

BACK TO LIFE

A 40-Day Bible Study Guide for Spiritual Revival



International Church of Christ Nigeria

www.icocnigeria.org

Back to Life

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#1, Otunba Jobi Fele Way
Central Business District, Alausa
Ikeja. Lagos.

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General Editors and Project Managers:
Chris and Rolayo Ogbonnaya

Subediting:
Adebowale Aderibigbe

Cover Design, Typesetting and Layout:
Emmanuel Emeh

About This Book

This is a 40-day daily Bible study guide that is designed to stimulate and refocus our members to the faith we profess. It is a tool for individuals and small groups in our Church to reevaluate and restore their walk with God in the various areas discussed. It contains daily personal quiet time guides and also great discussion and devotional insights.

BACK TO LIFE

A 40-DAY STUDY SERIES

FOREWORD

It is a glorious beginning because we are witnessing a brand new year. Therefore as we go into another year and milestone in our lives, we pray for a 2012 that will see us attain a new level in our walk with/devotion to God.

We praise God for our church family. We have borne together; suffered and rejoiced together; praised and worshipped God together; laughed and cried together; and, by God's grace we have made it this far in Christ together.

This 40 day study series is a call for us to study God's word together as well as to pray, fast and deepen our commitment to God together. Do not be left out.

"Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet." (Hebrews 12:12-13). Let us walk this 40-day road back to life together.

Leave behind the sins of apathy, laziness and lack of commitment. Forgive the hurts of 2011 and reconcile with your brother/sister. Attend Sunday and midweek services regularly. Give of yourself by serving in the Kids kingdom, choir, cleaning, ushering, security, finance or any other department. Give financially also, and do it cheerfully believing that you can never out give God. Rededicate yourself to reaching out to the poor and the lost.

Let us make this a resurrection of commitment, courage, zeal and love. Let us pray for each other and encourage each other. Let us leave the past behind and strain forward on the road back to life.

Remain blessed.

I.C.O.C., Nigeria Staff and Church Leaders.

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MY GOD

*Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but Thee.*

JAMES EDMESTON

(Lead Us, Heavenly Father)

DAY 1

GIVE IT UP

Those of us from the “slightly” older generation may remember the song that went thus:

'Give them all (give them all) 2ce

Give them all to Jesus

Shattered dreams, wounded hearts, broken thoughts...

Chorus

And He will turn your sorrows into joy.

Sometimes I don't like what I have become. My sins weigh me down again and again. I battle daily against complacency in my walk with God, as well as laziness and pride toward my brothers and sisters, to mention a few.

We are desperate to enter this year without lugging around the burdens of 2011; yet we all have issues. What a dilemma.

The truth is we need help. There is no shame in this.

I am reminded of my situation, barely 4 years ago, finding myself in hospital in America, having suffered a stroke. As the doctor pronounced his diagnosis and I was told that I would be admitted. I turned to my elder sister and said in Yoruba, “Sister, I don't have money o”. She calmed me down and I was admitted; received treatment and therapy and was discharged 18 days later. During that period, a social worker came and asked me how I would pay the bill. Upon learning about my situation she promised that the hospital would help. At the end of the day a bill of roughly N11,000,000 (eleven million naira) was written off by the hospital, and I paid nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing! This can be nothing but God!!

There is no harm in asking for help - **Matthew 7: 7- 11.**

Remind Jesus of his promise in **Matthew 11: 28 – 30.**

Difficult family problems; life threatening health challenges; unconfessed sins; confessed sins that you are still struggling with; dire financial/material need; bereavement; unrealized dreams; name it. We all have something. Give it up to Jesus through prayers of faith; receive counsel from his Word. Accept the support of other disciples. Give it up to Jesus. He will point the way. Happy 2012!

Getting Back to Life

1. Write down the situations/struggles you want to leave behind this year?
2. What sins are you still involved in?
3. Do you really believe that God cares about you?
4. Do you really believe that God can transform you and your situation?
5. Are you willing to act in faith and repentance where necessary?
6. Find someone at church who can encourage/help you?

*As I arise today,
may the strength of God pilot me,
the power of God uphold me,
the wisdom of God guide me.
May the eye of God look before me,
the ear of God hear me,
the word of God speak for me.
May the hand of God protect me,
the way of God lie before me,
the shield of God defend me,
the host of God save me.
May Christ shield me today.
Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit,
Christ when I stand,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
Amen*

Prayers of Patrick of Ireland

DAY 2

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER

In **Ephesians 5: 18** the apostle Paul warns us not to get drunk on wine but be filled with the Spirit. Anyone who is drunk on wine can be noticed very easily. The same is true of someone who is filled with the Spirit. Such a person's joy is infectious and they are always selfless.

Now that we are learning to give it all to Jesus we must not be left empty. We need a revival of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

When Jesus was on earth He told his disciples that it would be better for them when He left. (**John 16: 7**) He said that the Holy Spirit would live within them. Jesus only walked beside them. Now we have His Spirit inside us. WOW!

The Holy Spirit is our Counselor. **John 16: 7**

The Holy Spirit is our helper. **Rom. 8: 26**

Discuss/write down these attributes of the Holy Spirit and how they impact you daily.

We need to change. We must get closer to God. Do we quench the Spirit or put out His fire? (**1 Thessalonians 5: 19**)

The Holy Spirit will give you the power to change. He has been doing it for thousands of years. In **Acts 2**, he transformed the disciples from a frightened group to bold proclaimers of the truth.

In **Acts 4: 29 – 31**, He shook the building where the disciples prayed and He gave them even more courage.

Getting Back to Life

Write down everything you know about the Holy Spirit.

How have you seen the Holy Spirit change your life in the past and in the present?

How can you tap into God's power today and see His strength unleashed in your life?

Eph 1:18-21

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,"

DAY 3 FEAR GOD

When I read the book of Ecclesiastes from the beginning to the end, I found it very depressing. As Solomon repeated the word "meaningless" over and over, I wondered why on earth such a book was in the Bible. Later I understood and believe that Solomon himself wished he had practiced these lessons while he was still young.

Ecc1 11:9

"Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment".

Be happy and enjoy your life; only remember that God will judge you. As people who have made a commitment to God, we must honor our vow that 'Jesus is Lord'. We drift from God because we do not fear Him – **Ecc1 5: 4-6**.

Many of us have completely forgotten our vow to God. Still others look back and mock that same vow. The thief on the cross rebukes us; "don't you fear God" - **Luke 23: 40**.

Solomon looked back with regret on his life and is begging us not to make the same mistakes.

Our lives are fragile. You can die in an instant, no matter how young or healthy you think you are. I was shocked when I suffered a stroke at 42. I went from vibrant to dependent in one afternoon. All my plans changed. My busy schedule was cancelled. Surviving from one day to the next was my only preoccupation; and it was very scary. Every morning was a miracle. The day I was discharged from hospital, I opened my Bible and read **James 4: 13-17**. You are a mist. God owes you nothing and He can do whatever He wants. Sober up. In conclusion Solomon writes **Ecc1 12:13-14**. Fear God, it is your life.

Getting Back to Life

1. What are you afraid of? Why?
2. What does it mean to you to fear God?
3. Would you say your life is self-focused or God-fearing?
4. List the things you will change in order to practice the fear of God?

"Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue"

EUGENE O'NEILL
(*The Great God Brown*)

MY HEART

“O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.

2 You know when I sit and when I rise;

you perceive my thoughts from afar. ...

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 See if there is any offensive way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Ps 139:1-2, 23-24 (NIV)

DAY 4 GIVING MY ALL

1 Chron. 28:9

"And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts"

Deut. 6:4-5

"Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Col. 3:23

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,..."

Our God is a God of the heart. While we are consumed with what we see or don't see on the outside, God looks well beyond that. And what is He looking for? Yes – wholeheartedness. He gave the command of wholehearted devotion to the Israelites. It was not enough to observe the law meticulously and offer all the right sacrifices.

Someone asked Jesus centuries later in **Mt. 22:34-38** "Of all the do's and don't's God has given us, what is really the most important one? "Jesus wasted no time in giving him the answer – (this was not a moment for parables!) –TO LOVE GOD WITH YOUR ALL.

Do you appreciate half-heartedness in others? Surely not! Imagine a groom at his wedding making this vow, "Sweetheart, I promise to love you when I can and if I can..." That would be disastrous!

Recently, I had it with my plumber and vowed never to contract his services again because of his uncommitted attitude. I'm sure you can relate!

Our acceptable act of worship is to give our whole selves to God. Nothing less will do.

As we begin a new year through God's mercy, ask Him for the grace to give Him your all in 2012.

Getting Back to Life

1. In what specific ways have you held back from God in the past? Your finances, your time, your talents, your commitment and passion, your relationships with others?
2. Commit to God by faith one area of your life that has hitherto been difficult to surrender. Ask Him to have His way.
3. Read **2 Chronicles 6:14** .What is the blessing for those who serve God wholeheartedly?

*"2 Test me, O Lord, and try me,
examine my heart and my mind;
3 for your love is ever before me,
and I walk continually in your truth."*

Ps 26:2-3 NIV

DAY 5

KEEPING IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT

Gal. 5:25

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"

Eph. 6:17-18

"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests"

1 John 5:14

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us"

Today we continue learning how to keep our hearts pleasing to God by keeping in step with the Spirit.

What does it mean to keep in step? I think of harmony, unity, agreement.

Last year we had a brother visit us from our church in the United States. At Sunday service he was amazed to see how we Africans can effortlessly clap, sing and REALLY dance all at the same time. He confessed that keeping in step with all of that was impossible for him!

As Disciples of Christ we must live by the Spirit of Jesus, not by the spirit of this world. And our goal each passing day, month and year of our Christian life is to grow in harmony, unity and oneness with the Spirit until what we desire equals what the Spirit desires; What we are passionate about equals what the Spirit is passionate about. What we detest equals what the Spirit detests.

The more we train ourselves to keep in step with the Spirit, the closer we come to God. Then, because our desires are the Spirit's desires, our requests in prayer are granted because as 1 John 5:14 says , we ask according to God's will.

How do I know when I'm in step with the Spirit? Do I need to have dreams or revelations or supernatural occurrences to confirm what the Spirit wants me to do?

While God can choose any means to speak to us His children and He sometimes uses the extraordinary to catch our attention, He has told us in **Eph. 6: 17** that His word is the sword of the Spirit. The Spirit reminds us to do what God has said. Do you sometimes experience an inner prompting to give something to someone in need or to share your faith with the stranger beside you or to volunteer yourself to serve? That is the Spirit –keep in step with Him by being obedient.

Getting Back to Life

1. Write down 3 desires of the Spirit that you know of (crosscheck in your Bible) and 3 desires of your own. Do they tally? If not, scratch and rewrite until both your list of 3 desires and the Spirit's are virtually the same.
2. Transfer those items to your prayer list and pray about them every day. (Get ready to be answered quicker than you think!)

9 How can a young man keep his way pure?

By living according to your word.

*10 I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.*

*11 I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.*

*12 Praise be to you, O Lord;
teach me your decrees.*

*13 With my lips I recount
all the laws that come from your mouth.*

*14 I rejoice in following your statutes
as one rejoices in great riches.*

*15 I meditate on your precepts
and consider your ways.*

*16 I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.*

Ps 119:9-16 (NIV)

Day 6

Giving My All

"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted" – Romans 6:17

*"It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian,
but it does take ALL of him."*

– **Anonymous**

We live in a world where we are told to always look for the easy and fast way to do things and get to the top. Sweat and hard work is seen as old fashioned. Everyone seems to be on that fast lane pushing to get ahead of you. This craze leads to cutting corners, cheating, lying and stealing. As I write this piece, we are approaching the Christmas season of buying and selling. The atmosphere is charged and emotions are running high. It is at this time that we tend to forget we are Christians – slaves to righteousness. We are tempted to drop our guard and join in the rat race of consumerism and profiteering.

It will take your "All" to be different and to stay focused. No matter how hard and difficult, you must not forget the teachings you have received. God is watching and waiting. It is so easy to look at what those around us are doing and then conclude that we are okay in our giving and contribution to the service of God and people. I definitely fall into this category as a full time Minister. It is humbling and challenging to know that I will not be judged by the actions or inactions of others, but by God's righteous standards. Therefore, as a recipient of God's grace and mercy, I am expected in response to give my all – **Luke 12: 48b**.

Mark 12: 41-44 tells of the poor lady who gave two copper coin, which the Bible is quick to tell us is worth only a fraction of a penny, but was seen by Jesus as the most acceptable giving that day. Why is this so?

This is more than just a concept of financial giving. It is a heart-check and a life examination. We all need to learn more about wholehearted devotion and service. It is not about how much you

gave but how much you keep back for yourself. The craze to acquire and amass material things for ourselves can lead to our giving less and less to the Church and to people. Life becomes for us how much we have stashed away for the "rainy" day than how much value we have added to other people's lives through our generosity. Remember the saying "Givers never lack."

Getting Back to Life

1. What scares you the most about giving your "All" as a disciple
2. What areas of your life seem half-hearted at best? Why?
3. What can you do to show God you love him with all you are and have?

"I have no ambition in this world but one, and that is to be a fireman.

*The position may, in the eyes of some, appear to be a lowly one;
but we who know the work which the fireman has to do believe that his is a noble calling.*

Our proudest moment is to save lives.

*Under the impulse of such thoughts, the nobility of the occupation thrills us and stimulates us to deeds
of daring, even of supreme sacrifice."*

Chief Edward F. Croker

(American Firefighter Chief of Department)

Day 7

My Passion For God

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'. There is no commandment greater than these" **Mark 12: 30**

"Those who danced were thought to be quite insane by those who could not hear the music"
Angela Monet

Passion drives everything in life. It is the life-blood of every great feat and accomplishment – art, sports, music, business, etc. There is very little a man can achieve without passion and this very well includes his walk with God.

As a soccer lover, I know how passionate I can get in the field of play, on the stand watching or at home viewing a game. I give it my "All"! No matter what it will cost and what harsh condition I will face, I will go the whole hog to catch a game of the Super Eagles or London Arsenal (The Gunners!) against any opposing team. We are all passionate animals. The question is, what are you passionate about? What trips you?

Is your desire to be with God evident in your Bible study and prayer life? Our time with God daily is very important, as it affords us the chance to listen to him as he speaks to us through his word (the Bible) and to present our requests and petitions to him in Prayers. Are your times with God hurried? Are you proud of your love relationship with God? Who are you sharing it with?

If you get passionate about Jesus, you are considered a cult member at worst or an unambitious loser at best. You come to Church as if you are being forced, with a long, sad face and arms folded across your chest. You grudgingly throw in a few naira (if any at all) into the collection tray and barely open your mouth to sing. All these are signs that your passion for God is on the wane if not already dead. You cannot hide your passion for whatever you love. Do not allow other things take away your heart for God. If you do not give yourself wholly to God other things will take that place in your heart. What are you passionate about?

Getting Back to Life

1. Are there areas in your life that you think you can make changes to show you love for God?
2. What sacrifices are you struggling to make in your service for God?
3. Make a list of some fun things you will do this week to stimulate your walk with God?

Day 8

My Passion For The Church

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles’. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved”

Acts 2: 42-47

In this narrative in Acts, we see the true life of the early Church. This is the example that we are trying to model in our twenty first century fellowship of God’s people. It seems a very hard call indeed.

We see a people who are dedicated and passionate in not just their love for God but also for the Church. I want to assume that most of you reading this know that “Church” is not a building or a worship time. Real Church is about the community of God’s people who have decided to make Jesus the primary focus. Their primary intent is on how to help each other achieve that focus (**Acts 4: 32-33**).

On October 24, 1989 I made the confession that Jesus is Lord and I was baptized and added to the number of those being saved! I remember the feeling of love and compassion I felt over the forgiveness of my sins and the vow I made to remain faithful to the end. I remember the warm embrace of the few brothers and sisters at my baptism (it happened at 1pm!) and the party that followed that evening! The family atmosphere was palpable and rich. I remember the many that God has used in the past 22 years to help me mature and grow in my faith and life as a husband, father and Leader. It is easy to take all these for granted as the years go by in our Christian life. I desire to give my ‘All’ in response to this love.

God has used the Church to reach out and snatch us from the jaws of the devil. He has used people to reach out to us when we are blinded and steeped in sin. He is still using the Church today to strengthen and sharpen our faith. How grateful are you for these?

It is hard to imagine that God can bring people from all walks of life and diverse background into a community of faith. The Acts story is a picture of a passionate – not perfect- Church.

Getting Back to Life

1. How passionate are you about the Church?
2. What services are you going to render to show your gratitude for the love you have received from the Church community?

*"Great ambition is the passion of a great character.
Those endowed with it may perform very good or very bad acts.
All depends on the principles which direct them."*

Napoleon Bonaparte

DAY TIME

“Lost, yesterday, somewhere between Sunrise and Sunset,
two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes.

No reward is offered, for they are gone forever.”

Horace Mann

DAY 9

JESUS THE LORD OF MY TIME

*"Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him and he will do this:
He will make your righteousness shine like dawn,
the justice of your cause like the noonday sun"*

Psalm 37: 5-6

It is the beginning of another brand new year; Times like this are moments of hustling, striving, and pursuing our goals and a deep desire to actualize our resolutions for the year as it is customary at the beginning of a new year.

We are still fresh in our desire to put God first; the memory of unachieved goal of previous year is fresh. One thing we will not want to repeat are the failures of the previous year; but how can we sustain our dream for the New Year?

David calls us to take delight in the Lord and commit everything we have and do (our time and ways) to him. To delight in someone means to experience great pleasure and joy in his or her presence.

I am never bored being around my loved ones particularly my wife and kids-no dull moment. This is because I have come to know them well. Thus to delight in the Lord (Jesus), we must allow Him to be in the centre of our daily itinerary .We must know him better than we did last year. Knowledge of God's great love for us will indeed give us delight. Our scripture reading today should constantly be remembered till we come back home to sleep after the day's job.

To commit ourselves to the Lord means entrusting everything- our time, lives, families, jobs, possessions to his control and guidance. We must trust God believing that he will care for us better than we can ourselves.

Getting Back to Life

1. What are your goals? For the year? For the future?
2. Does your plan today reflect an effort towards your goal this month?
3. What were your prayer points?
4. Compile a list of 3 people you will share your goals with in order to hold you accountable and also pray for you.
5. At the end of today share with someone how you have practised the scripture of the day.

DAY 10

JESUS THE LORD OF MY TIME (Part 2)

"A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked. 11 For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The LORD will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right. 12 O LORD of Heaven's Armies, what joy for those who trust in you."

Psalm 84:10-12 (NLT)

I recall this scripture years back as a young Christian in relation to how much this passage guided me and my time; places I shouldn't be, things I shouldn't do, places I should be etc.

I am sure you remember the song "*Glory, Glory Hallelujah since I Lay My Burden Down*". Years have gone by and I am asking "Has my conviction changed?"

How do I feel being before God for thirty minutes or one hour praying and reading my Bible before I set out for the day's activities?

What is my mood like when I am gathered with other disciples on Sunday and midweek days for two to three hours?

In what area do I serve in the church? Is it just enough to come and sit without serving?

The sons of Korah (temple assistants) wrote this psalm and it truly reflects my feeling as a young Christian. My joy, growth and strength come from God's living presence each day and year. Nothing, I mean nothing, could hold me down from being in church on Sundays and midweek service days. I was always looking forward to the fellowship beginning from my early morning fellowship with God, and the saints daily. God has brought back this passage afresh in my heart this year, to re-enact my devotion, commitment and love for God and his church.

Getting Back to Life

1. In comparison to last year, how is your attendance at church meetings?
2. Has coming to church meeting become a burden, or routine or something you are looking forward to?
3. What task or area of service do you plan to serve this year?
4. Write a note of encouragement to brothers / sisters who are serving as doorkeepers in your church.
5. What will you do to forestall missing meetings of the body this month? Tell someone to hold you accountable.

*"Dost thou love life?
Then do not squander time,
for that the stuff life is made of"*

Benjamin Franklin

*"Time is a companion that goes with us on a journey.
It reminds us to cherish each moment, because it will never come again.
What we leave behind is not as important as how we have lived."*

Captain Jean-Luc Picard

Day 11

A STITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE

TIME IS MONEY
TIME IS PRECIOUS
TIME STANDS STILL
TIME PASSES
TIME IS ON YOUR SIDE
TIME WILL TELL
TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN
TIME IS A GREAT HEALER
TIME FLIES
TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE
TIME HANGS HEAVY
TIME CONSUMES
THERE IS A TIME AND PLACE FOR EVERYTHING
AHEAD OF YOUR TIME
TIME AND TIME AGAIN
THERE IS NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

N.B: Please read over and over again. What do you make out of time?

Luke 13:31-32

31 *At that time some Pharisees said to him, "Get away from here if you want live! Herod Antipas wants to kill you!"*

32 *Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox that I will keep on casting out demons and healing people today and tomorrow; and the third day I will accomplish my purpose. **33** Yes, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must proceed on my way..." (NLT)*

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

If you were to stop the reading at verse 31, what would you have advised Jesus to do? If you were to be in Jesus' shoe, how would you have responded to this threat to life? Your answer is a reflection of your understanding of your vision and mission for the year.

On the face value the Pharisees seem to be concerned about Jesus' life, but deep down they want to stop Jesus' mission to heal and save souls. Jesus was somebody they love to hate, (**LK 4:28-30, LK 6:6-7; 10-11, LK 10:25-29, LK 11:37-38;45-54, LK 12:14-17**) Something in me says that the Pharisees made up this story, aren't you tempted to think so?

Jesus knew the real challenge was Time. The ability to focus on His schedule marked out for three days was of the essence.

I am not sure which of the day this distraction came but it looks like the very first day. The implication would have been to give up the noble plan of healing and saving people; this distraction came too soon but Jesus was resolute on accomplishing His goal.

Reading through, I had a mind check of my attitude towards distraction and I realized how easily I give up, procrastinate, rationalize, blame shift etc. in the course of pursuing my goals and resolution. I found that it is much easier for me to worry for days and months than to think positive for just two days.

There is much To Do

*There is much to do
There's work on every hand,
Hark! The cry to help comes
Ringing through the lands,
Jesus calls for reapers,
I must active be,
What will thou, o master?
Here am I, send me*

Chorus

*Here am I
(Here am I, send me)
Lord send me,
(Lord, send me)
Here am I
Ready at thy bidding,
Lord send me.
There are hungering souls
Who cry aloud for bread
With the bread of life
They're longing to be fed;
Shall they starve and famish
While a feast is free
I must be more faithful
Here am I send me*

*There are souls who linger
On the brink of woe,
Lord, I must not, cannot,
Bear to let them go;*

*Let me go and tell them
Brother, turn and flee!
Master, I would save them,
Here am I send me.*

This song calls us to make commitment irrespective of our obstacles, excuses and distraction. There is no time I sing this song that I am not moved and challenged about the conviction of the original composer of the song. I see a man who exhibits the focus and heart of Jesus.

Getting Back to Life

1. What is your goal towards soul saving these forty (40) days of "Back to Life?"
2. What will be enough to stop you from reaching your goal at the end of these forty days of revival?
3. What are people telling you that can make you give up on your goals?
4. Whose voice would you listen to? The lies of these "Pharisees" or the voice of God? Give reasons.
5. Take some time out praying and fasting for boldness and courage to dare all obstacles and threat against your goals for this month.

Day 12

BEING SPIRITUALLY PRODUCTIVE WITH MY TIME

(Who owns your time?)

In the past three days, we have been learning how to make Jesus the Lord of our Time. The next two days, however will be dedicated to helping us all become spiritually productive with our God-given time.

God is the author of time. Though he does not live within nor is he governed by our time sphere. He gave us time so we can be organized, productive; knowing when to start and when to stop. The concept of time also aids us in planning and record keeping. God introduced time to us in **Gen 1:14** when scripture recorded these words;

"And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years"

There are many inequities in the world, but one thing we all have in common is the same amount of time each day. God has allotted twenty-four hours to each one of us. Perhaps, because we are products of our fast-paced society, we tend to think and act as though God has short-changed us when it comes to time.

To understand time is to understand and appreciate its maker and giver. Failing that will result in making God our enemy in the way we use our time. The Jews, who were predominantly farmers and herdsman show their appreciation for each year's blessings and in anticipation of future provisions by God, gave a portion of God's blessings back to him. We observe this in the forms of tithing, gifts and special offerings they made to God. Do you freely offer back to God a portion of what he has given you?

How do you spend your Time?

If time is a daily harvest of 86,400 seconds (24hours), an average of 28,800 seconds (8hours) is spent in sleeping, 32,400 seconds (9hours) spent daily at work or school and another 14,400 seconds (4hours) spent in traffic. All these add up to a whopping 75,600 seconds (21hours!), leaving us with just 10,800 seconds (3hours). What are the things that jostle for these remaining three hours? Late night News on T.V, dinner, family, newspaper, house chores or some other form of entertainment? Who REALLY owns your time?

The above scenario might be a gross underestimation for some people. Whichever way, it is clear that we all need some evaluation of how we prioritize and use our time. Have you ever caught yourself feeling guilty for your lack of productivity in certain areas of your spiritual life? – Prayer, Bible study, family devotionals, evangelism, visitation etc. you want a change... no, you need a change, let's start the process that will get us back to life!

Getting Back to Life

1. Draw up your normal daily timeline. From when you wake to when you go to bed.
2. Do you have Spiritual priorities throughout your day?
3. Do you work your schedules around God or merely try to squeeze Him into your time?

4. Write out your Spiritual Priorities. How can you make them part of your daily timeline?
5. You cannot be spiritually productive if you don't make spiritual things priority.

Meditate on the following scriptures and let them guide your thoughts throughout the day;

Mark 1:35-36, Matt 14:22-23, Psalm 104:1-35 (note vs.19-24), John 4:32-38, 1Pet. 4:1-11

Day 13

I will account for God's time

Time is a unique and an unusual resource. It cannot be accumulated like money or stockpiled like raw materials. We are forced to spend it, whether we choose to or not, and at a fixed rate of 60 seconds every minute. It cannot be turned on and off like a machine or replaced like a man. It is irretrievable.

You can imagine how the Israelites felt in **Exodus 16** when God gave them Manna to eat each day but none could be stored or preserved for use the day after. Oh, how we often wish we could transfer or carryover every unspent time! Time is short and time is precious, no wonder the psalmist wrote;

"Oh! Teach us to live well! Teach us to live wisely and well!"

- **Ps 90:12** (from THE MESSAGE)

To live well is to live productively. To be productive is *achieving or producing a significant amount or result*. What other rewarding venture outweighs our labour in the Lord? (**1Cor 15:58**)

Getting Back to Life

Here are some tips to help us all get more organized and hopefully produce some spiritual harvest.

1. Make a daily List

The practice of writing down tasks will remove the frustration of trying to remember everything that you need to do. If you don't write down your tasks, you are bound to forget some things. Furthermore, you will worry and waste time trying to remember what you forgot, rather than investing that time in creative thinking and focused execution.

Q: What are your spiritual goals today? Keep them short and simple

2. Prioritize:

After you make the list, then prioritize the tasks based on your most important goals. Don't confuse **"urgent"** with **"important"**. Many focus their time and energy doing urgent things while they leave out the important.

Q: Write out items on your "Spiritual to-do list"? – Q.T, follow up, evangelism, church meeting... Which one do you feel most comfortable doing?

3. Schedules and Deadlines

The purpose of scheduling activities is to break down a project into discrete tasks, order those tasks in the logical sequence of steps needed to complete the project, and then plot the steps against time or target dates. Even Jesus had a focus and time span for his mission here on earth (**Luke 13:31-33**)

4. Delegating Responsibilities

What the Bible says about delegation can be seen in the case of Jethro advising Moses to divide up the work, select good people to lead and judge the Israelites, yet under Moses' supervision (**Exodus 18:1-27**). You can't do everything!

Many things can be done by others, which frees up your time to focus on other things.

*"The best thing about the future
is that it comes one day at a time."*

Abraham Lincoln

*"Dost thou love life?
Then do not squander time,
for that the stuff life is made of."*

Benjamin Franklin

104 RELATIONSHIPS

“Relationships are all there is.

Everything in the universe only exists
because it is in relationship to everything else.

Nothing exists in isolation.

We have to stop pretending we are individuals that can do it alone”

Margaret J. Wheatley
[from *Never Eat Alone*]

Day 14

The ultimate example

Philippians 2:1-15

Paul, in prison, is writing to thank and encourage Christians in Philippi. They face their own trials and have their own problems. They, like many in the church today, had some petty disagreements and selfishness. Paul points them to a better approach to interpersonal relationships and gives them examples they can imitate.

Consideration

Paul begins by reminding them of blessings they have been given by Christ: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion..." — he assumes that they have enjoyed all of these —

"then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (**Phil. 2:1-2**).

He is not just asking them to think like one another. As he will soon explain, he wants them to be like-minded with Christ — to be encouraging, comforting, sharing, tender and compassionate, as Christ is. He wants them to have the same kind of love as Christ has, being like him in attitude and goals. That is the only sure way to be united with one another. When the Philippians put this into practice, Paul's joy among them will be complete, for his gospel will have produced its fruit.

The bottom line, he says, is to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit" (v. 3). Do not be motivated by selfishness or pride, for they destroy unity and are the essence of sin. Instead, "in humility consider others better than yourselves." Paul does not say that others are better — only that we should consider them better. Objectively, everyone cannot be better, yet Christian unity must be built on considering others ahead of self.

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (v. 4).

We may consider our own interests, but we must also look out for others. This is the way of Christ.

He, the best of all humans, did not put himself first, but considered the needs of others.

Getting Back to Life:

1. In what ways do you need to be more considerate of people around you?
2. How do you need to put off pride, conceit and selfish ambition in your relationships?
3. What damage has selfishness done in the relationships around you?
4. What do you think was JESUS' motivation in setting

Day 15 Humility

Philippians 2:1-15

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (verses 5-7).

Paul is using these words to remind his readers of the example they are to follow: someone who was divine, having the greatest of honor, yet who did not cling to his rights and privileges. The 2011 edition of the NIV puts it this way: Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." Though the Philippians had important rights as citizens of a Roman colony, they were to focus on others, not themselves.

Jesus willingly set his rights aside, in humility becoming a human, serving our needs. "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!" (v. 8). His humility, his desire to serve, was complete. He endured the most painful and most shameful form of death, just to serve our needs.

The result? God resurrected him and "exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (verses 9-11).

What is the name above all other names? The name of God. In Isaiah 45:23, God says, "Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear." Paul is saying that Jesus should be given the same honors as God. When we bow to Jesus, God gets the glory.

Jesus is in the highest place, worthy of worship, worthy of the name "Lord." Because he was humble, he is now exalted. Humility is the praiseworthy way.

Getting Back to Life

1. How can humility be a very difficult Christian character to imitate ?
2. What are some divine benefits of humility?
3. How will being humble put you at advantage in your relationships?

Day 16

Forgiving Past Hurts/ Confessing Your Wrongs

'In my alarm I said "Everyone is a liar"
Ps. 116:11(TNIV).

When someone hurts you, that person says or does something that injures your feelings, causes you pain and make you unhappy or, angry.

We tend to (most times), not feel too deeply the hurts that are caused us by persons not so close to us, such hurts are easily overcome or overlooked.

We however, do feel deeply the hurts that are caused us by loved ones. e.g. spouse, child, close friend, disciple, mother, father, spiritual leader, etc., these hurts are deep because of the level of commitment we have made to these relationships. These are relationships built on trust, devotion, sacrifice and expectations.

When we are hurt by anyone of the above mentioned, we become so emotional and 'alarmed'. If we do not fight to resolve the issues that led to the hurt, our hearts become a 'playing field' for the devil.

SOME POINTERS ON HOW WE CAN FORGIVE/OVERCOME PAST AND FUTURE HURTS.

Proverbs 17:17

1] We can forgive and overcome by having deep love that is for ALL times.

The ability to stay and remain committed to our relationships in times of great hurt is a testimony to how genuine our love is, because a true friend 'loves at all times', in good, bad and ugly times.

1 Peter 4:8

A genuine love covers over many wrongs

1 John 4:16-17

GOD's love for us was for all times, Jesus came and exhibited same love for us. We are like Jesus when we love in the same way.

2] Proverbs 19:11

We can forgive and overcome when we walk in step with wisdom.

Wisdom teaches us to be patient in our affliction. We cannot make right judgments in our affliction without patience. Patience gives us the ability to sort through our feelings in the light of scripture. When we do, we sometimes realize that some issues that are source of our hurts are not worth the stress we put ourselves through by refusing to forgive and let go. 'It is to one's GLORY to overlook an offence'.

Psalm 116:10-11

Wisdom teaches us that we can TRUST GOD to heal our hurts even when we feel (because of fear), that we are not getting the justice we deserve. Fear can make us not see the sincere efforts of those whom GOD wants to use to resolve our hurts. When we take our hurts to GOD in prayer, and are open about how we really feel, HE is much more than able to heal us. A calm mind makes for an objective heart, which makes for a listening ear and, makes a resolved heart.

Mathew 18:15-17

Wisdom teaches us to pay attention to the Scripture.

Jesus, being fully aware that we will have issues amongst ourselves gave us a command on how they can be settled. Happy are those who heed to the Scriptures, but those who don't pierce themselves with many griefs.

Getting Back to Life

1. GOD wants you to live a happy life. In **John 10:10** Jesus said "...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" TNIV.
2. For you to benefit from this promise, you must be ready to let go of past hurts.

Day 17

CONFESSING YOUR WRONGS

*"WHO CAN SAY, 'I HAVE KEPT MY HEART PURE,
I AM CLEAN AND WITHOUT SIN'?"*

Proverbs 20:9 (TNIV)

When someone confesses to a sin, they admit to doing something wrong. Those who find it difficult to admit to wrong doing usually justify and excuse away their wrongs.

*"FOR I KNOW MY TRANSGRESSIONS,
AND MY SIN IS ALWAYS BEFORE ME."*

Psalm 51:3. (TNIV)

When we sin against GOD and man and are able to admit that we have sinned, we show that we are in touch with our sinful self. It takes humility to acknowledge one's sins, and the fear of GOD to confess and ask for forgiveness. In **Psalm 51**, we see David totally broken and contrite before GOD as he confessed his sins and begged for forgiveness. Because he was broken and sincerely sorry, his confession and admittance of wrong was devoid of any form of self-justification and pride. No finger pointing, no blame shifting. When we wrong others, and sin against GOD, we should be quick to acknowledge our fault, and sincere in rendering apology. There should not be even a hint of pride or self-justification.

An honest acknowledgement and acceptance of wrongs makes for an easy resolution between man and GOD. Also such an attitude brings peace between man and his fellow man. Disputes are easily settled when the one at fault sees and accepts their wrong.

*"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ALWAYS TREMBLE BEFORE GOD, BUT THOSE WHO HARDEN THEIR HEARTS
FALL INTO TROUBLE".*

Prov. 28:14

Getting Back to Life

1. Let us show that we have a healthy fear of GOD in our hearts by our willingness to acknowledge and confess to our wrongs.
2. Those who harden their hearts will only breed more trouble for themselves because, they will sever their relationship with those they have hurt and incur GOD'S wrath.

*'WHEN THE LORD TAKES PLEASURE IN ANYONE'S WAYS, HE CAUSES THEIR ENEMIES TO MAKE PEACE
WITH THEM.'*

Proverbs 16:7. (TNIV)

MEMORY SCRIPTURE: Psalm 51:3

DAYS 18 - 19

RECONCILING OUR DIFFERENCES

Phil 4:2-7

"I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus".

Matt 26:35-46

"But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. 36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." 42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." 43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

All the hurt, fear, and rejection you have ever felt is what the Lord Jesus felt in the garden of Gethsemane. When he came to the garden to pray that night, Jesus knew He was about to be betrayed and die a painful death on the cross. He had confided in his friends, telling them His heart was at the breaking point with sorrow. He had asked them to lessen His grief by staying up with Him, and they had agreed to do so. Jesus went a short distance away from them and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Vs 42). Desiring comfort, he returned to his disciples an hour later only to find them asleep. How could able bodied men, who claim to be friends, people who had spent many nights on the sea fishing, be so lacking in strength that they couldn't keep with Jesus for just one hour?

It's easy for us to think, He was God in the flesh; He didn't feel hurt and rejection like I do. But scripture tells us Jesus was in pain. He began to be grieved and distressed. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Vs 38). He needed his friends; he invited them to share in his agony. They failed him. And to make matter worse, this happened two more times! It's one thing to be disappointed once, but can you imagine how you'd feel if your friends continued to fail you? (this is a very common illustration for us during CROSS STUDY)

You know the kind of pain friends can inflict on you. Or perhaps you're the one who has wounded and betrayed another. You were one of the friends who fell asleep when you promised to watch and pray. May be you're like Peter, disavowing allegiance to a friend in his time of need. The barrier in your relationship is your fault or, perhaps both your faults. You are in a standoff, and no healing has soothed the hurt.

Jesus asked his friends to bear his grief with him, and they abandoned him. This was a painful time when he needed them most. In fact, as Luke describes, Jesus' sweat was like blood, yet his disciples abandoned him. What a disappointment! In spite of the pain and abandonment he went through, he

still forgave them. He said "*Rise, let us go.*" He didn't hold any grudge against them.

I would have cried, forget it! If you can't watch and pray with me while I am in deep need of you, if you can't enter into my pain as a friend, then you are not worthy to be my friend. I have struggled many a time with betrayals, but I have come to learn from Jesus how to better handle it, let it go, it's never worth holding on to. That is why Paul had to address the issue of disagreement in the church in Philippi, because it has the tendency to destroy relationships and a great fellowship in the church if not better managed.

Did you notice that Jesus said, "*let us go*"? He used the word us. Even after they betrayed him, Jesus reached out to his friends. He forgave them, even though they had hurt him repeatedly as we read later. He asks us to do the same. In **1 Peter 2:21**, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Getting Back to Life

1. As I look at his response to betrayal, I am convicted. I must be willing to overlook imperfection as Jesus did. If I insist on perfection or nothing, I'll end up with nothing.
2. I must be willing to forgive! And if you long to be content, so must you. Unless we do, our hearts will not be right, we cannot be righteous before God.
3. As we engage ourselves on these days of fasting and prayer, let us forgive everyone who hurts us and set ourselves free for God's glory. God bless

N.B

For more on this, I recommend you read the books ***In His Step*** by Charles Sheldon

Some of the quotes used in this piece came from Linda Dillow's ***Calm my Anxious Heart***

DAYS 20-21

GIVING OF MYSELF

*Two things I ask of you, O Lord;
do not refuse me before I die:
Keep falsehood and lies far from me,
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much
and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonour the name of my God.*

Proverbs 30: 7-9

I spent some of my secondary school years with one of my uncles, who had a friend that I learnt a life lessons from. Though at that time what I'm about to share meant nothing to me.

I have known times when Mr. Tony; that is the name of my uncle's friend, has lost some of his possessions. When those around him show their concern, he usually tells them that the "owner" of the item has taken possession of it. This response has often caused many to ask him if he wasn't the original owner. In turn he would reply; "before the item was stolen it was his and now that it is stolen it is no longer his". In principal, Mr. Tony does not attach himself too much to his possessions. Today, as a disciple this attitude means a lot to me. The moral of this story is found in this line in Proverbs 30: "But give me only my daily bread"

I know a lot of people, myself inclusive, who will mourn the loss of a possession. We go through terrible moments and terrible days as a result of the loss of the things we hold dearly to us.

I have learnt to detach myself from most of my worldly endowment. And as a result it is easier for me to give of myself.

IT IS GOOD TO LEARN TO LET GO.

Those who trust in God's benevolence should not have problem in giving.

Psalm 34:19-20

*"A righteous man may have many troubles,
but the Lord delivers him from them all;"*

The heart that gives generously, like the widow in the book of **Mark 12** also has needs. Giving is putting your trust in God, knowing that He will take care of your needs. And so, living only to please Him.

We all have needs: school fees, house rent, desire to own a house, medical, household appliances, joblessness, etc.

Q: How have these needs held you back from giving?

The widow and those whose hearts are like hers, have all these needs also, yet they give regardless.

Do you trust God enough to supply your needs? Have you not realised that **Luke 9v25** is so true? (What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self)? Riches and attachment to them has not brought happiness and contentment to those who possess them. e.g. Michael Jackson, Tiger Woods, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Elvis Presley, to mention but a few.

Don't be deceived by the show of opulence and fancy dresses. More often than not the outward display of these things, hides the true picture of people's situation.

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."

Psalms 34v4-7

With excitement I share of a brother in my region (ministry) whose dad had cancer, and was dying in the hospital two years ago. In spite of the emotional and financial burden this situation was putting on this brother and his wife, he gave all he had to meet their special contribution goal, trusting that God would heal his dad and also take care of the hospital bill which was over a million naira.

My excitement is not in the faith exercised by this brother but the faithfulness of God in the events of the past two years in this situation. "Papa" has since been discharged hale and hearty! I was part of those who helped in converting him to Christianity. He is a disciple in one of the regions in the Lagos Church. In turn, he himself has also converted a household in his neighborhood to Christianity. This is what happens when our faithfulness is the exact match of God's. It is EXPLOSIVE!

Do you trust God the way this brother did? He has not only given his money, but also given himself. What this brother did is "stupid" in the eyes of his siblings, mum and the world, but through his faithfulness the POWER OF GOD is displayed. **1 Cor. 1v18 (For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God).**

Q. Do you have problems with giving? **Q.** Do you sometimes feel that you are doing okay as a disciple and that you need to ease up on your commitment? You will need to read **AGAIN** Luke 18v18-25. The story of the Young Rich Ruler who went for a check-up with Christ.

A sign caught my attention once on a trip. On it was this inscription

"DRIVE WITH CAUTION AS YOU APPROACH"

When embarking on a trip, a good driver must know when to apply his brakes, accelerate, stop for fuel or stop to change damaged parts. These precaution will ensure safe trip.

Q. Do you offer yourself for checks? Most of us deceive ourselves by thinking we are doing awesome, when in fact, we need help.

Proverbs 3:9

"Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of your crops."

Let us hold on to Christ alone so that we will be able to give ourselves as a living sacrifice. Let us give our talents, time and money.

Proverbs 11v28. Those who put their trust in their wealth will always fail. Do not be part of the statistics.

Proverbs 23v4-5. There is nothing wrong in being wealthy but there is everything wrong with it, if it becomes an obsession and it (your wealth) takes the place of God.

My excitement is not in the faith exercised by this brother but the faithfulness of God in the events of the past two years in this situation. "Papa" has since been discharged hale and healthy! I was part of those who helped in converting him to Christianity. He is a disciple in one of the regions in the Lagos Church. In turn, he himself has also converted a household in his neighborhood to Christianity. This is what happens when our faithfulness matches with God. It is EXPLOSIVE.

Getting Back to Life

1. Do you trust God the way this brother did?
2. He has not only given his money, but also given himself. What this brother did is stupid in the eyes of his siblings, mum and the world, but through his faithfulness the POWER OF GOD is displayed.

1 Cor. 1v18

"for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is

MY FEELINGS

“You can close your eyes to the things you do not want to see,
but you cannot close your heart to the things you do not want to feel.”
Johnny Depp

DAYS 22 - 23

Vulnerable and Secure

First, we must understand that only the truth can set us free, not our feelings (**John 8:32**). Severally, Jesus said to the crowd who cared to listen to his message, "I tell you the truth" meaning what you are hearing is accurate. Our obedience, trust and faith in God are more important than the way we feel about him. Sometimes we are joyful and we feel close to God, but sometimes we are not because of some reasons best known to us.

What is Truth?

It means facts or statements that are right, correct and not wrong. Good or bad times, truth will always stand. As we grow we are vulnerable to sin, criticism, different trials and hurts. This experience for Christ's sake builds our character, demonstrates our faith, and prepare us for further service to the Lord. Sometimes these experiences make us afraid.

"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood" Says **Marie Curie**.

Gen. 20: 2

"...and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "she is my sister."
" Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her".

Abraham was afraid of loosing his wife, but for God's intervention Sarah was gone.

"God chooses what we go through. We choose how we go through it" Says **Robert Oppenheimer**

It's All In Your Mind

His name is Roger Crawford. He makes his living as a consultant and public speaker. He's written two books, and travels all across the country working with Fortune 500 companies, national and state associations, and school districts.

Those aren't bad credentials. But if that doesn't impress you, how about this: before becoming a consultant, he was a varsity tennis player for Loyola Marymount University and later became a professional tennis player. Still not impressed? Would you change your opinion if I told you Roger has no hands but only one foot?

Roger Crawford was born with a condition called ectrodactylism. When he emerged from his mother's womb, the doctors saw that he had a thumb-like projection extending out of his right forearm, and a thumb and finger growing out of his left forearm. He had no palms. His legs and arms were shortened. And his left leg possessed a shrunken foot with only three toes. (The foot was amputated when he was five.) Roger's parents were told by various medical professionals that he would never be able to walk, probably would not be able to take care of himself, and would never lead a normal life.

After recovering from the shock, Roger's parents were determined to give him the best chance possible for living a normal life. They raised him to feel loved, to be strong, to give him the best chance possible for living a normal life. They raised him to develop independence. "You're only as handicapped as you want to be, 'his father used to tell him. They encouraged him to do everything his heart desired. And they taught him to think positively. Something my parents never did was to allow me to feel sorry for myself, or to take advantage of people because of my handicap, observes Roger.!

Roger appreciated the encouragement and training he received from his parents, but I don't think he really understood the significance of it or his achievements until he was in college and he interacted with someone who wanted to meet him. After receiving a phone call from a man who had read about his tennis victories, Crawford agreed to meet him at a nearby restaurant. When Roger stood up to shake hands with the man, he discovered that the other guy had hands that were almost identical to his. That got Crawford excited, because he thought he had found someone similar to him but older

who could act as his mentor. But after talking with the stranger for a few minutes, he realized he was wrong. Roger says: Instead, what I found was someone with a bitter, pessimistic attitude who blamed all of life's disappointments and failures on his anatomy.

I soon recognized that our lives and attitudes couldn't have been more different ...

He had never held a job for long, and he was sure this was because of "discrimination – certainly not because (as he admitted) he was constantly late, frequently absent, and failed to take any responsibility for his work. His attitude was, "This world owes me, "and his problem was that the world disagreed. He was even angry with me because I didn't share his despair.

We kept in touch for several years, until it dawned on me that even if some miracles were suddenly to give him a perfect body, his unhappiness and lack of success wouldn't change. He would still be at the same place in his life. That man had allowed failure to seize him from the inside.

Chances are that the adversity in your life has been nowhere near as difficult as Roger Crawford's has been. And that's why his story is such an inspiration. Roger maintains, "Handicaps can only disable us if we let them."

This is true not only of physical challenges, but of emotional and intellectual ones as well..."I believe that real and lasting limitations are created in our minds, not our bodies."

From **FAILING FORWARD - JOHN C. MAXWELL**

Everything we go through in life is a matter of perspective; we must see God in our different trials and hurts. God wants Abraham to feel secure in his love and his ability to save whenever his in danger.

Prov. 29: 25

"...those who trust in his love are kept safe".

What are your fears?

1. I am not smart (**2 Cor. 12 :9**)
2. What if I am not able to provide for my family?
3. What if I lose my job?
4. What if my children did not become disciples?
5. What will I become?

*"Happiness does not depend on outward things,
but on the way we see them"*

Leo Tolstoy

Life teaches those who listen and we need to understand; many who are smart, able to provide for family, have good jobs are still not happy. The unhappy heart will not find contentment in being able to provide for family.

Phil. 4:13 "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Getting Back to Life

(Benefits Of Trusting in The Lord)

Prov.3 :24-26	Sweet sleep
Isaiah 12: 2	Strength
Hebrews 13: 6	Help in all situations
Psalms 27: 1	Unwavering confidence
Psalms 125: 1	Protection

Galatians 1:4

Security is in God alone. We have been rescued from the power of this present evil age.

In Conclusion

2Cor. 1:1-11

Paul bonds his heart to the disciples by being vulnerable and sharing his weaknesses, and also by showing them how badly he himself needed God.

Paul helped them to see that no matter how bad it gets, God is going to come through for them in the end. The question is: Are you like Paul?

Are you vulnerable to others? Are you secure in your relationship with God and others?

There is no security outside a relationship with God. Being secure in God is an issue of surrender and trust.

Isaiah 40:11

"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."

He gathers us close to his heart and carries us in his arms.

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen, nor touched ... but are felt in the heart."

Helen Keller

DAY 24

THE GOD-GIVEN FEELING OF COMPASSION

'Too much and too little are both not good enough'. That is the case with our feelings. As I was growing up I often heard people say "do not trust your feelings." This in a sense is true and in another is false. True because some feelings are illusions and need not to be trusted, false on the other hand because feeling are a natural and essential part of us. Consider the following:

James 5:11

"the lord is full of compassion and mercy..."

Psalm 119:156

"your compassion is great, O Lord...;"

Psalm 86:15"But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God,..."

Matthew 9:36

"When he (Jesus) saw the crowds he had compassion on them,..."

Matthew 14:14

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them..."

It makes sense to conclude that the feeling of compassion is a vital part of life.

The saying "**you can't give what you don't have**" is true.

The word 'compassion' is one that is known by many but not everyone has truly experienced it. When compassion is mentioned I think about two key words: SYMPATHY and EMPATHY. To sympathize is to feel sorry for someone in an unfortunate situation. That is not good enough. When I add empathy I step into the shoes of the person in crisis and feel their pain as if it were mine.

I was born into a family where compassion is not a popular gospel. My wild aggressive teenage years in a military camp added salt to injury.

I remember being accused by friends for being CARE-FREE about the emotions and wellbeing of others. It was difficult to understand because they were asking for something I don't have.

Psalm 23 was very helpful to teach me about compassion.

Ps 23:1-4 (I rephrased this psalm)

- "God, you care for me and I lack nothing

- You provide all my needs

-you provide me spiritual protection

- you did all this to your glory

- Even in times of trouble I am not afraid

-You are in my shoe to empathize with me".

Christians can confidently sing with David Psalm 23 because in 2Peter1:3 God has given us all we need for life and godliness; so we lack nothing.

Guess what? "**To whom much is given much is expected**". We are all products of God's compassion. We have no excuse not to be compassionate to others. Life is tough; we all know it. I

have problems; I have challenges like you too. This may move me to think that the world starts and ends at my doorstep. What I am going through should not stop me from seeing that others need compassion. Give attention to your God given feeling of compassion. We can learn compassion from the prayer of **Saint Francis of Assisi**.

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen*

Getting Back to Life

1. How has God shown you compassion?
2. Why is it important not to think that the world starts and ends with your problems?
3. What have you learned from David's **Psalms 23** and Saint Francis' prayer?

"The greatest happiness is to transform one's feelings into action."

Madame de Stael

*"Love isn't finding a perfect person.
It's seeing an imperfect person perfectly."*

Sam Keen

DAY 25

REMEMBER THE WEAK

"Simon, stay on your toes. Satan has tried his best to separate all of you from me, like chaff from wheat. 32 Simon, I've prayed for you in particular that you not give in or give out. When you have come through the time of testing, turn to your companions and give them a fresh start."

Luke22:31 (The Bible in Contemporary Language)

When the 11-year rebel war ended in Sierra Leone the war victims felt the need for vengeance against those who committed atrocities. The government was smart enough to learn from the South African experience of having a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The aim was that people will exhibit the godly feeling of compassion. Open confessions were made and the perpetrators of war crimes asked for pardon. There was a need to rebuild but it must start with the foundation of compassion. That was a huge task but we realized that if ever we must stand as a country we need the love and support of every one (i.e. the good, the bad and the ugly) compassion has gone a long way in helping Sierra Leone stand on her feet again.

1999 and 2003 are historic years in our Churches in Nigeria. We were hard pressed but thank God that we were not crushed. The foundation of the faith of many was shaken. Here we are 8 years after we are still struggling to recover from our wounds. We were a church known for our inward beauty but materialism is catching up with us. The good news is that some people have recovered and are doing well spiritually. The weak will always be around for a reason. Guess what? It is for the strong to strengthen the weak. Satan had asked to separate all the disciples in Nigeria from Jesus Christ. Thank God that Jesus stood in the gap and interceded on our behalf. The strong have a spiritual responsibility in this respect; it is to strengthen those who are weak.

SEE THE BIG PICTURE

The fact that a person is coming to Church, and paying his tithes is not evidence enough that he /she is strong. God wants us to see beyond that. There are broken marriages, poor parenting, immorality among singles, and the married alike, materialism, ungodly competition, and the like. God wants us to help the weak.

Heb. 3:12-13

Make sure that none among us has a sinful and unbelieving heart

Also, encourage one other daily. The Bible calls for a healthy fellowship in the church

My wife and I spent four years without annual leave, leading the Freetown church. When we decided to go on leave in 2009 we headed for Conakry to spend 1 month helping out a spiritually unstable church we led before we moved to Freetown. We paid from our pockets our transport, feeding and other needs. This was challenging as we really needed rest. Our drive was compassion for the weak. We could not rest when God's church needed help.

God made the strong to be in the mist of the weak to strengthen them. I don't know about you but my spiritual life has been full of ups and downs, weak some times and strong some times, my

marriage too has been full of weak and strong moments; there has been times I have been a bad parent and an ungodly husband, there have been times I have lost it with disciples in my ministry. Many more things have happened to me that are beyond the scope of this dossier. The only reason I survived to tell the story is because many of you never gave up on me. You were there to help me fix my relationship with God, my wife, my kids, my ministry my extended family, and so on. Thanks for being there for me.

For this reason I will never want to give up on anyone. God has strengthened me to strengthen others.

Getting Back to Life

1. How do you know you are weak or strong?
2. How do you know your brother / sister is weak or strong?
3. How do you show God that you appreciate Him enough to strengthen you?
4. How much sacrifice are you willing to make to see the weak come back to life?

DAY 26

REMEMBER THE LOST

Jonah 4:10-11

10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (NIV)

John Newton was a British man born on 24 July 1725. He became a slave trader. The history books told us that he even visited my native Sierra Leone (a key country in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade). One night they were in the deep blue when a violent storm arose. It was so bad that he feared that they would not survive it. When the storm died out John Newton realized that God had spoken to him through the storm. This was the turning point in his life. He later became a minister of the word and the composer of the song "Amazing Grace".

This story in a way is akin to that of Jonah who sinned by running away from God. Instead of God letting him die in the sea he sent a big fish to rescue him.

In **Jonah 2**: he praised God and repented so God commanded the fish to vomit him

In **Jonah 3**: his mission was re-launched with the *sermon "40 days more and Nineveh will be destroyed"*.

The people repented at this sermon and God was merciful

Now in chapter 4 we see that Jonah was angry that his message worked.

The very Jonah that was shown mercy in chapter 1 was angry that God was merciful to the gentile nation of Nineveh a people who could not tell their right from their left.

Jonah was angry that God destroyed a plant yet was eager to see humans destroyed.

I learn that Jonah did not want to share the grace of God with the gentiles.

Such is also the attitude of the Jews. They feel they are the only ones God loves.

Think about the following:

Psalms 117- let all the nations praise the Lord

Gen. 12:3 – All nations on earth will be blessed through Abraham

In my human view of life I have high regard for discipleship. I have always wanted to see disciples and holy men and women alone in heaven. There are people in my widest imagination I do not expect will make heaven. In my heart I have passed my judgment on them that they should not spend eternity with God.

What is your take on this: if you see the likes of Adolf Hitler, Saddam Husain, Bin Laden, Fela, Abacha etc. in heaven? I don't know about you but I will not be too fired up to hug them as brothers. Deep inside me, I will ask 'why did God allow these evil men in heaven?' I feel we are 'small' sinners compared to them.

However, this study has helped me realise how sad it is that these men did not repent and become disciples before death. Had they repented, they would have been saved like us.

The key lessons to learn are that when I mean good for myself I should think about others no matter their past life style.

Even my so-called enemies have the privilege to be the seeds of Abraham.

I should not wish or rejoice or desire to see people I dislike go to hell. My compassion should not be limited to my friends only.

Some wicked people may not know their left from their right; before condemning them I should first reach out to them. I should value a sinner's life more than material things.

Getting Back to Life:

1. Write down the names of some people you dislike and why
2. Would you like to see them go to hell?
3. What should this story of Jonah move you to do for these people?
4. Reach out today to someone you have issues with and show them compassion.
5. Would you celebrate the death of a man like Bin Laden or wish he repented?
6. What means so much to you? Salvation of others or their material achievements?

MY HANDS

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Maya Angelou

DAY 27

GENEROUS GIVING

2Cor8:1-7-The apostle Paul at one time found it necessary to appeal to sister Churches around the Mediterranean world to give to support the Churches in Judea. They had come under great financial stress and were severely constrained by famine. He did not just appeal to them, but actually took it upon himself to travel around to these Churches to raise this support. Macedonia was one of the cities he visited, having made an earlier visit through a vision he had to preach there. On this occasion though, his purpose was not to solicit financial support knowing that most of the Macedonian Churches were very poor, as a good percentage of the disciples there were slaves. Instead, he rather wanted to use his time to encourage the disciples to remain focused and faithful to the end as they endured all manner of hardship as a Roman colony and a home for emperor worship. In spite of these daunting circumstances they did not hold back from giving whole heartedly.

They astonished the apostle Paul with their faith even though he tried to dissuade them from giving. Their love for God and the grace they had received as gentiles was enough motivation to give. They needed no cajoling or coercing, they gave it all, even beyond their ability.

A philosopher once said "the hardest thing to do is to drink so much in a day, and to give out so little in a day."

For all the grace you continue to enjoy today, how much of it has inspired you to want to give to God's Church? What excuse do you have not to give to God and other people around you in need? What is your motivation when it comes to generous giving? Yes! It takes faith to dare to give but if you wrestle with your faith in God, how is he to reward your giving, how are you going to excel in giving generously?

List all the excuses that can easily stop you from giving to glorify God this week. Plan to deliberately give no matter how small. Big things start small.

"Consciously or unconsciously, everyone of us does render some service or another. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and it will make not only for our own happiness, but that of the world at large."

Mahatma Gandhi

DAY 28

GENEROUS GIVING (2)

1Kings 8:62-66- After seven years of hard work king Solomon dedicated the temple he had built to God. He assembled the whole of Israel to the forecourts of the temple in Jerusalem to give thanks to God. People came to the courts to give. He built an altar out there in front of the Place to sacrifice. It was a day like no other. The people sacrificed hundreds of sheep and goats, fellowship offering, grain offering that they had to build a whole new altar, since they had so much to give to God by way of sacrifice. Solomon alone offered up a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats in addition to twenty-two thousand cattle in one day. No wonder a night after God appeared to him in a dream to ask him to wish whatever he wanted. Proverbs was right when it said '

'gifts given from a cheerful heart and a great spirit, always open doors for the giver''.

Truth really is that, it cost Solomon so much, to offer that many animals and grains, baked cake and figs.

Generous giving will always cost us something, because the goal is not just to give, but to give wholesome, fully and without reservation. The Church recently printed new song books for sale to disciples at N600, but later was sold for N1000 a copy. Adewale Yinka felt that not many could afford this sum, therefore on his own initiative he bought ten song books to give out to those he had penciled down as broke, but had great hearts as disciples. His example inspired all of us to give whole heartedly to other events and particularly a brother who was in need in the Church. How are you doing with giving generously? You don't have to be rich or a middle income earner but just understand clearly that giving is the very nature of God. Whenever you give you are just exhibiting the very nature of God. Give and you will be given back many fold and running over your jug into your lap.

Getting Back to Life

1. Don't think of where you are taking money from when you want to give and give generously; rather think about the many thanksgiving and prayers that will be rendered on your behalf.
2. Generous giving should not just be about money, but also your time and energy. Let us give to make others give also.

DAY 29

SERVING ONE ANOTHER (1)

"Jesus called them together and said "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must become your servant,²⁷And whoever wants to be first must be your slave-²⁸Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:25-28.

*"I belong to Jesus.
He must have the right to use me without consulting me"*

Mother Teresa.

The Ruler of The Gentiles.

Gentiles are regarded as non-Jewish nations or people, often connoting heathens (pagans). As disciples of Jesus, we have been adopted as bona fide Jews through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus according to the passage above is trying to explain the difference between the leadership in God's Church and that of the world. The former according to Jesus should be that of servanthood while the latter is that of a dictatorship.

People tend to respect and honor a kind of leadership that isn't just dishing out instructions but one that does and shows the willingness to be involved in the task to be carried out. While on the other hand, people rebel against a leadership that lords or forces people to do things.

I became a disciple of Jesus some fifteen years back and one out of the many things that attracted me to the Church was the exemplary attitude of the leaders. I saw leaders who weren't just giving instructions to people but were also committed to carrying out the same tasks.

What result did this produce? It gave people the free will to go everywhere, do anything, and give up everything for the sake of the gospel of Christ. People were ready to go the extra mile for God and one another.

Servanthood is the way to achieve greatness

A servant is regarded as a hired worker who maintains the master's household or business. While a slave is someone forced into service. These were the lowest positions in the Jewish society, yet Jesus receives their status in the community of disciples to indicate prominence and greatness.

*"The greater the sacrifice people are willing to make in life,
the higher they will go"*

John Maxwell

There is no way serving one another can be separated from sacrifice in the Christendom because the life of every Christian depends on the price he's willing to pay and the sacrifice he's determined to make to achieve his goals **(2 Samuel 24:24)**.

I grew up in a family where it was generally believed that joy, satisfaction and fulfillment in life come from serving others. Becoming a disciple has further helped me to understand this principle a whole lot more as I have witnessed how it's brought joy and happiness to others. Serving one another is part of our commitment to the life God has called us to and Jesus clearly said in the scriptures that the greatest amongst you will be the servant of all **(Matt.23:11)**. The opposite is the way and standard

of the world. Which of these categories do you fall into?

Some of us today have allowed the blessings of God upon our lives deprive us of the joy of carrying out our primary God-given role or purpose – serving others. It’s now become a burden to us rather than a privilege.

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"*

Phil. 2:3-4

Serving others is basically putting the interests of others above yours. You lose the interest of thinking about yourself. In the closing verse of the opening text (**Matt.20:28**), Jesus spoke about what serving others truly means - Giving His life as a ransom for many. He is the primary example of servanthood and has called us to the same lifestyle.

Getting Back to Life

1. In what ways do you intend to use the blessings of God upon your life to serve others in this New Year?
2. What parameters will you set in place this year to help you put the interests of others above yours?

DAY 30

Serving One Another

³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him"

- **John 13:3-5**

"No follower cares how much a leader knows until they know how much he cares"

Anonymous

Foot washing was very common in the Jewish culture. It was a daily routine and considered a gesture of hospitality. It was a very lowly and menial task reserved only for people considered as household servants.

Jesus in the above passage demonstrated his servant attitude by washing and drying his disciples' feet.

I grew up in a congregation where this tradition was observed on a yearly basis. A service is held the night before what is regarded as the Good Friday today. All the core leaders will have members of the congregation lined up before them and they will wash and dry their feet one after another for several hours. It was such a glorious experience for me growing up as a little boy and I looked forward to this day every year. The unfortunate thing was I can't remember at any other point in time of the year these leaders serve the members of the congregation in any other way.

Serving one another involves a great deal of sacrifice and humility (denial of self) daily not a yearly practice or exercise as recorded in the story above.

If we really want to experience the power and wonders of God as an individual and congregation this year, we must re-evaluate our service to both God and one another.

Many disciples today do not want to get involved in what is considered lowly and menial work in the Church. I must say here with exception that there are a few in our congregation who have done extremely well when it comes to doing things that will benefit others – they have made it a habit of going to some of our facilities periodically to clean up without being asked to do so. I have coincidentally met a couple of them on several occasions and I know God will surely reward you.

I have heard some disciples express that the Church should seriously look into paying disciples to do services that will benefit each other and glorify God's name – arranging and cleaning of chairs, setting up of electrical gadgets, sweeping and mopping of the venues, washing the bathrooms to mention but just a few.

Some believe they are not cut out for services like this in this present age and time – They say things like "all these are meant for others" except them.

I submit to you that if you fall in this category you don't understand what we are discussing here. When we are involved in services like these, it helps in the edifying of God's Church as every member benefits from this in one way or another. I want to encourage the parents to try as much as possible this New Year to bring their children periodically to our meeting venues either on a Saturday evening or early on Sunday morning to teach them what serving others is all about in the Church. God expects us as adults to teach and exemplify what serving one another entails to our children.

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature;

rather, serve one another in love - Gal. 5:13

Paul clearly stated in the passage above that the freedom we have in Christ shouldn't be used to indulge in sin but rather serve each other in love.

Getting Back to Life:

1. What will your freedom in Christ motivate you to do for God's Kingdom this year?
2. How steadfast and consistent do you want to be in your service to God and others in this New Year?

Further Reading – Joshua 24:15, Luke 12:35, 2Cor.5:14-15, Gal.2:20.

DAYS 31&32

DILIGENCE AND HARD WORK

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. – Heb. 6:11-12

"I do not know anyone who has gotten to the top without hard work. That is the recipe. It will not always get to the top, but it will get you pretty near"

Margaret Thatcher

Diligence here is hard work. History has shown repeatedly that hard work pays. However Success is always a result of many factors including the cooperation of God, people who are willing to network and submit their gift for a common goal, **and then hard work.**

Acres of Diamonds

In his famous lecture, "Acres of Diamonds", Russell H. Conwell told the story of Ali Hafed, a wealthy farmer who sold his farm and journeyed to distant lands in research of diamonds. The man who bought Ali Hafed's farm, together with the wise men of the East, discovered acres of diamonds in the gardens of that farm. Had Ali Hafed been diligent by staying back home to dig his garden, he would have had "acres of diamonds" and become one of the world's richest men, rather than experiencing wretchedness, starvation, and death by suicide in a strange land.

Christian life is hard work

In 2 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul uses three analogies to characterize the Christian life. What does being a soldier, an athlete and a farmer (in Christ) have in common? **Hard work!!!**

Jesus in **Luke 13:22-31** lays emphasis on the phrase "**make every effort...**" from the Greek word "**agonizomai**" also meaning "**to fight, violently struggle, agonize, labor fervently**".

The writer of Hebrews said God is not unjust. He will not forget or fail to reward our work and the love we have shown to his people.

"Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case — things that accompany salvation. 10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Heb. 6:9-12

Here are some basic examples of activities:

Seeking God	(Psalm 42:1-2)
Reading the word daily	(Psalm 119:9-16)
Praying fervently	(Col. 4:12)
Serving and sacrificing	(Matt. 20:26-28)
Attending church services	(Heb.10:24-25)

Preaching the word and making disciples	(1Cor.9:19-23)
Keeping your way pure	Psalms 119:9-16)
Honouring your marriage	(Heb. 13:4), (Heb. 13:5)
In parenting	(Deut. 6:6-9)
Providing for your family	(1Tim.5:8)

The list is not exhaustive.

A young journalist once asked an old farmer who lived twenty miles outside the town. "Sir at what time do you go to work in the morning?" The old man chuckled and replied, "Son, I don't go to work. I'm surrounded by it." We can learn a lesson from the old farmer that we are surrounded by lots of work. You just need to open your eyes and see them. Then act on them.

MY MOUTH

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

be pleasing in your sight,

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Ps 19:14 (NIV)

DAY 33

FERVENT PRAYERS

A known fact is that the reader of this page prays to God. The focus today is not on if you pray, but to answer the following questions: **HOW, WHY** and **WHAT DO I PRAY FOR?**

The Webster's dictionary defines FERVENT as to boil, burn, glow, very hot, exhibiting great intensity of feeling, zealous, passionate. Does this definition reflect your fluent verbal expression to God?

Ps. 66:1-3a. Take note of words like shout, sing, tell, say, cry out. These are things done with our mouths in prayer. "**Assume all the words we speak are seed, what will be your harvest?**"

MATT. 17:20. It's not the greatness of my faith that moves mountains but my faith in the greatness of God. If you were to write down your prayer for the past week, what will it be filled with? Is it a mountain moving prayer?

HOW DO I PRAY?

Ask yourself how have you been praying? Is it by quickly saying some things in the morning and at night? Or do you see it as an appointment with the president of the universe?

LUKE 11:1-13 Here Jesus not only taught his followers to pray; he also helped them to understand the need to have the right heart and also the importance of boldness in prayer.

LUKE 18:8, ACTS 4:12 Have you ever wrestled in prayer before and are you persistent?

LUKE 6:12 If Jesus could do this how much more you? (**EPH 6:18**)

WHY DO I PRAY?

Have you ever asked yourself whether you really need to pray at all, especially, when those who do not pray have things going well for them?

LUKE 6:12 Even Jesus, with all his authority' prayed. Why? If Jesus frequently did, don't you think we need it much more? **MATT. 14:23** He who spends time on his knees has no trouble standing on his feet.

WHAT DO I PRAY FOR?

MATT 6:31-33 There are normal daily things that we pray about but it's high time we started praying BIG just as we desire to live, think and talk big. Have you imagined the impossible or a very difficult situation coming to reality?

For example: Each disciple replicating him/herself in a year or every region/church having a property of their own. Read these amazing radical examples **1SAM 1:10, 1KINGS 18:36, ISA 37:14-22, ACTS 16:25, 2KINGS 20:2-3, NEH 1, DAN6:6-10.**

I pray that the words of our mouth please God **PS 19:14.**

Does the fruit of your mouth fill you? **PROV 18:20**

Getting Back to Life

1. Finally, ask yourself; what attitude does God desire to see in your prayers?
2. Check your prayer list and see if there is anything BIG. If not much, add things that can even jolt God.

*Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.*

*Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.*

Fran-ces R. Havergal

February 1874.

DAYS 34-35

CONFESSION OF SINS

"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy"
Prov.28:13

Sin promises us happiness, relief, fulfillment and solutions, but in the end it leaves us empty, bitter, ashamed, fearful and despondent.

(Adam and Eve were promised something more than they thought they had but in the end it was a lie. **Gen. 3**. Also David must have thought having Bathsheba was that extra excitement that he needed **2Sam.11**. But he soon discovered otherwise)

No wonder the Bible says we cannot prosper, as long as sin takes a grip on us. The clear mindedness we need to make right decisions, the energy to drive our thoughts and the godliness that enables us to receive, the grace to achieve prosperity (not just materially) do not and cannot thrive when we are bitter, fearful and ashamed.

Do you feel you are not at your best for God? If yes what do you think might be responsible?

What are some issues in your life that you will not want another disciple to know about?

*"When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long."*
Psalms32:3

We cannot function at our best even physically when there is unconfessed sins in our life.

"After we have committed a sin, at times we simply do not want to repent of it, instead we give in to the temptation of hiding the sin and acting like everything is okay. We continue to come to Church and smile as always yet deep down inside the sin is destroying us. God's plan is that we help one another to overcome our obstacles. But the shame of our sin and our proud concern for how we look sometimes pushes us to do things that are stupid"

Mike T. The Killer Within

We all face the temptation to sin every day and we will fall sometimes, but God has provided a way out through our sincere confession and repentance.

The following Scripture passages have much to say about how we need to view sin and the attitude to have.

Getting Back to Life

Luke12:2: If this is so why not be open now rather than wait to be exposed.

Prov.10:9 Are you at peace and secure in fellowship?

Eccl.12:14: Why wait till Judgment Day?

Num.32:23.

James5:16. When we are open about our struggles and weaknesses, then we are able to pray with and for each other.

*"You can't undo anything you've already done,
but you can face up to it.
You can tell the truth. You can seek forgiveness.
And then let God do the rest."*

Tertullian

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.*

Ps 51:1-4 (NIV)

DAY 36

INTEGRITY

Integrity can be defined as the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral Principles or professional standards. From the scriptures point of view, integrity can be seen as "honesty in life and adherence to moral principles".

There are certain expectations that come with living a life of integrity and honesty. **Proverbs 11: 3** says integrity is expected of the upright (disciples) as it guides them in return.

Integrity is of more paramount importance than wealth - **Prov. 28: 6**

Integrity is expected of all Christian leaders - **Titus 2: 7-8**

In everything show an example by doing what is good. In your teaching you have to show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.

Integrity is required in business dealings - **Lev. 19: 35-36**.

Do not use dishonest standards.

Use honest scales and honest weights.

Honest scales and balances are from the Lord — **Prov. 16: 11**

God detests anyone who deals dishonestly - **Deut. 25: 13-16**

BLESSINGS FOR LIVING A LIFE OF INTEGRITY AND HONESTY:

We gain a good reputation - **Prov. 16:13**

We receive God's protection - **Prov. 2: 7**

We gain security for ourselves - **Psalms 1: 1-6**

EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO HAD INTEGRITY:

Job - **Job 2: 1 – 3**

David - **1Chron. 29: 14 – 16**

Jesus - **Matt. 22: 14 – 16**

Getting Back to Life

1. Do you have integrity?
2. Compared to these men in which areas do you need to change?

DAY 37

KEEPING YOUR VOWS

A vow is a solemn promise to perform an act, carry out an activity or behave in a given way. Scripturally, this is a solemn promise to God.

Vows are completely voluntary.

Deut. 23: 21-23

*Make sure you fulfill your vows.
Whatever your lips utter be sure to do.*

Eccl. 5: 1-7

*Go near God's house to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools
When you make a vow do not delay in fulfilling it.*

It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it.

My mouth must not lead me into sin by making a vow only to turn around and say "it is a mistake."

Prov. 20: 25 I must not fall into the trap of dedicating anything rashly. (Remember Jephthah in **Judges 11: 30 -31** who had to offer his daughter to keep his vow)

LUKE 14: 25-35 People make vows to Jesus in the water of baptism after counting the cost. We all said "Jesus is Lord" to the hearing of our friends, Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ – that is a vow! e.g.: Jacob's vow at Bethel (**Gen. 28: 20-22**) and Hannah's vow (**1Sam. 1:21-28.**)

Getting Back to Life

1. Write down lessons learnt from these passages.
2. In what areas have you broken your vow?
3. Discuss areas you will have to make changes with your discipling partner.

Ps 116:12-14

*12 How can I repay the Lord
for all his goodness to me?*

*13 I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.*

*14 I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.*

DAY 38

ENCOURAGEMENT

2 Chron. 32:6-8

"He appointed military officers over the people and assembled them before him in the square at the city gate and encouraged them with these words: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles; And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said."

Heb 3:13

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

Do you know of anyone who does not need encouragement? I am yet to meet such a person.

Encouragement strengthens us (**Acts 15:32**). It builds confidence in us. (**2 Chron. 32:8**). It spurs us on (**Heb 10:25-26**). It keeps our hearts from becoming hardened (**Heb 3:13**).

Sometimes the challenges we face seem overwhelming. That was how the Israelites felt as they faced the threat of the pompous and boastful Assyrian army. The Christian race can be tough. And we Christians are the only ones on that track. While we run the race for an eternal crown, the people of this world are running the race for money, fame, comfort and the like. They won't encourage us much! We can only get that encouragement from each other. The faithful words of Hezekiah gave the Israelites confidence to stand firm. Do you know that your positive word to a sister or brother (Don't give up! You can do it! God believes in you! etc.) may keep them from falling away?

Our society is not very encouraging. We complain and shout each other down. We think about grabbing for ourselves and don't care who gets hurt in the process. Most of us did not grow up with many kind words said to us. As Disciples of Christ we must learn to think of each other differently. We need to hold up each other's hands in this battle.

Getting Back to Life

1. What is the one thing you will do today to encourage another brother/sister in their faith? How can you continue after today to take it higher?
2. If you are married or you are a parent, ask your spouse and children how you can be more encouraging to them. (Charity begins at home.)
3. Read **Rom 12:6-8**. Do you have the gift of encouragement? Why not ask others to find out.

"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

Dorothy Nevill

*"5 But my mouth would encourage you;
comfort from my lips would bring you relief."*

Job 16:5 (NIV)

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."

2 Thess 2:16-17 (NIV)

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Phil 2:1-4 (NIV)

DAY 39

SHARING

Acts 8:26-29

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, – "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."... "The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Acts 9:5-6

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The book of Acts is an exciting book that never ceases to inspire me. It speaks of disciples like me who God used powerfully. In chapters 8 & 9 that we study today, we see God at work seeking out souls to be saved. But the interesting thing is that God always partners with men to do so .

Let's take a closer look at **Acts 9:5-6**

"...Go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Who should go? The disciples of Jesus of course! In other words, God was depending on the disciples He had in the town of Damascus to tell this lost soul (Saul) about His plan of salvation. What would have happened if Ananias had failed to run God's errand and share the good news with Saul?

God depends on you to give His message to that colleague at work, that new neighbour, your customer in your business, the person who borrows your pen in the bank and the Good Samaritan who helps you change your spare tyre when you are stranded.

About five years ago a sister was baptized in our region. The interesting (and convicting) thing about her conversion was this: a friend of hers from outside Nigeria called and told her about the Church. The friend gave her the Church address and said "When you get there you will be told what to do." For three Sundays she came as directed, enjoyed the worship and the sermons, observed the warm fellowship of the disciples, but no one reached out to her. No one told her what to do. On the fourth Sunday she said to herself "This will be my last visit. If no one tells me anything this time I'll just go back to where I'm coming from". Again she was present and enjoyed the service till all was over. She got plenty of smiles and hugs but no one told her anything. So off she made her way to leave and on her way out, a young lady reached out to her while she was at the gate, took her contact number and promised to come visit her. They started studying the Bible that week and she was baptized a few weeks later.

What is the point? God depends on you and me to reach the lost. Far be it from us to drop the ball by being too occupied, too timid or too distracted to go to whoever He sends us and tell them what they must do.

DAY 40

GRATITUDE

Ps 116:12-13

"How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord."

Today marks the end of our church wide 40 day fast. How has it been for you?

As we turn our lives over to the Lord with a renewed dedication in 2012 let us remember the one thing that will keep us faithful and strong in spite of any circumstances or situations. It is a **HEART OF GRATITUDE**.

We are greatly blessed as disciples. We have been redeemed from an empty way of life. We no longer carry the guilt of our past sins. We belong to a family of love. We have an inheritance kept for us that cannot be tampered with. Satan has no hold or claim on/over our lives anymore. And the list goes on.

Many a challenge will come our way but nothing in all creation is bigger than the love God has for you and me. We must never become too familiar with the grace and goodness of God.

How can we say "thank you" to the Lord?

Disciples, we must keep on sharing about God's goodness with others in the hope that they too will taste what we have tasted and become members of God household.

Getting Back To Life:

1. Write a "thank you" letter to God for everything that you have to be grateful for.
2. Have a time of thanksgiving /prayer with another disciple.

"To speak and to speak well are two things. A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks."

Ben Jonson

Getting Back to Life

1. Reach out to at least one person today.
2. Ask God to lead you as He led Philip.
3. Tell the person about yourself and about your faith in Jesus.
4. Ask them if you can share the Scripture together.

Prayers of Patrick of Ireland

*I arise today
Through the strength of heaven;
Light of the sun,
Splendor of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftmess of the wind,
Depth of the sea,
Stability of the earth,
Firmness of the rock.*

*I arise today
Through God's strength to pilot me;
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's hosts to save me
Afar and anear,
Alone or in a mulitude.*

*Christ shield me today
Against wounding
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.*

*I arise today
Through the mighty strength
Of the Lord of creation*