verses

6-7). Further proof that he believed could be seen in the words that he prayed. *“O Lord, please let the man from God come back to us again and give us more instructions about the child you are going to give us”* (verse 8, TLB).

He believed so much that he was asking God for the Angel’s reappearance for the sole reason of learning more about how to properly do the work of parenting. I know many (expectant) parents read books on parenting and even seek advice from other sources, but I’m not sure there are many out there like Manoah who ask God about how best to parent a child He’s giving or has given them. His action is definitely worth emulating. And because you can count on God for answers when you’re asking question with a genuine need to know about His will, He answered Manoah’s prayer and sends the Angel again, like the previous time, to the wife, and again she runs off to get her husband. After making sure he is the same Angel that had appeared to his wife, Manoah asks for special instructions about how to raise their new son when he’s born. The Angel shares the information with him (See verses 9-14).

Manoah suddenly remembers to be hospitable and begs the Angel to wait until he can provide him some food, but the Angel wasn’t interested in eating; instead he directs them to bring an offering to sacrifice to God. When Manoah asks for his name so he could give him credit when the baby is born, the Angel doesn’t reveal that information. Manoah then goes ahead to give offerings unto the Lord, and right there before his and his wife’s

very eyes, as the flames from the altar leaped up toward the sky, the Angel ascended in the smoke! That very action left Manoah terrified and thinking they were going to die, because they had seen God. Thankfully his wife helps him see reason why they would live (verses 15-23).

And just as the Angel had said, Manoah's wife conceived and their family welcomed a son whom they named Samson. The Lord blessed him as he grew up. The Scripture reveals that "*The Spirit of the Lord began to excite him whenever he visited the parade grounds of the army of the tribe of Dan, located between the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol*" (verse 25, TLB). Notice what this verse reveals. God began to work in Samson through Samson's interests, which was to visit parade grounds of the army of the tribe of Dan.

Anyway, if by now you still haven't caught on why this story about Samson's parents and Samson is shared, here's a summary: His parents though blessed to have received first hand information from God about parenting this child of theirs and God's purpose for him, they sought more counsel from the Lord; and we know that till he became old enough to make decisions for himself, they feared God enough to obey His instructions for parenting Samson; and wait for it, they also released him to pursue his interests – which was at that time to visit parade grounds. Eventually they released him to be the judge/deliverer God had destined him to be. Samson's exploits are recorded in Scripture. Take time to read through Judges 14-16 and Hebrews 11:32-34.

Let me ask a question: Do you think God still reveals to parents His purpose for their children's lives? The answer is yes. There are a number of parents who don't know firsthand what God's purpose is for their children's lives; but there are many more who do know because God revealed it to them! What's expected after knowing this sort of information is to ask God for His wisdom on how best to parent such children. And when He makes such information available, because He will, you're expected to obey Him and, wait for it, yes, release such children; don't force your interests on them, because God usually works through their interests. Let them explore their interests under your guidance; and when they are old enough, reveal to them God's revealed purpose for their lives, then release them to do it. Provide encouragement too.

I know there are parents reading this and wondering why God reveals His purpose for some children pretty early and for some He doesn't. Well, while I don't have the answers to why God chooses to operate in this manner, what I do know is that you can take a step and ask Him in faith. Who knows, He might reveal it to you. And if He doesn't, proceed to asking how best to parent the child He has given you; you can be sure to get answers. And when He gives the instructions, simply obey, and take note of your child's interests and abilities, then help them explore and nurture these abilities. You just never know which one might be in line with God's purpose for their lives which He might reveal later on to you, or even directly to them.

5

HANNAH AND SAMUEL



THE record of the life of Samuel opens in the Scripture with the spotlight on his father. I believe though that Samuel's story really began with his mother; and this is not just because she carried him in her womb. Perhaps the opening is done in this manner to reveal Samuel's father and ancestry.

Anyway, Elkanah, before he became Samuel's father was husband to Hannah and Peninnah. He was also father to Peninnah's children only because Hannah hadn't had children of her own. We can assume Hannah was the first Mrs Elkanah and there was a need for a second Mrs Elkanah not because of the absence of love but because of Hannah's struggles with infertility. It is also obvious that Elkanah is somewhat religious because, as the Scriptures reveal, each year he gathered his family for a pilgrimage to

the Tabernacle at Shiloh to worship the Lord and sacrifice to Him.

But these family pilgrimage and activities weren't fun time for Hannah; in fact, it was a reminder of her childlessness. Yes, the little things like the presents their husband gave her made for good feeling, but the taunting of the other woman was a spoiler. To make matters worse, she really couldn't blame her husband or the other woman. They weren't responsible for her struggles with infertility. Everything got to her and she would end up crying so much that she wouldn't be able to eat (Read 1 Samuel 1:1-7).

On one such occasion Elkanah had supposedly been so concerned about Hannah crying and refusal to eat that he sought to find out why she was in such a mood. He asked what the matter was like it wasn't obvious. He might have been trying to be helpful but only made things worse, especially when he called her sadness over her inability to be a mother a fuss, like her desire to be a mother was nothing and her struggles trivial. He even said having him was better than having ten sons. Was that supposed to be a joke? But what did he know about desiring children so bad and not having it; after all, he was already a father! What did he know about struggling with infertility when he wasn't struggling with it? It was pretty obvious who had the issue here; it was her! And everyone knew it too because he had taken another wife and they had children together (See verse 8).

The family pilgrimages continued and her childlessness persisted; that also meant the things that annoyed her continued, yes, especially the taunting of the other woman. Feeling more and more desperate and even more so alone in her predicament, finally on this particular pilgrimage, after supper (we already know Hannah probably cried all through and didn't eat again) she suddenly remembers where they were, and how the occasion could serve her. They were at Shiloh where the Tabernacle was, which meant she had access to the presence of God. She quickly decides to spend some time talking to God about her predicament; apparently she had finally come to the conclusion that just crying and not eating hadn't done anything to change her situation; she had to try praying about it. And that's exactly what she did (See verse 9).

Never mind that there was Eli the priest sitting beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. Hannah was too burdened to care about the company. Now in deep anguish, and with bitter tears, she prayed to the Lord and even takes it a step further by making a vow to the Lord. Here, read her words:

“O Lord of heaven, if you will look down upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you, and he'll be yours for his entire lifetime, and his hair shall never be cut” (Verse 11, TLB)

She had specifically asked for a son and promised the Lord that she would release her son back to Him – to be His servant, a lifelong Nazirite. This is why I always say Samuel's story began with his mother. She was the one who struggled with infertility – alone! She was the one who had to endure the presence of another woman who came into her home to share her husband and do for him effortlessly what she continually failed to do. She was the one who made a decision in her heart to turn to the Lord. She was the one who prayed for a son and made a vow with the Lord. I insist, Samuel's story began with his mother Hannah! He was the product of a heartfelt and very private conversation between her and God.

Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. Hannah is still praying and oblivious of the presence of Eli the priest who was watching and judging her. Perhaps after grumbling to himself about what the world's turned into, where women were drinking and having the audacity to come into the Tabernacle drunk, he decides to confront and reprimand her, and perhaps also offer a word of advice to her. But, just like all who judge hastily, he discovers he has judged her unfairly. Hannah sets aside her pain and helps the priest see her in the right light. He doesn't apologize to her as he should have for his wrong assumptions, instead he quickly shares good wishes with her. Hannah probably assumes his words are an assurance that her prayers have been heard; after all, Eli the priest was supposed to be

God's representative. She goes on her way happily and began to eat again (See verses 12-18).

After the formalities had been completed and the family returns home to Ramah, God decides to show Hannah that He had as a matter of fact heard and answered her prayer. Make no mistake, Hannah getting pregnant was nothing short of a miracle; yet God used the natural process – Elkanah slept with Hannah his wife. And when it was time, she welcomed her own baby boy whom she named Samuel, meaning asked of God (See verses 19-20).

I already imagine people wondering if it was because of the vow that God gave Hannah a son. Is that so? We know that God had given childless parents children in the Bible even without them making a vow. So we can't say God wouldn't have answered her without the vow. Yet, I believe the vow was important. We can't deny it played a significant role in Hannah receiving the answer to her prayer. This is not to say everyone waiting on God for a child needs to make a vow. Hannah's case was peculiar to her.

Now let me explain what I meant by the vow playing an important role in Hannah getting her prayer answered. Here's one way to look at it. God already planned that Hannah would be a mother when the time was right, that she would have a son, and that son of hers would be His servant from the beginning of his life right to the very end of it; but if Hannah had been told about her child's special

destiny after he was born, would she have released him to it, or would she have not?

Clearly, only God knows these things; yet I'm leaning towards her struggling with releasing or not releasing him at all. Please, bear in mind her past struggles before having a child, and God deciding to wait until Hannah was desperate enough to outgrow her selfish reasons for wanting a child and becoming willing to entertain, wait for it, even suggesting to share her son with God! Her rationale? Perhaps God would give her a child, a son if she's willing to share him with Him. It's human to think that way, don't you think; after all it wouldn't be so bad to be the mother of a servant of God; besides, that way she'll get to be a mother and God gets a servant.

It makes sense, doesn't it? Now the words were out of her mouth; she couldn't take them back. She had reached the point God wanted, and the stage was set to welcome a new servant of God.

But it was one thing to utter the words of the vow; it's another thing to keep it. Yet Hannah proved to be a woman of her word. I believe strongly that the Lord provided her with strength to do what was required of her as He often does to all whom He calls to work according to His will. She doesn't go on the family's yearly pilgrimage after Samuel was born but waits behind only to nurture her son and count down until he is weaned. When he is weaned, as she revealed to her husband, she'd take him to the Tabernacle and leave him there. Surprisingly, but

maybe not surprisingly, Elkanah is okay with releasing their son to God's service too (See verses 21-23). This too I believe is the work of God. Even though others might think it was because he could care less, seeing that he already had other children, yet if you think of it, this too is the work of God; it was His order of releasing children into the family of Elkanah that gave Samuel the freedom from family responsibilities so that he could fulfil God's purpose for his life. Perhaps Elkanah might have not released Samuel if he was his first son or even second or third... or only son.

Anyway when the baby was weaned, Hannah bravely took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh, along with offerings. After the sacrifice she took him to Eli. And after re-introducing herself to Eli the priest and explaining the situation, she left him there at the Tabernacle for the Lord to use him as He pleased (See verses 24-28).

Such a brave act!

Someone might say, How could she? He was so little! Well, you should know that she didn't just leave him, never to see him again. The Scriptures record that each year during the family's yearly pilgrimage Hannah saw her son and they didn't part without him receiving a little present from her, something to remind him of her. Parting would have been hard since it seemed they did so yearly. But God had given Hannah sufficient grace to do so; plus it probably became easier when she saw that God was taking good care of her son. And He also compensated her

by giving her other children just as the priest had continually implored Him to do (Read 1 Samuel 2:18-21). To read more about the things God did through Samuel you'd have to read 1 and 2 Samuel.

There are parents reading this who have dedicated their children into the service of God; this is your reminder to keep your word and release your children wholly. You won't be sorry.

6

MORDECAI AND HADASSAH



THE Scripture describes Mordecai as a Jew and a Benjamite who was present at the palace of king Ahasuerus at Shushan. A little backstory about his past reveals that he had been captured when Jerusalem was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar and had been exiled to Babylon along with others who were captives too. About his family life, we are only told that he had a cousin who was beautiful and lovely but had been orphaned; her name was Hadassah but she was also called Esther. When faced with a decision on whether or not to adopt Esther, he made a selfless decision to adopt her and raise her as his own daughter, proving that extended family can be counted on, sometimes (Read Esther 2:5-7).

We aren't told if Esther had any difficulties adjusting to her new parent and home; what we do know is that there was no case of abuse on Mordecai's part; as for Esther, there was no trace of rebellion in her. The Scriptures affirms that Esther was quite obedient to Mordecai – a good dynamic, if you ask me. But Esther and Mordecai didn't live together for too long because the peace that was in their home was absent in the palace; and this would affect both their lives in ways they never could have imagined.

King Ahasuerus was in the third year of his reign and it was also the year of the great celebration at Shushan the palace. So, very important men had been invited over for the occasion, and the celebration would last for six months. It was to be a tremendous display of the wealth and glory of the king's empire. When that was over, the king gave a special party for the palace servants and officials; that lasted for seven days in the courtyard of the palace garden, which had been decorated. There were drinks and an abundance of royal wine available! Everyone could have as much as they pleased.

Meanwhile Queen Vashti gave a party for the women of the palace at the same time. However on the final day was when peace made its way out of the palace. The king was feeling high, he was half drunk from wine when he suddenly had a “bright” idea. He called seven eunuchs, who were his personal aides and asked them to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown upon her head for the sole reason of having the other men gaze upon her

beauty. She was a very beautiful woman, why not let the other men look at what they couldn't have, he thought. But when the eunuchs who were also the king's personal aides conveyed the emperor's order to the Queen, she refused to come. Perhaps she reasoned it was a foolish idea and she didn't want to be ogled by men, which woman with class and morals would want to be paraded in such a manner? I don't know one. And would the king have asked this of her if he wasn't half drunk? Perhaps not (See Esther 1:1-11).

But Vashti's refusal to obey the king's order was the beginning of the end of her reign as queen. For the king didn't take lightly her refusal; he was furious and wanted to punish her for her refusal. But first, he consulted with his lawyers, apparently he did nothing without their advice. He trusted their judgment. They were his personal friends and chief officers of the government. He asked them what he ought to do and what penalty to be issued the queen for her refusal to obey his order. I wonder why it never occurred to him to speak to her privately first and listen as she explains why for the first time since she's been queen she refused to obey an order of his; and then try to understand her point of view, and then find a common ground, so they could move towards solving their conflict.

One of his friends tells the king that Vashti wronged not just the king but every official and man in the empire, and that because of her position as queen, every woman in the empire naturally will look up to her and when they

learn of what she has done, would follow in her footsteps and be rude to their husbands, and this will lead to issues in the families in the empire. To avoid that, the suggestion was that a royal edict be issued and Vashti be banished forever from the king's presence and replaced by another queen worthier than her, so when women in the empire would learn of this, they'd be filled with dread at the thought of being replaced, and will have to obey their husbands every beck and call (See Esther 1:12-20).

This sort of "solution" might be okay for a non-believer; as believers know, we can't go about doing away with a spouse just because of conflict. Besides, we know that forced respect driven by fear is not the type we should have in our homes. Anyway, the group of men who heard this counsel presented by one of them, including the king, thought it made good sense. And that's exactly what they did, and added that every man should rule his home and assert authority.

But, eventually the king's anger subsided and, as is the case with all who make decisions when they are angry, he soon started to regret his decision knowing that he had lost Vashti and would never see her again. His aides hoping to make him feel better and knowing that if Vashti was restored they may be deposed decided it was time to begin a search for a new queen. One surely was in the empire and she must be found. They went through the details of their plan with the king and it pleased him so much he put it into immediate effect (Esther 2:1-4).

Now as a result of the king's decree, Mordecai and Esther are separated. Yes, she was selected to join the bevy of other beautiful girls in the empire who were taken to the king's harem in Shushan palace. One of them would be queen. Now Esther's beauty might have gotten her selected, but that's only how far that got her; gaining the admiration and respect of Hegai the eunuch who was responsible for the harem had to have been because of something other than her beauty. I'm leaning towards her character. With Hegai's admiration and respect, Esther enjoyed special privileges from him. But even while enjoying all of that, she doesn't lose her head or divulge her origin. She remembered to keep obeying her cousin/foster father's instructions. In case you wonder what Mordecai was doing after Esther went away, like any caring parent, he found his own way of staying in touch (See Esther 2:8-11).

Despite the pampering the girls received before meeting the king, those not chosen as queen were thereafter to spend the rest of their lives in a second harem under the care of another eunuch, never to see the king again unless he called for them by name! What horror! Thankfully that wasn't Esther's fate; she had conducted herself wisely by following Hegai's instructions when dressing to meet the king, and had ended up not only gaining the admiration of the other girls but the king's favour. Her meeting with the king ended up with her leaving with a crown on her head; she was declared queen in place of Vashti. Her life forever changed for the better.

The king seemed to be the type to always find a reason to throw a party. So he did to commemorate his marriage to Esther, the new queen; but he also found a good enough reason to still run through a second bevy of beautiful girls, only that by then he already knew what he wanted. But Esther wasn't the only one moving up; we learn her cousin/foster father had also become a government official. And believe it or not, the first thing they were able to do together was save the king from assassination (See Esther 2:12-23).

But will that be all that they'll do together? Not by a far chance. Soon trouble shows up in the form of a man named Haman who had recently been appointed prime minister but soon had a bone to pick with Mordecai and all the Jews in the realm. It all started with the fact that though the king had ordered that the king's officials bow before Haman in deep reverence whenever he passed by, Mordecai didn't, and with good reason too. At first Haman didn't even take note of Mordecai, but his colleagues who were perhaps eager to get on Haman's good side, discovered the reason why Mordecai was acting the way he did and reported the entire thing to Haman.

Haman was furious, and decided not only will Mordecai pay, but since his reason for refusing to bow to him was because he was a Jew (Jews were commanded to shun the sin of idolatry – See Deuteronomy 6:14-15 – the reverence the king ordered and Haman expected must have seemed like idolatry), then all the Jews will pay too.

He was going to destroy them all. He threw dice in April to find out the most favorable time to carry out the annihilation of the Jews; that turned out to be February of the following year. After that, he stealthily approached the king with the matter. He was careful enough to present the matter to the king in such a way that the king couldn't suspect that he was pursuing a self-serving matter but thought he was doing something that would benefit himself and was for the good of the empire. Haman succeeds in tricking the king (Esther 3:1-11).

The second phase of the plan was set in motion two or three weeks later. Haman dictated letters to the governors and officials throughout the empire, to each province in its own languages and dialects and signed it in the name of the king and sealed it with the king's ring (verse 12). Here's what Haman dictated; it was a cold move.

“The Jews—young and old, women and children—must all be killed on the 28th day of February of the following year and their property given to those who killed them.” “A copy of this edict,” the letter stated, “must be proclaimed as law in every province and made known to all your people, so that they will be ready to do their duty on the appointed day” (Esther 3:13-14, TLB).

The edict went out but was first proclaimed in Shushan. And while the king and the wicked Haman spent their

time drinking, the city – rather, the Jews – fell into confusion and panic.

Of course Mordecai learns about it before Esther. And his reaction is what's expected. So too were the Jews who reacted in a manner similar to Mordecai's. Esther's maids and eunuch seem to know the relationship between Esther and Mordecai, and when they learn of his behaviour, they give her a report. Esther cared deeply for her cousin/foster father. She was naturally distressed by his actions, and sends him clothes to replace the sackcloth he had taken to wearing as a sign of grief towards the plot against the Jews.. But a mere change of clothes couldn't do anything for Mordecai or the Jews. Finally Esther sends one of her eunuchs to find out from Mordecai what the trouble was and why he was acting like that. The eunuch learns the whole story from Mordecai, all the sordid details, and relays everything to Esther, including a command from Mordecai. Since she was the only Jew with access to the king, she was to go to the king, reveal her identity and plead for her people.

Esther's initial response was flight! She gave a very valid reason why she couldn't appear before the king when not summoned, even informing Mordecai that she hadn't been summoned in more than a month. And when the eunuch gave Esther's message to Mordecai, this was his reply to Esther;

“Do you think you will escape there in the palace when all other Jews are killed? If you keep quiet at a time like this, God will deliver the Jews from some other source, but you and your relatives will die; what’s more, who can say but that God has brought you into the palace for just such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13-14, TLB)

It was a much needed wake up call for the very fearful Queen Esther. She needed to be reminded that she was a Jew, whether as a captive or as queen. And if a bad thing was happening to the Jews, what was the guarantee that she wouldn’t be a part of it. This wasn’t a time to act discreetly about her roots. And if she chooses to, Mordecai reminds her, she could be replaced by God who would find another way to deliver the Jews. Mordecai wasn’t oblivious of the fact that Haman hated him, so he brings up the fact that Esther’s relatives, this of course includes him, and she might still end up dying. But in all he said, nothing beats his last words on the matter.

He reveals to Esther his belief about God giving her the position she had for this very specific reason of delivering her people from complete annihilation. That was the thrust Esther needed in order to fulfil God’s purpose for her life! And did it work? It did! For afterwards, Esther sends message to Mordecai asking for spiritual backup and informing him of her plans to involve God and take a stand for her people! (Read Esther 4:15-17).

So far we've explored parents releasing their children to fulfil their divine destiny; but now we get to see a cousin or foster father though forced to release his cousin/daughter to be queen (this is due to the circumstances), yet still needing to thrust her into her destiny. Mordecai does just that. Believe it or not, though Esther occupied the position of queen, her divine destiny was to be a deliverer for her people. And that's how God will continue to use willing and able members of the extended family for other members of the family, or even foster parents for children when the biological parents of these children are absent for whatever reasons. And their responsibilities might and should include catering to their needs, whether it's physical or emotional, and of course offering valuable advice when necessary, not forgetting nudging them towards their God-given destinies as is revealed (to you) and insisting on it.

Once Esther made up her mind to surrender to what she now believed was God's purpose for her life, she discovered how much of a difference she really could make (You'd have to read Esther 5-10 to see how Esther defeats the enemy of the Jews and all the other ways she helped her people). Oh, and right there in those chapters, you'd also see how God promotes Mordecai and all the good deeds he did for his people alongside Queen Esther.

7

ZACHARIAS, ELIZABETH AND JOHN



JOHN, otherwise called John the Baptist, is one of my favourite persons in the Bible, and for good reasons too, but don't ask me about it. Even though I'm tempted to begin his story by talking about his adult life, it's better to start at the very beginning before he was born.

Before John was conceived and entered into the world, his parents, Zacharias, a Jewish priest (a member of the Abijah division of the Temple service corps) and Elizabeth (a member of the priest tribe of the Jews, a descendant of Aaron) were godly folk who were careful to obey all of God's laws in spirit as well as in letter, yet had no children. According to the Scriptures, Elizabeth struggled with infertility. We don't know how long they had been married before they welcomed John, but we know they were both

very old when he became a part of their family (See Luke 1:5-7).

Unlike many people who despair and become offended after years of praying and waiting on God for a specific miracle and had had their hopes deferred, Zacharias didn't hold a grudge against God neither did he stop serving Him as he should. The proof of this is in the fact that he faithfully went about his work in the Temple whenever his division was on duty and the honour fell to him by lot. As a matter of fact, it was at his place of faithful service on an auspicious day that he had an encounter that would change his life and status forever. That very day Zacharias was going about his work in the Temple and a great crowd stood outside in the Temple court, praying as they always did during that part of the service when incense was being burned; while Zacharias was in the sanctuary, suddenly an angel appeared, standing to the right of the altar of incense! As can be expected Zacharias was startled and terrified (See verses 8-12).

But those emotions were just the firsts of what he would feel that day. And it would be because of the words the angel would say to him. Let's read it.

“But the angel said, “Don't be afraid, Zacharias! For I have come to tell you that God has heard your prayer, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son! And you are to name him John. You will both have great joy and gladness at his birth, and many will rejoice with you. For he will be one of the Lord's great men. He

must never touch wine or hard liquor—and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from before his birth! And he will persuade many a Jew to turn to the Lord his God. He will be a man of rugged spirit and power like Elijah, the prophet of old; and he will precede the coming of the Messiah, preparing the people for his arrival. He will soften adult hearts to become like little children's, and will change disobedient minds to the wisdom of faith" (Luke 1:13-17, TLB).

That's a lot to take in! The angel had said he was going to be a father! His wife would conceive and bear him a son whom they were to name John. The angel had said a whole lot more and Zacharias had heard him, but he couldn't stop playing the first words of the angel over and over in his mind. So much so that when he finally does speak, the next emotion he felt had taken over his mouth. He told the angel that it was impossible. He was old and so was his wife! Yes, you guessed right, the next emotion was skepticism! At the root of it was logical reasoning.

Unfortunately for Zacharias, his doubt isn't received well by the angel who had to reveal his name, mention that he was speaking not of himself but had been sent by God all in a bid to convince him. He however doesn't leave without disciplining Zecharias. God seemed to agree because just as the angel had declared, Zecharias became dumb until further notice, until his son will be born, that is.

The next emotion Zacharias would feel before that day was over is embarrassment. Earlier that day he could speak. Imagine him coming out to the crowds later mute and having to communicate using hand gestures, and only him knowing what he did to end up in that situation. Yet I commend him for taking the Lord's discipline in stride. Some would have left their duties because of their predicament. Zacharias stays on at the Temple for the remaining days of his Temple duties before returning home. Even when that was over, he'd have to live through the embarrassment over and over while attempting to recount the encounter to his wife and relatives (See verses 18-23).

In a short time after the encounter, and while Zacharias is still mute, Elizabeth his wife became pregnant (in old age) and went into seclusion for five months. Although her husband had told her everything, her initial joy upon hearing the good news couldn't be compared to the joy she felt when she finally was pregnant! Elizabeth told the Lord He was kind for taking away her disgrace of having no children. Yes, back then and even till date, couples, but especially women struggling with infertility, are treated badly and looked down upon. Why would the society put them through this like they don't have enough internal struggles already baffles me. I pray for a time when this will cease to be the norm. Anyway, during Elizabeth's pregnancy, she received a very special guest, and their exchange is worth reading; see that in verses 24-56.

Then finally came the time for Elizabeth's baby to be born. Just as the angel said, the baby was a boy! Of course this sort of good news naturally spreads quickly; and soon, their neighbours and relatives who heard agreed the Lord had been kind to her and rejoiced over the arrival of the baby. Soon the baby was eight days old and relatives and friends came around for the baby's circumcision ceremony; nobody bothered asking for the baby's name, for they all assumed he would be named after his father! I can imagine their surprised looks when Elizabeth announced his name would be John! As expected those who were around protested, seeing no one in their family bore that name. Elizabeth insisted still and when they proceeded to ask the father of the child, he too wrote that his son would be named John. And just as Zacharias was done writing and sharing the name with those who were around, he dumbness was removed, and he could speak again! The first thing he does is praise God! Good for him (See verses 57-64).

And that's how Elizabeth and Zacharias began to release John into his very special destiny which God through the angel had made known. Someone might say, what's in a name? What they did was no big deal! Well, I tell you that it was a big deal. John's name which means God is gracious had been given to John by God Himself, his parents knew and somewhat understood that it was symbolic for the things God was set to do through John's life and ministry, not insisting on a name change; for

giving in to the crowd's opinion not only meant disobedience to God's instruction but also a stand against God's revealed will for their son's life!

Yet, that episode was only the beginning; if they didn't begin early to say no to the crowd's opinion and expectation over their child's life, in later years when it was time for John to leave home and be the unique man of God he was destined to be, it might not have happened. Perhaps John would have learnt people-pleasing from his parents and refused to obey God's calling. Even if he didn't and wanted to obey, perhaps his parents would have stood in his way and found a more crowd-pleasing role for him to play in life and destiny. That would have been a shame.

There's definitely a parent or parents reading this whose first act of releasing their children into their respective divine destinies should be to say no, no to people's opinions and no to societal expectations over your child(ren), and yes to God's instructions. Say yes to God's revealed will for your children's lives. Dear Parent, it's okay to ruffle some feathers, if you're following God's instructions and revealed will. It's also okay if your child doesn't end up like the average child in the neighbourhood. Truly it's okay. In fact, it's more than okay! You should be filled with joy at the thought of it, for you're in great company.

Towards the end of Luke 1, we get to see a delightful scene! While people were wondering what kind of person John would turn out to be, although acknowledging that the Lord's hand was on him in some special way, John's

father Zacharias, became filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy. If you ask me, I dare say he had at this time fully embraced what God had revealed concerning his son, and it was worth praising God for! And the Holy Spirit decided to bless him with more insight on the matter. Read what he said:

“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to visit his people and has redeemed them. He is sending us a Mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago— someone to save us from our enemies, from all who hate us. “He has been merciful to our ancestors, yes, to Abraham himself, by remembering his sacred promise to him, and by granting us the privilege of serving God fearlessly, freed from our enemies, and by making us holy and acceptable, ready to stand in his presence forever. “And you, my little son, shall be called the prophet of the glorious God, for you will prepare the way for the Messiah. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. All this will be because the mercy of our God is very tender, and heaven’s dawn is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow, and to guide us to the path of peace” (Luke 1:68-79, TLB).

That’s one scene I wish I could see for myself! Zacharias and Elizabeth had succeeded in setting an example of conviction, submission and obedience to God’s will even

before their son John understood what any of that meant. But I'm sure they told him all about it when he was old enough to understand. Of course they must have also introduced him to God early and encouraged his love for God, and told him what God's revealed will was for his life and encouraged him as he obeyed the angel's rules. Even more importantly they would have also released him when he decided to move out of the house to live out in the lonely wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel (See verse 80).

Someone who is not familiar with John's story might ask, so does John fulfil his divine destiny? The answer is yes. You can read Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:1-22, and John 1:1-37. Then, someone familiar with John's story might ask, does John end well? After all, he lived like a crazy person, and some might even call him demon-possessed (see Luke 7:33). He doesn't marry or have children, and worse still he got imprisoned for telling the truth, and was beheaded over the same matter. To this I'd say, it's true John was enigmatic like Prophet Elijah in the Old Testament. He did not only stand out in a crowd, he faced rejection, never married nor had children, and was imprisoned and beheaded.

But it's also true that Jesus thought and spoke very highly of John. He didn't keep those thoughts to Himself, but shares it with His disciples and the crowd that followed Him. And this had nothing to do with the fact that they were related, but because He was pleased with John. Don't believe me? Read what Jesus says about John

in Matthew 11:7-15, then tell me, what's more important in this life than to live a life that pleases Jesus till the very end? Sure, John dies in a very horrific manner; but you do know he isn't still dead neither is he walking around headless in heaven, right? So let's please continue to prioritize God, His laws and His will, and remain heavenly-minded as we parent our children. That's what God expects of us anyway.

8

JOSEPH, MARY AND JESUS



IF there was anything Mary (who lived in Nazareth, a village in Galilee) was mentally preparing herself for, it would be her soon to be role as Joseph's wife, since she and Joseph (who was a descendant of King David) were already engaged to be married. Of course, she'd have considered being a mother as well, but she must have thought that children will come further down the line, not anytime soon, especially not before she became married. She'd have some time to get used to being a wife and then she could have time to mentally prepare herself to be a mother. But that was not to be the case, for God was going to disrupt the order of things.

While still engaged, one day an extraordinary thing happened, an encounter that would be the first of many other extraordinary events in her life; because after that

day, her life was never the same again. In fact, she would never be the same again. Mary had only heard about angels but on that fateful day she met one. She knew angels were sent by God, yet seeing one didn't do her nerves any good. Even more bemusing, the angel had greeted and congratulated her saying she was favoured! She could not understand why an angel would visit her. She was left more confused and disturbed by the angel's greetings; yet, nothing prepared her for what he was about to reveal to her (See Luke 1:26-29).

Let's read what the angel says to Mary. *"Don't be frightened, Mary," the angel told her, "for God has decided to wonderfully bless you! Very soon now, you will become pregnant and have a baby boy, and you are to name him 'Jesus.' He shall be very great and shall be called the Son of God. And the Lord God shall give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he shall reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom shall never end!"* (Luke 1:30-33, TLB).

Surely children are blessings, but the angel had said she would become pregnant very soon, and have a baby boy! Did "very soon" mean before her engagement period was over? Joseph didn't seem the type to mess with her purity; surely he would want to wait till after it was over. So she decided to ask the angel how it would all play out. He had to know she was still a virgin. The angel treats Mary's curiosity well, taking his time to reveal how it would be to her. He even goes on to tell her more about her baby boy that she would soon welcome. But he doesn't leave without telling her the wonderful news about her aunt

Elizabeth! I believe he added that piece of information not only to prove to Mary that God's promise shall surely come true, but also because God knew she would need her aunt's company, and soon too! And when the angel was done speaking, Mary says the words God expects every child of His to say when He reveals His will to them, and then the Angel disappears (See verses 34-38).

Mary might have in the moment agreed to God's revealed will, but like every one of us often would do after we are left alone for a while, she began to really think about what's to come. For Mary who had expected that children would come after marriage now had to almost immediately start thinking about being a mother alongside a wife. Would she even still be allowed to be a wife? Considering the way and manner her baby would come to be, would Joseph even believe her if she told him all the angel had said? Oh, the scandal that would trail her (she who had been careful to remain pure)!

It was all too much to take in! Mary needed someone who wouldn't think she was crazy if she revealed everything to her, and the perfect person would be her aunt Elizabeth. And so Mary hurried off to the highlands of Judea to where her aunt and her husband lived to visit. Turns out she made the right decision. As soon as Mary gets there and just as she greets her aunt – in fact even before she tells her anything - the Holy Spirit gets involved! Her aunt talks about her child! All of Mary's concerns disappear and in place of her concerns was praise! Mary decides to stay with her aunt for three months, and

by the time she was returning home, she was prepared for what was to come (See verses 39-56).

The account of Luke jumps to when Joseph accepted to still be married to Mary. But from Matthew's account, we learn that when Joseph eventually learns about the "pregnancy by the Holy Spirit", he initially doesn't buy it. He is a man of stern principle and didn't want his reputation tarnished. So he decides to break off his engagement to Mary, but he would do it quietly because he doesn't want to publicly disgrace her. While he was still considering his plan, he falls into a dream and an angel visits him to corroborate Mary's story! When Joseph wakes up, he dumps his plans and follows the angel's instruction, agreeing to still be with Mary, even though it meant being involved in a "scandal" (Read Matthew 1:18-24)... and much more.

Now back to the account of Luke, while Mary is still pregnant and close to birthing her baby, Joseph has to take a trip with his new family to his ancestral home (Bethlehem in Judea) for a registration the Roman emperor had made compulsory throughout the nation. While they were at Bethlehem, the time came for her baby to be born, and she welcomed her first born child, a son, laying him in a manger because there was no room for them in the village inn (See Luke 2:1-7).

Being visited by an angel, watching the work of the Holy Spirit in her body, hearing her aunt talk about her child before she even mentioned it, and of course Joseph keeping his commitment to her had all been extraordinary

events; but little did Mary know that there was much more to come! Not long after her son is born, shepherds come visiting talking about learning the news of the baby's birth from angels. Eight days come and go and the baby is named Jesus at His circumcision ceremony, and more things happen after that!

During Mary's purification offering at the Temple in Jerusalem, baby Jesus is taken along on the trip to be presented/dedicated to the Lord. There they meet a man named Simeon who not only holds Jesus but praises God for Him and also reveals things about the baby, and some things about Mary too. But that wasn't all, a woman named Anna, a prophetess also came along; she too thanked God for the baby Jesus and began to reveal things about the baby! It was a trip to remember all right! But when they went back home and in the years that follow, baby Jesus grew and remained a wonder, for Scriptures reveal that He was known for wisdom beyond His years (verses 9-40). It was beyond clear to Mary that her Son was special and had a special destiny. Just a few years on, Mary begins to realize that He was also gifted. She added that to all the things she had heard about Him, things she treasured in her heart and often thought about over the years.

When her Son was twelve years old (an age Bible scholars say Jewish boys undergo preparation for adult status in the religious community), something happened, another thing she would add to the things she was learning about her Son, but moreso one that would always remind

her whose Son He really was if she ever dared to forget. She and Joseph had taken Jesus along with them to Jerusalem for the annual Passover Festival, which they attended every year. Usually when the celebration is over they started home to Nazareth; and that's what happened this year too.

However, unknown to them Jesus would express His independence by making His first decision without consulting them – He had decided to stay behind in Jerusalem. It was not until the evening of the first day of the return journey home did they realize Jesus is “missing”. After a fruitless search for Him amongst their relatives and friends, they go back to Jerusalem to search for Him there. But they don't find Him until three days later! By then Mary – and Joseph – must have been frantic with worry! How was He fending without them? But surprisingly when they find Him, He isn't in “need” of them, He was in the Temple, sitting among the teachers of Law, discussing deep questions with them and amazing everyone with His understanding and answers (See verses 41-47). Here is what happens next.

“His parents didn't know what to think. “Son!” his mother said to him. “Why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere.” “But why did you need to search?” he asked. “Didn't you realize that I would be here at the Temple, in my Father's House?” But they didn't understand what he meant” (Luke 2:48-50, TLB).

On finally finding Jesus in the Temple sitting among the religious leaders of the land, His mother and Joseph are stunned by the sight before them! Mary is the one that speaks first on behalf of herself and Joseph. She asks why, like any average parent would, wanting to understand the reason He would suddenly make a decision like that on His own without informing them or seeking and receiving their approval. But Jesus' response is shocking, He asks her why too, wanting to understand the reason she (and Joseph) would spend their time searching; did they forget whose He was? If they remembered then they should have known where He'd be.

I guess Mary and Joseph hadn't told Jesus anything about Himself yet, but with those words Jesus revealed that He knew and was subtly reminding His "parents" whose He really was and what His duties would be, and the things He would be occupied with. Unfortunately, His "parents" were slow to comprehend. Yet fortunately for them Jesus returns home with them and doesn't begin His task fully until eighteen years after. I believe by then they must have fully comprehended the things revealed to them about Him (See verses 51-52).

By now I'm sure you know that neither Mary nor Joseph released Jesus (at least not initially); and for many children, teenagers and youths, like Jesus, the struggle for independence is real! I'm not encouraging children/teenagers/youths going to extremes just to express their independence, neither am I saying parents should let their

12-year-olds wander off on their own and act unbothered about it. What I'm saying is that parents need to keep in mind that though they are a part of their children's lives, their children are not extensions of them; they are separate entities, with their own interests and purpose in life; they should be released to pursue their interests and allowed to fulfil their divine purpose at whatever age they begin to realize this.

Jesus began to express His independence at age 12; some children begin earlier and others later on in life. My advice to parents is to be open-minded about it; whenever it happens, release the reins, allow them make their decisions and offer guidance when necessary.

I guess everyone knows Jesus fulfilled destiny. You can read any or all of the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) to learn more about His life and ministry; hopefully when you do, you'd end up being even more convinced that most of the times you don't know what's best for your children, but God does. He reveals it when you ask sometimes; and there are many other times He only reveals it to your children. And you've just got to go along with the flow, trusting that since you've committed them to God's hands, He'll take care of them and get them safely to their divine destinies.

9

ZEBEDEE, SALOME AND THEIR SONS JAMES AND JOHN



UNLIKE the other families we have delved into, we don't have much Scriptural details on the Zebedee family; yet, from the little made available, there's valuable information to glean. We'd take into consideration the account of Matthew, which is somewhat similar to that of Mark.

Matthew starts out by telling us that after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, He is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by Satan. When that was over, Jesus comes out to learn that John has been arrested; so He leaves Judea and returns home to Nazareth in Galilee. He doesn't stay there for long though because soon He moved to Capernaum, beside the Lake of Galilee, close to Zebulun and Naphtali to fulfil Prophet Isaiah's

prophecy. After the move, Jesus began to preach; it was while there on the beach, possibly preaching that His path crossed with the family of Zebedee (just Zebedee and his two sons, James and John. See Matthew 4:1-22).

We're to learn later of Mrs Zebedee. From the account, it's obvious that Zebedee was a fisherman, and his two sons worked with him because on the day they met Jesus, James and John were sitting in a boat with their father, mending their nets. Matthew describes the meeting to be something quite jaw-dropping. Let me get into it. Matthew says, Jesus (a literal stranger to the family) was walking on the beach (possibly with Simon, also called Peter and his brother Andrew) when He sees Zebedee and his two sons. On sighting the brothers who were busy, mind you, not idling away, He gets close enough and calls out to them specifically. Earlier He had made a similar call to Simon Peter and Andrew.

“Come along with me and I will show you how to fish for the souls of men” (Matthew 4:19, TLB).

Wondering how they responded to this ‘stranger’s’ call? Matthew says at once they stopped their work and, leaving their father behind, went with Him (See verse 22). You can't read this and not be curious about two things: First about Jesus' invitation: Was it so alluring that the brothers willingly left their father (this also means family responsibilities) and career behind? I wonder how Zebedee

reacts to all that was happening before his very eyes. I imagine it wasn't so much as the allure of Jesus' words that caused the brothers to leave with Him, but that they felt a deep conviction that they were meant to follow this 'Man', to follow this path! And so they did.

About their father, even though the strangest thing was happening before his eyes, with his sons not even thinking twice about leaving him, their responsibilities and livelihood behind to walk away with the Man they just met, Someone who was promising them something they probably didn't yet understand, Zebedee may have let go, recognizing that his sons were adults and should be left to follow their own destiny. He let them make their own decisions, choosing not to stand in their way, and letting them deal with the consequences of their actions should there be any. So doing, he was able to unknowingly release them into their divine destinies. Not only that, he was also able to maintain his dignity before Jesus, whom he could have easily picked a fight with or called a mob on for enticing his sons.

Zebedee did the right thing, but it must have hurt regardless. To "lose" two sons in one day to Jesus! I'm trying to imagine his emotions when he was left alone, watching his two sons leaving with Jesus; he must have wondered how quickly he had somewhat traded positions with Jesus in the lives of his sons, and perhaps worried somewhat about what their mother would say when she hears of this. Still he exercised restraint and didn't run after

them to try to convince them they were making a mistake while they were still within his range of vision.

In case you're wondering how Mrs Zebedee a.k.a. Salome reacted when she heard the news, well, it's safe to assume she made her peace with her sons decision and started to dream big dreams for them in line with their new "career". Though she got an earful from Jesus on that score, but in the end we're told she was a follower of Jesus too, and even supported His ministry (See Matthew 20:20-28; 27:55-56 and Mark 15:40).

Did the brothers turn out okay? Better than okay, if you ask me! Their decision to answer God's call upon their lives and follow Jesus, and their parents' acceptance, was the wisest ever! The brothers got to be in the centre of God's will doing exactly what they ought to be doing with their lives and helping a lot of people along the way. You can read the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, including Acts of the Apostles to learn more about their time with Jesus and their lives work; plus, you should know that John wrote the gospel according to John. He also wrote the 1st, 2nd and 3rd general epistles of John, including the book of Revelation.

As for James, aside being among the inner-circle disciples of Jesus, along with Peter and John, he was a prominent leader in the early church. I believe that but for King Herod masterminding his death so early, he most probably would have done as much exploits for the Lord as John, Peter and the others.

I believe you can guess what I'm about to say next. You'd agree with me that Zebedee and Salome serve as example to parents with adult children. Now you know that when your adult child(ren) come up to you claiming they have deep convictions about a call of God upon their lives or changing their career paths to a new one for instance, the ideal response is to respect their decisions and offer support; even more importantly, commit them into God's hands. Only parents who are control freaks, those who believe only they know what's best for their children, and those who believe their children owe them will have a hard time following Zebedee's example and releasing their adult-children.

There's also one more group of parents who will struggle with releasing their adult children, the ones who "care" too much. Did you know you can care too much about your adult children and be doing more harm than good? Yes, it's possible to love them out of their divine destinies and short-change them in life!

Don't believe me? Imagine if based on the excuse of caring, Zebedee clings to his sons and refuses to release them? It's clear that they would have remained ordinary fishermen with a stable income and some level of comfort; but they'd have missed out on their destiny which by the way was legendary! Imagine having the opportunity to walk side by side with Jesus, learning from Him, being transformed by His teachings, not forgetting being commissioned and endued with power by Him! Imagine

all the things they would have left undone in the body of Christ, all the lives they would never have been able to impact! Gosh! Not to talk of the fulfillment they'd never have had nor the reward in heaven they could have missed. I shudder at the thought of it!

Sometimes, in fact most times, the best way to show that you care a great deal for your adult children as a parent is to treat their decisions born out of deep conviction with respect, and offer your support, even though you don't understand any of it at all. Sure, you are a parent and you'd have concerns naturally; but take those concerns to God and leave them there! Then sit back and watch what happens next. You never know, you might be in for the most amazing surprise ever!

10

MARY AND JOHN MARK



WHILE writing about John who is also called John the Baptist I had mentioned in passing that he was one of my favourite persons in the Bible. Well, we've come to another John, who is called John Mark; he too is one of my favourites, and even though I didn't disclose the reasons why I favour John the Baptist, I will reveal one reason why I favour John Mark as we continue in his story.

The first time John Mark is mentioned in the Scriptures, a lot was going on; but more importantly, Peter who had been arrested by King Herod, imprisoned and awaiting execution had just been miraculously set free, and his first decision in the wake of his miraculous release from prison was to make a quick stop at the house of one Mary.

This Mary was probably a Jew and certainly a believer in Jesus and a follower too. She was also one to open up

her home for believers like herself to gather and pray. Peter had stopped by because that night was one of the nights he knew the believers would gather there to pray, and his welfare would be one of their prayer points. So he shows up to demonstrate God's answer to their prayers, and to inform them to share the good news of his release with the others who weren't in their company that night.

Now we know that Mary is a believer and follower of Jesus, a woman of prayer, an intercessor. One more thing the Scriptures reveal is that she's a mother. Mary had a son called John Mark. There's no mention of John Mark's father, so it's safe to assume that she was his only parent.

Contrary to popular opinion about children with single parents, John Mark turned out quite well. In fact, he was a believer and follower of Jesus too like his mother. I want to assume the testimony and faith of his mother had something to do with this; but I'm aware he probably had close contact with Peter and the other disciples; so, it could be because of their influence as well or maybe it's all of their influences; I mean his mother's and the disciples. Whichever the case was, they were all doing something right; because, soon enough, just like all of them, John Mark was interested in serving too! And when the opportunity presented itself, he grabbed it! Scriptures record that he left home and went with Barnabas and Paul in their first missionary journey (See Acts 12:12, 25).

There's nowhere in the Scriptures that John Mark consulted with his mother before making that decision;

and there's nowhere in the Scriptures that John Mark's mother, Mary, stood in the way of his decision. Yet I know from experience, being the only child of a single parent myself, that John Mark would not have left home and everything else behind without having a conversation with his loving mother, perhaps not just to seek her consent but to inform her of his decision. I also know from being the child of a single parent who is a believer and follower of Jesus, and who serves in the capacity of a pastor, that John's mother would have had some hardtime releasing her son. Someone might say, but shouldn't it be easier for John Mark's mother? Believe me when I tell you that it would have been harder; harder because she knew about the persecutions the early Christians faced.

She also knew what prominent figures in the early church faced; for example, she knew about James who had just been killed, and Peter who narrowly escaped death. She knew all too well the lack of comfort and challenges a missionary would have to endure. She knew these things and would, even more than ever, want to shield her son from all of it. Yet she proved herself a true believer in Jesus by releasing her son to Him, consoling herself that in his absence she would keep herself busy, not by being a worrywart, but by interceding for him like she did for others, and trusting in God's providence for him and for herself.

Barnabas and Paul were commissioned by the Holy Spirit to do a special work; they were to go from place to

place as the Holy Spirit reveals and preach; and John Mark was privileged to be their assistant (See Acts 13:5). But the trio would not be together for long because the next we hear of our eager John Mark, he's been referred to as a deserter. Scriptures reveal that when Paul and those with him left Paphos by ship for Turkey, landing at the port town of Perga, there John Mark deserted them and returned to Jerusalem (See Acts 13:13).

How does one go from eager to serve to deserting the missionary group and their cause? Only God and John Mark knew what went wrong because the reason(s) aren't disclosed. Many, including me, have come to assume that his desertion came to be because of the rude awakening to the hardships that accompany Christian service.

Anyway, while John Mark returns to Jerusalem which is home, perhaps the one he shared with his mother, the other missionaries proceeded with the work. But how does Mary respond to her son's abrupt return? We aren't told; but what I'm sure of is that she didn't make coming home something that was out of the question for him like many parents whose adult children have followed a conviction and left them behind would do. He does return home, and another thing is that she doesn't make staying home unbearable for him either. In fact, I believe Mary did everything right with her son's return. I imagine she embraced him when he returned, too relieved that he was home in one piece than to be judgmental about his abrupt return. She fed him and let him rest, and when he felt

ready to talk, she listened to everything he had to say, or discerned what had happened since he refused to confide in her.

I also imagine that being a woman of prayer and an intercessor, she spent many hours on her knees begging God to help her son return back to his call, even though she would have preferred him staying home where it was safe, and there was some level of comfort and financial security. She knew God's will must override her desires for her son.

And then one day, her prayers were answered. John Mark who went from being eager to serve to being a deserter was once again ready to embrace his divine destiny! And here I come finally to one of the reasons I favour John Mark, despite his history of being somewhat unreliable. He didn't remain like that; he was willing to change the narrative by facing his fears once again. And it didn't begin and end with just thinking it, he takes action by revealing his readiness to Barnabas – who was his relative, if you're wondering why not Paul. Most likely, he found his relative easier to talk to.

The proof that John Mark informs Barnabas is that later on when Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return again to Turkey and visit each city they had preached before to see how the new converts were getting along, Barnabas was open to the idea and mentioned wanting to take John Mark along. How did he know John Mark was now able and willing to accompany them if they had not

spoken? Unfortunately Paul doesn't agree, but thankfully Barnabas still goes on to take John Mark with him on another trip, giving him a second chance to redeem himself (See Acts 15:38-41).

In case you're wondering if John Mark ever reverts to old behaviour, the answer is no. He does completely redeem himself so much that Paul who had at one time considered him unreliable and didn't want to continue to serve alongside him, eventually spoke differently about him. You can read Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 1:24. Bible scholars refer to John Mark as the evangelist, and he is credited with being the author of the book of Mark in the New Testament. They say he was well informed to do this due to his association with Peter. See 1 Peter 5:13.

You'd agree with me that of all the cases we've explored so far, there's none quite like Mary and John Mark's where a parent has to deal with the failure of their child's initial decision after releasing them to follow their conviction and then be faced with releasing them again to follow the same pursuits – which is something that seems to be against better judgment. Yet I'm glad this case/ family story is recorded in the Scriptures because it now serves as a blueprint for parents on what to do when in a similar situation with your child(ren), especially adult children. Their success story might just be hinged on how you respond to their initial failure.

11

EUNICE AND TIMOTHY



EUNICE was a Jewess, this does not only reveal her origin but also that she knew and served the one true God, and was very familiar with His laws, even the one about not being intimately involved with a non-Jew. Yet she found herself pregnant by a Greek man (See Acts 16:1), who didn't know or serve the one true God, for the Greeks had an array of gods to choose from and serve. By the time she had her baby, a son whom they named Timothy, Eunice had made a decision – the best decision she believed she could make for her son.

She had decided that before she would lose him to the influences of his father and to the gods he served, she would introduce her son to the one true God, and would teach him the Hebrew Scriptures even if she had to do it orally. That's exactly what she did even while he was a

small child (See 2 Timothy 3:15). And even though that was as far as she was able to go with connecting him to his Jewish heritage, since his father had refused to allow him be circumcised like other Jewish sons were (See Acts 16:3), still what she had accomplished was no small feat.

Timothy grew up not only knowing about the one true God and being very knowledgeable about the Hebrew Scriptures, he also believed in his mother's God and lived by the laws in God's Word. All of which seemed to have prepared his heart for the time when he would hear the message of Jesus Christ. When that time eventually came, he readily accepted God's salvation by trusting in Christ Jesus; this he did alongside his mother and grandmother Lois. All three became Christian, but his father never did (2 Timothy 1:5). Yet Timothy didn't turn away from the Lord on his account; instead he learnt to trust the Lord more and didn't forsake the gatherings of other believers.

Timothy was not just another professing Christian; he grew in the faith and everyone could see the evidence! When asked about Timothy, all the brethren had only good things to say, everyone spoke well of him. And it was no surprise that when Paul and Silas went to Lystra where Timothy probably lived all his life, he not only caught the apostle's eye, but the apostle extended an invitation to him (see Acts 16:3). And we all know that Paul didn't just have the title of an apostle, he did the work of a missionary; so his invitation was for Timothy to join him in the work, share in the risk and in the joys. Timothy readily accepts!

Even though the first thing he encounters in his decision is pain, he believed Jesus was worth it (See Acts 16:3b).

How did his parents react to the news? There's no record of their reaction in the Scriptures; yet I believe if there was, Eunice would not have held back her only son who was pretty young at the time – a teenager at just 16. Shy and often unwell (See 1 Timothy 4:11-12, 2 Timothy 1:7 and 1 Timothy 5:23) from serving God, Timothy must have been greatly encouraged by his mum who gave him her blessings! As for his father, who perhaps was still alive and present in Timothy's life at this time, he most likely would have disagreed with the lad plunging into the high risk missionary work, and this for reasons we've already discussed.

Someone might say, if there's no record of the parents releasing Timothy, why then are we looking into their family? Well, despite the unavailability of that information, yet we look into their family to reveal certain truths. We know that sometimes the situation in the home can look like this, where one parent is Christian and the other isn't (please note that it's not ideal and not advisable for a Christian to be intimately involved or joined with a non-believer), and sometimes it can be that one parent believes their child's enthusiasm towards a certain career path is God's leading and the other parent can't see it regardless of how hard it is explained to them. When this is the case, one parent must step up and do the needful for the child(en), i.e. release the child(ren), and support them,

until the other parent catches the “rhema” and comes around; or even if they never did. For in the case of Timothy, his father is never mentioned to have believed. This also means he probably never got around to supporting Timothy’s decision.

I know this might not seem like the most “godly” advice to give, but would you rather stifle the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of your child and hinder them from their divine destiny, just to put up a united front? Besides, in such a case, God’s will trumps any parent’s wish/desire for a child; every true Christian knows this, or don’t you?

Did Timothy choose the wrong path in life and destiny? Absolutely not. Though he probably fell out with his biological father, he gained the love and support of Paul who saw and treated Timothy like a son (You can read the letters Paul wrote to him in 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy). Besides that, Timothy served with Paul on his trips and was also a leader in the church, albeit a young one. To follow up on Timothy’s works, read Acts 20:4, 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10, Philippians 2:19-22, Colossians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:2-3, 2 Timothy 4:9, 21 and Hebrews 13:23.

12

FADEKEMI AND MODUPE



This is a bonus story, and not intended to equate mother and daughter with the Bible characters aforementioned. For one, you won't find this in the Bible. But I'm certain you'd find it in God's plan for my life. Yes it's my story. Even though it seems a little premature to share it now, considering my life's just getting started, I believe opening up about my life might also help out with your decisions concerning releasing your children. Not that the stories of the families we've explored aren't sufficient, but perhaps learning that parents, not only in the Bible time, are still releasing children today, and this might be the final nudge you need towards doing the inevitable. I'll get right to it.

Fadekemi's father knew all too well that a young pregnant unmarried undergraduate would need help, but he was too disappointed to even consider helping her

when the news of her pregnancy reached him. He should have been furious, but disappointment was what he felt, for he had dreamed a dream for her; she was to be a Civil engineer. Yes, that was what was befitting for her sharp mind even though she had thought otherwise, claiming journalism was her calling. And now that dream had been crushed with her news!

Yet that was not all the news she had to share; she had also said the young man whom she was pregnant by had rejected her and the child she was carrying. He had thought she couldn't disappoint him any further than she already had, but he now realized that she could! He was going to make sure that she faced the consequences of her actions. He wouldn't help her and would forbid any of her siblings from helping her. She could find her own way and help herself by herself, and out of his sight and life; after all, and thankfully, he had other children by his first wife, and even by her mother. All was not particularly lost.

Fadekemi knew she was in big trouble. Her father had reacted how she expected and more. She knew he would be upset, which parent wouldn't? But never did she imagine how far he would go with punishing her. She had felt alone with her child's father's rejection, but this was way worse! Never had she felt the kind of loneliness she felt that day. She wished she could go back in time and make better choices, choices that wouldn't lead to this kind of loneliness, and pain.

Like someone who had to grope their way through a dark tunnel, the days turned to months; yet she felt perpetually enveloped with darkness and found herself stumbling over her emotions which were usually many all at once. One day her feet took her to a church. When she tried to think about it, she couldn't remember how she got there; but she had gotten there. Though from a Muslim background, she had followed her mother to her church once or twice. She knew how to say a word or two to God.

In that church she made a bargain with God on behalf of her unborn child. Perhaps if she knew more, she would have asked freely of God in faith without bargaining. She didn't know so much about God. She told God she needed help; no one else was willing to help her. She told God she was scared for her child's future, and asked Him to keep the child safe. She told Him that if He took up responsibility for her child as a Father, then He could have her child as His servant all the days of his/her life.

After praying, she stayed in that church a while longer. Members of the church discovered her but didn't put her out; instead they provided her with shelter. Not long after, her mother began to think about her and worry about her. Her worry led her to search her daughter out. When she eventually found her she took her to live with her brother (Fadekemi's uncle) since her father wasn't over his feelings of disappointment yet. And it was while she was with her relatives that she eventually had her baby, a baby girl whom, believe it or not, her father eventually took a strong

liking to and named Modupe! That's me, you know! You know what they say, that the birth of a new child puts an end to old quarrels.

Days turned to months and months turned into years and that prayer Fadekemi prayed in that church became a thing of the past, a very distant memory. Life was happening and no one had time to reminisce about the past; until I started to get curious about God, really curious. I say that because my mum had become a Christian somewhere along the line, baptized and Spirit-filled. She had even gone to Bible college because she believed she had a call. For me, growing up with such a parent meant being constantly in church and being surrounded by Christians. So God wasn't particularly a stranger to me; yet I really didn't know Him. But all that changed eventually when I was much older and I invited Him into my life. I suggest you read my other book, *Letters in My Green Bag*, for further detail. I had heard that God was a Father and could be one for me. Obviously God hadn't forgotten the conversation my mum had with Him back then. Of course, along the line, I came to learn I needed a Saviour, and soon received God's salvation offered through Jesus Christ by faith.

As I began to grow in Christ, my mother noticed I wouldn't stop reading the Bible despite the fact that I had many questions I couldn't find answers to. So she gave me a Bible with concordance and commentaries and handbooks to help my study. Through the help of the

Holy Spirit, I began to find answers to my questions. Soon I began to sense what God would have me do for Him and humanity; and I shared it with my mum. She soon began to revisit the past and remember the bargain she made with God, and some of the present prophecies that she had been told.

The time had finally come for her to make good her promise and release me from her hopes and expectations for my life. She knew she had no choice per se, yet releasing me wasn't easy. The choice to "free" me would also have its impact on her in many ways. She'd be required to make many sacrifices, yet she knew God had kept His end of the bargain, and she needed to do hers. Thankfully He supplied her with the strength she needed, and she's been releasing me one day at a time! Yes, because sometimes that's how you do it: a series of yeses that begin with one yes.

THE ROAD AHEAD

HERE are some meaningful tips for the road ahead, since you know someday, perhaps you're even there already, you would have to release your own child to fulfil destiny as the other examples we have looked at. Here is the plain truth:

1. God has a purpose for everyone's life.
2. True satisfaction in life happens when you discover purpose and live it.
3. Don't forget about God's invisible boundaries.
4. There are way too many benefits to walking in purpose.
5. God is always stirring new beginnings and He wants your child to be part of it.

1. God has a purpose for everyone's life.

BEFORE you roll your eyes and say who doesn't know that, wait till you read what's coming next. Since God has a purpose for everyone's life, then your children aren't born into your family for just you, nor have they come into the world even for themselves, but for God. They exist to serve God's purpose, whatever it might be. This talk about purpose reminds me of one of my favourite Bible verses; it's part of an ongoing conversation between God and one

of His creations, someone we all know as the prophet Jeremiah. That recorded conversation was of course before Jeremiah became a prophet. Let's read what God said to him.

"The Lord said to me, "I knew you before you were formed within your mother's womb; before you were born, I sanctified you and appointed you as my spokesman to the world" Jeremiah 1:4-5, TLB.

In this portion of Scripture, God talks to Jeremiah the priest about a time he knows nothing about, a time before he began to take shape in his mother's womb, a time before he came into the world as the son of Hilkiah who lived in the land of Benjamin. God tells him that during that time which He spoke of, He already knew Jeremiah, and had plans for him, an office that he would occupy, a work that he must do. Believe it or not, that portion of Scripture is not peculiar to Jeremiah; it is applicable to every one of us, including your children.

While a lot of parents in the world today, unfortunately including some Christian parents too, would argue that their children belong to them and that they have total rights over them and so they can go ahead to plan their future for them, now you see that that argument is not correct. Your children don't belong to you; they belong to God. He is the Creator of me, you and them, and so total rights belong to Him. What parents are, are stewards.

And as Creator with plans in mind for each life, God should be sought to reveal His plans; and when He does, we must embrace them and encourage our children to walk in them. And if you are concerned about the hows of bringing His plans to pass, remember that God's help is all you need; and His help comes for those who are surrendered to His will. This too is something Jeremiah ends up discovering before the end of his conversation with God that day.

Why did I share this tip? It's pretty straight forward, don't you think? It's to correct any inaccurate view you have of yourself as a parent and to give you the right view of God, and His position and rights over each and every one of us. If you bear in mind this tip, you're soon to realize how easy it is to actually release your children to God's designs.

2. True satisfaction in life happens when you discover purpose and live it.

THERE'S only one way to satisfy the hunger for fulfilment; it is by having a relationship with God so one is better positioned to discover His purpose for one's life, and then walking in it. Even if you're undecided about my opening statement, I'm sure you'd agree with me that every one of us has hunger for happiness and fulfilment. You'd also agree with me that in this world there are many things that people believe are the keys to happiness and fulfillment, some of which are good education, working

hard at a great job/business, steady income, living abroad, wealth and material possessions and fame. Some even believe it's marriage and having children. Well, different strokes for different folks.

I can argue that these ideas were either passed on to us by our parents, or it's just what society has conditioned us to believe. Yet, there are many, in fact one too many cases of people who have had all of the aforementioned and even more, yet still lack true happiness and fulfillment in their lives. What do you say to that? Before you argue that it's a case of greed and lack of contentment, I should inform you that many of those who fall into that category aren't looking for more of anything they already have/had. When they do open up about their struggles, they say there's a void in their lives and emptiness that they can't explain, a void nothing seems to fill.

They spend their lives searching for this thing to fill that void and when they discover nothing can, at least nothing from what they know and have tried, they end up frustrated, depressed and come down with suicide tendencies. Don't believe me? Check out the true stories of some really famous, wealthy and successful people.

I tell you, even the great king Solomon at one time in his life wondered if life was worth living, and discovered that all of his many great accomplishments couldn't answer to his search for satisfaction. You'd already know this if you've read the book of Ecclesiastes. In the end what did he do to truly get it? He decides to honour God, and

even encourages others to do so. To honour God is to esteem Him, value and reverence Him. Let's read something he says in the final chapter of the book.

“Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young – before the silver cord of life snaps and the gold bowl is broken; before the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel is broken at the cistern; then the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. All is futile, says the Preacher; utterly futile” Ecclesiastes 12:6-8, TLB.

Want to know what the world doesn't need more of? Young people who are frustrated, depressed, and suicidal, or even grown folks who are bitter and disappointed, looking back at their lives in regret, like Solomon was, all because they didn't turn to God early enough for His plan/will or turned away from walking in it.

I know the pull of all these things the world says will satisfy are strong and some might even say irresistible; but believe me when I say nothing else can satisfy like being in the centre of God's plan/will. So, ask Him for strength so you can break free from these worldly desires and let your children walk in their divine purpose.

3. Don't forget about God's invisible boundaries.

ALTHOUGH this particular tip is for parents with children who God has set apart for full-time ministry, it

will still prove useful for parents who don't fall into this category. Anyway, here's some truth for you. Whether you believe it or not, there's an invisible boundary God has outlined for His children; it's His way of marking the limits of how far they can go doing what they want, or what you as a parent want them to do before He pulls them to Himself to begin to do His bidding.

And there's nothing you can do about these invisible boundaries. All efforts will be futile; there's no going above it, beneath it or around it. The only way to deal with it is to surrender. Surrender is a beautiful word, one that mustn't be absent in our dealings with our Creator. Yet it is dreaded by children and parents who want to do what they want instead of doing what God wants. But whether we do it willingly or unwillingly, surrendering is what will eventually have to happen because God will insist on His will.

Speaking about God's chosen ones reminds me of the prophet Jonah. I believe we are all familiar with the story, but I'd recount it a bit so we can identify clearly the invisible boundaries I've been talking about. God had a mission and a message for Jonah, but Jonah wasn't submitted to God. Scriptures say he was afraid to go; so instead of doing what God wants, Jonah chose to do what he wanted. He "ran away" from the Lord. He went down to the seacoast, to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket, went on board to sail to Tarshish instead of Nineveh. But Jonah never did

get to Tarshish. And why? It's because of God's invisible boundary!

God Himself enforced His invisible boundary. The Scriptures say as the ship was sailing along, suddenly the Lord flung a terrific wind over the sea, causing a great storm! Jonah could only go so far. In the end, not only was he thrown out into the sea, exiting the ship, but God arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah for three days and three nights. Again the invisible boundary, from running away from God's will to being stopped midway, and being temporarily restricted from any activity that he would have liked. By the time Jonah was out of the fish, his attitude was somewhat better, and by the time God repeated His instructions to Jonah, he was ready and willing to obey (Read Jonah 1-3). Do you still think you can have your way when God is intent on seeing His will come to pass? By now, I believe you know the right answer to that.

You may ask, why did God have to go that far with Jonah, dramatically disrupting his plans and even more dramatically getting him to obey? Well, the only thing I can think of is that God sometimes must use extreme means to get our attention or, like in Jonah's case, fix our attitude and bring us to a place of surrender. You know something else, God still uses extreme means to get our attention, fix our attitude and bring us to a place of surrender when His will is concerned. You can choose to change willingly, and we can nudge our children to do

same; really the choice is ours. It is if we insist on our own way that we leave room for God to use extreme means. I'll leave us with this Scripture verses in Isaiah to remind you of a certain aspect of God's character.

“And don't forget the many times I clearly told you what was going to happen in the future. For I am God – I only – and there is no other like me who can tell you what is going to happen. All I say will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish” Isaiah 46:9-10, TLB.

4. There are way too many benefits to walking in purpose.

EARLIER I mentioned happiness and fulfillment (true satisfaction) as one of the benefits to walking in purpose; but now I'd reveal the biggest benefit to walking in purpose: it is what I call a gift that keeps on giving, and it's none other than the Almighty God Himself. Those who walk in His purpose get to have Him as Reward, a reward that leads to many rewards both spiritually and physically.

To really understand what I mean, we'd have to look closely into the life of Abraham whom God called to leave his country behind, including his people, and go to a land that He would lead him to (See Genesis 12:1). I doubt moving was something Abraham would have been excited about. I say this because nobody really likes to leave their comfort zone, especially if you're being told to leave your comfort zone into something completely uncertain. But

God didn't call Abraham for nothing; in the same breath He spoke the command for him to move is the same in which He readily promised him blessings (See Genesis 12:2-3, 7 and 13:14-17); yet of all the other times God made promises to bless Abraham, none can be compared with the one recorded in Genesis 15:1. For the sake of the point I'd like to pass across, let's see this promise from the New King James Version.

"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'"

Here God is promising to defend Abraham; but more importantly He is promising Himself also to Abraham as the reward for his obedience. Can you see how beneficial it is to walk in purpose? Walking in obedience is the same as walking in purpose. It's too good to miss out on. Don't you want your children to know what it feels like to be on God's good side, to enjoy His protection and have Him in their corner as their reward? What else is out there in the world that could be better than that? And we know God made good on His word to Abraham, both spiritually and physically, and also in eternity!

It's time for parents to get their priorities straight concerning their children's destinies and futures and begin to release them to walk in their divine purpose, to walk in obedience; and if at any time you're cornered by other

parents or “well-wishers” asking you why you’re letting your children go, be reminded of Abraham and how his act of obedience was the best thing he ever did, seeing that it got him God as a reward! This means he became everything that God determined he would be, and got everything God purposed to give to him. So don’t apologize for what you’re doing; instead tell them you should be envied and emulated for parenting the way you are doing!

I hope I didn’t ramble too much and made you lose the point? Here’s a brief recap in case you’re lost. Why is it a good idea to let your children go, releasing them to work in obedience and purpose? It’s because of Abraham, just kidding. It’s because of God. They get to have God, not only as Partner, but as a reward! Nothing can be better than that.

5. God’s always stirring new beginnings, and He wants your child to be a part of it.

DO you remember all the children we discussed in this book? I’d list them again for us: Isaac, Moses, Jephthah’s daughter, Samson, Samuel, Esther, John, Jesus, James and John, John Mark, Timothy and of course me, Modupe. What do they all have in common, besides the facts that are both obvious and the less conspicuous ones that we’ve covered? I’ll tell you. What they all have in common is that God desired to do a new thing with each and every one of them. Thank God He did!

It's true that God walked with Abraham, but Isaac's walk was different! Moses was a deliverer that none of his parents were. Jephthah's daughter became an example of being completely submitted to God's will, something her father struggled with. I'm sure no one in Samson's lineage was as strong as he, or did as many exploits for the people like he did. We already know how outstanding and impressive Samuel was as a child, even as an adult, in a time when people around him indulged in all sorts of wickedness against God.

How about Esther who became a deliverer for her people; or John who was nothing like his father when it comes to faith! Should we talk about how he stood out? For Jesus who is the Messiah, none of His earthly parents could completely discern what God was doing with Him and how truly great He would be. Then there were James and John who were not destined to be fishermen like their father but to be leaders in the early Church! There's also John Mark who became an evangelist. In his case, Timothy was a young and dynamic leader. I have my own story too, as I now serve in ministry with my writing, and in my unique way. So far, I have five books, with more to come. God is still stirring new beginnings, and He wants your child to be a part of it!

Else you miss the point, I'm not delusional. I know that as exciting and appealing as it sounds, there's a price attached to it. Costly? Indeed so. Worth it? A million times yes. And perhaps when you keep in mind that

parents before you have paid that price, you'd see that you too can pay it. Also, if you keep in mind that all those who paid that price of releasing their children got to enjoy God's faithfulness, you'd be willing to trust God with your children's present and futures. As I write this there's a Scripture that comes to mind.

"For I am going to do a brand-new thing. See, I have already begun! Don't you see it?" Isaiah 43:19a, TLB.

While I know that we usually have a hard time seeing things the way God sees, yet I hope by now, having read this book to this point, you see the brand new thing God desires to do, which is raising a new generation, a new crop of people who discover who they are, what God's purpose for their lives is, and choose to follow it. A new generation/new crop of people who receive fresh starts, because they broke generational impediments by doing away with unprofitable family traditions to escape the moulds that their parents have been forced to fill. A new generation/new crop of people who embrace their uniqueness and say no to conformity. I could go on and on, but I believe you see the big picture now.

There are different kinds of families out there, but your family can really be an example. You can make God a priority. You can make seeking Him on behalf of your children a priority. You can make discovering His purpose for your children a priority, and you can make

surrendering to His will a priority too. Think about it. It's all a series of choices; but begin with a single yes.

Change can be different, but it can also be really good. Give change a chance, give God a chance.

BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR



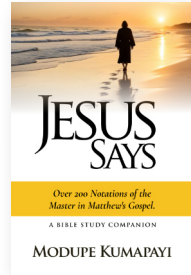
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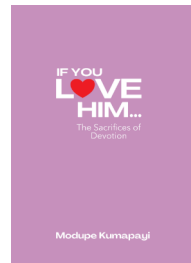
A Book For Dreamers

How dreamers transmute into achievers.



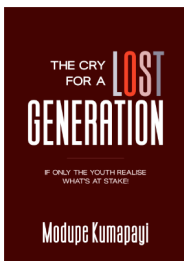
Take The Limits Off

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



If You Love Him...

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



The Cry for a Lost Generation

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



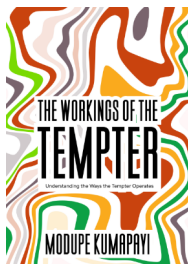
Dinah's Defilement Is Your Defilement

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



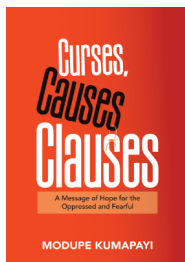
Prophet or Magician?

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



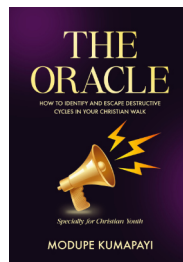
The Workings of the Tempter

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



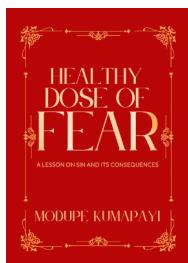
Curses, Causes and Clauses

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



The Oracle

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



Healthy Dose of Fear

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

THE BOOK

This book is anchored on Hebrews 6:12, and shows why we must follow the good example of the followers of faith. Its core message is yielding to God's ordained purpose for one's life, what the will of God means, and how doing God's will is everything wisdom can achieve for you.

Take the Limits Off is definitely a challenge to parents and guardians to release their wards to do what God wants and has ordained for each child. The examples offered are cupious, and cut across time and space. Each story is told in easy to read, easy to follow manner, you're sure to be thrilled.



THE AUTHOR

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