DAILY SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

(Spiritual Diet for All Christians)

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Daily Strength: January - December.....

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DIRECTORATE OF
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NIGERIAN ARMY

Acknowledgment

The production process of our Daily Spiritual Strength remains a major and deliberate effort to enhance the spiritual nourishment of the personnel and family. We thank God for this opportunity and equally thank the committee saddled with the writing, editing and production of the entire printed matters. Their sacrifice of time and effort is hereby acknowledged. Their ability to create time for this kingdom service despite their other engagements is not only exemplary but highly commendable. God is your sure reward in Jesus name.
Once again, thank you and God bless you all.

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PREFACE

Welcome to Year 2024! This year has its roots deeply enmeshed into the activities of 2023. A change of leadership at the middle of the third quarter was a significant occurrence while the year rounded up with our platinum celebration leaving behind fond memories for the barrack community to relish for a while. Indeed the platinum has propped us for a deliberate forging ahead as a directorate. We aim to consolidate on the attainments of our heroes both past and present. We also strongly believe that God will guide us into fulfilling this.

The Daily Spiritual Strength remains a major source of spiritual nourishment for the barrack community. The military personnel has need of the requisite enablement to remain equipped, well trained and highly motivated in order to carry out his assigned roles and responsibilities. This devotional aims at maintaining this relevance. The creation of a website for the Directorate as part of the platinum commemorative projects will also enhance the uploading of this devotional and other printed matters for public online use. It is believed that this will reduce the financial pressure on the physical printing of hard copies.

The contributors have maintained due diligence in churning out timely, relevant and balanced spiritual diet as coordinated by the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff (Administration). They have sought to sustain the achieved enviable standard through many hours of sacrificial hard work. The end result that you hold in your hands, if read with the relevant scriptures definitely has the

capacity to give life and set free as God releases His breath upon them as you read day in day out. The occasional prayers for those in the theatre of war remain not only relevant but a soothing wall of defense to lean on in the time of need.

It is my sincere prayer that this 2024 edition of Daily Spiritual Strength will find the right place in your heart as you read and obey.

Shalom.

Lieutenant Colonel (Venerable) TE Ogbonyomi
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ORDER OF SPECIAL OCCASIONAL PRAYERS AT OPERATION AREAS

FOR DEPLOYED TROOPS

Be strong and courageous, For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1: 9)

Prayer: Almighty God, you have always been the defence of your people in their battles, physically and spiritually. As we prepare for the battles that may come our ways, make your presence known to us anew. Grant upon our troops deployed your wisdom, strength and protections. May your divine arm rest upon us now as promised, so that victory will be sure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THOSE SICK IN MISSION AREAS

I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done (Psalm 118:17).

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you are the great physician who heals all diseases. Grant to your servants, our gallant soldiers who are sick quick healings so that they rise from this sickness to continue the battle for restoration of peace at this time, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THOSE AFRAID

Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today (Exodus 13:14).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are the light of salvation to your people and so let our troops not be afraid nor fear any evil. Sustain in them continual awareness of your presence, help them Lord, so that they may not give up. Strengthen their faiths in the faces of their enemies of this great nation and encourage them not to give up this struggle until victory is won, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THE DISCOURAGED

The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Prayer: Almighty God, the road is rough. Give courage to our troops to face every duty and trial just as your Son Jesus Christ faced the agony of

the cross. Encouraged by Christ example, may they not waver in duties, dangers or sacrifices, but as good soldiers of Christ and of Nigeria, they should know that victory comes from You alone; so help them to hold on till victory is won through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THOSE ADVANCING

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through fire you will not be burned; the flame will not set you ablaze (Isaiah 43: 2).

Prayer: Lead your children heavenly Father in this operation. Be their shield and defender as they advance. Guide them, give them courage and the spirit of cooperation in this operation. May your grace return them all safely home, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOR COLLEAGUES WHO FALL IN ACTION

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, present nor future will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8: 38 - 39).

Prayer: O Lord, the source of life for those who put their trust in you. We pray for your servants who have gallantly fallen in this fight to bring peace to Nigeria. Accept, O Lord, their sacrificial lives and receive them to your eternal rest, this I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen,

FOR THOSE WHO ARE HOME SICK

Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bone, which thou has broken, may rejoice (Psalm 5: 8).

Prayer: Lord, the hearts of your gallant soldiers are broken by loneliness due to home desires and worries. Help them to know that you are with them as well as their families. Lift up their hearts to full communion with members through spiritual connectivity. Strengthen them during this noble duty. Let their trust in you remain constant through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THOSE ON GUARD/SENTRY POSTS

If the Lord does not protect the city, it is useless for the sentry to stand guard (Psalm 127:16).

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the lives of those detailed to perform this sacred duty of guarding lives and properties of the people. Open their spiritual eyes to see your heavenly army present with them on this duty. Defend them against all perils, violence, and hostilities that may be lurking around them, let your Captain of host from heaven be part of this unique assignment, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THE WOUNDED

If I lift up my eyes to the hills, where shall I find help? Help come from only the Lord, maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1 - 2).

Prayer: Thank you Lord that you have not promised us freedom from affliction of this life, but that we shall overcome. Grant to your children who are wounded in course of this patriotic, selfless and gallant assignment, the fortitude to overcome the agony of the wound sustained. You are the Lord who heals our wounds. Heal them now and renew my strength to continue with this battle. Wear on them, your spiritual armour. This I pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CONSECRATIONS

We with the divine authority from you O God, consecrate these graves and the entire cemetery that harbours the corpses of these patriotic, gallant and selfless fallen heroes which also shall be where we are to be when our times come, that their souls resting with You will experience Your peace until the day of resurrection, in the name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

OR

Mention other items and equipments that need dedications.

GOD'S HANDMADE

Text: Genesis 1:27 *"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."*

There were only two handmade persons in history. Genesis says that God "formed" Adam from earth and Eve from his rib. He spoke everything else into existence, but people He chose to model like a sculptor making a statue. However, no sculptor has been able to breathe life into his or her creations. Imagine God bending over the clay, carefully shaping Adam, deciding how tall he would be and other features in his body. Imagine Him later putting Adam into a deep sleep, taking a rib from him and fashioning it into the perfect partner, the most beautiful handmade woman the world has ever known. Imagine being Eve and opening your eyes for the first time, hovering over you is the shining face of your Maker. Then you're led to your husband.

God took His time to create us for a reason. We are wonderfully designed for the purpose of His glory. Therefore, just like Adam and Eve were charged to tend and explore the fabulous garden home God created, we too being in the same image and likeness of God are commissioned to take charge, dominate and express the God-life here on earth. We were made to always be in communion with Him. The choice is ours to either live in line with God's purpose or misuse our freewill by choosing to follow our sinful desire. As we begin this new year, let us remind ourselves that we are created in God's image. Our lives therefore should give glory to God our Creator. Happy New Year!

Prayer: *My Creator and my God, help me to see myself clearly as your handmade and fulfil your purpose in my life.*

Insight: We were specially made to be the reflection of God in love and deeds.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 1

A CROSSROAD

***Text**: **Genesis 3:6** "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."*

God must have told Adam and Eve the exciting story of their creation and probably the horrible story of Satan's rebellion. He surely warned them stay away from the tree in the middle of the garden. He must have urged them earnestly to stay away from it and be safe. Unfortunately, Eve was standing under the tree, looking at the bright fruits, listening to the crafty serpent. There she was, making a decision that will affect the rest of the world — even the rest of the universe for all time to come. If only she had knownt, she would have stayed away! There she was, having tete a tete with the serpent, reaching out, touching the fruit, smelling it, bringing it to her lips.

Eve was at the crossroad of making a decision, hearing the tempter, hearing her conscience, making excuses and justifications. Unfortunately, she fell into the temptation of making the wrong decision that brought a life irreparable damage to her, her husband and her progeny. We have all found ourselves in such a tempting situation in life, a crossroad of life-changing decision making. But the beautiful thing is, there is always a way out of every temptation. The best way is to resist the devil. Never negotiate with the devil and do not give him an opportunity in your life by falling for his deceit. The right path is always before you at the crossroad, but you have to resist the devil in order to see it.

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to resist the devil and follow the right path whenever I am at the crossroad of temptation.*

Insight: Brace up! You are never tempted beyond what you can handle.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 2

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Text: 1Timothy2:14 *"And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."*

The Bible teaches that the serpent deceived Eve — he tricked her. Furthermore, Paul says that Adam "was not the one deceived." That certainly explains why the whole Bible speaks of "the sin of Adam" that got us into all this mess. Eve's sin *was sin*. She chose her own way over God's. However, there is a difference between that sort of disobedience and the deliberate choice to disobey. The Bible says that Adam, was not deceived. That's shocking! He took the fruit from his wife and ate. Then he was ready to face the consequences of his action. His moment of truth required that he stood firm and rebuked the wife for disobeying God's instruction. However, he chose to join his wife in the act of disobedience. Even when he blamed his wife after being queried by God, his excuse did not spare him of divine verdict.

Have you ever been about to do something wrong, hesitated, recognized the call of your conscience and of the Holy Spirit, and then done it anyway? Why do we do it? Sometimes it's sheer selfishness: *I want what I want when I want it.* Sometimes it's pride or ignorance: *I know better than God*. Often, it is fear that pushes us into disobedience. Nevertheless, there is no justification for any act of disobedience since we all have that moment to decide either to obey or disobey God's instruction. We are thereby enjoined to stand by the truth of God's word in order to overcome all negative influence.

Prayer*: Merciful Father, please give me grace to overcome my own selfishness and pride.*

Insight: All that God requires of us is to trust and obey Him.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 3

CLOSED AND OPENED GATES

***Text**: **Genesis 3:15** "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."*

According to today's text, the day God declared enmity between humanity and the serpent but much more, something greater happened. That day, a shining gate was closed, but not forever. Another was opened, but also not forever. The second gate was not so beautiful—it would involve the torture and death of the Son of God—but it would lead to salvation, and those who enter it would regain that lost garden. We have learned that we are all children of God by way of creation—made in His image, intended to care for the world and all in it, intended to have a close friendship with God. That plan seemed to be derailed and in ruins that dark day in Eden. But God who has a way of fulfilling His plan can never be caught unaware. He already knew before the Fall what would happen and how to salvage it.

God's promise of redemption was made immediately after the fall of man. He never hesitated to help His creature even when He had to make His verdict. This shows that God is never short of options; He cannot be pushed to the wall. He is the Master Planner. Whatever setback or failure we experience in life cannot stop God from accomplishing His purpose in our lives. Therefore, we need to trust Him in every situation that He has a way out. Even when He is angry with us or punishing us for our errors, He is merciful enough to provide a way for us to come back to Him.

***Prayer**: Creator of open gate, take my hand so I can walk with You in the journey of life.*

Insight: God is eternally loving and not short of options to help His children.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 4

GOD'S MESSAGE TO SINNERS

***Text**: **Genesis 4:6-7** "So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.''*

Abel was a shepherd and had plenty of flocks to spare. Cain was a gardener, and he thought his offering of fruits and vegetables should be just as good. An offering of Cain's best could have been accepted with delight if it had been given as a freewill offering *along with* the required lamb. But not instead, Cain did not get to make his own rules. So now he was sulking. Imagine his shock when God spoke to him! "If you do what you know is right, you'll be accepted," He promised. Then He added a warning, "Sin is lying in wait for you." In other words, watch out—the devil is out to get you. Cain might have thought God would only speak to people who were doing everything right. However, he refused to heed divine warning, even when the message was directed to him in clear terms.

Lots of people think and act like Cain today. Though God reached out to him when he was in a state of rebellion, he went on to do what he had in mind by killing his innocent brother. God is still reaching out to sinners today through several messages of warning. Put yourself in Cain's place. Think about something you have done wrong or are angry about. Do you feel God is being unfair? Read the words God spoke to Cain and imagine Him saying them to you. What would be your reaction to the warning? What do you think God would do if you fail to heed His warning?

***Prayer**: Merciful Lord, give me grace to heed divine warning and amend my ways whenever I err.*

Insight: God never ceases speaking to a defiant sinner.

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

***Text**: **Matthew2:7**"Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared."*

The story of Epiphany as seen in today's text shows different strokes for different folks. The term "epiphany" comes from the Greek word "epiphaneia" meaning "manifestation". Being the commemoration of Christ's first manifestation to the Gentiles represented by the Magi is observed on 6 January (12th day of Christmas). It was a clear signal that God's programme of salvation is not only meant for the Jews but also to the Gentiles. However, while the Magi reacted to the manifestation by making a sincere effort to find where the King was born, Herod's determination was to terminate the new born King, showing insincere interest. Most of the Jews among whom the King was born were also indifferent to the event.

The intent of the Magi looking for the King was totally different from the intent of Herod. The former sought to worship and present gift to the new born King while the latter sought to kill him because he wanted to retain his throne at all cost. How sincere is our response when God reveals Himself to us? Do we really seek God to worship Him and offer our life to Him as a gift? Or do we seek with a wrong intent? God knows our wrong intent and would only make Himself available for those who sincerely seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Unfortunately, there is gross ignorance in the world and even in the Church today. Those who are supposed to direct people to Christ are not interested in knowing Him. We thereby need to make deliberate effort to seek and know Christ.

***Prayer**: Heavenly Father, manifest Yourself to me and help me to see You more clearly.*

Insight: Those who truly desire to seek Christ would not regard the pains of seeking after Him.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 6

STANDING ALONE WITH GOD

Text*: *Genesis 6:9 *"This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God."*

Noah, who was Enoch's great-grandson, walked with God just like his great grandfather did. The generation of Noah was disappointing to God. Now there was almost no one at all, on the whole planet, who loved God. *It was recorded that* God's heart was broken that He created man. Now the whole world was to be destroyed, but God planned to spare Noah and his family. Noah stood alone with God and God Himself was ready to identify with him and his family because they stood out to be different in their evil generation. He was a just man that walked with God in obedience. His life of obedience prompted the first major covenant between God and man in the Bible. It was an unconditional covenant accompanied with a sign of God's faithfulness from generation to generation (Genesis 9:8-17).

Just like in the days of Noah, our present generation is full of evil and every inclination of the thoughts of the human is only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5). Our world is full of corruption, sexual immorality and all sorts of wickedness. However, God is searching for those who will walk with Him in the New Covenant. God anticipates those whom He would write His law in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34). He looks forwards to seeing a generation of believers who would stand against the tide of the present age just like Noah did. God's desire thereby for us as Christians is to walk with Him in uprightness as His people of covenant.

***Prayer**: Loving Father, help me to be determined to be Your covenant child even in this evil generation.*

Insight: Those who walk with God are always ready to be in covenant with Him.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 7

ASCRIBING GLORY TO GOD

***Text*: Genesis 24:48** *"And I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son."*

Abraham had committed a difficult task to his chief servant more so with an oath. The chief servant realised that he could not do it by himself so he lifted up his voice in prayer to God for help. God came through for Him. Divine arrangement was so evident that everything happened in succession without stress or delay. The assumed difficult task became very easy to accomplish for him. He immediately worshipped and ascribed all glory to God who has helped to achieve the success. Getting Rebecca as wife for Isaac and convincing her as well as her family wouldn't have been possible without the help of God. So, he never attributed his success to his own wisdom, eloquence or diligence.

Navigating through life daily is indeed a herculean task but we have God to lean on. So, if there are great things happening in your life, remember all blessings and success come from God alone. We are never self-sufficient and thereby always need to realise our reliance upon Him. Just like Abraham's chief servant in today's text, we need to acknowledge the fact that our success story or achievement is not possible without the help of God. Therefore, as you encounter success and prosperity, be careful how you handle it before God and man. Enjoy and rejoice in all that God is doing in your life. Enjoy His blessings as He raises you up in your family, business, ministry etc. Be reminded that you are never in charge. So, God who has made it possible deserves all the glory.

***Prayer*:** *Lord Jesus, take all the glory for all my achievements and accomplishments.*

Insight: Success is not by accident or luck; it is a result of diligence, hard work and God's favour.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 8

WHY BOTHER?

Text*: *Job 2:9 *"Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!' "*

Job had lost his wealth and his health. That was bad. He and his wife had lost their children. *All* of them! That was so terrible that nothing else really mattered much. The wife was angry and in pain. So was Job. Yes, she spoke hastily. They both thought God wasn't listening anymore, and both were tempted to think, "Why bother?" But Mrs Job said it. Perhaps she *was* truly turning her back on God, refusing to find comfort or to express trust in Him as Job repeatedly did, despite his anger, fear, and discouragement. But isn't it also possible that she just needed some comfort, too? She must have thought, having lost everything else, that she was about to lose her husband too, so why not hasten the process?

If Job had helped millions over the centuries to realize that it's okay to tell God our true feeling, then perhaps Mrs Job can be an example, too. Maybe Job's answer, "Don't be silly. We take the good days from God, we can take the bad ones, too," helped her to regain some perspective. Maybe when someone we know is allowing anger and confusion to overcome the trust, we can lovingly remind each other of God's care, too. The devil can use anyone around us to amplify our pain by making us to believe that serving God is not worth the pain. However, as Christians, we should be wary of giving up on God or being an agent of discouragement to others in time of trials.

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, help me to maintain the balance of admitting my true feelings before you as Your honest child, and also to trust You no matter what. Amen*

Insight: God cares and deserves the loyalty of His children come what may.

GOD'S CHANNEL OF BLESSINGS

***Text*: Genesis 12:1,3** *"Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family. And from your father's house, to a land that I will show you . . . .All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you.' "*

We are probably familiar with the story of Abram. God told him to leave the metropolis of Ur, a city of learning, libraries, high culture, and idolatry, and go to an unfamiliar land that He would show him. The land God shown him turned out to be wilderness, where they wandered around from one place to another, living in tents. It seemed that one of the things God wanted for Abram and his family was the simplicity of living close to the land. So, all their dependence would be on Him and they would know it. Everywhere he went, Abram built altars for God. Although he made mistakes, some of them huge ones, what people remembered most about him was that he was a man of faith and channel of divine blessings to the whole world.

We all want to identify with Abraham and his blessings. No wonder we sing, "Abraham's blessings are mine ..." Consequently, before we can become channel of blessing just like Abraham, are we really ready to follow his example of obedience, faith, simplicity, patience, selflessness and sacrifice? As Christians, we see ourselves as Abraham's heirs to divine blessings and so we need to emulate him (Galatians 3:29). However, we also need to learn some lessons from his mistake which would have cost him the fulfilment of God's promise. The ability to heed divine instruction on every situation will help us to overcome the embarrassment of human errors and weaknesses. Therefore, we become channels of blessings to our generation when we corporate with God in obedience and faith.

***Prayer**: Faithful Lord, bless me and make my life a channel of Your blessings to my generation.*

Insight: It is expedient that Abraham's heirs are channels of divine blessings.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 10

THE LAUGHABLE PROMISE

***Text**: **Genesis 18:10** "And He said, 'I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.' (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him)."*

Sarah peeked out of the tent flap to see who her husband was talking to: three strangers. They would need food and rest. Sure enough, here came Abraham. "Hurry. Get three cups of our best flour; knead it and make bread" (Genesis 18:6). While she did all this, she listened to the men talking outside the tent. She heard one say that next year she would have a child. If she could hear them, they could probably hear her, so she must have tried to smother the laughter that bubbled up at this outlandish statement. Sarah was 89 years old! She had long since given up hope of a child of her own. Imagine her embarrassment when the Man (the Bible says it was the LORD) asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" "I didn't laugh!" Sarah protested hurriedly. But less than a year later, God had the last laugh. Sarah, at the age of 90, had a baby!

Sometimes God makes promises that seem laughable and farfetched. Abraham and Sarah found it funny to hear God making an emphatic promise to fulfil His promise they had waited several years for its fulfilment. Are you tired of waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise? Learn from Abraham. The promise of God may sound funny, impossible or laughable but we must know that God is not a joker. He is not a man that He should lie or fail to fulfil His promise. Let us therefore continue to trust in Him for in Him there is no failure or disappointment.

***Prayer**: Lord, teach me to trust in You and patiently stand on Your promises in Jesus Name.*

Insight: The promises of God can never be too good to be true.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 11

THE GOD WHO SEES

***Text**: **Genesis 16:13** "Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, 'Have I also here seen Him who sees me?' "*

Hagar had it rough. She was a slave and was compelled to be a surrogate for her mistress This was a common custom in those times, and Hagar was no doubt familiar with it. But that didn't make it any easier for her. Hagar is recorded in the Bible as having God speak personally to her, not once, but twice. This is an incredible honour, especially in the eyes of those who thought she was only a slave. Hagar was pregnant for her mistress' husband as seen in today's text. She couldn't stand the maltreatment from her mistress anymore and she ran away. But God came through for her. He knew she had to endure a little more (Genesis 16:9). Hagar described God who spoke to her. She called Him "the God who sees". A slave woman, received personal attention and care from the God who really *saw* her for who she was.

God who cared for a slave like Hagar still cares today no matter your social status. God sees and knows every situation surrounding you. He monitors His purpose in your life to ensure its accomplishment. So, whenever you feel rejected, oppressed or depressed, rather than thinking of suicide, remember that God is watching over you to fulfil His purpose. The Lord sees all your secret pains. He knows about your predicament and He is willing to help you out. All you need is to be open to Him so he can assist you. Follow His instructions and you will never regret it.

***Prayer**: All-seeing Father, come through for me in my critical time that I need help. Amen.*

Insight: God sees and comes through for the helpless.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 12

WHEN GOD IS INVOLVED

***Text**: **Genesis 24:50, 58** "Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, 'The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good.' Then they called Rebekah and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go.'"*

After showing much kindness to a stranger, he asked "Whose daughter are you?" Imagine how Rebekah felt when the man told her family that he was the servant of their relative Abraham, his mission, his prayers and how he met Rebekah. Her father and brother recognized the hand of God. "We can't say anything either way—this is a God thing!" They asked Rebekah, and she said, "I'll go." Then they blessed her. The only reason this decision was so apparently easy to make is that this family had already decided to follow the will of God. Moreover, Abraham had prayed for God's involvement in the process of getting a wife for his son, Isaac (Genesis 24:7). Additionally, the servant too had prayed for divine intervention in the difficult task given to him (Genesis 24:12-14).

When God is involved in your endeavour, He will make even difficult process easy for you (Psalm 37:5). However, when the will of God is very clear, doing otherwise would attract serious consequences. That God is involved does not really mean there will be no resistance or opposition, but He can use even the opposition to fulfil His purpose (Proverbs 16:7). The question we thereby need to ask ourselves is if our ways are pleasing to God. Are we really comfortable to involve God in our endeavours? Then how ready are we to submit ourselves to God's will when it seems not favourable to us or in accordance with our expectations (Luke 22:42)? We therefore need to seek the face of God in all our endeavours.

***Prayer**: Almighty God, please let Your mighty hand be upon me for good in Jesus name.*

Insight: God's involvement in an endeavour is a surest way to make the process easy.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 13

BLESSED ASSURANCE

***Text**: **Genesis 26:24** "And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham,' do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake.'"*

It all started with the wells. Isaac's father, Abraham, had dug them long before Isaac was born. He was denied usage of them three times. By now, Isaac must have been pretty frustrated. Water is essential for life everywhere, but in a dry land like Canaan, it was a life and death matter. Wars were fought over wells. But Isaac didn't want to be like that. So, he moved yet again. This time, the Bible says, no one tried to take his well away. So, he named it Rehoboth (Wide-Open Spaces), saying, "Now God has given us plenty of space to spread out in the land" (Genesis 26:22). What happened next was very interesting. That very night, God appeared to him and blessed him, repeating and renewing the covenant promises he had made to Abraham.

The timing of God's blessing to Isaac relates to the fact that it was not only when he chose peace, but also went out of his way to maintain it. Imagine how much work it was to take down his big tents, pack up his family, servants, and possessions, to drive those large flocks and herds to new locations. Refusing conflict, even when it was offered, meant that much to Isaac. The assurance of divine blessing can be threatened when we decide to live a life of conflict rather than peace. We put ourselves in a desperate situation and involve in unhealthy competition when we are not aware of what plan God has for us. However, an assurance of God's blessing will make us keep calm in the face of conflict and opposition.

***Prayer**: Heavenly Father, teach me to keep calm in the face of conflict through the assurance of Your blessings.*

INSIGHT: The assurance of divine blessings is for those who love peace.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 14

GOD'S PRESENCE IN AN UNUSUAL SITUATION

***Text**: **Genesis 28:16-17** "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.'And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!' "*

Jacob was fleeing for his life after deceiving Esau and then his father. He fell asleep and had a dream. A ladder reached all the way to heaven, and he saw angels going up and down the ladder. Then God Himself appeared in Jacob's dream to renew the promises He had made to Abraham and to Isaac. How could that be? When Jacob awoke, he felt a sense of awe, almost like fear. "This is the gate of heaven!" he exclaimed. He set up the stone he used as pillow as a little altar and prayed. It was a memorable experience for Jacob seeing God in an unusual situation. He never expected it. He never knew he would experience God's presence in such an uncomfortable sleeping condition.

Today is Armed Forces Remembrance Day, a day to commemorate the end of the Nigerian Civil War and honour members of the Armed Forces of Nigeria. Though the impact of the war was gruesome, the presence of God in our life as a nation can be an awesome experience. Our country is still going through some terrible conditions that would have denied most of us sound sleep today. Terrorism, corruption, kidnapping, economic hardship, insecurity etc, are enough reasons to have sleepless nights. Many have lost their loved ones in the service of our nation or as victims of insecurity. Such gory memories are not sweet to imagine. Nevertheless, in these unusual conditions, we can still experience the awesome presence of God. Therefore, God's presence is an experience to desire in order to allay our fear and give us the assurance of a better future in the midst of the present uncertainties.

***Prayer**: Omnipresent God, let me enjoy Your awesome presence in every situation of my life.*

Insight: The awesome presence of God is a game changer.

A REASON TO PRAISE GOD

***Text**: **Genesis 29:35** "And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'Now I will praise the LORD.' Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing."*

We can certainly imagine what a woman's feelings might be to know she was married to someone who didn't want her but preferred her sister. It must have been so painful and difficult. When she had her fourth son, and the Bible records that she said, "This time, I'll praise the LORD." And she named him Judah, which means "Praise God." Maybe Leah had learned the difficult lesson that we must learn to praise God no matter what. Perhaps Leah had learned that the way to make the best of a bad situation is to give it to God and just live as His child, patiently taking what comes and waiting for God to make it into His grand plan.

Are you also feeling rejected and unloved? Do you find yourself in a situation where you feel that life has not been favourable to you? God has a reason for every situation though it may not be clear to us now. There was a story of a slave who believed in God and made his faith known to his master. One day, he saved his master from a ferocious animal and in the process got his fingers chopped off. He continued to ask why God would allow him to have such terrible experience. Later. When the king died, slaves were to be sacrificed as part of the burial rites. He was among those selected for the sacrifice but was rejected because of his chopped fingers. Then he realised that he had reasons to praise God. Therefore, in every situation, there is a reason to praise God.

***Prayer**: Gracious God, You deserve all my praise; help me learn how to praise You in all situations.*

Insight: There will always be a reason to praise God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 17 - 18

WHEN GOD LISTENS

Text*: *Genesis 30:22 *"Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb."*

Rachel followed the Canaanite custom of giving her maid to her husband to have children that would count as hers, since she believed she owned the maid. But the maid had two sons, and Rachel considered herself to have "won" in some kind of contest with her sister. Then Leah did the same, got two more sons from the maid, and even had two more sons herself. Poor Rachel! And then God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and had a son. Of course, we know God never forgot Rachel, even if it felt like it to her. But then it is said that He *listened* to her. Did Rachel finally remember to pray about the situation, instead of trying to fix it herself?

Have you ever tried to fix a problem without asking God? How did that work out? Have you learned to pray first? And then to *wait for God to reveal His plan?* That is the hard part, of course. Rachel might well have prayed at the beginning. Abraham and Sarah certainly did while they were waiting for the son God had promised. But when things didn't happen as quickly as they had hoped, they jumped in. Never a good idea! What are you waiting on God for right now? He will definitely listen and attend to those who continue to wait on Him by faith. He will never ignore the cry of those who trust in Him, because He is a compassionate God.

***Prayer*:** Merciful Lord, hear my prayer and let my cry come unto You.

Insight: Waiting on God is never a waste of time.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

***Text**: **Genesis 32:27-28** "So He said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.'"*

After several years of sojourn in a foreign land, Jacob was heading home with his family, back to where he had been raised as a boy. Then he heard Esau was on his way *with 400 men*. He was scared and made all kinds of arrangements. Then he sent his family across the ford of the Jabbok and tried to sleep. Jacob wrestled with a stranger all night long. At dawn, when the man said, "Let me go," Jacob said, "Not until you bless me." The man asked a strange question. "What is your name?" Jacob told him, and He changed his name from Jacob (supplanter) to Israel (one who wrestled with God). Before now, Abram's name was changed to Abraham and Sarai was changed to Sarah by God.

Name is a very important aspect of someone's identity and personality. The Bible says "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches ..." (Proverbs 22:1). While we have people who bear beautiful names but with ugly character, some also have meaningless names that they transform by their great personality. It is very important to note that the importance attached to names is about the personality. People are sometimes called names based on situation surrounding their birth or their behaviour. God is very interested in the names we bear not just because of the meaning but also the type of personality He wants us to be. He wants us to be a person He can be proud of and He wants to identify with the personality we are known for.

***Prayer**: Faithful Lord, let my name give glory and honour to Your Name.*

Insight: God is interested in our identity.

ALL FOR THE BEST

***Text**: **Genesis 50:20** "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."*

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers who sold him into slavery.So, the question is—how did he react, while everything was difficult and confusing? Did he fuss and complain? Did he get angry and turn his back on God? Did he lose his faith, or give up? No, Joseph used the time to become more steadfast in his faith. He used the time to learn to pray in dark circumstances, and to learn to trust more, not less. Joseph used his trials to grow. And so, he was ready when his big opportunity came. He was second in command over the entire land of Egypt, able to help countless thousands avoid death by starvation. After the death of their father, his brothers were afraid Joseph would treat them badly in revenge of what they did to him. However, today's text is a mature reply he gave his brothers when they begged him for forgiveness in the name of their father.

We don't know how our stories will end but God knows. So, the question is, how are we reacting *now*, while everything is often difficult and confusing? Are we fussing and complaining? Are we getting angry or turning our backs on God? While going through difficult times and trials as Christians, we need to know that God allows everything for a purpose. We should therefore not feel bad when we are betrayed or treated badly by others. God allows such experience for a purpose. Remember that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

***Prayer**: Great God, let unforeseen circumstances work out for the best and the fulfilment of Your purpose in my life.*

Insight: God can turn ashes into beauty.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 23 - 24

LAUNCHING OUT IN FAITH

***Text**: **Exodus 2:2-3** "So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. [3] But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank."*

Just try to imagine taking reeds or bulrushes, weaving a basket the size of a bassinet or car seat, lining it with pitch, and being careful—it can't leak at all! In your mind, wrap the baby in blankets, put a lid over it so that crocodiles won't eat the baby, and go down to the boat ramp. Set the basket afloat and let go. Take your hands off the basket and watch the current take it. If it is your baby, can you even imagine actually doing this? Only one thing would make you willing—a worse threat. Like a Pharaoh that wants to kill your child. Like trying desperately to keep him quiet and hidden for three long months. Only now, he's starting to teethe, and it's getting impossible. So you go to the river, you let your baby go, and you turn your back and walk away. And you pray.

It is sometimes hard to trust God. It's not *God* we don't trust, it's just that we sometimes find ourselves in terrifying situations, which don't always come out as we wish they would. This is a call for us to let go like Jochebed and let God have His way in those seemingly difficult situations. No matter how difficult taking a step of faith is, it's a risk worth taking. There are situations in life where you have to do something, else your inaction can be too costly to bear. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit or even your instinct backed up with prayer.

***Prayer**: Dear Lord, teach me what to do and trust You, even in terrifying circumstances.*

Insight: The greatest risk in life is to do nothing.

AN UNUSUAL COURAGE

Text*: *Exodus 2:4 *"And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him."*

One would wonder how old Miriam was? Five? Seven? Ten, maybe? Probably not older than that. Her heart must have been pounding enough to make her sick. What if crocodiles got baby brother? What if soldiers found him? What if nothing at all happened? Would they leave him there or take him home at night? Do this again the next day! She and Mother knew Pharaoh's daughter bathed here at about this time. They had watched her before and thought she looked kind. They were hoping. What were they hoping? Miriam wasn't even sure. Here came the princess with her maidservants. Miriam held her breath. "This must be one of the Hebrew babies," said the princess, looking sad. Hebrew slaves were *not* supposed to bother the royal family. But Miriam was bold enough to suggest a care giver for the boy and it came through. Miriam ran for her mother, joy giving her feet wings. And in just a little while, Jochebed and Miriam carried their baby home, in full view of everyone, soldiers and all. They could keep him! Mother would be *paid* for taking care of him.

Imagine Miriam was not bold enough to make such a proposal. It was an unusual courage from a girl of her age. We are encouraged to lead courageous lives even in the midst of daunting challenges. Such courage creates opportunities, enables growth and spurs creativity. Remember that if you spend your life running away from any risk of failure, you may never discover your potentials and what you are capable of achieving.

***Prayer**: Dear God, give me faith and courage to take risks to save situations. Amen.*

Insight: Courage is not the absence of fear but the control of it.

SOJOURNING THROUGH LIFE

***Text**: **Exodus 2:21-22** "Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. And she bore him a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land.'"*

Moses, at 40 years old, had already had a fairly eventful life. He had been raised for a while by his own Hebrew family. His mother and father had taught him as carefully as they could about faith in the one true God. Then Moses had moved into the palace of Egypt where he learned about the worship of different gods, literature, government and politics. He also learned that his people were being treated as slaves. When he saw an Egyptian beating one of his people, he killed him and buried the body in the sand. His life was threatened so he had to flee. He got married and took care of sheep. While in the desert, Moses also grew closer to God. He was impressed to write down the stories of Creation, the Flood, and the early patriarchs.

Moses enjoyed a life full of mysteries and stories. He showed by the name he gave his first son that he recognized he was just a "sojourner" in the land. There he learned how to listen to God. God who calls us out of our boxes, waits, teaches, and patiently makes us ready for whatever He has planned. Let us create the awareness in ourselves that we are foreigners in this world. This will remind us of how temporal our life is and how limited our opportunities are (1 Chronicles 29:15). Bearing in mind that we are strangers here on earth, let us thereby live our lives to glorify God to whom we are accountable (1 Peter 2:11-12).

***Prayer**: **Heavenly Father,** give me grace to maximize the limited time I have here on earth for Your glory in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: Life is an opportunity meant to be utilized for the glory of God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 29 - 30

A BURNING CALL

***Text**: **Exodus 3:9-10** "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."*

There was Moses, living in the desert, writing his books, caring for his family and his sheep. Then one day he saw a bush burning but didn't burn up. God showed up in his life in a new way, with a new call. A call Moses didn't want at all. Can you argue with God? It must be possible, because lots of people in the Bible did it. God actually had to adapt His plans more than once to get people to go along with His calls. In Moses' case, God promised that He would get Aaron to go with him. But finally, reluctantly, Moses agreed. God had taken eighty years to train and prepare him for a role that would not only combine leader, father, lawgiver, and judge, but in many ways, even prefigure the role of Jesus as Messiah.

God had plans. Though Moses argued, he was willing to follow God. He could have said no. You can be like Moses. Argue and ask questions if you have to, but say yes! The general calling to salvation or special calling to ministry can come either at young or old age. You may have several reasons to say "no" and reject God outrightly. But do not! God may not plan several ways to convince you like He did to Moses. Be willing to accept His offer even when you ask questions to clear your doubts. Your argument should not come out of a hardened heart and arrogant spirit but from a willing and humble spirit.

***Prayer**: **F**aithful God, do not reject me when I feel reluctant to answer Your calling but give me grace to accomplish Your purpose. Amen.*

Insight: God does not call people based on their ability but their availability.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 31 - 32

PLAYING SECOND FIDDLE

***Text**: **Exodus 4:16** "So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God."*

We know a lot about the story of Moses, the great deliverer of Israel, but we tend to forget Aaron's part. Have you ever thought about what it would have been like to be Aaron? Suddenly, Aaron seemed to have received a call from God to go to the desert and meet Moses. And he didn't appear to have argued as his brother did. God told Moses that Aaron would be his spokesman. Though Aaron was the elder brother, Moses was placed over him by God. So they went back to Egypt, and throughout the whole story, Aaron did all the talking, and Moses got all the credit.

Have you ever had to "play second fiddle"? How did you take it? You can be an Aaron to someone less qualified or younger than you. Take it with faith as your work for God. After all, it's an orchestral term, and second violin is a pretty good spot! If there were only one violin in the whole orchestra, there would be very few pieces they could play. Whatever role God has designed for you, play it diligently. God who gives you a lesser role knows how to reward you based on the role He gives you. Do not envy a bigger role of someone else at the expense of your own primary role that is considered lesser. Let us see ourselves as parts of the body with several functions and roles. Remember that the parts that we think are less honourable, we treat with special honour (1 Corinthians 12:22-24).

***Prayer**: Gracious Father, give me the grace to play my assigned role effectively to the glory of Your Name.*

Insight: Those who refuse to play second fiddle may end up playing no fiddle at all.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 33 - 34

A VICTORY WORTH CELEBRATING

Text*: *Exodus 15:20-21 *"Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them: 'Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea.'"*

Moses, Aaron and Miriam were siblings used by God for the deliverance of His people. Then came the miracle. God had made a dry path through the sea, the entire throng of freed slaves had walked through, and Pharaoh's army had been defeated by the waves. Miriam was leading the dance of celebration. She might be old, but she could still leap and sing praises to God. Did you ever wonder why they called her "Miriam the prophetess"? We are not given much detail about her life. Perhaps, all through those years of waiting, she had kept her faith. Or she must have been part of Moses' ministry receiving direct message from God too (Numbers 12:1-2).

Miriam was one of the leaders of Israel at the formation stage. Even when her role was not a major one, she led the women to celebrate the great deliverance of Israel. Just like in the world of football, only eleven players are active on the field at any given moment to win the trophy. However, all the players on the substitute bench, the coaching crew, the fans and supporters celebrate the win. The joy of the win cut across all the interested parties and not limited to only those who play a major role in the game. In the same vein, we are encouraged as Christians to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15-18). We should be willing to identify with others who celebrate success even when we are not directly affected or involved in the process.

***Prayer**: Everlasting Father, do not allow the celebration, miracle and success of others to be my sorrow.*

Insight: Celebrating the accomplishment of others is a sign of maturity and healthy relationship.

GIFTED RELEVANT AND USEFUL

Text*: *Exodus 31:6 *"And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you."*

Are you good with your hands? Do you like to make things, or paint, or draw? Or do you know someone who can do these things well? Did it ever occur to you that these are gifts of God? Today's text is an interesting passage. The people of Israel have been out of Egypt for two months, and they are settling down to create something God had planned—a mobile, portable place of worship called Tabernacle. This passage doesn't just say God gave Bezalel, Oholiab and the other craftspeople the skills to make things. Of course, we know all our abilities and talents come from God. God equipped them all for His use. So, it's no longer a thing of showing prowess in talents, craftsmanship; it's a mission. It's God's work.

If you are good with your hands, do you find ways to do God's work with them? If you are good at mathematics, science or writing, do you watch for ways those skills can minister to others? If you sing, do you sing for God's glory? If you have a strong, athletic body, do you use it for His glory? It all came from Him. He probably has big dreams for how you can be relevant to His kingdom and useful for others. Why don't you ask Him how He wants you to be relevant and useful? God has deposited some potentials and skills in all of us. We should be able to realise that all we have is a gift from God and belongs to Him (Romans 11:36; James 1:17).

***Prayer**: Gracious Lord, help me to be relevant and useful to Your kingdom project in Jesus.*

Insight: You are gifted to be useful and relevant to God's kingdom.

GOD ON OUR SIDE

***Text**: **Numbers 14:9** "Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."*

Moses had led the people of Israel out of Egypt and slavery. Now they had reached the borders of Canaan. Moses sent twelve spies, one from each tribe. Two of those men were Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, and Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim. These two men were men of faith. When other ten spies opined that it would be impossible to occupy the land, Caleb and Joshua encourage the people not to rebel against God. They had different spirit and mentality. They believed that with God on their side they would occupy the land. They also believed that their God is mightier and superior to the gods of the land. While the gods of the land had abandoned the people, the God of Israel was ready to go with His own people.

What does it mean, exactly to say that God is on our side? It means that we don't have any cause to fear challenges because God is bigger than our challenges. Though we have several obstacles to cross and several challenges to overcome, with God on our side, there is no cause for alarm. His presence with us should boost our morale in the face of insurmountable challenges of life on our way to the promised land. Provided we do not rebel against God, He is willing to be with us in all situation and fight our battles. All we need to do is to trust in Him and follow His way. We can therefore confidently say: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans

***Prayer**: Almighty God, open my eyes to know that You are always with me even in the face of difficult challenges.*

Insight: Victory is sure God being on our side.

A CALL TO RETURN TO GOD

Text*: *Hosea 14:1 *"Return, Israel to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall."*

When one is away from God, a decision to return comes only when the person comes back to his senses. Before we leave the place of God to the place of dishonour, one must have gone out of his senses. Prophet Hosea looked at the situation of the people of Israel, who they were before, the kind of things the people were enjoying before they left God because of sin and went their own way. He weighed both the past and the present. So, he made a call for the people to see reasons why they should leave their sins which led to their downfall and return to God who is merciful to forgive and accept them back.

Do we really examine ourselves to return back to God? The question here is that how do we examine ourselves? We have been living in sin and disobedience to God in lies, stealing, fornication, adultery, cheating, drunkenness etc. Some of us as Christians are going back to our old way of life.These sins have been the cause of setback, sickness, failure, poverty, downfall, calamity and some other evil that befell us. Instead of getting to the root of our problem, we have shifted blame and even prayed for healing or breakthrough. We need to return to God like the prodigal son who said "I will arise and go to my father and I will say 'father I have sinned against heaven and against you' ". When we do this, God will forgive us our sins, welcome us back and bless us.

***Prayer**: Merciful Lord, give me the grace to return to You in genuine repentance in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: God is calling all sinners to return to Him in genuine repentance.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 41 - 42

A REWARDING DEVOTION

Text*: *Exodus 33:11 *"So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle."*

Joshua, son of Nun, was Moses' aide. Did you know he even went up on the mountain with Moses when he got the Ten Commandments from God? Yet there's no record that either Moses or God chose him for this post. It seemed that Joshua, as a young man, just began to find ways to be with Moses and help him in his heavy task. Interestingly, according to today's text, God would speak with Moses face to face and then Moses would go back to the people. but his young aide, Joshua did not leave the tent. What did Joshua talk with God about during those private times? This is what we may not know. But what we know is that he later became a godly leader and was actually chosen as Moses' successor.

Have you seen someone you look up to as a godly person? Are there opportunities for you to shadow that person, helping in whatever ways you can? Would you be willing to take years of training to serve God in some future capacity, by serving Him daily now, in all the ways you can think of? Unfortunately, today we have a generation of impatient Christians who are not willing to be trained or mentored in the way of godliness. We are either ready to cut corners or follow a mischievous path to get to the top. Additionally, do you spend time on your own with God? Don't leave too quickly. Create time for devotion as a daily routine. It is highly rewarding.

***Prayer*:** *Father Lord, train me to be faithful and prepare me for whatever plan you have for my future. Amen.*

Insight: He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.

EYES FOR THE TRUTH

***Text**: **Joshua 2:12-13** "Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."*

Rahab must have been paying attention. She knew the stories about the Israelites how God had delivered them from Egypt and fought for them in their journey so far. So, when the spies came, she took them in. But she wasn't the only one who realized their true business. When the king sent to her to ask about them, telling her they were spies, she hid the men under stalks of flax she had laid out on her roof. She sent the men on their way and smuggled the spies out. Against everything she had probably been taught all her life, Rahab recognized new truth when she saw it. And she begged for mercy, not only for herself but for her entire extended family and everyone who belonged to them.

That's the kind of God we serve. He would have loved it if all of Jericho had turned itself over to Him. The destruction would never have happened. Try to imagine—if you had been Rahab, taught about Canaanite gods your whole life, would you have been able to recognize the truth? Would you have changed your whole belief and practice to follow God? Have you done anything like that in your life so far? Many today are enslaved by beliefs that make it difficult for them to see the light of the truth. Even when some hear the truth from the Word of God every day, it remains meaningless to them because they are blindfolded in ignorance (1 Corinthians 1:18). Therefore, we can only know the truth if our eyes open by faith.

***Prayer**: Faithful Lord, open my eyes to always see and walk daily in the light of Your truth.*

Insight: Faith is the gateway to harnessing the promises and purposes of God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Genesis 45 - 47

A GREAT COMMISSION

***Text**: **Judges 6:14** "Then the LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?' "*

Anybody would think Gideon was used to seeing angels any day of the week. He says: "With *me*, my master? If God is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all the miracle-wonders our parents and grandparents told us about, telling us, 'Didn't God deliver us from Egypt?' The fact is, God has nothing to do with us—he has turned us over to Midian" (Judges 6:13). Then, when the angel gave him a mission, Gideon argued about it. He asked for a sign, got it, asked for another sign, got it and asked again for another sign. And God kept giving them to him. Gideon got all the assurance he needed from God until he had no more reason to disobey God's order.

Is God calling you? So, the lesson for you is, if you're not sure, *just obey!* If you're timid, *just obey!* If you have to ask for a sign, do it, and then *just obey!* If you still aren't sure and have to ask again, clearly God will understand with you at least until you start deliberately taking advantage of Him. Just trust and obey God! There is no other way to be happy than trusting and obeying God. He cannot send you for an assignment without backing you up. He is too faithful to abandon you for failure (1Thessalonians 5:24). You cannot afford to turn down divine directive as disobedience to divine order attracts grave consequences. God has given you His words and He will not deny you.

***Prayer**: My Lord and my King, equip and use me as an instrument of Your glory. Amen*

Insight: God's command is not an option to be considered but to be obeyed.

THE BEAUTY OF CREATION

Text*: *Genesis 1:31 *"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day."*

Success has principles. These principles were demonstrated all through by God Himself in the story of creation. Today's text says that "God saw all that He had made and it was very good". Rereading the text again with emphasis on the word "*made"* shows that something was done to bring about the beautiful creation. Creation was a project of God and for Him to actualize it, He took some physical actions as recorded in Genesis 1:31. We can also take a clue from Isaiah 48: 13 *"Mine hand also hath laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together". God is therefore a successful Designer and His work is very good.*

When you see the beauty of creation, it is a reminder that God made the universe and sustains it. The creation is a beautiful design made by God to glorify Himself. It is the fruit of God's labour after which He rested and continues with the sustenance of His beautiful work. Therefore, do not be deceived, anyone who desires to be successful must work and be excellent at it just like our heavenly Father. Faith without works is dead dear believers. God knew exactly what He wanted to achieve and He was prepared for it. In like manner, we are called to have work goals and work towards excellently actualizing them. As people created in the image of God, we must manifest the express image of our Creator by following His example.

Prayer*: Heavenly Father and Creator of the universe, let the beauty of work reflect in my life and my endeavours.*

Insight: The beauty of creation shows that the Maker is a diligent Designer.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 1 - 3

THE DANGER OF AN UNTAMED LUST

Text: Genesis 49:3-4 *"Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it - He went up to my couch."*

Today's text mentions excellency of dignity and excellency of power as the prerogatives of the birth right which Reuben would have enjoyed had he not forfeited them by his sin. Reuben was Israel's first son and should have received the special privileges of the oldest son, but because he had sexual relations with his father's concubine, Bilhah (Genesis 35:22), these privileges were given to Joseph's sons and Judah. Beyond the act of sinful lust, Reuben's action by sleeping with his father's concubine was seen as challenging his father's authority and prestige. In Israel's family history, Reuben's name is not listed as the first son (1 Chronicles 5:1-2). It is worthy to note as a matter of history that no king, judge, or prophet is recorded as having sprung from the tribe of Reuben.

In every sin, is embedded a natural consequence and every action a repercussion. Therefore, any man who must succeed must watch his ways and consistently seek to do the right thing so as not to lose it all to some careless moments. Many a great man have come to ruin because of their untamed lust. Often it is sexual lust; it could also be lust for money, alcohol, position, property or power. So many people with promising future have ruined their lives because of their lack of self-control. The enemy knows your area of vulnerability and he is willing to attack you from such area. Remember that your untamed lust removes your spiritual immunity and exposes you to ruin.

Prayer*: Holy Spirit, please help me to build the character that is consistent with Your expectations in Jesus Name. Amen.*

Insight: Uncontrolled lusts lead to personal and family ruin.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 4 - 6

THE VALUE OF REST

***Text*: Genesis 2:2** *"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done"*

God rested on the seventh day after the six days of creation activity. God is omnipotent so He did not need to rest but He did rest. God will not grow tired or weary and His understanding, no one can fathom (Isaiah 40:28). So, His rest was not out of exhaustion but cessation from the work of creation because He had completed it. It was a purposeful stop. It is also meant to be a model for us that if the all-powerful untiring God could rest, we who are His creatures should follow a regular pattern of ceasing from our labours. Consequently, a lifestyle of day-to-day uninterrupted labour is neither good for us nor pleasing to God (Psalm 127:2). Our body system is designed to break down when it works beyond its limit.

We also can take a cue from God and pause purposely from time to time to reinvigorate since we are capable of growing weary. Rest entails detaching ourselves from our normal work routine. It is essential to our mental, emotional and physical health. Prioritizing rest can mean an increased output for us and inevitable success in our chosen fields. This is a call to discipline ourselves in order to know what to do per time but most importantly to take decisions that would propel us to success. We should avoid the extremes of working without resting and resting without working. While the former is called "workaholism" the latter is referred to as "laziness". As Christians, we are encouraged to be hardworking but we should note that the value of rest cannot be overemphasized.

***Prayer**: Dear Father, bless my labour with fruitfulness so that I will not overlabour myself.*

Insight: There is no reward for burnouts; only results are celebrated.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 7 - 9

GOD'S MERCIFUL WILL

***Text**: **2 Peter 3:9** "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promises, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

A lot of people are mocking God's word and the Lord Jesus Christ seeing the delay in His second coming.But God is holding back His judgment so that many may have a longer and hopefully better opportunity to hear the gospel and come to repentance, have faith in Jesus Christ and be saved. There is no doubt concerning the certainty of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Basically, from this text, many people especially believers have been carried away thinking that God is patient, therefore they can do anything with their lives. The answer is NO! We need to know that He is patient especially with the unbelievers so that they can come to the knowledge of the gospel of salvation.

God is merciful and that's the reason He did not destroy us even with our sins. His mercy is always with us. " 'I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner' says the Lord! But that they should turn from their ways and live" (Ezekiel 18:23). God is not interested in anyone's death without knowing and accepting Him personally as Lord and Saviour. As believers we have a duty today to perform. As we have been saved, there is a need for us to tell others about the Gospel of Christ without which many souls will perish. When God saw what the people of Nineveh did and how they turned from their evil ways, He repented from the destruction He had planned to bring upon them (Jonah 3:10).

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, help me to always reconsider my ways.*

Insight: God's patience should not be taken for granted.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 10 - 12

THE BLAME GAME

Text*: *Genesis 3:12 *"Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.' "*

We all know the story of Adam and Eve as well as how sin entered into the world through their disobedience. Actually, they did not lie to God about what they did, they just failed to take responsibility for their disobedience. Adam blamed God for the woman He gave him while Eve blamed the serpent. Interestingly, one begins to wonder what would have happened if they had just said sorry. Who knows if they had sincerely accepted the blame, God would have reduced their punishment. Maybe that would have been the game changer. Rather than accepting their faults, they wanted to appear as the victim of someone else. We all know how it ended. God did not acquit them. Instead, He pronounced them guilty as charged and gave His verdict.

Many of us also play the blame game today. It is quite unfortunate that a man who impregnated his own daughter after series of incest with her blamed the death of his wife. An adult who raped an underage girl once claimed that the girl seduced him. We have so many people or things around us to blame for our errors not knowing that God is too wise to be deceived by our excuses. If we are willing to admit, confess and take responsibility for our sins, God's grace is sufficient to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9). Also, in our daily lives, we at one point or the other have blamed or are blaming someone for our circumstances. Let us therefore stop the blame game and take responsibility.

***Prayer**: Merciful Father, help me to take responsibility for my errors and judge me not in Your anger.*

Insight: Taking responsibility is the first step towards sincere repentance.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 13 - 15

AN UNCOMMON COMMISSION

***Text**: **Genesis 6:13-14** "And God said unto Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.'"*

Today's text is the story of Noah's commission. Sin had grown so great that God decided to destroy the whole world with flood. It is a story of the tragedy of sin in the world and God's mercy on one man. Noah and his family were to be saved from the deluge. Genesis 6 describes Noah as a man who was uniquely righteous in an era of exceptional wickedness in the world. He exhibited extraordinary faith as he walked with God in obedience. So, God chose him for the uncommon task of building an ark for the salvation of his family and all the selected animals to enter the ark with him. The task of Noah to build the ark and gather the selected animals was herculean but at the end, the purpose was worth the labour.

You too can be commissioned by God to do the uncommon if you set yourself apart. The beautiful thing apart from being separate is that you get a deeper connection with God because you are not encumbered with sinful entanglements. The story of Noah teaches us that God knows how to exonerate the righteous from evil. Nevertheless, the importance of obedience to God cannot be overlooked in the process of fulfilling God's purpose. God is not demanding too much from us as Christians. Moreover, all He demands from us are for our own benefits and His demands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). We therefore need to note that the reward of fulfilling God's purpose is worth the pain of the process.

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to be set apart so that I can be a worthy vessel in your hands.*

Insight: An uncommon commission comes with uncommon privileges and benefits.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 16 - 18

AN ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTION

***Text*: Genesis 13:11** *"Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated from each other."*

In our text today, Abram offered Lot a choice of separation for the sake of peace and he accepted it at once. Lot looked at the goodness of the plain of Jordan and how beneficial it was going to be to his livestock so he chose it. Lot weighed his choice on the surface level but he would later discover that there was a problem. The inhabitants of the plain were impudent, daring sinners. His assumption turned out to be erroneous and regrettable. He would not have considered the Jordan plain if he looked deeper way beyond meeting his immediate needs as it were. Moreover, he assumed that making a choice before Abram, his uncle, would give him a chance to select the best portion of the land for himself. What an arrogant assumption!

Sometimes as Christians, we assume like Lot when we have an undeserved opportunity or privilege to make a choice. We allow greed and selfishness to prevail in making life's decisions. We always want to amass the best for ourselves even at the expense of others. Whenever we are privileged, we become so selfish that we don't care about the right of others. Whenever doors of opportunity open to become wealthy, to acquire property, to get employment, to hold a position, or to choose a marriage partner, do we get carried away by apparent features and ignore the will of God? It is the best to be patient and seek God's guidance in all we do in order to be in His will because He knows the end from the beginning.

***Prayer**: Omniscient Lord, give me the spirit of wisdom and discernment to keep me from erroneous assumption.*

Insight: Wisdom is profitable to direct.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 19 - 21

HONOURING FAMILY BOND

***Text**: **Genesis 14:14** "When Abram heard that his nephew Lot had been captured, he mobilized the 318 trained men who had been born into his household. Then he pursued Kedorlaomer's army until he caught up with them at Dan."*

It is said that blood is thicker than water. Despite his separation with Lot, Abram did not hesitate to go for Lot's aid when he was in dire need. Lot's location had been under attack and he was among those captured during the war. They were taken away by the enemy until the news reached Abram. He called the 318 trained soldiers from his household and they immediately swung into action. Have you ever wondered the fate of Lot if Abram did not have a ready army or if he had refused to react to the news? Abram never referred to the cause of his separation with Lot. He would have called him a betrayer who deserved what he was going through.

A number of times, opportunities have passed you by because of your lack of preparation. The truth is, we do not learn how to war on the day of battle. Rather, we give expression to our training probably done in the secret place. This is applicable in all areas of your life. We need to ask ourselves how far we have developed to get what to offer when the need arises in our families. On one hand, some of us give unnecessary excuses to cover our retrogression in life when family duty or responsibility calls. But on the other hand, we refer to past disagreement and misunderstanding as excuses even when we have the capacity to help. Are you in a position or capacity to help a brother or sister today? Never hesitate to help your relatives or brethren in Christ.

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, prepare and bless me to make good and relevant impact in my family.*

Iinsight: Anyone who must conquer the vicissitudes of life must stay ready.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 22 - 24

GOD'S TIMING

***Text*: Genesis 18:14** *"Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."*

One of the most striking things in today's text is the phrase "at the appointed time". God promised to return to Sarah and give her a child at the appointed time. This means that God had set a time in His plan when Sarah would have her own son. Although people had written Sarah off as a barren and she also had lost the hope of bearing a child, God had her in His plan. Just that it was not yet the appointed time. God was very sure of His promise, so, He did not mince words. The promise was not a mere prediction or encouragement. It was meant to come to pass exactly as promised without any further delay.

In the hustle and bustle of our frenzied lives, we often find it difficult to wait for anything or anyone. We want what we want now. God cannot be pressured into answering us. His timing doesn't mean that our timing is worthless and our schedules are useless. It simply means that God knows all things and works with His perfect time, not ours. Even when we are always in a hurry, God is not in a hurry. He is neither too early nor late. He is always on time because He has set a perfect time for everything. Our period of waiting is a test of our trust in God. So, the onus is on us to be joyful in hope and steady in faith as we await the appointed time of His visitation in our lives.

***Prayer**: Faithful God, give me grace to be patient even as I trust in you to fulfil your promises to me at the appointed time.*

Insight: God is not limited by time because He is the Creator of time.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 25 - 27

CAN GOD TRUST YOU?

Text: Genesis 18:19 *"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."*

Abraham walked with God and God saw something about Him: his loyalty, fear of God and piety. So, God entrusted him with a task that would span through generations. At that time, there was no written word of God but Abraham still knew God's will to the extent necessary. Abraham was without the written Scriptures but he did not presume or attempt to set up laws for his own interest. Rather, he led his household based on the precepts of God. This means that, he had a close relationship with God enough to learn from and obey. Little wonder, God was so confident to entrust unto him a role in fulfilment of His purpose. God was very sure that Abraham would bring up his children in godliness.

We are all leaders in one way or the other. How do we direct the affairs of people under us? Can God trust us to do His bidding in our sphere of influence? Are you faithful in keeping God's words? The man whom God can trust must know God and be known by Him. Life begets life. and you cannot give what you have. God cannot entrust with you the role of training people in the way of the Lord if you are spiritually bankrupt. He has the true knowledge of your life and your potentials. Are we godly enough to be trusted by God? Or we have been living such a disgraceful life that God cannot be proud of. We can amend our ways today that we may earn divine trust.

Prayer: *Father Lord, I pray for the grace to be consistent in my walk with you so I can be Your trusted vessel in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: Trust springs overtime from tested relationships.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 28 - 30

THE DANGER OF INSTANT GRATIFICATION

***Text**: **Genesis 25: 32** "And Esau said, 'Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?'"*

We all have been guilty of instant gratification at one point or the other. Whenever we want what we want and we want it at that moment we want it. Instant gratification is at play. Esau allowed hunger to cloud his sense of judgement and the repercussion of his actions. He saw everything that his birthright could offer him as worthless because of momentary hunger. Esau was willing to give up everything just for a bowl of stew. He allowed his flesh to make a decision that would alter the rest of his life. He settled for less. Afterwards, he sought after what he lost with tears but it was too late. No wonder the Bible warns us not to be godless like him (Hebrews 12:16-17).

How many times do we feel like we are going to die if we don't get what we want at that instant? One would wonder if Esau was truly starving to death or he just felt so. Feelings may lie because they can be fleeting. The enemy uses feelings to get us move away from God's will in our situation. We may feel the urge for sex, alcohol, money, food and so on. Many of such feelings are natural but how we control ourselves to know what extent or by what means we can desire satisfaction is very important. Today, we are reminded that instant gratification often comes with regret and once we get what we want, we soon realize the extent of what we gave up to get it. Don't fall prey!

***Prayer**: Gracious Lord, help me to have self-control over my cravings and desires in Jesus' name.*

Insight: We need to learn to control our appetites and desires else, we will become enslaved.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 31 - 33

TREASURE IN IMPOSSIBLE PLACES

***Text**: **Genesis 26: 12 -14** "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous;. . .So the Philistines envied him."*

The Lord had appeared to Isaac and instructed him to stay in the land of Gerar when he was contemplating going down to Egypt because of famine. The Lord encouraged him to stay in the land with the promise that he would be blessed. Isaac obeyed God and he was not disappointed he did. Today's text points out that Isaac sowed crops in the land and reaped a hundredfold. That year was a year of famine. So, it was extraordinary that Isaac could reap such a harvest while there was barrenness everywhere else. The distinguishing factor between Isaac and the rest was the hand of God upon him for blessing. God's blessings attended Isaac lavishly to the extent that the Philistines became envious of him.

In seemingly impossible circumstances, God shows up to prove Himself strong because, nothing is too difficult for Him. In our lives, we may face challenges that might seem insurmountable but we have the assurance that God is always with us. And He is able to turn every situation around for our good. We are encouraged to trust in the power of God and to always seek His blessings at all times. Just as Isaac obeyed God's instruction to stay in the land, we also need to obey God in order to enjoy His blessing. The blessings of God can come to you in unexpected places provided you are where God wants you to be. The Lord who provided manna in the wilderness and water in the desert is still at work today to bless you in unexpected places.

***Prayer**: Faithful Lord, let Your hand be upon me for all round blessings in Jesus' name.*

Insight: God has a way of blessing those who trust and obey Him.

HOPE DEFERRED

Text: Genesis 40:23 *"Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him."*

The Bible says that "hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12). The story of Joseph is a vivid illustration of a deferred hope. Someone who had a dream of greatness found himself in prison without committing any offence. Here was Joseph in prison hoping that the chief cupbearer whom he helped to interpret his dream would mention his case to Pharaoh. Unfortunately, the chief cupbearer now in his comfort zone, did not remember Joseph. God was planning a grand release and an elevation for Joseph in His time. So, He let Joseph remain in prison till the appointed time when the dreams of the king would need to be interpreted and no one else would except Joseph.

The story of Joseph in his dark days is a reminder for us as Christians that even the righteous may suffer. Some doors will shut against us but every suffering we pass through is in the will of God to accomplish His purpose. God has promised never to leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Our hope in God may be deferred but is definitely not lost. However, putting our trust in man will lead to disappointment. God can use anyone to accomplish His purpose in our lives not necessarily the individuals we focus for help. He is thereby working behind the scenes to work His purpose out. Let us just trust His procedure and wait patiently on Him to unveil His plan.

Prayer*: Almighty God, please help me to trust in Your process and timing even when my hope is deferred.*

Insight: Hope deferred is not hope lost when God is involved.

Operation Cover to Cover: Exodus 37 - 40

A CALL FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

***Text*: Hosea 1:13** *"Put on sackcloth, you priests and mourn: wail you who minister before the altar. Come; spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the home of your God."*

Prophet Joel issued a final call for self-examination. This time he addressed the priests, the professional men who fulfilled religious duties in Judah. He used a chain of comments to urge the priests to examine themselves, return to God and seek His forgiveness and mercy because the rest people are looking up to them. The priests are the people whom God has chosen for Himself to perform certain duties for the people, so God expected them to live a life worthy of emulation. Unfortunately, the priests failed God as at the time Prophet Joel was telling them what to do in order to attract God's mercy. They were to mourn their sins and repent of their evil ways.

Today is Ash Wednesday marking the beginning of the Lenten Season which is a period of fasting, penitence and prayers. This season affords us the opportunity for self-examination and genuine repentance as revealed in today's text. Many of us will say we are not a priest and that it was only the priests and prophets that were addressed. However, we need to know that the message is applicable to all of us. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light ***(1 Peter 2:9).*** In our own way we have to live a holy life by examining ourselves and to check the area we have gone wrong so as to return to God.

***Prayer**: Merciful God, help me to respond to the call for a genuine repentance in Jesus' name.*

Insight: A sincere self-examination will reveal our true picture before God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Leviticus 1 - 3

A RIGHT COUNSEL

***Text**: **Exodus 18:21-22** "Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them . . . And let them judge the people at all times.. . . So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you."*

When Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for His people Israel, he went to visit him in the desert where he and the Israelites were encamped. After he observed that Moses was encumbered on a daily basis from dawn to dusk, he advised Moses as captured in today's text. Jethro's advice was a way of saving Moses from burnout, time wasting and most importantly helping him to focus on the most important assignment which was communing with God on behalf of the people. It was like a balm to an aching sore for Moses at that time. Moses listened to his father-in-law and followed his counsel.

Nobody has a monopoly of knowledge. God uses people to reach out to us at one point or the other based on their experiences, wisdom, knowledge or direct words from God. We must be open to godly counsel by cultivating a listening culture. We must know that we need people who can give right counsel around us. We need those who can always tell us the truth and not those who will flatter us. Today, we are comfortable to gather around ourselves, counsellors who will tell us what we want to hear. Nevertheless, we must be very careful to examine the counsel we receive in the light of God's word for ratification. Sometimes, we are more comfortable with flatter than constructive criticism. However, we should know that those who truly love us will always tell us the truth not minding how we feel about it.

***Prayer**: Heavenly Father, surround me with people who will lead me aright in Your counsel.*

Insight: It's a precious thing to be surrounded by people who genuinely care for us.

Operation Cover to Cover: Leviticus 4 - 6

REASONS FOR AN INCOMPLETE VICTORY

Text*: *Judges 1:19 *"So the Lord was with Judah; And they drove out the mountaineers, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron."*

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites enquired of the Lord which of the tribes was to go up first to fight against the Canaanites. And the Lord answered "Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands". However, the tribe of Judah called the tribe of Simeon to go up and help them with the battle. They had victory on all sides except at the plains of the hill country where the inhabitants had iron chariots. As impressive as Judah's record of victory was, it was marred by the clause: "but could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron".

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Was God not with Judah? Was the Omnipotent God incapable of overcoming the latest military technology of the time? The answer is simple. The people had their eyes on the physical rather than on the all-powerful God who could give them victory in all circumstances. We miss out on a blessed life in Christ many at times because we lack complete trust in God. We tend to rely on our strength rather than completely trusting in God. This makes our success story to be incomplete. Stop trying to rationalize God's ways; they are beyond human reasoning. We are encouraged today to totally rely on God's strength and His ability to save us to the uttermost (Ephesians 6:10-18). The victory we desire over sin and the enemy is incomplete because we shift our focus from God who fights our battles to the capability of the enemy.

Prayer*: Dear Lord, give me grace to trust you fully in all circumstances. Amen.*

Insight: The totality of our victory in Christ is dependent on complete trust in God.

FEARLESSNESS IN LEADERSHIP

Text*: Judges 4:9"So she said, 'I will surely go with you: nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.' "Then" Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh."*

Deborah was God's mouthpiece and judge over Israel at the time Jabin of Hazor laid siege on the land. So, she sent a message, an instruction with a promise of inevitable victory that she had received from God to Barak, a military leader, to gather 10,000 troops and plan to attack the enemy forces. Sisera the commander of Jabin's army had 900 chariots of iron plus a huge infantry. So, out of fear, Barak declined going without Deborah accompanying him. In today's text, Deborah gave the implications of Barak's action. In those days, focus was on physical strength. So, women were not considered to participate in war. It was thereby a shameful thing for Barak to have made such a request.

Against all odds, Deborah arose to meet the request of Barak and led the army into victory. We also, are called to be fearless in our spheres of influence like Deborah. It is easier to give counsel and instruction than being at the forefront of implementing the same. When a leader leads by example, participating actively in the activities of the people he/she leads, the followers will be greatly motivated. As Deborah's courage was a motivation for Barak and his soldiers, let us be courageous in whatever leadership position we found ourselves. We will lose respect in the sight of followers when we excuse ourselves from the danger involved in achieving our goals as a group. The consequence of shying away from our responsibility is missing out in the glory of the success story.

***Prayer**: Gracious Father, give me courage to face the challenges attached to my position in Jesus' Name. Amen.*

Insight: Participation in the kingdom of God is praiseworthy while nonparticipation is shameful.

Operation Cover to Cover: Leviticus 10 - 12

STANDING ALOOF

Text: Judges 5:16*"Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart."*

The Book of Judges chapter 5 is the song of Deborah which she wrote after Israel's victory over Jabin. In it, she praised the cities that came out to help in fighting, cursed some and lamented over some. The case of Reuben was that of indecision. Reuben standing aloof in a critical situation like this was as good as being on the side of the enemies. The tribes of Reuben cared for their sheep more than their nation. They thereby preferred their flock to the people of God. They were indifferent to the call for duty in the fight against the enemies of God's people.

Today, some of the common excuses for not actively getting involved in service to God are; being unqualified or lack of time. However, it should be noted that God qualifies those whom He calls. What is required is a willing heart. No one should be too busy for the truly important things in life. Have you ever imagined your lot if God was too busy to attend to you? In this time of escalating violence, moral recklessness, selfish indulgence, indifference etc., God's people cannot remain silent. The Lord has not called us to be spectators but to be at the frontline with a promise that He will be with us. It is not enough to render judgement on the tribes of Israel but to learn and grow from their mistakes. We therefore need to render our personal services to the course of our commonwealth which is the kingdom of God.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to serve you wholeheartedly, enthusiastically and joyfully.*

Insight: Participation in the kingdom of God is praiseworthy while nonparticipation is shameful.

Operation Cover to Cover: Leviticus 13 - 15

PERSEVERANCE EXEMPLIFIED

***Text**: **Ruth 1:11-12** "But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters: why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go– for I am too old to have a husband. . . . .'"*

Ruth can be described as an embodiment of perseverance. She made a brave decision of following her mother-in-law, Naomi when she decided to go back to Bethlehem after the death of her husband (Ruth 1:16-17). While Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and turned back, Ruth clung to her. Seeing her fellow daughter-in-law turning back was a test of her perseverance but she clung on. It was indeed a brave decision since she was not an Israelite. And so many factors would have been to her disadvantage as a stranger, but she did not mind. Embarking on the journey with Naomi meant leaving everything she was familiar with and embracing an entirely new lifestyle. She also obediently followed her mother in-law's guidance in Bethlehem which led to her marriage to Boaz.

Many of us are better starters than finishers. We are quick to give up, we often start a good thing but always don't complete it. Ruth is an example to us of courage to start, continue and follow through especially on our journey of faith until we reach the finish line. How determined are we when we make a decision to persevere the challenges and obstacles faced? Many a time, we give up when we realise the implications of our decision just as Naomi explained to Ruth how hopeless the situation would be even there would be a miracle of getting another son. We should thereby count the cost and get ready to bear it to avoid the embarrassment not being able to finish what we start (Luke 14:27-30).

***Prayer**: Gracious God, grant me the grace of perseverance so that I can see to the end, all that you have committed in my hands. Amen.*

Insight: Perseverance has a price and its reward.

GRACE FOR HOLY LIVING

***Text**: **1 Samuel 2:17-18**"Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD. But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod."*

The sons of Eli were so wicked and immoral that they had no regard for God (1 Samuel 2:12). They were supposed to be role models and mentors for the young Samuel. However, Samuel could not follow their footstep because of the godly instinct in him. In fact, God was raising Samuel as replacement for the sons of Eli. Samuel was just a little boy who distinguished himself in his service to the Lord, exceptional enough to receive divine calling even at his tender age (1 Samuel 3:1-21). He served God better and in a greater way than the sons of Eli. Probably, His duties then would have been menial tasks around the tabernacle. But even in the little tasks and the circumstances around, he distinguished himself.

There is a Yoruba proverb that says, "Out of the black pot comes the white pap". The wisdom from this proverb is the fact that pap, though prepared from a black pot, retains its whiteness and refuses to be tainted or discoloured by the condition of its preparation. Neither the blackness of the pot's back nor the black smoke emitted by the firewood can change the colour of the pap. It is a mystery that something good, edible, untainted, pure and whitish can come from a very unusual source like a black pot. This illustration is a challenge to us that we can live a pure, holy, righteous and dedicated life not tainted by the evil and immoral society we find ourselves today. We can thereby excel anywhere if we are determined to distinguish ourselves.

***Prayer**: Holy Father, please keep me untainted, pure and holy, immune from the corrupt and immoral system of my society.*

Insight: He who stands alone with God stands the chance to excel in life.

Operation Cover to Cover: Leviticus 19 - 21

THE RESULT OF IMPATIENCE

***Text**: **1 Samuel 13:10** "And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him."*

The events leading up to today's text has it that Jonathan attacked a Philistine garrison. So, in response to the attack, they gathered together in their numbers against the Israelites. All odds seemed to be against the Israelites so they began to give in to fear. While some out of fear were hiding in caves, among the rocks, in pits and cisterns, some even crossed the Jordan to escape the impending ruthless attack. Saul was in Gilgal waiting for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices to seek guidance from God on the situation at hand. After waiting a whole week, he gave up waiting, stepped out of his bounds and sacrificed the burnt offering by himself. Barely had he finished doing so before Samuel showed up. The prophet asked him what he had done and he began making excuses. But his excuses were not acceptable and gave a verdict that his kingdom would no more be established as promised.

The sin king Saul committed was borne out of impatience. Saul did not trust that Samuel would keep his promise to come and gave up waiting. If only he had waited longer! Waiting is one of the most difficult things to do. Many have made regrettable irreparable mistakes in marriage, ministry and walks of life because of impatience. Do you trust that God would fulfil His promises or you give in to worry and impatience? God is always on time. So, do not be pressured into taking any step without hearing from Him. Although He tarries, wait!

***Prayer**: Righteous Father, give me grace to patiently wait upon You in all circumstance. Amen*

Insight: Patience is the strength of the weak, impatience the weakness of the strong.

Operation Cover to Cover: Leviticus 22 - 24

THE DANGER OF BEING A MEN-PLEASER

***Text**: **1 Samuel 15:24** "Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.'"*

God had instructed Saul to completely destroy Amalek in punishment for what they did to Israel when they came out of Egypt. Saul was to execute divine judgment on the Amalekites without sparing anyone or anything. However, Saul spared Agag king of the Amalekites, the best of the animals and other good things in the city. When Samuel confronted Saul about his decision not to completely destroy the Amalekites as the instruction was, he replied that he was afraid of the people and hence gave in to their demands.

A question comes to mind here. Whom do we fear, God or man? Funny enough, we are guilty at one point or another of make decision based on the wish and desire of people rather than obeying God's instruction. Our desire for validation from men is worrisome. Trying to please people makes you neglect the will of God in order to meet the needs of others. It also makes one a puppet to others because, when we seek to please people, our decisions are based on their approval. It is a dangerous thing to be a men-pleaser because when you yield to the fear of others, you allow them, and not God, to control your life. God does not want us to serve people out of fear but out of love for Him and them. It is good to be considerate, loving and patient but we should not let ourselves be intimidated or manipulated. It is therefore necessary to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

***Prayer**: Loving God, help me to seek to please you alone so that my life will be fully yielded to you. Amen*

Insight: A man-pleaser cannot be loyal to God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Leviticus 25 - 27

A FRIEND CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

***Text**: **1 Samuel 18:1** "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."*

The passage of today gives us one of the most famous of all friendships in the Bible. It is that of Jonathan and David. Despite the catastrophic events that would cause David to flee to the wilderness, one of the brightest spots of succour to David was his friendship with Jonathan. As time progressed, they also became brothers-in-law due to David's marriage to Michal, Jonathan's sister. Jonathan stayed with David through thick and thin and even pledged allegiance to him rather than to his father Saul. Countlessly, Jonathan defied the orders of his father just to favour David. Theirs was true friendship sealed in a covenant relationship.

Covenant relationships are based on steadfast love. God uses friendships as a way to bless us and to accomplish His purposes. The impacts of friends in our lives cannot be overemphasized. No wonder the Bible warns that, "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). We need to be aware that there are some friends or acquaintances who are willing to sacrifice our relationship to see our downfall. The same way we have good friends like Jonathan who would sacrifice everything for our upliftment. We must therefore choose our friends wisely because they can either help us fulfil God's will or mislead us out of God's will. We also need to ask ourselves what type of friends are we to others. Are we loyal and close friends like Jonathan?

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, help me to be a good friend and in return bring purposeful people my way for covenant friendship. Amen.*

Insight: Status or class is not the criteria for friendship.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 1 - 3

BEWARE OF JEALOUSY

***Text**: **1 Samuel 18: 8-9**"Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" "So" Saul eyed David from that day forward."*

God had used David, a shepherd boy, to rescue Saul and his army from the embarrassment caused by their inability to face Goliath and the Philistine army. As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistines, the women came out of all the cities of Israel. They were singing and dancing to meet King Saul with tambourines, songs of joy and musical instruments ascribing to David more credit than Saul. One can only imagine Saul's countenance at that instant and what was going through his mind. While on earth would the women ascribe more praises to David a mere warrior than to him a king? He had been fighting and winning wars for Israel even before David came into the scene. How dare these women! Saul became so jealous that from that day on, he put his eyes on David to eliminate him.

Try to create a mental picture of what Saul was feeling. Have you ever felt that way before? Probably yes!. Jealousy is dangerous. A jealous person is ripped of joy, peace of mind and capability to reason correctly. It also sets one's heart about other people's business instead of focusing to improve oneself. The song the women sang was not a lie. It was the reality but it hurt Saul because the glory wasn't all about him. Others are supposed to take the centre stage as well. Resist jealousy and it will flee from you. Be genuinely happy for people and God will keep elevating you as well.

***Prayer**: Loving Father, give me a heart of love and help me to be genuinely happy for others when they excel. Amen.*

Insight: Jealousy fosters anger and unchecked anger can lead to destruction.

SEEKING THE LORD'S FACE

***Text**: **1 Samuel 30:8** "So David inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?' And He answered him, 'Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all.'"*

David became a fugitive as a result of Saul's jealousy and plan to kill him. He even made a desperate attempt to join the Philistines in their war against Israel but he was rejected. When David and his men returned home from the battlefield, they discovered their city was burned and their families were taken captive by the Amalekites. Now, David was greatly distressed because the men became hostile towards him and even threatened to stone him to death. Everyone was bitter in spirit because of their loss. So, there was no one to encourage David because all they knew was that he was their leader and had brought this calamity upon them. But David found strength in the Lord his God and sought His guidance concerning the situation and the Lord answered in the affirmative concerning his plans to pursue and overtake the raiding party.

Despite the pressure, David did not go about to execute any plans on his own accord until he heard from God and God gave him victory. This is a difficult thing to do but a lesson we must take from today's text. Seeking God first in the face of trials, tribulations and difficult moments to get the right guidance and to avoid errors is very essential. We must desist from making God our backup plan but put him first at all times. The best source of morale and encouragement in life's battle is knowing that God has given us His word when we seek His face.

***Prayer**: Omniscient Lord, answer me whenever I seek Your face guidance in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: We are bound to fail when we fail to seek the face of God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 7 - 9

BEING AN AGENT OF GRACE AND HOPE

***Text**: **2 Kings 5:3** "Then she said to her mistress, 'If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy.'"*

Here's a servant girl giving advice to her mistress with respect to her master's health. The master in question was not an ordinary man. He was a commander in the army of the king of Aram, great in the sight of his master, highly regarded because of his track record of victory. Despite Naaman's status, the servant girl being concerned about his health had faith and boldness to speak up to his wife about the prophet in Samaria who had the ability to heal him of his skin condition. Most of us are not as powerful or prominent as Naaman but we can relate how hard it can be to ask for help from a subordinate, much more from an enemy. It must have taken incredible humility for Naaman to admit that he needed healing that only his enemy could provide.

The little girl in today's text was God's instrument of grace. Today, we are encouraged not to despise anyone because, God can use anybody as a channel of His blessings. So, we must honour all men because we never know who would help us tomorrow. How do we treat those who serve under us? Do we treat them as if they are less human? When you treat people around you with dignity, God will also use them to assist you as His agents of grace. In the same vein, when we found ourselves in terrible situation as Christians, we should not allow our condition to reshape our lives into evil form. Rather, we should know that we remain God's agent of grace in all circumstances.

***Prayer**: Gracious Father, help me to treat people around me with dignity and make me an agent of grace.*

Insight: We choose to become either agents of God's grace or carriers of the world's evil.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 10 - 12

GOD'S PERMISSIVE WILL

***Text**: **2 Kings20:2-3** "Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, 'Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly."*

Hezekiah received the word of the Lord from prophet Isaiah concerning his illness that he should put his affairs in order because he was going to die. But Hezekiah was so bitter and he pleaded with God for his life. So, the Lord responded and added fifteen years to his days. God kept all His promises to Hezekiah but during this period, he was involved in errors which would have long term consequences on the kingdom of Judah. First Hezekiah unwisely showed off of his wealth to the envoys of Babylon. He was then told that his descendants would one day serve in the palace of Babylon. He gave a selfish response to divine verdict on his error rather than being sober. Secondly, he stirred Israel's most evil king Manasseh who cleared the way for Judah to plunge into idolatry and sexual immorality which would ultimately lead them to defeat and exile. This was fulfilled some one hundred years later.

So, the extension of Hezekiah's life did more harm than good. Would it not have been better if he rested with his ancestors earlier in peace according to God's perfect will? God knows the end from the beginning so it is wise to always pray for his will and accept it wholly. While it is good to pray to God for our desires, our readiness to submit ourselves to His perfect will is for our own interest. We should be careful not to take the grace of God for granted. Whatever opportunity God has given us should not lead us into the error of complacency.

***Prayer**: Dear benevolent God, give me the grace to accept your perfect will at all times Amen.*

Insight: Nothing is as good as God's perfect will.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 13 - 15

BEWARE OF PRIDE

***Text**: **Daniel 4:30**"The king spoke, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?'"*

Nebuchadnezzar was a great king indeed. He was mostly famous for his building projects in Babylon- turning it into one of the great ancient cities and for a time, the largest city in the world. Yes, he was a great conqueror and what he did for Babylon was great indeed. He built great walls, three dozen temples and three stunning palaces. No doubts, he was doing well but he failed to realize and acknowledge that all enablement and achievement come from the one true God. He described himself as having mighty power and dwelling in majestic glory thereby, setting himself in the position of God. While the words were still on his lips, a voice from heaven passed judgement on his actions immediately.

Do you remember what happened to the builders of the tower of Babel and also King Herod? God will not share His glory with a man or another god. Can you remember the times you had trouble with pride? How did it end for you? Pride is an insidious barrier to salvation because, it convinces us that we do not need anyone else to provide our needs forgetting that only God is self-sufficient. God resists the proud but raises the lowly. We should always remind ourselves that God is the source of our being and all that we achieve should be to His glory (Romans 11:35-36). This reminder will make us remain humble and always acknowledging God who has made things possible.

***Prayer**: **King of glory**, help me to stay humble and remember that I am nothing without You.*

Insight: Pride will cost you everything but leave you with nothing.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 16 - 18

CHOOSING A PATH TO FOLLOW

***Text**: **2 Chronicles 34:1-2** "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."*

Josiah was just a little boy when he became king after the death of his father Amon. At age eight, he was supposed to be about playing care-freely with his mates not saddled with any serious responsibility. But Josiah's case was different. A whole kingdom was placed on the shoulders of an eight-year-old and God used him mightily to sanitize the land. Josiah's father was one of the most wicked kings of Judah following after his own father Manasseh. So, Josiah changed the narrative by tearing down altars of Baal, destroying Asherah poles, idols, images, burning the bones of the priests on their altars and hence purging Judah and Jerusalem. He established a focus on God that did not waiver and he chose to model his life after the godly ways of King David instead of his father or grandfather.

There is no age barrier to whom God can use for His glory. Your availability is one the major factors considered about those He uses. Choosing the path of salvation or serving God at a tender age is a glorious opportunity not to be despised. Unfortunately, many who are introduced to the path of salvation at their tender age choose to follow the path of the world. We all have a choice to make without blaming anyone for our wrong choice. Having ungodly parents is never an excuse for your choice because God has made provision for means to point the right path to you (Proverbs 4:11-12). Are you willing to choose the right path?

***Prayer**: Heavenly Father, give me the grace to choose the right path to follow to the honour of Your name.*

Insight: Everyone has the freewill to choose any path in life.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 19 - 21

A RARE FAITH

***Text**: **Matthew 15:27-28** "And she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table'. Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire'. And her daughter was healed from that very hour."*

The woman who came before Jesus in our text today was a Canaanite, a gentile. Her daughter was severely demon-possessed and in desperate need of deliverance. But in spite of her background, she knew that Jesus was the Messiah and had the power to heal. Despite the resistance, the woman was convinced that Jesus was the only answer. Although Jesus turned a cold shoulder towards her in test of her faith and the disciples were irritated by her pestering, her faith was not intimidated. She didn't grow discouraged; her faith persisted and it paid off. Jesus commended her faith and her request was instantly granted.

This is a big challenge to us believers who much more have tasted the salvation of Jesus Christ and are convinced beyond doubts that He is our Saviour. We sometimes find it difficult to approach challenges with unwavering faith. Our Lord Jesus is greatly concerned about the development and nurturing of our faith which is our victory over the world. God takes what is nothing, worthless, despised and dead, and works it into something beautiful, precious and living. Those whom God intends most to honour, He humbles in order that they may feel their unworthiness. An arrogant person would have found it difficult to tolerate Christ comparing her with dog. Therefore, for our prayers to be answered, our faith must be accompanied by humility, modesty and fervency.

***Prayer**: Dear Father, grant me persistent faith that breaks barriers and yields the joy of answered prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable and receives the impossible.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 22 - 24

LOYALTY TEST

***Text**: **John 6: 67-69** "Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?'But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ the Son of the living God.' "*

Jesus had miraculously fed five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two small fish. Rather than seeing Him as the Messiah, they were planning to make Him their king by force; He left them and went to the mountain. The following day, they gathered around him again and He rebuked them for their interest in physical and not spiritual food. He thereby revealed to them some hard to understand truths about Himself. They wondered how He would give Himself to them as food to eat. His hard teaching made many of His disciples to desert Him. Then, the Lord turned and asked the twelve who had followed Him closely if they would leave too. Peter replied on behalf of the twelve that they believed and knew that He is the Christ.

One may wonder why people deserted Jesus. Some persons came to Christ on a trial basis, others for what they can get from Him, others out of curiosity. Our motivation for coming to Christ must be of conviction and acknowledgment that He is our Lord and Saviour. As believers in Christ, our loyalty to Him will be tested when we see some turn their back on their acclaimed relationship with Christ. Knowing Christ personally should help us to remain loyal and committed to following Him not because of the physical or material benefits we stand to gain from Him. Our decision to follow Christ will always be tested but we must stand firm to keep to our words.

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, help me to be fully committed to you and to follow you truly to the end.*

Insight: Christ deserves our unswerving loyalty.

WHERE TO FALL BACK ON

***Text**: **Acts 4:23** "And being let go, they went to their own companions, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them."*

Peter and John were arrested, put in jail and tried before the Sanhedrin because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. After they found no fault in them and more so were afraid of the people, for they were praising God for the outstanding miracle that Peter and John had done. They threatened them not to preach in the name of Jesus again and released them. The disciples returned to their own companions and narrated the events to them. When they heard the testimony, the assembly lifted up their voices in prayer to God. The whole place shook and they received more boldness to preach about Christ as they were filled with the Holy Spirit that instant.

The believers did not organise a pity party for Peter and John as some of us would do today. They did not complain. They were not afraid rather they praised God. This is a model of a community of people with an aligned vision. We also, need people channeling the same course and purpose to pull us up and strengthen us in our moments of despair. We must choose our companions carefully and build one another up so as to be useful in times of need. Moreover, the church should be a place to fall back on to share experiences when believers need encouragement and prayer support. Do we have such fellowship of believers to depend on today? We should not allow sentiment, discrimination, carnality, prejudice or judgmentalism to cause distrust in our fellowships.

***Prayer**: Gracious Lord, give us the grace to support one another in You and for You that the world may know we are Your true followers.*

INSIGHT: A strong believer base is an encouragement for serving God.

KEEPING AN OPEN MIND

***Text**: **Acts 10:13-14**"And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.' But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.'"*

Here was God preparing Peter for what was to come using a trance: His meeting with Cornelius a gentile. He saw many animals classified as unclean according to the Mosaic law. Against the law, he was commanded to kill and eat the unclean animals. His response was natural of a Jew: that he had never eaten anything unclean. But the Lord's response to him was that he should not call unclean what God has made clean. The unclean animals here symbolized the Gentiles who were not considered to be part of God's salvation programme. However, the trance was a symbolic truth that God was capable of cleansing the Gentiles as well. That salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ was for as many as would believe in Him and be saved.

If there was ever anyone who could be saved without faith in Jesus Christ, it would be someone like Cornelius. The Bible describes him as a good man, religious, reverent, prayerful yet unsaved. No one is good enough to go to heaven on their own goodness. So, God desires that all men be saved through Christ. God can go any length to save a soul. We must therefore keep an open mind in order to corporate with God for the salvation of souls. Sometimes, we are quick to write off a particular group of people or tribe that we believe they are too bad to enjoy Christ's salvation. As Christians, we should not be selective in the propagation of the gospel of Christ.

***Prayer**: Lord Jesus, give me grace us to extend Your message of salvation to every tribe and group out of genuine compassion for lost souls.*

Insight: The message of the gospel is meant to be preached to all without discrimination.

Operation Cover to Cover: Numbers 31 - 33

IDEAL HELPERS IN THE MINISTRY

Text*: Romans 16:3-4"Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles."*

Aquila was a Jew of Pontus whom Paul had found with his wife at Corinth (Acts 18:1-2). They were tentmakers like Paul and they worked together as well as accompanied him in his missionary journey to Syria and Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 26; 1 Corinthians 16:19). Paul's association with the couple began in a purely commercial partnership. But as they stayed together and worked at their trade, the couple became disciples. They had a close-knit bond such that when Paul sailed to Ephesus, they kept with him. Their bond was not easily severed. Paul's last Epistle also captures this couple, probably a parting token of his undying love to them because, death was near for him then. This couple were true friends, they exhibited heroic self-devotion which love to Christ kindles.

Just like Paul, we all need ideal helpers who would stand the test of time in the ministry. We need a network of people that would endure and be supportive of us at all times just like Priscilla and Aquila were to Paul. Being a lone ranger in the Christian ministry is not a good idea. We need one another in genuine devotion for the sake of Christ. Additionally, let us also acknowledge and appreciate those who have been supportive to our Christian ministry. For instance, a lead vocal in the church cannot sing alone without the support of instrumentalists or backup singers. The same is applicable to every aspect of the Christian ministry. We are to see ourselves as coworkers in Christ.

***Prayer**: Lord, teach me to build bridges and not walls in my relationship with others in the Christian ministry.*

Insight: We are heroes if we corporate with one another in the Christian ministry.

GRACE AND DILIGENCE

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:10 *"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*

The Apostle Paul was once a persecutor of the Church until he met Christ. Though he was not one the apostles called by Jesus Christ himself during His earthly ministry, his zeal for the gospel he once persecuted was second to none. He worked harder than any of the other apostles and he attributed his success to the grace of God in his life. His influence in the Church is evident in the number of epistles he wrote that are included in the New Testament books.

This is an example for us believers. More often than not, believers have the perception of grace as having to do nothing- that is so wrong. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men teaching them to say no to all ungodliness and wordily passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11-12). Yes, grace is God's free gift to us but it isn't passive. It is active in that it empowers us to do what pleases God and to serve God diligently. Grace is not a license to sit around and wait for miracles to fall into our lap. Rather, it gives us the faith to believe that God is working in and through you despite your limitations. It will make you say "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". So, in whatever position you find yourself, see the Lord empowering you to fulfil your responsibilities with extraordinary diligence and effectiveness. That is what grace does.

Prayer: ***Gracious*** *Lord, help me to lean on your grace in all that I do so that I can become excellent and extraordinary in Your service.*

Insight: Grace empowers for diligent service.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 1 - 3

THE EVIL OF UNHEALTHY COMPARISON

Text: 2 Corinthians10:12*"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."*

Today's text is Paul's reaction to those who challenged his authority as an apostle. The false teachers and self-acclaimed leaders among the Corinthian Christians thought so highly of themselves that they failed to realize that their measure of righteousness was a faulty one. They accused Paul of being strong in writing but unimpressive as a person. Paul, in his mature response, opined that he did not need to compare himself with anyone to prove himself as the unwise leaders were fond of doing to commend themselves. He described his critics as unwise who tried to prove themselves through unnecessary comparison and self-commendation. He therefore brought to their reminder that Jesus Christ is the standard above all standards and His standard means more than anyone else's.

It is in our human nature to seek validation and confirmation for our achievements mostly with our focus on men, forgetting that no human standard will ever make us fulfilled. Only the approval from Christ can satisfy and provide the peace we seek in this life. The world standards have created benchmarks of happiness but time and again, we've crossed them one after the other. Yet, we remain unsatisfied because there is always the next level to aim for and someone higher to beat. Comparison is dangerous because, while chasing someone else's benchmark we lose our originality. We end up living a lie, ignoring our true selves and the capabilities that we are lavishly endowed with by God. All other standards will become foolish when we are rooted in Christ.

Prayer*: Faithful Lord, give me grace to live a sincere life in conformity with Your standard.*

Insight: Embrace your uniqueness in Christ; comparison breeds discontentment.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 4 - 6

PRAISEWORTHY AND VIRTUOUS THOUGHTS

Text: Philippians 4:8*"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

Our thoughts are very powerful. The Bible clearly states that "as a man thinketh, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). We are a product of our thoughts because, whatever we dwell on has a way of manifesting and becoming a reflection of who we truly are. So, it is a garbage-in-garbage-out thing just like the popular computer statement on input and output. In today's text, Apostle Paul uses the same principle with respect to our minds. He instructs the Philippians on what to meditate and focus on if they desire to live godly lives. These include: honest things, just things, pure things, lovely things and things of good report. All these constitute praiseworthy and virtuous thoughts that should occupy the mind of a Christian.

As Christians, our aim is to live a life that is pleasing and acceptable to God. Therefore, our lives must show a pattern of growth and sanctification which means becoming more like Jesus and less like the sinful people we were before. There are many things in the world that we cannot escape since we are still in the body. You have no control over what you see and hear in the world on a daily basis, but you can choose what you decide to fill your mind with. You can select the music you listen to, books you read, conversations you have or movies you watch. With the help of the Holy Spirit, such godly selectivity guides our minds from corrupt thoughts. "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Proverbs 4:23).

Prayer: *Almighty God, help my mind to be focused on things that reflect godliness and righteous living in Jesus' name.*

Insight: Our lives are shaped by our thoughts.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 7 - 9

THE GAIN OF CONTENTMENT

Text: 1Timothy6:6-8 *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."*

Contentment brings to mind its opposite which is discontentment or covetousness. Apostle Paul brought up this matter to address people who were teaching false doctrine and thinking that godliness was a means for financial gain. Clearly, they might have become religious or even joined the Church because of material benefit. Whatever their motives were, Paul corrected this error stating emphatically that godliness with contentment is great gain. He also establishes another key factor which is godliness. Godliness builds our faith in God, helping us to trust in His providence for or daily needs hence fostering satisfaction and contentment.

The world has many discontented people as does the Church. People complain and grumble about every and anything. God wants us to be contented, satisfied with what we have. Man is truly insatiable with regards to material things. So, we are called to be thankful instead of murmuring. When a man has more than enough, it doesn't feed his soul which is the principal thing. True contentment is not found in how much we own and possess of the things of this world because, both the rich and poor are often discontented and unhappy. Life is too short to be worried about material things which we did not bring into the world and would leave behind at death. As Christians, we should thereby be happy and satisfied with the basic things the Lord provided for us. With this, we live a life free of worries and endless search for satisfaction.

Prayer: *Father Lord, give me grace to be content with Your provision and live a life that derives satisfaction in godliness.*

Insight: The desire for high living often causes discontentment.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 10 - 12

SUSTAINING A GODLY HERITAGE

Text: 2 Timothy 3:14 *"But as for you continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it."*

Paul was telling Timothy to remain on the things that he had learned and had been assured of. Timothy learned faith from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. Both of them were sincere believers and mothers who did not just sustain a godly heritage but also handed it down from a generation to another. He also learned from Paul who was a mentor to him. Timothy would find great comfort and security in those things just as he would find at home with his family. It takes great faith and courage to remain in the things we have learned in the church or at the feet of Christian parents when the common culture is awash with deception.

It takes great self-discipline to practice faithfulness, honesty and sexual fidelity when undated in pressures from the common culture calculated to lead us in the opposite direction. The word of God is calling on us today to have that kind of great faith and self-discipline that our godly parents, most especially mothers, have. Given the condition of our society, we need the kind of godly mothers who will not only uphold godly heritage but also hand it down to the next generation. We can gain those qualities only through prayers, worship within a community of believers and the study of Scripture and its application to our lives. Timothy's mother and grandmother exposed him to the Scriptures from his early childhood. As parents, how are you impacting the lives of your children? And, as young Christians, do we value the godly heritage passed on to us?

Prayer: *Loving Father, help me to live a life of godly heritage and make me a model of godly heritage to people around me.*

Insight: A godly heritage is more valuable than wealth passed on to our children.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 13 - 15

THE VALUE OF DISCIPLINE

Text: Proverbs 29:15 *"A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces his mother."*

All children are born with the tendency to be foolish and they must be corrected by reproof (Proverbs 22:6, 15; 29:17). This is one of the simplest rules of life and it is most certain. If training and discipline are neglected, the child will be a painful disgrace to its parents. If you want your children to be wise, do not spare them discipline. The wisdom acquired from discipline secures favour with God and men (Luke 2:52).Discipline brings success in any endeavour the child pursues. Children are born ignorant; they must be taught the simplest tasks. Reproof is reprimands and warning against wrong conduct. The rod is for physical punishment to reinforce the verbal rebuke (Proverb 22:15). The rod of correction will drive folly away. It will teach the child wisdom.

A properly trained child is disciplined, diligent and devoted. He is gracious, loving, pure, noble, stable and trustworthy. Children are faithful and productive at their callings, charming and courteous in public, moral and virtuous in private. So, the right use of reproof and the rod will produce wisdom. The warning about a child left to himself is not a warning against daycares or schools. It is warning to parents about neglecting the moulding of a child's character. A good daycare or school may include reproof and the rod in their programme. But if the parent's job is not done, either directly or indirectly then future days of pain and trouble are coming when both parents will grieve over their foolish children (Proverbs 10:1).

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, give us the grace to train our children and to accept godly training.*

Insight: Discipline is vital for a child's development.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 16 - 18

MANAGING ENVY

Text: Genesis 26:16*"And Abimelech said to Isaac, 'Go away from us, for thou are much mightier than we.'"*

Envy is the feeling of resentment, discontentment, or jealousy of another's position or success. The verses before our text today point out how God rewarded Isaac greatly for obeying His instructions of not moving to Egypt. Isaac was so greatly blessed that the locals together with their king became envious of him. King Abimelech could not stand Isaac anymore. Being consumed with envy, he thereby requested that Isaac moved away from them because he was blessed by God on every side and had become really powerful. Everything he did prospered more than everyone else.

Becoming like Christ must be the goal of all believers. However, jealousy and envy are by-product of a carnal heart and must be overcome by the power of God's Spirit of love. We are all leaders in some way so, unlike Abimelech, we must seek to be genuinely happy for those under us, within our sphere of influence or subordinates because it is the right thing to do. A popular saying goes thus: "When your neighbour is being blessed, it means God is in the neighbourhood". We should derive pleasure in rejoicing with those who are favoured by God. It is through this we can be partakers of the blessing rather than becoming an enemy of progress because of envy. When we are not happy with someone who is blessed by God, we tend to make ourselves enemy of God. Thus, if our feeling of envy is left uncontrolled, it will lead us to making wrong decisions.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, please destroy every root of envy in my life, in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Insight: The cure for envy is expressing God's love and striving to be like Jesus.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 19 - 21

VICTORY THROUGH GOD'S POWER

Text: Judges 7:7 *"The Lord said to Gideon 'With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites on to your hands, let all the others go home.'"*

Today's passage tells us of God's promise to Gideon, to give him victory with the three hundred men He has selected out of the thirty-two thousand that were initially mustered to fight about one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianite soldiers. Gideon was instructed to reduce the number of soldiers to go for the battle by screening them. God did this so that the Israelites would not think that it is by human power they conquered the Midianites. Though the three hundred Israelites soldiers were physically on the battle ground, the battle was won by God for them.

God is still fighting battle for His children. The reason many of us suffer defeat in the hands of our enemies is because we live in disobedience to God's commandment. Sometimes when we acclaim God's glory to ourselves in what God is doing for us, God withdraws His support from us and allows us to suffer shame and defeat. The challenges many of us are going through in our homes, work places, and businesses are not beyond God's power. Many of us easily forget when we have gotten little opportunity in life. Let us learn to give God the glory in all our achievements because there are people who are stronger, richer, more righteous and more beautiful than you, yet they could not achieve the success you have attained. So, you most never take the glory upon yourself but ascribe it to God who has given the victory.

Prayer: *O God, let Your presence go with me and grant me victory in all the battles of my life.*

Insight: One with God is majority.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 22 - 24

ORDERLINESS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

Text: 1 Corinthians 14:40 *"Let all things be done decently and in order."*

Today's text is Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church about orderliness in their worship. Paul gave the instruction to them about how to maintain order in their services. Obviously, they were a gifted people. Although gifted, they were immature, hence, some of them used their spiritual gifts in a manner that was simply out of control. To this end, Paul had to guide them on what to do whenever they gathered together as a Church so that everyone could be edified, built-up or encouraged. God is not the author of confusion.

When the Holy Spirit is at work within a service or gathering, there should be harmony. No matter how emotional a service gets, order must be maintained because, “the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of the prophets” (1 Corinthians 14:32). God's purpose for any gathering of believers is that everyone leaves encouraged and instructed. This cannot be achieved in a chaotic atmosphere. Imagine you went to a church where two or three pastors got up at the same time and all started preaching. This would be weird, chaotic, confusing and a waste of time because, no one would be blessed. Then, how do we do things decently in our services? All those to lead in the service have specific roles to play and such roles should be played in maturity even when we are at liberty to use our gifts. Additionally, we are to be conscious of time management and doing everything to the glory of God.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, give us grace to corporate with Your Spirit to maintain orderliness in all our gatherings to the glory of Your name. Amen

Insight: Our worship in the church must be orderly and decent to the glory of God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 25 - 27

WALKING BY SIGHT

Text: Numbers 13:33 *"And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."*

Having waited for the spies for 40 days, they returned with terrible news because they viewed the land with the eyes of fear. The Israelites were under all assurances of success from God but they disbelieved God's power and ability. The spies' message discouraged a greater part of the people from going forward to Canaan. Ten out of the twelve who spied the land were behind the bad news. They were so emphatic that the Israelites believed their report and ignored the encouragement from Joshua and Caleb who were positive and optimistic about occupying the land. God was not happy with the people and promised that their negative confession would be fulfilled accordingly. God thereby promised that only Joshua and Caleb and the young ones would make it to the promised land.

When we base our judgement on what we see rather than on the word of God, we fall into error. Unbelief overlooks the promises and power of God, magnifies every danger and difficulty as well as fills the heart with discouragement. The instruction was to "go and possess the land" and God Himself was willing to go with them. Sight may give us the negative reality of every situation. It will see the obstacles, challenges, problems and impossibility without showing any hope of possible triumph. Rather than walking by sight, we are expected to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). We are thereby encouraged today to view our circumstances with the eyes of faith and to see God through it all.

Prayer: Almighty God, help me to walk by faith and see You in all circumstances in Jesus' name.

Insight: The devil will make a mountain out of a molehill to make us disbelieve God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 28 - 30

THE DANGER OF GRUMBLING

Text: Numbers 14: 22-23*"Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:"*

Today's text addressed those who grumbled against God in the wilderness. God said that the Israelites tempted Him ten times. They grumbled against Him in the face of every challenge or obstacle because they did not develop their faith in God. Obviously, some of their reasons for complaining seemed to be valid but a critical look at every circumstance that led to the grumbling shows that they simply lacked faith in God. They would have just experienced God's mighty hand upon them yet complained the next moment. It became more like a habitual thing for them. Moreover, they blamed God for delivering them from Egypt and made Him as if He had a negative intention about their journey. They therefore failed to appreciate Him or trust in His plan for them.

In what circumstances do you grumble? Grumbling is borne out of unbelief and lack of gratitude. Many of us grumble about barely everything in life. However, some of the conditions that we find ourselves and grumble is a sincere desire or prayer request of others. All we need to do is to appreciate what God has done for us so far and trust in His power to do more whenever we call upon His name. He desires that we have conversations with Him like children would with a loving father and not senseless chatters which clouds our vision and demeans God's wonders. Grumbling stems from a discontented spirit and it provokes God's anger. Let us rather develop a heart of gratitude and faith in God.

Prayer: *Everlasting God, help me to be grateful and trust in You instead of grumbling.*

Insight: Circumstances do not cause discontent; they rather reveal a discontent heart.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 31 - 32

DARE TO BE BOLD

Text: Numbers 27:7*"The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right;you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them."*

After the death of Zelophehad the son of Hepher without a son, his five daughters arose and went to meet Moses at the entrance of the tent of meeting to demand for their father's inheritance. The motivation of Zelophehad's daughters was not greed for land but a desire to perpetuate the name of their father. This is boldness stemmed from purity of heart and loyalty to their deceased father whom they intended to honour by carrying on with his name. Due to their show of boldness, they brought up a case that had never been addressed in the law before. God granted their plea and statutes were made to address such a case in the future.

They might not be the first who had experienced such. The only difference was that they had the boldness to speak up. There is no possession more than the inheritance we have in Christ through His atoning death on the cross of Calvary. It is sad to see believers indifferent to the great things into which God has brought each of His children. Are you in that category? We are encouraged today to be challenged by the noble faith of these daughters and like them, should delight to speak up, before God. Your natural disadvantage should not make you to give up rather, it should propel you to have a dialogue with God by faith. God can make you the first of a kind in history, just that you need to be confident.

Prayer: Loving Father*, grant me boldness to face my fears and disadvantages for unprecedent breakthrough in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: Protocol can be broken when faith is involved.

Operation Cover to Cover: Deuteronomy 33 - 34

TIME TO ADVANCE

Text: Deuteronomy 1:6-7*"The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying, 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites . . . as far as the great river, the River Euphrates.' "*

Moses spoke to the people all the Lord had given him in the commandment. Horeb was but eleven days distant from Kadesh-barnea. This was to remind them that their bad conduct had occasioned their tedious wandering, that they might more readily understand the advantages of obedience. Their season of going round had elapsed and God instructed them to move forward. It was time to advance and the order had come from God for them to move forward towards their objective, the Promised Land. No matter how comfortable they were in Horeb, that was not their destination. So, they had to move forward.

Often times we keep traversing about a point because of our disobedience but God knows when we have been tried enough and He calls us out to move forward. When He asks us to move forward, we must be prepared to move briskly as He leads us forward to the Promised Land ahead of us. Also in our Christian walk, this is a call to take a step ahead and move to the next level in all ramifications. It is said that an unmoved vehicle is destroyed by rust. The next level may mean improving the quality and effectiveness of our methods and not necessarily changing the message once it stems from sound doctrine. Do you know anymore Bible than you did last year? Do you pray more now than you did last year? Have you won anymore soul than last year? Check yourself.

Prayer: ***O*** *Lord of hosts, in your mercy, lead me to the next level in the journey of my life.*

Insight: We are soldiers not squatters; so, we must advance towards our objective.

Operation Cover to Cover: Joshua 1 - 4

OBEDIENCE: THE KEY TO UNLOCK BLESSING

Text: Deuteronomy 28:1"*Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you above all nations of the earth."*

Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy reminded the Israelites all the commandments the Lord had given them. The people were getting ready to enter the Promised Land and it was expedient to remind them that obeying the Lord's command attracts blessings while disobedience attracts curses. The condition attached to divine blessings is very explicit in today's text. It includes diligent obedience to the voice the LORD and observing carefully all His commandments. God's covenant of blessing for His people was thereby a conditional covenant: if they would obey, they would be blessed. The specifics of the blessing are listed, which include every aspect of their life collectively as a nation and as individuals.

The rewards of obedience far outweigh the pains. Serving Christ and obeying His command in this evil world may attract some painful conditions that would make us feel otherwise. Those who are exceedingly prosperous are probably unbelievers who even use their status to persecute us as believers. We may thereby ask ourselves where is the promised blessing for following and obeying Christ (Matthew 19:27-29). Questions have been raised about how much we love and serve God in Nigeria and yet, we are not a prosperous nation in comparison with other nations who naturally do not acknowledge God. The answers are very simple. Divine blessing is not limited to material prosperity in this world (1 Corinthians 15:19; Philippians 3:20-22). Moreover, obeying Christ's command is beyond mere religious activities without a deep sense of diligently honouring Christ through a righteous living.

Prayer*: Benevolent Father, help me to walk in full obedience to your word and instructions.*

Insight: Diligent obedience to God is the key to unlocking divine blessing.

Operation Cover to Cover: Joshua 5 - 8

THE CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Text: Joshua 1:8*"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth; but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."*

Joshua was to succeed Moses in leading the Israelites to the Promised Land after his death. He was saddled with the responsibility of taking the Israelites across the Jordan and settling them in the land. This was a herculean task because Canaan was not a vacant piece of land so he had to dispossess the original inhabitants who were strong and hostile. God knew the battles his mind must have been facing and hence sent His words of reassurance and a guide on how to attain success. God therefore gave him the conditions that would facilitate his success and prosperity. The conditions are all about the Word of God, the Book of the Law. He was to read and speak it regularly, meditate on it and practice it.

Real success has conditions which must be fulfilled before attainment. Genuinely, no one just stumbles over success in life. Our text today states clearly the conditions for success. The first is to study the Word of God. The second is to meditate on the Word of God, day and night. The third is to live according to the Word of God. These conditions are intertwined. For instance, without reading, studying and meditating on the Word of God we cannot live according to its teachings. This formula holds true for all time. Have you tried this and failed? It is not possible! We are encouraged today to live in conformity with the Word in order to have a successful and prosperous life.

Prayer: Heavenly *Lord, help me to live according to your precepts so I can be successful and prosperous.*

Insight: The Word of God well understood and religiously obeyed is the key to genuine success.

Operation Cover to Cover: Joshua 9 - 12

STAYING OPTIMISTIC

Text: Joshua 14:12*"Now therefore, give me this mountain, of which the Lord spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the Lord will be with me, I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said."*

Here is Caleb requesting for the share of his allotment of the hill country forty-five years after it was promised him by Moses when they returned from spying the land. Caleb kept this in mind and did not waiver in faith even after waiting for so long. He stayed optimistic. In Joshua 14:11b, he declared that he was just as vigorous to go to battle at that instant as he was forty years ago. For an eighty-five-years-old man to make such a pronouncement should be a big deal. However, he was optimistic because he knew that he had not reached his final destination. He maintained the fervour for the task ahead and was not lacking in zeal even after such a long period.

Are you running with the same zeal as the first time you received those instructions or promises from God? Do not be discouraged. God cannot lie; He is able. Keep holding unto Him with renewed fervour daily. We are enjoined to imitate Caleb and stay optimistic. Times and seasons may threaten the reality of the fulfilment of God's promises. Your unswerving faith in God will help you to remain hopeful against all odds. What are the challenges and obstacles frustrating the fulfilment of God's promises in your life? Is it sickness, old age, poverty, insecurity or failure? Be optimistic that God being with you, you will be able to overcome. Put your trust in God and He will never let you down. He will keep you on top of every situation.

Prayer: *Faithful God, give me grace to remain hopeful in the fulfilment of Your promises in my life in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: Those who stand on the promises of God can always remain optimistic.

Operation Cover to Cover: Joshua 13 - 16

COMFORTED TO COMFORT OTHERS

Text: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."*

At our various times of distress, God comes through for us and the beauty here is that, we also have to extend the comfort we have received from God to others. The good news is, God is not distant from us when we pass through trials and tribulations. But sometimes, we just need a hand to hold, a shoulder to cry on, someone physical like us to give us support. This support can mostly be viable if such a vessel is rooted in God in some way. Having head knowledge is different from having experiential knowledge. Many a time, people who have been there before know best how to comfort others because, they have felt the same pain and triumphed. So, their methods and approach are mostly useful. They know what to say and what not to, what to do and what not.

Dearly beloved, God's comfort will certainly come. It doesn't matter what you may be going through. God is always there to comfort you. The bad experiences He allows you to go through are for a reason. God will never give you a challenge more than you can handle and even when the burden grows bigger, He gives you a bigger shoulder to carry it (1 Corinthians 10:13). However, ensure you extend the favour you received from God to others who are experiencing the situation you have gone through. So, any comfort you receive from God isn't just for you. It must be shared.

Prayer: *God of all comfort, let me enjoy Your comfort in times of tribulations and make me a channel of Your comfort to others.*

Insight: We are comforted by God in order to be a reflection of His comfort to others.

Operation Cover to Cover: Joshua 17 - 20

WORSHIP THAT PLEASES GOD

Text: John 4:23*"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."*

The thought-provoking conversation between Jesus Christ and the Samaritan woman he met at the well reveals the truth about God's expectation on worship. The woman, after seeing Jesus as a prophet expressed her concern about the Jews insisting that God must be worshipped only in Jerusalem. She wondered why the decision of her forefathers to have places of worship on the mountains was adjudged not acceptable to God. However, Christ's response was neither in support of the Samaritans nor the Jews. Rather, He explained the type of worship that God desires which is not restricted to a geographical location. The most important thing is thereby worshipping God in truth and in spirit.

Simply put, worship is all that we are, reacting to all that God is. This entails quickening our conscience in holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, and to devote our will to the purpose of God. When worship is mentioned, our minds quickly run to solemn music but worship itself is not music-although, it can be expressed through music. The worship that pleases God is a life that honours Him, knows Him, obeys Him and proclaims Him as the way and not lip-singing or emotional outbursts. No one can honour, know, obey and proclaim God as a way of life in falsehood. They have not repented of their sins in thoughts, words and deeds. True worship is thereby leaving a life of concentration to God.

Prayer: *Everlasting God, give me the grace to worship You in truth and in spirit.*

Insight: Worship is a sincere submission of all our nature to the will of God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Joshua 21 - 24

REJOICING FOR THE COMING KING

Text: Zechariah 9:9 *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you: He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

Many Jews in Jesus' day could not just believe that their promised Messiah and King would come as lowly Saviour. They were expecting a mighty political deliverer who would lead Israel to fight the Roman Empire. Zechariah prophesied about the coming King of Israel and admonished the people to rejoice for His coming which would bring salvation. He further described how peaceful and humble the King would be, riding on a donkey. Zechariah's prophecy was fulfilled on Palm Sunday when Jesus publicly demonstrated to the Jews that He was their expected King and Messiah. He rode into Jerusalem while they watched Him being hailed as king. This bold display triggered his arrest and the accomplishment of the work of salvation through His eventual crucifixion.

The prophecy in today's text coming into literal fulfilment through the Triumphal Entry is an indication that the word of God is sure. Christ the King has brought a great rejoicing into this world. We can also be partakers of this joy if we recognize Him as our Lord, King and Saviour. Christ being a righteous King is able to make those who accept Him righteous in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He has also come to save us from our sins. All what Christ the King offers is free for all who believe in Him. However, He will still return one day as the righteous King that He is and judge those who fail to accept Him as their Saviour. The day of His second coming would be a day of sorrow for those who do not accept Him.

Prayer: *Gracious King, make me rejoice in the power of Your salvation and proclaim Your glory to the world.*

Insight: The coming of Christ the King is a blessing for all who accept Him as their Saviour.

Operation Cover to Cover: Judges 1 - 4

THE POWER OF UNITY

Text: Philippians2:2 *"Fulfil my joy by being like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."*

Disunity is one of Satan's most important tools against the Church and it grieves God. This is why Paul exhorted the churches on this serious matter. In Corinth, he gave them the admonition; *Now, I exhort you brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgement"* (1 Corinthians 1:10). In the same vein, having reminded the Philippian Christians of their experience in Christ and God's love for them, he exhorted them to be united. Paul had great joy whenever he thought about them, now he wanted to make the joy complete by their unity.

There can be no progress without unity. Moreso, the Spirit of God cannot dwell in discord. Therefore, God expects that we fight for unity, maintain unity and address disunity in relationships, in the family and the Church. As Paul spoke to the churches in his letters, he is also speaking to us today to be united. Let us meditate upon the importance of unity with the words of our heavenly Father in Genesis 11:6 concerning the builders of the tower of Babel "*And the Lord said, behold the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do".* Unity is possible when we have a common purpose and a common goal.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, use me to promote unity in my family, relationships, and in the Church.*

Insight: Unity is rooted in the very nature of God.

Operation Cover to Cover: Judges 5 - 8

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Text: Galatians3:28*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

The profound truth expressed by Paul in today's text challenges us to see one another through the lens of unity in diversity, which is the cornerstone of the gospel message. Paul wrote his letter to address the tension and controversy caused by the Judaizers. They were teaching the church that the Gentile Christians had to follow the Jewish ceremonial laws in order to be saved. This doctrine brought a division in the church along cultural and racial lines. The Jewish Christians saw themselves as superior while the Gentile Christians felt inferior and marginalized. The letter of Paul was thereby aimed at correcting the false teachings of the Judaizers and to emphasize the truth of the Gospel.

We were born into the world with so many distinctive features. Race, gender, belief, social status, cultures and walks of life differentiate us according to the world's system. We are always caught up in the idea that there is a hierarchy where we or others are better than another. However, we are to understand that even if the world gives us differences, in Christ, we all stand on the same ground of grace, love and unity. God has given us equal inheritance in Christ Jesus irrespective of tribe or race. Jesus Christ shed His blood for the salvation of all mankind. So, when we begin to discriminate against one another as though we are any different then, there is a problem. God does not want us to dwell in error because we all have been saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, cast down every wall of division and help us to see one another the way you see us all.*

Insight: The Church's unifying factor is the Gospel of Christ.

Operation Cover to Cover: Judges 9 - 12

GENUINE REPENTANCE

Text: Jonah 3:10 *"When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened."*

The city of Nineveh was a great city with a record of evil that attracted divine judgement. So, Prophet Jonah was sent by God to deliver a message of judgment on the city. Even when Jonah's message to the people was incomplete, not giving them any chance for repentance, they responded by faith in the One who sent the messenger. Today's text shows us how repentance ought to be. Genuine repentance should be from the heart not from the lips. The repentance of the people of Nineveh was faith-motivated. The king's official response was a repentance that involved humility and self-denial. God Himself was very impressed by the reaction of the people and their king, so He decided to forgive them.

For us to repent means to turn away from our old ways of life and embrace the new way of life in Christ Jesus. God states the conditions for forgiveness saying, "If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sins and I will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). If individuals, society, community, groups of people and nations are ready to give up their evils ways and turn to God in repentance, God is also ready to turn things around for their good. Our repentance must be total and genuine if we want to make things

Prayer: *Merciful God, give me a heart of genuine repentance and use me to preach Your message to sinners.*

Insight: Genuine repentance attracts divine mercy and forgiveness.

HOLY THINGS FOR HOLY PEOPLE

Text: 1 Corinthians11:27*"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."*

Maundy Thursday is the day during the Holy Week to commemorate two important events during Christ's last days of His earthly ministry. It is the last Thursday before Easter, a day that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples in display of humility and commanded them to do the same. He also celebrated his last Passover with them. The second important event is the Last Supper also known as the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed, shared the unleavened bread and wine with His disciples symbolizing His body and blood. He then asked them to always do it in His remembrance. As important as the Lord's Supper is for Christians, Paul warns us to examine ourselves lest we eat and drink in an unworthy manner.

Partaking in the Holy Communion without self-examination makes us to dishonor the sacrifice that Christ made on the Cross. Anyone who partakes in an irreverent and sinful manner sins against the body and blood of Christ. We therefore need to evaluate our attitude and understanding of the nature and purpose of the Lord's Supper. Even when the elements used as the bread and wine are made from wheat flour and grape respectively, the consecrated elements should be understood to symbolize the body and blood of Christ. So, it attracts divine judgement ranging from sickness to death when it is taken carelessly. Do we carefully examine ourselves before approaching the Lord's Table? We need to know that holy things are for holy people.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, cleanse me and make me a worthy partaker of Your body and blood.*

Insight: You have to be holy to be a worthy partaker on the Lord's Table.

Operation Cover to Cover: Judges 16 - 18

CHRIST'S PAIN OUR GAIN

Text: Isaiah 53:5 *"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."*

Today is called Good Friday, a day to commemorate the agony and death of Christ on the Cross for our redemption. Though a day of an unfortunate incident of the crucifixion of an innocent Man, the good outcome of the event makes it memorable and worth celebrating. Christ suffered and died for the purpose of our salvation. So, as sorrowful as His suffering and death may be, His subsequent resurrection on the third day brings an exceedingly joy that overshadows the initial sorrow. Today's text is a clear prophecy about the suffering of the Messiah and the purpose of His suffering. The text gives an apt picture of the Crucifixion both literally and figuratively. He was wounded and bruised for the sake of our sins. He was whipped that we may be healed.

The death of Christ is to restore the relationship between man and God. Our sins are atoned for by the death of Christ. Through His redemptive work, we are saved from the pains and penalty of sin. However, the gain from the pain of Christ is not automatically conferred upon all mankind. It is conferred upon those who believe and accept Him as their Lord and Saviour. We can only get the benefits of Christ's agony and death when we genuinely repent of our sins. God will not be happy with us if we do not value the sacrificial death of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Additionally, as Christians, we need to proclaim to the world the that Christ died for our sins.

Prayer: *Gentle Saviour, give me grace to appreciate Your redemptive work and proclaim it to the whole world.*

Insight: The death of Christ is the proof of God's love for mankind.

THE RESTLESS ENEMIES

Text: Matthew 27:65-66 "Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting guard."

The next day after the crucifixion of Christ, the chief priests and the Pharisees met with Pilate asking him for soldiers to guard Jesus' tomb so that His disciples would not come at night to steal His body. We would think that the enemies of Jesus would be satisfied that He was no more alive. However, they remembered that Jesus, when He was still alive, had promised to rise from the dead after three days. They were not comfortable; they even became restless despite having their wish to crucify Jesus. Pilate graciously granted their request for soldiers to guard the tomb. When everything about Christ's death and resurrection was going on as planned by God, the enemies became apprehensive about what would happen next. However, their scheme would not stop Christ from rising from the dead.

The Lord who raised Christ from the dead is still the same today. He is always at work to accomplish His purpose in our lives. The devil and his agents, who pose as enemies of God's purpose in our lives, are always restlessly scheming. However, rest assured that Jesus commands your destiny. So, no power of hell, no scheme of man can ever stop God's purpose in your life. As Christians, we do not have any cause to fear the scheme of the devil when our lives are on the right track. Let us also not make ourselves enemies of God's purpose either in our own lives or someone else's life because there is no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22).

Prayer: *Almighty God, frustrate the plans of the devil in my life and let Your own purpose be accomplished in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Insight: No power of hell or scheme of man can stop God's purpose.

Operation Cover to Cover: Ruth 1 - 2

GLAD NEWS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Text: Mark 16:6*"But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.' "*

Christ's death had been a terrible experience to all His faithful disciples, including women who had benefitted from His ministry. It was a very sorrowful and painful experience for them all that their Master was crucified like a common criminal. The women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome) went to the grave early on Sunday morning, out of love and devotion to Christ, to anoint His dead body which they were unable to do at His burial because of the Sabbath preparation. However, they were shocked to see an empty tomb thinking that Christ's body had been stolen or taken away. Today's text is thereby the response of the man, an angel who was there to calm their nerves. What a great news that He is risen!

Christ's resurrection is a glad news to us as Christians. It is proven fact that gives us confidence and hope for tomorrow. If Christ was not raised from the dead, His death was in vain and our faith would be pointless. However, by His resurrection, Christ shattered the power of death and arose victoriously over evil. What a great victory! We are thereby to spread the good news and encourage one another with the joy of Christ's resurrection today. We can only share in the joy of this great news when we accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour. The same news that made his disciples joyous made the devil and his agents greatly sad. Let us therefore, in our celebrations spread the news and the certainty of His second coming.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to share in the joy of Your resurrection and spread the news to the world.*

Insight: With Christ's resurrection, death is no longer a prison but a passage to God's presence.

Operation Cover to Cover: Ruth 3 - 4