The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a sunset. The sky is a gradient of warm colors, from a pale yellow at the top to a deep orange and red near the horizon. Numerous birds are silhouetted against the bright sky, appearing to fly in various directions. The overall mood is peaceful and inspirational.

Iremide Akinsola

Men of like **Passions**

Lessons from ordinary people who did great things with God



Iremide Akinsola

Men of like Passion

Lessons from ordinary people who did great things with God

MEN OF LIKE PASSIONS

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DEDICATION

*To Gamaliel who is my teacher,
friend and brother.*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The privilege to be a child of God is something I can't get over. My gratitude goes to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who redeemed me from destruction and brought me into His fold. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound!

A significant part of this book was initially shared as a series on my Facebook page. The encouragement and feedback from my friends there was one of the driving factors for the birth of this book. To them, I am extremely grateful. To my family, friends, encouragers and teachers who through the years have laboured over me so that Christ will be formed in me, I say a big Thank You. Please keep up the good work.

My love for God and writing is influenced by the examples of my friends and family members; my

Grandmas, Gamaliel, Jerry and Lizzy, Rev'd and Mrs Isaiah and Esther Akinsola, to name a few. These ones have helped me to grow and are helping me become more like Christ. My gratitude to them knows no bounds.

To Sister Bukola Falola who helped to edit this work and Brother Funsho Fabiyi who designed the cover page and helped to format the work, I am grateful. Thanks for joining God at work.

To each person reading this book, I say Thank You. It is my prayer that this book will bless your life and help you become more like Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria



INTRODUCTION

As we read the Bible, we come across stories of great exploits by people we now look up to as heroes of faith. When we read about Abraham almost sacrificing Isaac, Daniel surviving in the den of lions, Esther risking her life for her people and other great encounters, we are tempted to see these people not just as heroes but perhaps as superheroes. As a result, we unconsciously put Bible characters on a different scale. We see them as people who lived in a different world. We often forget that the heroes of faith we read about and seek to learn from faced challenges similar to those we face.

The challenges include childlessness, the struggles of a polygamous family, the fear of the future, feelings of inadequacy and much more! However, the encouragement we get from these characters is that despite their struggles, they had

great success as they looked to the Saviour.

This study looks at the life of 7 characters from the Bible. After each character study is a study guideline that can be used individually or collectively. This guideline is meant to help readers glean deeper lessons from each study.

It is my hope that in the pages that follow, you will understand the mind of God better and realize that the secret in being exceptional is not in being extraordinary, but in relying on Christ.

Shalom!

Iremide Akinsola



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EPISODE 1: GIDEON

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty man of valour." Judges 6:12.

Tired of the oppression of the Midianites, the Israelites cried out to God. They needed help, and God decided to step in. Although this sounds like the typical story of the people of Israel, God's choice of a vessel was one that was not in any way typical. We are introduced to Gideon as he was hiding from the Midianites in fear; threshing wheat in a winepress. The angel calls him "a mighty man of valour", but Gideon's response was one that showed doubt and had little or no element of "mightiness." Every statement the angel made was met with questions and objections from Gideon. At that moment, Gideon looked nothing like a mighty warrior. Nothing at

all.

After the angel reassured him of God's help, Gideon presented another flaw from his CV. He presented his background. Sometime ago, there was a popular message by a man of God which became a common ringtone: "Surely, you are greater than the greatest. You are higher than the highest..." You remember? Well, Gideon was the complete opposite! He was the "weakest of the weakest" (Judges 6:15). His clan was the weakest in his tribe and he was the least in his family. Despite that very important objection, the angel still reassured him of God's help and victory. But, it seemed that the angel's message was not getting through to Gideon...

Gideon still wanted a sign. He wanted to see before he believed. (It seems Gideon had something in common with Brother Thomas, the disciple of Christ). Surprisingly, his request was granted and his doubts were settled. However, his doubts resurfaced as he prepared for war and guess what? Gideon asked for another sign! He gave the "fleece test" (Judges 6:36-40) and God confirmed his word that truly He would save Israel through Gideon. Surprisingly, there is no mention of a rebuke from God.

Now, the tone of the story changes. After the confirmation from God, Gideon went to war with 32,000 men to fight an army of at least 135,000 people (Judges 8:10) who literally had an uncountable number of camels (Judges 7:12). The chances of victory were slim already, then God intervened and made the odds “worse”. He reduced the men from 32,000 to 300 so that Israel would not boast that their strength brought victory! Chai! Imagine the odds: 1 man: 450 opponents!

At this point, I would not have been surprised if the Bible said Gideon got scared and went back home. But it didn't say so. Rather, the Bible tells us that in the might of God, he was victorious. Amazing! What is more amazing is that it was the same people he hid from earlier that he later defeated. To put it another way, it was the fears that held him back in the past that became the victories that defined his future. Amazing. Simply amazing.

We can see that Gideon was a man just like each of us. He struggled with fears. He had doubts; loads and loads of them. He had a family background that was less than enviable. However, his story did not end on that note. Rather, he became the mighty man of valor that God had called him from

the beginning. He played his part. He fulfilled his purpose!

I conclude with these questions. What fear is holding you back? The fear of loss or rejection? The fear of failure or ridicule? Have the doubts and questions in your heart led you to believe you can't be who God has called you to be? Do you think that your family background has put a limit on what you can do and who you can be? We have learnt from Gideon who overcame these challenges and became who God designed him to be: a mighty man of valor! I believe you can too. Talk to God in prayer. Give all your worries and cares to Him and please don't take them back. **GO IN THE MIGHT OF THE LORD! BECOME WHO HE HAS DESIGNED YOU TO BE!**

Reflections

- God does not always use the obvious option
- God views you not as you were, but as you can be.
- When the odds are against you, then a miracle could be on the cards
- As you walk with God, slowly but surely, your fears give way to faith
- In God's hands, our deepest fears can become testimonies that would encourage others.

Study Guideline

Gideon was from a tribe that was considered the weakest in the nation. Also, he was considered the least person within the tribe. However when God sought a person to perform his purpose, he chose Gideon.

- A. What does the choice of Gideon tell you about the personality of God?
- B. Reconsider your answer in the light of 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

After the angel finished rolling out the details of Gideon's assignment, the response he got was one of doubt and questions. Gideon, just like Moses, was trying to explain why he wasn't fit for the assignment he was called for.

- A. In relation to your God-given assignment, what excuses are you making? In what ways are you postponing or ignoring God's call upon your life?
- B. Prayerfully, write out at least three solutions for each excuse you discussed. Use relevant scriptures as a guide. Find someone to keep you accountable.

Gideon gave the angel of the Lord a fleece test as seen in Judges 6:36-40. A fleece test means asking God to confirm his word with a particular sign or



EPISODE 2: PETER

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. Matthew 16:18.

Peter was one of the 12 disciples of Christ. He was a guy who wore his heart on his sleeve; he made his feelings clear to anyone who cared to know. The first time we read about Peter in the Bible, we find him and his brother Andrew casting their nets, seeking their daily bread. There, Jesus called them and “Immediately, they left their nets and followed Him.” (Matthew 4:19-20). No stories. No excuses.

There are several instances where we see Peter as a “man of like passions” but we will consider just two incidents that would help us in our study. The first incident happened when Jesus informed Peter that he would deny Christ three times. Peter

responded by telling Jesus: “Even if I had to die with you, I would never deny you”. (Matthew 26:35). There was no request for Christ to help him or something along that line. Peter was confident in his abilities. Well, as we know, Peter went on to deny Jesus thrice, just as he was told. Note that down as evidence 1.

The second incident: This scene played out in the garden where the people who wanted to crucify Jesus came to meet him. As Jesus spoke to them, Peter was furious, so furious that “he struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear” (John 18:10). This was the same Peter that Jesus said would be a cornerstone for the church. This was the same Peter that had walked with Jesus for more than three years and had listened to teachings about peace and other related themes. This was the same Peter who heard Jesus say, “If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.” Yet, he was quick to draw his sword and harm someone he perceived to be an enemy. That’s evidence 2. (Just in case you are wondering, Jesus healed the servant’s ear. Check out Luke 22:51 to see for yourself)

Now, if anyone was told to pass a comment on Peter at this point, it is likely that the person would have written Peter off. But the story did not

end that way. Few days later, Jesus came back to life and He met Peter. Rather than reject him, Christ sought to reinstate Peter. (John 21:15-17). By doing this, Jesus teaches us that our flaws do not disqualify us from His forgiveness.

At Pentecost, few weeks after, the disciples received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in diverse tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Some folks who were there mocked them and speculated that the disciples were probably drunk. Guess who stood up to them? Peter, of course! He spoke and led three thousand people to Christ. Yes, you read that right...3000 people in one sitting.

On several occasions afterwards, Peter was put in prison and beaten for Christ, yet he did not flinch or retreat. Rather, he held on and he was even grateful for the privilege to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41). This was the same Peter who denied Christ thrice. The same one who began to sink as he walked on water. However, he became the cornerstone that Christ had called him to be. History tells us that Peter was crucified, just as Jesus was, but in his case, he asked to be placed upside down on his cross because he did not consider himself worthy to die the same way as his Lord. This was a remarkable change. Peter

moved from being a man who feared for his life to one who didn't fear to die.

The life of Peter teaches us that rather than being a burial ground, our mistakes and shortcomings can become the birthplace of our greatest accomplishments. However, that is if and only if, we come back to Christ, repent of our sins, forgive ourselves and submit fully to the Holy Spirit.

Reflections

- Our flaws are meant to keep us focused on Christ
- To trust in one's strength is to prepare to fail
- With Christ, our mistakes can become positive reference points.

Study Guideline

From the evidence we see in scriptures, we can assume that Peter the Apostle was an outgoing person who enjoyed being in thick of the action. He was also someone who didn't hold back from sharing his views (John 13:6-8).

- A. Have you discovered your temperament? Do you understand how it affects your actions?
- B. In light of your God-given assignment, do you think that your personality fits in with

your purpose? If not, are there changes that you can make to help you function optimally?

The first disciples left their means of livelihood in order to follow Christ.

- A. How does this relate to 21st century believers? How does this relate to you?
- B. Are there opportunities for believers who work outside the church to serve while they are at their duty posts? Support your opinion with biblical references and practical examples.

Jesus watched Peter cut off the right ear of Malchus. He responded by scolding Peter and restoring the servant's ear.

- A. If you were in the garden when the incident occurred, what would you have advised Jesus to do?
- B. Are there instances where violence is acceptable for believers? Support your opinion with relevant scriptures.

Peter denied Jesus Christ. Judas betrayed Jesus. The two disciples let Jesus down at a vital period. However, the former went on to become a great



EPISODE 3: ESTHER

It is a fact that a grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die before it can grow and produce much more wheat. If it never dies, it will never be more than a single seed. John 12:24.

The loss of a loved one is usually a sad experience which has a big effect on the life of anyone who goes through such. The extent of the effect is usually stepped up a notch when the loved one in question is a family member. Now, can you imagine how it would feel to lose both parents? This is where our Bible character comes in. Esther was a young girl whose parents died and left her as an orphan. Now, for some people, the loss of a loved one is reason enough to go astray and rebel against God. They ask "If God is good, why did this happen to me?" They justify their wrong actions with thoughts along these lines and dive fully into sinful living. However, Esther did not

go that way.

The Bible tells us that Esther had a cousin named Mordecai who adopted her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. Lest we forget Esther and Mordecai were in captivity as these events unfolded. From this important detail, we learn from the life of Esther that while we might not be able to control some events that happen to us, we can choose whether we become bitter or better. Esther decided not to be bitter. The Bible said that “she had a pretty face and a good figure” (Esther 2:7) but she did not sell her body to the highest bidder night after night. She stood strong.

From Esther’s life, we see an important ingredient that anyone that would be successful needs: favour before God and man. Over and over, we see that Esther enjoyed the favour of God and man. The Bible had this to say about her “The king loved Esther more than any of the other young women, and she became his FAVOURite. He approved of her more than any of the others” (Esther 2:17). The Bible spoke about Jesus that “...he increased in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). This is not to discard human efforts and ability, but it is to emphasize that there is a limit to what the strength of man can do. 1 Samuel 2:9 says that “...For by strength shall no man

prevail.” This shows that beyond the effort, ability and influence, anyone who will truly be great needs God’s favour.

Let’s consider one more lesson. Please slow down here. Please. Alright? Okay. Now, after Esther had been chosen as the Queen, there was a plot by a man named Haman to destroy her people. At this point in time, Esther had to approach the king to seek the safety of her people, but there was a problem. No one came to the king without prior notice. Anyone who did so could be killed. Now, Esther was probably nervous! She was not a superhero who did not have emotions. She was a “woman of like passions”; who struggled as we struggle, but succeeded as we hope to. Through her choice, she taught us a lesson that every success of great note requires a sacrifice. Esther said “If I die, I die” (Esther 4:16) and approached the king... She found favour once again! Because of her actions, her people had a chance at salvation.

So, whatever your past looks like, don’t let it weigh you down and don’t let it make you bitter. Pray for God’s favour to distinguish you from the crowd. Lastly, be willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to fulfil God’s purpose for you (friends, fame, power... whatever it could be). Be rest

assured that your life will count in God's scheme of things.

PS: Take time out to read the book of Esther, I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

Reflections

- Although we can't always control circumstances, we can choose our reactions
- Being comfortable should not blind us from the needs of other people
- Sacrifice precedes success

Study Guideline

"The loss of a loved one is usually a sad experience... The extent of the effect is usually stepped up a notch when the loved one in question is a family member"

- A. Have you experienced the death of someone dear to your heart? How did the experience change your view of life?
- B. There are motherless children and orphans around us. How can you be of help to them?

Choose a day within the next two weeks to execute your plan.

"For by strength shall no man prevail"

- A. What do you understand this passage to mean?
- B. In a time like this where everyone strives to get ahead by any means possible, is divine providence still reliable?
- C. Share a personal experience of a situation or period in your life when you enjoyed God's favour.

Step into Esther's shoes for a minute. After years of struggling as an orphan in a strange land, you miraculously become the queen over 127 provinces. As far as you are concerned, you have reached your place of rest. Suddenly, you get a call from your cousin asking you to risk all of that for your people. You remember what happened to Vashti who was queen before you. You have a choice to remain silent and enjoy your affluence or speak out and risk being condemned.

- A. What would have been your next line of action?
- B. In your own life, are there any comfort zones you need to let go of in order to become who God wants you to be?
- C. Witnessing Christ means risking everything to give others a chance to receive the gift of salvation. Are you actively seeking to lead others to Christ?

All through the book of Esther, the man named Mordecai is an ever-present character. He serves as a mentor and guide for Esther.

- A. Are mentors a necessity in a person's life? Support your answer with relevant biblical passages.
- B. Make a list of the people who are your mentors. Evaluate how you can gain more from their wealth of knowledge.
- C. No matter the phase of life you are currently in, there are people coming after you in life's journey. Can you think of four people you can mentor? Write their names down and draw up an action plan.

NOTES



EPISODE 4: JOSEPH

For the vision is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.
Habakkuk 2:3

The story of Joseph is a legendary story that has been told again and again. His journey from the pit to Potiphar's house, then to the prison and finally to the palace is one that has been the subject of several Sunday School classes and Bible studies. For this study, we will be picking few out of the several lessons that are present in Joseph's life. The full story can be read from Genesis 37-50. Please take time to read it. I believe you will find it helpful.

Joseph started out as a dreamer, just like several of us. He had grand dreams of how the future would look like. However, his journey to his "Promised

Land” would take him through the “valley of the Shadow of Death.” As a 17 year old kid with a clear promise from God, I don’t think Joseph expected any trials whatsoever but he faced several. This teaches us a simple but important lesson; the path to success is rarely a bed of roses. The fact that our dreams are God-given does not mean that we won’t face challenges. In fact, Christ assured us that we would have tribulations and trials (John 16:33) but he did not stop there, he also assured us of our triumph. For any person reading this who is struggling with doubts about whether those things God told you would come to pass, Joseph’s life is an encouragement for you. Hold on!

Next lesson. It is said that “A river cuts through a rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence.” What this means is that with time and consistence, even a rock will give way to water. What does water have to do with Joseph? Well, let’s see. Now, in Genesis 39, we meet Joseph in Potiphar’s house. As a handsome guy (Genesis 39:6b), Potiphar’s wife wanted him to lie with her, but he refused. Here comes the part that gets me, “She spoke to Joseph day after day, but he did not listen.” (Genesis 39:10) DAY after day! Day AFTER day!! DAY AFTER DAY!!! Lojojumo! Haba! Madam Potiphar tried to see whether her

persistence would break Joseph's resistance but what she did not know was that Joseph was standing on a rock that is higher than him: "The Solid Rock". Joseph did not cave in, he stood strong. He did not yield to the offer of "free" sex. For you, the offer might be an opportunity to enrich yourself fraudulently, participate in examination malpractice or any other thing and it seems that you just can't take it any longer. Remember that Joseph stood strong, you too can!

Joseph was sent to prison because he stood strong, but God did not forget him. God sent the chief butler and baker to the same prison where Joseph was. Talk about divine arrangement! (Genesis 40:3; Romans 8:28). God brought the chief butler and baker to the prison where Joseph was for a reason which had to do with Joseph's glorious future. However, Joseph had a role to play in the fulfilment of his destiny just as each of us does. If Joseph had been moody and reluctant to help the people he met in prison, he probably might not have gotten the breakthrough that he sought. Joseph refused to lose hope, rather he utilized his God-given talent (interpretation of dreams) and built a relationship (with the chief butler) which served as a reference point for him two years later. This is a big lesson for us. We might be in places where we feel justified to be resentful and angry,

because we deserve “better places”. The lesson here is that wherever we are, we are there for a reason and for a season. Failure to make the most of our sojourn where we are might jeopardize our chances of being who (where) God wants us to be.

Two more lessons and we round this episode up. After helping the butler interpret his dream, Joseph told him, “But think of me when it shall be well with you and show kindness, I beg of you...mention me to Pharaoh to get me out of this house” (Genesis 40:14). However, the man did not remember him. This verse shows that clearly: “...but even after all that, the chief butler gave no thought to Joseph, but forgot all about him” (Genesis 40:23). The lesson I believe God wants us to learn here is that we should not put our trust in anyone, but in Him alone. There are times when people would disappoint us and let us down, (intentionally or otherwise) but our focus should be on God. “He who promised is faithful” and whenever He deems it fit, in whatever way He deems it fit, He will make a way.

Finally, the last lesson. Let me use an illustration to drive this point home. Imagine for a moment that you are standing at the starting line of a race. Okay? Okay. Now, you are told to run. You ask the umpire where the race would end and she

answers you, “Don’t worry, I will tell you when the race ends. Just keep running.” This was the situation that Joseph found himself. He knew that one day the promises of God would come to pass, but he did not know when. He “ran” for about 13 years (Genesis 37:2 – Genesis 41:46) yet he did not give up. He was “a man of like passions”; one who struggled as we do, but succeeded as we hope to. He experienced hatred from his family, an assassination attempt, false allegations and much more, yet he held on to God’s promise and he saw it come to pass.

So, for us, the assurance is that, “no matter how many promises we have in Christ Jesus, they are Yea and Amen.” God’s promises will surely come to pass, as long as we remain in His will. So, on your marks, get set...Run! Run, IRE, Run! Run, DAVID, Run! Run, REBECCA, Run!! Run *insert your name*, Run!! Even if it takes longer than you think, keep running. Keep trusting. The vision is for an appointed time...it will surely speak! Don’t give up. God is on the throne.

Reflections

- We are assured of trials and troubles, but we are also assured of triumph
- God is at work, even when it doesn’t seem like He is.

- A man's gift makes way and brings him before the great.
- Put your trust in God not man. Man is mortal and fallible but God is not.

Study Guideline

Life rarely turns out the way we plan. More often than not, challenges and obstacles surface and attempt to get us off the track in our search of fulfilment. The life of Joseph was a testament to the accuracy of the statement.

- A. Discuss some of the challenges that Joseph faced in the journey of his life.
- B. Are Christians exempted from trials and obstacles? Discuss in light of John 16:33

Myles Munroe said, "When purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable". Joseph lived with a dream and a goal in mind. However, he did not draw up a plan by himself. Rather, he received it from God. To live a life that glorifies God, a person should seek to understand the reason for his existence. This reason can only be found in Jesus. (Acts 17:28). How do you think Joseph's dreams help him to overcome the challenges that he faced?

"Flee all appearances of evil"

- A. What does this Bible mean when it says

“appearances of evil”?

- B. What role does the Holy Spirit plan in helping believers recognize things that are evil?
- C. Write out two alternative solutions that you think Joseph could have applied in the situation he faced with Madam Potiphar.

Then the Lord replied, “Write down the vision and make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry” Habakkuk 2:2-3. Memorize.

NOTES



EPISODE 5: MARY

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered; be it unto me according to thy word. (Luke 1:38)

There is a common theme in the lives of people that God uses, it is divine interruption. Over and over in the Bible, we see people who had plans and dreams about how their lives would go and then, God would step in and turn their lives “right side up”. Elisha was busy working on the farm when the mantle was cast upon him by Elijah (1 Kings 19:19-21). David was watching over the sheep in the wilderness when he was called to be anointed as king (1 Samuel 16:11-13). Peter and his brother were fishing when Jesus called them to be his disciples (Matthew 4:18-20).

For Mary, a young lady who was engaged to Joseph, she most likely had plans and dreams of how the future would look like. Then, out of

nowhere, an angel came and disrupted her plan for the future (Luke 1:26-33). We learn from here that if we are truly going to be who God wants us to be, we should expect divine interruption. It is usually not convenient. It usually involves movement away from one's comfort zone. However, if we obey God, it is usually a reference point for greater things in our lives.

Mary's life story in itself serves as a source of encouragement for us. Mary was a young girl residing in an area that was generally seen as a write-off (John 1:46). She was engaged not to a prince, but to a carpenter. However, today, her story is told all over the world. Her story is a good example of how God can make something out of nothing and somebody out of a "nobody". If He did it with Mary's life, then He can do it with your life (Hebrews 13:8). Your background or location does not limit you from being used by God. The only thing that is required is your willingness to surrender to God (Luke 1:38).

In the first episode of this book, we learnt from the life of Gideon. His response to the angel's declarations were questions (Judges 6:13, 15). Also, as we learn from the life of Mary, we see her asking an important question: "How will this be?" (Luke 1:34). The answer she got is one that is vital

for us. The angel replied "...for with God, nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Now, you might have gotten a promise from God and as you look at the circumstances around you, you find yourself asking: How will this be? How will I build a university when I am struggling to eat three times in a day? How will I reach the zenith of my career without losing my love for God and my family? How will *fill in the blanks* this be? Today, I am here to remind you that "WITH GOD, NOTHING SHALL BE IMPOSSIBLE."

The last lesson we will consider here relates to the time when Jesus was about to die. For me, it is noteworthy that Mary held on to Jesus even when it did not make sense to do so (John 19:25). She was promised that Jesus would save the world, and there He was hanging on a cross. She could have deserted Christ. She could have turned back but she didn't. She held on. There would be times in our lives when it seems really difficult to hold on to God. The tears in our eyes and the pain in our hearts might seem like justifiable reasons for us to turn back, but from the life of Mary we learn that true faith is following Christ even when it is not fanciful or fashionable.

Mary was a "human of like passions"; she struggled as we struggle and succeeded as we

hope to. She was not a demigod. Rather, she was a woman that God looked upon with favour. We have considered some lessons from her life. However, the lessons are not meant to increase our knowledge alone; they are meant to increase our faith and stir us to trust God more.

Reflections

- Along the path to divine fulfilment is divine interruption
- Your usefulness to God is directly proportional to your surrender to Him
- With God, nothing shall be impossible. Believe this.
- Even when it hurts, hold on...to Christ

Study Guideline

Imagine that you are a close friend and confidant to Mary. One day, she comes to you and tells you about her pregnancy which she says is of God, not man. What would be your reaction and advice?

“Along the path to divine fulfilment in divine interruption”

- A. Do you believe the statement is generally applicable?
- B. From the books of the Bible, share four examples of people who encountered divine interruption on their road to the

fulfilment of their purpose.

- C. If God interrupts your current plan and directs you to something that seems less lucrative and attractive, what would be your reaction?
- D. Considering Mary's example, what lessons have you observed about how to respond when God interrupts our plan? What is usually the outcome of divine interruption?

“With God, nothing shall be impossible” This is a passage of the Bible that is used in several situations. However, from the context in which it was used, it is clear that God only commits to making a project possible when He was the one that proposed it. In other words, “It is only a prayer that comes from Heaven that can be answered by Heaven.” In line with this guidance, prayerfully write down at least three things you believe God has spoken to you about. Seek scriptures that you can use as an anchor.

NOTES



EPISODE 6: HANNAH

By strength shall no man prevail. 1 Samuel 2:9.

The first thing the Bible says about Hannah is that she was barren. We don't know how long she had waited; the Bible does not tell us. However, one thing we know is that she had been to Shiloh year after year. (1 Samuel 1:3). What makes this so interesting? In ancient Israel, as in the 21st century, idol worship was a common practice. There were gods of fertility that the people sacrificed to in order to have children. For Hannah however, she kept her faith in God. She kept her faith even though she did not know if she would get an answer or not. She kept her faith even when there was an alternative route.

The words of the three Hebrews as they were about to be thrown into the fire comes to mind. They said: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not

careful to answer thee in this matter... If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power...but even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear that we will never serve your gods" (Daniel 3:16-18). It is easy to serve God when things are convenient and comfortable, but the true test of our faith comes when there are challenges and chances for compromise. Will you hold on to God even when things are not going as you want? Will you be like Hannah?

Hannah was a woman with anguish and sorrow (1 Samuel 1:16). She was mocked and taunted by her contemporary because she was barren but this only pushed her to pray more. She neither insulted nor cursed them. Her response was prayer. For her, prayer meant "pouring out her heart to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:15). The Bible teaches us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). In prayer, we talk to God. In prayer, we lay our burdens upon Him. In prayer, we lay down our wills and take up God's will. (Luke 22:42). For Hannah, prayer was a lifestyle. How do we know that? Well, after God gave her a child, she launched into a prayer of thanksgiving which came from the depths of her heart. (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Her life teaches us that prayer should be our way of life and not a spare tyre of

sorts, which we use only when we are in trouble.

After waiting for a child for some time, God answered and gave her a son. She named him Samuel. I can't imagine how joyous she would have felt. However, she had made a vow to give the child back to God (1 Samuel 1:11) and she did not forget to fulfil her vow to the Lord. There are two lessons I believe God wants us to learn here. We will consider the lessons and conclude afterwards. Please read with maximum concentration and take notes if you can.

Firstly, we learn from Hannah that there should never be anything that is too big for us to give to God. Whatever we have is a gift from God (1 Corinthians 4:7) and there should never be a gift that is too big for us to give back to the Giver. Remember Abraham? (Genesis 22:2-18). It is only when we sacrifice, that we can experience multiplication (John 12:24). Hannah gave Samuel to God even though she was not sure she would have another child, but God honoured her sacrifice and gave her five other children (1 Samuel 2:21). The biggest gift we have is our lives and we should not hesitate to live our lives for the One who gave us life (2 Corinthians 5:15). It is only when we give our lives fully to God that we can experience multiplication of impact, usefulness

and fruitfulness.

The second lesson from Hannah's fulfilment of her vow is that we should be people that keep our words even when it hurts. (Psalm 15:4). Hannah made a promise to God and she did not hesitate when the time to honour the agreement came. Some people promise "heaven and earth" when they need something from God or from people around them. However, when payback time comes, they come up with stories. As Christians, "our Yes should be our Yes, and our No should be our No. Anything else is from the evil one" (Mathew 5:37). God seeks people that keep their words even when it hurts. Remember Jephthah? (Judges 11:31, 39)

When Hannah was praying, I'm not sure she could have imagined that her son would be a judge, prophet, priest and king-maker. God showed that He is able to exceed our expectations if and only if we rely on Him.

In conclusion, we have learnt from Hannah that we should keep our eyes on God whether it is convenient or not. We have learnt to seek God's face in prayers whether in pain or in health. We also learnt that nothing should be too big for us to give to God. We see God reminding us to be

people of integrity and finally, we see that God is able to exceed our expectations when we trust in Him. Is God speaking to you about something in your life? Please, don't hesitate to address the matter!

Reflections

- Hard times should not lead us to compromise our faith.
- Prayer should be our lifestyle not an emergency tool.
- Nothing should be too big to give to God
- In sacrifice, we experience multiplication
- Be a person of integrity. Let your word be your bond.

Study Guideline

An idol is anything that takes the place of God in a person's life. For Hannah, the idols that existed in her time were statues and images crafted by human hands. However, in contemporary times, idols have been redefined.

- A. Keeping in line with the definition of an idol, can you mention some idols that you know?
- B. Can you sincerely write out the things that are taking the place of God in your heart? (Hint: What you spend your time and money on, as well as what you think about the most)
- C. Prayerfully commit to dethrone those idols in

your life.

For Hannah, prayer was a lifestyle. It was not a spare tyre; it was a livewire.

- A. What is prayer?
- B. What does it mean to make prayer a way of life? How can you apply this to your life?
- C. Communication is not complete without feedback. Therefore, prayer is not complete without hearing from God. How will this understanding help you when you pray?

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son... (Emphasis added). God exemplified His love by giving us something dear and precious to Him. Today, He expects you to show your love for Him. In what ways do you intend to show your love to God in the course of this week?

NOTES



EPISODE 7: PAUL

But I am what I am by the grace of God. 1 Corinthians 15:10.

Writer of 13 books of the Bible. Participant in 3 missionary journeys. Apostle. Scholar. Church planter. These and much more describe the man named Paul. Quite sincerely, Oga Paul's CV seems quite intimidating. Here is a man who was a key member of the early church and who remains a positive reference point for believers in our time. However, it is important for us to remind ourselves that Paul started out not just as someone who did not believe in Christ, but also as someone who played an active role in seeking to stop the spread of the Gospel. (Acts 9:1-2)

However, one day, on the road to Damascus, he met Christ (Acts 9:1-20). That encounter ended his BC (Before Christ) years and began an AD (After

Death) era in his life. Now, this gives us hope. It teaches us that anyone can be used by Christ. If Paul could be used by God, then anyone can be used by God if and only if, such an individual surrenders to God. It shows that as far as God is concerned, a rough start does not disqualify anyone from fulfilling his divine purpose.

Years after his life-changing encounter with Christ, Paul wrote: “This is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But for this very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His perfect patience, as an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15-16). This reiterates the lesson that a horrible beginning does not disqualify one from having an honourable ending when God is involved. It shows that God’s mercy is available to everyone. Whatever your past looks like, your future can be more glorious if you are willing to hand over the control of your life to Christ.

One of the things I am grateful for is the fact that the Bible does not only share the successes that Paul enjoyed but also gives us a clear picture of the struggles that he faced. “Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three

times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked... I have known hunger and thirst and have gone without food; I have been cold and naked” (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). Contrary to some schools of thought, we are made to see here that trials and hard times are not always a sign of a distant relationship with God. Rather, they are a fulfillment of God’s promise for us. (John 16:33). Christ promised us trials, but He also promised us triumph.

The hard times we are facing are nothing compared to the bright times ahead. (Romans 8:18). They are the experiences that God intends to use to refine us and make us fit for his purpose. (Proverbs 25:4). Our reactions to trying times should not be of those who turn back and are destroyed, rather it should be of those who have faith and are saved (Hebrews 10:39).

Another dimension of Paul’s struggles had to do with the desires of the sinful nature. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do.” (Romans 7:15). Like some people reading this, Paul found himself in a cycle of sin. However, he shared the solution to the merry-go-round cycle of sin. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this

body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25). If you are reading this and you need freedom from the endless cycle of sin, the solution is clear. The Solution is Jesus!

Sometimes I wonder how a man could achieve so much and break new frontiers for the kingdom of Christ. Sometimes I wonder how one man could touch lives across several generations with his lifestyle and writings. Sometimes I wonder what makes masterpieces different from other pieces. In two verses of the Bible, I find some answers. “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)

From the verses, it is clear that despite all that Paul had achieved, he did not count it as an entitlement to be a servant of God. Rather, he saw it as a privilege. He remained humbled by the privilege of sonship and service. Also, he acknowledged the importance of grace in his life; he understood that a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven (John 3:27). These

traits are important for anyone who intends to be a masterpiece.

In conclusion, from the life of Paul, we have seen a man who was a chief antagonist of the Gospel become one of the chief protagonists of the same message; thereby teaching us that while we are alive, we are never beyond redemption as far as the Father is concerned. We have seen that struggles are part of the success story and we have learnt that our efforts no matter how hard don't count for anything without the grace of God. However, I will love to point out that Paul became useful only after he met Christ.

Today, I am extending an invitation to you. If you have not given your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, you have a chance to do so now. You have the chance to draw the line; leaving behind your BC (Before Christ) days and operating in an AD (After Death) dispensation. God wants to use your life to bless your generation and generations after yours. However, this can only happen if you surrender your life to Him.

If you are willing to give your life to Christ, please say this short prayer: "Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I know that you came to die for my sins.

Today, I surrender my life to you. I confess my sins to you and ask you to wash me and make me whole. From this day on, help me to live in a way that glorifies you alone. Thank you for new life. Thank you for rebirth. Thank you for salvation. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.” Wow!! Welcome to the family. I wish you could see the smile on my face. Get a bible and read it; it is God’s word to you. Pray; it is how you talk to and hear from God. Also, prayerfully seek a fellowship of believers to learn from and grow with. Shalom!

Reflections

- Your past does not disqualify you from the future that God intends for you
- Trials are not always a sign of a distant relationship with God
- The solution to the vicious cycle of sin is to Jesus Christ
- Our service in God’s vineyard is a privilege not an entitlement.

Study Guideline

To move from the kingdom of darkness to light is to change dispositions. It is signified by a change from a BC era to an AD dispensation.

- A. Have you given your life to Christ? At what point in time or over which period of time

did this happen?

- B. What influenced your choice?
- C. Have there been any changes in your value system? Is there an evidence of the change in how you utilise your time, talents and treasures?

The Bible contains records of the success stories of heroes of faith. However, there were also records of challenges faced by these people.

- A. Would it have been better if mention was made of only the success stories and not the sufferings? Explain the rationale behind your answer.
- B. One of the things that Jesus promised believers is that we will have trials (John 16:33). Why do you think this promise is not widely accepted by believers?
- C. How can a person know whether the hard times he is going through is as a test or the result of his careless acts?

Economists talk about the vicious cycle of poverty. Paul talked about the vicious cycle of sin. The vicious cycle of sin refers to a merry-go-round experience: After the sinful act is committed, the person in question feels remorse. The person then goes on a period of recovery (short-term or long-term). However, the recovery is always short

lived when the person relapses into his old sinful habits. Then, the cycle goes on and on.

- A. Can determination and self-control alone break the cycle of sin? Support your answer with relevant scriptures.
- B. Paul made it clear that Christ is the only solution to the vicious cycle of sin. In what way can a believer enjoy victory in Christ? (Hint: Psalm 119:11; John 17:17)

NOTES



EPILOGUE

I believe that you have learnt important things from the lives of these men and women. However, the benefit that God intends for us does not come from acquiring knowledge but from applying knowledge.

Has this book blessed you in any way? I will like to hear from you! Feel free to contact me through any of the following channels.

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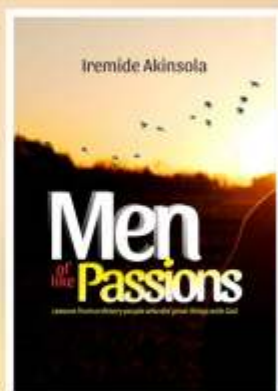
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ABOUT THE BOOK

The Bible presents us with the life stories of several people. Some of them excelled, others did not. For those who excelled, they sometimes seem to be ideal individuals who have little in common with us. This could not be further from the truth. The purpose of this book is to unveil the connection that we have with these people who faced similar challenges and overcame. It is to encourage us that if these men and women of like passions can succeed, then we also can succeed despite all odds.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iremide is a Christian who enjoys reading, writing and listening to music. He is an alumnus of Bowen University, Osun State, Nigeria. He believes that God calls all believers to be ministers in the marketplace by serving God in whatever capacity they find themselves. Iremide runs a blog.

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