

**THE**  
**SPIRIT**  
*of*  
**EXCELLENCE**  
**UNLEASHING THE GENIUS IN YOU!**

**E B U K   J O H N   E B U K**

ISBN 978-1-0980-1436-0 (paperback)  
ISBN 978-1-0980-1437-7 (digital)

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Christian Faith Publishing, Inc.  
832 Park Avenue  
Meadville, PA 16335  
[www.christianfaithpublishing.com](http://www.christianfaithpublishing.com)

Printed in the United States of America

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## Why I Wrote This Book

I wrote this book as my contribution to help promote practical demonstration, through daily living the qualities of integrity, honesty, and truthfulness among everyone in the world, and particularly by Christians, who are described in the Bible as the salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13–16).

**“Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him.”  
(Dan. 6:3)**

You have probably heard it said that what goes around comes around. A wise king by the name of Solomon once said, “That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9, NKJV). If more people are influenced to live by these qualities and they in turn influence others—friends, relations, and contacts—to do the same, then the world will be changed for the better.

If you think that one person’s commitment to quality living in the midst of a world like ours is like a little drop of water in an ocean, you need to also consider the fact that an accumulation of little drops of water can form a big pool of water.

**What goes around comes around.**

The challenges of our times are not too dissimilar from the ones described by Prophet Isaiah in his days: “Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter. **So truth fails, And he who departs from evil makes himself a prey**” (Isa. 59:14–15, NKJV).

This, however, does not imply a lost cause, nor the abortion of divine purpose because of His unfailing declaration: “But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21, NKJV). Despite the challenges, God’s power has continuously broken through, enabling many, all through the ages to rise above their circumstances and live lives of integrity and excellence that continues to be sources of inspiration and hope. This book draws from some of such lives with a view to inspiring faith and confidence for all to aim high in living for God now wherever they find themselves. You will be challenged! You will be inspired to take hold of God and pursue a life of excellence irrespective of your past or present circumstances.

## About This Book

This book is divided into three parts.

The first part covers generic topics on the theme of “the Spirit of Excellence.”

The second part explores specific examples of various aspects of excellence that were demonstrated by a selection of Bible characters and applies these to contemporary living.

Underpinning this approach is Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian Christians when he pointed to them that “all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). He advocated a similar idea in another of his epistles that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). This also echoes my goal in the writing of this book—to impart learning, patience, comfort, and hope through the scriptures.

The third part wraps it all up as a “glue” that holds everything together perfectly.

**The past is not merely history because it also holds the key for opening today’s doors.**

Throughout the book, important principles are highlighted in text boxes to increase attention and impact.

May God bless you as you apply the principles in this book to your daily living and sharing them with others you meet.



## Acknowledgments

I am eternally grateful to the Almighty God who loved me so much that He sent His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to die for me—saving me from sin and giving me the grace to live for Him. I thank God who not only put the idea in my mind to write this book, but also gave me the grace to carry it out.

I am indebted to the members of Victorious Christian Ministry who gave me the opportunity to preach to them the sermons documented in this book. Their faithfulness, response to the messages, and feedback have provided tremendous impetus in executing this project.

**The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, which began with one thought.**

I am very thankful to my immediate family members (wife and children)—particularly my daughters Sarah and Eunice for their love, encouragement, and support.

I am also grateful to Dr. Onyeabo Obasi, the founder and executive director of Agape World Missions for his friendship, support, and editorial review of the initial manuscript, providing valuable feedback for refining the content.

Finally, I would like to thank all the ministers of the Gospel worldwide, whose lives and ministries have provided the spiritual nourishment that has developed my Christian understanding and life—enabling me to become who I am today for God. Time would fail me to name them one by one as well as list their individual contributions toward my spiritual development and growth. May God continue to bless, enrich, and use them more as iron that sharpen other irons (Prov. 27:17).

My prayer is that as God has used these ministers to bless my life, I also through this book and ministry will be a source of blessing

to others as well—for the advancement of God’s kingdom and expediting the soon return of Christ.

**Iron sharpens iron.  
(Prov. 27:17)**

## Notes

- 1) Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV).
- 2) Some use of masculine forms of speech such as *he*, *him*, etc., may also apply to both masculine and feminine genders if the context permits.

# INTRODUCTORY PRINCIPLES

## 1.1 The Spirit of Excellence

What is a spirit of excellence?

Excellence is defined in the dictionary as the quality of being outstanding or extremely good. Synonyms such as distinction, quality, high quality, superiority, brilliance, greatness, merit, caliber, eminence, preeminence, supremacy, peerlessness, transcendence, value, worth, skill, talent, genius, virtuosity, accomplishment, expertness, mastery, prowess, ability, rare supereminence, etc., are used to describe excellence.

Having the spirit of excellence is much more than merely doing things to the right standards, as that can sometimes be accomplished mechanically through professionalism without an internally driven excellence of spirit. A human being is made up of spirit, soul, and body. Having a spirit of excellence is when excellence is motivated and driven by the inner spiritual being. When it is thus spirit driven, the results exceed those of natural accomplishments through professionalism because of the added value of these becoming an embodiment of virtues in daily lives, conducts, conversations, and character.

**Having a spirit of excellence is much more than merely doing things to the right standards.**

### **1.1.1 Pressure and Competing Priorities**

Living a life of excellence has its own challenges, two of the most dominant being the pressure to conform to the world around us and competing priorities.

#### **Peer Pressure**

Being surrounded by mediocrity is a challenge of similar proportions to that of Lot being a saint in Sodom (Gen. 18) or of Noah being the only righteous man in a world that God decided to destroy (Gen. 6). All the same, God expects us to rise above such challenges as He has made adequate provisions to empower us to overcome. Isaiah 59 enumerate some of the contemporary challenges that we are called to rise above, including the following:

- 1) Godlessness—arising from a separation from God through iniquities (vs. 1, 2).
- 2) Blood guiltiness, iniquity, lies, and perverseness (vs. 3).
- 3) Injustice, dishonesty, vanity, conceiving mischief, and bringing forth iniquity (vs. 4).
- 4) Lives that traps and entangles others as well as breed poisonous products (vs. 5).
- 5) Lives without values but rather filled with iniquity and violence (vs. 6).
- 6) Inclination toward evil, waste, and destruction in thoughts, life, and habits, etc. (vs. 7).
- 7) Ignorance of the way of peace, absence of judgment, and following crooked paths (vs. 8).

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- 8) Creating an atmosphere devoid of judgment and justice, resulting in a blind walk as if through darkness and obscurity despite being surrounded by light (vs. 9).
- 9) Uncertainty, confusion, stumbling, and ending up in desolate places as dead men (vs. 10).
- 10) Roaring like bears and mourning like doves due to lack of justice and salvation (vs. 11).
- 11) Caught up in multiplied transgressions and knowledge of their sins (vs. 12).
- 12) Transgressing and lying against God, departing away from God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood (vs. 13).
- 13) Disruption to judgment and justice, damaging truth and preventing equity (vs. 14).
- 14) Divine displeasure over failure of truth, causing honest people to become prey (vs. 15).

### Competing Priorities

Competing priorities easily lead to distractions, and both are common factors of life for many, including Christians. The temptation to measure spirituality in terms of material things, such as riches, possessions, status, etc., can bring tremendous pressures on the less advantaged, resulting in a “rat race” to become like the Janes and Jones of this world, thereby distracting them from their goal of pursuing a spirit of excellence.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus paints a picture of this danger by the seeds that fell among the thorns as representing “they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14).

The seriousness of this challenge is illustrated in the life of King David, who was described by God as a “man after God’s heart.” In his own words, King David described his feelings and thoughts, saying, “But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh

slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Ps. 73:2–3).

In comparing the lives of the wicked with the righteous, the apparent discrepancy got to him so much that he initially felt that “verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning... When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me” (Ps. 73:13–16).

A change came through spiritual revelation of the state and destiny of the wicked after he had been into the sanctuary of God, resulting in his declaration, “Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Ps. 73:21–25).

It is only intimacy with God that can open our understanding to discern the difference between vanity and reality.

**God created you to soar like an eagle. Do not be content to peck around with pigeons**

Have you encountered things like these in your life, family, society, schools, colleges, places of work, church, etc.? What is your response to them? Do you just follow suit or stand out as a shining light in a dark place and as salt of the earth?

### **1.1.2 The Potentials of Excellence of Spirit**

A life of excellence is not just an aspirational utopia with neither contemporary nor eternal benefits. On the contrary, it is full of benefits for now and beyond, some of which are highlighted in the following scriptures:

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- 1) Prominence—“Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men” (Prov. 22:29).
- 2) Preservation—“Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man” (Job 8:20).
- 3) Peace—“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace” (Ps. 37:37).
- 4) Divine protection and acceptance—“Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me” (Ps. 101:6).
- 5) Possession—“For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it” (Prov. 2:21).
- 6) Promotion—“Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm” (Dan. 6:3).

**A man diligent in his business shall stand before kings; and he shall not stand before mean men (Prov. 22:29).**

### 1.1.3 The Case for Excellence of Spirit

God is excellent in personality, character, power, and ways. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of excellence, and heaven is a holy place. Therefore, it behooves those who worship God to be modeled after His excellence.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus taught that “the disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master” (Luke 6:40). He further commanded, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). So the character of God, as highlighted in the scriptures below, provide

a compelling case for followers of God to have lives exemplified by excellence of Spirit:

- 1) Deuteronomy 32:4—“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”
- 2) 2 Samuel 22:31 and Psalms 18:30—“As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.”
- 3) Job 37:23—“Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict.”
- 4) Psalms 8:1, 9—“O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.”
- 5) Psalms 19:7—“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”
- 6) Psalms 36:7—“How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.”
- 7) Psalms 76:4—“Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.”
- 8) Psalms 148:13—“Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.”
- 9) Psalms 150:2—“Praise him...according to his excellent greatness.”

**Like father, like son!**  
**“The disciple is not above his master: but every one  
that is perfect shall be as his master”**  
**(Luke 6:40).**

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- 10) Isaiah 12:5—“Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth.”
- 11) Isaiah 28:29—“This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”

### 1.1.4 The Call to the Spirit of Excellence

Second Chronicles 16:9 reminds us that in every generation and time (including ours), “the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” Anyone who desires to find favor with God and be used of Him should strive for a perfect heart toward God. The following scriptures reveal the divine mandate for followers of God to manifest a Spirit of excellence:

- 1) Deuteronomy 18:13—“Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God.”
- 2) 1 Kings 8:61—“Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.”
- 3) 1 Chronicles 28:9—“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”
- 4) Romans 12:2—“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”
- 5) 1 Corinthians 1:10—“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that

ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

- 6) 2 Corinthians 7:1—“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
- 7) 2 Corinthians 13:11—“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

### 1.1.5 Divine Provisions for Excellence of Spirit

God never demands the impossible. He never asks us to produce what He has not already provided for us. The divine provisions for excellence of spirit are underscored in the following scriptures:

- 1) Hebrews 5:9—“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”
- 2) Hebrews 10:14—“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

**Your life is like a movie, let others see Jesus in you.**

- 3) Ephesians 4:11–13—“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”
- 4) 2 Corinthians 12:9—“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

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Never forget that God created you to soar like an eagle; therefore do not be content to peck around with pigeons.

**God created you to soar like an eagle, never  
be content to peck around like pigeons.**

## 1.2 Marks of Spiritual Excellence

Have you ever asked God a question and obtained an answer? How did you feel about the answer? Was it what you expected or far beyond your expectations? If you have never done so, it could be a life-changing experience to get an answer from God to your questions!

To some people, the concept of receiving answers from God, knowing the will of God or hearing the voice of God sounds as challenging as the climbing of Mount Everest for the first time. King Saul, in his later life, encountered just such a situation when he inquired of God, at a time of great crisis, and “the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” (1 Sam. 28:6). His life of sin and disobedience had created a giant chasm between him and God (Isa. 59:1, 2). It is such frustrations and disappointments that often make some people invent theories that God no longer speaks to people.

King David, on the other hand, had a completely opposite experience with God than King Saul, his predecessor. He had established and maintained an intimate working relationship with God that he could ask God anything at any time anywhere and obtain answers. With such experiences, you could not convince King David to believe that God no longer speaks to people because he would just respond, “But He just spoke to me today?”

God delights to and still speaks to His people today. Jesus unraveled the secret to hearing from God when He declared, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Today, you can get a response from God just like David or Jesus did because the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

**God delights to speak to His people,  
and He still does so today.**

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In Psalms 15:1, we have a record of King David asking God two vital questions: “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” The next four verses document their answers, which I believe he obtained directly from God. These answers outline eleven marks of spiritual excellence that provide invaluable insights to benefit our spiritual journeys. They are summarized below:

- 1) Walking uprightly (verse 2). *Walking* references “lifestyle” and “relationship,” whereas *uprightly* points to “the reference point” for the values in our lives and relationships. To walk uprightly, our reference point for character and relationship must be God as revealed in His word, the Bible. Sound relationship with God enhances an upright walk as pointed out by a prophet: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). When two people walk together, one will inevitably, and perhaps unnoticeably, adjust his/her steps to those of the other in order to maintain pace.
- 2) Working righteousness (verse 2). Work has to do with actions and activities that emanate from inner convictions. James challenged early believers: “Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18). This implies that genuine and real faith in God has outlets for outward manifestation with corresponding works. Note that the focus of the work is on “righteousness.”
- 3) Speaking the truth in his heart (verse 2). This is the cure for hypocrisy, deception, and manipulations. It delivers a person from speaking what appeals to “political correctness” for the occasion but is devoid of truth. This is a call for integrity—to stand one’s ground and speak what is really believed in the heart, irrespective of the cost.
- 4) Backbiting not with his tongue (verse 3). A person of excellence does not cut down another person with his tongue with a view to (a) put themselves up or (b) earn favor of others. Integrity demands honesty even when the person

being discussed is not physically present and may not find out later what was discussed. Remember, God hears every word spoken and will one day make us account for them: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36).

- 5) Not doing evil to a neighbor (verse 3). This deals with the fundamental issue of valuing and loving others as we do ourselves.
- 6) Not taking up a reproach against a neighbor (verse 3). A person of excellence exercises caution to avoid, wherever possible, actions that could potentially bring others into reproach, shame, and reputational damage.
- 7) “In whose eyes a vile person is contemned” (verse 4). A person of excellence evaluates a thing or person based on a value system of God—loving what God loves and hating what God hates.
- 8) Honoring them that fear the LORD (verse 4). He uses honor not as a tool to gain personal favors but rather to glorify God. This reflects deep respect for the things and people that matter to God. Excellence attracts excellence just as birds of a feather flock together!
- 9) Swearing to his own hurt and changing not (verse 5). A person of excellence maintains integrity even when it is sacrificial. He stays true to his words even when they are not personally convenient. S/he remains reliable and trustworthy in all situations and circumstances whether they are easy or tough. He keeps his promises, vows, covenants, and commitments no matter the cost. He does not renege on his vows when the going gets tough and price becomes dear. Jephthah was a good example of this: “And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back” (Judg. 11:35).

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- 10) Putting not out money to usury (verse 5). Charitable activities should not be driven by personal gain.

**A person of excellence holds fast to integrity even when it hurts.**

- 11) Not taking reward against the innocent (verse 5). This demonstrates freedom from corruption. It is a significant character flaw to pervert the course of justice because of a reward.

The concluding phrase in God's answer provides irrefutable assurance that God will watch over and establish people that meet these characteristics: "He that doeth these things shall never be moved" (verse 5). Difficulties may come, but God will deliver as He promised: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Ps. 34:19).

In Psalms 24:3–5, King David also asked God two similar questions and provided additional clarifications to the points above. The questions were as follows: (a) Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or (b) who shall stand in his holy place? (verse 3). God's response highlighted the following qualities:

- 1) He that hath clean hands (verse 4).
- 2) He that hath a pure heart (verse 4).
- 3) He who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity (verse 4).
- 4) He who had not sworn deceitfully (verse 4).

David concluded his discussion with the remark, "He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (verse 5). This further highlights the fact that God is very keen about blessing those who obey and follow Him. We rob ourselves of divine blessings when we chose to go our own way and ignore God's.

Excellence is characterized by determination, resilience, and perseverance amid challenges. Paul declared, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35–39).

Resilience imply never giving up, but rather rising and keeping on going irrespective of how many times a person falls: “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again” (Prov. 24:16). He recognizes and appropriates divine provisions to resume: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2).

A person of excellence does not settle down to accept the present level of achievement as the norm for life but presses on to higher grounds. The adage “An old dog cannot learn new tricks” has no place in his life, as he constantly labors to birth the new “self” from within. His reference point is not the past milestones covered nor past glories achieved, but attaining the future mark of God’s call for his life.

**A person of excellence does not settle down at the present level of achievements and accept it as the norm, but presses on to higher grounds.**

Paul exemplified this in his life when he declared, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of

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Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12–14).

By these declarations, Paul was acknowledging that there is a new version, a new model, and a new edition of himself than the one he was already operating with, and it was his determination and ambition to “birth” it into reality! The same is true of you!

**Give chance to the new “you”—i.e., the new version, brand, model, or edition of you—that is kicking within, to be birthed into reality!**

## 1.3 Excellent but Not Satisfied

Prophet Jeremiah once lamented, “How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!” (Lam. 4:1–2). This lamentation highlights the fact that nothing in life remains stationary forever. Anything that does not make progress will eventually deteriorate. The best way to retain the excellence that we have achieved is to take it to the next level of excellence.

**Nothing in life remains stationary for ever. That which does not make progress will eventually decay and die!**

So our focus should not just be on having but also promoting spiritual excellence. For some people, they are on fire and at the forefront of the hottest battle when pursuing a goal; but once they achieve it, lukewarmness and complacency sets in. God created human beings to be social creatures so that they can impact others for good in the same way as a mother impacts her newborn baby till growth to mature adulthood. Therefore, two antipolar extremes worth avoiding are the following:

- 1) A solitary lifestyle, akin to a withdrawal into a cave with the false notion of avoiding contamination by others.
- 2) Running with zeal without knowledge, like the error of the Jews at the time of Paul—“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righ-

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teousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:1–3).

The message inherent in the above is similar to the ones in the following scriptural stories:

- 1) The servant who buried his talent wrapped in a napkin not only forfeited his talent but was also punished for being lazy (Luke 19:19–26).
- 2) “He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it” (Prov. 11:26).
- 3) “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).
- 4) “They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept” (Luke 7:32). This illustrates failure through indifference and apathy.
- 5) “I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?” (Luke 12:49).
- 6) “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14–16).

To effectively propagate excellence, we need spiritual enabling. The same Jesus who would not tolerate the lukewarm (Rev. 3:15–16) also cautioned the disciples to tarry for spiritual equipping prior to launching their ministries “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

God bestows experiences for specific purposes, such as

- 1) empowering believers for service through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and
- 2) equipping believers with the credibility essential for spiritual service through the spirit of excellence.

After their baptism with the Holy Spirit, the same disciples who initially were in hiding for fear of the Jews became unstoppable in their bold preaching of Jesus: “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

King David, who was declared by God as “a man after God’s heart” was not merely satisfied to earn that title, but also committed himself to inspiring others to attain similar experiences. “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest” (Ps. 40:9). The following steps would enable us to follow suit:

- 1) Recognize, value the importance of and appreciate divine gifts of grace and excellence.
- 2) Fight a good fight of faith to prevent the devil from turning our testimonies into spittoons—“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12).
- 3) Obey Jesus’s command for bold public declarations of every known truth that can benefit others—“What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops” (Matt. 10:27).
- 4) Magnify our calling, gifts, offices “for I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office” (Rom. 11:13).
- 5) Model excellence and heed Paul’s admonition—“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12–12).

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- 6) Focus on divine manifestations of excellence—“Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion” (Isa. 8:18).
- 7) Be driven by zeal for the Lord as exemplified in King Jehu’s statement to Jehonadab—“And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him: and he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand. And he gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot. And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord. So they made him ride in his chariot” (2 Kings 10:15–16).

**“From the days of John the Baptist  
until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence,  
and the violent take it by force”  
(Matt. 11:12).**



# MODELS OF EXCELLENCE

Hebrews 13:7 exhorts us to follow good examples of spiritual giants: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.”

Both in the past and in contemporary times, there are examples of people who modeled the spirit of excellence in various aspects of their lives. It would be foolishness, and a waste of life, not to learn from their sterling examples. Applying the lessons from their lives to ours could enable us not only to become wholesome models, but also shine as light in this dark world for future generations to emulate. Some of these models are explored in the sections below, highlighting some aspects of excellence from their lives.

## 2.1 Freedom from Strife

In my systematic studies of the Bible, I recently came to an episode in the life of Abraham, which I have previously studied and preached on, many times in the past. It amazes me how a repeat study of a familiar scripture can bring out new meanings and insights that shed fresh light and provide solutions for contemporary predicaments in life. The Bible is truly a living book that can speak to our current situations.

The episode I am referring to is recorded in Genesis 13:8–9: “And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” As I reflected on these, it occurred to me the following:

**“Let there be no strife, I pray thee,  
between me and thee, and between my herdmen and  
thy herdmen; for we be brethren”  
(Gen. 13:8).**

- 1) Abraham was not a coward. When situation demands it, he could wage effective warfare and win spectacular victories. One example of such is in Genesis 14, when Lot was captured. He armed 318 of his trained servants, fought, defeated the captors, and rescued Lot.
- 2) Abram was not timid or fearful. He had more possessions and military capability than Lot, and if it was a matter of physical combat, Lot would not stand a chance, yet he selected a path of peace rather than war.
- 3) The promise of possessing the land was given to Abram, not Lot—so why would Abraham relinquish what was

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divinely promised to him to Lot, just because of a minor conflict that did not threaten his existence?

- 4) Abraham was older than Lot, and if division of the land was an option, he had the right to have taken the lead in first deciding which part to take, but he relinquished his right of priority to Lot for the sake of peace.

As I reflected on these, it dawned on me that Abraham manifested a spirit of excellence and the following spiritual insight:

- 1) God is the source of all true blessings (James 1:17), and that allegiance to God, walking in His ways and compliance with His righteous principles, were essential to divine inheritance. His relationship with God therefore took pre-eminence over everything else.
- 2) “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Tim. 2:24). The spirit of excellence avoids unnecessary conflicts, wherever possible. Although this scripture was not written at the time of Abraham, yet he lived and demonstrated the principles of it in his life.
- 3) There is significance and power through peaceful living—“Let there be no strife, I pray thee...for we be brethren.” This is powerful! It is failure to recognize this principle that is the cause of most wars, strife, divorces, broken relationships, and all sorts of conflicts in the world today. If only we recognized that we are brethren—descendants of Adam and Eve—there would be greater prospects for peaceful coexistence. Please, never forget that we are all brethren, from the same ancestry of Adam and Eve, irrespective of the following differences:
  - a. Countries, tribes, regions, continents we were born in
  - b. Languages we speak
  - c. Colors of our skins
  - d. Food we eat

- e. Attires and cultures we are associated with
  - f. Appearances, backgrounds, and social status
- 4) “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth” (Luke 11:17).

**The spirit of excellence avoids unnecessary conflicts, wherever possible, but can wage a valiant warfare, should the situation demand it!**

As I considered how Abraham handled this episode of life, I remembered the terrible pains, disruptions, sufferings, and loss of lives that resulted from a civil war in my country of birth many years ago. As the battle intensified, some people in my village envisaged what could happen and developed contingency strategies for survival. My family was not an exception to this. For example, we had our “bunkers” to “take cover” when bullets start flying about and the bombs came raining down from the sky. We also built an alternative home in a thick tropical forest to relocate to, if the warfront were to advance through the village.

Unfortunately, when the warfront advanced toward my village, it came through the very thick forest where our alternative home was. So almost without notice, we had to flee our homes for our dear lives and became refugees in a nearby village.

I could not fail to think of Abraham and Lot as these memories came back to my mind. I asked myself, supposing Abraham represented my country and Lot, the tribe that wanted to secede, would Abraham have engaged in a civil war with a view to subdue Lot by force? His approach demonstrates the difference that having a spirit of excellence can make in a situation.

I recently looked at the map of the world and noticed that there are more countries in existence now than when I first studied in school many years ago about the countries of the world. On analysis,

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I discovered that some of the new countries came into existence after years of bitter wars and others through peaceful bilateral negotiations. There are certainly better ways of resolving differences without resorting to brutal wars!

**Life is real, and in life we meet real people. Some relate as friends and others as foes. In between the two extremes lies a continuous spectrum of the rest.**

The fact is that life is real, and in life we meet real people. Some are friendly and others are foes, and in between the two extremes lies a whole continuous spectrum of the rest. When we meet people, real things happen, some of which can be very challenging.

The challenge for success, peace, and happiness in life is to live amicably and relate well with everyone—whether friends or foes. This is why the scripture commands, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). In Hebrews 12:14, God commands, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Divine blessings flow to those who dwell together in love, peace, and unity: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Ps. 133:1–3).

Martin Luther King Jr. made the powerful statement that “we need to learn how to live together as brothers or we will die together as fools.”

Abram’s response to this situation reveals that he not only knew but also followed “the way of peace” (Rom. 13:17). Some only know the way to shops, schools, workplace, gossip, strive, etc., but do not know the way of peace. Isaiah 59:8 paints a picture of characteristics and destiny of those who do not know the way of peace: “The way

of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.”

**People who do not learn to live together as brethren will one day die together as fools.**

Abram’s life was free from pride and carnal lusts, both of which are potential sources of contentions (James 4:1–3). Proverbs 13:10 confirms that “only by pride cometh contention.” When a life is infected by these maladies, not even a thousand meetings or discussions can yield agreement, unity, and fellowship because they develop an inability to “see eye to eye” (Isa. 52:8) through objective and impartial consideration of facts and reasonings. Their individual parochial views assume far greater importance to them to the point that it blinds them to the benefits of synergy, collaboration, unity, harmony, goodwill, and peace. When a person is too focused on self, such a person becomes blind to reality and the needs of others.

**“Only by pride cometh contention”  
(Prov. 13:10).**

Peaceful coexistence is so important that God commanded us to pray for our leaders so that we can live in peace: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1–4).

As important as peace is, it is equally important to realize that living in peace does not imply compromise of the truth. A man of

God once pointed out that **a person who compromises on truth for the sake of peace will end up having neither.**

**A person who compromises on truth for the sake of peace will end up having neither.**

Abraham's life of peace through the spirit of excellence obviously rubbed off on his descendant, Isaac, for we read in Genesis 26:19–22 that "Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

These lazy dwellers in the land never bothered to dig wells for themselves; but when the industrious servants of Isaac dug and found water, they fought and claimed it to be theirs. Isaac kept moving and digging wells until there was no more strife with the inhabitants. What a message—that **we must keep moving and digging till we reach the land of no strife.** Such a land does exist, and if Isaac got to his, you will surely get to yours, for God is no respecter of persons. Never give up pursuing a life of peace. It is attainable and achievable!

Our aim should not only be to attain the spirit of excellence for ourselves, as important as that is, but also to become propagators of the same to others.

**Never give up pursuing a life of peace.  
It is attainable and achievable!**

Finally, remember that not all battles are worth fighting for. A battle that does not affect your destiny may be a distraction from the devil to prevent you from reaching your destiny. It is not worth wasting your time, resources, energy, and life fighting such a battle.

A person with the spirit of excellence carefully discerns the battles of life and does all he can to avoid unnecessary ones: “When a man’s ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7). That is a divine promise worth remembering and holding on to. The God who made it to become a reality for Abraham and others is still the same God we are serving today, and He will make that a reality for you and me because God can make a way, where there appears to be none.

**Not all battles are worth fighting for. Never jeopardize your destiny by engaging in an unnecessary, unimportant, and inconsequential battle!**

## 2.2 A Person after God's Heart

While preaching during his first missionary journey, Paul alluded to God's rejection of King Saul and the appointment of David as his replacement by saying, "And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, **a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will**" (Acts 13:22). The phrase "a man after mine own heart" references excellence of spirit.

Prophet Samuel used a similar phrase when he spoke to King Saul after his disobedience to God: "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: **the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart**, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee" (1 Sam. 13:14). God has excellent and perfect heart. So if He refers to a man as being after his own heart, it implies that the man is also of an excellent spirit.

God is still in the business of searching for vessels of honor that He can channel through His power for manifestation in the world. The criteria He uses in His search is not based on personal appearance but heart condition. Second Chronicles 16:9 says, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

On his mission to anoint David, Prophet Samuel nearly made mistakes when God corrected him: "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for **the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart**" (1 Samuel 16:7).

While we as human beings may be very concerned about appearance, personality, and reputation, God is keenly searching our heart disposition and attitude. He declared in Revelation 2:23, "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."

**“The LORD seeth not as man seeth;  
for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the  
LORD looketh on the heart”  
(1 Sam. 16:7).**

As we know from history, King David’s life was not perfect. He committed adultery, murdered, and covered up his sins. Why would God describe such a person as “a man after mine own heart”? It is because David’s heart disposition was always toward God. He feared and served God from the heart and with all his might. A few qualities and characteristics of his life demonstrate this and provide a model to all who aspire to becoming people after God’s heart. These are as follows:

1. *Obedience and faithfulness*

David’s life was marked by obedience and faithfulness both to his parents and to God. Imagine what it would have felt like

- 1) obeying the parents to take care of the flock out there in the field when he knew that Prophet Samuel was having a ceremony in the family that involved a feast and
- 2) having to defend the flock against a lion and a bear at the risk of losing his life.

God recognizes, honors, and rewards obedience and faithfulness. What a good report to hear of Queen Esther that she “did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him” (Esther 2:20). What an honor to hear God’s commendation: “My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house” (Num. 12:7). Jesus illustrated that faithfulness in small things lead to great rewards: “And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17).

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### 2. *Ruddy, fair, and beautiful countenance*

The word *ruddy* is defined in the dictionary as “having a healthy red color.” This suggests a lively, shiny facial disposition (as when blood flows through the veins and make the face reddish). It could imply childlike exuberance and radiant joy. This term has been used of David a few times in the following scriptures:

- 1) 1 Samuel 16:12—“And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.”
- 2) 1 Samuel 17:42—“And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance.”

When combined with “fair” or “beautiful” countenance, it depicts a display of the joy of the Lord emanating from deep within the heart and bubbling forth from a living relationship with God. Nehemiah 8:10 points out that “the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

A constantly gloomy, sad, and despondent disposition is neither a manifestation of excellence nor the norm for Christlike behavior. Even in the secular world, some leaders and managers try to maintain a happy and inviting disposition; how much more should Christians become sources of joy and happiness in a sad and gloomy world?

### 3. *Seeing through “God’s eyes” and speaking through “God’s mouth”*

**The ability to see situations and circumstances through God’s perspectives places a person on a higher pedestal than the majority in the world.**

The ability to see situations and circumstances through God’s perspectives places a person on a higher pedestal than the majority in

the world. David saw Goliath based on God's word and rose to the challenge based entirely on faith in God, not military experience, of which he had very little to none.

Saul and the entire army of Israel saw Goliath from physical and military perspectives and lost the courage and faith to fight him. David saw him from God's perspectives, spoke by faith from God's perspective, and defeated Goliath:

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands. (1 Sam. 17:45–47)

#### 4. *Recognition and respect for God's anointing*

David was not born when Samuel anointed Saul as king of Israel, but as an Israelite, he grew up to learn the story of this as it would have been handed down by oral tradition. The fact that he was not there and did not witness the anointing did not stop him from recognizing and respecting God's anointing upon Saul, even when Saul had backslidden and was constantly seeking to kill him. Twice he spared the life of Saul when circumstances were ripe to kill him because of the fear of God. He respected the kingly anointing upon Saul and became a king, whereas Saul disrespected the anointing upon David and lost the throne despite his intense battle to keep

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it. What you value and respect will find a way of locating you and becoming your treasured possession.

Consider David's heart in respecting anointing from these scriptures:

**What you value and respect will find a way of locating you and becoming your treasured possession.**

- 1) 1 Samuel 24:6—“And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.”
- 2) 1 Samuel 24:10—“Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD’S anointed.”
- 3) 1 Samuel 26:9—“And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD’S anointed, and be guiltless?”
- 4) 1 Samuel 26:11—“The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’S anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go.”

### 5. *Healthy fear of God*

The prayers and statements of David when confronted by difficult situations and dubious characters at a time he was already a king for years reveal not only his fear of God but also respect for life and trust in God to vindicate him. One example is in Psalms 55:9–18:

Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues: for  
I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day

and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets. For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them. As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me.

## 6. *Praise and worship*

David's continuous worship even when passing through the worst crisis of life reflects his faith and confidence in God as well as unalloyed allegiance to Him. In Psalms 42:11, he soliloquized, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." This is faith shining through his night of crisis.

David felt free to dance before the Lord when the ark of God was being brought to Jerusalem to the point that his wife, Michal, despised him in her heart. Undeterred, David glorified God and determined to do so more. His response to Michal reveals that God's glory was more important to him than personal reputation or approval of the wife.

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Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself! And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD. (2 Sam. 6:20–21)

### 7. *Quick and genuine repentance*

When confronted by Prophet Nathan over his sins with Bathsheba, David quickly repented genuinely and turned back to God wholeheartedly. His heart attitude showed a stark contrast to that of King Saul when confronted over his sins by Prophet Samuel, as demonstrated in his response: “Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God” (1 Sam. 15:30). Saul was more interested in religious rituals to cover up his sins and protect his reputation, whereas David was more interested in God’s forgiveness, restoration, and renewal of the Holy Spirit within him—no wonder why God described him as “a man after mine heart”!

David wrote and published Psalms 51, a clear demonstration of a clean break from the sin. He burned the bridge that could have tied him back into it. Covering up one’s sins or keeping satanic objects after repentance has the potential of tempting one to return to the old ways.

### 8. *Seeking divine guidance in every decision*

Despite repeated victories in battles, David constantly sought the face of God and relied on divine strategies before engaging in

any battle. Through this, he received divine military strategies that brought him more victories. Note that two of his prayers were against the same group of enemies he had previously defeated:

- 1) “And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand” (2 Sam. 5:19).
- 2) “And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And when David enquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines” (2 Sam. 5:21–24).

By doing this, David distinguished himself from many of the kings of Israel who presumptuously entered battles without seeking guidance from God.

#### 9. *Submission to God and His prophets*

Although David regularly prayed to God and heard directly from Him, He also respected and submitted to messages from prophets of God. **True respect for God is also demonstrated in genuine respect for God’s people and submission to servants of God.**

**True respect for God is evidenced in genuine respect for God’s people and submission to servants of God.**

David regularly maintained healthy respectful relationships with prophets of God. He consulted them and promptly submitted

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to their counsel whenever they spoke to him in the name of the Lord. He stopped his ambition to build a temple for God when Prophet Nathan told him that God would rather have his son to do so. He took no offense but supported the project by making generous provisions toward its success. Although written after his reign, he truly lived out the principle proclaimed by King Jehoshaphat: “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chron. 20:20).

### 10. *He kept covenants*

David was not the type who would make a promise and break it later when it is no longer convenient to keep it. The principles of Psalms 15:4 guided his decisions in life: “He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.” For example:

- 1) He kept his covenant with Jonathan by showing mercy to his lame son Mephibosheth, making him live with him in his palace and eat from his table as one of his sons.
- 2) He spared the life of Mephibosheth when appeasing the Gibeonites by fulfilling their demand for hanging seven descendants of Saul.

**Zeal without knowledge entraps, but faithfulness to covenant brings deliverance and security.**

Zeal without knowledge entraps, but faithfulness to covenant brings deliverance and security.

### 11. *Reliance in the person of God more than in artifacts that represent God*

David had a living trust in God rather than in religious artifacts. When fleeing from the rebellion of Absalom, he commanded the ark

of God to be returned to Jerusalem, trusting in God to make him see it again if God is pleased in him: “And the king said unto Zadok, carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation” (2 Sam. 15:25).

12. *He maintained a living relationship with God all his life*

Throughout his life, he maintained a living and dynamic relationship with God. What a lesson. Despite his busy schedule, he created time to praise God seven times a day: “Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments” (Ps. 119:164). If you are too busy to find time for God, you are indeed TOO busy!

**If you are too busy to find time for  
God, you are indeed TOO busy!**

## 2.3 Faithful Commitment to Promises

You have probably heard the statement that a picture is worth a thousand words—so also is an exemplary life. Children emulate the examples of their parents more than their words. Role models provide useful examples for others to learn from and expedite their success in various areas of life. Integrity is one of the areas where there may be very few models, creating opportunities for contemporary Christians. In Proverbs 20:6, King Solomon observed, “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: **but a faithful man who can find?**”

Integrity is defined as “the qualifications of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness. It is generally a personal choice to hold oneself to consistent moral and ethical standards. In ethics, integrity is regarded by many as the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one’s actions.”

Integrity inspires confidence and paves the way for success. It is evidenced by how a person demonstrates faithfulness to covenants, contracts, agreements, and promises, not only when it is convenient but at all times.

The life of King David, the man after God’s heart, provides useful examples of integrity that we can all learn from. His writings in Psalms 15 and 24 provide good insight on God’s principles and requirements on integrity, as he described the person who will qualify to be in the presence of God as follows:

- 1) “He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not” (Ps. 15:1, 4).
- 2) “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Ps. 24:3–4).

Making promises is very easy for many people, but keeping them is another story altogether. Some even see making promises as a “strategic tool” for pleasing others and gaining temporary favors,

even when they have no intention of fulfilling them. God is very clear in His command: “Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay” (Eccles. 5:5).

King David demonstrated integrity by the way he kept his promise to Jonathan, even when the circumstances suggested the need to do otherwise. Note the following:

**“Better is it that thou shouldest not vow,  
than that thou shouldest vow and not pay”  
(Eccles. 5:5).**

- 1) Jonathan was the son of king Saul, and therefore a potential heir to the throne. He recognized the grace of God in David and his potential to become the next king, yet he loved him dearly. “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:3).
- 2) For the same reason (i.e., of recognizing the grace of God in David), King Saul became jealous, hated him, and plotted to kill him at all costs. He alluded to this in one of his angry outbursts against his son Jonathan when he said, “For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom” (1 Sam. 20:30).
- 3) There is an important lesson to learn here—it is futile to fight against the will of God. Saul of Tarsus learned this the hard way when Jesus confronted him with the statement, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:5).
- 4) Jonathan risked straining his relationship with his father and losing the throne by continuing to love David and sparing his life. Both of them entered into a covenant: “And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my

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seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city” (1 Sam. 20:42).

**It is futile to fight against the will of God.**

- 5) For David, this became a lifetime covenant that he felt obliged to keep and not just an escape route from the current crisis.
- 6) Fast forward many years later, King Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle. David became the king. It was usual practice in those days for a new king to kill the descendants of the previous one so as to establish his kingdom. Despite the hatred of King Saul for David, David did not follow suit; but rather in keeping to his covenant with Jonathan, he sought for ways of preserving them.

And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David

said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. (2 Sam. 9:1-7)

- 7) It is noteworthy that he did not just restore Mephibosheth to freedom and allowed him to live elsewhere, which would have still been great, but he brought him to the palace and made him eat at his table as one of his sons. In so doing, he was not deterred by the fact that Mephibosheth was lame. He did not just restore to him the land that belonged to Jonathan but also everything that belonged to his grandfather Saul. This was benevolence and integrity!
- 8) Fast forward again some years later. There was famine in Israel for three years, which prompted David to seek God's face to establish the reason. God revealed that Saul, in breaking the covenant with the Gibeonites through zeal without knowledge in seeking to exterminate them, is the cause of the famine.
- 9) Learn from here that there is a cause for every problem, and it may not always be obvious. However, seeking God's face can bring the revelation that leads to its solution.
- 10) The Gibeonites' demand as a solution was to hang seven sons of Saul. To some, this could have been a good opportunity for David to get rid of the responsibility of taking care of a lame Mephibosheth, but he recognized that it is not acceptable to God to break one covenant in an attempt to keep another so

the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom

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she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite: And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest. (2 Sam. 21:7–9)

- 11) God set a sterling standard when He said, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips” (Ps. 89:34). Between the events in Joshua 9 when the Gibeonites entered into a league with the Israelites and 2 Samuel 21, when they were pacified, about 430 years had passed. This means that neither King Saul nor David were born at the time of the league, yet God held them responsible for keeping it. Our God is a covenant-keeping God, and to do business with Him, we must learn to honor agreements no matter how long they had been in existence or how inconvenient it had become to keep.
- 12) The story in Ezekiel 17:11–20 further demonstrates that God expects us to honor covenants between people. Israel had been taken captive into Babylon. The king of Babylon had set one of the prince’s king to rule over the remnant in Israel, and they made an oath between them. Shortly after, the king in Israel broke the oath by seeking to transfer allegiance to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God’s message to the rebellious king was sharp and blunt:

### **Shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?**

As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. **Neither shall Pharaoh with his**

**mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons: Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant,** when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape. **Therefore thus saith the Lord God; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head.** And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me.

**“Shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?”  
(Ezek. 17:15).**

Note that in verse 19, God referred to the oath that the king of Israel made with the king of Babylon as **“mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he had broken.”** Then God took it personally to ensure that he paid for it **“even it will I recompense upon his own head.”**

My prayer is that you and I will be the practical demonstration in today's world of the answer to King Solomon's question in Proverbs 20:6: “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” Why not join me in determining and declaring, “I will be the faithful person in my generation!”

## 2.4 Saints in Sodom

One of the greatest challenges of contemporary times is to find courageous people who will stick their head above the parapet, overcome peer pressure, and live upright lives when surrounded and outnumbered by mediocrity.

The phrase “a saint in Sodom” is based on a story recorded in Genesis chapters 18 and 19 where Lot was spared to live because of his righteous conduct in the midst of such wickedness that provoked God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Referring to this incident, the Apostle Peter commented, “And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)” (2 Pet. 2:7–8).

**In crystallography, it is a well-known fact that the value of interfacial angles of minerals remain the same for each type of mineral irrespective of where in the world they are found. In the same vein, God expects Christians to be consistent in their conduct, character, and behavior anywhere and at any time!**

Consider the challenges and risks that Lot and the family faced in taking their stands and how much easier it would have been to just merge into the crowd and live like others so as to feel acceptable in the community.

This tells us a lot about Lot and what God’s expectations are for godly individual. It reminds us that a Christian is not the type of person that

- 1) imbibes the philosophy of “when you are in Rome, do as the Romans do”;

- 2) acts like a chameleon by changing its color to fit in with that of its environment; and
- 3) lives by the philosophy that as fish in water cannot be dry, therefore a person in a sinful society cannot be free from sin.

In crystallography, it is a known fact that the value of interfacial angles of minerals remain the same for each type of mineral irrespective of where in the world they are found. In the same vein, God expects Christians to be unique in their conduct, character, and behavior whether they are

- 1) alone or in a group of others;
- 2) in London or Leeds or Luxembourg, etc.; and
- 3) with like-minded people or with people of completely opposite beliefs and culture.

Lot was not the only person that had this quality. There were others in the Bible, including Daniel, a Jewish captive that ended up in Babylon. His selection to be trained in the king's school for elites could have provided the incentives to compromise his faith so as not to lose such a wonderful privilege. But instead, Daniel was prepared to lose everything to keep his faith in God: "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8). He became another model on a hilltop or another saint in his Sodom.

Every Christian will at one time or the other encounter his/her "Sodom," and the challenge is, will you be a saint in your Sodom as Lot or Daniel were in theirs? That is a question that can only be correctly answered practically through a demonstration of the answer in the person's life. Theoretical answers mean nothing unless they are corroborated by the life the person lives. To help us prepare for the correct answer, let us consider certain things that enabled Lot

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and Daniel to overcome the tremendous pressures and temptations around them in order to live godly lives in their sinful worlds:

- 1) They both had living faith in God. Their faith was not following popular fashion of the time nor mere religion but something that impacted and regulated every aspect of their beings—thoughts, words, actions, etc.

**Every Christian will at one time or the other encounter his / her “Sodom,” and the challenge is, will you be a saint in your Sodom as Lot or Daniel were in theirs?**

- 2) They maintained healthy direct and living relationships with God. Their faith was not merely based on fantastic but meaningless family religious rituals and traditions but rather on personal living relationships with the God they have encountered in their own lives.
- 3) Their lives became the very dwelling place of God. Of Daniel, it was said, “There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods... I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee” (Dan. 5:11–14). Can that be said of you?
- 4) They had routines that not only birthed but also fed greatness. Daniel had the habit of praying three times a day (Dan. 6:10, 13), a practice he would not give up in the pursuit of a career or at the threat of death. He would rather have a lively communion with the God he knew and trusted than friendship/fellowship with the ungodly around him. What are your routines that link you to God, and how consistent are you in keeping them?
- 5) They were driven by the spirit of excellence based on sound understanding of God: “A man of understanding is of an

excellent spirit” (Prov. 17:27). They were not just different for the sake of being different, but their differences were driven and fueled by their understanding of God and their allegiance/commitment to Him.

God’s blessings upon saints in Sodom are many and worth the price:

- 1) Daniel and his friends were healthier than those who ate the “royal,” but defiled food. They were ten times wiser than other students. God delivered them from fire, lions, and other temptations as well as promoted them above their enemies: “Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm” (Dan. 6:3). Above all, God used them to change the customs and cultures in Babylon as well as make His name known and worshipped.
- 2) Lot was spared when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed (Gen. 18–19).
- 3) Joshua and Caleb inherited the promised land while their colleagues, the other ten spies, perished in the wilderness (Num. 13–14).
- 4) Joseph was translated from the prison to the throne overnight.
- 5) David was preserved to inherit the throne that Saul lost and earned a significant place in the annals of history.
- 6) Jesus became exalted above all others and given a name far above other names, at which every knee in heaven, earth, and under the earth bows to (Phil. 2:1–11).
- 7) And you can be the next in line to be promoted and to inherit divine favor and the promises of God if you will pay the price of being a saint in Sodom.

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There is a warfare raging today for the truth and right. In this warfare, God needs reliable people who will courageously stand their ground, take up their batons, and wage effective warfare for the truth.

Can God depend upon you in times like this to stand your ground for the truth? “And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days” (Dan. 11:32–33).

Reproduced below for your edification and inspiration is an ancient poem by an unknown author that has blessed and inspired many.

I am a soldier in the army of my God.  
The Lord Jesus Christ is my Commanding Officer.  
The Holy Scripture is my code of conduct.  
Faith, prayer and the Word are my weapons of warfare.

I have been taught by the Holy Spirit, trained by experience,  
tried by adversity and tested by fire.

I am a volunteer in this army, and I am enlisted for eternity.  
I will not get out, sell out, be talked out or pushed out.  
I am faithful, reliable, capable and dependable.  
If my God needs me, I am there. I am a soldier.

I am not a baby. I do not need to be pampered, petted,  
primed up, pumped up, picked up, or pepped up. I am a soldier.  
No one has to call me, remind me, write me,  
visit me, entice me or lure me.

I am a soldier. I am not a wimp. I am in  
place, saluting my King,  
obeying His orders, praising His name  
and building His kingdom!

EBUK JOHN EBUK

No one has to send me flowers, gifts,  
food, cards or candy, or give  
me handouts. I do not need to be cuddled, cradled,  
cared for or catered to.  
I am committed. I cannot have my feelings hurt  
bad enough to turn me around.  
I cannot be discouraged enough to turn me aside.  
I cannot lose enough to cause me to quit.

When Jesus called me into this army, I had nothing.  
If I end up with nothing,  
I will still come out ahead. I will win. My God has  
and will continue to supply all of my need.  
I am more than a conqueror. I will always triumph.  
I can do all things through Christ.  
The devil cannot defeat me. People cannot disillusion me.  
Weather cannot weary me.  
Sickness cannot stop me. Battles cannot beat me.  
Money cannot buy me. Governments cannot silence me,  
and hell cannot handle me. I am a soldier.

Even death cannot destroy me. For when my  
Commander calls me from His battlefield,  
He will promote me to captain and then  
allow me to rule with Him.  
I am a soldier in the army, and I'm marching claiming victory.  
I will not give up. I will not turn around.

I am a soldier, marching heaven-bound.  
Here I Stand! Will you stand with me?

## 2.5 Seeing Your World through God's Eyes

And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. (Gen. 50:19–21)

What a powerful statement that is—an epitome of forgiveness and love, particularly when we consider who made the statement, to whom, and what he had just gone through/suffered in their hands. Imagine what thoughts went through the mind of Joseph:

- 1) As he saw his very brethren who years earlier plotted to kill him, dumped him in a pit to die, but later sold him in anguish to the Midianites; he ended up as a slave in Egypt where he was falsely accused and put in prison because of them.
- 2) As he noticed that his brethren did not recognize him, but he did.
- 3) As he saw the fulfilment of his dreams when they bowed down to him, albeit without recognizing him.

**“And Joseph said unto them, Fear not:  
for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye  
thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good,  
to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people  
alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you,  
and your little ones. And he comforted them, and  
spake kindly unto them”  
(Gen. 50:19–21).**

Joseph's feelings, thoughts, and emotions must have gone on a roller coaster trip and back. Could you imagine why he put them into ward (prison) for three days before telling them, "This do, and live; for I fear God" (Gen. 42:17–18). That statement is loaded with meaning; he had prayed through and discovered within those three days the importance of seeing things from God's perspectives and acting in line with God.

Life is queer; often we find ourselves in situations we do not understand nor know how to handle properly. Like the Israelites, where a potential eleven days' journey turned out to be a forty years' wandering in deserts, let's remember that God is on the throne. He is our guide, and He is more interested in developing our character than merely giving us possessions. Possessions without character will result in the loss of both. He is the one who told the Israelites, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jer. 29:11).

You are on a journey. God knows where He is taking you to. You may not understand where you are because you are not seeing the full picture yet, but a firm trust in God will safely lead you to his planned destination. The scripture is right when it declared, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

While journeying through life, let us never forget:

- 1) "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand" (Ps. 37:23–24).
- 2) "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

Panic, confusion, and disillusionment set in when we fail to see things from God's perspectives or trustfully surrender to him. Consider what the psalmist went through in Psalms 73:1–28:

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Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continu-

ally with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.

Finally, remember that seeing your world through God's perspectives calls for good spiritual discernment so that you recognize the trees from the wood. It also requires the courage not to surrender control to satanic circumstances that you are supposed to deal with while merrily but foolishly singing along "qu'est cera." Steadfastness will enable you to join in the chorus of the artist and sing along, "Through it all, I have learnt to trust in Jesus."

## 2.6 A Model of Integrity

Job's example of maintaining righteousness despite the odds is an excellent demonstration of integrity at its best!

### 2.6.1 A “Curtain Talk”

Job's story as recorded in the Bible began with behind-the-scenes conversations—which could be referred to as “curtain talks” in secular literature. These are talks that he was not party to, nor even aware of that they were taking place.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord. (Job 1:6–12)

After this conversation, Satan wrought a lot of havoc on Job, with the intention of getting him to denounce God. Even though Job did not know what was going on, and even wrongly thought that it was God that brought the evils upon him, instead of denouncing God, he rather worshipped and glorified God. Satan failed! Shortly after that, a second curtain talk took place:

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. (Job 2:1-6)

Have you noticed that in these curtain talks, God described Job as a perfect and upright man of integrity? Despite Satan's onslaughts and his ignorance of the source of his troubles, he maintained his integrity toward God.

There were other behind-the-scenes conversations in the Bible between the Creator and the created that we can equally learn from. These are as follows:

**1. Abraham and the Lord**

And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? (Gen. 18:16–23)

Note here God's decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sins and wickedness. Lot lived in these towns and knew nothing about the impending danger. He lived a righteous life in the midst of an evil generation.

**2. Ahab and his lying prophets**

And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven

standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee. (1 Kings 22:18–23)

While Ahab was relishing on the positive prophecies from his 400 false prophets, he knew nothing of the conversations behind the curtain in the spiritual realm that caused this. His ignorance and state of rebellion made the truth unbelievable when disclosed by Micaiah, a true prophet of God.

### 3. **Joshua the high priest**

And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. (Zech. 3:1–4)

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Joshua, the high spirit, faced physical opposition on earth, totally unaware of the spiritual warfare in the heavenlies and of the possible link to his “filthy garments.” However, he steadfastly continued in his mission till Zechariah, through spiritual revelation, addressed the situation.

### 4. **Jesus**

And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. (Luke 10:18)

Jesus saw what the disciples knew nothing about while on their mission field!

### 5. **Peter**

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. (Luke 22:31–32)

Peter was boastfully confident of dying for Christ, totally oblivious of Satan’s plot to sift him like wheat. Thank God for the discernment and prayer of Jesus, which stopped Satan right on his tracks.

One possible challenge from the above is, if such “behind-the-curtain conversations” were taking place between Satan and God about you today, what would God say of you to Satan?

## 2.6.2 **Standing Tall under Fire**

And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were

plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God **foolishly**. (Job 1:13–22)

**“Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither:**

**the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”  
(Job 1:20–21).**

So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. **But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.** (Job 2:7–10)

The above scriptures provide details of satanic attacks on Job and Job’s steadfastness in holding on to God. He stood tall under every fire! How would you have fared under such situations?

### **2.6.3 Salt and Light**

Jesus challenged the believers of his time: “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:13–16).

**“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity”  
(1 Tim. 4:12).**

The fires may be fierce and circumstances may be very trying and challenging, but we must always remember Paul’s admonition to Timothy: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). God has called and equipped us to be examples. His grace is sufficient for us to do so!

#### **2.6.4 Route to Modelling Integrity**

The scriptures listed below reveal tried and tested routes to modelling integrity:

- 1) “And thou, Solomon my son, **know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind:** for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever” (1 Chron. 28:9).
- 2) “And beside this, **giving all diligence, add to your faith** virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. **For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet. 1:5–9).

## 2.7 Excellence in Sacrificial Service

Most biblical names have important and revealing meanings. The name Epaphras means “lovely.” It is possibly a condensed form of Epaphroditus derived from the Greek words *epi* translated “on” and *Aphrodite*, the Greek goddess of love. Epaphroditus means “lovely, charming.” If Epaphras is contracted from Epaphroditus, then all references in the New Testament to these names refer to one and the same person—one of Paul’s coworkers. He was spoken of by Paul (Colossians 1:7, 4:12) as “our dear fellow-servant” and “a faithful minister of Christ,” words that carry great honor and responsibility.

Epaphras was probably a citizen of Colossae (an ancient city in Asia Minor/Turkey). However, his zeal in Gospel ministry was not limited to the Colossians only but also to others: **“For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis”** (Col. 4:13). This is a salient reminder that a faithful minister, although patriotic, must neither be parochial, tribalistic, nor self-centered in ministerial vision.

Colossians 1:7 says, **“As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ.”** It appears from this that Epaphras was their minister and probably the founder of the Colossian church. He was a distinguished disciple whom Paul had great love for—probably because of his commitment and labor to see the Colossians **“stand perfect and complete in all the will of God”** (Col. 4:12). Philemon 1:23 says, **“There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus.”** This indicates that he was with Paul (and most likely a prisoner with him) at Rome when he wrote to the Colossians. The footnote at the end of Philippians shows that the epistle was written by Epaphroditus from Rome.

My focus on Epaphras is aimed at identifying salient features that earned him the enigma “A Faithful Minister of Christ” and thereby draw vital lessons for our benefit in contemporary times where faithfulness to Christ’s mission is often a missing or scarce ingredient.

Colossians 4:12 captures the keynote of his life and ministry: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, **always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.**” The thrust of his prayer ministry was not for his personal life, problems, or projects, but rather it was an intercession for others—a selfless dedication to their well-being. This verse identifies three key qualities of Epaphras’s service as being faithfulness, fulfillment, and fellowship.

## A Faithful Minister

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul highlighted an essential ministerial requirement: “Moreover it is required in stewards, that **a man be found faithful**” (1 Cor. 4:2). Not every minister of the Gospel lives up to this high standard of expectation demanded by Christ and exemplified in Epaphras’s life. Some are so motivated by ego, fame, power, money, success, unhealthy competition, and many other things to the extent that they deny the very faith they profess to uphold.

**“Moreover it is required in stewards,  
that a man be found faithful”  
(1 Cor. 4:2).**

Paul commended in Epaphras the quality of faithfulness: “**As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ... Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God**” (Col. 1:7, 4:12).

Certain key phrases in these two verses highlight the characteristics of a faithful minister:

- 1) **“Our dear.”** He became dear because as a good shepherd, he gave his life for the sheep (John 10:11) in the service of

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others and of Christ. He was dear to Paul, a **minister** as well as to the Colossians, the **members** to whom he ministered. Thus, his dearness was balanced and not lopsided toward one sector that he felt favorably disposed to.

- 2) **“Fellow-servant.”** Epaphras adopted the disposition of a servant rather than that of a boss. He not only recognized his and others calling but also accepted and discharged his responsibilities to complement the services of other ministers, with the ultimate purpose of achieving divine objectives (Eph. 4:7–15).
- 3) **“Faithful minister of Christ.”** His agenda in ministry was centered on Christ’s objectives rather than personal goals as brought out in the phrase “a servant of Christ.” He served Christ, not mammon.
- 4) **“One of you.”** He identified with the people he ministered to. The phrase “saluteth you” shows that he was not only expecting salutation from the members as some would do today.
- 5) **“Always labouring.”** This describes his constancy in service. He is constant in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). God rewards such faithfulness. “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? **Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.** Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods” (Matt. 24:45–47).
- 6) **“Always labouring fervently for you in prayers.”** This is the climax of sincerity in service that goes beyond “eye service.” It also describes the intensity of that service. He was not just a loafer or drifter “passing time” but an active combatant serving the interests of the members.
- 7) **“That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”** This describes his ultimate objective in service and illustrates compliance with the will of God. It also illustrates a godly conduct in effectively addressing problems in the local church. Lack of faithfulness could have

resulted in unkind criticisms of the “spiritual standard” of the members and ministers. An unfaithful minister would rather wag the tongue, twist the mouth, wink eyes, and tear down everybody that does not fall in line with their pharisaic patterns than spend quality time to pray “that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Their attitude, disposition, and language (e.g., backbiting) displays lack of respect for faithful ministers. Their criticisms only produce conflict, confusion, and commotion rather than inspire godliness. The church today, with all its imperfections, need Epaphrases who will pray down revival and renewal of souls. May God make us all the Epaphrases of today who will stand in the gap to secure the much-needed divine transformations that will make our churches living stones for Christ’s kingdom.

Only very few associates in Paul’s ministry earned that excellent title “faithful minister” (Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7). It is only faithfulness that will result in a fulfilled Christ-centered ministry that qualifies for reward after the final fire test described in 1 Corinthians 3:13–15. May the Lord find you a faithful minister in these last days.

## A Fulfilled Mission in Ministry

Epaphras had a fulfilled mission in his prayer ministry that glorified God, as can be illustrated by the following characteristics.

- 1) **Companionship in service** (i.e., complementary, not competitive service).

Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and **companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.** (Phil. 2:25)

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Note also his remarkable feature of prayerfulness. He was a prisoner in Rome. Some of God's servants have done their best work in incarceration. Epaphras wrote nothing of his own; there is no report that he had any visions in prison, but his work was *prayer*, "laboring fervently." And notice it is in the plural, "in prayers," and "always." He was not like Paul who wrote letters that became part of the Bible, but he had another talent, that of prayer, and he used it powerfully and effectively. He was just as useful in using his gifts as Paul was in his. He "labored fervently" in prayers. If you cannot work or speak, you can pray. But work hard at it like Epaphras, and you will be an immense force for good to others in time and eternity.

**If you cannot work or speak, you can pray. But work hard at it like Epaphras, and you will be an immense force for good to others in time and eternity.**

- 2) **Continuity in service**, always laboring (Col. 4:12). He did this always. Every day, he was to be found praying for his beloved people. There are potentially so many interruptions and excuses for not persevering. Some believers are readier at *work* than at prayer. Satan does not like praying people. Someone has said that Satan's orders are "fight not with small or great, but only with the praying people." If we are to persevere in prayer, it must be prayer *in the spirit*, with the atmosphere of the spirit all around us. Epaphras would never say his prison was a boring place, but rather that he had plenty of work to do there. Be like him, laboring for God in prayer. Lengthen your brief prayers. Take more time, and in this way, bring down showers upon your own soul, and upon all around you.
- 3) **Commitment in service**, laboring fervently (Col. 4:12). These words are like those used about Christ in Gethsemane: "being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly." He ago-

*nized* in prayer. His were Gethsemane-type prayers. He made his prison cell fragrant with the sweet incense of the atmosphere of prayer. What an example worthy of emulation! Real and earnest prayer is hard work. If you are not “always laboring fervently in prayers,” you will be dwarfed Christians. Seek to engage fervently in prayers. There are many today who will give up time for prayer to devote it to other routines of life, but only few who would want to give up some part of their regular routines in order to use the time for prayers. If anyone did do this, the part of work he left would soon be completed.

- 4) **Concentration of his prayer service.** Described as a faithful minister, Epaphras faithfully used the “gifts” at his disposal “laboring fervently for you *in prayers.*” We would have thought that the main theme of Epaphras’s prayers would be for revival or the conversion of souls. No, it was for believers he prayed relentlessly, with most intense earnestness. This was an indirect way of reaching the unsaved, for if believers manifest more of God’s grace, they will reach out to others. It is more difficult to find Epaphrases than to find workers. The coldness, complacencies, and inconsistencies of believers often constitute great hindrances to salvation of souls. On the other hand, if Christians are full of the spirit and love for souls, the world would see that they have something that can make a difference. When they radiate their joy and satisfaction in Christ, the world would like to get what they have, and this will result in salvation of souls. Far more people would be provoked to desire Jesus by the good example they see in Christians than merely by the words they speak. This is why Epaphras prayed for the Colossians “that they might be perfect and complete in all the will of God.”
- 5) **Completeness in service.** “That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12). That means in all that God wanted them to do, and that the seal of the Spirit might be very distinct and legible in them. He knew

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the fullness of Christ's heart as well as the abundance of the treasure laid up in Him, so he was not afraid to ask much because he had great faith in prayer. He knew there was great danger of his people standing still and not growing in grace. When believers stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, it attracts divine presence, eradicates problems, and stimulates Church growth. At the time there was murmuring among the Gentile converts in Jerusalem, God showed the apostles how to address it through delegation of the distribution of food so they could focus on prayers and the study of the Word of God (Acts 6:1–7). The result was that “the Word of God increased, the number of the disciples multiplied, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” Doing the will of God brings great results. It glorifies God when believers are lively and vigorous.

- 6) **Consecration in Service.** This is demonstrated in Paul's statement: “Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: **Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me**” (Phil. 2:25–30).

**His recognition of the significance of fellowship and the complementary role of prayer meant that he did not frown at new assignments, nor**

**complain of being deprived of his precious time for praying or developing his prayer ministry.**

- 7) **Compassion in Service.** It was compassion for souls that birthed Epaphras's prayer ministry and kept him on the tracks of a "messenger" service: "**For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.** For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him" (Phil. 2:26–27).

### **A Fellowship with Ministers and Members**

Often, we find that people who have a prayer ministry today use that as excuse to be isolated from other believers under the auspices of praying. This was not the case with Epaphras. He maintained a lively fellowship **with Christ** through prayers as well as **with ministers** like Paul **and members** of the church—hence his being described as "our dear."

- 1) Being a servant of Christ, he was very much in fellowship *with* Christ. He went to Him to get commissions and then returned to report to Him how he had executed them.
- 2) Being in fellowship with Paul means that Paul could find him readily available to send on errands including writing the epistle to the Philippians under his dictation. **His recognition of the significance of fellowship and the complementary role of prayer meant that he did not frown at new assignments, nor complain of being deprived of his precious time for praying or developing his "prayer warrior" ministry.** He did not rate prayer ministry more important than the "secretarial role" of writing for Paul or of running errands. **He focused on the end results and recognized every activity as essential part of the giant gig-saw puzzle required to form a full picture—that of the believers "standing perfect and complete in all the**

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**will of God**” (Col. 4:12). His cordial relationship with Paul made him to record in his epistle to Philemon (1:23) **“There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus.”**

- 3) Being in fellowship with members enabled the Philippians to send him on physical errands such as taking presents to Paul. **“But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God”** (Phil. 4:18). He did not despise such physical assignments as being inferior nor treat them as distraction from his prayer ministry. The spirit of harmony and fellowship is of greater value in the sight of God than ministerial capabilities discharged with an attitude of contention, strife, and unhealthy competition.

May the Lord help us to be the Epaphrases of today in Jesus’s name! Amen.

**Epaphras focused on the end results and recognized every activity as an essential part of the giant jigsaw puzzle required to build a full picture—that of the believers “standing perfect and complete in all the will of God.” What a model worthy of emulation by all today!**

## 2.8 Loyalty and Allegiance to God

The captivating story of Ruth, originally a Moabite, as recorded in the first four chapters of her book reminds us that once a person is in allegiance with God, the past or present no longer defines their future. Many people pursue significance and importance in life. Ruth, on the other hand, sought for allegiance and loyalty to God and achieved success, significance, and importance as by-products.

- 1) The story began with Elimelech and Naomi, his wife, along with their two sons Mahlo and Chilion of Bethlehemjudah becoming economic migrants to Moab due to famine in Israel.
- 2) In the process of time, Naomi, bereaved of her husband and two sons, decided to return to Bethlehemjudah on hearing that the famine was over. No condition is permanent. Every crisis that has a beginning will certainly have an end.

**No condition is permanent. Every crisis that has a beginning will certainly have an end.**

- 3) The two daughters-in-law wanted to join her, a scenario that many would have loved. Being pragmatic, she lovingly discouraged them with a view to restart their lives over in their own countries and hopefully get a better future.
- 4) Orpah saw the sense in Naomi's logic, kissed her, wept, and returned to her people, whereas "Ruth clave unto her" (Ruth 1:14). Naomi's further persuasion to help Ruth get back resulted in one of the most beautiful statements of a daring boldness, courage, allegiance, and loyalty from Ruth recorded in the scriptures: **"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for**

**whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.** When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her” (Ruth 1:16–18). Naomi gave up, and Ruth got her way.

- 5) Life in her newfound world was not a bed of roses as Ruth had to glean ears of corn in the fields after the reapers to sustain herself and her mother-in-law: “And her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech” (Ruth 2:3). Some would call this luck, chance, or coincidence, but there are no such things with God, as the Bible confirms that “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way” (Ps. 37:23).

**“And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me”  
(Ruth 1:14–17).**

- 6) God had orchestrated the steps of Ruth and brought her into the field of Boaz, a near kinsman, who took notice of her and gained his favor. Was this another coincidence? Definitely not because the Bible confirms that “the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov. 21:1).

- 7) Ruth's response to Boaz's favor reveals a character of humility, gratitude, and respect: "Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" (Ruth 2:10).
- 8) Boaz gave her a reassuring response: "And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:11–12).

**Beware, because somebody capable of blessing  
you is watching and hearing of you.**

- 9) Boaz's statement reveal an important principle of success that we should always observe for our good: Beware, because **somebody capable of blessing you is watching and hearing of you.** His answer also reveal that God always rewards those who trust in Him. So all that happened to Ruth and the favors she got from Boaz were not merely luck, chance, or coincidence but rather the blessings and rewards of God.
- 10) Ruth's narration of the events of the day to Naomi, the remembrance of Boaz's name, etc., reveals that her attention to details brought further revelations from Naomi that filled the kinsman's gap and opened further doors to future blessings.
- 11) Her obedience to Naomi's instruction was demonstrated in her response: "All that thou sayest unto me I will do"

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(Ruth 3:5). It reminds us that **it pays to obey and that butterflies do not make good missionaries!** She adhered to Naomi's advice: "It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law" (Ruth 2:22–23).

- 12) Ruth's obedience resulted in Boaz's promise: "And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman" (Ruth 3:11). **Another poignant reminder of the value of a good name. Reputation matters!** Wise king Solomon postulated that "a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold" (Prov. 22:1).

**It pays to obey. Butterflies do not  
make good missionaries!**

- 13) Note the due diligence of Boaz in fulfilling his promise to Ruth: "And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning" (Ruth 3:12–13). Boaz's due diligence reminds us that it is not wise to cut corners in order to get blessings! It also begs the question as to whether Naomi did not know of this nearer kinsman. She probably knew **but was just following the lead of favor with a man of action.**
- 14) Naomi advised, "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest,

until he have finished the thing this day” (Ruth 3:18). This excellent advice based on her sound knowledge of Boaz reminds us that he that believeth shall not make haste. **Remember, speed kills! People who prosper are not procrastinators, neither are they unnecessarily in a hurry. We must learn and be content to travel at God’s pace.**

**Speed kills! People who prosper are not procrastinators, neither are they unnecessarily in a hurry. We must learn and be content to travel at God’s pace.**

- 15) The nearer kinsman missed his divine opportunity due to risk aversion and self-protectionism: “And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance” (Ruth 4:6). **Those who would do business with God must learn to walk by faith, even if that appears to be running a high risk.**

**Those who wish to do business with God must learn to walk by faith, even if that involves running at high risk.**

- 16) Fast forward, Ruth married Boaz and got a child, “And they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (Ruth 4:17). Ruth became the great-great-grandmother of Jesus Christ. Choosing to serve God and living a life of obedience brings blessings.

Ruth heard of the God of Israel through Naomi and took an irreversible decision to follow and serve Him all her life. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Her determination to fol-

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low was not based on any predictable prospect of a better future, but simply because of her love for the God of Naomi. True godliness is contagious! Naomi's godliness caught up on her. Is that true of your life? Ruth's readiness and steadiness paved the way for her success and growth.

Another beautiful salient point in this story relate to a curse in Deuteronomy 23:3 on Moabites: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever." They had treated ill the children of Israel when they were journeying from Egypt to the promised land. As a result, God placed a curse on them. The curse was to last for ten generations, which is approximately 1,000 years. No prophet, priest, or man of God was powerful enough to break that curse. However, Ruth's determination, decision, and love for God made God lift that curse for her only in just 129 years after it was placed. The curse was still active on other Moabites, but she was exonerated from it.

**Your past and present do not define nor determine your future if you are in allegiance with God and remain loyal to Him all your life.**

This is a powerful reminder that your past and present do not define nor determine your future once you are in allegiance with God and remain loyal to Him all your life. This incident illustrates the power of allegiance and loyalty to God in breaking curses, jinxes, spells, and all evil/demonic powers on those who love God with all their hearts. A strong love for and allegiance to God liberates a person from the influence and effects of all ancestral curses, witchcraft, and demonic powers. It is usually a weak love for God and lack of unalloyed loyalty that keeps the doorways open for curses, demons, and witches to continue operating in the lives of some Christians.

It is time for all Christians to rise up and claim their divine inheritance: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;

and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. **This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord**, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord” (Isa. 54:17). Jesus was not lying when He said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... **If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed**” (John 8:32, 36). The Bible reminds us that the purpose why Jesus was manifested in the flesh was “that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). The price for your freedom has been paid in full. There is no more valid reason to continue in bondage when God has made sufficient provision for your freedom and abundant living: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

**“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”  
(John 8:32, 36).**

Finally, Ruth never sought significance for herself. It was added to her as a result of her allegiance and loyalty to God in fulfilment of Matthew 6:33: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

**“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”  
(Matt. 6:33).**

## 2.9 A Shining Life of Faith in Challenging Times

Let your faith shine through every challenging time!

One day, a few years ago, I saw an article on a website within a theme section headed “A Diverse Month Ahead,” hosting a collection of related articles, one of which reads as follows:

Jews mark Purim on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March with carnival like celebrations. Purim commemorates the time a young Jewish woman called Esther saved other Jews from extermination in Persia.

As I reflected on that story line, it dawned on me the impact that one woman can have and the legacy of it still being remembered worldwide thousands of years after the event.

One of two women after whom books of the Bible were named was Esther, who certainly deserves her title. Esther’s story is special because she was very much like Jesus’s mother Mary—possibly the unlikeliest choice, from man’s perspective’s to be used in creating significant history to the glory of God.

Written about 521 BC, the book of Esther furnishes salient truths about God’s purpose for His people as well as godly principles of success. In a nutshell, King Ahasuerus had many Jews in his kingdom, one of whom was Esther the queen. God’s grace for Esther started with the appointment of Mordecai to care for her after the death of her parents. From that point on, he became an essential part of Esther’s journey. Without him, we would not today have the book of Esther. **The people in our lives will either make or mar us.**

Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, a gateman at the king’s court, refused to worship Haman who had just been promoted. Angered by this, Haman devised a plot to kill all the Jews. But God, through his timely intervention, demonstrated that **His chosen people**, irrespective of their predicament or circumstances, **were made for glory and not for the grave.** This aligns with God’s purpose for the saints.

**God's chosen people, irrespective of their plight or circumstances, are made for glory and not for the grave.**

It is often said, and rightly so, that to everything there is a purpose. This story illustrates that **to everything, there is a dual purpose—man's and God's**, and these two are not always the same. In fact, in most cases, God's purpose can be diametrically different and occasionally opposite to man's. For instance, the brethren sold Joseph into Egypt to frustrate his dreams, but God sent him there to save lives and to fulfill those very dreams. The Jews crucified Christ to get rid of Him, but God used His death to save the world from sin.

Mankind generally understand better the human aspect of their purpose, but only few can see God's purpose in situations. It must be borne in mind that even for the righteous, it is not always easy to perceive God's purpose in every situation before it is fully revealed, partly because "as the heavens are higher than the earth," so are God's thoughts and ways higher than man's (Isa. 55:9).

**To everything, there is a dual purpose—God's and man's.**

Vashti, the original queen, disobeyed the king and lost her queenship. From the king's perspective, this was a punishment for her pride, but God had a different purpose—to make a way for Esther in preparation for the coming events. God knew that the true worship of God as exemplified by Mordecai would come into conflict with the egotism of Haman, who, to satisfy his ego, plotted to kill all the Jews. God prepared for this by sending Esther, a Jew, into a place of position and authority in the king's palace to save her kindred. The believer can safely trust in God's perfect knowledge of the end from the beginning and of His perfect control over all

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events and circumstances. God's sovereignty and love for His children implies that eventually, all will be well for those who love and serve Him.

God endowed Esther with natural beauty and used it to get the attention of the king. This implies that God's endowment of natural talents on mankind is meant for their progress and not destruction. It is noteworthy that her beauty did not become a stumbling block on her path to godliness. Often, in contemporary times, talented people make the mistake of abandoning God in adoration of their temporal talents, only to discover later that God has also given them up. May it be known that only by close identification with God's purpose can one get meaningful success and lasting satisfaction in life.

Closely linked to this is the importance of the awareness of one's mission in life and a clear perception of the needs of the hour. To miss either of these could spell disaster in one's pursuits. Jesus lamented over the impending doom on Jerusalem because they did not know their time. When people are ignorant of their mission in life and of the reason why God brought them into specific families, institutions, nations, special privileges, or peculiar situations, they misuse their privileges and waste their lives. Opportunities are then mistaken for problems, goals become confused and ephemeral, eternal purposes in life are exchanged for the temporal, and the pilgrim become content to dwell in the fringes of the wilderness instead of pressing on to the promised land (Num. 32:1-7).

Today, many nice Christians in privileged positions who either do not understand or are not concerned about God's purpose in placing them where they are have lost their savor and light. Their main interest is in preserving their secular position, which they will one day lose rather than their position with God, which they could have kept for eternity. This has turned many into "dumb dogs that cannot bark, lying down loving to slumber" (Isa. 56:10). They would not stick out their head and save the situation for humanity, if that would mean being different from the society. Therefore, evil grows unchallenged.

Esther was not like that. When the full import of Haman's plot was made known to her, she ventured to go and see the king "which was not according to custom" even if that resulted in dying for a just cause should the need arise. The pages of history keep reminding us that it is only people who are willing to die for their convictions that ever influence the society for good or evil. Jesus underscored this point when he said that it is only those who are prepared to lose their lives that will have it. There is little to gain from a belief whose professor is not prepared to die for. Many are good dreamers whose plans and ideas will never see the birth of dawn because they are not prepared to pay the prize.

**Many are good dreamers whose plans and ideas will never see the birth of dawn because they are not prepared to pay the prize.**

As it was, Haman, like everyone else, did not know that Esther was Jewish, and it was this ignorance that brought him to ruin as Esther had more power than him before the king.

The purpose of God for Esther and the Jews are evident in this story. This purpose became fully realized, partly because Esther was prepared to cooperate with God in taking corresponding actions based on godly principles of success. Some of these principles are discussed below to encourage us to believe God for the impossible, provided we are prepared to cooperate with Him in acting wisely and on time.

**When something catastrophic threatens, do not panic but pray. God does not respond to panics, but He does answer prayers.**

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- 1) Firstly, in the face of impending doom, Esther, instead of panicking, got all Israel to fast and pray along with her. This is noteworthy! **When something catastrophic threatens, do not panic but pray. God does not respond to panics, but He does answer prayers.** Her actions show that she knew that the final say does not lie in the plots of Haman nor in the king's hand, but with God. Fasting in the king's palace, which is normally associated with feasting and dainty meals, would certainly not have been an easy task for Esther. However, **efficiency, not ease, was her goal**, and she achieved it in a grand style. "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins, and I will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14). Prayer works! If you pray, God will answer. He will change the situations no matter how complex they are.
- 2) Secondly, Esther realized that **prayer without action is like faith without works—it does not work!** After prayer, she went to see the king to make her requests following a well-laid-out plan to get his attention and favor. She was not in a hurry. She knew where she was headed, and steadily, she was getting there. "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16). Notice here that she just went in to see the king after the prayer and fasting. She did not wait for special feelings or revelations. Neither was she going to leave the plight of the Jews to the wind by hiding under the illusion of "I am praying about it" and just hoping that somehow God will intervene in some miraculous way without her personal efforts. Yes, God can do that, and indeed in some cases He has done so, but at this time, Esther knew that God had sent her into the kingdom for such a time as this. She therefore had to devise her own plans and implement them, trusting God to use them for the deliverance of the Jews. Her plans were not just mere mental gimmicks. They were "distilled for 72 hours from the laboratory of

prayer.” Her actions reveal deep confidence in the God she had just prayed to.

**Prayer without action is like faith without works—it just does not work!**

- 3) Thirdly, it is noteworthy that **God rewards faithfulness even when it goes unnoticed by man.** His reward transcends gender and racial barriers. Esther was primarily faithful to God, but this could outwardly be seen in her obedience to Mordecai. To her credit, the Bible records that “Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her. Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him” (Esther 2:20). Though now a queen, yet she was still obedient to her foster father. Her faithfulness did not just start when the problem arose. Many find it difficult to keep their heads above water when the goings are fine. But when trouble is imminent, they run to God for emergency assistance. Esther must have learned her faithfulness from the uncle who himself was also faithful both to God and the king. Mordecai had uncovered a plot to kill the king and prevented the bloodshed. This had gone unrewarded, but it did not deter him from continuing in faithful service. And now it was God’s time to reward him.
- 4) Fourthly, from the attitude of Mordecai during this predicament, we also learn that **one good “pusher” is better than a thousand pleasant but passive princesses.** It was Mordecai’s being pushful that moved Esther into decision and action. Many have been brought into the limelight through the pushful actions of others. Sometimes this push comes from a loving and self-sacrificing wife, husband, child, or others. It is common to find the less privileged

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becoming envious of the more privileged. The love of God in the heart of Mordecai did not allow any room for envy; rather it gave him a great mind. True love helps and lifts. And great minds lend encouragement while small minds look for something to talk about and criticize.

**One good “pusher” is better than a thousand pleasant but passive princesses.**

- 5) Fifthly, in answer to prayer, God changed the death sentence of Haman, but Mordecai and Esther still had to organize the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies. This underlies the fact that **even when God has given the victory, men may still have to do the fighting**. Just as **prayers does not exclude meaningful actions, God’s answer to prayers does not produce idle toddlers**. When God gave Canaan to the Israelites, they still had to fight to possess their possessions (Deut. 2:24).
- 6) And finally, this story also reminds us of that timeless and faithful principle that **Whatsoever a man sows that also shall he reap** (Gal. 6:7). He that digs a pit shall fall into it (Prov. 26:27). The very gallows Haman made for the hanging of Mordechai was used to hang him. How good it is to avoid scheming evil for others, knowing that **the God who rewards the faithful also punishes the wicked**.

Esther made this impact because her knowledge of God and commitment to God was so serious that she was willing to risk her life for the glory of God’s name. “And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but **the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits**. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many” (Dan. 11:32–33).

**Even when God has given the victory men may still have to do the fighting. Just as prayers does not exclude meaningful actions, God's answer to prayers does not produce idle toddlers.**

Esther has died thousands of years ago and has left her legacy. Her work still lives on. It is now your turn to make a mark in life for this generation and leave behind a worthy legacy for posterity.

**Prayer works if you pray.**

## 2.10 Divine Favor for a Holy Life of Faith

Today, Mary the mother of Jesus is known, revered (and even worshipped in some circles) throughout the world because of divine favor upon her. Truly, a day of favor is worth more than the wages of a thousand years!

The story of Mary's rise to fame is astronomical and unparalleled in history—from a young teenage girl from the notorious town of Nazareth that Nathanael even asked “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46) to a divinely favored woman, who till now is honored, adored, and revered by all. History has it that Nazareth had a bad reputation in morals and religion at the time, hence this question from Nathanael. So for Mary to remain a virgin in such a town is no small feat and is greatly commendable. How did it all happen? And what can we learn from it?

**A day of favor is worth more than the wages of a thousand years!**

- 1) God found in Mary a holy woman of faith who would be willing to risk her life to become a channel through whom He could use to fulfill the long-awaited promise of the Messiah: “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:23).
- 2) Right from the fall of man at Eden, God promised in Genesis 3:15 to bruise the head of the serpent by the seed of the woman—a pointer to the Messiah. The Jewish people were eagerly expecting the fulfilment of this prophecy. Isaiah also prophesied of this about 700 years before it happened: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). However, nobody

knew who the virgin would be. Mary herself probably did not know that it could be her, hence her surprise at angel Gabriel's message.

- 3) "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9). At the fulness of time, God spotted Mary as the likely channel for the fulfilment of the prophecy. God did not force Mary but presented her with the opportunity, and she made the right choice, even though it was not an easy one.
- 4) Mary's willingness to accept the message from angel Gabriel with the statement "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:37) reveal the extent of her devotion and commitment to God's plan at the expense of a disruption to her personal plans for marriage and the dangers to her life. Based on Jewish customs at the time, she ran the risk of being stoned to death for being found pregnant out of wedlock.
- 5) As any normal person, she had a question about angel Gabriel's message as she could not understand how the process would work out in her specific situation: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34). This was a sincere and genuine question from someone who wanted to know. With childlike faith, she was fully satisfied with the answer from angel Gabriel: "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). God has not called us to understand everything, but to always believe Him by faith: "The just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).
- 6) Mary was of a humble background. Nothing is said about her parents' affluence or her personal vocation. Her godly lifestyle was the chief factor that attracted God into her life,

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thereby changing the course of human history through the child of her womb. She knew the commandment of God as a young lady espoused to Joseph. Unmarried yet a virgin, her desire was to please God by emulating the godly example of other women like Esther, Ruth, and others. What a lesson for the unmarried: “*The unmarried careth for the things of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 7:13). The fear of God was her peculiar treasure. She had a working relationship with the God of her fathers. This is noticed in her conversation with angel Gabriel. Divine providence required that a human instrument (a virgin) was needed for the performance of the promised mercy: “*Behold a virgin shall conceive*” (Isa. 7:14). Not understanding what was happening to her, she surrendered completely to the angel’s message. This is seen in her humble statement: “**Be it unto me according to thy word.**” What a woman of faith and insight!

- 7) In addition, her character can also be seen by the speed with which she departed and went into the hill country to see Elizabeth who was also with child supernaturally. She was barren, yet she was about to give a miracle birth to John the Baptist. Mary did not dillydally. She went in haste, quickly journeying to see for herself and participate in the miracle God was working out there rather than spending the time with Joseph whom she was engaged to. Birds of a feather flock together. People of faith associate with each other.
- 8) Mary was characterized by a solid, faithful, loyal, dependable, and joyful disposition! Even though she did not understand everything happening to her, she never flinched. She remained surrendered, joyous, dependable, and godly.
- 9) She lived a balanced life with God, family, and the community. The angelic salutation “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28) reflects the commendation of the Almighty God. Apart from pleasing God, she also had reputation with men. Elizabeth, the mother of John and her cousin, commended her with a loud voice, “Blessed art

thou among women.” Even the baby in her womb leaped for joy when Mary came on the scene.

- 10) After the birth of Christ, Mary continued in her marriage with Joseph, and they had four sons (Joseph, James, Judah, and Simon and there were daughters as well though unnamed). Her submission to Joseph (Luke 2:4, 5); willingness to deliver her baby in a manger without complain (Luke 2:7); cooperation with Joseph in child care (Luke 2:40, 48); togetherness with the other children (Matt. 12:46) all attest to the genuineness of her walk with God. The neighbors in her local community knew her with her husband (Joseph) and children (Matt. 13:55, 56). This reminds us that Christian mothers have a responsibility to God, husband, children, and the immediate community.
- 11) Though Mary was the earthly mother of Christ, she looked beyond the natural physical relationship and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and followed His ministry zealously. With the series of events that preceded his birth and thereafter, Mary knew that this “son” was one with a difference. She believed in him.
- 12) Not much was said about her during Christ’s public ministry. She was mentioned with Jesus at Capernaum in John 2:12 and in Matthew 12:46 where Christ made the memorable statement, *“Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciple and said Behold my mother and my brethren!”* Note that Mary never took offense at this. The very first miracle of Christ at the marriage in Cana of Galilee was actually at the instigation of Mary (John 2:1–10): “His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5).
- 13) She is also included in John 19:25–27 at the crucifixion of Jesus. She did not esteem herself high above others but made herself of no reputation and followed Christ even to the cross. At the cross, Jesus said to her, *“Woman Behold thy son,”* pointing her to John and to John he said, *“Behold thy mother”* (John 19:26). From that time, John took Mary to

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his own house and was comfortable. At the time, nothing more was heard about Joseph—presumably dead.

- 14) The last place of mention of her was at the upper room (Acts 1:14) with other disciples of Christ in prayers waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. Her continuity in fellowship (Acts 1:14) also earned her the great privilege of being a firsthand beneficiary of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost promised by Jesus.

## 2.11 A Lamb with a Lion's Heart

Our spotlight turns to Deborah, a courageous woman that rose to the challenges of her day and brought great deliverance to the nation of Israel. Judges 4:1–24 portrays Deborah as the most courageous of the judges and a woman who prevailed on Barak to attack the army of the Canaanites. Highways are built for usage, and they make journeys pleasant. However, there was a time in Israel when highways were unused and people were using byways and bush paths because the land was full of anarchy and confusion. Armed bandits roamed the nation and ruled the land. The whole nation was infested by them. Public roads were no longer safe, and village people had to live in fortresses. These bandits were a law to themselves. They were essentially lawless and only lived as they liked—oppressing and afflicting people (Judges 5:6, 7).

In response to the prayers of the Israelites, and to address the situation, God raised up Deborah who rallied unarmed people together to secure a resounding victory over these bandits. There was deliverance from these lawless archers around the wells, and movement became a thing of joy again in the villages (Judges 5:11).

Is there any lawless, wicked individual or group of individuals that have decided to oppress and afflict you? God will grant you deliverance from them. He will raise up a deliverer in Deborah or Moses or Jephthah, etc., for you (Exod. 3:1–10; Judges 11:5, 6). And you could be that deliverer! There are valuable lessons from this story for all who are willing to learn today.

### Consequences of Corruption (Judges 4:1–3)

Eighty years of peace should have confirmed Israel in their devotion (religion) to God. On the contrary, it made them secure, wanton, and indulgent of those lusts, which the worship of false gods was calculated for the gratification of. The prosperity of the fools destroys them (Prov. 1:32). Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked (Deut. 32:15). They did evil because Ehud was dead (Judges 4:1). This underscores

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the essence of strictness and discipline—the absence of which attracts oppression by enemies. They forsook God and God forsook them (2 Chron. 15:2, 24:20). Those that threw themselves out of God’s service throw themselves out of his protection (vs. 2; Jeremiah 11:15).

Jabin reigned in Hazor. His ancestor was of a city burned by Joshua (Joshua 11:1, 10, 11), but now his descendants tyrannize Israel because of their sin. During the very grievous and long servitude, Jabin and his general Sisera mightily oppressed Israel. In their distress, they cried to God when they saw no other way of relief. **Those that slight God in their prosperity will find themselves under a necessity of seeking him when they are in trouble.**

The children of Israel would have prevented a great deal of mischief if they had obeyed God’s original commands to them. All the same, it is better to be wise late and buy wisdom by experience than never being wise.

**Those that slight God in their times of prosperity  
will find themselves under a necessity to  
seek Him in their times of adversity.**

### Completeness of Character (Judges 4:4–7)

For the oppression of the poor and the sighing of  
the needy, now will God arise. (Ps. 72:12)

On this occasion, the vessel of “honor” God used to arise was Deborah. The name Deborah means “bee” and implies **sweetness** to her friends and **sharpness** to her enemies. She was a woman of industry, sagacity, great usefulness to the public, and intimately acquainted with God (Job 22:21). A prophetess and a judge, she was instructed in divine knowledge by the immediate inspiration of the spirit of God. She had gifts of wisdom through hearing the word of God and seeing visions of the Almighty and was entirely devoted to the service of Israel in humility.

## Conquest through Courage (Judges 4:6–24)

Deborah nominated Barak to command the armies. Barak was probably known through some sort of unsuccessful guerrilla fighting. His previous attempts were unsuccessful until divinely appointed. He could do nothing without her head nor she without his hands, but both together made a complete deliverer and effected complete deliverance. What a message on unity. **The greatest and the best are not self-sufficient but need one another.** The commission from Deborah “Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded it?” specified the number of soldiers and the tribes they should come from and where to wage the warfare. God drew Sisera to the battle, only that He (God) might deliver them unto Barak’s hand (Mic. 4:11, 12; Isa. 8:9; Rev. 19:17, 18). Barak requests her company, and she consented with the warning aimed at correcting his weakness: **“The journey thou undertakest shall not be for thy honour” for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hands of a woman**” (verse 9).

**The greatest and the best are not self-sufficient  
but still have need for one another.**

Observe the battlefield—footmen versus chariots of iron. The presence of God and his prophetess was abundantly sufficient to balance that disproportion. Deborah went up with him. Deborah gave orders to engage the enemy at a time Barak almost withdrew to a safe place on seeing the mighty host (Isa. 59:19). She assured him that this is the day divinely appointed for the victory (1 Cor. 12:4, 11:3): “This is the day... Has not the Lord gone out before thee?” Once we are sure God goes with us, then we need to go with courage and cheerfulness. **Be not dismayed at difficulties you meet in resisting Satan, in serving God, or suffering for him. When the Lord has gone out before you, the only wise thing to do is follow Him fully.** God routes the enemy (Jer. 3:23). Stars (probably a sort of violent storms) fought against them (Judges 5:20). Barak exploits the

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advantage and improves by diligence. **We need to be diligent and watchful at the time of victory. When God goes before us in our spiritual conflicts, we must bestir ourselves; and when by grace He gives us some success against the enemies of our souls, we must improve it by watchfulness, resolution, and fighting with vigor and faith.**

At the heat of the battle, Sisera abandoned his chariot and ran on foot (Ps. 20:7, 8) to meet his death in Jael's tent. **He that fought to destroy Israel with his iron chariots is himself destroyed with one iron nail** (Ps. 76:5, 6). God uses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty (1 Cor. 1:27–29).

**When God goes before us in our spiritual conflicts, we must bestir ourselves; and when by grace He gives us some success against the enemies of our souls, we must improve it by watchfulness, resolution, and fighting with vigor and faith.**

Deliverance from oppression and affliction is an aspect of God's love toward us. As we benefit from and enjoy this love, we must not be forgetful of God's expectation: there must be praise from delivered captives (Ps. 103:1–5, 126:1–3; Jer. 31:11–14). Are you slumbering or sleeping? "Awake, awake." Are you tight-lipped despite God's goodness in your life? "Utter a song" (Judges 5:12). Declare God's praise in the congregation of the saints. Give testimony to the goodness of the Lord. Sing unto Him a new song.

Are you sitting down and folding your arms not knowing what you should do? "Arise...and lead captivity captive."

## 2.12 Reward for Obedience of Faith

Obedience of faith is a scarce ingredient in modern-day Christianity. Many want to eat an omelet without breaking the egg. God rewards obedience of faith. A good example of this is the reward on the widow of Zarephath after obeying the word of God from prophet Elijah. The following scriptures attest to the fact that God rewards obedience of faith:

- 1) “If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures” (Job 36:11).
- 2) “And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God” (Deut. 28:2).
- 3) “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chron. 20:20).

**Some want to eat an omelet without breaking the egg. God rewards obedient acts of faith.**

Famine has ravaged the land of Israel as Elijah pronounced drought due to the sins of Ahab. As the brook where God sustained Elijah with water while raven brought him bread had dried up, a new instruction from God came to him: “Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1 Kings 17:9).

If Elijah was walking by sight, he would have questioned the correctness of the guidance he received because of the following:

- 1) Zarephath was an unlikely place for refuge as it was not part of Israel, but rather where Jezebel’s father-in-law to King Ahab reigned. The salient message for all here is that there is always safety and security where God leads.

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- 2) On arrival at Zarephath, he discovered that the woman God sent him to was in abject poverty and was gathering two sticks to prepare her last meal to eat and thereafter wait for death (1 Kings 17:12).

And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. (1 Kings 17:13–14)

It took great faith for this woman from a foreign idolatrous land to believe a stranger she had just probably met for the first time, who claimed to be a prophet of God. Her obedience paid off as God miraculously supplied for them throughout the famine as prophesied by Elijah.

The blessing did not stop with the miraculous provision of food for her, the son, and Elijah throughout the entire duration of the famine. Other rewards include the following:

- 1) When her only son died, Elijah was close by to restore him from death to life (1 Kings 17:17–24). Just imagine the miracles she would have lost and the loss she would have sustained had she doubted the man of God and sent him away because of her plight. When God demands something from us, He is not trying to take away what we already have but looking for opportunity to bless us if we respond in obedience and faith.
- 2) Protection for Elijah in the most unlikely places.
- 3) Fellowship for them, eliminating loneliness for both.
- 4) Spiritual insight, instruction, and guidance for the woman and child.
- 5) Space to concentrate in prayers and focus on God for Elijah.

To be able to exercise the obedience of faith in our circumstances, we must observe the following points:

- 1) Abuses by gospel ministers does not nullify God's word and should not constitute a license to disobedience. The fact that some have commercialized religion does not nullify God's word on the blessings of being a faithful giver.
- 2) Previous suffering of abuse is not a license to disobedience. God has used people who were abused in the past to become His best messengers of hope, when they responded to God's call in obedience.
- 3) Our current circumstances must not become a deciding factor on how we respond to the word of God.
- 4) It would have taken great faith on the part of Elijah to obey God's word by not only asking for provisions from a poor widow, but also risking his reputation by lodging with a single mother.

## 2.13 Spiritual Insight

Why “spiritual”?

Because the spiritual realm dominates over the natural and determines what happens in it—whether positive or negative, victory or defeat. The spiritual realm has been characterized as the fourth dimension. Ignoring the spiritual realm is like living in utter blindness as illustrated in the analogy in James 1:23–24: “He is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”

I read a story some time ago that was framed around the theme “They came, they saw, and they went,” implying that what they saw had no impact on and certainly made no difference to their lives.

People who only live and operate in three dimensions are described in the Bible as “natural”: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

It is very beneficial to have the capability to distinguish between the “natural” and the “spiritual.” There are many situations in life that would appear foolish and many miracles that would potentially be lost until there is a switch from the natural to the supernatural, as illustrated in these examples:

- 1) A high government official who saw the fulfilment of Elisha’s prophesy but failed to participate in it because he viewed things at the natural level and questioned the Word of God in unbelief: “Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof” (2 Kings 7:2). When Elisha’s prophecy of miraculous provision came to pass, the man saw it but was dead before he had a chance to partake of it (verses 17–18).

- 2) King Saul, who argued blindly with Prophet Samuel and lost the kingdom because he was not seeing things from spiritual perspectives (1 Sam. 15).
- 3) Citizens in Jesus's hometown who through unbelief and familiarity missed their miracles because they only viewed Jesus from natural human perspectives (Matt. 13:54–58).
- 4) The wedding guests at Cana of Galilea who could have lost the first recorded miracle of Jesus in turning water into wine had they not followed His instructions carefully (John 2).
- 5) The blind man who received miracle through obedience to Jesus by going to wash in the pool of Siloam after Jesus had dubbed his eyes with mud (John 9). Had he rationalized or gone by natural reasoning only, he could have lost the miracle.
- 6) Naaman, who nearly lost his miracle of being healed of leprosy by being angry with the command from Prophet Elisha, as it differed from his natural expectations (2 Kings 5).

**It takes operating in the fourth dimension  
to understand the spiritual realm.**

It takes operating in the fourth dimension to understand the spiritual realm. This is what gave the Shunemite woman (2 Kings 4:8–37) spiritual insight that made a difference in her life.

Note that her name is not given. She is only described as “a great woman,” but her accomplishments through spiritual insight is eternally memorable. We can learn the following from her life and character:

- 1) She was so welcoming and generous that she was able to constrain a traveler (Prophet Elisha) who frequently passed by that route to regularly turn in to eat bread at her house (2 Kings 4:8).

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- 2) She looked beyond the “mental fog” of seeing a mere traveler to the discernment of a holy man of God: “And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually” (2 Kings 4:9). Today, many do not recognize the spiritual dimension in the men of God that they have opportunity to see “continually.” They allow familiarity to blind them and steal their blessings from them.
- 3) Her perception drove her to the next level of spotting opportunity to partner in divine service. She lost no time in making a polite and courteous request to her husband: “Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither” (2 Kings 4:10). Some could have seen in that a risk of wasting their resources on a stranger and ducked into a shell, but not her.
- 4) Her generosity triggered a spiritual reward system that would not shut down until she was rewarded. Her rejection of any reward (including the offer of introduction to the king and captain of the host) (2 Kings 4:13) indicates that she had no strings attached to her generosity and was not motivated by any anticipated benefits. However, Elisha identified a need for a child in her life and met it through prophecy (2 Kings 4:14–17).
- 5) Satan is described as a thief that comes to steal and to kill (John 10:10). He particularly targets spiritual blessings, and this woman’s child was no exception. He struck her child dead (2 Kings 4:18–20).
- 6) Faith kicked in and led her on a route back to the man of God for a miracle of recovery of that which Satan had stolen (2 Kings 4:21–37). Her reactions in her moment of

crises teaches some valuable lessons, which we can apply for our success, including the following:

- a. She was free from hysteria, emotional outburst, and tears. Her husband did not even detect from her facial expression that the child had died when she requested for servant and donkeys to go to visit the man of God (2 Kings 4:21–22).
- b. She took pragmatic action based on faith and spiritual insights, recognizing the fact that faith without works is dead (James 2:20).
- c. She did not just go on her own to see the man of God, under the excuse that the husband was not at home, but away at work, and that she had no time to waste under the emergency. Recognizing that she was under authority, she went to the husband’s workplace and obtained permission from him to travel. Crisis situations or emergencies do not constitute a license to break protocol or disobey God’s word. This is what made King Saul lose his kingdom by acting beyond his authority level on two occasions.

**Crisis situations and emergencies do not constitute a license to break protocol or disobey God’s word.**

- d. Her command to the servant to “drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee” (2 Kings 4:24) reveal her sense of urgency, a need to redeem time and maintain focus to avoid distractions.
- e. Her responses to both her husband, Gehazi, and the man of God that it is/shall be well were all wrapped in a language of faith. She was not lying to them nor trying to be deceptive but was looking beyond the immediate natural circumstances into the spiritual

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and acting like God “who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17).

- f. Clinging to the man of God and not letting him go (2 Kings 4:30) reveal her perseverance of faith and determination to get her miracle. In response, the man of God allowed his routine in God’s service to be disrupted to meet the need of this woman of faith. He was not stubbornly and blindly tied to his routines to the point of ignoring human needs. The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet! (1 Cor. 14:32).
- 
- 7) How wonderful was it to her ears when she heard the man of God tell her, “Take up thy son” (2 Kings 4:36)? Her faith had been rewarded. Her child had come back to life, and there is no record up to that point that the husband knew what hath happened! “Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out” (2 Kings 37). What a happy ending to what could otherwise have been a sad disappointing episode in her life story. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19).

## 2.14 Speaking to Destiny

Death and life are in the power of the tongue:  
and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.  
(Prov. 18:21)

**“Death and life are in the power of the tongue:  
and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof”  
(Prov. 18:21).**

When King Solomon made that statement, he probably was not fully aware of its power and the extent of its applicability, and contemporary mankind probably do not either! How we speak reflects whether we recognize and are speaking to destiny or merely speaking about our past and current circumstances. Recognizing and speaking to the destiny in a situation or person has the power of liberation and enhancing our prospects in life. Vashti and Abigail were two queens. One (Vashti) lost the throne because she did not know how to speak to the king in Ahasuerus. On the other hand, Abigail, who was not yet a queen at the time, gained the throne because she spoke to the king in David even when he was a fugitive at the time (1 Sam. 25:23–42). Let’s see what we can learn from this beautiful character, starting first from some background information for context.

- 1) Prophet Samuel had died, but his prophecy on David becoming king had not yet been fulfilled. For safety and security, David arose and went down to hide in the wilderness of Paran.
- 2) The prophecy of Samuel was yet to be fulfilled for David. The persecution of Saul had driven David to dwell with Samuel for protection, fellowship, and guidance. Now, Samuel is dead, and David must face life on his own.

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**There comes a time when our “Samuel” is dead, and we must muster courage to face the future on our own, totally relying on the God of the “Samuel.”** The death of a Samuel does not kill any unfulfilled prophecy for your life since the God of the prophet lives on!

- 3) While in the wilderness, David and his men happened to protect the flock of Nabal, whom the Bible described as a fool despite his riches and greatness. He was married to Abigail, “a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance” (1 Sam. 25:3). What a marriage of contrasting characters! It was Abigail’s qualities that made a positive difference for the family.
- 4) David thought that Nabal would reciprocate his kindness toward his possessions by giving him some presents at an opportune time of shearing his sheep (1 Sam. 5:4–11), but he was wrong because “great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment” (Job 32:9). At a time when jungle justice and survival of the fittest ruled, David could have slaughtered Nabal’s shepherds and taken his flocks without any human retribution. His restraint in such difficult circumstances reveal his righteousness and faith in God as his source of provision.

**There comes a time when the prophet in our life is dead, and we must muster courage to face the future on our own, totally relying on the God of the prophet.**

- 5) Nabal’s response to David’s men shows that he was too full of himself and of his importance that he became blind to the destiny of David. He spoke foolishly, based only on the past and current natural circumstances of David and failed to recognize the future kingship in him. Was he justified as an Israelite to be ignorant of the prophecy on David and of his achievements in killing Goliath? Where was he when

the women of Israel were singing, “Saul has killed his thousands and David his tens of thousands”? When a person is too absorbed in his little world of possessions and wealth, he can so easily become blind to the entire universe.

**“Great men are not always wise:  
neither do the aged understand judgment”  
(Job 32:9).**

- 6) On hearing of Nabal’s treatment of his men, David decided to launch an overnight raid that would kill all the males in Nabal’s household (1 Sam. 25:13–14).
- 7) A wise servant of Nabal, who could not speak directly to Nabal because he was unapproachable and described as a “such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him” (1 Sam. 25:17), confided in Abigail concerning her husband’s treatment of David’s men. As a wise woman, she immediately acted by preparing provisions and going to apologize to David (1 Sam. 25:14–19).
- 8) Abigail’s understanding, earlier referred to, kicked in to the salvation of her household. Proverbs 14:1 reminds us that “every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.” Are you a builder or destroyer of the family and other people’s lives?

**When a person is too absorbed in his little world of possessions and wealth, he can so easily become blind to the intricacies of the entire universe.**

- 9) She did not act or say things to expose the folly of Nabal so as to present herself as the great wise one. Neither did she try to castigate or pull him down because she understood

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that they were in the same boat and that she could not sink the boat and be safe herself. Rather she knew that the safety, protection, and success of Nabal would become hers—hence her prudent action to achieve these. This reminds us of Jeremiah 29:7, where God commanded the Israelites to “seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”

- 10) Abigail’s speech to David on arrival was so full of wisdom that she was able to assuage the anger of David (1 Sam. 25:20–35) because she spoke to “the king” in David: “A soft answer turneth away wrath” (Prov. 15:1).
- 11) It was not just physical beauty that attracted David to Abigail, but also her character. Every man desires to marry a wise woman whose words bring comfort, solace, love, respect, and recognition of “the king” in the man. No David (man), who after the rigors of battles and toils of life, wants to come back home to a nagging, complaining, bitter, unhappy, and accusing wife, who is so lost in her little world of self and fantasy that she cannot recognize the king in her man.

**The death of a prophet does not kill any  
unfulfilled prophecy for your life since  
the God of the prophet lives on!**

- 12) On the return home, “Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light” (1 Sam. 25:36). What a pitiful state—she found her husband so absorbed in his little world of folly and pleasure, totally oblivious of the looming imminent danger, that she had just successfully averted.

- 13) Nabal died ten days later, and David wasted no time in taking Abigail to be his wife (1 Sam. 25:37–42). It was Abigail’s mouth, based on her insight and understanding, that paved the way for her to become a future queen in Israel.
- 14) Truly, “death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (Prov. 18:21). Nabal’s tongue produced death, but Abigail’s life.
- 15) Use your tongue to create and model your destiny through speaking words that are aligned to the words, plans, vision, and prophecies of God for you.

**Everybody is speaking. Some speak to circumstances, others to objects, but only a few speak to destiny and move forward in progress.**

**You can do the following:**

**Create your desirable situations  
through your spoken words  
Exercise faith in God by your words and see it fulfilled  
Change your circumstances by your words  
Rule over your world by your words  
Exploit the power of spoken words  
Design your future by your words  
Say it and have it**

## 2.15 Life by Your Words

This is precisely what the maid, a servant to Naaman's wife, did through her spoken words. She released a new lease of life to the entire household and beyond by the miraculous healing of Naaman—all started by her spoken words. Genesis 1 described how God created the entire world by His spoken words. The following scriptures reveal that God has given similar powers to mankind—to also create their worlds by their spoken words. It is important to know and use the power that you have to your advantage if you are to make progress and a difference in this life!

- 1) **“Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee:** and the light shall shine upon thy ways” (Job 22:28).
- 2) **“I create the fruit of the lips;** Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him” (Isa. 57:19).
- 3) “(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, **and calleth those things which be not as though they were**” (Rom. 4:17).
- 4) “Thus saith the Lord... **That confirmeth the word of his servant,** and performeth the counsel of his messengers” (Isa. 44:24–26).

The road to the recovery of Naaman's leprosy is recorded in 2 Kings 5:1–27. The record also captures the people listed in the table below speaking. With the exception of the “neutral” ones, each of their words had the potential to either release life or doom.

EBUK JOHN EBUK

Speaker	Impact of the spoken word
A little maid, who waited on Naaman's wife (vs. 2)	Release of life
A person in Naaman's house described as "one" (vs. 4)	Release of life
The king of Syria (vs. 5)	Release of life
The king of Israel (vs. 7)	Release of doom
Person who brought the message to Elisha (vs. 8)	Release of life
Prophet Elisha (vs. 8)	Release of life
Prophet Elisha and his messenger (vs. 10)	Release of life
Naaman (vs. 11–12)	Release of doom
Naaman's servant (vs. 13)	Release of life
Naaman (vs. 15)	Release of life
Prophet Elisha (vs. 16)	Release of life
Naaman (vs. 17–18)	Release of life
Prophet Elisha (vs. 19)	Release of life
Gehazi (vs. 20)	Release of doom
Naaman (vs. 21)	Neutral question
Gehazi (vs. 22)	Release of doom
Naaman (vs. 23)	Neutral—ignorant of the lies
Prophet Elisha (vs. 25a)	Neutral question
Gehazi (vs. 25b)	Release of doom
Prophet Elisha (vs. 26–27)	Release of doom

Let us consider what each person said and note why their words created the potential it did.

- 1) "And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (vs. 3). These words from the little maid that waited on Naaman's wife were like the seeds of life that germinated and grew into fruitfulness.

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- 2) “And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel” (vs. 4). We are not told who this person was, but he immediately picked the words of the little maid and relayed it to his lord. Was the “lord” referring to Naaman or the king of Israel? We do not know for certain, but the next verse suggests probably the latter. Whoever it was, it is evident that the words of the little maid traveled to the king of Syria. Your words have life, ears, legs, and wings of their own. They can travel to where you cannot personally reach—so make sure that wherever they get to, they are transmitting life, power, faith, and hope.

**Your words have life, ears, legs, and wings of their own. They can travel to where you cannot personally reach—so make sure that wherever they get to, they are transmitting life, power, faith, and hope.**

- 3) “And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel” (vs. 5). The king of Syria was merely observing protocol by sending a letter to his peer—the king of Israel. However, protocol without knowledge and wisdom can create a mess out of good news, as it did in this case.

**Protocol without knowledge and wisdom can create a mess out of good news.**

- 4) “And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?\_wherefore consider, I pray

you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me” (vs. 7). His words, based on natural reasoning, created a gloomy situation that could have escalated into danger without timely and wise intervention.

- 5) “And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes” (vs. 8). Thank God for unknown individuals who conveyed the news to the right person who can handle the situation—Prophet Elisha, in this case.

**Note that the defeat of Israel by Syria did not remove the power of God from his prophet in Israel. Some could have argued, if God is with us, why did the enemy defeat us? It is not all questions that have simple logical explanations. The fact that we do not understand does not mean that God is no longer good.**

- 6) Prophet Elisha’s timely intervention saved the day; “He sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel” (vs. 8). Note that the defeat of Israel by Syria did not remove the power of God from his prophet in Israel. Some could have argued, if God is with us, why did the enemy defeat us? It is not all questions that have simple logical explanations. The fact that we do not understand does not mean that God is no longer good.

**God can transmit the word of life that you need through any individual. The guidance Naaman needed for his healing, though issued by Prophet Elisha, was conveyed by a**

**messenger. Wisdom demands receiving the word irrespective of who the messenger is.**

- 7) “And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (vs. 10). God can transmit the word of life that you need through any individual. The guidance Naaman needed for his healing, though issued by Prophet Elisha, was conveyed by a messenger. Wisdom demands receiving the word irrespective of who the messenger is.
- 8) “But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage” (vs. 11–12). Naaman’s anger was not because of the word from Prophet Elisha, but his disappointed expectations based on his wrong thinking. We must not dictate to God how He should carry out His work. Naaman’s anger could have easily robbed him of his miracle and resulted in a wasted journey.
- 9) “And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (vs. 14–15). It is wonderful to have wise servants who have the courage to speak truth to power. Their courteous and polite rebuke assuaged the anger of Naaman and brought him to the right sense of obedience that produced the miracle. Some people would rather do complex things that

play to their ego than the simple ones that hold solution to their problems.

**My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash and be clean? Some people would rather do complex things that play to their ego than the simple ones that hold the solution to their problems.**

- 10) “And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant” (vs. 15). Naaman was wise to show gratitude for his healing by returning to thank the man of God.
- 11) “But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused” (vs. 16). Elisha’s response reveals that the gifts and calling of God are not for commercialization. Jesus instructed his disciples “freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8).
- 12) “And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules’ burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing” (vs. 17–18). Naaman wanted a point of contact as a reminder of the great miracle he had received.

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- 13) “And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way” (vs. 19). Prophet Elisha sent him away with a blessing.
- 14) “But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him” (vs. 20). **Greed is dangerous! “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”** (1 Tim. 6:10).
- 15) “So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?” (vs. 21). Naaman asked an innocent question to establish why Gehazi followed after him.
- 16) “And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments” (vs. 22). Gehazi lied. God detests lying and has decreed, “He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight” (Ps. 101:7).

**God detests lying and has decreed,  
“He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my  
house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight”  
(Ps. 101:7).**

- 17) “And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him” (vs. 23).

Naaman was ignorant of Gehazi's lies; therefore his action of giving double what he asked for was merely a reflection of his generosity and gratitude for the healing.

- 18) "But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" (vs. 25). Prophet Elisha questioned Gehazi.
- 19) "And he said, Thy servant went no whither" (vs. 25). Gehazi lied again, in an attempt to cover up the previous lies. The sins he tried to cover was already an open scandal in heaven, and had already been revealed to prophet Elisha.
- 20) "And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow" (vs. 26–27). The judgment on Gehazi was greater than the gifts he obtained by deception. It does not pay to sin! "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

**If you do not like the circumstances around you, first check your words. What is your words creating in your world—releasing life or destruction, healing or sickness, deliverance or oppression, success or failure, etc.?**

If you do not like the circumstances around you, first check your words. What are your words creating in your world—releasing life or destruction, healing or sickness, deliverance or oppression, success or failure, etc.? "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21).

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Jesus reemphasized this in Mark 11:22–24: “And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”

You have within your tongue the power to rise or to fall. It is up to you, and it all depends on how you chose to use your tongue!

**You have within your tongue the power to rise  
or to fall. It is up to you, and it all depends  
on how you chose to use your tongue!**



# THE BOND OF EXCELLENCE

And above all these things put on charity, which is **the bond of perfectness** (Col. 3:14).

“Bond” is a glue that holds everything perfectly together in one piece. In the preceding chapters, we have explored various topics on the theme of “Excellence.” I will wrap this up by turning our attention to “love”—the perfect glue that holds everything perfectly together.

**“Charity is the bond of perfectness”  
(Col. 3:14).**

Colossians 3:14 describes love (charity) as “the bond of perfectness.” Why is that so? A few scriptures, like the ones discussed below, place love above all other laws and requirements of God, implying that satisfying this singular requirement is the best route to achieving excellence.

- 1) First Corinthians 12:31 says, “But **covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.**” After a lengthy and juicy sermon on spiritual gifts and after encouraging the believers to “covet earnestly the best gifts,” Paul went on to promise them, “Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.” This implies that there is a way that is more excellent than that of the best spiritual gifts that he had just talked about! And what could that be? He went on to expound it in 1 Corinthians 13:1–13 “**Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing... Charity never faileth:** but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; **but the greatest of these is charity.**”
- 2) This truth could not have been emphasized much better than by our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in His message to the church of Ephesus. “Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy **works**, and thy **labour**, and thy **patience**, and how thou **canst not bear them which are evil:** and thou **hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:** And **hast borne**, and **hast patience**, and **for my name’s sake hast laboured**, and **hast not fainted.** Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love.** Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else

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I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;** To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:1–7).

- 3) Note that **Jesus did not reprimand them for their works, labor, patience, intolerance of evil, trying false prophets, and finding them liars, their extra ability to further bear, be patient, not fainting, etc., but only for leaving “thy first love.”** Now consider the consequences He warned them of—“Else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Finally, He concluded His message with the admonition: **“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.** To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God,” implying that some have ears but would not hear, but those who hear (i.e., take action to repent and obey) will overcome and be rewarded. Which category do you belong to?

**“He that hath an ear, let him hear what  
the Spirit saith unto the churches”  
(Rev. 2:7).**

- 4) “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, **to them that have obtained like precious faith with us** through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that

hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness **charity**. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.** Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1–11). The admonition ended with a recommendation to add charity (love), implying that **whatever qualities you add to your life, if love is missing, it is incomplete!**

**Whatever qualities you add to your life,  
if love is missing, it is incomplete!**

- 5) “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). This signals the great test for love—a covering for a multitude of sins! Where do you stand? How much do you have to show for your love?

My prayer and heart desire is that God will baptize us all with a fresh understanding and practical demonstration of Christlike love!

## THE SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE

Congratulations for reading this book to the end. It demonstrates that you are a person with a heart for excellence.

If this book has been a blessing to you, then do not keep it to yourself only. Give a copy to others. You never can tell—by so doing, you may rescue a soul from hell or, better still, equip a saint for fruitful service. Whichever may be the case, you will be amply rewarded by God throughout eternity.

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## About the Author

Dr. E. J. Ebuk (PhD), a former university lecturer, is the founder and pastor of Victorious Christian Ministry. He is a diligent, seasoned, faithful, and balanced teacher of the Bible with a keen interest on integrity and transparent and practical victorious Christian living. He has planted churches and ministered in both Africa and Europe for more than thirty years. His anointed messages and ministrations have been a source of inspiration, blessing, and encouragement to many. God has also confirmed his words with miracles, signs, wonders, and answered prayers. This book contains a selection of some of the sermons he has preached on the theme of “The Spirit of Excellence.” It is published with the hope that readers will be challenged to live above mediocrity and realize their potential of living as God intended for them.

