



BOAZ ADHENGU

BLESSINGS

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PREFACE

Everybody has secrets and answers about how God has worked in their lives, and we need to find those teachers and mentors to enable us develop a culture of support for one another. And in each day, my struggles to walk with God translates into ministry, because faith without works is as good as dead yet all these, even unto my gift of writing, am doing through love to which am not ashamed to acclaim how knowing Jesus has brought me much joy and happiness.

In the midst of tribulation, God provides His presence, His purpose and His power; three things that act as our protection. His presence changes our perspective on the conflict, His purpose changes our priority and His power changes our possibilities (Isiah 26: 3- 4, Isiah 55: 8 – 11).

Nobody plans on sinning, the obvious delinquency is that we just don't have plans on "not sinning" and will often find ourselves trapped back to our former worldviews. In proverbs 4:28 we are told "above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life". This is only possible if we learn to set boundaries and live an authentic life; we have to be intentional about our character by developing visions of moral authority and this becomes the basis of christened leadership. Your attractiveness to people will be determined largely to the extent on how you handle yourself and this may put our minds at conflict with the reality; knowing that as the chosen generation of God, we are at a spiritual warfare with the devil and our ultimate goal is to defeat this evilness. The best bit is that conflicts with all their tribulations ultimately present opportunities for us to make choices which influence situational outcomes; and God desires that we bring our choices to Him.

May this book be a source of inspiration to you with all its enlightenment. Amen!

CHAPTER ONE

codependency

Man was created holy, without sin and with a faculty to control his appetites as a request of obedience by God. Humanity as represented by Adam and Eve, was not supposed to eat from the fruit of knowledge; hence the single temperance that reflected God's own image became corrupted by the serpent. In the chapter two, we discussed the four different temperaments that emerged as a result of a corrupted heart thereby engaging man to act in different pronouncements, perhaps habitually and ultimately as personalities.

As a consequence to sin, man became dysfunctional; for he was separated from God and this was to be his normal pattern of life. Hence, the divergent nature of temperance which are neither good nor bad but a system of relations that only has respective strengths and weaknesses. Importantly, we can't use our categorization in the temperament scale to excuse for our behaviour of sin. God has created us with the ability to choose good; for that is His image.

Adam and Eve were already in the image of God even before being deceived by the serpent into disorder; thus we can only regain that order by being more obedient to God, more than Adam and Eve were. Jesus therefore bridges the existing gap between mankind and God by owning the original mistake, the sin from deception, thereby bringing tranquillity.

Identifying our dark personalities, such as codependency, enables us to deal with them and develop a plan related to their ineffectiveness; noting that our dysfunctions are normal and can't be avoided because they are part of our fallen nature. Dark-sides only develop when we respond negatively to our

dysfunctionalities and this may take the form of blame, victimization, defeatism, denial, self-deception, rationalization or justifications.

As emphasized in relation to depravity of the will in chapter three, codependency is a personality trait to which our dysfunction is that of becoming an object of someone who is dealing with control issues to the extent that my mental attention is focused on pleasing you, solving your problems and not mine. Am not aware of how I feel but how you feel; thus will put my values aside in order to connect with you. This behaviour develops into an addiction to which we must always seek approval of others; an addiction towards being a pleasing personality to others. To this extent, some scholars have seen it as a disease thereby defining it as a pattern of painful dependence on compulsive behaviours and on approval from others in an attempt to find *safety, self-worth, and identity*. In essence, codependency is not a valid diagnosis at all, but rather becomes a description of highly diverse symptoms.

However, in as much as seeking peoples approval if well moderated is virtuous, for without it we become narcissistic (*people who only love themselves*); we must always be reminded that integrity is more important than popularity. Proverbs 29:25 warns against such behaviour of foolishness, to which we are addicted to pleasing others. Nevertheless, the fear of sharing your faith is a sign that you are a people pleaser to which we end up missing on the gifts God gave us.

All in all, using the Christian doctrine, the dysfunctions caused by accepting codependency have consequences, and to this, we can depict five:

1. It causes us to miss on God's purpose (*1 Thessalonians 2:4*)
2. It keeps us from growing in faith because we allow people to become bigger than God (*John 5:44*)
3. It leads us to sin because in the long run, we end up giving up to peer pressure (*Exodus 23:2*)
4. It causes hypocrisy in our lives for we become like chameleons adapting to our environments. We wear masks hence faking reality while hiding our true selves (*Luke 16:15a*)
5. It silences our ability to share the simple truths of how Jesus has changed our lives (*John 7:12 – 13, John 12: 42 – 43*).

We must always remind ourselves of the numerous people praying to God for help, and how many of such prayers remain unanswered; yet, even God Himself does not seek to please everyone, we sometimes lament for delayed or unanswered prayers. But if it is any dependency, we must only depend on God.

Additionally, what seems important now is simply temporary. Things that we give priority to in the now will cease to be important a few months away (*1 John 2:17*) and in that regard, we only have to please God. The simplicity of life is living for only one audience, and that is God; being reminded that happiness is a choice to which we need not to be approved by others (*John 5:41*).

We live our lives trying to make others happy, yet we don't know who the others are. To understand others, we must first know ourselves in God because God loves everyone unconditionally; and only actions pleasing in honour of God will be best dimension of happiness to others. Only God can give us our self-worth, not other people. Nobody was designed to complete you.

Our compulsion for perfection is met in our relationship with God, yet sin is never private; for it will always affect everyone else. Consider the story of David having an affair with Bathsheba, it resulted to Uriah's death, the wrath of God was kindled and restoration had to be initiated, hence fasting and forgiveness.

The historical literature about codependency presents a complex and interconnected range of terms, assumptions and models associated with the construct. It is contended that the construct has been interpreted variously over time, possibly reflecting a set of values and meanings carried by the communities operating in these different periods. This has created a complex historical background, which comprises a range of historical moments.

Early interpretations of codependency began to appear in the 1940's in the *United States of America* (USA) and were associated with behaviours presented by wives of alcoholics. It appears that some of these initial identifications might have been influenced by the early concepts presented by Karen Horney, a neo-Freudian psychoanalyst prominent in America around the 1940's. Moving on from traditional Freudian psychoanalytical views on sexuality, Horney focused much of her work on

psychosocial issues concerning women. In her writings, Horney suggested the notion of a woman's *morbid dependence*, described by her as a *drive for total surrender*, the 'longing to find unity through merging with a partner' and the *drive to lose oneself*. Horney characterised these behaviours as *parasitical, symbiotic relationships*, likely encouraged by traditional societal values featuring at the time.

These early formulations of codependency influenced some health professionals who adopted the term in their clinical practice. Although this trend of thinking had a *reductionist nature*, suggesting a victim-blaming aspect, characterizing the construct within a conceptual framework of behaviours observed mostly in women, it nonetheless influenced the early understandings of codependency. It is possible that these initial formulations influenced the popularisation of the construct, subjecting it to wider exposure to members of the public, substance users and health professionals at the time.

Early theorists suggested that individuals with codependency were likely to experience mental health problems such as depression, compulsive behaviours, stress-related disorders and personality disorders. As a result of such assumptions, researchers have sought to identify the psychological correlates of codependency, and to understand its relationship with other psychological problems.

Codependents can be addicted to relationships in the same way alcoholics use alcohol to get a "*fix*" or "*high*". They feel they have no meaning or self-worth in and of themselves, and are worthwhile only in relation to someone else; and may respond

only to external cues, not to internal feelings or perceptions. Each person in a codependent relationship often cannot survive without the other. Neither person functions independently.

The codependent spouse (*often involved with a substance abuser*) finds security in this type of relationship even though it is unhealthy.

Codependents may not recognize themselves as separate people with separate emotions and ideas. They are so externally oriented that they *take on* other people's emotions, such as anger, as their own and do not recognize that this is happening. Codependents do not know where they "*end*" and others "*begin*."

Codependents have low self-esteem and are externally oriented. As a result, they often become caretakers of others (*such as substance abusers*) and neglect themselves. The person being cared for is not allowed to take care of himself or meet the needs of the codependent.

The codependent becomes so preoccupied in fulfilling the expectations of others that they lose touch with their own feelings. They allow themselves to experience only acceptable feelings, such as compassion, and to ignore negative feelings such as anger. In a chemically-dependent/dysfunctional family, feelings often become *frozen* or totally ignored because the reality of the situation becomes too painful. The concept of self is conceptualised as a structure within the mind with instinctual energy and temporal continuity.

The psychoanalytical perspective of the *false and true self* add further explanations to participants' frustrations with their inauthentic and negative sense of self and their ongoing pursuit for a better and more authentic sense of self-definition. A defensive organization of self, termed the *false self*, emerges when the person did not experience his/her needs validated in childhood. A good parent accepts the initial total dependency of the child, and as the child develops the parent supports their growing autonomy and independency.

Virtually everyone has had dysfunctional family experiences; hence it can be postulated that different people would develop varying degrees of such behaviour depending on the effect that these experiences have had on them; the degree to which the resultant codependent behaviour was reinforced, and the strength of their denial system. Further, the degree to which codependency has had a negative influence on one's life would determine whether it is dysfunctional for a particular person.

In dysfunctional families it is natural for family members to care for and be affected by the member who has a substance abuse or serious behaviour problem. As this member's problems become more serious and unresolved, the family members become more affected and react intensely. This is a reactionary process in which the family members/involved people see the substance abuser or unhealthy member destroying himself. As a result, they become compulsively "*dependent*" on similar destructive behaviour patterns of their own, such as work addiction, eating disorders, or unhealthy relationships with one person or many people.

Originally, the term codependent was applied only to families of alcoholics. Eventually, the term expanded to include families with someone dependent on any kind of drug. Today, the word is often used to describe anyone in a significant relationship (*or relationships*) with a person who exhibits *any kind of dependency*. Being in relationship with this type of person often results in codependency, which involves an imbalanced sense of responsibility to rescue, fix and help this person. Codependents have a tendency to over-react to things outside themselves, and under-react to things inside themselves.

The over-reaction to things outside is the addictive aspect of codependency. He can help others in crisis, fix the problems of others, focus on all the negative and hurtful things others do to him or her, and blame others for their own problems. These are all ways of avoiding internal reality and pain.

The under-reaction to things inside is the denial aspect of this delinquency. He avoids feelings of pain, joy, dreams, ideas, hopes, desires, preferences, plans and goals. These are the things that make a person who they are! They are the person's identity. Thus, codependency becomes a denial of the self.

Codependency occurs when a person's God-given needs for love and security have been blocked in a relationship with a dysfunctional person, resulting in a lack of objectivity, a warped sense of responsibility, being controlled and controlling others, hurt and anger guilt and loneliness. This often begins in childhood. It is a compulsion to control and rescue others by fixing their problems; this affects the codependent person's every relationship and desire. So, while codependency may start

out as a problem in only one or a few relationships, it often becomes generalized and the codependent person responds in a codependent manner to everyone in his or her life, with both healthy and unhealthy people. Some characteristics of codependant include:

- ✓ Bondage to pleasing others
- ✓ Being controlled by someone and trying to control him or her
- ✓ Being dependent on making others happy
- ✓ Taking the responsibility to make sure others are happy, successful and feel good
- ✓ Feeling guilty when you don't do everything just right all the time
- ✓ Trying to make a sick person well, but ending up sick yourself

Codependents cannot view failure as an option. They have to be right. There are two extremes: some perfect their lives and some become immobilized. The obsessive-compulsive person wants their life in perfect order. Although good things can be accomplished, the satisfaction does not last. It has to be done over and over again. When this perfection cannot be attained, the codependent will become immobilized and feel like a terrible failure. The immobilized person feels overwhelmed by the “need” to be perfect. He or she will give up and quit trying. Hitherto, the codependent manipulates others usually by the same tactics used on him. Often, passive-aggressive tactics are used: praise, anger, withdrawal, hurt, humour or sarcasm can all be means of gaining control over others.

The codependent sets himself or herself up for hurt due to an inability to say no and set boundaries. Anger is the reaction toward the source of the hurt. Often, the codependent will be

uncomfortable expressing anger, thus setting himself or herself up for more hurt. His or her life becomes a life of “*I have to*” rather than “*I want to*.”

Recovery from codependency can be achieved through a successful combination of *professional treatment* and *self-care*. In seeking professional treatment, codependent must be careful to choose a therapist who recognizes that the codependent is in need of therapy for his own codependent problems, not only in relation to other family members who may have substance abuse or behaviour problems. There are four essential stages a codependent experiences in recovery. These closely parallel the recovery stages of a substance abuser.

- **Denial Stage:** the codependent denies that a substance abuse or serious behavioural problem exists in the family. Consequently, the codependent denies that he is experiencing any individual problems.
- **Acceptance Stage:** the codependent begins to acknowledge his own unhealthy behaviour patterns and take responsibility for them. He accepts the fact that he is *codependent* and that his life has become unmanageable.
- **Core Issues Stage:** the codependent accepts that he is unable to control the behaviour of others and that successful relationships allow each person in the relationship to be independent.
- **Reintegration Stage:** codependent learns to believe that they are worthwhile in themselves and that being worthy is not something that must be “*earned*” through

particular behaviour patterns or relationships with others.

In addition to seeking professional treatment and working through the recovery stages with a trained therapist, codependent can take additional self-care steps to aid his recovery:

- *Detachment.* Codependents can learn to separate themselves from unhealthy relationships with others in order to work on their own recovery.
- *Removing the Victim Image.* Codependents acknowledge that they are not victims and have the power to create positive change.
- *Independence.* The codependent learns to trust himself and realize that he can care for himself without help from others.
- *Living Your Own Life.* Codependents begin to focus on themselves and their own goals instead of focusing exclusively on others.
- *Accepting Reality.* The codependent acknowledges and accepts the problems in his life in order to begin solving them.

To recover and become healthy, the codependent person must shift from an external focus (*on other people, relationships, work, food, or power*) to an internal focus (*on his own feelings, needs, goals, and desires*). The codependent learns that healthy behaviour and *self-fulfillment* can be achieved by knowing, accepting, and trusting in himself as an independent person, and not by becoming dependent on something or someone else.

CHAPTER TWO

wave from antioch

A bitter pill which the majority of writers on Christianity and missionary activities in Africa should swallow is that they have not been writing African Church History. What should be the specifics about the history of the church? Is the church anything more than just another kind of sociological construct, informed by its particular ideology; a religious department fashioned by economic forces and social tensions and struggles?

Christianity in Africa has had more than its share of the attention of western writers, including throngs of social scientists and their disciples, most of whom are interested in everything except the Christian religion. It is as if in our concern to describe the sunlight we concentrate on the shadows, using that derivative relationship as the justification for a reductionist approach where the artistic supersedes the aesthetic functions.

It was as refugees, according to St Matthew, that the Holy Family came from Bethlehem to Egypt. In later Coptic tradition the pious story has followed the pilgrimage of the Holy Family from the Nile Delta all along the river to Asyut and back again, altogether a period of some three and a half years. Great miracles occurred during the passage. At place after place in a dry land, as the *divine child* stretched out his hand, fresh water wells would spring up and the trees would bow their heads; yes, the very palm tree to which the Mother held her hand during her birth-pangs gave the family shadow from the heat of the sun.

The sick were healed and the dead were raised again. *South of Asyut* (later to be one of the great centres of the Coptic Church) the Holy Family, having passed ruins of rock-temples and other holy buildings, found refuge in large rock-tombs from the early dynasties of Egyptian history. This vivid tradition has more to say about the local Church - which has loved to narrate it - than

about historical fact. It has been retold by generations and helped to make Egypt a *'holy land'*, because Jesus the Child and Mary, the Mother of God, by their holy presence, had made it so.

Twentieth-century literature devoted to the first thousand years of Church history of Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia and North Africa is immense. Finds of sources have added to our understanding of the forces which shaped the spirituality in the Church in those centuries. Archaeological excavations have brought to light invaluable documents and a fascinating world of Christian art. The UNESCO campaign in the 1960s to save the culture hidden in the sands of Nubia has produced sensational results, and even now, innocent-looking mounds in the sands of the desert may hide buildings, ruins and documents which could change our entire outlook on certain periods of this history.

The first beginnings of the Church's history in the Nile Delta must be understood as closely related to the life of the Jewish Diaspora on the Mediterranean coastline. About the first 100 years of Christian beginnings in the Nile Delta, the fundamental fact of the relationship to, and dependence on, the Jewish community in the city stands out as of primary importance. The Jews represented a highly significant minority in Alexandria with a population of hundreds of thousands. In all of Egypt there were, at the time of Christ, about 1 million Jews, thus representing the largest Jewish community outside Palestine. Two of the five sections of the city into which Alexandria was divided were dominated by the Jews, their synagogues and their culture.

A leading spokesman for the Jewish Diaspora in Alexandria was *Philo*, a philosopher and Bible expositor, an international and cosmopolitan Jewish scholar, deeply influenced by Hellenistic culture and concerned with establishing areas of contact and understanding between Hellenism and Judaism. Alongside Philo and his *assimilationist* teaching, there also appeared the more conservative schools of Jewish thought, less given to allegorical interpretation of the Scripture. It was here in Jewish Alexandria, that the *Septuaginta* translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was created.

In this Jewish world, marked by the Torah and the Prophets, the Sabbath and the feasts, the first Christian groups from Judaea appeared as missionaries, refugees and traders. While at first possibly seeking refuge in the synagogue they were soon prepared to proclaim their astounding and necessarily divisive message that the Messiah, the Saviour and the Lord had indeed come in Jesus of Nazareth. Scholars are at present attempting to identify the very place in the city of Alexandria where the first Christians congregated for worship, agape and *eucharist*, in an area of the Jewish neighbourhood, later known, from the fourth century on, as *Boukolou*.

A far-reaching generalization can be made at the outset: this religion of the Messiah, proclaimed by Jewish individuals, families and groups, came into Egypt and Africa from the East. It was an Eastern religion, and whatever changes it has since undergone because of its missionary outreach and consequent identification with many cultures, it retains its fundamental consanguinity with its Eastern origins, with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and with those *homeless wandering Charismatics*

who, in the Holy Land, as the disciples of Jesus had been the first to preach the Christian message. This brings us to a vivid analytics of Paul and Barnabas whose works resulted to the coining of the name Christians, for they preached Jesus Crucified and their first legal gathering was in Antioch; a place where almost five thousand disciples assembled to witness the gifts of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles. This therefore brings us to the major question, as to how a Christian life should be lived given that there is not enough pages that talk about the childhood of Jesus. What is a Godly life?

Jesus led the type of life that God originally planned for all of us. He had the Holy Spirit joined to His spirit from His birth to help, teach and guide him. As a baby and young child, He matured learning from the Holy Spirit. Unlike every one of us, His life was not stained by sin from birth nor was His heart wicked, hard and dark. Although He also learned from the outer person through His experiences in the world, this influence never dominated His mind, will and emotions. His physical life was sourced and directed spiritually by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was the perfect man in that His inner person followed the Holy Spirit in complete obedience. He lived the perfect life, a life completely without sin and pleasing to God the Father.

By the life He lived and His teachings, Jesus Christ showed how each of us could live a spiritual life that God wants us to. He was absolutely committed to God, dependent on God for everything and spent much of His time in prayer. Jesus lived the life of perfection because He put His love for the Father first and loved people so much that He lived His life for them and then laid down His life for us. He lived a life that put God's kingdom first

and He never acted in a way that was focused on Himself. It was a selfless life in that it put God first and all others next, it was a compassionate life that was lived for the good of others.

Jesus lived His life not for Himself but totally for God and we are to do the same (*not my will but Thine will be done*). He demonstrated that people must know God, love Him and obey Him. We are called by God to live a Christ-like life, seemingly impossible from our perspective, but something God is able to do increasingly in our life as we daily submit to Him. When we no longer live but Christ lives in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit, it can become natural for the person within, Jesus Christ, to be revealed in our outer life. A pure heart can only be developed in use where there is obedience and a clear conscious before God and other people. With a pure heart, we are purely focused on knowing God, loving Him, understanding His will and obeying it completely. In this state, we can always be assured that we can come to God knowing that our prayer will be heard and answered.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:21 – 22)

Believers who resign themselves to partially obeying God will limit their spiritual growth and fail to obtain all the spiritual blessings that God has for their life. Being poor ambassadors for Christ, their lives reflect little of the Holy Spirit within. As believers, we must all come to realize that by calling ourselves Christians we take on the responsibility to carry the Holy Name

of God in this world. That God places a great importance on His Holy Name and as Christians we must recognize the responsibility taken upon ourselves when we proclaim to the world that we are His children. We are seen by God as His specially chosen people who are a royal priesthood and a holy nation before Him. We must see ourselves this way and live our lives accordingly (1 Peter 2:9).

The greatest evil comes from those who are the most self-focused and the greatest good comes from those who have so lost their self-focus that they now live their life for God and live it according to His will. This is God's will for your life, applying your will to obeying His will; which is the same as giving your old way of living and starting a new life, living each day according to His will. God's will cannot be done on earth unless each of us who are justified by Christ's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection also rise up with Him to a new life of obedience to God. John the disciple whom Jesus loved the most and who had great revelation from God, wrote to Christians telling them that the world was passing away and that only those who did the will of God abided forever with God (1John2:17).

Through reading the gospels we know that the Pharisees and Sadducees were not looked at favourably by Jesus. This is because of the practices and hypocritical tendencies they regularly demonstrated towards Him during His ministry. To better understand these two groups of people, who even championed towards His crucifixion, we begin by definitions.

The word Pharisee in Greek is *pharisaioi*, meaning “*Separated Ones*”; thus the Pharisees got their name from other groups

because of their well-known practices of strict avoidance of Gentiles, of people who were ritually unclean or sinners, and Jews who did not strictly adhere to the laws of the Torah. It is interesting to know that the Pharisees were a lay group of believers and leaders; they believed that education in the Torah on the do's and don'ts of living life and worshipping Yahweh insured an individual's salvation and eternal reward. Thus, they emphasized the strict observance of specific religious practices like the Sabbath, ritual purity regulations, and tithing. They believed if all Jews practiced and fulfilled these specific observances it would lead them as a community to ancestral pride and appreciation.

Not surprisingly the Pharisees were very influential figures in antiquity and are estimated to have come to the fore of Jewish leadership about 150 BC. They probably never exceeded at any given time in their existence more than 6,000 individual members and whilst they adhered to strict observance of following the law, the Pharisees at times also took the liberty for broad and liberal interpretations of scripture to better fit the mould of their philosophies. This led the Pharisees to put great emphasis on oral interpretation of the Hebrew Bible which meant they could adjust their beliefs or practices on any given contingency thus allowing them to be flexible and able to confront any movement they saw either as a threat or outside their belief system. The Pharisees found their main function in the Jewish community as teachers and preachers. This is because the Pharisees, unlike the priestly class of the Sadducees, could not trace their lineage directly from a priestly family.

Since they were not of priestly lineage, the Pharisees were forbidden from offering sacrifice or participating fully in temple activities. While they have been portrayed as enemies, we as Christians are indebted to some of their beliefs and practices; specifically, the idea of resurrection and eternal reward for commoners originally came from the Pharisees. It was first presented to Christians by the former Pharisee Saul of Tarsus or Paul. Paul is not shy to mention in his many letters to the Churches throughout the Roman Empire that he was once a Pharisee. His writings very clearly reflect his former livelihood, in particular with his use and control of the Hebrew Bible. Paul quotes the Old Testament nearly ninety times in his letters found in the New Testament!

Now, on the parallel, the word Sadducee comes from the Greek word *saddoukaioi* meaning aristocratic and were composed of the upper class or wealthy. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees were closely affiliated with Temple ministries as part of the priestly class in Jerusalem. The Sadducees opposed many actions and practices of the Pharisees, especially their tendencies for oral traditions. The reason for this was because the Sadducees had the title of priest. With their title, they believed they held the keys to orthodoxy and truth. Since the Sadducees were part of the priestly class, they were ultimately the institutional religion led and directed by the High Priest. They also pursued policies designed to appease the governing authorities of Rome and were primarily concerned with keeping peace in the nation thereby avoiding trouble with the Romans. Any popular movement was a potential threat to the Sadducees, especially anything that would be regarded as an uprising. The chief priests said of Jesus: *“If we let Him go on like this, all men*

will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:48).

In the text of the New Testament, even though both the Pharisees and Sadducees were against Jesus, they also were against each other. In contrast, the Pharisees as lay preachers and teachers associated themselves closely with the Jewish people however much the Sadducees attempted to negate their most of the fundamental beliefs, for example, belief in reward and punishment of the soul in the afterlife, and the belief in angels.

Since Jesus was a layman like the Pharisees, the Sadducees in particular would not have listened to what Jesus was saying. The authority that the Sadducees claimed they had, explains in great sense, why the priests in Jerusalem played the largest role in bringing Jesus before Pontius Pilate ultimately leading to his crucifixion. Even more than the Pharisees, the Sadducees would have attempted to denounce Jesus’ ministry and teachings as heresy. While the Pharisees continued to exist after the temple destruction in 70 AD, the Sadducees completely disappeared because of their close association and reliance on the temple.

Among all the New Testament writers Paul is highly regarded as the first Christian theologian, however, his missionary unfolding still receives little recognition owing to the complexities and zeal involved. Luke, who joined Paul at Troas during Paul’s second missionary journey to be his travel companion, records that Paul, the missionary, undertook three missionary journeys, before he journeyed finally to Rome, and founded churches in key cities of Asia and Europe within a span of about twelve

years. How was it possible for Paul to plant and nurture churches in such an impressive way? What strategies, if any, did he adopt to reach out both the Jews and the Gentiles?

After Paul's conversion, he spoke of being called by God to have Jesus Christ revealed not only to him, as it happened on the road to Damascus, but also within him through the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was the spiritual knowledge and understanding that Paul received from the Holy Spirit within him that enabled him to be transformed and complete the call on his life to preach Jesus Christ among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:5).

From our own perspective, once we are in Christ, we are on a spiritual path of transformation from "*glory to glory*". The Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the spiritual realm giving us a spiritual understanding. This is done most frequently as we daily read and meditate on the words of the Bible. However, the transformation will only take place as we do this with the intention of obeying it. Otherwise, we may learn it with our mind but this learning alone will not do our spiritual life much good unless we apply it to the way we think about and live our daily life.

The teaching of the Holy Spirit is usually slow and gradual but with deliberate purpose, particularly designed by God for each one of us. He knows the best way for each of us to be taught; the lessons we need to learn and in what progression they need to be taught to specifically accomplish His will for our life. Although some of the teaching may at many a times appear confusing, it is like a *kitenge* fabric that is revealing its beauty once the Master Weaver has finished His purposeful and meticulous work in

each believer who draws near to Him with a true heart. His work is performed daily in each spirit-led person who diligently seeks to be near Him, who loves Him and follows Him with an obedient heart. The more spiritual we are the more dependent we become on God for everything because we gradually become less self-confident and more confident in what God can do through us.

After the day of the Pentecost, the disciples as lead by Peter gathered and with much zeal progressively preached based on the teachings of Jesus, His way of life and His crucifixion. The opposition from the Pharisees and their followers (*the Judaizers*) was still raw and deeply based on the political goals that Rome as the superpower had over its colonies. At this time, Paul who later converted to be Saul was the prime persecutor and chased after the apostles who still preached about Jesus even knowing that Jesus had been prosecuted and crucified. These apostles were seen as sectarian, an unpopular group of people that joined with the Jews to opposed the Roman cults; however, this new group was uncontrollable and had much resilience. And as the story unfolds, the Holy Spirit did miracles and many joined into the so called sect, and subsequently, for their zeal to follow onto the teachings of Jesus, they were referred to as Christians. This was in Antioch.

Thus, Christianity began as unpopular sect of Judaism but later revealed itself as the true religion. A name coined by those who persecuted followers of Jesus Christ became a chosen name of reference for those noble and chosen by God. Even the Judaizers who were mainly Jewish agreed to embrace most of the teachings and incorporate them into their way of life. This was

one of the main reasons why the Roman Empire destroyed the temple in 70AD, for it was seen as a source of opposition and unpopular leadership. Besides, Romans were mainly gentiles who worshiped pagan gods, spoke Greek and secluded themselves from the Jewish populace, united only because they ruled over them. Romans had allowed for an internal self-suffrage but taxes and supreme laws were to be given from Rome. This was the situation even during the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And when the gospel reached the gentiles through the works of Paul, much more debate ensued as to what really constituted salvation. Others insisted that it was through circumcision evident in the flesh but Paul insisted it was through circumcision of the heart; salvation was spiritual and this is what we call being reborn. For the gospel was first for the Jews and then to the Gentiles, and incarnation which accepts enculturation allowed for the Gentiles to worship without physically altering their bodies. And this is even true of the Christians in Nubia, south of Sudan who accepted the gospel around the sixth century.

According to Protestantism, one is born again at conversion, typically in conjunction with baptism, when one has received Christ. Catholic theology is similar, even extending the experience infants through its practice of infant baptism. The Catholic sacrament of infant baptism evolved into a religious work, and was rejected by Protestants during the Reformation. Subsequently, Protestantism developed a slightly different doctrine regarding being born again - based on a no works perversion of grace - that essentially teaches that all one has to do is profess Christ and they are then born again. Yet, most Christians have great difficulty explaining from Scripture what it

means to be born again or born of God. Indeed, there is great confusion on this subject. The Scriptures are, however, straightforward: In John 3:2-12, Jesus taught that to be born again literally means to be born of the Spirit - to become a spirit being.

One of the contributing factors which has obscured the true meaning of the phrase “born again” is the mistranslation of John 3:5 in the Latin Vulgate. Originally translated by Jerome in 383 AD, the vulgate inserts the word “*again*” into verse five, making it read “born again of water.” Yet, no Greek manuscript has the word “again” added to the phrase “*born of water.*” This faulty rendering has remained a part of the Latin Vulgate and is the basis of the Catholic sacrament of baptism - typically given to infants or children.

In order to fully comprehend the scriptural meaning of when one is born again, Jesus’ teachings in John 3:1-12 must be examined. The context of these verses proves that being born again does not mean a conversion or baptismal experience. Rather, it means a literal transformation from flesh to spirit:

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher Who has come from God; because no one is able to do the miracles that You are doing, unless God is with him’.”

Jesus answered and said to him, *“Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Nicodemus said to Him, *“How can a man who is old be born?”*

Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?" Jesus answered, *"Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone has been born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, It is necessary for you to be born again. The wind blows where it will, and you hear its sound, but you do not know the place from which it comes and the place to which it goes; so also is everyone who has been born of the Spirit."*

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, *"How can these things be?"* Jesus answered and said to him, *"You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things? Truly, truly I say to you, we speak that which we know, and we testify of that which we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"* (John 3:1-12).

The apostle Paul clearly showed that Jesus was born again when he wrote: *"Because by Him were all things created, the things in heaven and the things on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether they be thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all, and by Him all things subsist. And He is the Head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that in all things He Himself might hold the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell"* (Colossians 1:16-19). Regeneration renews every part yet not perfectly renewed. Nobody is fully grown up as a Christian and just like infants we have all the

parts of a man but not yet a perfect growth. The sanctification is gradual and instrumental to this is the Word of God.

Many still grapple with the amazing facts visible on the works of Paul, how he managed to meet his evangelical targets and how the first Christian massive gathering in Antioch, brought the wave into a worldwide reality, even amidst persecutions that were inflicted upon them by the Pharisees.

A cursory reading of the Book of Acts and Paul's epistles will show that Paul worked with some strategic plans and that they were governed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 16:6-10; 19:21; 21:11-14; Rom. 15:18-19). Paul had a definite aim in his mission and thus he was enabled to set out strategies that would fulfil that aim. He outlines his purpose in Romans 15:15-16 as to offer the Gentiles to God as "*an acceptable sacrifice sanctified by the Holy Spirit*". So saying, he identifies his mission as a "*priestly service of the gospel of God*" (Acts 9:15-16; 26:16-18; see also Act. 20:24 and Phil. 3:13-15 for other kinds of purpose statement of Paul). He had received God's call for Gentile mission directly from Jesus who revealed himself to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:16-18), and got it approved by the apostles reputed to be "*pillars*" (Galatians 2:9). As far as Paul is concerned, his Damascus experience was his *berufungsvision*. Therefore he worked with the purpose of leading people, especially the Gentile nations, to God's salvation that is in Jesus Paul sees his call to bring the Gentiles to God (*who is Light*) from the power of Satan (*who stands for darkness*) and to enable them to have a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies (Acts 26:16-18). His mission in general and his mission strategy in

particular, is thereby motivated by his vision for the eschatological gathering of Gentiles with the Jews to worship the one God, Yahweh.

Paul identified in each region the key cities such as Antioch of Pisidia, Paphos of Cyprus, Philippi, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Macedonia, and Caesarea to carry out his mission. Finally he landed as a prisoner in Rome, the capital of the Mediterranean world, where he was teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered for two whole years (Acts 28:30-31). Thus Paul was engaged in mission by journeying from one place to another and taking the gospel to the whole eastern half of Roman Empire, from Jerusalem as far around as Illyricum. Paul chose prominent cities which provided him such strategic locations as the market places, synagogues, lecture halls and houses to reach out easily both Jews and Gentiles with the gospel of Jesus and to expand his mission to the neighbouring towns and regions. He also chose Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, as a centre of strategic importance for his new Western mission. In all centres he faced both acceptance and rejection. Where he found good response there he stayed a little longer, but whenever opposition was intensified, he moved to another key city. Paul thus was constantly on the move and this was the wave of Christianity as established in Antioch, the zeal and commitment.

Paul's mission was not narrowed only to preaching the gospel, but it included a demonstration of pastoral care and concern. He was not satisfied with just planting churches, but he was keen on constantly nurturing them with the Word of God through

teaching, counselling, and writing letters of ethical exhortations (Acts 15:36,41; 18:23).

Paul does not use the word salvation and its cognates to refer only to the initial evangelism, but that he employs them to cover the whole range of evangelistic and teaching ministry - from the initial proclamation of the gospel to the building up of believers and grounding them firmly in the faith. The preaching of the gospel makes the initial experience of salvation possible, and also the whole Christian life is created through the same gospel that is preached (1 Cor. 4:15; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:5-6). Paul's purpose of visiting the Romans does not seem to be for their initial salvation, but all the more for strengthening them spiritually and for mutual encouragement (Rom. 1:11-12). This would not have been possible for Paul unless he had sought for, with a pastoral concern, a holistic growth in churches. His apostolic activity covered strengthening of the churches in faith, leading them to obedience through his exemplary life as well as his letters of exhortation and admonition.

Paul's holistic mission had a definite goal and a plan to achieve that goal. It was not simply fulfilling the spiritual and physical needs of the people, but, more than anything else, the mission seeks to fulfil the purpose of God for humanity. In our mission today, we must follow strategies that are dictated by our zeal for a holistic mission - a mission that eventually fulfils God's plan of salvation for humanity, even while it seeks to meet the total needs of the people.

Christian mission often faces stiff resistance in many parts of the world. Opposition comes both from inside and outside the

church, and often from fellow Christians who, like the Judaizers of Paul's time, give more importance to doctrines and rituals than to Christ and his life-giving word. Paul was diligent enough to convert such unfavourable situations into opportunities to clarify Christian truth and to consolidate and edify the churches. False teachings and any confusion created by them in churches should not be allowed to go un-addressed. On the one hand, the trouble-makers and intruders should be confronted firmly and Christian truth should be taught in churches in its right perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

dilemma of suffering

To better understand this chapter, we will look at the dilemma of suffering in the life of Job. The story of Job confronts us with the question: Why do good people suffer? And the story offers us insight into right and wrong ways to pursue the answer to this question. The suffering of Job points us forward to the ultimate answer to the problem of evil - the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ and the promise of a world made new. And as Jesus' followers, we seek to alleviate suffering as we walk alongside others.

To live is to suffer. All of us, regardless of our economic status, our health, our diet, or our skills, suffer. Whatever our worldview, our beliefs about God, or our stance on good and evil, we all will face some kind of trial and suffering in this life.

The question is not if we will suffer, but how we respond to suffering when it happens. Will we suffer toward God (*allow our suffering to drive us to Him*), or will we suffer away from God (*allow our suffering to hinder our relationship with Him*)?

In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, we find the story of Job - the classic story on pain and suffering. Even many people unfamiliar with the Bible know the basics of Job's story, how everything was taken from him and how he remained devoted to God. The New Testament lifts up Job as one of our examples of patience and endurance (*James 5:10*). Job suffered toward God and found that suffering gave him a greater understanding of God and His ways.

When our lives are comfortable and easy, we don't tend to think deeply about God. But when suffering comes, we "zoom in" on God. What we discover is that God is working our suffering for good and bringing about exquisite beauty and glory from even our deepest pain (*Romans 8:18,28*). We discover, like Job, that

God is even greater than we thought, and His goodness is even deeper than we ever dared to dream.

Job was an extremely rich and successful man who lived in a land called Uz. By today's standards, he could be compared to someone like Bill Gates: unimaginably wealthy and greatly respected and admired in society for being a good man.

Job had a large family; seven sons and three daughters and he owned extensive flocks of livestock. He was '*blameless*' and '*upright*,' always careful to avoid sinning. One day, Satan visited God in heaven. God boasted to Satan about Job's goodness and Satan challenged God, claiming that Job was only good because God had given him many blessings. Satan said that if God gave him permission to punish Job, he would certainly turn away from God and curse Him. God granted Satan permission to torment Job to test Satan's claim, but he told Satan that he was not allowed to physically harm Job in the process.

In just one day, Job received four messages, each giving him awful news. He learned that all of his livestock, servants, and ten children had died due to invaders and natural disasters. Crushed by the news, Job tore his clothes and shaved his head in mourning, but still he honoured and blessed God in his prayers.

Satan returned to heaven again, to request permission to test Job further. God granted Satan another chance at testing Job, and allowed that Satan could cause physical suffering to Job, but must not take away his life. Satan afflicted Job with agonizing, weeping skin sores all over his body. Seeing how mercilessly he suffered, even Job's wife encouraged him to curse God and to give up and die, but Job refused to turn his back on God, and instead entered a struggle to accept his difficulties.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, three of Job's friends went to visit him. To support Job in his grief, they sat in silence with him for seven days. On the seventh day, Job began to speak, and the four of them shared their thoughts about Job's afflictions. Job cursed the day he was born! *Eliphaz* replied that Job, who had comforted many other people, must have never really understood their pain. *Eliphaz* told Job that his suffering must be due to some sin he committed, and he encouraged Job to seek God's forgiveness and favour. *Bildad* and *Zophar* agreed that Job must have done evil and offended God; they urged him to resolve to live a more blameless life from now on. *Bildad* claimed that Job's children probably brought their deaths upon themselves. *Zophar* even suggested that Job may even have deserved a far greater punishment than what he had already suffered, for whatever wrongs he had committed.

Job became upset at his friends' remarks. He insisted that, in spite of their accusations, he really had lived a good and blameless life in the service of God and his fellow man. He began to ponder God's relationship with man. He could not make sense of why God judged people by their actions if He could just as easily change or forgive their behaviour. As he had been so badly afflicted, in spite of living an honourable, life devoted to God, he was at a loss to see how humans can please God and gain His justice. God is unseen, Job said, and God's ways are beyond human understanding. Job claimed that people cannot persuade God with words. Job desperately wished for someone who could be a go-between between himself and God, or for God to end his suffering by sending him to *Sheol*, the deep place of the dead.

Job's friends were offended that he ignored and criticised their advice. Believing that Job was not being honest about his wicked actions, they stressed to him that nothing good could

come of wickedness, and accused him of not being God-fearing enough. Job responded by telling them that he believed there would be a ‘*witness*’ or ‘*Redeemer*’ in heaven who would know that he was indeed an innocent man (16:19, 19:25). Distraught, Job became agitated and afraid. He lamented God’s injustice - how God let wicked people prosper while innocent people suffered. Job wanted to confront God and complain, but he was unable to physically find God to do this. He felt that wisdom was hidden from humans, but he decided to persist in searching for wisdom by fearing God and avoiding evil.

Without prompting, another friend of Job’s; a young man named *Elihu*, joined in the discussion. He too assumed that Job must have done wicked things to deserve his afflictions. He saw Job’s lengthy speech and questioning as being rebellious against God. He asserted that Job has spent too much effort vindicating himself rather than God. *Elihu* explained that God communicates with humans through visions and physical pain. He said that through physical suffering, humans can experience God’s love and forgiveness. *Elihu* concluded that, when Job recovers, he would understand that God has saved him from death (33:24).

Finally, from a whirlwind, God Himself interrupted the conversation. God demanded Job to be brave and give answers to his questions. God’s questions were rhetorical, aimed at showing Job how little he knew about creation and God’s power. God described many detailed aspects to show the extent and power of his creation, praising especially his creation of and control over two large and frightening beasts, the Behemoth and Leviathan (sometimes thought to be the hippopotamus and the crocodile, or mythical creatures). These beasts are said to represent the disorder and chaos that can be found in God’s world. Overwhelmed and humbled by the encounter with God,

Job acknowledged God's unlimited power and admitted that our human knowledge is very limited. God was pleased with Job's response, but was upset with *Eliphaz*, *Bildad*, and *Zophar* for their poor reasoning and advice. Job stood up for his friends, and God forgave them. God restored Job to good health, gave him twice as much property as before, new children, and a very long life he lived 140 more years and saw four generations of grandchildren.

Now, let us reflect upon these key points as we understand and delve a bit more into the dilemmas of Job:

1. The Book of Job is probably the oldest book of the Bible. Many Bible scholars believe that it was written about 2000 BC.
2. You can find it in your Bible in the Old Testament, right before the Book of Psalms.
3. Job lived in the ancient land of Uz (Job 1:1), not to be confused with the fictional land of Oz.
4. He was married with ten children, and was very rich (Job 1:2-3).
5. Even though he was a godly person, Job lost his home, his children, and his health (Job 1:13-2:8).
6. Four friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu) try to comfort and help Job, but they make him feel worse than he did already.
7. Job struggles to understand why bad things happen to good people. He is sometimes angry, sometimes sad. But he always remembers that God has a plan and a place for him in heaven (Job 19:25-27).
8. Throughout the book, Job prays to God and asks a lot of questions. Finally, at the end of the book, God answers Job (Chapters 38-41).
9. Job never really gets the answers to all his questions. After all, no one can understand God completely. But

Job does realize that God can do anything, and he affirms his faith in God.

10. In the end of the story, Job is blessed with a good life, ten more children, and a long life of 140 years (Chapter 42).
11. We learn that we should be content, have faith in God, and trust God in all circumstances.
12. The key verse of the Book of Job is 1:21, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Job’s story does not answer the question of why good people suffer. But it does offer us some direction. First, Job did not suffer because God was angry with him. One of the greatest temptations for Christians is to think that suffering is a sign of God’s anger. We think: “God is paying me back!” But Job’s story reminds us that God’s anger is not why we suffer. In fact, one of the most interesting things about the conversation between God and Satan is that God is the one who brings Job into the conversation (*1:8*). The Lord suggested to Satan that he consider Job because of his faithfulness and integrity. God did not suggest Job to Satan because he was angry with Job. He suggested Job because He was pleased with him! God knew that Job trusted Him for reasons far deeper than cattle and oxen. He trusted God because of who He is.

Second, Job did not suffer because he had sinned. The Book of Job begins by telling us “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.” (*Job 1:1*). Then, after Job’s family and livestock were taken, we read: “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.” (v. 22). The

author is clear on this issue: Job was not suffering because he sinned.

When we suffer, we often think of particular sins we've committed or ways we've faltered in our obedience. We believe that we are getting what we deserve. Usually our minds go to that one sin that we cannot seem to overcome and we blame that sin for our suffering. Our theology too often goes like this: Do good, be blessed. Do wrong, be cursed.

But Job's story shows us something different. The righteous do suffer. The Apostle Paul suffered deeply during his ministry but said it was a source of deep joy for him (*Col. 1:24-25*). One look at the life of Jesus should quickly remind us that suffering and sin aren't always connected. Even though He was completely sinless, Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, and rejected throughout His life.

James says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (*James. 1:2-4*). This is one of God's great aims for us during suffering. If God takes us through a season of suffering in order to help us love and trust Him more, it will always be worth the pain.

When we suffer, we ask many questions. We ask: *Why me? What is God doing right now? What did I do to cause this? Why does suffering come to those who love God? How could a loving God allow this to happen?* Those are legitimate questions and they need good, thoughtful answers.

But what we learn from Job - who asked lots of questions - is that what we need most in times of suffering is God. We need His presence, His voice, and His nearness when we are suffering. The greatest thing God can give us when we suffer is more of Himself. Listen to what the Lord says to Job.

And the Lord said to Job: "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it." Then Job answered the Lord and said: Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further." After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

(Job 40:1-5; 42:7-9)

What a wonderful ending to Job's story! Job received an even grander vision of God's power and goodness through his suffering. He was reminded that no one can bring accusations against Him. Job saw just how small he was in comparison to the vastness of God's glory. What's more, Job **saw** an even deeper level of God's goodness. The Lord accepted his prayers on behalf of his friends and removed His anger from them.

If nothing else, Job learned that suffering reminds us that we are not God. Suffering has a way of humbling us and reminding us that we don't have control over our lives. Job also learned that even though suffering is often beyond our control, God comes near to us during those times.

Job's journey is both difficult and beautiful. It is difficult because we see just how deeply he suffered and what he endured. Although many of us will never experience what Job did, we shouldn't minimize our own pain and trauma when trials come our way. But Job's story is also beautiful. The way God came to Job's aid, revealed Himself, and eventually restored Job gives us hope and courage. We are reminded that God will not leave us or forsake us. He even gave us His own Son to remind us He wants the best for His people.

CHAPTER FOUR

power of prayer

There is nothing more common among men, no human activity more universal, yet none more mysterious and misunderstood than prayer. Since the dawn of time and the advent of recorded history, the religious expression of prayer has been found in every culture, civilization, and era. Primitive tribes on every continent to complex civilizations around the world have been known to practice this ancient art called prayer to some god or deity. Even we as Christians, we practice prayer.

Psychologists and behavioural scientists have long studied the effects of prayer on human development and socialization. Some studies have even attempted to validate and document the effectiveness of prayers on the individual practicing the art. There is no shortage of skeptics and antagonists who frown on those who believe that such human superstition and fanatical religious tradition could impact human experience or the course of life on earth.

Yet the question must be answered, why do men pray? Hundreds of millions of people around the world participate in this ritual every day in every language, race, and culture. Why do people of every religion pray? All the major religions require their adherents to practice regular daily prayers. Why? Why is the human spirit naturally drawn to seek solace and comfort in the unseen and unknown? Is there a mystery that man still does not comprehend? Why should and - why do we - pray?

While prayer is so common, it is also mysterious and misunderstood. It seems as if it is the most commonly practiced activity unknown on planet earth. Scores of books have been written on the subject in every generation. Conferences and

seminars are held everywhere to explore the mysteries of this ancient art called prayer.

Despite all the questions, confusion, and uncertainty surrounding prayer, though, it is still the greatest common denominator among all the great Biblical characters and thousands of believers throughout history: Moses practiced it. Abraham practiced it. King David, Solomon, Esther, Deborah, Daniel, Joseph, all the prophets - and, of course, Jesus Christ Himself - had dynamic and profound commitments to lives of prayer. Their records show the direct impact of their prayers on their lives and on the circumstances and situations they faced. The evidence affirms that one thing is sure; no matter what you may think about prayer, it works.

To understand the principle of prayer, it is necessary to understand the mind and purpose of the God Himself. Prayer is a result of God's established authority structure between heaven and earth, as well as a product of His faithfulness to His Word. Prayer is as simple as respecting God's authority. This is because prayer was born out of God's arrangements for man's assignment on earth; it happened when the Creator spoke two words during the creation process: "*so that they*." These words are recorded in the Bible:

Then God said, "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*" (Genesis 1:26 - 27).

These words are critical in understanding the principle of prayer, since they define the relationship the Creator intended and desired with man and the planet earth.

The Creator's mandate for man to dominate the earth was established in the declaration, but the parameters of that dominion were established with the words, "*so that they.*"

The Creator's commitment to His original intent for creation is a priority for Him and motivates and regulates all His actions. In essence, everything He does is driven by His purposed desire, which never changes. In fact, His declaration is clear when He states, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21 - 22). Again, He declares, "*I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.*" (Isaiah 46:10 - 11)

It is this commitment to His Word that is the basis of the prayer principle. The Word of God is not just the law for man, for it is also called "*the Law of God.*" This implies that every word God speaks is also a law to Himself. He will subject Himself to His promises and decrees because of His integrity.

In the book of Psalms, we find these words: Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psalms. 119:89 - 90).

Prayer is a lonely experience for many of us. Although we have been taught that it is important to pray, we have been so disappointed and frustrated that our prayers haven't been

answered, we've almost given up on it. We may pray when we are scared or sick, but it's not a regular practice in our lives. Outwardly, we agree that prayer is worthwhile, but secretly we wonder: Does God really hear me when I pray? Why is prayer so boring and fruitless for me?

Unanswered prayer is a major obstacle that stands in the way of a life of true faith. Certain people have lost their faith altogether because of unanswered prayer. Some have turned to philosophy, metaphysics, or cults to find answers to life's questions and problems. Others have turned to horoscopes, psychic hotlines, and witchcraft. Still others have rejected the spiritual realm completely and now focus on purely materialistic things.

Confusion about prayer also affects those who are committed Christians. The greatest difficulty in most believers' experience is their prayer lives. Even though they believe prayer is a foundational element of the Christian life, they shy away from it because they don't really think it will make a difference. They don't pray because it hasn't seemed to work for them in the past, and they don't like failure. Some have been tempted to delve into ungodly activities because they were weary of not having their prayers answered.

Prayer is one of the most misunderstood arts of the human experience - yet it is meant to be one of the most exciting aspects of a life of faith.

What is faith and how does it work? What is the difference in faith and believe? Faith is information we get from God for us to act upon. We get information (faith) from God basically two

ways: (1) from the Scriptures and (2) directly into our spirit man from the Spirit of God. Faith (*information that we get from God*) enables us to know God's will in advance on a given subject. It enables us to literally peer into the future. It shows us what God is going to do before He does it. In addition, this advance information also shows us what our part is in what God is about to do. This is what faith is. We can demonstrate this from Hebrews 11:7 with the case of Noah:

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith”.

Now what is the difference in faith and belief? Faith is knowing something, believing is acting it out. Faith is having information, believing is following the instructions in that information. Although the term, believe, is not used in Hebrews 11:7, Noah obviously believed because he walked out the information God gave him.

Nothing will take the place of our dwelling in the secret place. We must experience God on our own. The person, who makes the choice to dwell there, is a person moving into the position to receive the blessings of God, no matter what adversities come. This is a person who is moving into a position where there is a protection and a covering, no matter what blows up in his life.

Your job may disappear. Your business may be running well today and tomorrow go bankrupt. Your home, family, wife, husband and children may be going perfectly right now and

tomorrow disaster strikes. One of them wants a divorce, a child runs away or gets in jail, but when you learn to dwell in the secret place of God, there are some benefits that accrue to you simply from the fact that you dwell there.

Psalms 91:1-16:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation”.

You can't move in and out, you must learn to dwell in that place. We must step aside and enter the chambers of the throne room and dwell in the secret place of the Almighty. There must be a time when you enter the throne room. You must spend time in the presence of God. Then, and only then, will He become your fortress and refuge. At that point, you abide under His shadow. This is a figure of speech. God does not have a *shadow*; neither does He have feathers and wings. These figures of speech are used here like Jesus used parables. The point is that if I am close enough to God to be in His shadow, I am close. If I am this close, since nothing harmful can get this close to God, it can't hurt me either since I am with Him. There is a refuge in the storm when we dwell in the secret place.

Do you have a storm brewing in your life? Are you living under circumstances that are painful for you? Is there a situation in your home that you really wish you could change, that has become like a fowler and a noisome pestilence? Is there anything in your work place that comes against you, robbing you spiritually and pulling you? Stop battling these things long enough to get into the secret place of God Almighty and get under His shadow. Under His shadow, He will surely deliver thee.

God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. When our minds go haywire and start thinking strange things, our answer is not in a tranquilizing pill, it is in the secret place. There, things level out and everything comes back into place. Then, I can function the way God intended. Everything comes together in the secret place.

A major principle regarding our authority and power in prayer is our right to use the name of Jesus. The authority of Jesus' name gives us access to our heavenly Father. Our right to "*approach the throne of grace with confidence*" (Hebrews. 4:16) brings us the delight of a restored relationship with God. Yet this essential aspect of prayer also enables us to agree with the Father and His purposes, and to ask Him to fulfil His Word as He meets our needs and the needs of others.

In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God (John 16:26–27).

God's presence, power, and unlimited resources are available to us in the name of Jesus. Yet Jesus' name isn't a magic word we use to get what we want. We must pray according to God's will, which we find in His Word. Jesus said in John 15:7, "*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*" The backbone of prayer is our agreement with God's Word, our oneness with Christ, who is the Living Word, and our unity with God's purposes and will.

God is loving and gracious. He knows we have a limited understanding of Himself and His ways, and that we struggle with our fallen nature. That is why He will at times answer our prayers even when they are weak and full of doubt. However, as a loving Father, He wants us to grow and mature. He doesn't want to leave us in our weakness and uncertainty. He wants us to enter into His purposes, because that is where we can truly be

children of our heavenly Father, work together with Him, and live the abundant life Christ came to give us (John 10:10). Therefore, at times, He will withhold answers to prayer so we will seek Him and the principles of prayer that are essential for praying according to His will and for appropriating His promises and power.

To begin with, God does everything for a reason, because He is a God of purpose. His actions are not arbitrary. *“The Lord Almighty has sworn, ‘Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand’”* (Isaiah. 14:24). *“The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations”* (Psalms. 33:11). *“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails”* (Proverbs 19:21). God is a God of purpose, and everything He has created in this world, including men and women, has been created to fulfil His purposes. Therefore, when God said, *“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness”* (Genesis 1:26), what does this statement reveal about His purposes for humanity and the reason for prayer?

God created humanity to reflect His character and personality. We were created to be like Him, having His *“image”* and *“likeness”* (Genesis 1:26). This means we were created to have His nature and moral character. That was meant to be the essence of our being.

Man was created out of the essence of God, yet is always dependent on God as his Source. As human beings, we are not self-sufficient, even though we would like to think we are. We cannot reveal God’s image and likeness apart from a relationship

with Him. We were intended to reflect God's nature in the context of being continually connected to Him in fellowship. I John 4:16 says, "*Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*" No human being is going to be truly satisfied with life until he or she loves God. God must have the primary place in our lives because we were designed to find fulfilment and ultimate meaning in Him.

The account of the creation of mankind shows us that God never desired or intended to rule the earth by Himself. Why? It is because "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8, 16), and love doesn't think in those terms. A selfish person wants all the glory, all the credit, all the power, all the authority, all the rights, and all the privileges. But a person of love wants others to share in what he has. It is crucial for us to understand that the relationship of love that God established with mankind is not separate from the purpose God has for mankind. Rather, the relationship is foundational to the purpose; both are essential keys to prayer.

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, it was never His intention that they leave the Garden. Instead, He wanted the Garden to be spread over the earth. What does this mean? God wanted them to take the character of the Garden - *God's presence, light, and truth* - and spread it throughout the world. This was the overarching meaning of having dominion over the earth. This is still God's purpose. Isaiah 11:9 says, "*The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*"

We know that tragedy came to mankind when Adam and Eve turned their backs on God and desired their own wills apart from

His will. Some think prayer originated because we were separated from God by our sin, and we needed a means by which to reconnect with Him. That is one use for prayer; however, it is not the heart of prayer. To understand its essence, we must realize that prayer began with the creation of mankind. It was not instituted after the *fall* but before it. Prayer existed from the beginning of God's relationship with man.

Because of the fall of mankind (*see Genesis 3*), and because of the stubbornness of our sinful nature, we often need to prepare our hearts in prayer so we can truly enter God's presence. Yet that is only for the purpose of taking us where we were originally created to be, the place where Adam and Eve were before the Fall - a place of purity before God in which we reflect His nature and a oneness with His purposes, in which our wills are in total agreement with His will. Jesus said, "*Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them*" (Mathew 18:20). The heart of prayer is communion with God in a unity of love and purpose. It is agreeing with God - *heart, soul, mind, and strength* - to bring about God's will.

Praying does not mean convincing God to do your will, but doing His will through your will. Therefore, the key to effective prayer is understanding God's purpose for your life, His reason for your existence - as a human being in general and as an individual specifically. This is an especially important truth to remember: *Once you understand your purpose, it becomes the "raw material," the foundational matter, for your prayer life.* God's will is the authority of your prayers. Prayer is calling forth what God has already purposed and predestined -

continuing His work of creation and the establishment of His plans for the earth.

Prayer is not an option for the believer. It is a necessity to fulfil God's purposes in the world and in our individual lives. Time spent in prayer is not time wasted but time invested. As we embrace the will of God, as we live before Him in the righteousness of Christ, as we seek to fulfil His purposes, nothing will be able to hinder our prayers, and we will begin to understand Jesus' saying, "*With God all things are possible*" (Mathew 19:26).

Power in prayer is not based on emotions, feelings, or the theories of men, but upon the Word of God, "*which lives and abides forever*" (1 Pet.er 1:23). His Word is the guarantee of answered prayer. God is asking you to bring Him His Word, to plead your covenant rights. We are not to pray to God in ignorance but as partners in His purposes. Prayer is joining forces with God the Father by calling attention to His promises. "*No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God*" (2 Corinthians 1:20). The New King James Version expresses it in this way: "*For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*"

Jesus' prayers were effective because He had a relationship with God, knew His purposes, and prayed according to God's will - according to what God had already spoken and promised to do. We are to imitate Him. More than that, we are to let His Spirit and attitude rule in our lives. "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 2:5). We are to live in the new

covenant that God has granted us in Christ, which restores us to oneness with God's heart and will: *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people'"* (Jeremiah. 31:33).

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD'S PLAN

The idea of natural knowledge of the divine can already be found in the Greek philosophies of nature as well as in the Bible and in the writings of many *Church Clergies*. The standard biblical proof text for natural theology has long been Romans 1:20: “*For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities (his eternal power and divine nature) have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*” Acts 14:17 states that God “*has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.*” The universe and everything in it represents the true image of God, but through the biblical understanding, the wisdom of this image becomes part of our collective conscious, a unified knowledge that inspires the soul. There is no need to struggle into resisting through rebellion or bad science about what wonders God can do and has done. The bible tells it all!

The Bible is a book that is very famous, and yet many people do not know a lot about it. It remains a best seller even in the twenty-first century, and many people try to guide their lives by its message.

We understand that there is more to this world and to this universe than what we can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch, and that there is a power greater than ourselves out there. We can see the hand of a Creator in the splendour and complexity of the world around us (*Romans 1:19-20*), and we may wonder if this Creator has provided us with any other messages. The basic message of the Bible is God’s eternal plan (*Ephesians 3:11*). The Bible shows how this plan develops throughout time, after all, we were created in Gods image; and this we must quest to understand.

The biblical material on the image of God is ambiguous, although it does provide ideas about the identity of this image of

God. The Hebrew words *tselem* (“image”) and *Demuth* (“likeness”) are the words used in the Old Testament to describe the image and likeness of God. The etymology of *tselem* is ambiguous; but if it comes from an Arabic root word meaning “to cut,” it could suggest the idea of “a cutting” or, more popularly, “a chip off the old block.” The etymology of *demuth* is more straightforward, meaning “resemblance” or “likeness.” Although some follow the analysis of Irenaeus (a Greek cleric who died in 202) in drawing a distinction between “image” and “likeness,” the majority view is that these terms are used synonymously as an expression of the device of synonymous parallelism in Hebrew poetry. In the Septuagint (*Hebrew bible*) and the New Testament, the word “image” is rendered by the Greek word *eikon*, and “likeness” with *homoiosis*.

Based on the affirmations in Genesis. 1:26-28 and Psalms. 8:5-8, Old Testament scholars are nearly unanimous in interpreting the image of God to be expressed in human dominion over nature. Just as human kings placed their images or statues around their kingdoms to remind their subjects of the king’s dominion, God has made human His vice-regents or ambassadors to represent Him on earth. In this “royal interpretation” of the image of God, humans are appointed and authorized by God to serve as His visible agents or representatives on earth, ruling and administering the created world and its inhabitants. Christ is the perfect image of God and as such humans must be “transformed” or “renewed” to come into alignment with Christ. Thus, the image of God is the reflection/likeness/similarity of God’s essence which He created in human beings, and is reflected most noticeably in the personal, spiritual, relational, rational, volitional, moral, responsible, and emotional aspects of human life.

The Bible begins with the story of creation. God speaks all things into existence over a six day period and rests on the seventh day.

On the sixth day, God made man and woman in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), which means that human beings have souls (cf. John 4:24). The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, lived in the *Garden of Eden* and enjoyed an unbroken relationship with God.

God had one rule for them: they were not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve was tempted and ate of that fruit, and gave also to her husband. Because of this disobedience, men and women were cursed with the sentence of death, were cast out of the Garden, and their relationship with God was broken by their sins. Adam decided to turn from the way of God. He chose instead to begin living for himself. After turning from the *Tree of Life*, he began to live for the lust (*desires*) of the flesh, the lust (*desires*) of the eye and the pride of life. Man's center for living turned from God to self and thereby separated himself from the spiritual life of heaven.

After man became his own god, everything he did revolved around the little kingdom he began making for himself. This turning from God to self is what separated the race of Adam from the eternal life of God and left mankind with the emptiness of spiritual death. This was the *fall* of man away from spiritual heaven hence the "*sin nature*" that everyone has inherited from Adam because of the *fall*. It is a nature that continues to be centered on self because it is missing the indwelling presence of God. However, Gods plan of providing spiritual life to man had nothing to do with the *fall*. "*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*" (Eph. 1:4) From the beginning God had planned to have many children who would reflect His spiritual image by receiving their life through the Son. "*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life* (His life of perfect love), *and this life is in His Son.*" (1 John 5:11)

While God's plan was temporarily delayed because of the *fall*, God has not changed His purpose. He still has a plan to provide a family of children who have been enabled to display His spiritual image in this world by receiving their life from the Son. While the fall interrupted His plan, Paul assures us that Christ's work on the cross has permitted God to go ahead with His original purpose. "*That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ.*" (Eph. 1:10). The abundantly full spiritual life that is now available from Jesus Christ is more powerful than the fallen life everyone receives from Adam. We are therefore expected to enter into His overcoming life in this world. In fact, according to the scripture, those who do not enter into the Lord's full redemption and begin walking as He did in divine love, cannot expect to stand before their Maker with "*boldness*" on the *Day of Judgment*. (1 John 4:17).

When Christians first believe (agree to submit to God's ways), they generally turn to God with their whole heart. They then are enabled to partake of His grace and receive the gift of His Spirit. The indwelling Spirit provides them with a real desire to follow the ways of the Lord. But this is only the doorway into a spiritual life in which God wants to become our All. The ultimate intention of salvation is to turn people from a self-centered way of life to a God-centered way of life.

God uses tribulations to separate His called-out children from their love for the world. He wants them to turn to Him as their only source of spiritual life. But as He takes them through a spiritual wilderness on the way to His life of promise, with the intent of teaching them to live by faith in Him alone, many begin looking back to the things of this world for relief.

There are many who take upon themselves the name of Christ but refuse to renounce the world. They seem to have found some

broader, easier way than the way of the cross. But the Bible presents only one direct way to heaven, and that way is the narrow way of the cross. The Bible presents no route of going around the cross without getting out of the way. Jesus says, “*If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, (not try to go around it) and follow Me.*”

Those, therefore, who attempt to go around the cross instead of taking it up, get out of the way to heaven into the *by-path* that seemeth to be right, but the end whereof is death. And these are the many to which the Saviour refers when He says, “*Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? And in Thy Name have cast out devils? And in Thy Name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you!*”...How evidently had these people died in their deception! And now they come to the very door of heaven, expecting admission, but the Saviour says, “*I never knew you.*”

Christ’s true disciples will follow Him through the cross. “*So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has (from his self-life) cannot be My disciple.*” (Luke 14:33) These true believers in Jesus Christ stop living for themselves (they come out from the ways of the world). They deny themselves by offering their *flesh-life* to the cross, so they may enter into a life of *self-sacrificing* love as Jesus did. (1 John 2:5-6) They will therefore begin saying with Jesus, “*My food (or spiritual sustenance) is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.*” (John 4:34)

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (*Eph. 4:22-24*). There is something Christians are to seek. But it does not include anything from this world.

Christians, according to Jesus, are not even to focus their attention on the things they will need to eat, drink and wear. (*Matt. 6:31-33*). The primary concern of Christ's disciples is to seek after the kingdom of God and His righteousness; in faith, they can rely on the Lord to be their *Sustainer*. In this process of seeking out the *Kingdom-life of God*, we need to be laying aside every weight that holds us back. (*Heb. 12:1*) We are responsible for pressing forward in our faith until we have received the promised "*abundant entrance*" into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (*2 Pet. 1:10-11*)

The apostle John, in writing his first epistle, wanted to help his readers understand what it means to enter into the full stature of Christ's spiritual life. To help distinguish the spiritual Christian from other less mature stages of Christian life, he separated all Christians into three categories. He said, "*I write unto you little children... I write unto you young men... I write unto you fathers....*" (1 John 2:12-14)

When referring to the little children, John says they are conscious of two main points: "*God is our Father*" and "*our sins are forgiven for His name's sake.*" Their faith has enabled them to believe in a loving Father who takes care of them. They are also conscious of being reconciled to God and being at peace with Him. These little children possess a basic understanding about redemption. Through repentance they have turned and submitted to the Lord. But their understanding of what this implies is very limited. Only as the Lord is able to strengthen them in their faith and reveal His deeper truths within their hearts will they begin to realize the real nature of their calling.

Next, John describes Christians who have matured into young manhood. As *young men*, we are required to bring every facet of our life under the authority of Jesus Christ. But we can still only

form pictures in our mind about Christ's nature of love because His life of love surpasses knowledge (*Eph. 3:19*). These young men are Christians who no longer need milk. They are fully grounded in God's word and committed to doing everything their Lord teaches. Through experience, they have moved from a position of defence to a position of offense. Instead of always running from the arrows of Satan, they overcome this wicked one. They have also learned to serve God by fighting against the powers of darkness through prayer and supplication.

The spiritual fathers have made their calling and election sure by permitting Christ to establish His Kingdom-life of love within their hearts. (*2 Pet. 2:10-11*) Jesus said, "*He who has My commandments and keeps them* (the "young men" who have fully responded to His way of the cross), *it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*" (*John 14:21*) While they have had to go through some very severe trials to stretch their faith in the time of testing, they have continued to respond to the teachings of their Lord until He has established His Kingdom-life within their hearts. It is the "fathers" who have truly learned what it means to live by grace. They can say with Paul, "*By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*" (*1 Cor. 15:10*) This supernatural work of God's grace enables these spiritual Christians to die daily to self and to live wholly for the good of others through the life they are receiving from Jesus Christ. They know their life has a source outside of themselves. "*For I know the plans I have for you,*" declares the Lord, "*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.*" (*Jer. 29:11-12*)

Most people never enter into the perfect will of God for their lives. Because they are unwilling to die to their own will, they

do not have an opportunity to discover the good and pleasing plans that God has made for them. Their independent walk also keeps them separated from the abundantly full spiritual life of the Son. This is why they never find true fulfillment. They end up going through life always looking for another means to help them find an enjoyable spiritual life.

God has special plans for each of His children. He has already made plans for our lives. (Eph. 2:10) And the only way we will ever know His good, pleasing and perfect will is by waiting on Him to reveal each of our steps in life. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on our own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.* (Prov. 3:5).

Christians cannot enter into a close and intimate fellowship with God until they are willing to share with the Son in His self-sacrificing nature. And to do this, they will need to have His way of the cross as an innate part of their inner nature. Only then can they be “made perfect in one.” (*John 17:23*) It is by entering into this participation with Christ in His divine nature, which includes His inwrought cross that His life of love can begin welling up from within and be reflected in everything they do.

When Adam turned from a God-centered life to a man-centered life, his human spirit lost contact with the life of God. God had said, “*For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” (Gen. 2:17) While he did not physically die, self-will resulted in a loss of the Kingdom-life of God. Instead of being vitally connected to God and living under His heavenly government, man’s spirit was left lonely and self-centered. He began to experience spiritual death.

Many people wonder how they can change their lineage after being born into Adam's family. They think it is necessary to remain under bondage to the sinful nature they have inherited from Adam until they physically die. But, glory be to God, the Gospel tells of a Messiah who has come as the *Last Adam* to deliver His followers from this bondage.

We can now better understand God's purpose for sending a Messiah. The kingdom of God needed to be re-established in this world. Men and women needed to have His Kingdom-life established within their hearts so they would be enabled to manifest God's eternal life of love and fulfil His heavenly purposes here on earth as it is done in heaven.

Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross and laid in the tomb as the "Last Adam." All that was in the first Adam was gathered up and put to death in Christ. And so, if we submit to this death with Christ on the cross, the old life that is dominated by the desires of the flesh can also be put to death.

We have a choice of being connected to either Adam's family tree or Christ's family tree. If our source of life is to change, we must make a conscious decision to trade families.

Everyone who wants to become fruitful in furthering God's Kingdom-life of love here on earth must take the awful and awesome path of the cross. We can expect to be taken through a real trial of faith after surrendering to the cross in our own *Garden of Gethsemane*. God takes us through a period of real darkness where everything from the old way of life begins to pass away. During this dark night of the soul, it will be necessary to be reminded that God is faithful to His promises. It will be necessary to hold to our faith. God never forsakes those who are earnestly seeking Him. And He does have the power to raise the dead.

CHAPTER SIX

what about love

Every personality is unique. Think about that. What an amazing thing it is that there isn't anyone, nor will there ever be anyone, exactly like you. Your appearance, personality, talents, circumstances, life purpose, and current or past life experiences are entirely unique. No one else is designed to have the experiences you are having through your *body*, *mind* and as a *personality*. That makes your life very precious, and it makes every other life very precious too, regardless of how another may seem to us.

For this reason alone, all life is precious. The image we have of someone isn't real - it's only an image, an idea. To know someone, we have to look deeper, and when we do, we find the same blessed divinity in everyone. To this end, everyone has an "essence", his *divine spiritual self* which needs to be awakened for all humanity has fallen. The fallen self is what we comprehend as *ego*, and this continuously fights our essence, our divine spiritual nature; for we are fearfully and wonderfully created by God, in the likeness of His image.

Love is so important to our *well-being*; and yet, contacting that which is within us; that which spontaneously and naturally loves is often difficult. It is obvious that human beings have a dual nature; that is, they have the potential for both good acts and harmful acts. We can be loving, compassionate, and altruistic or the opposite. Most of us would like to be more loving because it feels good to be full of love and because it is actually our true nature to love. But something exists within us that could make it difficult to love consistently, and that something is the ego.

The ego is the false self (*as opposed to the true self, or essence, as we have defined it to be*). The ego is made up of conditioning - beliefs, opinions, judgments, “*shoulds*,” and any number of ideas that are part of our psychological makeup. This conditioning affects how we see and react to the world, and we often respond unconsciously to this conditioning without realizing that we have a choice. Although some of our conditioning is necessary and useful, much of it is false, negative, and limiting. This is the conditioning that causes us suffering and results in our causing of suffering to others. These false, negative, and limiting beliefs and perspectives are what interfere most with loving.

The ego is reflected as the voice in our head, the ongoing inner commentary we all are so familiar with. The ego admonishes and pushes us, chats with us, judges, fantasizes, and tells us what to do and how to do it. The ego is also behind most sentences that begin with “*I*.”

The ego tells us how to run our life, but it doesn’t have the wisdom to guide us about this. Consequently, the ego becomes that cause of suffering due to its negative voice that often leads to negative feelings. The ego’s perceptions and values are also too limiting and narrow to encompass the truth about life.

This ego - *who we think we are, with all the judgments, conditioning, and projections* - is an imposter, a saboteur of all relationships and of happiness in general. Essence is who we really are, the divine self that is living this life through us. It is our essential goodness. We are actually spiritual beings playing at being human beings.

The experience of being identified with the ego, on the other hand, is an experience generally of contraction, fear, judgment, unhappiness, and discontentment. Love doesn't flow from the ego. The egos relationship to any relationship is: "*What can you do for me?*"

Love is only experienced when we are aligned with essence; thereby becoming more loving and less identified with the negative, judgmental voice in our head. This is accomplished in simply becoming more aware of our dual nature and consciously choosing to align with love rather than identify with the egoist mind and its judgment or other thoughts that cause negative feelings and contraction. What chooses love? That is the great mystery, isn't it? That is *essence* - what you really are!

When two people are meant to be together - *to enjoy love and life together, to help each other, or to learn something* - love is just there. Where it comes from and why is one of the great mysteries of life. You don't and can't make love happen; it just happens. Love shows up, and you had nothing to do with it.

Happiness, joy, love, peace, and contentment are not arrived at by trying to get them, but by noticing that they are already here. Just check: *is love here now? Is happiness here now? Is peace here now? Is contentment here now?* Noticing these qualities draws us into the experience of them.

We have everything we need because all we need is love, and everyone has an unlimited supply of that. Not everyone may feel love, but it is always there and available for us to share with others.

The way we experience the unlimited supply of love is by giving it away. That is counter-intuitive, which is why it may seem like there isn't enough love. When we believe we need to get love from outside ourselves, that sense of lack stops the love flowing from inside us to others. Believing that you need love becomes a *self-fulfilling* prophesy: You believe you need love because you aren't experiencing it, and in trying to get it, you fail to give it, so you don't experience it. You can't really do two things at once: If you are relating to someone, you are either giving your attention (*love*) to that person or trying to get something from that person. You are either in essence (*giving attention*) or in ego (*trying to get attention*). These are very different states of consciousness, and they result in very different experiences.

The experience of being in ego is an experience of lack. The ego never has enough of anything, including love. So the ego looks outside itself to try to get what it feels it lacks. The ego tries to manipulate the world to fill its desires and so-called needs. That flow of love and attention toward life is the experience of love that everyone is looking for. It is always possible to give attention and love to whatever is showing up in our life. It is a simple choice, but not so easy to do. The ego doesn't value doing that. It doesn't believe that doing this, it will get all what it wants.

All you need is love, and you already have plenty of that to give! On the contrary, the feelings of romantic love are created by an illusion (i.e., psychological projection) and by the release of certain chemicals in the brain. Romantic feelings are a very different kind of love than *true love*; they are a falling in love with what we hope will be our salvation and happiness forever.

That kind of love never lasts and often disappears upon getting to know someone better. If we are lucky, it turns into something truer, more real, more akin to our true nature. Love is an act of kindness, not a giddy feeling. Love is a natural expression of our true nature, not a feeling we get from others. The ego manipulates others to do what it wants so that it can feel love, but that's the opposite of love. Love allows others to be just as they are. It supports and nurtures, listens, and cares. Love flows toward others from within us. It exists within us and isn't something we get from others.

This kind of love is the most fulfilling thing in the world. Experiencing it doesn't require that you be beautiful or rich or healthy or intelligent or that you have a special talent or standing in life; experiencing it only requires that you express it. It's free and it frees us and others from the ensnarement of the false self. It's the greatest gift that doesn't cost the giver anything. It takes nothing from the giver and returns everything. This is the great secret we are meant to discover.

On a different note, appearances seem so important. Most of us believe that our appearance is very important, and we work very hard at looking a certain way. This is especially true for women, of course, and this conditioning is very difficult to overcome because there's a lot of fear that not looking good could have drastic consequences. For many people, appearance is a top priority and often remains that way right up until death. Our appearance does affect how others initially react to us. However, it's not as important as we make it. We suffer over it and try so hard to look any different, other than the way we do. All of this trying is exhausting and takes time and energy away from things

that are more fulfilling and important in life. That's the problem - when we are consumed with our appearance, we aren't giving our attention and energy to other things that might be more meaningful, fulfilling, and rewarding. We might not discover that cultivating kindness is more rewarding, more than cultivating beauty. We might fail to notice the beauty that is here, within ourselves and others, just as we are.

Inner beauty and outer beauty can be at odds, since there is only so much attention and energy we have. Where your energy and attention transcends will reflect what you value. Do you value outer beauty more than inner beauty? You might say you don't, but where are you putting your energy and attention? What are your thoughts on?

The funny thing is that others love us for our inner beauty, for the unique expression of essence that we are, although they may be attracted to us by our outer beauty. However, that allure doesn't mean much if they don't also fall in love with us. What people fall in love with isn't our outer beauty (*that's attraction or infatuation, not love*), but something much more subtle - our being. They love us because they see lovable qualities that belong to essence: goodness, creativity, kindness, joy for life, patience, compassion, courage, wisdom, strength, clarity, and so on.

Just because most people believe that appearances are important doesn't make it so. People are under the illusion that appearances are far more important than they are; which does create that reality to some extent – it makes this seem true. This illusion results in a culture that's sadly misled into putting too much

energy and attention on such things. This cultural illusion makes it more difficult to discover the truth - that appearances aren't that important. But life is wise and ages us so that we can discover the truth. It is perhaps one of the greatest lessons of our lives, although it may take a lifetime to learn it.

Some people are easier to love than others, and they are the ones, therefore, who experience a lot of love. They experience it both within themselves and coming to them from others. What is their secret? *Amazing good looks*? No! *Stunning personalities*? No! *Money and power*? No! Their secret is none of the things we assume will make us more lovable. Their secret is that they love, and by that I mean, they accept others the way they are. Isn't that the experience when you feel loved - when you feel accepted rather than judged?

Acceptance is the opposite of judgment and the antidote to judgment, and acceptance brings us the experience of love. *What is the experience of love*? It is the experience of accepting and being accepted, the experience of relaxation, of being able to just be, without struggling and striving to be any different than we are or requiring that others be different than however they are. That is what we all want - to just be able to relax and be okay just the way we are and to be okay with others just the way they are.

When someone gives us this gift of acceptance, we love them. What a gift! It is a gift you would never reject and hopefully one you will return, because returning it - giving others this gift - brings you the experience of love. Loving and accepting others feels good. It is its own reward. It isn't even necessary for others

to love and accept you in return because it's enough to just feel love and acceptance for others.

You accept others because you appreciate the unique expression of life that they are. What amazing things these human forms are! And all the different personalities! When we can just let people be the way they are, it is such a relief - for us and for them. Allowing people to *just be* is loving them in appreciation and allowing flows from our true nature, or essence, which is love. Accepting and loving is how essence feels toward life and every one of its creations.

People who love and accept themselves are lovable because they reflect essence, and that's what we all really want - not someone to do our every bidding and match our every fantasy. What we really want is to be with someone who knows how to love because our deepest desire is to love. Therefore, we are drawn to those who know how to love. They are our teachers - the path pointers in this world. And this is our destiny as well - to be a place of refuge, where egos dissolve and all that is left is the love that we are.

Our true nature, essence, is love. To be in essence is to be in love. If love is what you want (*do you?*), then being in essence and staying there is how to have it. The problem is that we have other agendas - other desires - when we are in relationship. Sometimes we want to be right more than we want to experience love. Sometimes we want to be separate and avoid being vulnerable more than we want to experience love. And sometimes we want what we want more than we want love.

Love flows when we recognize our own divine self in another. It flows when we are able to see beyond (*or behind*) the egoist mask to the real self, which is exquisitely lovable and which evokes love. All the qualities we love in another are qualities of the divine self, of essence: compassion, understanding, wisdom, kindness, love, patience, and inner strength.

The desire to be right is one of the ego's strongest desires because being right is felt to be closely tied to survival. Being right puts us on top, and that's where the ego wants to be because the ego thinks that being on top will keep it safe. Again and again, the ego will choose being right over love and connection with others. This tendency to make being right more important than love is what makes relationships so difficult. When people in a relationship are ego identified, both want to be right, and that's especially impossible when no one is actually right!

The reason that no one is actually right is because disagreements are based on conditioning, and conditioning is simply different beliefs being imposed. Everyone thinks their beliefs are right; however, there is no absolute truth when it comes to beliefs, only relative truth. Conditioning is just conditioning, and all conditioning bears the stamp of the ego. Conditioning is made up of generalizations, beliefs that have been passed on, truisms, cultural and religious training, and other acquired ideas. When we are attached to our conditioning and to being right, we argue about things like the right way to make the bed or wash the dishes. Getting the other person to do things our way becomes more important than loving that person and accepting that we are all different.

Our true self, essence, loves our differences, or we wouldn't be the way we are. Life wouldn't be what it is if we weren't different from each other. What an amazing thing it is that each of us is so unique! However, the ego feels threatened by these differences, and so it is uncomfortable with them. We are designed to both love others and disagree with them. It's part of how we were created by God, to learn to lovingly disagree, which requires that we hold our differences more lightly than the ego is used to doing.

Wanting to be right is not a worthwhile desire, and that has to be seen. This desire is the ego doing what egos do. Choosing love over being right is the choice that brings happiness because choosing love over our conditioning shifts us out of the ego's world and into our essence's.

Essence chooses love because essence is moving all of life towards love. Whenever we choose love over being right, or any other value of the ego, we drop into essence and immediately experience the love, peace, joy, and contentment of essence.

Being happy or not being happy is largely a matter of what we focus on. The ego can be miserable, and we can still be happy if we find something loveable about what is going on. Finding something to love is hard for the ego, but it's actually easy because there's plenty that is loveable about life. From essence's standpoint, all of life is loveable because essence experiences life differently than the ego.

Essence says yes to it, while the ego says no. Paying attention to the ego's rejection of life makes us miserable, while noticing what is loveable fills us with love.

The ego doesn't want to love because loving makes it feel vulnerable. It doesn't trust love because the ego isn't what creates or experiences love. Loving is the domain of essence, and when we are experiencing love, we are experiencing essence. So to move out of the ego and into essence, all we have to do is find something to love. There comes a time in our spiritual growth when we become aware of our deep inner self that can choose to move out of ego identification. Then we begin to wake up out of ego identification and live more as essence in the world. Essence is what chooses love over the ego's values. Essence is what loves, not the ego.

Finding something to love in every moment is the antidote to the ego's rejection of the moment. When you find yourself struggling against life, stop and notice what's beautiful and loveable. And don't just stop with one thing; find another and another. Life can be lived from a place of celebration and gratitude instead of rejection. It's your choice.

So what is it you love about life? It's so good to notice and acknowledge this because doing so aligns us with essence and strengthens our awareness of essence's presence in our life. When we notice those friendships, those dew drops, those beautiful and amazing things about planet earth and all of God's creations; we can't help but feel essence's joy. The only thing that gets in the way of that joy is not noticing such things, and the only reason we don't is if we are busy noticing something

else, which for most people is their thoughts. We are created in the likeness of God, we have that essence.

Do your thoughts bring you that same kind of joy? It really helps to notice the impact that some thoughts have on your state of consciousness because when you do, you see that they don't give you the same peace, joy, and happiness that noticing life more purely does.

Do you love how the clouds move and shift as you watch them? Do you love how the stars seem to twinkle? Do you love how your dog's chest moves up and down when breathing? Do you love the sound of the wind in the trees before a storm? Do you love the smell of damp leaves in the fall? Do you love the feel of the water against your skin when you are swimming through it?

It's impossible to run out of things to love about life. What a wonderful spiritual practice it is to notice and feel gratitude for the little things in life. What feels that way is essence. So as we can explain, essence is very close at hand. It's not some mysterious force separate from us, but rather, that which lives through us and experiences this precious life we have been given by God.

Love is the underlying fabric of life, and kindness is its reflection in the world through us. It can be conveyed in attentiveness to others, in words, or in deeds. One of the most powerful acts of kindness is kindness toward our very own selves. That is really where kindness begins. If we aren't kind to ourselves, how can we be kind to others? Unless we are also kind to ourselves, kindness toward others is more of a

manipulation, an attempt to get others to give us something, including love. However, unless we are kind to ourselves, we won't even be able to take in any kindness we do receive from others. That place of lack inside of us can't be filled from the outside. First, we have to be kind to ourselves.

True kindness comes from a desire to soothe and comfort others because we have discovered the power and blessing of kindness as a result of having received it. Receiving kindness from others heals us and makes it possible to express it to others. If we haven't received much kindness from others, we need to find a way to give it to ourselves, to be kind to ourselves even though others may not have been. To do that, we have to do two things: *We have to forgive those who weren't kind to us, and we have to see that we deserve love.*

Unfortunately, those who didn't receive a lot of kindness as children usually concluded that they deserved that and that they aren't lovable. They need to forgive those who were unable to be kind to them (*probably because they were treated the same way when they were young*) and learn to give love to themselves. Those who were abused learned to abuse themselves inwardly; they learned to believe their negative thoughts about themselves. They need to develop a loving inner voice rather than an unloving one. That can be done, but it takes a willingness to see the truth, to see through the negative self-image to the truth - that you are divinity in a human body, that you are love incarnate.

Everyone has the same capacity to love, but that ability may have been squelched by not having been loved. Not being loved

as a child blocks the natural flow of love, and giving love to yourself allows love to flow outward again. It's always possible to give ourselves love because our true nature (*essence*) loves the human expression that we are, no matter what we have or haven't done, no matter what our shortcomings are. When we tap into the love - the kindness and compassion - that our true self has for the human that we are and for all of humanity, we unleash the power of love in our life to heal ourselves and others. Be kind and compassionate toward yourself and those who are caught in the ego and the suffering it causes, and this kindness will release you and others from the ego's prison of limitation and fear. Love yourself and others for the courage to be alive and be human in these difficult and challenging times. Give yourself and others some slack. Forgive, allow, accept, and be kind. Relax and let everything be as it is.

The ego's thoughts in general and judgments in particular, aren't necessarily useful to share with others. Honesty is not the best policy, if that honesty comes from the ego. In addition to judgments, the ego is full of opinions, complaints, and *half-truths*, and sharing these with others can only bring them into the egoist state of consciousness. And often, what the ego thinks is just plain hurtful. Most people are conditioned to believe that being honest is necessary and good for relationships when, in fact, it's often very detrimental. If being truthful means expressing the ego's truth, then it's better to not be truthful or to just keep quiet. The ego's truth is not the truth, and speaking it just keeps us identified with the ego and drags others into ego identification.

Whatever we put out in the world tends to come back to us, although not necessarily right away. Whether feedback from others or from life about our actions is immediate or not, we receive feedback instantly internally: When we act in accordance with our true nature - *with love* - we feel good; when we don't, we don't feel good. This is how life teaches us love: It rewards us for love and doesn't reward the opposite. So if life is rewarding loving behaviour, what does that mean? This would seem to be evidence for a loving force behind life, a force that is guiding us toward love and away from whatever undermines love.

To love, we have to fall in love with reality - with what's true right now, not with what might be true in the future or with what we want to be true in the future. Love happens in the now (*like everything, really*). That's why the ego doesn't know about love - because love is the experience of being in the now, or the present moment, and as soon as the ego experiences the now, it runs. Commitment takes a willingness to fall in love with reality - with the real partner who is in front of you - rather than seek something else, either actually or through fantasy. What you commit to is what's here right now. Who knows what will be here next? All you ever really have is what's here right now, so it makes sense to commit to that - in other words, to give your full attention, your love, to that.

Essence commits itself to someone only when love is flowing in both directions and the relationship is rewarding on many levels. The ego, on the other hand, may commit out of sexual attraction or because some other need is met through that relationship, neither of which is a good basis for commitment.



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