

# A CALL TO BUILD



A Forty Day Devotional Guide on The Call to Build Solid,  
Spiritual Lives and Community for Christ

International Church of Christ, Nigeria  
[www.icocnigeria.org](http://www.icocnigeria.org)

## **A Call to Build**

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## **A CALL TO BUILD**

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## PREFACE

### BODY BUILDERS

*"To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances; to seek Him, the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest human achievement" - Saint Augustine*

*"7 Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God — no spiritual flabbiness, please! 8 Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. 9 You can count on this. Take it to heart. 10 This is why we've thrown ourselves into this venture so totally. We're banking on the living God, Savior of all men and women, especially believers." - 1 Tim 4:7-10 (from THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language © 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved.)*

Serious body builders, those men and women with built-up, well-defined muscles say that the two most important elements in their success are mind-set and discipline. A body builder, son to one of our "Power Series" contributors explains that body building begins with a belief, a desire to get better and an understanding that it is a complete lifestyle change - not for short-term goals but for the long haul. The muscle definition and growth do not happen overnight; it happens gradually with consistency and repetitiveness in training. Body building requires discipline with exercise, training and maintaining a healthy diet – no junk food or alcohol. There must be a balance in the exercise regimen - no part of the body can be ignored or else the body looks disproportional. A bodybuilder with big shoulders and biceps, but small thighs and calves will never do well in a competition - a proportional body is stronger.

As a bodybuilder, you must have deep convictions about what you're doing so that you're not swayed by the opinions of others who consider such lifestyle too radical - you must be willing to risk losing friendships as a result. Every bodybuilder is comfortable with self-critique as well as critique from others and not insecure about it because they know that there are always areas to improve on, always room for growth.

Many thanks to the many brothers and sisters across the globe who have graciously contributed to producing this fourth edition of what has become an annual venture of love, championed by the Lagos congregation of the International Church of Christ, Nigeria. Ministry interns, Administrators, Journalists, Lawyers, College Students, Human Resource Experts, Business Owners, Cartoonists, Graphic Artists, Architect, Medical Doctor, University Professor and a team of 23 Evangelists and Full-time Congregational Ministers with very diverse professional and academic backgrounds all make up this edition's team. These men and women have freely and willingly volunteered their time, resources and God-given talent in producing this book. Special recognition also goes to the entire Lagos congregation whose generous contribution has constantly made it possible to produce and distribute hard copies of this book free of charge to our entire sister churches around Nigeria and beyond.

Hilarious and convicting cartoons, puzzles, punchy illustrations with memorable Bible passages and famous quotes are just a few of the "sandwich effect" we have worked so hard on to ensure that our multi-generational reading audiences are glued to their Bibles and this book. Additional topics have also been added to this edition. These topics will stretch the reading span of this edition beyond the forty days originally intended and make it a timeless collector's manual for spiritual growth.

A few lengthy write-ups have been broken into parts. Other segmented topics were a result of more than one contributor, writing on the same topic. In all, you'll find this edition rich with insights for everyone. The next 40 days and beyond will see us embark on the journey to 'build' and 'grow' ourselves, communities and churches... *"until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* - Eph 4:13 (NIV)

#### Editorial Team

2015 Power Series Committee

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 1Co 6:19*

When we are expecting a special guest in our homes, we take great care to clean and tidy up because we value the relationship and want the guest to feel welcome. Of course, we also want to show our best side and make a good impression. The Holy Spirit is that special guest sent to dwell with us – what effort are you going to put in to make him welcome? When we're physically unhealthy we cannot serve God as well as we should or meet people's needs as he would want us to.

Your body responds to the way you think, feel and act. This is often called the "mind/body connection." When you are stressed, anxious or upset, your body reacts one way or another and tries to tell you that something isn't right.<sup>1</sup>

In order to be the "temple" of the living God, we must make every effort to have a healthy spirit, mind and body. Avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits such as high fat diet, lack of exercise, excessive alcohol intake and smoking, which put anyone at risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, etc.

Be willing to make aggressive lifestyle changes, such as:

1. Healthy eating – Eat less fatty foods, less salt, as well as more fresh Fruit, vegetables, whole grain foods, less red meat and more fish
2. Regular exercise – at least 30 minutes a day of moderate exercise such as brisk walking or jogging
3. Maintain a healthy weight
4. Stop smoking
5. Limit alcohol intake
6. Manage stress
7. Get enough sleep – the average adult needs 7 hours of sleep nightly

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. 1Co 9:24-27*

#### Practical:

- Identify any unhealthy lifestyle habits that you have and make a plan to change them this year
- Find a partner that you can make the changes with and encourage each other

#### References:

1. Familydoctor.org

The next page contains a transcript of the motivational video, "**Rise and Shine!**". We recommend you download and watch either of the two versions of this speech from the YouTube link provided below. It guarantees to set you up on a good start each morning - Raise and Shine!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNL\\_DAI19\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNL_DAI19_I)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuPLxQD4akQ>



**"Rise and shine!"**

**(From TCU Baseball 'The Grind')**

"6am and your hand can't make it to the alarm clock before the voices in your head start telling you that it's too early, too dark, and too cold to get out of a bed.

Aching muscles lie still in rebellion, pretending not to hear your brain commanding them to move  
A legion of voices is shouting their unanimous permission for you to hit the snooze button and go back to dreamland, but you didn't ask their opinion.

The voice you've chosen to listen to is one of defiance.

A voice that's says there was a reason you set that alarm in the first place. So sit up, put your feet on the floor, and don't look back because we've got work to do.

Welcome to The Grind!

For what is each day, but a series of conflicts between the right way and the easy way,  
10,000 streams fan out like a river delta before you, Each one promising the path of least resistance.  
Thing is, you're headed upstream and when you make that choice, when you decide to turn your back on what's comfortable and what's safe and what some would call "common sense", well that's day 1.

From there it only gets tougher.

So just make sure this is something you want.

Because the easy way out will always be there, ready to wash you away, all you have to do is pick up your feet.

But you aren't going to, are you?

With each step comes the decision to take another

You're on your way now

But this is no time to dwell on how far you've come.

You're in a fight against an opponent, you can't see

Oh, but you can feel him on your heels can't you?

Feel him breathing down your neck

You know what that is?

That's you...

Your fears, your doubts and insecurities all lined up like a firing squad ready to shoot you out of the sky

But don't lose heart

While they aren't easily defeated, they are far from invincible

Remember, this is The Grind

The Battle Royale between you and your mind, your body and the devil on your shoulder who's telling you that this is just a game, this is just a waste of time, your opponents are stronger than you.

Drown out the voice of uncertainty with the sound of your own heartbeat

Burn away your self-doubt with the fire that's beneath you

Remember what you're fighting for

And never forget that momentum is a cruel mistress

She can turn on a dime with the smallest mistake.

She is ever searching for that weak place in your armor

That one tiny thing you forgot to prepare for

So, as long as the devil is hiding the details, the question remains, "is that all you got?", "are you sure?"

And when the answer is "yes". That you've done all you can to prepare yourself for battle THEN it's time to go forth and boldly face your enemy, the enemy within

Only now you must take that fight into the open, into hostile territory

You're a lion in a field of lions

All hunting the same elusive prey with a desperate starvation that says VICTORY is the only thing that can keep you alive!  
So believe that voice that says "you CAN run a little faster" and that "you CAN throw a little harder" and that "you CAN dive a little deeper" and that, for you, the laws of physics are merely a suggestion.

Luck is the last dying wish of those who wanna believe that winning can happen by accident,  
Sweat on the other hand is for those who know it's a choice, so decide now because destiny waits for no man. And when your time comes and a thousand different voices are trying to tell you you're not ready for it, listen instead for that lone voice in decent, the one that says "you are ready", "you are prepared", it's all up to you now... So, **Rise and Shine!**"

The mind is the part of us that reasons, and thinks. It perceives the world around us and processes the information. It is our intellect or understanding.

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **Col 3:1-2***

Just as body builders set their minds on the goal of a bulked-up body, we set our minds on the goal of heaven. Before we became disciples of Jesus, we perceived the world through the filter of our own experiences and the natural tendency is to continue to do so even after we have become Christians. God tells us however that we must put off the old self and be made new in the attitude of our minds, no longer conforming to worldly patterns (**Eph 4:23, Rm 12:2**). In a nutshell, we must change our perception and thinking – about each other, about our relationships, about who God is and who we are, about expectations and desires, about everything.

A healthy Christian mind understands that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus Christ (**Col 2:3**). Therefore, we use Christ's life and teachings as the standard with which we assess and evaluate first ourselves, and then our interactions with the world around us. We must continually ask that the seemingly old fashioned question "What would Jesus do?" as we go along the journey of life.

*... But we have the mind of Christ. **1Co 2:16b***

The problem is that our emotions get in the way, clouds our minds, affecting our thinking and our judgement. Our emotions can cripple our spiritual growth and can sabotage our attempts to consistently set our minds on heavenly things. We are all emotional beings, (including men, who generally see themselves as not at all emotional!) so it is important to try to recognize our emotions and understand why we are having them. Sorting out the causes of anger, sadness, stress and anxiety in your life can help you manage your emotional health. <sup>1</sup>

Poor emotional health can weaken your body's immune system, making you more likely to get colds and other infections during emotionally difficult times. Also, when you are feeling stressed, anxious or upset, you may not take care of your health as well as you should. You may not feel like exercising, eating nutritious foods or taking medicine that your doctor prescribes. <sup>1</sup>

So, how can we improve our mindset and our emotional health?

1. Express your feelings in appropriate ways – allow God to direct our communication with each other. The umbrella over all our interactions should be love, therefore we choose our words carefully so as not to hurt one another. **Eph 4:15, Eph 4:26-32, Ja 3:9-10**
2. Live a balanced life – God first, family second, work and other third. **Mt 22:37-39**
3. Develop resilience – life happens, so keep your eyes on Jesus and keep moving forward. **Ph 3:13-14, Ps 46:1-3**
4. Calm your mind and body – sometimes the things that happen in life makes no sense. An unwavering trust in God during the storms of life will keep us at peace. **Ps 131:1-3, Zep 3:17**
5. Take care of yourself – you are being built into a dwelling for the Spirit of God. Strengthen your spirit, your mind and your body. **Eph 2:22**

#### Practical:

- How well do you express your feelings? Do you bottle them up until you explode or do you hurt others by always saying whatever you feel like? Practice sharing your feelings with others today, in a godly way.
- Do you live a balanced life? Identify what needs to change and make a plan to begin to change it.

Prayer can be defined as the desire, opportunity and privilege of talking with God.

Prayer is the voice of faith.

Prayer is opening the channels of our emptiness and entering into God's fullness.

In prayer, we move from our defeat to His victory.

**Mark 1:35**

Jesus made it a point to get away to pray. Yes, Jesus loved people, and was on a much needed mission to help them, but Jesus went away because he knew what he needed even more was to remain close to God the Father.

Jesus knew what needed to come first in his day, and we would be wise to look to Jesus' example in this as well. Consider the fact that Jesus went away, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark" Why would he do that? Wasn't he in charge of the events of his life? Couldn't he have picked any time of day to get away from it all to pray?

I would like to propose that Jesus made it a point to get away early in the day for reasons that we should strongly consider.

**Jesus wanted to give God the first and best part of his day.**

By this I mean that Jesus made his relationship with God the Father the number one priority over every other aspect of his day. By making prayer the first part of his day, Jesus demonstrated that nothing was more important in his day than to make sure that he had time to seek the Father in prayer and to stay in step with Him.

**Jesus knew the day ahead would be busy**

Jesus was growing in popularity among the people. People were beginning to follow him around quite a bit with all kinds of needs. Jesus knew his day was going to be busy helping people and in fulfilling The Mission. Before any of that could properly take place, however, he needed to take time out to pray.

Often we give the excuse that, "we are too busy to pray or do devotions", whereas, Jesus was busier than all of us. Making God a priority in our lives means forming our daily routine around Him. Sadly, we often arrange our lives the other way round, making God a mere appendage. Jesus set a great example for us in this passage. From this scripture, we can glean that Jesus made his relationship with God THE NUMBER ONE priority in his day. He set aside quality time to pray and stay in step with the God of the Universe.

**Effectiveness of prayer****Matt. 7:7-11**

The effectiveness of prayer is affirmed through this passage.

Jesus declared, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Every sincere prayer offered to God by His faithful children receives an answer from Him.

This does not mean that He answers all prayers immediately or exactly in the way the petitioners expect, but He does answer every prayer offered in accordance with His will and the desire to see His will done.

**Examples of prayer in the bible:**

- ✓ Elijah's prayer at Mount Carmel -

**1<sup>st</sup> Kings 18:36-38**

This prayer was offered during the contest between Baal's four hundred prophets and God's prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel. God answered by sending fire to burn the sacrifice as Elijah requested.

- ✓ Nehemiah's prayer for a Successful petition -
- ✓ Daniel's prayer in defiance of a king's decree-
- ✓ Jonah's prayer from the fish belly -
- ✓ Pray for boldness in preaching -
- ✓ Prayer for Peter in prison -

**Nehemiah 2:4:8****Daniel 6:10:23****Jonah 2:1, 2,7,10****Acts 4:24-29,31****Acts 12:5-12**



- ✓ Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane **Luke 22:42-44**
- ✓ Paul's prayer for God to remove the thorn in his flesh— **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

These examples show that God answers prayer in accordance to *His* will not ours.

To build a rich prayer life, we must be consistent, faithful and depend on God.

At this point, take some time to think through the following questions. Then, take time to write down your thoughts.

Q: Are there any places you can easily get away to enjoy private prayer and solitude?

Q: What are some things that often prevent you from taking time out of your daily schedule to pray?

Q: What are some things you can do to make prayer a priority in your daily schedule?

**Conclusion:**

Are you discouraged? Pray. It will comfort you.

Are you peaceful? Pray. It will confirm you.

Are you tempted? Pray. It will uphold you.

Are you fallen? Pray. It will uplift you.

Finally, take time out, NOW to pray and talk to God about how today's devotional speaks to you.



***"Prayer is not asking.  
It is a longing of the soul.  
It is daily admission of one's weakness.  
It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart."***  
— Mahatma Gandhi

Forgiveness is a sensitive and delicate issue to discuss because it opens "cans of worms". Emotions are roused and long and supposedly "forgotten" issues and hurts of the past resurface.

The truth is, we can spend a large part of our lives suffering needless emotional pains when we have the power to put an end to our suffering simply by doing to others what Jesus came to do for us. *"forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" - (Eph. 4:32).*

Forgiveness is certainly not easy, but it is absolutely necessary for long term mental and emotional health, and most importantly spiritual liberation.

### **What is forgiveness?**

Forgiveness is defined as the decision to let go of resentments, anger and thoughts of revenge towards real or perceived offenses or hurts.

Psychologist Sonja calls forgiveness "a shift in thinking toward someone who has wronged you" such that your desire to harm that person has decreased and your desire to do him good increases.

### **Genesis 50:15-21**

We see Joseph (Jacob's favorite son) extend a hand of love, acceptance and forgiveness to his brothers.

Prior to this passage, Joseph had experienced pain from betrayal and desertion from his family, exposure to sexual temptation, punishment from doing the right thing, long imprisonment and much more.

Q. Can you relate to any of these?

Q. What has been your response to those situations/persons that brought you hurts/pains?

Q. Are you still angry?

Q. Are you keeping a record of the wrongs?

- ✓ Joseph's positive response transformed each setback into advancements in his life.
- ✓ Joseph's heart of forgiveness demonstrates how God graciously accepts us even though we don't deserve it.
- ✓ God has set the example of forgiveness for us; because He forgave us even when we ignored, rejected and hurt Him.
- ✓ God brought good from Joseph's brother's evil deeds, Potiphar's wife's false accusation, the cupbearer's neglect and seven years of famine.
- ✓ God brings good from evil for those who trust in Him.

Q. Do you trust God enough?

Q. When you are hurt, do you leave vengeance to God?

### **Why we should forgive**

**Matthew 6:14; Eph. 4:32; Heb. 12:14-15; 2nd John:5-6.** All these scriptures instruct us to forgive.

Forgiveness is a decision. Since God commands us, we must make that conscious effort to forgive.

**Col. 3:13** - The word of God commands that we should forgive because we have been forgiven.

### **How often should we forgive?**

**Matt. 18:21-22**

Jesus said we are to forgive others "seventy times seven" in response to Peter's question.

Jesus was not limiting forgiveness to 490 times, a number that is for all practical purposes beyond counting.

Clearly forgiveness is not to be meted out in a limited fashion, but is to be abundant, overflowing and available to all, just as the measureless grace of God is poured out upon us.

Christians are capable of having this type of a forgiving spirit because the Spirit of God lives within us and it is He who provides the ability to offer forgiveness over and over.

### What happens when we don't forgive?

**Matt. 6:14-15; 7:2**

"...your Father will not forgive your sins".

Don't be confused here. God's forgiveness is not based on our works. However, our actions demonstrate our faith and the extent to which we understand God's grace.

Q. Are you gracious toward those who offend you?

Lack of forgiveness robs us of the full life God intends for us.

### Conclusion:

Forgiveness can be difficult, but God has given us the power to forgive those who have hurt us.

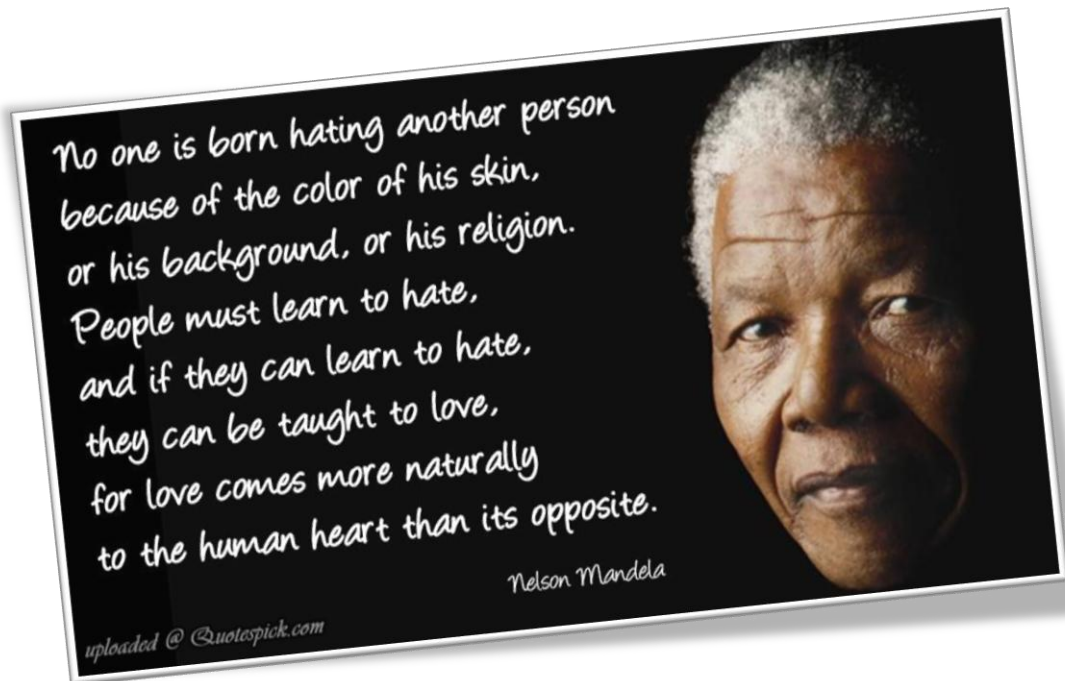
If you want to be free from the emotional torment that comes from lack of forgiveness and see God's power flow through your life, you must choose to forgive others like Christ has forgiven you.

I have decided that I want to be free from such emotional torment, how about you?

### Application:

Think through, today, those you are withholding forgiveness from and decide to forgive as Christ has forgiven you.

We shall explore other ways to grow in this virtue tomorrow.



***'Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself'***-Tony Robbins

On a Monday of October 2006, Charles Carl Roberts IV, a 32 year-old milk van man, entered an Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. He forced 10 girls to lie on the floor shooting them before killing himself. Five of the girls survived. Roberts said he was angry with God because his infant girl had died minutes after giving birth to her nine years earlier. Almost immediately, the Amish sought out the Roberts' widow and parents to offer 'forgiveness and concern'. At his funeral, half of the mourners were Amish. To them, forgiveness is letting go of resentment and offering the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence and love.

Anytime I think of the Amish, their faith and way of live convicts me. Although one may disagree with some of what they hold on to as a group, but in this area of their faith I agree with and respect them a lot.

### **Matthew 6:12-15**

Do you still ask God for forgiveness? This question assumes you are still a humble sinner who acknowledges the need for God and his benevolence.

*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 sin. - 1 John 1:7*

We forgive because we have been forgiven.

*"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." - Col 3:13-14*

***'To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you'***- Lewis B. Smedes

Many of us have been hurt, disappointed and have borne great harm done to us by others. It appears that the more of these hurts we are exposed to, and by certain people, the harder it is to forgive and let go. The practice of forgiveness, qualify you as a Christian. The refusal to practice it disqualifies us.

The lack of forgiveness leaves an internal pain with us, even after the external pain inflicted has healed.

Is there anyone you are still struggling to forgive? Maybe you need a third party, a more mature arbiter to help you get through. Let's practice forgiveness.

***"The best revenge is to be UNLIKE him who performs the injury"***- Marcus Aurelius

### **Romans 12:17-21**

Forgiveness is not pretending that a wrong has not been committed against us, nor is it condoning or excusing the offender. Like in the case of Joseph and his brothers (**Gen 50:15-21**), the memory of what they did had not been lost on him, but he saw God working through it for future good.

***"Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future"*** - Paul Boese

We are not saying that God is responsible for all hurts and offenses that come our way, we must all, however, begin to ask him to help us see the opportunities in the offense or hurt to make us, even our offender better people.

***'Forgiveness does not mean you excuse the crime, it just means you're not willing to be the victim (again)'***- Anonymous

Pray for God to help you tread this path of forgiveness. Though a difficult and humbling virtue to imbibe, it only proves our genuineness and the opportunity for Christ to showcase his divine power in us.

**Matthew 25 : 14 – 30**

The talents represent any kind of resource we are given. God does not give us more or less than we can handle. He gives us talents “according to our abilities”.

God gives to each of us individual talents because He loves us and believes in us.

Make a list of the resources that you believe God has given to you. It is tempting to think that God has not given you much. However, we need to remember that all our material resources; all our education; all our life experiences; our careers; even our family, friends and neighbors; all these counts as resources from God. He has lovingly and deliberately given us all these. I’m sure you can add more to the list. It stands to reason that God gives us these talents to use for His glory. How can we prepare our hearts to be accountable to God?

**Gratitude:** None of us deserves what we have. Gratitude is a key factor that divided the first two servants from the third. How grateful was the third servant for the gift he received? How grateful are *you* for the gifts you have received?

When was the last time you specifically thanked God for the resources He has blessed you with? The third servant in this story seems pretty ungrateful to his Master.

Without gratitude, you will resent being accountable to God or even to those whom He has put in your life to help you.

Take a few quiet moments to thank God for all these resources and gifts and talents. Be very specific and thank Him for each one. *We are grateful that He gave us all these because He loves us.*

**It’s all about God.** “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.”

That day will come when God will call us to account about everything – everything He has given us. ‘After a long time’... the passage says. No matter how long ‘that day’ is in coming it will come.

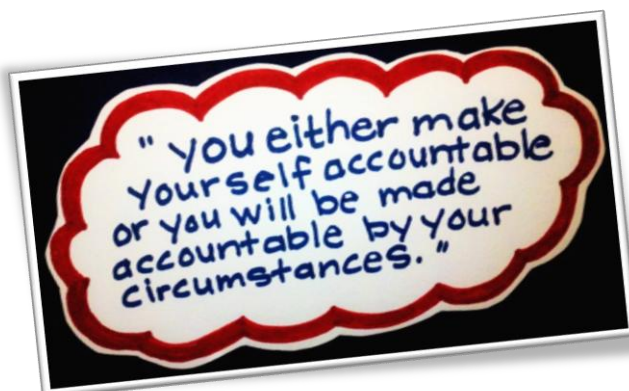
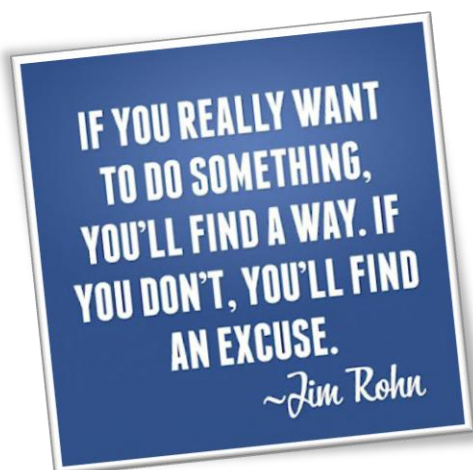
Remember, it is always about God. Our lives are *from* God and *for* God.

Every resource and opportunity you have is a gift from God. Every loved one in your life is put there by God. *We are willing to be accountable to God for all these because we appreciate how much He believes in us.*

**The goal is eternity with God.** “Come and share your master’s happiness!” God is looking forward to the day that He will say these words to you. Take a moment and imagine it! See **Colossians 3 : 2**

Be mindful about how you live. Are there areas you need to change? Are there talents and resources that you have neglected or ‘buried’? Repent.

*God is a loving Master who believes in you and wants you to lovingly give your best.*





As Christians, we should never be under the illusion that any amount of poverty alleviation or economic empowerment program of the Church or the State will ever remove or wipe out poverty from amongst us. That will be a false expectation and unbiblical.

Even in first world countries like USA, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, UK, etc. their economy or society is still filled with the poor, homeless, destitute, disabled and many more of such.

The scripture says in **Deut 15:11** that “there will always be poor people in the land”.

God has enough power and resources to make all of us, rich and affluent but by His divine wish and wisdom, He decides to make some poor or rich at various times and ways. (**Proverbs 22 : 2**)

Consider **Deuteronomy 15:7-11**

### **Why the Poor in the Land?**

- 1) It is the way God designed it. The poor will always exist side by side with the rich.
- 2) God delights in and take special interest in the poor.
- 3) The Kingdom of God is all about the poor – see the beatitudes.
- 4) To test and prove our godliness and willingness to share with others what He has given us.
- 5) The poor are there to bring glory to God.

### **What should our response to the poor be like?**

Whether within or outside the church, we must show great concern and love for the poor: **REASONS**

- Loving and caring for the poor is what it truly means to know God. (**Jeremiah 22 : 16**) You cannot claim that you know God if you do not have concern for the poor.
- Loving and caring for the poor is the proof of our love for God. (**1John 3 : 17**)
- Loving and caring for the poor is a very wise and safe investment. (**Proverb 19 : 12**)

### **SOME PRACTICALS**

- 1) Decide to have a new heart and perception of the poor today: pray for the grace to love and give to the poor consistently.
- 2) Use the platform and opportunity provided by HOPE Worldwide to support the poor.
- 3) Use the platform and opportunity provided by your Regional benevolence to support the poor.
- 4) Have a personal or family benevolence initiative that you will support from time to time.
- 5) Be concerned and deliberate about your benevolence contribution. Decide on increasing your contributions from time to time.
- 6) Look out for those in need in your church and in the community you live. Reach out to them. Let your attitude be like that of King David in (2 Samuel 9:1). Look around you. There are needs to be met.

**Gen. 39:1-23**

Building godly character can start in a day, but it is never done in a day. It is built over a long period with faith, determination and consistency with God.

Joseph's decision to be godly must have begun long before he was taken into Egypt. He must have listened to his father Jacob talk about God, and his encounter with God. Joseph grew up hearing about God's words and promises. He heard how God fulfilled His promises in Jacob's life. Joseph must have fallen in love with God and decided he would also serve and be faithful to Him.

In spite of the pain Joseph felt when he was sold by his brothers, he did not allow bitter roots to grow in his heart. From **verse 2**, we can conclude that God was pleased with Joseph.

**Verse 7-10**

Egyptian women are renowned for their physical beauty. Potiphar's wife made advances day after day. Perhaps she put on provocative and suggestive clothing to attract Joseph. Joseph, on the other hand, was interested in more than gratifying his flesh; he was determined to maintain his godliness and faithfulness to God. He had convictions and he had drawn some important boundaries in his life.

**NOTE:** Satan, not God is responsible for the temptations we face. The testing of our faith, comes, however from God who wants us to be strong.

Satan tempts us to see how vulnerable we are, God tests us to see how durable we are.

Remember, Satan's apples are full of worms. When we fall for one temptation, he fights so hard to keep us down. He lies to us that our relationship with God can never be restored. He tries to make us believe that confessing our sin is a disgrace from which we cannot recover.

There is so much at stake when we fall into sin. When we sin, we jeopardize our joy, peace, relationship with God, future glory and eternity. We must never trivialize the devastating effects of sin.

We need to remember that our enemy, the enemy of our soul, is a master of setting things up. He will put you in just the right place, at just the right time, he will make sin look so innocent and make you look like a fool when you try to refuse. Satan will have you believe that sin is the only option. That is not true. It is true, however, that we will suffer sometimes even when we do the right thing. See **1 Pt.2:20, 1Pt.3:14, 1Pt.4:16**.

Consider the temptations Joseph faced in **Genesis 39:10-12**.

Joseph's motivation to run from sin was the fear of God.

**Verse 9b** "how could I do such a WICKED thing and SIN against GOD"?

God must remain our motivation in fighting sin as well.

There is always a way out of temptation (**1 Cor. 10:13**) HOW?

Deal with it immediately - nip it in the bud.

Deal with it realistically - get away from it at all costs

Deal with it ruthlessly - do whatever it takes to avoid it

Joseph saw sin as an affront to Almighty God. He could have enjoyed the **temporary** pleasure, joy, peace of mind, and maybe **temporary** promotion, but he refused and he suffered. **Genesis 39:20 (Psalm 105:17-19)**. Yet God did not abandon him. God always rewards godliness and faithfulness. See **Genesis 39:21**.

**CHALLENGE**

Start every day with the determination to be godly in your speech, thoughts, reactions and deeds.

Make decisions to please the Lord today and every day. When you falter, do not give up, be a fighter. Even after a victorious day, brace yourself for more challenges ahead. Therefore do not relent for you are still 'work in progress.'

**1 Samuel 25:4-35**

I have always justified David's action or intended action when I read this passage. I've always felt like I would do the same if I found myself in a similar situation. Only recently I began to realize that what seems right to me, may not be right in the eyes of God.

We all get angry from time to time. The problem is that we don't always control our anger as we should; our anger controls us and before we know it, causes devastation and destruction on a scale we can never imagine.

Anger, like fire, finally dies out, but only after leaving a path of destruction.

David and his men served as a protective presence. They prevented thieves and robbers from taking Nabal's sheep and harming his servants.

Now it was customary in those days for the person receiving the protection to reward the person who provided the protection.

This reward was what David was asking for. So David was right after all.

Nabal called David's integrity into question. He called David a rebel and refused to pay for the service he received.

Have you ever been accused wrongly, mistreated, hurt, and called names by people?

Our goal today is to learn how to better manage our anger through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Anger manages everything badly (anonymous). Consider **James 1:19-20**

Aristotle said "it is easy to fly into a passion, anybody can do that, but to be angry with the right person to the RIGHT EXTENT, and at the right time in the right way, it is not easy"

Anger takes control of the mind and turns sane men and women into raving lunatics. That is what anger can do to all of us, if not controlled.

David gathered an army to fight Nabal, about four hundred fighters, (please read **verses 21 & 22**). That was what David intended to do. Anger makes us unreasonable.

Ponder on this: The proud man has no God, the envious man has no neighbor, and the angry man has not himself. We pray that God will help each of us to take a closer look at our hearts as we live and react to different situations we face every day.

There is a solution for David and there is a solution for us every day if we listen to the Holy Spirit.

Read **verses 23 - 31**.

Abigail reminds me of the work of the Holy Spirit. When our anger is stirred up the Holy Spirit reminds us that we need to rethink. Had David given in to his anger, he would have lived to regret his actions.

God wants us to follow the example of Jesus always. Consider his example in **Matt. 26:50-55**

God intends to build our character. He wants us to be an example to others in the way we react and respond in situations that stir up our anger.

Sometimes the loud cry of anger in our hearts is so strong that we often fail to hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit of God. If we could just calm down, listen to what the Spirit is saying and respond to Him instead of the flesh, then we will become better in our character every day.

**Questions**

Are you conscious of your anger?

Do you justify your anger?

Have you done things or said things that you regretted lately?

Could there have been a better way to handle the situation? Could you have stayed calm, prayed and listened to the Spirit of God?

This is not easy, but it is righteous and it can be done.

Reference scriptures; **Psalm 37:8, Proverbs 19:11, Eccl 7:9, Matt. 5:22. Romans 12:17-21**

***"It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad one to lose it."***

- Benjamin Franklin

## Job Chapters 1 and 2

If there was anyone in the Bible who found himself in the midst of discouragement, it was Job. He lost everything he had, including his wife, perhaps, except his life. One would be right to conclude that the heavy hands of Satan were really on him (or were they of God?). During his travail and trials, all means from which encouragement could come seemed not to exist. A strong argument could be made that he had all the rights to give up on life itself, but that was not the case.

**'GLANCE at your difficulties, but GAZE at GOD' - Unknown**

I believe life is full of situations and events that can bring discouragement, but Job was able to handle his and maintain his integrity because he kept his focus on God and not his problems. Many of us do quite the opposite. Our problems are all written over us than Our God. More often than not, instead of God, we allow the challenges to overwhelm and control us, and influence our attitude.

In the midst of the discouragement, Job still counseled those around him through his consistency in the knowledge of who God is and how he deals with man.

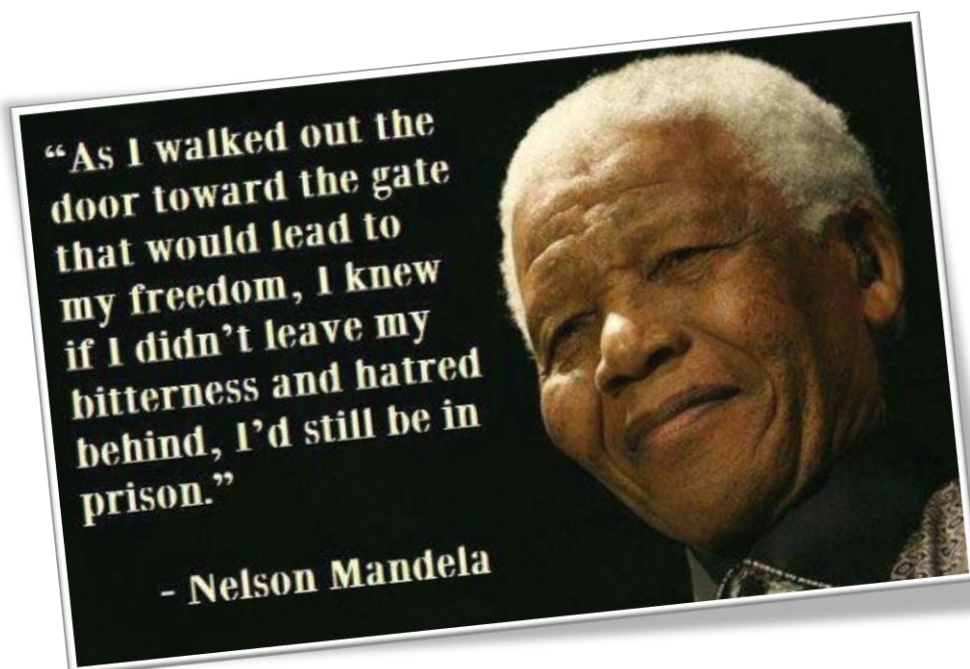
What are you going through right now? What difficult situations are weighing you down? Are there any challenges of life you can no longer bear? Look up to God. As long as you and I live 'under the sun', many things that discourage abound. It is only when we live 'above the sun' can discouragement be overcome (**Ecclesiastes 9**). Also, find comfort in the steadfastness of Job and let his story encourage you.

## James 1:2-4

Believe me, what you may consider a discouraging situation may perhaps be opportunities to build you and actually mature you. Could it be that God allows that situation to come your way not to discourage you, but to develop you?

***'If there is no struggle, there is no progress'* - Frederick Douglas.**

***'People may HATE you, RATE you, SHAKE you and BREAK you. How strong you stand is what MAKES you'* - Unknown.**



What exactly is building intimacy with God and what does it take to accomplish it?

The word 'intimacy' involves, among other things, having a close relationship with somebody and sharing precious moments together. Read **Psalms 139:1-24** and consider the following in relation to intimacy with your God:

There is a bond of affection between persons in an intimate relationship.

There is mutual understanding.

You know each other well.

This is one of many Psalms written by David. The psalm speaks volumes about deep intimacy with God. For us to truly be intimate with God, we must be genuinely interested in knowing Him on this level. As with any other relationship we must invest time. We need extended time in meditation and prayer. We need plenty of time in God's word. David had a depth of understanding of who God is and how God connected with him.

Are you confident in understanding how God connects with you?

God has expectations in His relationship with you. How well do you understand His expectations?

**Psalms 8:1-9:** God expects us to know of his existence. The greatness of God assures your worth in His sight. God values you and He expects you to know this.

**Deut 6:1-2:** God expects us to know His commands and obey them.

**Deut 6:5-9:** God desires our wholehearted devotion and love.

**Luke 9:23-24:** As in any enduring relationship, we must be ready to make sacrifices in our relationship with God. Understanding God's expectations and responding to them will deepen the bond between you and God.

Take to heart the assurances in God's word.

**Matthew 28:20:** God is with you. While you obey His commands, be assured that He is with you.

**Psalms 18:30:** When the storms of life come, take refuge in God. He is a shield and a refuge.

**John 14:15-19:** God does not leave us like orphans. His Spirit is with us. Because He lives, we will live.

**Psalms 23:4:** Even when death casts its frightening shadow, God is with us. Only God can take us safely through.

At the times when God seems far away, remember:

**Jeremiah 29:11:** God has a plan. He has it covered. His plans are good and they will come to pass.

**Hebrews 11:6:** God exists. Keep seeking Him. His reward to you is a promise. He will not disappoint. Keep the faith.

**Psalms 33:** God has always been and will always be faithful.

Intimacy with God comes with being open and honest about your feelings. When you are down and think God is not listening are you open and also honest? I learned this attitude from King David and since then I have enjoyed my relationship with God. When I am hurt or displeased about something I go to God saying it the way I feel at that moment. Be honest with God. God knows you well, come to Him as you are.

Learn from **Psalms 139-vs 19-22**; David's prayer here came from his zeal for God. His prayer here was a desire for God's righteous justice and not for personal vengeance. Let your prayers come with pure motives.

How about your sin? We will sin. God in his mercy will continue to expose our sin, so that we can repent. **2**

**Samuel: 12:7-10** and **Psalms: 51:1-19**. What is your attitude when your sin is exposed? God can give us the grace to be humble and contrite. God will restore our broken relationship with him.

Make a decision today, to always count your blessings and appreciate God's work in your life. **Psalms 84:11**

Finally, do not throw away your confidence in God. **Hebrews 10:35**.

**Let's pray:** Father, you are my morning, my noon, my night, my light, my darkness. In every hour of the day I see and feel your wonders in me. I live today because you made it possible for me. Who am I that you care so much for me? You stationed angels around me. What is so special about me that you pay so much attention to me? Your love and affection have overwhelmed me. My Lord, I surrender to you. Use me as you wish for yours, I am yours and forever I will be.



Today's Meditation – Ps 111:2-4 & Luke 22:19

*"He has caused his wonders to be **remembered**; the Lord is gracious and compassionate."* **Psalm 111:4**

*"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in **remembrance** of me."* **Luke 22:19**

One of my favourite hobbies is to visit places or see pictures or listen to music that awaken old wonderful memories. I like to think of memories as an emotional and spiritual bank account; one we can fall back on in times of need. A place we can run to and draw strength to face life's challenges. Memories are mental pictures our hearts remember.

There are two key areas in which we need to create lasting memories:

- Family
- Missions

## FAMILY

Some families are committed to planning for their annual holidays as a platform to build lasting memories of love and acceptance. Some make use of special seasons and moments like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, Easter & Christmas seasons etc.

Memories, especially joyful ones, fortify relationships and increase their endurance, especially through difficult times.

Some practical ways of strengthening relationships and creating lasting memories include:

- Experience new things together
- Create together & be active together
- Include others (from time to time) when you spend time together
- Learn together
- Share in Joy and celebratory events
- Make room for spontaneity

A parent's smile or a teacher's ridicule – acts of kindness or cruelty- are all wrapped up in memories that carry the power to bless or to curse. Each day we face a choice to leave positive pictures of blessing in the lives of everyone we meet.

One of life's simplest pleasures is to share an enriching experience with another.

The great thing is that it doesn't necessarily have to be anything complicated, expensive or time-consuming. What it should be is memorable.

(See Appendix for ideas on creating Family memories)

## APPENDIX

### 1. Talk about your shared adventure

Everyone has a story they love to tell. Encourage each person to describe what they liked best about a specific happening. Use gatherings, such as family dinners or car trips, to reinforce memories of what you have done together. Children especially have rather short retention spans, so help them relive some of your favourite times.

### 2. Use photos and mementos as keepsakes

After your experience, combine photos and mementos into a simple scrapbook or a shoebox. If possible, have each person provide input and feedback about what they did. You may be surprised about a child's perspective. Photos are great to use with all age groups, not just the very young. For more complicated experiences, you may want to expand the photos to include some journaling in your scrapbook. That process will help you retain the details of the trip and avoid disagreements about what you did and when.

### 3. Write about your experiences

As a Personal Historian, I am passionate about getting people to save their family stories before they are lost. What a great way to preserve your memories so they can be savoured for many years to come. People often ask how they can get started on their own stories. The easiest way is simple – just start with one story at a time. Before long, you'll find that each story leads you to others.

Whether you are working with children or adults, consider starting a writing journal. In fact, you may want to start a separate spiral-bound notebook for each project.

### 4. Plan future adventures together

Another activity that helps build memories is to talk about what you plan to do together, with your spouse, your kids, your friends. The planning and dreaming together are a wonderful way to understand what you each want and how you can help each other achieve those goals. Ideally, as you lay out your future trip, you'll be able to combine aspects of everyone's list of things to do and places to see.

### 5. Keep your sense of humor

Okay, now just in case all your adventures aren't perfect, consider a little bit of advice. Look at the bright side when things don't work out exactly as you planned. Be patient and roll with the punches. There's not much you can do about misfortune, but you can control how you react to it. You may not be able to laugh about it for a while, but at least you can make sure it doesn't ruin your trip. Besides, think about all the telltales you'll be able to tell when you get back home.

### MISSION

Faith in God is closely tied to the memories we have of God's wonderful works in our lives. God wants us to keep these memories for they are the raw material for praise, worship and thanksgiving. The Lord's Supper is an example of a lasting memory established by Jesus to help us to remember the significance of His suffering and death on the cross. Remembering the Cross of Jesus each time we gather as Christians renews our motivation to honour God in appreciation of our Lord's sacrifice.

We must find creative ways of remembering the cross. For example, the wordings of the song "Lead Me To Calvary" speaks volumes:

*King of my life, I crown Thee now,  
Thine shall the glory be;  
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow;  
Lead me To Calvary  
Chorus  
Lest I forget Gethsemane;  
Lest I forget Thine agony  
Lest I forget Thy love for me.  
Lead me to Calvary*

Create memories serving God in the mission field. Great memories of preaching in the bus, on the street, at temple courts, studying the Bible with friends late into the night, bible talk parties and all night prayers in someone's home etc. should rekindle our love for the cause of the gospel. When the chips are down and your faith is at low ebb, just reliving some memories of the mission field will revive your heart for God. Many older disciples draw a lot of strength and encouragement from the way the mission was lived out in the early days. Some of the best memories as disciples are built during conferences in other cities, countries and continents. During these conferences we get to experience the unity and love in the kingdom that cuts across cultures, languages, skin color etc. Plan to attend at least one this year.

**CHALLENGE** – Plan something memorable this month that you can do with your family or friends. Remember – it need not be expensive or time consuming – just something that you all will remember with a smile!

**PRAYER** – Lord, help me to always remember the good. Please do not let the beautiful things I have experienced in you slip from my heart. Help me to create lasting memories with those you have blessed me with. Amen.

*"What takes us back to the past are the memories.  
What brings us forward is our dreams." - Jeremy Irons*

*"Life is like a camera...  
Focus on what's important,  
Capture the good times,  
Develop from the negatives  
And if things don't work out,  
Take another shot."*

*Take care of all your memories. For you cannot relive them. - **Bob Dylan***

*My memories are inside me - they're not things or a place - I can take them anywhere. - **Olivia Newton-John***

### Sudoku Puzzle

Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3x3 box accommodates the digits 1-9, without repeating any.

	2	5	1	9				7
	6		5		7		3	2
8								1
5	4			7	9			6
6							9	8
1				2	6		4	
	1				4			9
2		6	9		1		7	
4				3		6	1	

	7	6		3		1	5	9
9					6			
	4		5		8		2	
	8	7	2					
			7	8		2	1	4
	1	2		5			8	
					4			8
	5	4		2	7		3	
7	3		9				6	2

	2	9	1		8		6	
3				4	5			1
6						8		4
	9	6				2		3
	8			1	9	4	5	
	3		8		6			7
		5			7		4	2
	4		2			6		
	6	3	4	8			7	

				9		4	5	1
1	7	5		2	8			
		9			3		7	
	3	2	7				1	
			2	3		7		6
	4	7		5		9		
	1				6	5		3
	5			7		1	9	
2		3	1		5			

**Deuteronomy 30:11-20**

God has called us to keep his commands, while reminding us that his laws are not hidden from us or beyond our reach.

- Obeying god's word is reasonable, sensible and beneficial. The most difficult part is making the decision to begin.
- What is god's motivation in giving you his commands to obey?
  - A. **Deuteronomy 10:12-13**. Have reverence for him and serve him with all your heart and soul.
  - B. **Psalm 19:7-11** god's word is a sure guide to obedience, because it warns of danger, and guides towards success.
  - C. **1 John 5:3-4**. If we find it difficult to build obedience, we can always trust Christ to help us overcome.
- What are the areas of your life in which obedience to god seems difficult? In those moments when it is difficult to obey, remember **1 John 5:3-4**

Consider **Deuteronomy 30:14**. According to this passage what are the ways in which we are encouraged to obey?

- 1) "The word is in your mouth". Sharing God's word with other people helps you to build obedience?

We can share god's word:

- a) In fellowship with other Christians... **Heb. 3:12-13**
- b) In conversations with non-Christians... **Philemon 6**
- 2) "The word is in your heart"... are you taking to heart the things that you read in the bible and hear in sermons and classes?

Is it possible to build obedience without having his word in your heart?

How can you evaluate whether you are letting the word affect your heart permanently?

- In the description of disobedience in **Deuteronomy 30:11-20** how does the problem start?

**V.17** the heart can be drawn away from god to other things.

**Proverbs 4:20-23**... Solomon tells us to guard our hearts above all else.

We must make sure we concentrate on those desires that will keep us on the right path.

Put boundaries on your desires: don't go after you see everything.

- To what other "gods" might you be drawn away (to what things or people or interests might you be tempted to be more devoted than to God himself) remember the command in **Deuteronomy 6: 4-5**

-What are the inevitable, ultimate results of building, obedience and ignoring obedience?

**Deuteronomy 30:15**

- a) **Psalm 1:1-6** to achieve anything worthwhile, we must build obedience to god's word in our hearts.
- B) **Matthew 7:21-27**. What you obey cannot be separated from what you believe. Jesus is more concerned about our walk than our talk.

- What are the specific ways you have seen god keep his promise of "life and prosperity" to those who obey him, in your life and in the lives of others?

***"Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid, one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory"*** - Douglas MacArthur

## TODAY'S MEDITATION – Gen 6:11-22

What are specifications? These are clear and detailed instructions highlighting dimensions, requirements and materials for how things should be done.

It is very obvious that God is an Architect. In giving instructions concerning the ark, He goes into great detail as to the type of wood to be used, the dimensions, number of floors, the finish, preservation, etc.

This reminds me of my class in specification writing, where we were told not to leave any material detail out, so that contractors and sub-contractors do not "use their judgment", but follow well laid out instructions. This also aids quantity surveyors in estimating accurately the cost of building elements. In **verse 22**, the Bible says Noah did all the Lord commanded; this was because he had specifications to follow.

Clearly, this science of specification was learnt from God.

In **Exodus 25 & 26** God gave detailed specifications for the construction of the Ark, Table, Lamp stand, Tabernacle, Courtyard, etc. When specifications are given, there is no room for ambiguity.

This ought to give us an idea of the kind of God we serve - a detail oriented God who leaves nothing to chance.

In the old covenant, God gave the people of Israel the 10 commandments and tons of instructions on how they ought to live (Book of Leviticus). At this present time, He has given us not just clear cut instructions on how we ought to live, but better than that, He has given us His Son as a model of how we should live.

Jesus is God's specification of how His children should live. Paul says it clearly

**1 Corinthians 11:1**, *"follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ".*

How do we build God's church to specifications?

By following the structure that Jesus laid out.

### 1. Build yourself (**Mathew 4:2, Mark 1:35, Hebrews 5:7, Luke 2:46-47**)

Jesus spent time connecting with God through fasting, prayers and bible study.

The time He spent with God fortified Him to go through all the challenges He had to face. All the vigils, the cries, the tears,... created intimacy with God.

How do we compare our relationship with God, with that of Jesus?

### 2. Build the Church (**Luke 19:10**)

Jesus had a clear purpose. And every day He lived to pursue it.

Jesus has given us a clear purpose. To know God (**Jn. 17:3**) and to make God known (**Matt 28:19**)

Are we living to pursue this purpose?

### 3. Build the Needy (**Mathew 11:2-5**)

Jesus spent a considerable part of His ministry touching lives. The poor and needy were a very important part of His ministry to the point that they had a "poor collection bag".

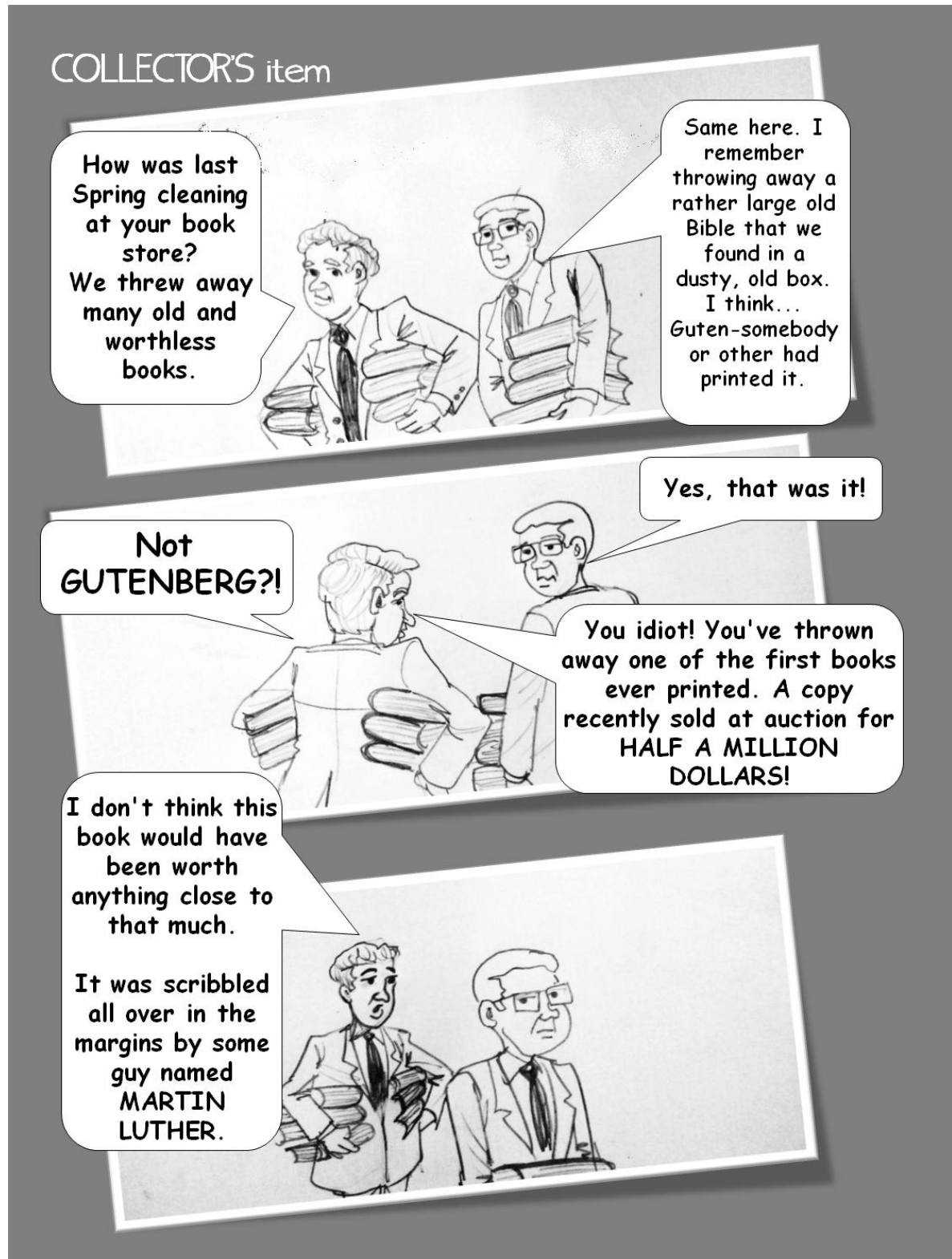
How are you imitating Jesus in this way?

**CONCLUSION** – God has given us specific instructions in different areas of our lives; be it as a married person, a student, a parent, a professional, a single person or even an elderly one. He has done so because He created us, He loves us, and He knows exactly what is needed in order for us to live a fulfilled life that brings blessings to us and glory to Him. We have Jesus as our example and model. Let us follow His specifications with faith.



**PRAYER** – Lord, thank you for giving me every specification for my life through your word. Help me to build my life, help me to build the life of others and help me to build your church according to clear direction. In Jesus name. Amen.

***"Whatever good things we build end up building us." - Jim Rohn***



## BUILD WITH COSTLY MATERIALS

DAY 15

Today's Meditation – **Rev 21:15-21**

What are "costly materials"?

Actually, costly materials in this text mean materials that are precious and very durable.

In today's passage, we see how God uses precious and rare materials to build the New Jerusalem foundation, walls and city.

In **1 Kings 6:7-31**, Solomon went to the best timber reserves in his time to get Cedar and Juniper wood for the Temple only to cover these expensive woods with pure gold.

### WHAT IT TAKES:

To build with costly materials requires:

Attention to **DETAIL, TIME and MONEY**.

Costly materials as the name implies, are very expensive, therefore architects have to go into great detail in their building designs to ensure that dimensions are accurate to reduce wastage. This is done by drawing up detailed plans with specifications.

Secondly, time is required to seek out these materials. In some cases, architects may have to travel to foreign lands to source for such materials. Solomon went to Lebanon to buy wood!

Finally, it will require money to purchase these materials.

### WHY GO THROUGH ALL THIS?

The goal is to build a structure that will be beautiful, functional, durable and stand the test of time.

Isn't it ironic that houses built by Africa's Colonial fathers in the 19th century are still standing today, while those built only 10 years ago are falling apart?

The most challenging and important aspects of construction are the foundation. Thanks be to God for helping us with that in Jesus. Now all that is required is that we build on Him.

How are we building?

It took Solomon 7 years to build the Temple of God because of his attention to detail and it was a wonder of its time.

It took Jesus 3 years to build 12 individuals that sparked a great spiritual revolution in the 1st century turning the world upside down. We still feel their impact today.

It also took Paul 2 years of preaching and teaching in the hall of Tyrannus to bring the word of God to every Greek and Jew in the province of Asia. (**Acts 19:8-10**)

All these individuals had detailed **PLANS**, spent **TIME** and **MONEY** to build with costly materials.

### PRACTICAL:

1. As disciples of Jesus, we ought to have detailed plans for our spiritual lives.

Plans of what to achieve in God's church and how to go about it.

Plans of how to build ourselves up spiritually.

Plans of how to be deeply connected to the vine, the fellowship.

A man who has no plans goes nowhere.

2. We have to be prepared to sacrifice our time.

Time to be at all Church meetings.

Time for prayer meetings, evangelism, leadership meetings, studies, follow-up, etc.

3. We must be ready to spend our money.

We may have to buy Devotional Bibles; visit people for discipling and encouraging; go for retreats; mountain top

prayer meetings; contribute to build church buildings, etc.

We must have an attitude of excellence when doing things for God. Be it building Church structures, buying equipment, etc.. We can't always want to save money thereby buying inferior items. Let us strive for excellence!

As the scripture put it, our building (relationship with God) will be tested by fire. This could mean the loss of a job or loved one, persecution, conflicts, disagreement, illness, accident, separation, unanswered prayers, the disappointment from the church leadership, etc.

The question is: will you survive the test?

**CONCLUSION** - In my 22 years of being a disciple of Jesus, I have come to the conviction that what keeps one faithful to God and His Church is having a great relationship with God and God's people. This year, resolve to build well in these two areas by investing the needed time, planning and resources. At the end of the day you will be glad that you did.

May we be found to have built with costly materials on that day.

**PRAYER** – Lord, thank you for showing me from your word the beauty of building with costly materials. Help me not to cut corners with you, but to have an attitude of excellence. In Jesus name. Amen.

Additional reading:

**1 Peter 1:3-7.**

**Today's Meditation – Heb 11**

Faith is having an incredible experience with God and an incredible experience of God on a daily basis. It is not something you can see or hold, but believe exists and you eventually own it.

Living your life daily by faith brings peace, joy and unlimited hope.

Hebrews 11 vs 6: And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

- It is the only way to please God
- To build with faith is to say am certain I will be this... Though I haven't seen it

In **Hebrew 11 vs. 2**: This is what the ancients were commended for...

- Great men and women in the bible built with faith
- Notice all that they were able to accomplish even though they were mere men like you and me
- They walked with God personally and built on God's conviction
- Their relationship with God wasn't based on people.

**Hebrew 11 vs. 3**

- Everything you see today in the universe was not made out of what was visible but invisible
- God created us to function by faith. We are created in His likeness

**1 Corinthians 4: 1-2**

So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

- God has given us his Spirit
- No one knows the thought of God except His Spirit
- The Spirit of God living in us makes known to us the secret things God has entrusted to us
- These secret things can only be grasped by faith because – NO EYES HAS SEEN, NO EAR HAS HEARD, NO MIND HAS CONCEIVED WHAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR YOU WHO LOVE HIM

When someone big, powerful and influential puts things in your care; he trusts that you will be faithful, isn't it?

- God wants us to be faithful with what he has entrusted to our care
- If we fail to be faithful, he can take it away from us.
- Are you faithful? Do you focus on the power of God or on the present situation
- Are you doubtful of God's power?
- Will you rather abandon God for a man who claims to see beyond and work wonders?

**WHAT HINDERS US FROM BUILDING WITH FAITH**

**1. LISTENING TO SATAN'S LIES- GEN 3 VS 1- 6, JOHN 8 VS 42- 47**

- Satan's native language is lies
- Satan is in the habit of twisting God's words
- What lies are you allowing Satan to tell you?
- We've got to take time to learn God's words and trust in them.

**2. TAKING YOUR EYES OFF JESUS- MATTHEW 14 VS 25-31**

- Peter removed his attention from Jesus and focused on the wind and storm
- Jesus must be our focus not man
- Don't focus on the distractions

## IS IT DANGEROUS WHEN I DON'T BUILD WITH FAITH?

**ROMANS 14 VS 23b:**... and everything that doesn't come from faith is a sin.

- Relationship with our neighbours, one another, giving in the church, evangelism, discipling e.t.c.
- All these must be built with faith

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER ON

- What kind of building do you prefer? The one that will last or the one that will be for a short period
- What is the highest /greatest feat your strength has ever gained for you? Can it be compared to any of God's
- What are your doubts? List them out.

Step out in faith and build your whole life this year with faith. You can only imagine what God will do through you. Go for it, God is your strength.

***"Some men see things as they are and say why?"***

***I dream things that never were and say why not?"*** - Robert F. Kennedy

**PRAYER** – Lord, open the eyes of my heart so that I can follow you by faith. Help me to build my life on what you say, not what I see. Increase my faith on a daily basis. In Jesus name.

***"He must trust, and he must have faith. And so he builds, because what is building, and rebuilding and rebuilding again, but an act of faith?"*** — Dave Eggers



Today's Meditation – **Ruth 1:1-18**

The book of Ruth tells one of the Bible's most beautiful stories of selfless love!

It tells the stories of two women who had gone through intense trials and tribulations in life that had crushed what they once had, but were able to build each other up through love and selfless devotion.

Love is defined (amongst many) as an intense feeling of affection and care towards another.

To love is to be deeply concerned and dedicated to the good and well-being of another.

To build with love therefore can simply mean "To form or develop another with utmost care, affection, and dedication."

In the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, we see all these elements - and more - playing out. Theirs was a relationship built on pure love, concern and devotion to one another.

Naomi's love for Ruth was selfless because she was more concerned about the younger woman's welfare than she was of her own... **Ruth 1:11**

Ruth's love for Naomi was equally selfless because she was more concerned about building Naomi up in love... **Ruth 1:16-18.**

Naomi left her homeland full; with her husband and two sons; and would have returned totally empty if not for the insistence of her daughter-in-law Ruth. Ruth's love and dedication later became a tool that God used not only to rebuild the lives of these two women, but also to bring about the lineage of Jesus our Lord.

As disciples of Jesus in GOD's modern day movement, we have been called as GOD's fellow workers to a life of building. Love is one of the virtues that will endure (1 Cor. 13:8). Whatever we build with love will surely endure. If you are married, you have been called by God to build your spouse and your children with love. If you are single, a bible talk leader, family group leader, Regional leader, Church leader, discipler, or a disciple of Jesus, we have all been called by God, through HIS Word to build others with love.

### **1) BUILD WITH AFFECTION**

*"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."... **Thess. 2:8.***

The words of the Apostle Paul (in the verse of scripture above) to the disciples in Thessalonica, showed that he was a man who built and mentored others with deep affection.

When you build or mentor others with deep affection, your attitude towards them would be devoid of any form of anger, frustration, or legalism. You would relate with them in an honest - down-to-earth basis, devoid of bitterness, insecurity, meanness, malice, master /servant attitude, and any form of pretense. You would work hard to build them up - not tear them down, to help them become their very best - even if it means becoming 'better' than you! They would become very dear and special to you and they will know it!

### **2) BUILD WITH CARE AND CONCERN.**

*"Again Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me? He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep" - **Jn 21:16***

To build with care and concern, is to pay close attention to the Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, and Mental health of the person/persons that GOD has put in your life to care for.

We live in a world where 'self love and care' has gradually taken over the minds and hearts of many, and it's sad to say that this ungodly, self-centered attitude has permeated the Church of Jesus.

Many are no longer concerned about the welfare - spiritual or otherwise - of their fellow brothers and sisters, and have chosen to justify this unchrist-like attitude with statements like "The Church is no longer like it used to be", "I've been hurt deeply in the past. I don't need any more hurt", "Why should I be policing people? We are all adults. Anyone who needs help should speak up!" "I have my own cross to carry. I don't even have enough time for myself" On and on we go, justifying and excusing away our lack of care and concern towards the building of GOD's Church.

In the light of the above scripture, can we be justified in anyway if we don't care for the 'sheep' (adult animals - by the way), that Christ has placed under our care?.

Admittedly, caring for others does have its challenges, however, if it's done in love, because you are mindful of God, you will be blessed!

### **3) BUILD WITH DEDICATION.**

*"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..." Gal 4:19.*

Paul shows us from the scripture above what building with dedication is all about.

He was ready to go through the pains of 'childbirth' - an indescribable pain, if I may add - until Christ is formed - Built - in the Galatian disciples.

Building can sometimes be a messy and frustrating job, but once it's done and done well, it brings joy, admiration, and commendation, both to the builder and the building.

When Paul used the word 'until', he communicated unshakeable commitment.

To build and build well, there must be a high level of dedication that is born out of love. For, when the pains and fatigue of building sets in, only love for the one(s) being built will keep you going.

Challenge: Write down one character sin that has been a stumbling block in your ability to build others with love. Pray and beg God to help you die to this sin, and share with a friend who is not afraid to challenge and hold you accountable - with love!

**PRAYER** – Lord, you truly showed me what love is by giving your life for mine. Teach me how to love. Please take away the things in me that hinder me from giving affection, care, concern and dedication to others. Help me to grow in these areas until I become like Jesus. Amen

*"Be the one who nurtures and builds. Be the one who has an understanding and a forgiving heart one who looks for the best in people. Leave people better than you found them."*

**— Marvin J. Ashton**

***"When someone loves you, the way they talk about you is different. You feel safe and comfortable."** — Jess C. Scott, The Intern*

*"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize..."*

In today's passage, Paul took his time to explain how the concept of making it to heaven works. He started by using a spot illustration. In the ancient Olympic era, there have been always one winner and one prize, no silver or bronze medal as the case is today. In a sport like that you must go for gold. The crown they fight for is perishable but the crown for our heavenly race is imperishable.

We must run and fight with a clear purpose to get the prize. The aim of the building must be as clear as crystal to every one of us.

Imagine you are building a house; you don't know how many rooms you will have; the structure plan is unclear to you, but you believe that "as the spirit leads" so you will build. Trust me; the outcome will not be anything pleasant since you did not set your mind on anything definite.

**Remember the realities:**

**1 Cor 13:11**

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

Now we need to put childish ways behind us and grow up. Quit complaining. Quit blaming the church, the government.

The realities we have on the ground are: parenting, health challenges that are mostly age related, family responsibilities, worldliness, high cost of living, false doctrines in the church, the need for more godly leaders etc.

Q. What are you aiming at building?

Q. What sacrifice are you ready to make to ensure we build a church family that will stand the test of time?

Q. Do you admit that we need to learn how to resolve conflicts in a more godly way?

Q. Have you seen that we need to rise up and invest more in parenting, and building our marriages and homes?

Q. Is it clear now that we need to pay more attention to our health both spiritually and physically?

People say that "Rome was not built in a day" yet, I say that without a sense of purpose Rome would never have been built.

Let us learn from the past: housing, light, and a healthy environment are a challenge today in Nigeria because our leaders were not visionaries.

The real deal is: Are you building? What are you building? And why are you building?

**Neh. 2:17**

*Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." (NIV)*

Let us, like the Jews join Nehemiah in building a purpose heritage so that our church family will not be in disgrace. A family we will all be proud of.

**1 Cor 3:10-15**

*10. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13. His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

One of the greatest privileges we enjoy today as 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples of Jesus is the quality of sacrifice made by the early Christians who gave everything they had to build on the incredible foundation laid by Jesus when He was here on earth.

Using the example of a physical structure, Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to be careful of the kind of materials they use in building their spiritual lives.

I have seen many newly built houses that looked very sophisticated upon completion, but became a death trap soon after. In the same way, I have seen many disciples who started the Christian journey on a very attractive and promising note but derailed along the line because they paid more attention to the present; ignoring the importance of the future.

**Matt 7:24-27**

*24. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*

Most of us do not understand the depth of the passage above until we begin to experience the realities of the Christian life. Have you experienced times as a Christian when you just felt like giving up on the discipleship and obedience stuff or when you wondered whether it was really worth it to deny yourself and follow Jesus?

In both passages that we read, the buildings were tested by some natural elements. Paul spoke of fire and Jesus spoke of winds and rain. They come at a time when nobody expects – suddenly and unannounced. We will all go through times of testing.

Building with the future in mind requires that we build **STRONG**. We must use the costly stones of commitment to the meetings of the body, serving, openness and confession of sin, love for one another, hospitality, giving, fellowship, prayer and bible study etc. We must kick out the hay and straw of slander, gossip, hatred, jealousy, envy, impurity, deceit, bitterness, immorality, discord, hypocrisy etc. Sin weakens our spiritual structure.

Building with the future in mind requires that we build with **INSIGHT**. What challenges are we likely to face in the future? How can we prepare for them now? One challenge that is paramount is that of helping the next generation. They are the future. What part will you play in building up the spiritual life of a young person this year?

Resolve that you will not give in to the pressure, challenges and trials of the moment. Hang in there. Look at the bigger picture of what God has in store for you. Keep your eyes on the future goal and you will find the strength to carry on.

Are you conscious of how you are building your spiritual life on a daily basis?

What kind of materials have you used to build before now? How will you build differently this New Year?

Come up with several things you will do differently this year as you focus on building your life with the future in mind.

**PRAYER** – Lord help me to build strong this year. Give me the grace to overcome whatever testing my faith may go through and help me to emerge victorious. Help me to keep my eyes on the future glory. In Jesus name. Amen.

## PARKED and ready

Congrats Ope! So Awesome you finally got your upcountry University admission!



Thanks Ade. I'm so Happy and **GRATEFUL TO GOD!**

I bet you have **EVERYTHING** checked on your checklist. That's at least **FOUR YEARS** away from home you know?



You bet!... School fees, Cloths, Phone & every other Gizmo imaginable, Books, Money... **EVERYTHING!**

That's Awesome! So, how is the **CAMPUS MINISTRY** over there?



Eeem... I'm not sure there is Church over there.

**Matt 25:1-13**

“... The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil in them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps...”

Just before He faced the cross (**Matt 26 & 27**) Jesus took time to tell His disciples several parables. His goal was to prepare them for the long haul – to teach them things that would help them stand firm even when He might no longer be with them. Surely, Jesus was building His disciples with the future in mind.

One of those parables is the one we read today – The story of the 10 virgins; loosely interpreted as the 10 bridesmaids. They were getting ready to be part of the final procession to take the bride to her groom’s home after the festivities of the wedding ceremony. (Even in our culture this tradition exists where later in the day after the wedding ceremony is over, a bride is escorted by her friends to her groom’s family home to take up her new residence.) They took lamps with them because evening was approaching. But 5 smart ones thought of taking some extra oil...

- What reasons might have made the 5 wise virgins think about taking extra oil?
- How else can you describe them apart from wise?
- Did the foolish virgins commit any sin in particular?
- If not, what was their mistake? And what were the consequences of their mistake? What lessons can you learn from these 2 sets of maidens?

Like the 10 virgins who all had their lamps, we all have a measure of faith as disciples of Christ. But what we build on our faith and how we build is what makes the difference eventually.

Last year we experienced heavy rainstorms in the country. On one occasion in my neighbourhood roofs blew off several houses due to heavy wind. But as people repaired their property, many put extra fortification. They were determined not to be caught unawares in the future! We may not always be lucky to have a second chance. Now is the time to build well.

What are the different areas of your life that you are planning to build on this year?

Your walk with God? Your career? Education? New Relationships? Your marriage? Parenting? The list is long!

In 5, 10, 20 years’ time, where do you hope to be in each of these areas? What would you need to do differently starting from today?

**PRAYER** – Lord, help me to build my life and my faith as you did – with the future in mind. Help me not to be careless with my salvation and with opportunities but be diligent. In Jesus Name, Amen.

***“Individually, every grain of sand brushing against my hands represents a story, an experience, and a block for me to build upon for the next generation.”***

— Raquel Cepeda, Bird of Paradise: How I Became Latina



Some rich historic tourist destinations in the world include; Paris, Rome, Egypt, USA and China, to name but a few. These days, many people from those parts of the world are streaming to UAE and other once considered, "desert lands". The theory that states that "When a paradigm shifts, everyone goes back to zero. Your past success guarantees nothing" is true. With vision, Dubai is setting the pace and rewriting the rules for tourism. Our Federal Capital Territory (ABUJA) was well on track to make history. In 2007, when I first visited I was impressed with what I saw as building projects. Last year, I was there for the West African Leadership Conference. Six years later, things were pretty much the same. Lagos is so congested, the light system is poor, roads are bad, the land is saturated, the air is polluted, what I know is working well in this city is God. Trust me; 40 years ago, we did not know we will have this much to handle in this city. We are so overwhelmed with what we have at hand that we are not even seeing what will happen in the next 40 years. God is our strength. The ICOC Lagos is 25 years old; we did not plan very well for what we have on ground today. May God help us to see what will happen in the next 25 years and beyond, so we can plan very well to his glory.

### **John 15:5-16**

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. The secret to staying alive spiritually is to remain in the Lord Jesus. Bear in mind that we can do nothing without him. It is to the glory of God that we are spiritually fruitful. This is not just about baptisms, but also fruits like: love, patience, self-control, kindness, faithfulness, etc. In verse 16, Jesus says that he chose us and appointed us to go and bear fruit that are enduring. Our fruit should not just be in the here and now, but also for the long run. Whatever we build today, we need to do so with an eye on the future.

Questions like "How will what I do or fail to do today affect my tomorrow and the future of the next generation?" This will keep you on your toes in the quest to leave a lasting legacy.

The quality of our leadership, parenting, love and respect for each other, commitment to God, love for the poor and needy, love for the lost and investment in maturing the church, love for our country will determine what the next 25 years will be. My prayer for every one of us is: 'MAY WE LIVE TO SEE THE NEXT 25 YEARS' Amen! This is the deal, some of us will see the future of our church, homes, country etc and will depart to our graves very happy and fulfilled or very sad and depressed depending on the outcome of the investment we put in today.

We can avoid the, "Had I known" now, if we start building strong families, church, country etc.... This will not happen by magic or wishful thinking. There must be a deliberate effort to make things happen. Remember that everyone is building something good or bad, but time will tell.

***"Keep all special thoughts and memories for lifetimes to come. Share these keepsakes with others to inspire hope and build from the past, which can bridge to the future". - Mattie Stepanek***

**Please turn to PAGE 75 of this book for a beautiful illustration of paradigm shift from  
Joel Barkers "Business of Paradigme" as reviewed by Grady McAllister  
(Slightly edited by us)**

**Ephesians 4: 14-16**

*"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

A healthy team, a team that is clicking, a team that is running on all cylinders is something special and is capable of doing things that are hard to believe. While my hope is that every church in the country operates as a healthy, effective team, I realize that we are humans and this is not always the case.

We hear about it in sports all the time: a player is labeled "locker-room cancer," or "super brat" or some other derogatory nickname. By the time it has come to the point of name-calling and finger pointing we all know that the end of a team is near.

While we are often incredibly focused on finding out who is to blame for the failure of the team, how often do we look back at the team's history to *identify the behaviors that led to the team's dysfunction?*

How often do we look to see the seeds of failure that were sown in the past, and learn how to prevent team failure in the future?

Team building is an art, not a science. Over the last 20 years that I have spent building and serving in church leadership teams, I have learnt more ways to kill one than I would like to admit. It is easy to destroy than to build!

**Vs. 14**

A strong wall is made up of solid blocks.

How solid and stable are you in your relationship with God?

Are you dependable and reliable as a disciple?

What are areas you have found weakness in your character and self-discipline?

**Vs. 15**

A strong building is made with costly materials.

Speaking the truth in love is costly; but it's a true sign of maturity.

Are you willing to face up to the truth and help others do the same?

What areas of your life are you uncomfortable or fearful of revealing?

**Vs. 16 (John 17: 20-23)**

On a strong wall, no block stands alone.

Jesus prayed for unity amongst the disciples.

We need one another to survive this harsh and cruel world.

In what areas can you work harder to be unified with your brothers and sisters?

**Conclusion**

You are a part of God's team and he desires for you to be a solid, stable and quality member. Working in harmony with other disciples to build up the Kingdom of God should be our unified goal.

Relationships to me are the 'oil of life.' Imagine a world without relationships; it would be like an engine of a million parts without lubricant. It just won't work, it will knock. Relationships are always an important part of life.

### IMAGINE

**2 Corinthians 6:18.** We are daughters and sons of the Father. This defines our relationship as the family of God. Family is important to God. According to **Ephesians 1:5** God adopted us in love. Love is the cord that binds the family together.

We must take time to consider the following questions.' What does God want for his family?' 'How does he want His children to live and relate?' Think and write down your imaginations.

How can you start? **1 John 3:16-18**

### THE NEED

The New Testament example of the Church shows the apostles were in the forefront of driving for family relationships in the early Church. They were led by the Holy Spirit to meet God's expectations of a church family. **Acts 2:42; and 44-47** reveal that certain levels of relationships were demanded by the apostles; fellowship – building relationships across the board (no class, no caste); commitment to one another to the extent of sharing things in common and sacrificing to meet each other's need. To cap it all; they (over 3,000 disciples) visited each other in their homes and shared fellowship meals.

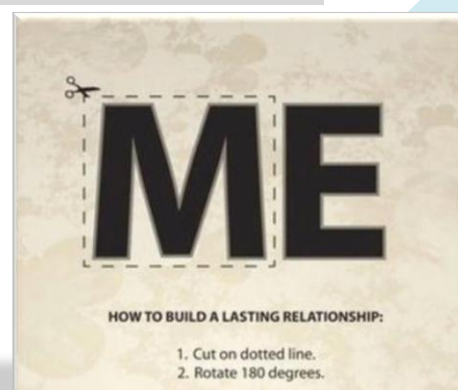
**THINK:** how could this happen considering the number of disciples? It was systemic, it was planned, there were follow -ups. How are you doing in these areas of relationship building? How can you drive this effort in your one another, relationships; Bible Discussion Group; Family Group; or Region? What needs to change?

### THE HEART

**Romans 16:1-23.** Keep it going. Stay connected. The price of relationship is time and communication. The quantity and quality put in are important. Paul gave us the example. Think about how many names Paul mentioned in this chapter? Note, for everyone, he had a special remark and greetings to make. These remarks reveal how much commitment and sacrifice they had made in his life and ministry. Do you remember old friends; those who have touched your life one way or the other? Do you keep the connection going for the new friends you have gained? Do you create memories? Do you send notes and words of encouragement?

Relationships add value to life. They demand that we love, give, care and receive. They keep us going in today's hostile world. Never walk alone!

***"You can talk with someone for years, everyday, and still, it won't mean as much as what you can have when you sit in front of someone, not saying a word, yet you feel that person with your heart, you feel like you have known the person for forever.... connections are made with the heart, not the tongue."** — C. JoyBell C.*



**Nehemiah 4 v. 1 - 23**

What an amazing account! Reading this chapter never ceases to amaze and inspire me. Opposition is a certainty.

**2 Timothy 3 v. 12** Persecution and opposition can be used interchangeably. Persecution is a promise to all believers.

Make a list of the areas in your life that you are working on building. E.g. building deeper relationships or building an area of your character like patience, perseverance, self-discipline, etc. For some of us it is some form of opposition in the workplace, or at school or even at home.

Do not be surprised if you face opposition while striving to be righteous. However, if we face opposition because we are doing wrong, then we have only ourselves to blame. Read **1 Peter 4 : 12 -13** and verses **15 -16**.

This is because of the 'evil one' who will not let you make progress without a fight. You will not live the godly life and be free of the pressure of opposition. Thankfully, we are forewarned. Be prepared.

Enduring opposition in itself can be overwhelming and emotionally draining. Let us draw from the practical lessons we can learn from **Nehemiah 4**. As the Jews succeeded in their task, we can succeed despite the opposition we face in various areas.

**Take it to God.** See **Neh 4 : 4 – 5**. The Jews quoted from **Psalms 123 v. 3 – 4**. This Psalm is believed to have been written by Hezekiah. It is possible that Hezekiah said this prayer after enduring ridicule from the Assyrians. It is painful to be insulted. Do not be shy to tell God how you feel. He understands. Take it to Him and leave it there.

**Proceed with all your heart.** **Neh 4 : 6**. At times like this our hearts are often heavy with discouragement. Do not let such negative emotions dampen your resolve. Confidently ask God for strength and then proceed with all your heart. **Neh. 4 : 7** Your progress will anger your enemy (the devil). **Neh 4 : 8** Keep praying and keep working.

**Know your weak areas and work smart.** **Neh 4 : 10 -18**. The Jews knew that their strength was given out and that they were seriously threatened by enemy attack. Use your energy in the most vital or vulnerable places. ( **Verse 13**). Ask for and accept help from others. Ask others to pray for you, pray with you or hold you accountable. Ask someone to hold your hand if need be. E.g. go evangelizing or helping the poor together.

**Keep at it slow and steady.** **Neh 4 v 16**. With only half of the men working, the progress probably slowed in pace. However, those who worked felt safe because others were on guard. We are often impatient. Yet a slow and steady progress is better than standing still. For example, as a nursing mother a consistent (though short) quiet time each day as your baby naps is better than no quiet time for days. As a neighbour, consistently sharing your faith while living a godly life will eventually bear fruit. It may take long, but keep at it.

**Further reading;**

**Matthew 10 : 17 -31 and John 15 :18 – 20.**

***“When life puts rocks in your way, build something nice with them.”***  
— Volksweisheit

**Matt. 7: 24-27;**

In his book "Good to Great" Jim Collins, opens with the phrase, 'Good is the enemy of great.'

Very often, as human beings, we are more prone to settle for a good standard instead of a great standard. Why? I believe because most often our focus is on immediate expectation, or fulfillment, rather than the future.

Perspective has a way of influencing our understanding of situations and, by extension, our choices.

There are several facts or truths that have come to be generally accepted and agreed to, but still do not affect people's action.

1. Smoking leads to cancer, stills millions smoke and tobacco companies are thriving.
2. Taking several cups of water early in the morning could prevent heart problems, diabetes and other, yet how many of us take water every morning?

We can go on and on, but the message here is, it is one thing to accept an idea as true but a different thing to really live by it.

In **verse 21 of Matt. 7**, Jesus said, "not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven".

The big question here is not what you believe in or agree to as well, but rather what you are doing about it?

If we are going to build anything that will last it will take more than us paying lip service to Jesus' word or having a nice idea, attitude to it; it requires a willingness and resolve to live by his word.

It takes hard work to build a solid and lasting structure; the problems with most of us Christians are we taking a little bit of God's word, a little of our self and a little of the world and mix them all together and you wonder what kind of structure do we hope to come up with from such a mix?

It will take courage, determination, persistence and, I must add, support to build on the rock. With courage, determination and persistence you can give yourself support you ask from others.

**James 1: 22-25;**

After two decades of being a Christian, with over 16 years of marriage and 2 teenagers, I am more convinced of my need for help than ever.

We've all heard of the blind spot. Sometimes we need others who have a godly perspective to help us to see ourselves the way we really are. We need to pray to have the humility to invite others to come and help assess what we are building.

As a family, as a church, as a people, the quality of what we are building is in the process of being tested; situations, circumstances and life issues are going to come.

- After 10, 15 or 20 years, what are some struggles that you are having now? How are you doing?
- Does the scripture still make sense or not? (In the face of intense pressure, sometimes it does not, to me, to my shame and I've been at this for 20 years).
- Are you opening up to other brothers and sisters to help even if it is all just to pray?

Finally and more importantly, there is a dire need for heroes of our next generation; heroes of faith, courage, sacrifices, godliness and great character. These great qualities are not forged on the altar of mediocrity and compromise, but on the solid rock of God's word and godly friendship. Many of us had heroes in our lives; that is one of the reasons we are still standing after two decades.

Are the choices you are making today helping to build the next generation? Is it building godliness in your children? This is our legacy.

***"Every great building once begun as a building plan. That means, sitting in that building plan on the table is a mighty structure not yet seen. It is the same with dreams."***

— Israelmore Ayivor, Shaping the dream

**Matt 7:24-27**

24 "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." - **NIV**

Building to last is to build with the best materials on the best of foundations!

Everyone intending to erect any structure first ensures the foundations are solid enough, regardless of the type or size of the structure. Building engineers either look for rocky foundations or they create one artificially. Building with a solid foundation is not a small task; it requires a lot more time, resources and determination. This is unlike building with a frail or sandy foundation; anyone can build with it as it is faster, consumes less resources and not so demanding but in the long run it collapses.

Christ has called us all to build. He leaves us with the choice of foundation and building materials. At many times in different context God compares a foolish and a wise person. In the text above, Jesus differentiates between a wise and foolish builder. We see that these two groups have some attributes; they wanted to build and they also knew how to build. The question is this: why is one considered a foolish builder and the other a wise builder?

Jesus' final conclusions from the classical Sermon on the Mount clearly differentiate a fool from the wise by saying. "... Everyone who hears these words of mine..." [**Matt. 7: 26**]. The words he taught starting from chapter five. Christ taught about the new life, a life that seeks the kingdom of Heaven, a life of perseverance, humility, love, prayer, purity of heart and body; a life that trusts only in God, one that fights for justice at all cost- the life of a Christian!

This would mean that anyone who would live in obedience to these teachings is considered a wise builder. I believe strongly that this is the only way to build a lasting spiritual structure.

Brethren, are you building on the solid foundation? Would Jesus use you as an example of a wise builder? Take some time to meditate on these questions. If you do not live in obedience to the words of Christ you often hear and read, then you are considered a foolish builder! The current struggle and contentions you are having about your convictions and discipleship as a whole are just reflections of the foundation you are building on. It is the foundation that you have built on that is holding you together now as it is also what you are building on now that will sustain you in the future. **ARE YOU BUILT TO LAST?**

When the rains come, streams rise, and the wind blows, everyone will run to their houses for shelter and protection; how sad will it be if there is nothing to run to. I pray that you will have a place to run to when your storm comes (when you need it the most). If you have made some mistakes in the past by building on a weak foundation; not living in total obedience to the scriptures, I have great news! There is hope for now and tomorrow! Pull down the structure (repent) and take your time to rebuild on the solid rock.

Be a disciple!





**Psalm 19:7**

The word of god is completely trustworthy because god was in control of its writing. Its words are entirely authoritative for our faith and lives to be built up. We must never forget its purpose - to equip us to do good. Our knowledge of god's word is not useful unless it builds up our faith and leads us to do good.

Ask yourself the following questions and consider carefully the scriptures referred to.

Q1. Why is my daily bible study so important? **2timothy 3:16a** the bible is "god-breathed", we must read it, and use its teachings to guide our conduct.

Q2. How is the bible able to affect my thinking process? **2timothy 3:15, Romans 12:2** we must make a decision not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world. God's word must be firmly planted in our minds before transformation can take place. **Ephesians 4:22-24** we must make a daily conscious commitment and have the new way of thinking before the word can build us up.

Q3. Can I have a close relationship with Christ without being intensely involved in studying the word of god? **John 1:1-2, 14** Jesus is one of a kind and enjoys a relationship with god, therefore he became the perfect expression of god in human form. How does this relate to **John 15:4-8**?

Q4 what makes a bible study effective? **John 5:39-40** you may know the teachings of the scriptures, but if you fail to see the Messiah whom the scriptures point it is useless. It is possible to know the rules, but miss the Savior. **James 1:21-25**: You can measure the effectiveness of your bible study time by the effect it has on your behavior and attitudes.

Q5. What then are the goals of effective bible study that can build you up?  
Study these additional scriptures and make a list of ways in which you want your Bible study to affect you.

**Further Study:**

**Deuteronomy 30:11-16, Isaiah 55:6-11, John 17:17, Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, 2, Timothy 2:14-15, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 1:1-3, Hebrews 4:12-13, James 1:23-24, Hebrews 5:13 -6:3**

***"Build a valuable brand by branding what is valuable about you."***  
— Ryan Lilly, #Networking is people looking for people looking for people

**Gen 6: 11-22**

*Now, the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So, God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So, make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it..."*

- The situation the earth was at this point was terrible
- God called Noah to build in a chaotic situation
- The earth was corrupt and full of violence
- Barely only Noah was found blameless in God's sight
- He was called by God to build in the midst of corrupted people
- How easy will this task be for Noah
- Your guess is as good as mine
- He was given specific instructions by God on how to build an ark for his safety and those who are ready to believe his message I presume
- In **vs 22**, Noah did everything just as God commanded him
- Do you know how many people his ark saved? (**8**)
- Isn't this a food for thought?
- You can only imagine how Noah would have felt
- I know how I do feel when people do not respond to discipleship or when people leave the church because of certain issues
- It is so disheartening
- Noah, however, had only one thing in mind; to build as God has instructed
- Today, the question is what has God asked us to build

**1 Corinthians 6 vs 19:** "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?..."

Let's read this quotation aloud

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us

And as we let our own light shine

We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

- God has called us to build our lives
- To reflect his glory
- To look within what lies inside of us
- To shine and let the whole world know or see how beautifully and wonderfully God made you.
- The only fear you need to conquer is YOU
- You can do what God has chosen you to do
- You can serve, be faithful, be committed, love, forgive, let go of the hurt, teach people about God, encourage, be kind, be given, say I'm sorry...
- Sin destroys God's gorgeousness in you
- Noah didn't give in to the corruption of the people of his time

- He focused on building
- Don't give in to the pressure and distraction of the world, rather focus on building "YOU"

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER UPON:

1. When was the last time you gave careful thought to your "thought"?
2. Who do you want to be like spiritually? Today, many want to be doctors, lawyers, bankers e.t.c.
3. Do you make sacrifices to achieve more earthly values or eternal values?

#### PRAYER:

Father, I confess my distractions (name them) please forgive me. Help me to be like Noah who did everything just as you commanded him. Help me to overcome my struggles (name them). Henceforth, I will make a conscious effort to build my life spiritually. Thank you father. Amen



**1Thess.5:11**

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. - NIV*

The above scripture is part of the instruction about the coming of Christ in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian Church amongst other criteria. This charge to encourage and build each other up is continuous as long as we are still expecting the coming of Christ.

**Philippians 2:1-4** Paul writes "... Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any, common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself "

Fellowship helps us to face life's problems by providing and getting the support and encouragement of other Christians. A number of factors have fragmented the nuclear family in today's culture; the high divorce rate, delayed marriages, the emphasis on individual alternative lifestyles, and women working outside the home, among others. The high rate of mobility is another. In our society, people have few roots. People are no longer surrounded by the extended family of aunts and uncles, grandparents, and brothers and sisters that provided a safety net for previous generations. Everywhere you look there are signs that people are longing for fellowship, community, and a sense of family. This "longing for belonging" provides the church with the opportunity.

Positioning the church as a place where people are cared for will touch a sensitive part in many lonely hearts. Each of us needs support, motivation, help, strength and advancement at one time or the other. The importance of encouragement cannot be overemphasized in building a Church that glorifies Christ.

Let's consider the following questions.

**Question:**

Who in the Church are you encouraging and building up?

**Heb. 3: 12-13**

One important commitment as disciples is that of fellowship and it creates an ideal platform for mutual encouragement amongst us. This is a collective responsibility among Christians – young and old; male and female; rich and poor; educated and uneducated as long as you are a disciple of Christ.

Encouraging one another can transform a sinful and unbelieving heart to a pure and discerning heart that seeks to please God. We should be deliberate in getting involved in one another's lives. There should be no barriers or fence preventing us from communicating at the feeling level. Openness is the key to getting encouraged. A lot of us are discouraged because we carry our burdens alone. It is also said that openness is a product of honest and genuine friendship. Let's make it a duty to ask questions that bother on the state or condition of our hearts with the goal being to encourage.

**Question:**

What life experiences can you encourage that brother/sister with?

**Colossians 4:7-9** Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

Paul sent Tychicus to the Church in the Colossian Church suffering from heresy. He was to encourage the Christians to remain faithful and true to the faith. Part of the message was to encourage them with Paul's experiences of suffering and how he stood strong and faithful to the Lord.

Have you ever wondered why God took you through those thorny paths? Perhaps, it is to guide others, to avoid a similar episode from befalling them in the future or for you to be a source of strength and support to others in their time of trouble or need.

Our life experiences differ as individuals, for some it could be the loss of a loved one, financial difficulties, academic pursuit, child bearing, loss of job, failure in examination, e.g. JAMB, WAEC, POST UME, etc. Abraham, Hannah, Daniel, Paul and other heroes of faith could not fully comprehend the fact that their life experiences and challenges will be a source of hope to us today. Whatever our past experiences are, we need to use it to glorify God, as we encourage others who are faced with similar or worse situations.

Building requires concerted efforts to accomplish a model that has been developed over time. As older Christians today, we should not forget how we were taught and mentored by our Church leaders to lead a bible talk. We gave all the excuses we thought of, however, with encouragement and development these dreams and aspirations came to pass and we are better equipped over the years to nurture and encourage others. All of these experiences should be used to benefit others in the area of mentorship for younger disciples and other areas of the Church building. Who are you mentoring today among the singles, teens, pre-teens, and children? Older disciples ought not to allow this important aspect of discipling through mentoring to fade away in our fellowship. Encouragement is the hallmark of discipleship where different hardships, trials, tribulations, victories, breakthroughs, success, etc. is shared amongst us to give hope and confidence that our God is able to do all things. It requires faith and prayer to build oneself and by extension build others.

<sup>24</sup>"And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds". **Heb. 10: 24**

This should be our attitude as disciples. We must look for ways to encourage and build each other up in an atmosphere of peace and love.

#### **Challenge:**

- 1) Spend time with two Christians you are not familiar with this week.
- 2) Always be on the watch for disciples who miss meetings; make it a habit to give them a call or a visit.
- 3) Married brothers and sisters should pick a single brother or sister to mentor in their congregation.
- 4) Look out for areas to use your life experiences to build others.
- 5) Make it your habit yearly to visit a congregation outside your city among our sister Churches to encourage and build them up towards love and good deeds.

***"You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world.  
But it takes people to make the dream a reality". - Walt Disney***



**ENCOURAGE AND BUILD EACH OTHER UP\_2**

One of the great things about our society is that we are a people who build, we like to build for ourselves palatial edifices but amazingly, we are also a nation of destroyers. If you are conversant with the news you will observe how people blow up things. This is just focusing on our country, Nigeria and you will agree with me that the worst things happen beyond our shores. We destroy things that people who sacrifice their lives to build. In fact, the bigger the explosion, the better

**1Thessalonians 5:11**

Apparently, Paul was addressing the disciples in Thessalonica on their lives as Christians and what is expected to come. However, Paul laid emphasis on the fact that we need to encourage one another first, then build each other up. Imagine what the church will look like if we are not putting these two key elements into practice, it will be a catastrophe!

There are two phrases in these verses that need careful consideration.

**Encouragement:** How can we encourage one another?

**THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD****1Thess 4:13-18, 2Timothy 3:16-17.**

Point: this scripture enables us to understand how useful and helpful God's word is to us as his disciples.

**THROUGH FELLOWSHIP****Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:24-25**

Point: the power derived from fellowships is what sustains us to be who we are as soldiers of Christ.

**BEING VULNERABLE****James 5:16, Proverbs 28:13**

Point: the greatest dilemma of mankind is SIN. I remember this study very well, When someone studied the Bible with me and you will agree with me that it was not an easy task for most of us.

Sin is the only thing that disconnects us from God. It jeopardizes our relationship with our creator.

**BUILD:** how can we build?

**HAVING A NEW ATTITUDE****Col 3:1-18**

Point: we need to focus our minds on things above (Godly things)

Guys, we need to lead ourselves before we can lead others- building!

**HAVING A GODLY CHARACTER:****BY TAMING OUR TONGUE****James 3:1-18**

This is evidently what was in James' heart, when he addressed this deadly, yet most utilized destructible tool - TONGUE. James used real life illustrations to help us come to an understanding of the power of our tongues. The issue is that we can destroy relationships with the flicker of a tongue. We can ruin a church by tossing a few well-lit words. That would be the opposite of build!

**Ephesians 4: 29** also emphasized on the need to control what comes out of our mouths.

Let's be more sensitive to our need than rush to condemn ourselves.

For me, being in the full time ministry as an intern exposed me to a lot of pedagogy (teaching and learning process) of the Bible and people relations based on their individual differences. You can do it!

**LIFE APPLICATIONS**

See to it that you encourage at least two disciples daily through text encouragement, visitation and fellowships. Learn how to control your actions.



There are dangers around anything you want to build in life. Be it a dating life, marriage, family, a physical building, a trip in or out of town including your spiritual life. So it is important to be courageous.

To be courageous is to possess the ability to face and deal with danger or fear without flinching. As builders in God's kingdom we must be courageous!

### NUMBERS 13:1-33

In this passage:

Leaders were sent out to explore the land of Canaan by Moses through God's directive.

They returned with the fruits of the land and two kinds of report.

The scary part of the report are:

The people who live there are powerful.

The cities are fortified and very large.

The descendants of Anak, were seen there.

**VERSE 29:** *The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. (N.I.V.)*

This is a dangerous report and is capable of causing fear and prevent anyone from wanting to go there, but for the courage of Caleb who silenced the people before Moses.

Caleb was in this missions findings, but he saw differently and came with a positive report.

His report was "we should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

This is positive and this is courageous!

### EZRA 4: 1-24

When the rebuilding of the Temple began by the exile who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel as the leader.

Their enemies rose up against them and did everything possible to stop the work.

They wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes, which eventually got the work to stop.

This is the time when courage is required.

The leaders of Judah, Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zachariah all demonstrated courage and in

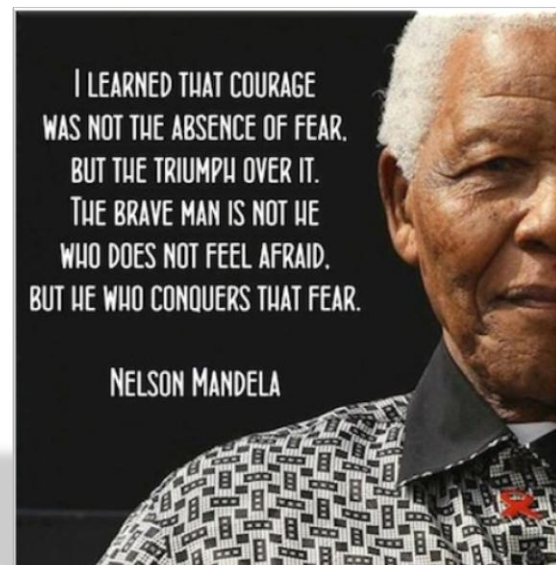
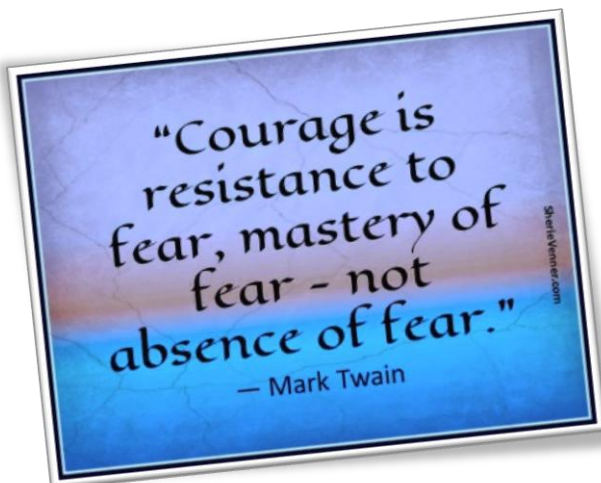
**Ezra 6: 14-18**, the temple was completed and dedicated to God.

### PRACTICALS:

Write down three things that causes you to fear and show a lack of courage.

Write down how you plan to turn these situations around.

Get your discipling partner and friends to hold you accountable and be a courageous Builder to the glory of God.



**Matt. 12:30**

*"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."*

- It is impossible to be neutral about Christ. Anyone who is not actively following him has chosen to reject him.
- Not being actively engaged in gathering with him is equivalent to being engaged in scattering what he has gathered.
- To gather and to scatter are two kinds of activity involving work.
- The action of scattering is of course the opposite of gathering.
- The evidence of our allegiance to Christ will be seen in whether we are working with him or against him.

**IN WHAT WAYS DO WE GATHER OR SCATTER?**

- They are actions on the part of a shepherd's life. In the Greek language, they can refer to the gathering of sheep and the scattering of sheep. For example, the word 'scatter' is used in **John 10:12** to describe the action of the wolf when it gets into a flock of sheep. The wolf attacks the flock and scatters them.
- You are either a shepherd who is trying to gather the sheep or a wolf that scatters them.
- Gathering and scattering happen during the harvest period. – **Matthew 9:35-38**.
- It is an allusion to the gathering and binding of wheat into sheaves and the careless scattering of the wheat due to a lack of diligence in collecting, binding and transporting them to the appropriate location. A more relatable example, if you live in West Africa, is the stacking of yam tubers in barns. When this is not done well during harvest, it can lead to huge crop loss due to pest infestation and rot. This action with negative consequence, we have tagged scattering.
- Everything that we do day by day will have one of these two effects. It is either going to draw people to the Lord Jesus or it will drive them away from him.

**PRINCIPLES OF GATHERING AS CONTAINED IN 1Cor. 3:9-17.**

- Gathering is synonymous with building. Working in God's field to build is gathering.
- You are God's field. We are God's fellow workers as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Constant, personal spiritual growth is gathering. How are you actively building yourself?
- Working out your salvation with fear and trembling is gathering. – **Php 2:12**.
- When we come together to worship God, we are gathering. Remember the popular chorus?; "we are gathering together on thee". How is your worship?
- When we devoid ourselves of sins and not cause others to stumble we gather.
- When we build with the required materials as in 1Cor 3 we gather.
- Availing ourselves to be gathered, is gathering.

**CONCLUSION**

- We either build or we destroy. We either gather or we scatter. Let us remember that whatever we do at any point in time can either count as gathering or scattering. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to gather for him and NOT scatter from him.
- Please examine yourself today!

**2 Cor. 13:5**

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?

**Gal 6:4**

- 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.

### INTRODUCTION

In **Mt. 16:13-17**, Jesus questioned His disciples concerning His identity, and then spoke about His church in **Mt. 16:18-19**

He promised to build His church, and mentioned the foundation upon which it would be built. He described the ultimate victory of His church.

This passage naturally raises several questions, such as:

- a. What is this "church" Jesus promised to build?
- b. What is the "foundation" upon which it would be built?

As disciples of Christ, we have a vital interest in the answers to these questions.

### JESUS BUILT & IS STILL BUILDING HIS CHURCH

#### A. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Greek word is "**Ekklesia**", meaning "an assembly, a congregation". It is used in the Bible in two ways:

- a. The church "universal" - the whole assembly of people who are saved.
- b. The church "local" - a company of saved people in a geographical area who work and worship together as a local congregation.

It is called "the body of Christ" – **Eph. 1:22-23**, it is called "the household of God" - **1Tim. 3:15**, it is called "the temple of God" – **Eph. 2:19-22; 1Pet. 2:5**, it is called "the kingdom of Christ" - **Col 1:13**, it is called "the bride of Christ" - **2Cor. 11:2; cf. Rev. 19: 6-9; 21:2**.

Our Lord Jesus Christ promised to build his church prior to his death, burial & resurrection. He also promised that Peter would be given the key to the kingdom of God.

It is very obvious that in the building of Jesus' church, Peter (and the apostles) was/were going to play a critical role. Let's explore further.

#### B. THE CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED AS PROMISED

On the day of Pentecost, post resurrection of Christ, the promised Holy Spirit came down to the earth, prompting the 12 apostles to speak in about 14 understandable earthly languages. On this day Peter stood up and delivered the first ever sermon post resurrection in **Acts 2:1-42**. It is fair to conclude that the church began on the day of Pentecost.

- a. When the Spirit was poured out on the apostles - **Acts 2:1-21**
- b. When Peter preached the first gospel sermon - **Acts 2:22-40**
- c. When about 3000 were saved, and the Lord added them to His church - **Acts 2:41, 47**

Read verses **38-41**. It is apparent that in starting the building of His church, Peter had the keys to open the door to the kingdom for the first time allowing the Jewish people to enter it.

To enter the kingdom being built by Christ, the following must happen:

Christ uses baptised disciples to preach the gospel of the Cross to people (studying the bible with people), encouraging them to have faith in Jesus Christ as the son of God who died for the atonement of man's sins.

Encouraging them to repent and get baptised into Jesus Christ.

As they accept and DO these, God forgives their sins, and gives them the gift of His Holy Spirit.

God, then adds them to the church that His son is building.

On the day of Pentecost, He added about 3000 people to his church that already had 120 people (**Acts 1:15**), **Acts 2:41**)

In **Matthew 28:18-20**, Jesus gives the great commission to the 11 which continues till the end of the age. This commission survives all generations, is given to you and me as well and involves:

- i. Making disciples in our neighborhoods.
- ii. Baptizing the disciples, we make.
- iii. Teaching the baptized disciples to obey everything the Lord commanded.

#### **Acts 4:13, 23-31**

The church is mentioned after Jesus' resurrection.

a. The Lord was adding people to the church - **Acts 2:47**

b. From that time forward, the church is spoken of as being in existence. Building the church of Jesus Christ cannot happen without the preaching and studying of the gospel. God adds to His church as we preach, study and baptize people. Look at **Acts 5:14; 6:1; 8:12-13; 8:35-38; 9:17-18; 9:31; Acts 11:24; Acts 13:48-49; Acts 17:2-4; Acts 18:8**

Preaching and studying with people requires boldness & prayer. Read **Acts 18:9-11**

He also strengthens His church as we teach one another obedience to Jesus' teaching. **Acts 15:35, 41**

This is the simple but powerful way the Lord is building His church. He fulfills that promise through you, me and every baptised disciple. Did you know and understand this?

Have you been personally committed to this noble task?

- i. Are you back in a serious discipling relationship?
- ii. Are you back to attending & bringing visitors to your Bible Talks?

The building comes with risks for the labourers sometimes. See **Acts 12:1-3; Acts 14:9; Acts 17:5-5**. The Lord's church today, is wherever there are disciples who have been saved and are committed to the apostles' doctrine.

#### **CONCLUSION**

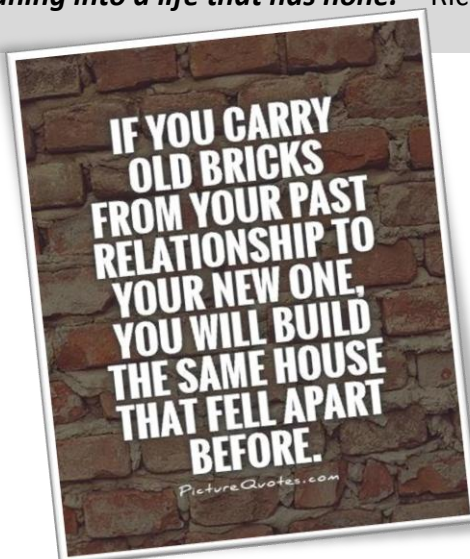
1. If you desire to participate in this glorious victory of Jesus' church then

a. You must first be saved the right way (Jesus' way) - **Ac 2:38-41, 47**

b. We must also be committed to Jesus' doctrine, which is also the apostles' doctrine - **Jn. 8:31; Acts 2:42; 1Thess. 2:13; 2Thess. 2: 13-15**

c. We must remain faithful until death – **Rev. 2:10**

***Money cannot buy peace of mind. It cannot heal ruptured relationships, or build meaning into a life that has none. - Richard M. DeVos***



## I JUST WANT TO HEAR HIM SAY “WELL DONE”

**Matthew 25** is a chapter totally focused on teaching us certain principles and patterns of the kingdom. The word ‘kingdom’ simply relates to a king and his domain. The king rules and the domain serves. Therefore, as members of the kingdom of God, we are servants and our purpose is to serve the king.

Any wonder **Philippians 2:7** reads: “.... Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” This was the position of Jesus when he was on earth. In spite of knowing that we were servants (and we will always be), Jesus still gave up his divine privileges; emptied himself and became nothing to serve the king – his father and us.

Let us read this same passage in the very dramatic THE MESSAGE Bible:

### Phil 2:5-8

*5 Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. 6 He had equal status with God, but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. 7 Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! 8 Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death — and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.*

In the several years I've been a disciple, I have been involved in many works of service in the church. To my shame, there have been times I have desired some form of reward or privilege from God. How about you? How have you felt or displayed some form of entitlement? We all want something in return. Sometimes, we even demand them up front. How does God want you to react to His call for service? Please read **Luke 17:10**  
10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

A look at **Matthew 25:14-30** should give us new perspectives:

**Selfless and Sacrificial:** The three servants were given assets to manage according to their abilities. Was there a promise of reward from their master? Yet, the ones with five and two went and put the assets to work. What kind of heart and attitude are seen in our world today? The present day reward system has been in place for ages. Growing up in the early 1960s, I looked forward to the benefits I enjoyed when sent on errands by neighbours and other grown ups. Sometimes, these benefits included the leftover change from transactions. So, am always at their service. In our world today, it is often said that, "something must give for something". Is it possible that this worldly reward mentality is what measures our service to the king and his Church? Would you be motivated to give more if you knew you would receive more?

**It's a privilege to serve the King of kings:** This was the attitude of the servants who received five and two talents. No wonder, hesitating or analyzing the master, they went to work and each got 100% more. Why? Because it is a HUGE privilege to be called upon by the master to work! What does this teach me? The excitement of being called to task by The King should be enough motivation. Do you truly feel this way when called to serve? What needs to change?

The attitude and actions (or inaction) of the third servant with one talent epitomizes worldly standards, i.e. “what’s in it for me?” He was selfish, ungrateful, and according to the master, “wicked and lazy.” It’s time to rethink our attitude towards the service for God.

**God rewards his servants:** The first and second servant got the master’s commendation. They were both commended as faithful and, ultimately, given more responsibilities. It's like getting promoted at work. Who wouldn't want that? They were to share in the master’s happiness. They became "shareholders." Many today rightly put in incredible hours and efforts at work to catch their supervisor's attention and hopefully gain the boss’s approval and maybe, a promotion. It's interesting to note how far we are willing to go and how much we



give for certain worldly pursuit. We give and go those extra miles, knowing at the back of our minds that a reward awaits us. How much more the reward that comes from the King of kings? We must all be willing to invest in the service of our God, so that in the words of our dear brother, Steve L. Johnson, in his 1999 DPI publication, we can all say, "I Wanna Hear Him Say "Well Done" (Instead of Going To Hell and Getting Burned Well Done!)"

**FURTHER SCRIPTURES:**

Prov. 25:13; Matt. 24:36-51; Prov. 27:18; Eph.6:5-8





*"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents" which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God." — Philippians 1:27-28 (NASB)*

**John 17:20-23** - Jesus prayed for all who believe in Him to be one as He and His Father are one. Jesus, the Head of the Church, prayed for unity. This kind of spiritual unity is inspired by our union with Christ. Christ himself likens it to the unity between him and his Father.

There are two examples of unity repeatedly seen throughout the pages of the Bible: Right and wrong.

Unity can build and can also destroy a family of God's people. The next few days will be spent to espouse the wrong type of unity which tends to destroy and create confusion amongst us. We shall also see examples of the positive and the right kind of unity that should be found among family of God's people. Every wrong kind of unity must be resisted!

### Examples of the wrong type of unity:

#### **Genesis 35:23-26; 37:1-36.**

- Joseph's brothers were in complete agreement with their decision to get rid of their brother Joseph. They were jealous and so conspired and sold him into slavery to some traders heading for Egypt.

They later, in unity, lied to their father Isaac that Joseph was dead.

Joseph was open to his older brothers when he told them of his dreams, which in the minds of his brothers, meant that he would rule over them. This made them very jealous. People can be united out of jealousy for other people's achievement, fame or popularity. The wrong type of unity does not build, but destroys.

#### **Exodus 32:1-35**

- The Israelites acting together out of impatience and faithlessness, passed a motion of no confidence on Moses and voted to have Aaron create a new god (**the Golden Calf**) for them in misrecognition of Moses' efforts who brought them out of Egypt with great power by God.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses, who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

How easy it is to find cheap and willing allies when we are sinning against God! Thousands died that day.

#### **Numbers 16:1-50**

- The story of Korah found in the above chapter in Numbers is an example of high-powered negative unity that bred an incredible state of rebellion amongst the desert-wandering Israelites.

*Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites — Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth — became insolent 2 and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. 3 They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" - Num 16:1-3 (NIV)*

*31 As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. 33 They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. 34 At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, "The earth is going to swallow us too!"*

*35 And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense. - Num 16:31-35 (NIV)*

But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. 50 Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for the plague had stopped. - **Num 16:49-50** (NIV)

At the end of this attempted mutiny, about **14,950** people were destroyed by God.

What a waste of lives and talents! These were some of Israel's finest leaders. Imagine the oratory power Korah had. Imagine what it took to win the trust and allegiance of those the Bible described as, "... 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council."

How would it have been if all these prominent and gifted leaders were available to assist Aaron and Joshua?

Unity is powerful, but the wrong kind of unity is deadly.

What kind of unity are you building in the church?

More on this topic tomorrow.

## the BIG wedding



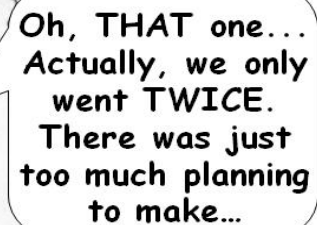
**It's finally here Mather. Tomorrow is your wedding! You've always wanted a BIG wedding. Thanks for adding me to your train. I can't wait to see how gorgeous the other NINETEEN ladies will look.**



**Right Sister! You're welcome. What are friends for?**



**You are so organized and thoughtful: Bridal Party tonight, Cool Reception planned out, Afterparty, Honeymoon in Dubai... So, tell me please, how did the PRE-MARRIAGE COUNSELING SESSIONS go? I want to Learn.**



**Oh, THAT one... Actually, we only went TWICE. There was just too much planning to make...**



**My Fiancée and I have agreed to attend ALL the Post-Marriage Counseling Sessions AFTER the honeymoon. I'm SURE we'll be FINE.**



**?!**

### Acts 5:1-11

#### The story of Ananias and Sapphira

This story will conclude our two-day brief study of this subject matter.

In our last two case studies from the books of Exodus and Numbers, we saw bad examples of unity mustered to dethrone the worship of God and to overthrow the leadership of Moses and Aaron respectively; both were from the Old Testament.

Today's example, found in the New Testament, is a perfect example of two people (this time, a Christian husband and his wife) wrongly united to tell lies to both God and man. Our story begins with the description of the early church in Jerusalem, a group so filled with the Holy Spirit that they were of one heart and one mind. So knitted were they that many would sell prized possessions and willingly hand over the proceeds to be shared amongst the young but fast growing group. Their incredible generosity was not forced, but motivated by the love they had for each other and the gratitude that came from knowing they were saved.

Maybe a public commendation and recognition of the donors were made. Maybe they got some thunderous applause from the grateful recipients, or maybe they overnight gained the status of "model citizens" in the community of believers. Whatever the scenario was, two members of this group, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, also developed the willing heart to contribute to the needs of the church by selling a field they had.

Our analysis will require some sense of imagination. Assume twenty years back, you bought a plot of land in a once remote part of Lagos, say, Ikorodu. I'm not sure, but the cost of a piece of land in Ikorodu, twenty years ago might not be more than N10, 000 (\$52 by today's exchange rate). Today, that piece of land will fetch nothing less than N1.5 million (\$7,936!). Imagine the struggle where your mindset was to sell and give out completely something you had thought was worth N10, 000 (\$52) only to sell and make a proceed of more than 150%! All of a sudden, you begin to see possibilities. Possibilities of fixing that car, paying that debt, buying that new phone, etc. If Ananias (maybe it was Sapphira) had kept this new secret, that would have been another story. But the fact that the couple shared their thoughts (and struggles) with each other and yet conspired to sin is the issue. They were not just well to do, they also had a heart to share and were unified at this. Unfortunately, their unity was the wrong kind. A unity that will lie, hide struggles and sin. A unity that seeks to divide and pollute. It was self-seeking and not kingdom-seeking. This wrong kind of unity cost them not just their lives, but maybe their salvation too.

Are you lying about your financial giving to God and His Church?

Are you uniting with somebody not to give and not to correctly give?

What kind of unity do you and your spouse practise?

Are you conspiring to rebel against church leadership?

Why would God kill two people for lying?

*19 Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.*

*20 There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace.*

*21 No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble.*

*22 The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful. - Prov 12:19-22 (NIV)*

God's judgment of Ananias and Sapphira helped guard the church against future pretence. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a reminder to us that God sees the heart (**1 Samuel 16:7**), that He hates sin, and that He is concerned about the purity of His church (**1 Corinthians 11; 1 John 5**). As Jesus told the compromising church in Thyatira, "All the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (**Revelation 3:23**)

*Ananias and Sapphira* were struck dead by God over the sin of lying. In fact, their only recorded sin was lying and they only lied ONCE. After Ananias and Sapphira lied, they were immediately struck dead by God, leaving them NO TIME TO REPENT. Their LIE was attached to a generous act of giving.

Many would consider what they said as just a little "white lie" and nothing serious, especially since their giving would help meet the needs of the poor saints, *they sought to* act just like some of the other Christians who previously sold properties and gave the proceeds to feed needy brothers and sisters, but apparently their lack of spirituality would cost them their lives. What if they had known beforehand, would they have taken that path? I guess the question for us is; don't we know there will be consequences for every sin we commit? Yet we still sin.

**Examples of the right kind of unity:**

- **Noah** and his family in unity with God, rejected the lifestyle of the world. (**1Peter 3: 20**)
- **Moses** chose to be unified with the suffering Israelites than unite with sinful Egyptians. (**Heb. 11:24-28**)
- **David** unified with God's law and refused twice to take Saul's life, even though his companions thought it was the right thing to do.
- The positive unity and comradely exhibited by **Daniel** and his friends **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego** as recorded in the accounts found in the book of **Daniel chapters 1, 3 and 6**.

The "right" unity is grounded in the truth and always brings together people that are striving for God's kingdom and its righteousness. It never goes along with the crowd's feelings, emotions or desire. It's the kind of unity that allows a small group to take stands against personal, group or kingdom vices.

What kind of unity do you cling to?

A wrong kind of unity is divisive. **Ephesians 5:11** - Have no fellowship with the works of darkness, but expose them.

**1 Corinthians 1:10-13** - Paul pleaded with the Corinthians that there should be no divisions among them.

Are you uniting to criticize, find faults and create confusion and bad company? **1 Corinthians 15:33, 2Corinthians 6:17-18** - Come out from among them and be separate!

If Paul rebuked the division at Corinth, should we not rebuke the far greater? Paul did not tell the Corinthians to overlook, condone or manage their differences, rather he told them to end their divisive practices and seek unity by practicing the true teachings of God which build the church.

***"You may have access to the best information; you may build up the most positive attitude, but, to get the wisest experience, your hands and legs must work!"***

— Israelmore Ayivor, *The Great Hand Book of Quotes*

**Hebrews 5: 11 – 6:3**

*“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truth of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

Therefore, let us move beyond the elementary teaching about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so.”

According to many historians, archaeologists, and others who study ancient cultures, the Incas had their great capital in the mountains of Northern Peru thousands of years ago. Most intriguing of their architecture from the period are the great walls they built. The Incan walls of Northern Peru, though less well known, are as much a mystery as are the pyramids of Egypt. Even more impressive, most of the Incas had already abandoned the rugged mountains of Peru for more favorable farmland as far North as Mexico before the first stone was laid for one of the pyramids.

Among the mysteries surrounding these ancient walls is how they were built to outlast the cities they surrounded and still, to this day, are solid and are in no danger of toppling. Some scientists and engineers speculate that the stones, of varying shapes and sizes, have been fitted so closely that there is no chance of shifting and thus falling down or apart. In fact, the stones were placed on bedrock and fit so closely together that there is not enough space between them to fit a piece of paper.

Although the Incas have disappeared, although the villages they inhabited have crumbled, although almost everything about the ancient Incas of Northern Peru has vanished through time, the walls still stand. I believe this is a snapshot of the spiritual house God is building with you, his living stones.

Do you see yourself as that precious stone that God has placed on his wall?

**Vs. 11-14**

The Christian race is for a lifetime - a long distance race!

It is not how well you start, but how well you finish.

The Hebrews writer is reminding the Christians displaced by persecution that they have to finish strong in their faith.

Are you growing in your faith?

What areas have you matured in the last year? (Write them down)

Are there areas you desire to make changes this year? (Write them down)

**Chapter 6: 1-3**

For us to go on to maturity in our understanding, we need to move beyond the elementary teachings to a more complete understanding of the faith we profess.

Mature Christians need to be teaching and raising young Christians in the basics.

If you are an older Christian in the faith, do you have anyone you are teaching and mentoring in the basics of their Christian life?

If you are a young Christian, what efforts are you making to grow, so you can help others in their faith?

We must all be worthy instruments in the hands of God to build his Church.

**1 Corinthians 12: 12-30**

We are different members, but one body.

God has a reason for bringing you into his household.



You are a gift to the Church; no matter how insignificant you think you are.  
What is your gift? (If you are not sure ask your discipling partner or other trusted friend).  
How can you use your gift to serve the Church, if you are not doing so already?

### Conclusion

The Church of God is like a great city on a hill with you and I its walls. We need to stand strong and resolute against all odds. We cannot cave in at every challenge we face in life. Also, as worthy builders, we need to believe in ourselves. Everyone has something to contribute in Church building and growth.





## SKILLED AND SPIRITUAL WORKFORCE NEEDED

The strength of Japan and Singapore economies is not their natural or mineral deposits, but their vibrant human resources. I once asked a Jewish Rabbi about the natural resources in Israel. His reply was that “we have no so little, but the blessings of the Lord.” Think about it, this is the land flowing with milk and honey the Bible tells us about, yet their petroleum deposits are insignificant. It is even believed by many that the most prized assets in Israel are their human resources; I will add spiritual resources to their list. Israel is arguably the number 1 nation in Agra- technology. In 2007 Israel ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the world in exportation of arms. They are a very smart person and a powerful nation.

Israel knows the main source for their strength and they made more efforts to build on it. It is my conviction that no one can grow more in his area of weakness as much as his strength. It is but wise to pay more attention on the area I believe I can grow better and not neglecting my weak ends.

We can do far better as a church family if only we can identify our skilled resources and spiritually utilize them. On to everyone God has given gifts, talents and skills. It is in our hands to use them to the glory of God.

### 2 Tim 2:15-16

**15** *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (NIV)*

Timothy was charged to show his worth before God as a certified servant, shameless and excellent. Timothy, the evangelist is expected to correctly handle the scriptures. He should teach the sound doctrine. Teaching and preaching are not the only skills or gifts we need to build the church. We need counselors, singers, administrators, people with creative minds, mentors, and the list goes on. How then do we work this out?

### 2 Tim 2:20-21

**20** *In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. **21** If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. (NIV)*

It really doesn't matter whether the craft man uses gold or silver or clay, the heart of the issue is what the crafted item is used for. The clay can be used to make a cup from which the king can drink and the gold can also be used to make an object used in the restroom. The point of Paul's analogy is that the way we avail ourselves so will we be used.

Our skills are viable when we cleanse ourselves from the latter (our past sinful lives). Talents, gifts and skills are excellent only with spirituality. Competence and character are both important for success. It is good to know your job, but that is only half of the story. The other half is having the right and godly attitude in doing what you know. Some soccer stars don't have a good sporting career, not because they lacked the skills but because of their attitude. Let me be quick to say this: even in our church we have brothers and sisters that are good in what they do for a living, but the wrong and ungodly attitude they display in their job has messed them up. Let me not mince words, there have been instances where job is given to a brother with complete payment made even before the job is done. In the end, the brother fails to deliver, not because he is not competent but because he simply lacks integrity. This is one of the key challenges that have killed trust in the church.

One key purpose for which the church exists is ministry (serving each other). In our church we have doctors, lawyers, bankers, tailors, plumbers, journalists, etc. Thank God for those who have used their profession to build up the Church. Many brothers and sisters who are seasoned journalists and writers could have contributed in making this 40 Days Power Series more rewarding. May God open your eyes to know the value of being an instrument useful for noble purpose in the Church of God.

My Final take: Building is not for a few, make yourself relevant.

What do you do for a living? What are some other areas you are good at?

How will you use these God-given gifts to the glory of God this year and in the years to come?

The choice is yours; the call is out... Skilled and spiritual workforce needed!

## REMEMBER THE LORD

DAY 39

### 1 Chronicles 16:7-36

The Psalmist exhorts the people to remember the wonderful works of the Lord and the covenant He made with their forefathers (The Patriarchs) to give them the land of Canaan and confirms his exhortation by pointing out how the Lord, in fulfillment of His promise, had mightily and gloriously defended them.

**Vs. 12...** Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, - NIV

Why focus on the memory of the wonders of the past?

The Psalmist paused to emphasize the importance of our memory of who God is, what He has done and how that can affect our perspective about Him. As humans our memory of God is most times impaired by neglect and often overloaded with other things. We more often focus on the failures of the present than the victories achieved through God in the past. In other words, our memory of God's goodness is often crushed down by a sense of present pain.

Aristotle called memory the stomach of the soul, in which it retains and digests what it gathers; but men cram it full of everything that it does not want -- upon which the soul cannot feed, and thus they fail to remember the best things. We need to constantly count our blessings and see what God has done.

## REMEMBER THE WONDERS AND MIRACLES OF THE LORD

### Exodus 14:26-28

The Israelites needed to look back at things like the miracle of the Red Sea. They needed to remember how God rescued them from the hands of the Egyptians. The LORD rescued the Israelites in a miraculous way with His mighty hands.

- Set apart time for meditation on the miracles of God in your life.
- Be sure to praise God for His goodness in your life.

## REMEMBER THE LORD'S MERCY & JUDGEMENT

### Psalms 30:2-3/Romans 5:8

- Take time to remember what God has forgiven you and meditate on His mercy.
- How would you have lived without God?
- Take time to praise Him for His mercy in your life.
- Share about His mercy in the hearing of others.

God is worthy of being our focal point of thought. We need to constantly be reminded of who God is, what he has done and what he is able to do. This will enable us to go through life with hope and assurance that He is more than able.

A positive view of the future comes from the right perspective about the past. When we remember where we are coming from, where we were heading before He saved us, what He has saved us from, what He has blessed us with and the impact of His love and grace in our lives, the thought of all of His goodness should have a positive impact in our private & public worship, our service to Him and our willingness to share about His goodness in our lives.

William Law puts it this way; there is nothing more suitable to the piety of a reasonable creature, or the Spirit of a Christian, than thus to approve, admire, and glorify God in all the acts of general providence: considering the whole world as his particular family, and all events as directed by His wisdom.

Always remember your maker and how at the dawn of each day, He works miraculously in our lives and never forget His mercies. He is working always because of us. He never sleeps, He never slumbers. To Him be praise forever and ever (Amen).

*"Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice."* - Prov. 13:10

**JOHN 4: 38**

The title of today's topic *planters and sprinklers*, gives me nostalgic feelings because as a young boy in my parents' home, I was given the task of watering our flower beds early in the morning and late in the evening. Civilization and advancements in technology have made planters and sprinklers obsolete because machines have been invented to ease the task of planting and sprinkling by men. However, in the spiritual sense planters and sprinklers are still very relevant. As Christians, we are called to the task of building and sprinkling on the seed(s) of faith and the gospel that were once planted by Jesus Christ, the Prophets, His Apostles and the early Christians (**Ephesians 2:20**).

Truth be told, the major work had been done by our forerunners in the faith. Our task today is focused on sprinkling of what has been done. We sprinkle in diverse ways, i.e. through financial contributions to the church, providing the desired leadership, counseling and "discipling" others, spreading the gospel from towns to villages, giving encouragement to one another in the kingdom etc.

These underscore the importance of this topic as we build through God, the master planter.

**UNDERSTANDING OUR ROLES AS PLANTERS AND SPRINKLERS.****LUKE 17:7-9, 8:1-3, ROMANS 16: 1-16, 21-23, PHIL 4:1-3.**

It is important as Disciples, Deacons, Evangelists and Bishops in God's household that we all are fellow laborers partnering in building the house of God. No one is more important than the other. We are servants and instruments in the hand of God just playing our parts based on the grace given us (**Eph4:7**). This is what Paul the Apostle calls our attention to.

**1 Cor 3:1-10** Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew who came to Ephesus following Paul's first visit and was taught the Christian doctrine by Priscilla and Aquila. Being an educated man Apollos handled the OT scriptures with forcefulness. However, he lacked a full understanding of the ways of Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and instructed him (**Acts 18:26**). Apollos became even more successful in his ministry. He went from Ephesus to Greece with the encouragement of the Asian believers and a letter of introduction. He greatly strengthened the believers by using the scriptures to demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ.

Apollos is last mentioned in the book of Acts as being in Corinth (**Acts 19:1**). Paul referred to Apollos frequently, particularly in this text. Here the majority of the references has to do with the schisms in the Corinthian church centering on personalities. Paul noted that some believers championed Paul; some, Apollos; and some, Cephas. What is important is, those believers belong to Christ, not to individual leaders; and that as planters and sprinklers they complement each other.

Such references show that Apollos must have been a dynamic figure to be compared with Paul and Peter.

In **1Cor 4:6** Paul placed Apollos on the same level as himself.

-Would you have done the same given the pedigree of Paul?

-Is this how we perceive or see each other in the ministry/the Church?

They both sought to defeat the arrogance and superiority which comes from being self-centered rather than Christ-centered.

Paul referred to Apollos in **1Cor 16:12** as "our brother" showing how much Paul considered him as part of the team.

This is also demonstrated in **Titus 3:13** where Paul asked Titus to help Apollos on his way.

Learned and gifted preacher Apollos was willing to receive more instructions and be part of the team.

As "planters and sprinklers" we must be humbled by the fact that we are limited to the grace given us apportioned by the will of Christ.

**REFLECTION**

- 1) In what ways can I improve on my skill as a Planter or a Sprinkler?
- 2) Whose glory do I seek as I Plant or Sprinkle?

I grew up a "Kingdom kid". This is a term often used to describe kids born or raised in the church community. Now a leader in the church, I usually think in retrospect of how great disciples (leaders) I know had scarified so much as giving up well-paying jobs, careers, social status to come build God's church. This was the fuel I needed to reignite my passion to follow and serve likewise.

Building the kingdom of God will demand total commitment and humility.

### **ROMANS 12:3**

As Kingdom builders, we need to transform ourselves inwardly before we can transform others in building the kingdom.

Evidently, Paul calls our attention to the grace given him. The question that comes to mind is why?

Based on my conviction, I believe Paul understood the efficacy of the grace of God. He knew he was saved by grace, he grew in wisdom by the grace and above all he became what he was by God's grace. This should describe us too.

Notice how Paul uses the word "THINK" twice. In the first instance, he tells us not to think, while in the latter, he calls us to. He did this way before he began discussing gifts; how they are interdependent and how we are to use them in the church. There are things we need to stop doing before we can serve in God's kingdom. Paul tackles the issue of pride, or lack of humility as the case may be. Pride breeds an unrealistic or ungodly exhibit of ourselves and the gifts God has given us. We all are gifted one way or the other. Paul's argument was that, these gifts were given to build the church, not to be kept for personal gratification or even more dangerous, to be used to tear apart the church.

### **What is humility?**

This is defined as the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, rank, etc.

Synonyms for humility include: lowliness, meekness, submissiveness. Only one antonym suffices: pride. - Dictionary.com

For us to be able to function well as a body, humility should be our springboard. It is when we are humble that unity is assured.

### **Vs 4-8**

Paul compared the physical body and the body of Christ in illustrating the importance of service; an integral tool for Kingdom builders.

Based on this illustration, I came up with the following observations:

### **The body is made up of different parts**

Since the body has many members, both prominent and less visible, the visible ones are not necessarily the most important e.g. Our vital organs are not visible but they are very important. Above all, the vital members of the body of Christ may be the least visible. We must be able to esteem all who are serving in whatever capacity; visible or less.

### **Every Member Of The Body Must Play, Unified Complementary Roles**

#### **1 Cor 12:12-25**

The body mentioned here represents the gift God has given us.

As a church, the Bible makes us to understand that we are all Kingdom builders and therefore, we should be able to use our gifts to complement each one another. Not taking pride in our gifts and also not giving room for ungodly competition.

We can't all have the same gifts. Our talent should be complementary.

### Romans 12: 6-8

Our commitment to worshipping and seeking God's will is incomplete until we are ready to serve.

In other words, if your worship does not lead to service, then it is not complete. True worship results in service.

So how are you doing in your service for God?

Suppose everyone in the church was like you, what kind of church would we have?

Note that all the gifts mentioned were accompanied with a "how to". These are the specifications on the way God wants us to discharge our responsibilities. E.g.: *"if it is leadership, let him govern diligently, if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."*

Have you been able to identify your own gift(s) and have you been using them) in accordance with biblical specifications?

### LIFE APPLICATIONS

1. Write out the gifts you believe you have and ways you can better deploy them in building up God's church.
2. You might want to ask people who know you to point you to areas they have seen you exhibit strength. This exercise can help guide you to the "sober judgment" Paul wrote about.
3. Pray about all these and welcome to the league of "Kingdom Builders"!





1. **MANAGING CONFLICT**
2. **INTEGRITY IN DATING\_1**
3. **INTEGRITY IN DATING\_2**
4. **CELIBACY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MARRIAGE \_1**
5. **CELIBACY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MARRIAGE \_2**
6. **STAYING SINGLE**
7. **BUILDING GREAT FAMILY DYNAMICS**
8. **BUILD GREAT MARRIAGES**
9. **ILLUSTRATION FROM BUSINESS OF PARADIGM**



## MANAGING CONFLICT

Conflict is inevitable. According to Fajana (2000), "conflicts may not even be expressed at all; they remain latent but quite volatile waiting to be ignited at the slightest provocation". From this, it is evident that conflict is unavoidable, thus, what matters is one's approach towards managing it.

### What is Conflict?

Conflict is to come into collision or disagreement; be contradictory, at variance, or in opposition - Dictionary.com. It is ANY situation WHERE your concerns or desires differ from another person.

Conflict is not necessarily a "bad" word. It is first and foremost, descriptive of a situation.

We know in life that there are positives and negatives. Even God created us male and female. These are by definition "conflict".

Conflict is not necessarily evil or a failure of an existing system. It can have both constructive and destructive outcomes. Conflict is a part of all relationships.

There are two kinds of conflict: Positive and Negative Conflict. While positive conflict is the "spice of life", negative conflict, however, is what leads to destructive tendencies.

### Conflict Eradication or Management

Conflict in itself cannot be eradicated. To attempt to eradicate conflict, will produce more conflicts. If this is true, then the ONLY thing left for us is to strive to understand and manage conflict, hence Conflict Management. For the benefit of this short article, we shall focus squarely on understanding and dealing with negative conflict.

### What Causes (negative) Conflict?

*"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. - James 4:1-3*

Negative and destructive conflict diverts energy from real work, destroys morale, polarizes individuals and groups while deepening differences. It obstructs cooperative action, produces irresponsible behaviour, and creates suspicion and distrust while decreasing productivity.

### How can negative conflict be managed?

Two classic examples are seen in the Bible. From the book of Judges, we notice the notorious tribe of Ephraimite confronting two judges and deliverer of Israel. Study carefully, the rather annoying and critical ways these "cowards" confronted Gideon and Jephthah. Observe also the tactful way Gideon dealt with the temptation to respond in anger, thereby shifting focus from the real battle confronting them all. Compare the desired response he succeeded in getting here from these Ephraimite as opposed to how Jephthah handled his.

#### Judges 8:1-3. (The GIDEON response)

Write out a short analysis of:

The Situation at hand, The Confrontation, Gideon's Response and The Outcome

#### Judges 12:1-6. (The JEPHTHAH response)

Write out a short analysis of:

The Situation at hand, The Confrontation, Gideon's Response and The Outcome

Constructive conflict will: open up issues in a mature, confronting manner. It will develop clarification of an issue, improve problem solving qualities, increase involvement and provide more spontaneity in communication. It initiates growth and strengthens relationships when creatively resolved. Positive will ultimately increase productivity.

**'Nothing is at last sacred, but the integrity of your mind' - Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**Integrity** is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principle. The state of being whole and not divided

**What is dating?** The term is commonly understood as a trial period in which two people (man and woman) explore whether to take their relationship further towards a permanent relationship. It is a relatively recent phenomenon and varies in practice from one society or culture to another. As humans have evolved from the hunter-farmer era to the civilized era and to the current modern era; the relationship between a man and a woman has been evolving as well. Few centuries ago, parents used to 'arrange' marriage for their adult children, but dating has since taken over as a process that leads to marriage and this is not without its challenges.

### **Ephesians 5:3**

**'I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions' -Lillian Hellman**

Probably, the greatest challenge of dating as we have it in recent years and not excluding our church community is the loss of moral principles and purity between the dating couple. Some have even gone ahead to start experiencing what they naturally ought to in marriage.

Mechanisms that are put in place to help dating couples maintain purity and high moral standard seem to be losing value and becoming less appreciated. Remember, integrity is being united and not divided with the church and its values.

Are you dating right now or intending to? Flirtation and gratification of your lustful desires in your dating relationship is establishing dishonesty and unwholesomeness in that relationship and possibly up to marriage. Be a man and a woman of moral principles. You owe it to yourself, your partner and to your God.

### **Song of Songs 8:4**

This calls for patience. As once a dating man, I understand what this passage is admonishing. The dopamine was at its best activation and years of longing were almost uncontrollable.

Yet, no matter the urge and temptations, it must be understood that one's integrity is on the line.

Do not let the pleasure of a short time mess up the pleasure of a long time.

**"If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything'- Gordon A. Eadie**

***"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.  
If you think about that,  
you'll do things differently." - Warren Buffett***

**Introduction:** The word 'integrity' means so much to a lot of people. The definition has never fallen short of words like honesty, decency, morality, character, uprightness, good, incorruptible, soundness probity etc. Merriam Webster defines it as "The quality of being honest and fair".

**Ps 25:21** *"May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you"*

**Ps 41:12** *"In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever."*

**Prove. 11:3** *"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity"*

From the above scriptures, it's obvious that integrity and our relationship with God are inseparable. Every action, decision, thought, how we relate with others, etc is informed by our walk with God. The totality of our lives as Christians is integrity. When you remove integrity from our lives, you have simply taken Christianity away.

**Matt. 22:16-17:** *"They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. "*

## **Notice from this passage how integrity is connected to the Truth.**

It will be good for us to establish the twofold areas integrity is practiced, with God and Man. How we relate with one another is a reflection of our walk with the Almighty; the life we live can tell whether we have God or not. We are expected to be men and women of integrity; integrity in Christianity is simply godliness, righteousness, character, blamelessness, holiness, faithfulness etc. These are all that we are in Christ Jesus. The day we fall short of all these without realising how to get back, there can be no doubt that our integrity is at stake.

Going by the focus of our reflection today, it will be apt to ask how we have been practicing integrity in our dating relationships? Let us consider this passage from **Genesis 29:16-20**.

In the above passage we realized how Jacob was ready to serve seven years to wait for the one He loved. Even when he was deceived by his father-in-law to take another, he still waited another seven years to get Rachel. What exactly are the lessons here?

## **Jacob no doubt was committed to the relationship**

Falling in love is a beautiful thing; we have heard and seen people do crazy things to make their relationship work. Some do not want to separate from each other because of the promises made. Commitment to any relationship no matter all the odds will take a great level of faithfulness. Promising each other to work things out and staying together no matter what also takes a lot of integrity. Love influences your stand on integrity. "I love her, so I don't want to disappoint or fail"

## **He was willing to wait for the appropriate time**

Jacob was ready to wait until Rachel has been given to him as wife. Sexual immorality is a lack of character. Ungodliness and sexual impurity are killers in any dating relationship.

**Proverb 11:3** *"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity".*

Unfaithfulness is duplicity.

Someone may say "after all we are still going to get married". Engaging in sexual impurities with someone you are not married to, is sheer disrespect for the person, duplicity in terms of what we profess as Christians and unfaithfulness to God. Know that God frowns at such. Jacob waited. Imagine what it took to ward off the temptation, day after day, month after month and year after year, to be with someone you love with marriage guaranteed.

### **Jacob was ready to abide by the rules**

Jacob understood the "Rules of Engagement" and was ready to abide by them. Today, the church has laid down some rules and guidelines to help us remain pure and faithful in our dating relationships. Our Custom, practice or tradition must be the bible. Shortcuts can have fatal consequences. Jacob chose to say 'No' to his physical urges and submitted himself to the wise custom that guarded the chastity of both parties.

We must allow God's word to lead us. Integrity to God is dependent on obedience to His words. When we throw away God, we then lose our integrity and all the values it holds.

**Ps 25:21** *"May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you" when we Hope in God and His word, uprightness will be our lives.*

***"I will love you always. When this red hair is white, I will still love you. When the smooth softness of youth is replaced by the delicate softness of age, I will still want to touch your skin. When your face is full of the lines of every smile you have ever smiled, of every surprise I have seen flash through your eyes, when every tear you have ever cried has left its mark upon your face, I will treasure you all the more, because I was there to see it all. I will share your life with you, Meredith, and I will love you until the last breath leaves your body or mine."***

***— Laurell K. Hamilton, A Lick of Frost***

### **Two Exams Every Time**

***George Sweeting wrote about the desperate need for honesty in our culture. He referred to Dr. Madison Sarratt, who taught mathematics at Vanderbilt University for many years. Before giving a test, the professor would admonish his class like this:***

***"Today I am giving two examinations, one in trigonometry and the other in honesty. I hope you will pass them both. If you must fail one, fail trigonometry. There are many good people in the world who can't pass trig, but there are no good people in the world who cannot pass the examination of honesty."***

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## CELIBACY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MARRIAGE \_1

Celibacy is one word people run away from, not necessarily because of what it means, but because of what it demands.

Celibacy refers to a state of being unmarried, or a state of abstinence from sexual intercourse or the abstention by the vow of marriage.

In **Matthew 19:3**, the Pharisees came to test Jesus and asked ‘*if it is unlawful for a man to divorce his wife*’. Jesus replied, “*I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery*”. (**Matthew 19:9**). Upon hearing this, his disciples said to him, ‘*if this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry*’ (**Matthew 19:10**).

### Recommended text:

**Matthew 19:3-12, 1 Corinthians 7:17-40.**

From these scriptures, the following can be deduced:

### Celibacy is not compulsory- it is a choice

Celibacy is not mandatory for everyone; it is a choice one has to make with utmost sincerity.

In (**1 Corinthians 7:32b, 1 Corinthians 7:34b, 1 Corinthians 7:35**). Paul clearly stated that celibacy is not compulsory, but praised those who choose to be celibate, according to him, those who choose to be celibate are only bothered about things of God and his kingdom.

In Matthew 19, Jesus talked about the fact that not everyone can accept to be celibate, that only those to whom it has been given. He outlined the various kinds of celibates:

*“For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by other (i.e. castrated) - and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”.*

At the end of his statement, he talked about a very important issue, CHOICE.

*“The one who can accept this should accept it”.*

### CELIBACY DEMANDS SINCERITY

Celibacy demands utmost sincerity; one should not choose to be celibate because of worldly praise and adoration but because of God’s word.

If one knows he or she is unable to live as a celibate and that his/her desires are very strong, he/she should not venture into celibacy, (**1 Corinthians 7:8-9**).

Doing something contrary to that causes one to sin and depart from God’s presence.

### Marriage is not a sin

Some people see marriage as a sin and support that all be celibate. There is this common assumption that marriage reduces one’s relationship with God and also acts as a barrier between God and his word and the individual in question.

In the bible, there was no place where Jesus or Paul said marriage was a sin. (**1 Corinthians 7:28**).

On the contrary, Jesus described marriage as unity of two to become one, a union joined by him which can never be separated. (**Matthew 19:5-6**).

Marriage is a beautiful thing so also is celibacy, therefore whichever you choose should be done in your own free will and with sincerity.

### Celibacy over marriage was not preached

Jesus and Paul in **Matthew 19** and **1 Corinthians 7** respectively did not recommend celibacy over marriage.

According to them, marriage is a good thing, so also celibacy. Both are pleasing to God, and should not be taken for granted.

### **Common myths of celibacy you should avoid**

1) If I become celibate, I will make heaven – celibacy is not a one-way straight ticket to heaven; God calls us to purify our hearts.

***"Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, keeping God's command is what counts". (1 Corinthians 7:19)***

2) I can't find an eligible brother or sister, why not go celibate? As brothers and sisters, we are not to be celibate because we can't find an eligible partner. Celibacy should not be the only solution when we are in a fixed corner; it should be a choice made with utmost sincerity.

3) She/he is celibate, why can't I be? Just as everyone has a distinct fingerprint, so also everyone has to make distinct decisions based on their conviction and purpose. One should not be celibate because their friend is, but because of their own personal conviction- 1 Corinthians 7:37.

Whichever decision we make brothers and sisters (whether to be celibate or be married), God, his word and heaven should be our watchword and our conviction should be biblical and not based on the worldly praise or admonition.

**Whichever we choose, to God be the glory!**

***"The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you.  
Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision.  
So write and draw and build and play  
and dance and live as only you can." - Neil Gaiman***



## CELIBACY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MARRIAGE\_2

Celibacy is the state of being unmarried and not having sex and usually for religious reasons - Oxford Advance dictionary.

This state is alluded to in **Matthew 19:10-12** (Please Read)

From the passage, one may conclude that some are celibate from birth (may be impotent), some made as such by men (perhaps castrated), while some choose to be so for the kingdom's sake. The topic at hand is premised on the latter. I must also say here that in recent times, some have become celibates for other reasons: economic reason, frustrations, other priorities and so forth.

What would be the motivation or rationale behind anyone being celibate and not married because of the kingdom? Is it that one cannot be married and still have God's kingdom as a priority? Or does being married limit one in one's contributions to advancing the kingdom? Perhaps, the following Scriptures may proffer answers.

### 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 & 27-28

*... 'I say to those who aren't married and widows-it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust... If you have a wife, do not seek to end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not seek to get married But, if you do get married it is not a sin. And if a young woman gets married, it is not a sin. However, those who get married at this time will have troubles, and I am trying to spare you those problems' (NLT)*

From the quoted passage above;

- (i) Being single, but having one's life characterized by lust is not good.
- (ii) Being married is better than such life.
- (iii) Yet, being single is better than the married status. Not that marriage makes one less spiritual or uncommitted, single life creates more opportunities to advance the cause of God and his kingdom more than the married person and to please him the more. Look at what verses 32 to 35 of the same chapter say;

*'I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him. A married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided. In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and spirit. But a married woman has to think of her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband. I am saying this for your benefits, not place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord the best, with as few distractions as possible'-NLT*

It is unfortunate and sad that we are in an era where we have, perhaps more distracted singles than even marrieds. Where many singles are taking the back stage and less visible position in the 'moving and shaking' of the kingdom of God; where many singles are overwhelmed with other priorities other than kingdom priorities; where many singles are in a frenzy to just go over, get whatever and do anything that satisfies their lusts and tastes and not the Lord any longer. I make bold to say that singles have fallen into the temptation to renounce the kingdom of God for marriage instead of the other way round, as Jesus shows us in **Matthew 19:12**

Are you single? Don't get me wrong, marriage is great and nothing is sinful in desiring it. But until you walk down the aisle with that sister or brother, resolve TODAY to have God as your first priority. Think about and act on things that can BUILD your bible talk, family group and other ministries in the church. I counsel the unmarried to give more time, energy and financial resources to advance God's ministry. Singles by design are the engine room and soul of every community and society. Our church community cannot be different. This day, I charge you as a single brother or sister to rise up, be proud of who you are and BUILD God's church!

The outline below is from our dear brother, **Dr. Douglas Jacoby**. It is from his rich collection of podcasts found on his website; [www.douglasjacoby.com](http://www.douglasjacoby.com). It is used by permission.

"**Staying Single**" is an interesting 21 minutes long podcast which can be downloaded, free, by visiting: <http://www.douglasjacoby.com/wp-content/uploads/podcasts/CE710-Single.mp3>

#### **Scriptures to consider**

Genesis 2 — marriage is the norm

Matthew 19:10-12

1 Corinthians 7:6

#### **Biblical celibacy has two components**

Companionship

The sexual element

It is assumed that church leaders will be married (1 Timothy 3), as correctly understood by Orthodox clergy.

#### **Celibacy over-emphasized in the 2nd century**

An overreaction to Gnosticism, which deprecated sexuality

See Ignatius, the Shepherd of Hermas, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Athenagoras

Although the early church took celibacy too far, we (in our culture) are guilty of the opposite error.

#### **Who should stay single?**

Those with the gift

Those with certain sexual struggles

Quite possibly those who, like Jesus, are destined to die young

Those who, like Paul, lead a lifestyle inimical to marriage

Some older brothers and sisters who, for whatever reason, are not likely to find a spouse.

#### **Final challenges**

Don't tease the single. This can be embarrassing; it has the power to shame people into marriage; it entails a certain thoughtlessness, a failure to think theologically about celibacy. (If you are a single and are being teased, consider telling others how you feel. And do your best not to be touchy — such attempts at humor are rarely made spitefully.)

Social pressure is strong enough (to marry; to have children; to favor male children. Various stigmas are all too familiar to our single brothers and sisters.

Yet Christians must not capitulate to culture, for we follow a countercultural Messiah.

Today's Meditation **Jeremiah 35**

God is the Father of all families **Eph. 3:14-15**.

Family is for every disciple, not just for marrieds. We are born again in the great big family of God. We belong here and we all have a part to play in building it. Family is my Bible talk, my discipleship group, my brothers and sisters all over the world who bear the name of Christ as I do.

Happy families are the envy of their neighbours. God wants us to make His household a place that everyone wants to belong and no one wants to leave.

We read today about the family of the Recabites.

Why did God take note of this family in particular?

What shows that they had a strong family dynamic and tradition?

What was the blessing for their commitment as a family?

As children of the kingdom family, we too must stick to our Big Daddy's instructions in the Bible with confidence and conviction and pass them on to the generations after us.

#### **FAMILY DYNAMICS IN THE BIBLE**

##### **Gen 18:18-19 & Acts 10:1-2**

Men are called by God to lead spiritually. Brothers, decide this year that you will take up the mantle of spiritual leadership in your home.

##### **Mark 1:29 & Jn. 1:37-39**

Be like Jesus. Visit the homes of other disciples and invite them disciples to your home.

##### **Jn. 21:12-15**

Eat meals together. We build great connections over a plate of food!

##### **Acts 10:22-24 Acts 18:24-26**

Make your living room a bible talk and conversion venue. Let your family see discipleship lived out at home, not just at church.

##### **Lk. 2:41-42**

Have family "traditions" – Things that you do consistently that create great memories. It could be a yearly family vacation, or your family's version of "Thank God It's Friday". The camel rides to Jerusalem for Jesus' family must have been times of great fun and fellowship.

##### **Prov. 31:28-29**

Spouses, build each other up! Express your love and appreciation of one another. Your children will learn to do the same.

***"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men".***

***- Frederick Douglass***

Whenever I go off on my wild goose chase, to keep me in check and appreciative, I ponder on two questions as I look at my husband very intently. The first two questions are: "who is he to me?", "why I am here with this person, who is a masculine version of me?" Then I remember the Garden of Eden, it's always good to reflect back. It keeps you in check and make you more appreciative. **Genesis: 1-26**; Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish,... **vs. 27** So God created man in his own image, In the image of God he created them, male and female.

In the above passage, we find a job Description but something happened before this time. **Gen. 1**, pay careful attention to **vs20**, 'for Adam no suitable helper was found', nothing in all of God's creation could fit in perfectly for Adam. So, God created a much perfect being which is the woman, made from Adam's rib. She was just like him, but in a different form because God had procreation in mind.

**Jeremiah: 1-5**. So, women, mother, wife, you were thought of before you were created. Created for a very important assignment here on earth. That's how I get myself back on track.

Last of my three questions is: "What role must I play in accomplishing God's Mission?". Again, I go back to the word of God, he has left instructions for for me to follow.

**Proverbs 18:22**. "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord".

Two important words to closely observe are: "**good**" and "**favor**".

Good is: Pleasant, high quality, or standard.

Favor is: to like and support a person. So how do I achieve this great mission? Every couple must ask themselves this question not just the woman, the man also must do likewise. Here is what has helped me so far in my 16 years of marriage.

So I always have this assignment in my heart.

Respect, support, love, nurse him, present him to the world as a man full of greatness and high achiever before his peers. Pray for him all the time, because I understand this instruction given to me by God. **Ephesians: 5-22-24**. There is no argument in the instruction.

Sisters, let's not fool ourselves, no amount of prayers will solve your problems until you understand this verse. The one you are kneeling before in prayer is the very one who gave these instructions: "Wives, submit to your husband's as to the Lord". The same goes for the men, **v's. 25-29** Brothers when you treat your wife the way God wants you to, then all your labor on this earth will not be in vain and you will continue to receive blessings and favor from God. Every man needs to see and respond to his wife the same way Adam marveled when God presented Eve to him **Genesis: 2-23** "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh", vs. 23 "for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame". All men must play their God-given roles and present their families spiritually and emotionally healthy before God.

**Mark: 10:9** "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate".

The two of you have become one, husbands are to see their wives as part of their physical body. This body should be loved, respected and protected. Same goes to the wives: **Ecclesiastes 4-12**. Two people united in heart and soul can never be broken. The following Bible passages can help serve as great guide when rouble times come: **Psalms:19vs 7-11**, **Ecclesiastes: 12-13**, (For Sisters): **Proverbs 31**, verse by verse, **Philippians: 4-6-7**, (For Brothers): **Philippians 4:8**, **Ephesians:6-10-18**.

This is how God has revealed it to me. I am not there yet, but I'm happy to declare that the journey has been, so far so good and it is my prayer that we all overcome and build great marriages to the glory of God.

Joel Barkers "Business of Paradigm". Reviewed by Grady McAllister (slightly edited by us)  
[http://vasthead.com/Articles/Business\\_of\\_Paradigms.html](http://vasthead.com/Articles/Business_of_Paradigms.html)

Futurist Joel Barker says people shoot down good ideas because they assume that the future is merely an extension of the past. Many things we accept today once met substantial resistance from thoughtful people. People resist change when they operate within old paradigms. These paradigms establish boundaries and provide the rules for success.

People tend to filter out information that doesn't fit the paradigm. Barker calls this the "**Paradigm Effect**". This can block creative solutions to problems and the ability to see the future.

To illustrate, Barker tells stories of triumph and disaster resulting from paradigms. Here's one:

**Question:** What nation dominated the world of watch-making in 1968?

**Answer:** Switzerland, a country renowned for over a hundred years for watch-making excellence. In 1968, it held 65 per cent of the market.

**Question:** What nation dominates watch-making today?

**Answer:** Japan, a nation which, in 1968, held virtually no market share.

**Reason:** The introduction of the quartz watch.

**Question:** Who invented the quartz watch?

**Answer:** The Swiss!. The Swiss were so certain that it was only a novelty, they showed it promiscuously at a trade show. They did not even protect the idea.

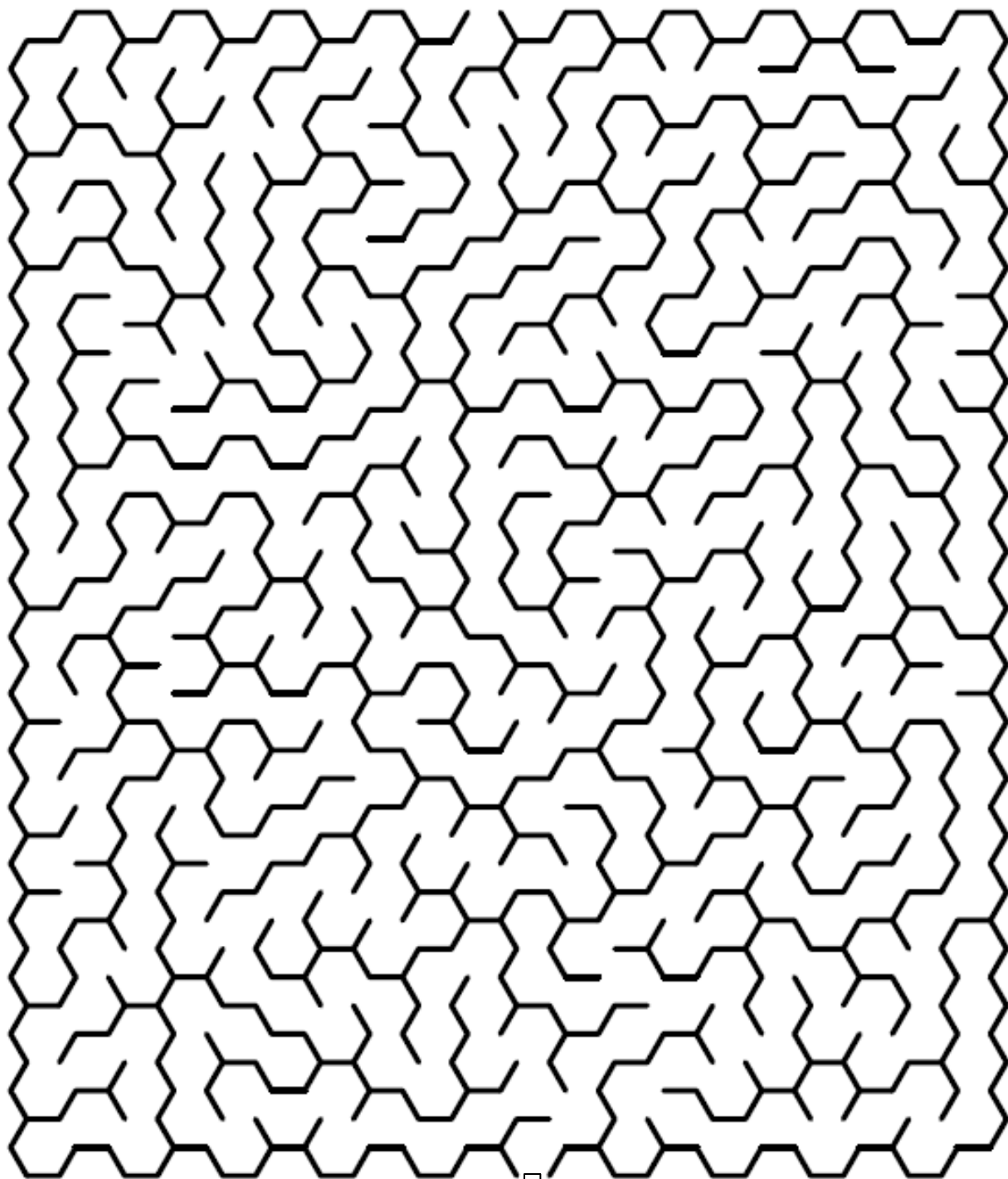
Seiko of Japan came to this watch exhibition, walked by, took one look... and the rest is history! The Swiss failed to see the potential because they had a financial and emotional investment in the old paradigm.

**Barker says:** "When a paradigm shifts, everybody goes back to zero. It doesn't matter how strong your reputation, or how big your market share, or how good you are at the old paradigm."

**Barker makes these key observations about paradigms:**

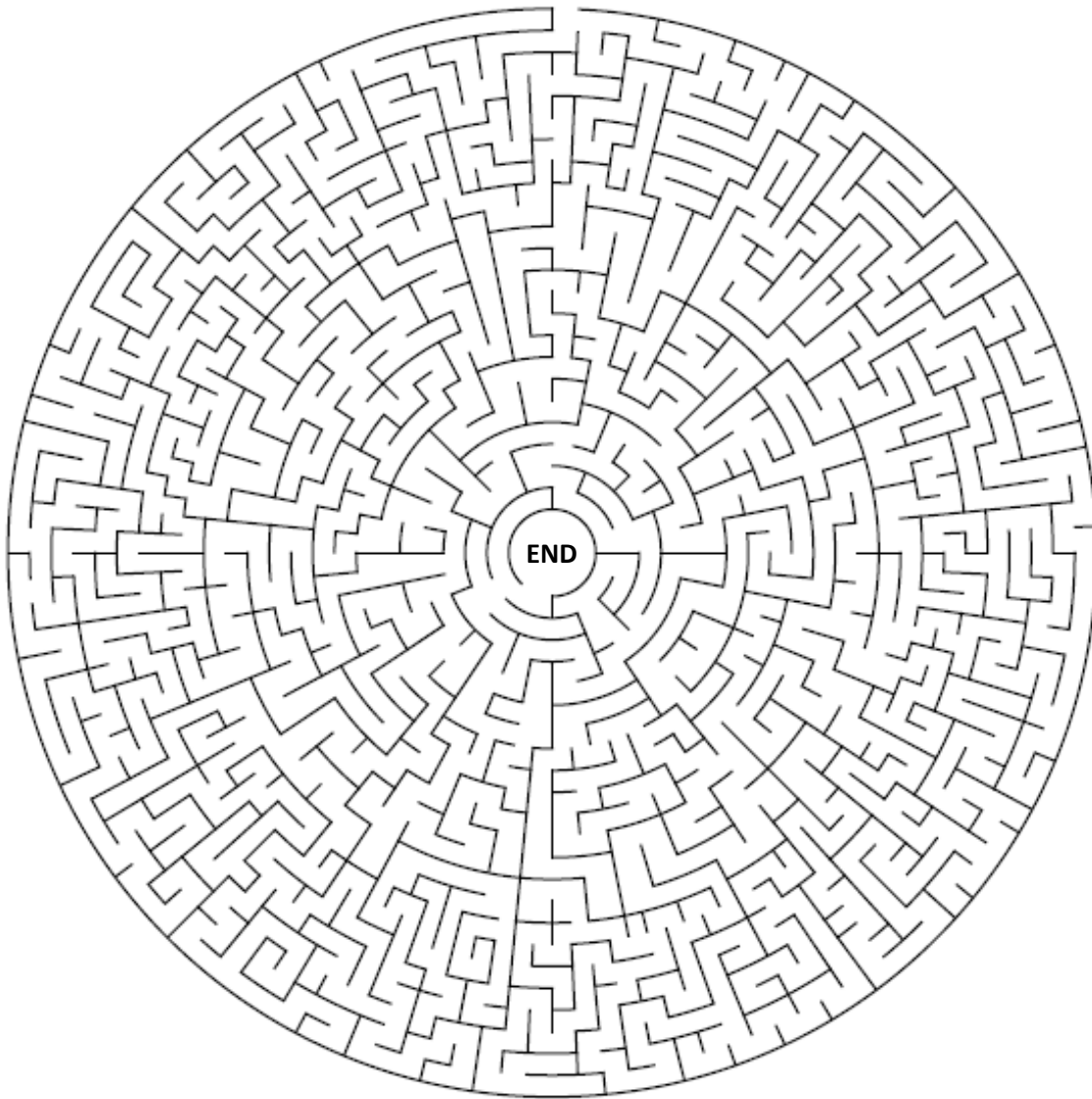
- (1) Paradigms are common. They apply to all areas of our lives.
- (2) Paradigms are useful. They show us what is important.
- (3) A warning: Sometimes paradigms become "THE PARADIGM" - the only way to do something. Thereafter, any new idea is rejected out of hand. Barker calls this "**paradigm paralysis**" It's a terminal disease that has destroyed many a mammoth.
- (4) The people who create new paradigms are usually outsiders. They are not part of the established paradigm community. They need not be young, but they are people who are not invested in the old paradigm.
- (5) The paradigm pioneers must be courageous.
- (6) You can choose to change paradigms ---- to see the world anew.

20 by 20 sigma maze





START



**ICOC, Nigeria: 2015 Calendar Of Major Events**

**Jan:** 40 Days Fasting, Bible Study And Prayer Series – Jan 2nd - Feb 10th

**Feb:** Ministry Training Academy 3rd & 10th | National Staff Retreat 22th – 26th

**Mar:**

**Apr:** Bible Teaching Series: "Book Of Ephesians" - 22nd - 29th

**May:** ICOC, Nigeria Annual General Conference | Bible Teaching Series: "Treasure Principles" 12th - 31st

**Jun:** Ministry Training Academy 13th & 20th | Congregational Bible Teaching: "Marriage, Divorce & Re-Marriage" 21st |  
Congregational Bible Teaching: "Separation & Celibacy & Singlehood" 28th

**July:** Teaching Series: "Return Of The Exiles" (Minor Prophets) 5th - 23rd August

**Aug:** Hope Youth Corps 27th – Aug 2nd | WAM Conference, Warri 21st - 23rd | Int'l Campus Leadership Conference: "Build!" 26th - 30th

**Sep:**

**Oct:** Bible Teaching Series – "The Gospel Of Mark" 4th – 29th Nov

**Nov:** National Singles Retreat Ilorin, Kwara 19 – 23

**Dec:** Great Hope Walk 5th | Congregational Teachings "The Blood Of Jesus" 13th | Ministry Training Academy 12th & 19th |  
Annual Campus Rendezvous 27th



# FOR LAUGHS

## HAVE FAITH MY CHILD

For the umpteenth time Mrs. Youngston came to her pastor to tell him, "I'm so scared! Joe says he's going to kill me if I continue to come to your church."

"Yes, yes, my child," replied the pastor, more than a little tired of hearing this over and over. "I will continue to pray for you, Mrs. Youngston. Have faith - the Lord will watch over you."

"Oh yes, he has kept me safe thus far, only....."

"Only what, my child?"

"Well, now he says if I keep coming to your church, he's going to kill YOU!"

"Well, now," said the pastor, "Perhaps it's time to check out that little church on the other side of town." - (<http://jokes.christiansunite.com/>)

## FOUR-LETTER WORDS

As soon as the newlyweds returned from their honeymoon, the young bride called her mother, who lived a couple of hours away. "How did everything go?" her mom asked.

"Oh, mother," she began, "The honeymoon was wonderful! So romantic, we had a terrific time. But, mother, on our way back, Andy started using really horrible language. Stuff I'd never heard before. Really terrible four-letter words. You've got to come get me and take me home. Please, Mother!" the new bride sobbed over the telephone.

"But, honey," the mother countered, "What four-letter words?"

"I can't tell you, mother, they're too awful! Come get me, please!"

"Darling, you must tell me what has gotten you so upset.... Tell mother what four-letter words he used."

Still sobbing, the bride said, "Mother, words like dust, wash, iron, cook."

## WEDDING REHEARSAL

During the wedding rehearsal, the groom approached the minister with an unusual offer. "Look, I'll give you \$100 if you'll change the wedding vows. When you get to me and the part where I'm to promise to 'love, honor and obey' and 'forsaking all others, be faithful to her forever,' I'd appreciate it if you'd just leave that part out."

He passed the minister the cash and walked away satisfied.

The wedding day arrives, and the bride and groom have moved to that part of the ceremony where the vows are exchanged. When it comes time for the groom's vows, the minister looks the young man in the eye and says, "Will you promise to prostrate yourself before her, obey her every command and wish, serve her breakfast in bed every morning of your life and swear eternally before God and your lovely wife that you will not ever even look at another woman, as long as you both shall live?"

The groom gulped and looked around, and said in a tiny voice, "Yes."

The groom leaned toward the minister and hissed, "I thought we had a deal."

The minister put the \$100 into his hand and whispered back, "She made me a much better offer."

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"Darling, you must tell me what has gotten you so upset.... Tell mother what four-letter words he used."

Still sobbing, the bride said, "Mother, words like **DUST, WASH, IRON, COOK.**"



As a bodybuilder you must have deep convictions about what you're doing so that you're not swayed by the opinions of others who consider the lifestyle too radical - you must be willing to risk losing friendships as a result. Every bodybuilder is comfortable with self-critique as well as critique from others and not insecure about it because they know that there are always areas to improve on, always room to grow.

In the next 40 days we will embark on the journey to 'build' and 'grow' ourselves... 'until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. - *from the Preface*

### **A Call to Build**

A Forty Day Devotional Guide on The Call to Build Solid, Spiritual Lives and Community for Christ.

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The Holyland Model of Jerusalem is a 1:50 scale-model of the city of Jerusalem in the late Second Temple Period. The model, measuring 2,000 square meters (21,520 square feet) was commissioned in 1966 by Hans Kroch, the owner of the Holyland Hotel, in memory of his son, Yaakov, an IDF soldier who was killed in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948

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