

PRIME
J o u r n a l s

Prime Research On

EDUCATION

ISSN: 2251-1253

www.primejournal.org/PRE



WHY SOME MEN MUST BE POOR

UNVEILING A COUPLE OF KINGDOM
SECRETS THAT MANY TAKE FOR GRANTED

Tsewo Edema-Eyen

Review

WHY SOME MEN MUST BE POOR

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Accepted 20th November, 2018

I was sitting in the office and meditating, asking the Lord to put food on the table of Under His Wings Orphanage. A young man walked in and asked us if he could celebrate his birthday anniversary with the orphans. Why not? I answered. "What is your name", inquired my wife. He simply answered, "Tsewo Edema" with a broad smile in his face. I never knew that he came in company of many believers. We had a nice time. As he kept coming, I knew by-good luck that Tsewo is one of the finest men I have ever met. His new book, *Why Some Men Must Be Poor*, is an important survey into men's destiny. When God created man in His image, He empowered him to be rich and wealthy not to be poor. "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness." The creation of man was preceded by divine consultation by the tri-unity God who gave man dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of air, the animal kingdom and all the earth. This is the record of Moses in the book of beginning - Genesis. The author wondered why man made in God's image could live in the depth of poverty. In my missionary odysseys over the world, I always face a group of young people asking this question; why is Africa poor? My answer has been, I do not think so. Africa is full of vast lands of wealth. It will amaze you to think the problem is lack of transparency, creation of job opportunities as well as utter selfishness. The elder John in 3 John, well informed a wealthy man in the Bible to open his door to true ambassadors of the true gospel. "...I wish above all things that you may prosper..." It is my hope that this book, another in the stream of scholarly works may change the mentality of many people in the community as well as the adage "make them poor and keep them humble." Tsewo as a lawyer and pastor has written this book with ocean clarity. I recommend "Why Some Men Must Be Poor" to all who seek radical change in their destiny.

By: Mike Okah, Prof. and Archbishop, CRKC, Warri.

INTRODUCTION

Very mindful of the universal notoriety which the term poverty connotes and has assumed from time immemorial but narrowing it down to this dispensation, I have been burdened by a strong urge to share my eclectic understanding of what this monster of utmost deprivation and its army of daily recruits or forced disciples all over the four corners of the globe entails. This is with a committed desire to probe beyond the normal, all its attributes and to keep many more men and women on guard against its killer inoculation.

So overwhelming and threatening is it that many seem helpless to either tolerate its assault or simply dwell with it as a vicious alternative. There is so much to say regarding this almost defying and overwhelming state of mind or attitude or choice or circumstance (anyone you choose) among majority in our land today.

One thing must be highlighted from the onset which is that poverty is a function of the choice we make in life. It

is not a condition that is forced on you. This aspect is salient as we shall discover in the course of this book. While I agree that our environment may, in fact does, largely influence our exploits, attainment and fulfillment in life, the fact remains that, "As he (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

Poverty is probably the most loathed condition of mortal man such that virtually every of his acts on planet earth are geared towards banishing it, chasing it, cursing it, eliminating it, denouncing it, deriding it, keeping it at a very far and convenient distance, and literarily incarcerating it from our engagements. The whole assignment or duty of man working, owning his personal business, engaging in all sorts of activities - legitimate or otherwise, is essentially tailored towards alienating this sore affliction that

continues to defy all governmental efforts. Poverty is such a defiant, defiling and demeaning condition of man. It craves association but not even those who seem ensnared are comfortable with its piercing influence. If man had ready and final ways and means to kill, destroy or annihilate anything so despised, that thing certainly will be poverty without blinking an eye.

Poverty has neither nationality nor scope of operation; it knows neither boundary nor legal sanctions. It is simply a transnational phenomenon with seeping osmotic character and defying whatever effort of world systems, governments and organizations. In every ten Sunday-based homilies, probably nine of them are structured toward addressing the ravage of poverty, including how to overcome it or escape its hideous fangs, especially in a developing nation but no less in a developed society.

Poverty has no ready friend yet it has more than enough disciples. In developing or under-developed countries, only two camps or tents exist - that of the rich and that of the poor. There is no middle course. And that brings us to the relativity of the term poverty. Poverty is explained or defined in relative terms, that is, the parameters of assessing and concluding that one person is poor and another rich. These parameters may be environmental, social, educational, economic, agricultural, medical, hygienic, nutritional, technological, scientific, infrastructural, administrative, management or leadership. Poverty may thus be inadvertently induced through government's omission or faulty implementation of policies. This oversight has led to the Pareto theory which postulates that 90% of the world's resources (wealth) is directly concentrated in and controlled by 10% of the world's population while the remaining paltry 10% of the world resources is in the control of 90% of the world's population.

It therefore behoves on mankind to have a much deeper understanding of this destiny-affliction and joy killer, and discover the approved strategies to keep it perpetually, nay significantly at bay at the risk of its continuous infectious spread.

I have been very careful in employing the terms to craft the title of this book at the risk of committing the fallacy of generalization. Thus, I used the terms "some men" and not "all men". I also used the term "must". My reasons are simple also. In the first instance, I used the terms "some men" because I believe that not all men are starkly ignorant of the deadly affliction of poverty. I appreciate that there are a few out there who by their actions are daily giving poverty the fight of their lives and conquering the monster through the secrets revealed in this book. To such people I say kudos but, by no means rest on your oars, because as Proverbs 6:10-11 says, *"Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep, So shall thy poverty come as one that travels and our want as an armed man."*

I also used the verb "must" in the sense of anticipating

the usual lackluster disposition of many who seem to have chosen the pathway of mediocrity. Except they give it what it takes, their condition may just continue to deteriorate. This is where personal responsibility is of essence. This initial clarification is therefore necessary as we journey into the *raison d'être* of poverty in our time including why it is so pervasive, seemingly overbearing and frighteningly osmotic in character. Why is it recruiting more ready disciples willy-nilly into its camp? Many more to discover.

UNDERSTANDING THE POVERTY MENTALITY

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" — Hosea 4:6

Since creation and with the divine agenda of Jehovah God at the inauguration of project earth, the intention of the Creator was instantly revealed for abundance in everything for the good enjoyment of man His ultimate creation -- material, reproductive, health, nutritional, spiritual relationship, and so on. In Genesis 1:27, it is recorded that,

"... God created man in his own image, in his image created he him; male and female created he them."

Immediately preceding this process, in verses 28-31, we read that,

"... God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth over the earth. And God said, Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the field, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good..."

From these first scriptural lines of divine decree, we can see unveiled the infinitely good nature of a pro-active God who did not create any room for lack or poverty in any guise. Poverty is thus the consequence of sin and disobedience directly flowing from the original sin.

"And the Lord God commanded the man saying, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." - Gen. 2; 16-17.

The death being referred to here is a compound term to describe spiritual separation which we are always taught at Sunday school and sundry sermons. The other ones that directly affect us in this mortal shell called body and this temporal abode called earth will include material and physiological deprivations or any such acquisitions at the

pain and toil of our brows, destitution, lack, insatiability, greed, covetousness, mercilessness, grinding poverty, and so on.

In addition, in Genesis 3:17-19, upon falling foul of God's instruction, the same fertile, fruit-producing earth was cursed to its root to become a scorched earth.

"... Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread..."

A Function of Man's Personal Choice

It is needful, as we begin to unfold in this book, to understand that poverty was not part of the original plan of God for mankind. In the law of manufacturing, every product must always carry a manufacturer's manual or what is referred to as the 'why of or 'how to' document. Producing a product without such manual or direction guide may impute fraud or attempt to infringe or duplicate copyright which attracts legal sanctions. In the case of earth, God had His distinct manual or direction guide on who, what, how and when to use the resources contained therein.

However, because the Creator gave man the exclusive option of making choices as a free-willing being, it can rightly be said that it was man who through outright seduction and temptation decided to choose poverty barrenness, lack, dehumanization, despair, oppression, torment, sorrow, pain and such other forms of deprivation as against the abundance, greenness, satisfaction and fruitfulness decreed in the earth manual by God Almighty. If a man decides to choose something, is it not right that his decision be respected? Must a man be forced against his will? And we know that God did not create man a robot but a free moral agent capable of forming his own opinion on virtually any issue in life, including his final place of abode. When Joshua was addressing the children of Israel in Joshua 24:15, he said to them, *"... Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord"*

He did not say, "Whether it pleases you or not, you must serve Jehovah God just like me and my household." That would have made the decision sub-human.

In Genesis 12:10, we read of the first famine on earth followed by another one in Genesis 26:1, all of them a consequence of the fall of man through sin and disobedience. We can see then that poverty, lack, deprivation, famine, barrenness are all a fall-out of the choice man has made since creation and continues to make until his last breath.

The decision to critically examine the nature, attributes and consequences of poverty is principally informed by the desire to unravel many revelations and personal research on this cancerous monster eating up nations, continents, regions, societies, families and individuals. No doubt, poverty is the outcome of aligning our thought

process and decisions with the kingdom of darkness and its deceptions, self-delusion, and so on. The Holy Scripture has copious references to all the departments and chambers of this vile tormentor of mankind as we shall discover in this book.

The assignment I have here is to expose those basic reasons why some men may just have chosen to remain in this abject state of lack, squalor and perpetual deprivation all the days of their lives. I must quickly add that, contrary to the smart tricks of the felon, Satan the devil, poverty is no mark of righteousness or holiness. From the definition of poverty we will truly grasp a better understanding of how, when, where, to whom and why it operates, sometimes creepily and unannounced.

The essence of this book is not to prescribe ways and means of completely and eternally eradicating poverty. I dare not because nations and world institutions have not and do not seem capable of doing so. It will be tantamount to carrying Nigeria on my head! I humbly submit that 1 cannot attempt it. Nations and global institutions are only trying through diverse programmes to alleviate and manage its effect. I only promise to show why it exists within scriptural revelations, social-economic paradigms and attitudinal indices. As usual, the choice to opt out and follow the path of abundance remains personal.

10 Vital self-performance and evaluation tests regarding planning

As we get set to engage in our voyage of discovery, I consider it pertinent to ginger our reasoning level and parameter of sincerity through ten rhetorical questions that challenge our planning schedule as responsible brethren in our day to day living and at the home front.

Without doubt self-examination is one of the most difficult genres of tests administered by self to self and scored by self. This is what makes it pretty difficult as it very often falls prey to bias, judgmental superiority and sheer insincerity. It is much easier to criticize others along the lines we disapprove of, but to beam the klieg light of the purifying fire on us is a Mount Everest we don't desire to climb and conquer. However, once we make up our mind to submit and subject ourselves to the crucible of self-examination, we can be sure of very frank and decisive turn around in our lives.

Sincerely answering these starting questions and scoring or assessing yourself will go a long way in spurring and assisting you to gauge your current status and areas where you need to make amends. You do not need to tell anyone. This also is a function of personal choice! So, are you ready? Then, let's go:

1. If you happen to live your present job now, can you survive for 1 year?
2. Do you have plan for you children's future?
3. Are you satisfied with your present financial status?
4. Do you have a map-out plan for your financial life?
5. Do you save on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis?

6. Do you take advantage of every investment opportunity that comes your way?
7. Do you have a reasonable bank account?
8. Do you know how much you spend on weekly, monthly or yearly basis?
9. Do you have a financial plan for your family?
10. Do you spend more than you income?

"To thyself be truthful" - Socrates

I will suggest to the reader to cover this page and do a 30-minute self-examination regarding these questions and provide answers in the manner of a dying declaration.

In simple terms, a dying declaration is a legal term used to describe a statement of evidence given by someone with no hope of surviving from his present health situation. By implication, whatever statement or evidence he gives in this state is adjudged admissible in evidence, nay law, as it is said to be patently free from any form of deceit, lies, fraud, prevarication and the likes. His or her statement is considered pure, untainted and ultimately genuine.

I must confess that one of the major problems of modern (lay) Christianity among others is that believers do not think again. They are now compelled to take to the advice of fellow but equally ignorant Christians or even the secular world. The average Christian of today is more like a zombie, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine most of which are contrary to scriptural prescriptions.

Unlike the Berean Christians in Acts 17:10 who went a step further than the usual homily from the pulpit to search the Scriptures to confirm whether what the man of God said was true or inspired by his own philosophy. Most Christians today are like a sponge soaking up almost any and every wave of doctrine without questioning.

In Ephesians 4:13-15, the apostle Paul warns us, *That we should be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of the deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head- Christ...*"

In Isaiah 1:18, God personally invites us to come for a reasoning session, allowing each party to state his case so that it will be clear who is right or wrong, what is wrong, where the solution lies and what next to do. This resignation to accept anything is what has consigned many to remain stagnant, cleverly manipulated and their ignorance exploited by their overlords. I pray that your anger against poverty on the platform of knowing what to do per time and doing it without hesitation will now be kindled hot in the authoritative name of Jesus.

One thing I am promising you here is that by the time you finish reading the last sentence in this book, divine revelations that will propel you and stoke your appetite for excellence will pour forth like torrents upon you, in Jesus

mighty name, amen.

Underutilizing the Human Machine

A wise man has reasoned that God has given to each man, a brain the equivalent of sixteen 500-gigabyte computers according to recent scientific research) so that we will give Him rest, according to Bishop David Oyedepo. The underutilization of this enormous human machine has contributed to the stark mediocrity and unproductivity of the human race. All the discoveries and their products which we daily savour today are the result of painstaking and tasking, never-say-die spirit of a handful of men. Imagine one billion scientists, inventors, researchers of the Hose to seven billion people scattered all over the four corners of planet earth churning out every other month new designs and ways of doing things! Where do you think we would be today? Would there be any thought of poverty or lack anywhere? This is just to signal to us the amazing power resident in our creative and thinking faculties many of which lie unacceptably dormant and avoidably stinking!

Our thinking as children of the Most High has always remained a source of worry to God, hence things that we should ordinarily be capable of accessing without any prayer project and prayer contractors have become so burdensome to us. Our thought process is becoming warped by the day for the fact that we have refused to engage this force within us.

In Philippians 4:8, Apostle Paul exhorts us in these words,

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

By simple analogy, the average Christian is and should be a virtuous thinker, always evolving new ideas of doing things nobly and progressively, and not a guzzler of resources with no added value. A default of this virtue is one of the symptoms of debilitating poverty. But at the risk of veering away from our subject matter, there is really need to take a holistic view of the concept of poverty. If not for anything, from the way I interpret poverty, many variables and definitional statements will help to characterize it. Let us now meditate on some of its snippets which I title,

The Seven Periscopes of Poverty A manifestation of total lack and want

Poverty is the act of total lack; want; inability to possess enough to meet the basic necessities of life, e.g food, shelter, transport, clothing, and so on.

This condition is probably the most pervasive undercurrent afflicting many - over two-thirds of the world population, today. This attribute of poverty may just be what informed British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes to'

submit that life in its raw nature is solitary, poor, short, nasty and brutish. Once a man finds himself practically ^capable of meeting these basic necessities of life, angst, furore, generalized hatred, cursing, feeling of rejection or abandonment, and eventual resort to unethical, illegal and criminal means to assert himself sets in.

Disturbing statistics from many global human performance index organisations including the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO; World Health Organisation, WHO; and so on reveal that a paltry 6% of persons control 59% of the world resources while 81% of the world population is living in abject, intolerable and grinding poverty, leaving only 19% relatively comfortable. All these conform with the timeless Pareto Theory on the world socio-economic index.

At other times, withdrawal syndrome overtakes him. He sees himself as not good-enough to live and may consequently contemplate suicide to end it all. Lack is a major satanic tool to keep men perpetually under his (Satan's) vicious grip. It is lack that engenders some irresistible temptations. When God created man, He provided everything for his enjoyment, including the basic elements like water, air, wind, fire and earth to survive him, to the extent that God saw that everything He had made, behold, it was VERY GOOD! What God made was not .sufficient, manageable, tolerable, a bit okay, and so on! There was no lack. That was not in His agenda.

The question will therefore be, who or what brought this lack upon mortal man? Remember that in our first salvo in this book we alluded to the fact that our current state of lack and insatiable appetite is directly tied to the transgression and disobedience by our first parent, Adam and Eve. This gene of sin has remained ingrained in all mortal man, unless and until he reconciles and gets washed in the atoning blood of God's only Son for a new life. This mystery is one that continues with us for eternity.

Lack makes a man sub-human and incomplete. It debases him and undermines his entire integrity. When a man cannot provide shelter, food, clothing, and so on for his family he cannot modestly be said to be a man. It is so serious a psychological indictment, torture and affliction.

A sorry state of deprivation and humiliation

Material poverty is a sorrowful and abysmal state of deprivation, anguish, humiliation and disrespect.

The grinding condition of poverty literarily deflates a man as a representative of the Almighty God on earth. He also loses his self-esteem and respect due to him among his peers. Like fear that has great torment, poverty also has psychological torment. The state of endemic lack is akin to a man who has lost everything worth its value in life. This brings with it anguish, pity and valuelessness.

Poverty is what makes an elder to kowtow, defer endlessly, minister in profuse but sheepish obeisance and greet a much younger but rich man as if his destiny

is tied to the I.in IT. Imagine an elderly man or woman saying "Oga", "Madam" (not in official capacity or setting) to his or her far junior sibling in the family circle just because the latter controls the liquid mammon. Is this not an unspeakable, garment-rending abomination especially in our highly stratified African setting where age, seniority and such values are held in high esteem? But poverty will cause a man to compromise and eat up his little pride and self-worth.

Remember that pitiable story of Jacob and Esau who for a pot of porridge had to sacrifice seniority for minority status as recorded in Genesis 25:29-34? Besides the spiritual angle to this story, could it not have been avoided had Esau himself enough meal and cooked his own porridge to the delight of others in the family? What is the lesson here then? Let every man cook his own delicious stew and porridge so that there will be more than enough in the family where mutual respect, sharing, generosity, tolerance and dignity will reign.

Poverty leads to use, misuse and abuse of a destiny

The concept of use here refers to exploitation and taking advantage of someone due to his apparent helplessness and submission to the grace of others who are sometimes younger, less endowed and even less intelligent than the poor person. To that extent, his assets, capacity and endowments are clearly exploited by others.

This may lead to misuse as the person could be manipulated, undermined and undervalued. The extreme of this state is abuse where the poor person's good and utilitarian values are rubbished and denigrated. A concise definition of the term 'abuse' will mean the use of something or someone in a way that is wrong or harmful. It will also refer to the excessive, unfair, cruel or violent treatment of something, thereby undermining its originally good, positive and beneficial intention.

This was the true scenario with the poor hapless but wise man in Ecclesiastes 9:14-16,

"There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it.

Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered that same poor man. Then I said,' Wisdom is better than strength, nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.'"

This perhaps explains why the poor always considers the! rich as his number one enemy, instead of Satan the accuser and tormentor. The poor person in his warped mindset is of the deep-seated belief that his past and present woes were/are inflicted on him by the rich. Once any policy targeted at imposing some form of stringent levy or tax on the rich is proposed and approved, the first group to celebrate and express unquestionable consent with it is the poor. To them, the rich remains the leech, monster, vampire or formidable obstacle to his material

prosperity which in all humility is neither defensible nor verifiable in its entirety. The two belong to different camps, mindset and orientation. While the poor is busy looking at untenable defence walls such as his physical circumstances and milieu of operation, the rich is busy creating opportunities and exploring new frontiers. I shall be focusing on this in subsequent chapters. But the fact remains that the poor will always remain a sworn enemy of the rich for the reason that the latter will continue to exploit the former in many ways.

Poverty is a state of eating roast turkey in your dream

Poverty is a state of wish where your needs are always in the realm of 'Utopia' or dream world.

A man in the state of poverty is always wishing for yesterday's cucumber and tomorrow's lettuce! He is always fixated on the impossible. His idealistic world keeps expanding and he seems to enjoy this state for as long while his reality stands waiting at the door after the bouts of dream world adventure. He never believes that his fair share of life ought to be delivered to him in the now. And it has been truly observed that if wishes were horses beggars would ride. He is a dream rider on the latest driving machine, owner of the cosiest mansion in town and the most successful industrialist in the city.

This defective and unrealistic thought process keeps him perpetually chained to the ground and he may just remain there all through his life unless and until a higher force intervenes like the case of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda whose regime of inactivity lasted a tortuous thirty-eight years until Jesus the great healer entered the scene to salvage what little remained for the poor fellow (Jn.5:2).

Poverty consigns a man into the dustbin of history

Poverty makes a man to be easily forgotten, unrecognized and unappreciated by society.

In Ecclesiastes 9:14-16, the irony and travail of the poor is contextually captured.

"There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and build great bulwark against it:

"Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then I said, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard."

In this scene, the poor man is shown to have something that is highly treasured as a saving grace or weapon by the little city. This poor man's asset is his wisdom. In other cases, it may be the poor man's talent or giftings, Education, elocution, special skills like swimming, climbing, bravery, stature, and so on.

Unfortunately and as is characteristic of the average rich man, having cleverly benefited from the poor wise

man's salvaging wisdom, he was totally forgotten and cast aside *iv.* if his contribution was inconsequential. But this is the stark reality in our sensual world today where man's mini inanity to man has reached an intolerable crescendo.

This condition has explained why there is a deepening gulf between the poor and the rich. We see such episodes being 11.uly dramatized in our body politics. The rich is an expert III using, misusing and abusing the downtrodden, Oppressed and exploited thugs during the frenzied electioneering campaigns.

But akin to the chaff of an orange, they are jettisoned with reckless abandon once the party is over and the winner has emerged. Painfully so, but this is the picture of any man or woman who by choice has refused to forcefully break through the pangs, clutches and snare of poverty. He/she will continue to be used and thereafter forgotten and out rightly unappreciated.

Another unenviable attribute of poverty is that it attracts and sticks like a sore thumb for as long. A poor man marries, will marry and should marry a poor lady because their "horoscope of lack" tallies! Their children in turn maintain the status quo of poverty and the chain keeps growing in leaps and bounds. This is the expectation of society and there must not be any form of alteration or "aberration" in this regard.

In the same vein, the rich attract the rich. They attend the same school, visit the same exclusive malls, plazas and boutiques, eateries, travel on board the same aircraft vacation to the same exotic places on planet earth, attend the same parties, their birthday parties and wedding ceremonies, and consequently as should be expected rendezvous and get acquainted which culminates in a relationship between the children of the rich dating and marrying themselves. Any alteration or obstruction of this flow line is sure to cause ripples, especially in the secular system.

In the body of Christ, it can only take divine grace an spiritual sensitivity for parents to read in between God predestination script and concur willingly, otherwise, be sure to see resistance by the family who protests and accuses the poor of being 'gold diggers', reaping where they did not sow and such hate words of derision. This is the true scenario and take my word for it.

Poverty is a contagious hereditary affliction

Poverty is an infection, a ravaging hereditary disease whose speed of transfer is faster than the speed of light. Very akin to the ravaging HIV/AIDS or its partner-infection, Ebola virus disease, EVD, poverty is without doubt the most dreaded disease afflicting mankind today which cure completely defies all world governments and international agencies till date. By its nature, it can rightly be concluded that poverty is a hereditary disease with a much faster speed of transfer than light!

No wonder, Jabez in his determination to be rid of this hereditary transfer of abject lack, subservience,

Oppression, humiliation brought his case before the divine arbiter, God Almighty, and besought His Majesty who alone is capable of deleting such cancer from the destiny of a man by supplicating frantically for a clinical surgery to remove the malignant tumour of poverty from his life, lineage and generations to come thereafter.

Jabez was sincere with himself as he engaged in self-discovery for a self-recovery, he perceived that his major obstacle was not the physical environment per se but his warped thought process denying him access to a more glorious destiny. He vowed never to yield to this debilitating condition but rather to confront it head long and

call on a higher force that is capable of altering this mindset. Jabez majored on the internal instead of the external. The poor is therefore a victim of his own present miserable condition as a result of very low and almost incurable self-worth. He believes that lives including those around him - family members, friends, government, institutions, society, the church, and so on have not assisted him and for this he sees everyone as his sworn enemy. Poverty dents and dampens destinies. But for Jabez, he did not accept this self-inflicted verdict from the pit of hell. He forcefully broke away from the stench and cocoon of poverty, sorrow, despair, lack, generation curse and affliction, and so on. See his profile and what he did to attain a better life for himself.

"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bare him with sorrow'

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested"

Even when his mother branded him an offspring of the poor, Jabez refused to accept or settle with this name.

What is a name or what is in a name? Is it not a seal on one's prophetic destiny? Cognizant of this, Jabez did not wait for anyone to take the responsibility for his change of story. He did not wait for the church, the man of God, the most popular prophet in town, the government, his friends, his family or institution to go on his behalf. He took the bull by the horns and he received his request in grand style.

Jabez by dint of foresight and hindsight knew the debilitating effect of poverty as a communicable and generational disease. He had to confront it with every ounce of seriousness and attack it right from the tap root. The only command language that poverty defers to is when it is pointedly caused to its root with divine authorisation,

Had Jabez glossed over it, pampered it or assumed that it was but a momentary setback, his fortune and glorious destiny might just have remained dented until his death With no place recorded for him in the Book of

books. We can see then that poverty is not to be tolerated for anything. Imagine the Ebola virus which consumes its Victim within days, but poverty is faster and worse still.

Poverty has a formidable magnetic pull

Poverty has a magnetic pull that attracts oppression, suppression and depression. Just like the magnetic pull of the earth, poverty has got this unusual force that carries the warhead of oppression, suppression and depression. The poor is always prone to being oppressed even when he is right and correct. Nothing he does gets a positive nod. The face and body of the poor being fully enveloped by the festering stench of poverty completely overshadow any aroma of favour, consideration and gratitude a man should ordinarily enjoy.

Imagine the account of the oppression of poor Naboth, owner of a vineyard that overlooked the palatial residence of Ahab, king of Israel, and you will read in that pathetic story, the desire of the rich to always target the poor oppression, suppression and blatant exploitation. This vineyard was certainly the only inheritance left and possessed by Naboth. However, because long Ahab symbolizes the average exploitative rich man, besides having the unenviable reputation of being a man sold to exceeding evil and "the troubler of Israel" as ably described by the prophet Elijah, Naboth had to be confronted by such an oppressive and intimidating character (1 Kings 21).

At the end of the story not only did he lose his life to the; demon-possessed royalty of Ahab and his wife Jezebel, he equally lost his only inheritance, the vineyard, to them You can see what the poor always undergoes in the hand of the 'stronger' rich man. The use of the word 'strong' here has nothing to do with physical strength but rather executive influence, overriding decision, financial muscle, status, position, office, material acquisitions, a whole gamut of connections with the powers that be, and so on.

What of the poor man who was clearly oppressed by the rich in the moral story relayed by God to king David through Nathan the prophet in 2 Samuel 12:1-5; 8-9? In that story we learn that the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished and it grew up together with him and his children. He doted on it-like a daughter and it used to lay in his bosom and it even slept on the same bed with him.

Pray, what did the immensely rich man who had a guest at night do? To describe a man as rich in Old Testament time implied possession of livestock, cattle, yokes of oxen, large expanse of farmland, and so on. Notwithstanding all these, He ordered that this poor man's only lamb be taken from him, albeit forcefully, and slaughtered to entertain the rich man's guest, leaving the poor man in perpetual sorrow and endless weeping. Drawing further from the lesson in the story, we also learn that it connected the atrocious oppression of Uriah

(seen in this context as the poor man) by king David (seen in this context as the rich man) and how he committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. Not done, by more merciless means David the king neatly (and secretly?) organised the death of Uriah, one of his most loyal warriors.

This has always been the lot of the poor man in the hand of the rich - exploitation, oppression, suppression deprivation, perversion and subtraction of any grain of value left in the poor by the rich. And the only reason why such condition exists is because he is poor, nothing more! If Naboth and Uriah were equally rich and had comparable substances like Ahab and David, would they dare harass one another? The rich know themselves, they watch their back, they respect themselves, they know when to draw the line and keep to their boundaries of operation, except when they must play the mischief and get their fingers burnt (Matthew 11:21-22).

Not only as an individual, even nations that are in the same measuring index of poverty equally fall into the same scorn and exploitation by the more developed and richer nations of the world. To that extent, the latter would always call the shots, dictate the direction and compel the poorer nations to accept their views, opinions, decisions, policies and agreements not minding whether these go clearly contrary to their moral values or higher order of action.

The countless cases of oppression and depression bed direct testimony to the helpless situation poverty can plunge a man into. Particularly this is what is making many today to fight tooth and nail to ensure that they never taste the dreaded hemlock called poverty in their life until they depart this sinful world. And even when they had undergone a slice of its torment at a time in their lives, they vow with all ferocity of character and determination again to pass through the lane, including their direct offsprings and generations to come. This may perhaps explain the almost disgusting accumulation syndrome some unscrupulous public servants with seared who plunge into their national treasury or commonwealth and grab as much as they can, once the opportunity presents itself. That is why they would do practically anything imaginable under the sun - from the M 11 mate to the illegitimate; from the approved to the sacrilegious", and so on.

Having outlined the main nuggets in appraising the term and state of being called poverty, it is also essential to add that the problem of the poor is in his poverty. The moment a man finds himself incapable of conquering lack and want, he has inadvertently courted problem with overbearing magnitude. Another thing to note here is that contrary to all the moral homilies flowing from the pulpit every Sunday, the bitter truth is that the poor are not totally loved. Please note that I deliberately used the term 'totally'. The implication of this is that although there is always some form of gesture or acts of charity shown to this group of people in the society, fact is, it is only partial,

reserved and measured. You cannot love the poor to the point of desiring to become deliberately poor, no matter one's arrowed lowliness and righteousness. A man may feel touched, empathise, sympathise or develop such momentary emotions with the poor. But never will he opt to swap places with the poor; this is the bitter reality. Have you seen a rich man lover of the poor or philanthropist deciding to evacuate his family from his palatial mansion in one of the choice areas in town, say Lekki, to a shanty area or shack in the suburbs of Makoko or Ajegunle, no matter the "great love" the former evinces for the former? The best he can do is make some mouthwatering cash donation to the poor family, rehabilitate them, or even reconstruct the house to an habitable level. It stops there. The rich will truly show his "love" but he will never swap his place!

This perception or mindset appears to be in-born to the extent that whatever policies, programmes or initiatives put in place by government and institutions are usually for the purpose of creating the impression of extending care and concern to them, nothing more. To further expatiate on this, just do a flashback on the various socio-economic and philanthropic initiatives of government, institutions and individuals that were targeted at those referred to as the less privileged and see how they are organized.

See how the items are distributed, especially if the target happens to be the physically disabled, the widows, street kids/people, refugees, internally displaced, victims of war and so on - in ram shackled facilities and highly uncoordinated state. At times, items meant for these groups are parachuted from the sky with each person scampering to get his own share. And for the fact that the poor are always in the majority, ministering to their felt needs is like pouring water in a basket as they are near inexhaustible. The implication of this is that the poor are always treated with minimum deep-seated affection. While this may be the attitude of the secular system, contrary should be the case with us children of another kingdom as commanded by our Master Jesus Christ when He reveals a mystery in Matt. 25:36-

"For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. . . "

Physically, the Lord Jesus Christ was not around to be ministered to. Nevertheless, to the extent and with the same value that we place on these 'destitutes' or needy, we have done same and shown our attitude towards the Lord Himself. The fact remains however that the poor are always looked down upon not for anything but because of their sorry dejected state. The poor are a victim of circumstances. Things are not always in their favour no matter their effort.

The prayer of King David in Proverbs 30:8-9 is particularly instructive as regard the desire to be rid of

poverty which is one of the extremes of life; the other one being unbridled riches. The condition of poverty is capable of deriding Jehovah hence he prayed frantically for the cup of lack and want to pass over him.

"Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain".

Exploring the Three 'W' Questions of Poverty

To further throw more light on the subject matter of poverty, I consider it pertinent to do a quick analysis of what I consider the three 'WH¹' questions underlining poverty - WHY, WHERE and WHO. This will help us explain why its impact is pervasive and almost overwhelming to government and the individual victim.

The why of poverty

Poverty, especially material, is first and foremost a function of attitude and mindset. It is a confession thing instead of the traditional concept of physical lack or deprivation. Every other thing flows from here.

"As he (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov.23:7).

If you think poverty you get poverty; if you conceive poverty you see poverty. You are not poor because a friend, associate, bother, sister, parent, church, or society deprived or denied you some material possession, no! Once your thought process is faulty or "contaminated", then poverty has been invited willy-nilly. When a man refuses to deliberately and resolutely position himself within a thought process of success, he is likely to end up always empty and lacking in possessions. Failure to take steps and responsibility to improve his life, is inadvertently sending an invitation to be guest to poverty. As children of God we know that it is the inside of a man that either makes or mars him. Jesus made this clarification.

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit..... For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him" (Matt. 12: 33 - 35).

Similarly, the apostle Paul reinforced this view when he says,

"What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'," (Rom. 2:28).

Poverty is thus the product of the inner man that gets its confirmation through the external manifestations in a deficit of productive activities, diligence, educational training, vocation, material possessions, and so on. No wonder, American civil rights leader, Rev. Jesse Jackson, once reasoned that, "It is your attitude and not your

aptitude that determines your altitude in life." In the school of wealth, it has been observed that there are certain things the rich do which the poor take for granted. One of such things is that the rich are usually the first to rise up from bed in the morning (the virtues of punctuality, diligence and commitment to duty) and the last to go to bed at night. Self-discipline is therefore one major attribute that distinguishes the rich from the poor.

The poor is ready to consume his destiny in a day but the rich would rather invest a portion, preserve and reserve some more, then share another portion with others and remain modest and unassuming. It is the poor that honks his car horn the more, makes the loudest noise (an empty barrel makes the loudest noise!), buys the most expensive clothes - suits, shoes, perfumes, jewelries, wristwatches, and so on. The rich can afford all these a hundred times over but they will not make noise to make news or they will do it but refined and when absolutely necessary. The rich hardly visit the most expensive malls because they know and understand the game of wealth very ingeniously and calculatedly. The rich makes his investment to work for him but the poor works for his survival.

Thus, a person's attitude to life is the first and cardinal indicator of his breakthrough in all that he gives himself to achieve. It is after a person's attitude has been correctly reoriented that diligence or aptitude becomes of essence and this is where the Scriptures provide a dose of instructions and pathway for our profiting.

"Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. 22:29)

Poverty dreads diligent, industrious, productive and proactive men. It cannot stand their commitment and dedication to work because it knows that that is its weak point. But show me an idle, slothful and reactionary fellow and will show you the ready guest of poverty.

"The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute" (Prov. 1 12:24).

Only hardworking, industrious, productive and committed people are entitled to lead and make headway. Any man who opts to remain idle and of no value to himself and society has deliberately chosen the path of perpetual servitude and unfortunate subservience to other men.

The where of poverty

Poverty enjoys the unenviable reputation of being ubiquitous or found everywhere. It is equally a pervasive state with strong osmotic power if unchecked or unresisted. From the disturbing statistics by global social development index agencies, institutes and organisations like the UN, WHO, World Bank, UNESCO, FAO, AfDB, OECD, UNICEF, and so on, more than two-thirds of the world population are under the grip of poverty, sometimes grinding poverty.

In fact, not done with reeling out frightening statistics on the ravage of poverty, the World Bank under its President has just revealed that poverty rate will increase from 2.3% to 3.2% worldwide by 2015 with Nigeria unenviably contributing about 61 million poor people to this bracket. Is this what Nigeria should be contributing instead of cutting edge space exploration, Nobel Prize-type award in scientific breakthroughs, world class inventions, and so on? Everywhere around us, there is an indication of abject poverty manifesting in poor sanitation, malnutrition, lack of and inadequate housing, lack of potable water, grinding unemployment, and so on. These indices continue to confront and confound governments and almost rubbish whatever efforts and policies put in place. Poverty appears to outgrow most of the developmental initiatives of government at a rate much faster than they expect.

In apparent reference to the presence of poverty everywhere, the Scripture passed a verdict long in time in Deuteronomy 15:11,

"For the poor will never cease in the land..."

From this Scripture it becomes obvious that any attempt by governments and world institutions to eliminate or abolish poverty may just remain one of the most popular jokes on planet earth. The only force that reserves this power or divine right is God Almighty Himself. Poverty resides in the abode of two out of every three households in India and Africa, one in every three households in Asia and South America, and one in every five households in Europe, North America and Australia. These statistics are a function of global productivity, employment and availability of basic needs of life. But it reveals a very challenging experience for world systems.

In my country, Nigeria, which is acclaimed as the most populous black nation on earth, the poverty index is even more frightening. This is against the backdrop of the two extremes - extreme wealth concentrated in very few hands and extremely unbearable poverty overwhelming the larger majority. In this kind of situation, it becomes very difficult to propagate the principles of social equality, equity and justice to the poor deprived masses who daily struggle to eke out a living for themselves. As governments and political administrations come and go, the impact of their policies and programmes on the ordinary citizen continues to be tested.

However, no one denies the fact and reality that poverty is everywhere staring us in the face. Poverty is right there in flic home, the church, the workplace, the market arena, the hospital, the school, on the street, under the bridge, in flic shanties and shacks, the village, hamlet, riverside, upland, community, town, city, nation, continent, everywhere. This explains why it has remained probably the most formidable of any challenge confronting governments, world financial, educational, health, agricultural and food organizations.

The who of poverty

One mistake we often commit when poverty is in discourse is to think or equate it with only the uneducated. Nothing can be farther from the truth! Poverty can harass both the educated and illiterate, the informed and uninformed, the worker, the retiree, the chieftain or leader of a community, clergy and laity, graduate and dropout, lecturer and student, and so on. Poverty by its pervasive and indiscriminate nature does not single out or intend to single out any body from its grip. Once you play near it by your own inaction or omission it jumps on you like a ferocious ferrous magnet!

While I agree that one's educational training or background is a very good springboard upon which one can easily lift himself up from the reach and deadly clutch of poverty, this may not be sufficient and a one-of solution. And in point of fact, (in our present age of fresh, creative and digit-based ideas), it is not sufficient to confront and perpetually put poverty under one's feet in monotonous prayer lines or broken-record symphony! What explains, or let me reframe my poser, how do we explain the sea of unemployed graduates roaming the streets year in year out that is almost overwhelming governments at all level in the country today? How come that in spite of all the plausible government efforts at reducing unemployment which dovetails into poverty, what we witness amounts to a drop in the ocean?

The reason is simply the disconnect between the educational system (policy and target) and the reality of the 21st century challenges and emphasis. In addition, how come that even dropouts who went and plied their trade, profession and fulfilled their heart desires in vocations such as music, film making, acting, software design and programming, inventions, and so on have come out as employers of labour with the educated and polished folks out there in their payroll?

To the extent that we still continue to churn out paper certificated graduates while failing to arm or equip them with the cutting edge skills in sundry enterprises hitherto underestimated such as tailoring or fashion design, confectionery, baking, hotel and catering business, photography, ICT, furniture making, welding and fabrication, techno-mechanics, upholstery, and such small and medium scale enterprises, all of which daily meet and fulfill practical societal needs, we can be sure that the ravage of poverty may never abate. Our educational policy thus requires bold, pragmatic, instant, frontal and radical overhaul in every facet. Anything short of this which continues to pander the status quo is an invitation to the monster of poverty unknown to them.

Not even the number of hours spent fasting and praying in the church can crush this scourge. Today, there are so many "anointed poor" brethren and men of God all over the place! Failure to learn the ropes, discover what it takes, understand its cause and how to overcome it, take personal responsibility in confronting it headlong will keep one perpetually in the dreadful camp

of poverty, lack; inadequacy, insufficiency, misery and despair all through one's life. You cannot pray poverty out of your life but you can pray for the wisdom to invest, plant, sow and sacrifice all of which are geared towards keeping poverty at bay for as long as it takes.

In Acts 18:5, we get to know that Paul the apostle was a tentmaker, a trade he used to support himself in the propagation of the gospel. According to Jewish tradition! "Jewish boys were all compelled to learn trades. It was considered disreputable not to be acquainted with some branch of handicraft. A practical knowledge of a trade was regarded as an aspect of personal independence. The Rabbis said, 'Whosoever does not teach his son a trade is as if he brought him up to be a robber.'"

This is certainly what informed the fact that the Lord Jesus actually learnt, practised and plied a lucrative trade in carpentry according to Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55. You know He was derisively referred to as the carpenter's son in His day?

Poverty can be likened to darkness. The moment you take light away, it (darkness) takes over or replaces the space. There are certain things you must never stop doing and there are other things you must never engage in to keep the darkness of poverty from taking over.

The account of the woman and the anointing of Jesus at Bethany as contained in the book of Matthew 26:6-13 will open your eyes to these steps that are often overlooked by even the seemingly sophisticated but poor and ever lacking folks out there. The whole message in this little book draws its inspiration from the snippets of information provided here. Why not follow me on a step by step analysis?

Unveiling Kingdom Secrets in Matthew 26:6-13

The revelations uncovered by grace in the book of Matthew 26:6-13 have informed the writing of this little book for brethren and especially those who desire to break forth and break through their limitations into the 'very good' dimensions of life. Interestingly this is one chapter I have had the privilege of studying like many others over and over again but always with a different perspective.

Moreover, because an idea whose time has come is difficult to stifle, the mystery that was wrapped up in that portion of Scripture literally jumped on me for deeper reflection, meditation and clearer understanding regarding the reasons why some people may never come out of their cocoon of lack and want.

Having compared this account in the four synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, I discovered that indeed this story of a true event in the time of our Lord

Jesus was divinely put there and retained in the holy book for our profiting. What a privilege to discover and unravel the secrets. Almost told with the same detail and candour in the other gospels, it seems true that there is a purpose for the story for this generation and those to

come. In the book of Mark, it is recorded in Chapter 14 and verses 3-9. In the book of Luke, we can find the story in Chapter 7:36-50 while in John it can be found in Chapter 12:3-8.

It is either titled, "The Anointing at Bethany" or 'A Sinful Woman Forgiven.' The woman is either referred to plainly as a woman or a sinful woman or Mary (one of such women bearing this name in the New Testament). In this account like I said, the issues brought for deep spiritual appraisal as it relates to our economic state and our relationship with God are contained therein. These issues which I intend to expand for better understanding subsequently, using Matthew's account as a basis, include the following:

1. The woman had invested a portion of her resources to obtain this great fragrance - v. 7
2. She seized the opportunity afforded her to access the Saviour which changed her story for life - vs. 6-7
3. She came to serve the Master Jesus with her resource -v.7
4. She sacrificed such a costly asset in order to contribute to the progress of the kingdom of God and write her name as a permanent memorial throughout mortal existence
5. She also gave part of her resources for a worthy cause (the kingdom business) - v. 7
6. She came to show gratitude for a favour done to her by the Lord Jesus Christ-v. 7
7. She came to offer worship to the Saviour with her resource -v.7
8. The Apostles envied her lavish reception and fragranced ministrations of the Saviour, and especially Judas Iscariot, as the group Treasurer, showed his indignation for not being handed this treasure for his personal profiting v. 8
9. The Apostles murmured against her and the Saviour in 11 K-ir usual human angle -v. 8
10. She was despised as a poor person everywhere she went due to spiritual body pollution - v. 11

It is needful to also state here that most of the issues raised in the woman's account are interwoven with one leading to the other or with one as a fallout of the other. Thus we will see wrapped in investment sacrifice, giving and service while opportunity becomes the launchpad for them. One thing is certain, the woman's story is an allegory of some sort, painting these virtues for our clear understanding and appraisal to replicate in our daily living. The woman also represents the group coming from a very humble background. Her actions show in what direction our emphasis should swing in desiring a breakthrough at difficult situations.

In Proverbs 4:7, the scripture counsels, "*Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*"

Also in Proverbs 3:13, it concludes on this fundamental

acquisition to put these nuggets into action,
"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding."

Getting wisdom will prepare you in productively utilizing the loaded information contained in every chapter of this book. My joy will be full should you mine the gold hidden in the crusted earth of each chapter. If you are fired up then let's discover some guided truths.

MINING THE CREATIVE GIFT OF INVESTMENT

"Go to the Ant, 'You Sluggard!' – Prov. 6:6

Most people are poor today and may remain in this condition for as long because they fail to discover the secret behind investment. This is no doubt the first lesson that the story of the woman with the priced perfume flask is teaching us mortals. No doubt she must have learnt this act from her family or developed keen interest in seeing those around her in her Jewish community. Just like the account about Jesus who learnt a trade in woodwork or furniture making or what is popularly referred to as carpentry.

The Rabbis are said to teach that a father must of necessity teach the Jewish boy a trade the neglect of which is interpreted as turning the boy into a robber in future. Whether boy or girl, the demand on parents is that they must learn a trade, an investment or to develop their gift or talent to become useful citizens in future.

As regard the alabaster box of ointment of spikenard which she invested in, Bible commentaries by Finis Jennings Dake reveal that in the Greek, there are two words meaning *spiked* and *nard* - pure or liquid nard. Nard was a variety of bearded grass of India, from which was extracted a fragrant oil used in the East. The act of breaking the flask merely means the seal or cement that kept the odour preserved was broken. This means by implication that the content was a steady production for a period of time which rightly explains investment.

In terms of the value of the ointment, it is estimated to cost around \$51.00, the equivalent of 300 days of labour according to the murmurers, Judas Iscariot and the other apostles. Certainly, a perfume of that amount cannot be taken for granted! What then are we imputing here?

There is Always Something To Plough

In the school of financial security and abundance investment is a core requirement for a man who desires to continue experiencing all round flow of funds. A man's life consists essentially in exploring and exploiting one thing or the other for life long purpose or for as long as he lives. The way God originally created man is such that whatever he possesses should always be in quantum leaps and bounds. Look at all the created beings - fish, birds, animals, herbs and sundry plants, fruits, seeds; who can count them?. They were all created in their abundance for the pleasure of man to keep, eat and save for more production or yield (Gen. 1:28-31). God did not

intend that man will consume every of these assets in one fell swoop in one day. He intended that man will groom them for his material security in the future. This is where the quality of investment comes in.

In simple terms, investment refers to the act of using your possession or money to generate more fund for the future. In Matthew 25:10-13, we have an account of the woman with an alabaster flask of oil, a very costly fragrant oil or perfume in our time. What she did here in pouring the whole stuff on the head of Jesus could very well be termed an investment in the same sense that the Lord interpreted it. For one, she made sure that for as long as the Scripture is read by mankind including angels, due reference will continue to be made to her person, name and her action. Only this not is enough to secure her salvation and eternal residence in paradise or the new Jerusalem being prepared for all those with such righteous disposition

Wisdom is Everything

A proper understanding of investment will make a man live well, stress-free and comfortably. It will help him meet the needs of many, give in acts of charity and joyfully fulfil other kingdom needs like Abraham, David and Solomon set the examples for us who live in this age. Experience has shown that only wise and prudent people invest. To be wise here has nothing to do with a person's education as there currently exist a thousand and one educated fellows out there wallowing in irreconcilable and incomprehensible lack and want in the society.

Wisdom in our context of use implies understanding the times and seasons after the order of the children of Isaachar; the tides and vicissitudes; the falling and rising value of commodity, the principles of demand and supply, and such specialised snippets of information for our profiting.

Investment requires a man to cultivate the uncommon virtue of self and godly discipline, being able to tame his uncontrolled appetites, check his thoroughfare buying impulses, clip the wings of his unbridled indulgence and such sensual afflictions posed by the lust of the eyes according to 1 John 2:16. Investment encourages a man not to destroy his glorious destiny with fork and knife! There is the demand placed on man to always keep or save for the rainy day. The rainy day is an idiomatic expression which refers to the unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances of life - our uncertain tomorrow.

Be Sensitive to Uncertain Tomorrow

Tomorrow or the future does not belong to us and we can never access it because we will never access it. We can, we may and are permitted to dream and fantasize about it. But the fact remains that it is not our property. What we are allowed to do is to look intensely forward to its positive outcome and translation into our lives.

Yesterday is also gone. Whatever success, exploits,

achievements, giant strides and all such feelings of self-fulfillment are forever cast in the shadow of inaccessibility. We may only see or replicate a semblance of them in our today if we choose to learn and appropriate the lessons learnt. Even at that, the fact remains that every single, new and fresh day is unique. The cucumber and water melon of yesterday may turn out to be the thorns and thistles of today. We must be careful not to equate the blessings of yesterday with those of today. We must treat every day as a new opportunity to invest another unused 24 pearls to our advantage. A wise man has reasoned thus; *"I do not know what the future holds for me, but I know who holds my future."*

If this consciousness guides us, then we can be sure that the act of investment is very vital to our desired fulfilled life is due to its importance to us that the Lord Jesus, in His characteristic teaching via parable gave a good insight into it in Matthew 25:14-29. In here, He used the word 'talent' to refer to any form of possession which could be a gift, money, seed or idea. But we will zero in on money in our context, while implying the other 'talents' as we reveal some salient points in investment. In the above referred Scripture, Jesus stressed the need to set aside part of our earnings for further investment or trading to bring more yield.

Even non-believers of the gospel, especially farmers, have long understood and practiced this act from time immemorial which is quite curious. Remember, I made allusion to the fact that your education (especially our current stereotyped and laterally theoretical type) has nothing to do with the practice of investment. This means in simple language that an educated man who fails to invest part of his today's fortune will end up a destitute and a byword in the near future. Are the current incidences of government/public servant retirees who continue to live miserably and die unsung while endlessly and fruitlessly waiting for their pittance called pension allowance or gratuity not enough signal for others to learn a bitter lesson? Do we still need to be told that the officers in charge of these pension funds who are themselves public servants and will also be in the same shoe in the nearest future are callous and mischievous in the discharge of their duties?

All these are pointers to the saliency and requirement or the culture of investment by everyone, no matter the level or magnitude of their current financial pull. This takes us to another lame excuse a lot of folks are quick to advance to justify why they cannot invest part of their present resources - inadequate or insufficient fund.

First, it is needful to state that by his very nature, man is or was created an insatiable being, never to be satisfied with whatever he has. This fundamental flaw I believe is a fall out of his original sin in the garden of Eden. This transgression was so cardinal to God that in the different stages of curses to the serpent, the woman and lastly the man, desire became half full. Thus, no

matter the toil and 'sweat of the brow' by man, he can never attain to the fullest of life.

Do Not Let the Circumstance Hinder You

Same thing goes for the woman; her desires remain for her husband who is never satisfied and is condemned to rule over her (never mind the rebellious attempt by the Women Liberation Movement to undo a divine pronouncement). What am I imputing here? It is to the effect that if we continue to wait for the cup to be "fully full" before plunging into investment drive, we may just have settled for a life of perpetual struggle, more miserable toil and sweat, and fantasy. Even those whom majority look unto or consider stupendously rich know within themselves that they are damn half full and still lacking in many areas of life. Did Jesus not reveal this to the rich young ruler, the equivalent of present day 'big boys', 'happening guys', business moguls, tycoons, world class industrialists, and so on? (Matt. 19:16-22).

The law of investment requires you to start small and set very high standard to end well, secured and fulfilled within the ambit of divine grace. Also, in investing your resources, you must bear in mind that what you are trading forms part of your sweat and to that extent you must learn the ropes. You require some form of training or tutelage, mentoring, reading, meditation, observation, research and diligence. Why is it that the average Ibo man is always a successful businessman? There is no magic; it is simply the strict adherence to these requirements. And in our case as children of the greatest investor, God Almighty, we are privileged to have the Holy Spirit who never guides nor guards nor teaches, nor directs amiss. We do not even know that God is a wonderful investor. He invested or traded His most priced possession, even His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to reap billions of souls (followers and worshippers) to Himself today and for eternity. Satan also is investing, although as we already know, in the most negative of means, using all manners of attractive baits - indecent dressing, jewelries, extreme materialism, excessive freedom, sensual beauty, esoteric knowledge, and all such perishable possessions to recruit in their millions easy preys into his infernal abode. What is the difference here? The end result.

We must be careful not to enter into the enemy's territory unknown or clue to some form of compromise. Remember our God assures us in 1 Kings 19:18 that He still has seven thousand incorruptible talents, skills, ideas and capital resources that have not succumbed to the contamination of the degenerate business activities in the society. This is very important if we desire to tread carefully and trade within the ambit of a godly orientation.

Pressure Today, Pleasure Tomorrow

Investment, it must also be said, is akin to sacrifice especially the denial of pleasure to get the best out of the exercise. We must therefore withstand the pressure to

access the pleasure much later which comes with God's sorrow-free blessings (Prov. 10:22). When we invest, we are cultivating a disciplined lifestyle which is an evidence of a Spirit-led life.

In Proverbs 10:5, the Scripture says, *"He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: But he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame"*

The act of gathering refers here to reaping. And from this we can see that a man is termed wise who trades, invests and consequently gathers in summer. But the question remains to be asked, can one gather without having first invested? In Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8, the Scripture provides the two sides of life in virtually every area of existence. But specifically, in verse 2, it says, *"...A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted."*

In here, the terms "plant" and "pluck up" refer to investment or trade for the former and reap, gather or harvest for the latter. What is the equation then? It simply means that a man who refuses to plant is not permitted to pluck up, simple. Our planting season is our investing season, it is and has never been adjudged pleasant, not even by those who are super rich. This season is one that a lot of folks dread with passion. It is like "Why can't one be spared his ordeal and inconvenience for once? Why this stress again?"

Ask the pregnant woman whether she enjoys all that ton of discomfiting tommy bulging here and about. How this state shuts her out of so many activities that she used to freely participate in ordinarily before now. How her present condition prevents her from jumping, swimming, diving, running and moving about as swiftly as can be before now. What of the D-day of delivery and the unimaginable pangs she must needs undergo, including for some, as I am told by sister nurses, ephemeral and chased-to-the-wall swear words, vows never to be pregnant again and such momentary go-to-hell-and-back experiences by these wonderful co-creators with God Almighty, then you will doubtless agree with me that indeed, the planting or investing period is never a tea party.

But when the woman is finally delivered of a live bouncing baby - boy, girl, twins, triplets, and so on, the beaming joy that effuses from her inner recesses is beyond quantifying. When she begins to cuddle that sweet, tiny bundle of miracle, she easily forgets all the "hazardous" trip to reach destination *joy unspeakable!* This is exactly what investment does to every man.

Imagine how Psalm 126:5 puts it concerning the groaning associated with sowing and the immeasurable joy that attends to informed investment.

"Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing precious seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

Learning Secrets from the Smallest Of Beings

The Holy Scripture has beckoned on mortal man to come learn a couple of secrets from a very tiny creature called the ant. In Proverbs 30:25, the teacher says, *"The ants are a people not strong, Yet they prepare their meat in the summer."*

Also, in Proverbs 6:6-8, the Scripture reveals fifteen ways of the ant against the sluggard (destitute by choice). But before highlighting these instructive lessons, let us see what those verses say,

"Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest."

To make a difference, it is needful to pay attention to the metaphor of the ant which is one of the smallest creatures of God and yet one of His greatest teachers. According to commentaries in the Maxwell Leadership Bible, the lessons the ant teaches us can be summarized this way:

A - Attitude of Initiative: Ants don't need a commander to tell them to get started.

N - Nature of Integrity: Ants work faithfully and need no outside accountability to keep them doing right.

T - Thirst for Industry: Ants work hard and will replace their anthill when it gets ruined.

S - Source of Insight: Ants store provisions for summer.

The ant is a remarkable creature, an emblem of industry among Orientals. The fifteen ways of the ants include:

- i. They are the most laborious (hardworking) insects in existence
- ii. They are the most highly industrialized
- iii. They collect food in proper seasons
- iv. They fondly attached to the young
- v. They have keen foresight for others
- vi. They work quietly without show
- vii. They work unweariedly until work is done
- viii. They work together in astonishing systems of organization to the best good of the whole community
- ix. They are ingenious carpenters and masons, building their own system of homes and underground tunnels
- x. They keep their homes scrupulously clean
- xi. No one among them exists without a definite job in life to help the needs of the community
- xii. They fight to death to protect their own homes and young from enemies
- xiii. Their social life compares with that of human beings in many respects
- xiv. They are intelligent and wise
- xv. They carry out life's work without being forced to do so by a guide or overseer, or ruler.

Drawing from this inspiration, French fabulist, Jean de la

Fontaine, in one of his popular stories adapted from Aesop's fables titled, *"The Ant and the Grasshopper"*, tells the story in a, most hilarious manner of the ant planting, investing, trading and working tirelessly day and night to gather as much as it could against the unusually harsh winter period in that far country. The grasshopper on the other hand was busy globetrotting from pillar to post, entertaining, singing, playing music to the delight of others who were working but listening to his rapturous and melodious tunes but with nothing to hold on to.

Not long after, the harsh and inclement weather announced itself with its fury, forcing everyone to remain indoors for as long. Whilst the ant and his family were well cushioned, warm and had enough in their reservoir throughout the period, the grasshopper was out there languishing instalmentally with nothing to fall on as means of sustenance. He then came knocking on the door of the ant to please spare him some of his harvest to keep him alive till the end of the harsh weather. What would be the answer of Mr. Ant to Mr. Grasshopper?

"And pray, what were you doing while others were tilling the soil and making the mounds?"

To this Mr. Grasshopper replied,

"Oh my beloved friend, I was singing and playing the flute." Mr. Ant then replied stoically, *"Singing? That's okay, now dance!"*

And she shut the door against our genial entertainer, Mr. Grasshopper. Did I hear you say the ant was wicked? No, not really. He was only reinforcing the message that it pays to be an investor while the opportunity presents itself. And like the Lord Jesus declared matter-of-factly in John 9:4,

"I must work the work of Him who sent Me while it is day; The night is coming when when no one can work."

We must in the same vein invest a portion of our resources for higher yield to secure our tomorrow, so that when we eventually arrive the gate, we will not have to be destitute and go a begging like the grasshopper. I believe that it makes far more sense to make this mistake, figuratively speaking, than refusing to make it. Interestingly, once you cultivate this habit like me, you will discover that you can! never lack to the point of not having a legitimate source of income to hold on to should it become necessary. And with this, your giving and sacrifice become natural and stress-free.

All around us today, we have seen illiterate men and women investing in their children's future through the all-time power of education. Most of them are said to vow that since they were not fortunate enough to be educated by their own parents, they would never allow the same fate befall their wards. To that extent, they plough all their resources in the education of their children up to university level; very clearly and resolutely to break the ancestral or generational fetters of poverty afflicting the

family over the years. They may be selling "puff-puff", buns or bean cakes by the road side every morning or plying some modest trade. But make no mistake about their metallic determination to erect a formidable financial pillar behind their children who represent their guaranteed future. They are not carried away by the mundane charm and impulsive trends that remain a drain in ephemerals such as the latest fashion, jewelry and accessories. In one word, they forbear today to savour the dividends tomorrow.

I am always humbled by this attitude of such folks. But there are many more out there who choose to waste their present and future destinies through riotous living in the little they possess just like the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The woman with the alabaster box of perfume invested her substance to secure her future. In so far as the scripture is read, of necessity reference must be made to her and her act to the Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Concept of Fruit and Seed

A very necessary corollary to the practice of investment is the all-time universal principle of fruit and seed or sowing and reaping.

"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease."

- Gen. 8:22.

As a starter, let me say straight away that there is a marked difference between fruit and seed. Fruit is that part of our investment that we are permitted to eat, share and distribute or donate to the needy, and so on. however, inside a fruit are seeds that must be sowed to produce more fruits and so on and so forth. Therefore, our seed is that portion of our resources which we must set aside for the purpose of investing, planting or trading.

Thus, eating our seed which unfortunately is the order today's fast lane, fun-filled society is, without any fear of contradiction, the first signal of a dented or damaged destiny. It is as simple as that. Our seed must never be compromised no matter what, if we desire to experience bloom and boom much later. Sowing our seed means taking responsibility to check the right soil, temperature, condition, environment, right manure, diligence to weed and keep it clean and tidy with required amount of water and sunlight to activate it, and so on. Our seed thus represents our potential glorious destiny. We owe it a duty to preserve and protect it.

Inside the seed is a tree which develops flourishing leaves and branches to produce fruits which contain seeds for sowing again! This cultural circle is one of the greatest eternal mysteries that underpins our existence as mortals, both in parable forms as contained in Luke 13:6-9 and 21:25-28 as well as in real encounter as recorded in Matthew 21:18-19, Jesus expatiated this principle of sowing and reaping to the extent that failure of a tree to yield fruits after investing in it by way of

planting amounts to a distortion of this law and the only thing left is to curse it to its root (prevent it from occupying a useful space).

Like I said before, our seed must never be eaten or given as offering or tithe or in whatever form. This discipline is key to a life of unending productivity in investment.

In the parable of the sower, the Master Jesus who remains the Chief Sower and Agriculturist shared the mystery of sowing in Luke 8:4-8; I 1-15. Although this parable was related to unfold the gospel message to mankind, nevertheless it shows us the emphasis and need to be careful how we sow our seed in order to reap net-breaking, boat-sinking yields.

From the parable of the sower we get to know that the right soil or good ground is at the root of whatever we intend to derive from our effort. Thus, our sowing must be with understanding and not mere emotions and emulation. That you see someone prospering in a line of business does not automatically mean that you also will end up the same way. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to venture into a line of business so that we do not commit a grave mistake what will end up wasting our precious resources.

We must also not be carried away by what people say, except of course they are prayerfully led, which you are also bound to confirm from the Lord God. These are perilous and trying times where deceit, fraud and dishonesty reign. That everyone appears to be in a certain business does not mean you also must be in it. Some are not meant to glorify God and you cannot afford to plunge hook, line and sinker into it. Certainly, in so far as you express the desire to invest and with prayerful request from the Lord who takes great delight in the prosperity of His children, you can be sure that a far more beautiful, glorious and prosperous business is waiting for you around the corner.

You must know that investment is a plan and not a product. A plan is simply an intention, a detailed arrangement of what you want to achieve in the future. It is what comes out of the investment or plan that is the product. One of the most challenging aspects of investment today remains ignorance which is expressed in so many ways.

In Hosea 4:6, the Lord God complained that,
"My people are destroyed/or lack of knowledge..."

In here, we can see that failure to crave and accept knowledge can lead to utter destruction. This I consider very serious, to say that one who despises or lacks knowledge qualifies for destruction! That means knowledge must be key to the mastery of any other aspect of life. Knowledge means the information, understanding and skills that you gain through education or experience. To invest therefore confers a responsibility on us to access the right knowledge, skills, training and experience to enable us succeed in that line of business.

It could be through education, (formal, informal or non-formal), training or skill acquisition.

Education Good, But Not Enough

Like I posited earlier, our education is not the ultimate requirement to be a good and productive investor, although it is quite important. What education does is to refine the raw material in a person and fill him with new insights in looking at issues with a critical mind. The essence is so that the person does not remain a liability or a burden to society anymore. A wise man has said that God gave to every man a brain, the equivalent of sixteen 500 gigabytes computers so that we will not disturb Him! This is no doubt a profound observation which goes to confirm that every human being is a loaded machine of self-development but unfortunately only a pitiable drop in the ocean is able to maximise their potential and make universal impact. Just see some of the world's most amazing inventions and scientific breakthroughs such as the airplane, radio, television, motor car, the Internet mobile phone, submarine, rocket, copier, camera, electricity; sundry vaccines to cure deadly viruses, and so on and you will agree with me that truly man is created in the image of a higher being that can only be God.

Knowledge is therefore cardinal if we intend to invest properly and rake in multiple benefits. In the same vein, ignorance has always stood against our attaining goals we set for ourselves. Thankfully, this generation has been branded a knowledge-based one with the evidence abounding all over the place. This however does not mean that there are not many out there who remain ignorant of certain factors which I will quickly mention here.

Ignorance or underestimating what they have

A lot of folks think that until they have millions in their bank account that is when they can start investing. This is faulty thinking *ab initio*. Setting out to invest must be hinged on what little there is with you. This is the first step to the fact that you are tapping into the very depth of your inner creativity whipping yourself up to discover that seemingly abandoned thing of value in your household.

I have heard and seen determined people of all sexes using insignificant amount of money that is not enough for others to guzzle delectable fried chicken and chips with a couple of friends, to engage in a profit-making venture and in a few months time end up as controllers of millions. It is not rocket science. God blesses this kind of investment irrespective of whatever faith one professes because He is no respecter of persons. In the parable of the talents, we read that the man to whom a talent was given went and hid it while the ones given two and five went and traded or invested them.

We are not told whether these investors were Spirit-filled, tongue-babbling, forty-day fasting and praying born again Christians. These are not fundamental as far as investment is concerned. And this sadly, is what explains

why it appears as if non-Christians are doing much better in business. The reason people advance is that we spiritualize practically everything to the extent of missing out the vital link or losing it when others are concentrating. The era of thoughtless, careless and foolish Christianity must stop for God's sake! Christians can be successful businessmen without having to plunge into the same filth that defines secular business. But the fact remains that the principles of investment are the same. We must learn the ropes and stand upright in business. As a matter of fact, by the grace of redemption, the average Christian should be loaded with a thousand and one heaven-guided business ideas to excel in life.

"I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions." - Prov. 8:12

"For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." - Lk. 21:15

The "old man" now a converted and redeemed Christian is no longer a vegetable, but a vibrant Spirit-led dynamite capable of blazing through in every legitimate and noble paths in life.

If as Christians we refuse to get knowledge, understanding and wisdom and invest, we will remain at the mediocre hand-to-mouth level and it will be difficult to propagate the gospel. The wheel of the gospel is money. It is what makes the gospel easy and impactful to preach, dispense print, televise, broadcast, and be acted upon.

In Exodus 4:2-3; 17, God told Moses to use the rod in his hand to perform all the incomparable miracles in the land of Egypt. According to Bible history, the rod of Moses was actually a scornful staff handed to him by Pharaoh Ramses when he, Moses, was excommunicated from Egypt for killing an Egyptian. He was mockingly asked to use it to lord it over the snakes and scorpions in the deadly wilderness with no human companion whatsoever. But praise be to God, from the carcass of a lion comes the honeycomb (Judges 14:14)!

Similarly, in 2 Kings 4 reading from verse 1, we are told of a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets who had just been widowed and came crying to the prophet Elisha to assist her in alleviating her challenge and delivering her from the threat of her creditors who were after her two children as collateral. Elisha's question to her was simply, "What do you have as a contact to access blessings from the Lord?" Elisha even went as far as encouraging her to go borrow vessels from everywhere as she could find and at the end of the story, we read that the cruse of oil never ran dry until all vessels were filled with which she sold the oil and paid her debts to the glory of God.

The lesson here is that there is something in your house that the Lord wants to use to open up your heavens. You have the personal responsibility to discover it and swing into action. I see you in your abundance sooner than you know it.

In my privileged capacity as a youth mentor, counsellor and leader, I have had encounters with some persons - men, women, youth, single, married, divorcees, separated, single parent, Christian, unbeliever, student, graduate, employed, unemployed, and so on who come to me for some form of financial assistance for investment. Of this lot are some who create the impression that they really need urgent and robust financial assistance. However, when they approach me, I find it hard to reconcile their present status - physical packaging in form of very expensive dressing, with designer shoes, suits, expensive wristwatches, top of the range "android" mobile phones or "tablets", 18-carat gold necklaces, designer sunglasses, and so on. In summary, the value of what they put on vis-a-vis the amount they come to request is far incomparable.

In fact, by the time you add up what we refer to in my locality as their "swag" or personal effect, we may be talking of tens of thousands of naira. Meanwhile, they may just have come for only a quarter or half that amount. Does it not then sound ironical and indefensible that someone who is really desperate for some financial muscle for investment will make a mockery of himself by his or her own extravagant lifestyle? Funny enough, this is how many people in the society behave and suppose that they will be pitied or empowered with starting capital without being ready to pay the price and make necessary sacrifice. But life does not navigate along this route, not in this generation.

Ignorance of what to avoid or booby traps

A lot more out there are equally ignorant of what to avoid when investing. The act of investment is not a tea party. It is and must be treated as a matter of life and death because that is where your destiny and that of your entire family is tied. You must not take it for granted and be grounded. You must choose during this period to steer clear of destiny assassins. These include uncontrolled appetites and the niceties of licentious and unbridled lifestyle, and so on.

You must focus to hit the bull's eye. A careless and carefree sniper can never hit at his target. The distractions of life are becoming overwhelming and deceptive as if they are the very essence of life. If you want to catch a big fish, you need tact, very strategic understanding of the tide and water level. Big fish don't come to the surface just about anyhow. To trap them, you must go deeper. You must launch out into the deep for your anticipated horde of catch.

Ignorance of wealthy people

We also need the sharp edge of the blade of the wealthy to rub on us instead of seeing them as sworn enemies.

"For iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" -Prov.27:17.

These are pathfinders and trailblazers whose job is to

show the way of success to others behind, especially in the household of faith. By divine appointment, just one encounter with a wealthy person is enough for a change of story. Having been familiar with the terrain, whatever counsel a wealthy man gives should be taken as a good launch pad in business. Their contacts, directions and instructions are usually handy in investment.

Setting a High Standard But Starting Small

In investment you start modestly but with a Mount Everest mindset. Modest in this context means not extravagantly but with measured temper. It means not very large or expensive. A study of the great business, empires and wave making global brands of today like Coca Cola, Adidas, Pepsi, Sony, Samsung, Honda, Toyota, and so on shows that they started on a modest note. Some of them are said to have kicked off and unleashed the great oak-dimension ideas today in a living room, a garage, a bedroom, under a tree, and so on. According to world renowned motivational speaker, Norman Vincent Peale, *"Empty pockets never held anyone back. Only empty heads and empty hearts can do that."*

My friend told me of a school that started the first educational experiment as a full boarding school in Nigeria but patterned after the famous Eton College in London with just twenty-three 10-year olds drawn from all the geopolitical zones of the country. Today, on the basis of the very high and uncompromising standard of the school, it has surpassed its expectations, served as a model to hundreds of similar schools scattered all over the country. But you need to see how they started. You would never give them the chance to succeed but they were focused with cutting edge management, committed teaching and non-teaching staff; admission was pegged to only the entry class, that is, Basic 7. The total enrolment per arm was strictly and uncompromisingly 25 pupils with 4 arms per class or 100 ten-year old pupils for admission each session. A child who passed the school's entrance examination but was less than ten years old had his admission deferred to the next session. It was not influenced by the characteristic stench of corruption and compromise no matter whose child was involved and the prospective parents respected this admission policy of the school.

The structures were unique, the school uniform was first class design; the observance of school routine was unequalled; classes were conducted to time with impact. Before a subject teacher got to a class, all the students were already outside with their books for that subject and in queue waiting. The implication of this was that no teacher could skip a class except with due authorisation from the Principal of the school or her representative. And even at that, a ready replacement would have been made for this before now. So the whole exercise was as seamless as can be. Within a month to joining the school either as a student or staff, one had already adjusted his

attitude to this routine.

As at today, more than two decades and counting, everything there is to achieve and win as an international centre of secondary education has been won in the country and even beyond by this school. But this is the same system that began on a very modest note. This is how we are to treat investment. The proprietor has through this school set up many other forms of business all of which are doing excellently presently. Starting small is actually biblical because it is from here that God always takes His unshared glory. He is the one who grows acorns into mighty oaks, tadpoles into giant frogs, fingerlings into barracudas, chicks into ostriches, and foetuses into the African elephants! In Job 8:9, the Scripture reveals something curiously true when it says, *"Though your beginning was small, yet your latter end should greatly increase."*

The term or implication of the term 'small' is a reference to the reality of our existence. Everything created by God Almighty started in an infancy state, besides the two human kinds. This is for the purpose of replicating themselves and being nurtured on the grace of their creator God. That is why the Scripture says to not despise the days of little beginning (Zech. 4:10).

"For who hath despised the day of small things? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; They are the eyes of the Lord which run To and fro through the whole earth."

The days of little beginning are usually humble, modest and manageable. However with time they begin to experience exponential growth when the investment is within the right frame.

Some people perhaps out to impress or to compare their capital muscle with others begin their business on such a large and seemingly intimidating scale. No sooner had they moved on the blast of the whistle than later they crash out or go under never to recover again. This is a clear example of bad, misdirected and impulsive investment. To the extent that your business cannot continue making an impact or meeting a need, please do not waste your precious resources. Close shop, sit down and do a rethink. Repent and ask God to direct you aright. He does not mislead people who come humbly to Him. He has, like the Scripture has revealed in 1 Kings 19:18, distinct, unadulterated wave-making business ideas for your own profiting and that of humanity.

Who Should Invest?

One major error many folks make including the church and its ministers is to think that investment is meant for a certain category of people. Nothing could be farther in truth than this. Investment does not discriminate on the basis of one's vocation, age, status, creed, anointing, family, education, colour, sex or nationality. Failure to invest is a clear invitation to poverty. I particularly get

worried to see brethren in the church of the living God living their lives to chance. Most ministers of God will encourage their church members to invest and trade in business, ostensibly with the belief that the yields will benefit them through prophet offerings, tithes or some special givings. But they themselves do not bother to also key into the investment initiative. Perhaps they have forgotten so soon that God is no respecter of persons (2 Sam. 14 14; Acts 10 34; Rom. 2:11).

"For there is no respect of persons with God." - Rom 2:11

A heavily anointed minister who refuses to invest today will end up a heavily anointed poor minister; a doctorate degree holder who refuses to invest today will end up a poor doctorate degree holder; a black or white man from a particular ethnic or religious persuasion who refuses to invest today will end up a poor fellow. Life operates on principles that compact all beings into the same existential frame. Jesus the Master invested his time, effort, energy, resources into the kingdom project. Man has no excuse whatsoever to toe a different line.

One thing you should take home here is that an investor is a creator, an actor upon ideas and like you already know, ideas rule the world of the 21st century, not production. This is what has made China, a hitherto communist enclave to emerge as the world's 2nd largest economy displacing Japam and still threatening the economic base of the United States of America which currently occupies the 1st position. Beloved, what are you still waiting for, would you allow those sterling ideas capable of changing destinies and significantly advancing God's kingdom to remain buried after the similitude of the one-man talent killer in Luke 19:20-21?

Whatever happened to that great idea of a bakery, a school, a shoe factory, a plastic factory, a confectionery industry or a sardine industry here in Nigeria? Wake up, destiny beckons to you.

Invest today and secure your tomorrow and that of many 'horn destiny has thrust on you.

GRABBING THAT DESTINY-CHANGING OPPORTUNITY

"The sons of Issachar understood the times and seasons"
1 Chronicles 12:32

A wise man once said that we don't have a second chance to make a first impression. There is also this saying that opportunity lost can never be regained. Whichever one comes first, the fact remains that in life what we call opportunity is simply a chanced privilege to lay hold on or access something for our use. It also means the privileged occasion to assume a certain position in life. Opportunity is one vital key to attaining certain blessings.

Smell the Cheese of Opportunity

Life basically is plain opportunity although we often take it

for granted. There are many out there who think that it is their God-given right to be born, exist or to be where they are presently or even to achieve what they currently possess. This mindset is the most miserable of any that I know. We must agree and accept that although life is an opportunity, we still have a responsibility to smell the cheese and know which of the cheese stations has it in abundance! In his genial book, *Who Moved My Cheese* Spencer Johnson, MD, shares a very cute story immensely loaded with management snippets and lessons for all age and cadre.

The story centres around four little creatures, two mice and two little people the size of mice but with the same complicated brain network as humans. Whilst the two quickly detected the downward flow of the delectable cheese they all had been enjoying and accustomed to over an habitual period of time and had to remove themselves in search of other cheese stations where perhaps better, more delicious and abundant cheese was waiting for them, our two little people were too dull of ecological understanding to read the handwriting on the wall, no thanks to that ever complicated, rationalizing and philosophizing brain of ours. The long and short of this management masterpiece is that instead of understanding the times and seasons like the children of Issachar, the two little people lost a golden opportunity which presented itself elsewhere but which is only accessible by those who would brave the odds, pick up their "jogging shoes" and hit the streets running, combing every available cheese station for newer opportunities and much more delicious cheese. Opportunity is therefore another measure of grace available to those whose spiritual sense organs are sharp to the last key to the point of smelling and detecting like the anteater where those hidden ants are located in the dead wood.

Opportunity is a Slippery Eel

Some have said however that opportunity is nothing but a harlot looking for the highest bidder, the warmest covering and the most secured shelter to jump at. This may just be true in the sense that opportunity does not like to relate or stay long with complacent, idle, unserious, procrastinators. It loathes those who think that by their social standing or such attributes they can detain and determine where it goes or to whom it must defer.

Opportunity is as slippery and deadly as the electric eel to the extent that it takes strategic format to grab it, hold on to it, use it beyond measure and suck it dry. Failure to do this might be deadly because it hates a revisit or should I say rarely does it revisit a man. Opportunity enjoys playing on the sensibilities of people but it is left for them to latch on to it and tame it so that it does not dissipate like the morning dew. Moreover, once you lay hold of it, never let it depart until you have thoroughly exploited all its succulent parts for it will be the first to mock you, criticize you and laugh you to scorn.

In Mark 14:7 and 9, Jesus speaking on the occasion of

His anointing with an expensive oil of spikenard or perfume, said something that shows the very nature of opportunity when He revealed thus;

"But Me you do not always have... ssuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done Will also be told as a memorial of her."

This is exactly how opportunity presents itself. It is not a common phenomenon. It does not appear every so often. It is not a comet that shows up at a certain period and upon its appearance it must be held tight and close to the chest to serve its purpose before releasing it.

As children of the Most High, we are predestined to be successful in everything we lay our hands to do because of the power of Calvary.

Ecclesiastes 9:11, we read of a profound truth in line with the place of opportunity or chance.

"I returned and saw under the sun that – The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all."

From this passage it is clear that what we call opportunity is actually that extra qualification that we do not have but which is counted as imputed on whosoever divinity chooses. If the race were to the swift, then some people would never be in certain positions. Olympic gold medalists would have occupied the choicest positions available. If the battle were to the strong then all the world class wrestlers and mobile cart pushers would be in strategic portions in the country. If bread were to the wise, then philosophers, orators, professors would eat the most sumptuous of meals anywhere.

If riches were to be for men of understanding, then the university dons, scientists, inventors and such like would control the wealth of nations. If favour were to be for men of skill, then the inventors, designers, artists, would be the ones occupying all juicy positions in their respective nations. If and only if...! But alas, life does not consist of wishes because if wishes were horses beggars would ride most pleasurably. What we learn from this passage is that everyone is on equal pedestal for favour as far as opportunity or chance is concerned. Opportunity is thus the leveller of mankind. It does not discriminate. It only embraces the person who has guts and who is first to press the *buzzer* and ride on.

Moreover, it is needful to remind us that as exciting as opportunity might appear, it can turn out to be positive or negative. This is where prayerful caution is indispensable. We must not in the quest to seize any land of opportunity jump at the negative one harmlessly provided by Satan the devil as was the case with Judas Iscariot who for thirty miserable and blood-coated pieces of silver (not even gold or diamond or platinum!) agreed and did betray the Saviour Jesus. In the same vein, the

quest for "golden" opportunity must not blindfold us to the truth of being able to discern the death trap lurking therein and thereby strike the anointed of God, as was the case with David being presented with one such chance to strike and finish off his sworn enemy, king Saul, in the wilderness of Engedi as recorded in 1 Samuel 24: 1-22. David would not give in for anything including the prodding of his warrior lieutenants to visit any harm on this tempestuous king called Saul. This attitude is very pleasing to our God who has warned that vengeance is His to dispense.

So, I ask, will you henceforth make use any positive opportunity and better your lot, touch lives and advance the kingdom of God? If your answer is positive, then welcome to a change of story and may the good Lord bring beautiful and heaven-backed opportunities across your way. May they wait for you and may you quickly discern them and grab them for impact.

We Serve the God of a Second Chance

It is said that opportunity comes but once. This may be true to some extent especially because of its rarefied nature. However, do not forget that we serve the God of a second chance who suffers long and tolerate our falling and faltering steps. To that extent, it equally behoves on us to be always vigilant and ready to grasp opportunity when it does come our way. To make maximum use of opportunity, the word is extreme vigilance. We must also be prepared at all times like Jotham.

"So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." " -2 Chr. 2 7:6

You Can Use, Abuse and Misuse Opportunity

Life itself is basically an opportunity. We are either using it, misusing it or abusing it; but the choice remains ours, I must concede here that to be poor or come from a poor start may not always be our making or choice because we do not have the option to determine our place of birth and family of origin. If these factors induce poverty in us as a starting point, we may have to see it thus. But the choice to either remain accustomed or enveloped in this mould thereafter and throughout our existence is entirely ours to make. It becomes henceforth a personal choice, a fundamental human right to break away from its entanglement, so to say, and should anyone compel you to remain in it, one may sue for damages! Getting out of poverty becomes therefore a question of choice like Jabez did.

Opportunity beckons on us on a daily basis in ways that may not be so plain or glittering because all that glitters is not gold. Opportunity is likened to the gold in its raw, crude and unattractive form and this is what explains why many folks miss it, narrowly or plainly. They fail to discern its hidden beauty and endowments and may even loathe it or repel it or criticise it. And before you know it some much smarter person has plunged in and taken hold of it not intending to lay it aside any moment for now. There

were some positions - political, spiritual, social, and so on that came knocking in a very bizarre and unsuspecting manner before some folks who really ought to use them maximally to their advantage and others around them. But they despised little beginnings, derided humble starters and mocked unassuming initiatives. A little while later, they found themselves biting their nails for allowing these opportunities slip through their fingers.

To make maximum use of opportunity we must be prepared as a matter of routine and have well laid out plans. The implication of this is that preparation, planning plus opportunity amounts to a full blast into the mine of wealth capable of wasting and truncating poverty in our lives. Particularly this factor of not recognizing opportunity when it beckons on them explains the persistent lack and eventual frustration of many folks in life.

The parable of Jesus about the three young men that were given talents to trade with according to their sizes is most instructive in this regard. While the ones with two and five talents went and traded and made very quality use of their opportunities, reaping huge dividends thereof, the one with one talent was busy rationalizing and complaining about why he should be given just one miserable and frustrating talent as against his other colleagues apparently in the same age bracket, the same academic baggage and the same status. What was his offence; why is he been so underrated; why the discrimination; is it because he is black, white, of this ethnic group or that religious persuasion or because of his/her sex; isn't this another form of victimization, male Chauvinism, gender inequality, and so on? He began to justify -himself and consequently became enveloped with the coat of envy. His attitude produced the reaction he evinced. At the end of the story, he let the status quo of mediocrity remain - no addition, no new value, no fresh breath of initiative, no reaping because no sowing, and so on. But pray, who lost out if not the 'untraded' one-talent hard man whose opportunity was eventually taken and given to more serious and committed investors or opportunists?

SECURING THE SURE SHELTER OF SERVICE

"He who waters shall also be watered himself - Prov. 11:25

Another very instructive lesson the woman's encounter with Jesus taught men is the noble and blessed virtue of service to the Lord with her prized resource. Another name for service is work. By service I mean the act of rendering or performing duties that benefit others and which are helpful to their happiness and comfort. Service connotes humility even as it is a quicker way of accessing God's and man's blessings. The ultimate intention of any service rendered to society and others must be for selfless purpose.

The most essential aspect of service is work which entails a form of sacrifice. God is more favourably disposed to workers than praying merchants. No wonder

the Scripture rightly places the order as "work and pray." God expects us to work and serve first before garnishing it with the dessert of prayer.

In 2 Thess.3:7-11, the Scripture captures the virtue of work thus;

"For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, hut worked with labour and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make an example of how you should follow us.

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies."

Idleness is an Affliction

In the school of excellence, work or service is everything. From the admonition of 2 Thessalonians, it is clear that idleness, busybody, laziness and such inactive and unproductive states amount to sin and a curse before God who expects us all (no exception) to work, render service and perform some form of duties and assignments as a sure way of accessing blessings from Him. If anything, work does not, even hardwork does not, kill. Rather, what kills faster is being idle, lazy and daily feasting on the sweat of! Others like some loathsome leech.

In John 12:2-6, we understand that "...Martha served", but three things were said of the treasurer, Judas Iscariot and his sanctimonious attitude toward the poor. That part of Scripture reveals that,

"... not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief; and he used to take what was put in it (the treasury)."

In Luke 10:7, Jesus said assuredly to the confirmed workers and service providers in these words,

"... For the labourer is worthy of his wages."

Any man who works and renders service to himself, society •ml others is entitled by heaven's authorization to reap find enjoy abundance. But above all, I like the way James 1:18 puts;

*"But someone will say, *You have faith, and I have works.' show me your faith without your works, and I will show won my faith by my works"*

In Exodus 23:12, God the Almighty commands us in these Words,

"Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall res..."

The Workable Equation Is Work and Pray

Interestingly and as my education teaches me, six days are more in number than one day; thus the former are

superior to the latter, figuratively speaking. By implication therefore, God expects us to toil, labour, work and render physical service to all and sundry far more in quantum and then take one day to rest with Him, exalting, thanking, appreciating, glorifying, worshipping and praising Him for the dividends and harvest of the past six days.

As a minister of the glorious gospel I find it very disturbing with no scriptural explanation to the new wave of endless prayer contractors all over the place who by their acts seem to indulge and tolerate idleness and endless babbling and repetitions as the Lord Jesus will describe it in Matthew 6:7-13. The truth of the matter is that prayer is only effortlessly effective when the requirement of work has been placed before it, and not the other way round.

Why then must some think that anybody or the society owes them their daily bread in their state of inactivity and inexplicable idleness? This is the poor man's mentality which explains his present pitiable and destitute state. God is no respecter of persons. He is not ready or getting set to alter His immutable words just because you are a poor man by choice. Get up, take responsibility, brace up, get yourself doing something meaningful and legitimate no matter how little and modest from today and see your destiny being lifted up beyond your wildest imagination. The secret is to set a high standard, start small but do not remain small.

"Jesus is the same today, yesterday and forever." - Heb.13:8

Take Responsibility, Dress Your Garden

In Genesis 2:15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend, keep and dress it. In here, God did not suggest to the man to do as he pleased with the garden but to take responsibility of tending and keeping it in a way to benefit him. God will not eat of the produce or drink of the wine thereof. The garden was a responsible provision by God to His ultimate created being. Having done His own part it was now the turn of mankind to play his. Failure to do this was an invitation to poverty and destitution.

In today's world, we are witnesses to the level of idleness, incompetence, inactivity, lethargy laziness, lack of creativity innovation and invention at national and global levels. But for the endless inquisitive spirit of the ever tireless whiteman, I sometimes wonder if most regions of the world would not still be living in the Stone age. Imagine students spending between four and six years of their lives pursuing one form of education or the other and ending up as unemployed and useless to themselves.

This is simply due to the refusal or reluctance to deploy their latent potential through the instrumentality of passionate and committed work. Some of them upon leaving school still expect their parents who had toiled over the years to keep them in school to continue footing

their bills and feeding them.

Unleash Your Work Potential

This "feeding bottle" mentality has doubtless taken the shine off work as a noble virtue. Instead of challenging their innate abilities and exploring the open field of work, they sit idly by and think that society and government owe them their existence willy-nilly. Life is not lived like this.

Buy choice they join the swelling rank of the poor and pitied. The time to wake up is now. Even the Bible has confirmed that in Deuteronomy 15:1 1 that, *"The poor will never cease in the land."*

Nonetheless, our goal should not be to remain in this category of the needy. It is far better to be giving to the poor than to be given as a poor and needy person. There is even a blessing in giving because your hand, the hand of the giver, is always on top! So, which do you prefer?

If the Lord God has commanded us in Deuteronomy 28:12 that we shall not borrow, the question will be, how can we be borrow-free or borrow-proof if we just sit down idle and be lazing around? The implication is simply that we are to work with our hands and render service to others in order to expect the rewards by the grace of divinity. Talking about the sweetness of labour, Ecclesiastes 5:12 assures us that, *"The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much."*

Similarly, Proverbs 12:11 confirms that, *"He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity (lousiness, idleness, complacency) is devoid of understanding"*

It is acorns that make oaks

Are you into any legitimate but small business enterprise? Enjoy it with the grace of God upon you. That acorn of business is set to translate into a mighty oak of industrial empire sooner than you think with branches all over the world. That was how the present big corporations like Coca Cola, Pepsi, Dangote, Ibru Holdings, Microsoft, Apple, Samsung, Sony, Toyota, Honda, and so on started. They were not giants from day one. This is very important to those who expect to prosper in business via legitimate work. In Proverbs 6:9-11, the Scripture charges thus, *"How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep - so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and our need like an armed man."*

Premature and unjustified sleep is a quick destroyer of a man's destiny. This kind of sleep is commonplace among the layabouts who have no goal or target to achieve in life. They live life by chance; but life is not to be lived by chance. Life is the greatest gift and opportunity available

for every man to invest, explore and enjoy to the fullest. No one single person is on planet earth by chance, never mind the circumstances, time and place of birth. We must not undervalue life, rather we must make the best use of it and add value to it when leaving than we met it.

Selfless service to mankind: Footprints on the sands of time

Without equivocation, selfless service is the hallmark of great men, statesmen, leaders, pathfinders, trailblazers, and so on. It is what determines or measures your impact on society, your community and mankind in general. Philantropists are far more in value than the richest man that does not selflessly offer service to his community and society.

What makes billionaires like Microsoft founder, Bill Gates (10-time record holder as the world's richest man) or statesmen like former American presidents like Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, and some notable footballers tick in the clock of the human race is not in how much they really worth, the cars or jets they own, drive and fly, the marbled mansions they own in choice locations around the world or the record-breaking size of their bank accounts; it lies extensively in their selfless service in impact and what they give or plough back from their material excesses to the society. This will also include their personal effort, time and energy in shuttling along areas that require urgent intervention in health, food, widespread diseases, natural disasters, and so on. I recall the intervention of these and many more statesmen in trouble spots such as Haiti, the Sudans Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and so on.

Instead of waiting to be served why not derive the inner joy of service that no man can compensate? The greatest impact you can make in today's heavy-laden society is selfless service to humanity. People should be able to identify your selfless contribution in terms of the quantum of your time, effort, energy, skills, initiatives, resources and ministrations to the needy - and they are legion. The needy are not far from us; they are not some alien creatures that we cannot access as often as possible. The needy include the very society and community where we live in. But they equally include the indigent, the widows, the orphans, the street kids, the elderly, the abandoned children, the destitute, and so on. there is a whole lot to do for society and mankind when you look all around you.

Flowing with this line of thought, the government has mandated young graduates in their one-year compulsory national assignments to embark on selfless community service and impact their areas of operation. There is nothing as inwardly rewarding as rendering selfless service, without anticipating any compensation whatsoever. Interestening, God who weighs the actions of men always takes delight in personally placing such acts of service in heaven's record.

The same thing goes for the sundry clubs, and circles

founded over the centuries exclusively by men with uncommon vision to offer voluntary services to humanity. Global organisations such as the Red Cross International of Swiss origin, the Lions Club, Inner Wheel Club, JayCeas International, Rotary Club International, St. John's Brigade, and so on were birthed to fulfil the service mantra to humankind. Instead of joining associations with dark intent, blood-letting propensities and such rivalrous dispositions, why not subscribe to the league of noble and service-oriented men and women? Martin Luther King Jnr has reasoned that *"life is worth living only to the extent of service to humanity."*

The Nelson Mandelas, Mother Teresas, Aung Saan Sun Kyis, Julius Nyereres, Charles de Gaulles, Moses's, Joshuas, Pauls, Peters, Jephthahs, Gideons and the ultimate Saviour, Jesus Christ all shone like burnished armour of diamond in service and leadership to their respective generations. The undisputed greatness of these men is in humbling themselves in selfless service to humanity. The impact of our service to people around us is what will be used to describe and immortalize us when we depart this sinful world. We must therefore be reckoned among the servants as the Master commands in John 13:1-17. Particularly, verses 4-5 and 14-15 show the practical demonstration of humble and selfless service by the Lord and Saviour Jesus to His disciples and us in this age.

"And He rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was I girded... If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, I you ought also to wash one another's feet, For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

The Real Dignity Is Selfless Service

Any service that is rendered with intent of receiving a reward or of being compensated amounts to a paid job. In these days of sheer ingratitude, only a very negligible few are prepared to render service without anticipating one form of reward or the other. This major deficit is one of the afflictions of the poor man in contemporary time who does not see selfless service as one exciting value to add to the society. There is no exemption to rendering service. The rich and the poor, male or female, old and young, everyone has this golden opportunity to positively impact their environment in their own little way. The goal should never be to expect society to compensate you. This inherently self-conceited posture must change henceforth. Instead of inviting friends and family members to celebrate important occasions like your birthday and others, would you rather not visit the orphanage homes and share God's love with these bundles of joy and make them feel wanted and loved?

Service to Family, Friends and Community

In this part of the world, polygamy was encouraged and practiced for sundry reasons which include the fact that the larger the farmland the more the need to promote the family wealth and influence.

As civilisation, monogamy and individualism were infused in the society, it became clear that parents expected their children to carry out certain activities for the family. In this wise, the girl child is required to assist the mother in household chores in the family cooking, washing, fetching water, cleaning, general home management, all of which are also designed to informally train and prepare the young girl for marriage and higher responsibilities in future.

As for the boy child, he was expected to engage in energy sapping jobs such as washing the cars, and cutting firewood, trimming the flowers, and so on. This had been the practice over the years with the tenets of selfless service well understood and practiced with enthusiasm by the young ones from generation to generation.

But how a lot has changed in this so-called jet age! The new generation of youngsters rightly branded the Millennials is doing practically everything to work against this age-long tradition of selfless service to their family, community and fatherland. It is an immensely self-centered generation. It monetises any form of service. This so-called digital generation has fought desperately to be rid of what they consider imaginary undue yokes or burden on them in their quest to savour o the fullest all the trappings of 21st century civilisation and associated freedoms to express (themselves, even if totally immorally and antisocially.

Thus, what our forebears whom we consider timeless mentors fought to establish as core values such as hardwork, selfless service, dedication to duty, good neighborliness, communal spirit, African hospitality, pristine family values and traditions, have all been either derided, rubbished, ridiculed, and out rightly jettisoned or more individualistic, self-centred, overtly ambitious mercantile consideration of anything under the sun. But this also is what is responsible for the descent of hitherto noble values in our society today. When a young man believes that he can no longer carry out any form of service to his family, nuclear or extended by reason of the demands of civilization, he has signed a pact with poverty, unknowingly. And this begins to reflect gradually in his future. Life has never been programmed to be lived independently and individually and whoever thinks he can alter this universal law is only bargaining with a very miserable future in the twilight of his life. At the end of the day the usual culprit is the devil even when it is obvious he is not.

Pray, how does one explain instances where a young girl cannot and is in fact reluctant to wash her parent's clothes but she can do this ten times over for her sinful lover? How come a young man cannot afford to take good care of his aged parents but he is very ready,

disposed and quick to splash wealth around for sensual and sexual pleasure? Is this a case of cutting the nose to spite the face?

Selfless service is to all intent and purpose one opportunity to access divine blessings, parental heartfelt prayer with heaven's backing for long life and real fulfillment. Only fools despise such secrets (Gen. 27:3-4;25-29).

UNDERGOING THE CRUCIBLE OF SACRIFICE

"When you –withstand the heat, you will eat the crunchy – wheat!"

Another notable lesson this woman taught us in the account was that she sacrificed something of value in her encounter with the Lord Jesus. In the school of investment, sacrifice is one true test to trigger heaven's outpour of blessings. Sacrifice is also a test of our commitment to a cause of action. This test was first carried out by God Almighty on the person of Abraham who was later referred to as God's friend. It was no doubt a trying test of Abraham's obedience, implicit trust and reliance on God who revealed Himself as Jehovah Jireh (Gen. 22:13).

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."

The dictionary definition of sacrifice says it is the fact of giving up something or valuable to you in order to get or do something that seems more important. In simple terms, a sacrifice is the deliberate act of depriving oneself of valuable and costly materials, virtues, enjoyment and pleasure for the benefit of others or to achieve a yet higher goal. In this definition, some terms need further expatiating.

First, a sacrifice is only so-called if it is deliberate or voluntary. In other words, the person making the sacrifice must purpose in his heart to lay it down even when he is told or compelled. A person may be told to offer something that costs him or her but the decision or power to lay it down is exclusively his to take, thus another kettle of fish. If he refuses or is reluctant to lay it down nobody will question him or her. In John 10:18, Jesus declared matter-of-factly,

"No one takes it from me, But I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received of My Father"

This reinforces the fact that God Almighty did not make man a robot but a free moral agent capable of deciding on issues that may make or mar his destiny. This is what makes him a unique creature of all beings.

Pay the Price Today, Receive the Prize Tomorrow

Second, sacrifice entails a form of deprivation. To deprive oneself of a valuable or priced possession in this

generation, it might seem, quite difficult and the reasons behind this are legion. The harsh economic climate, unpredictable nature of life, overwhelming doubts and apprehension, anxiety, lack of trust in the word of God due to charlatans, hypocrites and spiritual masquerades parading themselves as men of God in today's world, material and mental poverty, and so on. This explains why many do not seem to appropriate the hidden benefits in sacrificial giving or offering or service these days. In the same vein, this reluctance is a satanic carrot to shut people out of the immense blessings of the gracious God.

At the risk of being unduly narrow in this context, I feel obliged to state that sacrifice refers to anything including a form of activity, work, time, energy, substance, money resources, comfort, that is within one's grasp and control being willingly offered for the benefit of others or in compliance with a heavenly instruction as was the case with Abraham and others to which we shall refer much later. It should be seen that these aspects of our lives are so crucial and cardinal to our existence such that asking one to lay them down is sure to elicit some form of resistance, trepidation, doubt, anxiety or manifest unbelief. It has been agreed that one's income in form of wages, salaries, allowances and other pecks of office as a consequence of work done represents your blood or sweat, since you make a sacrifice of your time, energy and comfort to earn them.

Further laying these down in total obedience to the instruction of your heavenly Father, God, is the very definition of sacrifice. In addition, depriving yourself and family of these resources for the benefit of others - less privileged, widows, orphans, kingdom use or service, indigent students, the sick, the homeless, the imprisoned, and so on amounts to a clear demonstration of the uncommon virtue of sacrifice. This explains why the dividends that flow from sacrificial offering or giving are always in torrents, not necessarily in material terms, for that is the very narrow expectation of many today. Rather I talk here of unusual, enviable package of divine blessings in un failing health for the whole family, a complete passover of premature death and generational afflictions, open heavens with vistas of rare opportunities, placements, positioning, uncommon favour, guaranteed longevity and the likes. All these heaven-approved blessings dwarf our narrow material possessions and such pecks.

Sacrifice is a Kingdom Mystery

Any wonder then that even idol worshippers are always instructed in their heathen understanding to offer sacrifice according to the intensity and magnitude of their respective challenges to assuage impending disaster, avenge wrong done to them, placate those wronged, access desired breakthrough, or repel one deadly force or the other. By the principle of heaven, the bigger or the more substantial your sacrifice the more impactful the dividends. Take the case of two people making sacrifice

with a live cow and a live human for example. You can rest assured that sacrifice of the person with a live human will be more effective in impact than the one with a cow no matter how gargantuan the cow may be. But even as regard sacrifices involving humans there are grades. The sacrifice involving a child and the one of a full size adult have different impact. But now, how about the sacrifice involving the Son of God, what do you think? Not even all the temporal world Presidents, Kings, Queens, cutting edge industrial magnates, first class business tycoons put together in influence can match the divine impact now and in the world to come, Alleluia! God has already taught us on how and what to offer in sacrifice.

'For by one offering (sacrifice) He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.' Hebrews 10:14

Third, to qualify as a sacrifice, the thing being laid down or offered must of necessity cost you both in terms of price, value and effort. But please note that this does not mean it must be big or so imposing. The defining attribute of a sacrifice is its importance to the person offering it and we must not forget that men are in sizes as life is in phases or stages. The case of the widow and her mites that caught the attention of the Lord Jesus Christ readily comes to mind here.

In Luke 21:2-3, it is recorded that Jesus saw the rich and affluent casting their gifts into the treasury. They were giving of their excess and to that extent they did not feel any qualms about releasing a tinny-winy fraction of their booty. This is not a sacrifice, in simple term. But a little later, Jesus saw a certain poor widow casting in the treasury two mites. According to a Bible commentary, the term, mite, is from the Greek word, "lepton", which is the smallest copper coin, about one fifth of a cent. And He said in verse 3,

"Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, But she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

Sacrificial offering is no doubt a quick trigger of supernatural supplies because it carries a dangerous provocation of heaven's grace, favour and mercy all at the same time. When you offer a sacrifice to God, you are telling Him that you are sold out completely to His glorious intervention in your affairs and consequently testing His avowed and sworn integrity. A heartfelt sacrifice makes the hosts of heaven to take notice of a mortal demonstrating deep understanding of the workings of divinity.

Abraham Example of a Heaven-Trigger Sacrifice

That was exactly what Abraham did to God in yielding the only covenant son of his old age. Even though it was at the command of God, he could still have refused. After all, God did not make man a robot or a zombie that has no mind of its own. Moreover, in this instance, Abraham not

only complied, he did it with the finality and seriousness of a man determined ab initio to execute this mission, and this got God wondering, "So this chap is damn serious and ready to comply with My dangerous and seemingly difficult test or instruction? Haba, I also will prove to him that he has a match in His creator who is called Jehovah Jireh." And the rest is history. For not complaining, pining and whining away, reeling out a plethora of solid, defensible, intelligent, comprehensive, fundamental human rights and reasons, ad infinitum, why God has to do a rethink on this suicide mission, he became instantly God's friend (obviously the highest terrestrial award or honour ever for a mortal man). Not only that, the whole generation or genealogy is traced to him. God is now addressed not just as the God of our fathers but with precision - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!

There were a million and one families and names in the same land but Abraham was singled out for such special, generational and everlasting honour on this basis with his obedience to offer his only begotten son like God for sacrifice. He behaved truly like God His creator who also gave His only begotten Son Jesus Christ for our salvation. It was sacrifice that truly confirmed Abraham's faith in God. It is not enough to say you are a Christian and profess Christ. Your real test comes when, either directed or with personal decision, you are to offer or lay down that precious object or possession for the use of God's work 01 for the benefit of others.

Jephthah's Dangerous Sacrifice

Another clear instance of a dangerous sacrifice recorded in Scripture is that of Jephthah who offered his daughter as an atoning sacrifice which he also fulfilled, never minding the consequence. Jephthah is described as a mighty man of valour who led the Israelite army to defeat their enemies. In his warlike challenge, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said,

"If you will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, Then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, When I return in peace from the people of Ammon, Shall surely he the Lord's, And I will offer it up as a burnt offering." - Judg. 11:30-31

But perhaps more touching to God and man was the fulfillment of the dangerous vow.

"... For I have given my word to the Lord and, and I cannot go back on it" Judges 11:35

The incident here attests to the uncommon quality of integrity where God can rely and confer certain tasks and responsibilities on you and you will diligently and faithfully deliver on them, barring any obstacle and so-i ailed unforeseen circumstance.

I must confess that the very first time I read this portion of Scripture, I developed goose pimples instantly, principally because it challenged the very core and my profession of the Christian faith, and I asked my

conscience, "Boy, do you have guts; can you do this likewise? Can you provoke heaven in this manner?" Since then, I have striven to walk along this path, albeit in many seemingly 'dangerous' ways, and I am a living witness to the boom and bounties of Jehovah God in my life and family.

A point to take home here is that obedience with sacrifice far outweighs obedience without sacrifice. But the worse is sacrifice without obedience which amounts to Lucifer's original sin - rebellion, according to the revelation in 1 Samuel 15:22-23;

"...Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king."

The poor will always remain in his pitiable state until he takes personal accountability such as can trigger heaven's blessings upon him on the platform of sacrifice. A lot of folks today do not know that there are spiritual principles governing every human activity of which sacrifice is one of such. You must pay the price to win the prize. Life is not happenstance. It requires a clear pathway and keen understanding of what it takes to access its sweetness. Instead of pining and whining away and complaining of how you are the most loathed or despised in society, why not on the altar of genuine and heartfelt sacrifice, provoke the favour of heaven to your advantage?

The Ultimate Sacrifice: God Offers Jesus Christ, His Son

The case of the Lord Jesus is even more instructive for all of us. He willingly yielded Himself as an atonement for the sin of mankind in order to redeem all who by choice will come through Him to the Father. This decision to lay down His precious life was not a tea party as some think. Jephthah only sacrificed, unwittingly, his one and only daughter for just one narrow purpose - victory over the people of Ammon. This was perhaps a nation among many others around then. Neither Jephthah nor Abraham sacrificed their individual lives for a purpose. That made them mere mortal beings. But in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, not only did He voluntarily lay down His life, He also did it to redeem every single person born of a woman by sundry means on planet earth, now and in the generations to come. This is why everyone is welcome on board the salvation aircraft into the glorious kingdom of God.

"The sacrifice and offering of Christ has remained a sweet-smelling aroma unto the Lord God" (Eph. 5:2).

A life of sacrifice is therefore a life full of colour and divine provisions from the Almighty God. It testifies of your

commitment to the spread of the salvation gospel. In a year, how committed are you financially materially spiritually and otherwise in contributing to the continuous effervescence of the gospel through all the known media (print broadcast - tracts, literatures, books, pamphlets; electronic broadcast television, radio, the Internet, and the various social media networks)? Do you only employ your communication gadget to "ping" worthless messages that stoke lust and sensuality in others? How have you added value to the body of Christ by way of a modest sacrifice to bring men to the Lord?

It was the energy flowing from sacrifice and other virtues that propelled Mother Teresa, a foreign missionary to criss-cross thousands of kilometers of seas, mountains and sundry impediments from her native Macedonia (formerly Albania) to the slums of Calcutta, India, and minister to the felt needs of homeless, dejected and rejected children in that sub-continent, sacrificing her comfort, luxury and status. It was the service of Christ's legacy and charity personified!

On the last day in heaven, you will not be asked how many cars (including the brands, models) you bought, houses you built or bought, delicious meals you guzzled, positions of authority you assumed and dictated, great and influential men you related with, how fat your bank account was, how many cities of the world you visited. These are but dung before the thrice Holy God.

Rather, the inquiry will be how much of impact did you make in the furtherance of the gospel; how many, homeless, abandoned kids did you take off the streets and hugely impact with your eager or abundant resources; how many hopeless and helpless widows did you significantly touch their bruised and battered lives; how many children's financial burden in their quest to be educated were you privileged to lift? These commitments all fall within the precincts of sacrifice.

Yet Another Kind of Sacrifice

Another very important form of sacrifice required of us as Christ followers is what Romans 12:1-2 referred to as a living sacrifice. This is how it puts it,

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice implies the total transformation of our spirit, soul and body. Unlike what many are in the habit of reasoning these days, our bodies do not belong to us to abuse, expose (as in indecent dressing or exposure that has become the rave of contemporary society) or indulge in lustful appetites anymore. The Scripture describes our body that took God His ample time to fashion out as "the temple of the living God" (1 Cor. 3 16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16).

Our bodies should no longer be employed by the enemy to consummate the works of the flesh listed in Galatians 6: 19-21. Rather it should be used to glorify and exalt a pure, holy and dignified God.

Sacrifice in our Contemporary World

In our world today, the refusal or failure to key into the virtues inherent in sacrifice has put men perpetually under the struggle ladder. Nothing good and lasting comes cheap; this is a timeless saying with empirical proofs all around us. In sacrifice, you save and secure something much better or of more value. Just like investment, sacrifice requires reserving something of value for a more productive and beneficial cause.

I have seen cases of widows and persons of humble background sacrifice their little comfort for the education and training of their children. In no distant time their children end up very prominent society and eventually build them mansions, buy them chauffeur-driven choice cars, arrange for them to vacation in foreign lands and such other pecks. But they did pay the price of sacrificing their modest leisure for the upliftment of their wards in time past. Some men however fail to key into this great destiny opener and remain in their poor and pitiable condition. Once again, nothing good comes cheap; it demands a price called sacrifice.

EXPLORING THE TORRENTIAL GAINS IN GIVING

Giving is Living

The woman in the story also gave her substance out of a generous, cheerful and willing heart. Giving is another of the missing link in the favour chain by many today who desire to mount the ladder to access material blessings from the good Lord. The lack of it is also responsible for the struggling phase by many out there today, including the body of Christ. Giving is the act of parting with some of our valuables or possessions for kingdom expansion or promotion as well as to others around us.

Giving which has the same meaning as 'communicate'¹, 'share', 'partake of and 'distribute' is derived from the Greek word, "koinoneo." In Romans 12:10-13, the commands regulating Christian brotherhood include the following:

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, In honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in prayer, serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality."

Our profession of the Christian faith is only effective and impactful on the world only to the extent that we share, distribute, minister, give and meet the need of many famished souls out there.

Living a life of giving is synonymous with the true believer in Christ. Giving amounts to a practical act of worship and service to man and God. The woman

specifically gave of her resource for the symbolic burial (but unknown to her) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Giving defines the true test of man as caring for his neighbour. It produces fruits which benefit many others.

Giving is a requirement by both humanity and divinity. It is a symbol of love, affection and admiration for both lower and higher beings. Our world is filled with dry-hearted beings whose milk of human kindness has dried up. In these days of unfeeling individualism imported from foreign lands, it is no longer fashionable to show love to our neighbours, whether mutually or otherwise.

The fact however remains that giving is a core requirement in the school of abundance which conforms with the Holy Scriptures. Already, we have a perfect example in our Father God who demonstrated this virtue to us by sending His most precious possession in His Son Jesus Christ to die and redeem us from the curse of the law. Any wonder then that this verse of Scripture remains one of the most popular and readily quoted verse off heart in the evangelism assignment. In the book of John 3:16, the Scripture says,

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

So popular is the verse that all the major languages in the world have their ready equivalent in a jiffy. I also consulted a bi-lingual brother of mine to render the French version for universal appeal here and this is how it goes;

*"Car Dieu a tant aime le monde qu'il a donne Son Fils unique, afin que quiconque croit en Lui ne perisse point mais q'il ait la vie eternelle**"*

In John 15:13, Jesus said,

"Greater love has no one than this, That a man lays down his life for his friends."

Love is an Action Word: It Means Giving

"Agape" or God-patterned love consists essentially in giving and not in wishing and playing to the gallery; this is what John 3:16 is teaching us. Giving is thus a lifestyle we must cultivate like clothing, food and drink. God showed us a lot in this regard by first giving our forbears the beautiful idyllic garden of Eden, complete with all that makes for a pleasant life. He gave mankind meat, fish, herbs, fruits, water, air and dominion over all living things, from the

smallest creature to the most awesome and gigantic whale in the deep ocean. He wanted our joy and happiness to be at peak level.

Giving can however be differentiated from sacrifice in the sense that while sacrifice may be inconvenient and uncomfortable even though without compulsion, giving on the other hand is with ease and also without compulsion. We give out of the abundance God has blessed us with in appreciation. The mystery of giving is that the more you give the more the windows of heaven are disposed to you

even when you are not expecting the returns.

The best giving is that which is offered cheerfully and liberally. Cheerfully in this context refers to a state of mind that rejoices at being able to positively affect people and circumstances as well as the kingdom of God. When your giving is not conditioned on any factor other than to be an agent of succour, value, impact and relief to others, you can be sure that you will see yourself fulfilled and blessed inwardly.

In Luke 6:38, Jesus personally admonishes us thus, *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

From this verse it can be seen that our giving is an invitation to the abundance of man and God. This understanding is key to reordering our priority when next I we are privileged to give for any good cause of which the best is the house of God. This is because there is nothing we give to God that does not yield multiple-fold. When we give our time, effort, energy and resources (liquid cash or otherwise), we can be sure of a net-breaking, boat-sinking dividends that are sorrow-free and immune to waste.

Show Me Your Christianity as a Giver

The very first identity of a child of the Most High God is his attitude to giving. A selfish Christian cannot be a selfless Christian, it is as simple as that. Show me your deep affection and selflessness without giving as a Christian and I will show you a hypocritical and selfish Christian. Your giving is not because the pastor or any special homily was delivered to convince or confront you so to do. You give because you believe and are convinced that you should do so and that Jesus takes delight in seeing you His priced child following His footsteps.

Besides, you are also convinced that the easiest way to show your love to God is in your giving thus following the heavenly Father's example in John 3:16. That portion of scripture did not say or imply something like "For God so loved the world that He sang, praised, danced, preached, evangelized, prophesied, taught, disciplined, and so on." While these may be important in other circumstances, in this context the evidence or proof that our commitment, loyalty, undiluted love and obedience to God Almighty are genuine manifests when we part with a fraction of our substance.

Giving, I have come to realise, is by no means a burden. Rather it is the greatest relief that releases the lid over our closed heaven. The Bible is awash with people who demonstrated genuine love toward their neighbours, fellow men, prophets and God and the outcome was always delightful.

In Genesis 18:6-8, Abraham loyally gave to angels unknown. And the outcome? The promised child of

destiny called Isaac. Lot also did not miss out in this act even as he also was exempted from the catastrophe that befell Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19: 3; 15-22). The Shunamite woman gave as an act of courtesy and reverence without any prompting or prodding to the prophet Elisha and got an unexpected gift of a child which broke barrenness in her life (2 Kings 4: 8-37). What about the little boy whose voluntary offer of his breakfast of two fishes and five loaves (Matt. 14:17-22) that led to the feeding of five thousand men beside women and children? All these brief instances reinforce the pivotal place of giving in the body of Christ. Christianity is a practical experience that manifest in our acts of charity and goodwill to others. We are said to be the salt and light of a failing and faltering generation. The only evidence of our faith consists of our demonstration of unconditional love, kindness, care and concern for the hurting, the weak, the deprived, the orphaned, the widows, the indigent, the imprisoned, the naked and the needy. That makes our gospel message to be effortless, stress-free yet very impactful to the sinking and unfeeling world.

The Master's Work Thrives on the Platform Of Giving

There are so many things to do in the kingdom and the house of the Lord. Missionaries must be supported with logistics to advance the kingdom of God and depopulate Satan's infernal abode; the needy must be attended to as a commandment from the Father God, and so on and so forth. In Matthew 25:34-40, we read of the last day judgment where things men take for granted will be accounted for. The major underlying issue in this account is the extent to which we gave, assisted and visited those in need. At the end of the day, we will be rewarded with a majestic handshake plus an inheritance in the everlasting kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34).

All these pecks and privileges will only be accessed simply by our earthly concern and ministrations through giving to the needy, providing drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, cloth for the naked, visitation to the prisoner and warmly welcoming the stranger. Thus whatever resources we are well disposed, we should make it a point of duty to share with others less privileged. We have only one life to give and once to make a positive impression.

Often times, our giving should not be done in expectation of anything. If this is our mindset, then we are in the same boat with the long-caped Pharisees and Sadducees who always want their act of giving to be publicised and televised in the media and sundry organs. Our giving must transcend the tax collectors' and maintain a solemn, unsung disposition. That is how and when our heavenly father can reward us openly (Matt. 6: 1 -4).

Investment, sacrifice, service and giving all represent the human effort by mortal man to break away from the

deadly clutches of poverty. They are well packaged with the ornaments of gratitude, praise and worship. Let us therefore explore these two realms and see why the cardinal to a fulfilled life.

MULCHING THE LAND WITH THE MANURE OF GRATITUDE

Only the grateful are praiseful; only the praiseful are thankful; and only the thankful are "thankful"!

The land of the poor man is famished for the lack and failure to give prominence to the demand of appreciation. Ingratitude has robbed the poor on a daily basis of his breakthrough in life. Appreciation is the ability to recognize a favour or an act done by another with gratitude. It is appreciation that leads to thanksgiving. To thank simply means to show or acknowledge appreciation. Appreciation is an indirect application for yet another benefit or act of favour. A man who does not appreciate easily depreciates and his benefactor does not feel enthused to do more for him or her. Gratitude attracts heavenly and earthly approval. Appreciation is internal which if expressed becomes external, also known as thanksgiving. The two words "Thank you" are among the world's magical words of guaranteed and blessed propulsion. Like iron that sharpens iron, what you do not appreciate you cannot attract into your life. Psalm 95:2 says to,

"Come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms."

Also, Psalm 100:4, exhorts us thus,

"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name."

Psalm 26:7 concurs when it says,

"That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of Your wondrous works."

In Amos 4:5, the Scripture commands to,

"Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; for this you love, you children of Israel! says the Lord God."

It needs no further stressing that the entire book of Psalms is dedicated to profuse expression of thanksgiving and appreciation to our Lord who alone is Jehovah. Every word, line and sentence is embellished with the shining armour of thanksgiving from the grateful heart of mortal man to God for His wondrous acts then and forever.

Upon receiving their healing, the Scripture records that only one of the ten lepers returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, fell down on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. Agreed that the blessing of the Lord makes rich and He adds no sorrow with it (Prov. 10:22), yet any act of goodness or favour of

God that is not acknowledged will always lead to a burden and a curse that defiles him until he dies.

Our world of today is full of sworn ingrates. It is a thankless generation. But lest we forget, it is a major characteristic of the perilous times well foretold by the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1 -4.

1. But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

2. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3. unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,"

4. traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

5. Our society is replete with many who believe that whatever act of kindness extended to them is by right and not a privilege. That is why certain socio-economic benefits by government are considered fundamental rights, whereas, in reality there is nothing far from it. Most people do not as much as know that life is essentially a product of divine privilege from our loving, righteous, caring, benevolent and immensely wise King of the universe.

Thanks Givers Are High Flyers

Any man who desires to fly in life must of necessity put on the parachute of thanksgiving or else he is embarking on a disastrous journey. The poor believes that until all his needs are met he is not entitled to appreciate anyone. It is this feeling of thanklessness that results in more lack and want, and eventual envy of others. If the poor will just humble themselves in their state and always cultivate the habit of showing appreciation like the one leper who was healed and cleansed by Jesus anytime an act of favour is done to them, there is no doubt that they will see more goodies coming their way by the day. A wise man has reasoned that if you thank God for His finger, you can be sure to see His hand and when you thank Him for His hand you will see His face; and when you thank Him yet more for His face He will appear to you!

Thanksgiving must be made so popular and commonplace such as to suffocate ingratitude, coldness and closed mouth. For every single act of kindness shown to you, let the whole world know that you are grateful in deed and in truth. Let it be genuine, sincere and heart-felt, and not cosmetic and hypocritical. Let God know that you do not take Him and His shower of grace on you for granted less you be grounded and remain there for all time. It does not cost a dime to say thank you to a benefactor or a body that has done you good, let alone the Almighty God. Grateful people are thankful people and thankful people become "thankful" in life!

Pastor Ituah Ighodalo says that gratitude unlocks the fullness of life; it turns what we have into enough and more. This is in perfect agreement with the one leper among the ten others who came to show gratitude to

Jesus for His healing touch on him. At the end of the day he not only got healed but he was also cleansed and made as fresh as a newborn baby.

RAISING THE BAR WITH THE WISDOM OF WORSHIP

Worry will weary you, but praise will raise you

The act of worship is another wisdom button missing on the poor man's life keyboard. Worship refers to the act of reverence or deep regard or respect for somebody greater or higher than you, and in our context, God Almighty. In true and heartfelt worship, you do not recognize any fault in God, you just show adoration and total reverence to Him in spite of your present condition or situation.

Through genuine worship you end up provoking the rapt attention and uncommon intervention of heaven. There is nothing as potent which triggers emergency intervention of heaven like heartfelt worship. The type of worship that literally sees you lost in another realm but located and directed by the traffic of heaven!

In Matthew 4:10, when Jesus was confronted in a tempting ordeal with the devil, He checkmated Satan by reminding the fox that,
"You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve."

From this we can see clearly that worship is reserved only for the Heavenly Father, the creator of heaven and earth, the Father in whom is neither variableness nor shadow of turning. The worship of any other being - spiritual or material, celestial or terrestrial, is roundly condemned in its entirety. Idol worship, no matter its appeal to religious flavour and ecclesiastical tolerance, is therefore not only a sin and transgression of the Decalogue but it is also a curse on a man and his descendants to the third and fourth generations (Exodus 20:4).

True worship is the best connection between humanity and divinity. In worship to the Father, our Saviour Jesus Christ and our great Comforter the Holy Spirit, we must empty ourselves of any status, stature, influence, possession and crave the infilling of divine grace. Pride must be nailed to the Cross in order to receive in good measure the unconditional grace of God. In the same vein, our worship must be aligned in spirit and in truth according to the direction of our Lord Jesus Christ in John 4:24. Worshipping God in truth means that we are offering due reverence with sincerity of heart and a broken state.

In Matthew 15:8-9, Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah in condemning the hypocritical, lip service and faceful disposition of men toward God.

"These people draw near to Me with their mouth and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men "

Thus any form of worship that is conditional, cosmetic or vain is totally unacceptable to our God before whom the actions of men are weighed (1 Sam. 2:3).

In heaven, the only duty of celestial angels and the raptured saints is unbroken and untainted worship, away from the earthly distractions and mundane preoccupations of mortal man. The only tangible food mortal man can offer to the Almighty God is endless worship and unfettered praise.

In Revelation 5, we have an awesome image of the dignified and glorious environment of endless worship of our God. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders constitute the initiators and leaders of this celestial chorale. The songs churned out are infinitely sublime in praise and effusive worship. While the twenty-four elders are singing and adulating the Lamb for His capacity to redeem us in these words,

"You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Many angels swarming around the throne of God in their multitude of thousands were also chorusing in a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!"

Not done, every creature in heaven and on earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them were also saying:

"Blessing and honour, glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the lamb, forever and ever!"

Raise Your Worship Bar

Worry will surely weary you but praise will raise you! The whole duty of man is to praise, worship, thank and exalt the high and lofty Jehovah God who inhabits the realms of eternity (Is. 57:15).

From the intent of the scriptures above it becomes obvious that the dwelling place of God on earth is called praise.

"But thou art holy, O thou that inhabit the praises of Isarel" -Ps. 22:3

God does not dwell in man-made buildings so to say but in the effusive shouts, acclamations, worships, melodious hymns, psalms, joyful noise from joyful hearts, rhythmic singing, well-orchestrated musical accompaniments, David's rapturous, garment-exposed dancing and massively high praises.

We all have a duty to contribute in erecting this edifice that is not man-made so that He can come in His fullness, majesty excellency, holiness and awesome

power to intervene in our affairs, just like He did for the children of Israel in 2 Chronicles 20:22-25; *"And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten."*

When high praise and sublime worship are rendered to tickle heaven's royalty, ambushments against our "Judah" (praise) state are directed at our enemies. Praise is the sure key to unlock heaven's bounty doors. There is never error in praise. A man can pray amiss but he can never praise amiss! What is the whole duty of man if not to render endless praise, worship, shouts, acclamations and singing to Jehovah El-Shaddai?

REPELLING THE LETHAL DART OF ENVY

It was the "I" mindset that dethroned Lucifer from his lofty height of honour

Without doubt, one of the deadliest darts of the 'old man' is the spirit of envy. Listed as one of the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-20, envy is the perverted state or strong feeling of desiring to be in possession of another's property or to be in that person's stead in terms of progress. Envy is one of the spiritual sins that could obstruct our accessing God's kingdom. It is co-called because it does not manifest in physical form but you feel its lethal impact on people around. Others in this category include jealousy, malice, covetousness, hatred, anger, murmuring, greed, and so on. The Scripture is replete with manifest cases of envy as we shall unfold later here. Suffice it to say however that this attitude is one of the major shackles standing between many brethren and their own God-ordained blessings in the body of Christ today.

As usual in our spiritual analysis of terms of this nature, the first culprit and bad example will certainly be Lucifer the devil. It was his inordinate, insatiable desire to be like God that filled the cup of jealousy, envy, comparison, emulation and eventual treason which saw to his banishment from heaven's abode to the netherworld. The strong urge for the "It should be me; it ought to be me; it must be me instead of him/her mentality" has reduced potentially successful men to mere shadows of themselves. Very pretty ladies by every strand so on of imagination and human assessment who should be wives and mothers long ago are still struggling and being bugged down by this deadly arrow of envy. They wonder, question God in their heart and by their acts while less beautiful and endowed ladies in every facet of life compared to them are "lucky" in their reckoning and are getting noticed, being engaged married, having as many children as they so please, and enjoying the grace of marriage when it ought to be they who should savour these joys and privileges. Seemingly more hardworking men query God in their hearts and acts while they are not breaking through and forth, in and out in life and major

endeavours, instead of their intellectually less endowed colleagues and friends.

But because the Scriptures cannot be broken, in Exodus 33:19 this is what the Lord God Almighty says to mortal man,

"... I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will have compassion (show mercy) on whom I will have compassion (show mercy)."

One thing we must never forget is that God owes no man an apology for whatever He does or whosoever He. We are only to intreat His enduring mercy and unmerited favour on the basis of His abundant and sincere love. God's standard of judgment is basically different from our very narrow and immensely subjective scope of reasoning. The criteria which we resort to in adjudging others are outside and far inferior to God's pure, holy and sublime standard.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." - Isaiah 55:8-9

Envy results when a man is not or never satisfied with what he possesses. The insatiable nature of man has always remained a challenge to their expression of gratitude to those who may have benefited them in one way or the other.

As Christians and from another kingdom, envy must not be reckoned as a character among us. In the first place, envy is not a fruit of the Spirit and to that extent it should remain one of those works of the flesh we are required to do away with completely.

Over the millennia, Satan has not ceased using the worldly weapon of envy to cause disaffection among brethren. It was envy mixed with its twin brother jealousy that instigated Cain in slaying his blood brother Abel. Envy manifests in so many ways. In the case of Cain and Abel it was not because Abel had any possession or talent. It was very curiously because of right-hearted worship by one and self-centeredness and wrong sacrifice by the other.

After all, Cain had the same opportunity like his brother Abel to sacrifice his best to God but he chose to compromise, thereby misusing the opportunity. It was the consequence of envy that turned him into setting the record as the first murderer in Scripture. Envy is a burning force that misleads, misdirects and misunderstands a clear and obvious situation. Thus even your looks, attitude, humility, reverence for your God and positive disposition towards others can spark the hateful fire of envy, much more your education, academic qualification, leadership position, status, material possessions and the likes.

In the case of Joseph, it was on the basis of a spiritual gift of dreams and their interpretation. The enviable

person will always target anything you have as offending him.

In Genesis 37, we read the account of Joseph sharing the dreams he had with his parents and siblings - his family, so to say. This was a close knit nuclear unit. At the risk of being squarely criticised for indiscretion, he did not "open" his mouth as it were to others in the neighbourhood, nor did he publicise it beyond borders. And still there was trouble, why, because the brothers felt that he was going to lord it over them. Instead of being thankful to God for using a vessel from among them to communicate mysteries to them as a chosen family among the thousands in the land, all they could zero in on was to see little Joseph from their jaundiced view as their sworn enemy and schemed his destruction to prevent the fulfilment of this divine revelation. No wonder Jesus Himself said,

"A man's enemies will be those of his own household." - Matthew 10:36

In our contemporary world today, including the Church of God, the spirit of envy appears to have possessed many who in their hearts never wish those who are successful among them well.

I have found out rather painfully that envy constitutes a very strong hindrance to a man's blessings. In other words, envy attracts affliction and curses. That was what Cain received as a reward for expressing his feeling of envy by killing his brother Abel. Similarly, in the case of Joseph's brothers, not only did God humble them, He ensured that heaven implemented and translated the dreams into incorruptible and unassailable reality, never mind the momentary incarceration of Joseph. Remember the prison to palace experience? That is one of the strange yet humorous steps or ways by which our God intervenes in the affairs of men.

But the truth be told, envy remains one very debilitating obstacle to the full fluorescence of a man's destiny.

The Haman saga is yet another account of the foul odour of envy to a man's existence. This was a sworn enemy of Diasporan Jews taken captive by king Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon, among whom is a man named Mordecai who, though Esther's cousin, was her adopted father in this foreign land. What was Mordecai's unforgiveable sin as far as Haman was concerned?

Having acknowledged the unusual honour done to him by Queen Esther in inviting him to a special banquet with the king, he nevertheless still felt unfulfilled seeing Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. In time past in oriental civilization, this honour of waiting on the king was considered a special one. But the question would be, could just waiting on the long be anything comparable to being physically invited to a banquet with the long himself to wine and dine with him, partaking in and enjoying all the riches, pecks and privileges?

Yet as far as Haman was concerned, Mordecai must not breathe any fresh air of freedom or joy in his new

abode. This reminds me of the same horrendous evil visited on the Jews in Adolf Hitler's nazi-Germany during the 2nd World War (1939-1945). The deliberate and systematic extermination of the Jews in Germany in specially built gas chambers in different concentration camps in their conquered territories amounted to unspeakable horror and indelibly and so oned stain of horror of the 20th century. This Holocaust experience remains perhaps the ugliest, vilest, foulest and most vengeful of all universal atrocities and the very definition of man's inhumanity to man since creation.

Envy is a Murderous Drug, Avoid It

Perhaps, Adolf Hitler may have flipped through the book of Esther and seen how Mordecai the Jew escaped his tormentor-in-chief and vowed to avenge Haman's miserable and shameful death centuries later. Anyhow, the fact remains that the lethal dart of envy is one of those constant afflictions that overwhelm the poor (seen here as being filled with hatred for his fellow being).

Back to our biblical account, in Esther 5:9-13, the Bible records thus,

"9" Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. 10" Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. 11" And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. 12" Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow am I invited unto her also with the king. 13" Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." (words underlined and in bold mine for emphasis)"

We can see clearly in these verses the fallen state and depraved nature of the heart of man. Here was a man well honoured and exalted beyond his status but still harbouring the deadly spirit of envy against a lowly humble fellow. The conclusion is that Haman did not want Mordecai to exist at all. For just sitting at the gate and not bowing to him was the mother of all sins by poor Mordecai against Haman the god!

The story concludes by revealing how Haman and his ten sons were hanged in the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai and the Jews in the land, with the latter rising from the ashes of envy, hatred, organised persecution and being elevated into pomp and splendour (Esther 7:10, 9:13).

One thing envy does is that it conducts to jealousy, strife and evil thoughts, all of which can be seen in the Haman story. Seeing other's blessings and being blessed

is enough to breed malignity in certain people. This is one of the first malignant tumors of the poor which shuts them from accessing the grace of divinity.

Over the centuries, the church has listed seven vices which it rightly brands 'The Seven Deadly Sins' and which it warns believers to effectively conquer with the grace of the Holy Spirit. These include:

- ENVY - Ps. 27:20 (strong uncontrolled feeling of wanting something that other people have or possess). The opposite of this is the virtue of godly appreciation - 1 Pet. 1:3;
- GREED - Ps. 22:26 (strong desire for more wealth, possession including food and drink when one is no longer hungry, thirsty or materially deprived). The opposite of this is the virtue called godly contentment - 1 Tim. 6:6.
- SLOTH - Rom. 12:11 (incurably lazy disposition, inactivity, useless to self and society). The opposite of this is the virtue of diligence - Prov. 4:23;
- PRIDE - Prov. 29:23; Matt. 7:20-23 (self-glorification, having a high opinion of oneself and feeling more important than others). The opposite of this is the virtue of humility- James 4:6;
- ANGER- Eccl. 7:9 (strong uncontrollable reaction or outburst to a situation that shuts out pure reasoning which one considers bad or unfair, usually with devastating and unguarded consequences) – The opposite of this is the virtue of peace- Heb. 12:14;
- LUST - Gal. 5: 16-21 (very strong sexual desire especially when love is not involved). The opposite of this is the virtue of agape love - 1 Cor. 13:13;
- GLUTTONY - Prov. 23:21 (unbridled appetite for food, pleasures of life, exaltation of the flesh). The opposite of this is the virtue of moderation and self-control – Phil. 4:5;

The Divine Antidote: Rejoice With Others

But to every ailment there is a prescribed cure. The timeless panacea or cure to neutralize the lethal dart of envy is simply to rejoice and celebrate with the one being blessed. When you celebrate with others you will be celebrated yourself because what you appreciate is what you attract. The logic is simple. As you wish your friend, neighbour, colleague, associate and admirer well in your heart, it is being recorded as a credit to your account in the heavenly bank of grace and mercy.

This mindset is the surest, safest and quickest way to check the onslaught of envy in our lives. Instead of preoccupying our minds with the polluting effect of this gangrenous attitude and pining and whining away as if we are hated by God Almighty, we should rather do a reverse and choose by determination to rejoice at the success of others. Our God is the ultimate God of love and He loves us all equally.

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" - 1 Peter 2:1

One thing we must realize and which is a fact of life is that no two people are created the same, including Siamese or identical twins, blood siblings, and so on. our makeup - physical built or stature, spiritual mindset, social impact, economic influence, mental capacity, psychomotor and sensory skills, level of creativity, and so forth totally differentiate one from the other. This variety in creation was deliberately designed by God the Almighty. It is not for us to start questioning Him, rather we owe it a duty and responsibility to appreciate Him on our behalf and others. We must as a matter of fact not only rejoice with others, we must also pray for them. The Scripture has enjoined us to always pray for one another. As you pray for the success and breakthrough of others your heart leaps for joy at seeing them progress because it will occur to you that indeed God is still in the business of answering prayers. In your case, you can rest assured that your set time for favour is sooner than you expect. God's time is the approved time as it is also the best there is. To overcome the poison of envy we must rejoice inwardly and pray for others because it is heart thing. If envy is not dealt with squarely there is the tendency for it to mislead a person into taking harmful Decisions against others around us, something we never contemplate.

A critical appraisal of the story in Matthew 26:6-13 dearly shows that Judas Iscariot the traitor was driven by the force of envy. Whilst the woman was celebrating and worshipping the Master with the costly perfume, Judas did not only calculate the amount of the perfume, he had wished in his heart to be bestowed such honour. This can be deduced by inference because in verse 14 of the same chapter, Judas had gone stealthily to consult with the grand conspirators in the person of the Chief Priest and others to negotiate and seal the deal on how he might sell his Master for a paltry thirty pieces of silver, not even gold or diamond or platinum! This shows how desperate, lacking in reason and callous an envious person can turn out once he is bitten by the monstrous bug. This burning and intense rage of envy can turn a person into a monster if not properly tamed with the antidote of godly contentment.

The poor has always been a culprit in this regard. Once he sees a man or woman with and enjoying the niceties of life that he so desires to have, he immediately begrudges the possessor. At other times he becomes a fierce and most virulent critic of all rich people, castigating them for being greedy uncaring and "wicked" to others. He incites others against the rich person through deliberate or intentional distortion of facts or creating imaginary facts to justify the acrid criticism of the fortunate party. The poor man is always armed with a couple of self justifying facts,

information and hearsay evidences to rubbish, verbally attack, twist the mind of the gullible public and impugn on the character of the rich in the society. All of this stems from envy which is evil. Envy leads to poverty which perpetually puts or shuts a man's destiny into abject lack,

more destitution and insufficiency.

The poor man must of necessity and by choice avoid envy so that it does not shut him out of heaven's abundance.

QUENCHING THE FOUL SPIRIT OF MURMURING

Murmurers are coup plotters and treason is their offence!
Whilst the woman was engaged in more virtuous acts of worship, sacrifice and lavish giving to her Saviour, some of the apostles, including Judas Iscariot for sure, were busy murmuring against such act of worship. Murmuring, like pride, is a cancer of the spirit. It destroys and places one as a sworn enemy of the Omnipotent God. It was one single cause of the decimation and prevention of almost every adult Hebrew, save two - Joshua and Caleb, delivered from Egypt by the awesome power of God from entering the promised land of Canaan.

"And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I hear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, 'As I live', says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in my hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. but your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness.

I the Lord have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there shall they die." - Numbers 14:26-33;35.

To murmur is to quietly whisper and breathe the poison of hatred, dislike, disapproval and disdain for someone and what he does or represents. It is to undermine, by stealth, the effort of another who is struggling to please others. In the judgment against the children of Israel by the Lord God, it is obvious that this attitude puts God off and provokes Him beyond measure such as to earn whatever sanction as decreed for this "stiff-necked" generation. Nothing offends God so provocatively like murmur.

When you murmur, you are sending a signal of an intending coup against the person, his office or interest. You are stoking the vicious spirit of envy, malice and jealousy. These all go together and they are clear evidence of the works of the flesh referred to in Galatians 5:19-21. Murmuring is a serious provocation of the Lord God Almighty with deadly consequences. As children of

God we must be very careful not to provoke God in the way we murmur against the servant of God or workers - ushers, choir, traffic control staff, and so on. If we are not satisfied with what is going on or with their performance. It is better to confront the situation head on by expressing your position or how you feel to the person concerned or the church leadership.

Once a person is dedicated to do God's work, he becomes God's property and anybody who questions this through murmuring is directly confronting God which I do not counsel for a million pounds to contemplate. The person or murmurer is inadvertently expressing an invitation to fight God without saying one word. Murmuring is an expression of displeasure in a soft quiet tone against a person. In the case of the Lord God, since He is invisible, omnipresent and omniscient, nothing goes without His knowledge. No wonder 1 Samuel 2:3 reveals that,

"For the Lord is a God of knowledge and by Him actions are weighed."

What we think is secret is the most exposed information in the market arena, so naked with its content fully decoded by the divine computer of heaven. By murmuring, you are provoking God to a duel.

And trust God, He is a good fighter. He will fight such a person here and on the other side of life. While here, God will fight the person, his family children, job, health, business, education, position, office, aspiration, status, beauty, physique, joy, comfort, friends, anything or A/body protecting the person up until the person finally gives up the ghost. But the fight has just begun! He will fight the person in hell fire by directing that he is eternally tormented. Do not trivialize this for anything. The only solution to all these afflictions is to steer clear and remove oneself from the camp of murmurers.

The many cases of murmurers in the Scripture are enough to understand why this attitude is to be done away with in its entirety, especially for us who call on the name of the Lord.

From the gleanings of Scripture, there are eight ways of tempting God which include the following:

- Murmuring-Ex, 17:2
- Unbelief-Ex. 17:7
- Rebellion-Num. 14:22; 21:1-9
- Provoking God-Ps. 78:17-18,56
- Backsliding- Ps.78:41,56
- Lust and Sin-Ps. 95:8-9
- Idolatry - 1 Cor. 10:18-22

We remember the Aaron and Miriam saga and how they murmured against the Lord's anointed, Moses, including the consequence, in Numbers 12:1-15. This murmur was essentially out of jealousy because they had opposed Moses marrying an Ethiopian or Cushite woman. But little did they know that this had kindled the anger of the Lord

who called and chose Moses as His servant in a particular way, beyond the normal calling.

Thus Miriam and Aaron had crossed the boundary and for this they had to be dealt with. Unfortunately, it was Miriam who bore the brunt as she was made a living corpse in that she became a loathed leper, as white as snow. In Old Testament times, the affliction of leprosy was seen as the ultimate affliction, like the present dreaded AIDS or Ebola virus disease, such as require seven days' quarantine outside the camp. This was a total humiliation. Remember the saying that pride goes before a fall?

In murmuring, intent is everything and in 1 Samuel 2:3, the Scripture says,
"For the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed."

In the case of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, their judgment was even more fearsome as the earth opened up itself and swallowed up these rebels-in-chief along with their wives, sons, daughters, families and entire household (Numbers 16).

It is in line with these devastating consequences that murmuring is forbidden in Scripture on pain of death or such unimaginable verdict. In Psalm 37:1, the Scripture warns thus,

"Do not fret because of evil doers, nor be envious because of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither like the green herb."

"Nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer." -1 Cor. 10:10

"Do all things without complaining and disputing." - Phil. 2:14

"Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold the fudge is standing at the door." - James. 5:9

Murmuring is thus a robber of destiny, besides pitching mortal man against the Almighty God. It must be avoided with every force in us. A man cursed by a mortal man is easily redeemable by God Almighty.

"As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come." - Prov. 26:2

A man cursed by a man or servant of God requires extra effort, deep repentance and forgiveness from the man of God to enjoy redemption (Num. 12).

But if a man be cursed by God Almighty, who can redeem him? This is why we must be careful how we willingly give ourselves to the destroyer of destinies to ruin us beyond redemption (Num. 16).

NEUTRALISING THE STENCH OF SPIRITUAL RODY POLLUTION

The Stood of Jesus is the most potent deodorant available

I have decided to reserve this factor for the last due to its

personal implication for the individual. This body pollution has nothing to do with the physical body odour that is a consequence of lack of management or treatment of one's pigmentation at birth such that as the person grows into adulthood, the blocked pores begin to effuse certain unpleasant odour or smell especially during perspiration in the heat of the sun. If this is what I am talking about here, then my assignment will be brief enough as I can easily recommend through epidemiologist friends of mine here and abroad to prescribe drugs, body lotions, soaps, powerful deodorants, perfumes and the likes such that the person will end up smelling sweet all the time.

I am talking here of a body pollution with a strong spiritual undertone, the type that repels good fortunes, great and! Feat-breaking opportunities, choice investments and such glorious destiny-changing activities from a person. I talk here of destiny wasters and killers. This is without doubt an affliction that requires a frontal attack or self¹ deliverance.

This spiritual body pollution can either be of a generational description due to a curse placed on the lineage or genealogy. This curse may be as a result of wrong done by the head or a principal member of the family. Or it could be that the curse was placed on the family due to an abomination, the violation of a community taboo such as incest between a father and his daughter or niece or son's daughter, and so on.

I particularly recall an incident involving a popular family within my state in which three prominent members of the family died mysteriously within two weeks. Those who knew the family narrated how in time past the patriarch of the family had committed incest with his own daughter for so long that a curse was placed on the family by the community, having learnt of the development and prevailed on the culprit to desist and make an atonement to cleanse the land of such unimaginable abomination. But the man proved recalcitrant and at the end of the day a curse was pronounced on the entire family. This happened long ago almost beyond remembrance.

Decades later, the effect of the curse started to take its toll on the family and the first indicator were three lives lost within two weeks. Some may say this is just coincidental, but do not forget that in the spirit realm, a thousand years are like a day and a day like unto a thousand years unto the Lord (Ps. 90:4). Also, whatsoever a man sows, that also shall he reap (Gal. 6:7-8). These are eternal and universal laws that are not subject to human analysis, scientific verification or concrete evidence. Earthly things are ultimately connected in the spirit realm.

At other times it could result from the dedication of a member of the family to a god or gods with a taboo that such member must not have children again or must never touch a particular animal talk less of killing and eating it; the consequence of all these heathen practices and taboos can be devastating to an unsaved person who is

yet to encounter Christ. However, having done so, the intervention of Calvary is unmistakable. But sometimes there are cases of some folks even as believers in Christ still under this spell, curse, enchantment or divination. This is where personal responsibility as a child of God comes in to play.

Spiritual body pollution could also be as a result of wrong orientation. By this I mean a situation where a person is following a destiny destroyer or tormentor instead of a destiny lifter, a destiny mentor or encourager. Or it could be that the person is doing the wrong job, plying the wrong trade, reading or studying the wrong course, acquiring the wrong skills and such deviations that subtract instead of adding value to his life. All these are the consequences of not being led by the Holy Spirit of God (John 16:12-15).

In Romans 8:14, the scripture declares assuredly, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."*

In John 15:5, Jesus makes it clear to us when He says, *"I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same bring; much fruit: for without me you can do nothing."*

From our understanding of Isaiah 3:24, pride is one of the major causes of stench or spiritual body pollution.

"And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty."

However, before this curse or pronounced judgment on mankind, the scripture states the reasons in Isaiah 3:16-18,

"Moreover the Lord says: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstrand so onhed necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, making a jingling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will uncover their secret parts."

It is needful to be very spiritually sensitive to the assault of body pollution and tackle it headlong through personal deliverance. Life is all about taking responsibility to confront these challenges and attack this cancer with the fiercest determination. Satan is the master pollutant and he has a thousand and one ways and means of covering people's glorious destinies with this stench that chokes beauty and greatness off men. As a 2 Corinthians 5:17 Christian, you have the ready antidote to neutralise this destiny destroyer as provided in Isaiah 10:27,

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing."

I am glad to announce to you that "that day" is today and as you read this book, the quickening power of the Holy Ghost anointing shall consume and liquidate any harassment on your life. This is what the Lord says He will do and has done for you. Receive it in faith today and fulfill your destiny without the harassment of the evil one.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, God created abundance, excess, surplus, net-breaking and boat-sinking supplies for mankind (Gen. 1:1; 11-12; 20-31).

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."
-Gen. 1:1

"And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so." -
Gen 1:11-12

"And God said, let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth." - 20-22.

Equally but as a consequence of disobedience, man chose and brought curse, poverty, lack, insufficiency, toil, torment, destitution and despair upon himself (Gen. 3:17-19).

"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

By the universal and eternal principles of sowing and reaping, only creators, workers, investors, initiators, manufacturers, designers, traders, and such as belong to this group are entitled to enjoy abundance and live comfortably. God is no respecter of persons and the Scriptures cannot be broken.

The woman in our anchor Scripture, Matthew 26:6-13, as a reference for our study of the concept of poverty has, like the ant, taught us some fundamental lessons of life and the need to take personal responsibility for our actions and our state of being. We must take to heart what she taught us and which have been laid out for our profiting in this book.

Poverty is not a must get fashion dress or jewelry or precious stone that should be possessed or purchased or kept in a strong treasure box. It is not some pet to curry

or a designer suit to wear; it is an affliction of the mind manifesting in material deprivation. Therefore, it should, by our individual and collective actions, be reduced to its barest minimum of influence. Poverty is ravaging nations, communities, families and individuals at a rate never before imagined.

The mentality or mindset of the poor remains his Achilles heels. Unless and until he decides with such vehement resistance to burst and resist its power by gainfully engaging his thought process in investing, sacrificing or paying the price, serving, exploiting and maximising as many opportunities or creating as many others, and so on, his state of lack may just continue to dare and overwhelm him beyond his imagination. The developed nations or the wealthy people of the world today did not wake up one day to find wealth thrust on them by happenstance. They paid the price through diligence, commitment, sacrifice, investment in human and material resources. They did not consume their surplus in a day. They saved for the rainy days many of which did come. They understood the times and seasons like the children of Issachar. The woman in our story did all these and more. She worshipped, appreciated, served, gave and humbled herself before the Lord in order to be exalted.

Poverty and its entangling condition remains one enigma or riddle to unravel. It takes courage and determination to break out of its gripping cocoon. As children redeemed to excel, we have a role to play to reduce its surging rate. If the average man will key into these nuggets and apply the principles proposed in this book, I have no doubt that his testimony is the next on line. Above all, the poor must overcome envy by actualising the antidote recommended in this book. Rejoicing at the progress of others is the easiest way to access heaven's blessings.

I am glad to finally lay down this burden to unfold these kingdom trade secrets for this generation. Instead of adopting the 'feeding bottle' mentality of always waiting for manna to fall from heaven or from the government, state, community or some more fortunate persons out there, why not rather choose to be a contributor adding value, wealth and blessing to others? Let our mentality as Africans change henceforth. It is not an abomination to be lending to European and American nations instead of the other way round that seems to be a permanent order today. Let us tap more into the formidable mine of internal capacity in our respective faculties and improve the world much better than we met it.

The rate of poverty in our environment is intolerable and indefensible. The time to turn the table is now. All of us have a stake in this project of kicking poverty from our society by our actions. God expects us to keep and dress this earthly vineyard for our own profiting (Gen, 2:15). We must not disappoint Him any further.

World and African legend in life and beyond, Nelson Mandela, popularly called Madiba has impressed on

everyone to make poverty history. Will you heed the call and change your little environment? The time to take responsibility is NOW!

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

"Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the sons of God!" -1 John 3:1

It is on this premise that I consider it pertinent to acknowledge the immeasurable grace and mercy of my heavenly Father who has inspired me to engage this work by joining the crusade to eradicate the upsurge of poverty mentality that continues to threaten and ravage our generation.

Let me start by appreciating my destiny encourager, Evang. Prince (Dr.) Michael Diden for inspiring me at the very beginning with his humble story of how he met poverty face to face, confronted it and conquered it. Today, his life is an evidence to show that one's birthplace does not determine his birthright and that you can move from zero to hero.

In the same vein, I remain indebted in thanks and appreciation to the following destiny mentors and God's generals in the land for their specific roles in my exciting odyssey: Papa and Mama Ayo Oritsejafor, Archbishop God-Do-Well Awomakpa, Archbishop (Prof.) Michael Orkah, Bishop Mike Laju, Bishop Felicia Leleji, Bishop Emmanuel MacJones, Pastor Magnus Ogun, Evang. Austin Otu, Evang. Jimoh, Rev. Uzuaze, Pastors and members of Christ Foundation Ministry Worldwide.

Further thanks also go to Rev. Dr. Joshua Afolabi who through the leading of the Spirit ordained and poured the anointing oil on me as a Minister of the glorious gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on a Good Friday! I also acknowledge the role of Rev. Pajiah (Rtd.) of the First Baptist Church Sapele and the entire members of that dynamic body of Christ for all the spiritual, social and sundry trainings that have helped to empower and shape my life.

I am most indebted to Mr. Larry Mogbeyiteren for his visible intellectual input from the blast of the whistle in the planning, editorial critique, typesetting, proofreading into what eventually culminated in the publication of this book. I also appreciate my beloved brother in Christ, Dr. Michael Ekotogbo for being there always.

I must also not forget to acknowledge these great personalities for their invaluable impact by reason of predestined encounters with them at some point in my life; they added tangible value to me: thank you Chief Andrew K. and Dame Patience Osawota, Mr. Oritsuwa Kpogho, FCA and Sir Austin Ede Oghoro.

I also do not by any means leave out my Godmother, Mummy Juliet Mowarin for believing in me when it was not convenient to do so, as well as Barr. Emuobo Bazunu, thereby bringing the best out of me.

Then, I reserve an indelible place in my heart to celebrate my parents in consanguinity and affinity Mr. and Mrs. Austin Edema-Eyen and an array of my treasured

brothers and sisters, Mr. Godwin Bodje, Mrs. Mofe Ikanone, Pst. Jolomi Edema-Eyen and Pst. (Engr.) Utiyinyin Edema-Eyen.

To a couple of my beloved parents-in-law, Chief and Mrs. Oma Eyewuoma, my amiable in-laws, Mr. Gbesinmi Eyewuoma, Mr. Taye Eyewuoma, Barr. Gabriel Eyewuoma and Mrs. Alero Gwoti, I remain grateful for making me a part of you.

Finally, I celebrate my delectably lovely wife, Omayeli in whom I am well pleased as well as my wonderful children who remain bundles of joy now and always: Nira, Oyo and Gbogwa. I love you all.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife, Maye, my soul mate and companion in this journey called life. Thank God, I married my friend.

BIBLE VERSES

- ✓ Prov. 23:7
- ✓ Proverbs 6:10-11
- ✓ Hosea 4:6
- ✓ Genesis 1:27
- ✓ Genesis 2: 16-17
- ✓ Genesis 3:17-19
- ✓ Genesis 26:1
- ✓ Genesis 12:10
- ✓ Acts 17:10
- ✓ Ephesians 4:13-15
- ✓ Isaiah 1:18
- ✓ Philippians 4:8
- ✓ Genesis 25:29-34
- ✓ Ecclesiastes 9:14-16
- ✓ John.5:2
- ✓ 1 Kings 21
- ✓ 2 Samuel 12:1-5; 8-9
- ✓ Matthew 11:21-22
- ✓ Prov.23:7
- ✓ Matt. 12: 33 - 35
- ✓ Rom. 2:28
- ✓ Prov. 22:29
- ✓ Prov. 1 12:24
- ✓ Deuteronomy 15:11
- ✓ Acts 18:5
- ✓ Mark 6:3
- ✓ Matthew 13:55
- ✓ Mark 14:3-9
- ✓ Luke 7:36-50
- ✓ John 12:3-8
- ✓ Proverbs 4:7
- ✓ Proverbs 3:13
- ✓ Proverbs 6:6
- ✓ Genesis 1:28-31
- ✓ Matthew 25:10-13
- ✓ 1 John 2:16
- ✓ Proverbs 10:22

- ✓ Proverbs 10:5
- ✓ Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8
- ✓ Psalm 126:5
- ✓ Proverbs 30:25
- ✓ Proverbs 6:6-8
- ✓ John 9:4
- ✓ Luke 15:11-32
- ✓ Genesis 8:22
- ✓ Luke 13:6-9 and 21;25-28
- ✓ Matthew 21:18-19
- ✓ Luke 8:4-8; 11-15
- ✓ Hosea 4:6
- ✓ Proverbs 8:12
- ✓ Luke 21:15
- ✓ Exodus 4:2-3; 17
- ✓ Judges 14:14
- ✓ Kings 4 reading from verse 1
- ✓ Proverbs 27:17
- ✓ Job 8:9
- ✓ Zechariah 4:10
- ✓ 1 Kings 19:18
- ✓ 2 Samuel 14:14; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11
- ✓ Luke 19: 20-21
- ✓ 1 Chronicles 12:32
- ✓ Mark 14:7 and 9
- ✓ Ecclesiastes 9:11
- ✓ 1 Samuel 24: 1-22
- ✓ Proverbs 11:25
- ✓ 2 Thessaonians 3:7-11
- ✓ John 12:2-6
- ✓ Luke 10:
- ✓ James 1:18
- ✓ Exodus 23:12
- ✓ Matthew 6:7-13
- ✓ Hebrew 13:8
- ✓ Genesis 2:15
- ✓ Deuteronomy 15:11
- ✓ Deuteronomy 28:12
- ✓ Ecclesiastes 5:12
- ✓ Proverbs 12:11
- ✓ Proverbs 6:9-11
- ✓ John 13:1-17
- ✓ Genesis 27:3-4; 25-29
- ✓ Genesis 22:13
- ✓ Hebrews 10:14
- ✓ Luke 21:2-3
- ✓ Judges 11:30-31
- ✓ Judges 11:35
- ✓ 1 Samuel 15:22-23
- ✓ Ephesians. 5:2
- ✓ Romans 12:1-2
- ✓ 1 Corinthians. 3 16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians. 6:16
- ✓ Galatians 6: 19-21
- ✓ Romans 12:10-13
- ✓ John 3:16
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- ✓ Psalm 95:2
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