



Spreading the Good News Around the World

Walk the Winning Walk

A Heart Talk on Living a
Fulfilled Life in CHRIST

DIVINE LITERATURE INTERNATIONAL

Welcome to God's Family, Beloved!

The Bible says whoever is set free by Christ is indeed free (John 8:36). You were set free from bondage the moment you surrendered your life to Christ and should begin to experience the benefits of His death and resurrection.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, all does not end with the short prayer of salvation. We begin to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). It is important to emphasise here that we do not work FOR salvation but do need to work it OUT once we get saved. Ensure that you surrender your life to Christ with no restrictions. Set no boundaries for Him to be the Lord of your life. You are blessed!

We Love You in Christ!

Divine Literature International

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Style of Writing is casual and conversational!

Welcome to the Family of God, beloved! Once we receive Christ, we begin to work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12). It is important to emphasise here that we do not work for salvation but do need to work it out when we get saved. The Holy Spirit enables us to do this. Many have been made to believe that receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour is all that is required to make it to Heaven and have eternal life, regardless of the lifestyle one chooses to live; but this is not true. The truth is that all does not end with the Prayer of Salvation. Making a decision to receive Him is only the starting point of our blissful relationship with God. Christ will never turn His back on anyone who believes in, and receives Him (John 6:37, Matthew 18:11-13). That said, a person who claims to have received Him may very well do the turning directly or indirectly, when they reject His Lordship altogether. He or she is then said to have left the Faith by choice.

Jesus Christ said that not everyone who says they believe and follow Him will make it to Heaven, unless

they do the will of God the Father (Matthew 7:21-27). It takes some time to get to the point where we finally reject and depart from Him, but it is possible. The Bible speaks of it as, “A dog turning back to its own vomit” (2 Peter 2:20-22). Gladly, our merciful and loving Father is always delighted to have us in His arms when we wander away but find our way back to Him like the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32).

You may have wondered: “*I am saved. What should I do now?*”

(i) **Forgive Yourself:** You are now a new person. God showed how much He loves you by offering His only Son to die in lieu of punishment for all your sins.

Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Old things in the verse above are the sinful passions and desires that you once had. Your enslavement to them was broken when you received Jesus Christ. You are no longer your own, but the temple of the Holy Spirit. He now dwells in you (1 Corinthians 6:19).

(ii) **Commit to Living a Life of Holiness:** This is of great importance, beloved (Hebrews 12:14). Once you are determined to fully obey God and live for Him, all

things will start to fall into place. The Holy Spirit will enable you to live holy, as you cooperate with Him.

(iii) **Get a Bible and Spend Time with God:** Develop the habit of reading the Bible and praying to God always. It may not be for a long period of time initially, but as you grow spiritually, you will find that the time you spend with Him gets longer. You can make use of a Bible online for now, if you don't have one yet. Visit our webpages, *Read the Bible Online* and *Listen to the Bible Online*, for Bibles in many languages. It is important that you read your Bible daily to be grounded in the teachings of Christ. Reading the Bible will help you live a victorious life. In it also, you will find the promises of God to you. The Bible (which is the Word of God) helps you stand firm when the devil whispers his lies and tries to lure you back into sin and the life of misery that you just escaped. The Bible is a powerful weapon that every victorious believer holds on to, which is why it is called, The Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Pray to the Lord for understanding and meditate on what you've read. There are certain parts of the Bible that you may not be able to comprehend at first. Again, pray for understanding. As time goes on, what you read will begin to make sense, and bring great benefits to you.

(iv) **Find a Bible-Believing Church or Assembly:** It is important that you are fed with sound doctrine on this

journey. Find a church or place of fellowship, where you can worship and grow spiritually.

(v) **Seek Fellowship with Followers of Jesus Christ:**

Associate with other true believers who will answer other questions that you may have and support you on your Christian journey.

(vi) **Get Baptised:** Ask to be baptised by immersion in water, as modelled by Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:13-17), and commanded (Matthew 28:19). Through baptism, we identify with His death and resurrection. Baptism also signifies the death and burial of our sinful nature, our resurrection as forgiven people through Christ (Colossians 2:10-13) - abandoning our selfishness, pride, past; and placing all that we possess before Him. The Spiritual Leader at your local church or assembly will touch more on the subject of Baptism.

(vii) **Be a Faithful Witness for the Lord:** Tell others about your new faith in Jesus Christ. Let them know about His saving grace and the importance of Salvation. Refer to our Evangelism Styles webpage for tips on becoming an effective witness for Him or make use of our Gospel Tracts (available for free).

Below is a suggested order of reading for a new believer who needs to start to read and understand the Bible. There are 66 Books in the Holy Bible to be covered, but this plan will get you started:

- The Gospel of John
- The Gospel of Matthew
- The Gospel of Mark
- I John
- II John
- III John
- Genesis
- Exodus
- Ephesians
- Galatians
- The Gospel of Luke
- I Corinthians
- II Corinthians
- Romans
- Proverbs
- Psalms

An important point about reading to understand the Bible, is not to be in a hurry. The Father gives spiritual knowledge through the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Holy Spirit began to dwell in you when you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. Pray to the Father for understanding, and then meditate on what you have read.

Greetings!

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Choosing a Good Bible-Based Church or Assembly (I)

Reflection: Matthew 24:24, 1 John 4:1

Stay away from churches or assemblies where the leaders seem to be doing exploits – miracles and such, but never attribute them to the One and Only True God. Such are growing by leaps and bounds these days. They can say to you, "Arise from your sick bed", and you will indeed arise. They can also say to you, "That job is yours", and a few days later, you are sitting on an executive chair. The problem with these blessings is that they are temporary. Not just that – such blessings are bound to lead those who accept them to the path of destruction, because they are carefully packaged from the kingdom of darkness. All good and perfect things come from the Only True God; He adds no sorrow to His blessings (James 1:17, Proverbs 10:22).

It is true that Jesus Christ said we shall do greater things than He did (John 14:12) – He was only here for 33 years; but He never said we would do them through

other spiritual forces. He said, "Without Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). It is through Him that a true believer does exploits (Philippians 4:13). We do them in His Name. The force that strengthens these so-called miracle workers, however, is satan - a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), who is an expert at creating counterfeit blessings. Whatever satan offers is not only temporary; it also comes at a high cost. These blessings could cost a person who accepts them their life, or that of a loved one; their peace, joy, health, and other things of value that cannot be recovered except God intervenes.

Believers in Christ are meant to do exploits for God. Some of us have also been empowered to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, and more (Mark 16:17-18, Matthew 10:8, John 14:12). But what goes on in some of these churches and assemblies?

(1) The leaders do not acknowledge the One and Only True God as the source of their strength, and the One who performed the miracles.

(2) They rarely make out time to talk about sin, the need for repentance, the importance of salvation, Christ Jesus, His Saving Power, and His Coming-Soon. They are mostly all about prophecies, acquisition of wealth, miracles, and more miracles.

(3) They make you believe there is something supernatural about them beyond what we all hear about chosen men and women of God.

(4) Some also directly or indirectly demand to be worshipped, claiming to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the world, or the second coming of Christ. When I was a young girl, this Jesus existed in my country of descent. They called him Jesus of Oyingbo (Jesu Oyingbo). What came to my mind, even as a young girl, was that the Jesus Christ I read about in the Bible was meek, lowly in heart, loving, and went about doing good; but this Jesus was ruthless, had an insatiable thirst for wealth and women, and was often in the news for the wrong reasons. Even at a young age, I knew nothing about the man people foolishly worshipped and called Jesus was Christ-like, for the primary reason that he taught the most appalling doctrine to lure innocent souls to his fold. We all know the source of his power by now, from the little I have shared about him. This was just one man then in my country of descent, but there were others like that in other nations - Haile Selassie (who was proclaimed to be the Messiah) for a very good example, and many in these last days (Luke 17:23, Matthew 24:23).

There is only One Christ and Saviour (not two or more), who is worthy to receive Glory, Honour, and Power. He is Jesus Christ of Nazareth: The Holy One of Israel,

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, The Hope of Glory, The KING of kings, and The LORD of lords. May we be guided.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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Choosing a Good Bible-Based Church or Assembly (II)

It's time to look elsewhere, if you are made to feel uncomfortable, guilty, or downright miserable at your place of worship because you are not in a position to give as expected. Some churches and assemblies give you the notion that having a fulfilled life in Christ is contingent upon your willingness to lay down a big chunk of your money. This distasteful sermon is usually given to fund unworthy causes or to satisfy the leader's huge appetite for worldly possessions - let's be real! It is false teaching to assure givers that they will reap a hundred-fold or more of what they have given. Likewise, making Giving or Pledging to give a condition to receive a miracle and/or have their prayers answered, and by that, pressurise them into laying down their money by all means (credit card, debit card, loans, etc).

Sadly, many believers are victims of these places, because of their love for God and the pursuit of signs and wonders, with some failing in their family responsibilities. Bills are left unpaid, children are going

hungry, while spiritual leaders live lavish lifestyles they normally can't afford, off their victims' giving.

The blessings of God are not for sale, beloved. He does not need your money to bless you. He is not after your money. Think about this for a minute: How is it possible that the Custodian of all things (Haggai 2:8, Psalm 50:12) who gives and owns all we have, is in dire need of them to that extent? The Lord summarised His self-existence when He said, even if He was hungry, He would not tell us, for He owns everything on earth (Psalm 50:12).

It is good to give to propagate the Gospel. It is great to give to those in need (Proverbs 19:17). However, God needs your heart first. When you have given Him your heart, then you can give as you desire. Give, because you want to be a good steward of what God has blessed you with - not because you are expecting a hundred-fold of what you have given, in return. God may choose to reward you – that is true; but HOW He rewards your giving (if He chooses to), WHAT He rewards you with, and HOW SOON He rewards you, are His prerogative. If you have something to give, give as your heart desires. If you do not have much to give, give your widow's mite. If you do not have anything to give, give God praise. He would rather you give cheerfully - never grudgingly, and certainly not out of compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Your salvation is personal, beloved. Do not ever give up on God and forfeit your relationship with Him because you are compelled to give.

Shalom!

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Choosing a Good Bible-Based Church or Assembly (III)

Reflection: Jude 1:4, 2 Peter 2:1

Not every church is a Bible-Believing Church, beloved. Having the words Church or God attached to the name of a religious entity, their building, website, billboards, etc., does not always mean we are moving in the same direction with them, running the Christian Race together, and serving the same God. Jesus Christ said, "I know My sheep, and My sheep know Me" (John 10:14).

"For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among us. They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

The Bible says, whoever denies that Jesus is The Christ is a liar and one of the many antichrists spoken about in 1 John 2:18. Anyone who denies the Son does not have the Father (1 John 2:23). And not just that - it is also a grievous and unforgivable sin to blaspheme the

Holy Spirit (see Matthew 12:31-32). There are religious groups that view Christ as merely a great prophet. Some also do not have reverence for the Holy Spirit. Some of these religious groups claim to be of the Christian Faith, and yet have a problem believing that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One - the One and True God that we serve. They are not three Gods, but three persons in One: The FATHER being the unseen Omnipresent Source of all being, revealed by the SON, and experienced as the HOLY SPIRIT.

The issue is not so much those who believe in the Jesus Christ-is-Not-God Heresy, but those who proclaim it to others (Matthew 23:13,15). They shall have their reward, for the reason that Jesus Christ the Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6) Himself said, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). In their boldness and arrogance, they have misled numerous innocent souls. May we be guided.

Shalom!

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Recognising an Unfruitful Gathering

Your place of worship is swarmed with beautifully dressed and high-achieving people. The parking lot of this magnificent building is filled to capacity every Sunday, with folks buzzing as they park their eye-catching cars. Not a problem! After all, the Bible says those who diligently seek the Lord will lack no good thing (Psalms 34:10).

Here is where things may get dangerous: The Pastor hardly teaches from the Bible. Nothing is mentioned about the urgent need to completely surrender to Christ, the importance of repentance, righteous living, the reality of Heaven and hell, and the second coming of Christ. Sermons are rather centred on Prosperity - emphasis is on gaining financial wealth and possessions, living your best life, pursuing mutually beneficial relationships, and more. The place is as lukewarm as a poorly served cup of tea on a cold winter night - you have no accountability whatsoever for your flaws, as they are overlooked. You just seem to be floating through life.

If this has been a comfortable place for you, then you have gained nothing, beloved! First, you cannot serve both God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). Then, you run the risk of losing your soul ultimately if you choose to serve mammon (Mark 8:36-37). Further, Jesus Christ wants nothing to do with a believer who is spiritually lukewarm (Revelation 3:14-17). If you value your life very much and want to be assured of eternal bliss, you should get to the point where you are grabbing your things and getting up to leave such a gathering.

You only need to pay attention to events around the world to know that fame, material wealth, and other worldly possessions without Christ do not go far. Consider them Prosperity without Peace - only to be enjoyed for a short period, or never. True prosperity flows from the presence of God in your life, as you deepen your relationship with Him. When you have Him, you have it all. All good and perfect gifts come from Him, through Jesus Christ His Son (James 1:17, Proverbs 10:22, 1 Corinthians 8:6).

Stay focused on seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, beloved. All other things shall then be added unto you (Matthew 6:33).

Shalom!

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False Mediators

Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between Father God and Man (1 Timothy 2:5). He is the only One who intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). Therefore, since you have received Him as your Lord and Saviour, you have direct access to Father God through faith in Him (Ephesians 3:12). You can approach Father God freely and with confidence to make a request, make a confession, give a petition, share your heart with Him, ask for guidance, etc. in the Name of Jesus. You do not need a fellow human acting as an intermediary, to communicate with your Father.

Contrary to popular belief, no human being was given the authority by Father God to speak to Him on your behalf - not a preacher, spiritual leader, prayer partner, dead saints, Mary mother of Jesus Christ, or other mortals you presume have the privileged role of an intermediary because you believe they are closer to Father God than you are. Not even angels have this authority. By the same token, no one has the authority

to plead your case with Jesus Christ, before He then pleads the case with Father God. The most any human being can possibly do, is to agree with you in prayers (Matthew 18:19). No one has the power to make things happen for you.

Great things happen when believers come together in unity and agree in prayers. However, answers to prayers said, blessings, miracles, and every other good and perfect thing we enjoy should never be ascribed to a fellow human being, but the Almighty God, who chose to be merciful to us. He alone deserves the glory. Give God all the glory and appreciate the faithful believer(s) who agreed with you in prayers concerning your situation.

Shalom!

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When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, all does not end with the short prayer of salvation. We must continually work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). The Holy Spirit enables us to do this. However, a person is set free from bondage once they surrender their life completely to Christ, and should begin to experience the benefits of His death and resurrection. A person should not be in the same situation they were in before they gave their life to Him, unless they did not accept Him wholeheartedly. He that Christ makes free, is indeed free (John 8:36).

Did you surrender your whole life to Christ, or just part of it? Make the decision to commit your life to Him today, with no restrictions (if you haven't). We don't set boundaries to be in a relationship with the Lord. He is not into the half-measure business.

Surrendering completely to Jesus Christ also means, burning all the occult and ungodly materials in your

possession, getting rid of addresses of past lovers, contact information of psychics, fortune tellers, etc (Acts 19:18-19). You are a new creature now and will not be needing them any longer. Do away with everything that does not glorify God. Be intentional about avoiding people, places, and things that can easily lure you back to sin. Be aware that, hanging on to part of your past life will place you in a worse state than you were in before you surrendered your life to Christ; and this is the truth (see Matthew 12:43-45).

We believe that there is one God; demons also believe and tremble (James 2:19). Satan knows the Bible from cover to cover. Just as Jesus Christ said we shall be known for signs and wonders in Mark 16:17-18, the messengers of satan have nicely wrapped counterfeit packages as well. They mimicked God's power in Exodus 7:8-13, turning their rods into snakes; remember? This is why miracles, healing, and blessings from certain religious places are never permanent, and people seem to be going back for another round of session to be '*re-healed*', '*re-delivered*', and '*re-blessed*' -- as it were.

A person who is not truly saved will always be at the mercy of satan, and lured back to the path of destruction, eventually. May we be guided. If this message doesn't apply to you, we rejoice with you, beloved.

Shalom!

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The Grievous Sin of Idolatry

One of the schemes that the devil uses to bring the elect down is Idolatry. God said nothing, and no one should be worshipped besides Him. He explicitly forbids it (Exodus 20:4-5). Some consequences of worshipping and serving creatures rather than the Creator are listed in Romans 1:21-32.

Idolatry goes beyond creating false gods and bowing down to them in worship. Let us look into a few examples of Idolatry.

Idolising Creatures

(1) Saints, Angels, Mary Mother of Jesus Christ

Saints, angels, Mary Mother of Jesus Christ and their images or statues are not to be worshipped. Mary was no doubt of impeccable character, and much loved by all Christians. However, she is not to be prayed to, petitioned through, or worshipped; likewise, saints and angels. Making images and pictures of God the Father, Jesus Christ, Mary, angels, saints in the Bible,

and supposedly using them to connect to God is also a very common act of idolatry (Exodus 20:1-6). Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man, beloved (1 Timothy 2:5).

(2) **Religious Leaders**

(a) You may find yourself worshipping and serving a creature instead of the Creator, when you do not acknowledge that blessings come from God, and not the vessel through whom He gives them (James 1:17). This is so rampant today, as folks give credit to, and idolise mere mortals like themselves; and blindly give their all to support selfish and vain causes just to please them. Thank God for the lives of those He has used to graciously bless you but give Him alone the glory - not Him and the vessel (1 Peter 4:11).

(b) A lot of well-meaning folks in the vineyard have also served their leaders with great zeal, thinking they were serving God. While some of these folks got used and dumped, some got swindled out of their possessions. Unbeknownst to them, their service was not unto God; and so, they missed out on His blessings, as He never acknowledged all they did.

(3) **Self**

We set ourselves up against God when we attempt to take His glory. God uses us in different capacities to

be a Blessing to others and for signs and wonders, all for His Glory. We are not to direct attention to ourselves while we go about doing what He has called us to do. We are what we are, and have what we have by His grace.

Modern Day Idols

Many people unconsciously worship idols, these days. One does not have to physically bow to an object or a person for them to become an idol. An idol is anyone or anything that takes the place of God in your life or is depended on more than Him. An idol could be some addiction (drug, alcohol, etc.), money, an asset, your career, a portrait, your spouse, your children – just to mention a few. Prayerfully unseat the idol - be intentional about doing so.

Accepting Undeserved Worship

We may let our desire to be respected and admired for our gifts get the best of us, and unconsciously accept worship. Only God deserves to be worshipped, beloved. If saints and angels rejected worship, as recorded in the Bible, we should be quick to do so, as well.

A Saint Rejected Worship: *When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying,*

“Stand up; I am only a man myself.” (Acts 10:25–26)

An Angel Rejected Worship: *“Then I fell down at his feet (the angel’s feet) to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Revelation 19:10).*

When one of the Pharisees asked Jesus Christ what the greatest commandment was, He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:34-37). God alone is worthy of our worship. May we be guided.

Shalom!

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A Powerful Weapon (I): The Word of God

You may or may not know already that you should read, meditate on, memorise, and use the Word of God to your advantage. The Word of God is quick, powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). There is power in the tongue as well (Proverbs 18:21). Even the ungodly know this, which is why they use incantations and text from books and other materials to bring their plans to fulfilment.

Once, I was grading students' exam sheets in a higher institution of learning. As I was going about my business, I stumbled on a particular sheet with a few strange sentences. It took a few minutes to realise they were verses from the Quran - not meant to bless me; but we thank God for the Blood of Jesus. There were sheets from other students as well, with sentences, right at the beginning of the answer sheets (some at the end), written in Hindi, Arabic, etc. I mean, those students were bold! These were English-Speaking students, though from foreign nations – they certainly spoke English in class. Whether they were good students or

not, is irrelevant here; but I can tell you that most, if not all of them, failed the course. The point I'm making here is this: Those students knew certain words were powerful and were ready to use them to make things happen. Now, the effectiveness of the word used by a person for whatever reason, will of course depend on its source and the power backing the one who is using it.

The ungodly curse, cast spells, and control or manipulate their victims, using words. If they know well enough to do these, why would we, followers of Christ, who have authority, not use the Word of God for our own good? If you have not started already, learn to use the Word of God to your advantage.

The Bible made it clear that satan is our enemy – cunning and hostile to the core (John 10:10, 1 Peter 5:8), yet some believers do not fight back when he attempts to execute his plans for their lives. Not only do we have the authority to overcome the power of satan, as followers of Christ (Luke 10:19) – we have also been given the full armour of God as a means of defence against his schemes (Ephesians 6:10-18).

A piece of this armour is the Word of God (also called the Sword of the Spirit) – a powerful offensive weapon through and through! Use the Word of God to counter satan's plans, his accusations, and temptations. Jesus

Christ used no miraculous power to overcome the temptations of satan in the wilderness, even though He could have. He simply used the Word of God (Matthew 4:1-11). We are to do the same, as His followers.

There are times when the war between the Kingdom of Light and the kingdom of darkness is verbal – an exchange of words (so to speak). Again, the Word of God is available to you. Use it! Spoken words are powerful; either for good or for evil (Proverbs 8:21). They have the potential to build and to destroy. This is why those who are spiritually conscious respond with positive statements when people give them evil reports or utter negative statements to them. They are never in agreement with these. You have not taken vengeance when you do that; you have simply responded and stepped over what was said to you. Being silent means that you are in agreement with what they said. The ungodly have no power over you, unless you choose to let them. Jesus Christ gave you power to tread upon serpents, scorpions, and all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19). Exercise that power to the fullest. Speak the Word like Christ did.

Pray the Word, accordingly. Learn to use verses from the Bible (the written Word of God). If you find yourself in a difficult situation, pick a verse that speaks to the situation, and say for example: It is written in <quote the verse>, and so I take authority over <mention the

situation>. We take authority over situations by releasing the Word of God upon them. Another example is to pray in this manner: Father, it is written in Your Word that those who seek You will never lack anything good - then continue by making your request known to Him with this. There are many verses available to you.

You also have the liberty to seek the counsel of the Holy Spirit on a situation through Bible verses. He will prompt or lead you to verses that address the situation. He can speak to you audibly as well, if you are spiritually-alert. I experienced this some years ago. He gave me a particular verse in my sleep. He only mentioned the verse. So, I had to grab my Bible when I woke up, since I was not doing a good job of memorising Bible verses at the time and didn't know what the text in the verse was. I understood what His counsel was for me after I read it, and then did the needful. I triumphed over the situation I was having, shortly afterwards; all glory to God! It was amazing.

There are other ways the Lord speaks to His beloved, besides the three I mentioned.

Another advantage you have, is to confess the promises of God to you. You will find them all in His written Word (the Bible). Confess the promises, whether you are in a mode of prayer or not. Meditate on them;

memorise them; and confess them to remain victorious. His promises are “Yes” and “Amen” in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20), beloved!

Feel free to visit our other website, www.doveletters.org for Bible Verses on different situations.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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A Powerful Weapon (II): Personal Testimony

Reflection: Luke 7:21-22

Do we proclaim the power and the greatness of God by telling those who care to know, what He has done for us? Personal Testimony is a powerful weapon that silences our accuser - satan, and destroys the works of darkness, when given with the right motive. It is our conviction, our confession, and what we believe God has done, and will do again. Revelation 12:11 is relevant to believers of today, as well - not only do we overcome satan with our testimony of Christ as the Bible says; we also build people's faith and populate the Kingdom of God, when we testify of our life-changing experiences to highlight the merits of what Christ did for us on the Cross. As you testify, the Holy Spirit comes alongside to bear witness to what you are saying, by convincing people who have an open mind of their need for Christ.

Make it a point to testify of the goodness of God in your life, beloved. It does wonders! The love you have for

others should compel you to bear witness to what God has done in your life, so that they can experience His goodness as well. Contrary to popular belief, the devil cannot steal your joy or destroy your blessings if you attribute them to God and share your testimonies with the right motive. It is very important that you show-case the awesome power of God when you share personal testimonies – not your strength, resources, or the vessels through whom God made things happen for you.

We hold back our testimonies sometimes, because we do not want to be judged as being showy or prideful. But let us remember that Christ gave us the commission to spread the Good News (The Gospel). Telling others what God has done for us is one of the ways we spread the Good News (Mark 5:1-20). Personal Testimony has always been very effective in spreading the Good News. Some people out there want to know what the Lord we believe and have so much faith in has done for us before they even listen to what we have to say to them about getting saved. This shouldn't be a problem for us (1 Peter 3:15)! We are not to judge them. The goal is to give them the opportunity to receive the free Gift of Salvation and be privileged to have the life-changing experiences we have had.

God wants our commitment to testify and speak of Him, more than the resources and other things He has blessed us with. One of the reasons those are not as

important to Him, is that He owns them all (Haggai 2:8, Psalm 50:12) and has the power to withdraw them at any time, to be transferred into the hands of those who will put them to good use for His Kingdom (Ecclesiastes 2:26, Job 27:16-17).

Testifying of the goodness of God (which exposes the lies of satan) also sustains our breakthroughs, blessings, and miracles. We position ourselves for more. A wise child continually shows gratitude for the good things he receives from a parent, in expectation of more (Luke 17:11-19).

Testifying of the awesome power of God could be as simple as this:

Someone is struggling in an area of their life (for example):

(1) Introduce Christ to them. Let them know He has the answer to the way out of their situation.

(2) Tell them how you were in a similar situation and God saw you through it. Tell them how you have triumphed over adversities. Tell them how good God has been to you, and all you have experienced since you gave your life to Christ.

You have testified! Now, take it to the next level by telling them how to get saved, and have a personal

relationship with Jesus Christ. Then encourage and follow up on them. This person may or may not want to give your recommended solution a thought at first, but it is doubtful that they would reject it altogether after hearing your personal testimony.

To wrap this topic up: Let us keep in mind (as we testify) that it is not our place to condemn a sceptic who eventually surrendered to Jesus Christ on the basis of a personal testimony we shared with them, after everything else they tried failed them. Our responsibility is to lead unsaved people to Christ - not set the criteria for them to be saved beyond what is specified in the Bible. Jesus Christ will never turn away anyone who comes to Him to be saved (John 6:37). It is not uncommon for people to give up on options they thought were available to them, to look for a way out. Many of us were in their shoes before we got saved - an adversity we were faced with made us turn to Christ.

Testify and overcome again and again, beloved. Let others know they can also be victorious in Christ Jesus. You are blessed!

Shalom!

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Developing Yourself Spiritually

Many who have been running the Christian race for quite some time still chase after other believers to make things happen for them. While they should be working on themselves to move to the next level, they depend on others to pray for them, lay hands on them, and/or prophesy into their lives, for all to be well.

Nowhere is it written in the Bible that we have another Mediator besides Jesus Christ. Neither is it true that it cannot be well with you until a particular person receives a revelation or prays for you. Do you know, without a shadow of doubt that a person will attend to your plight and pray for you day and night? Absolutely not! You are not with them 24/7. Only Christ and you, can love you to that extent.

You should be at the level where you are determined to develop yourself spiritually - a level where you now ask others to pray with you, not pray for you. God is no respecter of persons (Deuteronomy 10:17, Acts 10:34). If you seek Him diligently, you will have a personal

encounter with Him as well. That said, some effort is required to grow spiritually. While others mentor you, do your part. Start by studying the Word more - you should have your own Bible or access to one by now (hopefully), get some good Scriptural Books, eBooks, and other resources; listen to good sermons online, etc. Spend quality time with the Lord, to learn at His feet and hear from Him.

Seek the Creator, not the creature, beloved. If you are yet to have a personal encounter with Him, ensure that you have surrendered all aspects of your life to Christ, not just some. May we be guided.

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Getting Too Intelligent for Our Own Good

Reflection: 1 Corinthians 2:10-14, Titus 3:9

One thing not to do as you begin your Christian Race is to analyse the Word of God and Biblical doctrine. The Holy Bible (which is the Word of God) is what it is. It cannot be modified in any way, shape, or form (Proverbs 30:5-6). When we are unteachable, because we believe that understanding the Word of God and Biblical doctrine is about being intellectually sound, the things of the Spirit will eventually seem foolish to us (1 Corinthians 2:14). We'll then find ourselves bringing up the 'Whys', 'Hows', 'Ifs', and 'Buts' every so often, unaware of their potential to stunt our spiritual growth.

I was like that in my early years as a believer. I gave my life to Christ in 1992 but spent seven years going round in circles. I didn't achieve much, spiritually. By the time I got my act together, precious time had been wasted. Many of those who started running the Christian race the same time I did, and some of the people I led to Christ left me behind for greater things. Reason? They

were obedient to the core. They were committed - no questions asked. May we not get too intelligent for our own good, in Jesus' Name.

There are some subject matters that we may find difficult to comprehend at first, such as the Trinity, how the world came to being, the conception of Christ by the Holy Spirit, the two natures of Christ (human and divine), and more. It would be wise to take in with what you are being taught from the Word of God while you are still growing, beloved. Good Teachers of the Word do err sometimes, don't get me wrong. What to do when what you are taught does not seem to make sense or is perceived to be erroneous, is to turn to your Bible. If it's in there, accept it for what it is. As time goes on, things will begin to make sense, and bring great benefits to you.

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The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few (Matthew 9:37). The hearts of many have been stolen by the world. The Lord is counting on us to leave our comfort zones and reach out to those who have not yet heard the Good News of Salvation. Are you available?

Some believers have been left wondering if they are good enough or mature in the faith to be used by God. They have been made to believe that they are either too young or too new in the faith. It is not how long you have been in Church and what other believers think of your capabilities that determine your eligibility to be a vessel. Availability is what the Lord needs from you. When that is ascertained, He will empower you for His work. David's father presented his older sons to Prophet Samuel as candidates for the throne, but God said He wasn't interested in any of them. He wanted the little errand boy, David. The bullies (Joseph's brothers) also thought they were better off because they were older, but God had someone else in mind – Joseph.

You may have given your life to Christ earlier than other people and not even be considered eligible, to be a vessel. For example, I gave my life in the year 1992, but spent the first seven of those years napping. I just wasn't serious. I had my own plans, and working for the Lord was certainly not one of them. By the time I knew what was going on, precious time had been wasted. Those who met me as a believer and the ones that I led to Christ left me behind for greater things. It was not until I got my act together some years later that the Lord gave me the privilege to be of service.

On the other hand, you may have given your life to Christ just last year and find you are available to be used because you already have the zeal to do exploits for the Lord. Some turn over their lives to Christ and grow very quickly in the faith.

It's a good thing to thank God for the lives of those He has called to labour in His vineyard; but don't be content with the role of an onlooker or a bench-warmer. God is no respecter of persons (Deuteronomy 10:17, Acts 10:34). Do not be another familiar face in your church or assembly. Make yourself available, to go out there and snatch souls for Christ. Someone told you about Him when you were yet a sinner; you should do the same. With that said, not every believer aspires to be a labourer in the Lord's vineyard. In that case,

this message may not be for you. You are blessed,
regardless!

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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Living Up to Your God-given Potential

Did you know, beloved? The Lord wants the best for us. He loves to see us advance to greater heights for His glory. He makes our feet like those of a deer and sets us on high places (Psalm 18:33). A deer is known to have very strong legs that move with great speed. Swiftiness is necessary to succeed in anything we do, and to be steps ahead of the enemy. The Lord wants us to climb higher in Him as a deer climbs the mountain to reach the top. He is happy to empower us to reach the top by bestowing upon us the Spirit of Excellence, amongst other gifts.

The Lord also wants us to soar like eagles (Isaiah 40:31). Eagles do not mix with other birds. They fly alone at high altitudes and see from a long distance to spot their enemies and prey. They can see farther than other birds.

Five things could hinder us from living up to our God-given potentials. They are **Disobedience**, **Unbelief**, **Self-Reliance**, **Pride**, and **Laziness**. Once these traits

are eliminated, take a step of faith. The Lord will see to it that you prosper in whatever you do. While you are at it, avoid any form of negativity like the plague. Stay away from people who discourage you, put you down, and never see anything good in you. Love them from a distance and wish them well - do this with caution and wisdom.

Stay focused, beloved! If you find yourself aimlessly hanging around too many people, then it's time to reevaluate your situation, as this can be a huge distraction. Likewise, indiscriminately involving just about everyone in your endeavours. Learn to be by yourself sometimes - this will give you the opportunity to spend quality time alone with the Lord to hear from Him on a consistent basis. May we be guided.

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Some believers do not know that some of the people they look up to for support may not be the ones God sent, to be a Blessing to them. They are disheartened when people let them down.

God knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46: 9-10). He knows that some of those who have refused to support you are talebearers. The minute they lift a finger to assist you, everyone in town has heard about it. If they are not the chatty type, they may become little *messiahs* over time and subtly demand to be worshipped. Some of them also have accursed resources in their possession, and the Lord wants no part of those. If you are His beloved, He will make them fail to support you. Just thank God, instead of making plans to pay them back in their own coin – the Bible says we are to give thanks in every circumstance (1 Thessalonians 5:18). When it comes to the things of the Lord, no one takes His glory, and no idol takes His praise (Isaiah 42:8). Look up to Him alone (Psalm 121:1-2) - He is the Ever-Present

Help (Psalm 46:1). He will point those who will support you, your way. He can make them look all around for you, just to come to your aid.

Do not coerce or manipulate anyone into supporting you, if you have spoken to the Lord about your situation. Remember also, that the Lord's grace is sufficient for you. Wait upon Him and ensure that you are living in obedience; He will come through for you. It is important that you are generous, as well. A generous person is always blessed. As you remember others with what the Lord has entrusted to you, He will gladly attend to all that concerns you (Proverbs 11:25).

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What is Wrong with Your Act of Generosity

Reflection: Whosoever stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard (Proverbs 21:13).

So, you give, but it is never given unto you as promised in Luke 6:38. No one comes to your aid in your time of need - not even those who have benefitted from your generosity.

The Bible says when you help the poor, you lend to the Lord; and He will reward your act of kindness (Proverbs 19:17). The Lord knows that the poor are more prone to assault, abuse, and humiliation, and therefore, need to be protected. Nowhere is it written that we will be rewarded for giving towards selfish and vain causes or helping the wealthy amass more wealth. On the contrary, the Bible says: *He that oppresses the poor to increase his riches, and he that gives to the rich, both will come to poverty* (Proverbs 22:16).

To further break it down for you: God frowns on those who neglect to help the poor and the needy from the

plenty they have been blessed with. Did you know that, beloved? Read it for yourself in Proverbs 21:13 and Ezekiel 16:48-49. God expects us to be good stewards of what He has entrusted to us. Being a good steward involves sharing our time, talents, resources, and all the good things He has given us with others (Matthew 25:34–40). Let's move on to the next point!

As followers of Jesus Christ, our giving should not be motivated by rewards. We are to give from the goodness of our heart, without expecting anything in return (Hebrews 13:16). Nonetheless, God will reward our giving because He never goes back on His promises (Luke 6:38, Proverbs 19:17). Give, for the right reasons, and to the deserving, bearing in mind that, HOW God rewards you (if He chooses to), WHEN He rewards you, and WHAT He rewards you with are His prerogative.

Money quickly comes to people's minds when *Luke 6:38* is recalled. They then feel inadequate to extend generosity as expected. But remember that there are other ways to be generous than giving material things. What has God blessed you with? As you give, out of what He has blessed you with, He will gladly attend to all that concerns you, as well (Proverbs 11:25).

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God's relationship with His close friends is deep. While those who are righteous through Christ understand and cherish this relationship, it will always be a mystery to unbelievers, the carnal, and the wicked. Abraham was loyal to God. He was very much obedient to God. The Bible speaks about him as, The Friend of God (James 2:23). God had a deep relationship with Abraham. In Genesis 18:17-33, He shared His plan with Abraham before He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. If you are a close friend of God, that is: You obey Him, please Him, and regularly spend time with Him, He can share deep and hidden things with you that can be used to your advantage, and for the good of the Body of Christ (Daniel 2:22). You will continually enjoy His presence in your life and be a living witness of His awesome power, and by that, lead others to Christ.

What Makes a Person a Close Friend? A close friend is loyal to you. He hates what you hate and loves what you love. He does not want to let you down. A close friend defends you at all times. He trusts and believes

in you. A close friend does not love you, just for the benefits he enjoys, being your friend. He loves you in good and tough times.

Are you a close friend of God, or still shaking hands with the devil? Jesus Christ said He knows His sheep and His sheep know Him (John 10:14). Assess your relationship with God now, and take steps to be a close friend, if you are not already one.

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The Fair-Weather Friends of God

Some believers would rather have God perform mighty miracles than crave to know Him and take their relationship with Him to a higher level. They proclaim Christ as Lord and seem to be doing the right things, but seldom move beyond this point. They hop from church to church, attend all manner of events, seek out prayer warriors, and shop around for prophets and prophetesses, all to experience the miraculous. They forget that the Lord is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11), and that the most important thing to Him is the depth of our personal relationship with Him. In their pursuit of The Miraculous, they sometimes run into unscrupulous anointed folks, who claim to be what they are not.

Some also want to be known for doing exploits in the Name of the Lord but are not desirous of being His friend. When He tests their faith and things are not quite going well (by their own limited understanding), they are gone! They disappear from His presence and go back to the world.

A friend loves you in good and tough times, not just for what he gets from you.

Abraham was very loyal and dedicated to God. In fact, the Bible refers to him as The Friend of God (James 2:23). God Himself, called Abraham His Friend (Isaiah 41:8). Are you intimate with God? Are you loyal to Him? Can He count on you to still be there when things are not well with you (by your own human understanding)? When it seems things are not going well, and you get tired of waiting on God, do you seek the hand of his enemy, satan in friendship for a quick solution to the issue at hand? Do you seek help from demonic helpers, whose ultimate agenda is to lure you into the snares of their master?

Take steps to deepen your relationship with God and see Him do wonders in your life. Quit running helter-skelter, searching for what was not missing in the first place. You can also have your prayers answered and experience God's touch on all that concerns you. He is not interested in knowing how long you have been in Christ, or your role in a church to do wonders in your life for His glory, as long as He sees that you desire to have a deeper relationship with Him, with every fibre of your being.

Make it a point to spend quality time with God and seek intimacy with Him on a personal level. If you draw

close to Him, He will show Himself mighty in your life as well.

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If you are a new believer, let it be known that many of the friends you had prior to your new life, were not really your friends. They will disappear with time (if they haven't already), now that you are a new creature, for obvious reasons: you cannot do certain things with them anymore, go to places with them, and grant their ungodly requests.

Now that you are born-again, other followers of Christ around you are your true friends. You have a divine connection with them. Your destiny is tied to your godly friends - so to speak. They are citizens of the Kingdom of God, moving in the same direction as you are, and going to Heaven with you. You do things alike, have similar views, and tend to have the same desires in life. They are glad when things are going well for you, and remain true, even when things are not going so well.

When I was still in the world, many years ago, I had numerous friends. Thinking about it now, the manner I made friends all over the place was bizarre. Unlike my

siblings, I had no set boundaries when it came to making friends. I could roll with anyone on earth and be cool with it. I didn't care who the person was or their background. My younger brothers of blessed memory were worried about me at the time, and would always wonder - *"Who is this new friend, again?"* They would devise strategies to keep some of the friends they thought weren't good for me, away. I can tell you now, that my destruction was imminent at some point, but for God. I can also tell you that I was more on the giving side in those friendships. Those friends gave me nothing in return, other than deceit, backstabbing, betrayal, envy, and jealousy. Some led me astray and got me into trouble, many times. Some also took advantage of me. But I enjoyed having them around because I thought they were fun to be with, in spite of everything. When I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ completely, I lost those friends (besides the ones that found Christ as well) and gained valuable ones. Cherish your godly friends, and thank God for their lives, beloved!

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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Reflection: 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

Evil companionships corrupt good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). Adam and Eve accepted counsel from satan. In the end, they did exactly what satan did - they wanted to be like God. With time, we imitate the characteristics of a role model, mentor, counsellor, and those we associate with. We imbibe their moral principles and conform to their standards. This is why a person who desires to please God should be wary of spending time with the ungodly.

It is not prideful for a person in Christ to choose their friends and associates with caution (2 Corinthians 6:15). We are commanded to do away with the works of darkness and walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8-10). As you already know, the works of darkness include, Sexual Immorality, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Jealousy, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, Contention, Murder, Drunkenness (Galatians 5:19-21), and more. Those who partake in them are called

Workers of Iniquity. Frankly, no unbelieving family, friend, or associate of yours is capable of totally rejecting what is unacceptable to God, unless they are willing to turn from their sinful ways and surrender to Jesus Christ. You are just not of the same breed, spiritually.

We must be wary of ungodly relationships and support, just as the Bible teaches. Guard against seeking the counsel of the ungodly, executing their plans, and making decisions that conform to their views (Psalm 1:1-6). The only reason a believer may find it necessary to relate with the ungodly, is to lead them to Christ. If that purpose seems unachievable, we are to simply move on with no ill-feelings and continue to pray for the salvation of their souls. We are not to hang on to them, else we run the risk of craving and ultimately conforming to their way of life.

Rest assured, God's commands and standards are for our own good, beloved. Save yourself undue pain and misery, and live by them.

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When Prayers Remained Unanswered

Some believers may find it disappointing and worrisome that God did not grant a particular request they made to Him. While some wonder if they did something wrong, others may find themselves blaming their prayer partners and spiritual leaders for their predicament. Some also blame the devil. To start with, others do not pray for us; they pray with us. The bulk of the job is ours. Then, let us take the time to re-evaluate our walk with God, instead of putting the blame on others and/or the devil.

God loves to hear from us (Matthew 7:7-11, Proverbs 15:8); but there are reasons our prayers may remain unanswered. It could be that we are praying amiss (James 4:3), or perhaps we are not praying according to the will of God (1 John 5:14-15). It could be that He has a better plan for us than what we have come up with. It could also be that we are going through the trials He allowed to come our way to refine us, to attain greater heights and fulfil His purpose for our lives. Such trials are peculiar to the righteous by reason of

our anointing and shall surely pass (Psalm 34:19). There may be other reasons beyond our own understanding - known to Him alone.

It is also important to continually re-evaluate our walk with God, to be sure that we are in right-standing with Him, as the reasons mentioned above may not always be the case. God may choose not to listen to a person's prayers because of sin: Living in disobedience, neglecting to keep a pure heart, serving Him with unclean hands, harbouring unforgiveness, ingratitude, and more (Isaiah 59:1-2). If we look within and find that we have displeased Him in any way, there is Good News. He is rich in mercy, and faithful to forgive and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 John 2:1-2, 1 John 1:9), if we would only do the needful, which is, to confess our sins to Him and turn away from them. May we be guided.

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Thanksgiving – One Last Step to Receiving from God

Borrowing a Leaf from the Leper in Luke 17:11-19

Once, I was forced to say this to a much older lady, with tough love: "Don't call God a liar". She looked at me, startled, and said she did not. "Why are you complaining and weeping as though God has never been good to you, then?" I asked. "You behave and talk as though you were a stranger to Him", I said. She quickly wiped off her tears. She must have done the needful, because a few weeks later, she had a major breakthrough and put on her dancing shoes.

Don't wait until God has granted the last item on your Request List before you give Him praise. We are not ungrateful children, Amen. Praise Him in good and not-so-good times. If you have made a request to Him in accordance with His word and have no unsettled issues (hidden sins, for example), He may just be waiting on you for a testimony you have refused to share and/or your Thanksgiving. When Jesus Christ healed the ten lepers in Luke 17:14, only one came

back to thank Him. He praised Jesus Christ with a loud voice. He fell at His feet and thanked Him. The leper received more blessings because he had a heart of gratitude. While the other nine received healing in their bodies, he received healing in both his body and soul. I shared a personal testimony in one of my books, on the importance of praising and thanking God and how a night of simply praising God changed my life completely.

We give thanks, not only to express appreciation to God for what He has already done for us, but to also thank Him in advance for what we believe He is going to do for us. Giving thanks in this circumstance, releases our faith. We are also enjoined in the Bible to be thankful in every situation we find ourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, beloved. Let us borrow a leaf from the leper in Luke 17:11-19.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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God will honour those who honour Him, and treat those who despise Him with contempt, just as He said (1 Samuel 2:30). He honours His loved ones in amazing ways, and has a lot stored up for us.

How do we honour God?

We honour God when we are intentional about loving, pleasing, and serving Him. He will honour us when we honour His Word and Commands. He also loves it when we honour Him with our resources, gifts, talents, time, all that we have, and all that we are without restrictions. He gave them to us for His glory.

When do we despise God?

We despise God when we do exactly the opposite. Also, if you are using all that He put in you or entrusted to you for vain and unworthy purposes, you need to retrace your steps while there is time. The good news is that He is rich in mercy, willing to forgive and forget our shortcomings. We can still make things right with

God while we are alive; but when it's time to go, that's it! There will be no more chances to make things right.

These are the last days, and times are going to get even more perilous until Christ comes for us, His Bride. There is nothing the world system can do to bring the much-talked-about change – it's not their call. Not even the smartest President in the world can do anything about it. You might as well do your part with what God has blessed you with, to rescue perishing souls and prepare them for the second coming of Christ. You do not have to have \$1m stashed up in your Bank Account before you acknowledge how richly blessed you are, as a child of God and a joint heir with Christ Jesus. You may, on the other hand, have \$1m stashed up now, and enrich the pockets of doctors and health specialists with it down the road.

Life becomes empty and meaningless when we do not honour the One who created and blessed us with the good things of life. This is why we find many people falling into the trap satan set for them – taking refuge in drugs and alcohol, falling into depression, living a reckless lifestyle, and committing suicide, after having achieved a lot in life. May we be guided.

Shalom!

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Who Dictates Your Day?

Reflection: Deuteronomy 18:10-14, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, Isaiah 8:19

The Bible cautions us against living by the counsel of the ungodly (Psalm 1:6). If you claim to be a true child of God, but still depend on palm readers, psychics, astrologers, crystal ball readers, tarot card readers, sorcerers, Ouija boards, ungodly prophets/prophetesses, witchcraft, and occult practices to survive the day and live life, you need to pick up your Bible again.

Perhaps you have not been told by anyone that seeking information from these sources is an idolatrous act and detestable to God (Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 18:10-14, Leviticus 19:31). They are all empowered by satan. They may appear to be helpful and harmless (2 Corinthians 11:14-15, Acts 16:16-18), but know now that, information obtained from them is sourced from other gods and demonic spirits. Consider them, emissaries assigned by satan to pull his targets farther away from God. Their goal is to control and ultimately lead a person to the path of destruction.

Speaking of which, you need to ask yourself how possible it is that satan wants the best for you, a human created in the image of God. All humans are intensely disliked by satan. He is incapable of loving anything good. His emissaries have no relationship with God, want nothing to do with Him, and should have no business whatsoever peeping into your destiny to dictate your journey in life.

Astrology, daily horoscope reading, or zodiac signs prediction, which many people believe are harmless or safe enough to live by as a child of God, are forms of divination. These are forbidden and detestable to God, as well (Deuteronomy 18:10-14). Divination is the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown, by supernatural means. Seeking wisdom apart from God is an abomination to Him.

God is our Creator; He is our Possessor (Isaiah 44:24-15). Only He has the power to dictate the course of our lives. God guides the steps of the righteous (Psalm 25:12, Psalms 37:23). All we need to know about our future and His plans for us are in His Word. Take steps today to end your attachment to, and dependence on ungodly counsellors. Cut the cord! You are now a new creature; you belong to God. Why would you expose yourself to the works of darkness? Commit your ways to the Lord, from this day on, beloved (Psalm 37:5-6). Ask Him for wisdom if the need arises (James 1:5). Let

your total dependence be on His Word for guidance in the journey of life (Psalm 119:105, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Be blessed!

Shalom!

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Reflection: 1 Corinthians 10:13, Ecclesiastes 9:4

Suicide (except in cases where it happened as a result of a severe mental health challenge) is Premeditated Murder, and not an option for any child of God (Exodus 20:13). Suicide is the deliberate and unlawful murder of a unique creature of God. Committing suicide does not put a matter to rest - it is considered a wilful sin.

There is no justification for wilful sin. A person who committed suicide will be liable for the sin of murder, except they were not aware of what they were doing – as may have been the case for those who had a severe mental illness. It will not matter if the person was born-again when the sin was committed – they are still accountable, for the reason that they did not make it right with God before they died. The Blood of Jesus Christ surely covers all manner of sin; however relational forgiveness (i.e. forgiveness after a person becomes born-again, and they are said to have a relationship with God) is dependent on the admission

and confession of sins (1 John 1:9) – an opportunity that a person who committed suicide did not have. It would be a different matter if a person committed murder and had the opportunity to make it right with God since they are alive, as the case was for King David, in the Bible.

If we try to find a loophole to justify committing suicide, just to view it as a misdeed that God will pat us on the back for, then we are showing the ability to know right from wrong. He will hold us accountable. Suicide is not an option for a follower of Christ. As long as there is life, there is hope (Ecclesiastes 9:4). Wait patiently on the Lord, beloved (Psalm 27:14). Don't give up on Him. Whatever you are going through shall pass (1 Corinthians 10:13).

You may find our Life Answers: [Hope](#), [Peace](#), and [Courage](#), helpful. Feel free to visit our website – www.doveletters.org.

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Dangerous Praises that Erode our Blessings

Reflection: Daniel 4:28-37, Acts 12:20-23

As much as we work on ourselves to stay humble as followers of Jesus Christ, we may find ourselves unconsciously accepting undeserved praise for things God has done through us, out of excitement. I don't know about others, but there were times I did things I was impressed about and screamed, "Yes!"; but I thank God for the Holy Spirit, who quickly reminded me how I got them done. The wise thing to do when we have been put in a position to take credit for the things God has done through us, is to promptly give it back to Him. He could easily have used anybody or anything, but He gave us a chance. He used a donkey (Numbers 22:21-34); the ravens (1 Kings 17:4-6); the fish (Jonah 1:17, 2:10); and unworthy Rahab, the prostitute (Joshua Chapter 2).

The Self-Glorifying Praise Seeker

King Nebuchadnezzar set himself against God, when he attempted to take His glory. Nebuchadnezzar ascribed

accomplishments and successes to himself (Daniel 4: 28-30). God then stripped him of his status as a king, and moved him to the jungle, where he ended up on his knees with wild animals and lived like them for seven years. He was transformed into a beast (Daniel 4:33). Nebuchadnezzar spent time in the jungle, until he learnt that the Most High God rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone He chooses (Daniel 4:31-32). The case of another king, called Herod, was even worse. Prideful Herod accepted the people's worship instead of giving God the glory. Herod was not given a second chance like Nebuchadnezzar - death was his own portion. His cup was full, I guess (Acts 12:20-23).

We set ourselves against God when we attempt to take His glory. God empowers and uses us in different capacities for signs and wonders, as a blessing to others, and for the benefit of the Body of Christ, all for His Glory. We are what we are and have what we have by His grace. We must point men to Him, not ourselves.

Some spiritual leaders are in trouble today because others put them in this position. Others looked up to them at some point, idolised, and gave them the glory due to God, while they consciously or unconsciously basked in it.

The Praise Giver

When you fail to acknowledge that it is God who blesses - as all good and perfect gifts come from Him (James 1:17), and that human beings are only vessels He uses, you may find yourself worshipping the creature instead of the Creator – a grievous sin called, Idolatry. This is quite rampant today, as folks idolise mere mortals: Hopping from church to church, following false preachers, getting easily swayed by heresies and deception, and blindly giving their all to support selfish and vain causes in their desperate pursuit of miracles. God will never give His glory to another, nor His praise to graven images. He made that clear in Isaiah 42:8.

Appreciate the vessel God placed on your path for your good; but give Him alone the glory - not Him and the vessel. All glory and power belong to God forever and ever, Amen.

Shalom!

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Do We Listen When God Speaks to Us?

We tend to take the grace of God for granted, sometimes; but He loves us, still, and uses our stubbornness and laxity to train us. Things are bound to get ugly when we refuse to heed His warning. Gladly, He heals us again. It is said that, when God speaks to you once, you have His Grace. When He speaks twice on the same issue, then you have His special Grace. This testimony may, or may not be beneficial to you, but here it is:

Some years ago, the Lord revealed a family friend to me. In the revelation, this friend suddenly became very unfriendly and cruel, for no reason at all. I took it casually. *"How can that be? I've been good to this family. He's a nice person"*, I thought. Then, I got a warning in a dream again. This time, it was a persistent nudge (a reminder, so to speak). This time, it was a persistent nudge (a reminder, so to speak). As usual, I paid no attention to it.

A year later, what was revealed to me came to pass. In fact, it would have been the most emotionally devastating experience for me, orchestrated by this person and his wife, just to steal my joy, if the Lord was not on my side. As I sat on my bed thinking, "Where did this come from Lord; I didn't see it coming", the Holy Spirit quietly responded: "You didn't? Do you remember this?" I quickly closed my eyes and went to sleep to avoid asking further unnecessary questions that could get me in trouble.

How faithful our Father is, beloved. All glory to the All-Knowing and the Only Wise God! May our spiritual eyes and ears be open to receive.

Shalom!

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Not Hearing from God?

One of the reasons we may not hear as much from the Lord is our lack of availability. We also get too busy with things that do not matter to Him. He then focuses on those who are ready to sit at His feet.

It is important to limit courtesy visits and long chats on the phone. Spend quality time with your Heavenly Father and be attentive to what He has for you. Ask Him specifically where, and whom He has sent you to for your earthly mission; then pray for everyone else and wish them well. It may be time to prune down your list of *unnecessary things to do* and unprofitable friendships that add no value to your life and do nothing to support your efforts to maintain spiritual wellness.

To the things of the world - keep a low profile and be scarce. A vessel who wants to hear more from the Lord cannot afford to hop all over the place and honour every invitation to events, unless of course He

approves of your attendance, or has specifically sent you there for a purpose.

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God can choose to give you a revelation of His plans for you to be a useful vessel beforehand, to build your faith. What He reveals to you could be so huge, that it seems unachievable; but it is. He would not need to build your faith in the first place, if what He plans to call you to do is achievable by your own power. Simply trust Him and follow as He leads.

How can you tell if a revelation is not from God?

If the revelation contradicts the truth of God, then it is not from Him. For example, He will not tell you to play the lottery and use the proceeds to fund a ministry or embark on a project for His glory. He will not tell you to divorce your current '*Unholy spouse*' and marry another '*Holy*' one to succeed in what He has committed into your hands. Now, these are just a few examples. Some believers have also implied that God approved of them taking out loans to build a church or other edifices. This is a questionable one, as it is not God's will that we get

ourselves into debts and put undue pressure on those who support us. That said, we would rather not judge, but admonish you to tread carefully and spend time seeking clarity from the Lord in prayer.

Truly, God will never tell you to do anything that contradicts His Word. May we be guided, beloved.

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Hearing from Other Believers

God can use anyone or anything He chooses to get to us. He did the unimaginable and used a donkey to speak to Balaam (Numbers 22:28-33). Some believers miss out on messages specifically meant for them because of pride. Growing spiritually is a life-long journey - we keep progressing until our last day on earth. Spiritual maturity does not mean we have stopped learning and do not err sometimes. It only means that we have grown in our knowledge of God and taken steps to deepen our relationship with Him. It also means we are making progress in developing Christ-like attributes. These are all on-going processes; don't you think? We all, are Work in Progress!

Sometimes we look for treasures where they will never be found. God may have been trying to speak to us, but we may not have been looking in His direction. I was brought up in a Christian home - going to church, praying, reading the Bible, and wearing appropriate clothing, because one of my parents was a pastor in a traditional church; but I did not see the Light until I

surrendered my life to Christ in my adult life. And this was after I left home. I grew up in a Christian home, but it turned out that I didn't know Christ, and didn't have Him, all along. I knew nothing about Salvation and the importance of having a personal relationship with Christ. All I knew was, Church!

Though I have grown tremendously, spiritually over the years, and am certainly not an infant in Christ, I still yearn for knowledge. I mentor others, but also tap into other vessels' knowledge – and I intend to keep doing that. Proverbs 27:17 says, *"Iron sharpens iron, and so, one man sharpens another"*.

You may miss out on information that is crucial to your spiritual growth if you do not humble yourself to receive from others. What God intends for you to know may not even be revealed through those you are around or familiar with. God can speak to you through good and bad experiences, a stranger, a mentor or a mentee, a spiritual leader, or a person you are leading, a subordinate or your superior at work, a new convert, children (yes), and just about anyone He chooses. That said, we will not accept counsel from the wicked - there are no compromises on that, Amen.

Prayerfully open yourself to receive from vessels God may send your way. It may surprise you to know that it is not how long that brother or sister in Christ appears

to have known the Lord or a religious title that matters when it comes to the things of God – only He knows the heart. He does as He pleases and cannot be questioned. May we be guided!

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God can use anyone, and just about anything to speak to us. If you don't believe that, then read Numbers 22:21-33. The Bible says there is a time to speak and a time to be quiet (Ecclesiastes 3:7). Attentiveness is a great quality to have. If you complement that with spiritual alertness, you can learn a few things from your adversaries (so to speak), but God will reveal things to you through them. Not just that; He can make them reveal what their own plan is for your life, as well, without them even realising it. He is known to turn wisdom to foolishness. God may also show you deep and hidden things if you learn to follow peace with all people and leave your battles to Him (Romans 12:19). With that said, He will not give you a revelation that you will misuse.

When I was still in the world, many years ago, I had an older friend – she was old enough to be my mother. She just took a liking to me (or so I thought). Unknown to me, she was an agent of darkness. I would run to her for counsel any time I had a problem, because I

thought she had my interest at heart. I didn't suspect a thing, as I had no one else to turn to, and was desperate for motherly love. I was a babe in Christ then, and didn't know better; so, I trusted and accepted her counsel. I must say that this woman seemed to always have valuable counsel to give - which was strange for someone who was not in Christ. What I didn't know was that her counsel was not from a pure heart. Well, didn't the Bible make us understand that satan masquerades himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14)? I noticed each time I panicked and uttered a negative statement in fear, she would rebuke me and say, "Stop that, you don't say such things with your tongue; that is self-destruction". She would warn me about people I should be wary of, who could harm me. At the time, I often wondered how she knew that much about my family, but she was right about the people she warned me about. It soon occurred to me that she was into occult practices.

One day, my older friend looked at me and said, "Hmnn; you know, there is something about you - you are an unusual person; you are a peculiar person". I didn't pay much attention to what she said until a few years after. The wicked older woman knew better than the Deborah claiming to be born-again. Beloved, God is merciful to us, even when we seem to be straying away from the fold. It was a case of being in a lion's

den with the lions' mouths shut. I was in the den but couldn't be devoured (Daniel 6:16-22). OK; Let's move on!

About two years after, my older unfriendly friend and I fell out. She then uttered her hidden evil plan for me, out of anger. It was too late for her, as I had gotten my act together and developed a closer relationship with God. Then, other things began to make sense to me: God loved me in spite of my rebellion and had kept me on the shelf for a purpose. He knew the only person I trusted and spent time with was this wicked woman. Perhaps He also had pity on me because I was naive, and my desperation for parental love was justified – I honestly won't say I know this for sure; but what I do know is that He certainly wanted my life preserved; and so, He ensured to make her foolishly give me counsel that countered her evil plan for me. I sat down one day and imagined what would have become of me, and if I would still be alive today if she had taken advantage of my ignorance. To God be the Glory!

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Does Heaven Help Those Who Help Themselves?

"Heaven helps those who help themselves", many say. Remove this from your list of favourite quotes today, beloved.

The truth is that God helps those who cannot help themselves. Without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5); with Him, we can do all things (Philippians 4:13). He does His best for us when we are not trying to do ours. More importantly, you cannot help yourself not to sin or fall into temptation; neither can you save yourself from the wrath of God when you sin. You need the Holy Spirit to stay away from sin, and you need Christ - the only Mediator between God and man, who continually intercedes for us, and pleads our case.

As it is my routine every morning, I was looking over one of my write-ups for the last time with my usual thoughts, "This just has to be good to go; phew! I'm tired of editing it; it's going as it is". The Holy Spirit suddenly nudged me to add a feature to the package I

was about to deliver. I wondered why I was getting this directive at the last minute, then it occurred to me that even though God was the One directing the project, there were times that I unconsciously sat on His chair running the show, because I felt He had finished working and it was time for me to do my part. It was a case of *"OK Father, I'm fine now; I will take it from here"*. The problem with this is that the Holy Spirit is gentle. He will not push things on us. He seems to say, "Very well my son/daughter. You know I am always here if you need Me". How was I supposed to get divine directives when I was already helping myself?

God created us to be dependent on Him for everything, because He wants an intimate relationship with us. We often hear it preached that when God works in our favour, He expects us to do our own part. While that is true, we still do need Him to do the part that is ours. Frankly, we need God every second of our lives.

You can never be the best God wants you to be, and you also stand the risk of struggling and not achieving much, if you choose to get things done without His help. An average person seeks to have a sense of being capable and self-reliant; but I would rather be weak in the eyes of God, for His strength is made perfect in my weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Let God!

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When Knowledge Becomes Dangerous

Consider yourself highly favoured if God gives you revelations, beloved. God loves to share deep and hidden things with His loved ones (Daniel 2:19, 22). He may choose to give us revelations through visions and dreams, regardless of our age, our status, our spiritual calling, or the duration of our relationship with Him. However, there is a limit to what He will reveal to a person who is not spiritually mature. He will not give us revelations that we will misuse – more so to our own detriment.

I grew into a withdrawn, short-tempered young girl because I was often verbally and physically abused by one of my parents. But then, I had a gift, which thinking about it now, God is indeed gracious, not to have taken it back. He would show me evil things people were doing, but not their faces. Sometimes, it would be just a glimpse. I was often baffled at the time, to the point that my thoughts would go, “What am I to do with half the scene?” I kept wondering why I couldn’t put the pieces together, until I learnt that I was still

growing in the faith, and lacked spiritual maturity and the wisdom to take it all in. I also needed to be protected for my own good - mainly because of my temper. Besides, it's not everything God shows us that is meant to be shared with other people. He may just wish to warn us of danger, prepare us for certain tasks, or need us to pray about matters. At times, He wishes to reveal certain things to us because of our intimacy with Him, and requires nothing of us. Most of the revelations I received at the time were warnings (as I found out later in life), which I used to my advantage, or I wouldn't even be alive today; praise God! Most of the missiles thrown at me in my adult life, He already forewarned me about, when I was younger. Isn't He faithful!

A Tip: *Ensure that you write down what God reveals, if He speaks to you through visions and dreams.*

Knowing what I know now, it is doubtful that I would still be alive today if God had given me complete revelations or shown me the faces of those evildoers, and I had confronted them without the much-needed fire and spiritual covering. I can tell you though, that things are pleasantly different now. To God be all the glory!

Shalom!

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Don't Be Your Own Enemy

Reflection: Acts 20:35, Proverbs 19:17, Hebrews 6:10

You are abundantly blessed if your heart's desire is to please God, and He has called you to be a Blessing to others. He will always be on your side. Not even satan can hinder God's plans for you, unless of course you are secretly dining with him. Know it now, that anything you are struggling or labouring so hard to achieve to the detriment of your body and soul is not yours. Drop it! The blessings of God are without sorrow (Proverbs 10:22).

Those whom God sends on people's path to support them are called to do what they do. They are blessed and privileged to be a Blessing. God has substitutes for those who do not heed His call to be a Blessing - substitutes who are more than willing to support others from the kindness of their hearts, and desire to please God. So, maybe it's time for you to start praying to be a Blessing as well.

Being a Blessing does not take much out of you. Be generous to others as God has been to you, giving you the gift of life, peace, joy, His love, His friendship, and all other things that pertain to life. Being generous is not always about money and other material things. You can also:

- Pray with someone.
- Reach out to the needy.
- Help others grow in the Lord.
- Help someone get a job.
- Lend a Listening Ear.
- Offer someone a room in your home.
- Feed someone.
- Contact the relevant authorities if someone is suicidal or needs help – little things count.
- Find ways to make someone happy.

The DON'Ts of Giving Support

- Don't support others because you want them to look up to you as their messiah (Proverbs 14: 31).
- Don't support others for what you hope to gain from them (Acts 20:35).
- Don't' humiliate others or bask in seeing them make endless pleas to you before you give a helping hand (Proverbs 3:27-28).

- Don't judge others who genuinely need urgent support; embarrass, scold, or engage them in lengthy judgmental conversations before you come to their aid. It's in bad taste. Leave the lecture for another day.

Shalom!

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Reflection: Ephesians 6:10-18, John 8:36

The Bible says, if Jesus Christ makes you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36). There are churches and ministries that still believe participating in constant deliverance sessions is required to “*fight, rebuke, bind, kill*” satan and demons (evil spirits) to be set free from bondage. Yes, you can fight satan, and you can bind and cast out demons, but you honestly do not need sessions upon sessions to do that, if you are a true follower of Christ. The full armour of God has been made available to us (Ephesians 6:10-18). We also have the authority to cast out demons in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-19). Christ is the Head of all principalities and power – He is feared by demons (Matthew 8:29); they know Him and submit to His authority (Mark 1:23-28); they also know true followers of Christ (Acts 19:11-16). With that said, let us keep in mind that even God uses evil spirits to punish people. He sent an evil spirit to King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14–15). Let us pursue holiness, beloved,

and it will be well with us. As for satan, you can resist him, defeat him, overcome his attacks – all because of Christ. But can you kill him? No, you can't. Satan will continue to roam the earth until God gets rid of him (1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 20:3,10).

Some of these churches and ministries also make you say repetitive prayer lines targeted at cutting short the lives of your enemies. Ideally, we are not to avenge ourselves, as true followers of Christ - Do not avenge yourselves. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). Who is to say cutting short the lives of your enemies will be what the Lord chooses to avenge you of their wrongdoing? You may still believe saying these prayers is the thing for you, regardless of what the Bible teaches. While at it, keep in mind also, that there are three categories of enemies in the life of a true follower of Christ.

The first category of enemies are the ones permitted by God Himself to bring out the best in us, so that we can attain greater heights. For example, Joseph faced some obstacles before he could fulfil the purpose of God for his life. Satan meant to harm him through his brothers, but God permitted those obstacles for good. God permitted satan to afflict Job, as well, for good. We also face trials, as we go through the refining process that prepares us for good works.

The second category of enemies are those we may have permitted through sin. They are going nowhere in spite of warfare prayers, and may eventually do a lot of damage if we continue to live in sin and refuse to repent. Do the needful, beloved!

The third category of enemies are those who hate us without a reason. These enemies exist through no fault of ours and are influenced by satan to bring us misery. However, God gives us victory over them. We are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37). He said we are to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). Remember always, that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4), and all things will always work together for our good (Romans 8:28). The Bible says when the ways of a man please God, He will cause his enemies to be at peace with him (Proverbs 16:7). We have no reason then, to fear, if our ways please Him. May we be guided, beloved.

Shalom!

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Reflection Exodus 20:3-6

A blessing is a favour, a gift, or anything bestowed by God for our well-being. Luck, on the other hand, is a non-Christian view of good or bad fortune, and closely connected with superstition and magic. Believing in Luck is the same as choosing to believe in random chance, thus eliminating God's influence in your life. A dangerous thing to do! Once we become followers of Christ, we are to reject the idea of Luck, and all activities to attract it, by all means. None of the following should be perceived as the determinant of a person's well-being:

- (1) An unread Bible tucked underneath the pillow
- (2) A cross on a gold/silver/metal necklace, good luck charms, etc.
- (3) Pictures of long-haired Jesus and other scriptural portraits hung on the wall
- (4) Scripture-worded stickers on the bumper of the car

(5) Praying to, or through saints, angels, and Mary mother of Jesus Christ.

(6) Praying to deceased relatives or invoking their names/spirit when we are faced with challenges.

(7) Visiting the graves of deceased loved ones to make wishes.

(8) Tossing coins into a fountain to make wishes.

(9) Seeking zodiac signs predictions, and more.

All good and perfect things come from God (James 1: 17). You became eligible for those things when you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all righteousness, then all you need will be given to you (Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:19). May we be guided.

Shalom!

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Reflection: It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man (Psalm 118:8)

You know - I quietly giggle when a person is introduced as the *Mover* and the *Shaker* that will make things happen for me, and they feel so important or appear difficult to deal with. I just smile and say, "Hello!", with no comments when they are introduced to me, because I know who has the power to make things happen for me. A fellow human being cannot be the *Mover* and the *Shaker* of anything that concerns a child of God. We are to look up to the One who owns the earth and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1-2).

When this ministry took off, the work seemed so much. I was physically and materially unprepared for my new role - to say the least, but had certain people in mind that I trusted would support us: Mr. A, Mrs. B, Ms. C, Pastor XYZ. Bear in mind that these folks were all believers (or should I say, they claimed they were), known personally, and quite well-off. *We are going to reach lost souls for Christ together. We are going to*

feed the poor, help the needy, and more - this is why the Lord has placed resources in our hands, I thought.

God must have watched me and said, "My daughter is still naive, but she will learn." He then gave me a revelation in my sleep one day. In the revelation, I was sitting quietly in a church-gathering minding my own business, when a church leader suddenly approached me. He said, "You shouldn't be sitting at the back there. Come, let me take you to this important man of God so that you can be known; so that you can move up the ladder." The person he was talking about is actually a well-known and respectable man of God (he is still very much alive). I got up and followed him. Suddenly, the church leader disappeared. I searched everywhere for him, but he was nowhere to be found. I was then on my own. I found the "important man of God" eventually but was treated shabbily and pushed to a corner like a mere object. I remember thinking, *Why didn't this church leader just leave me where I was sitting?*

It took a few days for the revelation to sink in. It was God saying, "You are looking up to man? Man will fail you. Look up to Me." This was how I learnt to look up to God and no one on planet earth, in all our endeavours in the ministry; and surely, He proves Himself faithful, always. None of those I trusted would support us did anything towards the start-up of the ministry, and I took it well. The Lord hand-picked other supporters for us - a

few wonderful people that I didn't have in mind when we started. EL-SHADDAI, our Sufficiency is more than enough for us, beloved.

Let God be true, but every man a liar (Romans 3:4). The church leader gave up his calling some years after I received this revelation, to pursue other interests. I then remembered what the Lord had shown me. Needless to say, his departure did not come as a surprise to me. Indeed, he failed the Body of Christ!

This message is for anyone who is struggling to make it in life by their human strength: Desperate to get to the top, getting disgruntled because their promotion is delayed; or devising ways to get noticed by persons in positions of authority to the point of being ridiculed, just to achieve success. Dear sister or brother: Promotion comes from God. Both riches and honour come from Him, and He reigns over all. In His hand is power. His delight is not in the strength of the horse; neither is His pleasure in the legs of a man (Psalm 147:10). Your destiny is in the hands of God. Be of good character and follow peace with all men by all means possible, but look up to the unchanging and dependable God. He alone is faithful to take you to greater heights. May we be guided, beloved.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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Soul-Winning Challenges - Dealing with Difficult People

Reflection: Proverbs 11:30, Daniel 12:3, Matthew 10:11-16

Don't give up on doing your part to win souls for Christ, beloved. He who wins souls is wise (Proverbs 11:30). The Bible also says those who turn many to righteousness are blessed (Daniel 12:3). God never forgets all that we do for His glory. He is not unjust, not to reward our efforts (Hebrews 6:10, Proverbs 11:25) - I am a living witness to this. Now, there will be times when you will feel that you failed or didn't do enough to bring certain people to Christ. Don't beat yourself up! You are not responsible for those who continually reject the Gospel and refuse to surrender their lives to Christ, once you have done your part and sown the seed.

The other thing to guard against is, succumbing to emotional blackmail. In this case, people give unending excuses for not accepting Christ and try to make you feel less worthy of your calling, even when you have done all within your power to show them love. Don't expect everyone to like you. Some people may also

have the strong urge to persecute you. Be that as it may, fear not! The One who sent you is with you, always.

Years ago, as the Lord moved me out of my comfort zone to an unfamiliar environment, a lady in need that I was trying to lead to Christ made a false allegation against me, in a bid to tarnish my image. Suffice it to say I was beyond shocked, because a few days before the ugly incident, I had prayed for her, and given her good counsel, interview tips for jobs, and a nice gift. While I was feeling comfortable having her around me, thinking I had made progress, she had other plans for me. But God was on my side. Her made-up statements were so ridiculous that she ended up putting herself in an embarrassing situation.

What I experienced hurt so much, even after I was vindicated, that I almost got discouraged, as I was new to soul-winning at the time. I also remembered how the lady had been hostile to me from the onset, but I kept pushing. As I mentioned earlier – not everyone will like you; keep it moving. It was my first test on the field as I launched out, and God wanted to prepare me for what I was getting into. He also wanted me to know that He would always be with me. The next time I saw the lady was 16 months after. I remembered what she did to me, but said a warm greeting, anyway. God taught me humility, and the whole experience made

me stronger. My younger daughter and I still talk about the ugly incident – in a playful mood, of course. I doubt very much that I will forget it in a hurry!

Evangelists and Soul-winners who are old-timers often encounter challenges, but a person who has just started winning souls may feel discouraged. Don't be disheartened if you find yourself in an unpleasant situation. It's more than likely that you are not the only one sharing the Gospel with an unkind or hostile person, and they probably did the same hurtful things they did to you to the soul-winner they met on the street the other day.

There is absolutely nothing wrong in persistently sharing the Gospel with those who are resistant to it, but bear in mind that some of them are assigned by the enemy to intentionally wear you out, discourage you, harm you, or make you feel unworthy of your calling. When you have done your part as expected, walk away with a clear conscience (Matthew 10:14 & 16). Leave the rest to the Holy Spirit and keep interceding for them in prayer. Likewise, put on the full armour of God that has been given to you, at all times (Ephesians 6:11-18) - you are going to need it. You are blessed!

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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When you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit began to dwell in you. He is with you always. If you left a building minutes before it collapsed, He made you leave. If you narrowly escaped an automobile accident, that was His doing.

Now, one of the reasons (there are others) that the Holy Spirit will not want to stay with you any longer is your mode of dressing. If you have been wearing cleavage-revealing, body-revealing, skimpy, or provocative clothing, it's time to prayerfully stop, beloved. The Holy Spirit will not stay around for two reasons: First, you cannot go out dressed like that, and not make at least one person commit the sin of adultery-by-looking (Matthew 5:27-28). Making others sin is a sin on its own and detestable to God (Luke 17:1-2, Matthew 18:7). Then, more importantly, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). He will not dwell in a temple that is not pure.

Please cover up. Honour God with your body in your own interest, really. Let the Holy Spirit do in your life, what He is sent to do in its entirety. You cannot finish the Christian Race without Him.

Shalom!

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Preparing to Be a Useful Vessel

Reflection: Luke 12:42-48, Acts 9:1-21

Some of us perceive men and women of God and certain mature believers as saints from birth, who have always had it good; and never had a rough, troubled or rebellious past. Well, that is not always the case. I don't know about others, but I had a troubled and rebellious past. It is also a fact that all humans are born with a sinful nature. We are to learn from mistakes others have made, their tribulations, whatever they are honest enough to reveal about their lives before they met Christ, and never be intimidated or shy away from taking steps to also be in a position to be a useful vessel for God.

Jesus Christ died for all manner of sin and can use the most vicious person on earth for His Glory. He forgave, transformed, and used Saul of Tarsus - the one who was persecuting His disciples and other Christians (Acts 9:1-6, 20-22). Saul participated in the murder of Stephen (Acts 7:55-59, Acts 22:20). That Saul of

Tarsus is the respected, much loved, and unrelenting Paul the Apostle in the Bible, who did exploits for the Lord.

The other misconception is to think that life is a bed of roses for men and women of God. I wish! Years back, as I was growing in the faith, I made a request to God for some of the spiritual gifts one of my spiritual mentors had. After all, the Bible says it is justifiable to desire the best gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28-31). This great man of God often gave personal testimonies to proclaim the power of God; so, he was telling us some of the very difficult things he went through and the personal sacrifices he had to make before the Lord found him worthy to be given certain spiritual gifts. I thought about them and quickly changed my mind about the gifts I desired. I said to myself, "Umm, not now Deborah, be careful what you ask for. The trials and tribulations you have gone through, and the ones you are currently faced with are just about enough for now".

Are you prepared?

It is a privilege to be an instrument in the hands of God. However, it is said that "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown". If you didn't know, be informed now that, as genuine labourers in the Lord's vineyard, we go through some tough situations that prepare us

for our respective assignments. What's more, we continue to bear certain burdens (to the extent that God allows) even as we occupy our different roles. This is why the Lord has His eye on us always. Not only does He expect a lot from us; He also guards us jealously.

On another note, not every believer is prepared, and not everyone aspires to be a labourer in the Lord's vineyard. In that case, this message may not be for you. You are blessed, regardless!

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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The Price You Pay as a Useful Vessel (I)

Certain things don't come cheap. Some people go through severe persecution and spiritual attacks just to speak the truth and spread the Gospel (usually depending on the level and the scope of their assignment). I have had my own share, as well. While some forge ahead after much endurance, strong determination, unwavering faith, and more, others drop off along the way as a result of impatience, disobedience, spiritual laxity, and the cares of the world.

Using Mel Gibson as an example: The movie, *The Passion of the Christ* was an enormous box office hit in 2004, taking more than \$600 million worldwide after attracting huge numbers of religious filmgoers. Mel Gibson was its Director/Producer. Thousands (if not millions) of souls all over the globe received Christ after seeing this movie. I personally know an agent of darkness whose life changed after watching the movie.

Not only was the movie despised in Hollywood (for obvious reasons), it also did not receive the Academy

Awards it deserved. All it received were nominations. Reputable sources have said that Mel and other key actors knew what they were getting into but were determined to bring us this life-changing movie. One of the key actors was actually struck by lightning while filming. Not just that, Mel's acting career wasn't doing well for a good while, after he released the movie. He has also been in and out of deep trouble with the law (mostly, for the poor choices he made – let's be real) and had personal woes since then. He just wasn't himself anymore. Then there was backlash for his choice of cast and crew, and claims that the movie was centred more on catholic beliefs. Mel was obviously a target for the enemy; and the attack to ruin him was heavy.

While this write-up of mine may be discouraging, the positive side of things and the profound influence the movie has had on numerous souls is what we should focus on. Could Mel Gibson have handled things better? Yes. I personally believe his spiritual laxity played a part in his unending adversities. Spiritual warfare is real, beloved – expect it. And this is why we must have the full armour of God on, always – just as instructed in Ephesians 6:11-18. We need the full armour of God to win on the battlefield. Followers of Jesus Christ have been freed from the authority of satan. That said, we must do the needful, and never let our guard down (1 Peter 5:8).

I know little of the man Mel Gibson, or his faith; but whatever his motives were for giving us this priceless movie, souls were led to Christ, and many are still being led to Him, today. Let us remember Mel Gibson in our prayers.

Shalom!

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The Price You Pay as a Useful Vessel (II)

Reflection: John 15:18-19; 1 John 3:13, James 4:4

Some years ago, a young zealous sister in the Lord on Facebook was very upset. The number of people on her Facebook friend list was dwindling. Her friends seemed to be leaving. I gave a few words of encouragement to pacify her but knew the situation may not change. I also knew what she was going through was an inevitable trial that she would have to shrug off as a Soldier of Christ. How did I know that? I looked at her Facebook page and found she was doing great things for the Lord.

You can't proclaim the undiluted Word of God and expect everyone to stay with you. Those with itching ears are bound to leave (2 Timothy 4:3). Some who managed to tolerate you at first may also leave at some point. They will hang around a little to see if you will say what they love to hear. If you don't, it's "*Good-Bye Friend!*"

Some things are better left unsaid, since lessons learnt from experiences often lead to deeper understanding

in certain situations, so I didn't say much to my young sister in the Lord; but I'm sure she learnt.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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The Pros and Cons of Spiritual Gifts

Ensure that you give serious attention to what you do with the gifts that the Lord has been gracious to give you. If you do not fully understand why you have them, spend time alone with Him to ask questions: "What would You have me do for You, Lord?". It is also important that you follow His leading - obedience is key!

Having spiritual gifts is a good thing, if they are used for the purpose they were given. You are indeed blessed if you have them. They are given for God's glory, and for the benefit of the Body of Christ. If you have them already (or when you do have them), be on the lookout for two little foxes: Self-Idolatry and Pride. Your gifts could also potentially advance the activities of the kingdom of darkness if you are not intentional about using them to honour God.

Spot the Danger

If you misunderstand the purpose for which spiritual gifts have been given to you and become engrossed

with your own desires and the cares of the world, you will end up misusing them. The Lord will not take them back from you - His gifts and calling are without repentance (Romans 11:29). However, satan will make use of them to ruin you. If you don't believe this, what would you say about those who rose to stardom, failed to honour God with their gifts, and died in their prime, without fulfilling His purpose for their lives? We miss them sometimes, and wonder, *"So sad! She was gifted. It's a shame that she ended up that way, and left us, unexpectedly. Didn't they say she started singing at her home church at the tender age of six"*? Think also, about Once-Upon-a-Time stars who are fortunate to be alive, but sadly living a life not worth emulating. May we not outlive our usefulness in Jesus' Name. God said He will honour those who honour Him, and make those who do not, insignificant (1 Samuel 2:30). Make a conscious effort to honour God with all He has given you, beloved. May we be guided.

Shalom!

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The Spiritual Boot Camp (I)

Reflection: 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Peter 4:12-13, Romans 5:3-5

True Soldiers for Christ go through intense trials. They understand what the heat is all about, and take it in. They stand firm in their faith as God purifies them in preparation for greater things. Some believers who had God's calling on their lives have failed to endure the rigor of the trials apportioned to them, and allowed themselves to be counselled to curse God and give up. Unknown to them, as the Lord appointed them for greater things and started putting them through these trials, the devil also got busy and strategically placed human agents in their path to do what he knows best (John 10:10, Job 2:8-9).

God uses trials to prepare and equip His chosen vessels for the task ahead. Consider going through them, *Spiritual Training* (1 Peter 1:6-7). Some people have also rightly termed the seasons we go through these trials, as time spent in a *Spiritual Boot Camp*.

We will be tested to be refined, beloved! Keep in mind that God allows these types of trials in our lives, irrespective of where they came from. Some of the trials will no doubt be from satan; nevertheless, nothing happens to us (pleasant or unpleasant) without God knowing about it - and even permitting it. You only need to read the story of Job in the Bible, from the beginning to the end to understand that. God chooses to allow them in our lives, for His glory.

You will need to stay enrolled in this *Spiritual Boot Camp* to be acknowledged as having the qualities of a True Soldier of Christ. Take all your courses, pass your tests, and strive to graduate with flying colours. Don't be tempted to quit. When Job was going through his share of trials, Mrs Job said to him, "Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God and die" (Job 2:9).

Here is a list of naysayers like Mrs Job, who may try to make you drop out of the *Spiritual Boot Camp*. Be on the lookout for them:

- Scorners
- Mockers
- Negative people (could be friends or family)
- Unbelievers and carnal Christians
- Talebearers

- Detractors
- Brethren in Christ, who find a reason to dampen your spirit at the slightest opportunity
- Spiritual leaders who allow themselves to play a role in killing your destiny
- Competitive co-labourers in the vineyard, who see the work of God as another opportunity to build their own little kingdoms, and perceive you as a threat

A Few Points

(1) Understand that God does not derive joy from your trials. If the Lord has not made you go through them, that could denote a form of rejection. This is not always the case, but it could mean He still has not found you fit to be an instrument in His hands, and has no plans yet to set you apart for His glory.

(2) Every trial you encounter for sanctification purposes is a training exercise, behind which God has a divine purpose. He did not save you to allow you cruise into paradise on a luxury liner. He wants you to be of use in His Kingdom. When you stopped feeding on milk and became a mature believer, He enrolled you in the *Spiritual Boot Camp* to be drilled for a higher calling. Out of every trial comes a lesson. Count it joy (James 1:2-4, James 1:12).

(3) If a person despises the trials God sends or allows their way, for sanctification purposes or fails to persevere, God withdraws the trials after a while. The person then simply floats through life. Now, this does not mean they won't make it to Heaven if they stay committed to living a life of holiness. It just means that the person remains an onlooker who isn't fit to be used for the Kingdom. They are like the older generation of the Israelites, who wandered around aimlessly in the wilderness for forty years and never made it to the promised land (besides Joshua and Caleb). God tried them time after time, and finally gave up on them.

So, you ask, "Does that mean God afflicts His own children"? Here is the psalmist's answer: *"For thou, O God hast proved us: thou hast tried us as silver is tried (Psalm 66:10)*. Some folks have put this mildly: *"A Believer is like a teabag. He is not worth much until he has been through hot water"*. Rest assured, that our Lord will uphold and see you through your tribulations (James 1:12), beloved. Be blessed!

Shalom!

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The Spiritual Boot Camp (II)

Reflection: 2 Timothy 2:20-26, 1 Peter 5:8-11

Being a vessel useful to the Lord comes with a price – a high one at that. You will be tested – and very much so (Luke 12:48). The Lord will not send out half-baked vessels. Be sure to remain in the Spiritual Boot Camp you have been enrolled in and finish up. Expect to experience spiritual warfare, and be rejected by people, lied on, ridiculed, criticised, hated, slandered, and gossiped about. Some who attended this Camp have also had to lose some of the material things they used to enjoy, at some point. If this happens to you, church folks may begin to tell you: “The devil stole your blessings.” “You need deliverance.” Don’t embrace their opinions, if you were truly called, beloved. The devil stole nothing! The Lord had to strip you of all that you placed your trust in, and your pride. It’s part of the refining process required to prepare you for the tasks ahead.

Some friends will disappear; yes. The truth is that they were never part of the Lord’s plan for you. Love them

from a distance and remember them in your prayers (you are going to have to narrow down your circle of friends, anyway). The few friends the Lord hand-picked for you will however stay close, even in their occasional confused, and clueless state.

The end is glorious, friends; count it all joy (James 1:2-4, James 1:12). Some of us have been there, and may be able to give you some advice, if needed; but every calling is unique. There is no better Teacher, Guide, Counsellor, and Comforter than the Holy Spirit. Turn to Him.

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The Work of God is Not a Career

There is a difference between a Professional Calling (also known as a vocation, career, passion, working for others, serving others by choice - secular), and a Spiritual Calling (working for God, dedicating your life to serve God and others – ministerial). Both can be said to be to the glory of God, albeit different. Everyone is called to work in some capacity, for a living (2 Thessalonians 3:10, Colossians 3:23), but not everyone is called to work for God. You will most likely need to have a talent and/or acquired skills to work for others, but must have been given one or more spiritual gifts to work for God. While skills and/or talents are needed for a career, they may or may not be instrumental in fulfilling a Spiritual Calling, as the driving force to fulfill this calling is beyond physical. We are also at liberty to choose and switch careers at will - it is not so with the work of God; we are chosen.

Clearly, the work of God is not a career; neither do we retire from doing it, since it is assigned by Him. Are

you wondering why Moses waxed strong and didn't retire till he died at the age of 120? He worked following God's leading. Moses did not pursue his own plans. He did not rely on his own strength, either. Once we start seeing the work of God as a career, we are bound to find ourselves scheming and devising strategies to succeed, only this time we are on our own, unknowingly working for ourselves. At that point God is no longer our source - He already vacated the ministry for us to do our own thing.

We see ads and invitations all the time: *'Learn to be a Pastor'*; *'Become a Pastor, Today'*; *'School of Prophecy - Enrol'*; *'Prophecy Training'*; *'How to Start a Church'*, *'Learn to Speak in Tongues'*, and just wonder. How does a person pay or learn to assume an office they are not specifically called to? Everything has been so commercialised. These institutions are thriving because, many who say they were called, and claim to be serving under the authority of Christ want to run their own show. First, not everyone is called to be a pastor, for example. Not everyone is a gifted prophet. You don't just wake up one morning and decide you want to be one, unless of course you have a hidden agenda. You need to be called and spiritually equipped by God Himself for the office. Then, it is Christ who governs the Church through revelation to certain chosen persons, by the Holy Spirit. Not even a magnificent building with

its state-of-the-art equipment and eloquent speakers is fit to be a church, except the one that is under the authority of Christ.

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to those with knowledge. The Lord does not delight in the strength of the horse. He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man (Psalm 147:10) and has no regard for those who are wise of heart (Job 37:24). May we take heed to ourselves.

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Reflection: Luke 9:57-62

God chooses those the world calls foolish, rejected, useless, weak, poor, uneducated; or insignificant, in every sense of the word (1 Corinthians 1:26-28). Spend some time to look into the respective backgrounds of those who consistently do great things for Him, and you will find this is true. God chooses such people so that no one would boast before Him and attempt to take His glory.

However, because the same True God does as He pleases in Heaven and on earth, He can, in His infinite mercies, choose to give you a chance to be used by Him even if you are of noble birth, strong, wise, wealthy, famous, or have all the education in the world. However, He may need to strip you of some things, first. You will be humbled.

Now, not many are willing to be humbled – they are not ready to part with the things they believe are rightfully

theirs and make the sacrifice to be used by God; otherwise, every born-again Christian would be an instrument in the hands of God, today. Some of us still want to flow with the world. As soon as God puts us through fire to be refined, and we face inevitable trials, we flee and deny our calling. This is when we start to look for a way out, and question our calling. "Maybe I was not called", we say. Family and friends who are clueless about the things of God, and certainly have no business with Him, may then suggest that we *shut it down*: "You should *shut it down* and find something better to do" they'll say. It may surprise you to know that these self-appointed counsellors will be the ones to scorn and call you a failure if you cease to remain focused, and "*shut it down*" as they advised. A known fact!

The Lord did call you if you got the ball rolling in the first place, beloved. Stay committed and finish up (Luke 9:62). May we be guided!

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Reflection: Proverbs 15:8-9

God rejects anything we offer Him with wicked and unrepentant hearts. He rejects prayers, worship and praise uttered with slanderous and malicious lips, no matter how loud and fervent they are. He also rejects what we claim to give to advance His kingdom, gotten from fraudulent activities, theft, dishonest contracts /jobs, gambling, prostitution (regardless of the level or class), and all other forms of wickedness. To offer such is disrespectful to God, more so if we are born-again, in which case we are expected to know better. For people who are not born-again that do these, we already have the answer - it's a case of pouring a bucket full of water into a basket. If we have a problem believing how detestable the sacrifice of the wicked is to God, then turn to Acts 5:1-11.

Further, if we, who serve in the vineyard, have been indiscriminately receiving funds, donations, etc. from shady persons and unscrupulous sources, due to our

desperation to do His work, He is not impressed as well, and may He speak to us.

Shalom!

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Last Minute Conversion - The True Befitting Final Goodbye

Reflection: Luke 23:39–43

It is worthwhile to make an effort to lead an unsaved dying loved one to Christ before they slip out of your fingers. Even a difficult, egotistic, or rebellious human being is weak and helpless in the last few days or hours of their life, especially when they know for a fact, that death is imminent. Chances are pretty good that they will listen to whatever you have to tell them at this stage of their life.

We may believe it is probably too late or pointless trying to lead an unsaved dying person to Christ. "They have lived a rebellious lifestyle, anyway", we say. "Perhaps they are suffering for their misdeeds", we think. But there is a reason the Lord is still giving them the privilege to breathe. It may not be to see them suffer for their sins as some of us may think, but to give them a chance to repent of the things they have done, acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and be forgiven. He is that merciful!

We are the most selfish people on earth, if we say we have Christ, but fail to make an effort to lead an unsaved dying loved one to Him, and then put in so much effort and resources into planning what we call 'a befitting burial' for them when they are gone; and added to that, await what the lawyers or solicitors have for us in their will. There is nothing more befitting for an unsaved loved one who is gone, than regrets and sadness for the person, now that it is evident that they won't make it to Heaven, judging by the way they lived their life and neglected to make it right with God before they left. The greatest gift of love anyone could have given them is the opportunity to receive the Gift of Salvation.

An unsaved dying person certainly missed out on years of joy, peace, and all the other blessings they could have enjoyed if they had surrendered their life to Christ sooner. Nonetheless, Christ will not turn a person who has reached the end of their life, away, if they are willing to come to Him. The story of the thief on the cross next to Christ depicts the possibility of last-minute conversions (Luke 23:39-43).

With all that said, not everyone gets the opportunity for a last-minute conversion. Some people have had just a short time left to live and lost their chance to make it right with God to spend eternity with Him – while some died instantly and unexpectedly, some died sooner

than expected. Don't wait till the last minute to make an effort in bringing your loved ones to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now is the time of salvation!

Shalom!

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Why Ailing Loved Ones Die in Spite of Our Prayers

Sometimes we pray for loved ones who are on their sickbeds and holding on to life. We do our part to successfully lead them to Christ in their state, and then cry out to Him to keep them alive. We would be right, if we then say that they became new creatures, since they surrendered to Christ, and deserve to live. But then, our loved ones die, shortly after, and we are disheartened. We then wonder if God truly heard our prayers.

Yes, God did hear our prayers (James 5:16, Proverbs 15:8). Contrary to human thinking, God did not literally "kill" our saved loved ones. It is a fact that God kills and makes alive (1 Samuel 2:6), but He would not take a saved soul without a good reason, even though He has the prerogative to do so whenever He wants. He is not a cruel God. He cares, when a person falls ill; He feels our pain, when we grieve the loss of a loved one.

Those who sincerely and completely surrendered to Christ before they departed were indeed saved – it was

not as early as we had wished, but it was not too late neither to turn to Him (Luke 23:39-43). However, the Lord knows the end from the beginning. There are two possible reasons the All-Knowing God would choose to call our saved loved ones to glory:

(1) As a Merciful God, He kept them alive till their very long dying days for one reason: To do the needful and inherit eternal life – that was settled when they surrendered to Jesus Christ.

(2) Some of our ailing loved ones got healed for real, but then passed away just as we began to give praise reports. He may have taken them because He knew how they would end up if he kept them alive. He knew that they would later backslide and turn out worse than they were before they got saved. He then, in His infinite mercy, called them to be with Him as soon as they surrendered to Christ. It is possible to get saved and backslide down the road. The Bible speaks about it as, "a dog turning back to its own vomit" (2 Peter 2:20-22). Peradventure, our loved ones may not have the opportunity to make things right if they backslide in future, before death finally comes calling.

Other reasons God calls back saved souls are hidden to us and known to Him alone (Deuteronomy 29:29). Take heart, beloved, if your departed ones sincerely and completely surrendered to Jesus Christ before

they left. It hurts; but find comfort in the fact that you shall see them again in glory (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Rest assured, they have found peace, and are in a better place.

Shalom!

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You would be surprised to know that some unbelievers out there want nothing to do with the devil. This is what I have discovered on my journey meeting people from diverse backgrounds, personalities, social statuses, and cultures.

That said, let us not forget that satan has a lot of tricks in his book, and be deceived into thinking all is well with these people. An unbeliever will always be an easy target for satan to prey on. He sneaks into a person's mind, to deter them from coming to the knowledge of the truth. The person is then blindfolded (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Choosing not to have anything to do with satan does not send him on his way and tear off the blindfold. The blindfold stays on, until the person truly and completely surrenders to Jesus Christ.

Let us imagine, for example, how Bob Marley (the Reggae Singer) could have positively influenced many souls if he had been singing and proclaiming the One and Only True God. He had good intentions but got his

message all wrong. He and his sweet-voiced backup singers held '*jah*' the false god in great reverence all the time. I believe Marley would have been a vessel unto honour if he had the right foundation. No pretence, now: I listened to his songs a lot when I was young because he spoke against injustice, oppression, and discrimination all the time, and they sounded harmless to me. I was rebellious then, and hated injustice as well, so I became a huge fan and familiarised myself with the lyrics to his songs. When I became a committed believer, I did a little research of my own and realised he was proclaiming a false god *jah rastafari*, and believed Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia was the messiah. Though he mentioned Jesus Christ in one of his songs, he never recognised Him as Lord and Saviour. He most certainly thought Jesus Christ was a prophet of a kind, and kept himself busy, proclaiming *jah rastafari*, until he realised this *jah* could not save him in his dying days. Gladly, he surrendered to Christ shortly before he died (as we were told).

Jesus Christ is counting on us to be the Light that leads others out of darkness (Matthew 5:13-16). He left this task to us, His ambassadors. You became an Ambassador of Christ when you made the decision to follow Him. It may not always be easy, as we sow in tears, sometimes; but we are not to relent in our efforts. Tell someone about Jesus Christ today by any

means possible. It could be as simple as telling them what life used to be, before you met Him, and the changes you have experienced as a new creature. You are blessed!

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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Some of us have no sense of humour, and hardly smile. We just seem to be angry with everyone, but ourselves and our buddies. We mask our cheerful high spirits when we are around people outside our circle, and make ourselves unapproachable to them. Some people also feel the need to stiffen up when they get saved or hold a position in a church or ministry, to portray a godly image to others. I don't know about you, but before I became a born-again Christian and got this far, I used to be so put-off by unpleasant ministers and ushers in churches with their frowny faces. I just didn't find their outward display of godliness appealing.

We will agree that many who attend our church services or religious events are not saved yet - some are just getting to know about Christ. Perhaps they just got invited there, and are attending for the first time, thinking, *"No joy?"* And saying to themselves, *"If this is what being a Christian is about, I want nothing of it?"*

Our countenance should glorify God, and make unbelievers desire to come to Christ. Granted, friendships change when we get saved, as we choose to only connect or hang out (as it were) with other followers of Christ; but we give the wrong impression when we are cold towards those who are not. The Lord expects us to be meek, humble, civil, and kind to our fellow human beings, regardless of their religious beliefs. Indeed, we must be of sober spirit and set boundaries in our interactions with unbelievers; but nowhere is it written in the Bible that we are to have a sombre or haughty expression to be set apart as followers of Christ.

Be joyful always, beloved (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Being joyful does not imply that we do not have our own share of life challenges sometimes; but waking up every morning with our senses, functioning body organs, the privilege of having a close relationship with the Lord, and knowing that all things work together for our good (Romans 8:28), are enough reasons to be joyful. We are also blessed people with a glorious inheritance.

There are people out there contemplating suicide and threatening to harm themselves and others, for various reasons – most times illogical. We can give hope to the hopeless with a friendly handshake, our smile, sense of humour, bright outlook, testimony, and more. Your blog, vlog, or a visit to your social media page may just be their last hope - they are looking for something to hold

on to; something to assure them that they are not alone. They see you, or hear from you, and their enthusiasm to give life a chance is aroused. And who knows - they may just turn to Christ, with the hope that they'll find joy, just as you have.

You are the Light of the world, beloved (Matthew 5:14). Let your light shine for all to see. By your influence and example, you save the world from universal depravity.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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The Matthew 11:12 Testimony

Reflection: 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, Ephesians 6:10-18

Some years back, I had a big challenge. I wept and wept, but my tears brought me nothing. The Holy Spirit then gave me a verse in my sleep one night to let me know that I was not serious at all about getting the matter resolved. He didn't quote the text - He just simply said "*Matthew 11:12*". I was not good at memorising Bible verses at the time, so I had to dash to my Bible when I woke up. "*I see,*" I said in my mind, when I read the verse. Then I did the needful. I got my victory soon after, and have continually lived a victorious life in Christ, ever since.

We give different interpretations to the text in Matthew 11:12, but the Holy Spirit gives understanding. It means: **Pressing on to Finish Your Race:** Pressing on, to resist temptation, to fulfil God's purpose for your life; and to obtain your blessings (spiritual and temporal), as though you would grab them violently. In other words: Doing all it takes with fervent prayers, praise, and worship; a strong sense of commitment to what God has assigned

to you to do for Him (if He has); and above all, taking steps to deepen your relationship with Him and striving to live a holy life at all costs. Satan isn't playing, beloved (1 Peter 5:8). He violently does his three-fold business (John 10:10), and so shall we, to do ours – which is, to resist Him (James 4:7). Never let your guard down!

Speaking about Prayers: The prayer of a righteous person is indeed powerful (James 5:16, Philippians 4:6). We are exhorted to pray without ceasing – this is to our own advantage, and for the fact that God loves to hear from us (1 Thessalonians 5:17, Proverbs 15:8). You need to pray without ceasing if you want to survive the viciously wicked, dangerous, and perverted world that we now live in, beloved.

Praying without ceasing is often misinterpreted as, repeating the same request we have made to God over and over, saying lengthy prayers, or reciting prayer lines. Wrong (see Matthew 6:7-8)! You want to speak with your Heavenly Father at any time of the day and anywhere, give thanks to Him, seek His counsel, petition Him, intercede for others and the Body of Christ, and more. Remember to give Him Praise, as well. Then testify to what He is doing in your life, as things will certainly begin to take a new turn.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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Reflection: Exodus 20:23, Exodus 20:3-6

When I was still running after the things of the world, years ago, the idol I unknowingly worshipped was Solid Gold. I mean, I had so much solid gold jewellery, that I wouldn't even remember some pieces until I needed them. I had my man-made god securely kept in the safe deposit box in a bank. You would never find me at church services, shopping, or running simple errands without it. One Sunday, I had no interest going to church because I could not find a particular piece I had planned to wear - ignoring the fact that I was the only one in the family at the time, pulling everyone else in the house to church each week, whether they liked to go or not. It was just one item, but I was miserable all day!

I invested in Solid Gold jewellery: Bought it, sold it, wore it, and loved it to bits. Unknowingly, it was the man-made god that I had in my possession and worshipped, until it ruined, and left me without a penny to my name

at some point. In fact, I was fortunate that money was all I lost - the kingdom of darkness had other plans, but for the mercy of God and His awesome power.

I also found it very strange, that this Solid Gold-Hunting-and-Trading Venture was stressful from the onset. I had no peace: Running after debtors to collect money owed, making enemies all over the place because they wouldn't pay what they owed, the fights, the threats (once, a debtor unleashed her trained vicious dog to attack me), the fear of losing my investments, and other issues I had to deal with. These should have been pointers that this venture was not God's will for me (coupled with the fact that I had made this thing my god), but I lacked spiritual discernment at the time. I would wonder, *"People invest in Solid Gold all the time; why is my own situation different?"* I also loved shoes (in fact, I still love shoes without a problem -- LOL), but there was just something about Solid Gold jewellery that was causing me pain, as much as I loved it.

When God revealed deep things to me about the items, and the ungodly activities some of the people I was trading with were involved in, I rededicated my life to Him and stopped making attempts to recover the pieces of jewellery that I still had out there and money I was owed. At some point, I also stopped wearing jewellery (I haven't worn it till date). I woke, up one day and found that I had completely lost interest in every-

thing that had to do with jewellery, solid gold or not. The stress was over. I finally had peace, and continued living my life without sorrow, staying beautiful inside and out, just as He created me. Hallelujah! LOL.

This testimony is not to specifically say that you are committing a sin if you invest in, or wear solid gold jewellery, diamonds, or other precious jewellery - the Lord did not give me a No-Jewellery Message for you. Speak to Him about your situation. In my own case, I idolised these possessions - that was the sin. Also, God works with people differently, especially if you have His calling upon your life. In my wild desire for worldly possessions, the devil seized an opportunity and carried out his own plan. If you are a believer abiding in Christ, the Holy Spirit will convict you of excesses, accordingly. Hopefully, you will heed His rebuke.

Many people (even believers in Christ) unconsciously worship idols, just like I did. You need to do some soul-searching if you find yourself drawn to a particular thing or a person more than our Lord God. Do the needful - unseat the idol! Solid Gold was the idol I unconsciously worshipped; yours could be money, other assets, your career, your physical attributes, a portrait, your spouse, your children, your spiritual leader - anyone, or anything for that matter. You do not have to physically bow to an object or a person for them to

become the idol that you worship. Anyone or anything that takes the place of God in your life or is depended on more than Him is an idol. Idolatry is an abomination to God - a grievous sin (Exodus 20:3-6). May we be guided.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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What is in Your Name?

Reflection: Exodus 20:3-6, Exodus 20:23, Isaiah 42:8

As a true follower of Jesus Christ, it is important that you make good judgment about the names you choose to be called, the names you choose for your children, your projects, your businesses, and everything you own that needs to be named.

Do you consciously or unconsciously bear a name that promotes other gods/goddesses/deities, or an ungodly act? What is the spiritual state of the person who gave the name you bear? Your name may mean one thing to you, and another thing to the one who gave it to you, especially if you are from Africa, Asia, some parts of South America, Latin America, and the country of Haiti. A name could be a Blessing or a Curse. An ungodly one will hinder you from enjoying the presence of the One and Only True God in your life. In Africa for example, many people still innocently answer to names that promote deities - the god of iron (*Ogun*), the devil himself (*Esu*), the god of lightning (*Sango*), the river

goddess (*Oya*), *Osun*, *Oba*, *Ifa*, *Odu*, just to mention a few. Prayerfully rebel against these names and have them changed if you are determined to remain a true follower of Christ. You must have no relationship whatsoever with these deities, beloved. Cut the cord!

I had a name given to me by my maternal grandfather when I was born. For some reason, my mother made it my first name on legal documents. Right from my childhood (and for quite some time), my life was a mess: Things would be beautiful one day, and then turn ugly the next. I just could not figure out what was going on, until I did a little bit of investigation and figured out what was in the name, and other pertinent details that I would rather not share, out of respect for my grandfather. I stopped answering to the name, instantly.

You are who you say you are, and what you answer to. When you answer to a name you are called, you are more or less saying, "Yes, *it is so*" to a Blessing or a Curse pronounced. Likewise, when you introduce yourself, stating it. You are confirming what others have said you are, to be true. Citing examples: My Christian name (from birth) is *Deborah*, and so I am destined to be a blessing to others, not a curse. I am chosen to speak forth the Word of God, deliver messages from Him, and encourage others. My African name (also from birth), *Olutoyin (Toyin)* means, *The Lord is worthy to be praised*; thus, everything that concerns me must

showcase His greatness. I am called by these prophetic names with numerous tongues that have power (Proverbs 18:21), and my destiny is tied to the names.

Some people had their names changed in the Bible, for good reasons: Abram (Abraham), Sarai (Sarah), Jacob (Israel), Simon (Cephas/Peter), to mention a few. With the change came renewed covenants, new beginnings, and new blessings. Although their name-change was not by their own choice, you are at liberty to prayerfully have your name changed as well. It is your prerogative, and not a crime to choose not to be called by certain names (especially those that promote other gods and ungodly acts) now that you are a new creature in Christ.

It costs little to have your name changed in the United States and the United Kingdom, and almost nothing in some parts of the world. If people question your decision to have your name changed, let them know you were created for God's pleasure only, and must live out His purpose for your life (Revelation 4:11). Let God be glorified by your lifestyle, conduct, and the name you are called, beloved. May we be guided.

Shalom!

Deborah O Daniel (Toyin)

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