





# **Refreshment for the Weary Soul**

Divine Comfort and Counsel  
for God's Servants in the Making

U D E M E A N O S I K E

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To you, O Lord, my strength;  
For you are my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;  
My God, in whom I take refuge.  
You are my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
Thank You, Lord, for being everything to me.\*

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\* Psalm 18:1-2



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But now, Lord, what do I look for?  
My hope is in you.  
Save me from all my transgressions;  
do not make me the scorn of fools.  
I was silent; I would not open my mouth,  
for you are the one who has done this.  
Remove your scourge from me;  
I am overcome by the blow of your hand.  
You rebuke and discipline men for their sin;  
you consume their wealth like a moth—  
each man is but a breath.  
Selah

—Psalm 39:7-11 (NIV)



## Preface

A positive response to God’s call to consecrate ourselves for His use always brings change—significant change. It brings the kind of change that shakes the foundations of our beings, causes confusion and inner turmoil, and alters what we have believed about ourselves, our future, and life in general. This is the type of change from which we cannot hide; we run to the Lord for help only to find that He permits these unsettling experiences. What do we do? Where do we go? Where do we find the fuel to carry on?

The psalmist asks a similar question: “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come?” Then he gives a wise answer: “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” He confidently asserts, “He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:1-4).

Yes, God is the source of our help. I have learned that He provides different types of help for different situations. Sometimes His help delivers us *out of* trouble; at other times, His help enables us to *walk through* trouble.

*Refreshment for the Weary Soul* serves as the latter. The messages were birthed during my journey to embrace the purpose for which

I am called by God. They are neither abstract nor theoretical; rather, they provide spiritual balm for challenging times.

Each chapter ends with salient prayer points. Praying after each meditation is important because it invites God's power into specific areas of our lives that He aims to transform through our refining experiences.

I pray that the Lord strengthens you as you journey with Him. May He fulfill His good thoughts for this season of your life. I also pray that this book serves as an invaluable companion and source of refreshment on your journey.

Blessings,  
Udeme Anosike

*Part I*

# **A Closer Walk with God**



## CHAPTER 1

# David: An Inspiring Example

David, a king greatly admired and respected by many Old Testament Jews and New Testament Christians, was a man of courage, zeal, and compassion. Today, his psalms are read and quoted by millions all over the world. Christians in particular admire him for his successes and sincerity of heart. Many of us would like to be as victorious as he was; we desire to be called “a man after My own heart” like God called David.<sup>1</sup>

The good news is, God is raising many like David in the body of Christ today. Remember, it was God who made David a man after His heart. God taught David to trust Him, to be courageous and tenacious, and He made David a blessing to the nation of Israel. God accomplished this great work through the peculiar path He made David walk, a path of training and pruning, a path many committed Christians walk today though they do not recognize it.

Are you a Christian who desires to serve the Lord the way David did? Have you at some time had hopes and dreams of doing great things for God? Those hopes may have been birthed by specific words the Lord spoke to you, or they may simply have resulted from your love for Him. Are you now finding yourself so tossed about by

difficult circumstances that your hopes of serving God victoriously are fading? Have your life circumstances placed you so far from your dreams that you have resigned yourself to a mediocre Christian life? If so, come along with me as I explore salient and inspiring lessons from the life of King David, a man who pushed against many odds to become all God created him to be.

### **David's Bumpy Ride**

David was chosen and anointed to be king over the nation of Israel at a young age. Shortly after his anointing, doors of opportunity seemed to open for him to fulfill his calling. During this period, David demonstrated his courage by killing Israel's archenemy, Goliath.<sup>2</sup> Because of the significance of this victory, he got a job in the king's palace<sup>3</sup> and earned the respect of the people of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, David led Israel to battles against the Philistines and won, strengthening his reputation as a wise and courageous warrior.<sup>5</sup> David became close friends with the king's son, Jonathan, and married the king's daughter, Michal.<sup>6</sup> Things looked good for him; he seemed to be walking a straight path to the fulfillment of his destiny.

But it was not to be, for right in the midst of these successes the tide turned. David's boss and ruling king of Israel, Saul, became jealous of him and repeatedly tried to kill him. As a result, David was forced to run away from his fresh successes to save his life.

But his troubles had only just begun because Saul, with all the strength of Israel's military might, pursued him relentlessly wherever he went. Soon, David found himself running further and further away from the throne and kingdom he was anointed to inherit and, eventually, from the land of his dreams.<sup>7</sup>

## **And God Did What?**

Where was God while all these things happened to David? Why did He not deliver His anointed? After all, God, who rejected Saul as king of Israel, could have dethroned him and made room for David. Alternatively, God could have weakened Saul and made his attacks impotent. But God did none of these; rather, He allowed Saul to attack David and watched His anointed get into desperate situations. Why?

I believe God permitted these trials in David's life because they were part of his divinely appointed training. As we will see shortly, God used these challenges to refine and prepare David for the role he was to fulfill in Israel.

Although God allowed David to be so tested, He never really forsook him. God remained with David all through his years on the run and provided him a way out of *every* difficult situation.

God helped David in several ways, but three forms of help are most prominent when reading David's story:

*First, God ensured David had knowledge of his enemies' plans against him.* God provided David inside information either through people or supernaturally. Such information was usually critical to David's deliverance. An example of this was when God used Jonathan to inform David of Saul's plan to murder him in the royal palace. This information, coupled with Jonathan's assistance, helped David escape. Through this and similar experiences,<sup>8</sup> David developed confidence in God's ability to watch over him. He learned that his enemies could not destroy him because his God watched over him and made a way of escape at all times.

*Second, God favored David supernaturally whenever this was needed.* For example, God used Ahimelech the priest to provide food for David and his men when they desperately needed it.<sup>9</sup> God also

granted David favor with the king of Moab who agreed to shelter his parents while he was on the run.<sup>10</sup> Much later, God used Abigail, Nabal's wife, to prevent David from exacting revenge on wicked Nabal<sup>11</sup>, an action that would have brought a curse upon David.

*Third, God delivered David miraculously from near-death situations.*<sup>12</sup> A striking example of this was a time when Saul closed in on David and his men and almost captured them.<sup>13</sup> Fearful and desperate, David called on the Lord<sup>14</sup> and God intervened. In the nick of time, a messenger arrived to inform Saul that the Philistines had invaded Israel. Since the Philistines were a greater threat than David, Saul stopped pursuing him and returned home to defend the land. In this way, God delivered David from defeat and death.

Through these and other experiences, David came to the realization that, although God did not eliminate his troubles, He was ever present with him in a mighty way.

## **So It Is with Us**

Many of the people God calls and uses for His glory have experiences similar to David's. They start out with a vague or clear understanding that they are called to serve the Lord. Initially, things seem to go well as they press on to fulfill their calling. However, at some point, the tide turns, and they are thrown into chaos. Often, they do not fully understand the reasons for their circumstances, though they find within themselves an assurance that God is still with them. It is at such times that they learn deep lessons about trusting God and walking with Him through trials. They learn to draw strength and joy from Him in spite of their afflictions. They keenly identify with Scriptures, such as Habakkuk 3:17-19, which says, "Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; . . . yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is

my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.”

During these divinely orchestrated experiences, God's servants see the Lord's faithfulness in new light. They obtain firsthand knowledge of His supernatural ability to sustain His own during challenging seasons. They learn that while their needs may not be met in the ways they prefer, God consistently provides help and deliverance out of every difficult situation.

During this period of training, God's servants often find themselves constrained into living in isolation and obscurity. They are unable to speak freely and openly about their trials because people around them do not understand the path they walk. The significant work of maturity taking place within them seems to go unnoticed by others. This is no different from David's experience—David was a courageous, anointed, humble, and God-fearing man whose virtues were not known or appreciated by most Israelites during his years on the run. As a matter of fact, David was hated and reproached by some because of the path God made him walk.<sup>15</sup>

## **Change**

David's trials accomplished significant transformation in him; as the hunt continued, he became more confident, courageous, and wise. He was no longer afraid of Saul though he knew the ruling king was still a threat. The once potent enemy became impotent to David!

David learned the importance of waiting on the Lord for clean victory through his trials.<sup>16</sup> Twice, he had the opportunity to kill Saul, but through the Lord's guidance and discipline, he learned not to harm God's anointed, even when the latter was in the wrong.

Eventually, David left Israel to be free from Saul's pursuits. This must have been a tough decision since Israel was the land of his dreams. However, his decision paid off because Saul sought him no more.<sup>17</sup> I believe it was God who led David into this phase of respite to refresh and prepare him for what was to come shortly.

God never forgets His promises; He always finishes what He starts if we do not quit. This truth was made manifest in David's life. After he completed his training and was judged ready for ministry by God, David's circumstances changed. Saul and his heir, Jonathan, died in battle, and this opened up the throne of Israel to David.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, even at this opportune time, David did not devise his own plan nor did he hasten to seize the throne. Rather, he sought counsel from the Lord, and God told him to go to Hebron in Judah. When he got there, the people of Judah made him king over their tribe.<sup>19</sup>

About that time, David reached out to the remaining tribes of Israel, expecting them to follow suit, but they rejected him and crowned Saul's son, Ishbosheth, instead.<sup>20</sup> David knew it was God's will for him to rule over the entire nation of Israel, but again he chose to wait for God's perfect time and opportunity. Fierce battles between David's army and Saul's army followed. The Bible records that "David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker" (2 Samuel 3:1).

After several years, conflict within Ishbosheth's army led to his death. The Bible says David was grieved by the events surrounding Ishbosheth's death. However, this was God's way of opening up the throne of Israel to him. This time, the remaining tribes of Israel sought him and anointed him king.<sup>21</sup> David's call to rule over the nation of Israel now began in earnest.

## **God's Leader**

David's attitude toward the opportunities God gave to him reveals much about the type of character God develops in His servants during their training. David was passionate about God's call and spent years in preparation for its fulfillment, yet when faced with opportunities to fulfill the call, he was patient and humble. He learned to submit his zeal to God and allowed God to lead him into each phase of His divine plan. He learned that he was nothing and could do nothing without God, even though he was called and anointed. These character traits, developed through David's experiences, made him effective and successful in God's hand.

After the Lord opened the throne of Israel to David, his life became public. All the people of Judah and Israel began to see God's anointing on him; he was "unveiled" to them, as it were. By this time, God had set certain virtues in David that were essential for a life lived in public view, virtues that made him a testimony rather than a reproach to the name of the Lord.

David was not perfect, but he was a leader who clearly loved the Lord and His ways,<sup>22</sup> one who was single-mindedly and zealously focused on God's work,<sup>23</sup> and one who walked in the fear of the Lord. These were outcomes of his training. Through its rigor and length, God set in David the foundations of a man who would lead an entire nation to love, fear, and serve Him for many years to come.

## **Reflect and Pray**

Does David's story resonate with you? Are you facing situations that indicate you're being broken, refined, and trained by God? Does it feel as if God has forgotten His promises to you? If so, I encourage you to believe that the Lord is still with you; His thoughts toward you have not changed.<sup>24</sup> Although it may not be apparent, God is

working through your experiences to accomplish His good purposes for your life.

Trust Him against all odds; make a choice to believe that His plans for you will prevail in spite of your present circumstances. In addition to standing in faith, here are some thoughts and prayer points that will help you wade through the dry and difficult periods in God's training:

1. **Maintain a victory mindset.** Our attitude plays a major role in how we fare during God's training. The enemy tries to make us feel miserable and pitiful, but God wants us to be joyful and confident during trials. However, we cannot be joyful and confident without His help, and it is important to recognize this. If we do go to Him for help, God gives us sufficient grace to go through our trials with a good and positive attitude.
2. **Hold fast to your dreams.** When God gives us dreams and visions about His plans for us, we become "pregnant." A pregnant woman is guaranteed to give birth to a child after nine months unless the pregnancy is voluntarily or involuntarily aborted. In other words, the baby never just disappears into thin air. Likewise, the dreams God gives us are like "seeds" guaranteed to come to life unless they are aborted.

If we hold fast to our God-given dreams, they will not be aborted because then they are wrapped in the shield of faith and divine protection. However, if we give them up through unbelief, disobedience, or by redirecting our lives, we will lose them and not see them fulfilled.

It is important to know that our adversary, the devil, stands by to help us abort our dreams. Therefore, one of our key responsibilities during God's training is to guard the dreams He puts into our hearts.

3. **Make fellowship with God a priority.** When we are being trained by God, His presence is our classroom. It is the place where we are transformed, the place where we fully apprehend His plans, and draw strength to cope with our stressful circumstances. For these reasons, spending time in His presence should become a priority. It is true that we could be so pressured physically or emotionally that we find ourselves unwilling or unable to spend time in the Lord's presence every day. If this occurs, we should ask for the grace to discipline ourselves into spending time with Him.
4. **Take life one day at a time.** One of the greatest problems we encounter during trials is impatience. We tend to race through each day with our focus set on the hope of breakthrough. We miss the fact that God does not view our training in this way. While it is important to remain expectant, we must realize that our training is more about the process than the destination. God is interested in how we fare during the process and will keep us in training for as long as it takes to accomplish His attitudinal and behavioral goals for this season.<sup>25</sup>

The difference between the Lord's approach to our training and our expectations causes a great deal of frustration. But God does not change His ways to suit us; we must come up to His level. One way of doing this is to learn to live one day at a time.<sup>26</sup> The Holy Spirit has specific

goals to accomplish in us each day; our responsibility is to be still and let Him do so. As we work with Him one day at a time, we are changed and eventually arrive at the destination God has for us. Of course, being still when circumstances are imperfect is almost impossible for us as human beings. But this is precisely where God's supernatural grace, received through prayer, takes over.

**5. Wait for God to open His doors of opportunity for you.**

It is always tempting to try to make things happen on our own when God seems slow. However, this only brings frustration because God allows our efforts to fail. Therefore, it is important to ask the Lord for grace to wait for *His* opportunities and for the ability to identify them when they come along.

**Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to help you maintain an inner joy in spite of your circumstances. Ask Him to help you embrace and maintain the mindset of a victor regardless of the roadblocks and difficulties you encounter.
- Ask God for the wisdom and grace to guard the dreams and visions He gives you.
- Ask Him to give you the willingness and the ability to discipline yourself into spending time with Him daily.
- Ask for the grace to live one day at a time. Ask God to help you fulfill His attitudinal and behavioral goals for this season. Ask for help to remain at peace in spite of your challenging circumstances.
- Ask the Lord to help you wait for His opportunities. Ask Him to keep you from engaging in works motivated by the flesh. Ask

Him to help you reject the idea that you will wait indefinitely, but rather believe that He will show up in good time. Ask Him to help you discern and act wisely on His opportunities when they do come to you.

## CHAPTER 2

# God Is True, but His Ways Are Hidden

*I felt those emotions rise again . . . discouragement, hopelessness, de-motivation . . . I was on the verge of another spiritual valley. Once more, I wondered how long I would have to wait before seeing the fulfillment of God's promises in my life. Weary and frustrated, I dropped to my knees and lamented to God. As I prayed, the Lord gently touched my heart, and suddenly, I understood the way He was leading me. With this insight, I was comforted and felt His peace, strength, and hope once again.*

Many Christians experience emotions similar to what I experienced. We encounter situations that make us subtly question God's integrity. "If God promised this, why have my circumstances not changed?" we wonder. I wondered about this too. But I eventually learned through my experiences that God is true and does everything He promises completely and excellently. However, His ways of accomplishing His will are often different from what we expect. Moreover, His

ways are hidden from our natural understanding; we find ourselves unable to decipher them through reasoning or natural observation<sup>1</sup> and this leaves us feeling perplexed and frustrated.

Thankfully, God is willing to teach us His ways.<sup>2</sup> However, the process of learning them could be painful.<sup>3</sup> The pain arises because God sometimes trains us through experiences that humble us and cause us to embrace things to which our human intellect and pride can lay no claim. Allow me to explain.

As Christians, we typically come to a time when we feel the need to seek God's purpose for our lives or for difficult situations that we encounter. As we seek Him, the Lord gives us counsel and promises that paint a picture of what He wants to do through us. His plans excite us because we see that He has a far better future for us than we dared to imagine. Filled with joy, we believe and trust Him for the manifestation of His promises.

Sometimes, His promises are fulfilled soon after we have believed, but sometimes fulfillment tarries. At such times, we find that the excitement we experienced when we first received the promises fades into despair, and despair leads to discouragement and unbelief. The whole situation becomes uncomfortable, and we wish we never had to walk the path. We wonder why the Lord has tarried and why we continue to experience difficulties after we have received such great promises.

There is a purpose to the path upon which God leads us, and we gain insight into that purpose by studying Biblical examples. For our present discourse, let us consider some of the experiences of the Israelites prior to their entry into the Promised Land.

God delivered the Israelites from centuries of Egyptian bondage by a miraculous and mighty hand. By His words and actions, He showed that He loved Israel and had a good future for them. After

they left Egypt, God could have taken the Israelites into the Promised Land through a short route that crossed the land of the Philistines. But God took them through the wilderness, which was a longer route. His Word tells us He did this because He knew they were unprepared for the battles they would soon encounter if they took the shorter route.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, God sometimes chooses to lead us along the longer route to the fulfillment of His promises. From His dealings with Israel, we can infer that He does this to prepare us for the conflicts we will undoubtedly face prior to possessing our “promised land.”

The Israelites had a rough time in the wilderness but eventually came to a point where God judged them ready to enter the Promised Land. In preparation for this significant move, God gave them lots of counsel through His servant, Moses. One of the things He said to them gives us insight into the reason for the uneasy path we sometimes have to walk prior to inheriting His promises:

For the land which you go in to possess is not like the land of Egypt, from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot laboriously as in a garden of vegetables. But the land which you enter to possess is a land of hills and valleys which drinks water of the rain of heavens, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from beginning of the year to the end of the year (Deuteronomy 11:10-12 Amplified Bible).

In this Scripture, God told the Israelites that they were about to inherit a land that would operate on a different set of principles from what was familiar to them. In order to prosper in this land, they

would have to learn a way of existence completely different from what they had practiced so far.

This principle still holds true for us today; the lifestyle of victory God promises us operates *very differently* from what is familiar to our natural minds. To enable us to prosper in our promised land, God always has to strip us of the carnal mindsets and the ways we have acquired from our past and present existence.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples this truth when He said that no one puts new wine into old wineskins. New wine, He said, must be put in new wineskins so that both the container and the wine will be preserved. God does not mix the things of His Spirit with ideas and mindsets that originate from our carnal nature. He purges worldly thinking patterns and works before He commits the weighty matters of the Spirit to us.

Our Lord Jesus also taught that no one after drinking old wine immediately desires new wine, for he says, ‘the old is better.’<sup>5</sup> This means that we do not easily give up our carnal ways of thinking and acting because they feel familiar and comfortable. To make us fit for His purposes, therefore, God passes us through His refining furnace where our ways are “burned off,” and we are left with no choice but to embrace His ways fully.

### **God’s Refining Furnace**

God’s refining furnace often manifests itself in our lives as circumstances that are gloomy and stagnant. Even after we pray and trust God for change, these circumstances remain the same. Such situations, commonly called *trials* or *wilderness experiences*, are difficult to endure. During one of mine, I found myself terribly distressed and lethargic, so I sought the Lord in prayer. As I knelt before Him, unable to utter many words but desiring that He

would reach out to me somehow, He touched my heart and gently imparted some understanding that gave me hope. He showed me that although things looked stagnant in my physical circumstances, there was much progress in the work He was doing in my soul. This understanding, empowered by His anointing, comforted me greatly and gave me the strength I needed to keep following and trusting Him.

On that occasion, the Lord opened my understanding to the goals He fulfills in us during our wilderness experiences and the process through which He accomplishes those goals:

### *His Goals*

In the wilderness:

1. We develop a heightened awareness of our character weaknesses and become more conscious of the need to relinquish them.
2. We develop a healthy distrust of our human nature. The Bible tells us “the heart of man is . . . desperately wicked . . .”<sup>6</sup> Another way of saying this is: “the unregenerate human nature always tends toward evil.” But this truth only becomes real to us after God has passed us through His refining furnace. Our natural inclination is to admire and trust our own “goodness.” For example, Susan has always described herself as a loving, easy-going person because of the natural strengths of her sanguine temperament. She does not realize that she still has a lot to learn about God’s love until the Lord places her in a situation where she has to play host to a difficult friend. Simultaneously, Susan gets off to a rocky start with her new boss at work. This combination of circumstances makes her edgy and moody and depletes her enthusiasm for being a pleasant hostess.

As she struggles to cope with these circumstances, Susan learns that she cannot trust herself to love at all times like the Lord commands. Consequently, she starts seeking Him for grace and the ability to deepen her love walk.

Like Susan, our wilderness experiences help us to see the true nature of our hearts, and to lean more on God for the grace to fulfill His commands.

3. We learn to exchange our dependence on our own resources—our wealth, friends, family, skills, abilities, jobs, and more—for a total dependence on God. We learn that the things we see in this world are fleeting and should not be the basis of our confidence and security. We learn to make God’s living Word, ministered to us by His Holy Spirit, our only source of confidence and hope.

### *His Process*

Isaiah 30:15-23 provides an excellent synopsis of the process by which God accomplishes His refinement in us [please read Isaiah 30:1-26]. While every believer’s individual experience may be different, this Scripture enumerates certain common elements that characterize God’s dealings with His people in the refining furnace.

The Israelites, God’s covenant people, had turned away from their God. They had intentionally created distance in their relationship with Him. They wanted to hear His Word, but not all of it; they listened only to counsel that was smooth and pleasing to their souls.

The Israelites no longer trusted God with all their hearts as He had commanded them. They formed alliances with ungodly nations, such as Egypt, and depended on these for security and protection in times of difficulty. Also, the Israelites devised plans for themselves without seeking counsel or direction from the Lord; they consulted their own minds and the heathen nations around them.

These practices displeased God, so He sent His prophet, Isaiah, to them with stern words of rebuke. Amazingly, the Lord's words did not merely state His displeasure and punishment; they proclaimed a process of recovery. The Lord recounted Israel's rebellion, and then revealed a process by which He would bring them into full submission to Him (Isaiah 30:12-17). Their repentance and obedience would be followed by the outpouring of His guidance, blessings, and fruitfulness into their lives.

What God did for the physical nation of Israel He does for us today. We are His covenant people through Jesus Christ, but often we live lives that only partially acknowledge His lordship. We trust Him in part and put the rest of our confidence in the things we own or in the systems of this world. We plan our daily lives and future without seeking His counsel. We surrender some aspects of our lives to Him and are unwilling to let Him do whatever He pleases with us.

When this becomes our way of life, the Lord, in His mercy, intervenes and sets us on a path of spiritual refinement. He works in different ways, but generally we may notice that He removes certain aspects of His grace and blessings we have hitherto enjoyed. The result may be that we become easily worn down by circumstances we previously handled well. We may also find that we repeatedly encounter defeat and failure in areas we expect victory, leaving us with the belief that our covering of divine favor has been taken away. God allows these types of circumstances to persist until we genuinely surrender every aspect of our lives to Him.

When we eventually turn to Him with *all* our hearts, crying to Him in desperation, our call for help delights Him. His delight is not in our suffering, but in the fact that our resistance is finally broken and a way is made for Him to mould us as He wills. On hearing our cry, the Lord receives us with love and mercy<sup>7</sup> and causes us to hear

His counsel. This “opening of the ear” brings relief because it eases one of the major frustrations we feel during our trial—that is, the absence of clear divine counsel.

Although the Lord restores His counsel to us, our afflictions do not cease immediately. He allows our difficult circumstances to persist but comforts us by continually providing direction.<sup>8</sup> Through the combination of His Word, His power, and our experiences, we eventually come to a place where we completely discard every inappropriate attachment we have to persons or things and every hidden confidence we have placed in ourselves, things, and persons besides God. Isaiah 30:22 (Amplified Bible) aptly describes this event as ‘casting them (\*our idols) away.’ (\*Author’s comment)

It is at this point—when we have cast away our idols—that the Lord begins to release His promised blessings to us. He floods us with fruitfulness in areas where we previously experienced barrenness.<sup>9</sup> He restores our fortunes, but this time gives us better blessings than we had before.<sup>10</sup> He ushers us into the life He caused us to envision prior to our afflictions. We begin our entry into our “promised land” indeed.

Having said all of this, it is important to mention that not every unrelenting affliction experienced by Christians is a part of God’s refining work. There are times when Christians walk out of God’s covering by deliberately turning away from what they know to be His will for them. By so doing, they expose themselves to fierce attacks from the devil. The only way out of such a situation is to genuinely repent, turn away from disobedience or unbelief, and return to God with a solid commitment to follow Him.

There are also times when people who love God are ferociously attacked by the devil as he tries to hinder their walk and work for the Lord. In such situations, prayer, faith, and complete reliance on

God for direction and victory is the answer. God is always faithful to provide a way out.

## **How Do We Cope?**

God's Word tells us that His refining furnace achieves great results.<sup>11</sup> But the question is: How do we cope with the process, seeing that it is stressful and difficult to endure? How do we maintain our peace, joy, and faith in the midst of afflictions?

First of all, we must understand the provisions made by God to carry us through these difficult times. In Isaiah 43:2, He says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you." The Lord tells us through this Scripture that He will prevent us from being overwhelmed by our trials; yes, we may be broken and humbled, but we will not be crushed or destroyed.

As we learned in the previous chapter, David was a man who experienced many trials in his lifetime, the longest one recorded in the Scriptures being the years when Saul relentlessly pursued him. The Lord did not eliminate all of David's afflictions; however, He always gave him great help. David testifies in Psalm 34:4-6 that God delivered him from all his fears† and troubles. Because he looked to the Lord, he was able to remain radiant during difficult times, and ultimately the Lord did not allow him to be defeated. From David's experience, we learn that although trials are unsettling, there is sufficient help and comfort in God to get through them. If we seek Him, the Lord will give us the grace, comfort, and encouragement we need to endure our season of adversity.

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† The spirit of fear is one of our principal enemies during trials.

During difficult trials, we sometimes have moments of feeling ignored or forsaken by God. Fortunately, the Lord does not despise us for such feelings. He understands our vulnerabilities and comforts us with words, such as, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me” (Isaiah 49:15-16). What a powerful analogy! Most mothers know how difficult it is for a mother to forget or fail to feel pity for her nursing child. Although she may be deeply inconvenienced by her child’s demands, she can hardly abandon him or her. In Isaiah 49:15-16, the Lord tells us that His awareness of our situations and His compassion for us surpasses a nursing mother’s attachment to her young child. God never forgets us, He never gets weary of us, and He never gets tired of caring for us in the midst of our difficult circumstances.

Contrary to what we might think, the Lord is never passive in the face of our sufferings. His compassion is the sort that moves Him to act on our behalf. The key to benefiting from His love is to understand the way He acts during seasons of trial. This helps us set our expectations right. He shows us one of the ways He acts in Isaiah 41:17-18. He says, “The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongue fail for thirst. I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.”

The Lord says that at those times when we feel as if our souls are “failing for thirst,” at those times when we feel dry and weary and are unable to encourage ourselves, He, the Lord, will come to refresh, uplift, and revive us. Although He may not immediately change our

circumstances, He will give us sufficient grace and inner strength to endure the journey and press on to our promised land.

## **Reflect and Pray**

Our ability to walk through God-appointed trials is largely dependent on God's grace. However, there are certain steps **we must take** to make His grace effective in our lives. Since everyone's situation is different, the specifics for each of us may differ. But here are some general biblical principles we can all apply:

1. **Go to God daily for manna.** Manna<sup>‡</sup> is wilderness food,<sup>12</sup> one we desperately need in order to have strength and courage to face our trials. We obtain “manna” through fellowship with God. In His presence, we receive the comfort, grace, and wisdom we need for survival.

The Lord releases manna one day at a time. Therefore, it is imperative that we go to Him daily if we want to remain well-nourished throughout the wilderness journey.<sup>13</sup>

2. **Determine to go all the way with God.** There will be several times when we feel tempted to quit following the difficult path. At such times, we need to intentionally determine to go all the way with God, in spite of the way we feel. We can gain strength for this decision by asking God for help and waiting on Him until our commitment to follow His path is restored. This approach was exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ at Gethsemane. Faced with the temptation to avoid Calvary, He spent time in fellowship with the Father, pouring out His grief

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<sup>‡</sup> The physical nation of Israel was sustained by physical food, but the Church—God's spiritual nation—is sustained by spiritual food.

and receiving strength to embrace the difficult path that lay ahead.<sup>14</sup> We know from Scripture that He successfully endured the cross He had to bear.

Like Abraham and Sarah, we will be tempted to take shortcuts.<sup>15</sup> However, the problem with shortcuts is that they never reach the destination promised by God. They may lead to “a destination,” but it will not be the land of promise. Abraham and Sarah’s decision to have a child through Hagar produced a son, but he was not the child of promise. So when tempted to embrace seemingly “good ideas”—which in reality may be shortcuts—it is advisable that we test those ideas with the Lord rather than walk by our own wisdom. God will speak to us if we ask with a sincere desire to know and do His will.<sup>16</sup>

3. **Determine not to murmur or complain against God.** The devil will frequently tempt us with a subtle spirit of rebellion; this we should resist steadfastly. The Israelites habitually murmured and complained about God’s work in their lives, even though He blessed them in many ways and led them wisely. Their repeated complaints angered God because it implied that He did not care for them.<sup>17</sup> When our paths get tough and we can make no sense of what we see, we should remind ourselves of who God is (a good, faithful, true, loving, and wise Father) and of His promises to us. As we reflect on these, we will find our self-pity and sorrow replaced by hope and joy.
4. **Continue to believe and expect the best from God.** God always fulfills His promises. Therefore, we should resist the urge to doubt Him regardless of how impossible our circumstances look. We should remember that our faith has high value before Him. When teaching about persistence, our Lord Jesus said, “When

the Son of Man comes, will he really find faith on the earth?”<sup>18</sup> He implied that God will look for faith when He comes to fulfill His promises to us.

Not surprisingly, the devil tries to quench our faith during adversities. But by trusting the integrity of our God, we can fight to preserve our confidence in the words He speaks to us. We should ask Him for help if we have difficulty doing this. As He provides such help, we should determine (and voice our determination) to continue believing His promises.

5. **Seek inner peace and contentment.** One of the assurances that God gives us in His Word is that we can have peace and contentment in the midst of challenging circumstances.<sup>19</sup> Contentment releases joy, and soon we find that we are able to enjoy our lives to some degree while waiting for our circumstances to change. We certainly cannot work up peace, contentment, and joy on our own, but we can receive them from the Lord if we ask.

If we cooperate fully with God, our trials will not last longer than necessary. Proverbs 23:18 says, “There is a latter end [a future and a reward], and your hope and expectation shall not be cut off.” At the appointed time, our trials will pass and our God-given expectations will be fulfilled.

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to open your spiritual eyes to see the way He’s leading you. Ask Him to help you see the change He desires to accomplish in you through your trials.
- Ask Him to help you yield to His path.

- Ask Him to help you come into His presence daily for fellowship and nourishment.
- Ask for help to overcome every temptation to abandon the difficult path.
- Ask for the ability to resist shortcuts. Ask for the discipline to check ideas with Him prior to embracing them.
- Ask Him to teach you to resist murmuring, complaining, and negative thinking.
- Ask Him to help you believe that your challenging wilderness journey will lead to the fruitful and prosperous life He has promised, even though you do not understand how.
- Lastly, ask Him to help you embrace contentment, peace, and joy while you are in the wilderness.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Source of Our Desires and Hopes

Have you ever stopped to consider the motives behind your desires and hopes? Do your desires and hopes stem from what God has revealed to be His blueprint for your life? Are they driven by authentic needs created by your circumstances? Or is it possible they are subtly motivated by:

- ❖ The expectations of your family, friends, or community.
- ❖ The desire to measure up in reputation, appearance, or wealth to people around you.
- ❖ The fear of failure.

Many Christians today are pressured by the need to achieve goals outside the scope of God's purpose for them. They are plagued by the desire to measure up to standards set by the world and people around them. Some of these desires produce thoughts like, "If so and so can attain to that, I can do same through my faith in God."

The problem with this seemingly harmless thought pattern is that it is ignorant of God's ways. Although God is faithful and willing to bless us abundantly, He only does so within the confines of His own purposes for our lives. God does not bless us so that we can measure up to others or be as successful as they seem to be. God has specific plans for His Church and creation. His plans are founded on our Lord Jesus Christ and culminate in His absolute reign over all things. Everything God does for and through us is vitally connected to these plans.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, God faithfully blesses us and helps us prosper; however, His goal is not to make "superstars" of us. His goals are to transform us into the image of His Son, showcase His great salvation through us, use us for the work of His kingdom, and build us (His church) into a glorious and united bride for His Son.<sup>2</sup>

The temptation to aspire to worldly success and earthly glory is not new; our Lord Jesus Christ faced and overcame the same many centuries ago. Luke 4:5-8 records one instance as follows:

The devil led him to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

Like many aspiring servants of God today, Jesus had a great vision and fiery zeal for God. He had the Word of Life and a superfluous anointing. He knew that He would be used mightily by God and that crowds would follow His revolutionary ministry. Because he

had these blessings, it would have been easy for Jesus to launch into ministry with the underlying motive of seeking personal success and acclaim, and if He did, He would have prospered because He had all it took. But the Lord did not take this path. Rather, He armed Himself with the singular purpose of fulfilling the Father's will and strictly followed the path God appointed for Him. This attitude set Him apart from the religious leaders of His day and gave Him decisive victory over the devil.

The "carrot" Satan offered to Jesus in the wilderness<sup>3</sup> is offered to many servants of God today. The devil whispers thoughts like, *"You are anointed, God has spoken great things about you; however there is little happening in your life to show this. See what your contemporaries have achieved! See what following they have! Why don't you do so and so to get a following for your ministry; after all, you are an anointed preacher (or artist, singer, writer); people will love what you have to offer!"* He offers suggestions that sound spiritual and good except that the underlying motive is to promote our own agenda.

If we embrace these wrongly motivated plans, we soon find that our focus has shifted from singularly doing the Father's will to partially pursuing God's agenda and partially pursuing ours. When this happens, we are lured away from being *fully* available to our Master. We become like the Pharisees of old who served in God's name but whose hearts were not one with Him.<sup>4</sup> Unwittingly, we become servants who scatter from rather than gather with the Master. We soon value the gains and accolades of this world more than eternal gain.<sup>5</sup> All these attitudes gradually eat at the fabric of true leadership, pure service, and selfless ministry, which the Lord requires of us.

## **Victory Is Possible**

The good news is that God empathizes with us as we contend with human frailties that make us susceptible to wrong motives. He does not condemn us for our weaknesses, but rather wants to deliver us,<sup>6</sup> His Word tells us:

He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For His unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth . . . The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust (Psalm 103:10-11,13-14 NLT).

God gave His Son as a sacrifice so that we would have the power to overcome these sinful tendencies.<sup>7</sup> But victory over these tendencies is *a process*—a process that involves specific actions on God’s part and appropriate responses on our part.

When we become born-again, we receive the seed of Christ in our spirits; with this experience, comes an initial deliverance that secures us victory over several weaknesses almost instantly. This fills us with joy and expectation. As we walk on with God, however, we come to the realization that we are still overcome by our flesh in many areas. We find ourselves struggling with anger, malice, selfishness, deceit, pride, slander, corrupt speech, vainglory, lusts, and more. We soon learn that in order to be pure, we must work out our salvation earnestly.<sup>8</sup> This realization prompts us to intensify practices, such as studying God’s Word, praying, fasting, fellowshiping with other believers, listening to Christian messages, and so on.

During the same period, the Holy Spirit intensifies His work of transformation in us. In fact, our renewed consciousness of sin is most likely an outcome of His ministry.<sup>9</sup> As part of His transforming process, the Holy Spirit prompts us to work actively toward developing our relationship with the Father and exposes us to specific teachings about God and His way of doing things. If we listen closely to His teachings and obey them, we find ourselves increasing in spiritual strength and stature. With this increase comes a greater ability to discern and turn away from temptations and sins that previously overcame us. As we grow in this way, the influence of the flesh and the world over our lives decreases, and we begin to show the character of Jesus Christ indeed.

Gaining victory over our many weaknesses is a progressive journey. This is because God focuses His cleansing work on little portions of our lives at a time as is exemplified by the following illustration:

John and Terry are both born-again Christians. Terry has been a Christian longer than John, and for the most part, has been serious about his faith. John and Terry share a love for sports, and each spend a substantial amount of time watching sports programs on television. In recent weeks, Terry has begun to feel uncomfortable about spending so many hours watching sports. During his devotions, he has been sensing the Lord's prompting to invest more time in personal fellowship with Him. Gradually, Terry is figuring out that the Lord is asking him to review and reorganize his activities so that he will have more time for fellowship with Him. This will require cutting back on his sports-viewing time.

While these inner dealings are going on, Terry visits John. They chat about recent developments in the sports world, as usual. From their conversations, Terry realizes that John has not been under the same conviction as he has been. John still has peace with the length of time he spends watching sports programs. This makes Terry wonder why God has dealt with him differently. Why is God not convicting John in the same way that He is convicting him?

Terry, like many Christians, does not realize that God has an individual plan for each of His children, and each of us may be at a different stage of our plan versus the next person. The Lord may ultimately deal with John about his sports-viewing habits, but it is not His topmost priority for John in this season. For Terry however, letting go of this excess is what God requires at this time, and a conscientious response to this specific light given him is vital.

As we follow and obey the specific spiritual light and instructions God gives in each season of our walk with Him, we grow. We do not become mature in one day, but we manifest the spiritual and moral fruits expected for our level in Christ. We also get to know God better<sup>10</sup> and learn the things that truly matter to Him. As we keep in step with Him, our motives for serving Him become purified, and our desires and hopes become sanctified. We no longer seek to pursue our agenda, but commit ourselves fully to promoting His.

As these new mindsets take root in us, we find contentment in following the path God has prepared for us, regardless of how that path may be perceived by others. We also find it easier to turn away from “juicy carrots” of fame and fortune the devil offers. If our God-ordained path does take us through the highway of fame like

Jesus's did,<sup>11</sup> we are not distracted by popularity, but remain focused on pleasing the Father, whatever the cost may be.

## **Reflect and Pray**

I believe that the Holy Spirit may have shone His light on certain aspects of your life and brought some prayer points to mind as you have read through this chapter. If so, pray as He leads. In addition, you may pray using the following guidelines:

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to search your heart and to show you wrong motives and desires that you may have knowingly or unknowingly harbored.
- Surrender those motives to Him, and ask His forgiveness for them. Seek deliverance from every tendency to embrace wrong motives—you cannot deliver yourself, but God can and will do so if you ask sincerely.
- Ask the Lord to help you respond swiftly and sincerely to His red flags about impure motives as you journey with Him. Ask Him to help you be zealous for a pure heart in His sight.

After you pray, rest assured that God has heard you, and He will redirect your desires toward the things that please Him as you trust and obey Him, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

## CHAPTER 4

# God: Our Closest Ally

Do you know that God wants to be your closest friend? Do you know that the Creator of the universe wants to have a close, rich, and warm relationship with you? Do you know that He wants your relationship with Him to be the best relationship you have?

One of the qualities that endear us to close friends is their unconditional acceptance. With them, we pass through the rocky phases of relationship-building and come to a place where we know we are accepted for who we are. We are comfortable being ourselves around them because we believe they understand us and will willingly give us a shoulder to rest on.

Well, God wants to have this type of relationship with every born-again Christian. He wants us to feel comfortable in His presence. He wants us to be able to open up to Him and confide in Him things that we would be unable to share with others. He also wants to reveal those secrets that He reserves for His treasured ones to us.

### **A Challenge**

Many Christians find it difficult to draw close to God in the way I have described. One of the reasons for this is the way we relate to

our sins and weaknesses. Typically, we believe that God criticizes or condemns us for our sins, so we cover them up and shy away from Him. But this assumption is far from the truth. The Bible teaches that God loves us and wants us to bring our weaknesses to Him so that He may deliver us.

Let's consider an analogy to better understand this truth. Let's think of a mother-child relationship. This is often a strong relationship, involving many responsibilities on the mother's part in the early years. One of the messier tasks a mother undertakes is cleaning her infant after a bowel movement. As messy as this task is, however, many mothers do it willingly and cheerfully. As a result, the infant soon realizes that Mom does not mind cleaning up her messes and gains confidence in dealing with this aspect of her young life. Whenever she has a bowel movement, she goes to Mom for help. As she expects, Mom picks her up, cleans her, and puts a fresh diaper on her.

Because of its messy nature, we could liken the infant's pooh to our sins. Just as no responsible mother pushes her child away when she makes pooh, God does not push us away because of our sins. He is not daunted or frustrated by our weaknesses because He is able to deliver us from them. However, He is displeased when we intentionally cover up or justify our sins rather than acknowledge and confess them to Him.<sup>1</sup> In John 3:17-21, our Lord Jesus Christ taught that God did not send Him into the world to condemn mankind but rather to save. However, He said, people bring condemnation upon themselves when they choose to stay in darkness rather than accept God's salvation offered through Him. While this truth applies primarily to nonbelievers, it carries a vital principle for believers. Just as the nonbeliever brings condemnation upon him- or herself by refusing to accept God's salvation through Christ, the believer

brings God's judgment upon him- or herself by refusing to open his or her soul to the scrutiny and sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

As born-again Christians, we do not need to be morally perfect to please God; He knows all our imperfections, but loves us still. However, He expects us to willingly bring our sins out of the dark holes of our souls into the light of His presence. We do this by acknowledging them before Him and seeking His forgiveness and deliverance. Such childlike humility pleases Him and opens the door for His redemptive power to transform us into the image of His Son.<sup>2</sup>

### **Another Challenge**

Another formidable challenge to drawing close to God is our limited knowledge of His love.

Many of us struggle with understanding and accepting God's unconditional love. We have difficulty accepting that He loves us deeply though we have done nothing to deserve it. Yes, we may believe John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," and we may believe in His love and grace poured out to mankind in a general sense, but we do not believe His love and care for us as individual persons. We do not consider that God does not only love us as members of His large family, He loves us individually also. We do not internalize the fact that God knows each of us by name and treasures us as individuals. This limitation in our understanding creates unhealthy fear, which hinders us from drawing close to our heavenly Father.

In 1 John 4:18, the Bible tells us, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (NIV). This Scripture

provides a litmus test of our knowledge and acceptance of God's love. It tells us that when we find ourselves fearful of drawing close to God, when we are afraid of making Him our closest ally, we prove that we do not yet fully understand or accept His love. In other words, a deeper understanding and acceptance of our Father's love for us will drive out the wedge that fear places between Him and us.

It is important to be honest about the extent to which we understand God's love. God does not take offense when we acknowledge that we do not fully grasp the depth of His love. He knows the weakness is not in Him (His love is perfect and undisputable), but in our understanding. He knows we need His help to fully appreciate the nature of His love, and He is willing to grant us such help if we ask. A deep, experiential knowledge of God's love is a core foundation of our faith. It sets the stage for a deeper level of obedience to God; it equips us with the ability to love Him with all our heart, soul, and strength; it gives us reason to love others unconditionally; and it equips us for transformation into the image of Jesus Christ.

When we experience the width, length, and depth of our Father's love, we will be able to testify that our God is a *friend* who loves at all times.<sup>3</sup> We will be able to say that He is like a *brother* born for adversity. We will be able to sing meaningfully: "You're my friend and you are my brother even though you are my King . . . ."<sup>4</sup>

When we understand the depth of God's love for us, we will gladly make Him our closest ally and willingly yield every sin and shortcoming to His light and sanctifying power.

## **Reflect and Pray**

There is a lot to gain from understanding the depth of God's love. There is even more to gain from drawing closer to Him. There are heights in God that can only be attained as we obtain a true revelation of His love

and learn to love Him in return. For this reason, Paul prayed for the Ephesian church saying: “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—**that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God**” (Ephesians 3:17-19 NIV, emphasis mine).

As you seek to know God better, ask for His help to understand His love more deeply and to draw closer to Him.

### **Prayer Points:**

- Ask God to reveal His love to you.
- Ask Him to help you receive His unconditional love and to love Him in return.
- Ask Him to cause you to be rooted and established in His love.
- Ask Him to teach you to be open about your sins and weaknesses, to willingly confess them to Him, and to trust His love and mercy at such times.
- Ask God to help you trust His willingness and ability to deliver you from every sin and weakness in your life.<sup>5</sup>

Believe that He has heard your prayers and will manifest His answers in due time. Whatever happens, do not give up believing for these changes in your relationship with Him. Soon, you will rejoice as you see them come to pass.

## CHAPTER 5

# A Call to Know God More Intimately

“For His divine power has bestowed upon us all things that [are requisite and suited] to life and godliness, through the [full, personal] knowledge of Him who called us by and to His own glory and excellence [virtue]”  
(2 Peter 1:3 Amplified Bible).

### The Call

The Lord is sending out a distinct call to His people at this time. It is a call for men and women to whom He can reveal Himself, men and women who are willing to come up higher in Him, men and women who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught that one of the core purposes of our salvation is *to know God*. He spoke about this implicitly when He said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, **but have eternal life**” (John 3:16 NIV, emphasis mine). Then He shed more light when He said, “This is eternal life, that they may **know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent**” (John 17:3, emphasis mine). Our Lord Jesus taught here that having eternal life is intricately linked

with **knowing** God and Jesus Christ His Son, and this uncommon knowledge is God's destination for every child of His.<sup>1</sup>

## **Knowing God**

The idea of knowing God sounds very simple to the natural mind; so simple, many may think, "Of course, I know Him; I have been born-again, water baptized, and Spirit-filled for many years. So yes, I do know Him!" However, the truth is that many of us do not yet know God in the way He desires. Let me explain with a simple illustration.

Let's assume a certain rich man lives in a town called Kingston. Over the years, this man has shared his wealth with numerous members of the community, he has sponsored students through college, and bought homes and cars for many families. He retains underprivileged families on his payroll and cancels debts owed him. He has established numerous foundations for sick children and makes regular contributions to various humanitarian projects. His kind and benevolent acts can hardly be numbered. Almost every person in Kingston knows him, and most residents have personal stories to tell about his kindness and love.

But there is something unusual about this story. Although most residents of Kingston are beneficiaries of the rich and benevolent man, many do not know him well. They do not know his likes or dislikes or the type of things that are close to his heart. They do not know his thoughts on various issues or his plans. One could rightly say that they have experienced him from a distance but do not know him closely.

The benevolent man is not averse to intimacy though. He has a handful of close friends whom he cherishes. He spends lots of time with them and shows them his more personal side. Through their

many interactions, the benevolent man and his friends have built a strong and enriching bond. Though many in Kingston could claim to “know” the rich man, it is only his intimate friends who truly *know* him.

As with the benevolent man and the residents of Kingston, so it is with God and His children. Many benefit from His material, physical, and spiritual provisions, but do not know Him intimately. They receive His blessings, but do not truly understand His person. They serve and speak about Him, but do not draw close enough to know Him as an intimate divine friend.

### **Come Up Higher**

Regardless of where we stand presently, there is room for each of us to come up higher in our relationship with God. We must keep in mind that our destination is the full, personal, precise knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> As recipients of His numerous blessings, it is easy and tempting to settle for the precious experiences and wonderful things He brings our way each day. We can get so caught up in their beauty and blessedness that we forget they are just precious stones on the way and not the real treasure itself.

But thanks be to God for our Savior Jesus Christ, who finished His course and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He knows how far we are from our destination and is determined to get us there. So like a mother says to a distracted child, He says to us, “Come up higher.”

### **Our Lives and Ministries**

As we hear the call to intimacy with God, it is important not to mistake commitment to ministry for an intimate knowledge of God because the two are not necessarily synonymous. Our ministries have

to do with our work for God whereas intimate knowledge emanates from our personal walk with Him. Both aspects are important; however, consecration and intensity in our personal walk with God should precede and underlie our ministries.

The pursuit of intimacy with God leads to the surrender of our lives to Him. Such surrender, when fully attained, rises as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God and gives authenticity and power to our ministries. When we lay down our lives in surrender, God transforms our daily circumstances into a crucible where He refines and equips us for ministry. Of this, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:12, “Death worketh in us but life in you” (KJV). He meant that as they (the early apostles) surrendered to the processes of “self-death” that God planted in their lives, the life of Christ flowed abundantly through them to the church of the Lord whom they served. Likewise, when we give ourselves wholly to God, sincerely surrendering all our desires, ambitions, and pursuits to Him, and yielding to His dealings and disciplines in our daily lives, the Lord initiates certain processes that draw us closer to Him and lead us into God-honoring, life-changing ministry.<sup>3</sup>

When God leads us into ministry in this way, it is important not to place the ministry above Him. He expects to remain our first love, and He rewards us with a deeper knowledge of Himself and increase in ministry when we continually place Him in a position of preeminence. Many servants of God through the years have fallen into the trap of pursuing ministry at the expense of a deepening personal relationship with God. But we should avoid this snare, and rather follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, whose revolutionary ministries were underpinned by a strong, ever-fresh, ever-deepening relationship with the Father. The church at Ephesus deviated from this pattern and was chastised by our Lord

Jesus Christ. The Lord told them that their labors and good works in His name did not compensate for the negligence of their first love. He warned that they would lose their spiritual light if they did not repent.<sup>4</sup>

### **Peter Heard the Call**

Peter heard and hearkened to the call to know God intimately. This is evident from his counsel to the church in 2 Peter 1:2-4:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Peter sets forth two important truths in this Scripture. First, he teaches that we are called to be partakers of God's divine nature, glory, and excellence. Second, he teaches that we obtain this inheritance through the knowledge of God.

*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* tells us that the Greek word translated "knowledge" in this Scripture means "full, or thorough knowledge, discernment, and recognition." So, Peter understood and taught the church to pursue a deep, thorough, personal knowledge of God. He understood and taught that we will inherit God's nature and the blessings that come with it as we press toward a fuller, deeper knowledge of God.

## **Paul Heard the Call**

Paul also heard and heeded the call to know God intimately. Of this he said:

[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness . . . ] (Philippians 3:10 Amplified Bible).

Paul willingly gave up several privileges to allow him to focus single-mindedly on knowing God. He sought to know God (through Christ) more intimately, to become deeply acquainted with His person, and to experience the power and life that flows from Him.

Paul understood the life-changing benefits that accompany an intimate knowledge of God and let go of all hindrances to pursue this goal. He resisted the temptation to be distracted by past experiences, whether glorious or discouraging, and pushed toward the full expression of the knowledge of God in his life.

## **Grace and Peace Multiplied**

One of the most significant obstacles to heeding the call to know God intimately is the weight of our daily lives. This is because we view the issues relating to our lives as pressing and expend almost all our physical and spiritual energy pursuing them. However, Peter, inspired by the Spirit of God, gives us better wisdom. He says:

“May grace (God’s favor) and peace (which is perfect well-being, all necessary good, all spiritual prosperity, and freedom from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts) be multiplied to you in [the full, personal, precise and correct] knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2 Amplified Bible).

The Word of God tells us here that favor, blessings, and peace will increase in our lives as we get to know God more accurately and intimately. Why is this so? Because when we draw closer to God, not just for the purpose of receiving His blessings but to know Him in true friendship and surrender, we get to understand His limitless love better, and this understanding makes us trust Him more. Our increased faith brings greater peace and confidence and opens wide the door for His blessings to flow into our lives and circumstances.

Knowing God better also enables us to tap into His wisdom more; armed with the Creator’s wisdom, we are able to sail through life’s challenges more successfully.

## **Reflect and Pray**

The call to know God more intimately goes out to all believers in different ways at different times. However, only those who respond sincerely are drawn closer by the Lord.

Are you willing to heed the call? Do you desire to be one of the few who enter in through the strait gate and walk down the narrow path of intimacy with God? If so, tell God your desire in prayer. When you do, He will respond by initiating certain experiences in your life that will draw you into a closer relationship with Him.

If you understand this call and would like to respond positively but have difficulty making a sincere commitment, ask God to make

you willing. His Word says that He creates in us the power to will and to do what is pleasing to Him.<sup>5</sup>

If you do not fully understand the call, ask God for understanding. Do not miss out on an important opportunity simply because you lack understanding. God says wisdom and true understanding come from Him and promises to give these freely to all who ask in faith.<sup>6</sup>

## CHAPTER 6

# After the Call

What should a Christian who responds to the call to know God intimately expect? He or she should expect powerful promises, promises that bring about total life transformation. In 2 Peter 1:4, the Bible tells us that God has given us exceedingly great and precious promises so that through them we may become partakers of the divine nature. This Scripture highlights an important truth: God always begins His work in our lives with His Word and His promises. He speaks forth His counsel first, and then fulfills them by His power. Because of the significant role God's promises play in His dealings with us, it is vital that we embrace them with conviction.

We see from Hebrews 6:17-18 that God went to great lengths to convince the Old Testament patriarchs of His promises in His dealings with them:

Accordingly God also, in His desire to show more convincingly and beyond doubt to those who were to inherit the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose and plan, intervened (mediated) with an oath. This was so that, by two unchangeable things [His promise

and His oath] in which it is impossible for God ever to prove false or deceive us, we who have fled [to Him] for refuge might have mighty indwelling strength and strong encouragement to grasp and hold fast the hope appointed for us and set before [us] (Amplified Bible).

This Scripture tells us that after He had made great promises to Abraham and his descendants, God went on to bind Himself to an oath so that Abraham and his descendants would be doubly assured that He will accomplish what He had promised.

God continues to do this today so that all who run to Him are assured of the certainty of the hope they have in Him. To the one who draws closer to Him in intimacy, God quickens several significant promises from His Word, promises that bring us into new and deeper experiences in our relationship with Him. Following are some of the promises every sojourner on the path of intimacy might expect to receive.

### **Promise I**

“Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he [will eat] with Me” (Revelation 3:20 Amplified Bible).

Whereas this Scripture is commonly believed to be addressed to nonbelievers, it is actually a message to born-again Christians. The context shows the message was addressed to the Laodicean church—a church that was already in covenant relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord chastised these believers for their lukewarmness. He said they had a reputation of success and believed they were doing well, but by His assessment, they were wretched,

miserable, poor, and blind. He called them to true repentance and counseled them to seek true spiritual wealth from Him.

When we acknowledge the superficiality of our relationship with God and seek to know Him intimately, the Lord fulfills this promise made to the Laodicean Christians in our lives. He opens His Word richly to us and anoints our eyes with eye salve so that we are able to “see” His truths clearly. He blesses us with a deeper understanding of Himself and teaches us His ways. He passes us through a process where we behold His glory, spiritually, like the disciples did on the mount of transfiguration.<sup>1</sup>

The Lord does not end His work with instructing us in His Word. He goes on to purge us so that our lives bring Him glory and become fit for His use.<sup>2</sup> As He purges us, He endows us with an abundance of gold—symbolizing the nature of God—and white garments—symbolizing purity.

## **Promise II**

“Also, the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants . . . Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:6-7).

In Isaiah 56, the Lord makes lofty and enduring promises to those who choose to walk uprightly before Him. In verses six and seven quoted above, He promises to bring them to His holy mountain and make them joyful in His house of prayer.

As we, His sons and daughters through Christ Jesus, draw near to know Him intimately, we start to see the fulfillment of the promises of Isaiah 56:6-7 in our lives.

Being brought into His “holy mountain” (higher levels of fellowship, glory, and grace) begins with entering into His rest. Hebrews 4:10 tells us that those who enter God’s rest cease from their own works. So, as we draw closer to Him in intimacy, we will see His Holy Spirit leading us into a season where we are constrained to cease from doing our own works (that is, from pursuing our own carnal ideas) and are taught to only do the works the Father ordains (this is a dying process).

Ceasing from our own works is sometimes painful and frustrating because it breaks our flesh and self-will. But great rewards await those who patiently endure. Not only does the Lord lift them up to higher levels of fellowship, grace and glory, He also makes them effective priests in His house—“Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar . . .” He accepts their prayers and spiritual offerings and uses them to execute His purposes on earth.

Yielding to the dying process releases spiritual power and fruitfulness in our lives and ministries. Our Lord Jesus taught this when He said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”<sup>3</sup> He spoke primarily about the fruitfulness that would result from His death and resurrection on the cross; He also laid down a pattern for success for those who would seek to do His works on the earth.

### **Promise III**

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing

asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

As we draw near to the Lord in intimacy, we will see Him separate the things of the soul from the things of the spirit in our lives. In God’s divine order, man’s regenerated spirit (led by the Holy Spirit) leads man’s soul, and the spirit-led soul directs and rules the body. However, this order has become mixed up in our lives as a result of the fall of Adam. More often than not, and sometimes unknown to us, our souls<sup>i</sup> and bodies ignore the promptings of our spirits and do their own thing. But God wants to restore His divine order in us. And so, as we draw near to Him in intimacy, He will teach us to differentiate between the promptings of the soul and the promptings of the spirit. He will restore our spirits to the place of leadership and cause our souls to take the place of submission to the spirit. Rather than being led by the carnal impulses of our souls and bodies, we will be led, through our spirits, by the Spirit of God. God will reign in us indeed.

#### **Promise IV**

“I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires” (Isaiah 54:11).

“And he carried me away . . . and shewed me . . . the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, . . . And the wall of the city had twelve foundations . . . And the foundations . . . were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the

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i The will, mind, emotions, and desires constitute the soul.

second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald” (Revelation 21:10, 14, 19 KJV).

In Isaiah 54:11, the Lord promises to lay beautiful foundations in the lives of His spiritually barren people, and then in Revelation 21, we see this promise fulfilled in the bride of Christ.

Hebrews 6:1-2 lists some of the doctrinal foundations in the believer’s life. It speaks of repentance from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Today, we see great weakness in these foundational aspects of believers’ lives. Knowledge of them is sparse and sometimes confused; experience in them is limited. However, God still purposes to have a church whose foundation is well established and adorned. He will have a people who truly live by faith as it is said, “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). He will have a people who live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit just as the early church did. He will have a people who understand and live in the power of Christ’s resurrection, a body of believers whose lives truly conform to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ—a glorious church without spot or wrinkle indeed.

To accomplish these divine purposes, we will find the Holy Spirit taking us back to many foundational doctrines as we draw close to God in intimacy. He will purge from us erroneous beliefs and attitudes and lay pure foundations upon which the spotless bride of Christ must be built.

Our learning environment will not be limited to church sanctuaries and fellowship halls, but the Spirit of God will also use the circumstances of our daily lives to inculcate divine truths and principles in us.

## **Promise V**

“Mine ears hast thou opened . . . Then said I, ‘Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God . . . ’” (Psalm 40:6-8 KJV).

As we draw closer to God in intimacy, we will find Him preparing us for higher levels of ministry. We know from the Scriptures that God does not release His servants into significant, glory-bearing ministry until He has prepared and equipped them adequately. We see this exemplified when His temples were to be built by Moses and King Solomon. Prior to the commencement of these works, the Lord invested many years in the preparation of His people. He made them willing and equipped them with the skills and abilities needed to execute the work excellently.<sup>4</sup> The Lord also provided detailed and extensive plans for the work<sup>5</sup> and empowered His people to accumulate the physical resources required.

God has not changed His ways; He still prepares and equips His servants extensively today. As we draw near to Him in intimacy, we will experience a similar depth of preparation for His service. He will give us a clear vision of the work He has called us to do, painting the picture precept upon precept and line upon line. He will lay down the guiding principles and warn us of possible pitfalls. He will work on our zeal, stripping away human zeal, which is often dependent on outward circumstances, and He will fill us with His divine zeal and power. He will provide every resource needed for His work and give us the skills and abilities needed to accomplish every task well.

If we wait patiently for the completion of God’s preparatory work in our lives, we will find ourselves filled with vision, zeal, and

resources for our service to Him. Like David and our Lord Jesus Christ, we will be able to say:

- “Lord you have opened my ears.<sup>6</sup> Now I have *a clear understanding* of your commission and plan.”
- “I come in submission to what is written about me in your book<sup>7</sup>, *I am willing* to do all you have appointed.”
- “I delight to do your will O Lord.” “Not only am I willing to obey your call, but I find within myself *a deep passion for your work*. My food is to do your will and to finish your work.<sup>8</sup>”

## **Promise VI**

“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Revelation 3:11-12).

The promises received when we draw closer to God in intimacy are not limited to this present age; they extend right into eternity. The Bible tells us that the present order of things which we see in the earth (physical world) and heavens (spiritual world) will pass away. God will institute a new order<sup>9</sup> where He will rule all things through Christ and His bride (the church).

Those who persevere in holding fast to the Lord, to His rule over them, and to the entirety of His will are guaranteed an unchangeable place of significance in the affairs of His kingdom—“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and

he shall go out no more.” Unto them the Lord Jesus will impart His new name, the Father’s name, and a name that will qualify them to be part of “the City of God,” “the New Jerusalem.”

## **Reflect and Pray**

A positive response to God’s call to intimacy is essential for every believer. It represents a major turning point in the believer’s life.

If you have responded to the call positively, know that heaven rejoices because of your decision. Determine to go all the way with the Lord, leaning on His grace at every stage. Although the path may be rough initially, your heart will soon rejoice as you begin to reap the rewards of your invaluable decision.

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to help you to remain on the path of intimacy with Him.
- Ask Him to help you to open up fully to Him, and to teach you deeper things about Himself.
- Ask Him to help you endure the pain of ceasing from your own works, and to lead you into His rest.
- Ask the Lord to restore His divine order to your soul. Ask that everything within you will become subject to the leadership of His Holy Spirit.
- Ask God to teach you the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, and to establish those principles in your life.
- Ask Him to give you a clear vision of the ministry He has called you to fulfill, and to prepare you for the work.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to His truths about eternity. Ask Him to prepare you for a life of significance therein.

After you have prayed, believe that the Lord has heard you and will fulfill these requests and much more in your life.



*Part II*

**Agents of Transformation**

**I**n this section, I discuss various tools that God uses to draw us into intimacy and to prepare us for service. Our journey does not occur in seclusion; rather, the Lord orchestrates the circumstances of our daily lives in ways that favor His purpose. Our responses to His acts are of paramount importance. Therefore, the chapters in this section highlight key situations that we should watch out for and share counsel on the appropriate spiritual responses.

## CHAPTER 7

# God's Awesome Grace

There are few things that I know that have the ability to transform a believer's life like the grace of God. God's grace is the power that makes living life, as written in the Scriptures, possible.

My real awareness of the need for God's grace emerged years ago during my career as a mid-level manager and culminated during my role as a stay-at-home mom. During those years, I found myself frequently saddled with responsibilities that far exceeded my abilities; an endless list of things to do, coupled with grossly inadequate time, became a daily experience. I stretched myself to my limit, but found I was digging at an ever-increasing mountain of tasks. My determination to "do my best" and "be strong" soon faded into fatigue, de-motivation, and frustration.

In desperation, I cried to the Lord for help. His answer to me was, "My grace is sufficient for you . . . <sup>1</sup>" Of course, God did not release this precious truth to me instantly because He knew I would neither understand it nor appreciate its power. Rather, He used my experiences to teach me about His grace.

Up to that point in my life, I was a Christian whose speech hardly lacked the phrase "by God's grace," yet I never really understood the

power of His grace. I always thought of God's grace as a spiritual force that impacts a believer's *external circumstances* to make them bearable or favorable. I never knew the aspect of His grace that works *within us* to motivate and empower us for all He allows to come our way.

The Lord tenderly and lovingly nurtured me during my crisis until I began to understand and trust the power of His grace. I came to the understanding that, indeed, God's grace is sufficient for me. It dawned on me in a fresh and powerful way that, being a faithful Father, *God would never give me responsibilities without providing me the ability to bear them.*

Over time, I learned that God's grace had always been available to me, but my wrong thinking had hindered me from receiving it. Previously, my mind thought about the numerous tasks I had to accomplish and lamented my inability to handle them all. This negative trend of thoughts released negative emotions that drained my energy and caused resentment. As the Lord began to teach me about His grace, He showed me that such crippling thoughts were satanic lies, which I did not have to accept. From His perspective, it was untrue that I was incapable of handling my responsibilities, for He had given me sufficient grace for them.

As the Spirit of God unveiled these truths to my heart, He encouraged me to believe and confess them. Although weary, I made a decision to believe and confess God's Word about my situation; amazingly, this simple act of obedience unlocked an unexpected miracle. As I repeatedly spoke the Word out of my mouth, all the weariness and frustration I had felt dissipated, and a tremendous amount of motivation and energy flooded my soul. With this divine strength, I knocked off the tasks that faced me like

a workhorse. As I repeated this practice each day, the Lord broke the stronghold that had gripped my mind and set me free. I no longer experienced the debilitating feelings of discouragement that had so far afflicted me.

These simple beginnings in the experiential knowledge of God's grace led to much more. Learning to depend on God's grace in a situation as simple as caring for my family equipped me with the ability to depend on His grace in more significant circumstances. I have since learned to lean on His grace for the ability to overcome my flesh and follow His will; I have learned to depend on His grace for the ability to teach and write His Word. I have depended on His grace for the ability to love, forgive, and obtain victories in spiritual warfare. I would not be the person I am today but for the grace of God, nor would I be securely rooted in Christ without the help given me by His grace. Through God's grace, I have been able to do all things the Lord has appointed for me to do. Through His grace, I have found strength to live a life that is far better than anything I could have imagined for myself. God's grace has truly been sufficient for me.

### **Are You Struggling?**

Are you faced with an overwhelming situation, schedule, or responsibility? If so, ask the Lord to show you how to receive His grace for your situation. Often, we assume we can handle our responsibilities on our own, and do not ask for help. We stretch ourselves as demands increase on us, typically at the expense of our families, spiritual lives, and other important aspects of life. We forget that the Word of God says the strength of man will always fail:

“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:30-31).

This Scripture teaches that even the most energetic among us will eventually run out of strength. However, those who learn to depend upon God will find their strength renewed. They will become like evergreen trees planted by a river; their leaves will not wither, and they will never stop bearing fruit.<sup>2</sup>

### **Grace for Service**

The matter of bearing responsibility through God’s enabling grace is a fundamental requirement in God’s kingdom. If we desire to be fruitful and glorify Him with our lives, we must learn to exchange our strength for His, both in secular activities and ministry endeavors.

The Bible tells us in Psalm 147:10-11 that God does not delight in the strength of the horse, nor does He take pleasure in the legs of man. He takes pleasure in those who reverently and worshipfully fear Him and hope in His mercy and loving-kindness. We do not impress God by striving to do great works for Him in our own strength. God wants us to depend fully on Him and is pleased when we look to Him for grace to do His work.

Laying down our own strength in exchange for God’s is a deliberate act of the will. It is a step we must take intentionally. *Intentionally*, we must invite God into our works and hand Him the reins. Our human strength is typically zealous and will stealthily bypass handing over the reins of our works to God, if allowed. Therefore, we should learn to discern the hastiness of our own

strength. Then, we should learn to lay down our strength and step forward only as God's grace empowers us.

## **Accompanying Principles**

The principles that underlie the working of God's grace are the same whether in ministry or in our daily lives. Here are three principles I have learned:

### **1. Weakness is a requirement.**

The Lord says in His Word, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). "The Creator of the ends of the earth . . . gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength" (Isaiah 40:28-29).

God delights in weak, willing vessels because it is in such lives that His power is most visible. In our world today, inability and weakness bring reproach. In God's kingdom, however, the reverse is true: The recognition of our inabilities and weaknesses positions us to receive and demonstrate God's ability. God welcomes us in our weak state when we are humble enough to acknowledge our condition and seek change. His Word specifically says that He opposes the proud (those who believe they have no need of Him), but gives grace to the humble (those who acknowledge their need for Him).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, when we are faced with situations or responsibilities that look daunting, we need not be disillusioned; rather, we should put our hope in the One who loves to give grace and help to the weak.

We *can* fulfill our God-given responsibilities and dreams through Christ who strengthens us,<sup>4</sup> and this is more than a religious cliché. A simple analogy can help illustrate this truth. A wealthy father with assets worth ten billion dollars lives in a town called Bethesda. As

a new school year approaches, his children, who all attend private colleges, present him with the following budget: tuition and books, \$60,000; transport and boarding, \$30,000; miscellaneous expenses, \$10,000; total cost per child, \$100,000; total cost for three children, \$300,000. The children anxiously await their father's response, as they know the cost of their education is high.

The wealthy father scrutinizes his children's budget to ensure prudence, and then with warmth and compassion in his voice says, "Do not worry, my dear children, I will gladly give you the money you need for college."

Spending such a large sum of money, even for a worthy cause, would be a burden and source of anxiety to any ordinary parent. But, unlike other parents, this father spends the money joyfully because he has a superfluous supply. He is a billionaire!

Similarly, our God is a limitless source of strength and ability, and He is willing to continuously supply us with His strength for our situations and God-given responsibilities. As a result, each of us can optimistically say, "I can do whatever needs to be done," even in the face of daunting tasks and circumstances. We do not make this claim based on our own strength and abilities, but by reckoning upon the abundant supply of resources that exist in our heavenly Father.

## **2. Deliverance from self-reliance is essential.**

Many of us are inherently self-reliant, even in seasons of weakness and weariness. At those times, we ask God for help but covertly think, "*Lord, I want you to take care of this portion of my problem, and I will handle the rest.*" God does not accept such a proposition because His power and glory are best revealed through *fully* surrendered vessels. Yet, He does not turn away from our cries for help. What He does is pass us through experiences that break our

self-reliance. Such experiences may be simple and subtle, but they are effective at emptying us of ourselves and bringing us to a place of total dependence upon Him.

### **3. God only supplies His strength in support of His plans.**

The surrender of our strength must be accompanied by the surrender of our wisdom. As He taught Joshua, God teaches us that He is “commander of the army” and, as such, He expects us to seek His counsel and guidance in all we do.<sup>5</sup> Since discerning His voice is crucial to following His direction, God also spends time teaching us how to accurately discern His voice both in the mundane tasks of daily living and in overtly spiritual things.<sup>6</sup>

Personally, I have learned that the Lord has a daily plan for me. His plan consists of some tasks of which I am aware at the beginning of my day and some which I do not know. As the day unfolds, I gain more knowledge of His plan and face the choice of following Him or staying with my plan. I choose to follow Him to the best of my ability because I have learned that no matter how inconvenient or mundane the tasks in His plan may seem, it is only His plan that glorifies Him, leads to fruitfulness, and brings true fulfillment.

The Lord teaches us all to surrender each day of our lives to Him. He is aware of all our responsibilities and cares about fulfilling them much more than we do. For this reason, we can trust Him to order our days in ways that ensure excellent fulfillment of each responsibility.

After we have committed our day to Him, God orders our paths in ways that eliminate responsibilities that are not in line with His plan. We may find Him giving us no time or grace for certain activities even after we have asked repeatedly. When this occurs, we should give up petitioning and rest in the assurance that He knows

what's best for us and is working all things in accordance with His perfect will.

## **Reflect and Pray**

Are you feeling crushed under the weight of challenging responsibilities and circumstances? Have you considered inviting the Lord into your situation? Your circumstances may look so fixed that you think, *“What difference will praying about this really make? This is the way life is for everyone. I must just find a way to cope.”* Well, I want to remind you that the God who created this vast and diverse universe has a way out of every situation. There is no limit to His wisdom, creativity, and power. I encourage you to talk to Him about your situation; tell it as it is. Do not try to figure out how He will rescue you. Simply trust in Him, and expect a breakthrough.

You may have invited God into your situation, but He is unable to work freely because you have not yet surrendered your strength, abilities, and plans to Him. It may be that you are still trying to work out some aspects of your problem on your own. This could be a deliberate choice, or it could be that you are just having difficulty surrendering fully to the Lord. Either way, I encourage you to ask God to strip you of everything that prevents you from surrendering. Thereafter, you need not try to bring yourself to a place of surrender on your own because you will definitely not do a good job of it. Rather, trust the Lord to work through your circumstances to bring about the depth of surrender that He requires of you.

You may already be in a situation where you are being compelled to surrender your strength, abilities, and plans to the Lord. This may feel uncomfortable because you are accustomed to having things planned out perfectly and under your control. At certain times, you may be tempted to kick, scream, and take things into your own hands.

If you feel this way, I want to assure you that most Christians who have made it to spiritual maturity have faced and probably fallen into this snare many times. However, every one of them has eventually learned that it is only consistent surrender to God that brings real change to challenging circumstances. Therefore, when frustrated by situations that seem out of your control, ask the Lord to help you stay calm, patient, and hopeful. Ask Him to help you resist the urge to engage in your own works. Ask Him, with all the sincerity you can muster, to help you abide under His hand until you get to His destination, which will undoubtedly be an excellent one.

## CHAPTER 8

# When You Don't Have All the Answers

“Therefore do not be vague and thoughtless and foolish, but understanding and firmly grasping what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17 Amplified Bible).

God has a purpose and a plan for every person He re-creates in Christ Jesus. His plan covers every detail of our lives, from things as simple as, “How should I spend my day?” to things as weighty as, “What is my ministry calling?” Understanding and walking in God’s plan not only pleases Him, it takes the pressure off us.

Walking in God’s plan is a process, one that begins with learning to hear His voice and develops into discerning and obeying His will on a continuous basis.

Knowing how to discern God’s will is a privilege given to every New Testament believer. As with many other privileges we walk in today, God typified this truth under the Mosaic covenant prior to establishing it as an element of the new covenant. Under the old covenant, God stipulated the items of clothing to be worn by the

high priest for his duties. The priestly garment consisted of a tunic, sash, robe, ephod, and band for the ephod. Over this, he wore a breastplate which carried the Urim and Thummim. On his head, he wore a turban and a holy crown.<sup>1</sup> Every item of clothing had its own significance; the Urim and Thummim in particular were used by the high priest to discern God's will and to obtain His counsel<sup>2</sup> in matters of importance.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ has made us kings and priests unto God; it calls us a royal priesthood.<sup>3</sup> This means that every New Testament believer is a priest of God. Just as the Old Testament priests were equipped with the ability to discern God's will and counsel for the issues they faced, we are divinely equipped with the ability to hear God's voice and discern His will,<sup>4</sup> and this ability is critical for our survival and progress as Christians today. About this, our Lord Jesus Christ said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28). In saying "my sheep hear my voice," He signified that the ability to hear Him (our Shepherd) exists within every born-again Christian (His sheep). By saying "hear my voice . . . follow Me . . . I give them eternal life . . . neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand," He indicated that our security in Him and our progress into eternal life are directly linked to our ability to hear His voice and follow Him.

### **Like a Child . . .**

Learning to hear God's voice is like a child learning to walk. Initially, the child's steps are shaky, and he falls frequently. However, as he continues to practice, he gains confidence and eventually masters the skill. Similarly, born-again Christians learning to hear God's voice gain experience and become more confident as they practice the skill

in real-life situations. Faced with a difficulty, they may ask, “What should I do, Lord? Please teach me how to hear your counsel for this situation and confirm to me that what I have heard is truly from you.” The Lord answers and uses such opportunities to teach them how to recognize His voice.

A child learning how to walk is unlikely to suffer life-threatening injuries because his parents or guardians watch diligently for his safety. Likewise, believers with a sincere desire to hear God’s voice will find themselves protected from making catastrophic mistakes because the Holy Spirit supervises their endeavors. Indeed, they may make mistakes and God will allow such for training purposes. However, His Spirit will watch to ensure that they do not make disastrous errors as they seek to follow His leading. He will also ensure that their ability to discern His voice develops properly.

If you have been reluctant to learn how to hear God’s voice, I encourage you to develop this skill. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide and guard you, and soon you will see rewarding results in your life.

### **Another Challenge**

“The wind blows (breathes) where it wills; and though you hear its sound, yet you neither know where it comes from nor where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8 Amplified Bible).

After we have learned to hear God’s voice and discern His will for our lives, another challenge typically presents itself—the challenge of impatience. I describe this kind of impatience as the tendency to want to know *everything* that is going to happen concerning particular issues in our lives and wanting those things to happen

immediately. This tendency leads to tension and anxiety and steals our ability to enjoy each day's blessings.

For many years, I was impatient about God's promises and plans for my life. On one occasion, as I anxiously tried to figure out how certain promises that the Lord made would unfold, the Lord rebuked me. He chided me for trying to *reason out* the details of His plans. "But, Lord, I ought to know your will," I protested. In response, He affirmed that He does require me to seek His will. However, having received His promises and a general idea of His plan, He expected me to *trust Him* to provide the missing details at the appropriate time.

Impatience, anxiety, and agitation about God's plans steal our joy. In fact, these are sometimes ploys of the devil to make us doubt God and question His loving-kindness. If you have faced this problem, I believe you would agree that sometimes you have thought, *Lord, why do I have to keep waiting? Why don't you make things happen now? I really want to get to the end of this journey; why can't that happen now?* We become agitated and worked up and soon start believing there is a problem with God's plan. We may not say this overtly, but we imply it by suggesting that there is a better or quicker way to resolve our situation. But the truth is, there is never a problem with God or His plans. **The problem is often the weakness in us that makes us unable to wait.** God understands every problem we face. He knows when our agitation is the result of a root of impatience. On those occasions, He knows we need deliverance, so, rather than compromise His plans to please us, He works to deliver us from this dangerous weakness. Consider the following analogy to better understand this truth:

An Ontario couple plans a vacation to Atlanta, Georgia, with their six-year-old son and four-year-old daughter. After investigating various travel options, the couple decides a road trip would be most

affordable for the family. The journey by road takes about seventeen hours. Knowing that the children will be bored during the trip, Mom and Dad pack various books, movies, games, and snacks to make the journey fun.

Few hours into the trip, their son, Danny, asks, “Daddy, will we arrive soon?” His dad replies, “No, Danny, we have just begun. We still have a long way to go. Occupy yourself with the books, movies, and games Mom has packed. Relax, and enjoy the trip.”

The route Danny’s parents have chosen is scenic and has recreational spots. To allow Danny and his sister refreshment and play, Danny’s dad makes several stops on the way. The family also makes an overnight stop at a nice hotel about half way into the journey.

Danny and his sister, Susan, enjoy the recreational spots and times of refreshing, but soon after each one, they slip into complaining about the length of the trip. What they fail to understand is that complaining about the trip will not make it any shorter. In fact, their agitation will only make them unhappy during what could be a pleasant journey. If they were wiser, they would utilize all the activities provided by their parents to occupy themselves and make their long trip more enjoyable.

Like Danny and Susan’s parents, God takes each of us on long journeys that are intended to accomplish revolutionary changes in our lives. He provides several refreshing experiences along the way and supplies His grace to make our path bearable. However, many of us fail to see and enjoy these benefits because we are too focused on reaching our destination. Our flesh continually whines, “I want the end, I want the end; only the end result will make me happy.” Fortunately, God does not give the flesh its way. Rather, He delivers

us from its control and empowers us to patiently enjoy our lengthy but fruitful journey with Him.

## **Seek Deliverance**

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; . . . And ye shall tread down the wicked (\*in your souls); for they shall be ashes under . . . your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 4:2-3 KJV). (\*Author’s comment)

It is difficult to make ourselves wait patiently for God when we have a root of impatience within. However, God has never asked us to make ourselves righteous. He promises to deliver us from all unrighteousness if we genuinely give our weaknesses and sins over to Him.

**The first step toward deliverance from the problem of impatience is a change in perspective.** When the flesh tugs at the strings of our hearts and accuses God of delaying the fulfillment of His promises, we must immediately identify our problem as being from our flesh, not from God or His plans. The truth is, if we were not hindered by the flesh, we would be able to follow the Lord to His destination for us, filled with joy and contentment all the way.

**The second step is yielding the root of impatience within us to God for destruction.** When I got to this stage of my journey, God unveiled my heart to me. He showed me that although I knew impatience to be a problem in my life, I was unwilling to give it up! He revealed my deeper thoughts on the issue, and they went something like this: *I know I have to give up agitating and worrying about when God will fulfill His promises to me, but I am afraid of what giving up*

*these anxieties will cost me. Perhaps I am better off keeping the issue topical in my mind because this gives me hope that God's plans will soon come to pass.*

As I considered my thoughts and asked the Lord for further insight, I understood that this supposed “hope” to which I held was no hope at all. It was an *imitation* of God-given hope! It dawned on me that my belief that pondering and re-pondering God's promises contributed to the timing of their fulfillment was deceptive. I learned that true hope, which God supplies with His promises, empowers us to be expectant without becoming anxious. True hope is holy and focuses on God, not on our need. True hope does not compromise our peace and joy; it is not obsessive, and it does not become an idol.

This revelation of truth brought me much relief. Consequently, I asked God to deliver me from the root of impatience and fill me with His pure and blessed hope. He did.

The Lord promises healing and victory to those who genuinely desire to please Him but find themselves encumbered by recurring sins and weaknesses.<sup>5</sup> His work of deliverance is always so thorough that its beneficiaries are able to walk away completely free of the conditions that previously plagued them. Impatience is a weakness that can be overcome through the ministry and power of His Holy Spirit within us. This victory is an experience to be desired indeed!

## **Reflect and Pray**

God loves us dearly and does not want to see us suffer from problems for which He has already provided solutions. Lack of knowledge about His will for our lives and impatience with His plans cause unnecessary suffering; the kind of suffering that bears no good fruit in our lives. Cry out to the Lord for deliverance if you find any of these weaknesses within yourself.

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask God to stir in you *a desire* to know His will for every aspect of your life. Ask Him to help you *seek Him* for His will and to help you believe all that He shows you.
- Even if you have not yet observed impatience within yourself, go ahead and ask the Lord to prevent this tendency from taking root in you. If it is already a problem, ask Him to make you willing to give it up for destruction.
- Ask the Lord to help you come to a place of rest concerning His promises. Ask Him to help you enjoy today's promises and blessings while waiting patiently for the future to unfold.

## CHAPTER 9

# Announcing a Day of Deliverance

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ is in a day of deliverance. We are in a season when God is beckoning us to trade our moral defects for garments of moral uprightness, a season when ordinary men and women are receiving grace to put on divine character:

But unto you who revere and worshipfully fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings and His beams, and you shall go forth and gambol like calves [released] from the stall and leap for joy. And you shall tread down the lawless and wicked [in your souls<sup>§</sup>], for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts (Malachi 4:2-3 Amplified Bible).

The Lord is indeed shining in the hearts of His own to bring healing where there has been sinfulness and beauty where there has been brokenness.

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<sup>§</sup> Author's comment

## **Why Healing?**

“Why healing in our souls?” some might ask. Because our souls<sup>5</sup> have been distorted by sin. We bear inner defects that corrupt our attitudes and behaviors. Many of the difficulties we face in our relationships, our negative reactions to adverse circumstances, our inordinate attachments to the things of this world, our shortcomings in our walk with God, and our character weaknesses are largely a result of these irregularities of the soul.

Consider the following analogy to better understand this truth: A person who suffers from asthma is one who has problems with the functioning of her lungs. When exposed to certain environmental conditions, her breathing may become difficult, and she may wheeze, cough or feel constricted in the chest.<sup>1</sup> The root cause of her symptoms is not her environment, but her lungs’ inability to function well under the prevailing environmental conditions. If her lungs get completely healed, she will no longer exhibit the symptoms of asthma even when exposed to the same environmental conditions.

Similarly, the character weaknesses we exhibit are not caused by the triggers in our environment; rather they are the result of the way our souls respond to those triggers. The sin of a man who defrauds his employer of money is not caused by his access to money but by his inability to handle such access credibly. If healed of the root of greed and dishonesty in his soul, the same man will find himself able to work with money without succumbing to the temptation to steal.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught these truths when He said: “There is not [even] one thing outside a man which by going into him can

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<sup>5</sup> The soul consists of the will, emotions, mind, and desires.

pollute and defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him and make him unhallowed and unclean” (Mark 7:15 Amplified Bible). The Lord went on to say: For from within, [that is] out of the hearts of men, come base and wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, stealing, murder, adultery, coveting (a greedy desire to have more wealth), dangerous and destructive wickedness, deceit; unrestrained (indecent) conduct; an evil eye (envy), slander (evil speaking, malicious misrepresentation, abusiveness), pride (the sin of an uplifted heart against God and man), foolishness (folly, lack of sense, recklessness, thoughtlessness). All these evil [purposes and desires] come from within, and they make the man unclean and render him unhallowed (Mark 7:21-23 Amplified Bible).

Throughout generations, both Christians and non-Christians have devised many practical ways to curb these unruly desires of the heart. Some formulae have served well, but all in all, their value has been limited. Our Lord Jesus Christ offers complete transformation of the inner man, a transformation which begins with the soul’s acceptance of His sacrifice for sin on the cross and thereafter continues until we become like Him.

The Holy Spirit, which we receive from God, is the agent of this work of transformation. The Holy Spirit convicts us of evil tendencies in our souls and prompts us to seek deliverance from the Lord. As we seek Him, the Lord arises with healing upon us. As we are thus healed, we find that the situations that tempted and frustrated us previously no longer bother us. In place of our weaknesses, we receive wholeness and begin the development of Christ-like character in those aspects of our lives.

Jesus Christ, our pattern, modeled the inner wholeness which we ought to have as sons of God. Our Lord faced terrible opposition and many temptations<sup>2</sup> when on earth yet never sinned. He was able

to resist temptations because He was whole inside. The devil could not lure Him into sin because there was no weakness in Him upon which Satan could capitalize.<sup>3</sup>

## **God Will Save**

It is sad to see that we Christians sometimes glib over our weaknesses and attempt to hide our shortcomings from the One who is most willing and able to save us.

God's attribute as Savior of His people has been evident right from the early days of His relationship with the nation of Israel. God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage with a mighty hand (a type of our deliverance from the world through the born-again experience) and led them through a wilderness into a promised land. The Promised Land was at the time occupied by very strong nations, nations Israel could never defeat in their own strength. God knew Israel was powerless against these nations, yet He promised them (Israel) their land. Why did He do this? We find the reason embedded in words He spoke to them as He prepared them for the Promised Land: "When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to possess and has plucked away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you . . ." (Deuteronomy 7:1 Amplified Bible).

This Scripture gives two important insights. First, it confirms that God knew the opposing nations were mightier than Israel. Second, it shows that God promised Israel the land because *He reckoned on His ability* not theirs ("when the Lord your God brings you . . ."). God intended to drive the mighty nations out by His power; all He required of Israel was humility (acknowledging

they could not drive the nations out on their own), trust, and obedience.

Israel's experience in this context typifies our experience as Christians. We are called to inherit God's nature and manifest His character,<sup>4</sup> yet each of us still have our "seven nations mightier than us." Each of us have weaknesses and flaws that repeatedly draw us into covert and overt sins. Like Israel, we are incapable of overcoming these "nations" on our own (a fact God knew before He called us). But God still calls us and promises we will show forth His virtues because His plan is based on *His* ability to deliver us from our weaknesses not ours. What He requires of us is to:

1. Sincerely and humbly confess our weaknesses to Him rather than justify them or pretend they do not exist.
2. Acknowledge our inability to deliver ourselves.
3. Trust in His ability to deliver us and confidently expect His deliverance.
4. Fully cooperate with His Holy Spirit as He leads us down the path to freedom.

### **He Delights to Save**

Why should we expect such deliverance from God? Because He loves us and delights in saving us from bondage to sin. God does not offer us this deliverance reluctantly; it is a provision He has already made through the death and resurrection of His Son and now wants to work out in every believer's life. The Holy Spirit speaks about this persuasively in Romans 5:8-10 (Amplified Bible):

"But God shows and clearly proves His [own] love for us by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ . . . died

for us . . . For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, it is much more [certain], now that we are reconciled, that we shall be saved (daily delivered from sin's dominion) through His [resurrection] life.”

The Holy Spirit again testifies of God's saving grace in Zephaniah 3:16-17:

“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: ‘Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.’”

What a delightful Word! This Scripture—spoken many years ago but as relevant to us today as it was to the Jews then—encourages us to be confident that our God, who is mighty, will save us. It also assures us that He will do this precious work of deliverance with rejoicing, singing, and love.

### **Deprived of His Love**

Although this privilege of deliverance is available to every born-again Christian, some use it sparingly while others do not use it at all. One reason for this indifference is the enemy's accusations. The devil and his demons would have us believe God is always angry at us for our sins; consequently, we have this mental picture of a furious God who is always ready to chide. With this in mind, we shy away rather than run to God for deliverance.

This perception of God is a dangerous lie that deprives us of His unconditional and liberating love. God loves us and wants to save us, not punish us. Out of His love, He makes available deliverance from the “seven nations mightier than us.” Let us therefore determine to benefit from the redeeming love of our Father. Let us take our eyes off the magnitude of our weaknesses and our inability to help ourselves, reject the accusations of the enemy no matter how true they seem, and fix our gaze on our heavenly Father, looking not to the things that are seen (our present condition), but to the things that are unseen (God’s ability, power, and plan for our righteousness).<sup>5</sup>

### **Cooperate with the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is appointed to bring us into the fullness of our inheritance in Christ—and this includes the practical manifestation of the righteousness of God in us. Total submission to Him to the best of our ability is the way by which this manifestation is made evident in our lives. The Holy Spirit will progressively but lovingly reveal our weaknesses to us. His intent is never to condemn but to deliver. Let us learn to listen and respond submissively to Him, and as we do, He will lead us into God’s mighty deliverance.

### **Reflect and Pray**

Divine deliverance is available now. The question is, “Are you desperate enough for it?” Jesus tells us in Luke 5:31 that only the sick need a physician. It is only when we reach the point of saying, “Lord, I want to be delivered; I am desperate for your help,” that the healing process can work uninhibited in our lives.

As long as we hide our weaknesses or keep trying to deliver ourselves, we will remain bound. However, when we give them up

to God and follow Him down the path of deliverance, we will surely be set free.

### **Prayer Points**

- Acknowledge your weaknesses and sins to God.
- Ask Him to deliver you from them.
- Ask Him to destroy their roots so that you will not engage in them anymore.
- Ask Him to help you believe that He desires to save you completely.
- Ask Him to help you cooperate with His Holy Spirit throughout this process.

## CHAPTER 10

# The Lord, Our Good Shepherd

Psalm 23 of the Bible is arguably one of the most popular Scriptures in church history. Many regularly quote the entire psalm or portions of it for comfort, encouragement, and protection. I believe its popularity stems from the fact that it is very positive, inspiring, and uplifting.

I memorized Psalm 23 as a child, and since becoming born-again, I have come to deeply appreciate the beauty of this precious Scripture. I share some nuggets of truth I have gleaned from Psalm 23 in this chapter and hope that God will use them to soothe, comfort, and encourage you on your journey.

### **Our All-Sufficient Shepherd**

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1).

A shepherd’s responsibilities toward his flock in David’s day were all-encompassing. Sheep, unlike goats, were unable to fend for themselves, so they depended on their shepherds for almost everything. The shepherd found pasture where the sheep could

feed, he found fresh water springs where they could drink, he provided them shelter for rest, and protected them from all forms of danger. The shepherd also sought and restored sheep that strayed, tended the wounds of injured sheep, and led the flock in the way they were to go.

Like sheep, we are continually in need of help and guidance. We need nourishment for our souls almost every minute of the day, we need refreshment when our souls become parched from life's burdens, we need a strong shelter to run to when the devil and his agents target us for harm, and we need divine guidance on how to chart our lives through this world's complex maze.

Psalm 23:1 declares that God is our Shepherd; it tells us that He is able to meet *every* need we have. He does so, not by handing us road maps for our journey or supplies for the way, but by providing Himself as a permanent companion and an all-sufficient Shepherd of our souls. Because He is excellent and perfect in all His ways, we can be assured we will never lack for nourishment, comfort, guidance, protection, deliverance, and more. If we follow like sheep (that is, in obedience and utter dependence) we will enjoy the rich rewards of being the flock of an experienced, skilled, all-knowing, almighty Shepherd.

Psalm 23:1 first applies to our inner lives, that is, our spirits and souls. This means that our bodies may sometimes suffer difficulty and lack. However, if we place our spirits and souls under the leadership and protection of God our Shepherd, we will remain inwardly vibrant even in the face of difficult outward circumstances. Ultimately, we will gain victory over our challenging outward circumstances by His power at work in us and for us.

## **Rest for Our Souls**

“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters” (Psalm 23:2).

Sometimes, we encounter seasons when life’s burdens feel overly heavy. Things we have borne well for long periods of time begin to drain us, and we feel as if we are crumbling under the weight of our lives.

At such times, our great Shepherd comes along and bundles us up in His arms. Psalm 23:2 tells us that He caresses us with words of comfort (“green pastures”) and leads us into places of refreshing (“still waters”). As we open up to His care, the weight of our burdens is lifted, and we experience lightness in our souls again.

The Lord nurses us until we are ready (by His assessment) to get back into the mainstream of life. At the right time, He releases us back into our burden-bearing lives, having filled us with strength, zeal, and wisdom to live victoriously again.

## **He Leads Us in Righteous Paths**

“He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3).

For a long time, I did not fully understand the meaning of the phrase, “He restores my soul” as used in this Scripture. In recent years, however, the Holy Spirit has enlightened my heart to this precious promise, and the resultant effect has been peace and freedom for my soul.

The word “restore” as used here means “to turn back.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, this Scripture teaches us two precious truths. First, it teaches that whenever we go off track, our good Shepherd will “turn us back”

to the right way—His way. Second, it teaches that God will bring us back to a state of inner wholeness as we walk with Him. Our fallen human nature and the sins we have permitted in our lives have had adverse effects on our souls. They have created appetites in us which Satan uses to lure us. These appetites serve as a foothold for him, a needling point where he applies pressure whenever he wants to trip us up. For some, that point of weakness may be sexual sins, for others it may be gambling; for some it may be deceit, and yet for others it may be theft, pride, or the love of money.

Psalm 23:3 brings us good news; it tells us that as we walk faithfully with Him, our great Shepherd will correct the distortions that exist within us and “turn us back” to the state of wholeness we ought to have in Christ Jesus. When we are so restored, the devil will no longer find a foothold upon which to stand within us. Coming along with his usual arsenal of temptations, he will find that our souls have been sealed and made impenetrable to him.

Psalm 23:3 further teaches that God will do this “for His name’s sake.” By making Himself our Shepherd and taking full responsibility for the well-being of our souls, the Lord has placed His name (His reputation) on the line. This could be likened to a father who crosses a busy street with his young son. If he is to uphold his reputation as a responsible father, he must get his son to the other side of the street safely. The success of their trip does not depend as much on the son as it does on the father’s wisdom and might. If his son gets distracted along the way, the father makes it his duty to restore the son’s focus and move him swiftly and safely to their destination. Like this father, God has taken upon Himself the responsibility of ensuring that those who follow Him like sheep stay on righteous paths. He does this for the sake of His name that He has put upon them. Because He

is mighty in power and perfect in His ways, He is able to accomplish this goal exhaustively and with excellence.

Many sincere, God-honoring Christians spend a lot of time worrying about whether or not they have missed God or will miss Him. God would have us know that *once we have surrendered our lives fully to Him* we can be confident He will cause us to follow right paths. He will ensure we get back on track whenever we stray. Indeed, the devil will tempt and distract, but through methods our finite minds cannot fully comprehend, our mighty Shepherd will ensure that we overcome the devil and continue down righteous paths with Him. Armed with this knowledge, we can rest in Him, follow Him with all our hearts, and trust Him to take us to His perfect destination for our lives.

### **His Rod and Staff Comfort Us**

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

Shepherds in David’s time carried a rod and a staff as essential items of their gear. They used the rod for self-defense and for protection of their sheep. They also used it to discipline wayward sheep and keep them on the right path. Whereas the rod was used to exercise authority, power, and discipline, the staff was a symbol of intimacy and comfort. The shepherd used it to catch individual sheep and draw them close for intimate examination. He also used it to gently guide sheep into new paths or steer them along dangerous, difficult routes.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, our heavenly Father gently steers us through difficult routes with His staff. And when we veer off the path in disobedience, He firmly chastens us with the rod of His correction.

Hebrew shepherds often led their flock to graze on dangerous tablelands. The sheep needed the kind of pasture found on those mountaintops, so the shepherds led them there, but kept a keen eye for predators.<sup>3</sup> In the same way, our heavenly Father sometimes leads us through beneficial but painful experiences to refine, build, and mature us. He never abandons us at those times because He knows our experiences are difficult. On the contrary, He abides with us and monitors our situations to ensure they do not go beyond His set boundaries. He soothes, comforts, and strengthens our hearts to help us endure those seasons of suffering.

Whenever there are difficult experiences through which we must pass to become stronger and more victorious in Christ, our faithful Shepherd encourages us to embrace them, trusting His ability and willingness to make them bearable. He knows we are better off going through those experiences than remaining spiritually stunted. First Corinthians 10:13 tells us that with every such trial He makes a way so that we are able to bear it.

God's comfort is the balm that makes divinely approved trials bearable. His comfort *always* brings an end to sorrow. Although the external circumstances that cause such sorrow may persist for a while, His comfort always gives us the ability to cope and persevere to the end.

How do we receive His comfort? By turning to Him *every time* we encounter hurt, pain, or sorrow. At such times, we should seek His help before anyone else's and keep our hearts turned to Him until we receive His soothing touch. We should shut out self-pity which says "Poor me, no one cares," and open the door to faith, which says,

“I know God understands my situation and empathizes with me. He will comfort my heart.” Like David, we should encourage ourselves in the Lord saying, “I will wait on the Lord and be of good courage, and He shall strengthen my heart” (Psalm 27:14).

Embracing God as our Comforter frees us from the dread of trials. It enables us to walk through life confidently, assured that we are well equipped to deal with all that comes our way. When through our experiences we come to know the Lord as Comforter, we find ourselves able to boldly declare, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be seized with alarm [I will not fear or dread or be terrified]. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6 Amplified Bible).

## **He Feeds Us**

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (Psalm 23:5a).

One of the most significant responsibilities of a shepherd is feeding his flock, and shepherds go to great lengths to accomplish this. It is said that as the summer season approaches, diligent shepherds take time and trouble to search out and prepare grazing tablelands for their flock. These high plateaus may be remote and hard to reach, but the diligent shepherd is not deterred. He makes preparatory trips to survey the land and assess its suitability, and then he prepares it purposefully for the arrival of his sheep.<sup>4</sup>

God, our great Shepherd, has done the same for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. During His three and a half years on earth, our Lord fed His disciples with a steady stream of life-giving teachings and words.<sup>5</sup> His words built them up and kept them on the path of truth.<sup>6</sup> Prior to His ascension, the Lord commanded that this

model of service be followed and prioritized by those who serve as shepherds among His flock.<sup>7</sup>

Our Lord did not stop there in His work of “preparing a table for us.” Ephesians 4:8,11-13 tells us that He went ahead and released ministry gifts and callings to the Church (He continues to do this) for the purpose of feeding, nourishing, and building His body to the stature of His fullness.

Thirdly and best of all, God sent His Spirit to indwell each of us so that we would have a continuous supply of spiritual food and nourishment.

Our journey to the fullness of Christ is not without challenges, however. We are surrounded by crafty enemies who watch and tempt, in the hope of making us fall. But our good Shepherd is not deterred by them. His precious supply of spiritual nourishment continues to flow in spite of the enemy’s threats, and as long as we remain firmly connected to His supply, we will not fall. Of this, He said:

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29 NIV).

What a precious assurance! If we stay connected to our Shepherd, we will abide in His hand forever! We stay connected by spending time in personal fellowship with Him daily; there, we receive anointed words that are quickened specifically for us. We also stay connected by believing His words and trusting Him to bring them to pass. We stay connected by obeying and acting on every word we receive. As

we do these, we find ourselves encouraged, strengthened, and able to overcome every snare the enemy places in our way.

## **The Overflowing Anointing**

“You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over” (Psalm 23:5b).

When we are full of God’s Word—receiving, believing, and obeying it—His anointing abides upon us and finds easy passage through us. [His anointing is the supernatural power that enables us to be effective ministers of the Gospel in word and deed.] Although the enemy may throw vicious darts to hinder us, our good Shepherd continues to funnel His anointing through us for His glory and the good of His kingdom.

## **Overriding Goodness**

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalm 23:6).

The first and last verses of Psalm 23 are like two bookends of a bookshelf. In the first verse, David declares the Lord as his Shepherd, and in the last verse, he provides a “report card” based on the different situations that God had led him through.

Having been through rough and calm waters, discouraging and blissful experiences, enemy-infested and safe territories, David came to the assuring conclusion that loving-kindness (mercy) and goodness will always follow him because he had Jehovah as his Shepherd. He confessed that he would dwell in the presence and service of his Master all the days of his life because he was confident

of the might, faithfulness, and commitment of his Shepherd. He came to the conclusion that nothing could snatch him from his Shepherd's hand if he remained submitted and obedient like sheep.

Like David, every Christian can come to these assuring conclusions about God. God who shepherded David through diverse circumstances is our very own Shepherd and Savior today. His commitment toward us has not wavered in the least, hence His Word says: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32). God freely gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness, and nothing can snatch us away if we follow Him like sheep.

The promise of Psalm 23:6 is ours to claim today. We do not have to see our lives in perfect condition before believing it, rather, we can embrace and confess it by faith. As we do, we will see its reality made manifest in our lives.<sup>8</sup>

## **Reflect and Pray**

Are you letting the Lord shepherd you? Do you trust Him fully? Have you entrusted your whole life to Him, or do you still have reservations that hinder you from surrendering? God's faithfulness to His flock is sure; however, we do have to position ourselves right to benefit from it.

I encourage you to believe the truths of Psalm 23 and then surrender absolute control of your soul and ways to the Lord. You will be glad that you did.

## **Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to help you surrender all to Him.
- Ask Him to enable you to depend upon Him fully, like natural sheep depend upon their shepherd.
- Ask Him to make you swift to come to Him when the burdens of life weigh you down.
- Ask for the restoration of every soul distortion that makes you prone to particular weaknesses and sins.
- Pray for the willingness and ability to receive His comfort when trials come your way.
- Pray for help to stay fully connected to Him through personal fellowship, faith, and obedience. Pray for grace to follow submissively like sheep.
- Pray that you will overflow with fruitfulness for His kingdom.
- And pray that He would bring you to the deep assurance of His faithfulness that David had.

Believe that the Lord has heard your prayers and will grant these desires of your heart.

## CHAPTER 11

# Be Careful How You Hear

“And He said to them, Be careful what you are hearing. The measure [of thought and study] you give [to the truth you hear] will be the measure [of virtue and knowledge] that comes back to you—and more [besides] will be given to you who hear” (Mark 4:24 Amplified Bible).

The way we receive God’s word matters a great deal. In fact, I believe this to be one of the most important precursors of spiritual growth. Several times through the Gospels, we observe that our Lord Jesus Christ drew His audiences’ attention to the matter of “hearing.” He concluded some of His teachings with the words, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”<sup>1</sup> When He later sent messages to the seven churches in Asia,<sup>2</sup> He concluded each with the words, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In speaking these words, the Lord was not talking about the physiological function of hearing; rather, He was referring to a deeper level of hearing which, although important, is somewhat elusive. This type of hearing is the focus of this chapter. With God’s

help, I hope to share its importance and some of the things we can do to help us hear God's word more effectively.

## **Hearing Well**

Few Scriptures better describe the importance of hearing than the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. I believe the Lord spoke this parable because He observed limitations in the way we human beings receive God's word.

The process of receiving God's word works somewhat like the human digestive system where food is ingested, passed through the system, and finally assimilated into the body for nourishment and growth. Hearing God's word either by reading the Bible, reading a book, or listening to a speaker is merely a first step. Like food, the words heard must be processed and assimilated to be beneficial.

In Matthew 13, our Lord Jesus taught that four outcomes are possible after the initial step of hearing God's word:

1. The word could be lost due to lack of understanding.<sup>3</sup>
2. The word could be received joyfully but later lost because it is not firmly rooted in the heart.<sup>4</sup>
3. The word could be received but bears no fruit because it gets choked by the cares and pleasures of this life.<sup>5</sup>
4. The word could be received, planted, and nurtured to different levels of fruitfulness in our lives.<sup>6</sup>

### *Importance of Hearing Well*

The release of God's anointed word is almost always accompanied by the release of open doors, and the way we hear determines the extent to which we are blessed. God's sending us His word can be likened to someone giving us a check. Just as the check can secure us

money, God's anointed<sup>7</sup> word is empowered to secure us deliverance, victory, spiritual growth, material increase, peace, joy, and lots more. Even when His word to us is a rebuke, heeding it brings blessings.

But there are two prerequisites we must meet to be fully blessed:

- First, we must “unwrap” the word. Just as we unwrap a parcel to obtain the gift inside, we must dig deep into God's word to obtain its real value.
- Second, we must allow the word to take root in us. God's power is only fully released when His word is allowed to take deep root in our lives.

### **Receiving the Full Benefits**

Our Lord Jesus's use of the planting process to depict spiritual hearing in Matthew 13 was both intentional and apt. Just as a seed planted in the soil has the potential to blossom into a fruitful tree, so every anointed word of God has the potential to blossom into a tree of life and blessing.

However, just as the nature and condition of the soil determine whether or not a seed survives, so does the condition of our hearts, and our ability to create the right environment for God's word, determine whether or not we see its fruit in our lives.

What then can we do to ensure we receive the full benefits of God's anointed word?

**Meditate on it:** After we read a Scripture or hear a message and have an inner witness that the Lord is specifically speaking to us through it, we should take time to meditate on what He has said. Doing this gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to expand our understanding

of what we have heard. Failing to do so limits our understanding and may result in the loss of the fruit of the word.

Meditating on God's word is a spiritual process. His word cannot be understood by the ordinary reasoning of our minds.<sup>8</sup> We only truly understand His word when the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds to its intent and meaning.<sup>9</sup>

Effective meditation on God's word is not a natural, inborn skill; it is an acquired one. Naturally, the human mind prefers to figure out God's word on its own rather than wait for the enlightenment of His Spirit. But God has sealed His Word and made it inaccessible to the natural mind, so although the mind may come up with its own interpretations of the Word, none of them will carry the life, meaning, and power that can only originate from God.<sup>10</sup> To receive God's life and power from His word therefore, we must hold the word quietly in our minds and wait for enlightenment and understanding to be imparted to us by His Holy Spirit.

A notable hindrance to effective meditation on God's word is the assumption that we have nothing new to learn or gain from it because it sounds familiar, or because it seems irrelevant to our present circumstance. This is a mistake, for God never sends us purposeless or irrelevant words. Every Scripture or message brought to our attention by the Holy Spirit is significant for us. Its relevance or purpose may not be immediately apparent; however, in order not to miss out, it is best we proactively ask the Lord to show us its meaning rather than take the word lightly.

Another common stumbling block to effective intake of God's word is the eloquence of the vessel used to deliver the word. Some of the people God uses to minister to us differ in style or approach from what is familiar; as such, we may be tempted to disregard their message. But we should learn to look beyond the vessel and listen

for God's voice in the message, realizing that, by God's design, we all differ in gifts, abilities, and personalities. Conversely, we may like and identify with a preacher so much that we receive his or her word, not because we know it to be God's specific counsel for us, but because we like his or her eloquence and personality. In this case, we should also look beyond the messenger and search for God's voice in the message, for it is God's voice alone that is capable of giving life and strength to our hungry souls.<sup>11</sup>

**Receive it:** After God's word has been opened to us by the Holy Spirit, it is important that we receive it into our hearts with an attitude of faith. We do not have to *fully understand* how the word applies to our lives before receiving it. For example, suppose the Holy Spirit drops a word in my spirit saying "the Lord is your shepherd, therefore you will not lack." Initially, I may not see how this word applies to me because I may not be aware of any lack in my life. But rather than ignore it, I should ask the Lord to confirm its source. Once I am persuaded that it is a word from Him, I should immediately receive it into my heart with thanksgiving.

I do not have to fully understand when or how I will experience lack before I receive God's promise of provision. Once I am convinced that He is the One speaking, I should receive the promise, believing that He knows what lies ahead of me and has spoken to me based on that knowledge.

What I have just described is an attitude of faith. Receiving God's word by faith is an action we should take *every time* His word comes to us. The opposites of faith are doubt and unbelief. In my example, I would be walking in doubt and unbelief if I insist on knowing how the promise will be fulfilled in my life before opening my heart to it. In other words, I would want to understand when a situation of lack

will present itself and how God will provide for me in that situation, before opening my heart to His promise. If the promise fails to make sense to my mind, I would subtly or overtly reject it. I may assent to its possibility but would not accept it for my life.

Such an attitude of unbelief does not please God and is not His way.<sup>12</sup> Unbelief disregards God's omniscience, wisdom, and might; it dishonors Him by questioning His integrity. God desires that we receive His words with open, trusting hearts even when our understanding is not full.

**Act on it:** God's word almost always requires some kind of action on our part. Sometimes the action required is simply aligning our thoughts, expectations, and, very importantly, our speech, with the truth we have received—this being evidence that we have truly believed. The Bible tells us faith speaks of things that do not yet exist in the physical realm as if they exist. The Bible also teaches that in God's kingdom, our words confirm what we have believed:

“For with the heart a person believes (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Christ) and so is justified (declared righteous, acceptable to God), and with the mouth he confesses (declares openly and speaks out freely his faith) and confirms [his] salvation” (Romans 10:10 Amplified Bible).

Another kind of action we may need to take after receiving God's word is prayerful submission. Often, God's word is a revelation of what He plans to do in, through, or around us. Those plans are usually different from our present experiences and, as such, leave us in awe. At these times, God does not expect us to take on the responsibility

of bringing His promises to pass. Rather, we should believe and then pray in faith that He will accomplish what He has purposed. Mary, the mother of our Savior, demonstrated this attitude after she received news of her divine conception. She believed the message even though it was unfathomable to her natural mind. Then with a believing heart she prayed, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Indeed, her faith and prayerful submission were all God required of her at that stage in the process.

A third kind of action the revelation of God’s word may require is taking specific steps in obedience to the word received. In such instances, it is important to be sure that we are not acting out of our own zeal but have a strong conviction that the steps we plan to take are in line with God’s will. Once we are so convinced, we should act promptly in accordance with the leading of the Holy Spirit. True obedience entails doing God’s will with a good attitude and without delay. As a parent, I do not consider my child to have obeyed if she insists on finishing her game before running an errand for me. Although she may run the errand in the end, her decision not to make it a priority compromises her obedience. Likewise, the timing of our obedience to God is important. God deserves first place in every aspect of our lives, and His business should always be a matter of priority. I am not implying we should always leave our activities immediately to do what God instructs; sometimes this is neither practical nor wise, and the Lord does not expect it from us. However, if we seek His guidance, the Holy Spirit will always give us wisdom on the best timing for the execution of His counsel. Obedience on our part means taking the necessary action at the time He indicates.

**Wait for fruit:** It is natural to expect to see results after we have meditated on, received, and obeyed God's word. Indeed, results follow, but they may not be immediate. Hence, the Bible encourages us to endure, and not cast away our confidence after we have done God's will.<sup>13</sup> Just as a natural seed takes time to bring forth fruit, the seed of God's word takes time to bear *visible* fruit. Waiting times vary, and we often do not know how long it will be for our situation. But whatever happens, we should set our hearts on God and trust Him to conclude what He has begun in us.<sup>14</sup>

### **Delayed Understanding**

The Lord sometimes gives us words we do not fully understand, though we are convinced they have come from Him. At such times, we should not be discouraged but store those words in our hearts and wait for further understanding. As minutes, days, months, or even years go by, we will find the Holy Spirit reminding us of those words and giving us better understanding as He brings the promised events to pass.

Even when He does increase our understanding, the Lord may not give us the full meaning of His words at once. In such situations, we should be confident that He will paint the full picture as we walk patiently and obediently with Him.

### **Unpalatable Words**

Not all of God's counsel is easy to swallow. Sometimes His word targets things we are reluctant to acknowledge or give up. In such situations, we should not reject His counsel, become defensive, or recoil in self-condemnation. God's word does not come to condemn or lay impossible burdens on us but rather to release and deliver us from bondages. The same word that convicts carries the power

to deliver, and we can tap into that power by acknowledging and repenting of the issue at hand, and then asking the Lord for grace to genuinely and completely give up the sin.

### **The Deceiver**

This discourse would be incomplete without mention of the fact that we have an enemy who continually tries to deceive. The devil tries to bombard our minds with deceptive thoughts disguised as godly ideas. But the Holy Spirit is effective at revealing those lies and enabling us to follow God's truth. We should not allow the adversary's activities to discourage us from seeking to hear and digest God's word effectively, for our God is able to protect us from his deception.

Personally, I check thoughts and ideas that come to mind to see if they line up with God's Word in the Bible. I also listen for the Holy Spirit's approval or disapproval of ideas that I may consider implementing. In addition, I specifically ask God for confirmation of ideas that require significant use of my time and resources. The Lord never fails to respond clearly and convincingly. Often, He responds by giving me insights and wisdom that enable me to judge the appropriateness of the idea in question. Alternatively or additionally, He sheds light on it by speaking through His written Word.

It is important to wait for answers after we have sought the Lord for discernment or confirmation. The devil often tries to pressure us into hurrying into action. However, we should always remember that God does not expect us to act before we are convinced that counsel or direction we have received is from Him.<sup>15</sup> We can always trust God to respond to our inquiries at the right time. If there is a real need for immediate answers, He will give them. If not, He will answer at a time He considers best, and that time is never late.

## **Reflect and Pray**

Most Christians have room for growth in their ability to hear and apply God's counsel. It is an area that should not be taken lightly because it is a lifeline for spiritual growth and effectiveness. The ability to hear and apply God's word is to a Christian what an umbilical cord is to a baby. Just as a knotted umbilical cord cuts off the supply of blood to a baby, defective hearing hampers the supply of divine life and counsel to our souls.

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to refine your ability to hear Him. Ask Him to purge wrong hearing patterns you may have imbibed and bring you to a higher level of discernment and understanding of His counsel.
- Ask Him to deliver you from every tendency to try to figure things out on your own. Tell Him to teach you to wait on Him for deeper understanding of His counsel.
- Ask Him to deliver you from all roots of doubt and unbelief.
- Repent of every attitude of incomplete obedience or outright disobedience that you may have embraced. Tell the Lord to help you to develop an attitude of complete and timely obedience toward Him.
- Ask the Lord for grace and ability to wait patiently and hopefully for the fulfillment of every promise He makes to you.
- Ask Him to teach you to receive, submit to, and respond appropriately to unpalatable words from Him.
- Lastly, ask God to help you discern and reject every deceptive counsel of the enemy.

## CHAPTER 12

# Winning the Battle in the Mind

Every born-again Christian is at war, the battlefield is the mind, and the enemy is the devil.

When we were of the world, Satan had free access to our minds, and we readily implemented his ideas. After we became born-again, however, things changed. The Spirit of God came to indwell us and doors were shut in the devil's face. Satan no longer has the access he previously had; he can no longer control us. The Holy Spirit has begun a work of renewal in our souls so that we will no longer conform to the ways of the world but develop the mind and ways of Christ.

Although this work of renewal has begun, it is not yet complete. We are works-in-progress, and as a result, are vulnerable in our minds at certain times. The devil recognizes this, so like Pharaoh of old, he launches calculated and sometimes severe attacks on our minds, hoping to regain the control he had when we were of the world.

## **The Mind**

The mind is the place within a person where actions are initiated. When the mind accepts a thought, other parts of the soul follow suit almost automatically, resulting in outward action that is a product of the initial thought. Specifically, when the mind accepts a thought, the *emotions* get stirred up, the *desires* get activated, and the *will* is influenced into making a decision that results in outward action. This dynamic is the reason the devil wants control of our minds. He knows that if he gains control of our minds, he can control our actions, and if he controls our actions, he can destroy our godly witness.

The impact of the mind on our actions is profound. As the following story illustrates, the battle for a God-honoring life often must be won first in the mind:

Sam and Nancy have enjoyed a pleasant and fulfilling marriage for five years. In recent months, however, they have had several misunderstandings that have left both upset and hurt. Being practicing Christians, they have made the decision to forgive each other, let go of their hurts, and continue to interact lovingly.

But there is a problem. Sam and Nancy's decision to forgive and love each other has not been easy to execute. Nancy in particular finds her mind going back to the hurtful things Sam said a few weeks ago, and remembering those words leaves her feeling bad all over again.

Nancy desperately wants their relationship to get back to the pleasant phase she and Sam enjoyed in the past, so she prays to the Lord about her feelings, asking Him to help her let go of her hurts and to love her husband like she did before. Feeling certain the Lord has answered her,

Nancy hopes to see an improvement in their relationship soon.

Later the same day, as Nancy expectantly awaits Sam's return from work, she finds her thoughts drifting back to the same issues she's been trying to put away. She finds herself thinking about aspects of the issue she had not previously considered. "What if . . . ?" thoughts fill her mind. As this happens, her warm feelings toward Sam cool, and she recoils inwardly. Her desire to have a pleasant evening fades, and her face tightens into an unfriendly scowl. Just then the door opens, and Sam walks in, full of smiles. He walks over to Nancy, notices her cold demeanor, and his heart sinks. He too had hoped they would enjoy a warm and loving evening together. When he spoke to her earlier in the day she sounded pleasant and friendly. What could have happened?

The same course of events continues until one day when Nancy makes a life-changing discovery. On this day, she observes that the negative thoughts and cold feelings she has toward Sam always occur just moments before he arrives home. It suddenly dawns on her that those negative thoughts are not really hers. In her heart, she wants to show Sam affection, but whenever she tries to act out her desire, a barrage of negative thoughts hit her, and from then on, things just get worse. As she ponders this trend, the Holy Spirit causes Nancy to see that those negative thoughts are baits from Satan, and up to this time, she has unknowingly embraced them as her own thoughts. Once

she accepts the initial bait, more negative thoughts come, and soon she is emotionally sour with no desire to show Sam any kind of affection.

Next, Nancy realizes that God has already answered her prayer for the restoration of her marriage relationship. However, she has not benefited from His answer because the enemy lured her away from God's provision. He successfully implanted negative thoughts in her mind that adversely affected her emotions and dampened her desire for her husband. The resultant effect has been the weakening of a previously strong and healthy marriage relationship.

Nancy realizes that in order for her relationship to be restored to its former healthy state, she has to resist the devil and overcome him in her mind.

## **Thoughts**

The thoughts we think determine the way we act. Proverbs 23:7 tells us, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Even after we become Christians, our lives can only manifest the nature of Christ if we turn away from negative thinking and align our thoughts with God's way of thinking. If through the help of the Holy Spirit we think godly thoughts, we will produce the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. However, if we allow the devil to plant evil thoughts in our minds, we will produce fruits of strife, anger, resentment, envy, lies, worry, anxiety, unbelief, depression, worldly lusts, and other works of the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Origin of Thoughts**

The thoughts that pass through our minds originate from three sources—God, ourselves, and the devil. Many of the negative thoughts we pass off as ours actually begin as suggestions from Satan. Of course, I am not implying that Christians are incapable of conceiving negative thoughts. However, I am saying that many of the negative thoughts that bombard the Christian’s mind about himself, other people, and circumstances that surround him are seeds from Satan and his demons.

We can test the origin of our thoughts by checking the extent to which they can be controlled. Thoughts that originate from God are gentle and peaceful and do not overwhelm our minds. Our own thoughts are subject to us; we are able to direct and control them. The thoughts that come from the devil, on the other hand, are nagging and unruly. They are persistent and just don’t let up. Take a moment to ponder what happens when a bothersome thought comes to your mind. Do you find yourself able to think about it only for as long as you want and then release it to the Lord? Or do you find that the thought continues to nag you in a persistent and pushy “you must do something now” kind of way? When the latter occurs, it is likely that the thought in question is from the devil.

Uncontrollable thoughts and an unruly mind are not from God. In James 3:17, the Bible teaches that the wise thoughts (wisdom) that come from God *are gentle and peaceful*. In 2 Timothy 1:7, it tells us that God has given us a spirit of power, love, and *a calm, well-balanced mind*. In Colossians 3:2, the Bible instructs us *to set our minds* on things above, where Christ is seated. And in Philippians 4:8, it instructs us *to think on things* that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of a good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. The Bible gives us these instructions because God has equipped us with the power

(through the help of His Holy Spirit) to control our minds and our thoughts. He has given us the ability to maintain a calm disposition and to set our minds on things that align with Him and His Word. Therefore, thoughts that repeatedly upset or unsettle our minds, and resist being brought into subjection, are not of Him.

A second way of testing the origin of our thoughts is by evaluating their content. Negative, depressing or sinful thoughts about ourselves, others, and our circumstances never come from God.<sup>2</sup> Although God sometimes allows us to discern negative intents and actions targeted at us or others, such discernment is always accompanied by positive assurances of His intervention and the constraint to walk in love and peace toward our adversaries.

As we seek to discern the origin of our thoughts by evaluating their content, we should note that the devil sometimes disguises his thoughts to look good on the surface. In 2 Corinthians 11:14, Paul warns that “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” To protect us against such deception, the Lord tells us not to believe every spirit but to test whether what we hear is from Him.<sup>3</sup> A simple way of testing is by asking the Lord whether the thought or idea in question is truly from Him. If we wait for His response, the Lord will answer us in a way we are able to comprehend. As our walk with Him matures and our spirits get more attuned to His Spirit, we will find ourselves able to quickly sense an inner check whenever we accept a thought or idea that does not come from God.

### **Fighting the Good Fight**

God created us with the ability to control and direct our will, but we lost a significant part of that ability when Adam and Eve sinned and fell in the Garden of Eden. This is why we are naturally weak-willed in the face of the devil’s thoughts and ideas. When we receive salvation

through Christ, the process of restoring our will and other functions of the soul to wholeness begins. But this process does not prevent Satan from attacking us with his thoughts. So the big question is, “How do we fight Satan’s attacks?”

The first and most significant step is to acknowledge that we do not have the power to overcome the devil on our own. To be victorious, our weapons and power must come from God.<sup>4</sup> Rather than try to overcome negative thoughts on our own, we should earnestly call on the Lord and depend on Him for direction and victory. This is important.

The second step is to put on the armor provided by the Lord for this battle.<sup>5</sup> Putting on this armor is not an outward activity; it is a process that occurs in the inner man as we submit to God and walk in His ways. Ephesians 6:14-17 tells us that putting on our God-given armor involves five steps:

**1. Standing upon and holding fast to truth.** Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). Truth is the antidote to the lies upon which Satan builds his weapons of attack. Truth reveals God’s mind concerning every situation. Truth reveals the real condition of our hearts and the real nature of a problem or situation with which we are faced.

Putting on this weapon during spiritual warfare means knowing the truth, embracing it, and refusing to let it go. In the example shared earlier in this chapter, Nancy was only able to overcome the attack of the enemy when the Holy Spirit showed her the truth behind her sustained bitter feelings. Nancy learned that her negative thoughts about Sam often began when she accepted baits from Satan. She learned that she had the power (through the help of the Holy Spirit)

to resist his baits and to open the door for warmth and love to be restored to her relationship.

In this example, Nancy faced the danger of believing that God did not answer her prayers for her marriage. This is a lie that could have led to other destructive thoughts, such as *'my marriage is doomed'*, *'my marriage cannot be healed'*, *'I do not love my husband anymore.'* But thank God that He showed Susan the truth. He showed her He had answered her prayers and indeed cared about restoring her marriage.

When faced with attacks upon our minds, it is essential that we identify and embrace the truth about our motives, attitudes, and beliefs. It is important that we know the truth about the motives and beliefs of other persons involved in our situation. Most importantly, we should know God's mind concerning our situation. We obtain these insights by seeking God's face and then receiving and believing His counsel concerning the situation. We also obtain truth by communicating with other persons involved in the situation as we are directed by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, simply asking a question or two can debunk false perceptions created in our minds by the devil.

As we gird ourselves with truth—seeking, holding fast, and acting upon it continually—we expose the lies of the enemy and overcome his evil attacks.

**2. Having our hearts in right standing with God.** Sin is an enemy of the believer, especially in seasons of warfare. When Israel went to war against Ai, they fled before this small city because there was sin in their midst. Sin robbed them of God's power and victory. Similarly, we cannot fight victoriously against our enemy when there is sin in our lives. Sin weakens us in warfare. Therefore, we should be watchful and tread carefully at all times, but particularly

during seasons of satanic attack. We should be swift and diligent to confess our faults and receive our Father's cleansing for our errors. Our confession should be deep and sincere—we should call our sin by name, admit the pleasure we derive from it, and then ask God to deliver us from the unholy attraction.

**3. Proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed.** One of Satan's goals when attacking believers is to stifle us and thereby prevent us from doing damage to his kingdom. His attacks on our minds aim to bring us to the belief that we cannot afford to serve God because we are experiencing trouble in our own lives. But this thought is misleading and contrary to God's will. Therefore, when we find our minds under satanic attack and our Christian witness threatened, we should cry out to God to deliver us from the devil and continue to use us to deliver others from his kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

**4. Shielding our hearts from the darts of the enemy through steadfast faith in God.** In one of his psalms, David said, "I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13). David had faith. In warfare, faith chooses to hang on to God even when we feel overwhelmed and unworthy. Faith chooses to believe that God will rescue us from the barrage of negative thoughts, emotions, and events we face and restore us to a place of total victory. This may look impossible when we are under persistent fire, but faith chooses to believe, hanging on to every Word of God and ministration of the Spirit it can grasp. The Bible says "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4). As we hold steadfastly to God in faith, we obtain victory over our adversary and oppressor for good.

**5. Filling our minds with the hope of our salvation.** The season of warfare is a time to take a long-term view of our salvation. It is a time to remind ourselves of the temporal nature of our present struggles. It is a time to remember that our present afflictions are working in us a greater glory to be revealed in a time to come. The season of warfare is a time to reckon upon God's commitment to perfect the work of redemption He has begun in us: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

The season of warfare is a time to remember that the storms of the adversary cannot snatch us out of God's hand no matter how tempestuous they may seem: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

When we clothe our minds with such glorious thoughts about the eternal nature of our salvation, believing these unseen truths to be more real than the things we physically see, we become uplifted by hope and protected from the paralyzing effects of temptation and suffering.

**6. Wielding the sword of the Spirit by speaking the Word of God.** Scripture tells us that words are powerful,<sup>7</sup> and we can use ours to build or destroy our lives.<sup>8</sup> When parts of our lives are troubled, it is tempting to keep confessing what we see with our physical eyes. But this does no good. We should rather confess what God says about our situation; His Word is truth and carries creative power.<sup>9</sup> As we confess God's Word—and simultaneously cooperate with the Holy

Spirit in every aspect of our lives—things that did not previously exist in our experience will come into being. God’s power will create His reality in our lives.

It is good to develop a habit of speaking God’s Word as part of our daily or weekly spiritual routine. Personally, I have been led by the Lord to develop and routinely confess a series of Scriptures over various aspects of my life, family, and ministry. I also use God’s Word as a weapon of warfare against potential trouble spots, such as sickness, strife, pride, lukewarmness, calamity, and more. I have found these confessions to work powerfully against the devil and his forces of darkness.

### **The Armor Works**

The full armor of God is 100 percent effective against the attacks of the devil. However, our experience of its effectiveness will depend on the extent to which we put it on. The more we mature spiritually, the greater will be our ability to put on God’s full armor.

You might wonder then “If I have to mature spiritually to be able to resist the devil effectively, how do I deal with the attacks I am facing now?” The Lord tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that He will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle, but with every temptation, He will make a way of escape. This means that God will always protect us from attacks that are too great for us, and that He will only allow us to face attacks at a level we can handle. Those attacks might be challenging, but if we seek and follow His guidance, we will gain victory and grow through such experiences.

### **When Down and Out**

There are times when we feel too weary to stand against the attacks of the devil. At such times, we find our minds easily slipping toward

discouragement and dejection. At those moments, we should remember that if we simply call on the Lord for help, He will intervene and deliver us from the enemy's squeeze.<sup>10</sup>

In 2 Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, faced a similar situation. Judah was attacked by a great army from Ammon and Moab. Recognizing his inability to win the battle set against him, Jehoshaphat gathered all the people of Judah and sought the Lord. Jehoshaphat expressed his vulnerability to God saying, "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You." (2 Chr. 20:12). Thereafter, all the people of Judah waited expectantly before the Lord.

God heard their cry and spoke to them, saying, "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's . . . Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you . . ." (2 Chr. 20:15-17). King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah rejoiced and the following day went into the battle praising God. Indeed, the Lord fought for them, and they won. Similarly, God will intervene to deliver us if we call on Him when we find ourselves drowning under the pressure of our adversary.

### **The Role of Praise**

I believe the praises offered by the children of Judah in their situation strengthened their hearts and kept them focused on God while they waited for Him to act.

Praise is a weapon we can also use as we face our battles today. Praise lifts our focus away from the problem at hand and sets it on God and His ability. Hope springs up in our hearts and mountains become plains in our mind's eye when we praise God.

It is true that we naturally do not *feel like* praising God when faced with difficult circumstances. However if we open our mouths and begin to praise anyway, we soon find our spirits uplifted and our souls anchored in peace as we await the Lord's intervention in our circumstances.

David, a man who faced many trials said, "I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies" (Psalm 18:3). Here David spoke of prayer and praise as weapons of spiritual warfare. In Psalm 100:4-5 he also said, "Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting." Here, David spoke of approaching the Lord with a thankful attitude, knowing that He is good and merciful, and believing this is what He will be for us in every situation.

## **Reflect and Pray**

The Bible tells us our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour,<sup>11</sup> so we can infer that attacks from him are inevitable. However, his attacks will only affect us adversely if he is able to defeat us in our minds.

Our heavenly Father does not want us to run away from the devil in fear. Hence, Jesus said, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). God wants us to mature spiritually and, like our Lord Jesus Christ, keep the devil firmly under our feet. To facilitate this process in your life, here are some requests to take to the Lord:

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask God to help you become aware of the thoughts that pass through your mind.

- Ask Him to teach you to discern the true origin of every thought.
- Ask that He would teach you to take every thought captive to the Lordship of Christ.<sup>12</sup>
- Ask Him to help you replace old thinking patterns with new ones that are based on His Word and interpretations given by His Spirit.
- Ask Him to help you seek, know, and embrace truth in every situation.
- Ask Him to help you mature in the use of your God-given armor.
- Lastly, ask Him to help you learn to reach for Him whenever you find yourself drowning under pressure from satanic attacks.

If you ask these sincerely, God will grant your petitions. But be aware that the process of renewing the mind takes time and requires patience. It requires that we firmly believe the Lord is transforming us even if we do not see changes immediately. It requires continually reminding ourselves that He who began the good work in us will be faithful to bring it to completion. As we trust and follow Him to the best of our ability, we will soon see what God has accomplished in us, and this revelation will bring us great joy.

## CHAPTER 13

# Nurturing Your Relationship with God

Our Lord Jesus Christ described the believer's involvement with God in many symbolic ways. In one instance, He spoke of it as a father-child relationship; in another, a friendship. In another place, He described it as a master-servant relationship, and in yet another, a king-subject relationship.<sup>1</sup> Through these analogies, the Lord revealed a fundamental truth: Every true follower of Christ has *a relationship* with God. It is a relationship that begins when we invite Jesus into our hearts and endures unto eternity if we remain true to the faith. This relationship is progressive and has the potential for growth into maturity.<sup>2</sup> It is a relationship that must be nurtured if it is to become all the Bible says it is.

### **Spiritual Growth**

Some Christians are aware of the need to grow in their relationship with God and invest the right kind of effort to accomplish this. Some, however, are ignorant or misinformed about what really drives spiritual growth. They believe spiritual growth to be the result

of church attendance, participation in Christian programs, and similar activities. They do not realize that these activities do not, in themselves, cause spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is the result of the progress we make in our personal, one-to-one relationship with God. It is the result of our daily heart connection and obedience to Him. Church attendance, participation in Christian programs, attending Christian seminars and conferences, and other spiritual disciplines are good and can be channels through which we serve and experience God. However, when void of intimacy with God or when used as substitutes for drawing close to Him, they become dead works that grieve His Spirit.

Now you might be wondering, “How can a person who is actively involved in Christian programs not have an intimate relationship with God?” Well, this happens often, and as the following story illustrates, the persons involved are sometimes unaware of their deficiencies:

Dennis, a morally upright and hardworking young man, has recently been invited to a Christian outreach program by a friend named Peter. Dennis is reluctant to accept the invitation because he feels that he does not need Christ. But Peter is persistent, so Dennis eventually agrees to attend the outreach program hosted by Peter’s church.

When Dennis arrives at Peter’s church, he is surprised to find the people there warm and friendly. As the service begins and the visiting evangelist preaches the sermon, Dennis is surprised to find himself drawn to the message! Later that night, as he settles into bed, Dennis finds himself

thinking about the words spoken by the evangelist earlier in the day.

The next day, Dennis feels a strong urge to attend the outreach program. When he does, he finds his heart drawn in a special way again. By the end of the three-day program, Dennis is strongly convicted of his need for a Savior and can no longer resist surrendering his life to Jesus Christ.

Dennis embraces his new faith zealously. He joins Peter's church, gets baptized in water, and receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Dennis is elated about his new life. He experiences and loves the Lord's goodness, and he also loves and appreciates his church family. Dennis's life is filled with joy.

Things go well with Dennis until he encounters his first season of spiritual dryness. For the first time since becoming a Christian, Dennis feels empty inside. He feels as if something is missing from his spiritual life. Dennis discusses this problem with some Christian friends, and following their advice, decides to embrace certain disciplines to help deepen his spiritual walk. He begins to read his Bible regularly and gets more involved in programs at church. He does this believing that these endeavors will nourish him spiritually and help him grow.

Some weeks later, Dennis encounters a problem with a client at work. Naturally, he expects the problem to be solved easily and quickly. But things do not turn out that way. As days go by, the seemingly small problem gets bigger, and soon Dennis's job is on the line.

As the problem drags on and disfavor mounts against him, Dennis becomes anxious and afraid. At this point, Dennis decides to take his problem to the Lord. He prays about the situation as best as he can but does not feel confident his prayer is answered. Then he remembers he has heard others request prayers from the church in times of trouble, so he decides to put in a prayer request. To his dismay, his circumstances do not change! Confused and weary, Dennis wonders, “Why are things going this way in my life? Why has my situation not changed? I have been faithful to my Christian faith, and I have applied the Christian principles I know to this problem, why is nothing working?”

What Dennis does not realize is that something vital is missing from his approach to Christian living. While he has expended much effort on Christian works (this is commendable), he has not given adequate attention to developing a personal, intimate, two-way relationship with God. If Dennis had an active, personal relationship with the Lord, he would be able to seek and receive God’s counsel about this storm in his life. Such counsel would provide him direction and assure him of God’s absolute control over his turbulent circumstance. As a result, Dennis would be able to ride the storm peacefully.

God did answer Dennis’s prayer for help, but because of his weak relationship with Him, Dennis could not discern the Lord’s response. Like many believers, Dennis has been zealous and active in his Christian faith, but he has lacked a crucial component needed to make that faith grow.

## **Why the Distance?**

Many Christians are not comfortable with the idea of getting intimate with God. They do not mind working for Him or participating in church programs, but closeness to Him is a challenge.

The principal cause of this distance between God and us is our flesh. Our flesh is self-willed and hates the penetrating, self-crucifying light of God's presence.<sup>3</sup> To get intimate with the Lord, therefore, we must subdue our flesh<sup>4</sup> and bring it under the authority of the Holy Spirit. We should be aware that the flesh will resist our efforts at subjection because it is accustomed to having its way. There will be times when we will know what the Holy Spirit requires of us, but find ourselves *not feeling like doing it*. There will also be times when we will perceive the promptings of the Holy Spirit, but find the carnal mind telling us what we are prompted to do *does not make sense* or could be done some other way. In these instances, we must swiftly discard our feelings and carnal thoughts and submit to the authority of the Holy Spirit. By doing this consistently, we will deprive the flesh of its longstanding authority in our lives and aid the transformation of our souls<sup>5</sup> into entities that love God, love His presence, and willingly follow the leading of His Spirit.

Taming the flesh is a challenging process; as such, we could be tempted to believe we cannot do it for ourselves and may expect the Lord to do it for us. But God does not forcefully tame our flesh for us. He provides and teaches us to use divine resources such as His Word, the power of His Spirit, His grace, His mercy, His wisdom, and more, but He leaves the responsibility for applying these tools for the subjection of our flesh to us. For example, God will not force a proud person to repent of his or her haughtiness. The Lord may convict, openly rebuke, withdraw privileges, and more. However, it

remains that individual's responsibility to repent of his or her sin, reject pride, and look to God for deliverance from this idol.

There are certain steps we can take to facilitate the process of subduing our flesh. These disciplines build our spirit man, giving it the strength needed to exercise dominion over the soul and flesh:

**1. Receive God's grace to make right choices.** Sincerely and persistently asking the Lord for help to make right choices makes resisting the flesh easier. At the point of temptation, the Lord does not force us to follow the leading of His Spirit, but He supplies His wisdom and grace (inner strength) and encourages *us* to take the necessary steps to obey His Spirit.

**2. Repent immediately and confess our sins to God when convicted of wrongdoing.** Sin, guilt, and condemnation rob us of divine strength. Therefore, when we sin, the Holy Spirit will faithfully convict us of our sins and show us God's provision for our restoration. When this happens, we should repent immediately, confess our sin earnestly, give up the sinful action, and then receive God's forgiveness promised in 1 John 1:9 by faith. If the Holy Spirit prompts us to take specific actions to correct our wrongdoing, we should do so swiftly. Thereafter, we should carefully internalize the lessons learned from the experience, but be mindful to shake off crippling feelings of condemnation and self-righteousness ("although God has forgiven me, I cannot forgive myself") that may try to creep up on us.<sup>6</sup>

**3. Come to Him in personal fellowship daily.** This is a primary source of spiritual strength. It is an ordinance instituted by God under the old covenant, lived out by our Lord Jesus Christ during His incarnation, and taught to the early church by the Holy Spirit.

In Exodus 25, God instructed Moses and the Israelites to make a tabernacle for His presence. One of the items to be placed in the tabernacle was a table of showbread. The word “showbread” translated literally means “bread of the face,” that is, bread set before the face or presence of God.<sup>7</sup> After providing the design for the table of showbread, God gave an ordinance concerning it, saying, “And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always” (Exodus 25:30). That is, the act of placing the showbread before the Lord was never to cease.

We know that the form of worship instituted by God under the old covenant was changed by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> Although that form of worship was set aside however, the spiritual truths and principles it symbolized abide and are being fulfilled under the new covenant. Hence Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18).

How then is the ordinance “you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always” being fulfilled under the new covenant? It is fulfilled as we (God’s priests<sup>9</sup>) feed on the Bread of Life (Jesus Christ<sup>10</sup>) in God’s presence. As we do this, we honor God (by keeping His ordinance) and receive nourishment from our Lord Jesus Christ.

How do we feed on the Bread of Life, practically speaking? The ability to feed on Jesus Christ begins with developing the habit of spending quality time with God *daily*. By “quality time” I mean a period when we are fresh, alert, and unlikely to be interrupted.

Typically, we come to God with rigid perceptions about how time in His presence should be spent. For example, we may think we should always start with prayer, sing praises, read our Bibles, and

then conclude. However, I have found that the most powerful and effective way to fellowship with God is to be quiet in His presence and allow His Spirit to lead us. This may mean that He prompts us to start with reading the Bible on one day but with prayer on the next day. We may enter His presence with praise and thanksgiving on one day, but feel prompted to quietly ponder certain events and related Scriptures on a different day. The principle here is that God has a fresh and different agenda for each time we come to Him. In order to benefit from what He has in store, it is best to be still and listen for the stirring of His Spirit in our hearts, and then act as He leads.

Because God sets the agenda for time spent in His presence, we should learn to wait on Him until we have received all He has to impart. This could take as little as fifteen minutes or more than an hour. He determines the time, and it is best if we do not try to rush.

Sometimes the flesh gets weary and distracted when in God's presence. I have found that asking the Lord for help to stay focused solves this problem and helps me to wait on Him until He has concluded His fellowship with me.

**4. Yield our hearts to God's Word and Spirit when we gather in fellowship with other Christians.** It is essential that we fellowship regularly with a Bible-believing, Holy Spirit-led church family.<sup>11</sup> The choice of such a place of fellowship should be made through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If we fellowship with a church family the Holy Spirit assigns us, we will find ourselves enriched and built up by the messages ministered when we gather. We will also benefit from the corporate anointing that is present when Spirit-led believers worship. Expecting the Lord and submitting wholeheartedly to the ministry of His Word and Spirit at such times builds our spiritual strength and helps nurture our relationship with Him. Submitting

to faithful, God-ordained leadership<sup>12</sup> and learning to walk in Christ-like love toward fellow believers in our church families also facilitate the work of God in our lives.

### **Intimacy Produces Fruitfulness**

Pushing past the inhibitions of the flesh to pursue intimacy with God is difficult initially. The easier thing to do, and unfortunately what many Christians do, is to avoid this narrow path. Subconsciously, we accept the idea that we can have a healthy spiritual life by merely following a prescribed set of religious rules (go to church twice a week, say family prayers once a day, rush through devotions every morning, pay tithes, and so on). This approach does not work because God does not accept anything, not even Christian works, as a substitute for a loving, personal relationship with Him.

Make no mistake: God wills for us to engage in Christian works that glorify Him. However, He does not expect us to do so at the expense of a vibrant, personal relationship with Him. More so, we cannot bear genuine Christ-like fruit if we do not abide in Him.<sup>13</sup> Just as a tree's root continually supplies its branches the nutrients needed for fruit-bearing, we need the life of Christ continually poured into our spirits and souls in order to bear fruit that reflect His character and glory. If we fail to remain intimately attached to the Lord, we may be busy with religious works and appear to bear some fruit, but such fruit will be void of the life of God and will be incapable of producing lasting change in our lives and the lives of others.

### **Reflect and Pray**

Is your personal relationship with God vibrant and growing? Are you abiding deeply in Christ? Or do you find yourself uncomfortably

distant from Him? Are you perhaps more comfortable engaging in Christian works than spending time in personal fellowship with your heavenly Father?

Ask the Holy Spirit to search and reveal the true condition of your heart to you. If you sense the need to draw closer to the Lord, ask Him to help you do so. Tell Him about the things that hinder you from drawing close to Him. God knows these things already, but talking to Him about them is therapeutic for you. Go ahead, and tell Him.

Remember God does not condemn you for your weaknesses. His Word tells us that He gives grace to those who in weakness seek His help.<sup>14</sup> The Bible also tells us in Hebrews 4:15-16 that our Lord Jesus Christ empathizes with our frailties and shortcomings. Therefore, we should come boldly and confidently to His throne of grace to ask for mercy and help when we need it. If you seek the Lord sincerely, He will give you help and grace<sup>15</sup> to press in to know Him more. As you do so, you will see your relationship with Him transform, and your life will bear rich fruit for Him.

*Part III*

**Preparing for  
the Promised Land**

**O**ur season of preparation for spiritual service has a definite beginning and end. A time comes in our journey when we begin to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit announcing the dawn of a new day in our hearts.

As with the Israelites of old, our season of entry into our promised land requires a new way of thinking. Whereas we may have been subdued in the wilderness, we are called to be warriors in the Promised Land. Because of this change, the Lord takes time to orientate us for life in the Promised Land. Our orientation period is relatively short because, like a trained army being prepared for war, our souls have already been trained in the wilderness.

The chapters that follow highlight mindsets that are essential for victory in the Promised Land. I trust that your leader, the precious Holy Spirit, will speak to you through these words and ultimately usher you into your land of promise by His wisdom and power.

## CHAPTER 14

# Life in the Promised Land: A Preview

Prior to the creation of man in the Garden of Eden, God declared His lofty intent for mankind saying: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26).

God’s purpose, as declared by these words, was for man to be like Him (“in Our image, according to Our likeness”) and to rule over His creation. The Holy Spirit confirms this truth through several Scriptures,<sup>1</sup> including Psalm 8:4-6:

“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? . . . You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet . . .”

Sadly, man fell from this glorious estate through Satan’s deceit. In his fallen state, man occupied a level of glory lower than the

creation he was to rule. This created a discrepancy which, I believe, would have been detrimental to fallen humanity. So God demoted His creation to a level commensurate with man's fallen state:

“For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:20-21).

God judged Satan for his role in the fall of humanity and simultaneously provided a preview of His plan for man's redemption. He said, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). God spoke here of His Son, Jesus Christ, who would come to the world to redeem mankind and restore us to His original purpose.

Jesus came many years later. While on earth, He spoke severally about the mission He came to fulfill. On one occasion, He said: “The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)” (John 10:10 Amplified Bible). Jesus revealed<sup>2</sup> that His mission was to restore mankind to the God kind of life—that is, abundant life, eternal life, life to its fullness. This “abundant life” and the glory that accompanies it is the believer's destination. Inheriting the fullness of God's life and ruling over the works of His hands is the believer's Promised Land.

## **Abundant Life**

What is abundant life? What is this life that we are to experience here and now, but also reaches into eternity? How does this kind of life look today? The Bible gives various depictions of it. Let's examine one found in Deuteronomy 11:10-12:

“For the land which you go in to possess is not like the land of Egypt, from which you came out, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your foot laboriously as in a garden of vegetables. But the land which you enter to possess is a land of hills and valleys which drink water of the rain of the heavens. A land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year” (Amplified Bible).

In a physical sense, this Scripture describes the land God promised the Israelites who came out of Egypt. Spiritually, however, it gives insight into the inheritance He holds out to those who become His through Christ Jesus. Let us consider the descriptions used in this Scripture more closely, looking first at the prerequisites for abundant living and then at some characteristics of abundant life:

- I. The Lord said Israel's land of promise would be watered by the rain of the heavens, not laboriously on foot as one would water a garden of vegetables. Speaking of the physical lands of Egypt and Canaan, Matthew Henry's *Commentary of the Whole Bible* says this:

Egypt was a country fruitful enough, but it was all flat, and was watered, not as other countries with rain . . . , but by the overflowing of the river Nile at a certain season of the year, to the improving of which there was necessary a great deal of the art and labour of the husbandman, *so that in Egypt a man must bestow as much cost and pains upon a field as upon a garden of herbs.* And this made them the more apt to imagine that the power of their own hands got them this wealth. But the land of Canaan was an uneven country, a land of hills and valleys, which not only gave a more pleasing prospect to the eye, but yielded a greater variety of soils for the several purposes of the husbandman. *It was a land that had no great rivers in it, except Jordan, but drank water of the rain of heaven, and so, saved them a great deal of labour.* While the Egyptians were ditching and guttering in the fields, up to the knees in mud, to bring water to their land, which otherwise would soon become like the heath in the wilderness, the Israelites could sit in their houses, warm and easy, and leave it to God to water their land with the former and the latter rain, which is called the river of God (Ps. 65:9)<sup>3</sup> *Italics mine.*

Israel was being ushered into a land where they would depend on God for their sustenance. Their land could not be watered the way Egypt was watered because of its topography. But this was a benefit because it constrained them to focus their energies on the worship of their God who, in return, would release abundant rain on the land. Their land would bring forth rich and abundant fruit, not commensurate with their human effort, but commensurate with God's divine provision!

For us today, Deuteronomy 11:10-12 teaches that experiencing the fullness of God's rich and abundant life requires full surrender to and total dependence on Him. It requires focusing on Him and His worship as our utmost priority, for as we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all other things (diverse, rich, and abundant) will be added unto us.<sup>4</sup>

Experiencing the fullness of God's abundant life also requires setting aside all Plan Bs and unreservedly committing ourselves into the able hands of the almighty God. To the Israelites, God basically said, "Worship and obey Me with all your hearts and I will bless and provide for you"; this was the message of their covenant. They were to make no back-up plans (for example, "if God does not provide, we will do so and so for ourselves"). Theirs was a call to absolute trust and obedience, and when they complied, they reaped the rich benefits of His covenant. Likewise, God's covenant with us today embodies one core plan: *Trust and obey Me with all your hearts, and I will bless and increase you abundantly*. When we put all our trust in Him, we begin to see the spiritual, physical, and material blessings of His covenant poured abundantly into our lives.

II. The Lord described Israel's land of promise as a place where their lives would take on broader scope and greater fulfillment. He contrasted Israel's previous country (sowed and watered like "a garden of vegetables") with her promised land ("a land of hills and valleys which drink water of the rain of the heavens"). Looking closely at these descriptions, we observe:

- "A garden of vegetables" connotes a small and limited place, for there is only so much one can plant in a garden. On the

other hand, “a land of hills and valleys” connotes a place of varied landscapes, a land so broad and diverse that it cannot be watered on foot.

- “The eyes of the Lord are always upon the land from beginning of the year to the end of the year” connotes a place that has God’s attention at all times. God tends it all year round, releasing His resources in full force to care for it and ensure its fruitfulness.

Putting these thoughts together and adding other biblical knowledge, we learn that abundant living is a realm where:

1. The creativity of our heavenly Father manifests itself liberally in the believer’s everyday life. The One who created the universe brings His diversity to bear upon our lives in ways we previously never knew. Life becomes filled with an overflow of divine experiences and opportunities.
2. The scope of our lives (our lives being fully offered as living sacrifices to God) bursts beyond our prejudices. This is exemplified in the lives of the early apostles who found themselves led to minister to people whom they previously considered heathen. Doors were opened for them to preach the gospel in places they previously thought unlikely. Likewise, as God elevates us to the realm of abundant living, we find an overflow of opportunities to take the gospel to places and peoples we previously considered unacceptable. We become wholeheartedly committed to preaching the true gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.
3. The hidden but beautiful nature of our God is taught and imparted to us daily. Just as the early disciples learned God’s

nature by observing Jesus at work, we learn God's nature and character as we observe Him at work in us, through us, and in the world around us.

4. Our sojourn on earth becomes an enjoyable and fulfilling lesson in divinity. We enter into the experience of knowing God in the way described by Paul: "That I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly] . . ." (Philippians 3:10 Amplified Bible). When we know Him in this way, our hearts are captivated and smitten by His person. We increasingly desire nothing else but Him.
5. God's nature, character, and glory are manifested in and through us in increasing measure, for to know Him intimately is to become like Him.<sup>5</sup>
6. We experience great fruitfulness in our spiritual and physical endeavors because our paths are ordered by the Lord.

## **Reflect and Pray**

Abundant life—the God kind of life—is life at a different level from what we have hitherto experienced. Fortunately, God has made this life accessible to us, both now and in the age to come: "I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)" (John 10:10 Amplified Bible).

Are you experiencing this life today? Do you see evidence of God's greater glory in your life? Are you learning fresh truths about Him? Are you experiencing greater scope, fulfillment, and transformation through Him? Is your life spiritually and physically fruitful?

If not, ask the Lord to open up the fountains of life within you. You have abundant life in your spirit if you have received Jesus

Christ as your Savior and have accepted the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> However, those fountains may be clogged up by various impurities. Ask the Lord to unclog them. Believe He has heard you, and then be open to His guidance as He works to set you on the path to abundant living.

## CHAPTER 15

# Forgive and Be Reconciled

There are certain virtues we must become proficient at if we are to dwell victoriously in our promised land. “Forgiveness” (discussed in this chapter) is one of them, and “love” (discussed in the next chapter) is another.

### **Forgiveness**

What is forgiveness? In simple biblical terms, forgiveness is the act of releasing or letting go of an offense committed against you by someone else’s thoughts, words, or deeds. When we forgive, we intentionally give up the right to retaliate against another in thought, word, or deed. Speaking of forgiveness, our Lord Jesus Christ said: And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him and let it drop (leave it and let it go), in order that your Father Who is in heaven may also forgive you your [own] failings and shortcomings and let them drop (Mark 11:25 Amplified Bible).

The decision to forgive our offender is a decision God expects us to take shortly after we are offended. Extending forgiveness swiftly prevents bitterness from taking root in our hearts and keeps our relationship with God pure. This decision is independent of the

attitude of the offender. In other words, God expects us to forgive whether or not the offender is repentant.

Forgiveness is an act of the will. We may not *feel* good toward our offender at the point of making the decision to forgive—we may even be angry and hurt because of the wrong we have suffered—yet in the midst of these emotions, we can make a quality decision to forgive. We can say, “Father, although I feel angered and hurt by this offense, I choose to forgive my offender because you have instructed me to do so.” When we act in this way, we emulate the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who, on the cross, forgave His offenders while still suffering persecution at their hands.

When treated unfairly by others, God expects us to forgive them and then wait for His intervention on our behalf. Sincerely, it is very tempting to indulge in self-pity and nurse a grudge rather than release offenses at such times. However, God does not condone this. He has His way of dealing with injustice, and His way begins with forgiveness on the believer’s part. In His Word, God tells us, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay . . .” (Romans 12:19). He also says, “For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him” (Isaiah 30:18). The Lord gives us these and similar words to assure us that He will do His part in giving us justice after we have done our part in forgiving and releasing offenses.

## **Emotional Wounds**

When offended, mistreated, or persecuted, it is natural to feel hurt, and sometimes deeply so. What should we do about such hurts? Should we expect them to simply disappear after we have forgiven our offender?

Depending on the nature of the offense, our relationship with the offender, and our temperament—among other things—hurts

may fade after we have made the decision to forgive. But this is not always the case. Many people suffer from emotional wounds caused by offenses long after they have forgiven their offenders.

Although the Lord instructs us to forgive swiftly and do so every time we are offended, it is not His will for us to live with emotional wounds (see Psalm 147:2-3). Emotional wounds are painful and difficult to live with; they let down bad roots in our souls and produce fruits such as hostility, malice, defensiveness, self-isolation, inability to trust, and much more. These kinds of fruit steal our joy and hamper our ability to walk in love. For this reason, it is important that we identify emotional wounds early and obtain healing for them from the Lord.

## **Healing**

The Bible tells us the Lord Jesus Christ is our healer. His healing ministry covers our bodies as well as our souls.\*\* Speaking prophetically about His ministry, Isaiah said Jesus would:

Console those who mourn in Zion . . . give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified (Isaiah 61:3).

We often hear great testimonies about the Lord healing people's bodies. What we may not know is that He is just as powerful and effective at healing emotional wounds and broken hearts as He is at healing bodies. No one else is able to heal the soul like Jesus does

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\*\* The soul consists of the emotions, will, mind, and desires.

because no one else understands us like He does and no one else has power vested in them by the Father for the healing and restoration of human souls.<sup>1</sup>

When we open our hurts to the Lord Jesus Christ for healing, we soon find that the offenses that brought us grief no longer do. Over time, we discover that our offender's attitude, if unchanged, no longer bothers us. We find ourselves willing and able to love and help him or her unconditionally.

Many times, Christians do not recognize their need for God's help when dealing with offenses. We believe our obligation is to forgive as the Lord commands and thereafter deal with the lingering turmoil and pain on our own. Yes indeed, we may not need God's help if our intention is to relate superficially or to keep a distance from our offender. However, if we intend to love our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us like Jesus taught,<sup>2</sup> we must receive the Lord's healing for our wounded emotions. Only when we are healed and whole within can we love our offenders like Jesus does.

It is important to note that our flesh does not like to forgive or love. So, even though the blessing of emotional healing is available to us in Christ, we may find within ourselves a hidden reluctance to embrace it. We may find ourselves thinking, "I don't want to forgive or love so and so because he or she was very mean to me." We should firmly resist such thinking and frequently ask the Lord to make us willing to forgive and love like He does.

## **Reconciliation**

After forgiveness comes reconciliation. Speaking of this, Jesus said, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there

before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). At the time that Jesus spoke these words, the people of God usually took physical sacrifices to the temple to offer to God. Today, God no longer requires this of us. Rather, He requires us to bring our prayers, praises, and worship as sacrifices to Him. But in Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus tells us that if, in the process of bringing these sacrifices to God, the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance a misunderstanding between us and another person that needs to be resolved, we should stop our prayer, praise, or worship and go make peace with that person. Only after we have done this should we come to present our sacrifices to God.

Reconciliation may be difficult to implement in distant relationships or in relationships involving people we do not know well. But even in such cases we should forgive our offender and be open to obeying any instruction the Holy Spirit gives with respect to the relationship. We should maintain a heart disposition that says, “Lord, I will do whatever you ask of me at anytime for that person.”

In close day-to-day relationships, such as with family, friends, Christian brothers and sisters, colleagues, and neighbors, reconciliation is essential. The purpose of such reconciliation is to mend the relationship between the parties involved. We should approach reconciliation *with hearts that have already forgiven and let go*, hearts that are healed and willing to do whatever the Holy Spirit commands in order to move the relationship forward. This is significant because approaching reconciliation with unforgiveness or bitterness in our hearts compromises the process and worsens the dispute.

Having said this, let me mention that there are some close relationships that can only be restored after the offender has repented and changed a particular attitude or behavior; for example, relationships where trust is repeatedly broken or abuse is involved. In such cases, we should *stand in forgiveness* and trust the Lord to bring the other person to repentance and to restore a healthy relationship.

There are also situations where mature, trustworthy, God-honoring believers should be called in to facilitate reconciliation. This is described by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17:

If your brother wrongs you, go and show him his fault, between you and him privately. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two others, so that every word may be confirmed and upheld by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he pays no attention to them [refusing to listen and obey], tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector (Amplified Bible).

In such cases, we should seek the Lord for direction on whom to involve as mediator. We should also ask for grace to hold on to forgiveness in the face of our offender's obstinacy.

## **Reflect and Pray**

Unforgiveness is a deep-seated problem in many hearts. Unfortunately, it is a stronghold Satan uses to defeat many Christians. But the Bible is clear about the consequences of unforgiveness: "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:26).

I believe our Lord Jesus spoke these words not to threaten us but to enable us to stay clear of the snare of unforgiveness. I encourage you to search your heart and turn over every root of unforgiveness or bitterness you find—old or new—to the Lord.

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to purge you of those roots and their fruits.
- Ask Him to make you willing to forgive at all times.
- Ask Him to help you believe that after you have done your part of forgiving, He will do His part of vindicating you as He sees fit.
- Ask the Lord to help you see the importance of emotional wholeness. Ask for the ability to quickly identify and present your emotional wounds to Him.
- Ask Him to help you trust His willingness and ability to heal you emotionally.
- Ask Him to help you depend on Him alone for emotional healing. [Be open to human resources but use them only as the Holy Spirit directs.]
- Ask Him to make you willing to love those who offend you with the love of God.
- Thank the Lord for being your healer and restorer.

After you have prayed, trust the Holy Spirit to lead you through the various steps needed to bring you to emotional wholeness. The entire process of forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation requires large doses of submission and humility on your part; it also requires much grace and guidance from the Lord. Lean on Him, yielding your heart, until He makes you as He is in this aspect of life.

## CHAPTER 16

# L-O-V-E

A second virtue that is fundamental to living abundantly in Christ is love. [Recall that in the previous chapter we highlighted forgiveness as a requirement for living abundantly in Christ.] Loving others is high on God's priority list and is greater than the best spiritual gifts.<sup>1</sup>

Today we live in a world that prizes material accomplishments higher than love. People base their value upon their wealth, fame, physical appearance, status in society, and other accomplishments. Unfortunately, Christians also get carried away with this tide. We assess ourselves by our physical and material accomplishments rather than by spiritual yardsticks, such as love. But the importance that God's Word places on love teaches us that a truly successful Christian is one whose ability to walk and live in love is well-developed, one who loves the unlovely, and does so neither for selfish gain nor personal glory.

How do we attain this level of love? A very important starting point is to understand what to expect and what not to expect from our human nature. In our human nature, we will find *feelings* of love, feelings that are warm and fuzzy one moment, angry and bitter the

next. In ourselves, we will find love that is conditional: “I will love you if you act in such and such ways toward me.” In ourselves, we will also find love that is unable to stand on its own and requires external props (favorable circumstances) to function. In our human nature, we will find great inability to fulfill Christ’s commandment to love one another as He has loved us.

What do we do then? The primary way to grow in Christ-like love is by relinquishing our limited human love and allowing God’s love to flow through us to others.

### **Characteristics of God’s Love**

Growing in Christ-like love requires an understanding of what God’s love looks like. Thankfully, God has provided a simple and practical description of attitudes and actions that portray His love in the Bible. He says:

Love endures long and is patient and kind; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God’s love in us) does not insist on its rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong]. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures

everything without weakening (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Amplified Bible).

These are the attributes the Holy Spirit develops in us when we make a commitment to live a life of love, and our daily lives are the classrooms where we get to practice walking in divine love.

Since God's love is unnatural to our human nature, we literally have to learn how to walk in it. After we have gained knowledge of it from studying the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit creates opportunities in our lives where we practice applying the lessons we have learned. For example, we may find ourselves in a situation where we are mistreated by another person for no fault of ours. Our human nature will want to respond in anger and resentment, but the Holy Spirit will remind us that God's love "takes no account of evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong]" (v.5). We may hear news that a person who mistreated us in the past has been mistreated by someone else. Our human nature will want to gloat and rejoice because our offender is suffering. But the Holy Spirit will remind us that God's love "does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail" (v.6). He will teach us to pray for those who hurt us and to lend a helping hand rather than seek revenge. Through lessons such as these we grow in our ability to walk in love. Virtues that were difficult to express initially become easier and more natural as we practice them repeatedly under the loving guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### **Selfishness: A Spiritual Cankerworm**

One of the main hindrances to living a life of love is selfishness. What is selfishness? *The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* defines it as being "concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself: seeking

or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others."<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* says "selfishness" is being "concerned chiefly with one's own personal profit or pleasure at the expense of consideration for others."<sup>3</sup> Sadly, our fallen human nature is intensely selfish; it loves to focus on itself and presumes this to be the way to succeed. On the contrary, Christ's nature in us is selfless; it loves to give of itself and grows by pouring itself out for the benefit of others.<sup>4</sup>

Selfishness is not only inherent in human nature, it cleverly hides itself behind cloaks of morality and religion.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, it is easy and common for people who are spiritually and morally upright to consider themselves free of selfishness when they actually are not. A simple way to test our level of selfishness or the lack thereof is to assess the nature of our thoughts and prayers (these being indicators of our motives and the things we truly care about). If most of what we think and pray about is matters that benefit us, we are still selfish.

A form of deception that drives selfishness is the belief that focusing on ourselves and our issues gives us a much better chance of succeeding in life. Indeed, we may grow and succeed through self-focus; however, such growth would be nowhere near what we could attain if we choose to pour ourselves out selflessly for others. Consider the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who achieved great success during His earthly ministry. Rather than protect and perpetuate that success, He laid it down and poured out His life for us. Through His selfless sacrifice, billions of people have been released into the glorious blessings of the kingdom of God.

## **Love Gives**

An important attribute of love is that love expresses itself through giving. Not only does it give, loves gives that which is valuable to its recipients. God demonstrated this by giving His only begotten Son to die so that we might have eternal life. Realizing our desperate need for life, God gave exactly what we needed, though it cost Him a lot.

But someone may ask, “What do I really have to give?” As Christians, we have and should give the spiritual substance in us. Isaiah 58:10 expresses this by saying, “And if you pour out that with which you sustain your own life for the hungry and satisfy the need of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in darkness, and your obscurity and gloom become like noonday” (Amplified Bible). How do we “sustain our own lives,” spiritually speaking? We do so through prayers, seeking God’s counsel, and receiving support from fellow Christians. Through these channels, the Lord directs His love, wisdom, and grace to us.

Just as we are blessed through these channels, we can bless others too. We can share their burdens by praying earnestly for their situations, seeking God’s wisdom on how best to help them, and extending practical and emotional support as needed.

To the Christian who is already weighed down with many afflictions, the task of bearing other people’s burdens may seem daunting. However, it is possible to do so through God’s grace and enablement; His Word tells us that He is able to make all grace abound to us so that in all things at all times, having all we need, we may abound in every good work.<sup>6</sup>

Another way we can bless others is through our gifts, talents, and possessions. God gives us these not only for our benefit, but for the benefit of others also. To Abraham, He said, “I will bless you

and . . . you will be a blessing,”<sup>7</sup> showing that being blessed and being a blessing go hand in hand.

Although material wealth is useful when blessing others, it is not always needed. There are times when people need a show of God’s love beyond money or material wealth. This implies that financial challenges in our own lives should not hinder us from being a blessing to others. If we genuinely open our hearts to carry their burdens, the Lord will give us insight and ability within our means to minister precisely and effectively to others.

### **Recipients of Love**

Who does love support? Love supports every person God brings our way for this purpose. We never have to look far; the world around us abounds with people in need of God’s love—spouses, children, relatives, friends, friends of friends, fellow Christians, colleagues, schoolmates, neighbors, and more.

Although God expects us to show His love to everyone He brings our way, there are specific individuals He gives us grace to carry for specific periods of time. These may be people passing through difficulties that require His intervention, people who need to be saved, or people who are saved but need to grow in their relationship with Him. If we are attentive and open, God will show these people to us and make us aware of their areas of need.

Some Christians limit their show of love to family, friends, and church members. While it is good (and biblically prudent) to show love to our families<sup>8</sup> and Christian brethren,<sup>9</sup> we must be aware that God’s grace and ability given to us is also for the purpose of supporting others outside our usual circles of interaction. God cares for everyone regardless of social status, creed, or race. When we open

ourselves up for His use, He sends us people within and outside our familiar circles of interaction who need His love.

### **How Does Love Give?**

God expects us to support others with gentleness and kindness.<sup>10</sup> His own support to us, whether in the form of encouragement, counsel, or material blessings usually comes tenderly and kindly. Even when we are entirely undeserving, the Lord remains constant in His manner of giving. Likewise, He expects us to bear each other's burdens and troublesome moral faults with humility and kindness.

Honestly, this is not easy and can never be achieved by a mere desire to be pleasant. It requires grace, strength, and fortitude from God; it also requires understanding the nature of His love and being willing to allow that nature to flow through us. The good news is, He makes all of this possible when we ask.

### **What We Gain**

The most significant benefits obtained from loving others with the love of God are closeness to God and transformation into His image. We also receive His favor, blessings, and protection and earn rewards in eternity.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Closeness to God*

The Bible says, "He who loves [his fellowmen] is begotten (born) of God and is coming [progressively] to know and understand God . . ." (1 John 4:7 Amplified Bible). When we choose to love selflessly, we embrace God's heart, and as we do, He changes our hearts. Soon, we find ourselves easily moved with compassion (like Jesus was)<sup>12</sup> and always willing to bear the burdens of others.

*Transformed into His image*

The Lord changes our character as we walk in love. This happens because the people whose burdens we are sent to bear are not always as warm and loving as we would like them to be. Therefore, to fulfill the mandate to support them, we find ourselves crying to the Lord to help us show them love in the face of their unfriendly attitudes. The Lord responds to this call by changing us inside so that we become proficient at serving both the friendly and the hostile with a loving attitude.

### **Reflect and Pray**

Every born-again Christian, whether a babe in the Lord, growing believer, or mature son of God, has a designated “support team” from the Lord. However, many do not receive the benefits of such divine support because their benefactors do not bear their burdens. Knowingly or unknowingly, their benefactors expend their God-given grace and abilities on themselves while the ones they ought to support go hungry. As you read this, I encourage you to ask the Lord to show you the people He has equipped you to support. Also ask Him for wisdom and grace to bear their burdens well.

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask God to reveal the limitations of your human love to you. It is only when you realize your inability to love like Christ commands that you will genuinely seek His love to flow through you.
- Ask the Lord to teach you about His love. Ask Him to help you *receive* and *express* His unconditional love.
- Ask the Lord to deliver you from the things that hinder you from loving the way He does.

- Pray for the willingness and ability to share other people's burdens. Pray for grace to do this without selfish motives.
- Ask Him to help you make walking in love an unending priority.
- Then, ask the Lord to bring you the people He has appointed for you to support.
- Ask Him to help you support them in a way that pleases Him and makes a real difference to their lives.

## CHAPTER 17

# The Church—Active or Effective?

Sickness, sorrow, bondage, and destruction—these are just a few of the evils that characterize our world today. So pervasive are they that they have become the norm to many. Yet, our Lord Jesus Christ is present in the world today through His church. Jesus obtained salvation and deliverance for mankind through His blood and appointed us—His church—as the conduit through which His salvation and deliverance are to be dispensed to the nations.

But we—His church—often seem weak in the face of evil. We suffer the effects of Satan’s wickedness in our own lives and seem incapable of delivering others from him.

To his disciples, Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12). The Lord spoke of the grace and power that would be released upon the church after His ascension. He promised that she would be empowered to function effectively as or more effectively than He did during His earthly ministry.

Do we see this today? I dare say no. We see a church that is active and responsible for many good works. However, we see her lacking in

the demonstration of power promised by the Lord. We see a church that often backs off when assailed by forces of darkness or strives to overcome such forces by physical and intellectual means. We see a church whose impact pales in comparison to the impact of Jesus's earthly ministry.

Sincerely, many of us can testify of great miracles and divine interventions in our daily lives and circumstances. But when it comes to having a powerful impact on the lives and needs around us, when it comes to rescuing men and women from the clutches and deception of the kingdom of darkness, when it comes to ministering deliverance from the senseless sufferings and bondages we see around us, most of us are paralyzed. The desire to help is present, but the ability to minister in power is largely lacking.

Why is there such variance between Jesus's ministry and ours? I believe this variance is because we have lost the lifestyle that makes the release of significant levels of God's power possible. I am referring to a lifestyle of total surrender and dependence on God and His Holy Spirit. In some ways, we are like the early Laodicean church who lacked true spiritual substance, although they seemed to be doing well outwardly. Knowing them beyond their outward appearance, the Lord said to them:

For you say, I am rich; I have prospered and grown wealthy, and I am in need of nothing; and you do not realize and understand that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to purchase from Me gold refined and tested by fire, that you may be [truly] wealthy, and white clothes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nudity from being seen, and salve to

put on your eyes, that you may see (Revelation 3:17-18 Amplified Bible).

Our Lord saw the true condition of the Laodicean church and loved them enough to disclose it. He showed them that they were not as spiritually advanced as they thought themselves to be. He invited them to come to Him with humble hearts so that He would take them to their rightful position in God.

As with the Laodicean church, our Lord calls us to repentance today. He calls us to change our approach to worshipping and serving Him. He beckons us to embrace lives of full surrender to Him so that He may make us people that “set forth the wonderful deeds and display the virtues and perfections of Him Who called (us) out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9 Amplified Bible).

### **An Individual Call**

Our Lord’s call to His church is as much an individual call as it is a corporate one. Just as the condition of one part of the human body has a significant effect on the well-being of the entire body, what we do as individual members of the Body of Christ has a significant impact on the overall well-being of the Body. For instance, when the level of spiritual devotion among members of a church or Christian group is high, the spiritual power and authority manifested by such a group is high. On the other hand, when members of a church or Christian group are spiritually complacent, there is substantially less power available to withstand the enemy and perform the great works of God through that group. Therefore, God is calling individual members of the Body of Christ to turn to Him in humility, contrition, and surrender. As we respond, the Lord will draw us close, refine us, and release us into the nations to do His will. He will make us

conduits of His power and glory because we have yielded our lives unconditionally to Him.

### **Serve Like Jesus**

Many centuries ago, our Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2). Interestingly, this statement still holds true today though its context is different. At that time, there were relatively few people proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, but this is no longer the case (except in countries where persecution of Christians is intense). Today, there are many people and organizations who labor in God’s name. The problem is that many of them pursue their own agenda rather than His. They define and pursue their own goals, or attempt to fulfill the Lord’s commission by developing and implementing their own cleverly thought-out strategies and plans. They belittle or avoid making the commitment to work only as the Holy Spirit directs, and as a result, miss that element of consecration required to make the church an effective channel of God’s power and glory. So, indeed, the harvest is great, but authentic laborers are few.

During His earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ spoke and did only what the Father commanded Him. He said in John 12:49-50:

I have never spoken on My own authority or of My own accord or as self-appointed, but the Father Who sent Me has Himself given Me orders [concerning] what to say and what to tell. And I know that His commandment is (means) eternal life. So whatever I speak, I am saying [exactly] what My Father has told Me to say and in accordance with His instructions (Amplified Bible).

Our Lord Jesus also said:

Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner (John 5:19).

If the Son of God, the one who came down from above, confined Himself to doing and speaking only what the Father commanded, why do we (His church) believe that we can walk away from this pattern and be effective? Why do we try to “figure out” how to execute God’s purposes without obtaining His directions? Is it surprising that our plans do not produce the caliber of results our Lord promised?

We must serve God the way Jesus did if we want to bear the kind of fruit He bore and do the greater works He promised. We must seek and pursue God’s agenda exclusively and determine to serve only as He directs in every situation.

### **Give Glory to God**

While on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ gave glory to God at all times. The Bible says of Him that although He was essentially one with God and had all of God’s attributes, including His power, Jesus did not reach to grasp God’s glory for Himself. Rather, He abased Himself and became like a servant. Because He did this, God exalted Him and gave Him a name high above every other name.

If anyone had what it took to be proud and high-minded, it was Jesus. He had power and exuded God’s glory. But knowing that God does not lightly regard man usurping His glory, the Son of God gave all the glory visible through His ministry back to God.

He took no honor for Himself, except the honor which His Father gave to Him.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, this cannot be said for many servants of God today. Many who are used by God direct people to themselves rather than to God. The church of our Lord is filled with “superstars” and “would-be superstars.” But consider this analogy to understand the inappropriateness of this trend: Assume a king sends his servant to deliver gifts to the citizens of his country. On getting there, the citizens, happy for the gifts they have received, begin to worship the servant. What would a faithful servant do? Would he not immediately tell the citizens to refrain from worshipping him and rather give their gratitude and praise to the king? A true servant would not take his master’s glory because he knows he has no reason to do so. Yes, he has delivered great gifts, but without his master’s call and provision, he would not be privileged to bear good gifts to the citizens of the land. Awed by his master’s benevolence, he would rather defer all praise, gratitude, and glory to him.

The same should apply to every true servant of God. We should defer all praise, glory, and honor to God because the gifts we bear and the anointed services we render belong to Him. After we have done all we are commissioned to do, we should say (like Jesus taught), “We are unworthy servants. We have only done our duty” (Luke 17:7-10 NIV).

The early Christians understood this principle and refused to take God’s glory for themselves. In Acts 14:14-15, we see Paul and Barnabas dismayed when the people of Lystra tried to worship them. In Revelation 19:10, we hear these humble and God-honoring words from a servant when John the apostle tried to worship Him: “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”

Sadly, many servants of God today do not act as humbly. Many consent to being idolized by people who should worship God and thereby become demigods who inhibit the spiritual progress of believers and limit the effectiveness of the church. We must diligently guard against this sin. Our human nature loves to receive glory and praise, but we must deny the flesh its desire and seek God's grace to be humble, recognizing we are mere servants.

Thankfully, we serve a faithful Master who rewards His servants in benevolent and unprecedented ways. Consider the woman who used what was probably her most valuable possession to anoint Jesus for His death. Although the disciples and other observers did not regard her service or sacrifice, Jesus saw its value and rewarded her with an enduring legacy:

“For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her”  
(Matthew 26:12-13).

The Lord still does this today. He takes note of sincere, diligent, sacrificial service rendered for Him and blesses and honors faithful servants for their work.<sup>2</sup>

### **Remain Focused**

Stories abound of people who are sent to fulfill specific purposes in foreign lands but get so caught up in the excitement of being in a new place that they lose sight of their original purpose. This is a very real predicament for God's servants as we operate in this world.

When God assigns a servant a task, He opens uncommon doors that allow him or her access into lofty places or privileged positions from which he or she can effectively fulfill the assignment given. For example, when God wanted to end the drought in Israel and punish Ahab for idolatry, He ensured His servant, Elijah, had immediate audience with the king.<sup>3</sup> On a separate occasion, God ensured that Esther gained the favor of King Ahasuerus in order to pave the way for the deliverance of His people from destruction.<sup>4</sup> This still happens today; God gives His servants favor in unusual places. It may be a job or business opportunity, a God-honoring relationship, a position, or something else. God's primary purpose for opening such doors is to place His servants in roles that enable them to effectively execute or intercede for the fulfillment of specific aspects of His purposes. It is vital that His servants understand this and remain focused on the true purpose for being where they are. The Bible puts it this way:

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4).

The counsel here is to avoid distractions and involvements that draw us away from our primary purpose. Our field of service may be beautiful and exciting or difficult and distasteful. Whatever the case, we should ask God for grace, and be determined to stay focused on representing His interests where we are placed.

## **Reflect and Pray**

Do you desire to be used effectively and powerfully by God? Do you desire to see your church or Christian group used more effectively by

God? If so, here are some prayers that will help position you or your group for the release of God's power:

**Prayer Points**

- Ask God to teach you and your group to depend on Him fully in ministry.
- Ask Him to teach you to speak and act only as His Spirit directs.
- Ask Him to deliver you from every form of pride, fear, or deceptive thinking that would lure you into serving Him through your own wisdom and plans.
- Ask God to purge every tendency to usurp His glory from you and members of your group.
- Ask Him to shield you from distractions and help you stay focused on fulfilling His purposes.

Our God is faithful and will grant these pure and humble desires of your heart through Christ. Amen.

## CHAPTER 18

# **He Comes for a Church without Spot or Wrinkle**

There has been much talk recently in the Body of Christ about the coming of the Lord. This is more so because of the events in the world that point to the fact that we are nearing the end of this present age. But the vital question we must ask ourselves is this: Is there enough teaching in the church about the conditions we must meet prior to the coming of the Lord? In 1 John 3:2-3, the Holy Spirit tells us the kind of lifestyle the Lord demands of us as we await His coming. He says:

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

This Scripture tells us that we will be like Christ when He is revealed. We will be like Him in character, holiness, love, power,

and more. The Scripture goes on to say that whoever has the hope of being like Him at His coming is presently purifying himself. In other words, there is a deep work of sanctification going on in the lives of these persons now; the Lord is purging and making them like Himself so that they will meet His standard at His coming. Their transformation into the fullness of Christ will not be unexpected; it will be a culmination of what has occurred in their lives during this preparatory period. Ephesians 5:25-27 bears further witness to this truth: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

The Holy Spirit tells us here that our Lord Jesus Christ is presently washing His bride with His pure Word so that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, wrinkle, or blemish. So, again we see that a deep work of sanctification and transformation is presently going on in the hearts and lives of those who will be glorified with Christ at His coming.

The early apostles understood these truths and focused their ministries on preparing the bride of Christ for her Bridegroom. To this end, Paul said:

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

He prayed, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians

5:23). John the beloved saw the outcome of this preparatory work and wrote:

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:6-9).

This Scripture speaks of the marriage of the Lamb and tells us His wife had made herself ready. She prepared herself and consequently received the garment of righteousness needed for her marriage to the Lamb. There was great rejoicing and praise to God for the fulfillment of this principal event in His plan of redemption.

The preparation of the Bride of Christ for her Husband ought to be a matter of paramount importance to every believer, servant of God, and church as we approach the coming of the Lord. But is it? Are our churches and ministers making the Bride of Christ ready? Do we somehow think God has given up on this important purpose? Do we realize that our preoccupation with ourselves and the world detracts from this purpose?

I believe it is time for us—the church of Jesus Christ—to shake off our many distractions. It is time to say, “Be gone from me, Satan.” It is time to turn our focus to the preparation of the Bride for the

coming of the Lord. It is time to scrutinize every practice we embrace as individuals and churches with the goal of letting go of the ones that pull us away from the Lord.

It is time to question our status quo, time to ask ourselves, “Why do we as a church or Christian group engage in such and such activity? Does it help or hinder our preparation for the coming of the Lord? Does it help present us as a chaste virgin to Christ, or does it cause us to flirt with the world? Does it align with God’s greater purpose for His church at this time?”

It is time for every servant of God to ask himself, “Am I jealous over God’s flock with a godly jealousy? Am I encouraging them to cleave steadfastly to the Bridegroom, or am I knowingly or unknowingly turning their attention away from Him? Am I subtly endorsing their flirtations with the world? Am I giving them the appropriate kind of food (teaching) or service for this season, or am I throwing spiritual junk and fast foods at them?”

As we ask ourselves these challenging questions, I believe the Lord will open our eyes to every distraction or defiling practice we may have embraced and will point us to purer ways that align with His purpose. He will help us prepare ourselves and God’s flock in our care for the coming of our Bridegroom.

## **Reflect and Pray**

As you ponder this, pray for yourself, your church, and every Christian group with which you are involved.

### **Prayer Points**

- Ask the Lord to make the truth about His coming plain to you.

- Ask Him to reveal and shake from you every purpose that does not support the preparation of the Body of Christ for His coming.
- Ask Him to begin a deep work of sanctification in you and those around you. Ask Him to pour out the pure and sanctifying ministry of His Word upon you.
- If you are in ministry and have not been faithful in preparing God's flock for the coming of the Lord, ask Him to forgive you and to help you to serve faithfully in this regard.
- Finally, ask the Lord to have His way in you, in all you do, and in every place you serve.

## Epilogue

I would like to share a bit about the process of writing *Refreshment for the Weary Soul*.

The events that led to this work began about nine years ago (2002). I had resigned from my job to stay at home with my baby. My plan was to give her a full year of undivided attention. Since we had recently relocated from a foreign country, I reasoned this one-year period would also give me time to settle our young family into our new home. At the end of one year, I would resume the pursuit of my career, I thought. But how wrong I was!

It turned out that God had an entirely different plan. In His plan, my time at home was a turning point not a break; also, my time at home would last much longer than a year.

I learned about God's plan as I sought Him for direction, and oh, how distressed I was. I grieved the unexpected loss of my former lifestyle and struggled to adapt to the new experiences He had in store. I soon learned that period was the beginning of my training for His service, training that would take me on an intense wilderness journey with Him.

The journey through God's wilderness was difficult, but thankfully it did not last forever. Within a few years, I began to see that God's turning point for my life was one of the best things that

ever happened to me. His plan, initiated during those difficult years and still unfolding today, has remained far beyond my imagination and expectation.

## **Refreshment for the Weary Soul**

I began writing the chapters of *Refreshment for the Weary Soul* in 2003. They were initially short articles that I circulated to friends and family. Most of them were birthed during specific phases God passed me through as I journeyed with Him. Some years later, I felt the Holy Spirit lead me to collate the articles into a book. I was very excited about the plan and expected the manuscript to be completed within a year. But once again, I was wrong! God had a much longer and more intricate plan for the completion of the work. The process of writing was to be done first in my heart and then through my hands.

The Lord hardly permitted me to write or edit any portion of *Refreshment for the Weary Soul* as a mere intellectual exercise. Rather, He led me step by step and accompanied the writing process with fresh practical experiences. For example, prior to the most recent edit of “Winning the Battle in the Mind” (chapter 12), I went through an unexpected and challenging spiritual battle. From within my struggle, I cried out to God and He brought me through a process of deliverance that taught me fresh practical lessons about fighting battles with the full armor of God. About that time, my editing work reached chapter 12, and from within my spirit, the Lord pulled out lessons which He imparted during my preceding struggle. This helped me rewrite the latter portion of the chapter in a way that makes it more meaningful to readers seeking help on how to overcome attacks on their minds.

The Lord performed many more seemingly little but significant “miracles” during the writing process. Many times, He brought

thoughts to mind and reorganized ideas in ways I never anticipated. As a result of these occurrences, I have come to the conclusion that this is not “my” book per se. I believe God had *Refreshment for the Weary Soul* in mind and needed someone to internalize and then write it. He chose me for the work, and for that I am grateful, but I give all the glory and honor back to Him.

If you have been blessed by reading *Refreshment for the Weary Soul*, please give thanks to God for what He has done.

In His Service,  
Udeme Anosike

And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.

But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

—Luke 12:42-48

# Notes

## ***Chapter 1: David: An Inspiring Example***

- <sup>1</sup> Acts 13:22
- <sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 17:1-54
- <sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 17:55-18:2
- <sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 18:5-7,13-16
- <sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 18:30; 19:8
- <sup>6</sup> 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 20-28
- <sup>7</sup> 1 Samuel 27:1
- <sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 19:2-3,10-16; 20:12-13,18-22,35-39; 22:5; 23:9-13
- <sup>9</sup> 1 Samuel 21:3-10
- <sup>10</sup> 1 Samuel 22:3-4
- <sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 25:14-20, 32-35
- <sup>12</sup> 1 Samuel 19:18-24; 23:14-15
- <sup>13</sup> 1 Samuel 23:19-29
- <sup>14</sup> Psalm 54
- <sup>15</sup> 1 Samuel 22:8-10, 20-22; 1 Sam. 21:10-15; 1 Sam. 25:9-12
- <sup>16</sup> 1 Samuel 24:1-22; 26:1-25
- <sup>17</sup> 1 Samuel 27:1-4
- <sup>18</sup> 2 Samuel 1:1-27
- <sup>19</sup> 2 Samuel 2:1-4
- <sup>20</sup> 2 Samuel 2:5-10

- 21 2 Samuel 5:1-5
- 22 Psalm 27:4; 19:7-14
- 23 1 Chronicles 29:1-5
- 24 Hebrews 13:5-6
- 25 James 1:2-4
- 26 Matthew 6:34

***Chapter 2: God Is True, but His Ways Are Hidden***

- 1 1 Corinthians 2:11
- 2 1 Corinthians 2:6-12; Psalm 25:8-9; Ephesians 1:17-20
- 3 Philippians 3:7-11; Luke 9:23-24
- 4 Exodus 13:17-18
- 5 Luke 5:37-39
- 6 Jeremiah 17:5-10, Romans 7:18
- 7 Isaiah 30:19
- 8 Isaiah 30:20-21
- 9 Isaiah 30:23
- 10 Job 42:12-17
- 11 Malachi 3:3-4
- 12 Exodus 16:14-21
- 13 Luke 11:3
- 14 Luke 22:39-46
- 15 Genesis 16:1-6; 17:18-22
- 16 James 1:5-8
- 17 1 Corinthians 10:1-10; Numbers 14:1-39; 16:41-49
- 18 Luke 18:8
- 19 John 16:33; Philippians 4:6-7

### ***Chapter 3: The Source of Our Desires and Hopes***

- <sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:7-10
- <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Ephesians 3:10-11; Mark 16:15-18, John 17:21
- <sup>3</sup> Luke 4:5-8
- <sup>4</sup> Matthew 15:7-9; John 8:19
- <sup>5</sup> Colossians 3:1-4; 1 John 2:15-16
- <sup>6</sup> Psalm 103:10-14; John 3:17
- <sup>7</sup> Romans 8:1-4
- <sup>8</sup> Philippians 2:12
- <sup>9</sup> John 16:7-8
- <sup>10</sup> John 14:22-23
- <sup>11</sup> Matthew 4:23-25; Mark.1:28

### ***Chapter 4: God: Our Closest Ally***

- <sup>1</sup> Proverbs 28:13
- <sup>2</sup> James 4:6
- <sup>3</sup> Proverbs 17:17
- <sup>4</sup> Written by Marty Nystrom
- <sup>5</sup> 1 John 1:9; 5:14-15

### ***Chapter 5: A Call to Know God More Intimately***

- <sup>1</sup> John 17:2
- <sup>2</sup> Philippians 3:10-14
- <sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6
- <sup>4</sup> Revelation 2:1-7
- <sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:13
- <sup>6</sup> James 1:5-6; Job 38:36

## ***Chapter 6: After the Call***

- 1 Luke 9:28-36
- 2 Ephesians 5:25-27
- 3 John 12:24
- 4 Exodus 35:4-36:7; 1 Chronicles 29:1-9; 2 Chronicles 2:12-14
- 5 Exodus 25-27; 1 Chronicles 28:11-13, 19.
- 6 Psalm 40:6
- 7 Psalm 40:7
- 8 Psalm 40:8; John 4:34
- 9 Revelation 21:1

## ***Chapter 7: God's Awesome Grace***

- 1 2 Corinthians 12:9
- 2 Jeremiah 17:7-8
- 3 James 4:6
- 4 Philippians 4:13
- 5 Joshua 5:13-15
- 6 John 10:3-5

## ***Chapter 8: When You Don't Have All the Answers***

- 1 Exodus 29:4-9; Leviticus 8:4-9
- 2 Numbers 27:18-21; 1 Samuel 23:6, 9-12
- 3 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 1:4-6
- 4 John 10:3-5
- 5 Malachi 3:2-3

## ***Chapter 9: Announcing a Day of Deliverance***

- 1 "Asthma." 2011. *Merriam-Webster Online Medical Dictionary*. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/asthma>. Accessed April 8, 2011.
- 2 Hebrews 4:15

- 3 John 14:30  
4 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:2-4  
5 2 Corinthians 4:18

### ***Chapter 10: The Lord, Our Good Shepherd***

- 1 James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 841.  
2 Phillip W. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 111-124.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Ibid.  
5 John 6:51-63  
6 John 17:12-19  
7 John 21:15-17; Acts 6:2-4  
8 2 Peter 1:19

### ***Chapter 11: Be Careful How You Hear***

- 1 Matthew 11:15; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8; Luke 14:35  
2 Revelation 1-3  
3 Matthew 13:19  
4 Matthew 13:20-21  
5 Matthew 13:22  
6 Matthew 13:23  
7 "Anointed Word" in this context refers to God's Word quickened (brought to life) by the Holy Spirit. Scripture teaches us that the letter of the Word kills, but words quickened by the Holy Spirit give life (2 Corinthians 3:6).  
8 1 Corinthians 2:14  
9 1 Corinthians 2:11  
10 2 Corinthians 3:6b

- 11 John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:4-6
- 12 Hebrews 11:6
- 13 Hebrews 10:35-36
- 14 Philippians 1:6
- 15 1 John 4:1

### ***Chapter 12: Winning the Battle in the Mind***

- 1 Galatians 5:19-21
- 2 James 1:13
- 3 1 John 4:1
- 4 2 Corinthians 10:4
- 5 Ephesians 6:10-13
- 6 Ephesians 6:19-20
- 7 Proverbs 18:21
- 8 James 3:8-12
- 9 John 6:63
- 10 Psalm 18:3-19; Psalm 27:5-6, 13-14
- 11 1 Peter 5:8
- 12 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

### ***Chapter 13: Nurturing Your Relationship with God***

- 1 Romans 8:15; John 15:15; Matthew 25:14; Matthew 25:34
- 2 1 Peter 2:2-3; Hebrews 5:12-14
- 3 Romans 8:7
- 4 Colossians 3:1-10
- 5 The soul consists of the mind, emotions, will, and desires. In the unsaved person and in the carnal Christian, the soul is led by the flesh. However, in the Christian who has subdued the flesh, the soul is led by the Holy Spirit through the person's own spirit.

- <sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:11-13
- <sup>7</sup> J. D. Douglas, F. F. Bruce, J. I. Packer, N. Hillyer, D. Guthrie, A. R. Millard, D. J. Wiseman, *New Bible Dictionary*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 1109.
- <sup>8</sup> Hebrews 8:7-13; Hebrews 9:1, 9-15
- <sup>9</sup> Every born-again Christian is a priest before God as is declared in 1 Peter 2:9
- <sup>10</sup> John 6:35
- <sup>11</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25
- <sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-7
- <sup>13</sup> John 15:1-8
- <sup>14</sup> James 4:6
- <sup>15</sup> Luke 11:9-13

### ***Chapter 14: Life in the Promised Land: A Preview***

- <sup>1</sup> Psalm 82:6; John 10:34-35; Psalm 8:4-6; Hebrews 2:5-8
- <sup>2</sup> John 3:16; John 7:37-38; John 6:53-58
- <sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 250.
- <sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:33
- <sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18
- <sup>6</sup> John 4:13-14; John 7:38-39

### ***Chapter 15: Forgive and Be Reconciled***

- <sup>1</sup> Luke 4:14-21
- <sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:43-48

### ***Chapter 16: L-O-V-E***

- <sup>1</sup> Mark 12:28-31; 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3

- 2 “Selfish.” 2011. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. *http://www.merriam-webster.com*. Accessed June 12, 2009.
- 3 “Selfish.” 2011. Oxford English Dictionary. *www.askoxford.com/concise*. Accessed June 12, 2009.
- 4 John 10:11, 14-18; John 12:23-24
- 5 Jeremiah 17:9
- 6 2 Corinthians 9:8
- 7 Genesis 12:2
- 8 Matthew 15:4-6; 1 Timothy 5:4-8
- 9 Galatians 6:9-10
- 10 I Thessalonians 2:7
- 11 Psalm 41:1-3; Proverbs 19:17; Matthew 25:31-40
- 12 Matthew 9:36; Matthew 15:32

### ***Chapter 17: The Church—Active or Effective?***

- 1 Matthew 3:16-17; John 12:27-30
- 2 1 Timothy 5:17-18; Mark 10:28-30
- 3 1 Kings 18:1-20
- 4 Esther 2:15-18

