

The background is a textured, greyish-blue surface. In the upper left, there is a red cross with a crown of thorns on top. In the center, a large butterfly with yellow, black, and blue wings is perched on a bright orange flower. Below the flower, a green stem with a caterpillar and a chrysalis is visible. The text is overlaid on these elements.

POWER SERIES

Volume #12

BE

RANSFORMED

A Forty-Day Devotional Guide Inspired by Romans 12:2

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will." NIV



BE TRANSFORMED



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**Rom 12:2**

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

Rom 12:2

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

(THE MESSAGE)





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POWER SERIES 2023
 THEME: Be TRANSFORMED
 (Adapted from Romans 12:2)

SUBSECTIONS AND TOPICS:

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- Day 2 – The God of Another Chance
- Day 3 – Mind Change
- Day 4 – Renewing our Vows
- Day 5 – Changing the Wardrobe
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Happy New Year!

Welcome to the 12th edition of our Power Series. This year, we hope to have a walk with God that transforms us from the inside out.

I always marvel at nature. God gives us so many life lessons from just observing His creation. I love watching the butterfly and how it darts from flower to flower in search of nectar. Each one has such a beautiful pair of wings. Their colour scheme and intricate design are unique. Where you find butterflies, you will almost always find warm sunshine and budding flowers.

But this lovely creature didn't always look so pretty. It began life as a small oval-shaped egg which hatched a worm-like creature called the caterpillar. The caterpillar is known for its slow and sluggish movements and its voracious eating. Then something amazing happens in nature. The caterpillar at some point builds a cocoon around itself where it stays for some time. Something called metamorphosis takes place and what finally emerges from that cocoon is the majestic insect that we see. What a transformation!

On this spiritual journey, we are reminded that transformation is the goal. God wants to work in us to produce a glorious version of ourselves – the transformed and renewed version that expresses itself in a life of daily righteousness, in relationships that glorify God and in hope beyond this life that is built on the Rock. It is our changed lives, individually and collectively as a people of God, that will speak to the world to make our God known.

May we be willing to submit ourselves totally to the Maker's transforming Hand.

RENEWAL



Isa 40:29-31

29 He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
30 Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
31 but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

NIV

RENEWAL

- Day 1 – Awesome Wonder
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Psalm 104:24

*"How many are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all;
The earth is full of your creatures..."*

~~We~~ shall begin our 40-day devotional with worship as we consider God's glory displayed in all of creation; His awesome wonders as the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-seeing, all-hearing and all-mighty (Almighty) God.

The Year 2022 was a year of many unprecedented events.

- The level of insecurity and the rate of inflation in the country was at an all-time high. Even as you read this, goods and services prices are rising!
- We experienced the longest ASUU strike in the history of Nigerian Universities.
- We saw the mass exodus of families, friends or colleagues in search of greener pastures abroad. The phenomenon in Nigeria has been widely referred to as the "Jakpa Syndrome."
- Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to the soaring cost of grain and commodities globally. Several countries experienced their highest inflation in the last 40 to 100 years.
- Increasing variances of wars – economic, political, cyber or geographic, such as China's intense military activities around Taiwan.
- The death of the longest-serving British Monarch in history; Queen Elizabeth II and UK politics witnessing 3 prime ministers in 2 months!

Yet, having lived through all these and more, you and I are still counted among the living today. This is an attestation to the Awesome Wonder of our God.

In Psalm 104, we join the Psalmist in praise of the Lord. When we come to know about our God and the vastness of His majesty which is beyond our comprehension, our soul cannot but praise the Lord.

vs 1-2, How do you describe splendour? How can you qualify or quantify it?

God is beyond everything beautiful that is known to man. He is clothed with indescribable glory and majesty. The purest, finest, richest, and highest of qualities do not compare to this description of how the Almighty is robed; the sandals on His feet, the crown on His head or the belt around His waist. Nothing known to man that royals have been adorned with even comes close to the splendour of our God.

vs 2, Who else can wrap himself in light, or build on water as if it were rock?

vs 3, The clouds are God's chariot; His Jeep and Rolls Royce. Winds and flames of fire are His errand boys. Indeed, awesome is what describes our God. He has built the visible on the invisible. This is no trick or magic. I don't know about you but it beats my imagination.

vs 7-9 What you and I refer to as nature; the weather or the elements; are products of God's creation and they receive instructions from Him which they follow strictly. God sets a boundary they should not cross just as He sets boundaries for you and me not to cross.

If nature can follow God's instructions, should we do any less? Have you crossed any of God's boundaries? God gives you room for repentance. (Jeremiah 31: 34, Revelations 2: 1-7); That is an awesome wonder of our God!

vs10-16 God waters the earth and all living creatures are refreshed. The fact that water plays many roles in these verses speaks of its significance. For us as disciples of Jesus, water reminds us of our baptism into Christ. Do you remember how you were refreshed when your sins were washed away?

And how you began to live a transformed life by the Spirit through the study and application of God's word and fellowship among disciples? As a result, many good deeds have emanated from you and me; mere wretched sinners. This too is an awesome wonder of God!

We must keep going back to God for refreshing. He alone can revive our spirit and our lives. He did it at our conversion and He wants to do it again!

vs17-18 God makes daily provision for all His creation, man and animal alike. He is in the business of providing our needs (not necessarily our wants). Let's depend on Him for guidance and success in all our endeavours. Our endeavours imply that we are actively pursuing our goals; be they financial, spiritual or otherwise. As I look at my own life in the past year, I am in awe of how God has provided for me and my family. I left paid employment to start up a business of my own with high expectations. Just when I believed I had finally secured my dream contract, things took a different turn and I lost the opportunity! I was discouraged beyond words. After much prayer and advice from friends and especially my dear wife, I decided to return to paid employment. But that meant I was going to earn a salary that was half of what I had received at my last job almost four years ago! How would I cope? God saw to that. I have been able to meet all my financial obligations to my family and live a modest yet comfortable life. Indeed, He is the Miracle Worker, the great Provider. This is another Awesome Wonder of God! Dear brother or sister, plant, water, and trust in God. He will make your seed grow.

vs19-30 Nature maintains order – there is day and there is night, rainy and dry seasons, planting and harvest times. For years and centuries, divine timing has not changed. This is yet another Awesome Wonder of God! God has it all figured out and everything is set in its proper place. We complain today about climate change. Man has done so much damage to nature by trying to alter what God has set in place. Climate change is a result of man's failure to take care of that which God has freely given to him. Is there order in your life? If not, why not ask God?

CONCLUSION

We serve a great and awesome God! He who is mighty and majestic is also the God who cleanses us from sin, renews our hearts and provides for our every need. Let us praise and continually worship Him!

CALL TO ACTION

As we meditate on the Word today, resolve to do the following:

- To begin this new year with praise and an attitude of gratitude. Gratitude will magnify the wonders of God in your eyes.
- To start afresh, take advantage of God's mercies, generosity and magnanimity to live your life in a way that truly honours Him. Retrace your steps where necessary and repent of all His boundaries that you have crossed.
- To be responsible with the resources He has blessed you with and to use them for the good of His kingdom and mankind.
- To live an ordered life. Seek it from God through His Word and the mentorship of mature disciples.
- To sing to the Lord and Let your soul always praise Him in season and out of season.


ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Psalms 145 - 150

Psalm 51:10 -12**Lamentations 3:22**

"Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me..."

"...His compassions never fail...they are new every morning..."

 Have you ever felt like, if given another chance to do something, you would do it differently?

I have felt like that several times in my career and some of my life choices.

Do you know that God gives you and me another chance every day?

How was the year 2022 for you? Perhaps there are both victories and setbacks. Answered prayers and those yet to be answered. You may be full of rejoicing in some areas and in other areas you have regrets.

Yesterday we recounted some of the major events of last year. For me and my family, it was a rollercoaster of mostly good and some not-so-good incidents – School strikes, financial downturn, fears, illness, new appointments, weddings, opportunities for career progression, healing and much more. In the course of the year, my family and I had to make some new decisions on the way forward for us. It was a year of trusting God's plans and depending on Him like never before. **Psalm 46:10** was a scripture I kept reminding myself of as the year unfolded. For me 2022 was a better year than 2021 because I chose to have a different mindset; to see that in the past, God was faithful. In the present God would prove faithful. And for the future, God will forever be faithful... I chose to have a new heart for God and hold on to him steadfastly.

Lam 3:22-23

Because of God's mercy, we are alive and well in the new year. We were not consumed by our fears, sins or despair. God has given you another chance to live and make better choices... Your discipleship, your relationships with others, your career, your giving, your health, and the list goes on. On each new day, we can make choices that are better than the day before. God gives you and me a new opportunity to say no to sin and yes to Him. Another chance to be the best you can be as a disciple of Christ, a better husband or wife, a better parent, a better friend or neighbour, a better student or citizen and much more.

Psalm 51:10-12

I don't know what you will face in 2023 but as we go through this year, I pray that each of us will seek to see God daily with a pure heart and have a steadfast spirit that holds unswervingly to our Lord and Saviour. The evil one may try to tempt us to give up on our faith, on our convictions or even on the godly resolutions we have made for this year. Remember, He is your portion, wait for Him and He will do immeasurably more than you can ask or imagine. His plans for you are for good and He that started the good work in you will bring it to completion in Jesus' name.

CONCLUSION

Let us receive with thanks the gift of another chance to be our best for God and ourselves. Let us remain steadfast through this year because God will always prove faithful.

CALL TO ACTION

Think of one thing you plan to do differently in 2023. Also, think of one (good) thing that you will not give up doing, no matter what.

Commit these to God in prayer. Share with a trusted friend.

Memorize Lamentations 3:22 - 26 and Psalm 51:10 - 12.

Let these verses be your daily companion scriptures as you navigate 2023. Shalom!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

Revelation 21:5

"A second chance doesn't mean anything if you didn't learn from your first."

— Anurag Prakash Ray

"I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better."

— Maya Angelou

"Not everyone gets a second chance. If you do get one, take advantage of it because it's a gift, and it may be something better than you had before!"


— Nishan Panwar

"Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending."

— Carl Bard

Rom. 12:2, Psalm 19:7-14, Rom. 8:5-6

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

 Having been saved from the world, Apostle Paul admonished us to no longer conform to the patterns we just got saved from; the sinful patterns as dictated by the world. It is important to note that the call was not just for us to stop certain acts but to take up new acts which can only be made possible by a change of mind.

Renewal of mind is a call to godliness. It is a call to focus our minds on things that edify our body and spirit; to submit our minds to God to such an extent that His good, pleasing and perfect will become clear and incontrovertible to us. When our mindset changes, we invariably change our lives because as we think so we act.

One very important requirement for mind change is intentionality. In other words, my heart and focus must be fully on this goal. How intentional am I in my desire for mind change? Is my intention founded on deep convictions? What actions do I take to back my intention? How accountable am I as a result of my intention? Am I vulnerable to the word of God to ensure a true and lasting mind change?

In Psalm 19: 7-14 the Psalmist recounts the many qualities of God's word. It is of extreme importance that we keep God's word in our hearts and meditate on it day and night to have a godly mind change. God's plan for the redemption of our souls is enshrined in his word. Our commitment to this word will keep us focused on this plan and take away all kinds of distractions and sinful tendencies. God's word will also open our hearts to wisdom as we navigate the trajectories and challenges of life.

In Rom. 8:5 Paul helps us see the sharp difference between a mind governed by the Spirit of God and a mind governed by the sinful nature.

How do you live? What are the things that excite you? Is your mind set on the things that stimulate the sinful nature or on the things that stimulate the Spirit? God's plan is for you and me to be transformed into the likeness of Christ through the Spirit. This transformation cannot progress and be complete if we continue to live by the sinful nature. God is Spirit and those who worship him must do so in spirit and truth.

I recently had an encounter with a brother who left the church over some things he disagreed with and which of course were sinful on his part. He had made up his mind never to return because he didn't have his way. However, after much reasoning and persuasion using the word of God, he saw his folly. He reviewed his decision and had a change of mind to return to God. He is currently attending church to get restored. That is the power of the word of God and the Spirit; it is the power that can change and transform minds, hearts and lives.

CONCLUSION

Followers of Jesus must have a different mindset from the world. It is when our thinking changes that our lives will experience change, growth and transformation. Are you willing to let God's word reshape your mind? Let us resolve to keep striving to become like Christ and attain a mind change that glorifies Him.

CALL TO ACTION

- How is your study of God's word?
- Come up with a bible study plan for yourself in 2023. Determine to make God's word your daily diet.
- Share what you are learning with others.

If you can change your mind, you can change your life." - William James.

FURTHER READING

Col 3:1-2, 1 John 2:6

2 Chron 34:29-31 | 1Cor 11:23-26

"A man who makes a vow to the Lord or makes a pledge under oath must never break it. He must do exactly what he said he would do." – Numbers 30:2

There is something that comes to mind when I think of vows: watching a couple on their wedding day make or recite their vows to commit to each other for life. To me, this is the most spectacular, solemn and meaningful part of the ceremony. I love weddings – the excitement, the romance, the glamour, the pomp. One reality or known fact is, a wedding is not a marriage. The beginning of marriage starts with vows; a commitment of a man and a woman to be with each other for better or for worse as long as they shall live. The truth is that not all marriages last a lifetime. Some are truncated by unfaithfulness, disappointment, abuse, trust issues etc.

Marriage symbolizes our relationship with God. (Is 54:5, 2 Cor 11:2). It is a relationship bound by covenant vows between us (the vassals) and God (the suzerain). As Christians, we often do not take seriously the implication of our covenant relationship with God. Covenant speaks of a deeply personal relationship. In God's covenant relationship with his people Israel, God says; "I will be your God and you will be my people" (Jer 7:23). God is the superior partner in our relationship with Him. He dictates the terms or conditions. His terms are not one-sided, for He also states His commitment to us if we keep faith in Him. God sealed His covenant by the shedding of blood as with circumcision in the case of Israel and Jesus' death on the cross for us who live under the new covenant.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WE RENEW OUR VOW?

2 Chronicles 34:14–32 is the story of Israel in the time of King Josiah. Notice that the word of God had been neglected in Israel over time. The Book of the Law was no longer being publicly read. It had been forgotten somewhere in the archives of the temple until Hilkiah the priest found it. How could this have happened?

When we fail to recall or remind ourselves of the covenant that binds our relationship with God, we will start to neglect His commands. This neglect implies that our worship of God is incomplete. King Josiah realized this and lamented; "Great is the Lord's anger..." (vs 21)

- We cannot afford to incur the wrath of God when we break our covenant with Him.
- Are there areas of commitment as a disciple that you have begun to neglect?

In **Joshua 24:24 – 27**, Israel was finally about to take possession of the land that God had promised to their ancestors long ago. God had been faithful to His promise that He would be Israel's God. Now, Joshua had to assemble the tribes and help the Israelites renew their covenant vow to be God's people. Why was this needed? Because just like in any relationship, time and situation can erode or weaken our commitment. This was the situation with this new generation of Israelites.

- We need to become true to God. Joshua was concerned that the Israelites were becoming untrue to God. They were not keeping their part of the covenant. They had started to drift. They were divided in worship, no longer committed to Yahweh.
- Have you been true to God in the promises you made through knowledge of scripture to live faithfully as a follower of Jesus at your baptism? Have you let time and situations erode your commitment or weaken your devotion?

1 Corinthians 11:23–26. Jesus instituted the new covenant with his blood. He had a commemorative dinner with his disciples and commanded them to do this in his memory.

- The key reason we meet on Sunday is to remember Jesus. It is He who paid the price for our sins. His blood sealed the covenant that brought us into a relationship with God. We partake in the Lord's Supper, not as an empty ritual, but as a sacred time of rededication to Christ.

- As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are to remember and recommit to living the covenant way.
- Like the public reading of the law to the Jews, we as disciples of Jesus renew our vow every week to stay faithful to our Lord. 1 Cor 11:28–32 warns us not to eat and drink judgement on ourselves as we eat the Lord's supper.
- We cannot continue to break the covenant with God and eat the communion without regard to its divine purpose. Does that mean we should abstain from taking the communion? No. It means we should urgently repent in any area that we have fallen short of. (Rom 6:1-2)
- At baptism, we entered into our covenant relationship with God, where we pledged a good conscience and made the true confession that “Jesus is Lord!” Do you remember that special day? Do you remember your vow?

CONCLUSION

Throughout the history of God's people, whenever they are called back to God's word, a period of spiritual revival follows. This is why we must constantly renew our vows. Rededication should bring an inspiring revival. Not doing so will lead to neglect and drift from God with damning consequences. We may be physically present in church but spiritually separated from the sustaining presence and power of God and the Holy Spirit.

CALL TO ACTION

- Revisit the Discipleship Study for your reflection at least twice this year.
- Take the weekly communion as an opportunity to meditate on how you have lived as a disciple in the last week. Make a conscious effort to renew your commitment to Jesus and pray.
- Have regular Bible Study.

- Be accountable. Allow your discipling partner to hold you accountable with the needed repentance or change.
- Are you married? How are you doing with your marital vow? Do your best to renew or recommit to any dying or weak area of your marriage.

FURTHER SCRIPTURES:

Joshua 5:2–12

Deuteronomy 4:25–31

Psalms 103:1 – 5

2 Corinthians 13:5

Deuteronomy 28

"If you live to be a hundred, I want to live to be a hundred minus one day so I never have to live without you."

A. A. Milne


"A vow is fixed and unalterable determination to do a thing, when such a determination is related to something noble which can only uplift the man who makes the resolve."

Mahatma Gandhi

Eph 4:22-24 | Col3:12-14

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires ... and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

"Therefore, as God's chosen people... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.... And over these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity."

 Glory be to God for yet another opportunity and a brand-new beginning to achieve the unachieved. For us as human beings, it has always been about achieving and acquiring and hardly ever about shedding, downsizing or entirely decluttering our lives of the things we can or should do without.

The scripture today is a message to alert us as those who have been given the opportunity of a new life and it is an encouragement to us to make every effort not to go back to our old ways of life.

I remember some time back when I decided to overhaul my wardrobe. I hadn't done so for a couple of years before then. Over half of what I had in it was either out of fashion or undersized. I got rid of these and by the time I was done with the exercise, my wardrobe was spacious and clean. I then made a resolve that this would be a consistent practice for me.

In the same way, as Christians, a new spiritual wardrobe means becoming better in our relationship with God, self, family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and our community at large. It means deciding to get rid of the garments of ungodliness that do not glorify God or portray us as Christians, such as hatred, fornication, adultery, idolatry, tribalism, slander, cheating, hypocrisy, factions, masturbation, nudity and the like.

(Gal 5:19-21) We should decongest our space regularly by regularly confessing sins and temptations, renouncing ungodliness and making decisions not to go back to them.

In **1 Pet 2:1-3**, Apostle Peter captures what we need to remain clothed with the garment of righteousness. We must crave God's Word. 2 Pet 1:5-9 tells us we must add on or acquire godly qualities: goodness, knowledge, self-control perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. The currency we need to acquire these are prayer, discipling, vulnerability and indignation to ensure a change.

CONCLUSION

What do you have in the closet of your heart? Here is a call to put off any ungodliness in us while we still can. Let us work with the Holy Spirit to renew us from within and to help us acquire new garments(character) that befit us as ambassadors of Christ; garments of truth, sincerity, purity and clarity of purpose as people who are heaven bound.

CALL TO ACTION

What are the old characters, lifestyles or habits in your life that do not glorify God and that you need to put off this year?

What are some new Christ-like apparel (character) that you need to acquire and start putting on?

Write these down and share them with your discipling partner.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of a new year, a beautiful opportunity we barely deserve. We are sorry for the times we failed to do as You command. We pray for inner strength and the guidance of your Spirit to do what pleases You. Help us to be obedient and to love you more; to work out our salvation and to be more like you in Jesus' Name, Amen.

FURTHER READING

Gal 5:19-24

Ephesians 1:18-19

"And [I pray] that the eyes of your heart [the very centre and core of your being] may be enlightened [flooded with light by the Holy Spirit] so that you will know and cherish the hope [the divine guarantee, the confident expectation] to which He has called you,..."

[AMP]

An enlightened heart, as mentioned above will be spiritual.

Will see things in the way Jesus sees them.

Will believe and be consumed by the things of God.

A spiritually filled heart will have the hope of heaven to which we have been called.

The race of heaven will be real to him.

He is constantly preparing and living like someone who is a candidate for heaven.

John 4:34-35

34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Here is a perfect example of the heart that is spiritually enlightened:

While the disciples were preoccupied with the 'important' day-to-day activities, Jesus saw opportunities to touch and impact lives.

The disciples saw Samaritans, a rival ethnoreligious group, that were not worthy of salvation.

They saw a very 'sinful' adulterer destined for hell. They only visited the Samaritan village for food for their survival.

Imagine all the jaundiced, judgmental opinions and stereotypes, can you in any way relate?

Jesus was very clear-minded about His mission. He was tired and needed a rest; and most likely hungry and waiting for the food that the disciple went out to buy. Lo and behold, some more important assignment took over His attention (to do the will of him who sent Him...).

In the same village that the disciples came back from without seeing a single open soul, Jesus with His enlightened spiritual eyes saw fields full of harvest. He saw a city of lost souls. A city that physically looked perfectly ok, but spiritually dead and in need of salvation. This city is my city, this is your city.

Q: How often do I put on Jesus' lens? Are you opening your eyes to see the harvest fields?

Matthew 9:36

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

As usual, Jesus was about His goal (v35).

He saw harassed, helpless, lost, and poor souls. He saw a crowd in need of shepherding and assistance.

In our fellowships, we have such people (physically and spiritually). How am I doing in reaching out to bring them comfort and show them compassion?

We live in a world that is filled with harassment and lacks love and compassion. Have you been seeing people through Jesus' lens or just consumed in your world?

There is a need to show compassion to others (disciples and non-disciples alike) without being judgmental and/or further complicating their issues. Jesus' sincere love for people converted their souls.

Are your eyes open to the helplessness of people around you; to the needs of fellow disciples struggling in their faith and with ungodliness?

Are my/your lifestyle and attitudes leading people to Christ or away from Him?

CONCLUSION:

Use Jesus' lens: (i) The various aspects of Paul's prayer must be the things that an enlightened heart pursues daily. (ii) My/your goals and pursuits must reflect God's goals.

CALL TO ACTION:

Pray for your heart and spiritual eyes to be opened daily.

FURTHER READING:

2Corinthians4:6, James 5:20

"We must look at the lens through we see the world, as well as the world we see, and that the lens itself shapes how we interpret the world."

— **Stephen R. Covey**


Paradigms are like glasses. When you have incomplete paradigms about yourself or life in general, it's like wearing glasses with the wrong prescription. That lens affects how you see everything else.

Sean Covey

Psalm 103:5 | 2 Cor 4:16-18

"...who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

"...though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day..."

 In today's Psalm, David urges his very soul to rejoice in God who grants him youth that keeps being renewed like that of an eagle. The eagle is the strongest of birds, flies at 200 mph, can look directly into the sun, and soars above the clouds. God offers us strength when we are weak, fortitude to look into the eye of the storm, and peace to rise above our challenges, struggles, hardships, and trials. It should come as no surprise to us that the One who created us also promises to renew our youth like this.

As a youth, I recall chapters in my life that were very difficult and almost unbearable. At some point, I was drained mentally and physically. I desired to gain admission into the University like every aspirant. However, my case was not it at all. After many attempts, I finally had to settle for a part-time program. Because of that, I couldn't have the exposure to campus life experiences like most of my mates and that affected me. I tried reapplying to other schools but nothing worked out. For 5 years, it wasn't easy. Since I was schooling part-time, I decided to look for a job, but despite my well-crafted CV, nothing was forthcoming.

Living a Christ-Like life was not easy. I was going through tough times and everything about me was tested! There were times that I stylishly put down my cross and cruised away, more like to just feel free. There were times I felt "God! Why is it always different when it comes to me? Why is it so hard for you to just answer my prayers straightaway?"

The questions went on and when God was ready to give His answers, He redirected everything about me towards Himself.

First, He set me on a journey of Revival, Restoration, and Renewal of strength by taking me to Akure, Ondo State for the church planting there as well as the Inaugural service and post-missions follow-up work. This period marked my first time living on my own and being fully accountable for myself. I was my own backup!

Then, He reset my paths and directions, and in doing so, He met my desires and blessed me. He renewed my strength to serve Him! He strengthened my faith, deepened my convictions and made clear to me where my fulfilment would be. I had prayed to God to give me a placement even before I finish school. God answered that prayer beyond my imagination by granting me admission into the Onyechi Emeka Oguagha School of Missions West Africa (NEOSOM) a few months after the Akure Mission.

This is the way God decided to renew my strength and honestly, it is way better and safer than any other plan I could have had for myself.

What are your desires?

Are they in line with God's desires?

In 2 Cor 4:16, Paul described us Christians who bear God's Spirit as having treasures in jars of clay. Our bodies are fragile and breakable, yet the Spirit in us is eternal. None of us is getting younger each year. Though outwardly, we may be prone to ageing, illnesses and the like, yet, inwardly, God is renewing us day by day if we remain steadfast and rooted in Him.

Is your spirit getting stronger?

CONCLUSION

No matter our wants, needs or desires in this life, it is only God that gives us true and perfect satisfaction. Some of His blessings might take time while others come in no time. However, He blesses you to renew you, so that you can glorify Him even more.

Whether we are young or old, God is the source of our strength and He should also be the recipient of our strength as we make it our goal to serve Him better and better.

CALL TO ACTION

What is one way that you can serve God better with your strength this year?

Is there an area where your spirit feels weak most of the time? Take it to God in prayer today.

"Running out of Human Strength is Normal, running out of God's Strength Is Not"

- Daniel Oyewolu Ayomide

FURTHER READING:

Proverbs 20: 29, Psalms 119:9-16, Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

"Change is supremely inconvenient, uncomfortable and naturally scary. Yet we only move through life through the process of change, reinvention and renewal, and so bravery is our quintessential rebel for pushing us past our own limiting beliefs and behaviours. Bravery is feeling the fear, immersing yourself into it and through it so you can come out the other side."

- **Christine Evangelou**

Gen 22:1-14

And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided" ...

The story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 is one that most of us know quite well. God gave Abraham a son in his old age; the fulfilment of a promise God made to Abraham that took twenty-five good years to come to pass. (Gen21:5) Some years later, God summons Abraham and tells him to go and sacrifice this same son as a burnt offering. What a challenge!

As I read this passage, I tried to imagine Abraham's thoughts. I am sure he did not sleep the whole night; tossing, turning and wondering how this could be the will of God. As they set out the next morning, perhaps he was hoping earnestly that God would say something to reverse the plan. With every step they took toward the mountain of sacrifice, Abraham's heart must have gotten heavier and heavier. How would he bind his son and slay him? What would he tell the boy's mother when he returned home?

But what strikes me most are the words of Abraham at this time. On the third day, he told the servants who accompanied them "We [the boy and I] will worship and then we will come back to you..." How would he return with the boy when he knew he was to be sacrificed? Later on, when Isaac, a smart and observant child noticed that everything was set except the lamb for sacrifice, he asked his dad about it. "Where is the lamb, Papa?" Abraham's reply:

God, Himself will provide...

We often joke that we will have a good time in heaven enjoying fellowship with our spiritual ancestors like Abraham and asking them lots of questions. The conversation might go something like this:

Us: So, Father Abraham, what made you say what you said that day? How did you know that God would provide a lamb from nowhere and that Isaac would return alive?

Abraham: Honestly, as the scripture says in Heb 11:19, I just reasoned that God would do the impossible. I had no clue how He would do it, but I was prepared for a miracle!

Last year in my family, we experienced God's miracles in amazing ways. My husband did not receive a paycheque for the whole year. We wondered how we would survive but we decided by faith that we would continue to give our tithes as if he was still earning. I tell you; God came through for us in ways that we would not have believed if someone had told us!

Dear brother or sister, are you prepared for God's miracles in 2023? This new year, you might be wondering how the myriad of needs in front of you will be met. The economy is not friendly. School fees, house rent, and the ever-rising cost of food and transportation are just a few of the headaches. It can seem overwhelming.

God, Himself will provide...

We may be tempted to exclude sacrificial giving to God from our financial plans for the year. "God will understand" "I don't have to give" "When the economy improves". God who provided the lamb for Abraham to sacrifice will also provide what we will give to Him. Only let us be faithful to obey when He calls us to do so.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, we serve a God of miracles. He is our Great Provider. He will come through for us and He promises to meet all our needs. Let us trust Him for this as we faithfully obey.

CALL TO ACTION

- Make a list of your needs for the year. Put this list before God in faithful prayer.
- Speak God's word to your situation, just like Abraham did. When you face that mountain, say "The Lord will provide!"
- Make plans of what and how you want to give to God this year. Ask Him to help you achieve this.

FURTHER READING

1 Kings 17:7-14 2 Cor 9:6-10

RIGHTEOUSNESS



Job 27:3-6

*3 as long as I have life within me,
the breath of God in my nostrils,
4 my lips will not speak wickedness,
and my tongue will utter no deceit.
5 I will never admit you are in the right;
till I die, I will not deny my integrity.
6 I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it;
my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live.*

NIV

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Day 9 – God's righteousness and ours
Day 10 – The Pattern of the World
Day 11 – Divine Escape Route
Day 12 – Salt and Light
Day 13 – The Pitfall of Self Righteousness
Day 14 – Flee and Pursue
Day 15 – Seeing the Invisible
Day 16 – Blessings of Righteousness

Psalm 89:14 | 1 Pet 2:24

*"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne
He Himself bore our sins in His body... so that we might die to sin
and live for righteousness."*

Over the next few days, our meditations will be on righteousness. What does the Bible mean when it talks about God's righteousness? What does it take for you and me to be righteous before God? What does righteousness have to do with our salvation? How righteous does one need to be to make it to heaven? Does being righteous mean being perfect? These are some of the questions we ask when we read our bibles. We will attempt to get a better understanding.

What does "righteousness" mean?

If you lived in the Old Testament times, you wouldn't think of righteousness the way we tend to think of it today; as a checklist of good and acceptable behaviour. Your understanding would be this: Righteousness is the character of being faithful to your covenant vows or commitment.*

"So, because God had entered a covenant relationship with Israel to be their God; their Defender, Protector and Provider (Ex 19:5-6) everything that God did in furtherance of that was referred to as God's righteousness. For example, when God delivered Israel from her enemies and punished her oppressors, or when God provided food and water for His people in the wilderness.

In the same way, righteousness on man's part meant faithfully fulfilling one's part of a covenant relationship. For the Israelites, that meant faithfully keeping the Law God had given them. Righteousness did not mean perfection. Nor was it a way of earning God's salvation. Rather, it was the faithful response of God's people to the gracious covenant that Yahweh had made with them.

*Trent C. Butler, *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Holman Publishers, Nashville, 1991: 1194-5.1

Let us use the example of a marriage covenant. From the biblical perspective, all the things I do as a husband to fulfil my covenant vow to my wife would be considered acts of righteousness such as loving her, taking care of her, providing for her and keeping her only as my intimate partner. She also, in a loving response, would be submissive to my leadership, respect and honour me and be a suitable helper to me. That would be her righteousness. She is not doing these things to earn the marriage. No. She is doing these things as a response to the covenant which I initiated and which we both entered into.

What does righteousness have to do with our salvation?

When Jesus came, He became the sacrificial lamb who shed His blood so that you and I could be bought back from slavery to sin and become God's possession. (Tit 2:14) When we responded to the gospel message by placing our faith in Jesus and making Him Lord of our life at baptism, something incredible happened. That response of faith catapulted us and gave us the same status of "righteous" that hitherto was only enjoyed by covenant-keeping Israel. That is the difference between "the righteousness based on the law" and "the righteousness based on faith" which Paul explained in Phil 3:9 and Rom 3-4.

God's plan is not for us to boast about our law-keeping righteousness ("I do this, I have never done that") He wants us to boast about Him! (Jer 9:24, Rom 3:27)

How much righteousness will get me to heaven?

Our striving to live a righteous life today is not so that we can earn our salvation. No amount of good work can wash away our sins and justify us before God. We became candidates for heaven when we repented of our sins and made Jesus our Lord at baptism. Now, we live for righteousness as our grateful response to the God who cancelled our record of sin, nailed them to the cross and declared us forgiven, acquitted, justified, ransomed, redeemed and guilt-free in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

God's righteousness is the totality of His covenant-keeping acts toward us. We see God's righteousness in His care and provision, in His justice and discipline and His granting us forgiveness and peace.

Our righteousness does not mean perfection or never sinning. It is rather our proper response to the incredible grace of God who brought us into a covenant relationship with Him. We now have the status of "Made Righteous" not because of our works but because of Jesus' sacrifice for us. Hallelujah!

CALL TO ACTION

Reflect today on your response to Jesus' sacrifice for you. Write down the ways that you want to show [more] gratitude for your priceless salvation.

FURTHER READING

Isaiah 5:16

Rom 4:18-25

Titus 2:14

"What we count the ills of life are often blessings in disguise, resulting in good to us in the end. Though for the present not joyous but grievous, yet, if received in a right spirit, they work out fruits of righteousness for us at last."

- **Matthew Henry**

Rom 12:2

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Apostle Paul beginning in chapter one of the book of Romans up to chapter twelve was building a case for God's mercy; His grace to all - first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, and the expected appropriate response to this mercy. Now in chapter twelve, Paul urges the disciples as beneficiaries of this great mercy and grace, to render true and proper worship to God which involves marshalling the body in daily righteous service to Him.

How does one achieve this "true and proper worship" in a wicked and morally depraved world? I think the answer is in verse 2 of the passage which reads "Do not conform....., but be transformed....". To my mind, this is using two different words to say the same thing – change from the former ways of daily living to a new way of living. Now the Greek word for conform is *symmorphos* which can be translated as "to deliberately or willingly shape your daily living along a defined pattern" or "to deliberately or willingly assume a certain form". So, we see that to conform is to be swayed at will – to easily align with the new or the next trend/fad/philosophy in the world.

By telling the Romans to no longer conform to the world's pattern, Paul urges them to stop deliberately aligning themselves to the worldly lifestyle and values of their day because only a non-conformer or transformed person can give true and proper worship to God.

What are some things that characterize the pattern of the world today?

- Fashion: Dressing without regard for modesty/moderation and propriety (1 Tim 2:9-10). People expose parts of their bodies that ought to be covered all in the name of fashion. Dress to look like a prospect and not a suspect! (1 Pet 3:3-5)

- Insatiable material acquisition: This is a direct result of situating happiness on material things rather than on contentment. This is why many in the world pursue riches at all costs or go for immediate gratification rather than true blessings of God premised on contentment (Ecclesiastes 5:10; Hebrews 13:5)
- Self-fulfilment over Self- denial: This is the pursuit of success at the expense of salvation.
- Show-off: Seeking praise or validation from people over validation from God.
- Freedom without boundaries: Drug/Alcohol abuse; sexual promiscuity, divorce, racism, tribalism, lewd entertainment
- Inordinate ambition: Making ourselves the centre of our universe. This is the altar on which service to God and humanity is sacrificed (Phil 2:3-4).
- Can you think of others? The list goes on.

The question is, as a disciple of Christ Jesus, do your lifestyle and values differ from those of the world? Better yet, has discipleship transformed your lifestyle and values? The Greek word for "transform" is *Metamorphousthe* from which we get our English word, *metamorphosis* which simply means change. A good example of metamorphosis is a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. Therefore "to be transformed" means to change from one thing to another. That is to say that there ought to be a visible change as a disciple in your lifestyle and values.

As for me, the only way I know how not to align to the pattern of this world is to be devoted to my daily Bible study, prayer, discipling relationships and meetings of the body in our small and large groups etc. These disciplines keep me in shape spiritually. We must remember that we are foreigners in the world. Heaven is our home country.

CONCLUSION

The world has a distinct way that it lives and behaves. As followers of Jesus, we must also have a distinct way we live and behave. Whatever the pattern of the world – inappropriate fashion, material acquisition, self-fulfilment, show-off, freedom from boundaries, inordinate ambition and the like; the values and lifestyle of a disciple must be different.

CALL TO ACTION

What patterns/lifestyle or behaviour of the world do you see creeping into your life? Go on your knees and pray for the grace to overcome. What new patterns will you start to adopt? Discuss these with godly friends and mentors who can help you on your journey

FURTHER READINGS


1Peter 1:14; James 4:4; Psalm 1

"The man who embraces a new paradigm at an early stage must often do so in defiance of the evidence provided by problem-solving. He must, that is, have faith that the new paradigm will succeed with the many large problems that confront it, knowing only that the older paradigm has failed with a few. A decision of that kind can only be made on faith."

Thomas Kuhn

1 Cor 10:1-11 | 2 Pet: 1:4-11

"God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear..."

 Yesterday we learned about the patterns of this world and how as disciples our lifestyles and values should differ and stand us out. Today, we will learn about the divine escape route that God provides for us to endure when tempted.

The saying "learn from other people's mistake" is employed by Apostle Paul in 1 Cor 10 as he encourages the disciples in Corinth (vs 1–6). The church was surrounded by every kind of ungodly practice which was a threat to the faith of the believers. Chief of these evil practices was idolatry which was gradually slipping into the church. The disciples may not have recognised it, but their daily lifestyle and values were becoming indistinguishable from that of the world around them.

Paul was concerned about the end of such ungodly practices as he knew how destructive sin was and that God who is just will punish all forms of wickedness (1 Cor 10:8–10; Col 3:5-8; Eph 5:5-7).

In verse 13, we get an impression that the Corinthians were excusing their drift into ungodliness on the ground that it was probably beyond their ability to resist, and that theirs was a peculiar temptation. Can you relate to this? Have you sometimes given yourself a "good" reason why you cannot take a stand for righteousness or repent of sin in your life?

Paul dismissed this excuse with the grand truth that no temptation is uncommon or peculiar to anyone. If anything, what underscores falling or not falling into temptation for every human being is "desire". Every temptation seeks a platform to express itself. That platform is untamed or evil desires (James 1:14-15).

Ask yourself "What are my uppermost desires right now?" "What sin can tempt me through this desire if I am not watchful?"

In 2 Pet 1:3-11, Peter advises certain virtues that a disciple needs to add to his/her faith in increasing measure. As we do so, we will see ourselves living an effective and productive daily life. Living this way will keep you from setting your heart on ungodly desires so that you don't stumble or fall into temptation. In other words, the more we are growing our faith, the better we will escape temptation's trap.

Again, we can infer from verse 13 that Paul is implying some temptations have a direct after-refusal effect, which I think is either physical or emotional or both. Our enemy is never pleased when we refuse to join his camp. He tries to intimidate, discourage or deceive us so that we might reconsider our stand for righteousness. Thankfully, God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. When you are tempted, Paul says, God always provides some way out so that you can endure it. Wow! What a divine escape route. Can you relate to this at various times in your life?

For me, many scenarios come to mind. I remember leaving one employment for another that offered better pay. Not quite a month after I joined the new employment, I began to observe certain sharp practices that I could not help but point out. That was the beginning of my trouble. I needed to point these things out because my position in the organisation required me to take over and continue these sharp practices. I resisted the temptation even though I knew it could cost me my job. This eventually led to my being sacked and parting ways with the company just two months later. Then began the years of financial pain. But I can confidently say that in all of this, God kept to His promise of providing a way out, so that I and my wife were able to endure it.

One way that God will provide for us to endure, is the help through the many brothers and sisters that make up the family of God (Mark 10:29-31). For us, we got spiritual, emotional, and financial help during the entire period, and then God opened other doors through which we were able to meet all our financial needs. Those days were pretty difficult to go through but thank God for His intervention as His word has promised.

All through that period, and even to date, not even once did our landlord increase our rent. I am now back in paid employment and we are doing well, but the battle to not fall for temptation continues.

CONCLUSION

Temptation abounds all around us and seeks to indulge us, but we must continuously decline its offers. We must rather set our hearts on doing the things that will keep us effective and productive as disciples. Always remember and trust God our Father who promises to provide a divine escape route to help you endure the after-refusal effect(s) of any temptation you are facing. He is faithful!

CALL TO ACTION

- Be honest and open about any temptations you are facing right now. Be in close touch with brothers and sisters who can encourage and admonish you.
- Take God's way out, no matter how difficult it may seem. He promises to see you through.

FURTHER READING


- Luke 4:1-12

"God hears and He sees, and you are not alone in your struggles. Remain firm and stable, for God has your deliverance planned."

Meyer

Matthew 5: 13-16

"You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world."

 If we claim to be disciples or Christians, it follows that we should do three key things: know the word, live the word, and propagate the word. The way we live our lives is fundamental to our claim to the fruits of the Spirit.

In **Matthew 5**, Jesus called His disciples and began teaching them. One of the first things He wanted them to understand was their new identity as His followers. The same scripture speaks to us today and helps us to understand who we are as Christians – The salt and Light of the world.

But what exactly does that mean? It means that we are like a seasoning to the world, the same way salt is a seasoning or a flavour to food. It means that we are the healing tribe of the world, the same way salt is used for therapeutic purposes. If salt loses its saltiness, it becomes useless and is of no value. In the same way, we lose value when we no longer live the Christian life. If we are much like the world by following its trends - music, fashion, and habits, we will not be able to affect the world positively- hence we lose our value and become useless. If we are more like Jesus and more unlike the world we become the lamp unto their feet that will light their path. As light, we are meant to show others the way to live.

Personally, I have not done enough in these areas. But I have chosen to repent today. Of what use is it if I know Christ but I do not live the life or tell the good news to others? It is like lighting a candle and hiding it under the table.

CONCLUSION

Friend, how are you representing Christ where you are? Do you study and meditate on the word daily? Do you live the life? Do you propagate the word enough to your friends and in your neighbourhood? If not, please repent like me. Repent today. From now ensure you play your role as the salt and light of the world around you. Jesus is counting on you to do this. God bless you.

CALL TO ACTION

Commit yourself to daily bible study. Spend quality time in the Word so that you can understand the will of God for your life, grow your knowledge of who you are in Christ, and learn how you can share your faith with others.

Commit to studying the Bible with a neighbour, friend or colleague at work/school at least once every week.

Let your light shine to reveal your righteousness

FURTHER READING

1 Pet 2:9-10

"The Bible says that Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. On the job, in the grocery store, even among unsaved friends and family members, God's people are there to bring seasoning to an unsavoury situation."

Meyer

Luke 18:9-14 | Matthew 23:1-11.

"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted"

"Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach"

It is beyond debate that our church's doctrines are sound, though they may not be perfect. For example, our study guide gives the clearest directions on how an unbeliever can come to faith in Christ. However, claiming and teaching sound doctrine does not tell who is spiritual. Your doctrine must reflect in your life. The Bible enjoins us to watch our lives and doctrine closely.

1 Timothy 4:16 says:

"Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your salvation and the salvation of those who hear you" NLT.

Sadly, there are times when our lives have not matched our doctrine. There have been situations where converts who were baptized after intense Bible study subsequently became disillusioned on discovering that the lives of those who took time to teach them God's Word were incongruous with what they were shown from scripture as the standard of discipleship. Some of us are not known as disciples beyond the precincts of the church. In some cases, husbands and wives do not live as two baptized disciples of Jesus Christ. Sometimes Christians go about their business in a way that is no different from that of non-Christians. The list goes on. My greatest challenge as a professional in the market square is to glorify God with what I do. It is tempting to want to conceal your identity as a disciple so that you can do business the way the world does and not be tagged as a hypocrite. It has not always been easy but I thank God for how far He has kept some of us.

When our daily lives do not match the doctrine we hold out or profess, this is called hypocrisy.

- Can your neighbours, colleagues or business associates identify you as a true follower of Jesus, not because of what you say but because of how you live and interact with them?

It is common knowledge that today, we have many preachers who preach and teach what they are not living out. The biblical standard is that you must strive to live out what you teach and preach to others. This was the high point of Jesus' encounter with the teachers of the law and the Pharisees in Matt 23:1-11. He denounced them because they do not do what they teach. They insisted on high and strict standards of obedience to the law of Moses which they did not keep. This is hypocrisy.

- For those of us who lead others, are we calling them to do what we are not doing? Are we willing to be held accountable for what we preach and teach?

Close to this sin of hypocrisy is the tendency to compare ourselves with each other rather than with biblical standards. This is called self-righteousness. It is eloquently addressed in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:1-11. The Pharisee was quick to point out how great he was doing spiritually in comparison to the Tax collector. It makes you feel good when your standard is that of a mere fellow disciple. Let us remember that Jesus is our standard! (Eph 5:1)

Most times we compare ourselves with others in the area of our strengths, not our weaknesses. We can be like this Pharisee when we look at what we do and use other disciples as a yardstick for measuring our spiritual well-being. As we can see from the parable, this attitude is both foolish and harmful because we end up with a false sense of security. We may think we are doing well when in fact, before God, we are doing woefully.

Jesus says we should not be like the Pharisees in this parable. Instead, the humble attitude of the tax collector was commended to us to emulate.

CONCLUSION

The attitudes of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in Matthew 23:1-11 and that of the Pharisee in Luke 18:9:12 serve as warnings for us as disciples of Jesus. Let us prayerfully live our lives devoid of the sin of hypocrisy and self-righteousness.

CALL TO ACTION

-Strive to live out whatever you preach and teach to others. Whether it be regular attendance to meetings of the body, commitment to giving and serving in the church, personal bible study, bringing visitors etc.; demonstrate the importance of these commands by your example.

-In what areas have you not been acting like a disciple of Jesus where you live, school, or work? What would these people say about you if asked? Decide to make necessary radical changes this year.

-Have you been comparing yourself to others for various reasons lately? Take your focus off people and fix your eyes on Jesus.

FURTHER READING

2 Corinthians 10:12.

"God judges men from the inside out; men judge men from the outside in. Perhaps to God, an extreme mental patient is doing quite well in going a month without murder, for he fought his chemical imbalance and succeeded; oppositely, perhaps the healthy, able and stable man who has never murdered in his life yet went a lifetime consciously, willingly never loving anyone but himself may then be subject to harsher judgment than the extreme mental patient. It might be so that God will stand for the weak and question the strong."

Criss Jami

2 Timothy 2 vs 20- 22.

"Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Timothy was a young man who began travelling with Paul for the propagation of the gospel in Acts 16. He was mentored by the Apostle and equipped for the task of the ministry. Paul recognized Timothy as his true son in the faith. The passage today is taken from Paul's letter to the young evangelist. He began by using the illustration of a large house with articles of varying quality and purpose, admonishing Timothy to set himself apart for God's noble purposes. He then went on to urge him to flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness. It is the same call for us all today. Let us examine this in more detail.

To flee means to depart, desert, retreat, take off, abscond, avoid, etc. Desire reveals the motive of the heart. Whatever we have a strong desire for in life is what we will go after and give our focus and energy to. Not all desires are bad. However, a lot of times we desire things that take the place of God in our lives. In other words, these desires are MISPLACED.

What evil desires do we need to flee from, especially as youths? Here are a few.

LUST:

As long as we are alive in this earthly body we will battle the lust of the flesh. 1 John 2:16. When we became disciples through the water of baptism, it is our spirit that was regenerated, our body was not. We must therefore put our bodily appetites under God's control. This includes our human tendency to indulge in things like food, alcohol, sex and other forms of pleasure-seeking. The Bible does not say overcome lust with strong faith. No. Lust is something we must FLEE from. There are times I have been drawn to lust over someone especially if I like that person. When I fed my lust, I allowed sin to occur and this never really ended well.

Whether young or old, we have a sinful nature that is prone to the enticement of the world. Its only aim is to draw us away from God. We must flee!

LOVE OF MONEY:

Someone wise once said, "A great number of people plan for their future. They earn to save or invest and it becomes a pattern." Priority changes. There is the quest to chase the zeros, amass wealth etc. All these things are good but the question is, "At what cost?" We must not keep amassing wealth just for our selfish interests. Let's not forget the scripture Matthew 6:19 which says "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We must set our priorities right.

GREED / SELF- CENTEREDNESS.

A greedy person is someone selfish. He or she only thinks of themselves. Philippians 2:3-4 says, let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his interests but also for the interest of others. Mr Dough, a renowned teacher once said "Don't think less of yourself but rather think of yourself less". Be confident enough in your awesomeness that you don't think twice about creating opportunities for others. I'm working hard at this!

FLEE FROM FOOLISH TALK:

Ephesians 4:29, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths but only what is helping for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen. Foolish talk is trash talk. Many times, we engage in reckless talk because of anger. At other times it may be because we want to "fit in" with the attractive but ungodly environment around us. We are no longer conscious of our words and we end up having zero control. The foolish talk also takes the form of gossip and coarse joking, sometimes on social media.

PURSUING RIGHTEOUSNESS, FAITH, LOVE AND PEACE.

Pursuing righteousness means being intentionally committed to God's standards. Paul encouraged Timothy to pursue a righteous life "along with others who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (vs 22)

Our man-made effort alone will not result in righteousness. We need the help of the Holy Spirit and the help of other godly men and women.

One thing that stood out for me after my baptism was mentoring. I had committed mentors and godly friends who were fully intentional about my growth and pushed me to pursue God's standard in my daily life. This gave me the foundation I needed and which I am still striving to build on today. I get distracted sometimes and fall back to my old sinful self, but studying God's word and talking to the right people put me back on track. I am truly thankful for that impact. It is a shame that many of us as youths have no spiritual mentors whom we are getting help from and who are accountable for our growth. We can not afford to be spiritually independent. We can identify disciples in the church who are committed to pursuing righteousness and build great relationships with such people.

CONCLUSION

We are all in a race and we must finish strong! This is only possible if we are willing to run away from some things at all costs (flee). But that is not all. We need to join with others to run after (pursue) the goal of righteousness, faith, love and peace.

CALL TO ACTION

- What sins or enticements of the world do you know that you need to run away from? Identify them. The time to act is now!
- Who will be accountable for your spiritual growth this year? Write down their names.
- Ask yourself in every situation, "WHAT WILL JESUS DO?" This might seem like an outdated question but it is a word that has helped me and will surely help you to be consistent in pursuing personal righteousness.

FURTHER READINGS

1 Timothy 6:11-12, Colossians 3:5, 12-14, Hebrews 12:4, 1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5: 15.

Hebrews 11:24-27; 12:1-3

"...And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"

On the popular HBO series 'The Game of Thrones' and its prequel, 'House of Dragons', alliances were formed between powerful houses by marriage to secure power or move a step closer to sitting on the Iron Throne. The Iron Throne epitomized what was seen as ultimate power and invincibility.

Today, we live in a world where all that matters is not what you know but whom you know and are in alliance with. Moses could have remained in the house of Pharaoh and possibly become the next king of Egypt but he gave up the opportunity because "he saw he who was invisible" (Heb. 11:27b).

There have been times in my walk with God when it was stormy and dull. Everything seemed unexciting, and emotionally draining. I went for months without having regular bible study because it had become stale and boring. Sharing my faith was the last thing on my mind and sometimes, temptations that once were never a struggle, suddenly became something I seriously considered. I look back and sometimes marvel at the thoughts that passed through my mind because it felt as though someone was whispering those thoughts to me and just like in a cartoon movie, my spirit in protest, leaves my body, takes a few steps away, turns and asks "Did you just think those thoughts?"

We all have stormy seasons in our spiritual lifetimes when our passion fizzles out, our love grows cold and our commitment wanes.

In our central scripture above, Jesus embraced his storm because he wasn't looking to sit on the Iron Throne of power, but to offer his life as a sacrifice of atonement for mankind. Unlike me, he didn't abandon his walk with God during his "dry spells". Instead, he found himself in a solitary place where he could pray and renew his strength for the journey ahead. (Heb 5:7)

Storms are a necessary part of life. However, what I failed to understand was that having all-year-round sunshine only produces a desert in one's life. The clouds (life's challenges) are necessary to produce rain for a bountiful harvest. As much as I would love to go through the year living on the mountaintop, the storms have been sent to keep me humble and dependent on God.

CONCLUSION

It's not easy to be righteous in this day and age. It's the invisible reward ahead that motivated the men and women of old. This must also be our motivation today. As you read this devotional, what do you see: your Iron Throne or the invisible One?

CALL TO ACTION:

- Spend time this week asking God to strengthen you with His might to endure spiritual trials
- Look for someone to share with about whatever you are going through

FURTHER READING

2 Cor 4:17-18

Isaiah 32:17 | Matt 6:33

"The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever."

"But seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these will be yours as well."

Today we shall round up our devotionals on righteousness by taking time to meditate on the wonderful blessings of living a righteous life.

To be blessed means to be happy, fortunate and fully satisfied beyond measure. It is the experience of hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness regardless of all outward circumstances.

Seeking the righteousness of God brings to us every blessing from Him. When we give God the first place in our lives, and when serving and obeying him have become a priority to us, we are assured of the blessings (everything else) from Him. God's favour is with anyone whose thoughts, speech, and actions are pleasing and acceptable in his sight. (Psalm 112 vs. 1-4, Psalm 128 vs. 1-2).

GOD REWARDS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Tell the righteous it will be well with them; they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds - Is 3:10

...the one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward - Prov 11:18,

The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness. - Ps 18:24

Righteousness is a path that brings us to a life that is filled with blessings and fulfilment from God. Throughout the scriptures, we notice that there are endless promises reserved as rewards of righteousness.

Let's take a look at some of them:

1. Peace of God

Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you – Jn 14:27

Great peace have they who love your law; nothing can make them stumble – Ps 119:165

The Lord blesses His people with peace – Ps 29:11

God's peace helps us overcome the pressures and uncertainties of daily living. It gives us confident assurance and the comfort of His presence in any situation we may find ourselves.

2. True Joy

The light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart - Ps 97:11-12,

The prospect of the righteous is joy... - Prov 10:28,

...may the righteous be glad ...may they be happy and joyful Ps 68:3

Joy is the smile of the heart, even when it is hurting or broken. Only in God can we find such true joy that defeats discouragement.

3. Answered Prayers & Deliverance

The righteous cry out....and the Lord delivers them from... trouble - Ps 34:17-20

The Lord's eye is on the righteous...His ear is attentive to their prayer - 1 Pet 3:12,

The righteousness of the upright delivers them... - Prov 11:6

God promises to hear our cries and save us when we are helpless. He is our ever-present help to lift us out of trials and troubles.

4. God's Direction & Guidance

The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in Him... - Ps 37:23-24,

He will guard the feet of His faithful servants ... - 1 Sam. 2 vs. 9.

God watches over and makes firm every step of His faithful ones. It's comforting to know that God watches over the righteous even in times of trials.

5. God's Provision

...I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread - Ps 37:25-26,

Surely You bless the righteous and surround them with favour...
- Ps.5:12

God takes pleasure in showering us with His favour and blessings that make us fully satisfied.

The ultimate blessing that God gave to us is the new life that we have through Christ's redeeming work on the cross by Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Psalms 112 is my favourite and a psalm of great encouragement as you strive to live a godly and righteous life. Many blessings are available to us if we delight in obeying God's instructions. The more we seek God's righteousness the more we will see everything in our lives being taken care of by Him. Let's ponder on these!

CALL TO ACTION

Pick one or two of today's verses and memorize them so that you will remember God's promises.

FURTHER READING

Ps 85 vs. 10, 13

Prov. 24 vs. 16

Ps 72 vs. 3, 7

Prov 15:29

Psalms 145:19

Prov 10:6

Ps 55:22

Prov 21:21

Phil 4:7

PURPOSE



Jer 1:4-5

4 The word of the Lord came to me, saying,

*5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*


NIV

PURPOSE

- Day 17** – Created for a Purpose
- Day 18** – Jesus' focus and Sense of Purpose
- Day 19** – Finding Purpose in Pain
- Day 20** – No Mistake
- Day 21** – Alone with God
- Day 22** – Dealing with Distractions
- Day 23** – Gifts and Calling (1)
- Day 24** – Gifts and Calling (2)

Isaiah 43:6-7 | Eph. 2:10 | 1 Peter 2:9 – 10

“Bring my sons from afar...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory...”

 Nothing happens by accident. Good housing structures, edifices, outstanding bridges, artwork /paintings (and so on) were all masterly designed, fabricated and created. All such human creations are made for specific purposes.

No human is a result of an accident. Ps. 139:13-16 says it all. “We are fearfully and wonderfully made” by the Supreme Being – God Almighty. Every one of us is unique and special in the eyes of the creator. How does this make you feel?

A. You are created for a purpose: (Isaiah 43:7, Ps. 100:3)

God created all of us for a purpose. But have you yet discovered the purpose or reason of your creation? There is no human born into the world with a handwritten note on what his or her purpose here on earth will be. We have to search and discover by ourselves.

Take out time to reflect on Rom. 9:14 – 23. What are you created for? All humans are created for the following;

1. To know their creator, to have an intimate, loving and endearing fellowship with him daily. Gen. 2:8–9.
2. All men are created to listen to the voice of their creator and obey.
3. All are created with a will and the ability to make choices between

- Good and evil
 - Life and death;
 - Light and darkness
- Gen 2:15-17.

- What choices are you making or have you made?
- The choice is yours.

B. You are called for a purpose: Have you been called? Take note that it is not all that are created that are called. Rom. 9:14-23. You can be called according to the purpose of God for your life based on your love for him.

Why you were called? 1 Peter 2:9-10

- From darkness into his wonderful light; the world we are born into is in darkness before God because of sin. Creation is subjected to frustration and bondage of decay (Rom. 8:18-21 Read and meditate).
- To declare the praises of him who called you. 1 Peter 1:9

Are you still in the business of declaring God's praise daily or have you allowed the worries of life to take this out of your daily schedule?

- You are created and called to do good works. Eph. 2:10 lists out the good works you are currently engaged in. If none, list out the good works you can start doing.

CONCLUSION:

We are all created by God for a divine purpose. But we all do have a choice and the will to live out the divine purpose for our creation and calling.

CALL TO ACTION

Find your divine purpose and live it out wholeheartedly according to the scriptures.

FURTHER READINGS:

Ephesians 2:8-10,
Proverb 16:4.
Ephesians 1:13 – 14,
Ephesians 4:1 – 4

John 12:23-27

"What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour."

There is a popular saying that your purpose will always drive your actions.

There is a reason we send our children to school; to secure a better future for them. There is a reason why we work; to earn a living. So also, there is a reason why we became disciples and chose to live as we do – To spend eternity with our Father in heaven.

In today's reading, we will look at the purpose-driven life of our Lord Jesus and strive to imitate Him.

"FOR THIS VERY REASON I HAVE COME" were the words of Jesus in verse 27b.

In **John 12:23-27**, Jesus' crucifixion was drawing near. Being human, He wanted to be delivered from this terrible death. Jesus paints a vivid picture of the necessary sacrifice He must undergo. A kernel of wheat must be buried in the ground and die to be able to produce many seeds. In the same way, the Son of Man must lay down His own life for many to be saved. Jesus remembered this fact and confessed: **"FOR THIS VERY REASON I HAVE COME TO THIS HOUR."** Jesus knew that He had to die to pay the penalty for our sins and also demonstrate His power over death. His resurrection proves that He has eternal life and can give it to anyone who truly seeks Him.

Let us read **Mark 1:35-38**. Here we see another purpose-driven statement of Jesus. Each time we look at this passage we take note of Jesus finding time to pray very early in the morning, and rightly so. Prayer is a vital link between us and God. Like Jesus, we must break away from others to talk with God even if we have to get up early. In vs 38, Jesus said "Let us go ... to the nearby villages so that I can preach there also. **THAT IS WHY I HAVE COME.**"

In the words of Jesus, the reason He had come was to preach. Also, Luke 19:10. Here we see the words of Jesus as He concluded His conversation with Zacchaeus the tax collector.

He said, "Today salvation has come to this house ... FOR THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE WHAT WAS LOST."

Jesus knew that no person is saved by good heritage. Faith is more important than genealogy. For me, my Dad preached (in his capacity) until he passed but that did not save me. I had to study the Bible and make changes in my life to become a disciple. Jesus said the purpose He came was to bring those who are lost into His kingdom. No matter their background or previous way of life, He would forgive and make new. This was Jesus' focus and goal.

Jesus' focus should be our focus as well. We must be so committed to living for Christ that we "hate" our lives. This does not mean that we become careless or destructive of the life God has given us but that we are willing to serve in any capacity to bring glory to God.

We must disown the rule of our self-centeredness by laying aside our advantages and pleasures, relinquishing control of our lives and referring control to Christ who brings eternal life and genuine joy.

CONCLUSION

The very reason for Jesus' coming was to lay down his life for my sins and yours. He also came to preach the good news so that many can turn to God and live changed lives. His purpose was and still is to seek and save the lost. Let us go and imitate Him and may God bless our efforts as we step out there. Amen!

CALL TO ACTION

In your notebook, jot down different ways you can glorify God today. Concentrate your efforts on preaching on finding a friend who will become a disciple by teaching him/her God's Word and how to live a changed life.

Looking at Jesus' words today, think deeply and write out your Purpose Statement. Why have you come? What are you here to accomplish for God? Make every effort to live up to it. Share with your friends and discipling partner to keep you accountable. I live to bring glory to my Lord through consistent worship, to cultivate a life of intimacy with God and to equip others through the power of the Holy Spirit. – Inspired words

FURTHER READING

1 John 3:8b 1 John 2:6

2 COR 1:3-11

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God..."

The Collins dictionary defines pain as hurt or discomfort caused by injury or illness. Pain can be mental or emotional distress or suffering; such as afflictions, agony, grief, hardship, heartache, and trauma.

HOW DO PEOPLE TAKE PAIN GENERALLY?

Pain is not a feeling anyone enjoys. We try hard to avoid it because it creates so much fear in us. Some try to hide it until it is too late. Others reject it, deny and pray it away, saying "it is not my portion". Contrary to the above, some people willingly accept and face the challenge headlong.

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE PAIN?

Pain in any form is part of life. It reminds us that we need God. When we go through pain, be it physical or emotional, we are tempted to ask God – "Why me?" 2Cor1:3-11 has answers to this. Pain comes our way because;

- *God wants us to be close to Him and do His will.*
- *It enables us to share in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.*
- *We can receive comfort from God.*
- *It helps us to rely on God and not on ourselves.*
- *We learn to have a hope of deliverance.*
- *It will lead to prayers and thanksgiving for self and others.*
- *God wants to be glorified.*

In the passage above, Paul used his story of hardship to help the disciples find a purpose in their pain.

As disciples today we should use such scriptures to help transform our thought patterns to that of Christ. Be careful not to follow the thinking of the religious world or pagans. Always remember that whatever happens to us is to be used to bring glory to God.

James 1:2-4 helps us to see the purpose of going through pain.

- Pain has a time frame.
- It makes us mature and complete
- Our attitude should be one of rejoicing. 'Consider it pure joy...

I ask myself if it is possible to be joyful when going through pain. I answered in the affirmative because that is exactly what I'm experiencing now - a life-threatening illness which started sometime last year. I decided to put the scriptures to practice and that has brought me so much joy on this journey. My illness has helped me experience God's amazing love. God has given me a second chance to run this race consciously and faithfully for as long as I remain alive. I have come to over-appreciate God's kingdom more these days. 99.9% of my support system comes from the saints – at home and abroad. Be it in prayers (abundant), visits, calls, financial support and more. My joy also comes from the many fruits this illness will produce for God. The impact it is having on many brothers, sisters and friends are heart-blowing. In all this I see God being glorified.

CONCLUSION:

- *Our pains should mature and transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.*
- *In pain, let our response be full of thanksgiving to God and looking out to comfort others going through the same.*

CALL TO ACTION

Have a time of pure thanksgiving today for any pain that you might be going through.

Take some time to intercede in prayer for anyone you know who is going through pain.

FURTHER READING:


2Cor12: 9-10; James 1:12;

Heb2:10, 5:8; 1Peter 2:21; 4:12-13

Ps.139:13 – 14 | 2 Cor 12:7b – 12

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well."

"My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness..."

 In this passage of Psalms, David is praising God because he is overwhelmed by the majesty of a God who could create him in such a meticulous, intricate and unique way.

The word "wonderfully" is the Hebrew word "pala", which means to be separate, distinguished, or unique. This means that God made you special. It starts with your genes; the four-letter code that provides the blueprint for every characteristic that makes up who you are as a unique individual unlike anyone else. Your DNA is what makes your body tick and, because we are not clones (like mass-produced goods from a factory), every human being's genome is distinct in its special way.

Have you ever looked in the mirror and told yourself that you are just average, inadequate, or not good enough? If so, then you are not seeing yourself the way God sees you – as His well-thought-out, divine creation.

There is no one else like you. You are the only you that God has ever created. Your DNA, fingerprint and retina blood vessel structure are all distinct features that have no duplicate in any other individual on earth. The word "fearfully" used in this passage is the Hebrew word "yare", which is the same word the Bible uses when referring to "fear the Lord". When you criticize yourself, you are also criticizing the God who made you. But God doesn't make mistakes.

In **2 Cor 12:7b – 12**, Apostle Paul speaks passionately about his human limitations. The fact that Scripture does not reveal the exact nature of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" seems deliberate. Vagueness allows his experience to reveal important truths, applicable to all believers.

If we knew with certainty what his condition was, it would become easy to miss the greater point of the purpose of the thorn and Paul's fruitful handling of the condition. That God's power manifests in our weakness is all-encompassing; all manner of physical and mental disabilities in humans do not make them less of God's masterpiece. Imperfect does not mean ineffective.

Our son had learning difficulties as a child. He was diagnosed as grappling with an autism spectrum disorder. As parents, we were shocked, confused and alarmed. Why? What? How?

We did more tests and several investigations. Finally, we went back to God on our knees. We asked Him to open our eyes to see the potential He had loaded in this boy. We sought professional advice and enrolled him in a special school. Later, he progressed to a regular school. Today he is currently pursuing his tertiary education. He does wonders on the computer, draws beautiful animation images and writes stories. We learnt as parents and taught him not to accept the thought of limitation. Indeed, in Christ, we can all live up to our full potential with God's power manifesting in our apparent weaknesses.

I learned three important lessons from 1 Cor 12:7 -

- Humility in God's servants is very important to God.
- God is willing to allow Satan a limited level of power to create helpful weakness in His children. As Paul shows in the following verses, God's power is made perfect in a believer's weakness, not in our strength.
- Spiritual strength is no guarantee of health, wealth, or prosperity—as Paul's reference to his prayer makes clear (2 Cor 12:8–9)

Just as Jesus prayed three times on that night of extreme anguish, Paul asked three times to be relieved of the agony he faced. God's response is most remarkable: His power is demonstrated when we are powerless to sort things out. How are you partnering with God and submitting to His strength?

CONCLUSION:

If we are convinced that:

** God is Omniscient, knowing the end from the beginning

**God is completely in charge of our lives.

**That He has a unique plan for every unique creature of His

**That we are purpose-driven creations

**That God dearly loves us

Then we must be completely persuaded that nothing about our lives in Christ is a MISTAKE.

CALL TO ACTION

Thank God specifically for who you are and what He created you to be.

Ask Him to show you how He wants you to use your weak or challenged areas to bring Him glory

Share your thoughts with someone who can encourage and hold you accountable

FURTHER READING

Eph 2:10

"Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to a believer, without God's ordering and permission. There is no such thing as "chance," "luck" or "accident" in the Christian's journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God. And all things are "working together" for the believer's good."

J. C. Ryle

Gen 32:22-30

"So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let go, for it is daybreak. "But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

*M*any historians agree that no sport is older or more widely distributed than wrestling. In almost every tradition, local styles have persisted till the present day.

As a child growing up in the Akwa Ibom State of South-eastern Nigeria, I remember every Saturday, all the children would converge in the living room of one of the few households with a television set to watch our most popular programme - Championship Wrestling. Heavyweights like Mighty Igor, Dick the Bulldog, and Hulk Horgan were popular stars that no one wanted to miss at that time. I remember how disappointed I felt to later discover that the stars we fell over ourselves to watch, were merely acting their scripts. They were all in the same association, screaming and threatening just for the audience!

The wrestling match that Jacob faced in today's passage was not stage-managed. Indeed, there was no audience to necessitate such luxury. Jacob was on his way to Canaan with his wives and children after a twenty-year sojourn in Paddan-Aram. His alienated brother, Esau, was coming to meet him; not with a band of musicians, but with four hundred armed men. Jacob was scared to death. To avoid total annihilation of his household he divided them into two camps and kept them apart. As they moved, he tarried alone, probably in deep thought and desperate prayers as well. This was when a strange man emerged to rudely interrupt his solitude by challenging him to a marathon wrestling bout that lasted till daybreak.

Here, Jacob was full of fear and desperation. He was probably expecting God to speak with him in a dream or vision as he had at other times. (Gen 28:12) or to reiterate His promises to him and speak comforting words. But this time, God addressed Jacob's fears, not with encouragement and assurance, but with confrontations that require him to wrestle all night.

Sometimes when we want God's comfort, He sends it in unexpected or unwanted packages. God even afflicted Jacob with a debilitating injury on his hip that left him with a permanent limp. If necessary, God will cause us to limp to increase our faith. It was only at the end of the struggle and encounter that God dropped a huge package of blessings and a new identity that changed Jacob's destiny forever. He was no longer to be known as one who received his blessing by deception. This time he received God's blessing by prevailing with God.

Wrestling with God may take several forms. Sometimes it is about going back repeatedly in prayer over something that is confusing or making us uncomfortable in our lives. Sometimes, wrestling looks like negotiating with God, and at other times it looks like reminding God of his promises while urging him to act. At other times wrestling with God is about struggling to come to terms with God's will for our lives and seeking strength to go with God's plan.

Sometimes, we wrestle with God and God grants that for which we are praying. Other times, we can wrestle with God and be transformed by the experience so that we gain wisdom to accept the answer that He has already given. God wants us to be active participants in the survival and growth of our faith.

Especially for us brothers, that participation should not be limited to our personal lives and pursuits, but to the spiritual life of our families. In the Bible, we see how the men, just like Jacob, always stood in the gap for their families. But what do we find in this age? Women are almost always at the forefront. They are the ones who will gather the children to pray. They show more concern about the ministry and talk more about service in the kingdom.

Some men feel if they can take care of the material and financial needs of the family, then their role is done and dusted. This cannot be if we must rise as men of God.

CONCLUSION

When God calls us to wrestle with him, there's always more going on than we first understand. God always uses it to transform us for good. Something deep inside us receives the divine touch and changes our perspective, our vision and our direction. That transformation will always uplift our families, the household of God and everyone around us.

CALL TO ACTION

Plan a personal retreat with God. Choose a place and time with no distractions. See yourself being transformed by that experience.

If you are a man, rededicate yourself to God's purpose for you – to be the spiritual leader of your home.

FURTHER READING

Hannah – 1 Sam 1:1-20

Hezekiah – 2 Kings 20


Jesus – Luke 22:39-46

"Waiting on God requires the willingness to bear uncertainty, to carry within oneself the unanswered question, lifting the heart to God about it whenever it intrudes upon one's thoughts."

Elisabeth Elliot

Luke 8:14 | Proverbs 4:20-27

"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures, and they do not mature"

 grew up as a kingdom kid. My parents are disciples of Jesus and I loved the church. I was inspired and got baptized when I was seventeen years old.

During my college days, however, I found that despite my faith I wasn't immune to the distractions that are common to most young people. I was influenced by friends that didn't share the same faith as I did. I wanted to make a lot of money so I could have the things that they had. I also wanted the pleasure of relationships as a young chap.

Funny right? No, not at all. Because of these, I misbehaved greatly and stopped growing as a Christian. I am thankful today that through it all my parents and other great disciples always urged me to stay focused on the purpose of God and the important things in life.

Life is full of distractions. It's one thing to have a noble desire of who and what you want to be, and it's another thing to manage those stumbling blocks that can end up diverting you from your goals. As youths, we are particularly prone to this. However, you will agree with me that we are all not moved by the same thing.

Think for a minute and ask yourself, "What easily distracts me as an individual? What tends to grab my attention or thoughts? Am I presently on track with becoming the person I said I want to be?"

Simply put, distractions and worries shift our focus and purpose. Distractions can be inward in nature such as fears, loneliness, worries, depression and laziness or they could be outward such as the influence of friends, addictions to social media/ the internet, comparing ourselves to others, undue focus on our jobs, on making more money, family issues and so on. In particular, we must beware when these things begin to take us away from our relationship with God. They are dangerous because they make us lose sight of God's word and plans of God for us.

We end up being led down the path of sin and begin to live in fear, anger, worry, and doubt. In Luke's parable, we read of the seeds that fell on thorny ground. Note that this seed began well, but later it was choked by the worries and pleasures of life. In the same way, we can start our Christian race well but later we become choked by keeping our focus on earthly things rather than spiritual matters. Are you in love with the temporary joys of this world? Jesus gave his word to set us free from worldly entanglements be they painful or pleasurable. In this parable lies an important warning, especially for Christian youths. So, I ask you; are you being choked or being renewed daily? How can you keep a clear focus on what is important in your life?

CONCLUSION

Distractions are common to everyone but the desire to live a transformed and purposeful life is what makes the difference. We should be determined to grow the seed of God's word in us. The riches and pleasures of life can choke us if we aren't careful. We are to help each other grow, hold each other accountable, pray and love one another!

CALL TO ACTION

Read Proverbs 4:20-27. The scripture gives us practical ways we can remain focused and steadfast.

- a.** Pay attention to God's words. Take it as your daily diet and memorize scriptures.
- b.** Meditate and learn to pray for God's wisdom in making decisions and taking action.
- c.** Be open to godly friends about your struggles and challenges.
- d.** Identify and eliminate whatever is a distraction to you.
- e.** Guard your heart and actions because everything we do flows from it.


By prevailing over obstacles and distractions, one may unfailingly arrive at his chosen goal or destination – Christopher Columbus.

ADDITIONAL READING

Psalms 119:9

Romans 12:3-8

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. ..."

 Gifts are given and received in various ways. One of my birthday memories is that of my fiancée as at then, friends and family who surprise me with gifts (presents). I get wowed by such gifts not because they are expensive (it may be as simple as a can of malt – yes!) but because of the heart behind the giving. The spiritual gifts God gives to every believer are not like those of my fiancée and family members. God's gifts are beyond measure. God has given each of us a spiritual gift. The purpose of that gift is to support and sustain the body of Christ. Not only that, but He also gives us all that is needed to carry out those functions vital to the health and ministry of His body, the church. With those gifts, God gives to each of us a measure of grace to empower us for service and a measure of faith which brings glory to Him only when expressed in humility.

A sense of purpose is a call to use our God-given gifts to serve in His vineyard. As disciples of Christ, we have all been endowed differently. Whatever gift or talent we have is to be used ultimately to serve God and is not just for our edification. That is the purpose. It isn't all about us but all about God.

Do we take out time to call our families, friends, and disciples regularly? That call or text can save a life and can as well make all the difference.

That is the gift of encouragement. The ability to serve is another virtue we need to take into cognizance. We can never go wrong serving. Jesus served! Unfortunately, if we are not careful, we begin to lose the gift and instead we also expect to be served. This is evident in the way we conduct ourselves when we come for service.

Just as the word implies, we should come to "Service" to serve. So when you come to church services, do you express your God-given gifts like encouragement, giving generously your time & resources, and showing mercy for those who are struggling in faith among others?

1 Peter 4:7-11

*"The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of a sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.
Amen."*

CONCLUSION

Each of us has some gift or quality that God gave us and that He wants us to use to bring Him glory. He who gave us will enable us. What is yours?

CALL TO ACTION

This is a call for you to explore your unique talents and gifts and commit to using them for God and God's people in 2023. Lord, I pray that we will humble ourselves as we live out your words, and become functioning members of the body, exercising those gifts that you have graciously extended to us. Amen.

"When purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable"

- Myles Munroe

FURTHER READING

Matt 25:14-30

Be TRANSFORMED WORD SEARCH



AWESOME
BUTTERFLY
CHANGE
CHRIST
DANGER
DISCIPLE
DISCIPLESHIP
DISCIPLINE
DISTRACTION
FRIENDS
GIFT
GOD


GOSPEL
HOPE
HOUSEHOLD
HYPOCRISY
INVINCIBLE
JESUS
KINGDOM
LAGOS
LIGHT
LOVE
MIRACLE
MISTAKE

PARTNERSHIP
PEACE
POWER
PURPOSE
RELATIONSHIP
RENEWAL
RESURRECTION
RIGHTEOUSNESS
SALT
TRANSFORM
VOWS

Mark 5:18-20 | Ex 4:2,17

“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you...”

“But take the staff in your hand so you can perform signs with it...”

 Yesterday we looked at how God has blessed each of us with unique gifts that He intends for us to use, not for ourselves, but for the Body of Christ.

Today we will look at another aspect of God's gifts and calling – using our gifts, whatever they may be, to bring souls to God.

In Mark 5, we read of the demon-possessed man who was healed by Jesus. He wanted to go with Jesus (a very noble desire if you ask me) but surprisingly, the Lord didn't think that was a good idea. He had a different assignment for him – to go back to His people and tell them how much God had done for him. Those who knew this man's former hopeless condition would be the ones most impacted by his present transformation.

Often, our life experiences are the equipping class that God puts us in to prepare us for the calling he has in store for us. What experiences have you been through in life? Have you ever asked yourself why God allowed you to go through such? Perhaps He is calling you to reach out to certain people using your life story as a witness.

Moses had a staff in his hand when called to lead the Israelites. God did not ask him for what he did not have but turned that old stick into an instrument for miracles. We all have one unique talent or another. Are you into music? Perhaps God has a mission for you to reach a talented but lost soul in the music industry. Are you a sports lover? Maybe your mission field is not in some faraway land but on the football pitch in your neighbourhood.

I have always loved working with young people. I served in teen ministries in the past but later moved on to other kingdom responsibilities. Of recent, the Spirit has been nudging me to reach out to youths in my community. I finally decided to dump my excuses of being too busy and step out in faith. I am currently planning empowerment and outreach to youths in my area. I am excited about this and I can't wait to see what God will do!

CONCLUSION

Let us remember that everything we have and are is a product of God's grace and must be used for God's glory.

CALL TO ACTION

Ask yourself, "Who is God sending me to with my gifts, talents or the life experiences I have encountered?"

Pray about this and ask God for direction. Share whatever ideas you have with godly friends who can spur you on.

Take a small step in this direction. Reach out, call, post, give, invite.

Watch God do great things.

"We do not need permission to do what delights God"

- Anonymous

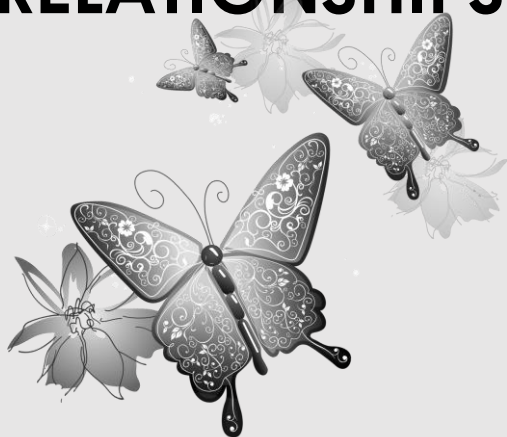
FURTHER READING

Acts 18:24-26

"To place ourselves in range of God's choicest gifts, we have to walk with God, work with God, lean on God, cling to God, come to have the sense and feel of God, refer all things to God."

Cornelius Plantinga

RELATIONSHIPS



Deut 31: 6

6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

NIV

RELATIONSHIPS

Day 25 – God's Unfailing Love

Day 26 – He Calls us Friend

Day 27 – Best of Friends

Day 28 – God's Household

Day 29 – Kingdom Adventurers


Day 30 – Partners in the Gospel

Day 31 – Partners in the Gospel

Day 32 – A Friend to the Poor

Isaiah 54:10

*"Though the mountains be shaken
And the hills be removed,
Yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken
Nor my covenant of peace be removed,"
Says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*

When God makes a promise, he keeps it. Even when we falter, God does not take his love away from us. In Psalm 89: 33-34, God says "...but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered." Indeed, so great is the love of God! Because love is intrinsic to God's nature, it is important that we remain steadfast in our knowledge and understanding of God's love. This is crucial in order for us to remain in his love (John 15:9) and in order for us to be continually compelled by it to live for Christ (2 Cor. 5:14).

God's love is unfailing and unconditional.

The common mistake we make as people is in thinking that God is like us. We forget that even though men may have failed us time and again; we can put our trust in God who never fails. I often find it difficult to wrap my head around God's unfailing love for me because I feel that I do not deserve his love. On top of that, my judgmental attitude towards my neighbour is exposed when I see their failings and I struggle to love them. I need to remember that God does not struggle in this way. Whether I deserve it or not, God's love for me, will not change. Whenever I understand this, I am at peace, grateful and motivated by his love to pursue righteousness.

God's love is greater than our trials.

Nothing exposes our human frailty more than sickness and death. This is why our faith and trust in God's love are put to the ultimate test when we or our loved ones face intense health challenges. Similarly, the death of a friend or loved one can shake us to the core and cause us to question God's love.

At such times, victory comes as we deepen our understanding of God's complete love, kindness and provision for us. Strength comes when we remember, that according to Rom. 8:38, nothing can separate us from God's love. Even in sickness and death, God's unfailing love is with us.

Longstanding trials and hardships can drain our faith and sap our conviction about God's love. When you have endured years of challenges and difficulties; whether they be relational, financial, or personal; or when you have been praying for something for years and you are still waiting, God's love can seem very far away at best.; like a fairy tale. Consider then - his love and kindness to you in the past and remember that his love stands firm forever (Psalm 89:1-2).

CONCLUSION

We can rely on the unfailing and unchanging love of God for us. He promises to never leave us or forsake us. He was there for you in the past, He is with you now and He will be on your side forever, come what may.

CALL TO ACTION

Write out a list of ways that you have experienced God's love in the past. Let these reminders encourage you.

If you know someone who is presently struggling to believe that God loves him/her, share these with the person.

FURTHER READING


Romans 8:31-39

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

Isaiah 54:10 (NIV)

JOHN 15:15

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

 Friends of God! Friends of Jesus! That is who we are. What an amazing privilege! The reality of the grace by which we stand has granted us blessings in Christ on many levels.

Jesus our Saviour -	Acts 4:12.
Jesus our Lord -	Acts 2:36.
Jesus our brother -	Mark 3:35
Jesus our friend -	John 15:15

Jesus' words in John 15:15, further define how He has pulled us close. We are assured of this because He has made known to us, everything that He learned from the Father, and so we know the way to live to please God. We get more context if we back up to the previous verses.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. (John 15:9)

Amazingly, Jesus' love for us is of the same intensity as the Father's love for Him. In addition, Jesus charges his disciples (and us) to remain in His love so that we can continue to be in that tight circle of love. Remaining in His love will require a conscious decision by us daily, to be close to Jesus – obedient, prayerful and depending on Him in every circumstance. We will now see how this circle of love will not be complete without a few other key elements.

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy, may be complete. (John 15:10-11).

Here we see that obedience, love and joy all go hand in hand. Our obedience to Jesus must be motivated by His love for us. This is why our loving obedience helps us to remain in His love and be complete in joy. Jesus goes on to say that His command to us is to love each other as He has loved us (John 15:12-13).

Now we see that this circle of love flows from Jesus' love for us to our obedience to Him, and then to joy and then to love one another. Many of us can relate to the struggle to remain obedient in our Christian walk. For me, my motivations are not always where they need to be. Instead of joy I sometimes feel pressure and drudgery, even when I am trying to obey. Conversely, I have experienced my best seasons of joy (and even growth) when I have trained my heart to focus on and be motivated by Jesus' love for me.

CONCLUSION

Jesus spoke the words in John 15:15 in the context of His love for us, His desire that we obey His command to love one another and ultimately, to experience a complete joy. He calls us friends. Allow Jesus' love for you to be your reason for living an obedient life of love. Remain in that circle of love and friendship with Jesus today and every day.

CALL TO ACTION

Confess the ways that you have not remained in Jesus' love.

Be a joyful friend in going about Jesus' business today.

FURTHER READING

Hebrews 2:10-12

1 Sam 23:15 – 18 | Acts 9:23-27

“Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God”

On today's passage, we read about the relationship between Jonathan, son of Saul, and David whom God had anointed to be Israel's future king. Their friendship began back in 1 Sam 19:1 when David entered the service of King Saul. David became more and more powerful and successful in Saul's army and Saul became jealous of him and plotted to kill him.

Jonathan and David should have been sworn enemies considering this state of affairs. Imagine what it would have taken Jonathan to risk his father's ungodly wrath and even his own life, in supporting David. Many times, he would secretly go to the wilderness or desert where his friend was hiding, and he would strengthen, encourage and assure him. (1 Sam 20).

What is striking about our verse today is that in a few words, it tells us something important about the nature of the friendship between these two young men. Jonathan helped David strengthen his relationship with God.

I will never forget a sermon preached from this passage by Dr Phil Osagie. How do you think David was feeling about his life at this time? Here he was, anointed by God to be king, yet living like a fugitive. His faith must have been at an all-time low. Jonathan helped him remember God's promises and purposes for His life.

Barnabas is another example of a great friend. In the early days of Paul's dramatic conversion (Acts 9), it was Barnabas who took it upon himself to reach out to this controversial new disciple and introduce him to the leaders of the church. Though Paul would go on to be even more influential than him in the kingdom's advancement, Barnabas was that godly friend who encouraged his faith at a time when he needed it most.

One of the things I cherish so much about being a disciple of Jesus is the wealth of godly relationships I can enjoy in the kingdom. Many times, I have been down and discouraged. I have had issues in my family. I have made poor financial decisions. I have struggled in leadership. Yet through all these, I can point to amazing brothers and sisters who neither condemned me nor condoned my sins, but helped me get back on track and renew my strength in God. One day after prayer, I decided that I would be there for others in whatever way I can, just as many have been there for me.

Brothers and sisters, what is the quality of our relationships? Are we spurring one another on toward love and good deeds? Or are we more involved in gossip, slander and "character assassination"?

Do we have friendships that are mainly about material interests; networking, business connections etc but we shy away from calling each other to God and His standard where necessary?

CONCLUSION

None of us can make it through life, including our spiritual life, without friends along the way. Let us embrace those friends who call us higher. Let us be that friend who lovingly calls others higher.

CALL TO ACTION

Today, evaluate your kingdom relationships. List people who've been there for you and send them a heartfelt thank you. List people whom you can be there for and start to do something, no matter how small.

Be the best friend you can be. You cannot hold a torch to brighten another person's path without it brightening your own.

-Ben Sweetland

FURTHER READING

Prov 27:9,10,17

Eph 3:14 | 1 Tim 3:14-15 | Isaiah 32:2

"For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name...."

The Bible uses many metaphors to describe the church. An army (2 Tim 2:4), a field (1 Cor 3:9) a bride (Eph 5:32) and so on. Today we will learn from a very important one – the family.

One of the cornerstones of the Christian faith is that God is not just Almighty and Sovereign, but He is Father. Through Jesus, we who believe are now His adopted children, brothers of Christ and co-heirs of everything God has promised. This is nothing short of amazing!

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1

In 1 Tim 3:15, Paul describes the church as God's household. What did he mean?

Growing up, I have many memories of the household in which I was raised. As was common in those days, we grew up surrounded by parents, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins, not to mention other distant relatives that were always in and out of the homestead. Never mind that you had to scramble for food or a decent corner of the bed at night because there were so many occupants in one room. In the household, we were nurtured and everyone had a role to play. We fought, forgave, were punished for wrongdoing, praised when we did well and taught to look out for each other. No matter what you went through out there, you were sure that when you came home, you would find something to eat, somewhere to sleep and someone to talk to. One thing was for sure – we were stuck with each other! Changing families was not an option!

For some of us, our recollections of family life are not pleasant – they may even rouse deep feelings of bitterness or pain. If this describes your situation, know that in Christ, our Father wants to heal your wounds and give you a true sense of family and belonging. (Ps 27:10)

In 1 Tim 5:1, Paul told Timothy how we should relate to one another in the spiritual family. Older men should be treated as fathers. If an older man needs to be corrected, it should be done with respect. Older women should be treated as mothers. Younger men should be raised and inspired as brothers whilst younger women should be treated like their own sisters – with the same level of protective purity.

Isaiah 32:2 describes the kingdom of righteousness - God's kingdom. The household of God should be a haven, a refuge; the place where we give and receive spiritual, physical, and emotional support to one another. As with our households, there are no spectators. Only visitors and guests are uninvolved.

In today's world where family values are fast being eroded and the individualistic lifestyle is gaining ground ("no one should get into my affairs"); where people view church the way they view the neighbourhood shopping mall ("go get what you need and get out") and great relationships are measured by profitability ("how will it pay me") rather than perseverance; the true people of God must stand out and show those around them how to live. In our marriages, dating relationships etc, God forbid that the world should become our model.

As disciples of Jesus, one of our biggest strengths is the quality and closeness of our relationships. So many people have been baptized not only because of what they saw in the Bible but because of what they saw in the way we loved and relate to one another. (John 13:35) Let us not take that for granted! No family is perfect, but great families fight to remain close.

CONCLUSION

We are blessed to belong to the greatest, biggest and most influential family on earth; the family of God! We belong here. Let us renew our commitment to our Heavenly Father and to our brothers and sisters in Christ as we play our part to build the Household and bring glory to God.

CALL TO ACTION

- Discuss today's devotional with members of your small group and share your responses.
- How are your discipling relationships? Decide one or two steps you will take to strengthen those relationships and take them higher.

We are better together

- Coca-Cola advert

FURTHER READING

Acts 2:42-47

Ephesians 5:1

Ephesians 5:21 – 6:1 -9

"The assembly (ekklesia) is the family -- the household -- of God. The Lord Jesus is the only one with absolute authority, and He is the chief feeder of all the saints. Therefore, as brothers and sisters in the same family, everyone is equal in status, but some may be relatively ahead of others in life experiences and knowledge"

Henry Hon,

1 Samuel 14: 1-23

“Jonathan said to his young armour-bearer, “Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will act on our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.”

Today we will consider how we can partner with one another to do great things for God by looking at the relationship between Jonathan and his armour bearer.

We often hear this saying: No man is an island! Everyone relies on the help of others. Imagine a football team with only one man playing the entire midfield, attack and defense. No matter how much of a professional he is, what would be the outcome?

In 1 Samuel 14, the Israelites were at war with the Philistines. Backing up in chapter 13 we see that for the entire army, all they had to fight with were farming tools! Only King Saul and his son Jonathan had steel swords. Amid this discouraging situation, Jonathan and his young armour bearer decided to do something daring and different.

Jonathan and his armour bearer were an interesting pair. Jonathan was a young prince while his armour bearer was a servant – perhaps no more than a teenager. They were not well equipped with weapons for this battle. Despite this, they had a great connection and they both had the heart to do something extraordinary and out of the blues that would bring victory to Israel.

Imagine your good friend calling on you to join him or her to go preach in the Sambisa Forest! Would you give it a thought? That was pretty much what Jonathan was calling on his armour bearer to do. The armour bearer's response was, “Go ahead, I am with you heart and soul.” (Vs. 7) He must have shared Jonathan's belief, vision and gutsy faith. Jonathan on the other hand did not look down on his armour bearer as inexperienced or too young. What mattered most was that they were united in one purpose.

How are your connections? How is your relationship with others whether younger or older than you in age or faith? Do you appreciate those who can call you higher? Do you have those brothers or sisters in your life who will dare you to do more and be more for God?

Our Christian race becomes an inspiring adventure when we partner with others to do things that will glorify God.

We are writing this devotional as brothers who have had some great adventures together in God's kingdom. In 2021 there was a call for volunteers to join a mission planting in one of our Nigerian churches. We had never been part of anything like that before. We had our jobs and our plans. But guess what? We decided to step out in faith and go for it. Looking back, we know that if it were left to each of us on our own, we might not have had that courage. But being together, we were able to spur one another on.

The mission adventure transformed us from spiritually cool disciples to spiritually hot! We learned to survive without our usual comforts of life. We learned to be focused on God. We shared our faith like crazy! We learned to rely on our convictions and not wait to be encouraged by Dad, Mum or by Uncle this or Auntie that. It was a life-changing experience. When the assignment was over, we did not want to leave!

As we saw in today's passage, God blessed the faith of these young men. Because of them, Israel gained victory over the notorious Philistine army. (Vs 13-14)

We too can achieve great things when we are connected with others, striving as a team and sharing the vision that Jesus gave us.

Are you partnering with others as a disciple of Jesus? Are you trying to survive on your own, or trying to live an independent existence as a Christian? Do you exclude yourself from church activities or do you try your best to be a part of what is going on? This new year, make a decision that you will build stronger connections with others and you will be more involved in your bible talk, region or ministry than ever before.

As youths, we are naturally adventurous. We easily enjoy and adapt to new experiences. Why not let's be crazy for Christ? Where are you targeting all your strength? Let's use our passion, vibrancy and energy to do different exploits for God.

For those of us who are older, our zeal should not burn out. There is no limit to the exploits we can do for God. Our best years as a disciple should not be behind us but ahead of us! Let's use our long-standing friendships to do greater things for God together.

CONCLUSION

Jesus said those of us who believe in Him will do greater things than He. (John 14:12) God wants us to dream big for Him. When we walk and work together, we grow each other's faith and build each other up. More than that, God blesses and rewards our faith amazingly.

CALL TO ACTION

- Decide to be fully committed to the things of God and activities in the church.
- What do you want to do for God this year?
Here are some "scary" things we thought of doing together.
 - Study the bible with 40 people in one month
 - Go on a mission trip along with other disciples
 - Visit every region in the church to fellowship and encourage others.
 - Be part of a nationwide Bible Talk Equipping Seminar.
- Make your list. Choose your kingdom partners who will join you and encourage you. Go for it!

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.


- Victoria Odoi-Atsem

FURTHER READINGS:

Acts 2:42-47 Mark 2:1-12

Phil 1:3-6, 2:25-30

"In all my prayers for all of you, I pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..."

 Yesterday we learned from the story of Jonathan and his armour bearer how God is glorified when God's disciples partner in doing exploits for Him.

Today we will learn how we can maintain godly relationships as we work side by side in different capacities in the kingdom.

In Phil 1:3-6, Paul began his letter to the Christians by expressing his joy that they were all partners in the cause of the gospel. Throughout his letters, we get a glimpse of his relationships with many brothers and sisters who worked together with him, as he preached and planted churches. Some were there for him, providing for his physical needs. (Rom 16:1-2,13) Others suffered with him in prison. (Col 4:10) He remembered all of them and held them dear in his heart.

As we mature in Christ, God will always call us higher to serve Him by taking on more responsibilities. As we do so, however, we cannot be unaware of Satan's schemes to divide us and destroy the unity Jesus prayed for (Jn 17) and that is crucial to the success of Christ's mission. Whether in our bible talks, family groups, leadership groups or other units of service in the church, our unity is vital!

- Let us **complete** and not **compete** with one another. (1 Cor 3:6-9) We can learn a lot from the field of play. Watching the last World Cup taught me a lot of life lessons. Some teams remained united and encouraging to one another even in the face of defeat. In other teams, you could see team members blaming and exasperating each other. We must always remember that we are on the same team.

- We are all **brothers**. In Matt 23:1-11 Jesus warns us that we must see ourselves most importantly as brothers and sisters. We should not be overly focused on positions or titles that we or others might bear.

- We should **recognize** the **grace/gift** that God has deposited in each of His servants. In Gal 2:9 Paul described how, though he and Barnabas were quite new in leadership, the older apostles recognized that God was calling them for a peculiar assignment, and they gave them their full support.

Are you a team player?

Do you fight for unity with your brothers and sisters?

Are you willing to let others shine if that will bring glory to God?

CONCLUSION

What a privilege that we can share not only the gospel but our lives as well. (1 Thess2:8) Let us glorify God by being humble and completely unified (Phil 2:1-4) as we strive together for the heavenly prize.

CALL TO ACTION

Decide on one thing you can initiate to do that will build closer unity in any of the groups you belong to at church.

FURTHER READING

– John 17:20-23


"For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me."

Philippians 1:7

2 Cor 2:2 | Col 3:13

"For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved?"

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

 We are imperfect people in imperfect relationships with each other. It is more painful when a friend hurts or betrays us. A wound from an enemy is bad enough but from a friend? That's another kettle of fish! You may be familiar with the famous exclamation by Julius Caesar **"et tu Brute"**, on seeing his friend Brutus among his assassins. Shocked and dejected, he went on to say **"then fall Caesar"** as he succumbed to the cold hands of death. What a tragedy to be stabbed by a friend.

Hard as it may be, as Christians, we are called to respond differently as Jesus did in Matthew 27:50 - "Jesus replied, *"Do what you came for, friend"*. Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus, and arrested him."

Jesus is our model, but it is so difficult to imitate our Lord's attitude. We are usually quick to quote the bible verse Ex 21:24 - *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot"*.

We would not want to remember – Matthew 5:38-41

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

This is easier said than done, right? I agree with you.

I would like to share a personal experience. A few years back I decided to get a second stream of income and contacted a friend who is a renowned importer of automated water bottling machines. We reached an agreement, and I paid a total of N42m (all my savings and loans from the bank) for the manufacture, importation, and installation of the machines. Long story short, my friend used my money for something else and couldn't fulfil his obligation nor refund my money. To make matters worse he became incommunicado; his office was shut down and he was nowhere to be found. After several weeks he showed up begging for mercy. What was I to do in this situation? I got loads of advice including, "Arrest him!", "Report to EFCC!", and so on. I was tempted to do these but then I thought, "Would that bring back my money?" I also asked myself "What would Jesus do?" Matt5:38-41 and Rom12:17-19 were burning on my mind. I decided to let him go.

Though I refrained from having any other business dealings with him, we kept in touch. Occasionally he would call me asking that we pray together, and we did so until his crumbling business started picking and he promised to refund my money to the last kobo or make sure he delivers the machines as soon as he is back on his feet. One thing that struck me deeply in all of this, was when he said that I taught him the true meaning of Christianity.

If you are thinking "it is because he is not a disciple", I would like to also share that in a second business I run, I put a disciple who is very close to me in charge. Not only did he embezzle huge proceeds from the company, but he also connived with other non-disciples to pilfer a substantial part of the company funds. At the end of the day, I forgave him as a brother and was able to mend our relationship.

CONCLUSION

Yes, wounds from a friend are more painful, but we must remember that Jesus went through worse. Jesus' example required that his life be given up. Our lives would most likely not be demanded from us. However intensely hurt or disappointed we are by our experiences; we must strive to address the wrong and mend the relationship just as Jesus did. May we be encouraged to imitate our Lord's example even in this difficult aspect of relationships.

CALL TO ACTION

- Be willing to process your hurt feelings from the past. In the long run, it is better to deal with issues than to sweep them under the carpet. Pick a trusted friend and unburden yourself.
- Take small steps forward. Personally resolve to forgive. Then talk with the one who offended you. Seek God's help in prayer for the grace to let it go. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you.
- Revisit the process till your heart is free of all grudges

"TO ERR IS HUMAN; TO FORGIVE IS DIVINE"

FURTHER READING

Eph. 4:31-22

"True friends say good things behind your back and bad things to your face"

Day 32 | Matt 25:31-40

...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me...

An anytime we go for outreaches to the poor in my region, I am always humbled. I leave with a different perspective on life. I learn anew how to be grateful and quit complaining. I look at those we minister to and realize that most of them are not poor or otherwise challenged due to their own making. Conversely, I realize that the opportunities I have enjoyed throughout my life have little or nothing to do with me. Did I decide who should give birth to me? Did I come to the world loaded with enough resources to send myself to school and get a good education? What do you and I have that we did not receive? (1 Cor 4:7)

At one of our recent outings, I was greatly inspired by the example of a dear brother. He does not just give to the poor, he is friends with them. In his neighbourhood, they call his name, wave excitedly to him and give him hugs. Wow! This brother reminds me of Jesus.

A man with leprosy came to Him and begged... "If you are willing you can make me clean." Jesus was filled with compassion. He... touched the man. "I am willing," He said. "Be clean." **Matt 1:40-41**

I decided that I would do my best to imitate this worthy example. One day I took some goodies along and prayed that God would lead me to whom I should share with. I met a young boy in a wheelchair being pushed by a woman I believe was his mother. This time, I did not just give my parcel away and hurry on to other things. I wanted to make a friend. As I gave what I had, I watched the boy squeal with excitement (he couldn't talk) and the mother open her eyes wide in amazement and joy.

I cannot describe to you the feeling that was in my heart that day. Even as I write, tears still fill my eyes. We couldn't communicate except with signs. I took a picture of my friend which I have kept on my phone. His huge smile is a reminder for ME THAT JESUS IS THE ONE SMILING AND BEAMING WHEN WE HELP THE LEAST OF HIS BROTHERS.

CONCLUSION

Let us imitate the heart of Jesus toward the poor and the needy.

CALL TO ACTION

Decide to give something to someone less privileged than you. It could be as simple as a smile or as big as a scholarship. Put your heart into it. God will surely bless you for doing so.

FURTHER READING

Prov 11:25; James 1:27

"One who is happy has everything, though poor. One who is sad has nothing, though rich."

Matshona Dhlwayo

HOPE



Job 11:16-19

*16 You will surely forget your trouble,
recalling it only as waters gone by.*

*17 Life will be brighter than noonday,
and darkness will become like morning.*

*18 You will be secure, because there is hope;
you will look about you and take your rest in safety.*

*19 You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid,
and many will court your favour.*

NIV

HOPE

Day 33 – Christ our Hope

Day 34 – Words of Hope

Day 35 – Against All Hope

Day 36 – Hope in Times of Discipline

Day 37 – Hope Costs Nothing, Asks for Nothing


Day 38 – Facing the Odds

Day 39 – Renewed through Hope

Day 40 – The Resurrection – Our Ultimate Hope

Psalm 33:17 | Isaiah 61:1-3

The Lord has anointed me... to preach good news to the poor...to bind up the broken-hearted...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour...

 Some days you turn on your television or surf the net and the only “news” is bad news. Kidnap, killings, war, catastrophes of different kinds, politicians at loggerheads, and scarce resources meant for the many being stolen or squandered by the few. The list goes on.

We look forward to elections in Nigeria this year and pray that it will be peaceful and that all will go well. Most importantly, we pray that God will elect for us a leader who will carry out His will and purposes. We have heard many campaign promises. The question on everyone's mind is “On which candidate can we pin our hopes?”

In Isaiah 61:1-3, we read a prophecy about Jesus and His mission on earth over 2000 years before Jesus was even born. In Luke 4:18-20, Jesus spoke these same words in the synagogue of his hometown at Nazareth. Some may call it “Jesus' campaign message.”

Unlike the politicians, Christ is not canvassing for our votes. Neither is he dishing out empty promises.

He left His glory in heaven for our sake. He came to preach good news to the poor. In Him, we will be satisfied and our real needs will be met. He came to open the eyes that are blind. In Him, we will see clearly. We will not stumble through life or be misled and deceived. He came to set us free from oppression – from those things that keep us in the prison of frustration and helplessness.

It is this Jesus that we must offer to our friends, family, colleagues, neighbours and those around us as we share our faith. We have the candidate that the world desperately needs.

All of us who are disciples can remember how joyful we were when we got baptised. We know the heavy load of sin, shame and guilty conscience that we were carrying before Christ set us free. Today we have hope and a future. But we must not forget where we are coming from, lest we begin to put our hopes on persons and things that cannot save. Money, connections in high places, an affluent life, even the opportunity to seek greener pastures abroad; none of these is bad and they can all be used for the glory of God. But we must check our hearts when we start pursuing these things at all costs. Where does our hope lie?

CONCLUSION

Jesus is the answer for the world today. Christ is our hope and the hope of all mankind. Let us renew our conviction as disciples and not look to lesser things to offer us hope. Let us use every opportunity to share with others that Jesus Christ is the answer that they seek.

CALL TO ACTION

Prayerfully look out for an opportunity today to tell someone about the hope that Jesus offers.

FURTHER READING


John 6:35 John 8:12

"Hope can be a powerful force. Maybe there's no actual magic in it, but when you know what you hope for most and hold it like a light within you, you can make things happen, almost like magic."

Laini Taylor

Romans 15:13

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing
[through the experience of your faith] that by the power of the
Holy Spirit you will abound in hope and overflow with
confidence in His promises*

 God gives us joy, peace, and hope through the power of His Holy Spirit. Today's verse was written by Paul as a blessing and prayer for his readers. At the time the epistle was written, many believers had begun facing various forms of persecution for their faith. Today, we may not face persecution as they did, but the believer is still plagued by Satan and his tricks. We must endure the dominion of darkness until the return of our Savior. How do we cope?

How does God fill His children with joy and peace, and what role do we play in receiving the blessing?

How do we abound in hope and overflow with confidence in God's promises in today's cynical and despondent world?

Let's take time to meditate on these Scriptures

1 Peter 1:3-5 becomes an anchor for the soul.

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

As Christians, we have hope that this life is transient no matter what it brings. There is a better life to come. Our inheritance is kept safe and secure for us in Christ!

Hebrews 6:18-19

*...by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of **the hope set before us** may be greatly encouraged. We have this **hope** as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*

There is little hope in the world today. Chaos, turmoil and trouble are what we see everywhere. The hope that we have in Christ is a firm anchor. We need not fear. We can smile at the storm.

Hebrew 1:1

*Now faith is confidence in **what we hope for** and assurance about what we do not see.*

By faith in God, we have unshakeable hope. In challenging situations, our faith can be tested. We may become near-sighted and give way to fear or doubt. This is where the power of the Holy Spirit, gives us doses of hope and confidence in God's promises.

Colossians 1:27

*To them[the Lord's people] God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the **hope** of glory.*

Think of a difficult time in your life. A time when you thought that you walked through the valleys and shadows of death. How did you pull through? Where did you find the courage to withstand your opposition? You found strength in that turbulence through prayers and the word of God, which anchored your faith and hope.

Paul called on the God of hope, the only reliable source, to enable His people to abound in all joy and peace as they put their trust in Him. God does not just pour happiness into our hearts for no reason. He gives a supernatural serenity inspired by the Holy Spirit when we believe, we put our faith in Him and make Him our ultimate hope.

Philippians 1:6.

confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Lamentation 3:22-24 *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.... I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.'"*

CALL TO ACTION

Choose one scripture on **hope** and make it a personal memory verse.

Decide to build your faith in God this year through daily Scripture studies and holding on to what it says.

FURTHER READING

Col 3:1-2;


Rom 8:18

"You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one."

John Lennon

Romans 4:18-20

"Abraham became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him..."

 In my over 30 years of being a disciple, I have struggled with many challenging and difficult situations that made me doubt my faith in God's promises and provisions. I have had fears, anxiety and negative thoughts about the future, my family and the ministry.

Unlike Abraham, I found myself drifting in my walk with God and allowing anger, laziness and apathy to creep into my life. It took the grace of God, His word, and godly friends to jolt me out of this spiritual pit.

There are odds stacked against us in different areas of our lives; career and family challenges, financial or health difficulties, racial and tribal injustices, economic and political disruptions, insecurity, pandemic and so on. These monumental challenges make it easy for anyone to lose hope and despair. Why hope against hope when there seems no evidence of help and reprieve on the horizon?

Abraham believed in God when there was no good reason to believe – he was old and Sarah his wife was beyond childbearing age; suggesting that it would be impossible for him to become a father. (Gen 21:1-5). Against all these impossibilities, Abraham did not waiver in his belief in God's power to do the unthinkable and to use his situation to teach generations yet unborn about the truth of God's grace and faithfulness. He had a hope that defies the evidence and clings rather to the word of God!

Where are you presently in your walk with God? Are there things that you are struggling to believe God for?

We should not let the failed promises of men – loved ones, politicians, and the world around us; harden our hearts toward God's divine promises. He has never failed in His dealings with mankind. On the contrary, it is the faithlessness and disobedience of man that make the challenges of life more unbearable and hopeless.

Our great and mighty God is able and Almighty! The devil will always try to put before us the alternative; fear, anger, frustration, cynicism, bitterness and apathy. He plans to make us lose faith in our devotion and commitment to discipleship and the mission. (Matt 28:18-20) Christ promises that He will be with us to the very end as we stay faithful to His mission.

CONCLUSION

Paul charged the church in Corinth saying

Therefore my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. 1 Cor 15:58 That charge is for us too, to remain focused and immovable in the work of God despite every seeming CHALLENGE TO OUR FAITH. OUR HOPE WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED!

CALL TO ACTION

Who will you share with today, your “highs” and “lows” – areas of encouragement and areas of discouragement in your life right now? (Choose at least 2 people)

Pick a day this week to pray and fast for a renewed faith in God.

FURTHER READING

Romans 5:1-5

Jeremiah 29:1-14

"This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.... "

The passage speaks to a period when the Israelites were exiled to Babylon in line with God's promise to punish disobedience. A promised 70 years in captivity is like a lifetime of suffering,

Discipline is God's way of calling His people to turn away from the wrong path and turn to Him. It is a moulding process most often following disobedience or sometimes strengthening His followers for the plan He has for them. We often refer to the example, that the beauty of gold comes through refining. On the other hand, 'Hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness'-Wiley online library.

In essence, Hope is not a mere wish of what we expect to happen but being convinced that ultimately, we will enjoy the goodness of God.

Discipline, whatever the form: sickness, loss of financial independence, God's denial of good things of life that we so desire and need can be responded to with despair, dejection, anger, depression, shock, loss of hope and all sorts of reactions, especially in the earlier stages.

How do we have hope today in times of discipline?

-We should have the assurance of the scriptures, in who God is, and in the promises he makes. God does not intend that people be hopeless; instead, we should uphold his word. Hope requires that we understand God's mind by seeking to know His purpose and will for us. Hope requires that we trust God's ultimate plan.

- In times of discipline, we must in hope, trust that God will come through. We must believe that discipline is not forever but is meant to lead to transformation. Ezekiel 18:23. In exile, with many years gone by, God sent Jeremiah to remind the Israelites that discipline is not condemnation or destruction. On the contrary, God desired repentant hearts. God's intention in discipline is to shape us. He reminds them of his good plan for them. He calls his people to seek peace even in the nation of captivity and pray for the nation.

I have gone through several times of discipline and suffice it to say that I dread discipline because of the premise that it is punishment rather than for moulding or transformation. I also dread the duration! How do you sustain hope for years of discipline with one year gone by, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, 6 years and still counting? You must think of the purpose, think of God's love and faithfulness. Continuously ask him to give you hope to see beyond the pain and see the glory to come.

In addition to God's word and trust in Him, you need a community of faithful friends to spur you on. You need to take captive every opposing thought (2Cor 4:10) until God fulfils the promise in your life. 1 Peter 5:8-9

CONCLUSION:

It is in keeping hope alive that we can have victory and enjoy the promised harvest of righteousness that follows God's discipline.

ACTION:

Reflect on your attitude and how you view discipline. Pray to God for the right mindset. Memorize scriptures that help you focus on God's purpose for you.

FURTHER READING

Romans 8:26-29, Hebrews 6:17-19, Hebrews 12:11, Romans 15:13

2 Sam 9:1-13

"Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."

A poem titled "Hope is the thing with feathers", written around 1861 by an American poet, Emily Dickinson metaphorically transformed "Hope" into a resolute bird that lives within the human soul—and sings its song no matter what. The poem implies that hope costs nothing and asks nothing from us. She lives within us all; we may deny her but she keeps singing in good

I lived peacefully in an apartment for five years; three as a single man and two after I got married. Our landlord didn't increase the rent for this period until the worst happened. Days after our daughter's first birthday, I received a call from my landlord. He announced that he had sold the house! Shortly after, the new owner's lawyer served everyone a three-month quit notice! We were sad, scared, and financially disabled but we prayed.

Although we had no money, with hope and faith we kept searching for another apartment. Through a sister in church, we finally got one, though three times the rent we were paying. We agreed to take it but we still had no money. I had applied for a loan that was rejected. We spoke to family and friends but no headway. We were asked to pay and right there while sitting with the landlady, I got an alert on my phone. The loan sailed through at just the right time! That could not have been a mere coincidence. Indeed, our hope is built on Christ alone.

We can be hopeless for many reasons. For Mephibosheth (the name meaning "from the mouth of shame"), he had every reason to be hopeless. At age five after losing both his father (Jonathan) and grandfather (Saul) to the Battle of Mount Gilboa, Mephibosheth's nurse took him and fled in panic. (2 Samuel 4:4) The child as a result fell and became disabled.

He was a prince from a royal family but certainly was not living like one. He could have thought to himself that it was too late to aspire to royalty. David indeed had God's heart. He didn't forget the friendship between himself and Mephibosheth's father.

Jonathan had saved David from death. Now David became the renewed hope of Mephibosheth, the only surviving son of Jonathan and the house of Saul. This shows that hope transcends generations. David did not pick Mephibosheth for any other reason than the family he hailed from. It was not about his call but about his alliance. In Christ, God gave us hope. The hope of eternal life. That hope remains alive and cannot be threatened. It is always there within reach. Just as David's offer was permanent ("*...you will always eat at my table...*") so God's mercies and the hope He offers us are permanent. (Lam 3:22-23)

Before you give up, before you think perhaps God has not forgiven you, before you throw in the towel, remember that God is never in a hurry. He will do what He says He will do! Hope is always there urging us to believe, especially when things are rough. We should give her a chance. No matter how we try to stifle hope, she is ever sturdy and strong-willed. The bird in us sings. Let us listen!

CONCLUSION

God has in one way or another used people to give us hope. Sometimes because of who we are, because of who our parents were or because we are disciples of Christ. We should also pay forward and give hope to people, it is free!

CALL TO ACTION


Be someone's lifeline this week. Give of yourself. You may be the hope to someone's hopelessness. God will direct you; hope will sing. All you need is to listen.

FURTHER READING

Luke 8:40-56

Dan 3:1-39

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

 Before we delve into these two specific verses of this chapter, it is important to understand the background of this great, shocking but important story. The book of Daniel took place in Babylon and addressed the disheartened and disillusioned remnant of Israel in exile.¹ The chapter addresses the tough issue of idol worship during Israel's exile in Babylon. Why were these Hebrew exiles able to refuse/reject the worship of idols which their captors insisted on? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego serve as examples of God-centred devotion and opposition to pagan idol worship.

This true story has always been a daunting one for me. I am certain it is for you too. Because of their sin of turning away from Him and turning to idols, the God of Israel and the cosmos authorized a foreign invader to take his redeemed people into exile. As a result, many Jews (both devout and unfaithful) were forced into exile.

Try to imagine this. You are living in forced exile in a powerful country. While there, the powerful king Nebuchadnezzar builds a massive 90-foot high by 9-foot wide (see verse 1 in CJB translation), mutes the golden image and mandates everyone to bow down and worship it. What do you do? The odds are seriously against you. Hear the urgent mandate from this powerful king in verses 4-6 **Then** the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Whoever does not fall and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.

Even though the Babylonian emperor ordered them to do so and threatened them with punishment by incineration, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (their Babylonian names) refused to worship this idol. Nebuchadnezzar blurts out in a fierce commanding voice *Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?* (3:15).

Think about it. Consider this very intimidating circumstance to- a challenge to faith and faithfulness. How should the faithful people of the true and only powerful God respond? What would I do? What would you do? Are you thinking what I am thinking? Can this exact scenario happen today?

Read the text carefully and slowly again. Do you notice that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not hesitate to respond? I believe their response had a historical background. There was a basis for their confidence in God.

Come with me as we attempt to unearth why.

1. *They were aware and believed the story of YHWH's powerful deliverance of their forefathers from slavery in Egypt. Ex. 19:4-6, Ex. 20:1-6, Deut. 4:6-12*

2. *They knew about the red sea crossing and the drowning of the best of Egyptian soldiers. Ex. 14/15*

3. *They knew about the wilderness wanderings, and the daily provisions (manna, quails). Exodus-Numbers 10*

4. *They knew about how the sandals and clothes of their forefathers did not wear out. Deut. 8:3-4*

5. *They knew about their formation into a holy nation and all the laws and regulations of YHWH. Exodus-Numbers 10*

6. *They knew YHWH called and still calls for faithful loyalty to him and non-worship of idols or images. Ex. 20:1-6*

7. *They knew their present exile was orchestrated by Israel's turning away from YHWH and turning to idols.*

8. *They knew YHWH's covenant calls for loyalty and obedience (Deut. 6:1-4 -the Shema).*

9. *They have been doing their best to worship YHWH back home when their countrymen turned away from YHWH.*

Now, in exile, this idol worship opportunity presents itself, with an existential threat to their lives.

God seeks true private and public worshippers (who know the covenant requirements and promises) who are willing to give up their lives instead of worshipping false gods. Jesus calls us all to this standard in Luke 9:23-26.

Consider how this event ended as the pagan king proclaims in verses 28-29. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, *"Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses are turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."*

What imposing idol do we face today?

I will refer to it as the idol of self-worship.

The massive dimensions of Nebuchadnezzar's statue are just a dot compared to the size of the idol of self in today's world. The idol of self fills the whole earth: self-sovereignty and self-worship, self-pursuits, self-advertisement, self-promotion, self-image, self-worth, self-awareness, self-love, self-pleasing, self-gratification, self-preservation, self-will, self-praise. It is all about, "me, myself and I."

We know that the serpent said to Eve..." you (self) shall be like God. Don't trust God. Trust yourself." We know that the mind controlled by the flesh is death (Rom 8:6). Self sabotages the life of God in us; the life of submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, the life of loyalty (obedience) to God, the life of re-telling Jesus's story to would-be disciples. The daily practice of true devotion to God ingrains true faith and true worship of YHWH in His followers. God has demonstrated He is willing and able to control and overrule all the powers against us.

He will do this through good and not-so-good circumstances, threatening situations, health situations, marriage situations, parenting situations, near-death or death situations and so on.

CONCLUSION

Daniel's core message is unmistakable: God is sovereign and rules over all people and governments, even if it does not always appear that way.² Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, in times when our faith is being challenged, we must remember who He is and who He has always been and know that our hope in Him is never misplaced.

CALL TO ACTION

Today, pray for the strength of conviction like that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to do God's will despite the odds.

Are there ways that you have become unduly focused on yourself? Decide on specific areas where you will practice SELF-DENIAL.

FURTHER READING

Matt 10:37-39

"The feeling of success is a special one. And this feeling becomes magical when you achieve success against all odds in life!"

Avijeet Das

¹ J. Daniel Hays and Tremper Longman III, *The Message of the Prophets-A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*" 254

² Joyce G. Baldwin & Willem A. VanGemeren "Daniel, *Theology of*," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:502 – 503.

Isaiah 40: 27-31

"Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

There will always be times in our lives when we become, weak and tired, and our passions feel "old". It may feel as if you do not know how to do things well anymore. You who were acknowledged as a "Champion" or "Hero" can't seem to do things well anymore. When I felt this way, I found myself asking "What exactly can be said to be wrong with me? Where am I going from here? What can I do to rescue myself from this? I am depressed and utterly discouraged to go any further. This was exactly the stage I was in my life as an Elder. I was still wrestling with this when, one Sunday morning in the Combined Service in Surulere Church, the Lead Evangelist asked in his sermon:

"Are you lost and you don't know what to do? Does it seem as if have exhausted your life plans and you are left with nothing to do (anymore)? Do you consider yourself useless, as if you cannot make any further positive contribution? Wake up and rewrite a new plan that will launch you into a new life and you will see how God will renew you into another life of productive action."

I took a serious view of this input and went to thinking, meditating, seeking and praying for input to see what I can do to write a new plan of action for myself as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I ended up applying for a Master's degree in Christian Counselling in 2019 at the age of 73.

I believe this will enhance my value in helping me counsel members of the Church professionally on the recurring problems in their lives. I will be graduating the early next year 2023 and the requests for my service locally and internationally have gone up beyond my imagination. I am happy again and I can see myself being functional for the rest of my life. I have entered a group of Christian Counsellors in Nigeria, and I am vigorously learning more about human problems and how to solve them with the Bible.

CONCLUSION:

The above-stated new plan has brought to reality the letters of the Scripture in Isaiah 40: 27-31. God can renew the strength of those who hope in him. Even now, my strength is renewed as I am soaring on wings of service which old age cannot take away from me till my last breath is gone. You can experience the same victory.

CALL TO ACTION:

What is your situation? Don't get burnt out. Wake up and rewrite a new plan for your life of service, pray, meditate and seek input and you will receive a renewal of strength for a new life.

FURTHER READING:

2 Corinthians 4:16;
Colossians 3:10


"You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own."

Michelle Obama

John 11:25 | Rev 22:1-5

*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me,
though he dies, yet shall he live...*

*...No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of
God and of the Lamb will be in it ...they will need no light of
lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign
forever... ESV*

 Jesus has power over life and death as well as the power to forgive us our sins. This is because He is the very Creator of life. (Jn 14:6) He who is Life can surely restore life!

Whoever believes in Christ and has given his mortal life over to Him in repentance and baptism now has a spiritual life that physical death cannot take away or diminish. When we come to realize our Lord's power over death and how wonderful and reassuring His offer of this grace is, it will strengthen our faith and our total commitment to Him and His service.

Death in this life is inevitable. The thought of losing a loved one or even our own life can be scary, unnerving or painful. It can leave us with a feeling of hopelessness and discouragement about life. We feel abandoned (God is not with us) or overwhelmed with fear of the unknown. We must share and confess those feelings so that they do not develop into mistrust or cynicism toward God and His promises.

What is God's promise to His faithful ones?

God promises that those who overcome will have eternal life with Him and the angelic host in heaven, free from every sickness, pain or death. (Rev 21:1-5) This promise is for those who stay faithful to the end. The resurrection is our ultimate hope in this life! What we have or experience on this side of eternity is not all there is for those who are in Christ Jesus!

This precious hope should inspire us to continue to pursue righteousness to the very end. It should encourage our hearts to trust in God and hold on to our faith in Him that He will surely bring us to that eternal rest with Him in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Do you have faith in the resurrection of the saints? Does this conviction fill you with hope? Are you looking forward to spending eternity with God?

CALL TO ACTION

Spend time today just thanking God for His divine grace and provision for you and your loved ones and the hope He has given you of eternal life with Him in heaven.

FURTHER READING

Rev 7:9-17; Rev 21:1-27

"The world is rich in small wonders, but so poor in eyes that see them."


Glen Wiggins

"Faith is being able to open your heart to God's love and your eyes to His wonders."

Gift Gugu Mona

2 Cor 3:7-18

"And we all who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"

 Who does the work of transformation? Who has the power to change a living being from one form to another? I have asked myself this question many times on this 40-day journey. Maybe you have too.

When you exercise your body to lose weight, keep fit or build muscle; your part is to get up early, hit the gym or be consistent with your fitness regimen day after day. As you do this, you are not even aware of how your body cells are burning fat or becoming more resilient. All you know is that after a while of consistent discipline, you start to notice changes when you look in the mirror or mount the scales.

Or just consider the growth of a newborn baby. Once the child feeds regularly on the right kind of milk, you and I marvel at how rapidly he or she gains weight and begins to look chubby and fresh. Who makes this happen?

We find the answer in today's scripture. It is the Spirit of God that does the work of transformation in our lives. He works in us in ways we are not even aware of as we meditate each day on the Word; spend time on our knees in prayer, as we share with others, confess our struggles, give encouragement to someone or strive to put something we have learned into practice. All we know is that after a while we and those who know us start to see a transformation in us – from one level of glory to another.

As we close the final chapters of our Power Series, let us be energized to begin in earnest this journey of growth. Ours is to be faithful and obedient each day. The Holy Spirit is an expert at growing our mustard seed faithfulness till we attain the full measure and stature of Christ.

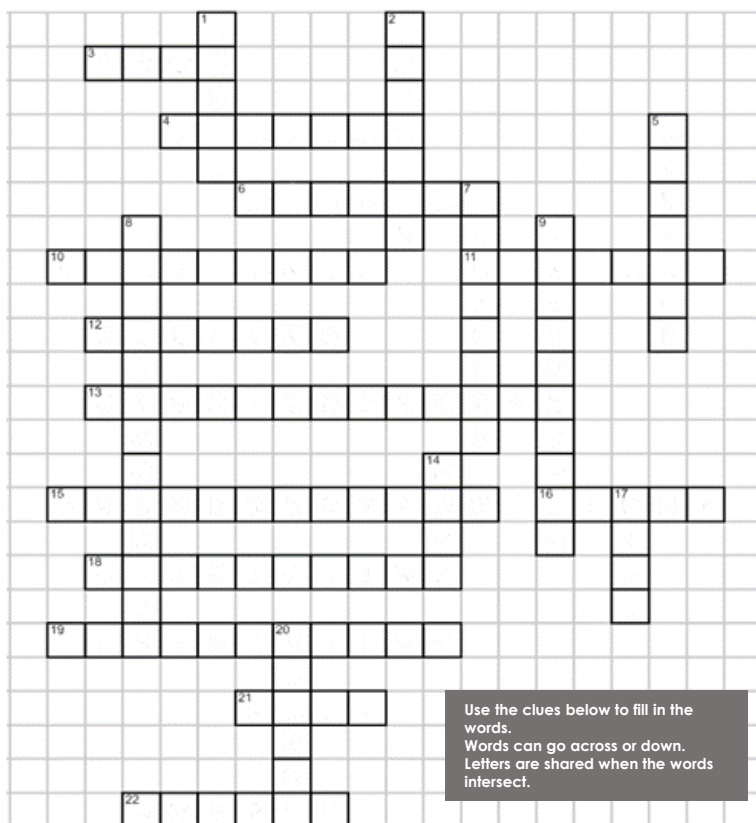
And when it's all said and done, we will experience the greatest transformation of all when we see Him face to face.

12 EDITIONS OF THE POWER SERIES



On 2011, the Lagos Church, in her bid to encourage all her members to kick off the new year with a unified Bible study plan that's tied with 40 days of prayer & fasting, published her first devotional book titled, **"Back To Life"**. The success and acceptance of this debut effort paved the way for what would later be the **"Power Series"**. 2023 marks the 12th edition of this annual volume & we're happy to allow you to download all 12 volumes in PDF. Please click here <https://bit.ly/3rZeZwn> to download.

Be TRANSFORMED CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Use the clues below to fill in the words.
Words can go across or down.
Letters are shared when the words intersect.

Across

3. It never fails
4. When you know what you were created for
6. The domain of a King
10. When God gives to us
11. Second attempt at something
12. A Special invitation or mandate from God
13. when things are done God's way
15. After the death of Jesus
16. First thing God created
18. Restraining self
19. When you lack focus
21. Used for cooking
22. The Good News

Down

1. Second person in the Godhead
2. What Jesus called his followers
5. An Error
7. When God breaks the laws of nature
8. what two or more people can forge
9. What you can't see
14. Our expectations from God
17. Something you get freely
20. A Turnaround



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Be TRANSFORMED

A 40-Day Devotional Guide Inspired by Romans 12:2

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