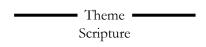


FOLLOW ME



POWER SERIES

Forty Days Devotional
International Church of Christ Nigeria
www.icocnigeria.org



The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

-Luke 6:40 NIV

— A 40 Days Devotional

The 2020 Edition calling us back to focus on the life and mission of our LORD, JESUS CHRIST.



Follow Me

40 Days Devotional Booklet
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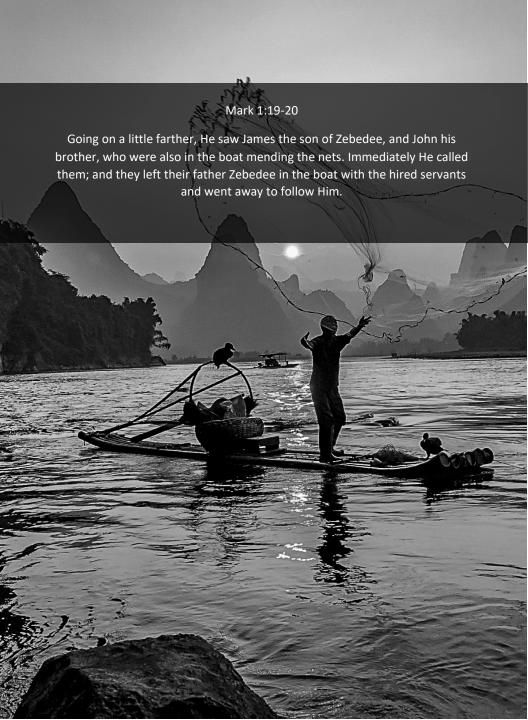
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DEVOTIONAL TOPICS

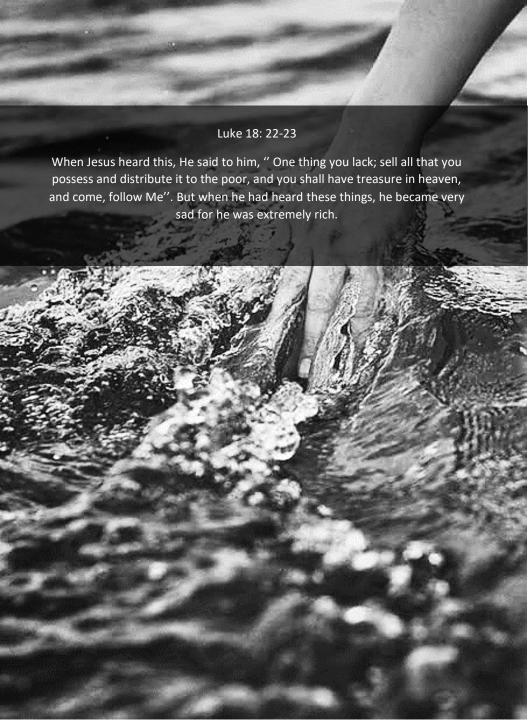
Day 1	In the Beginning
Day 2	Preparation for Ministry
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Day 5	Managing Temptation.
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INTRODUCTION

(A Renewed Call to the Lordship of Jesus)

It is with a humble sense of excitement and anticipation that we publish the 2020 edition of the ICOC Nigeria Power Series. After celebrating 30 years of our church in Nigeria, the Holy Spirit is directing our hearts towards re-dedication and re-commitment to Jesus Christ.

This edition draws its lessons from the gospels and highlights several themes and lessons taught by Jesus and inspired by His example. These devotionals will convict us to identify areas where we have lost focus and lost faith. We will be called to repent of worldliness and distractions in order to free ourselves for his service.

All of us will be reminded of that good confession and that eternity-changing vow we made at the beginning. This is a call to every one of us to make that vow again. Our prayer is that this year's devotional inspires you to identity the sins, attitudes and bad choices that have held you back.

We pray that you confess and renounce them. We pray that in each home and in each heart, we can make that good confession once again and live it out to his glory. What is that good confession? JESUS IS LORD!

May this devotional guide your life to uphold this vow and bring honor to Jesus Christ.



Our gratitude goes to the various contributors and the editorial team for another excellent devotional.

We look forward to the transformation we hope to experience as we respond to the Spirit's call for a return to following Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Chris & Rolayo Ogbonnaya



FOREWORD:

2020 Power series

The greatest calling in this world, is the call to follow Jesus. Jesus called many in the Bible to follow him. Some did and many didn't.

Think for a second about who is doing the calling. The highest authority in the universe, The Most-High whose name is Yahweh, is the one calling us all to follow him. We were called not to shine our own light but to reflect His.

God does not make mistakes. You and I are not part of His Kingdom by accident. He determined long ago for us to be holy and blameless in His sight. We did not draft ourselves into the Lord's Army. God in his mercy drew us all to Himself. All of us are on this journey called life. We are in a race. We all have an assignment from God to complete. One day we will give an account of our stewardship while on this earth.

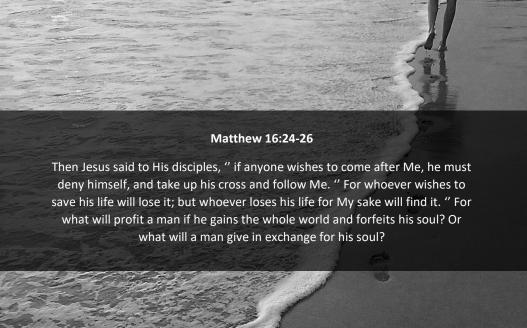
The question is, "what kind of a follower and student of Jesus are you?" Are you an average student or will you decide to be an exceptional one to the glory of God!

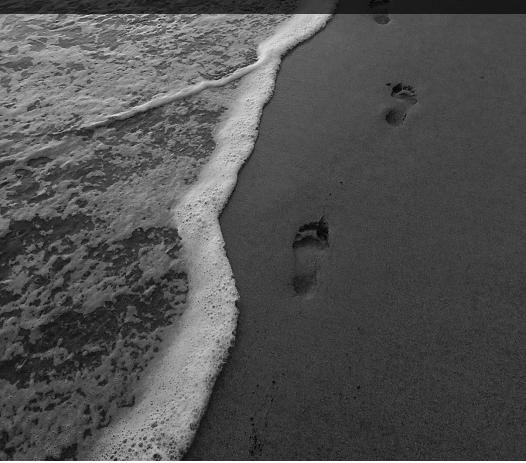
Let us all decide to become awesome students for God because an incredible eternity awaits us.

God Bless.

Richard Alawaye

(Corpus Christi, Texas)





Follow | Me Luke 6:40

DAY 1

IN THE BEGINNING.

John 1: 1-3, Genesis 1: 1-2

- 1. In the Gospel of John, we see Jesus being clearly portrayed as fully human and fully God! Although Jesus took upon himself full humanity and lived as a man, he never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed, the creator and sustainer of all things both in heaven and earth and the source of eternal life to all who worship and follow him. This is the truth about Jesus Christ, and the foundation of all truth. If we cannot and do not understand, believe and hold on to this basic truth, we will not have the faith and confidence in our eternal destiny in our followership of him.
- Jesus is our God and King! He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He was there at creation and is still there today as our great high priest at God's right-hand interceding on our behalf – Heb. 4: 14-16.
 - We must face each day with confidence!
- 3. Having this clear understanding and perception of Jesus, moved John and the other Apostles to give their lives for the cause of the mission to spread the good news to all generations, even at the cost of their comfort and lives. How does this truth resonate with you today?
- 4. Do you ever feel that your life is too complex for Jesus to understand? Remember, he made you and the entire



- universe, and nothing is too difficult for him. He is alive today, and his love is bigger than any problem you may be facing.
- 5. As we follow Jesus daily, we must be reminded that he is with us Matt. 28: 20, "......... And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age". He knew us from the beginning and will stick with us to the end. Why? He knows our frailties and shortcomings and will do everything to bring us to the finish line if we hold on to him till the end.
- 6. Many times, out of frustration, anxieties and worries of life, pride and selfishness, I have taken my eyes off Jesus and started to focus on other things like, entertainment, sports and even on friends, instead of looking to the Almighty Jesus for help and guidance. I want him to be my motivation and source of strength as I strive to be a true disciple of his
- 7. The call today is for us to remember that Jesus is God, and that he created us to be his disciples. He has all the power, rulership and authority **Matt. 28: 18,** at his disposal and he has promised to be with us till the end. No shaking!
- 8. **CHALLENGE:** Write down 5 things today that you will cut off from your schedule that will help you give more time to pray, fast, be in fellowship and share your faith more this month.





DAY 2

PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 4:1-13

It is noteworthy to point out that the baptism of Jesus was recorded by all the four gospels (John 29-34; Mk 1:9). This shows how significant this event is. It is also important to note that John's baptism is one of repentance (Matt 3:11) so when Jesus came to be baptized, John refused to baptize him because he knew Jesus had no sin to repent of (verse 13-14).

We may ask, why then did Jesus go to John to be baptized? **John 1:31-34** seem to suggest that Jesus made himself available to be baptized by John in order to announce himself to the world. This announcement came through the Holy Spirit that came on him in form of a dove. Then of course, after his baptism, then came the temptation.

IMPLICATION: for any warrior or campaigner, explorer or someone who intends to go on a quest or embark on an important mission, they always go through certain procedures before they start. For Jesus, his temptation was to test his fitness for the mission, his baptism was to announce him through the coming of the Holy Spirit on him.



Just like Jesus, I too as a Christian has been called to a mission. There is a race that has been marked out for me (Hebrews 12:1), my life has experienced similar situation as that of Jesus, I too was baptized, and God announced me to the world through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when I came out of the waters of baptism, and boom!

I was also faced with a myriad of temptations. But unlike Jesus, I failed! I fell because I didn't understand that the temptation was a test, it was a process of preparing me for the race that has been marked out for me. It was to test my fitness and help me build the necessary spiritual muscles to run the race.

I remember after my baptism I was faced with the temptation to forgive. I had a confrontation with my immediate younger brother, we got into a physical fight, I was vexed that he could engage me in a fight. I would not listen to anyone who spoke to me then, I just wanted to show her. I kept the anger in my heart till the next day. At that point my Dad started reading the story of the unmerciful servant out loud because I refuse to listen (Matt 18:21-35).

As he read the story, my heart began to yield, and it became clear I have fallen. My Dad ended with the words 'this is how my heavenly father will treat each one of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart". Since then, I have never allowed the sun to go down while I am still angry. I learnt through my failings. My falling into the temptation of provocation thought me a lifelong lesson of forgiveness.



I don't know where you are at in your life today, but one thing I have come to know is that, we all as Christians have a mission, and have been called to run a race. The moment we got baptized, God announced us to the world, and a race is marked out for us, temptations are part and parcel of this race and that is why the church in its wisdom gives every baptized disciple the first 40days series to help us through that teething period. My prayer is that we will see temptations as a way to show how fit we are. And may God empower us all.

Follow | Me | Luke 6:40

DAY 3

THE CALL

John 1:35-51

In this scripture, there are four key statements of Jesus I want us to take note of. **They are:**

"What do you seek?"

"Come, and you will see"

"Follow me"

"You will see greater things"

At the time Jesus was about to begin his ministry, John the Baptist baptized him. Then the Spirit led him to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He went through series of temptations and was able to overcome them. Jesus had a goal and a plan to achieve the goal. He had to recruit men, teach them all he had to teach and let them carry out his mission.

Going back to the scripture. The disciples of John saw something in Jesus. Their master pointed them to someone greater and they followed. The sought for something they knew John couldn't give and Jesus showed them what they sought for.

As a disciple today, there was a time in your life when some situation triggered you to search for Jesus. Your life was probably



upside down, the things you once believed, began to lose meaning. You needed to know who this Jesus was, and the kind of life He wanted you to live. Through the scriptures, Jesus revealed himself to you. He showed you his life as a suffering servant (read Isaiah 53). He showed you his power also as the Son of God. Then he said "Follow me" which involved self-denial, taking up your cross daily, giving up everything and making him Lord of your life. You saw how your life turned around through all the wonders of Jesus in your life because of your decision and he still said, "You will see greater things." The apostles truly saw greater things. Three of them witnessed His transfiguration. They saw all the miracles, his crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension. They witnessed the spirit using them powerfully to spread the gospel as promised by Jesus. This is the call of Jesus Christ.

I was born to a family of disciples. I grew up seeing my father lead bible talks, family group meetings and family devotional. I saw how the bible talk operated, the love for one another, the love disciples had for me as a child (I'm eternally grateful to all the disciples that taught me in kids kingdom), the love disciples had for the lost also. Every baptism was an exciting moment for me. I really wanted to be a disciple. So as soon as I became a teenager, I started studying the bible. I was shown through scriptures what I was searching for. I saw the life of Jesus: His power, His suffering. It was clearly explained to me. Then I was asked if I wanted to be a disciple after all these things had been revealed and I said "Yes", and I was told to follow Jesus. I



answered the call and got baptized. Till today I still see Jesus doing greater things in my life, in the church and in the world. The call of Jesus is an invitation for your life to be turned around. Not in the way you want but the way He wants. It is the call to get the answers you seek. It's the call to follow him, to self-denial, to crosses. It is the call to expect greater things.

Things to Do

- Write down your conversion experience.
- What were you deeply searching for?
- Did you see it through scriptures?
- Did you answer the call to follow Jesus?
- What are the great things you have seen in your life, in the Church and in the world?

Scriptures for Further Study 1Corinthians 1:26 Mark 1:16-20



DAY 4

FOLLOW ME

Matthew 4: 18-22, Mark 1: 16-20, John 8: 12, 1 John 2: 6

We often assume that Jesus' disciples were great men of faith from the first time they met him. But we see that they had to grow in their faith just like many of us today. Jesus' intent was to call these men to a transformational journey of their lives. He was to lead them by example as they follow.

We must understand that Jesus calls us to become fishers of men. It is something we cannot become on our own. He is to be involved in changing our lives from what we have been into what he wants us to be. Jesus has not called us to just do the right things but to be the right people. It is not the doing but the being that Jesus is attempting to bring about in our lives.

We are commanded to follow Jesus, so that we can become fishers of men. It is not what we want to become but what Jesus wants us to become. A person can be very religious, doing all right things but not be a follower of Jesus. So, what have you become in the past years of your life as a Christian? Paul in 1 Corinthians 11: 1 calls the disciples in this Church to follow his example as he follows the example of Christ and in Philippians 3: 17-21 he urged the Church in Philippi to join in follow his example



as he models for the them a total focus and perseverance on Christ Jesus. What are you modelling for others? Are you confident to call others to follow your example of faith, purity, sacrifice and dedication to the mission of Christ?

As a disciple and leader for many years, I'm deeply convicted by how much I've allowed so many good things that I'm doing blind me to how much I've lost faith and courage in the face of the health challenges I'm facing. My character was truly tested, as I struggled to share my faith, stay positive and motivated in giving to my family and friends. I was coming to Church regularly and attending to all my ministry duties, but I was struggling to find peace and comfort in my relationship with God. I wasn't willing to allow the situation mould my character to be like Jesus.

It will take humility and courage to face the facts of where you are presently in your followership of Jesus Christ.

To follow Jesus means several things:

- We must obey all his commands John 8: 31, Matt. 7: 21-27,
 John 14: 15, Matt. 18: 1-4
- We must have the heart and attitude of Jesus Gal. 2: 20,
 Phil. 2: 5
- We must love who he loves God! Matt. 22: 37
- We must love our brothers and sisters John 13: 34-35
- We must love the Lost Matt. 9: 13
- We must love the Kingdom Matt. 6: 33

No Church on earth has the right to exist that is not saving the lost and does not have disciples who are committed followers of



Jesus. This is the plan of Jesus. Let us accept the call to become followers of Jesus, to obey his command and to acquire Christ-like qualities.

CHALLENGE:

Write down 5 things you need to change to become a more focused and committed follower of Jesus and share it with a trusted and accountable partner.



DAY 5

MANAGING TEMPTATIONS

Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-12; 1 Corinthians 10:13

Personally, when I was much younger, I always felt that the temptations Jesus went through in the wilderness were very basic and simple, but as years have gone by and maturity has set in, I see how smart and very tempting the Satan's offer was to Jesus.

Satan based his attack on what he thought would be Jesus' greatest weakness - His humanity!

The temptations hit entitlement (If you are the Son of God) and servitude (promising Him what He already owns if He serves him) and the more. Any human would have failed by trying to justify that he was the Son of God or had the power of Heaven protecting him. I know I would have, just the idea of turning stones to bread trills me. But Jesus understood beyond his humanity that there was nothing for Him to prove.

In His victory, using His humanity as a standard for us, showed us how to overcome temptations as He did by using the Scriptures, not just reading it out He was also obedient to it and the Spirit



(Luke 4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness).

There are many other ways I feel this passage could have played out but one thing am sure of is that Jesus took the steps and responses He did as an example for us to follow and overcome our temptations also promising us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that the temptations we face are not be beyond us.

With the temptations that come my way most times I feel that God looks at me in too much high regard, like am expected to overcome this.

Father you know I am weak and feeble please let easier and smaller temptations come my way am not matured for this yet! But He knows how weak and feeble, I am! and He knows I can't overcome the temptations alone, and that's where the problem lies "Alone" I forget the template Jesus has set out the "Scripture", the "Spirit" and "prayer". My human logic, brains or determination cannot and will not help and that's why I keep failing.

It is very clear the part that Jesus has set out for us to overcome the temptations that comes our way He shows us these steps himself when He overcame the temptations of the devil.

A very unfavorable part for me in 1 Corinthians 10:13b is the "Endure" part, which lets me know most temptations would not be short lived and He expects me to persevere (James 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:12; James 5:11; Hebrews 10:36). Then He also gives



me joy by promising great rewards when I endure, just as He wore the crown of glory when He endured the cross.

So, the question is what are you facing? Do you, like me, disagree with God that you are matured to go through this sort of temptation? Have you been using his word? Allowed his spirit to guide you? Are you consistently praying? How long have you endured or stopped enduring?

Victory is on your side as you look up to Jesus, listen to his Word, obey His Spirit and endure to finally bask in Glory with Him! We will keep walking and enduring in this world till we are finally home with Him. Amen.

Follow | Me Luke 6:40

DAY 6

PERSONAL MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

John 4:1 - 42.

Jesus was a man driven by passion for his personal ministry, a ministry of seeking and saving the lost. The drive behind Jesus' ministry — I believe — stemmed from the deep love and compassion he had for humanity (John 3:16), and his desire for all men to be saved (2 Pet 3:9). This is seen in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman — as captured in today's devotional scripture, and in all the scriptural accounts of the activities of Jesus in the four gospels of the Bible.

This devotion to his personal ministry propelled Jesus to break all ethnic and conventional barriers of his days, to take advantage of every opportunity he had to preach the gospel, to challenge the sins in the lives of the people, and to call them to repentance. Those who yielded always went away healed, happier, and much joyful than they were before their encounter with him. I am pretty sure we can testify to this!

In the story of the Samaritan woman, we see all these principles playing out as Jesus engaged her in a rigorous and life changing discussion. In Jesus' day, Jewish custom prohibited men from talking much with women, and Jews in general do not associate



with Samaritans, who they considered an 'inferior' or 'unclean' race due to their half Jew and half Gentile bloodline. These, and the woman's unfriendly, negative and haughty reactions - could have served as a deterrent to her receiving the message that led to her total turn-around, but Jesus looked beyond all that because he saw a woman who was hurting and under the burden of sin. He knew that through her, many others would have the opportunity to be saved.

As disciples of Jesus we are called into this same personal ministry, to make use of every opportunity to seek and save the lost (Acts 8:4 -13). For we are beneficiaries of the commitment to this worthy ministry by those God used to reach out to us.

Sadly, we have all made excuses at one time or the other why we are not actively making the most of the opportunities God create for us on a daily basis to touch someone's life with the gospel. Excuses such as — "They are not open", " Everyone I meet tells me 'I have my own church'", "I am building friendship with him/her first", "I am still getting to know him/her", "S/he is not friendly", "I am tired of the negative responses I get", "I want to show love first, before I introduce the bible", etc. These are lies of the devil, and many disciples today have bought into these lies. What usually helps me to quickly repent of these excuses and get back into the mission is when I remember the gift I have been given through my baptism, the unmerited gift of the Holy Spirit, and the joy of my salvation. I desire that many would — through me — be blessed this way, and I must testify that God has shown Himself faithful, when I am faithful.



Early last last year (2018), I went through a period of emotional apathy towards the lost. Unlike my usual self, I ignored many prompting by the Holy Spirit to reach out. My excuses were 'I am tired of reaching out to people who are not willing to listen to the truth'. Interestingly, I began hearing similar excuses from the women in my ministry, including the women leaders. Towards the end of that year - during a leadership meeting, I shared a message from the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus. I encouraged them to look beyond the excuses the devil places before us daily, and to imitate the attitude of Jesus because "...the harvest is plentiful." While engaged in a time of fellowship after our meeting that day, I saw a lady on the street walking towards our direction. The spirit prompted me to reach out to her, but I ignored it, and allowed the lady to walk by. After she had gone few meters away from us, I felt guilty and quickly reached out to her. This young lady was the first baptism we had in January this year. She is now a bible talk leader, and disciples two women. What a blessing! The harvest is indeed plentiful.

Questions for your personal reflection.

Question: Do you desire to be used by God this year to help someone spiritually?

Question: Would you make a promise to God to make use of every opportunity to share your faith?

Question: What would you do differently this year to achieve this goal?



Question: Would you make it a habit to commit this goal to God in prayer daily?

Question: Have you written down your answers to these questions for constant reflection?

"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever". **Dan 12:3 (NIV)**

God never fails in fulfilling his promises, they stand firm for ever!



DAY 7

FORGIVENESS, FAITH AND HUMILITY

Ephesians 4:32

The Christian understanding of forgiving others can be traced to God's forgiveness of us through Jesus Christ. As disciples we are to forgive each other just as Christ forgave us.

NECESSITY OF FORGIVENESS

Luke 17:1-10

Peter did ask Jesus how many times he was supposed to forgive someone who continued to sin against him (Matt 18:21). Jesus responded that we should not set limits on our forgiveness because God has forgiven us a far greater debt (Matt 18:23-35)

So, does God expect you to forgive some who keeps hurting you? Yes, because we have been shown such abundant forgiveness, yes because we have a new nature, created to be like God in righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24)

One person can initiate and bring forgiveness to a broken relationship, but it takes two people to come to reconciliation. You are responsible to forgive others, because God has forgiven you of your sins. As Paul Counselled in **Romans 12:18:** if it is possible, as far as it depends on, live at peace with everyone.



Broken relationship can only be repaired through forgiveness and repentance. Where there is no repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be achieved.

Forgiveness is setting yourself free so that you can move forward in your own life as God's image bearer. When someone does something that upsets and hurts, it can be hard to let go and move on. But harbouring frustration or bitterness towards that person is actually a punishment for yourself.

It doesn't mean that the person is not guilty of whatever they did to upset us, neither does it mean forgetting. It simply means letting go of the pain the incident is causing us.

Much of our pain in life comes from not forgiving the injuries done us. If you are in emotional or even physical pain, forgiveness could be the answer you have been seeking.

You owe it to yourself to explore the possibility of forgiveness. It can help to remember that holding unto hurts and bitterness doesn't hurt the other person, it hurts you.

It produces all kinds of stress chemicals that fill your body and make you sick, physically and emotionally.

You may feel strongly the other person deserves to suffer, but you are not in control of that.

"Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you"

Don't forget that we received forgiveness in Christ Jesus, and in turn should be kind and forgiving to those around us.



The lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive.

Forgiveness is so important because it is a crucial and critical ingredient needed in rebuilding and repairing broken relationship and damaged hearts. It is the very essence of our faith as Christians.

In **Genesis 33:10**, we saw Jacob and Esau two brothers, who for eighteen years were separated and alienated — allowing bitterness and hatred to fester between them; come together again as brothers. Esau had forgiven Jacob for stealing his birth right, and Jacob responded to this gracious act in gratitude and thanksgiving.

The essence of forgiveness is turning toward and not away from one another. This is what God did through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

God turned toward us, forgive us and reconciled us back to Himself.

WHY FAITH IS NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH FORGIVENESS

Faith is the acid test of our trust and belief in God Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). God commanded us to forgive our brothers so many times daily. Jesus pictured our faith as a seed. Plant a seed and it grows.

We have to ask God to help us put forward our faith in forgiving others.

Day by day we live like we have faith in God, yet most times when faced with challenging situation like forgiving others, we depend primarily upon our own feelings and emotions.



It will take faith and trusting God to obey God's instructions, which includes forgiving people who have wronged me.

God called Abraham to perform the actions of faith on mountain of Moriah (Genesis 22:14). God called Abraham to give up all his hopes and dreams for a future and sacrifice Isaac, the only son God blessed him with.

Abraham's trust and faith in God through obedience, allowed him to see God's faithfulness.

Forgiveness is a test of our faith and trust in God. Faith should never lead us to spiritual pride but rather to humble actions that will bring repentance and forgiveness.

WHY HUMILITY PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12) This has always been the most difficult of the Lord's Prayer to me. I have always been concerned about how much of forgiveness is required of me. And the most difficult hurts to forgive, are those committed by persons closest to me.

It takes humility to achieve repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Looking at the story of Joseph (Genesis 45:1-15), who was threatened with murder, attacked, put into a pit by his brothers, and was eventually sold into slavery to a family where he was sexually harassed and then punished because he fled from temptation.



Joseph had all the justifiable reasons to hate his brothers, but he overlooked all the sufferings and humiliating experiences, and was able to forgive them.

He did not only forgive his brothers, he was so humble that he broke down, kissed them, wept over them and sacrifice so much to help them get back to their lives again.

Forgiveness here, benefited joseph as much as it did his brothers, because he got the desired result, the restoration of a broken relation with his family.

Joseph could have pursued the part of vengeance, but when he saw the suffering showing on the faces of his brothers who had hurt him, he saw only their pain rather than his own.

Humility helps us to consider the interest of others better than ours. Part of being able to forgive is being able to look beyond our own pain and see the pain of others

These scriptures will help serve as a reminder that holding a grudge or unforgiven heart doesn't serve anyone:

Numbers 14:18 - God will handle those who wronged us, for He does not let the guilty go unpunished

Luke 17:4 - There is no maximum amount of forgiveness we can bestow

1 John 1:9 - We must admit our own mistakes in order to be forgiven



Psalm 86:5 - God is just waiting for us to ask for His help, and He will be there with love and forgiveness.

2 Cor **2:5-8, 10** - To forgive is an act of kindness that helps the other person heal in God's light as well.

Matthew 6:12, 14-15 - Forgiveness is a two-way street with God. If we forgive others, we will be forgiven.

Mark 11:25 - When we pray, if we forgive those who have wronged us, we will be forgiven for any of the times we may have wronged others.

Romans 4:7-8 - We are blessed to be able to make mistakes and still obtain God's love and forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32 - Don't forget that we receive forgiveness, and, in turn, should be kind and forgiving to the people around us.

Colossians 3 -The ultimate lesson here in the bible is that we forgive because God forgives. If He can do, so can any of us.



THE BE-ATTITUDES

Matthew 5:1-12

Attitude -a settled way of thinking or feeling about something. Definitely attitude is everything and Jesus knew that too well. He calls his predominantly Jewish audience and us to a series of life lessons that amazingly were not new to his audience. Picking up from popular scriptures like Psalms 1 Jesus exclaims Blessed (Hebrew -Ashray). Any Jew listening would pay attention to hear what came next and Jesus did not disappoint them. He raised the bar and challenged the heart like no one else ever did. He brought what a relationship with God ought to be about alive, afresh, anew away from the legalism, double-speak and hypocrisy of the teachers of the law.

Though attitudes, they did not come with the passive sense in which we could discuss them full of philosophy without action. They are action filled attitudes that not only describe the emotion, it commands the action desired by God.

When do you consider yourself blessed, happy, to be envied (in a godly sense)? Why do you consider your church blessed? When do you consider your nation blessed? When you acquire a property, build a house, get the dream job, finish a project, get honored in some desirous way? Do you consider yourself blessed when your finances are low, when you are either dealing with or



helping someone who is dealing with a health challenge? The world today as was in Jesus' days on earth has gotten us to see life using a selfish balance sheet. When all seems well be faithful, when all seems to have fallen apart, get self-help, God understands! Does he?

Jesus calls us to follow him in consistent living - desperately seeking God, grieving over sin, relinquishing our rights for his cause, being merciful, keeping a clear conscience, making every effort to maintain peace, being right with God even being rejected by the world yet being glad and rejoicing. Who lives like this? Think for a while, what have you given up gaining acceptance in the world with family, friends, colleagues, neighbors?

Has it like me been your witness of Jesus, the Gospel and his life that you now live or your knowledge and sharing of scripture or your commitment to the fellowship meeting daily and building bonds of love, friendship and unity in the faith or the contentment that we are truly as blessed as Jesus has said There is a whole world of false accusations and evil plots contending against our willingness and consistency at being right with God! Ever tried obeying the traffic light when everyone else is beating it? Ever tried being true when everyone else lies? Is your business, work, study or life running and thriving on falsehoods and lies?

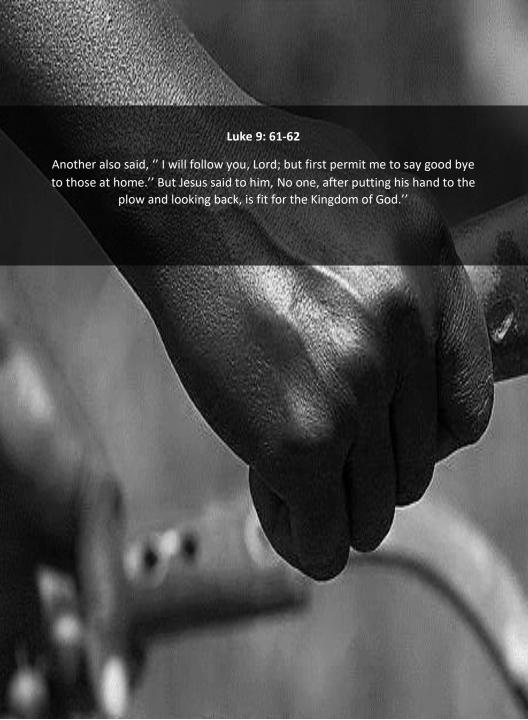
Jesus promises here as everywhere else that we will find justice that is comforting not vindictive, we will see God – know His nature, understand His will, fulfil His mission as individuals and as his church, we will remain children of God and co-heirs with



Christ and the reward that awaits us in heaven having enjoyed the grace of God in its many folds on earth is indeed great.

Take careful notes of all the be-attitudes and get to work on areas you desire to grow in even if you're currently failing at them. They amplify in clear words the call of Jesus – **Follow Me!**

Psalms 1, 2 Peter 1:3-11, Heb 10:32-39





THE FULFILMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

Luke 17:11-37

The Kingdom of God was a core theme Jesus taught. We see that his ministry started with the same message John the Baptist preached – Repent for the kingdom of God (or heaven) has come near!

The pharisees like all Jews were looking forward to the fulfilment of the prophecies about the fulfilment of the kingdom, sometimes often described as the restoration of the kingdom. In what sense did they expect it and what were they doing about it?

They expected it to come as Christ's messianic kingdom, a visible, earthly, political kingdom promised to Israel in which Messiah reigns over the whole earth from a throne in Jerusalem.

However, in response to their question Jesus presents the kingdom in yet another sense than he had presented earlier with stern warnings this time.

What does Jesus say?

Jesus makes it clear that the fulfilment of the Kingdom isn't going to happen with carefully observing dates, times and events. Staying glued to news channels for political and weather updates to determine the time(s). Some eschatological preachers with



deep conviction told us the Jesus was coming in 1990 at the height of the cold war! Jesus says be careful, the dates and time are not what matters (Acts 1:7)

The kingdom was present "in your midst" already. Several translations say within you which we comfortably interpret to mean the kingdom is not physical but spiritual. True but Jesus needed the Pharisees to know that his physical presence meant more than the futuristic national view they had to the kingdom. In a sense the kingdom was present with Jesus physical presence on earth. Isa 9:1-6. The establishment of the church in Acts 2 was yet another sense in which the kingdom of God came and was made visible.

It will find fulfilment twice! One for the generation of Jews to whom he spoke with the destruction of Jerusalem and eventually at the end of time with his second coming — "in his day" when all of us faithful disciples shall be taken into his eternal kingdom where he is enthroned and reigns over all and in all.

On those 'his days' people will be about their normal business. Accumulating wealth, pursuing their dreams, given to all kinds of indulgences — idolatry! What has you? What takes your resources? What are your addictions? Write them down!

Those who are prepared will be taken to be with him in the ultimate fulfilment of his kingdom. Are you still actively or subtly monitoring world politics and the weather channel to know if it will be today or tomorrow or even stuck on Nostradamus like I



used to? Stop it! The heart of the message was never when these things be? It is still repent because of these things.

For all of us disciples of Jesus today the kingdom comes in two ways

Present, Here! Upon our baptism into Jesus we were added to his church and by extension his kingdom in an act that needed us to reach out and take hold of salvation that God offered with its many blessings. (Matt 12:28)

Future, not yet, to come! We hope that at his coming we will be saved to glory and joys unspeakable from all the challenges we are faced with here. The call isn't any less than it was then. Repent and be refreshed for the fulfilment of the kingdom. It is our life nothing less will do to heed the command of Jesus Follow me thru to the fulfilment of the kingdom.

Further reading Isaiah 53, 1 Thess 5:1-11, Heb 12:22-29



INTERCESSION IN PRAYER

John 17:9,11,15,19-21,24-26 NIV

The beauty of JESUS prayers outlined in the scriptures above is inspiring. Its content and focus are highly motivating as an example of prayers interceding for others! Its innocence purity is very engaging and transfixing!

The experience of INTERCESSION in prayer helps us to take our attention away from self and selfishness to the needs of others and the power of GOD displayed in HIS intervention through our prayers.

At this let's look at some background:

"in-ter-sesh'-un (pagha`, "to make intercession"; originally "to strike upon," or "against"; then in a good sense, "to assail anyone with petitions," "to urge," and when on behalf of another, "to intercede" (Ruth 1:16; Jeremiah 7:16; 27:18; Job 21:15; Genesis 23:8; Isaiah 53:12; Jeremiah 36:25).

The meaning of the word is determined by its use in **1 Timothy 2:1,**

"I exhort, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all and men"; where the different kinds of prayers appear to be distinguished.



Intercession is prayer on behalf of another, and naturally arises from the instinct of the human heart--not merely prompted by affection and interest but recognizing that God's relation to man is not merely individual, but social.

The progressive character of the Divine leading of man is found in the development of the intercessory spirit, e.g. Moses' prayer for the removal of plagues (Exodus 15:25); for water at Rephidim (Exodus 17:4); for victory over Amalek (Exodus 17:8-16); prayer for the people after the golden calf (Exodus 32:11-14,21-34; 33:12); after the renewal of the tables of stone (Exodus 34:9); In the prophetical books the note of intercession reappears.

The prophet, though primarily a messenger from God to man, has also something of the character of the intercessor (see Isaiah's call, Isa 6). The request of Hezekiah for the prayers of Isaiah (Isaiah 37:4), and the answer of the Lord implied in 37:6, recall the constantly recurring service of Moses to the people. Hezekiah himself becomes an intercessor (37:14-21). In Jeremiah 4:10 intercession is mingled with the words of the messenger. Intercessory prayers are found in Jeremiah 10:23; 14:7,19-22. The Book of Lamentations is naturally conceived in a more constantly recurring spirit of intercession.

In the New Testament, At the outset, Christ teaches prayer on behalf of those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). This completely changes the entire spirit of prayer! We breathe a new perception and of a higher revelation of love. We also find the



spirit of intercession in the pleas of those who sought Christ's help for their friends, which He was always so quick to recognize: The centurion for his servant (Matthew 8:13); the friends of the paralytic (Matthew 9:2-6), where the miracle was wrought on the ground of the friends' faith. Of a similar character are the requests of the woman for her child and the Lord's response (Matthew 15:28); of the man for his lunatic son (Matthew 17:14-21).

With this background we can understand the attitude our LORD has to intercession. And why intercession was powerful tool in our LORD's ministry!

A wonderful new 2020 stretches before us! How are you going to intercede in prayer for others! Our nation needs daily prayers. Our biological families are in great of prayers!

The weak disciples in our church! All the churches in our fellowship of churches. Our leaders and our leadership! Our bible discussion leaders because of their fundamental role in future of our churches.

The list of intercessory needs are endless!

Will you stand in the gap! And be the bridge between all these needs and our powerful!

May your yes be surrounding to the heavens!

As you finish today's devotion make your list for daily prayers!



TRIALS ON EVERY CORNER

John 18:13-40, Matthew 26:57-27:26, Mark 14:53 - 15:15, Luke 22:63- 23:25

4 different accounts of the trials of Jesus. All the passages relayed a Savior powerful enough to short circuit his suffering but who decided otherwise. Imagine for a moment: Jesus was taken to Pilate by the highest Caliber of religious leaders; who made all efforts to find false witnesses against; the 3 times denial by an inner caucus friend; 30 pieces of silver received by a foundational disciple to betray him; the desertion by all the disciples; the pressure by Pilate to answer questions on His kingship in spite of his silence; his condemnation to death after telling the truth; the outcry by the crowd led by Caiaphas and Annas for an innocent Jesus to be killed in place of a condemned murderer; the mockery; the beating; the torment just to mention a few of the pains that Jesus went through for scores of hours before his death and burial.

Jesus knew about his coming ordeal, but experience is always different from knowledge. He was prepared as shown in the garden, prayer and Surrender were His weapon. Jesus was not caught in open denial of who He was even in the face of death,



no self-pity, no grumbling and no complaint to God. He bore the pain **Heb 12:1-4, 1 Peter 2:23**

Jesus entrusted himself to the one who judges justly and focused on the goal set before him. Unimaginable.

As followers of Christ, we are not exempt from pain and suffering, although we are not as exposed to physical torture but are exposed to hardship and pains from rejection, separation, disappointment, illnesses and chronic health challenges, trauma from abuse and we have sometimes wondered why as disciples we need to suffer all these. Let's remember it is what we have been called to.

Question: How do we respond to this life challenges, how do we remain focused on our calling without compromise. Remember and follow Jesus's example in his endurance and faithfulness, through the word and prayer.

I hate pain and I believe most of us and if not all of us do. I have experienced pains ranging from ill health to being in a seemingly unending financial crisis, I have seen lazy people rewarded with promotion at work, my deepest pain has been having to provide care for my sick brother of over 15 years and it seems like it was never going to end, it is emotionally stressful having to be the only one in my family who is able to really understand his health and provide the psycho social support that he needs, I have been frustrated at different points of my challenges, sometimes I have questioned God for not changing situations. In addition to this I



have wondered why I do so much and yet I am not fruitful for souls. I have questioned why our country is so hard and so much suffering in the land; bad news on the media, traffic and you name them if you leave in Lagos or Nigeria. What I have done is turned my focus from Christ to all these issues, I complained and blame like most Nigerians, I have not been deliberate to think about Christ and imitate Him. Following Jesus examples is not just to keep praying but also to be an example for others.

My prayer and resolve are to be like Jesus in handling the challenges of life. When Trials are dark on every side, may God grant us all the strength to remember Jesus and follow His example. Amen

John 8:12

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying. "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness but will have the Light of Life".





A HEART OF SACRIFICE (THE MIGHTY MITES)

Mark 12:41-44

While the story of the widow's offering brings to mind all too familiar sermons that we've heard on giving, it evokes for me, an imagery of reckless abandon in giving generously to God. It is worthwhile for us to take a deep dive into this understated story which draws vivid parallels into our relationship with God and the true value of sacrifice.

In order to appreciate the importance of this story in the account of the gospel of Mark, we must understand the proper context of its time period. The story of the widow (Mark 12:41-44) is sandwiched between two very important events in biblical history:

- 1. Mark 12:1-40 End of Jesus' public ministry
- 2. **Mark 13:1-37** Jesus' pronouncement of the destruction of the temple (the end of the old order of things)

Another important thing to note is the emphasis on widows throughout the bible. Yahweh is described as a 'defender of widows' (Psalm 68:5, Deut 10:18). In (Psalm 146:7,9) He is said to 'sustain the fatherless and the widow'. The bible is also clear that our God takes notice of the wicked who 'slay the widow and the alien' (Psalm 94:7) while promising certainty of judgment:



'Yahweh will tear down the house of the proud, but he will establish the boundary of the widow' (Prov 15:25).

It is against this backdrop that Mark gives his account of the widow's encounter with our Lord. As alluded in Psalm 94:7, Jesus took note of the widow. The rich and teachers of the law stand in striking contrast to the devotion of the widow who expresses her faith as an act of generosity by giving all that she owned to God, with complete trust in His divine providence. The widow's giving reflected her faith that God is able to meet all her needs. In contrast, the teachers of the law put their confidence in the fraudulent religious system they had instituted to benefit themselves. They did not trust God to provide for their needs even though the system was already in their favor.

Jesus explicitly accuses them of exploiting the helpless and the widows they should have been protecting by God's law - 'They devour widows' houses, covering up their crimes with still more superficial piety—their long prayers,' (Mark 12:40).

Meanwhile, the laws which these leaders claimed to profess made unique provision for the protection of widows. In **Exodus 22:22–24**, an Israelite was forbidden to afflict a widow. Additionally, in the third year, tithes were to be deposited in the local towns instead of being brought to the sanctuary, so that widows like her would not be destitute. **(Deut 14:29)**. Jesus unmasks their hypocrisy at the end of his ministry in **Mark 12:38-40**, by exposing them as a ruling class who exploited the Jews using religion for disreputable gain.



With this context in mind, it is therefore not surprising to find Jesus observing the widow.

Coincidental? Of course not. Jesus was so moved by the plight of the widow and the unjustness of the system that he immediately called his disciples attention to this teachable moment as a lesson of ultimate sacrifice, devotion, worship and discipleship. The ultimate lesson to be learned here, is therefore not about money, but the triumph of the widow's faith despite the injustice life had served her.

In monetary value, the two mites that the widow gave was very small — it was the equivalent of six minutes of a daily wage (christiananswers.net/dictionary). Yet she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on,' (Mark 12:44) and this makes the true value of the her sacrifice priceless.

With this imagery in mind, Mark 12 ends and Mark 13 begins with Jesus making a pronounced verdict on the judgement of the pious, greedy and godless teachers of the law when he condemns the temple to destruction.

REFLECTIONS:

Jesus is moved by selfless giving and He is also moved to anger by injustice, greed and self-seekers. Studying this story with more context has challenged my concept of giving. I have never given with such reckless abandon to God; and especially not under such circumstances of injustice as the widow faced. I give, but



often not enough to hurt my purse. I love giving and in fact, giving is the most prominent virtue I am known for. However, this story truly calls into question this assumption of myself. Simply put, my giving pales in comparison.

A mere offering of two mites was enough to merit the attention of our Lord because it embodied the entire heart and complete trust of the widow in her God. In this new year, I am challenged to use giving as a thermometer gauge of my devotion. I am choosing to reflect on my giving as a mechanism to spur full self-sacrifice. A sacrifice must deprive one of something valuable, and even at times sustenance, for it to truly be a sacrifice. How can the widow's heart of giving challenge you to move God to notice your faith? I encourage you to also reflect on this.

Follow | Me | Luke 6:40

DAY13

ENDURE ALL SITUATIONS

Matthew 10: 5 - 31

As Christians, we feel proud when people we relate with refer to us as Pastor, especially when it is as a result of our conduct, and we enjoy the benefits that from being known as a follower of Christ, like the respect people accord us. We also enjoy it when God showers us with blessings his children, especially those unmerited favors, and in those situations, we say God is God...all the time, and all the time.... God is good!

However life is full of ups and downs, and when those down times come, when things don't seem to be going our way; financial challenges, health challenges, relationship challenges, misfortunes, work/business challenges, etc. many times we're tempted to complain and we are quick to forget all the blessings and undeserved favors we have enjoyed previously from God, to the point that some of us even take a walk from God, either physically or in our heart.

The twelve disciples sent out by Christ enjoyed many privileges, but Jesus was also quick to remind them of the challenges (cross) that come with it, and the same applies for us today as his disciples.



I must say that I have enjoyed many amazing blessings from God, like working in a place where God's favor was clearly on me, that even the mistakes I made were turned into blessings, and I have equally experienced some very challenging situations which I will never wish even for my enemy, but which God has used to mould me and help me grow in my faith and in my walk with him; like when our second son fell from a terrace at the age of two, when my first son fell head long in a man-hole, when my wife had a breast cancer scare, when my finances was at rock bottom and had to depend on my wife and friends, and recently my elder brother being diagnosed of a colon cancer and all it related fears. But in all these situations God has remained faithful and has used them to help me to grow in my walk and trust in Him, and like a brother shared with me recently "that Storms often bring out our true spiritual condition. Jesus was in the boat, but the disciples still feared for their lives. He chastised them for their fear and their little faith! Thus, we learn our greatest need is not for the storm to end but to be free from fear, anxiety and have faith in Him while the storm rages'.

PRACTICAL:

In our walk with God, many challenges will come, but they are all meant to build us up and prepare us for heaven, even though it might not seem so most of the time, and many times we may not even understand why God allowed them, but let us continue to pray for his grace and strength, lets run to Him with our prayers and petition, and with faith thank Him in advance, and I believe that His peace that surpasses all understanding will guard our mind and heart in Christ Jesus our Lord.



THE NARROW DOOR

Luke 13:22-30

Jesus said make every effort to enter through the Narrow Door. **Matt 7: 13-14** tells us that only a few will find the Narrow Door. As disciples, we have seen it and just need to make every effort to enter.

Every effort means doing everything I can to enter, not caring about any obstacles that may stand in my way. It is a fight for survival and for my life.

When we look at vs 22, Jesus was asked a question, but he didn't answer because it is not by few or by many but by my individual choice to enter. In other words, making heaven depends on meit is my choice.

Rev 21 tells us where the narrow door and path leads to. Are you willing to do all it takes to get to the streets of gold?

I believe that as disciples of Christ, we saw the Narrow Door and stepped in the narrow path when we were baptized but the door keeps moving forward as we walk the Narrow path. It is a daily effort that you and I are to continue to make until the master



comes to shut the door - either when we die or at the 2nd coming of Christ.

Sadly, many of us are just "trying" to get in and not making every effort, because we have accepted the low standards and mediocrity of the world around us in our relationship with God. We give excuses why biblical teachings should be watered down etc.

Truth be told, a lot of us are so distracted and laid back and just put in the barest minimum.

What are the efforts we should be making to enter the narrow path?

- Taking our relationship with God as no 1, we need to strive for intimacy with God, doing deeper Bible study to know him better, knowing you can talk to him at anytime, anywhere or in any place, being aware of him as we go along and have the sense of awe of him daily.
- Continually shifting our focus back to heaven as we journey through life. Our focus constantly will stray towards a comfortable life (more money, better jobs, comfortable homes etc.) Don't get me wrong, these are all good things and are in fact blessings from God, but it should not be our focus or what takes our attention. Sadly, I see a lot of us whose focus are these things to the detriment of our relationship and our walk along the narrow path. We must continue to turn our gaze to God as we journey on
- Choosing to be righteous in our daily dealings, speaking the truth, having integrity to stand out in this corrupt nation.



- We are not of the world, we are called to be different in the way we love others, in our lifestyles, in the way we celebrate and all.
- Let us stop competing with the world, be content with what you have. Trust God to take care of you.

Making every effort will not be easy but we must be at it daily Lately, going to midweek has been challenging, due to the traffic caused by the road work ongoing.

I have been tempted several times to just go home and several others have chosen that option, but one thing that came to mind for me is that Jesus had told me that I must carry my cross daily.

And if that traffic is a cross, I will have to carry for the next few months, then so be it, I must make every effort to fellowship with my brothers and sisters.

The door will be shut sooner or later, I don't know about you but after 30 years of discipleship, I certainly don't want to be called an evil doer (Luke 13:27).

This means that I will be considered the same as those who never proclaim Jesus as Lord, ritual killers, kidnappers etc. No way will that be my story.

CHALLENGE:

 Strive for an intimate relationship with God, challenge yourself to learn new things about him every month this year. Find a study partner and keep each other accountable.



2. Make it a habit to review your day, check the effort you put into the day and failures and strive to be better the next day.

PRAYER:

Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for always calling our focus back to you. Help us to always remember that we need to make every effort to be with you in heaven.

Help us to continually deny ourselves and choose you above all, make us ambassadors that shine your light for others to also find the narrow path. Thank you for showing us the door and path and help us to never fall on the way. It is in Jesus name we pray. Amen



THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Philippians 1: 25

Everyone who leads people in God's church is a shepherd. God refers to His people as sheep, knowing that like real sheep we will require attention, care, protection, guidance and leadership.

Some shepherds have small flocks, like Bible Talk leaders and Family Group leaders. Others have larger flocks like Regional leaders, Church leaders and Elders. But all are shepherds who have been entrusted by God to lead and care for His people. God expects us to be servants and requires that we prove faithful in this trust (1Corinthians 4: 1-2).

In John 10, we learn critical and fundamental lessons about being a good or true shepherd. Please read **John 10: 1-14.**

LEARNING POINTS:

 Coming to Jesus and truly knowing Him is foundational. It is essential to salvation, essential for a relationship with God, essential to be a true shepherd of God's people, essential to knowing God, and essential to shepherding God's way. Our effectiveness as shepherds' hinges on our relationship with Christ (vs. 1,2,7-9)



- 2. A good shepherd knows his sheep. He knows them intimately. He knows their condition physically, spiritually, emotionally, financially, health-wise, etc. He knows every area of their lives. He knows their struggles, victories, motivations, aspirations, etc. (vs. 3)
- 3. The sheep know the good shepherd. They know how much he cares about them. He pays attention to them, he is connected to them, he spends quality time with them. They see the genuineness of his love and concern for them (vs. 4,5). Quoting Maya Angelou, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel".
- 4. The good shepherd leads by example. His life models God's standard. He does not call them to what he is not (vs. 3,4)
- 5. The good shepherd leads and guides the flock to a full and abundant life, as God intended (vs. 10)
- The good shepherd is willing to sacrifice anything for the good of his flock. His love for his flock is deep, genuine and wholehearted (vs. 11-13)
- 7. The good shepherd knows the condition of his flock and they know him intimately also. He is real and vulnerable with them (vs. 14)

Self-examining Questions We Should be Asking Ourselves:

- 1. Why am I in leadership?
- 2. Do I earnestly believe God has called me to this responsibility?
- 3. What does God expect of me as a leader?
- 4. What things am I doing to keep this trust from God?



- 5. How well do I know the condition of each person God has put under my care and leadership?
- 6. How often do we talk about how they are feeling and personal matters (like health, finances, pastimes, careers, jobs, businesses, relationships, etc.)?
- 7. How often do we talk or communicate outside church meetings?
- 8. How much quality time do I give each of them, and do I enjoy doing this or do I struggle?

TO DO:

Write out a plan of action today on how you will become a good shepherd as follows:

- 1. State what you are doing well already
- 2. State areas you need to improve on and steps you will take to achieve these
- 3. State areas you need to change significantly, and steps and timeframe to achieve these.

Follow | Me Luke 6:40

DAY16

IMPRESSIVE FAITH

Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10

I began the year 2019, like most people, with a vision of what I hoped to achieve. I also joined the rest of my church family to start the year with our customary 40 days of praying and fasting (21 days for most who don't have the stamina to go the whole yard). I rose early in the morning to have my quiet time and was pumped up with the insights I gleaned from the scriptures which I shared with friends and family alike. I set both spiritual and physical goals for myself and bible discussion group. Everything was going on smoothly until sometime in February when the trapdoor to the underworld was "accidentally" opened and a demon from hell escaped to torment me.

Financially, things took a turn for the worse. I couldn't gather enough money to meet basic needs, I struggled to pay tithes and give financially to the church, I struggled with paying my children's school fees on time and even fell behind on my rent payment. I had a running battle with my spouse frequently; the type that only the lack of money and basic amenities would usually cause and came very close to going our separate ways because the kitchen was too hot for both of us! We both resorted to coping the best way we could, and it opened us up to temptations from the opposite sex because at this time our



physical relationship was almost non-existent. Why was all this happening? We have both been disciples for a combined 45 years plus and have given our best to God and the Kingdom. Many thoughts came! Were we being punished for past or unrepented sins? Perhaps it was the tithes we didn't pay? What about the years past that we paid our tithes religiously? Couldn't that count for something? I began to doubt my relationship with God and even doubted when I prayed because nothing made sense anymore. These pressures made it difficult for me to hold my faith.

It was not the same with the Roman Centurion in the Bible. In Matt 8:5-13, the Roman Centurion (a Gentile) astounded Jesus with his faith and thus set an example of great faith for us all because he understood what authority meant. He understood that he didn't have to be physically present for his orders to be carried out by his soldiers. In the same vein, he understood that Jesus didn't have to physically come under his roof to heal his servant; he only had to say the word and he would be healed. Unlike Thomas Didymus (one of Jesus' chosen twelve) who, in John 20:25b said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe", this gentile believed first even though he hadn't yet received the healing he craved for his servant.

"Doubt is best worked through individually with trusted friends. If leaders confess doubts on major Christian doctrines, their congregations may lose confidence in their leadership, equate doubt with unbelief, or be thrown into an unnecessary crisis of faith themselves." (Douglas Groothuis)



As Christians, we sometimes suffer from doubts and are "ashamed", so we keep to ourselves because we fear being judged or even ostracized by fellow Christians. These fears may be justified since Christians sometimes secretly lick their own wounded.

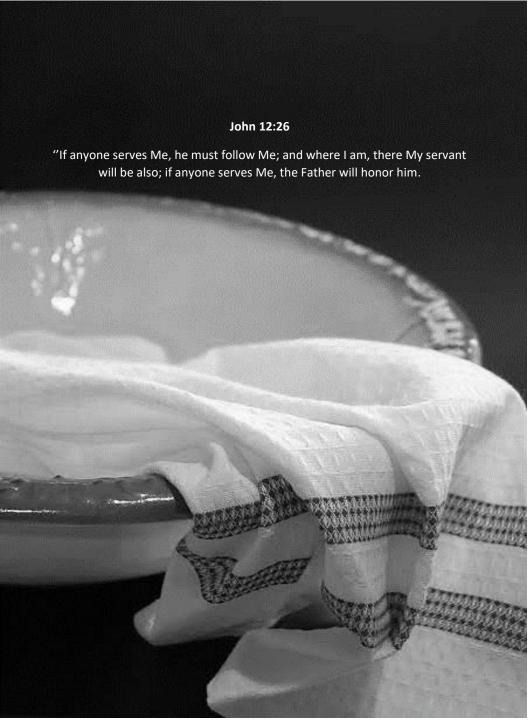
Are all my trials over? I wish they were! Do I still have doubts? You bet I still do! Will I stop being a Christian because of the raging warfare? Far be it from me! I don't need Jesus to be physically present under my roof for my situation to turn around. Like the Roman centurion, I only need to have faith that from His throne in heaven, all He needs to do is just say the word and my challenges will end for good. Wouldn't that be an impressive faith?

Further Reading:

Phil 3:12-14

Reference:

Douglas Groothuis – Speaking wisely about doubts in the Church.





PERSISTENCE AND SINCERITY IN PRAYER

Prayer is an integral part of my daily walk with God. I must pray right.

Praying to God in the name of Jesus Christ is my daily acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus over my entire life. He teaches me how to pray. Without daily prayers, Christian life and race will be fruitless, powerless and faithless.

We did not invent prayers; consequently, we must learn to pray in accordance with the will and purpose (manual) of the one who invented it. This devotional today tries to help us with this.

SOME DEFINITIONS

Persistence: The fact of continuing in an opinion or a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. A determination to do something even though it is difficult or other people oppose it. According to Norah O'Donnel "Persistence is incredibly important. Persistence proves to the person you are trying to reach that you are passionate about something, that you really need something"



Sincerity: The absence of pretense, deceit or hypocrisy. It is the virtue of one who communicates and acts in accordance with their feelings, beliefs, thoughts and desires.

Persistence and sincerity (from the definitions above) truly are two very important elements of an effective and potent prayer life. Jesus thought it. The Apostles thought and practiced it. This is the one example for you and I today.

SCRIPTURES AND APPLICATIONS

In **Luke 18:1-8**, this parable was all about the fact that we should always pray and never give up (persistence) vs 1 see the example of the widow.

Is this your practice?

In **Luke 18:9-14** addresses the attitudes and (sincerity) of our prayers: compare/contrast the attitude of the tax collector with that of the Pharisee.

Which one resonates with you?

Without persistence and sincerity, our prayers will certainly not achieve the desired results. Remove persistence and sincerity from your prayer life it just comes to nothing. Woody Hayes says; You "paralyze resistance with persistence"

Again, refer to the parable of the persistent widow.

In **Luke 11: 1-13** Jesus thought his disciples how to pray emphasizing the great importance of persistence and sincerity when we pray.



Have you learnt how to pray? Who taught you or who is teaching you how to pray? These questions are important for us to answer because many of us just think we know how to pray because we "pray".

For me as a Christian, effective prayer most times is hard and difficult to achieve. Effective, potent and impactful prayer takes time, efforts, commitments, consistency and above all persistence, sincerity and the right motives/attitudes.

There are many things that militate against effective and efficient prayer life such as:

- 1. My prayer time management (at times I can't just make out the right time)
- 2. Physical wellness, tiredness, fatigue, sleep, weariness, etc.
- 3. State of the heart (sin)
- 4. Distractions (my praying environment (internal/external).

Can you relate with the above?

The effect of all these factors is to kick out persistence and sincerity from my prayer life. They can make us prayerless. I have been there. This is where I must fight the battle of my life by going to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles from the Holy Scriptures to give me the right perspective, attitudes and motivations for an effective and potent prayer. Persistence and sincerity are key. In 1 Thess. 5:17 the Bible says pray continuously or pray without ceasing. This connotes persistence and sincerity. I have long learnt to pray continually and without ceasing in obedience to this scripture. How?



- Pray in every situation and circumstance
- Pray with every situation and circumstance
- Pray for every situation and circumstance.

Pray when in meeting, pray while you walk, drive, eat, talk, read, etc. Teach your heart and mind to pray continually with sincerity, vulnerability.

If there is anything that Satan wants us to achieve every day is a prayerless and faithless Christian life. Many of us are in this position today. We must push for the needed change in this area.

SOME PRACTICALS/ACTION POINTS

- 1. Pray with the correct Bible Theology in mind. Do not pray as the "religions" world prays.
- 2. Pray with scriptures in any and every situation or circumstances pray for knowledge, patience, wisdom, love, understanding, strength and courage; etc.
- 3. Study out the patterns and the prayer life of all the powerful men and women in the Bible. Learn to pray like them. e.g. Moses, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Jesus and The Apostles.
- 4. Learn to be persistent and sincere in your prayers (Pray without ceasing)

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE PREFERENCES

1 Kings 18:26 – 29, Nehemiah 1:4 – 11. Matt. 6:5 –15, Nehemiah 2:4. Eph. 6:18 – 20, Philp. 4: 6, James 1:15

"The most interesting thing about the postage stamp is the persistence with which it sticks to its job" Napolean Hill. Be a postage stamp in prayers.



THE NATURE OF GOD'S POWER

Matthew 8:23-24, Matthew 9:18-26, Mark 4:36-5:20, Luke 8:22-39

Today's scriptures are focused on God's exceedingly great power, evidenced in different scenarios. Have you ever considered this: that the same power that raised the dead, calmed the storm and cast out demons is available to us today? In my 2nd year in the university, I was faced with emotionally unsettling situations and ended up being diagnosed psychosomatic.

I was admitted in the Psychiatric ward at Yaba and was there for 3 months – I lost almost the entire semester. I got back in school just in time for my exams. Those were tough times for me.

However, I wrote my exams, performing dismally, thus I had quite a few carryovers. I had been advised by my psychiatrist to stay away from any undue excitement, I adhered to the advice, and my medications. Yet in my 3rd year, about the same time, the persistent headaches returned — these were the first symptoms of psychosomasis.

The medications were not helping so I resorted to prayers. I prayed deeply, fervently, reminding God of His word in Nahum



1:9B "Trouble will not come a second time". God heard and the headaches suddenly disappeared and have never returned! I went on to seat for my carryovers and eventually graduated with a 2nd class degree. God came through for me! God is infinitely great.

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength." Isaiah 40:28-29

That means that this same power, the same tremendous power that calmed the troubled sea in a moment, which cast out the legions of demons, is available now – to you and me! Most of us will not overtake cities and countries, or go to battle against physical enemies, but God has called us to resist the sin that dwells in us. Through Jesus He gave us the possibility of being set free from sin's slavery, to overcome our own lusts and demands, and to conquer everything that causes unrest and conflict.

We need God's help every day – each time we are tempted – to overcome the sin that wants to come out of us. Sin is strong, but God's power is always stronger! His power breaks down barriers and walls and makes possible what was impossible!

We can stand by the power of the eternal God in those very areas where we used to fall in sin again and again!



TO PONDER:

What battles have you been fighting in your strength rather than tapping into God's infinite power through prayer?

Do you even pray when faced with tough situations or do you figure out a work-around? Are you on the verge of throwing in the towel?

Now is a good time to tap into God's boundless power.

Follow Me

DAY 19

DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

There are some regular things we do that have a significant meaning to us especially on special occasions. I remember growing up and seeing my family gathered together every 31st night for prayer, but the highlight of the night came up after 12 midnight my father would bring out special bread and other delicacies for us and our neighbors to eat, it did not matter that we had all eaten the night before. One year my father decided to tell us what brought about this tradition. He told us that in 1963 himself and his wife with two children went through some horrible financial challenges to the point that feeding was extremely difficult. He prayed that if God saw him and his family through that year, he would celebrate every new year with a meal for every person around him.

In Luke 22: 14- 23; 14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."



19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. 21 But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.

The breaking of bread and sharing of wine at meals was a common practice in the ancient eastern culture. However, to the Jews this meal on this particular night had a unique purpose, it was the meal to commemorate the Passover. For thousands of years, Israel had celebrated this particular night in accordance to God's command, (Ex.12:14, 21-27).

However, on this night as recorded by Luke, when Jesus sat with his disciples to partake of the Passover it was to signify a new meaning.

- It marked the end of the ancient covenant; the old Passover had fulfilled its meaning.
- It signified the beginning of a new covenant. "The ancient covenant, which changed the slaves of Egypt into God's servants, had given place to the new, which changed his servants into his Sons" (Bible illustrator)

Just as Israel was charged to remember the path and cost of their redemption, Jesus wanted his disciples to remember his sacrifice and death.

Why do we need to remember his death?



- His death is central to the message of the gospel. (1Cor.15:3-4).
- It is not the life or teaching of the Lord that saves us but his death. (1Pet. 2:24).

What does this mean to us?

John 6: 53-54; 53 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

In other words, this passage is saying that our salvation is tied to our willingness to 'eat his flesh and drink his blood'.

Even though, our response to this statement may not be similar to the Jews who took offense, we can fall into another equally unhealthy response which is apathy.

What does it mean to 'eat his flesh and drink his blood'?

John 6: 57; 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

- Every time we partake of the communion, we acknowledge our decision to live not for ourselves but for Christ.
- Communion is a reminder of our vows that Jesus is Lord and our commitment to live life every day for him.



Gal. 2: 20; 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. We must pay careful attention to how we approach the Lords' table.

To share in the communion without recognizing the commitment we made or the propriety of life that is expected is partaking of the communion in an unworthy manner. (1Cor. 11: 27-30)

- In what way does the communion remind you about Jesus? (ROM.8: 6-10)
- What area of Jesus' character are you imitating?

IN CONCLUSION:

We have been privileged to be brought into his kingdom, the price for our redemption is not cheap even though we struggle every day to live up to God's expectations of us we cannot be absentminded or irresponsible in the way we approach the communion. May God continue to use the Eucharist to renew our love and commitment to his Son.



THE HIDDEN LIFE

Please begin by reading Matthew 6:5 -13

I love stage plays. I am always intrigued by the drama and theatrics heightened by the theatre atmosphere. It's always a treat for me to watch live plays. I suspect that some of us share the same passion. By contrast, we can learn from this passage, that prayer is not a show. Jesus teaches us that the showy display of the theatre must be replaced by prayer that is a simple, honest and sincere communication with God.

Jesus has warned us saying: "when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites..." who pray for show to impress people. Sadly, our society is full of religion for show. We must not fall into the vanity of loud repetitive prayers to impress people while our hearts are full of sin and not connected to God. Intense expression of emotion are not necessarily wrong. However, while God understands our emotions, both positive and negative, shouting and rolling on the ground are not necessary to get God's attention.

Again, Jesus urges "And when you pray don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do..." (Matthew 6:7 NLT). We are sometimes tempted with the notion that, the harder we pray, the more God



hears us. While Jesus does urge us to be persistent in faith and in prayer, we must not be ignorant of God's divine nature. God is all-knowing and always compassionate. He would rather have us approach him with pure simple hearts than trying to impress God with flamboyant or dramatic prayers. Simply keep your heart pure. We learn from the Lord's prayer, that we should connect emotionally with God as our Father when we pray. Our requests must be backed by simple faith in God's provision and the knowledge that God knows our needs even before we ask Him. Above all God knows our hearts so let us not harbor sin.

As I reflect on God's faithfulness and help over the years, Jesus' words in this passage are an encouraging reminder. I remember going through intense illness and those numerous simple prayers I quietly prayed on my hospital bed day and night. In all those, God kept me connected to Him, and, every day He gave me renewed reasons to count my blessings. I believe we can all remember times in our lives when God answered our quiet heartfelt prayers.

I hope these thoughts encourage you to maintain a pure heart and keep it simple and real with God because He loves you.

ACTION:

Take some time out today for a time of private prayer. Use that time to praise and thank God for lovingly hearing and answering our prayers.

Further reading: Luke 11: 5-11, Luke 5:16, Luke 18:1-8, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18.



LUCRE AND HADES

Story of Lazarus and the rich man and the lessons for us today. Luke16:19-31

LUCRE denotes any act of ill-gotten wealth.

HADES is a place of punishment.

These two terms can be used in relations to our "actions" and "consequences".

Luke 16:19-21, expressed a privileged/rich man who was not sensitive to the plights of the poor in his immediate environment, this is a display of inactions by him. What Lazarus needed was just a basic act of benevolence from the rich man.

Luke 16:22-26. We see the privileged/rich man being made to suffer the consequences of his inaction towards Lazarus.

It is important to note that we are all born equal and always equal before God, which is why we all need the same basic amenities (water, food, clothing, housing etc.) in life. Only God's grace through knowledge, sets us apart on how we acquire them and what we do with them.

Luke 16: 27-28 shows the privileged/rich man's concerns towards his immediate family, knowing that his actions and way of life has influenced them, and they may experience the same



consequences that he is facing. The big questions in this scenario for us as disciples are;

- What is our life teaching our immediate family?
- Are our actions leading others to Christ?
- Is our life the Bible our neighbours/associates are reading today?
- With the knowledge God has given to us, WHO ARE YOU IMPACTING?
- With the salvation we have, WHO ARE YOU CALLING TO CHRIST?
- WHAT ACT OF BENEVOLENCE ARE YOU ENGAGED IN?

Personally, for me "what will Jesus do?" is my guiding principle in making decisions in my home, business dealings and as well as how I relate with others generally.

Learning from this story will also help me to audit my actions all the more and I believe it will be the same for everyone.

In conclusion we must always remember that there is always a consequence for every action or inaction. We should always keep in mind that life is keeping records and Heaven is watching. We all have a chance to make our actions count for good.



THE JUDAS IN US

Matthew 26:1-16, Mark 14:1-11, John 12:1-7

1 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 2 "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 5 "But not during the festival," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." 6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. 9 "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." 10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." 14 Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests 15 and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?"



So, they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over (Matthew 26:1-16).

Following Jesus requires absolute denial and total surrender in every aspect of our lives (Luke 14:33).

It is possible to be in close proximity to Jesus yet have no relationship with Him as seen in today's text.

Every disciple of Jesus has some garbage that we are carrying along with us as we journey through this pilgrimage which only Jesus can help us overcome completely.

Judas was introduced for the first time by all the gospel writers as "the betrayer of Jesus" (Matt.10:4, Mark 3:19, Luke 6:16, John 6:70-71).

Jesus knew about the character and conduct of Judas from the beginning but still gave him an opportunity to serve as an apostle in His ministry (John 13:10-11).

Our text today shows a contrast in attitude of two different individuals who claim to be followers of Jesus - Mary and Judas (John 12:3-6).

While Mary chose to honour Jesus with the best she had, Judas willingly offered himself to be used by Satan (Matthew 26:14-15).

To Mary, money was simply one of the means of expressing her true and sincere devotion to her Saviour. Mary gladly gave of that which was her best, while to Judas on the other hand, money was



to be gained and grasped at the expense of his master and Saviour. Judas did not care that it had to be done deceitfully and in a crooked manner – in fact he considered money spent on Jesus, as wasted (John 12:5).

"Greed is not a financial issue. It's a heart issue" - Andy Stanley How much is Jesus worth to you and what would you be willing to give up showing your sincere followership and devotion to Him this year?

Your attitude towards sin and temptations reveals the worth and value you place on Jesus.

Judas had opportunities to overcome his weaknesses and struggles for 3 good years but failed to take advantage of them. What sins are you hiding or keeping in your life today?

Many years ago, my life was totally miserable. I lost the joy of being a disciple of Jesus Christ because of unconfessed sins. I attended Church meetings but was dying inside. I found and picked fault with everything going on around me in Church because of the sins I had committed which I failed to confess. However, when I decided to talk about it, I regained the joy that comes with salvation and understood the words of David - 1 "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 2 Blessed are those whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. 5 Then I acknowledged my sin



to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" And you forgave the guilt of my sin (Psalm 32:1-5).

If you fail to confess your sins, your Christian will be miserable, and you will be heading towards spiritual downfall and destruction as it was in the case of Judas (Matt.27:3-5).

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE REASONS JUDAS ISCARIOT BETRAYED JESUS:

- (i) He was never a true follower of Jesus he never repented of his past sins (John 17:12).
- (ii) He was a greedy person (Matt.26:14-15) Jesus warned His disciples to watch out for this sin (Luke 12:15).
- (iii) He left his thoughts untended or better still he nurtured his evil thoughts.

Do you have any of these above-mentioned traits in your life? What step/s will you take to eradicate them? Judas resented the generous act of Mary not because he loved the poor but because he was denied the opportunity to steal from the purse as was his custom (John 12:4-6).

"Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction." - Erich Fromm



How often do you confess your struggles and temptations so that you can receive the needed help?

Jesus willingly put himself on the cross so that we could be purchased from slavery to sin with His blood and live a life of total victory and fulfilment.

What resolutions will you come up with this year to live gratefully for all that Jesus did for you on the cross.

Pull a friend aside today and talk to him/her about the different ungodly thoughts that have been going through your mind and spend some quality time in prayer asking God to help you overcome this challenge/s.



THE COUNSELLOR FROM JESUS

In the gospel of John, as well as in the rest of the New Testament, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are very closely connected. When Jesus says, "another counsellor" in **John 14:16**, He's implying that He is also a counsellor and He's making a clear distinction between Himself and the Spirit.

The Greek word used in reference to the Holy Spirit is Parakletos, which means one who is called to one's side especially, to help. It also means an intercessor, an assistant or one who pleads the cause of another before a judge.

Therefore, the role of the Holy Spirit is all encompassing. He is our Comforter, Counsellor, Helper, Advocate, and Intercessor.

It is a joy and relief to know that we do not have to labour through life because God is always with us and our victory is secure in Him.

How does the Holy Spirit counsel us?

John 14:26

The Spirit will build up the Church by reminding the disciples of Jesus' teachings and revealing the depths of meaning to them.



John 16:14

The Spirit glorifies Jesus: He takes the things of Jesus and shows them to disciples.

John 15:26

The Spirit testifies about Jesus. Jesus uses two names for the Spirit — Counsellor and Spirit of truth. The word Counsellor conveys the helping, encouraging, and strengthening work of the Spirit. Spirit of Truth points to the teaching, illuminating and reminding work of the Spirit.

Acts 8:26-30

The Spirit leads us in evangelism. The Spirit leads us to the right people at the right time.

Why do we need the Holy Spirit?

Romans 8

Because Holy Spirit confirms our union with Christ - vs. 9
Because Holy Spirit helps us win victories over sin – vs. 12-17
Because Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses – vs. 26-27
Because Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf – vs. 26-27

I am very thankful to God for the help of His Spirit in me and the countless times the Spirit has helped me to be victorious over sin. Specifically, there was a day in my former office when my General Manager asked me to deceive a client. When I refused to yield to his request, the next thing I saw was a query from the administrative manager to explain my reason for disobeying the GM. I was shocked and perplexed, not knowing



what to do and how to answer the query. After some time, I prayed and asked specifically for wisdom and God's divine intervention. After my prayer, the Holy Spirit counselled me on how to respond to the query. The rest of the story was that I got promoted few months after the incident. God turned my query to promotion because I kept in step with the Holy Spirit's counsel.

Galatians 5:25

The Holy Spirit is our counsellor and He provide the energy and direction for living the Christian life, so keep in step with His leading. Don't fall behind or hold back anyone else. Don't let anyone else's values or standards hold you back in any area of your life.

Q. What would you do differently as a result of this devotional? Q. How would you keep in step with the Holy Spirit in 2020 in order to help you follow Christ faithfully?



GODLY PRIORITIES

LUKE 12:13-34

Two things catch are evident at first glance from this passage. First the distraction - someone out of the blue in the middle of Jesus' teaching asking for the division of their parent's inheritance.

What a distraction? Next, the paradox - How can a fool become rich? This man must have been smart to be rich. He however was not prepared for eternity but only for here and now. Someone can possess the ability to make money and make lots of money but lack the ability to make Godly priorities. To Jesus, a fool, therefore, is someone who only has worldly priorities but lacks spiritual investments (Psalm 14:1).

In this parable, the rich man had absolutely no regard for God and it showed. His statement was filled with "I." The proud, arrogant, conceited self. God warns sternly against boasting especially about the uncertain tomorrow or what we can achieve (James 4:13-17).

As Christians, we should learn to say, "If it is the will of God, I will live to do this or that. Is that the way you and I plan? We must



acknowledge God in all we do and plan to do. We are here by the grace of God, and nothing can be achieved without him. "...in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your path straight" (Prov. 3:6).

The parable reminds me of a man who started a business trading breakable bowls of different colours through a huge loan he secured from a bank. The day the goods were delivered to him, he piled everything up and sat in front of them thinking to himself: "When I finish selling all this stuff, I will make a huge profit. I will quickly go to the market and buy a new set, make more profit until I make so much money in my bank account. Then I will buy a car, start building houses in the best areas of town, and finally get married. One day, my wife will offend me and later kneel in front of me begging for forgiveness, but I will not accept her pleading. At a point, I will just kick her to get away from me. Immediately he raised his legs to demonstrate how he will kick his wife; he mistakenly kicked all the plates in front of him, breaking several and making a huge loss."

Probably if the man had thought, "I will sell the first set of plates, make a huge profit, give my offering to God, support the mission, help someone in need, be ever more so kind and forgiving to all especially my would-be wife etc., the story would have ended differently.

As a disciple, when I make a profit or receive my salary, the first thought should be my monthly/weekly offering, missions offering, and benevolence before my own needs. This is one of



the ways to be rich towards God. In addition, Jesus rejected the role of a judge or mediator and used the opportunity to open up the real issue, which was greed - all kinds of greed. It is greed to desire the good life that helps no one else but yourself. Generosity not greed gives us true possessions with God.

Eph 5:3, Matt 6:19-21



AUTHORITY OVER SIN & SINNERS

MATTHEW 9:1-8

It is important not to lose sight of the lessons for us here as we settle into looking at Jesus authority over sin. We see here that Jesus is moved by our faith even on behalf of others, that we need forgiveness more than physical healing and taking a stand for God usually invites opposition.

As we get back to the subject matter of Jesus' authority over sin and his love for sinners it will be great to consider the following.

JESUS AND TEACHERS OF THE LAW

Jesus could have had another quiet healing were it not for the opposition of the Pharisees who questioned his authority to forgive sin and labelled him a blasphemer for doing what only God and his Son, the anointed one could for they considered him a mere man! Yet, the Pharisees failed to accept that a mere man can't heal with the same authority and power as they had seen Jesus was doing. Yes, even Nicodemus, a Pharisee had testified that "no one could perform these signs if God were not with him" John 3:2. Jesus took the seemingly difficult option in this regard to let them know who he was.

"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him". John 1:11, John 10:34-38



Have you been in a situation where you were confronted negatively or discredited for the good you did? Jesus' lesson for us is that sometimes you might find yourself in hostile environment and are opposed or the good may not be acknowledged; be courageous to stand. Do you have authority over your life? Do you have things to do for Christ that in the end makes you happy and fulfilled but you no longer to do? What is stopping you? Take a stand for Christ whatever the opposition.

JESUS AND SINNERS:

The account of the paralytic revealed the compassionate heart of Jesus. The faith of the paralytic's friends moved Jesus. They came desperately looking for healing, but Jesus gave more than they desired and demanded, he gave what was needed; he healed him and empowered him for heaven – the greatest gift of all because Jesus cares deeply. It is not enough to meet the immediate physical needs of people as is on demand, meeting their spiritual need is by far more important. Every now and then I find myself eager and ready to help the vulnerable, weak and needy based on what is demanded of me but fail to see and respond to greater and more gratifying need for God and eternity that is usually hidden behind the needs. Jesus realized that the paralytic would after his healing still be miserable, full of sin and desperately needing a relationship with God.

Do we strive to see the spiritual void and emptiness in those whose needs we meet (and those who meet our needs) and make the unpopular and difficult move to act? Do take



Zechariah 4:6 "This is the word of God to Zerubbabel; 'Not by might nor by power, but my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty" with you as you follow Jesus.

Follow | Me | Luke 6:40

DAY 26

ENDURE ALL SITUATIONS

John 18:13-40, Matthew 26:57-27:26, Mark 14:53 - 15:15, Luke 22:63- 23:25

Four different accounts of the same event — The trial of Jesus. All the passages reveal a Saviour powerful enough to short circuit his suffering and rewrite history and prophecy but acted differently by fulfilling every single one of them through intense pain and needless suffering. Imagine for a moment the pain and suffering in these events: Jesus taken to Pilate by the highest of leaders- Sanhedrin who made all efforts to find false witnesses against him; the betrayal by a foundational disciple for 30 pieces of silver; the denial by an inner caucus member; the desertion by all the apostles; the pressure by a politically weak Pilate to break his silence; his condemnation to death by the crowd who chose a convicted felon in his stead; the mockery; the beating; the torment; the separation from God!

Jesus knew about his coming ordeal, but experience is always different from knowledge. He was prepared as shown in the garden through struggle, prayer and Surrender. Jesus was not caught in open denial of who He was even in the face of an unjust death, no self-pity, no grumbling and no complaint to God. Jesus bore the all the pain (Heb 12:1-4, 1 Peter 2:23)



Even when he thrust himself on God it was not for self-serving justice, it was for our mercy! Unimaginable. As followers of Christ, we are not exempt from pain and suffering, it is most likely not physical torture but we are exposed to hardship and pains from rejection, separation, disappointment, illnesses, trauma from abuse and we have sometimes wondered why as disciples we need to suffer all these and bear with many who do as well.

I hate pain and I believe most if not all of us do. I have experienced pains ranging from ill health to being in a seemingly unending financial crisis on account of being a disciple, I have seen lazy people rewarded with promotion at work; my deepest pain has been the seemingly never ending over 15 years of providing care for my sick brother, it has been emotionally stressful having to be the only one in my family who is able to really understand his health challenge and provide the psycho social support that he needs. I have felt frustrated severally, and questioned God for not changing my situation. I have wondered why I do so much and yet I am not fruitful with souls. I still question ever so passionately why our country is so hard with so much inflicted suffering in the land, horrible news on the media, terrible traffic conditions and you name them if you live in Lagos or Nigeria.

Sadly, to my shame turned my focus from Christ to other selffocused things. Complaining and blaming like most Nigerians would. I have not been deliberate to think about Christ, consider him and imitate Him. Following Jesus' example of faithful



endurance is not just to keep praying but also to live as an example for others even when it is hardest.

QUESTION:

How do you respond to life's challenges and remain focused on our calling without compromise?

My prayer and resolve are to be like Jesus in handling the challenges of life; when trials are dark on every side, may God grant us all the strength to remember Jesus and follow His example.

Follow | Me Luke 6:40

DAY 27

THE FOUNDATION OF A SPIRITUAL LIFE

Matthew 7: 21-29

The strength of a building lies in its foundation hence the quality of any foundation should never be compromised.

The foundation holds the structure upright, preventing it from collapsing when hit by all sorts of harsh weather conditions. Some buildings in our country have stood and are still standing the test of harsh weather, while some have collapsed even under normal weather claiming lives of innocent people and children!!! Obviously, the poor foundation couldn't keep the buildings upright.

Likewise, building a spiritual life that will stand the test of time starts with building on a solid foundation, which is doing the WORD of GOD.

2 Tim 3: 17 says the word of God trains us in Righteousness. The training in righteousness started with the first forty days for me as a young Christian. By doing the first 40 days, every young disciple learns obedience to God's word, imitates the Bereans in **Acts 17:11** who searched the scriptures every day to confirm and affirm that the things they were taught were true. The first 40 days was followed closely by "Guard the Gospel series and these



formed an integral part of the spiritual foundation building time for me and many who were got baptized several years back.

However, at some point in our spiritual journey, the true test of how well we built our spiritual foundation will be tested. Storms, winds and rain will come in form of challenges faced in parenting, marriage, financial difficulties, failed business, ill health, persecution at work, the list is endless!! The true test of our spiritual foundation is how faithful we are in doing what Jesus expects us to do when faced with these challenges. Obedience to God's word doesn't come to us naturally but we can start by digging into God's word through daily Bible study to know what we need to do and be rooted. We don't need to wait for crisis to come before getting into frenzied study and memorization of scriptures.

I had my share of turbulent weather in my spiritual journey; a fatal car crash, life threatening obstetric emergency that necessitated my being in the ICU, unemployment at a point in time, sick mother to care for and marital challenges to mention a few. The most devastating out of all these challenges was the thought my husband and I entertained concerning our marriage which was 7yrs old then when his business crashed leaving us indebted financially.

We considered going our separate ways, which to me automatically meant walking away from God!! Walking away from my marriage and by extension from God may have looked like the easiest and wisest decision considering all the storms and winds 9 years ago, just like the world would!! The true meaning



of **Hebrews 4:12** "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double -edged sword..." would be evident in the events that followed thereafter.

A sister, who is also a close friend in the church, looked at me during those difficult times and said, she doesn't have silver nor gold to give me, but she is giving me a "Marriage Devotional Bible" to study.

I took the Bible home and that was the instrument that God used and still using to save our marriage. The Bible convicted us so much about God's plan for marriage. My husband and I strive almost every day when together to study this Bible. We owe our marriage to the words of God in that Bible.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES:

- 1) There is no other foundation that can be laid in our spiritual journey besides our obedience to the word of GOD.
- 2) Listening to JESUS and doing what He says is survival 101
- Commitment to daily study of the Bible is the beginning of wisdom.
- 4) Do take out time to do in-depth study on storms of life.



MANAGING REJECTION

LUKE 14:16-24

As an active member of His community, Jesus took part in every aspect of its social life and of course the meals which was one of its main and basic elements. Jesus' social behavior is uniquely inclusive in character. He accepted different kinds of invitations from different people. He dined with the wealthy, with the poor, with the 'righteous' and sinners alike. Naturally this seemed highly controversial to others but for him, it is as part of His ministry.

In the scripture, the dinner invitation was given out informally, and by messengers or servants and is read out in front of invited guest that a host is preparing a dinner for his friends. Wealthy men were invited to this dinner. The invitation and participation in the dinner depicts the idea of connection between the host and the guest as no one invites an enemy or unknown person to a dinner.

A feast is typically made of the host, the dinning, the invitations and the guests. We see that the host of the dinner in the parable is not an ordinary simple man. He might probably be a wealthy



person in the community. The dinning could take many people. "And still there is room," and "my house may be filled," help us to consider this dining room as a typically large room, which many ancient Greco-Roman houses contained for the dining occasions.

The guests come in two waves. The first wave was those who got the exclusive invitation and were entitled to attend and had possibly committed to being at the feast but eventually turned down and rejected the invitation. This revealed their ingratitude and self-centeredness and the master will have none of that. The Master in swift response throws the invitation open to the second wave, any and all who will come from those undeserving layabouts nearby.

The poor, maimed, blind and lame and seeing there was room extended the invitation with greater appeal to those who were further off.

He transforms the character of the dinner from being exclusive to being inclusive. Jesus uses the parable to break down social borders between the entitled Pharisees and wealthy on the one side, and the ordinary and undeserving people on the other side, like tax collectors, sinners and, the poor. The master did not cancel or postpone his planned feast because of rejection from friends. He ensured that the latter "outsiders" attended, whereas "insiders" were excluded; that the dinning was filled to capacity; that anyone willing was welcome yet the standard



remained the same as we will see from the similar parable in Matt 22:1-14.

Have you ever been rejected before? How did you handle it? Rejection for me connotes shame and embarrassment, with feelings of unworthiness. I am unable to seek for certain favors from people because I fear rejection. Many times, it impacts on my evangelistic lifestyle, not wanting to continue to reach out for a while to recover from previous rejections - quite unlike the master. You and I need to "compel them to come in, so that my house will be full".



THE LAST COMMANDMENT

John 15:1-17

When asked by the Pharisees, "What is the greatest commandment? Jesus answered; "To love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself." Similarly, in **Matthew 7:12** he presents it from the context of other people - "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

The command is brought anew again in **John 15:12** "love one another as Christ loved you". If we consider the expectation of such love, we may admit to ourselves that we would never love others to the extent that Jesus loves us.

Jesus mentioned the source of this love in **John 15:1** He says, "I am the true vine; you are the branches, remain in and bear fruit..." It is obvious that the source of this love is the vine (Christ). The vine, the branches and its fruits constitute an integral biological system that Jesus used to communicate spiritual truths. Just as the branches receive its nourishment from the vine, so disciples must depend on Jesus for spiritual vitality. We must remain connected to manifest the life of Christ. In the real



sense Jesus branched out through his followers to produce these relational products of love.

John 15:9 suggests a relationship from God to Jesus, Jesus to us, and us to others. This flow raises questions that beg for answers, "How did the father love Jesus?" "How did Jesus love us?" and how can we love others? We know that God had an intimate connection with his son. He said, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:2).

Jesus left a life of comfort for that of suffering and shame, even death on a cross. His sacrifice was not statutory but grace, a product of his unconditional **love (John 13:15)**. He did the unimaginable, though innocent; he voluntarily took the place of sinners awaiting God's wrath by paying the ransom to reconcile us **(Romans 5:6-8)**. How does Jesus demonstrate his love to you? I still can't fully comprehend the experience of his love for me. I had a religious mindset that made me self-righteous and self-deceived that I was right with God because I avoided the "big sins", sexual immorality and murder; but I was a cheat and a liar **(Revelation 21:8)** until Jesus came to my rescue.

The command is basically to "love like Jesus".

As a young disciple, I remember been locked out on returning from mid-week service.

A brother offered to spend the night with me out in the cold. If we want to remain in His love, we have no choice but to oblige



and become like minded (Philippians.2:1-4). Unfortunately, majority have quit loving because of past hurts, betrayals or unrealistic expectations; some nurse scars from failed relationships. Refusal to let go of the past means we have forgotten Christ love, and nothing can separate us from it (Romans 8:31-39). We need to exhibit unconditional love that is unhindered by the shortfall of others and ourselves.

Let's love with action bearing fruits of concern and care for others (James 2:14-17). We need to show concern for the problems of others as if it were ours (1 Corinthians 12:26). Cultivating love will create a family atmosphere and no-one will leave our community (Acts 2:45-45), no one will be left behind (Acts 4:32-35) instead our love will attract outsiders (John 13:34-35, Acts 6:7). We need to decide to obey the command to love like Jesus.



JUDGE NOT!

Matt 7:1-6

"Do not judge or you too will be judged....for with the measure you use it will be measured to you....take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye..."

A vital part of following Jesus is reflected in our relationships with others. Today we focus on Jesus' admonition against judging our fellow man. The Amplified Bible explains this verse well ..." Do not judge, criticize or condemn others..."

As human beings it is much easier to "correct" another person than it is to correct oneself. We judge and criticize others when we are more preoccupied with their faults, sins and shortcomings (the speck in their eye) than we are with ours (the plank in our eye). If we are to be true imitators of Jesus, we must change this common but un-Christlike attitude.

I am reminded of an incident a few days ago when a man walked straight up to me asking for alms. In the middle of a busy market, hot and harassed, I must confess I was in no mood to give that day. The man persisted. I became rather annoyed. Seeing no obvious disability in him I passed judgement in my mind that this



was an entitled individual. My judgement quickly extended to his tribe and religion. "They are so lazy!" "Why do they feel it is their right to receive?" I resolved not to give the man anything but then remembered that I had some money which a bus conductor had overpaid me, and I had promised to give to the next needy person I met. So, I gave it to him and expected a humble "thank you" or the usual litany of prayers for the open handed. Alas I received neither! He simply took the money and walked off. "How ungrateful!" I said to myself. "I shouldn't have given him anything in the first place!"

No sooner had I said this than God reminded me of specific persons who I myself owed a debt of gratitude and for one reason or the other had not gotten around to thank. How often have I received God's blessings after fervently praying and then slacked off in fervently thanking Him! I was humbled indeed to see how easily I can judge another person when I am guilty of the same thing.

One may wonder if we should just turn a blind eye when others are clearly in the wrong, after all, God says, "Don't judge". When we look closer (v5) we see this is clearly not the case. Jesus is not saying we shouldn't point out what is right to others. He makes it clear that we should deal with the 'plank in our eye' our sins and shortcomings, which are pretty easier to handle than the delicate matter of the 'speck in another's eye', that requires clarity of vision like the attitude of Christ, the purpose of compassion and the precision of right use of God's word to deal with.



- Do you silently judge and label others who have a different viewpoint from you in debatable issues such as food, dress, cultural habits etc?
- As a leader, do you find yourself policing others spiritually but not policing yourself?
- As disciples, do we carry an air of religious superiority because we feel all others are lost and going to hell?
- As citizens do, we have more criticism and condemnation for those in authority than prayers for them?

CHALLENGE:

Ask God for grace to help you become better at judging yourself than others

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Rom 14:4, 13, 1 Cor 4:5, James 4:11-12,

Follow | Me | Luke 6:40

DAY 31

HYPROCISY AND COMPASSION

John 8: 3 - 11

We all are familiar with the story of the woman caught in adultery. Why was she the only one standing trial, being named and shamed? I believe this reflected the attitude toward women in Jesus' time. They were seen to be less than men and equated with slaves and children. The law prescribed that if caught in the act the couple not the woman alone are to be put to death (Deut 22:22) and the instance where the woman alone stands trial is in the law of jealousy where the husband accuses her of adultery without proof (Num 5:11-31). But more, the teachers of the law were desperately looking for ways to trap Jesus, discredit him and have him killed.

They brought her in, already condemned, ready to be stoned unmindful of the irony that they had only one party to a crime committed by two people. So, were they really concerned about the law and its intent?

Absolutely not! At this time, she was simply and expedient pawn in a game the teachers were playing.

Jesus stooped and wrote on the floor. Scholars differ on what that signified, and we will gloss over that here. Not saying a word



in response to their accusations, their questioning, and their baiting to trap him in His words as though he did not hear. Reminds us of Isaiah 59:1-2! Sin causes God not to hear us.

Jesus then responds and many times we want to think this was a generalized issue about no one being sinless which right. But specifically, to the case at hand, the one who had not sinned in this matter should cast the first stone! The Pharisees and scribes had violated the laws around the issue pertaining adultery and capital punishment. The woman was standing trial alone having been caught in the act. The witnesses would bear false testimony in the man's absence; her husband if part of the plot had violated the law of jealousy; the scribes under Roman rule were not permitted to execute capital punishment and more! Jesus saw to it that the intent of the law was fulfilled – Mercy, justice and love (Matt 23:23). He offered it to both the hypocritical Pharisees in calling them to obedience and the convicted woman calling her to repentance.

For me, this is food for thought on how I respond when a report is brought of a brother or sister caught in sin. Though I feel they should get the treatment for sin, in other words, they should be punished am I keen on seeing that they are restored. What Jesus meted out to this woman was not condemnation, but restoration and grace.

I am work in progress in this regard.

I remember lying to my boss and having to confess to her thereafter! Her response was most unexpected.



First, she looked at me in shock like "who was daft enough to confess such to their boss?" (Only a disciple of Jesus would) and then told me it was ok and warned me not to let it happen again. Waves of relief washed over me, as I am sure it did this woman.

Whichever side of the divide we fall into either as false accusers or pitiful sinners, as we often do like a pendulum ball swinging from one end to the other, Jesus hardly gives us what we deserve but freely offers us his compassion and grace that always wins over our hypocrisy in the hope that we will go on and do likewise.

Gal 6:1-2, Luke 10:25-37



THE SCIENCE OF WAITING

It was Voltaire who said, "we never live; we are always in the expectation of living". This quote had a lot more significance and meaning to me after my younger sister died. Prior to my sister's sudden death, procrastination was my way of life. I perfectly understood what it meant to live in the moment; I just never seemed to do it.

Of course, I'd seen and heard of many people dying before, but I never really felt the never- ending sharp pain nor the sense of personal loss that provoked deep soul searching until I lost my junior sister in 2013 at the age of 34. She was very young and healthy, had loads of hopes and aspirations and her prospects were amazing, in other words, she had everything to live for. She went to the hospital from work for what should have been a routine medical check-up and never came out alive.

I spoke with her earlier in the day only to call later that evening and be told that 'we had lost her'. I never expected my sister to die when she did, she certainly did not expect to die when she did as well. One minute she was there and the next, I realized that I would never see her again on earth and frighteningly, probably not even in heaven. Life seemed very meaningless at



that point and the only way that I could find answers to the many questions that flooded my mind was to turn to the bible.

Luke 12:35 - 48 admonishes us to be in a state of perpetual readiness as we wait for the coming of the Almighty. Only very few people on earth have the luck of having a good idea about when they would die and so can make some preparations. It's smart to constantly examine our hearts to determine where we are with God because as this passage says none of us have any idea when the coming of the Lord will be. People, who die, however, go ahead of God's coming.

Anyone whom God has given the grace to understand the bible appreciates that hell is the one place that no one should ever plan, consciously or otherwise to be. Making it to heaven therefore takes a very conscious decision and requires constant attention to ensure that one is still on the right track while waiting.

Being selfish and wanting to please myself is a fundamental part of being human but God appreciated this before telling me to 'keep my light burning' i.e. I should never let anything extinguish my light.

Life is a race against time, but life is greatly enhanced when i surmount my instincts and can pause the clock to process what I am doing and why I am doing it. A wise decision requires reflection and reflection requires a pause



It's my personal responsibility to make the assurance of my heart being in the right place for God's coming a personal matter. It's not just theory or something that is applicable only to others, it concerns me personally.

Do you ever spend time thinking about heaven at all? Everything on earth should pale into insignificance when we do this.

Heb 12:1 - 3 speaks to us about Christ being able to endure the pain and the shame associated with the cross because of the anticipation of the joy of hanging out with his father which he looked forward to, the bible encourages being exactly like Jesus in waiting for the Almighty.

Follow Me

DAY 33

SET UP BUT FORGIVEN

John 8: 3 - 11

We all are familiar with the story of the woman caught in adultery and dragged to Jesus to be displayed during his teaching class.

I have always wondered: where was the man in question? Afterall, the woman was not committing an adulterous act all by herself! And this begs the question, why was she the only one being displayed and disgraced? I believe this reflected the attitude toward women in Jesus' time. They were seen to be less than men, equated with slaves and children.

At the temple, we see a vast difference in the way the woman's case was handled by the teachers of the law and the Pharisees vs the way it was handled by Jesus!

The first group brought her in, already condemned, ready to be stoned. Unmindful of the irony that they had only one party to a crime committed by 2 persons. So, were they really concerned about the law? Were they concerned about the woman? About the state of her soul? About bringing her back into the fold?



No. No. No. And No! At this time, she was simply and expedient pawn in a game the teachers were playing.

Jesus stooped and wrote on the floor. Not saying a word in response to their accusations, their questioning, their baiting to trap him in His words. Jesus' treatment of this woman was in stark contrast to the attitude of the men who brought her in. With his response, Jesus showed her true compassion. He triggered a self-reflective response in all her accusers, and they all left, realizing that they were no better, for none was without sin. (Rom. 3:23). Thinking about that now, I think this must have been a gift to her. Not for her to gloat over her accusers, but to see they were all equally guilty. How did she know? No one threw a single stone. The rocks lay there, in silent testimony of their guilt as well.

For me, this is food for thought on how I respond when a brother or sister is caught in sin. I feel as if they should get the treatment for sin, in other words, they should be punished. Well, this is the treatment Jesus 'meted' out to this woman. Not condemnation, but grace. I am work in progress in this regard.

We don't hear about this nameless woman again.

We don't hear of her being caught in another compromising situation.

I remember lying to my boss and having to go confess to her! Her response was most unexpected. First, she looked at me in shock (who was daft enough to confess such to their boss? Disciples, that's who); and then told me it was ok and not to let it happen



again. Waves of relief washed over me, as I am sure it did this woman.

For me, this woman represents us, sinful, teeming humanity and of course, Jesus is Lord.

Thank God for that.

And he demonstrates how, in the face of overwhelming, caught in the act evidence that builds against us daily, He chooses to treat us with compassion and grace. We hardly get what we deserve.



WHEN FAITH CANNOT SEE. A LETTER FROM BARTIMAEUS

*(please kindly write your name on the blank lines).

Mark 10:46-52

Good morning,

My name is Bartimaeus and my father's name is Timaeus. I was once blind, and I used to sit by the roadside begging.

I must confess though that sitting by the roadside every single day of my life was tough. On the flip side, this 'adventure' afforded me the opportunity to be up to speed with happenings around me and in my community.

Amazingly, being blind heightened the other sensory organs in my body - I could perceive more, feel more, taste more and, of course, hear more. In order to know what was going on, I would find out from people close enough. I would also use my sense of judgment and perception and then form an opinion.

On this fateful day, I sat by the roadside as usual and I heard it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by. I then began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'



yes, I might not have eyes to see but I had heard a lot about him before this particular day. Many rebuked me and told me to be quiet, but I shouted all the more because I knew he would do something about my situation.

So, upon hearing my cry for help, Jesus stopped and asked his followers to call me. "What do you want me to do for you?" He asked me. With enthusiasm, I said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.' And Jesus said to me "Go, your faith has healed you."

Immediately, I received my sight and followed him along the road.

He was who I heard He was. I am glad I put my faith in Him even though I was blind, but now I see.

Are you blind, deaf and dumb?

Or do you have all your sensory organs functioning?

LET US DO THIS EXERCISE.

Please answer in the affirmative if you have heard any of the following:

- Have you not heard about the Son of David?
- Have you not heard all that he began to do and teach?

(The Book of Luke)

Have you not heard about his powers and love for you?
 (Ephesians 3 v 20)



- Have you not heard about his faithfulness in every situation?
 (2 Timothy 2 v 13)
- Have you not heard from your parents and grandparents about Jesus? (2 Timothy 3 v 14-15)
- Have you not heard about the five loaves and two fish that he multiplied? (Mark 6 v 30-44)
- Have you not heard how he was bruised and sentenced to death for our sins? (Isaiah 53 v 5)
- Have you not heard that sometimes friends, family members, neighbors, etc. can stop you from following Jesus Christ just as they tried to do to me?
- Have you not heard that we should always look up to Jesus, fixing our eyes on him because he is the Author and Perfecter of our faith? That was why I jumped on my feet when he called me. (Hebrews 12 v 2)
- Have you not heard that Eternity awaits you if you follow Jesus? (Revelation 2 v 10-11)
- Have you not heard that unless you repent and get baptized, your sins won't be forgiven, and you won't receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2 v 36-41)
- Have you not heard that he answers prayers according to his will? (1 John 5 v 13-15)

Dear	,
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have you not heard that he is coming and that he said, "...when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" (Luke 18 v 8) So, I ask again, have you not heard?



Do you still have faith in Jesus, the Son of David? Will he find you faithful when he comes back?

TODAY'S ACTION PLAN

Study to know more about God and to build your faith in him.

Cry out to God for help - draw near to Him and He will draw near to you. (Acts 17 v 20-27). Recall who God has been to you/your answered prayers and write them down.

Pray that you are able to fight the good fight of faith in all situations.

I, Bartimaeus heard and pulled up in faith. We can too. God is willing and able.

Pull up in faith and answer this question:

"What do you want him to do for you?"
Pray about this need and trust His judgment.
May God hear all our prayers offered in faith. Amen.



WEALTH AND WORRY!

Matthew 6:19-34; 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

If the poor worry about money, what do the rich worry about? A survey conducted by Prince and Associates notes that over 80% of people worth 20 million dollars or more worry about being the target of a lawsuit and putting their wealth at risk.

There was a time I flew back and forth to Maiduguri in pursuit of a contract that I believed at the time will change my financial fortune and make my dreams come true. I was promised that I had won the bid and I would be credited an advance as there was an urgent need to supply the items for use. I came back excited and waited expectantly every day for a credit alert on my phone. I remember waking up several times in the middle of the night thinking I had heard a beep on my phone only to check and see that it was all imaginary. I got a call some days later to be informed that the contract had been awarded to another person, that night I slept like a baby!

Our Lord Jesus Christ knows that the pursuit of wealth is one thing that can cause us to worry and take our hearts away from him and often times disciples fall into this trap. ('Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.



For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grieves."1 Timothy 6:9-10 NIV)

Is money a bad thing? Certainly not! But the priority we place on it will determine whether it's good or bad. So, the question a disciple should ask himself or herself is: am I actively seeking first God's kingdom and its righteousness (Matthew 6:33) or am I worried about losing or increasing my wealth? Is money a tool to secure my comfort and luxury or a tool used to glorify God? If the answer is the latter, we will fulfil our Lord's command to build treasures in heaven and avoid the anxiety and worry that comes with the pursuit or lack of money. What we have or do not have should not define who we are or are not.

Rather, if we have been blessed with material wealth, we should look for creative ways to share what we have with others, most especially those who cannot repay us. Someone will say, "But I am just looking for my basic needs and things just seem so tough". Yes, it may appear that way and rightly so.

But it is worthy to consider, "Am I trying to fund my greed or need?" It's important to carefully consider what needs and greed are here.

The bible assures us that our father knows we have basic needs and He is faithful to provide them. If He provides for the birds of the air how much more for us that He has given status of sons and daughters? So, some things to ponder upon:



- 1. Am I content with what God has provided for me? (1 Timothy 6:6-8)
- 2. Am I pursuing to satisfy my greed or to meet my needs? (1Timothy 6:8-10)
- 3. If I have been blessed with material wealth, do I look for creative ways to share with others? Remember you have been blessed to be a blessing on to others (1 Peter 4:10)

Further scriptures to study;

- 1. 1 Timothy 6:17-19
- 2. Matthew 25:34
- 3. James 2:5



GODLY AMBITION UNGODLY ATTITUDES!

Matt 20:17-28; Mark 10:32-35; Luke 18:31-34

Today our text shows that humans are innately self-centered. We have always lived in an ambitious world where life is all about winning and losing. And that's why the Mother of Zebedee's son wanted Jesus to make her two sons the two highest ranking officials in God's kingdom.

How could she make such a bold request? The possible closeness of the Zebedee's family with Jesus may explain to some degree the boldness she had in coming to Jesus. Many commentators, using the account at the cross during Jesus' crucifixion, point out that this "mother of Zebedee's sons" was also the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. If that is true, then James and John were first cousins to Jesus, and she was Jesus' aunt. Perhaps she thought Jesus should take care of his own family members first. Besides, what mother would not want her children to rise to important positions, especially with cogent reasons?

At least it was clear that Jesus loved her sons. He even gave them a nickname - the "sons of thunder". They were among the earliest disciples. Along with Peter, they were clearly in the top



three of all the apostles. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, his only witnesses were Peter, James and John. So why shouldn't she ask that her boys be given those seats of highest honor if people must seat there?

This would definitely give her some "bragging rights" in the community. From their response to Jesus' question, it was obvious that James & John were not innocent bystanders. They must have felt that the best packaging would be a request coming from their mother.

It was amazing that James and John and their mother could come up with this request few days after the disciples received heavy rebuke when they were arguing about greatest in the kingdom (chap. 18). It also seems much more amazing that they would be bold enough to present such a self-focused plan just a couple of hours after Jesus had told them about what He would soon suffer in Jerusalem (Matt 20:18-19). Luke 18:34 explains that they did not understand and absorb fully what Jesus had consistently explained. While Jesus was coming to grips with the bloody death that looms before him, his top men were arguing for better seats in the Kingdom.

In their dialogue, Jesus agreed that they would indeed drink the "cup" He promised. James actually took the first gulp as he was the very first of the Apostles to be martyred (Acts 12). John also drank from that cup as he lived to be an old man and apparently died when he was exiled to the Island of Patmos.



James and John wanted to talk about their expected glory but Jesus in his reply pointed them back to the cup and the cross. Jesus also revealed that the most important thing about the Kingdom is being there as everyone will have an unobstructed view of his presence.

Jesus clearly pointed out that the main ambition of everyone should be to relentlessly pursue "the Office of the Disciple". Without it, the positions of right-hand man, elder, deacon, bishop etc. would be irrelevant. This He further reinforced when the other ten disciples reacted over what James, John and their mother had done. They were indignant that James and John were trying to gain a higher position over them probably through their kinship to Jesus. Just like James and John, all of them were still infected with the world's values of positions of prominence and power.

This is not different from what we see today, where success is valued in terms of money, prestige, position, power or fame. Even the church is virtually caught up in this mentality

For some years, in our church in Lagos I had served as a leader in one of the small cells' teams called family Groups.

My group had about 22 Christians. About 18 months ago, I was told my family group would stop existing due to some "restructuring". I felt it was okay to move on till another opportunity comes. The surprise came really from friends and members who asked whether I was considering moving to a



nearby region or if I had disagreements with some Leaders. Others felt it was a demotion I should resist. Let us imagine the contention if the position involved had been of great influence. Stories abound where issues of position have disrupted the advancement of strong Christian institutions.

This is why the bible commands that we must guide our hearts above all things. If not properly guided, our positions and ambitions even in the Church can move us away from godliness and into worldliness. The disciples wanted to be great in God's kingdom, but they thought of it in terms of worldly standards.

Even as he was marching to the cross Jesus took time to teach them how to be truly great - "whoever wishes to be become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to first among you shall be your slave". Leaders in the church are to be slaves of Christ and servants of His people.

Even in the Church, what are your ambitions? What is your dream? What are your secret hopes? In our renewed call to the Lordship of Jesus, let us learn that the road to heaven always goes by way of the cross. We are called to follow Jesus, and that means denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, and following him wherever he leads.



THE UNUSUAL MIRACLE!

Mark 11:12-14; 19-26. (Cf. Matthew 21:18-22)

Our Lord Jesus Christ used the occasion in this passage to teach great lessons on hypocrisy and spiritual fruitlessness and faith in God's word. For clarity I will focus on **verses 12-14.**

There is no doubt that any passage of the Scriptures has a divine lesson therein for us. The story of the fig tree sounds strange to a carnal mind like my own.

First, the fig tree has leaves on it without the fig. This is strange because figs come out with the leaves. Second, Mark says: "When He reached it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs"

Third, why then was the fig tree cursed, I wonder? Why will one be punished for failure to deliver goods that was not due for delivery?

What therefore is the Lesson there for us? Our Lord certainly could not have acted impetuously. He used the fig tree purposely as a divine object of lesson - hypocrisy and spiritual fruitfulness. The focus was on the appearance of the fig tree. It was evident it



had advantages that the other fig trees didn't have. It was on a good soil but failed to maximize that advantage. Our outward appearance may be deceptive. Our physical impression of what we do or say may be conveying the impression of spirituality whereas the reality is the opposite. We may be regular at Bible talks, Sunday services and other meetings of the body but on a closer look we may be barren spiritually.

This is hypocrisy.

The Bible tells us that a hypocrite is someone who puts on a mask and pretends to be something he is not.

WHERE IS THE FRUIT THAT COMES WITH SUCH OUTWARD REPRESENTATIONS? See generally Jesus' warning on hypocrisy in Matthew 23:27-28; 6:16-18; Luke 20:46-47.

This passage takes one's mind to the Parable of the Fig tree recorded in **Luke 13:6-9**. Is this incident the acting out of the Parable of the Fig tree? Absolutely not. The focus here was on the intercession of Christ, Israel's spiritual fruitlessness and God's extreme patience and graciousness.

CHALLENGE:

1. Does your appearance convey a wrong impression of your true spiritual state? Evaluate your spiritual state



DISHES AND DISCERNMENT

Luke 10:38-42

In this passage, we see how Martha was doing everything possible to show hospitality to Jesus, while Mary simply sat at Jesus' feet, listening as he spoke. It is easy to imagine how that made Martha feel irritated, frustrated and probably, resentful. Martha even felt justified in her indignation that she went and talked to Jesus about it, but to her disappointment, Jesus appreciated Mary's decision to listen to him.

Likewise, as disciples of Christ, it is so easy to get engrossed in all the things that we need to do, that we lose sight of what is most important. The highest priority in our lives needs to be choosing the best part as Mary did. It is love and devotion to God that makes every other thing of secondary importance. What drives you? Is your relationship with God still of primary importance? How spiritually involved are you in kingdom matters? Are you now living on past glory?

As a senior employee of a bank, I have seen myself fall many times in the trap of misplacing my priorities. I have been driven several times by the pressure of meeting my performance budgets at work that I gradually saw myself drifting in my



relationship with God. Rushing to the office without spending time with God and entrusting my days into his hands; not seeking for his guidance before taking major decisions and depending on my wisdom and experience to discharge my duties. These led to several frustrations, resentment and a weakened relationship with God. But I thank God for helping me to retrace my steps back to him and to realize that the best place to start, is putting the Lord first even in the midst of my busy schedule.

My husband and I have since been making deliberate efforts to speak with the Lord immediately we wake up. I also personally take out time early in the morning to spend quality time with God in my 'war room' in the office. Life is a lot better, because God is now fully involved in the affairs of my life. Though my current situation is far from perfect, but I have grown to understand that the Lord is in full control of my life and I enjoy the peace that comes from totally entrusting the affairs of my life and family to him, while trusting his guidance daily.

There is no blessing in running our own lives based on human understanding of what is important. Mary understood that she needed to learn more from her master and seek the things that have eternal value. It is when we do that, that we can be a blessing, because then, all of our works are spirit driven. Love for God causes us to listen, learn and keep his commandments (1 John 5:3). Making God priority is to seek the riches of his wisdom, which can be found in Him alone. If we don't do this, how can we follow him? How can we be His disciples? A disciple learns of his master (Phil 3:5)



Dear brethren, let us all rise above the noise and pursuits of this world and seek those things that really matter and have eternal value. Like Mary, let us find that fellowship with the master and those who follow him, so that we can learn of him and become like him.

Through the Word of God, fellowship and prayer, we become rich in our spirit and God will give us everything we need in abundance.

Further reading:

Matthew 6:33 Proverbs 3:5-6

Psalm 27:4



THE RESURRECTION FAITH

DANIEL 12:1-2

Today's reading from Daniel 12, follows the last verses of Daniel 11, which speaking about the very last days of life on earth. We see here that; God through Daniel gives us a peep into an apocalyptic scenario; (apocalyptic is from the Greek word apokalypsis) - an unveiling of the end of human history. The writer understands this future end as an imminent event. This scenario paints a time of intense distress on earth.

Arch angel Michael will intervene and bring deliverance to God's faithful ones, holy ones, (Daniel 7:27) who are living, while the dead will be resurrected and judged.

The special name "the People of the Holy Ones of the Most High", reveals the special relationship among Daniel's people, the Most High God, and other inhabitants of heaven, who in Daniel's vision are called angels, watchers, princes, men, and holy ones.

The title "prince" in Daniel 10 and 12 refers to a superhuman, celestial being who represents and has responsibility to protect a particular people (cf. Deuteronomy 32:8-9). The situation may have seemed hopeless, but what Daniel's oppressed people



could see and hear did not tell the whole story. Behind the scenes, forces more powerful than those on earth shaped the destinies of peoples and nations. This encourages me and builds up my faith in God's powerful protection.

In verse 2, the phrase "in that time" marked a decisive turning point. In that time of horrible persecution and of the persecutor's death, Michael, warrior-angel and prince of Daniel's people, would stand up. The people would be delivered, and there would be salvation for all who "are written in the book" (12:1). To be written in this book is to be registered as a citizen, not of an earthly city, but of God's kingdom.

Resurrection is a central fact of the Christian faith today. The next verse promises resurrection for multitudes who have died (Daniel 12:2). Two fates await those who wake from dusty earth. One group will wake to life eternal. Another group will wake to reproaches and eternal horror (everlasting contempt). Among those who wake to eternal life, another group is singled out: "those who are wise," "who lead many righteous" (Daniel 12:3).

The angel told Daniel of these "wise" ones in 11:33-35. The wise can find a pattern to follow amidst the chaos by following the example of the suffering servant of **Isaiah 53:11**, to whom they are likened.

REFLECTION:

How do these words of Daniel comfort you? How does God's presence and protection give you hope? You and I and all the



saints long gone will be raised to life. God demonstrated this by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

The implications of the resurrection are massive. How does Jesus being raised from the dead affect the message of the gospel? The resurrection of Jesus makes clear that the gospel story is more than just a story.

The Christian gospel demands more than mere study. The gospel demands that readers not just dispassionately observe its content only, but affectionately respond in the right ways. One theologian explains that the Bible functions as a kind of script that "calls not only for responsive reading but for responsive action and embodiment" (Drama of Doctrine, 115). Nothing makes this clearer than Jesus's resurrection. The fact that Jesus is raised stands forever at the height of this story. He waits for us to respond, giving us a chance to say something. Our refusal to comment is, of course, a kind of comment, nonetheless.

Resurrection proclaims forgiveness and freedom to us. It requires that we proclaim his being raised to others too. The resurrection of Jesus makes clear that the gospel story is more than just a story.

The prophecies in Daniel offer us this hope to sustain, guide, strengthen, and embolden us. This should make you to witness to God's covenant by your words and by your life. Let's stand up for righteousness in the face of oppression and death. Look away from the legacy of sin, violence, and rebellion. In the hour of



distress, you cannot save yourself. Instead daily, lay your life down in a non-violent way worthy of the Lord knowing that God's powerful resurrection awaits you and me.

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THE ASCENSION

Luke 24:550-53; Mark 16:19-20; Acts 1:6-12

From the moment of His arrest till His resurrection, Jesus left a gathering of discouraged, confused and timid disciples.

After the resurrection, for forty days He appeared to the apostles and some selected few to rebuild and reassure them; He opened the Scriptures to them, and He left them with concrete proof of His resurrection. He reaffirmed His earlier prophecy to them – to rise again from death.

- Are you bold as a disciple of Christ or are you discouraged, disillusioned or timid?
 - To crown it all, they witnessed His physical body been lifted up to heaven (Ascension). What a glorious day! What an awesome sight! What other type of evidence was required? All His sayings, all His teachings been confirmed in their hearts, minds and beings.
 - Why is the ascension of Christ important to us at this time as it was then?
- Ascension marked the end of Jesus physical earthly ministry.
 His Lordship and Messiac status firmly established. He sits at the right hand of God.



- His promised Advocate (John 16:7, Acts1:8) was sent few days later on Pentecost and the Christian Church started with a big bang.
- From the day of Pentecost, bold and courageous men and women, willing and ready to defend and die for their faith have been/are being produced (Acts 4:19, 20). Are you one of such?
- All the sayings, promises, assurances and proclamations of our Lord became firmly established with the disciples ("all that we have seen and heard... "). All doubts and 'Thomaslike' uncertainties were evaporated. What are you hearing and seeing in your walk with Jesus? Are such sayings reassuring your faith? As a disciple, I can recollect times I setout in raw and undiluted faith (such as Peter did when he walked on water); over times I can also recall several times I have allowed situations and circumstances of life to distract and affect my faith. There have been prices to pay for standing up (some very high), but today I certainly thank God because I'm better off.
- Jesus having returned to His heavenly glory has gone ahead to prepare our eternal home (John 14:2); we are required to make our calling and election sure. As we make efforts on a daily basis to follow Jesus, you and I are expected to also bring people's hearts back to Christ (disciples and nondisciples alike).

Jesus talked a lot about His second coming which is usually referred to as "The Lord's Day" or "Judgement Day". It will come suddenly when one least expects. Am I ready? Are you



prepared? If Jesus returns tonight, would you be with Him? I dare say, some live unprepared lives (scoffers) (2Pet 3:3-7)

Just as He ascended, He will also come back the same way to take home those that are worthy:

- (i) the faithful (Luke 18:8)
- (ii) those who fought and finished the race (2 Tim 4:8)
- (iii) those alert and sober (Matt 25:13; 1The 5:6)
- (iv) those who remember the poor and the needy (Matt 25:34-40)
- (v) those who are obedient to His commandments (Matt 28:18-20; John 12:47, 48). Mind you, it's not that you have to be "proficient" in just one of the above (Jam 2:10)

On a daily/regular basis, let's ponder over:

- Am I really worthy of Christ calling?
- Am I obeying Jesus and living as a disciple?
- Am I still teaching others to obey Christ?
- Am I still availing myself the opportunities and privileges of being taught to obey Jesus teaching?
- Do I go for discipling? Do I still believe in it?
- His promises, assurances & proclamations are sure, let's step out in faith.



BONUS

WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION

At the point of baptism, there is one statement that each of us had to make: "Jesus Is Lord!" After counting the cost to this confession, the call was then to continue to do this every day of our lives. It required commitment and wholehearted devotion in spite of life's distractions, and we said yes! Sign me up!

Question is, is He still Lord for you?

a. Is Jesus Lord of your Time?

James 4:13-16 – Every day we wake up to a blank canvas for how we spend our 24hours. How do we spend it? Do we spend time in His word, and in prayer - everyday? Or do we get sucked into doing things around the house, social media, internet browsing, and game playing? (Psalm 127: 1-2).

Do you try to fit God into your schedule or your schedule around God? This isn't simply rushing a Bible study into your day so you can check a box. It is about an entirely different approach where your whole-hearted devotion is evident in the place God takes in your life every day. Consider the way Daniel lived, having set times throughout the day to ensure his connection was strong such that his adversaries noted that His devotion was the only tool to bring him down. Could that be said about you? Consider spontaneous prayers,



meditating on the word (or learning how to meditate if you need to), short steal-away during your day just to spend time with Him who can nourish you soul and body. The call is yours.

b. Is Jesus Lord of your Heart

Romans 12:2; Deut 6: 4-6. Our hearts, minds & spirits are the seat of our emotions, our thoughts, our dreams, our aspirations, our fears and also our struggles. If we say that Jesus is Lord of our hearts, are we subjecting our dreams/aspirations/struggles to His authority? Do we even consider that what we want for ourselves may not be what He wants for us? When we face difficult situations or difficult people, or someone offends us, do we still remember that Jesus is Lord? Or do we lose it and completely forget who and whose we are?

c. Is Jesus Lord of your Family? Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 14:26; Luke 9: 57-62

These passages are very clear about who needs to be in charge over and above spouses, children, siblings or close friends. These individuals though close to us, are human and as fallible as we are. We must therefore never forget who Lord is. This means that we daily choose to do what Jesus would regardless of how it would feel. This may mean pitting us against those we love. What would this mean for you? Would this require you to not indulge in gossip with your "gist partner"? Would this require you to impartially call out the person when they are in sin and refuse to side with them? Would it require you to speak up and not sweep a matter under the carpet for fear of offending? Would it mean



that you turn the other cheek though you have been unjustly treated?

Think about it. It may mean your relationship...evolves. If it is true though, it usually does so for the better. More importantly however, Jesus remains Lord. Amen.

Call to Action

- Meditate on these areas of your life.
- Pray to God to search you completely and reveal any areas where your devotion is divided
- Ask His help to restore His Lordship in your life. Amen.

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Meet the people who are the International Churches of Christ. We are believers of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds in over 150 countries. We are simply people who have found God and are committed to serving him and his children around us.

The Lagos Church is one of the congregations of the International Church of CHRIST.

From this humble beginning the Church in Lagos remained steadfast in the desire to spread the gospel across all Nations, it has planted so many other Churches not just in Nigeria but also in the West Africa Sub-Region. Thus, Churches have been planted in Asaba, Abeokuta, Abuja, Benin, Calabar, Ibadan, Ilorin, Ijebu-Ode, Jos, Kaduna, Port Harcourt, Warri, Uyo and Yenagoa.

Others are Accra, Bissau, Banjul, Conakry, Cotonou, Freetown and Njamena.

Today through the dedication and sacrifice of these men of faith, the Church has continued to grow. The membership of the Church in Lagos is about 2000 disciples and staff strength of 35 people. The Church in Lagos is divided into Ten Regions and several family Groups spread across the whole of Lagos and its environs.

This special edition booklet is dedicated to the 30 years of work in the Lagos Church!



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