

**A 40-DAY  
POWER SERIES**

**2**

To Know God and to Make God Known

**Web Edition  
Revised &  
Edited**



# **THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY**

**A forty day Devotional Guide on  
360° Love for God, One another  
and the Unreached**

**International Church of Christ Nigeria**

[www.icocnigeria.org](http://www.icocnigeria.org)

## **Forward to Web Edition**

### **The Most Excellent Way** (Web Edition)

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# **THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY**

**- A forty-day Devotional Guide on 360° Love for God, One another and the Unreached –**

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## PREFACE

### Love in 4D

#### Eph 3:14-19

*14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Many years ago, most children's love was the reading and collection of comic books. And for those artistically inclined, reproducing those awesome drawings of their favourite super hero was a glorious and sacred duty which left many Math note books sacrificed on the altars of creativity.

Our younger readers may not appreciate this, but the first TV cartoon animations were not just in two dimension (2D), they were done in black and white, no voice-overs (just a musical background) leaving the audience with the sacred duty of figuring out what was going on. It was like reading the book of Revelation for many of you today. You really have to be very intelligent to watch TV in those days!

Having mastered the fine art of lip-reading and the almost psychic ability of foretelling every preceding action scene, we were now ready to carry out the ultimate and hallowed duty of understanding every dialogue and sequence in all the Indian and Chinese movies produced... Life was so much easier back then.

Sadly, these days these divine powers have been lost to never be regained. Like the miraculous gift of tongues, they ceased, disappeared the moment colours and subtitling was introduced.

In those days, animated cartoon movies were distinct from real people. Interestingly today, we have a growing demand for what is now widely referred to as "CG Movies". CG stands for Computer Generated. Who can ever forget the 2005 remake of "King Kong" or how this "New technology" helped movies like "Lord of the Rings", "X-Men", "Jurassic Park", "Avatar" and all the other Marvel and DC comic super hero movies make huge financial statements at the box-office.

What makes this new technology so appealing? Simple, but you'll have to watch one of these movies to better understand and appreciate my answer. CG movies go beyond 2D and even 3D which movies like the award- winning "Shrek" was made of. This generation of movies goes beyond borders. Extinct creatures are brought back to life, whole towns and cities can be recreated, six foot tall humans can be made to appear ten foot tall or even as dwarfs. The possibilities are basically limitless!

Today, you can seat in a movie theater and actually feel the cool breeze of the beach scene you are watching or even have water splash on you from a waterfall scene. How cool is that?! Now tell me, who wants to watch 1960's 2D, lifeless, shaky, black and white, cartoon animation? ...

The above illustration is very close to what Apostle Paul was trying to help the disciples in Ephesus see.

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp **how wide and long and high and deep** is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this **love that surpasses knowledge** — that you may be **filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

God's love transcends ALL dimensions - WIDE (extensive), LONG (lengthy), HIGH (elevated), DEEP (unfathomable). This love which "surpasses knowledge" is the very one the Bible wants you to have.

And it is our prayer you will be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” as you partake in this forty day spiritual adventure. We have tagged it “**The Most Excellent Way**” - A forty-day Devotional Guide on 360<sup>0</sup> Love for God, One another and the Unreached – Our focus will be; “Up-Reach”, “In-Reach” and “Outreach”

Many thanks go to the Lagos Church office for making available the funds needed to get this book out to all our disciples in the ICOCN family at no cost and the hard work of our creative and dedicated volunteer writers (especially our first timers). May God bless you all!

We humbly advise readers to get a new notebook for the purpose of a journal as you study. Commit yourself to the fast, give yourself daily challenge, join or form a group where you can pray, plan outreach programs and share daily. Pray to sustain all the good changes you would have made during this journey and resolve to live a life walking in the Most Excellent Way!

#### **Editorial Head**

2013 Devotional Book Committee



# UP-REACH: INTIMACY WITH GOD

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.  
(Deut 6:4-6)



## **The First Time I Met You**

### **Jer.2: 2-3**

This was about 800 years after Israel left Egypt and came to know God, His grace, Mercy and Love. It was their first time with God.

Lots of events have taken place since then, from being a group of nobody to a powerful nation and now, a defeated people, they have tasted both sides of life so to speak.

The past 21 years for me holds lots of memories; I was young, inexperienced, unattached with so much to look forward to. Life was simple back then, my needs were limited, my wants were minor and my desire was simply to please Him who rescued me and gave me a life of meaning. Today, it's sometimes hard to figure out what went wrong.

I have no idea who is reading this and where you are right now in your spiritual journey. One thing I do want to ask is, "do you sometimes feel like you don't know who you are and what you want?" If your answer is "yes" then I'm sure you can relate with me.

God remembers Israel's early days of unadulterated devotion and He longed for them to return. Sometime it feels like we had a lot more peace and joy back then, doesn't it? How can we reawaken some of those early feelings and the love we felt for the first time? Here are some pointers that have helped me and I believe could speak to you too.

### **Jer. 9:23-24**

- Familiarity, they say, breeds contempt
- Having done the same things for years, it is so easy to become complacent and allow apathy to set in

It is time to begin to seek God all over again. There is a lot more that we are yet to know about our great King; His Love, His Grace, His Judgment, His Forbearance, and so much more.

In what ways have you got too familiar with your God?  
How has that affected your love and devotion to Him?

### **Phi.3:7-16**

Let us all consider Apostle Paul's advice as we forget the past hurts, disappointments, failure, sin, even success if need be and strain forward to discover again the Awesome God that turned our world upside down.

Let us resolve to pray, fast and search the scripture throughout these 40 day period and be amazed as God himself reawakens in us that first Love and devotion we felt for Him the first time we met!

Older disciples will remember the song below. I still remember that hot Saturday afternoon of 1993(?) when the entire church got together at Saint Finbarr's College, Akoka (I think, for a family meeting) and this song was taught. It's a love song to God. This week will be a great time to revive this song, both privately and in our group meetings and Church services!

## **Song of the Day**

### **THE FIRST TIME I MET YOU**

#### **(MEN)**

All of my dreams came true, O my Lord  
All of my dreams came true, first time I met you  
All of my dreams came true, O my Lord.  
Oh Lord. I'm here to stay.

#### **(WOMEN)**

All of my dreams came true  
First time I met you.  
All of my dreams came true,  
O my Lord, I'm here to stay.

#### **(MEN)**

You know I'll never go back on that promise I  
made.

#### **(WOMEN)**

To hold to your hand till you take me away.

#### **(MEN)**

I'll fight for the truth and I'll fight for the right

#### **(WOMEN)**

You take me to glory in heaven so bright.

### **CHORUS**

You washed all my sins away...  
You came to live in me...  
All of my dreams came true...

## Day by Day In His Presence

### **Psalm 27**

The Lord is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid? (Read everything)

One thing I know that has helped me these past few months in all my years as a Christian is coming to the realization that nothing works until you are in His Presence. Many times I have tried doing things on my own; fighting my battles all alone without Him in the picture and often times I find myself falling flat on my face.

Being in His Presence is something I had to find out myself, how it works, and the importance of it. I had to discover why I need to be there with him at all times. My entire life transformed at my discovery! Not only does it work; I love it too. The importance of being in His Presence is, knowing for sure that your life depends on it because it is a "LIFE SUPPORT". Once you unplug it, you become lifeless. You are spiritually dead. You wouldn't want that to happen, do you?

You feel connected and loved in His Presence. You are safe, secure, happy, joyful and triumphant over every obstacle you encounter. In other words, you are "invincible!"

The love you feel is that 'Air,' the Oxygen that gives life you cannot do without. And when you truly begin to see your relationship with God this way you will want to be there with him at all times. You become permanently "plugged in"

Being in His presence sums up the life every Christian should live today. This is where all the problems and life's worries come to an end. Where all fears, insecurity, jealousy, bitterness, envy and past abuses are dealt with. This is where the frustrations faced with parenting, marriage, singlehood and divorce are confronted. All of these are conquered on our knees in His Presence. This is my story as I discovered few months ago. The great thing about this discovery is that it works!

If we all just cultivate the spiritual discipline of spending more time being in His presence, then we will be much happier instead of the infighting we are constantly engaged in. You will receive that which you so much desire.

### **Practical:**

- Study Psalms 1, 23, 34, 89, 139 and 150
- Connect with Him at all times, and anywhere
- See Him as your Life Support which must not be unplugged
- Take your Christian life seriously
- Invest in reading faith-building books. DPI<sup>1</sup> and IPI<sup>2</sup> have a wide range of interesting titles
- Build healthy Christian relationships

For sisters, have you ever imagined yourself in the kitchen cooking and God watching you, being right there with you and seeing what you are doing? How does that make you feel? That is the consciousness of God!

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<sup>1</sup> Dpibooks.org

<sup>2</sup> www.ipibooks.com

Have you tried writing a song or poem to God? It might just be words that make sense only to you. Below is one of mine:

*Papa on my knees, every day before you  
Knowing you are there listening,  
removes all the darkness that beclouds my life and brings joy and hope back.  
When sin clouds my heart that I cannot feel your Presence,  
my life is wasted, but hope is back when you stretch out your hands and draw me closer.  
You kiss my forehead and your soft voice brings me assurance all over again.*

**ILLUSTRATION: Foolish Prayer**

*If I am to talk to my friend on the telephone, after I have dialed his number, I must wait for an answer. It is not a bit of use to ring up and then put the phone down. I must wait until I hear the "Hello!" or "Are you there?" from the other end. Now, it is exactly like that with prayer—we must give God time to reply. It is not a bit of use to offer up a prayer and then "hang up." That is a mistake people often make in prayer.<sup>3</sup>*

**ILLUSTRATION: Just One Day at a Time**

*One of God's aged saints fell and broke her hip. As she lay discouraged in a hospital bed, she asked the doctor, "How long will I have to stay here?" The wise doctor replied, "Just one day at a time!" God deals with His children on a day-by-day basis: "As thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut 33:25); "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11).*

*Just for today, my Savior,  
Tomorrow is not mine;  
Just for today, I ask Thee  
For light and health divine;  
Tomorrow's care I must not bear;  
The future is all Thine.<sup>4</sup>*

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But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, ...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—<sup>5</sup> having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.  
(2 Tim 3:1-5)

## Jesus' Intimacy With The Father

### John 14:1-14

As Jesus comforted his disciples, a question that brought about additional discourse on his intimacy with his Father ensued.

- V8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father..."
- V9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me..." "If you know me, you will know the Father."
- V10 "Don't you believe I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"

### Jesus' intimacy with his Father is based on Unity.

- What is Unity?
- It is the state of being one. Singleness or the state of being made one.
- Jesus is in unity with his Father.
- If you know Jesus you will know God his Father.
- God was involved in Jesus' every move, thought and speech.
- **V10:** "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."
- We are seeing a common goal, purpose and mission
- **V6:** Jesus confidently claims to be the way, the truth and the life as a result of his unity with his Father
- Jesus could say, "No-one comes to the Father except through me."

**Heb.1:3:** "...the radiance of God's glory... the exact representation of his being..."

### Take the Father away and Jesus will not be (Matthew 27:45-46)

- Jesus felt the pain of separation because of the world's sin that was upon him.
- Jesus and his Father being one, made him immune to the vices of the world.

### 1John 3:1

#### As disciples of Jesus, we too have been called to this kind of relationship.

- Are you in unity with the Father (God)?
- Would people know God by knowing you?
- Do you realize that you could be in the Father and the Father in you? How?
- Are you availing yourself for the way, the truth and the life?

### JOKING APART

A preacher was completing an intense anti-alcohol sermon: with great expression he said, "If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river."

With even greater emphasis, he said, "And if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river."

And then, finally, he said, "And if I had all the whiskey in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." He sat down.

The song leader then stood very cautiously and announced with a pleasant smile, "For our closing song, let us sing

Hymn #365: 'Shall We Gather At the River.'"

## When It Doesn't Feel Like Love

(Trusting His discipline)

### Gen. 37:1-36

Joseph's story has and will always be one of those intriguing stories of the bible for me.

How do you, in a day, go from being shown the vision of what a glorious future you are to have to being a slave without the certainty of survival?

Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism and subsequent wilderness sojourn is another. **Matt.3:16-4:1**

If you hear the voice of God Himself telling you that you are his and how much He Loves you what would be the next thing you would expect from Him?

I don't know about you, but definitely not to be sent into the wilderness at the mercy of Satan himself.

There are lots of things that happen to us sometimes that we don't know why or have answers to, however, how we react during this period not only shows the level of our trust in God but also the victory we receive in the end.

Another instructive account is found in the gospel of **Mark 4:35-41**

**35** That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." **36** Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

**37** A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. **38** Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "**Teacher, don't you care if we drown?**"

**39** He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

**40** He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

**41** They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

This incident happened after a powerful and lengthy set of Jesus' teachings on the kingdom. Before then, he had just performed some incredible miracles. You see, trust is not measured accurately when things are going well and our expectations are met.

How did these eye witnesses respond when they encountered a furious storm? Their response to Jesus was, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

If I were Jesus, my response would have been something like this; "After all you have seen me do, how dare you question my concern for you?" or "Do you really think I brought you this far to kill you?"

Note Jesus' response to their doubt: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

- It takes faith to trust and accept that God loves us even when we pass through the difficulties of life
- What are the difficulties or challenges that you are going through right now?
- How has it affected your trust and obedience to God?

Sometimes, the situations we face might just be God training us so that we can develop stamina and the spiritual muscles we need to face future challenges. Please read and meditate on **Heb. 12:4-11**

**4** In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. **5** And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,

**6** because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

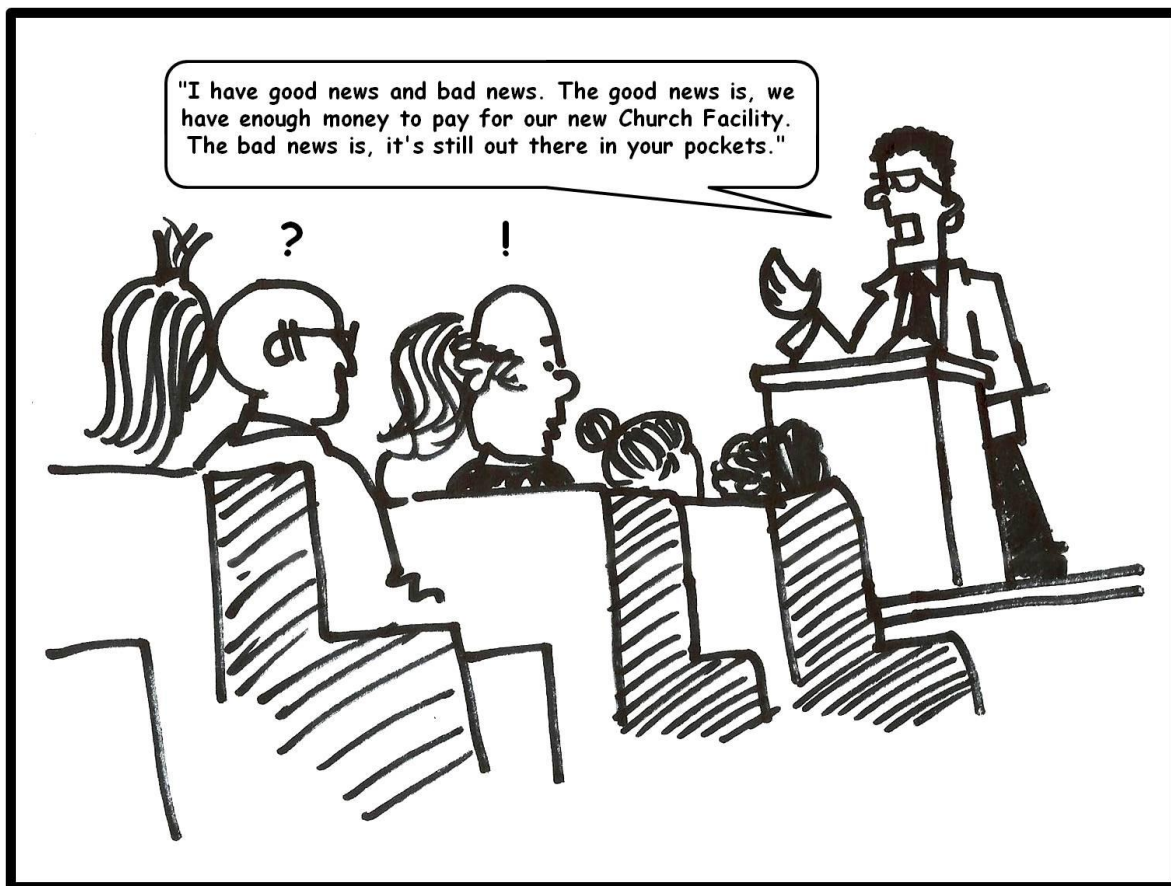
**7** Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? **8** If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. **9** Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them



for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! **10** Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. **11** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

### Psalm 73:1-28

- How easy it is to remember the lord's teaching when the going is good
- It takes total trust to keep the commands of God when life seems to be slipping away
- Let us trust in the Lord no matter what because He has promised that He will never leave nor forsake us.



### **ILLUSTRATION: Discipline a Blessing**

Some prayers Christ does not answer, we may say, because they ask Him to do our work for us. Tell me, is there a kinder thing that you can do for your pupil who comes up to you with his slate, asking you to work out for him his problem, than to bid him go back to his seat and do his task himself, and get that discipline and learning which is really the object of his having his task set to him at all? You ask Christ to show you with a flash of lightning what your sorrow means. You ask Him to reveal to you by some supernatural illumination which path of life you ought to take, which friendship you shall cultivate, what profession you can most successfully pursue. There comes no answer to those prayers. And why? Those are your problems. It is by hard work of yours, by watchful vigilance, by careful weighing of consideration against consideration, that you must settle those things for yourself.

—Phillips Brooks<sup>5</sup>

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## Love Is A Verb

Love has been described as many things: 'beautiful', 'amazing', 'unbelievable' and even 'indescribable' are descriptions that come to mind. Books, songs and poems on the subject of love abound. But we shall look to **the source of all love** for answers. As we focus on the Biblical descriptions of love we will learn that love is 'who you are' and 'what you do'.

### LOVE IS WHO YOU ARE

Every human responds to love. Even a child will naturally be drawn towards a person he perceives as showing love to him. A careful study of **1 Corinthians 13:1-13** explains what love is not (v.1-3) before going on to explain what love is.

Love is essentially who you are.

**Verse 4:** Are you **patient**? Are you waiting patiently on God, trusting in His love and timing? Are you patient with your family members? It is so easy to take our families for granted. We are often impatient with our spouses, children, siblings, aged ones, dependants and in-laws (to mention but a few). You can add to the list. Are you patient with your co-workers and subordinates? How is your patience with fellow disciples and neighbours?

Are you **kind**? Do you habitually notice and respond to needs? Do you share even when it is difficult? Will you be willing to do menial tasks for someone else, e.g. clean their kitchen, wash clothes etc.?

Are you **envious** of anyone? Consider carefully whether you envy others' status, position or possessions. Envy is common to most of us. Beware and be careful.

**Boasting** is a symptom of insecurity. Boasting is a way of putting others down while attempting to raise yourself up. Boasting is mean and immature. Do you boast?

**Verse 5:** Are you **proud**? This is a deep question. Take your time to answer.

Are you rude? Do you consider others' feelings before you speak?

Do you look out for others or for yourself only? Are you aware of the interests of others around you?

Are you easily angered, quick to flare up or short -tempered? Are you easily irritated and annoyed?

Have you let go of past hurts or do you keep a journal of wrongs done to you? Do you find it hard to forgive and move on?

**Verse 6:** Are you **envious**, scheming for ways to bring others down – even if it means lying against them?

**Verse 7:** Are you protective and trusting of others ALWAYS? Are you hopeful, believing in people and persevering ALWAYS?

**Verse 8a:** If you have these qualities, you will practise love that never fails.

### LOVE IS WHAT YOU DO

In **Luke 10:37** Jesus asks us to go and do as the 'good Samaritan' had done. Read **Luke 10:25-37**.

Have you passed by on the 'other side' recently?

In what ways can you step in and be of help in this busy country of ours?

As Nigerians we tend to be suspicious of each other. Ask yourself, "how can I make a difference in showing love?" Beggars need food and clothing, accident victims need rescuing, the sick need to be visited and cared for, the poor and vulnerable need support. According to Jesus, these are our neighbours. We must "go and do likewise."

## GOD IS LOVE

**1 JOHN 4:7-8.** If we do not love, we do not know God.

Let us therefore be like our Father, the perfect God of love.

### **ILLUSTRATION: What's in the Cage?**

As Paul Harvey once told the story, S. D. Gordon, a Boston preacher, used a beat-up rusty bird cage one Sunday to illustrate his sermon. First he explained how he had come by the cage, saying when he first saw it, it contained several miserable small birds, and was carried by a boy of about 10.

Curious, he asked the lad what he was going to do with the birds, which he had obviously trapped. "I'm going to play with them ...have some fun with them," the boy responded. "But after that?" the preacher persisted. "Oh, I have some cats at home, and they like birds," said the boy.

Compassion tugged at the minister's heart, and he asked the boy what he would take for the birds.

Surprised, the boy blurted: "Mister, you don't want to buy these birds. They're ugly . . . just field birds.

They don't sing, or anything." Nevertheless, Dr. Gordon persisted, and soon struck a bargain with the boy for the birds. At the first opportunity he released the poor creatures.

After explaining the presence of the empty cage, Dr. Gordon then told another story: this time about how Satan boasted that he had baited a trap and caught a world full of people. "What are you going to do with them?" Jesus asked him. "I'm going to play with them, tease them; make them marry and divorce, and fight and kill one another. I'll teach them to throw bombs at each other," Satan replied. "And when you get tired of playing with them, what will you do with them?" Jesus queried. "Condemn them," Satan answered. "They're no good anyway." Jesus then asked what Satan would take for them. "You can't be serious," the devil responded. "They would just spit on you. They'd hit you and hammer nails into you. They're no good." "How much?" the Lord asked again. "All your tears and all your blood; that's the price," Satan said gleefully.

Jesus paid the price, took the cage, and opened the door.

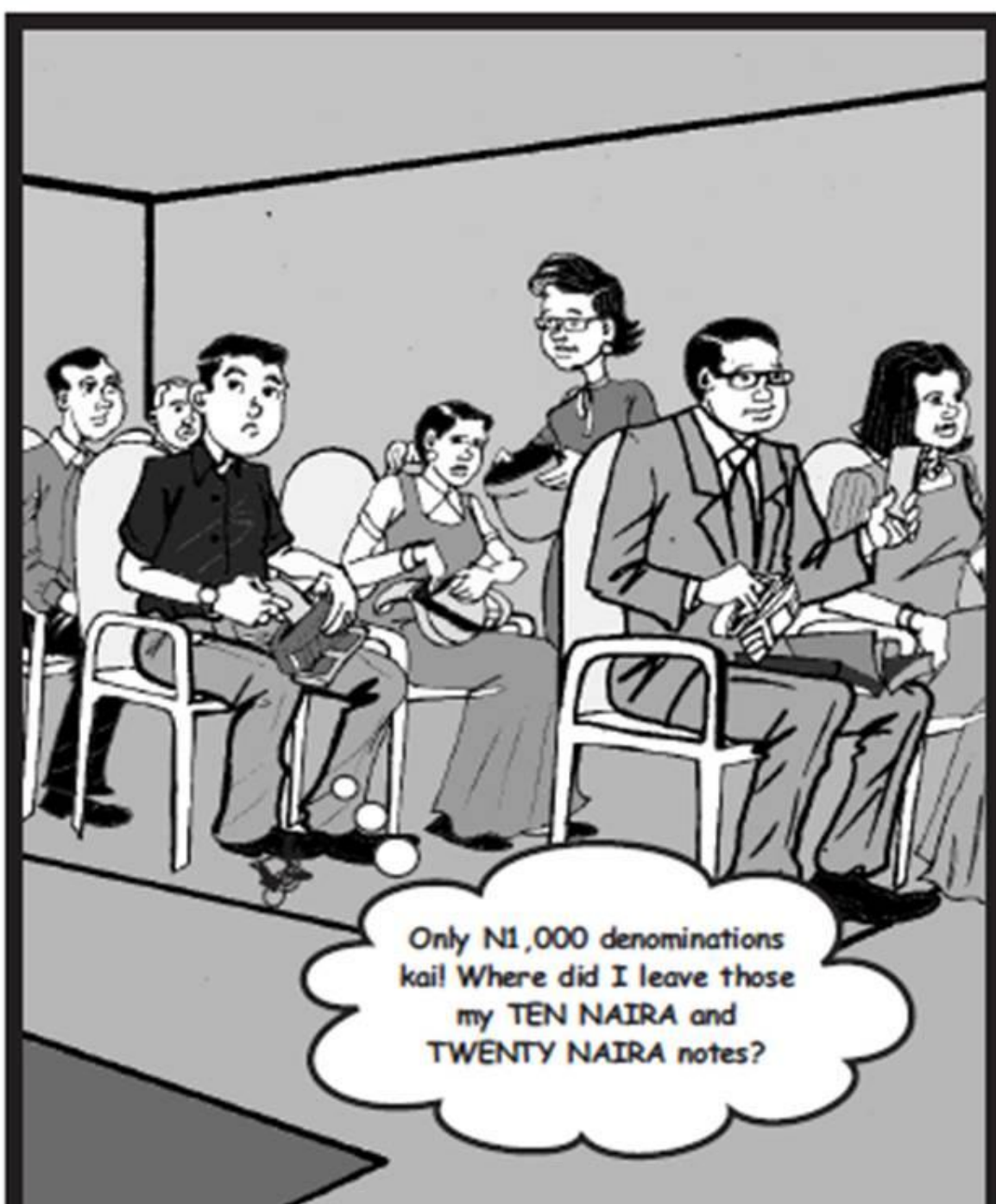
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### **ILLUSTRATION: Active Benevolence**

*A woman visited New York City, and saw on the sidewalk a ragged cold, and hungry little girl, gazing wistfully at some of the cakes in a shop window. She stopped, and, taking the little one by the hand, led her into the store. Though she was aware that bread might be better for the cold child than cake, yet, desiring to gratify the shivering and abandoned one, she bought and gave her a cake she wanted. She then took her to another place, where she purchased for the girl a shawl and other items of comfort. The grateful little girl looked at the woman right in the eyes, and with precious simplicity said, "Are you God's wife?"<sup>6</sup>*

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"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. (Ezek 16:49-50)

## My Body, His Temple: Taking Care of my Body

Africa has a rich heritage and Nigerians are people of colour. We love to dress rich, eat well and party! We are famous for elaborate weddings, naming ceremonies and funeral parties. We know how to take care of our physical bodies, yet there are a lot of lessons to learn on how to care for our bodies spiritually because they belong to God.

The concept of the Temple started with a movable tent known as the tabernacle. When the Israelites exited Egypt and were on their way to the Promised Land, wherever they decided to camp they would first set up the Tabernacle and the people would set up their dwelling tents by family around it. When they entered the Promised Land, God used Solomon to build the Temple.

### 1 Kings 8:27-28

*"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"*

Solomon knew that God will not dwell "in" a temple built by human hands, nonetheless the glory of God was "on" it.

### John 2:18-21

*Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"*

*19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*

*20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body.*

At this point we see that the meaning of Temple was changing. It is no more a building but the very body of Jesus Christ!

### 1 Cor. 3:16-17

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

### John 14:23-

*Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."*

We disciples are the temple of God. God's Spirit is in us. He has come so close to dwell in our hearts. He wants us to keep the Temple clean. There is a price to pay for destroying the Temple of God. If God is active in us, the changes will be evident.

Whoever loves and obeys the commands of Jesus will have the father and the son dwell in him/her in the Holy Spirit.

### What do we stand to gain having God dwell in us?

- **Rom.8:9:** The Holy Spirit (God in us) controls us
- **2 Cor.3:17-18:** The Holy Spirit (God in us) transforms us to reflect Jesus
- **John14:26:** The Holy Spirit (God in us) will teach and remind us of Jesus' teachings
- **John 15:27:** The Holy Spirit (God in us) will enable us testify about Jesus, etc.

Now that we know who we are (the Temple of God) we should know how to take care of ourselves.

- Is God enough for you? Christians should be content with God

- Do you obey God or job? God is a great and awesome king; he deserves all our respect
- Do you encourage gossip in the Temple of God? Watch out for slander and gossip
- Are you fleeing sexual immorality? No one is strong, run for your life as fast as you can
- Is your Temple a house of prayer? Enjoy fellowship with God in daily prayer and meditation
- Are the scriptures studied in your temple? Sit at the feet of the Lord and listen as he speaks to you through the Bible

## 2 Cor. 7:1

*Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

To contaminate is to make (something) impure by exposure to or addition of a poisonous or polluting substance.

Today, we talk about water, air, noise and food contamination. All these, if allowed into our bodies will lead to contamination.

Physical contamination is dreaded because of its visible effect. What about the contamination of our souls? Though not visible, it is what will determine where we spend our eternity.

What good is it to dress well but the man/woman in the dress is empty? Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

What do we gain if our bodies look fresh and nice but are sinful and pitiful?

What will it profit you and me if Nigeria and all the wealth in this country are yours but at the end Jesus says "I KNOW YOU NOT"! We are God's Temple; therefore, let us honour Him with our bodies.

**39** Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. **40** You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?  
(Luke 11:39-41)

## JOKING APART

### Report from the Pastor Search Committee:

We do not have a happy report to give. We have not been able to find a suitable candidate for this church, though we have one promising prospect. Thank you for your suggestions. We have followed up on each one with interviews or by calling at least three references. The following is our confidential report.

**ADAM:** Good man but has problems with his wife. One reference told us how he and his wife enjoyed walking nude in the woods.

**NOAH:** Former pastorate of 120 years with no converts. Prone to unrealistic building projects.

**JOSEPH:** A big thinker, but a braggart; believes in dream interpreting and has a prison record.

**MOSES:** A modest and meek man, but poor communicator; even stutters at times. Sometimes blows his stack and acts rashly in business meetings. Some say he left an earlier church over a murder charge.

**DEBORAH:** One word --- Female.

**DAVID:** The most promising leader of all until we discovered the affair he had with his neighbour's wife.

**SOLOMON:** Great preacher, but serious woman problem.

**ELIJAH:** Prone to depression; collapses under pressure.

**HOSEA:** A tender and loving pastor, but our people could never handle his wife's occupation.

**JONAH:** Told us he was swallowed up by a great fish. He said the fish later spit him out on the shore near here. We hung up.

**AMOS:** Too much of a country hick. Backward and unpolished.  
With some seminary training, he might have promise; but he has a hang-up against wealthy people.

**JOHN:** Says he is a Baptist, but doesn't dress like one. May be too Pentecostal. Tends to lift both hands in the air to worship when he gets excited. You know we limit to one hand.  
Sleeps in the outdoors, has a weird diet, and provokes denominational leaders.

**PETER:** Too blue collar. Has a bad temper, even said to have cursed. He's a loose cannon.

**PAUL:** Powerful CEO type and fascinating preacher. However, he's short on tact, unforgiving with young ministers, harsh, and has been known to preach all night.

**TIMOTHY:** Too young.

**JESUS:** Has had popular times, but once when his church grew to 5000, He managed to offend them all; and his church dwindled down to twelve people. Seldom stays in one place very long. And, of course, he is single.

**JUDAS:** His references are solid. A steady plodder. Conservative. Good connections. Knows how to handle money.

We're inviting him to preach this Sunday in view of a call.



## Unless A Kernel Of Wheat Falls To The Ground And Dies”

Inward Renewal

### PRODUCING “MANY SEEDS”

(PERSONAL GROWTH) JOHN 12:12-28

12:12-22

#### JESUS’ MINDSET

Jesus experienced triumph and popularity. Yet these did not obliterate his ultimate mission and focus.

V.23-28

He was not carried away by the praises of the crowd. His focus was on fulfilling God’s will. Jesus knew that He would endure a painful death, yet He did it to glorify God and to produce “many seeds”. Among those seeds are you, me and the church. But for Jesus’ death, we would not be saved today.

In these verses we learn many important lessons:

- A seed will only bear fruit after it has died. We can only bear fruit after we have died. What does this mean?

V. 25-26

- What kind of death are we to die?
- Write down at least 3 specific ways in which you must die to produce the kind of seed God intends for you.
- How often are we to die in these ways?

V.27 -28

- How did Jesus feel about dying?
- How did Jesus handle his emotions?
- How does “dying” make you feel?
- How will you follow Jesus’ example here?
- In what ways have material/worldly success made you lose focus on “dying”?

### PRODUCING “MANY SEEDS”

V. 24: We have seen that it is only when we “die” that we can grow.

- When was the last time you experienced the pain of self denial and “dying” daily?
- If it has been a long time, could it be that you stopped growing a long time ago?  
(I don’t know about you, but I feel kind of scared asking myself this question.)

#### AREAS TO NOTE: Have you grown in:

- (a) Recognizing and confessing your sins;
- (b) Prayer;
- (c) Bible Study;
- (d) Fasting;
- (e) Boldness in sharing your faith;
- (f) Generosity and giving?

#### CONCLUSION:

- Personal growth is deliberate.
- Personal growth will cost you something.

#### PRACTICAL TIPS:

- Focus on one area of growth at a time.
- Do not try to change too many things at once. It may take a few weeks to work on changing something.

**FINALLY** be encouraged. Even a little progress is progress.  
God recognizes and will reward your efforts.

***ILLUSTRATION: I Saw a Sermon***

The following account is told by Rudi Risher:

"It happened in Munich, Germany. I got out of my warm bed, looked through the window covered with 'ice ferns' at the new deep snow. I debated whether I should go to the worship service or stay at home and read the Bible. I would have to walk half a block in the cold to catch the bus. Finally I decided to go, but only because I had to lead the singing.

"While I was riding the bus, I looked through the window and recognized two people trying hard to make their path through the deep snow. Mr. Trollman was a man in his eighties, who had lost his eyesight. His only guidance was his 78 year old wife, who was lame in one foot. Because they could not afford to ride the bus, they walked three miles every Sunday to church. They were driven by their love for the Lord.

"I was not able to do anything but blush, ashamed of myself. I thought of the duty which had motivated me—of the weak faith and love I had shown. Without their knowledge and without a word, this old couple had taught me that love for God is the true motive for attending worship services."<sup>7</sup>

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## When It's Hard To Pray

Remember Hannah in 1 **Samuel chapter 1**?

You remember her story and all she endured before receiving her heart's desire.

What of Sarah Abraham's wife or Elizabeth John the Baptist's mother.

I want you to imagine what these women must have gone through when for years they didn't get any answer to their prayers from God.

Imagine the disappointment they felt year after year when nothing was happening.

Day by day they prayed and cried out to God, the same God who is unlimited in power and promises to do whatever we ask of Him in prayer.

We can only imagine what must have been going through the hearts of these women and how it affected their faith, trust and belief in God and his word.

There were times I felt the same way as these women, times when I prayed and nothing seemed to be happening. I did all the religious duties expected of me. I fasted, paid my tithes, honoured my discipling time appointments, even over loaded myself with responsibilities that were not mine all in a bid to catch God's attention and possible response to my plea. Yet, it seemed like the more I did things, so to say for the Lord, the more I got disappointed!

What I felt were hurt and disappointment. My faith and trust in God suffered; I felt God had no interest in me, nor were my sins forgiven or that I was not just good enough for Him.

Different kinds of thoughts were running through my head. It is at moments such as this that scriptures appear so negative to me, Scriptures like **Psm32:1-2, Mal.1:2-3**. "Even so I loved Jacob but I hated Esau".

This is when going to God becomes a struggle. You become weak, you feel hopeless and faithless. This is the time you put up a critical response about the Church's stands on issues that concern you. All the sins start coming out at this stage and people are worried about you. It becomes worse when you begin to compare yourself to others you believe you are doing better than 'spiritually' or you begin to find company in fellow sufferers so to speak, who you consider are going through the same unjust neglect.

Going to God becomes a problem. Of what use is it? If God has not answered these people what hopes do you have? Confusion sets in at this point.

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that even at this dark times that God is present and watching, looking and working out the right time to amaze you. For each one of us He has planned out different times; how, when, where, whom are all in His hands.

He has arranged our lives according to His purpose and plan. One person's situation may get sorted faster while another person's may seem to take longer or even delayed. Ironically, some may never get what they asked for or were promised. Now this is rather strange coming from a book that seeks to encourage and give hope to its readers. This is just another side of the TRUTH. If we agree that God is all knowing and will do what is best for us, then we must also accept that sometimes, our wish may not be His will and thus not for Him to command.

Many scriptures in the bible lay credence to this truth; Consider the stories of Abraham, Moses, Gideon, David, Job, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jesus and His Apostles. At different times in their lives, they asked but never received. But how do you determine if your situation is a "No" issue? The truth is you can't! It's like asking how you'll know if your favourite soccer team will finish tops or lose out in the championship. You just have to wait till the end to find out. But what do you do while waiting? Well, you wait faithfully, patiently and PRAYERFULLY!

Are you beginning to get the idea of how God wants you to feel and act? Read Jesus' words in

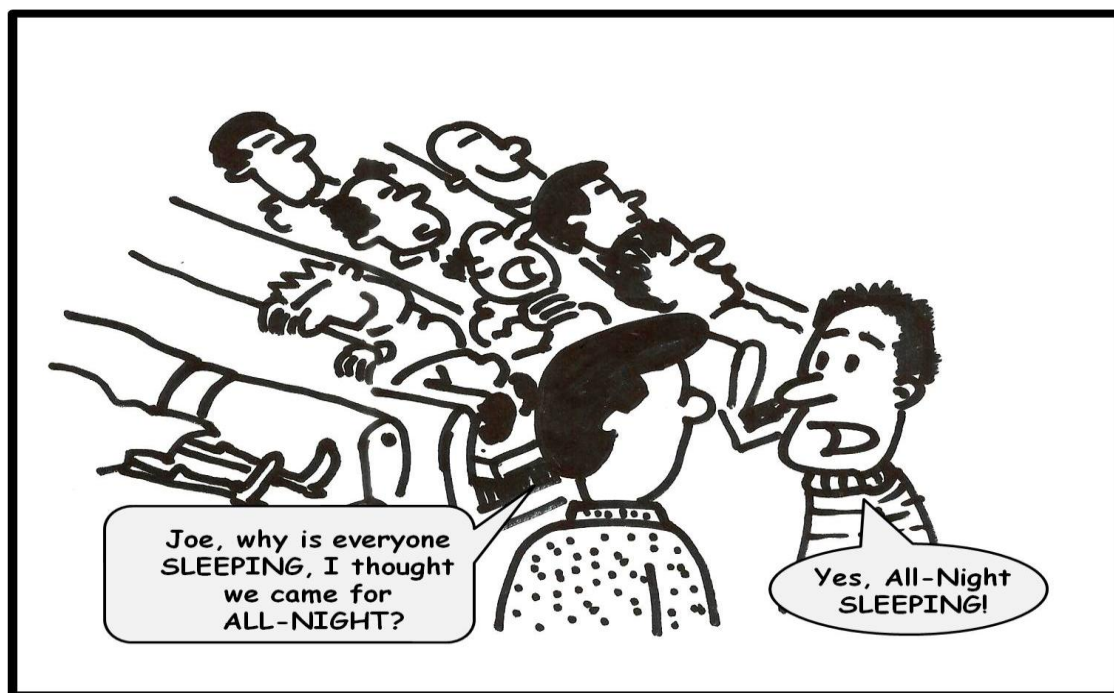
**Luke 18:1-8** and hopefully it will help.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. **2** He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. **3** And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' **4** "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, **5** yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" **6** And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. **7** And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? **8** I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

#### **ILLUSTRATION: Delayed Answer to Prayer**

A poor woman stood at a vineyard gate and looked over into the vineyard. "Would you like some grapes?" asked the proprietor. "I should be very thankful," replied the woman. "Then bring your basket." Quickly the basket was brought to the gate. The owner took it and was gone a long time among the vines, till the woman became discouraged, thinking that he was not coming again. At last he returned with the basket heaped full. "I have made you wait a good while," he said, "but you know the longer you have to wait the better grapes and the more." So it is sometimes in prayer. We bring our empty vessel to God and pass it over the gate of prayer to Him. He seems to be delaying a long time, and sometimes faith faints with waiting. But at last He comes, and our basket is heaped full with luscious blessings. He waited long that He might bring us a better and a fuller answer.

—J. R. Miller<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> From Making the Most of Life

## Conscious of God's Presence

### Matthew 1:23

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"-which means, "God with us."

God has promised you His constant presence (**Hebrews 13:5**), but are you conscious of His presence every day? When you are conscious of His presence each day, you will experience the kind of peace that gives you rest, joy inexpressible in your spirit and a power that nothing in this world can offer. In fact, you will begin to be peaceful and powerful like Jesus. You will speak and behave like Him. You cannot be in God's presence without His beauty, love, peace, power and glory rubbing off on you.

### How do you awaken your consciousness of God's presence?

- Start by seeing God being with you in whatever you do and wherever you are
- Are you in a business or management meeting deliberating on issues? See the Lord there with you, guiding you in your thinking. And you can be sure that His presence will bring clarity of thought and wisdom to you. You will find yourself flowing with great and sound ideas
- Are you going to share or defend the gospel with a friend? See the Lord there with you, putting answers in your mouth. Your nervousness will melt away as you see God teaching you what to say and how to say it
- Are you going for a surgery? Well, see the Lord in the operating theatre with you, guiding the hands of the surgeons. Your worries will dissipate because nothing can go wrong in the Lord's presence
- Are you in the middle of an argument? See the Lord standing by you. Your words will change and your body language will become more reconciliatory as you see Him right there with you extending His grace to you. There will be a restraint which is not borne of willpower, but which comes supernaturally when you know that the One who loves you and watches over you is there with you
- Are you facing opposition or rejection? See the Lord standing by you like He did with Peter and John in Acts 4 and He will use your situation to draw many more people to faith

When you become conscious of God's presence in your life, worries and fears will have no foothold in your mind. You will see Him maximizing your joy and fun, and prospering you in what you say and do!

### Food for thought:

Q. Is your consciousness of God's presence stimulated even as you read this book?

Q. What does God's omnipresence nature mean to you?

***The story below illustrates how Christ's presence can be our stimulus:***

There is a touching fact related in the history of a Highland chief of the noble house of McGregor, who fell wounded by two balls at the battle of Prestonpans. Seeing their chief fall, the clan wavered, and gave the enemy an advantage. The old chieftain, beholding the effects of his disaster, raised himself up on his elbow, while the blood gushed in streams from his wounds, and cried aloud, "I am not dead, my children; I am looking at you, to see you do your duty." These words revived the sinking courage of his brave Highlanders. There was a charm in the fact that they still fought under the eye of their chief. It roused them to put forth their mightiest energies, and they did all that human strength could do to turn and stem the dreadful tide of battle. And is there not a charm to you, O believer, in the fact that you contend in the battle-field of life under the eye of your Saviour? Wherever you are, however you are oppressed by foes, however exhausted by the stern strife with evil, the eye of Christ is fixed most lovingly upon you. (D. Wise,)<sup>9</sup>

**Application:** Practise daily this act of being conscious of God's presence in your day to day life and be amazed that the saviour whose earthly name means "God with us" also confirmed it in his last words recorded in the gospel of Matthew as saying, **"I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."**<sup>10</sup>

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## Fasting: Beyond Food and Water (Part 1)<sup>11</sup>

### Isa 40:29-31

**29** He gives power to the weak,  
*And to those who have no might He increases strength.*  
**30** Even the youths shall faint and be weary,  
*And the young men shall utterly fall,*  
**31** But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength;  
*They shall mount up with wings like eagles,*  
*They shall run and not be weary,*  
*They shall walk and not faint. (NKJV)*

What other better time is there to talk about fasting than when we are actually involved in it? The subject of fasting can be controversial thus taken to either extreme; it is a subject that touches on something dear to us all – FOOD!

Because of the nature of this subject, we shall be tackling it in two parts.

The next three days will be more than a pep talk. You are encouraged to set out additional time to study through the scriptures. Make personal notes, ask questions and discuss your findings. This is a spiritual journey that is guaranteed to keep you well rooted in your understanding of God's word.

Let us first clarify by defining what our subject matter is: FAST

- To fast is to voluntarily abstain from food
- It involves a decision to go without food as opposed to being hungry from lack of access to food
- It is not abstinence from whatever you; in your own judgment decide to abstain from. You can't abstain from television, movies, cell phone etc and call it biblical fasting
- Fasting is the bowing down of the soul to God in humility that he may deliver and have mercy on the one who fasts

The only fast "commanded" by the law is found in **Lev.16:29-31, 23:26-32; Num. 29:7**

- The catch phrase is, "Deny yourself" (NIV) "Afflicting one's soul" or "Chasten one's soul with fasting" (KJV). See also Psalm 69:10. All refer to fasting

### People in the Old Testament era fasted at various times and for many other reasons

- In war or at the threat of it **Jud. 20:26, 1Sam. 7:2-6**
- When loved ones were sick **2Sam. 12:16-23, Ps. 35:11-13** (David even fasted for his enemies)
- When their loved ones died **1Sam. 31:13, 1Chr. 10:12, 2Sam. 1:12**
- When they sought God's forgiveness **Deut. 9:3-5;15-18, 1Kings 21:21-29, Jonah 3:4-10, Neh. 9:1-3**
- When faced with impending danger **2Chr. 20:3, Ezra 8:21, Neh. 1:4, Esther 4:3**
- Fasting was used to commemorate certain calamities as observed during the post exile era. The Jews observed special fasts on the days the calamities had befallen Jerusalem

**Sackcloth:** a hairy garment, rough on the skin was worn as a sign of mourning. Apart from the Jews, we also observe other Eastern Nations do the same (**Jonah 3:6** Nineveh)

<sup>11</sup> Thoughts for this three part class on Fasting was adapted from Mark A. Copeland's sermon series "Fasting"

**“Institutionalized Fasting”**: this became a huge thing after the exile. Many days of fasting was institutionalized for commemoration. They were often observed by people who were never directly affected or connected to the original event or calamity.

**A note for us today**: A person cannot institutionalize the personal fast and predicament of another into a celebration and expect to gain the rewards God accorded the one who originally fasted. Jesus and his disciples did not participate in these traditions (**Matt. 9:14**)

### **Nature of fasting**

- The **Normal** means of fasting involved ABSTAINING from ALL FOOD but not WATER (you can't survive for more than 21 days without water)
- The **Absolute** fast (rare occasions where neither food nor water is taken) e.g. the absolute fasts of Moses and Jesus (**Deut. 9:9, Matt. 4:2**) It is obvious that these characters were divinely assisted

**Important Note**: Fasting is not a restriction of diet (**Daniel 6:18; 10:2-3; 9:3**) but total abstinence from food.

**Definition of FOOD**: Nourishment, Nutrition (food can either be Solid or Liquid)  
Semi-Liquid food is called **PAP**. Liquids such as Cocoa is called **“FOOD DRINK”**

**Point**: You can't live on pap, soda drinks or custard and still call it **“BIBLICAL FASTING”**  
Originally, when people fasted, they were mostly stationary; they did not go to work apart from praying. We too can take leave from work or use our holidays to do this. The benefit is very rewarding.



## Fasting: Beyond Food and Water (Part 2)

### The case of Abstinence by Disciples

#### 1 Peter 2:11-12

*11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*

- We are called to “abstain” from sinful desires which war against our souls
- While by definition, inference or examples, FASTING involves abstinence from food, we are however called to abstain from anything that has the potential to hinder. This is not fasting but a choice. As individuals, we all have to decide what we should abstain from, e.g. too much television or unaccounted hours on the world wide web (the Internet), chocolates and other habits that might endanger your health
- Abstinence is a matter of discipline and varies from person to person
- Not all abstinence from food is called fasting

### The Length of Fast

- Often for one day (sunrise to sunset) A.M. to P.M. not the other way round!
- After sundown, food would be taken (**Jude 20:26, 1Sam. 14:24, 2Sam. 1:12, 3:35**)
- The fast of Esther continued for Three Days, day and night (Esther 4:16). This is a special case. History has it that she fainted while addressing the king
- Seven Days fast at the burial of King Saul (**1Sam. 31:13, 1Chro. 10:12**)
- David fasted for Seven Days too when his child was ill. (**2Sam. 12:16-18**)
- The longest fasts recorded in the bible were the FORTY-DAY fast by Moses (twice) and Jesus – **Ex. 34:28, Deut. 9:9, Matt. 4:2, Luke 4:2b**)

### Warning concerning fasting

Fasting can easily turn into an external show and ceremonial ritualism. When it did, the prophets spoke out against it!

The most vigorous attack against such fasting is made in **Isaiah 58:1-14** please read carefully...

*"Shout it aloud, do not hold back.*

*Raise your voice like a trumpet.*

*Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.*

**2** *For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.*

**3** *'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?*

*Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'*

*"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.*

**4** *Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists.*

*You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.*

**5** *Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?*

**6** *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?*

**7** *Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

**8** Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

**9** Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, **10** and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

**11** The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

**12** Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

**13** "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,

**14** then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the Lord has spoken.

- The people complained that they had fasted and God had not seen
- But they had not been fasting for the right reason (they did fast to be heard by God)
- In contrast to simply an external display of bowing one's head like a reed and spreading sackcloth and ashes, the Lord would rather they do certain thing
- Can you identify and write down below these requirements by God?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

Only then will they be heard! (Is. 58:8-9)

Note verse 4: **"You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high."**

The same point was made about the ceremonial fast that had been added by the Israelites to commemorate certain occasions (**Zech. 7:1-14**). People wanted to know if they should fast on the special occasions as they had done for seventy years.

In your own words, write out God's response and where you think we too can fall prey today.

**Bottom line: Fasting without true repentance defeats the purpose.**

## Fasting: Beyond Food and Water (Part 3)

### Fasting in the life of Jesus

- Jesus fasted for 40 Days and 40 Nights in the wilderness (**Matt. 4:1-9, Lk. 4:1-2**)
- He taught on fasting in his famous "sermon on the mount" (**Matt. 6:16-18**)
- Jesus said, "When you fast", not "if", assuming his disciples WOULD fast
- When questioned by John's Disciples, he had this to say: (**Matt. 9:14-17, Mk. 2:18-19, Lk. 15:33-39**)

### The combined power of prayer and fasting

- **Matt. 17:14-21**
- **Mark 9:14-29**

### Fasting in the Early Church

- **Acts 13:1-3**
- **Acts 14:21-23**

Fasting can be a group activity in the work of a local congregation

### Fasting in the ministry of Paul

- **2Cor. 6:4-10**
- **2Cor. 11:23-27**

**Note:** fasting is mentioned separately from normal hunger and thirst

### Other "Non Christians" that fasted and were blessed by God

- Anna - **Lk. 2:36-38**
- Saul - **Acts 9:9**
- Cornelius - **Acts 10:30-31**

### When you can't fast

- Health Reasons

### Questions that demand a Verdict (It will be helpful to discuss your answers in small groups)

1. Should Christians fast today?
2. When should you fast?
3. Can our leaders call the congregation to a time of prayer and fasting?
4. How should a Christian fast?

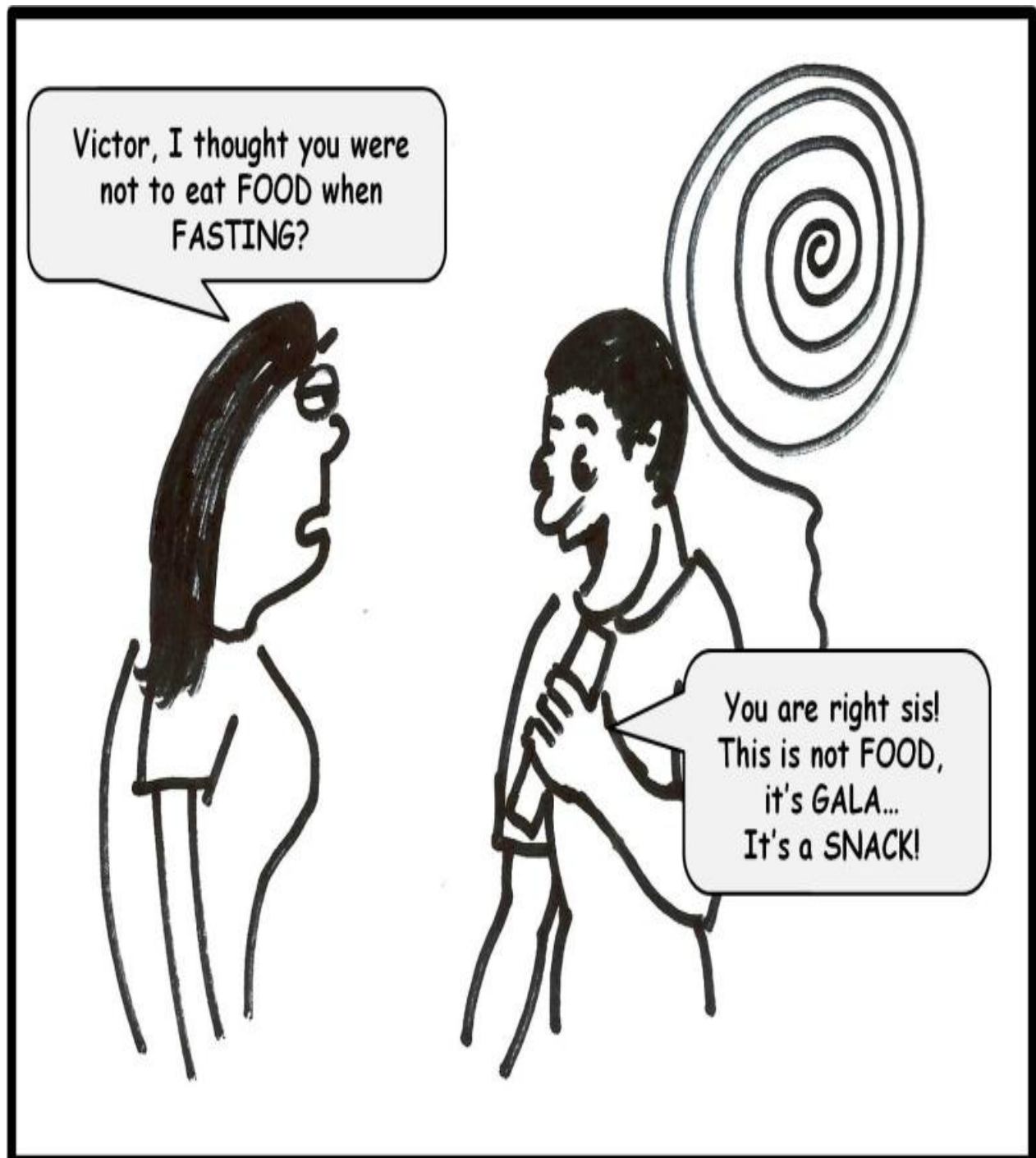
### Practical Suggestions

1. Don't go out to fast because it sounds like a good idea.
2. If you have never fasted before, start slowly. Fast only for a brief period, end slowly.
3. Remember the ultimate purpose –humility before God.
4. Whatever spiritual virtue you achieve this period, please keep it up!

### JOKING APART

#### "My Dad is the Greatest"

Three young boys were walking on the sidewalk arguing over whose daddy was the greatest. One said, "My dad is the greatest because he is the president of the town bank." The second boy said, "That is pretty good, but my daddy owns two grocery stores in town!" The third boy said, "That's nothing, my dad is a preacher, and he owns hell. He came home last night and told my mom that the Church Board gave it to him!"



## New Every Morning

The Book of Lamentation is believed to have been written by Jeremiah at a very challenging time in the history of the house of Jacob. Israel was in captivity in Babylon and was facing the consequences of their disobedience to God. Jeremiah wrote a wailing song that connects with the agony of the Israelites. Even in a period of lament Jeremiah wrote in a way that brings hope and portrays the love and goodness of God:

### **Lam 2:13-14**

*What can I say for you? With what can I compare you, O Daughter of Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O Virgin Daughter of Zion? Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you? 14 The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading.*

Jeremiah was saying in his lament that their captivity could have been avoidable had their leaders confronted their sins. God could not have disciplined them this much if they had been challenged about their sins.

### **Lam 3:22-23**

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (ESV)*

The lesson Jeremiah wanted to teach was that there is no cessation in God's love for mankind. What they were going through was not to be seen as a lack of love from God. Discipline is a sign of true love.

**Hebrews 12:5-11** tells us that God disciplines us because he loves us. He does so for our good. And no discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful; yet in the end the fruits are worth it.

Jeremiah teaches that God's love for us is unfailing and endless. God's love is steadfast in the sense that it is not on and off. It is not dependent on whether you do well or not. God loves completely; his love does not increase because I am doing well or decrease because I am messing up. God renews his love and mercy for us morning by morning. This is one of the sources of my joy that as I wake up every morning I realize that God has renewed his commitment to loving and having mercy on me. This shows consistency and reliability on God's side. God has loved us with no strings attached. He loved us while we were still sinners.

### **Lessons:**

- God's love is not performance-oriented. Whether you do well or not, he loves you nonetheless. He loves the sinner but hates the sin.
- With love he disciplines us to bring the best out of us.
- God commits himself every morning to loving us and having mercy on us. Yes! That is what he does.
- This fires me up! I am loved by my father. With such mindset, even rebuke from God can be trusted. God is a good father. He has plans to prosper us not to destroy us. His aim is to give us hope and a future. (**Jer.29:11-12**)

### **Rom 8:28**

*28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

In all things, God is working for our good. Whatever God does or allows he is doing it for our good. Thank you Lord for committing yourself to living and having mercy on us every morning, great is your faithfulness!



Q. What is your mental picture of God?

Q. Do you often see God in the same way you see our fallible fathers?

Q. Do we mistake the treatment we receive from our bosses or political leaders for God's workings?

When everyone seems to be distant from you remember that God is right there.

**Song of the Day** (From Lamentations 3:22-23)

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;*

*His mercy never comes to an end;*

*They are new every morning, new every morning;*

*Great is your faithfulness o Lord*

## Great Is Thy Faithfulness

To add to our creative bible study today, we shall be doing, not just a scripture study, but a “song study”. Our theme song, you must have guessed is the classic, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”. Before we go into the study, it might help to know a bit about the composer and circumstances in which he lived and worked.

Composer **Thomas Obadiah Chisolm** (1866-1960) had a difficult early adult life. His health was so fragile that there were periods of time when he was confined to bed, unable to work. Between bouts of illness he would have to push himself to put in extra hours at various jobs in order to make ends meet.

After his conversion at age 27, Thomas found great comfort in the Scriptures, and in the fact that God was faithful to be his strength in times of illness and weakness, and to provide his needs. **Lamentations 3:22-23** was one of his favourite scriptures:

*22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.  
23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”*

While away from home on a mission trip, Thomas often wrote to one of his good friends, William Runyan, a relatively unknown musician. Several poems were exchanged in these letters. Runyan found one of Williams' poems so moving that he decided to compose a musical score to accompany the lyrics. **Great is Thy Faithfulness was published in 1923** and was heard around the world in 1945 as George Beverly Shea began singing it during many evangelistic crusades.

For several years, the hymn got very little recognition, until it was discovered by a Moody Bible Institute professor who loved it so much and requested it was sung so often at chapel services, that the song became the unofficial theme song of the college.

Thomas Chisolm died in 1960 at age 94. During his lifetime, he wrote more than 1,200 poems and hymns including, “O to Be Like Thee” and “Living for Jesus”<sup>12</sup>

- Read every line carefully and write out your thoughts as it applies to you
- Pray through the stanzas as you go on today
- Remind yourself of all the many ways God has been faithful through the years
- Make vows in areas you need to be faithful and pray for God's strength
- Share your thoughts with someone who can help and also remind you of today

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from [www.sharefaith.com](http://www.sharefaith.com)

**Hymn of the Day**  
**GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS**

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;  
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

**CHORUS:**

Great is Thy faithfulness (2 xs)  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All that I needed Thy hand hath provided,  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me

Summer and winter, and spring time and harvest,  
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings are mine, with ten thousand beside

## Be Still My Soul: The Art Of Meditation Part 1

*It is generally believed that men of God are closer to God than the “ordinary Christian” This belief creates a clergy / laity divide. This should not happen since scriptures teach that we are all priests (1 Peter 2:9). This does not mean that we should not honor our ministers. Since we are all priests we need to improve on our relationship with God.*

*What is the popular concept about relationship with God? Bible study and prayer (Quiet Time), mostly in the morning?*

*One area we are yet to explore is that of meditation. Most eastern religions do a lot of meditation and Christians these days do less of it. Let us explore and learn together about the power of meditation.*

### **Q. What does it mean to meditate?**

Definition: Focus one's mind for a period of time for spiritual purposes or as a method of relaxation<sup>13</sup>. Speaking to oneself, to mutter, to ponder on, contemplation, reflection, deep thinking.

To meditate on something is to think about it carefully and deeply for a long time.

**Biblical meditation** involves becoming “**detached**” from the controlling and hindering influences of the world and “**attached**” to the living God through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. This is so that we might experience God and be transformed into His likeness. It is about coming into God's presence.

We learn from **Joshua 1:8** that meditation should be day and night. Unlike bible study and reading, meditation is a spiritual art we can practice day and night wherever we are. It can even be done with or without “NEPA”.

### **Ps 1:1-2**

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. (NIV)*

Meditation brings blessing from God. It helps us to be wise and discerning. From Psalm 1 we learn that the man/woman who is able to make a wise and godly choice on the kind of friends he/she keeps and the things he/she is involved in owes that to the art of meditation on God's word.

Does God speak today? YES! Do you want to hear him speak to you? Meditate on his word and he will tell you what he has for you.

### **There are some fruitful advantages of meditation:**

Meditation helps us to internalize and personalize the Scripture so that its truth can affect how we think, thereby shaping our attitude.

A regular quiet time makes you think about God for a moment but meditation keeps you thinking day and night about what God is saying to you.

- It is a cure for worries and materialism
- It helps in finding answers to difficult questions of life
- Are you looking for soul revival? Try meditation!
- Do you wish to be wiser than the world around you? Try meditation!
- Do you wish to experience the peace that surpasses all understanding? Try meditation!

Finally for today, we'll like to note some basics as you begin this act.

### **Ps 4:4 Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. (NASB)**

- Select a verse or more in the bible based on issues you may want answers for
- Memorize that verse quickly (if you can)
- Spend time to think about every word in that verse
- Question the text and wrestle with it

<sup>13</sup> Concise Oxford Dictionary (Eleventh Edition)

- Keep your mind off other things and meditate on the verse constantly
- Use any free time to meditate on the word of God
- Keep praying about the verse you are reflecting on
- Find a quiet place and observe nature and see God's grace and power in his creation (more on this tomorrow)
- Have a wonderful time with God and tell your soul, "be still!"



## Be Still My Soul: The Art Of Meditation Part 2

Jesus deeply valued his time alone with God. It was said of him that he “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (**LUKE 5:16**).

We all need places where we can relax, unwind, breathe freely, think clearly and commune without interruption. Time away from our usual routine and environment is essential to developing intimacy with God. We can see this from the examples of great men in the Bible. Consider these examples from the life of Jesus and let us imitate him not only in prayers but also in searching through his word and thinking calmly, carefully, (meditating) through it.

### **LUKE 6:12-13**

Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. And the next day he was able to take some major decisions.

### **LUKE 9:18**

“Once when Jesus was praying in private...”

- In private we can think clearly, calmly and carefully through the word of God
- We also tend to remain still as we reason through our study of the Word

**LUKE 9:28** - Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray

- Again, away from his regular environment

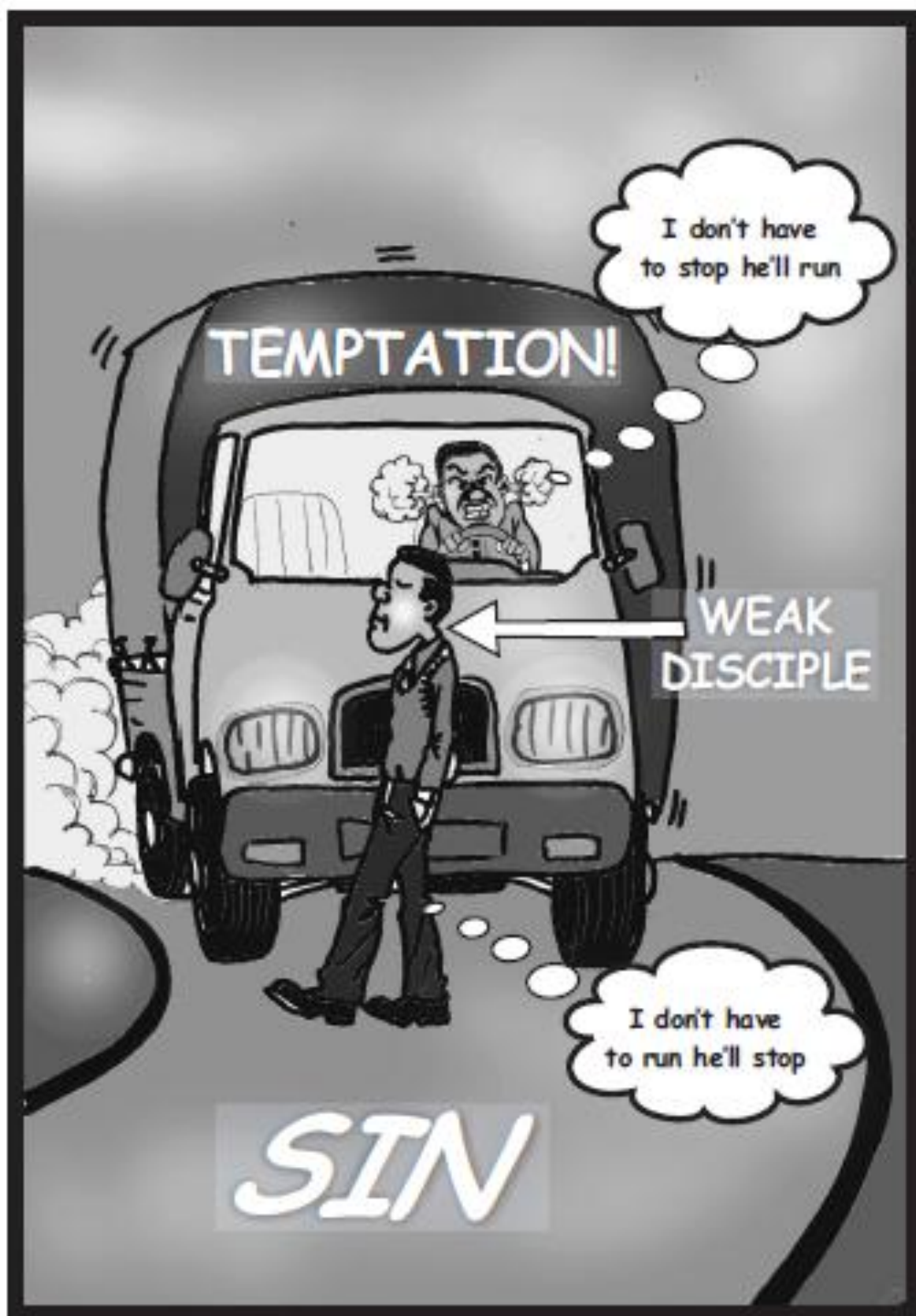
**Luke 11: 1** - “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place...”

**John 6:15** - Jesus,...withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”

Time spent alone, time spent in large amounts and time spent in lonely places without interruption and distractions are what we need to concentrate our minds on God and meditate on His Word. Some of us have been disciples for years and have not done much in this area. Do you sometimes wonder why you are stale, unmotivated, joyless, and weary and not experiencing healthy growth in your faith?

### **PRACTICALS:**

- Begin with thirty minutes to an hour of calm, clear and careful thinking through your bible study and the awesomeness of God
- Take time off, away from your usual environment as you concentrate on prayer, worship and meditation
- If you can't leave your environment, try a time alone in your room. Turn off all gadgets that might cause distractions (phones, TV, radio etc). Let the people around you know you want to have a special time with God and that you will appreciate some privacy.



# **IN-REACH: LOVE FOR SELF & OTHERS IN THE BODY**

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."  
(1Cor 12:12-13)



## Fathers, Mothers, Brothers and Sisters: The Household of God

Several descriptive terms have been used to describe the church of God; Temple, Building, Body (human), Body of Christ, Household.

The Term “Household” refers to a house with its occupants as a unit.

Today, as we continue in our “in-reach” study of the excellent way, we’ll like us all to use our imagination as we unlock together the mysteries of our faith.

Most of us reading this devotional book probably live in a town or city. In our original traditional village setting some older ones either grew in or witnessed extended families live together and thus play a vital role. I remember very well the structure of my paternal grandfather’s compound. His house (the main building) is almost right in the center of the mammoth compound while his children’s houses all circle his. This was more than a group of buildings, it was HOME.

There are many advantages in this kind of setting; security, corporate nurture, sense of belonging and equity. We are all too familiar with the early *snapshot* we see in **Acts 2:42-47**. This kind of unity and family atmosphere does not come cheap. It takes sacrifice and a wiliness to build.

Below are several scriptures on the church family.

- Read them carefully
- Meditate on each passage and write out the qualities you see in the dynamics God is calling us all to
- Discuss them in your little groups and make a resolve to begin building to the glory of God

a. Eph. 2:19-21

b. 1 Tim. 3:14-16

c. 1 Tim. 5:1-16

d. Rom. 16:1-24

e. Eph. 2:19-22

### ILLUSTRATION: A Defective Church

The following illustration is by D. L. Moody:

*"A father took his little child out into the field one Sabbath, and he lay down under a beautiful shady tree, it being a hot day. The little child ran about gathering wild flowers and little blades of grass, and coming to his father and saying: 'Pretty! pretty!' At last the father fell asleep and while he was sleeping the child wandered away. When he awoke, his first thought was 'where is my child?' He looked all around, but he could not see him. He shouted at the top of his voice, and all he heard was the echo of his own voice. No response! Running to a little hill, he looked around but all he heard was his own voice. Then going to a precipice at some distance, he looked down, and there upon the rocks and briers, he saw the mangled form of his loved child. He rushed to the spot, and took up the lifeless corpse, and hugged it to his bosom, and accused himself of being the murderer of his own child. While he was sleeping his child had wandered over the precipice. I thought as I heard that, what a picture of the Church of God! How many fathers and mothers, how many Christian men are sleeping now while their children wander over the terrible precipice a thousand times worse than that precipice, right into the bottomless pit of hell? Father, where is your boy tonight?"<sup>14</sup>*

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## Building Bridges: Devotion To Fellowship

Have you ever wondered why governments spend large sums of money building bridges?

If you live in a place like Lagos, the sight of bridges will be an all too familiar sight.

What are bridges for?

Bridges form links between two points. They make for easier flow of traffic, especially where there are multiple intersections and heavy flow of vehicular traffic.

If every disciple is a point of intersection in our congregation, do you see yourself building bridges?

We need bridges and bridge builders that promote easy networking, "gap closing" and better integration. You must have heard the expression, "Let's bridge the gap."

### Acts2:42-47

After the conversion of about three thousand souls on the day of Pentecost, what followed the devotion to the Apostles' teaching was Fellowship.

Have you considered the state of fellowship in our various church groups today? How is your role in all these? How is your fellowship?

A deep and spiritual understanding of fellowship is needed if we must be bridge-builders as a people.

### What is Fellowship?

- Friendliness and companionship based on shared interests
- A group of people that meet to pursue a shared interest or aim

### True fellowship will lead to the following:

- **Php1:3-5:** Partnership in the Gospel
- **Ps119:63:** We'll all seek spiritually-minded people and thus populate our church with like-minded groups
- **1Jn1:7:** Our fellowship with one another will be based first on our love for God. There will not be "evil camps"

### KEY HINDRANCE TO FELLOWSHIP:

#### 1 John 1:3-7

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4** We write this to make our joy complete.

**5** This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sins.

Blind Religiosity appears to be a major hindrance to our fellowship. How can we have two or more disciples who claim to love and worship the same God, share the same communion and yet hate and avoid each other, even in fellowship? The bible calls this, "walking in the Dark".

### WHY WE NEED FELLOWSHIP

- Romans1:11-12: Mutual Strengthening
- Heb10:24-25: Mutual Encouragement
- James 5:16: Fight against sin

### LIFE APPLICATION

- How have you been building bridges?
- How would devotion to biblical teaching help you to have fellowship?
- What is the one thing you would change about the fellowship you now experience with other disciples and what can you do to change it?

As we consider all these and more, may we end with this iconic words of Apostle Paul found in **2 Cor. 13:12-14**

*Greet one another with a holy kiss. **13** All the saints send their greetings.  
**14** May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

**ILLUSTRATION: The Parable of the Oil Well**

There was a certain man who had a great possession; and, when he would find a profitable place upon which to bestow it, a friend said to him, "Look, there is for sale in a certain city an oil well. Now, this well is fitted out with the finest machinery, and is capable of producing large returns to its owner." So the man sent and bought the well, and, after many days, he journeyed to the place where it was. When he came to the place he found the well even as his friend had said.

"Surely," he said, "this well must be producing much profit for me." One thing he saw, however, that amazed him sorely. Nearly all of the great wheels and belts were idle. In one corner of the well a part of the machinery was in motion.

"Why is it," he said to the overseer, "that my well is yielding me no return?"

"Not so," replied the man, showing a small vial of oil. "The well is producing splendidly, since it turns out every day enough to keep its machinery perfectly oiled."

Then was the owner of the well greatly angry, and said, "Of what advantage is it to me that I have invested my money in this thing? If it is to do no more than to keep itself whole, it might as well be burned to the ground and its place given to another."

So is he who is satisfied with using the grace of God to keep himself pure and has no concern for others.<sup>15</sup>

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Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."  
(Heb 12:28-29)

## **She/He Isn't Heavy She/He Is My Sister/Brother** (Carrying Each Other's Burdens)

### **Galatians 6:1-2**

These verses give practical direction on how to be responsible to yourself and to others, within the church.

v.1: We are reminded that there will be sin in the church. The scripture urges us to be careful when dealing with each other's sin. It is easy to be self-righteous and judgmental. Feeling superior to the 'sinner' is a common pitfall. We forget that we too have sinned at other times. That is why we are told to restore gently, the one in sin. (Read **John 8:4-11**) It takes spiritual maturity to be firm and gentle at the same time.

v.2: We are told to carry each other's burdens.

Let us consider:

- (i) Our communal responsibility
- (ii) Individual burdens

### **COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Our church is a spiritual community. No person should stand alone.

In our physical community we have; the police, health care providers, teachers, transporters, traders, bankers and so on. All these serve the community in various ways. When any of these services are not provided, we all feel the pain.

In our spiritual community, the church, we have those among us who serve in various areas like; teachers in the children's ministry, encouragers or contributors to the needs of others. (Read **Romans 12:5-8**). The church is also blessed with elders, evangelists and teachers.

What is your gift?

In what ways are you a blessing to the church?

When you fail to use your gift, the church suffers.

When you use your gifts, you ease the burdens of others, because your brothers and sisters benefit from what you give.

Remember that GIVING is not only financial. You don't need to have money to encourage others.

### **INDIVIDUAL BURDENS**

v.2: Reminds us that when we carry others burdens, we fulfil the law of Christ.

**1 John 2:6** says we must walk as Jesus did. Let us learn how Jesus carried the burdens of others.

### **Matthew 9:35-38**

- Jesus had compassion on the lost. We must never stop inviting people to study the Bible / inviting people to church and Bible Discussions
- Jesus taught in the synagogues. We are able to teach others in the church. Even if you have been a disciple for just a few months, you can teach someone else. Make it your ambition to disciple someone. Ask your regional leader how you can be of help. When you help others spiritually you indirectly help yourself at the same time
- Jesus had compassion on the sick. We must be careful in fellowship to notice how people are doing. Take notice of who is sick, who needs a helping hand, who needs a meal, who needs a drink. Take notice of anyone who missed church. Call, text or visit them

### **Find Out the Needs**

- We have emotional as well as physical needs in the church. In fellowship, take note. When you ask, "Brother/Sister, how are you?" Look into their eyes and let them tell you how they are REALLY doing.
- Concentrate when you have fellowship. Ask specific questions. e.g. 'how is your job?', 'how was the interview', 'how was your visit to the doctor?'

- As humans, we tend to have a lot of emotional needs. They are usually not obvious therefore we must be intuitive. Some disciples are sad, some are lonely, some are afraid. It helps when someone cares enough to listen or pray with them. I was very sick a few years ago. During my recovery, I battled emotionally. Till this day I am grateful to disciples who listened to me and prayed with me.

It is our responsibility to bear each other's burdens. Remember that there is a balance, because just as you want others to help you carry your burdens, you must also be willing to help carry theirs.

May God help us, amen!

#### ***ILLUSTRATION: The Pit***

A man fell into a pit and could not get out.

A subjective person came along and said, "I feel for you, down there."

An objective person came along and said, "It's logical that someone would fall down there."

A Pharisee said, "Only bad people fall into a pit."

A mathematician calculated how he fell into the pit.

A news reporter wanted the exclusive story on his experience.

An IRS man asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.

A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit!"

A charismatic said, "Just confess that you're not in a pit."

An optimist said, "Things could be worse."

A pessimist said, "Things will get worse."

Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.<sup>16</sup>

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## When We All Get To Heaven

*'If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another(world)'*

(C.S. Lewis)

Our thoughts today will be channeled through the words of a famous song of the same title as today's focus. *"When We All Get To Heaven"* This song was written by Eliza Edmunds Hewitt (1851-1920). She was bed-ridden after some serious injuries to her spine. She wrote this song in her sick bed.

*Sing the wondrous love of Jesus,  
Sing His mercy and His grace;  
In the mansion bright and blessed,  
He'll prepare for us a place.*

### John 14:1-4

The wonderful love, mercy and grace that Jesus had for me by dying on the cross was completed by going ahead to prepare for me a mansion above; one that cannot be broken into by burglars, gutted by fire or submerged by flood as being experienced here on earth.

A large impressive house for me? So, why should I envy the duplex of my neighbour, or feel dejected because I live in 'face me, I face you' apartment on this earth? I, honestly, can't wait to acquire this promised mansion.

*While we walk the pilgrim pathway,  
Clouds will overspread the sky;  
But when traveling days are over,  
Not a shadow, not a sigh*

### Acts 14:22

Before we acquire our mansion above, here on earth below we are on a journey laden with trials, tests and temptations. These are to be faced in our marriages, jobs, health, to mention but a few. The journey was never promised to be smooth, but the destination is great. Our enduring in the face of trials, the passing of the test on pride/humility and not giving in to the temptation to cheat on your wife, to cheat at the examination hall or cheat your business partner one day will be worth it - not a sigh indeed.

*Let us then be true and faithful,  
Trusting, serving every day;  
Just a glimpse of Him in glory  
Will the toils of life repay*

### Colossians 3:1-6

Because of the hope and rewards that await us; we should remain faithful to God, working on our righteousness daily. Sins, when not confessed and renounced, break fellowship with God here on earth and lead not to the mansion above.

*When we all get to heaven  
What a day of rejoicing that will be!  
When we all see Jesus,  
We'll sing and shout the victory!*

*'Here in this world,  
He bids us come,  
There in the next,  
He shall bid us welcome'  
- John Donne*

## The Art Of Hospitality (Part 1)

Hospitality could be defined as an act of friendly, generous and cordial treatment of guests.

### **1Peter 4:9-10; Romans12:13.**

Apostle Peter in his writing is encouraging the people to offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. He goes further to say that each of us should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. Hospitality is a gift from God to us.

Paul in the same manner was encouraging the church in Rome to share with God's people who are in need. They should also practise hospitality.

As God's children, we need to identify whether we have this gift and use it to His glory.

Our abilities as disciples should be used faithfully. We need to have the heart and make efforts to meet the needs of others including disciples, families and even strangers.

When we show hospitality to people, it makes them feel loved, refreshed and accepted.

God has really blessed us as disciples in different ways. It is our duty to open our eyes to those gifts and use them to meet each other's needs. He has given us beautiful homes, apartments and other belongings with the intention to use them to glorify him.

### **Luke10:38-42**

Mary and Martha opened their home to our Lord Jesus. I am very sure Jesus felt special by the act of the two sisters. It is all about going the extra length to make our brothers and sisters feel special and warm.

Hospitality according to Paul is clearly stated and he did not categorize or make it for selected few. Every disciple, young, old, single, married, male, female is to practise it.

### **1Timothy3:2**

According to this passage, the aspiring elder must have this quality as to be qualified for eldership.

### **1Pt4:8-11**

We all have something to give. Use whatever gift or ability you have to serve the brotherhood.

In **John21:1-13** our Lord Jesus set us an example; he prepared breakfast for his disciples. Let us imitate the heart of Jesus.

Further Reading

**Acts16:11-15** {Lydia's attitude}; **Acts18:1-3, 24-27** {Priscilla and Aquila's style} **Luke10:7**

### **APPLICATION**

- Would your guest, brother and sister find Christ in your home this year?
- What would you do differently this year to show people around you some hospitality?
- Resolve this year to use your God-given gift to meet other people's needs.



*A story of an American tourist's visit to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. Astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books plus a table and a bench, the tourist asked, 'Rabbi, where is your furniture?' 'Where is yours? Replied the Rabbi, 'Mine? Asked the puzzled American, But, I'm a visitor here and I'm only passing through'. 'So am I' said the rabbi.*

**ILLUSTRATION: Active Benevolence**

*A woman visited New York City, and saw on the sidewalk a ragged cold, and hungry little girl, gazing wistfully at some of the cakes in a shop window. She stopped, and, taking the little one by the hand, led her into the store. Though she was aware that bread might be better for the cold child than cake, yet, desiring to gratify the shivering and abandoned one, she bought and gave her a cake she wanted. She then took her to another place, where she purchased for the girl a shawl and other items of comfort. The grateful little girl looked at the woman right in the eyes, and with precious simplicity said, "Are you God's wife?"<sup>17</sup>*

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## The Art of Hospitality (Part 2)

### Hebrews 13:2

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Can you think of some of the people who entertained angels in the scriptures?

- Abraham
- Gideon
- Lot

What an honour it would have been to “entertain” a celestial visitor! The catch however is that these men didn’t know their visitors were angels until they were about to leave.

### Food for thought

- Would you entertain a stranger or needy person if you knew he or she were an angel from God?
- Would you do the same if you had no prior knowledge of who they were?

One of the main missions of the church is hospitality; not only the corporate church but also individual disciples. The gift of hospitality is an act of spiritual discipline because using our resources, opening our homes, using our money, our lives to help someone, depicts selflessness. In essence, we are saying that the other person’s needs precede ours.

Hospitality is a form of sacrifice because we give without expecting anything in return.

God calls us to be hospitable (not hostile); in order that we may demonstrate the love of God which brings us hope. This love helps us see that hospitality goes far deeper than responding to someone’s immediate and basic needs. It also offers dignity, self-worth and hope to people.

It’s so easy to give to our friends and those we know will reward us. The most challenging part of showing hospitality is when it comes to sharing with total strangers and those who we know might never be able to return the favour.

### Food for thought

Q. What will you do differently this week to show hospitality to strangers?

Q. Will you view every stranger who comes your way as if they were God’s angel?

### Application:

Identify your fears when it comes to entertaining strangers and share this with someone?

## Wounds and Scars: Letting Go Of The Past

In the epic Disney movie 'The Lion King', the fugitive lion king Simba is told that there are two things you can do with the past. You can either run from it or learn from it.

In some ways our past experiences have left us wounded and scarred. This will be the focus of today's quiet time. Ultimately, how you decide to process the past is a personal decision. The real question is this "have my hurts in the past made me a better person today?"

**2 Samuel 13:1-20**, records the disturbing event of the rape of Tamar by her brother Ammon. It is unclear from scripture if Tamar ever recovered from this blow. **Verse 20** says she lived as a desolate woman after her rape. No doubt, life was hard in those days for an unmarried girl who had lost her virginity, but it looks as if Tamar allowed the incident to destroy her.

What is your scar? What/who has hurt you so badly in the past? Where does your pain from the past come from? Rape, chronic illness (like cancer, stroke or HIV), job loss, bereavement, physical disability or even betrayal by a friend can alter your life forever. No doubt, this list is not exhaustive. Take a moment to write down your specific area of struggle and write down how you have handled it up till now.

The following steps will help put you on a path to healing and letting go of the past. Tell yourself 'my past will make me a better person'.

1. Accept it. It has happened. You can't erase it.
2. Refuse to be a victim of it. See it as a challenge to overcome. Positive thinking is an antidote to bitterness. **Philippians 4:8-9** describes how we can direct our thoughts towards peace. The battle begins and ends in the mind.
3. Accept:
  - a. The fact that many people will not relate to your situation. It is not because they don't want to it's simply because they can't.
  - b. The fact is that people care about you and want to help, even if they cannot fully relate. Don't be angry when they tell you to be encouraged. Most times they don't know what else to say, and they sincerely want to reach out to you.
4. Learn from others who have overcome similar situations. Those are your heroes. When you overcome you will also become someone's hero/role model. **2 Corinthians 1:1-4**. God will comfort you so that you can comfort others.
5. God is in control, He is good and He loves you. **Romans 8:28 and v.31-39**. Hold fast to these eternal truths.
6. God is faithful. **1 Corinthians 10:13**. He will surely help you.
7. Accept nothing less than to be free of the negative thoughts and emotions the past can bring.
8. Forgive whoever needs to be forgiven. Do not go around bad-mouthing others. **Ephesians 4:29-32**
9. Even if you were wronged, your love can be a game-changer. **1 Peter 4:8**

Brother, sister, it's time to let go!

Let this New Year be a new beginning for you.

### ILLUSTRATION: Judging the Church

*Spurgeon* tells a story of an American fruit-grower who once tried to persuade a friend to taste apples from his orchard. The friend did not accept the offer, and the fruit grower was offended. The friend frankly told the man that he had once picked up and tasted one of the apples that fell over on the other side of the wall that bordered the orchard and admitted that he had never tasted such a sour apple in his life. Relieved, the grower then explained that he had put those sour apples across the fence to discourage children from stealing from his orchard, which in reality contained some of the sweetest apples to be found in that part of the country. Many people today make the same mistake of judging a church by one "bad apple."<sup>18</sup>



15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

**Matt 18:15-16**

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## Can We Talk? : Understanding And Appreciating Individual Differences

READ AND MEDITATE ON **ROMANS 12:1-8** "...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"

When you experience conflict, it means that someone has a different value or opinion from what you have. Most of us assume that our position is the correct one and we try hard to help the other person see things as clearly as we do. Of course, the other person feels exactly the same way. He/she, in turn, invests an equal amount of energy trying to help you see things from his/her own perspective.

Rather than working at listening and understanding, most of us attempt to change the other person. Sometimes between husband and wife, each feels his/her position on a certain issue is the correct one. To add more muscle to their argument, they would say that their view was the most biblical one.

Some of us have the erroneous belief that disciples who are mature will agree almost all of the time. We tend to believe that every decision made must reflect the unanimity of those involved. Conflict is viewed as a sign of immaturity and worldliness. I dare say that this is not true. In many ways, just the opposite is true.

Those who believe that diversity always leads to division feel threatened by differences. They tend to discourage individual uniqueness and creativity. Individuals are therefore pressured not to disagree. Spirituality and maturity are in part determined by the degree to which everyone thinks. Wareen Wiersbe says that "unity without diversity leads to uniformity". If everyone always agrees and thinks alike, then no one thinks very much at all!

Jesus Christ died to take away our sins, not our minds. In fact, in **Romans 12:1-2** Paul tells us that in the process of making us holy God wants to renew our minds. In **Philippians 2:5** we are encouraged to have the mind of Jesus.

**Further study:**  
**2 Corinth 4: 16**  
**Colossian 3:10**  
**Isaiah 40:31**

1. What kind of people are threatened by differences?
2. What happens when you experience conflict?

Be honest and ask yourself, if you are threatened by differences or you work hard at listening and understanding others.

### **Joking Apart Evangelist/Choirmaster Feud**

There was a feud between an Evangelist and the Choirmaster of a Church.

It seems the first hint of trouble came when the Evangelist preached a sermon on, "**dedicating yourselves to service**" and the Choirmaster chose to sing: "**I Shall Not Be Moved.**"

Trying to believe it was a coincidence; the Evangelist put the incident behind him. The next Sunday he preached on "**giving**". Afterwards, the Choir fidgeted as the choirmaster led them in the hymn: "**Jesus Paid It All.**"

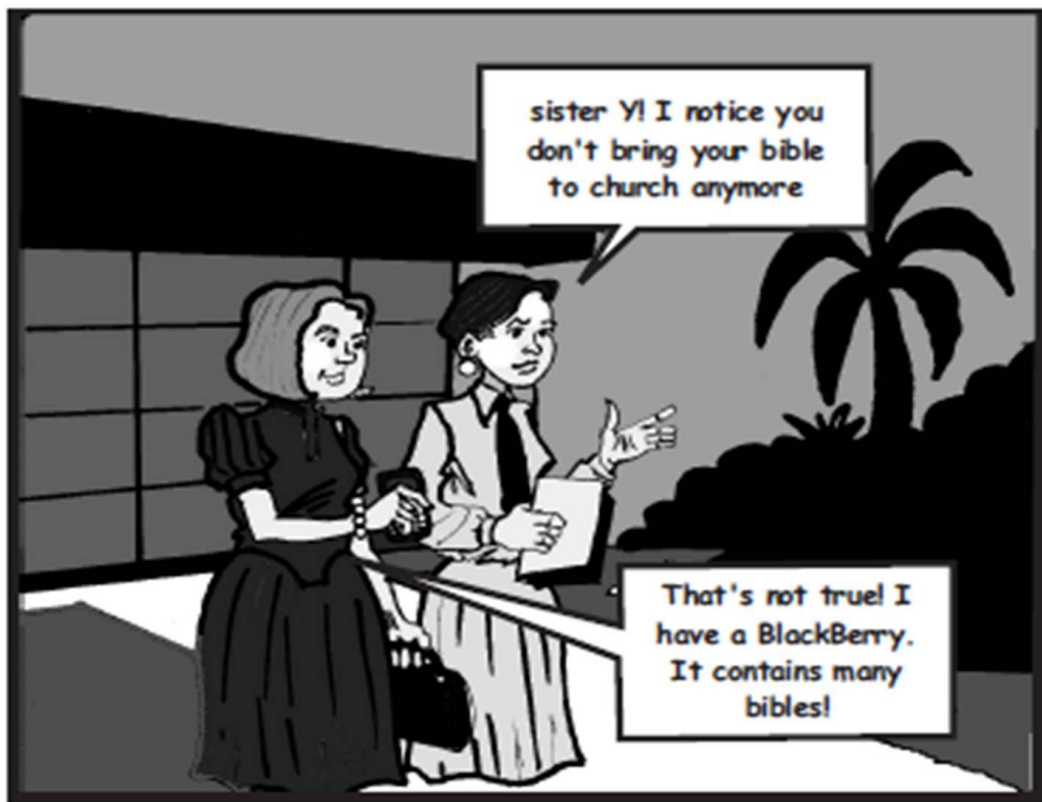
By this time, the Evangelist was losing his temper. Sunday morning attendance swelled as the tension between the two built. A large crowd showed up the next week to hear his sermon on "**the sin of gossip**". Would you believe the Choirmaster selected: "**I Love To Tell the Story**"!

There was no turning back now. The following Sunday the Evangelist told the congregation that unless something changed he was considering resignation. The entire church gasped when the Choirmaster led them in: "**Why Not Tonight.**"

Truthfully, no one was surprised when the Evangelist resigned a week later; explaining that Jesus had led him there and Jesus was leading him away. The Choirmaster could not resist as he did a solo: "**What a Friend We Have in Jesus.**"

### **Food for Thought:**

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. (1 Thess. 5:12-13)



**14** *I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*  
**Rom 15:14-15**

## Understanding The Evolution And Downward Slide Of Conflict

Read and Meditate on **Romans 7: 14-25**

"... So I find this law at work: When I want to do good evil is right there with me"

- a. "When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway". This is what Paul is saying in **Romans 7:14-25**. "But thanks be to Jesus who rescued us from this body of death."

Have you ever felt like this before? A kind of intense spiritual battle against your soul?

What is the point here?

- CONFLICT BEGINS WHEN GOOD CONFRONTS EVIL. THE TWO CANNOT PEACEFULLY CO-EXIST, ONE MUST TRIUMPH

- b. Read **2 Samuel 15:1-12**... "Absalom stole the hearts of the people ... and the conspiracy gained momentum."

- A TIMES CONFLICT BEGINS WHEN WE DON'T GET WHAT WE WANT AND THE ONLY WAY TO GET IT IS TO TAKE IT FROM SOMEONE ELSE. THIS LEADS TO DISAGREEMENT AND CAN LEAD TO OPEN WARFARE

- c. Read **Acts 15 36-41** ... Their disagreement over this issue was so sharp that they separated. Two people who had been working together on the mission field had to part ways due to disagreement. (Though it was later resolved **1 Tim 4: 11; Col 4:10**)

- CONFLICT BEGINS WHEN TWO OPPOSING VIEW POINTS ARE NOT WILLING TO FIND A COMMON GROUND

- d. Read **Ester 3:1-9** "...Mordecai refused to bow ... So Haman was filled with rage." He decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. He decided to destroy all the Jews throughout the empire.

- CONFLICT BEGINS WHEN WE SEEK REVENGE

- e. Read **Proverbs 13:10**. Pride leads to arguments.

- f. Read **Proverbs 28:25** Greed causes fighting.

- g. Read **Proverbs 30:33** Anger causes quarrels.

- h. Read **James 4:1**

What is causing the quarrel and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you?

- PRIDE, GREED, ANGER ARE ALL ASPECTS OF OUR SINFUL HUMAN NATURE, AND THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT BRING US INTO CONFLICT WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

Read **Romans 7:22-23**

- DISCIPLES OF CHRIST MUST ALSO EXPERIENCE CONFLICT WITHIN THEMSELVES. BETWEEN THE OLD SINFUL NATURE AND THE NEW SPIRITUAL NATURE. THIS IS WHERE CONFLICT ALSO BEGINS. SO AS A DISCIPLE YOU MUST BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THESE AREAS.

1. Identify the causes and sources of your conflicts using the scriptures above.
2. Talk about it with your spouse and your disciple. Decide on steps to take and win the battle.



## **JOKING APART**

### **“Forgive Your Enemies”**

The preacher, in his Sunday sermon, used "Forgive Your Enemies" as his subject. After a long sermon, he asked how many were willing to forgive their enemies. About half held up their hands. Not satisfied he preached for another twenty minutes and repeated his question. This time he received a response of about 80 percent. Still unsatisfied, he lectured for another 15 minutes and repeated his question. With all thoughts now on Sunday dinner, all responded except one elderly lady in the rear.

"Mrs. Jones, are you not willing to forgive your enemies?"

"I don't have any."

"Mrs. Jones, that is very unusual. How old are you?"

"Ninety three."

"Mrs. Jones, please come down in front and tell the congregation how a person can live to be ninety-three, and not have an enemy in the world."

The little sweetheart of a lady tottered down the aisle, very slowly turned around and said:

"It's easy, I just outlived those troublemakers!"

## Practical Ways To Resolving Conflicts

READ AND MEDITATE ON, **Genesis 13:7-9**.

Look at the heart of Abram here and his spiritual maturity. He told Lot, "This argument between you and me and between your herdsman and mine must stop. For we are brothers. So this is what we will do."

- RESOLVING CONFLICT TAKES INITIATIVE; SOMEONE MUST MAKE THE FIRST MOVE. ABRAM GAVE LOT FIRST CHOICE, PUTTING FAMILY PEACE ABOVE PERSONAL DESIRES. GOD BLESSED THAT DECISION. UNKNOWINGLY TO LOT HE CHOSE SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Read **Genesis 26:17-22** "...Isaac's men dug well, there was fight over it. He dug another well but again there was a fight over it ... he dug another well, and the local people finally left him alone."

- RESOLVING CONFLICT TAKES HUMILITY, A DESIRE TO SEEK PEACE MORE THAN PERSONAL VICTORY. YOU MAY HAVE TO MAKE EVERY EFFORT LIKE ISAAC TO ACHIEVE PEACE IN A CONFLICT

Read 2 Samuel 3: This was the beginning of a long war between those who had been loyal to Saul and those who were loyal to David.

- RESOLVING CONFLICT INVOLVES COMPROMISE. FINDING COMMON GROUND THAT IS BIGGER THAN YOUR DIFFERENCES. IF NEITHER SIDE IS WILLING TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE OR SHOW THE NECESSARY HUMILITY TO SEEK COMMON GROUND, CONFLICT WILL RESULT IN A BROKEN FRIENDSHIP, DIVORCE OR EVEN WAR

Read **1 Corinthians 6: 1-8**) – Disciples having lawsuits among themselves is a sign of defeat. It is better to just accept the injustice and leave it at that. Why not let yourselves be cheated?

- WE MIGHT HAVE TO GIVE UP OUR RIGHTS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Read **John 17: 20-23** - YOU SHOULD PRAY FOR PEACE AND UNITY WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

Read **2 Timothy 2: 24-25** - The Lord's servant (as disciples, we are servants of Jesus Christ) must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone. We must be patient with difficult people. We should gently teach those who oppose the truth.

- WHEN PEOPLE DISAGREE WITH WHAT WE ARE SAYING, WE MUST MAINTAIN A GRACIOUS AND GENTLE ATTITUDE INSTEAD OF BECOMING ANGRY AND DEFENSIVE
1. Are you putting the peace within your bible talk, family group above your personal desires? What about your region? Your ministry or church?
  2. Would you rather seek peace than your personal victory?
  3. Are you praying for peace and unity with other people like Jesus?

Make a list of changes you need to make towards resolving unresolved conflicts in your life.

## CONCLUSION

Read and Meditate on **Ephesians 4:12-16**

In sports-football, basketball, baseball, volleyball, etc., you see grown men standing toe to toe, faces red, veins popping out of their necks as they shout at each other, "my ball" "No, it's our ball". "Offside" "No, it's a penalty" If a player disagrees with the referee's call; a spectacular and entertaining argument sometimes ensues.

Since people have different opinions on everything from sports to politics to religion, conflict seems to be unavoidable in human relationships. The Bible does not hide from the issue of conflict, nor does it condemn all conflicts as sinful. From Moses to David to Jesus to Paul, the Bible's greatest figures found themselves in conflict. According to the Bible, there is nothing inherently wrong with conflict. Disagreements happen. But the manner in which we are to resolve our conflicts is extremely important.

Conflict can become the catalyst to greater understanding, intimacy, and depth of relationship, or it can bring anger, bitterness, and broken relationships.

How has your conflict with other people affected your relationship with them? Do you resolve your conflict with people in a godly or ungodly manner?

Does your conflict with people result into intimacy, greatest understanding and deeper relationship with them? Or does your conflict with people produce anger, bitterness and broken relationships? If it is on the negative side, you must start to bring together those broken relationships. If it is on the positive side, keep it up.

The goal is to become more and more like Jesus until we all reach unity in faith.

#### **Further Reading:**

Galatians 3: 28; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 1: 28; 1 Peter 3: 8; Ephesians 2: 14; Isaiah 11: 13; Jeremiah 50: 4; Exodus 17: 12; Judges 20: 11; 1 Samuel 14: 6-7; Nehemiah 4: 16-17; Mark 2: 3; Chronicles 12: 38.

#### **ILLUSTRATION: God's Mercy**

John Newton claims: *"For my own part, if my pocket was full of stones, I have no right to throw one at the greatest backslider upon the earth. I have either done as bad or worse than he, or I certainly should if the Lord had left me a little to myself; for I am made of just the same materials: if there be any difference, it is wholly of grace."*<sup>19</sup>

#### **ILLUSTRATION: Contentious Peacemakers**

Perhaps it has been true at times that the only way to get peace was by means of war; more often, however, the remedy has proven far worse than that which it strove to banish. There is a story told of a man who was awakened one night by the sound of a gunshot in his room. On inquiring the cause, his servant replied that there was a rat in the room, and, fearing it would awaken his master, he shot it.

Here is logic surpassed only by that of the brother who is willing to throw the whole church into turmoil for the sake of getting rid of something that he fears may cause dissension.<sup>20</sup>

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"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain;..." – Mark 7:6-7

## Coaching, Mentoring and Discipling

(Competent to instruct one another)

*"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another"*  
**(Romans 15:14)**

A brother recently commented that perhaps the only thing that we do better than other religious groups which differentiates us for many years is "DISCIPLING". Mention evangelism or prayer for instance, we can come up with at least a group each that does better than us, and these groups have been known for these for years. Yet, for us this valuable practice that we have had and known for years is fast becoming weakened in our church.

Discipling is meant to achieve certain goals in the body of Christ, and I think one of those is to keep helping each other to know what Jesus would do in every situation, so that when we are faced with the same situation, we can make a righteous decision.

"What would Jesus do?" was a mantra so common in the church in the early 90s' when I was a young Christian. It was not needed to make a choice between eating rice or yam for example, but was needed to choose either to eat the rice or yam in debauchery or share with someone else that is in need.

Working in one of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation banks some fifteen years ago, every staff was expected to clock in the time they resumed work. There were those that would clock in 7.30am instead of the 8.30am they got to work. Many at times I was faced with such situation, but the question, 'what would Jesus do?' helped me all through with this and other situations and yet, there were times I didn't ask the question and did what Jesus would not do.

These days, the climate in our fellowship sometimes suggests that this mantra has been thrown to the wind.

\*When pornographic pictures pop up on your computer for example, do you ask "what would Jesus would do?". Or you stay glued to it?

\*Again, when driving and you encounter another driver driving recklessly, do you ask the same question? Or you join in reckless driving?

'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1)

I was called into the ministry in 1998 by a brother who now resides outside the country. This brother disciplined me between 1995 and 1999. Even if I didn't know then much of what Jesus would do through my personal knowledge of Jesus, I knew through imitating this brother. The imitations were so noticeable that some dubbed me his 'son'. For me, it was an era of coaching, mentoring and discipling to the core.

It takes humility to imitate others. Whose marriage (for those who are married) are you imitating? If you manage your own business outfit, do you seek input from those who are doing same in godly manners? I submit to you that disciplining is a way of helping each other to know what Jesus would do. Unfortunately today, many are not seizing this wonderful opportunity to keep a check on their spiritual life but rather fight it as they indulge in sin.

### Some reasons why some resist discipling

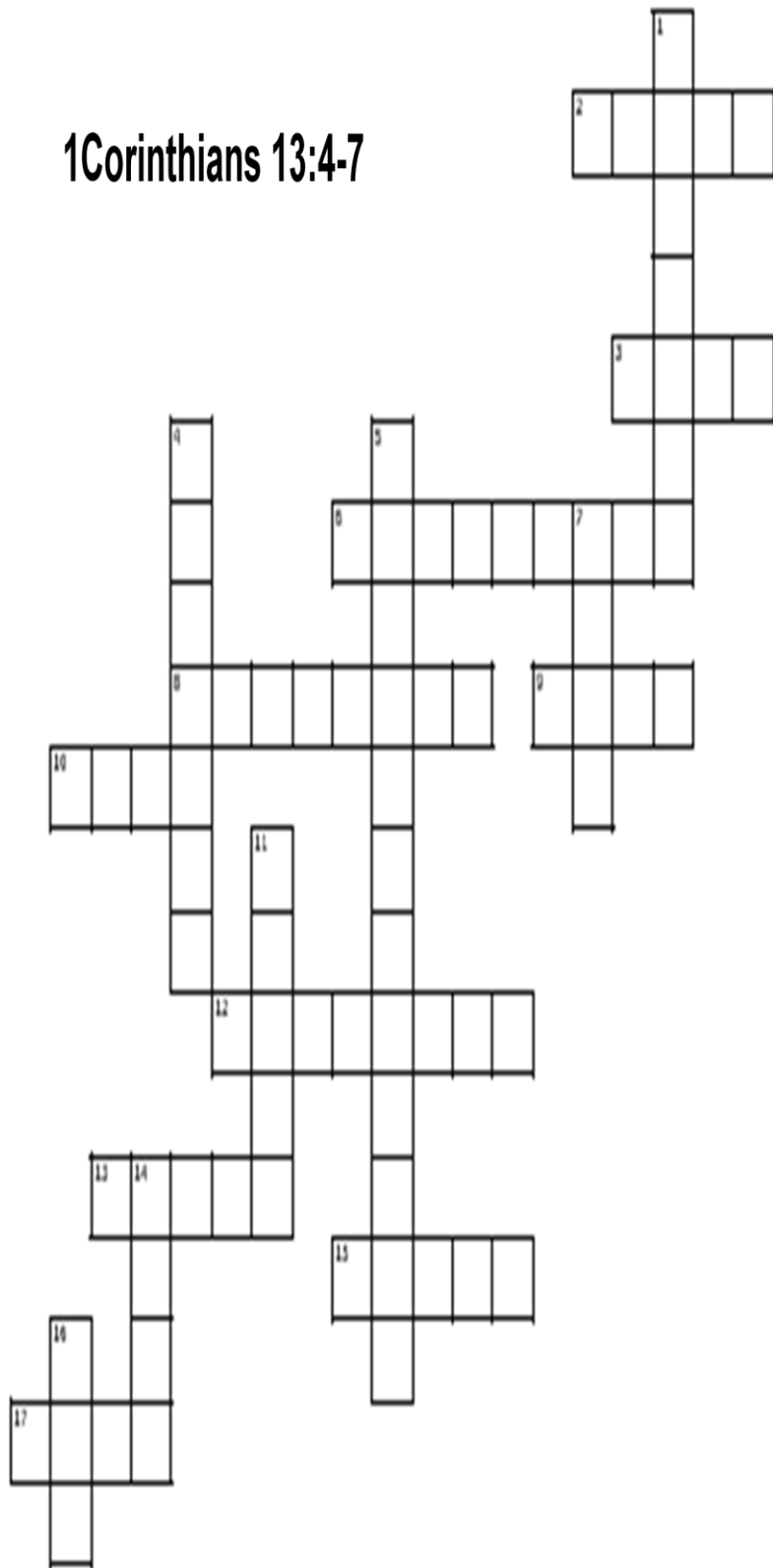
- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| - Lack of scriptural understanding:         | Matt 22:29                 |
| - Transference of past negative experience: | 2Pet. 1:5-9                |
| - Personal Complex:                         | 1Cor 1;26-31               |
| - Lack of trust and openness:               | Rom. 15:13-14; 1Cor. 6;1-3 |
| - "Small Picture" mentality:                | Rom. 8:12-30               |

## Challenge

Resolve today to embrace Discipling and all the benefits that come with it.

***“By three methods we may learn wisdom. First, by reflection, which is the noblest, second, by imitation, which is the easiest, and third by experience, which is the bitterest.” – Confucius***

### 1Corinthians 13:4-7



#### HINTS

##### Across

- 2. high opinion of one's self
- 3. considerate
- 6. continue in a course of action in spite of difficulty
- 8. honest
- 9. extremely wicked
- 10. Deep affection
- 12. capacity to tolerate
- 13. belief in someone
- 15. strong feeling of annoyance
- 17. feeling of expectation

##### Down

- 1. stop feeling angry
- 4. keep safe from harm or injury
- 5. pursuing one's own welfare
- 7. discontented
- 11. talk with excessive pride
- 14. ill-mannered
- 16. feeling of great happiness

## Praying for One another

I have closely observed that when all hope is lost people do turn to God in prayer as last resort. This is common even among non-Christians. These days if you invite people to a church service they may give you many reasons why they will not attend; but if you tell them to come for prayers about issues affecting their lives they may make time to attend.

Without doubt most people agree that prayer is very important. Take time out to write out a list of things in your life you will like to pray about; you will realize that there are a good number of things that will keep you on your knees for at least 30 minutes or more. The problem is that we get hooked on praying for our needs and forget that life is not only about “me” but “us”. The aim of this lesson is to help remind each other that life is about “US”.

For us to ensure we pray for each other we need to consider the following:

### **The Need for Fellowship:**

**Acts 2:42, 44, 46**

*42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

*44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.*

*46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,*

I isolated these verses from this scripture to emphasize the need for fellowship. Fellowship entails: meeting, getting to know each other, encouraging each other, confession of sins, talking honestly about life issues and praying with and for each other. Often in casual conversations, people ask me to pray for them about issues in their lives and families but I tend to forget and do not remember them in prayer. For some I do pray once about it and move on. I guess it happens to you too. How then can we deal with this weakness of self-centeredness? We need to deepen our fellowship. Unless we are close and meet often and talk deeply we may not see the need to pray for each other.

Another reason we need to deepen our fellowship is to help us distinguish between the urgent and the important. The story of Martha and Mary in **Luke 10:38-42** helps us understand the difference between urgent and important. When Jesus visited them, Martha chose the urgent i.e. to entertain their guest. (This was good by the way) but Mary chose the Important i.e. to listen to Jesus.

My point in this is that the urgent has a way of overshadowing the important. When we have needs, the urgent may mean to go ask someone to meet that need. The important is to first ask God who truly meets our needs. When we are worried about life's problems we need the fellowship of believers to help remind us about the important (prayer). I have followed up on people who had asked me to pray for them on a particular issue in their lives, to see if God had answered. To my amazement I learned that they were not even praying for it themselves! We all need to put prayer in its right place in our lives, not just the usual lip service. When someone asks you to remember them in prayers for some issues in their life, why not ask them for you two to pray right there and then? Why wait? When you visit a disciple, don't leave without praying together. When singles go out on dates, why not end with prayer?

For those of us who are parents you will realize that our children often pray for their close friends. We can do the same when we deepen our fellowship.

### **Application:**

- Decide to spend quality time with a disciple every Sunday.
- Invite someone home this week and spend quality time with them
- Visit a brother/sister today and spend quality time together.

May God bless you as you do this.

## Many Parts, One Body

### 1corinthians12:12-27

As Paul went on to teach about unity among Christians he used the illustration of the human body which is a unit but comprises of many members (parts).

Developing his thoughts, he began explaining how the different members work in the body as a unit. Every member seeks the good of the body, every member contributes its part accordingly, every part is content with its ability and role, every part appreciates the contribution of each other for the common good.

I believe in the adage that, "If you know and are convinced about who you are then you will know how to behave". That is the case with the human body. There is complete awareness in our bodies. Every part knows there is a function it has to perform in the body. Every part knows what other members of the body are there to do; they help to complement each other's effort.

This awareness brings security to the body. No part is jealous or angry or envious of others.

Paul sees this as a way of explaining how Christians should function as a unit. Let us note some key points:

- Every part must have its role. In the same way every disciple of Jesus MUST have a role to play in the church. There is no such thing as an ordinary disciple; we are extraordinary people serving a highly extraordinary God. When we make ourselves redundant in the Body of Christ we become like dead ends of a tree that need pruning or complete cut-off

### John 15:1-2

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."*

When one is "ordinary" to the church it will just be a matter of time before that person is cut off but when you are useful God prunes you to keep you sharp.

- Every part MUST play its role in the body. Our roles mostly follow the pattern of the gifts and skills God has accorded us. This will put responsibility on our side to keep up with our roles
- Next is to value the roles of others: there is no super member in the church. Jesus is the super star of the church not us. (This in no way undermines the respect due those who sacrifice more) .The point however is that those who serve in public areas like preaching, singing, administration etc. should be reminded that their role is as important as one serving in the kids ministry, or the brother who does security or cleaning. Respect each other's role in the church. When this concept is clear then there is no need for insecurity

We must think of ways to help those from insecure background to know that they are in a family where the colour of their skin, the size of their house, the reserve in your bank account etc. are no obstacle but a unifying strength in our church family. Let us discourage the issue of class, position and completely rid our family of worldliness. We are not of the world but Christ has chosen us out of the world

### Food for thought:

- Are you aware of the godly outlook the church of God should reflect?
- Have you identified your role(s) in the church based on your gifts and skills?
- Are you being responsible enough to use you gifts and skills in the church?
- Do you have anything you are contributing towards the advancement of the church?
- Do you wish to be in the position of service of another brother/sister?
- Do you feel at home or like a stranger in the church?
- Good to have you in the family of God; we are one body of Jesus Christ that has destroyed the frontiers of class, power drunkenness, envy and the likes. Keep the fire burning!



# **OUTREACH: LOVING THE UNREACHED**

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields!

They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together."

**(John 4:34-37)**

## Compelled by Christ's Love

### 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

For as long as mankind exists on earth, there will never be a message more important than the message of the cross. The eternal hope of the human race hangs on the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we experience the hustle, bustle (and hassle) of life, the message of the cross is obliterated by life's demands. As a result,

- The cross loses its power in our lives
- We fail, as carriers of this saving message, to point a lost world to the cross

The ultimate measure of your Christian life is determined by what the cross means to you

The fruit of your Christian life will be determined by your response to the cross

I remember as a young Christian, meditating on all this. 'Why do I do what I do?' I asked myself. I found answers in scriptures. The book of 2 Corinthians answered all these questions and more. **2 Corinthians 5** became my favourite chapter. It reminded me of

- God's love and plans for me
- My eternal destiny
- My role in fulfilling God's salvation plan for the world

We are compelled by Christ's love to be God's ambassadors. The people of the world may not understand, (v.11-13) but those chosen for salvation will be eternally grateful.

### 2 Corinthians 6:1

We are commanded not to receive God's grace in vain.  
How is God's grace producing spiritual fruit in your life?

### 2 Corinthians 6:2

Now is the day of salvation. John 4:35-36. Today is the day to share your faith. Do not procrastinate. Be motivated by Christ's love for you.

### 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

The Apostle Paul is an amazing example because he lived his entire life in appreciation of Christ's love.

- What will Christ's love motivate you to do today?
- What hardships will hold you back?
- Write down what you will do to overcome such hardships

Our ultimate example is Christ himself.

**1 Peter 2:19-21:** It was difficult for Jesus to demonstrate his love to mankind. If he suffered, and being our master, should we not also be prepared to suffer?

**John 12:27:** Jesus did not hold back his amazing love. Will you hold back yours? Let Christ's love compel you to live for Him in amazing ways.



## Remember The Poor

*'There are people so hungry in the world that, God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread'*  
(Mahatma Gandhi)

*'All they asked was that we should remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do'*  
(Galatians 2:10)

The three key words for me in this passage are;

- **Remember:** to have or keep in memory
- **Poor:** lacking in something or having something in small quantity
- **Eager:** full of desire or interest, being keen

These definitions can be applied to certain things in my life. For instance, as a football enthusiast, I keep in memory very important European football fixtures and look forward to them with keen interest. I am sure there are things in your life you too can relate to this way.

The poor also deserve such attitude in our lives. In our bible talks/family groups, neighbourhoods and families are those who lack in some ways. You may only know them and act accordingly if you don't keep to yourself or make 'self' your primary focus.

The poor could be that family struggling to complete their children school fees or house rents, or a brother/sister who can't pay all the medical bills for treating malaria or typhoid.

*"As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 'I tell you the truth,' he said, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:1-4)*

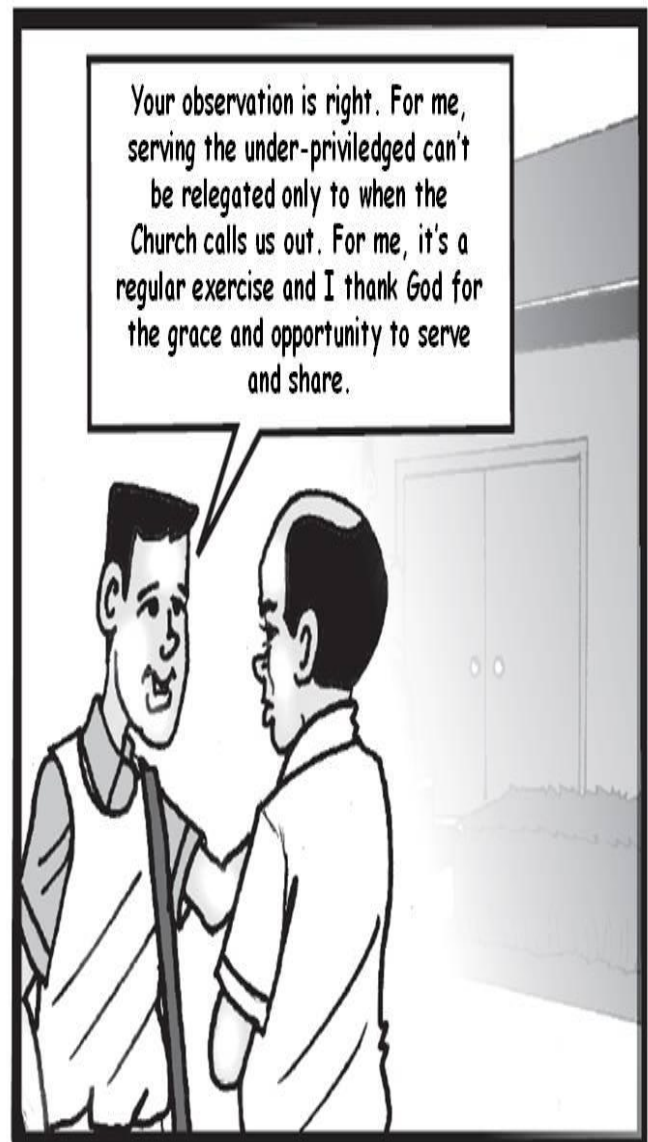
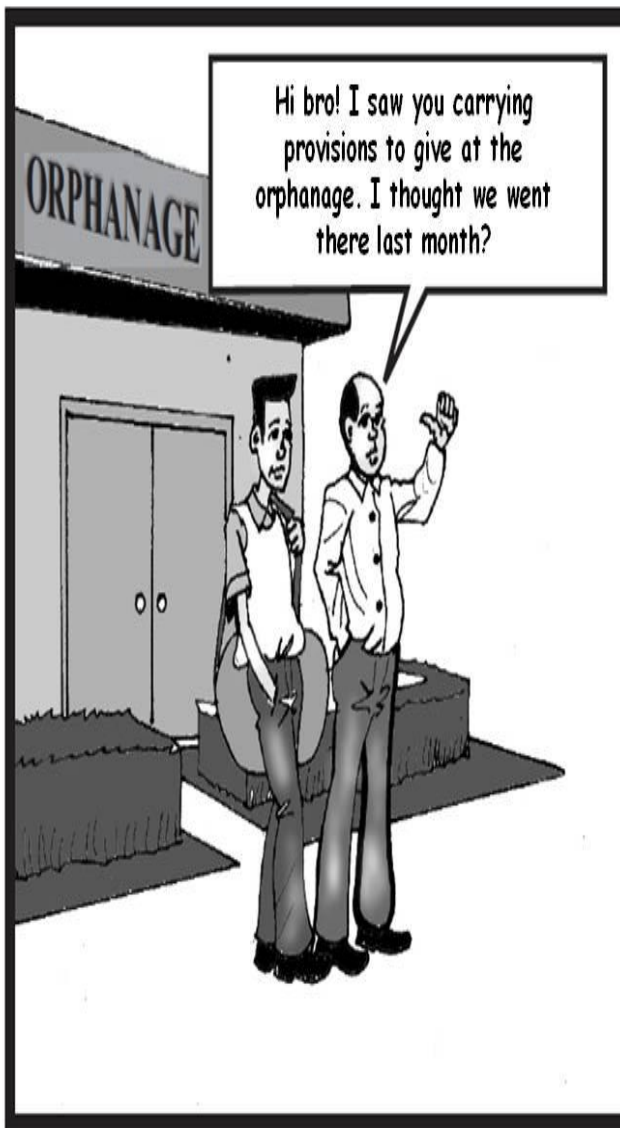
"I don't have enough myself" can't be a justifiable reason not to think of the under-privileged and the needy around us. Your little contribution could go a long way to put a smile on the face of someone.

A key word that will help us change our paradigm is "need". Someone can be "rich" but in need. When we focus on meeting "needs" then it will be easy not to draw a line that only identifies certain category of people as being the only ones deserving our benevolence. This mind set breaks the stigma that giving is only relegated to parting with money. Many today are poor when it comes to having friends and companions. Your presence, encouragement, prayer, assurance, understanding, empathy, correction, direction, service or assistance can make a difference.

The other truth is also that many are out there in need of material needs and should be remembered by us individually and collectively. Yet, as they say 'charity begins at home'.

Decide to take your fellowship deeper this week. Take genuine interest in the welfare of fellow members and where there is a need, please meet it and God will bless you accordingly.

*"Once poverty is gone, we'll need to build museums to display its horrors to future generations. They'll wonder why poverty continued so long in human society-a few people could live in luxury while billions dwelt in misery, deprivation and despair" (Muhammad Yunus)*



## Woe To Me If I Do Not Preach

### 1 Cor 9:16

*16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

Why was Paul so compelled to preach?

What do you know about preaching? What is preaching?

- To preach is to publicly proclaim (in this case) a religious message

### 1 Tim 1:12-16

- Paul understood the gospel; the good news, the saving message of God's grace
- He understood his sinfulness before God and how he was shown mercy
- He understood many are still sinful and may be acting in ignorance
- Paul was deeply broken about his own sin **1Timothy1:15 "...Christ Jesus came to the world to die for sinners-of whom I am the worst"**. This brokenness enabled him to deeply appreciate God's grace.

### 1 Cor 15:10

*10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*

- The grace of God was in effect in Paul's life.
- The grace was not just a concept for Paul; it was something that had a powerful effect in him. It changed the view he had of himself and others.

### APPLICATION

Are you grateful to God?

**How do you show gratitude to God?**

Is God's grace of effect in your life?

Resolve to be compelled to preach i.e. inspiring challenge in people to live for God.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

**2Kings7:1-9; Ps51:10-13; 2Timothy4:1-2**

### ILLUSTRATION: "The Right to Remain Silent"

*Many of us are familiar with the Miranda Act which instructs all peace officers to give the arrested party a review of their rights as a United States citizen. Often we hear these famous lines on television or relayed over the radio. The one most of us can remember the best is "You have the right to remain silent; anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law . . ." The first time you hear these words spoken in person, you realize the gravity of the situation.*

*In a somewhat different way, the believer is asked a different sort of question by the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We are questioned about our faith and trust in God for our eternal salvation on a daily basis by the world, and commanded to witness for the Lord in His Word. As a recent songwriter wrote: "you don't have the right to remain silent if you have been arrested by God's grace." The truth is that we are commanded in the Bible that we do not have the right to remain silent about our faith. Christians are called to tell the world about Christ's death, resurrection, and His saving grace, and to tell of how we have been pardoned for our sins (1 Peter 3:15). How can we then be silent about the joy of knowing Christ! Share Him with someone today!<sup>21</sup>*

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## The Bible Talk: Our First Line Of Offence And Defence

### 2 Cor. 3:15- 4:3.

*"Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing."*

It is a common saying that "People fear what they do not understand". So often we stay away from the source of discipline because of the fear of repercussion. Our relationship with God should not be borne out of the fear of hell but compelled by the sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.

I remember an experience I had in my secondary school days. At that stage in life we knew the danger in meddling with naked electric wire. There was such exposed in my secondary school dormitory then. Initially we stayed clear of the naked wire until we were made to understand that there was no voltage running through it. With this new knowledge we threw caution to the wind and we handled the wire anytime we so desired. Unfortunately and unknown to us repairs on electrical wiring of the dormitory were later done- and our once harmless naked wire came to life. The shock came when one of us casually rested on the wire while he was in a deep conversation with another student.

My point is that people's hearts are veiled because to them the word of God does not carry that voltage that should jolt them to embrace the truth. Like the electric wire in its former state, there are a lot of things today that distract us from God, that are actually dead and irrelevant. **Verse 17 of chapter 3** states, "...where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom". And this freedom, the absence of fear ought to allow us experience and express Christ freely and boldly, much so because we are in his likeness.

I'm not unaware of the fact that a larger part of the world does not know Christ as they should. A good number have heard but not convinced, because of the veil that covers their hearts. But as for us to whom the ministry of reconciliation has been given, we must demonstrate that transformation into Christ likeness and expose the word clearly.

As Paul observed with the Corinthians, the word of God is veiled to those who are perishing. Why is the word of God veiled to those in my neighborhood? There is a clear and present fear which has watered down their fear for God. The crave for money and power in the society has veiled the hearts of many (including some disciples), therefore leading to the apathy currently being experienced in many of our Bible Talk units.

A lot of us do not believe that money and power are the sole preserve of God. That is why it is difficult for us to gravitate towards Him.

Unfortunately, I sometimes conform to these basic values of society which has adversely affected my bible talk. But we have all made serious commitment to the bible talk and there is excitement amongst us once again the though visitor attendance needs to go up.

**2 Cor. 4:1.** "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart."

Yes, there are challenges but we will continue to hold discussions with our friends / neighbours through this unit. This is the avenue for us to bring salvation to our community and, by so doing, strengthen the spiritual hedge around us. We shall continue to do this because we have renounced all our secret and shameful ways.

## Mission Impossible: When To Shake The Dust Off Your Feet

### **Matt 11:20-24**

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. **21** "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. **22** But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. **23** And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. **24** But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

For all those you who are actively involved in seeking and saving, you'll agree with me that this is a heart breaking moment for Jesus. Even the son of God had his share of rejection on the mission field!

Let's see Saul's first attempt as a Christian preacher as recorded in **Acts 9:19-25**

*Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. **20** At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. **21** All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" **22** Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. **23** After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, **24** but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. **25** But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.*

This was just after his conversion. Many times we are so optimistic that if we can change, then it should be easy for the rest of the world. This was a lesson Paul had to repeatedly learn. The most instructive part of it all is that, rather than the situation discouraging Paul, we actually see him getting stronger, deeper, more prayerful and tactful with each rejection. He came from being lowered through a basket to standing before governors, high priests and kings!

### **Matt 10:14-15 (Luke 9:4-6, Mark 6:11)**

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.

"And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. <sup>5</sup> If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them."

Jesus is saying, "It's not about you, it's about me and the message you have"

It's so easy to swing and get personal when rejected. As we combine this period of spiritual revival with an outward focus of seeking and saving the lost, let us be guided by the wise admonitions of Peter and Paul.

### **1 Peter 3:15-17**

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

- Always do good even when rejected



- Give an answer, not quarrel or arguing
- Let your goal and motivation come from pleasing Christ not yourself, then it will be Christ they are rejecting not you. This "I am just a messenger" mindset will insulate our hearts.

### 1 Cor 3:5-9

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. **6** I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. **7** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. **8** The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. **9** For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

- Know who you are – Gardeners and Water boys, nothing more or less
- Sometimes the seeds don't grow when we expect them. I remember reaching out to and baptizing someone who turned out surprisingly open! The truth is I was reaping from the years of labour of some other disciples. I only came into the picture just at the right time this person's heart was considering making the decision to follow Christ
- Don't take the position of God. Remember that we are planters and water boys; God is the one who makes things grow. Don't play God
- Soul-winning is a labour that should be based on love not self-gratification



## With That Very Passage of Scripture

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

### Acts 8:34-35

Once upon a time, a brother told how disappointed he was when he got a rare opportunity to share his faith but didn't have the **STUDY GUIDE!**

Have you ever found yourself in this situation? Think of how Philip felt when God gave him the incredible opportunity to convert a Country's equivalent of a Finance minister.

Read Paul's admonition to young Timothy...

### 2 Tim 4:2-5

*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. **3** For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **4** They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. **5** But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

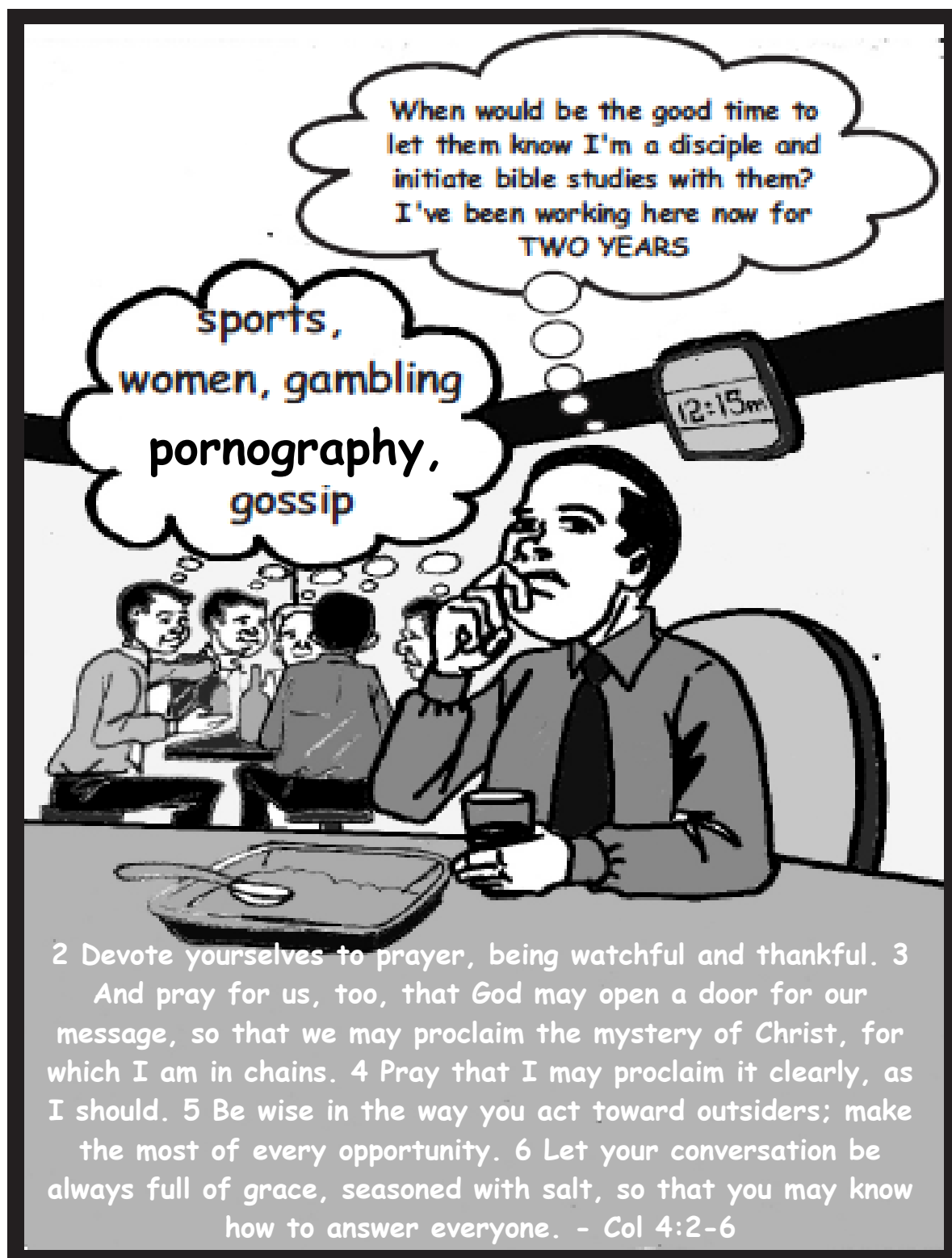
- We have to preach (No excuse!)
- Be all round in your teaching (correct, rebuke and encourage)
- Our preaching will curb false doctrines
- It won't be easy
- Go all the way

A great example of a disciple who was ever ready to preach was Stephen. Take some time out today to read again the brief account of this fiery disciple who told his entire audience the history of God's people. This account is found in **Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-60**

### Memory scripture

#### 1 Peter 3:15-16

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect



## Salt Of The Earth, Light Of The World

*All things to all men*

If you know who you are then you will know how to behave.

We like to be great but we should also know that greatness comes with challenges and responsibilities.

***In case we are in doubt about our identity; this is what Jesus has to say in Matt.5:13-16***

*13"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*

Jesus uses a metaphor when he referred to the disciples as the salt of the earth.

### **What is the role of salt in food?**

Salt adds value to food by making it tasty.

In the same way, Jesus is saying that disciples are those who add value to the lives of others.

In other words he is saying that the world without disciples is like soup without salt!

Disciples make the difference in the world.

Jesus says if we lose our value as disciples how can we be useful to the world again?

He stressed the need to know who we really are - we add value.

Our worth is that value of spiritual saltiness in us.

### **What is it in us that the world needs?**

Our unconditional love, our willingness to forgive, our sacrifice for others, our moral uprightness (honesty, transparency, accountability, purity, etc.) - this is why the world needs us. These are what will bring others to Christ.

A good example to think about is the fact that the only reason a sports club will require the services of a player is when he or she has something to offer that club.

### **Additional Qualities of Salt**

- Salt as a preservative
- Salt as a disinfectant
- Salt as anti-slip agent
- Salt makes colours fast
- Salt as antiseptic
- Salt as a cleansing agent
- Salt as medicine

### **What do you have in you that can add a taste of value to the world?**

When we lose our taste of value we become just like the world.

What are the symptoms of a disciple who has lost his value?

- No time for God (in bible study, prayer and meditation)
- No feeling of guilt of sin, desires are material dominated
- One becomes a shadow of oneself, no sense of responsibility towards the lost

If this is what you see in your life then get help from stronger disciples immediately!

### **Matt.5:14-15**

*"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

Jesus told his disciples that they bring light to the world.

- This means that we are the ones who will help the world to see things through God's eyes with good life examples
- We are a light that cannot be hidden just as a city on a hill cannot be hidden
- We cannot hide the light in us but must help others to see it

Jesus commanded the disciples to let their light shine before men, let people see their good deeds. That will make them praise God in Heaven.

### **Who is light?**

**1 John 1:5** God is Light (of the universe)

We are the light of the world i.e. we represent God on earth. We are the ones that will show the world how God looks like.

Our good and godly deeds are what the world needs to see and glorify God.

They glorify God because people will realize that our good deeds are as a result of faith in God.

What are these good deeds our lives should reflect?

- No adultery, generous in giving, prayerful, fasting, storing your treasure in heaven, no anxiety, loving your enemy, forgiving those who hurt you, keeping of oath, no divorce, no murder, etc.(as seen in Matt.5,6-7)

How are you doing with these virtues in your life?

This is what it will take for us to be the salt and light of the earth.

Being a disciple of Jesus comes with a huge responsibility.

You are not ordinary; you are special and much needed by the world. Make your worth count.

Do your best today and always to be the salt and light of the earth.

## Ministry of Reconciliation

To “reconcile” is to restore friendly relations between people or things. It also means to settle (a quarrel).

To reconcile someone is to make the person accept (a disagreeable thing).

Many a times when we think of evangelism and saving souls, we seldom think about the “strayed”. Our antennas are sensitive to track the totally lost that sometimes we walk past the starry without half the push we would have given if they were first timers.

Now, granted, people “fall away”, “drift away”, “walk away”, or “withdraw membership” for several reasons. And, depending on the situation, we can only pray for them as even our attempt to contact them or strike up a conversation could ignite some unwanted emotions.

The focus of today’s class will be primarily to stimulate a sense of duty mixed with compassion towards this category of people.

### Matt 10:5-7

*5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.*

- Jesus’ first priority here was to those who have tasted a bit of what he has to offer
- This appears to be an interesting strategy. Apart from the compassion he felt for them, if he was going to build a ministry that was going to influence the entire Jewish Nation, it made sense to use the Jews.

I am reminded of a stray brother we bumped into in one of our mission fields. Convicted was he that he left the church for a distant land, yet he was overjoyed and humbled by the love and concern all the members of the mission team showed him. Today, a married man, this once stray brother is now a pillar of encouragement and support to his local congregation.

### Matt 12:11-12

*He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

- More than a lesson on prioritizing, Jesus is teaching us the heart of the ministry. It is not about laws and duty. It’s more of compassion and conscience
- Do religious duties and restrictions stop you from reaching out to the strayed?
- Would you go two minutes late to an after service bible talk leaders meeting because you stopped to reach out to a stray brother who just walked into church?

### Luke 15:3-10

*3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

*8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

- While we celebrate every conversion, there is something really different when it comes to restoration
- It’s like a much awaited home coming. What kind of parent will her child wonder off, kidnapped or just lost, will turn around and console herself by saying, “okay, that one is gone. I’ll just go ahead, get pregnant and have me another child”

### Ezekiel 34

- **Ezekiel 34** records about the most graphic description of shepherd / sheep obligations in the bible
- Read it carefully and write down ways this scenario plays out in your local congregation
- Notice that shepherds are judged first before the flock
- Do you consider yourself a shepherd?
- What will you do differently from now on?

For a true heart of a sheep that is cared for and the ultimate shepherd, read **Psalms 23** and **John 10:1-17**



## Two by Two: Purposeful Outreach

### Gen 6:19-21

You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.

**20** Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive.

### Josh 2:1

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go; look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute **a** named Rahab and stayed there.

### Mark 6:7

Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.

It is a very wise concept to send people (or in the case of Genesis 6, animals) two by two.

### Why do we need company?

- As the word suggests, for companionship
- For security
- For encouragement
- Better productivity
- Two is Fun
- Variety
- Accountability

Even the Apostle Paul got discouraged in some cities when he did not find any of his travelling companions.

One of the reasons many give for the drop in evangelistic zeal is discouragement.

I remember years back when a brother dropped by my house as I was heading out for an evangelistic appointment. While I hurried off, this good hearted brother later called me up the next day to express his desire to be involved in what I'm doing. His response went somewhat like this, "I feel so bad that while I was just making a casual visit to hang out, you were going to save souls. Really desire to study and help someone to be saved." Do you have any friend we can study with? I replied. That was the beginning of a great partnership in the gospel for this brother and me. The first guy he brought was baptized within two months! From there on, our wives formed yet another twosome partnership. We studied with singles, married couples, at different times and venues. We switched appointments when it was not convenient for the other. We learnt new strategies and followed up spontaneously. We were flat having fun as the power of two was at work!

### Eccl 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

**10** If one falls down, his friend can help him up.

But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

**11** Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

**12** Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.



### **ILLUSTRATION: *Practical Discipleship***

*Basically, God is looking for us to serve Him in three ways: as a wife (bride of Christ), as a worker, and as a witness.*

**Wife**—*The good wife comes from the fact that Christians are the bride of Christ. Christ expects His bride to be pure (avoid the things of the world that would defile us) and chaste (not flirting with the world or running after other loves). That's easy to understand. These are the same things you want of your husband or wife.*

*When we violate God's rules in marriage we come to the big "D's" (and I don't mean Dallas!)—disgrace, disease, debt, dishonour, and divorce.*

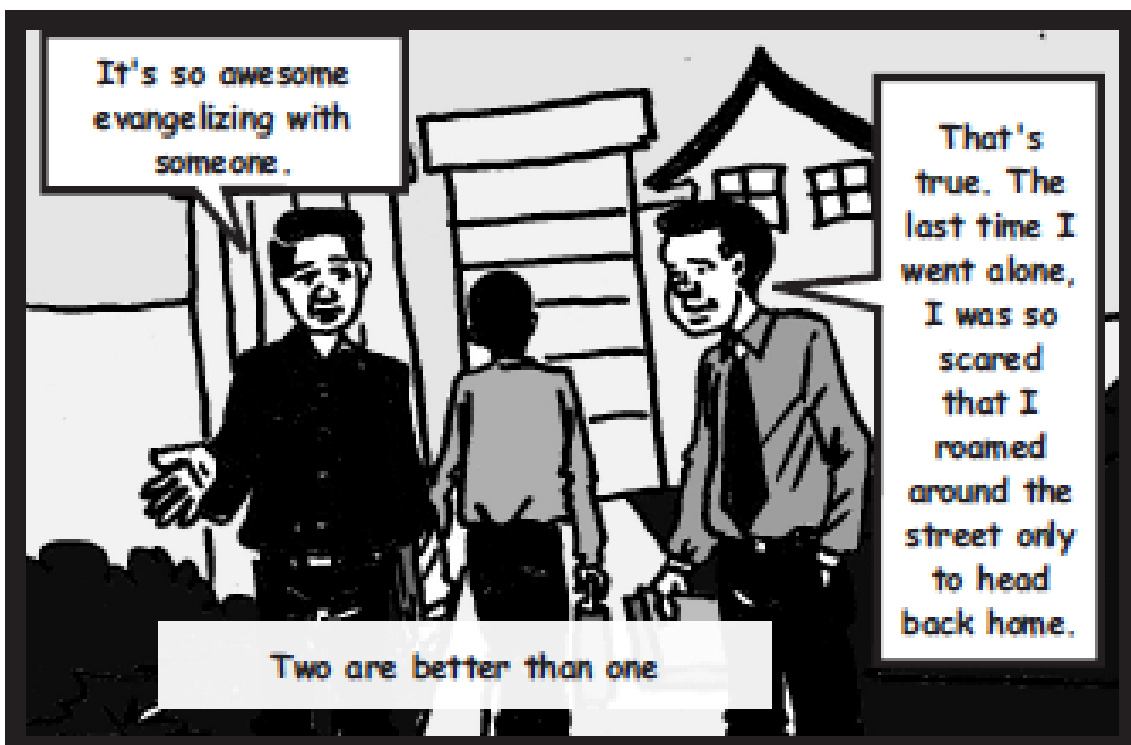
**Worker**—*a good worker is someone who comes to work on time every day; gives an honest day's work for an honest day's pay; and does his job without complaining. These are simple ideas that should apply to your place of employment as well as your place of worship.*

**Witness**—*witnessing is not throwing someone in a corner and making them believe as you believe. Witnessing is simply telling people the difference Christ has made in your life. Sharing answered prayers should be as natural as sharing an exciting news item from the newspaper. Sharing your love for Christ should be as easy as sharing your devotion to the Gamecocks or the Tigers. It's simple to witness when Christ is the main focus of your life.*

*As Charles Templeton puts it, "Christianity does not remove you from the world and its problems; it makes you fit to live in it, triumphantly and usefully." Are you fit to live and ready to die?<sup>22</sup>*

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## Pray For Open Doors

We have all been called to make disciples, to reach out to the weak, sick, poor, needy and those who have drifted away. In this day and age where the material god is highly followed, where churches are many, and other religious beliefs are highly competing vis-à-vis building their membership. This must tell us something; this battle is not ours, the mission is not ours, the souls are not ours, and this is strictly God's business. Our skills will do some good, our passion and strategic plans will pay off but all are subject to limitations. We will need God to open doors to help us meet our vision for the lost, strayed and needy. This battle will certainly be won on our knees in prayer to God.

### **Matt 9:36-38**

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

Wherever Jesus goes he attracts crowds. The crowds often follow for different reasons such as: miracles, food, teaching etc... Jesus did not just see their wealth or dress or devotion; he saw a people without God. He saw a people who need God in them. He told his disciples, 'the job is all yours, you need to ask God in prayer to help you'. The key to a breakthrough in outreach is prayer.

### **Col 4:2-5**

*2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.*

Paul called the Christians in Colosse to be devoted to prayer. He requested that they pray for open doors so that the message could be preached. Solomon in **Psalms 127** acknowledges that unless God is the builder our labor is in vain and unless God is our security the guards can do nothing. The key message in this is that prayer helps us know the true source of power. It is only human that when we work, we glory in the good result we get.

Prayer helps us understand that God gives the victory to us but the glory goes to him. People who see no need for God have no reason to pray to him. The foundation of humanism and atheism is that they stand on the grounds that they are achievers even without God. History has proven that what they call victory is like standing on quicksand.

Think about it: we have more professionals but less output. In our church we are financially better but less joyful compared to our earlier days; we have more married homes but poor family systems. God is certainly making a point in all these. He is simply saying that "WE NEED HIM" for without him we can't serve the poor, or convert people, or bring back those who have wandered away from the faith. One key lesson I have learnt is that when I am running out of ideas on issues that need due attention I know that the only place to start is to ask God for wisdom. Guess what? He gives direction and bails me out.

Prayer will keep you very humble, make you dependent on God, help you trust Him more, relieve you of the stress of wanting to figure out things for yourself. It will remind you that the victory is yours but the glory goes back to God.

Concerning the poor, our first prayer point should be for God to open the door of our hearts to loving the poor as we did at first.

These days when we interact with people we know, it is obvious that according to the Bible standards, they are lost but our focus of discussion tends towards business, pleasure and the like. Our passion for the lost is ebbing away.

We need to pray that God opens our hearts to the mission of reconciliation. There are physically and spiritually sick people in our church and our neighborhoods. We should ask God in prayer that the

door of our hearts be open wide to their needs. We are all on mission for God. As we pray for the hearts of others don't forget to pray for yours because the change we need begins with you and me.

### ILLUSTRATION: "Dump Ministry"

Doug Forbes observes:

*"In parts of New England, we still have to take our trash to the local dump. When I lived in Maine, I rarely saw three people together at once. But Saturday at the dump was a different story! All day long the dump had a steady stream of cars taking care of one of life's necessary bits of business. From this observation came our 'Dump Ministry!'"*

*"When our church held a special event, we took turns out at the dump handing out colourful flyers. We worked in teams so that we could encourage each other. In one day we reached approximately three-quarters of all the homes in our town. So, if you have a dump, God has given you an inexpensive way to publicize your next church activity, youth event, or concert. Give it a try, and next Saturday, I'll see you at the dump!"*



## Endless Love

### Romans 8:28-37

There will never be anything in all of existence more enduring than the love of God. At the end of all things even God's creation will be rolled away, but His love will last forever. Read the Bible passage above very carefully. Focus on how the scripture describes God's amazing love.

- God's love works for our good
  - God loved us before we were born
  - God's love makes us Christ's brothers
  - God's love makes us God's sons and daughters
  - God's love puts us in right standing before him; we are justified
  - God's love gives us eternal reward; we are glorified
- WOW!

We will never need to do anything, be like anyone, and go to any place to be qualified to receive this indescribable and unconditional love of God. God has sealed this deal with the precious blood of his son on the cross and will stop at nothing to display this love to you and me.

How should we respond? (What then shall we say?)

God spared nothing, and God will not spare anything to bring us His love.

He gave His Son, His only child for me, and for you.

What is making you doubt God's love today? Is it your financial problem? Is it your health problem? Is it your family problems? Is it because you are waiting on God for something, and you have been waiting for a long time?

The Bible says you are a conqueror. No, more than a conqueror. No matter what it is that you are going through you are enveloped in the love of God. Nothing in existence will ever change that.

Today: Enjoy God's love. Think about it. Sing about it. Talk about it. Feel good about it. ENJOY. Just ENJOY.

#### Into Your Life:

- Write down 5 areas in your life God has shown you love and faithfulness
- In what areas are you willing to serve in the New Year, as a response to God's endless love for you?

#### Today's Theme Song

As we end this journey, let's meditate on the song below and may God's love dwell richly in our hearts!

### **THE LOVE OF GOD**

Since the love of God has shed,  
Priceless blessings on my head,  
I have made it my own;  
I will hide it in my heart,  
That it never may depart,  
It shall rule there alone.

### **CHORUS**

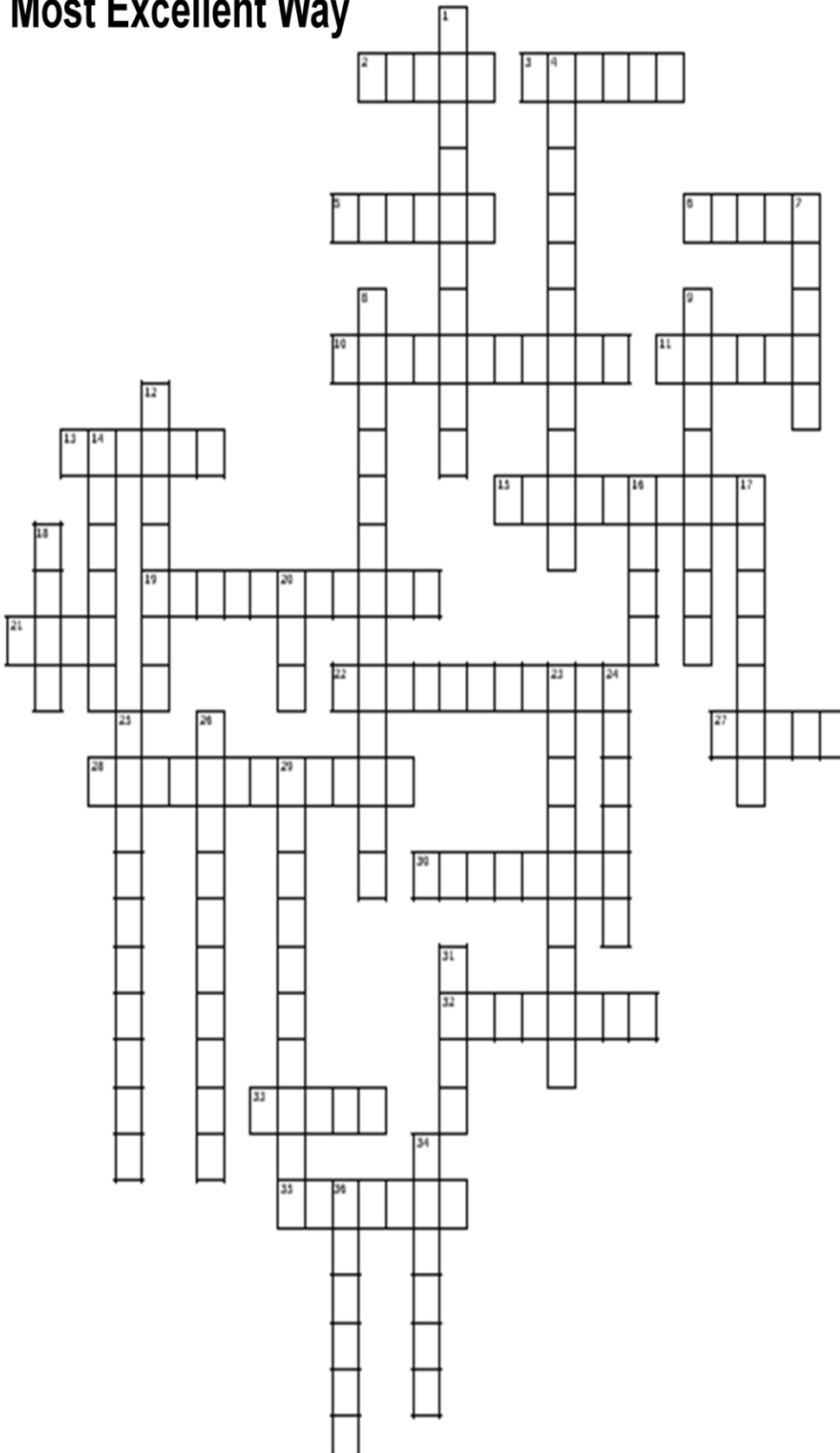
The love of God, within the heart,  
Will kindness and warmth impart,  
The soul will glow like Jesus in His tender mercy,  
If the heart is made His dwelling place.  
The love of God glows like a flame,  
Thro' endless years it is the same,  
The love of God will never fail nor lose its glory  
'Till we see Him face to face.

Since the Son of God came down  
With His love our lives to crown  
He with us would remain;  
Greater love there could not be,  
Jesus died for you and me,  
In our hearts He would reign.

He who gave His love to me,  
That I might from sin be free,  
Bids me share it today;  
"As I loved you", He has said,  
"You must serve men in my stead,  
As you go on your way."

While His love burns true and bright,  
We are walking in His light,  
He has shown us the road;  
We His glory must reflect,  
Lest our dimness and neglect,  
Keep some soul from its God.

# Most Excellent Way



## HINTS

### Across

- 2. church leader
- 3. a link
- 5. a seed
- 6. head of church
- 10. it's okay
- 11. head of family
- 13. biggest family on earth
- 15. i did it
- 19. kindness
- 21. affection
- 22. takes two
- 27. illumination
- 28. following
- 30. Ikeja meeting venue
- 32. disagreement
- 33. Gods word
- 35. serve abroad

### Down

- 1. inward thinking
- 4. at heart
- 7. it lingers
- 8. two way talk
- 9. not eating
- 12. male in family
- 14. eternal home
- 16. seasoning
- 17. country
- 18. i don't have
- 20. company
- 23. all of us
- 24. communicating with God
- 25. one of the pillars of our church
- 26. evangelist
- 29. good news
- 31. global church family
- 34. it hurts
- 36. female in family



**Web Edition  
Revised &  
Edited**

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