

THE GREAT PATRIOT

By Ebenezer Ajewole

Published by: @FAMOUZ DA GOLD Jos - Nigeria

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ISBN: 978-978-991-639-9

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Almighty God, for His Mercy, Grace, Love, and Protection over me and my family. Also, it is dedicated to my family- Mrs Bunmi Ajewole, Oluwatobi Ajewole, Temidayo Ajewole , and my late Mother, Mrs. Janet Ajewole

FOREWORD

I considered it a privilege to write the foreword of this beautiful piece - THE GREAT PATRIOT by the author, I also congratulate the author for this giant stride.

ILU OKE is about the story of an industrious, energetic and patriotic young farmer by the name - Adeoye Atanda who was loved and respected by all. His great feat as the winner of the village grand prize at the annual agriculture fair during the Ilu- Oke day celebration made his fame spread abroad.

Atanda's accomplishment in the village also made him to be envied by his colleagues, chief of which was Ishola Afuye who did all he could to destroy Atanda but availed not. Atanda feared God and together with his family were delivered from every attempt of his enemies.

Atanda desired that Ilu-Oke would have modern infrastructural facilities such as good schools, tarred road, water supply and lots someday. After several failed promises from politicians he took the bull by the horn in search of greener pasture for a better life and empowerment to develop his village, "Ilu-Oke".

His decided to relocate to a nearby village together with his family, though very difficult and challenging but with the support of his wife and the counsel of his Pastor, Atanda left Ilu- Oke for Ajede. Atanda was tremendously blessed in the land of Ajede; he became a business owner and was successful in all he did. In a very short while, Atanda became all that he desired to become, then the need to return back home.

I personally find the story in this book interesting and therefore recommend it to all.

*OLUWOLE OLATUNDE,
Esq. Legal Learning
Bwari, Abuja.*

PREFACE

The book, THE GREAT PATRIOT " is a fiction work written to inspire sterling leadership, and also provoke the patriotic spirit in us. The book equally aims at inspiring leaders to adopt the good leadership traits of the Protagonist - Atanda Adeoye like integrity; selflessness, determination, magnanimity and hard work. The Book is a product of my many years of contributions to national development through writings, discourse and engagements. The knowledge and information provided in this book will be useful to Politicians, Students, Leaders of Communities, Youths etc.

I therefore urge that this book is adopted in a bid to help raise role models that will champion the cause of patriotism and also restore sterling leadership in all sectors of our society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I sincerely express my appreciation to; Elder James Ajewole, Pastor Samuel Osamolu, Mr. Daniel Abesin, Barrister Oluwale Olatunde , Mrs Bunmi Ajewole, Aniefiok Arthur, Mrs.Victoria Agbata for their tremendous work, dedication and rich professional advice that contributed to the successful production of this book.

I also thank Mrs. Esther Awodiya, Mrs. Yemisi Okeowo, Mrs. Grace Odofin, and Victoria Ajewole who have been supportive in different forms especially through constant prayers.

Finally, I thank my colleagues like Mr. Tosin Oshunkoya, Alaka Oladimeji, Jafar Rikiji, Gabriel Orim, Anyanso Richard, Mrs. Vivian Amadi, for their superb encouragement and support, may the Almighty God

Bless you all richly in Jesus name.

Chapter one

ILU-OKE DAY

Ilu-Oke, a small rustic village, 15Kilometres from Ayowole, the local government headquarters of Adun, every November, attracts huge number of guests from far and near, to the Ilu-Oke Day Celebration. The exhilarating rich culture of the people of Ilu-Oke displayed at the event, largely accounts for the influx of people in to the village during this period. Also, the avenue the Ilu- Oke Day celebration provides for old long-lost friends to reconnect again, contributes to the reason why people throng to the village, in spite the bad roads that leads to Ilu- Oke.

The annual event which attracts top dignitaries like; Government officials, Traditional Leaders, Politicians, Clerics and Business Men ensures that the guests depart Ilu-Oke fully thrilled. The event is a spectacle to behold, little wonder the guests long for it every year and also prepare for the event in advance.

The first point of attraction at the Ilu-Oke Day Celebration is the ostensible; colourful, and beautiful artistic designs, which expresses the rich culture of Ilu-Oke that adorns the venue.

It is followed by thrilling activities like cultural dance, Panegyrics rendition and Beauty pageant. While the Traditional Wrestling, Ayo game and the Agriculture fair completes the full list of the entertainment menu for the event. The alluring serene atmosphere at Ilu-Oke, combined with the canopies, which provides air of receptive festivity, also complements the celebration.

However, of all the activities on parade that day, the Agriculture fair stands out amongst the others. The atmosphere created by the Agriculture fair is always a tumultuous one. The audience

shove themselves to catch a better glimpse of the massive farm produces like Yam; Cassava, Cocoa Yam, Cocoa, and Kola nuts on display. Some of them capture these humongous crops on their cameras.

The size of the crops presented at the event like tubers of Yam ranges from 20-21m in length and 18 to 19cm high; Oranges as large as a size 5 football, Cocoa twice the size of the oranges. Equally, massive kola nuts made of white and red colours presented at the event, are broken in to pieces with the aid of a cutlass due to their sizes, before they are shared amongst the guests at the event.

The highpoint of the Agriculture fair is the presentation of the award of the best farmer of the year. The award attracts a cash price, new farm tools and a certificate from the organisers. It also comes with a garland placed on the neck of the recipient. In addition, the winner is carried shoulder high by the farmers, amid praises sang in his honour.

One man, Atanda Adeoye, a very industrious farmer, though believed by his colleagues to have been sanctified by the deity of Agriculture, (Orisha Oko) has literally turned the grand prize to his birth right. Since the inception of the Agriculture fair, Atanda has always emerged the best farmer, as well as consistently break old records and set new ones. His knack for producing incredible crops remains legendary. The sizes of his crops are usually twice bigger than what other farmers' presents at the show.

These feats did not go unnoticed, as it suddenly turned Atanda in to a village hero, loved and respected by both the old and the youths. Atanda was also loved in other villages that borders Ilu-Oke because of his other sterling qualities like humility, honesty, magnanimity, patriotism etc.

Likewise, Atanda's exploits, also created troubles for him. His successes brewed envy amongst some of his colleagues, who nursed bitterness in their hearts every time he was called up to the podium to receive his prize. Ishola Afuye, Atanda's predecessor as the Egbe Agbe Omo IluOke's (Farmers' Club of Ilu-Oke) Treasurer, led the pack of the jealous group. Afuye's tenure as the Treasurer of the Club, witnessed a lot of embezzlement, hence the need to change him with Atanda. Afuye was not pleased with his removal as the Treasurer of Egbe Agbe Omo Ilu Oke.

The choice of Atanda replacing him as the new Treasurer of the Club was even a bigger blow to him. He resented Atanda for his success and also was scared Atanda would expose all his shady deals. So, for Afuye, a battle line has been drawn between him and Atanda.

Afuye's first onslaught on Atanda came during the nocturnal meeting he held with his cohorts on how to destroy Atanda at his residence. At that meeting, they resolved to embark on a well-orchestrated campaign of calumny against the person of Atanda as a means of destroying him. They started by spreading dangerous rumours that Atanda bewitches other farmers' crops with juju, and also sacrifices human heads to the gods in return for a humongous harvest. This rumour quickly spread like wild fire. Unfortunately, Atanda was unaware of the wicked lies told against him.

Afuye continued in the act of disparaging Atanda, until he was challenged one day by Olapade, Atanda's friend at Iya Ibeji's palm wine joint - a rendezvous for the men of the village. That

day, Afuye in his usual mischievous way, raised a false alarm about Atanda's plan to use some children in the village for rituals. He cleared his throat and said " am sure you guys have heard the latest about Atanda's wickedness and evil against this village. He has now graduated from sacrificing the head of adults to the gods in exchange for tremendous harvest, to that of children. I heard he is planning to do that soon. That is pure wickedness! We must not allow the greed and selfishness of one man to destroy our children. We must stop him! "

His false accusation regarding Atanda as a ritual killer, sharply divided the revellers as a heated argument ensued between Afuye and those that opposed to his wicked lies against Atanda. Olapade who frowned at the lies, thundered and charged at Afuye. He cursed him with Ogun the god of Iron and also with Sango the god of thunder for dragging the name of an innocent man in the mud in the name of envy.

Olapade blurted out, "I invoke the gods of the land to strike you down. Ogun and Sango, will bath with your blood. You evil and corrupt man. The atrocities you committed as the Treasurer of our Club still remain fresh. Now your new found hobby is trying to destroy Atanda with your lies. You have failed! ."

After the altercation with Afuye, he left the scene and went to Atanda's house to inform him of what occurred at the Palm- Wine joint. When he got to Atanda's house, he met him and his children clearing grass in his compound. Atanda, who had sighted Olapade from afar, wondered in his mind the reason for his visit to his house, because he knew Olapade to be the type that rarely visits people in their houses.

Nevertheless, he welcomed his guest with a good smile and quickly offered him a chair after both men had exchanged

pleasantries. Then Atanda asked, "what do I owe this august visit? Especially from the one that rarely pulls his bottom off the chair in his compound. In fact, the chair must have be wondering where the boss has gone to".

Atanda's joke did not amuse Olapade as the earlier encounter with Afuye still left him seething with anger, and it clearly reflected in his countenance. A closer observation revealed to Atanda that Olapade looked unhappy . He probed to find out what the matter was by asking, "Olapade, I observed you are not happy over something. I cracked a joke about how inseparable you and your favourite chair have become, yet you did not laugh. What is it? Why not share it with me, maybe I could be of help to you".

Olapade replied with a proverb, "all lizards lie with their stomachs facing down, one cannot spot the one with a stomach issue". Atanda, confused by that proverb, urged Olapade to 'unveil the mask from the masquerade's face'.

Olapade then said, "you are a very kind man, loved by many, hated by few. I almost engaged in a fight with Afuye today at Iya Ibeji's palm wine joint, but was stopped by three men because he told a horrible lie against you. He said you sacrifice human heads to the gods in exchange for a bountiful harvest. Beware of Afuye, he is a dangerous man who plans to kill you".

Atanda's reaction stunned Olapade. He expected him to be very furious and also rain curses on Afuye, just like he did earlier, but instead, Atanda burst in to a laughter dismissing it as the talk of an ignorant man. He even vowed never to confront Afuye nor dignify him with a response, insisting that by doing so, will amount to a waste of his valuable time.

But Olapade was not impressed. Mindful of the fact that it was Atanda's call to make, and also would not like to been seen as crying more than the bereaved, Olapade stood up from his chair,

shook hands with his host and left.

One week after Olapade came to warn Atanda about Afuye's evil plans towards him, which he dismissed with a laughter, Atanda decided to throw a party to celebrate his feat at the Agriculture fair. He extended an invitation to all members of the Egbe Agbe Omo IluOke (Farmers' Club of Ilu-Oke) including Afuye and his group to the party.

The party had in attendance the Traditional Ruler of Ilu- Oke (Atona of Ilu- Oke), The Pastor of his church, the Councillor representing Ilu-Oke, Iya-Loja of Ilu-Oke, (Market Woman Leader) Youth Leader of the Village, Men and Women of the community. Food and drinks were freely served at the party, and musicians entertained to the delight of the audience.

In recognition of Atanda's feat in farming, and also the fame he had brought to Ilu- Oke, the Atona of Ilu-Oke honoured Atanda with the title, Oba Awon Agbe Agbaye (King of Farmers World-Wide). Also, one after the other, leaders at the event eulogized Atanda for his great feats in farming as well as his great personality which transcends beyond the land of Ilu- Oke.

The action of the Atona of Ilu- Oke sparked envy in the camp of Afuye and his gang, as they hissed, murmured and cursed. They expressed their displeasure during the coronation of Atanda as the King of Farmers World- Wide by the Atona.

Afuye was first to express his hate and displeasure of witnessing Atanda achieving another feat just in a short while after emerging the best farmer at the Agriculture fair. He muttered, "I swear I hate him. He thinks he is better than everybody. He is not. It is not enough that he wins the Agriculture fair every time, now the Atona crowning him the the King of Farmers World- Wide, is a slap on us. We have to kill him otherwise, we will remain unimportant in this village throughout our lifetime due to Atanda".

Ashade Akogun, a member of Afuye's group concurred with the

position of Afuye to kill Atanda, but with a slight moderation in plan, which is to attack him through a spiritual means rather than assassinating him as earlier planned. He stressed that it is safer for them to adopt that method as nobody will have any concrete evidence to nail them should he dies.

In unison, they all agreed to Akogun's suggestion and settled for Alawo Ika (The wicked herbalist) amongst other herbalists in the community because of his notorious record of executing evil plans with perfection.

As early as 6a.m., they were already at the house of the herbalist, carrying two bottles of gin, a he-goat, a cock, and cash as payment for the service they want the herbalist to render to them. When they got to his house made of mud and a thatched roof located in an isolated part in the village, Afuye - the leader of the group knocked on the herbalist's door gently, as he was not sure what could infuriate him.

There was no response from the herbalist because he could not hear Afuye knocking on his door. Afuye convinced that Alawo Ika could not have left his house that early, persisted in knocking the herbalist's door until he muster enough courage to bang the door ferociously which rudely woke Alawo Ika from his deep sleep.

He yelled with a loud voice, "who is that unfortunate fellow that will not allow me to enjoy my sleep quietly? Don't you have a house to sleep in? Speak now or I command the gods to kill you right there". Afuye trembled and stuttered with his words, but finally managed to state his mission to the dreaded herbalist's house.

After listening to Afuye stating his mission to his house, the herbalist reluctantly stood up from his wooden bed, wearing a long face to meet his guests. His countenance made them uncomfortable at first, but when he smiled after seeing the gifts they brought for him, Afuye and his group heaved a sigh of relief.

Without formal greeting or light jokes, he asked them what they want from him. Afuye responded on behalf of the group that they want Atanda dead because he was a threat to them. Alawo Ika, though a very wicked herbalist, was surprised that anybody would want Atanda - the village hero dead.

After a long silence, he raised his face and then said, "well, if that is what you want, I will do it for you. But note, the gods do not support your action to kill this man. Whatever happens, you will bear the consequence of your actions. They could be very terrible. I have warned you. It is no longer my fault".

He asked them if he should continue or stop the plan, they opted to continue with the plan after cooing words in to one another's ear. He nodded his head for few seconds, before reaching out for his pot where he dipped his hand and brought out an amulet. He handed it over to Afuye, with a stern instruction on how to use it.

He also instructed them to attack him in the middle of the night after chanting the incantations he taught them. They stood up happily, thanked him and presented the gifts they brought for him. He collected them, and assured them that their 'Kola' will get to the gods accordingly without any inhibition.

On their way home, Akogun raised the concerns Alawo Ika noted about the gods frowning at harming Atanda and its possible consequence, but it was quickly dismissed by Afuye who explained that the herbalist was not speaking for the gods but for himself. Afuye's words convinced Akogun not to pull out from the plan to attack Atanda.

Indeed, Atanda is a man with a resplendent destiny. The more Afuye and his group hatches evil plan against him, the more God Almighty kept blessing him in different forms. Abiodun, the councillor representing Ilu-Oke, had in the Local Government Executive meeting of October, reported Atanda's feat over the years in farming.

His report caught the attention of the Chairman of Adun Local Government Area, Otunba Sunkanmi Ige who demanded that Atanda's name should be included in the list of those to be honoured at the occasion to mark the Chairman's 2nd year anniversary in power.

When Abiodun got to Ilu- Oke, he informed Atanda that the Chairman plans to honour him in a month time at Ayowole with other outstanding individuals in Adun Local Government Area. He was very elated upon hearing that. Atanda thanked Abiodun for bringing his exploits in the world of farming to the notice of the Chairman.

On the day of the event, Atanda and others selected to be honoured by the Chairman of Adun LGA, dressed gorgeously in their native outfits with a neat pair of shoes to complement it. One after the other, they were invited to the podium to receive their awards and cash gift to go with it.

When it was the turn of Atanda, the Chairman spent more time lauding him for his dexterity in farming. The Chairman also harped on the terrific crops that emerges from Atanda's farm. Many people at the event were very surprised to hear that such crops exist. All eyes were gazed at Atanda, as the Chairman lauded him. He immediately became the star of the occasion, as many people surrounded him, demanding to take pictures with Atanda.

The Press took his pictures and requested to interview him, which he gladly granted them after speaking with Councillor Abiodun on that.

He was handed the chance to address the audience at the event by the Chairman. Before he spoke when the microphone was handed over to him, Atanda said to himself, "I have to act as an Ambassador of Ilu-Oke and also use this medium to popularise the Agriculture fair. I will also task the Chairman on the need to develop Ilu- Oke. I hope he agrees to my request".

When he climbed the rostrum to address the audience, Atanda started by thanking the Chairman for recognising them. He spoke glowingly about the Ilu-Oke Day event, and also seized the opportunity to demand for the provision of basic amenities like pipe- borne water, electricity, health centres, good roads, and markets in his community.

He also assured the Chairman that if the basic amenities are provided, it will develop the potentials of the village culturally and economically too. The Chairman responded by pledging to look in to his requests later, which is a common expression by many Politicians.

When Atanda got home, he told his wife about his experience at Ayowole ecstatically. He expressed confidence that the Chairman would fulfil his promise of providing water, electricity, tarred roads, and hospitals at Ilu- Oke after he promised to look in to his demands. But as weeks drifted into months, and months into years, that promise remained elusive. Atanda was sad and frustrated because of the failed pledge by the Chairman.

Dejectedly, Atanda went to the Atona's palace to protest his displeasure about the failure of the Chairman to fulfil the pledge he made about providing basic amenities at Ilu- Oke, but was told to be patient and hopeful by the King. He thanked the Atona for his counsel, before departing the Palace . But, before he left the Atona's palace, he promised to defy whatever the odds are, overcome them and bring development to Ilu- Oke someday even when he was not sure on how to achieve that.

On his way back to his house, the thoughts of replicating what he saw at Ayowole enveloped his mind. He wondered and asked himself rhetorical questions why his beloved Ilu-Oke could not enjoy electricity, potable water, tarred roads, hospitals like Ayowole and other communities in Adun LGA without an answer.



The aftermath of the interview Atanda granted the Press at the Award ceremony in Ayowole, turned him in to a media sensation trending in major news platforms across the states. Notable magazines and newspapers in Orire state used the picture of Atanda in their front pages.

Also, Atanda's exploits in the world of farming dominated discussions in Radio and Television Stations in Orire state. But despite the rave in the Media about Atanda's exploits in the world of farming, he was oblivious of it. It took few days after, before Atanda realized that.

One afternoon, Councillor Abiodun visited Atanda in his house clutching the Star newspaper, one of the most famous newspapers in Orire state that has the picture of Atanda in the front page, which he dropped on the table for him to see.

Atanda picked up the copy of the newspaper and saw his picture besieged by the Chairman of Adun LGA and other dignitaries at the Award ceremony. He was surprised, at the same time, very elated that his picture could appear in a newspaper judging from his status as a farmer. He quickly called his wife and children to the sitting room to see the newspaper.

"Aduke, you and the children should come over to the sitting room quickly; I have something wonderful to show you. The Lord is great, and forever will remain wonderful". His wife and children joined him in the sitting room in a jiffy as instructed by Atanda, and quickly he handed the copy of the newspaper to Aduke after she had greeted Abiodun their guest.

She looked at the picture of the husband in the newspaper with a fulfilled smile, and spontaneously, started singing God's praises

on account of the husband. Atanda, Councillor Abiodun and the children also joined her too to glorify God for the things he has done for them.

After they had finished dancing, an excited Atanda dashed in to the room and brought out a bottle of fruit wine which he bought at Ayowole to celebrate the feat. They toast to more achievement, good health and the development of the land of Ilu-Oke. Done with the celebration, Councilor Abiodun stood up to leave, Atanda quickly pleaded with him to allow him keep the copy of the newspaper which he obliged him.

The next day, a crew from the City Radio & Television Station left Ajede for Ilu-Oke with the aim to do an exclusive interview with the man of the moment - Atanda. The journey from Ajede to Ilu-Oke the state capital of Orire was a tortuous one, no thanks to the bad roads that leads to Ilu-Oke. A journey that was supposed to take 3 hours, eventually ended in 5 hours. Finally, the crew landed at Ilu-Oke noon, very tired. Despite their tiredness, they tried to locate Atanda immediately to enable them carry out their assignment as they planned to return that same day to Ajede.

They saw some men drinking palm-wine at Iya- Ibeji's joint, and they decided to stop there to make enquiry about how to locate Atanda's house. Unfortunately, the men the crew met turned out to be Afuye and his group. The leader of the journalists from the City Radio & Television Station, Bayo Muyiwa, greeted the men and announced to them why they are in Ilu-Oke. He added, "Please could any of you take us to Atanda's house? Or give us vivid description to his house. We would like to see quickly because we plan to return back to Ajede immediately after our assignment here at Ilu-Oke".

Afuye replied them by asking why they have to trouble themselves to embark on a 5 hours journey from Ajede to Ilu-Oke to interview Atanda, who according to Afuye is deceiving the people with his claim of producing humongous crops. He said, "Atanda is a fat liar. His claims about producing humongous farm produce are all lies. That is not even our biggest worry today, but his engagement

in ritual acts. He sacrifices human heads to the gods. You guys should not bother to interview that ritual killer".

The journalists were shocked by Afuye's allegation against Atanda. They quickly demanded to record Afuye on tape but he declined and hurriedly left the scene with his gang without even directing them to Atanda's house or offered to take them there. The journalists managed to find a woman who agreed to take them to Atanda's house after Iya-Ibeji had pleaded with her to help them. In 10 minutes, there were in Atanda's house where they met him sitting on a chair under a tree in his compound.

They greeted Atanda and introduced themselves to him as journalists from the City Radio & Television Station. They also stated their mission to his house. He welcomed them well and even offered them water and food before the interview commenced, but the journalists politely rejected his gesture as it runs fouts the ethics of their profession. The interview started expectedly well, but hit a bad patch towards the end when the only lady in the team, Nike Oye, asked Atanda whether it was true he sacrifices human heads to the gods.

Atanda, who was earlier beaming with smiles, when the interview started, suddenly had his countenance changed. He kept mute for a while, before he finally responded to the accusation as merely untrue. The interview ended and the crew thanked Atanda for his time. He wished them safe trip back to Ajede and also walked them to where they parked their bus under a tree close to Iya-Ibeji's palm- wine joint.

Unlike the first interview he had at Ayowole, the second one elicited a mixed feeling from Atanda. While he was happy the journalists came all the way from the town of Ajede to interview him at Ilu-Oke, which is something he was proud of, but at the same time unhappy that he was questioned on sacrificing human heads to the gods.

On his way back home, Atanda kept wondering who told the journalists such lies against him without a clue, until Iya- Ibeji the

palm- wine seller beckoned to him to come over to her palm-wine joint.

He obliged and sat down on a chair very close to her after they both had exchanged pleasantries. She offered him a fresh palm-wine for free as the hero of the village, but Atanda turned down her offer because his faith (Christianity) abhors it.

Despite her plea that it was Atanda's first time at her palm-wine joint, and also the explanation that palmwine is different from beer, Atanda still declined the offer. Iya-Ibeji later conceded when she discovered that Atanda was not going to budge. She switched to the main reason why she invited Atanda to her palm-wine joint.

She stated, "Atanda, you know me to always mind my business. I do not have time for frivolities. But I cannot stand and watch as a good man like you fall in to a ditch. Atanda! Atanda!! Atanda!!! How many times did I call you? You have enemies and they are in this community. Afuye is your main enemy".

Atanda replied, by requesting Iya-Ibeji to kindly explain to him what exactly she meant by regarding Afuye as his main enemy. Iya-Ibeji continued by saying, "what a pity! Two men and a lady stopped by at my palm-wine joint today to enquire from Afuye and his useless friends while drinking palmwine in my shop on how to locate your house. But instead of doing that without destroying your name, Afuye told them that you are a ritual killer. I was pained by his lies but I tried to maintain my cool so as not to cause any scene in the presence of the visitors".

Immediately Iya-Ibeji finished talking, Atanda stood up from his chair, gazed into the sky for few minutes, with his hands folded in akimbo. He also did not utter a word for few minutes. After recovering from the shock of what Iya-Ibeji told him, he managed to thank her and left for his house.

This time around, he was convinced that Afuye was really an enemy, and could actually harm him, if he did not act fast. Atanda

concluded to tackle the issue through prayer rather than engaging Afuye in a physical battle. He summoned his household to the family altar, where they prayed for hours against any form of attack from their enemies including Afuye. Atanda and his wife also observed a three day s fasting.

On the night of the third day of the fasting, which coincidentally, was the night Afuye and his evil group chose to strike, Atanda had a dream. In the dream, strange things occurred at Ilu-Oke. Atanda heard eerie sounds made in the night by unknown creatures, and also sudden deaths of domestic animals in virtually all households in the village. He also saw the turning of day in to night, and unexplainable sudden drought of streams. Atanda woke up terrified, picked his Bible and read some verses of Psalms. He also prayed fervently for three hours concerning the strange dreams before going to bed.

While Atanda was praying in the night, a figurine was sent to attack him by Akogun, the man picked by Afuye's evil group to carry out the assignment on behalf of them after chanting incantations as instructed by Alawo Ika. But unfortunately for Akogun and his members, it boomeranged as Akogun suddenly shouted, slumped and died before help could come his way.

His wife and children rushed to his room when they heard his voice but met his lifeless body on the ground. By dawn, the news of his demise has gone round the village.

The next day, as early as 7 a.m., mourners had gathered in his house to condole with his family. Afuye, though in shock and utter disbelief, managed to visit the family of Akogun, his late friend and partner in evil acts to express his condolences to them.

Immediately the news of Akogun's death got to Atanda while working in his farm, he left what he was doing and quickly proceeded to his house to prepare to join the other villagers already gathered at the late Akogun's house. But, just as he was about to depart his house, Seun Ojo - Atanda's pastor entered his house.

He stated, "Brother Atanda, the lord has given you victory over one of your enemies. Last night while I was praying, I saw you in a battle with a scary creature and I joined in the battle with you. Am happy the lord gave you victory over the wicked one. You need to watch and pray always".

Atanda corroborated the assertion of the Pastor and told him about the battle he was facing and the steps they have taken as a family spiritually to fight their battles. The Pastor noted that Atanda should have brought it to his notice and that of the Prayer Warrior group in the church. He warned Atanda not to visit the family of the deceased that day as his enemies could still be lurking around to attack him. Instead, he advised Atanda to visit there the second day.

It was awkward for him; the village hero to agree with the Pastor's idea to visit the second day after everybody would have finished commiserating with the family of the late Akogun . But after thinking about it for few hours, he decided to listen to the voice of reasoning, as he argued in his mind that the Pastor may be right after all.

He thanked the Pastor for his advice and also for helping him secure victory over last night's attack. He also appreciated the Pastor for visiting him and his family.

After Atanda finished thanking Pastor Seun for his visit, the Cleric in a very low voice, dropped a bombshell ! "Brother Atanda, this is the beginning of your battle to achieve your dreams. More attacks will come but none shall overcome you. With your own eyes you shall see the end of your enemies. But Brother Atanda, for you to fulfil your destiny, you must leave the land of Ilu-Oke for some years".

He added by asking Atanda to choose an appropriate time to break the news to his family, warning that if he fails to handle it well, it could affect them psychologically.

Before the Pastor left, he prayed for Atanda and encouraged him to always pray and fast together with his family. He implored

Atanda not to ignore his words or dismissed them as mere talks. Atanda promised to obey the instructions of the man of God.

As soon as he returned back to his house after seeing off his guest - pastor Seun, he became concerned how he will survive with his family in a strange land after living at Ilu-Oke for 30 years. Other thoughts that also captured his mind, was whether he would ever realize his long time ambition of bringing basic social amenities to Ilu-Oke again, if he leaves the community. While he was ruminating over these things, Afuye too, was busy planning to execute his plan B, which is to assassinate him since the plan to attack him spiritually failed. Afuye, still determined to eliminate Atanda, in spite their earlier failed plan that consumed his evil partner Akogun, travelled to the village of Odofufun to hire Assassins to kill Atanda.

He handed a picture of Atanda, which he had in his possession during his time as the ex-Treasurer of Egbe Agbe Omo Ilu-Oke to them, and also gave a vivid description of his house to the assassins. The assassins demanded cash and wraps of Indian hems to execute the job, which Afuye easily provided them.

The Assassins stormed Atanda's house in the night armed with two pistols, cutlasses and charms in their bag in case he resists gun shots and machete cuts. But unfortunately for them, the barking of the dogs in the area woke Atanda up. He quickly peeped through the window and saw some strange guys trying to break in to his house.

Atanda picked his machete, reached for the rear door and escaped to the next street where he alerted the Vigilance group on patrol. The Men mobilised other members from different streets and they went after the assassins. On sighting the vigilance group advancing towards Atanda's house, they opened fire at them which the men responded with their Dane guns.

Sensing apparent danger, they decided to flee the scene. But unfortunately for them, two of the assassins were killed by the vigilance group that lay ambush for them in the exit route of the village. Also, the leader of the group and his deputy were caught

and taken to the Atona's Palace the next morning after tying them down for three hours.

At the palace, the villagers gathered very early in the morning to catch a glimpse of the unwanted guests - assassins in their village. The Atona noticed from their scarification that they are not from Ilu-Oke, so he asked, "where are you from and why did you choose to rob my village? The gods of our land are not asleep. If not, you would have successfully executed your evil plans. Speak up or I ask the gods to shut them up permanently for you". The assassins, unruffled by the threat of the Atona, refused to cooperate with interrogation by keeping mute. This angered the Atona as he thundered again, "speak up or you die this moment!". The leader of the assassins, a very huge guy, lifted his eyes towards the Atona, looked at him contemptuously and hissed as if to say, who the hell are you to bark orders at us .

The Atona felt insulted by his action, demanded that 'Omi Iku' (The water of death) be served him, but the Otun (The Right-hand man to the Atona), cooed in to the ears of the Atona, to jettison that idea, but rather have him confessed through a charm necklace placed on his neck. The Otun's idea worked like a magic as the leader of the Assassins started to shout, after the charm necklace was placed on his neck. He cried out, "please, allow me to confess. We are from Omifufun village. We are not armed robbers we are assassins.

We were contracted by one of your sons to carry out this attack on Ogbeni Atanda. The man's name is called Afuye. He paid us good money and provided the information on how to kill our target". The villagers cursed, "ha! Afuye "Olori buruku" (the unfortunate one). It shall not be well with you. Wicked man. Dogs will feast on your corpse when you die".

The Atona immediately ordered that four able young men should go and bring Afuye to the palace. When they got there, Afuye had already escaped to the next village called Abata . The men returned to the palace and reported to the Atona concerning the sudden disappearance of Afuye from his house.

Peeved by that report, the monarch sent a larger team consisting of 24 young men to comb the whole village with an order to capture him alive, but their effort still did not yield any positive result.

The arrested Assassins were later taken to Adaba police station, the nearest police station to Ilu-Oke, because Ilu-Oke lacked one. And the case

was transferred to Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at Ayowole for further investigation. The next day, the assassins were charged to court while the police went after Afuye. The judge ordered that the assassins be kept in prison and the police ensure that Afuye is brought to court the next sitting.

The Police intensified search for Afuye, and after two weeks of combing Ilu-Oke and its environs, finally, Afuye was arrested in his hideout at Abata village. He confessed to his sins and was later sentenced alongside the assassins to 25 years in imprisonment with hard labour. When news reached Atanda that Afuye and the assassins had been imprisoned, he and his family thanked God for saving them from Afuye's evil plans.

Atanda finally broke the news of their imminent exit from Ilu-Oke after breakfast with his family. The response that greeted Atanda's disclosure, was a very emotional one. Aduke, while trying to speak, could not withhold back tears already gathered in her eyes, broke down crying uncontrollably like a baby, while her children also joined her to weep.

She stated amid sobbing, "am not sure I can survive with out Ilu-Oke. There can never be any land better than Ilu-Oke. The most fertile land in the world. The village with great farmers and hunters. I wish to stay all my life here. I love my mothers land Ilu-Oke".

Atanda did not want to betray emotions as the man of the house cannot be seen crying before his family, so he fought back tears strongly, while consoling his wife and children concerning their predicament in a low laden voice. He reminded his family of the

need to repose their trust in God as only the

Almighty God can turn their grief into joy. He backed his talk with a story in the Bible about how God instructed Abraham to vacate his father's land for a strange land and how God eventually blessed him there. Aduke later gathered herself together, wiped her tears and went straight to the kitchen to wash the pots used for cooking earlier.

After the drama from Aduke, Atanda left to inform some of his friends and close confidants of his plan to depart the village temporarily. His first port of call was the Atona's palace. The Traditional ruler tried to dissuade Atanda from departing the village for another community assuring him that the gods of Ilu-Oke will always protect him and his family. He even went as far as divulging to Atanda the plan by the Council of Chiefs to make him the Balogun (The General) of Ilu-Oke because of his heroic acts and patriotism.

Atanda thanked the Atona for his offer, and stated that though he would have loved to become the Balogun of Ilu- Oke, a position he considered very powerful and influential too, but rejected it because he did not want to disobey a prophetic instruction. He prostrated before the Atona and demanded he offered him his blessing to enable him succeed in a strange land. The Atona agreed and prayed for Atanda's success and protection.

Atanda also informed Olopade of his plans when he visited him in his house. He begged Olopade to forgive him for not heeding his warning earlier concerning Afuye's evil plans towards him. Olopade was happy that Atanda eventually realized his mistakes. Though he expressed his disappointment that Atanda was leaving Ilu-Oke, he prayed for his success in his new adventure.

While both men were still chatting, Olopade's wife entered the sitting room with two plates of hot and steamy porridge garnished with fish which she served her husband and their guest - Atanda,

while Olopade added a bottle of wine to 'wash down' the sumptuous meal.

After the meal, the two men went and sat under a tree in Olopade's compound where they continued with their discussion.

During the discussion, Atanda reiterated his desire to develop the land of Ilu-Oke by providing them with basic social amenities, like good roads, pipe-borne water, electricity, hospital etc. He promised to defy the odds to realize his ambition no matter how long it will take him to achieve that.

Olopade, moved by Atanda's patriotism, hugged his friend for few minutes, after which he prayed that God should grant him his heart desires. Atanda thanked him and urged Olopade to work closely with other good men in the village to keep it safe, as well as work for its development. Olopade saw him off to a junction leading to his house before waving him good bye which Atanda reciprocated gleefully.

Atanda sold some of his farm produce, gather the money and handed over to his wife Aduke to keep for him. He shared his other properties like furniture, bed, pots, clothes, etc. to his neighbours. He also handed his land and house to Olopade to manage for him until he returns from his journey.

Some of Atanda's debtors who heard of his plan to relocate from Ilu-Oke, quickly came to his house to pay up their debt. With some money in his kitty, Atanda was a little bit relieved financially to cope with the journey ahead.

Despite overcoming the issue of money to some extent, Atanda was still not sure of the exact place he was moving to. He trusted the Holy Spirit to guide him and reveal to him his next destination. Truly, he was shown in a dream his destination, a week to his departure from Ilu-Oke.

In his dream, the Holy Spirit instructed him to move to Ajede, the state capital of Oriri. His revelation was confirmed by his wife Aduke, who had a similar dream, three days after Atanda had his



As early as 5 a.m, Ajose, a popular driver at Ilu-Oke famed for his ability to drive any kind of vehicle, and also blessed with the dexterity to manoeuvre through the worst roads, had parked his 504 GL car outside Atanda's house, waiting for him and his family members to finish their preparation, so that they can commence their journey to Ajede.

While waiting, Ajose decided to enjoy music a little by playing the song of his favourite traditional music artiste, Irawo (Star). He excitedly slotted Irawo's cassette, his latest work, inside his car stereo and pressed play. But after two minutes he had done that, it failed to function. Ajose, infuriated, ejected the cassette, rolled it round his finger for few seconds, then hit it vigorously on his left palm, before slotting it back into the car stereo. Like a magic, the cassette started playing to the delight of Ajose who beamed a satisfying smile. He nodded his head fast in ecstasy to the song of Irawo blazing out from his car stereo amid chewing a stick.

Fifteen minutes later, Atanda and his family members were ready for the journey to Ajede. Ajose arranged their luggage and packed them properly to the amazement of Atanda, who initially had doubts that Ajose's 504 car may not accommodate their luggage. Atanda said, "Ajose, indeed you are very good at your job. How did you manage to pack the luggage so well that we did not have to leave some behind? Am really impressed. You have indeed shown that Oga na master. Bravo!".

Ajose replied with a smile while stating in pidgin English, "Oga Atanda, no be today I don dey do dis work. E don tey. I have been doing this job for the past 10 years. I started early after my

Primary School at Ilu- Oke. Though I wanted to proceed to Secondary School at the village, but could not due to the inability of my mum to pay for my school fees after the demise of my dad. Experience has helped me to tackle many things concerning the driving job. Don't worry I will try my best to make the journey an enjoyable one”.

With those comforting words from Ajose, the journey to Ajede finally started at exactly by 5.30 a.m. The journey drew a mixed feeling from Atanda. While the prospect of succeeding in the town of Ajede and returning as a rich man to Ilu-Oke appealed to him, also, the fear of being forgotten in a hurry despite all he had achieved as a great farmer in Ilu-Oke loomed large in his mind.

Atanda, immersed in his stream of thoughts, was unaware of their arrival at Adaba, until Ajose stopped at a filling station to refill his car with petrol. Atanda said to Ajose, "I did not realise that we are in Adaba already. I was lost in thought. The accent of the traders who besieged our car hawking their wares made me realize that we have left Ilu- Oke. Wow! Adaba, the land popular for its love for Beans cake (Akara) and pap.

Ajose asked Atanda what he was thinking about, but instead of telling him what was bothering his mind, Atanda instead evaded the question. He cleverly shifted attention to Ajose by asking him questions on how to drive a car and properly invest in a car business.

Ajose smiled and said to Atanda, "I will be glad to teach you Oga Atanda how to drive a car. You only need few weeks to become a good driver if I teach you. I will also do that free of charge. For the car business, at least you need a good car, an honest and dedicated driver".

Atanda tried hard to resist enquiring from Ajose about some critical things concerning Ajede town, because doing so may present him as an unwise person who suddenly moved his entire family to a strange land he knew nothing about and has

never visited before. But on a second thought, he decided to do so, rather than ask a stranger.

Ajose, stunned by Atanda's question, replied him, "Oga Atanda, why did you do such a thing? You were a hero at Ilu-Oke, but suddenly you want to become a villain in a strange land? I don't think your decision to suddenly depart Ilu-Oke was the right one. Any ways, Ajede is a good town just like Ilu-Oke, though better developed than Ilu-Oke. The people are nice and also receptive to strangers, but can be nasty, if you mess with them. Opportunities abound there, the strong and the favoured benefit mainly from these opportunities”.

On hearing the things Ajose said, Atanda heaved a sigh of relief and thanked him for the information he provided him. Few hours later, they stopped by at Asegun town to have a lunch at a popular food canteen, Yakoo Yoo Food Joint (Stop over and get satisfied). Other drivers and passengers also visit the canteen . That afforded Aduke and her children the opportunity to urinate as well as stretched their cramped legs for few minutes before joining Atanda and Ajose for lunch.

Atanda ordered for his favourite meal - pounded yam and vegetable soup with goat meat, which turned out to be a far cry from the one he normally enjoys at home. While Aduke and the children settled for rice. Ajose had a different option from Atanda and his family members, he opted for Amala and ewedu accompanied with a bottle of chilled soft drink.

In 30 minutes, they were all done eating, ready to continue their journey to Ajede. Ajose entered the car and started the engine, but the car shockingly, refused to start. He thought the

battery head had shifted, so he opened the bonnet and checked, but discovered there were intact. Wondering what could be wrong with the car then, he decided to check the plugs and still found them okay. He went back and started the car again, yet it failed to respond. Angry and frustrated, Ajose decided to go and fetch a mechanic that will fix the car from the mechanic village, 15 minutes' drive from the food canteen.

Ajose's strong phobia for motorcycle is well known amongst his friends. He will not even board it for free. But after 30 minutes of waiting for a taxi without any in sight, he was compelled to board one.

Atanda was scared stiff when he mounted on the back of a motorcycle rode by an 18 years old boy, who incidentally, was the only one willing to ply that route that day because of the bad road that leads to the Mechanic Village, worsened by the heavy down pour earlier in the day.

He concealed his fear by keeping mute and also closing his eyes any time they approached a bad spot. After 20 minutes of manoeuvring the bad roads with an unbelievable dexterity, the young boy reached the mechanic village to the relief of Ajose.

He quickly asked the boy to wait for him while fetched the mechanic. The young boy obliged and patiently waited for Ajose. Five minutes later, Ajose came back with Dapo, a very experienced mechanic with over 15 years experience. They both jumped to the back of the motorcycle and the boy took them back to the food canteen where Ajose's car was parked. This time round, the motorcycle rider, decided to move slowly and more carefully too, because of the pressure Dapo has added to the motorcycle.

Eventually, they got to where Ajose's car was parked, and he alighted from the motor cycle, paid the young man and thanked him for saving the day which he acknowledged with a smile. He explained his ordeal to already troubled Atanda and his wife - Aduke.

Atanda after listening to him, stated, "in all situation let us thank God. Who knows if this had not happen, may be worse thing could have happened. The most important thing is to arrive our destination in peace. It may be stressful, but better than one losing his life. I thank God".

Aduke added, "we bless God for his mercy over us. Am very convinced He is with us in this journey. He has assured us victory already. We will get to our destination in peace".

While Atanda and his wife were expressing God's ability to protect them from any danger that could occur in the course of their journey to Ajede, Dapo had already gone under the car fixing the problem. 30 minutes later, he was done working on the car which left him sweating profusely.

He asked Ajose to start the car which he did, and immediately, the car started working again. This elicited a smile from the face of Ajose and a clap from Aduke and her children. Ajose paid Dapo the agreed fee for the service he rendered, and also thanked him. Dapo in return, wished them a safe trip to Ajede, while cautioning Ajose to drive carefully as it was already late.

Ajose heeded Dapo's advice to drive carefully. This advice came handy when he approached a junction leading to Ajede town. A car with no head lamps suddenly came out from the other side of

the road and almost collided with Ajose's car, but luckily he managed to dodge it.

Ajose reassured Atanda that nothing bad will happen to them because they are covered with God's protection, more so, he is experienced enough to handle the challenges of driving at night.

Atanda and his children endured the tortuous journey and wished they arrived Ajede quickly as it was already very late coupled with the fact that they were hungry and tired. 30 minutes later, the children were already sleeping, while Atanda and Aduke tried to stay awake by chewing bitter cola and kola nuts to fight off sleep.

Finally, they got to Ajede town 9.20pm without any place in mind really to sleep. They have never visited the town before, and so, clearly, knew no place to visit that night, which created a real concern to Atanda and his wife Aduke.

Ajose, tired too from the hectic journey, managed to suggest to Atanda to look for a Church to pass the night. Atanda agreed with him, but told him he cannot locate any because he is not familiar with the town. Ajose informed him that he knew a big church along the road, but cannot guarantee if they will accept to accommodate them because it was very late. Atanda begged him to take them to the Church immediately.

Ajose agreed and took Atanda and his family to the church, and when they got to there, the security man refused them entrance in to the church premises, despite Atanda narrating his ordeal to him.

Ajose joined Atanda in begging him to at least allow them inside

the church premises, but their effort proved fruitless. Aduke also went on her knees to plead with the security man to allow them inside , but her plea was also met with a resistance. The refusal of the security man to allow them in, forced tears to stream down Aduke's eyes.

As Aduke tried to plead more with him, she burst into hot tears which made the security man to become emotional. He explained to them that he is not a wicked person, but only doing his job. He told them that their request to enter the church premises was complicated by the odd hour they visited.

Tope, the security man stated, "bad people have spoilt the good ones. What you are asking from me is a tough one. I do not know you people from anywhere. But my heart is troubled seeing this woman crying. Also, I cannot deal with the situation of the children either. Okay, I will try my best to inform the Resident Pastor". Atanda and his wife thanked him and waited while he went to fetch the pastor.

He woke the pastor from his sleep and narrated to him the reason for his action. The pastor followed him to the gate and was shocked to find Atanda and his children outside the gate at that time of the day stranded. Moved by their plight, the pastor ordered the security man to open the gate for them to come in. He immediately opened the gate, and Ajose drove in. Atanda, immediately alighting from the car, in show of appreciation, prostrated for the Pastor, while the wife went on her knees too to thank the Pastor.

The Pastor asked them to stand up and quickly instructed the

security man to help them remove their luggage from the car. He also asked him to take them to the Mission house and provide them with food and water. Ajose after ensuring that Atanda and his children had a place to sleep that night, left for the Garage. Before he left, Atanda and Aduke thanked him very well for all he did for them.

The next morning, Pastor Ifeoluwa Segun and his wife came to check on them. He knocked on the door three times before Atanda managed to open the door for him. Atanda greeted him and his wife before apologising for not opening the door immediately, blaming it on fatigue. He even told the Pastor that his wife and children were still sleeping as a result of the tiredness.

The Pastor replied him, "Mr. Atanda, do not worry about that. Obviously I understand . It is nothing we came to check on you and your family and to inform you that we are going out to visit one of our Brethren. I have instructed the security man to provide you and your family with breakfast and other things you may need.

Mean while, I would like to have a word with you when we return ". Before the arrival of Pastor Segun and his wife from their visit, Atanda had engaged Tope in a conversation with the aim of obtaining vital information about their host - Pastor Segun and also how to secure an affordable accommodation.

The Security man provided Atanda with answers to his questions which delighted him. Few hours later, Pastor Segun and his wife returned from their visit and sent for Atanda. He sensed that the

reason Pastor Segun summoned him, was because he cannot accommodate them any longer in the Mission house, which turned out to be correct. But Pastor Segun's action was predicated on the fact that the house belongs to his assistant who was out on a missionary assignment outside the state.

After exchanging pleasantries with Atanda, he offered him water and a glass of chilled juice. He waited for Atanda to finish his drink while clutching a newspaper in his hands, before stating the reason why he sent for him. He said, "Mr. Atanda, I am sorry about your predicament, the lord Almighty will send helpers to you swiftly in Jesus name. But am sorry, you cannot continue to stay at the Mission house again. The room I offered you is reserved for the Evangelist who is out on a Missionary work. Besides, it is church policy not to accommodate strangers in the Mission house. I broke Protocol to offer you accommodation in the Mission house because of the situation I found you and your family.

I want you to understand the situation. Am not trying to chase you away, in fact, I promise to help in any possible way to ensure you settled down quickly in Ajede".

Atanda thanked the Pastor very well and prayed that God Almighty continues to bless him and his family for the help he offered them. He also requested the Pastor to help him secure a good and affordable accommodation to enable him settle down quickly in Ajede.

The Pastor assured him that he had already instructed a brother in the church to help them search for a good

accommodation. Barely had they finished talking when Brother Wale walked in to the church premises. And on sighting him, Pastor Segun quickly shouted "Brother Wale we are here please come over". He greeted the Pastor and Atanda , before briefing them about his search for accommodation which turned out to be successful.

Atanda was so elated by Wale's report that he did not wait for him to conclude before thanking him profusely for his effort. Brother Wale suggested that they should visit the place, which is not far from their church in order to inspect it and possibly pay for the accommodation. They were impressed by what they saw and Atanda paid for the accommodation the next day. Before he moved in to his new house, Atanda took his family to the Pastor for prayers. After Pastor Segun had finished praying for Atanda, he revealed to him that God has promised to grant him his desires if only he will obey his word and carry out his instructions.

Shocked by that revelation, as that will be the second time a Pastor will be prophesying same in his life, he pledged to do his best to serve God faithfully. He later disclosed to the Pastor his ordeal at Ilu-Oke and how he was reluctant to leave his beloved village for Ajede. Pastor Segun assured him that Ajede remains his Goshen land and that the lord will honour his words in his life to fulfil his ambition of developing Ilu-Oke.

Pastor Segun also provided a vehicle that carried their luggage to the new house, and in addition, sent two boys from the Youth Fellowship to join Aduke and his children in cleaning the house.

Same day, two women from the church, came to assist Aduke. They accompanied her to the market to purchase few things she would require for their new house like mattress, cooking utensil, food stuffs etc. Atanda, impressed by that show of love, promised to reciprocate the kind gesture that has been melted to him by Pastor Segun and the church members, when he finally settles down .

Later that evening, Aduke cooked a delicious meal of Amala and Ewedu soup for dinner which they all gulped delightfully to celebrate their first night in Ajede. After the meal, they prayed, and the children went to bed, while Atanda and Aduke stayed up late till the midnight discussing on how to start a new business in Ajede.

Atanda and his wife could not reach a compromise on the type of business they would like to venture into. Another issue they had, was, how much they needed to invest in the business because of the limited resources at their disposal. Later, both of them decided to sleep because it was very late already, promising to continue the deliberations the next day.

The next day, an idea came to Atanda's mind which is to take his dilemma to Pastor Segun. Aduke though agreed with Atanda's idea, but felt that it was too early for them to start burdening Pastor Segun. Atanda replied her in a proverb that, "the one we met in the hamlet first is the landlord".

Convinced Pastor Segun would have a positive answer for them on the type of business they need to start doing, he concluded to consult him the next day.



Chapter Four BUSINESS

Barely few minutes after ending the morning devotion with his family, Atanda left his house to visit Pastor Segun in a bid to consult with him on his business plans, without even waiting for Aduke to serve him breakfast. He knocked on Pastor Segun's door twice gently, and his wife opened the door for him. After they both exchanged greetings, she offered Atanda a seat while she went inside the room to inform her husband of Atanda's presence.

Pastor Segun welcomed Atanda and asked him why he visited that early. Atanda replied him in a proverb saying, 'one does not hide an injured hand in his pocket' hence his reason for the early visit to his house. Pastor Segun laughed so hard that that the wife came to the sitting room to find out what was responsible for his laughter. Atanda explained his challenges to him concerning starting a new business and the limited fund with him.

Pastor Segun advised Atanda that they should pray over it firstly, consequently, find out the next line of action to take. He accepted Pastor Segun's advice and returned back to his house. When he got home, he told Aduke what Pastor Segun said. After listening to him, she served him lunch.

One week after, Pastor Segun revealed to Atanda that based on his findings, he realized that building material business best suits him. Though, Atanda have not done that kind of business before, but he trusted God to help him. He also hoped that Pastor Segun too will assist him.

Not deter by by Atanda's plethora of challenges, Pastor Segun continued with his good deeds towards him. He introduced Atanda to Poju Akinloye, a famous Building material seller and a great philanthropist in Ajede. Desperate to learn the business quickly, Atanda enrolled as an apprentice for 4 weeks at Poju's shop in Ajede. Upon completion of his apprenticeship, he was released to start his own business.

While serving there, Poju treated Atanda with respect unlike other apprentices, because of Atanda's humility and eagerness to learn regardless of his age. While in return, Atanda also influenced other apprentices he met there positively by encouraging them to always be honest in all their dealings, a quality that was lacking before he joined them. He got a certificate from Mr. Poju after serving as an apprentice attesting to his good behaviour and industry.

Impressed by Atanda's good behaviour during his period as an apprentice, he supported him to rent a shop in a strategically positioned area in Ajede. He also gave him money and some building materials to kick start his new business. Atanda prostrated and thanked Poju for his kind gesture towards him. He prayed for Poju's progress and God's protection over him.

Atanda could not contain his excitement as he rushed to Pastor Segun's house to divulge the good news to him. Pastor Segun congratulated him for the achievement. He reminded Atanda of God's promises in his life, and added that what he experienced with the favour he received from Poju, which was indeed rare, is a tip of the iceberg compares to what God has in stock for him. Atanda thanked him before leaving for his house.

He entered his house singing God's praises amid whistling on account of the favour he received from Poju. Aduke enquired from Atanda the reason for his ecstatic mood. He quickly shared the good news with Aduke and the children, which generated the shout of Hallelujah! Hallelujah!! Hallelujah!!! by Aduke.

Thrilled by that splendid news, Aduke prepared Atanda's favourite food - pounded yam and vegetable soup for dinner. Atanda after gulping a big bowl of pounded yam, sang Aduke's eulogies. "Aduke, the daughter of Olokun, the sage. The daughter of the wise one whose puzzle ten thousand men could not unravel. My beautiful princess from Ilu-Oke, the land of honourable men. Thank you for feeding me with my favourite food". Aduke blushed as her husband showered her with encomiums.

The night that preceded the day Atanda opened his shop for business, turned out to be a difficult one for him. He could not sleep very well. Many thoughts engaged his mind. He wondered how he will manage to attract plenty customers to his shop as a new person in the town of Ajede. He also considered the issue of his accent, which is different from the one spoken in Ajede affecting his business. He thought about asking Poju for help regarding these questions, but later changed his mind when he remembered the saying that 'you cannot help one to help find a job, and also help him to do the job'.

So, Atanda concluded to brace up to the challenges that may arise in the course of his new occupation. He said to himself, "why am I even worried? After all, the Lord is always with me in all I do. He will not abandon me now. Besides, I have faced tougher issues in the past, and I overcame them. I will equally do the same to this one". He instead, started praising God rather than worry over the issue.

His first day at his shop was a memorable one. Atanda got there early, swept the floor and prayed to God before opening for business. After praying, he picked his Bible and read some verses from the book of Psalms. When he was done with reading the bible, he switched on his small transistor radio he bought during his period as an apprentice. He ensured he listened to news and newspaper review, before eating his breakfast of pap and

moi- moi . He learnt that from Poju Akinloye, an avid listener of Iroyin Ilewa (News Across the country) and Koko Iwe Iroyin (Newspaper Review).

Atanda did not record any sale until one hour to the closing time. An old man walked in to his shop and demanded for a Head Pan. He told Atanda how he has visited other shops but could not find the type he wanted until someone directed him to his shop. The man after inspecting it, paid for the item. That really made him happy. 30 minutes later, five other people purchased different items from his shop and that left him even happier.

The next day, more customers visited Atanda's shop to buy building material. It really excited him and also encouraged him to open for business earlier than he did on the first day. People started noticing that he opens his shop earlier than some of his competitors, hence why many people started patronizing him.

In a very short time, Atanda has made quite an appreciable progress in his business. He has doubled the size of the goods in his shop to his own amazement. He continued to strive even harder to do better. Three months after, Poju, unannounced, decided to visit Atanda to check his level of progress. He was stunned by the quantity of goods he found in Atanda's shop. Poju in disbelief, asked Atanda to confess to him what he did to boost the size of goods in his shop. Atanda replied Poju, "my Oga, it is neither magic nor juju. I only rely on God Almighty".

Atanda noticed Poju was not utterly convinced by his explanation because it was strange to him, more so as a stranger, to have achieved that level of success within that short period of time. Atanda smiled and said to Poju, "I noticed you are still surprised and not convinced by my explanation, I bet you, it is a miracle from God. I am equally surprised too. Today I will tell you a little story about my experience at Ilu-Oke, my village. I was

almost killed by a man called Afuye because he was jealous of God's blessings in my life. I was a successful farmer before coming to Ajede. He scandalized my name and also hired assassins to kill me. But God saved me from his evil plans. All am only enjoying is God's grace".

Poju later shifted from his earlier stance by saying, "Atanda, please forgive me. Just that I have never seen anything like that since I started this business over 20 years ago in Ajede. I now believe you are a chosen one". Atanda retorted with a smile, we are both chosen and favoured by God.

Poju suggested to Atanda to start planning on how to expand his business, because, he believed that in a very short time, considering his level of progress, his shop will not accommodate the goods there any longer. He pledged to support Atanda financially, when he is ready to do that. Atanda thanked him, and prayed for God's blessings upon him.

Three months later, Poju's prediction came to fruition, even faster than he imagined. Atanda's shop could not accommodate the goods there again. He displayed some of his goods outside the shop, which impedes movement in to the shop.

Atanda, one day after his morning routine of praying and listening to the radio, listed out his plans on how to expand his business in a white sheet of paper. He checked them properly, one after the other, to ensure he captured all he had in mind, before taking it to Poju to scrutinise and possibly inject his own input to it.

He took it to Poju, who after checking the plan, made some changes and suggestions on it. Poju also advised him to quickly implement the plan, after doling out a huge amount of money to Atanda in fulfilment of the pledge he made to him.

Atanda, in his characteristic manner of expressing his appreciation, prostrated while thanking Poju for his kind gesture

towards him. He asked Atanda to stand up, stating that Atanda's good behaviour was the reason for his generosity towards him.

Atanda joked, "so this proverb that if one shows appreciation for a good deed towards one, he is guaranteed to receive more is true after all. Mr. Poju I bet you, I will be showing appreciation every minute I set my eyes on you, so that I can receive more". They both laughed at Atanda's joke. He thanked him again and promised to put the money he gave him into judicious use before leaving for his house. Atanda later visited Pastor Segun's house and told him about the 'miracle' that has happened in his business. Pastor Segun praised God on Atanda's behalf for the favour he received from God. He advised Atanda to involve his wife in the business. Atanda thanked him and promised to do so before departing for his house.

After dinner, he told Aduke about his plans to expand his business and also the idea of involving her in the business. Aduke consented to his plans to involve her in his business. Her promise to participate in the business, encouraged Atanda to intensify search for a new shop. Luckily for Atanda, Baba Kemi, his neighbour directed him to a vacant shop next street. Atanda visited the shop and liked it. Its location and the structure of the shop endeared Atanda to it. He enquired about it and was directed to Chief Onikoko, the owner of the shop.

Chief after interrogating Atanda promised to hand over the shop to him, but not after discussing with Poju Akinloye, who he mentioned in the course of their discussion as his former Boss. He did as promised, and was told by Poju Akinloye, that Atanda is a man of impeccable character. Based on Atanda's good report, Chief Onikoko rented the shop to Atanda.

Atanda hired a Sales Girl to oversee the new shop, because Aduke was still going through training under his tutelage. When

Aduke graduated after six weeks, he assigned her to join the Sales Girl at the new shop. Within six months of opening the new shop, it has appreciated greatly in terms of quantity of goods in the shop. One year later, the shop was filled to the brim with plenty of goods. His good fortune excited him any time he visits his shops. But when he thought he has seen it all, Atanda had another breakthrough !

Orire state government had awarded contract for the construction of 12 new blocks of classroom in Ajede, six each for the Junior and the Senior Secondary Schools respectively. The contract was awarded to Chief Ayobanjo Akinpelu, a foremost contractor from Ajede and an Elder from The Lord's Church - where Pastor Segun oversees.

Chief Ayobanjo, after Church Service, went to thank Pastor Segun for his prayers and moral support which played a part in him securing the contract. He met Pastor Segun and Atanda discussing when he arrived. He greeted them before announcing to the cleric that he had won the contract for the school project in Ajede. Pastor Segun, elated by the good news, shouted seven hallelujah to praise the Lord.

He congratulated him and also urged him to ensure that he redeemed the pledge he made to God when he was looking for the contract. Chief Ayobanjo promised to fulfil his pledge soon. He informed Pastor Segun that the project would commence in a fortnight. As the chief was about to leave, Pastor Segun introduced him to Atanda, and also encouraged him to patronize him for building materials. He agreed to patronize Atanda since the recommendation came from Pastor Segun.

Chief Ayobanjo uttered, "I don't have a choice but to agree with you Sir. I trust your judgement not only because you are my Pastor, but also because you are a brilliant man. May the lord

continue to be with you". Before he left in his car, Pastor Segun prayed for favour and protection from the Almighty God upon him.

After Chief Ayobanjo left, Pastor Segun told Atanda to consider selling cement as part of his plans to expand his building material business. He told him that it will help him to increase his profit base. He also stated that cement complements his kind of business. He stressed too that, he already has a big customer in Chief Ayobanjo who has promised to patronise him. Atanda startled by Pastor Segun's business acumen, was forced to ask him, if he was a businessman before becoming a pastor.

Pastor Segun replied him, "wisdom comes from the Almighty God. And it profits a man to receive wisdom from God. Am glad, the Lord has bestowed it on me to help mankind. Feel free to always consult me on anything. I was not a businessman before. I have always been a Pastor".

The next day, Atanda visited Poju Akinloye, and briefed him on his latest business plan. Poju approved of his plan and also urged him to invest in the cement business quickly before the school project commences. He guided him on how to place an order for the goods as well as how to maximise the space near his shop without necessarily renting a new one for the meantime. Atanda thanked him and quickly placed an order for a truck load of cement. Within three days, the cement Company supplied Atanda his consignment. He was really elated at the pace the company responded in delivering the goods.

Baba Kemi, Atanda's neighbour impressed by his idea to add cement to his line of business, commended him for the initiative. He advised him not to be complacent with what he had achieved , but ensure that he worked even harder, insisting that it is the only way

to guarantee success. Atanda thanked him for his counsel and promised not to rest on his oars.

Three days to the commencement of the school project, Chief Ayobanjo visited Atanda's shop to purchase the building materials needed for the school Project, as promised. He alighted from his car amid hailing from his admirers. He acknowledged the compliments by waving at them before heading straight to Atanda's shop.

Chief Ayobanjo does not need an introduction. He is a wealthy, famous and a big philanthropist in Ajede. Anywhere he visits in Ajede, he gets such accolades. Atanda's shop was turning in to a Mecca of sort as plenty people besieged his shop to greet Chief Ayobanjo. The number kept increasing until Chief Ayobanjo dipped his hand in to his Agbada (Free flowing gown) and parted with some money, before they all dispersed. This really surprised Atanda as he wondered in his mind that being rich and famous also comes with its own pains.

Chief Ayobanjo quickly brought out a list that contains the items he came to purchase after exchanging pleasantries with Atanda. But while moving round the shop with a little impediment, as a result of the plenty goods in it, he looked outside the shop and saw bags of cement packed outside. Chief Ayobanjo enquired from Atanda the owner of the bags of cement. Atanda replied him that the bags of cement belong to him.

He said to Atanda, "Oh I see! That is brilliant of you. You must have considered selling cement based on the discussion I had with Pastor Segun concerning the school Project. Because I still remember vividly that Pastor Segun told me you sell building materials only. Wise man! I like your business acumen and your industry. Okay I will buy cement too from you". Chief Ayobanjo matched words with action by purchasing 500 bags of cement

from Atanda after buying the building materials his workers needed for the school project. He made a promise to return in few weeks to buy more. Atanda thanked Chief Ayobanjo very well and saw him off to his car before returning to his shop. Atanda and Chief Ayobanjo continued to do business till the end of the school project.

Five years down the line, fortune has indeed smiled on Atanda. He can boast of 15 shops where he sells his building materials in Ajede. His staff strength has increased to 20, and also owns many vans which he uses to move cement to different locations for customers. He also has his own house and a personal car. His account balance swells every day and his children now attend very nice school in Ajede. Despite that, Atanda did not relent in his effort to break more ground in his business, rather he continued to wax stronger.

Atanda thought it wise, to reward those that helped him during his difficult days in Ajede. So, he started with his immense benefactor, Pastor Segun by buying him a new car. He chose Pastor Segun's Birthday to present the car gift to him. Atanda visited Pastor Segun after service that Sunday and presented him only a card and a bottle of wine without revealing to anyone that the main gift is reserved for evening. Pastor Segun thanked him and he left.

He returned in the evening, knowing that the crowd that had gathered earlier in the church to congratulate him must have left. After chatting with Pastor Segun for few minutes, he demanded to leave just to lure him outside where he parked the new car he bought for him. Pastor Segun stood up from his chair and decided to see him off. Just few meters from his house, Pastor Segun spotted a new car parked under a tree. He saw the Security man close to it, and he enquired from him who owns the car. Atanda

answered him, "Sir it is for you. Happy Birthday. This is just my little appreciation for your support and all you have done for me and my family".

Dumbfounded, Pastor Segun shouted seven hallelujah to thank God for the surprise gift he received from Atanda. He added, "Brother Atanda, thank you so much for this great gift. You really surprised me greatly. As you have surprised me, the Lord will surprise you in great fold. I must confess I never expected it. More blessings and God's protection for you and your family in Jesus name".

Atanda also gave the Security man a huge sum of money for his kind gesture towards him that fateful night he arrived Ajede with his family. He could not contain his happiness as he broke down in tears. He thanked Atanda greatly and prayed for his success in every of his endeavours. Atanda said to him, "stop crying. You have only benefited from your kindness. If you had sent me way that night, it would have been very difficult for me and my family. I will always remain grateful to you for helping me and my family that night".

Poju Akinloye, was next on the list of those he planned to present a gift. His dilemma was what to give Poju as a gift. Confused, he decided to ask Baba Kemi, his neighbour for help. While trying to step out of his shop to see Baba Kemi, he met Poju at the entrance of his shop. He was shocked to see him. He quickly greeted him, and ushered him in to his shop.

Poju then said, those we set out to see, we always meet them at the entrance of their door. Atanda smiled and quickly offered him a drink. Poju after drinking, announced to Atanda that he came to inform him formally that the daughter would be wedding soon. Atanda congratulated Poju and prayed for a successful wedding for the couple. Thereafter, Atanda saw him off to his car and bid him a good bye.

Few days to the wedding, Atanda surprised Poju by presenting two big cows, two pieces of expensive lace, bags of rice and huge amount of money to Poju as his contribution to the wedding of his daughter. Poju, stunned by what Atanda presented to him, said, "Atanda, when I saw the things you gave to me, I thought there were from the Groom's family. Am really amazed. The Lord will continue to bless you mightily. Thank you very much". He smiled and wished the Bridegroom and the Bride a blissful wedding in advance before he left.

He continued with his spending by buying the Church a brand new bus, new set of musical equipment and also donated a large sum of money for the completion of the Children Church that has been abandoned for years as result of paucity of funds.

Atanda also gave the Welfare unit in the church a huge amount of money to be distributed to indigent women and unemployed youths to start small businesses. But despite Atanda's spending, his account balance kept increasing. God continued to bless Atanda beyond his own comprehension.

Atanda, moved by the plight of the poor people in Ajede, approached Pastor Segun for advice on how to provide support to them in an organised form. Pastor Segun was delighted to hear that. He said, "Brother Atanda, that is a commendable step you want to take. It is a laudable initiative. It is pleasing to hear this. History will never forget you for this action. God Almighty will continue to bless you". He chorused amen.

Pastor Segun told Atanda that a committee to be headed by him, which will consist of men of integrity and experience will be set up in the church regarding his request. In two weeks, a committee was inaugurated in the church with a clear mandate on how to dispense their duty, which is to help the poor financially in a very transparent and professional form. The congregation prayed for the financier- Atanda and all the committee members to succeed in their task.

Gradually, the good works of the committee had spread around Ajede.

Despite the success recorded by the Committee in a short time, Atanda still wanted more. So, he suggested in their meeting that they should solicit for support from other wealthy men in Ajede who are willing to support their initiative. Unanimously, they all agreed to his suggestion and tasked Atanda to head the advocacy team. He consented to that wholly and drew a list of possible wealthy and willing rich men in Ajede that could support them in their work.

Atanda's first assignment was a visit to Chief Adebajo's house. Chief Adebajo welcomed Atanda happily to his house and entertained him to a sumptuous meal. Atanda thanked him after the meal and then announced to Chief Adebajo, his reason for visiting his house.

Atanda said "Chief, I have been delegated by a Committee set-up in the church to visit you, concerning supporting us financially. The committee's objective is to reduce poverty in Ajede through empowering women and the youths on small businesses. Chief, I beg you to support this initiative". He replied Atanda, "it appears to me a good one. Since it is coming from the church and headed by Pastor Segun, I will donate some money to support it. Again, your inclusion in the committee has assured me that all is well. I don't want it to be hijacked by dubious people for pecuniary and political reasons".

He assured Chief Adebajo that the committee is irrevocably committed to doing what is right always guided by the Spirit of God. Immediately, Chief Adebajo, issued a fat cheque which excited Atanda. He thanked Chief Adebajo and promised him that the money will be used judiciously for the purpose it was earmarked.

But, as he was about leaving, Chief Adebajo said to him, "Atanda, I don't like politicians because many of them are dishonest people. We have plenty of them in Ajede, and they are not my close friends. But, since you have passion to help people, and also an honest man, please join politics to achieve your dream of developing your community like you told me.

You are not from Ajede, yet you are very passionate about helping the people of Ajede. Am very convinced you will make a good politician, but you need to overcome the odds of money and education. You have to some extent achieved that of money, you have to prevail over the other which is education". Atanda thanked Chief Adebajo and left.

Atanda's earlier excitement of receiving a huge cheque from Chief Adebajo to support the Committee's work, faded away and was replaced by a worried face as he drove home. His source of concern is how to defy the odd of acquiring a higher education at his age, which could deprive him the chance of holding a political position, central to his ambition of developing his community. Lssike a dogged fighter that he was, Atanda vowed to defy the odd of education and achieve his dream.

Again, Pastor Segun to the rescue. Atanda raced to Pastor Segun's house, and told him about his new plans to start school. Pastor Segun encouraged him and assured him that he can do all that he has set out to do in Jesus name. He told him that he will hire private teachers that will guide him in preparing for external exams.

His words were the soothing balm Atanda's heart was yearning for. His countenance brightened again, and his energy revived too. He said to Pastor Segun, "am determined to defy the odds, overcome them, and achieve my long time ambition of providing my people of Ilu-Oke with light, water, education, good health, prosperity. What can I do without you Sir? Thank you very much."

The next day, Pastor Segun commenced the search for competent and experienced teachers, on behalf of Atanda. The search took him only three days to get the type of teachers he needed. He agreed terms with them, and also encouraged the teachers to work very hard in order to bring Atanda up to speed as the external exam was just four months away from the time he engaged them. They pledged to do their best to help Atanda excel in the exams. Despite agreeing to pay the teachers far above what is obtained in terms of private teaching in Ajede, Atanda went a step further, by promising to pay them a huge bonus if they help him to excel in the exams. Atanda's huge bonus offer propelled them into action as they vowed to work round the clock including on Sunday evening to ensure that Atanda achieved his purpose.

To demonstrate the seriousness he attaches to it, Atanda handed 'transportation money' to the teachers, which was bigger than their monthly salary. It was part of the incentives to motivate them. The three teachers thanked Atanda very well and promised to help him pass the exams. The extra mural classes were scheduled to commence on Monday, the following week, at the premises of Saint John's Primary School in Ajede by 3P.M.

Chapter Five

EDUCATION

Atanda woke up that Monday morning, feeling very excited about attending classes again, after more than twenty years since he finished Primary School at Ilu-Oke. He said to his wife, Aduke, while waiting to depart for class at 2.45p.m., "am ready to grab this great opportunity by the scruff le of the neck. It is a path to achieving my long time ambition. I will not let it slip. Who knows whether I will have such opportunity again".

Immediately the clock ticked 2.45p.m., like a young boy, who is attending school for the first time, Atanda, with a smile on his face, waved good bye to Aduke and zoomed off. He vowed never to arrive the venue of the extra mural class late on any account whatsoever. His decision is hinged on the fact that, regardless of his determination to excel in the exams, he considers his attitude also key, if he was going to succeed in the exams.

After 10 minutes' drive, Atanda arrived the venue of the extra mural class. He went straight to the front row, picked a chair and cleaned it with his handkerchief, before sitting patiently for his teachers to arrive. Mr. Fisayo Obileke, an experienced Mathematics teacher, was the first to arrive.

He patiently taught Atanda the basics and gave him assignments to work on, which he was expected to submit the next day. He encouraged Atanda to channel all his energy and concentration to his class work for now, while he delegates his wife to take charge of the affairs of the business. Atanda thanked him for the advice and promised to do so.

The other teachers took their turns with him on English language and Economics before calling it quits for the day.

When Atanda got home, he narrated his experience at school on the first day to his wife, and they both laughed and made joke about it. Atanda heeded Mr. Obileke's advice and handed over the control of the business to his wife in order to fully concentrate on his class work.

The teachers taught Atanda three times in a week. After two months, they assessed Atanda's progress, and found it very impressive in spite the fact that he never attended secondary school before. Spurred by his impressive performance, the teachers vowed amongst themselves to take the task as a personal challenge in order to ensure Atanda's success at the exams.

Mr. Obileke said while discussing with the other teachers one day, "I want us to make history with the task Mr. Atanda has given to us. I view it that if we succeed, we will be writing our names in gold as this has never happened in the history of Ajede town. I want us to look beyond money. There is a silver lining at the end of this serious task. We need to work even harder, and also show greater commitment to this task. Not necessarily because of his money, but for our own sake too". The other teachers concurred with Mr. Obileke's position and pledged their renew commitment and loyalty to the project 'Atanda must pass'.

As the examination date draws nearer, the teachers increased the pace at which they teach Atanda, in order to get him ready ahead of time for the exams. Atanda on his part, intensified in his studies too. He spends hours in the night, revising all he was taught by the teachers. The teachers were able to cover the syllabuses on time and had three weeks to do revision with him. The revision exercise proved to them that Atanda was ready for the exams. He answered the questions set for him by the teachers correctly to their admiration.

After four months of rigorous teaching by the teachers and intense studying from Atanda, the exam finally commenced.

Atanda approached every subject seriously as if his life depended on it. The examination was finally over after three weeks. Atanda heaved a sigh of relief and took few days off to rest before going back to his business. While he continued with his business, Atanda patiently awaited his result. He confessed to Pastor Segun that though he is convinced he did well in the exams, but agitated about the result. Pastor Segun counselled him to be optimistic and also to always repose his trust in God in the face of any situation.

After listening to him, Atanda was a little bit relieved.

Three months later, the result of the External exams was released. Mr. Obileke heard the news on radio. Immediately, he rushed to his school to check the result, abandoning his friend's place he had planned to visit earlier. Of all his students that sat for the exams, Atanda's result was the one that caught his attention the most, because of his circumstances. He was so keen to see Atanda's result, that he did not hear the Principal greeting him.

He was really delighted when he discovered that Atanda passed all the subjects he sat for. He screamed in ecstasy which attracted the attention of other teachers who enquired from him, the reason for his action. With a smile on his face, he disclosed to them that Atanda passed the entrance exams in flying colours.

Mr. Obileke took the good news to Atanda's shop to share with him. When he got there, he met Atanda eating his breakfast. Atanda greeted him and requested him to join him in eating his breakfast of moi- moi and pap.

Mr. Obileke who could not contain his joy announced to him, "Mr. Atanda, I have a good news for you. Am pleased to inform you that, you have passed the entrance exams. You made us proud. Bravo Mr. Atanda! Am really honoured to be part of this success story of yours".

Atanda was stunned and speechless. He was overwhelmed with joy. He tried to speak, but instead started shedding tears. When he finally spoke, he sounded emotional. Atanda said, "life is a mystery indeed! Those who understand that should consider themselves lucky. Few years back after my ordeal at Ilu-Oke - my village, I was very sad and dejected about leaving for a foreign land. But, look at me today, am moving from one ladder of success to the other. Am really a lucky man. Thank you God for all you have done for me".

Mr. Obileke patted him on the back and encouraged him to smile rather than cry. He congratulated Atanda and wished him the best. Atanda thanked him very well and doled out some cash to Mr. Obileke. He also pledged to visit Mr. Obileke's school the next day to show appreciation to him and the other teachers for their effort in helping him pass the exams. He kept to his words as he visited the teachers in their school the next day and rewarded them handsomely.

Thrilled by that cheering news, Atanda drove to Pastor Segun's house to inform him that he passed the external exams. He barely closed his

car door before he jumped out to announce the news of his success at the exams to Pastor Segun. He was shouting the Pastor's name from afar in joy. The Pastor was surprised at his behaviour and wondered what could be responsible for his action. He asked him, "Brother Atanda, why are you shouting my name from afar? Very much unlike you. Is anything the matter? I hope you are fine".

Atanda replied him that he is fine, but could not contain the joy of what the Lord has done for him, hence his reason for shouting so loud. He told the Pastor what the Lord has done for him, and the Pastor unleashed a loud Hallelujah to bless the name of the Lord. He hugged Atanda and congratulated him. He also urged Atanda not to relent in his effort, but strive even harder to

gain admission into the University. Atanda thanked him and joyfully left for his house.

He broke the news to his family in the evening, when Aduke had returned from the shop. They danced and rejoiced together as a family. He asked Aduke to prepare rice and chicken for dinner, as part of the celebration. After dinner, he disclosed his plans to gain admission in to the University to study Finance and Account to his family. Aduke was surprised with his ambition to go to the University. She said to her husband, "am really surprised you want to take another giant step towards gaining knowledge. It is a good one, but am concerned that this one is going to be a little bit different from the external exams. It will be very difficult for you am afraid".

Atanda dismissed her pessimism, and assured her of his determination to succeed regardless of the odds against him. He reminded Aduke that he has God's support and so, will overcome all situations. Aduke's faith was emboldened again when Atanda mentioned God as his pillar. She apologised to him and wished him well in his plans to go to the University.

Atanda, once again, consulted with Pastor Segun concerning steps to follow in order to gain admission in to the University. Pastor Segun offered him the options opened to him: Part-Time and Full-Time. He explained to him clearly the challenges and the potentials inherent in the two options offered to him to study in the University. Atanda, after listening to Pastor Segun, took the decision to inform his wife firstly before deciding on the best options.

When he got home, he informed Aduke about it without giving much detail. Aduke did not want to dissuade him this time around, as she quickly gave him her blessings. He noticed that Aduke did not contest his choice to study Full Time even when she knew it could affect his business, so he said "I know you have reservations, but

because you don't want me to feel bad, you hurriedly approved it. Am very convinced this option will work for me better. As for my business, you will act in my absence as the CEO. It is going to be fine my wife". He hailed her, "CEO Atanda Enterprises", and Aduke smiled, exposing her white sparkling set of good dentition.

Atanda returned to Pastor Segun's house the next day to inform him that he has finally settled for the Full-Time option. He met the Cleric and his wife sitting down under a mango tree in their compound chatting and drinking juice. He was surprised to see them in that mood because he perceived Pastor Segun to be a workaholic, who hardly unwinds. Pastor Segun, who already knew what was in his mind said, "Brother Atanda, you are surprised obviously to see me in this mood right? It is okay. Remember am a human being too. Pastors relax sometimes. Besides, there is nothing to be worried about, am only bonding with my wife".

Atanda nodded in the affirmative to what he said. He managed to greet them before revealing to Pastor Segun that he has finally settled for the Full-time option to study in the University. He asked Atanda if he thought about it properly and considered the hassles that are attached with Full-Time study before arriving at that decision. Atanda replied him that he reached that decision after carefully thinking about it. He prayed for Atanda and wished him well in his quest to gain admission to the University. He thanked them and drove straight to his house.

Atanda assembled the same team that ensured his success at the external exams, led by Mr. Obileke. This time around, unlike the external exams, Atanda will only deal with four subjects for the University Matriculation Exam. Atanda was thrilled and ready to sit for the exams. His confidence level was very high; thanks to the good results he obtained in the external exams. In fact, he told the teachers that he will pass the UME, as far as they show the kind of commitment they exhibited during the External exams.

Mr. Obileke who spoke on behalf of the other teachers, assured him of their unequivocal loyalty and commitment towards him passing the UME just like he did with the external exams. Atanda replied "I am excited about the assurances you gave to me concerning helping me once again to scale this hurdle in my life. Education is very key to me and my life ambition. Thanks so much".

The teachers commenced preparations in earnest, with each teacher, teaching Atanda every week days except the Weekends in the first four weeks. The following month witnessed a change as they included Weekends in order to cover their syllabuses for the exams. The strategy worked as they covered all the subjects with 3 weeks to spare before the exams commenced. The 3 weeks was used for revision.

One month after the UME, the result was released. This time around, it was Atanda who heard about the release of the result on radio, while listening to one of his favourite programme, Newspapers Review. He quickly ran to Mr. Obilike's school to inform him. He encouraged Atanda to visit the City University to check for his name. Atanda consented to Mr. Obileke's counsel. He thanked him for his suggestion before rushing back to the shop to inform his wife of his plan to visit the City University that day.

When he arrived the premises of City University, he was amazed at the large expanse of land that the University is situated on, and also the beautiful structures decorated with flowers. The tar roads and street lights intrigued him too. Atanda had already fallen in love with the University even when he has not been offered admission to study in the University.

After five minutes of admiring what he saw at the University, he realized he has to attend to what brought him there in the first

place-which is to check for his name.

He accosted some students and asked for the notice board in the Administrative Block where the list of successful candidates was pasted. They directed him, and he thanked the boys, before heading straight to the notice board. When he got there, he met a long queue which he joined without complaining, after all, he was going to join the University soon and will face similar situation often. He said inwardly, "this stress is just for some minuets and cannot be compared to the joy that will follow when am done checking the list. I am very sure my name will be on the list. I cannot wait to announce to Aduke, Pastor Segun, and my able teachers about this great feat".

30 minutes later, he had the opportunity to check for his name in the list of the successful candidates to study Finance and Accounting in the institution. He skimmed through the list but could not locate his name on the list to his astonishment. Atanda was very sad and disappointed. He left there dejected and confused. He sat for more than 30 minutes in his car looking very sad while hissing. He was close to tears. The strength to drive his car back to Ajede failed him. A member of staff of the institution who stood near Atanda's car waiting for his colleague to offer him a lift back home, noticed Atanda's distressed mood and walked up to him. He enquired from Atanda, why he looked unhappy. Atanda narrated his plight to him amid sobbing.

After listening to Atanda, he promised to help him check the result, before considering other options if he was not selected as Atanda claimed.

Atanda agreed and thanked him. He took Atanda to the notice board where they checked and really did not see his name on the list. But Mr. Ibile Omilade noticed that the list had been torn

and some names missing, so he went to the Examination Officer, and demanded for the original list. As a friend and colleague, the Examination officer obliged Mr. Ibile's request, and handed him the original list. He checked the list and found Atanda's name on it. He was happy that he helped a distressed man.

He called him in and showed him the list, which Atanda checked and found his name third to the last. He screamed in joy and immediately started praising the name of God. He thanked Mr. Ibile profusely while prostrating on the floor to show his appreciation.

He also expressed his gratitude by doling out some cash which he handed over to him and the Examination officer. They rejected the offer and told him they were just doing their job. He insisted that he was not bribing them but was merely showing his heart felt gratitude, hence they have to collect it. After much pressure from Atanda, the officers yielded and collected the money. They thanked him and promised to guide him on any issues concerning his academics in the university.

The once dejected Atanda, suddenly started singing and shouting Hallelujah to magnify the name of the Almighty God for passing the exams. In spite driving home late in the night as a result of the delay he encountered checking his name, he was not worried, rather, he kept signing choruses to praise God until he got home.

Atanda got home after two hours drive from the City University to Ajede. He met Aduke at the entrance of the house awaiting his arrival. When he alighted from his car, Aduke welcomed him and immediately demanded the reason he arrived home late. He wanted to inform his wife of the splendid news of passing the UME, but he held it back till after having his bath and dinner.

He simply told Aduke that there was no cause for worry. Aduke was not satisfied with that explanation, but she decided not to probe further, but wait till Atanda is ready to talk about it. Atanda, done with his bath and dinner, announced to his wife and children that he has been selected to study Finance and Accounting in the City University.

Atanda's announcement drew a mixed reaction from Aduke who hugged the husband in ecstasy amid tears streaming down her eyes. She held him tight while singing God's praises. Atanda, confused by the out pour of emotions from Aduke, teased her, "Aduke, am not leaving your sight forever. Am only going to study in the University for a period of years. Besides, I will always visit home to check on you and the children". Aduke even cried the more after listening to Atanda speak.

Finally, Aduke stopped crying and said to her husband "am very delighted that you passed the UME. Am really proud of you. Indeed, you are a very brave and a determined man. In spite of the odds, you did not allow it to stop your dream. I wish you the very best in your new endeavour. Am crying because I have never been separated from you for any reason. It will be tough, but am ready to make the sacrifice".

The family celebrated with a bottle of fruit wine and biscuits which was served after toasting to more success and good health. They all ate joyfully, prayed before going to bed. While lying on his bed, Atanda thought over Aduke's words. It dawned on him that he would indeed be separated from his family for a while, a situation that is strange to him and his family members.

Disturbed by his decision to settle for Full- Time study at the City University without really considering his family, Atanda woke Aduke up from her sleep and apologised for his action. Aduke

told him not to be apologetic, that the family is solidly behind him in his quest to achieve University education. He thanked Aduke and went back to sleep.

The next day, Atanda visited Pastor Segun's house and informed him of his success at the UME. Pastor Segun danced round his living room in elation. He said to Atanda, "I believe that the hand of God greatly rests on you. You kept recording feats after feats. His grace has found you! Do not depart from the sight of God for he has more in stock for you. Remember God in all you do, when you get there".

Atanda thanked the Pastor, entered his car, and drove to Mr. Obileke's school to intimate him of his success at the exams too. He got there and asked after Mr. Obileke and the other teachers that helped him in the exams, from Mrs Funmi Olakunle, the Chemistry teacher. She told Atanda that Mr. Obileke and the other teachers went for a verification exercise at the State Education Authority Office. Atanda enquired from her if they would still return to the school after the exercise, she nodded in the affirmative. So, Atanda went to sit at the Visitor's Room waiting for his teachers to return.

After two hours of waiting, finally they arrived. Mr. Obileke went to see Atanda immediately, after the Chemistry teacher told him that Atanda was waiting for him and the other teachers at the Visitor's Room. Atanda beamed a smile as soon as he saw him walked towards the Visitor's Room to see him. Both men exchanged pleasantries, and without even sitting down, he asked Atanda straight, if he passed the UME.

Atanda had planned to create a suspense by stuttering in responding to his question, but the joy in his heart betrayed him as he quickly answered him a definite yes.

Mr. Obileke spontaneously went on his knees and started thanking God. He hugged Atanda and wished him well. Atanda, surprised he knelt to thank God on his behalf, asked why he reacted in that way, when he was not the student. He replied Atanda stating, "you will not understand why I reacted in that manner. We are in this together. If you excel, the success can be attributed to me and the other teachers too. Am very delighted that our effort was not a waste after all. Am very proud of you".

Atanda demonstrated his gratitude by giving Mr. Obileke and the other teachers a large sum of money to share. He equally doled out money to the other teachers at the Staff Room. They all prayed for his success and wished him the best in his new endeavour.

Two weeks after releasing the names of the successful candidates that sat for the UME, City University released their resumption time table . The University added that the list released was the final one, as there would be no supplementary list. The institution is famous for its standard and very strict admission requirement.

Mr. Ibile informed Atanda about the resumption date as well as the position of the institution not to add a supplementary list. His comment further made Atanda to appreciate the contributions of all that played a role in his success at the exams, especially his teachers led by Mr. Obileke.

Mr. Ibile guided Atanda on how to commence his registration, sort the issue of accommodation and also lectured him on the need to take his studies very seriously. His help ensured that Atanda settled down quickly to life in the University ahead of some of his peers, who encountered 'teething problem' as fresh students in the University.

Done with his registration, he travelled back to Ajede to get his luggage ahead of the commencement of lectures slated for the following week.

After church service, Atanda visited Pastor Segun in his office and intimated him of his plans to travel back to school - City University that afternoon as lectures would commence the next day. Pastor Segun was very happy to see Atanda. Pastor Segun and his wife prayed for Atanda's success in his academics.

He counselled him to remain a good Ambassador of Christ in the University and also not to stop his good deeds towards all including his fellow students. He thanked them and left for his house.

Atanda, ready to leave for school, decided to inspect his car properly. To his consternation, Aduke had filled the booth of the car with different types of staple food and other perishables. He yelled, "Aduke, am only going to school to learn and study. You filled the booth of my car with different types of food stuff as if am going there to sell them. Thank you though, but it is a little bit excessive for a student".

Aduke replied her husband that she was only trying to ensure his comfortability. She urged him to go with them as they will help him in the long run. He grudgingly accepted Aduke's request to go with all the food stuff she packed in the booth of his car after some persuasion from her. He hugged Aduke and the children before he drove off to school.

Lectures commenced in earnest, and Atanda warmed up to it. He attended classes regularly, and asked questions without being shy. In a short time, Atanda was already a popular figure in his class. He was loved for his kindness and also for his willingness to learn regardless of his age. He did not abandon his style of hiring

tutors to teach him. He identified brilliant young students, who helped him with difficult courses. One-on-One teaching and group studying which he employed effectively, eventually paid off, as he did very well in all his first year result.

Spurred by that result, he vowed to continue in that vein until he has graduated from the University. The results of the subsequent years were equally as good as the first year, demonstrating a clear consistency.

Gradually, tongue started wagging round that Atanda may have bribed his way to achieve that kind of result judging from his background. When he heard about it, he felt bad. But when he decided to take action concerning that, he remembered what Pastor Segun warned him about. He instead opted to address the issue rather than attack his classmates.

He addressed his class members after lecture the next day. He counselled them to love one another and also do away with rumours. He revealed to them that the secret to his good grades has to do with engaging tutors and employing group studying method and not by offering bribes to lecturers as wrongly insinuated. Some of his classmates who help him with difficult courses and also do group studying with him, attested to his assertion.

After his comment, many of his classmates met him later in the day and apologised for smearing his name. He pardoned them and encouraged them to always establish the truth before commenting on issues. His ability to forgive even endeared him to many of his class mates. He even became more popular after that encounter. They praised his humility, courage and forgiving Spirit.

He was also popular in Student Fellowship. He played all types of drums very well. Atanda was equally active in the Evangelism team. He equally had time to participate in sports sometimes. He emerged the best athlete in the short distance races he competed

in throughout his stay in the University. Despite all that he was engaged in, he continued to do well in his academics. His night was reserved for reading.

As months rolls into weeks, and weeks into days, it became evident that Atanda would finish as one of the best students in his department. The final exams in his fourth year in the University was just two weeks away, when the Head of his Department, Professor Tayo Ademilade, one afternoon sauntered in to the class unannounced to the surprise of the students.

They hailed and shouted his name to his admiration. He smiled and greeted the students. He advised them to focus on the final exams rather than the celebration that comes after it. He stated, "this period could be very delicate. It can determine one's progress in life. If you don't take your exams seriously you could fail. Please ensure you do your best so as to graduate with your mates. Reality is when you resit and your mates leaves you behind. It could be painful. Please focus on this exam. Meanwhile, some of you will be graduating as one of the best students in the department; don't allow last minute distraction to derail your progress".

The hitherto loud class suddenly turned very silent. Professor Tayo's speech touched the students deeply. Till he left the class, all the students were quiet.

Atanda latched on the advice of Professor Tayo and became even more studious. He increased his time for studying and also ensured that he engaged in group study with his team. He continued in that manner throughout the two weeks that preceded the exams date.

The last two weeks opened Atanda's eyes to the wisdom of Aduke stuffing his car booth with food any time he returned home from school, despite mocking her. The food came handy as it served as

a live-saver for many of his study group members who were broke during that period. They cooked the food and ate together during that period.

Finally, the exams time table was released two days before the scheduled date of its commencement. Atanda, like other students, where edgy despite many exams they have done in the past. They did a recap of all they have learnt for the two weeks and signed off with a prayer.

They wished themselves good luck in the exams too. Atanda decided to fast throughout the period of the exams. He broke his fast in the afternoons to enable him prepare for the night.

The students were relieved after two weeks of intense studying and inadequate sleep, when the exams finally ended. They sang in jubilation and danced. They signed autographs on their outfits as a mark of remembrance. Photographs were also taken for the purpose of records.

Few months after they finished the exams, the University had its Convocation. The University management promised to make the event a mega one, in order to make up for the two years they failed to organise the event, as a result of litigation against the management of the school. Now, that the coast is clear, the plan was to make the most out of it.

The Management of the University walked their talk by producing a top notch event. From the institution gate to the venue of the Convocation, beautiful decorations placed in strategic corners at the University were evident. Security men were strategically positioned too. The flowers well- trimmed and the premises kept very clean. The hall was painted and decorated in resplendent colours of the state flag. Music was supplied intermittently as the event progressed, while refreshment was offered freely too.

Atanda stormed the venue of the event with his wife, children, Pastor Segun, Pastor Segun's wife, Chief Adebajo, and Poju Akinloye. He was full of smiles as he walked majestically in his graduation gown. Atanda confessed to his wife that the Convocation day would remain his most memorable day. He joined other students in the front seat. One after the other, names of the best students were reeled out and Atanda's name was mentioned too.

Tears of joy cascaded freely from his eyes as he walked up to the podium. The shout of Senior! senior!! senior!!! rented the air, as his classmates hailed him. As he collected his certificate and walked towards his seat, his H.O.D, Professor Tayo tapped him and he turned to discover that it was him. He greeted him and the Professor, in return, offered his congratulations.

Atanda returned to a warm embrace of Aduke, his children and friends that were already waiting outside the venue of the hall. He sang and danced around in appreciation of God's blessings in his life. He later took pictures with his family and friends before they finally ate the food and consumed the drinks they brought from Ajede.

Pastor Segun prayed for Atanda and his family before they all boarded their vehicles and headed straight to Ajede. One week later, Atanda held a Thanksgiving Service in the church to appreciate all the good things the Almighty God has done for him and his family. Atanda told the church members the story of his life while sobbing. Many of them joined him in shedding tears as his story was indeed a very pathetic one. Later, in appreciation of what the Lord did for him, Atanda presented a brand new bus to the church. His action sent the church members in to frenzy.

Pastor Segun and the Elders of the church surrounded Atanda and his family members, and prayed for God's blessings and protection upon them. Food and drinks were freely served to the

church members. Similarly, many got souvenirs that had the picture of Atanda in his graduation gown emblazoned on it. The celebration did not end there for Atanda. He extended the celebration to his neighbours around his shop. He asked Aduke to prepare rice which they dished and distributed to them along with some souvenirs.

He bought food stuffs, clothes, toiletries which they took to the Motherless Babies Home in Ajede. The team that visited the Motherless Babies Home included Atanda, Pastor Segun, Aduke and Pastor Segun's wife. After they had finished celebrating with the children, he doled out a huge sum of money to the proprietor to enable her continue to take care of the children.

The Proprietor thanked him and prayed for God to grant him all his wishes in life which they all chorused amen to. She also confessed that they have never received such huge amount of money that Atanda offered them before. They rounded off the visit by taking pictures with the Children and the Proprietor before heading home.

The last lap of the celebrations was with Atanda and his family members in his house. The family was treated to a sumptuous meal of fried rice, chicken and fruit juice bought at a popular Eatery in Ajede as dinner for the family. After the meal, he brought out the gifts he bought for Aduke and the children and presented the gifts to them for their sacrifice during his absence, and also their prayers which contributed to his success.

He got Aduke expensive clothes, shoes and necklace. While he bought the children clothes and shoes. He also gave them some money to buy few things they would require. Aduke and her children were very excited with the gifts they received from Atanda. They danced in ecstasy to the delight of Atanda that he even sprayed them few notes. They thanked him and also prayed for God's blessing upon him in all his endeavours.

Chapter Six

HOME COMING

A whole lot has happened since Atanda left Ilu-Oke for Ajede ten years ago. Within that period, Ilu-Oke lost their revered King to death, while Olapade - Atanda's friend installed as the new monarch. Also, Afuye died in the Prison, and Ajose returned to Ilu-Oke after unsuccessful adventure in the town of Lago.

Atanda was oblivion of these things until Pastor Seun and Ajose came to look for him in Ajede. Pastor Seun was ministered to in his dream by the Holy Spirit, that it was time for Atanda to immediately return back to Ilu- Oke. Though he was happy with the revelation, but was perturbed on how to locate Atanda. He has not set his eyes on Atanda in a decade, nor spoken to him. But while ruminating over this, suddenly, Ajose who was returning from the adjacent street where he had gone to see his friend, saw Pastor Seun and decided to stop by to greet the cleric.

After exchanging greetings with Ajose, the Cleric enquired from him if he had heard from Atanda, but Ajose's reply shocked him. Ajose quipped, "Sir, the last time I saw Atanda was ten years ago. I drove him and his family to Ajede town. Precisely to the church where they passed the night because we arrived there very late that day".

Pastor Seun really doubted if the information Ajose provided him would help him in his quest to find Atanda, but managed to thank him any ways. After few days of sourcing for information concerning Atanda's whereabouts from some people in the village, he realized that the information provided by Ajose remained the most useful one, even though it appeared unreliable. He quickly sent for him, and in a very short time, Ajose

arrived Pastor Seun's house.

He said to him, "Brother Ajose, am very glad you responded to my call urgently. As you have honoured my call, the Lord will honour you. The reason why I sent for you is connected to the information you provided me concerning Atanda. It is a matter of urgency; I have to deliver the Lord's message to him. Please you will take me to that church in Ajede where you dropped him off that night".

Ajose, without any hesitation, obliged to go with Pastor Seun to Ajede to look for Atanda. Pastor Seun was very elated by Ajose's decision to consent to his request. He thanked him and also prayed for him.

Very early in the morning the next day, they were off to the park to catch the first bus travelling to Ajede. Despite arriving the Motor Park very early, they almost missed out from travelling with the first bus. As soon as they arrived, the conductor handed them the remaining two tickets left.

Pastor Seun immediately dipped his hands in his pocket, brought out some money, and handed over to the conductor of the bus. Five minutes after paying for the tickets, two men on motorcycle arrived and immediately rushed to pay, but was told that the remaining two tickets was bought five minutes ago. They were very furious as they vented their anger and frustrations on the motorcyclist who they blamed for not speeding fast enough.

Pastor Seun silently thanked God for their luck to have picked the last two tickets for the first bus. He later confessed to Ajose that he would have been furious too if they had missed out on the first bus, judging from the fact the second bus usually take longer time to get filled up.

Ajose told Pastor Seun that the journey from Ilu-Oke to Ajede is usually a very tiring and boring one because of the bad roads

that stretches from Ilu- Oke to Ajede. He narrated his experience the last time he drove Atanda and his family to Ajede.

Pastor Seun replied, "clearly from your narrative, this journey appears like it is going to be a tiring one, but am determined to deliver the divine message to Atanda regardless. It is very important".

Five minutes later, the driver of the bus, jumped to his seat and requested for prayer from any of the Passengers willing to do so before they commence for the journey to Ajede. Pastor Seun immediately heeded the call and prayed earnestly for 10 minutes. After the prayer, the journey finally started. The driver, who read the mood of the passengers after the prayer, slotted in the cassette of a popular gospel music artiste in the state to further lift the spirit of the passengers to high heavens. The driver ordinarily would have played the song of his favourite Fuji star, but he decided to act otherwise.

The majority of the passengers, who were mainly women, reacted ecstatically as they shouted yea! They sang the songs of the artiste words for words. Pastor Seun also joined the women to sing some of the songs of the Gospel artiste. Three hours later, many of the passengers had fallen asleep, and so, the driver switched to Fuji song to the displeasure of Pastor Seun. He was not okay with the vulgar words reeled out by the artiste, but could not complain because the driver had earlier treated the passengers to their own genre of music.

He quickly picked his Bible and read for more than 30 minutes before turning to the young man by his side who he noticed looked distressed. He engaged him in a discussion in a bid to find out why he looked flustered. After few minutes of speaking with him, the young man opened up on his worries. He told Pastor Seun that he was at the verge of missing out on his entrance examination due to the inability of his indigent parents, who he had gone to visit at Ilu-Oke, to pay for his exams fees.

Precisely, he told Pastor Seun that he has only two days left to enrol for the exams before it closes. The Pastor after listening to his narrative, was deeply touched. He assured the young man that God is capable of doing everything, hence he should trust God to handle his situation even when it appears bleak.

The young man said inwardly that he does not need comforting words now, but money to pay for his external exams. Any ways, he thanked Pastor Seun for trying to lift his spirit. Pastor Seun later prayed for the young man and asked him to come to the church where he hopes to find Atanda the next morning.

On getting to the next town close to Ajede, the driver stopped at a filling station to refill his tank with Petrol. This provided the passengers the chance to urinate and stretched their already cramped legs for a while before they continued their journey to Ajede again.

Ajose asked Pastor Seun the question supposing they fail to locate Atanda what would be his reaction. He replied Ajose that he is on a divine assignment, and so, convinced that the Lord will lead and guide them.

Ajose had wanted to ask further questions on that, but ceased from doing that since Pastor Seun has assured that the Lord will guide and lead them in their divine assignment. Instead, he announced to Pastor Seun that they will be in Ajede in an hours' time. Pastor Seun was relieved by the announcement. If he had his way, he would have wish that a chartered aircraft fly him to Ajede, instead of the difficult journey by road to the town. In spite being famished and tired, Pastor Seun would not eat at food canteens or buy snacks from the roadside. He is very finicky with his food. He would rather endure hunger till he gets to Ajede than compromise on his choice about food. That was exactly what he did.

One hour later as predicted by Ajose, they were in Ajede. As soon as Pastor Seun saw the sign board 'Welcome to Ajede', he smiled.

He started thanking God and praising Him for journey mercy to Ajede. Ajose told the driver to stop them at the big church on his way to the Motor Park. The driver agreed and stopped them at the entrance of the church before driving to the Motor Park.

Ajose led in the front, while Pastor Seun followed from behind as they marched to the gate of the church. Ajose greeted the security man and demanded to see Atanda. He requested them to identify themselves and also state why they want to see Atanda. Ajose then introduced himself as the driver that drove Atanda and his family to the church that fateful night they arrived Ajede. Though the security man remembered the event even though it was ten years ago it happened, but could not recognise Ajose's face any longer.

He asked them to wait, while he fetched Pastor Segun, the one presiding over the church. In few minutes, Pastor Segun emerged from his house with the security man. Immediately he saw Pastor Seun, the Holy Spirit ministered to him that they came to confirm what he saw in the dream 30 minutes ago before their arrival. He welcomed them in even before even they could introduce themselves. Ajose thought the Pastor still recognised him, hence the reason why he warmly welcomed them even without them introducing themselves. But, Pastor Seun knew, that the Holy Spirit was at work.

He served them water, juice and biscuits as appetisers while he instructed the wife to prepare them a nice meal after she has greeted their guests. Pastor Seun felt at home immediately and gulped a glass of juice with some biscuits to quench his hunger. After eaten, he thanked their host. As soon as he wanted to introduce himself and also state the reason why they came to Ajede, Pastor Segun cut in, "Sir, blessed is the name of the Lord. I know why you are here. The Holy Spirit ministered to me about 30 minutes ago. It is time for brother Atanda to return back home. I know that is why you are here".

Pastor Seun confirmed what Pastor Segun said and expressed

that he is not surprised at all because the spirit of God is one. But not for a canal mind like Ajose. He was stunned by the revelation Pastor Segun made. Later, Pastor Segun announced to them that Atanda is fine and also doing very well. The disclosure by Pastor Segun that Atanda is fine and also doing well, gladdened their heart as they shouted hallelujah to praise the lord. He also stated that he has sent message across to Atanda to visit him immediately.

One hour later, Pastor Segun's wife entered the sitting room with plates of hot steamy jollof rice with chicken. They all ate together in the sitting room. After the meal, the two Clerics deliberated on issues that dwell on the church and other sundry matters while they waited for Atanda's arrival.

Thirty minutes later after their meal, Atanda drove in to the church wondering why the sudden call by Pastor Segun. He alighted from his car, and saw the Pastor's wife sitting outside their house on a chair. He greeted her and tried to find out from Pastor Segun's wife, if all was well concerning the emergency call from her husband. She assured him that all was fine.

He heaved a sigh of relief and knocked at the door of Pastor Segun's house gently. He opened his door and welcomed him in. To his amazement when he entered Pastor Segun's house, he saw Pastor Seun and Ajose sitting on the sofa. Atanda shouted in elation. He hugged them tightly with tears of joy cascading freely from his eyes. The two men were emotional too, as they joined him crying. After few minutes of the drama, Pastor Segun asked them to sit down. Immediately they sat down, Atanda asked them if all is well and the reason why they came to Ajede.

Pastor Seun replied Atanda, "Atanda, it is time for you to return to Ajede. A new chapter in your life has just started. The Lord wants to do new things in the land of Ilu-Oke through you. No more time to waste!". Pastor Segun corroborated his claim when he told Atanda that the Lord showed him in a dream a day before the

arrival of Ajose and Pastor Seun to Ajede, and also ministered to him same thing before they arrived. Atanda shocked and clearly worried about returning to Ilu-Oke, bowed his head without uttering a word to anybody for five minutes.

He later raised his head and said, "I cannot turn down the Lord's order. Blessed is the name of the Lord. I have already found home in Ajede, but I know the Lord will back me in this new assignment he is committing in to my hands". The three men - Pastor Segun, Pastor Seun and Ajose all chorused amen to Atanda's expression that the Lord will back him in his new assignment at Ilu-Oke.

Atanda was full of smiles again after the shock news of his imminent return to Ilu-Oke. He said after all the love he has for his village cannot be compared to any place as well as concluded that there is no place like home. His earlier demeanour was hinged on how to deal with the issue of relocating his family back to Ilu-Oke in a short time, the handling of his business as well as losing his great friends in Ajede.

He later brushed aside those worries and announced that it is time to celebrate the arrival of his kinsmen in Ajede in a special way. His announcement evoked smiles from them and they jokingly demanded special delicacies from Atanda to celebrate their arrival in Ajede.

He drove his guests to his house after promising to visit Pastor Segun the next day. When Atanda got to his house, he honked the horn of his car to indicate his arrival. Aduke responded to the honking of the horn, came out to welcome the husband alone, but was surprised to see their guests - Pastor Seun and Ajose alongside the husband alighting from the car. She was so stunned that she opened her mouth wide agape in utter shock until her husband called her to come and greet their guests. Aduke greeted them and quickly apologised for her action which she

attributed to her utter shock to see them.

Pastor Seun responded, "Aduke we are very pleased to see you. We understand you were shocked to see us obviously. It is ten years now since I set my eyes on you and your family members. It is okay. Our coming here is for good". Atanda asked Aduke to prepare a sumptuous meal of vegetable soup and pounded yam for dinner which Aduke prepared quickly.

While Aduke was sweating it out in the kitchen, Ajose opted to narrate to Atanda all that has happened in his absence since he left Ilu-Oke. He told him how Olapade, his friend had become the new Atona of Ilu-Oke. How Afuye died in the Prison and also how his sojourn to Lago turned out to be a miserable one. Atanda was moved to tears when he heard that Ajose - his great benefactor is still battling with poverty, but was consoled with the news of Olapdae becoming the new Atona of Ilu-Oke.

One hour later, Aduke entered in to the sitting room with plates of pounded yam and vegetable soup. She announced that dinner is served and the men hit the dining table immediately. After the meal, the men continued with their chatting till 10.00pm before they later prayed and retired to bed. Very early the next morning, Pastor Seun had woken up, earlier than the Atandas use to. He immediately started singing choruses and also ringing the bell to signal the commencement of the morning devotion.

After few minutes, Atanda and his family members joined, followed by Ajose who grudgingly pulled himself from the bed. The morning devotion of that particular morning was very intense and spirit filled. For more than twenty minutes, Pastor Seun prayed intensely on different prayer points. He rounded off the devotion with an admonition that they should love one another and also to be prayerful as Christians.

After the devotion, Aduke prepared breakfast and they all ate. Thereafter, Pastor Seun broke the news of Atanda's imminent return to Ilu-Oke to Aduke after receiving the nod to do so from

Atanda. He added that it was a divine instruction. Surprisingly, unlike the other times, Aduke did not betray any sort of emotion or kicked against the instruction. She simply said, "Let the will of the Lord be done. Thy Lord is our helper and refuge. I know Hewill make our return to Ilu-Oke a memorable one".

Pastor Seun praised Aduke for her implicit obedience and faith in God. She urged her to continue to be strong in the Lord. Impressed by Aduke's words, Atanda expressed his gratitude to Aduke for her understanding and support for him. He assured her that he will work out a plan to handle the challenges that may arise from his return to Ilu-Oke, especially concerning his business and the children's education.

Atanda informed Pastor Seun and Ajose that he plans to visit Pastor Segun after breakfast to discuss how to help him support his family and also his business tentatively while he provides long term solution later. He asked Pastor Seun and Ajose to follow him to Pastor Segun's house, which they agreed to his request.

On their way driving to Pastor Segun's house, Pastor Seun remembered the boy he asked to see him at the church that morning and told Atanda about it. Atanda immediately picked interest in the matter and promised to offset the boy's examination fees if he meets him there. Pastor Seun was delighted with Atanda's pledge to pay the boy's exam fees. He also prayed that the boy should visit the church as promised. As soon as they got to the gate of the church, the security man informed them that a young boy named Dipo was waiting for Pastor Seun at the Security post.

Atanda asked him to bring the boy to them. The security man informed the boy that Pastor Seun has arrived and also would like to see him. He smiled as he followed him to see Atanda. On sighting the three men, Dipo prostrated to greet them. He was neatly dressed and also polite while answering questions from Atanda who was the only one amongst them that he has not seen before.

After asking him few questions, Atanda gave him more than he requested for. He thanked Atanda profusely amid tears streaming down his eyes. He also thanked Pastor Seun and Ajose. Atanda urged him to ensure he registered for the exams unflinchingly that day since it was the deadline. He promised to do as instructed by Atanda. The boy prayed for Atanda and his family before heading to the exams registration centre where he eventually registered for the exams regardless of the huge crowd that turned up to register too that day.

Atanda had discussions with Pastor Segun on the areas he had identified as concerned areas, like the issue of his absence and its implication on his family, and also the handling of his business when he departs Ajede for Ilu-Oke in the coming days. After listening to him, Pastor Segun suggested to Atanda to hire someone to assist Aduke with managing of the business, while he visits weekly to check on his family. He added that gradually he can make it fortnightly and eventually relocating the family back to Ilu-Oke permanently when he feels it is time to do so.

He also assured Atanda that he would be visiting his family regularly as well as suggested useful ideas on how to manage his business in his absence. Pastor Seun and Ajose agreed with the idea of Pastor Segun and urged Atanda to agree to the suggestions

Atanda thanked Pastor Segun and also informed him that they will be departing for Ilu-Oke the next day. He prayed for Atanda and requested him to forgive those who had offended him at Ilu-Oke.

When they left Pastor Segun's house, Atanda decided to drive to the market to purchase few things he would require for his trip to Ilu-Oke like torch, mosquito nets, stoves, transistor radio and toilet tissues. For a decade, Atanda had enjoyed electricity, potable water and tarred roads in Ajede. Adjusting back to life without these basic social amenities was indeed going to pose a concern to Atanda.

But instead of allowing these things to weigh him down, Atanda was instead, all smiles and very delighted to return home. He knew that since it was a divine call, the Lord will back him. He also realized it is the auspicious time to turnaround the negative situation of Ilu-Oke into a positive one. Time to pursue his long time ambition to develop his community and also expose it to economic prosperity and growth through education and his wealth.

The eve to the day Atanda was billed to return to Ilu- Oke, Aduke painstakingly arranged her husband's luggage properly and put them in the booth of the car to avoid leaving out anything. By 4.a.m.the next day, Atanda, Pastor Seun and Ajose were already prepared for the journey. Atanda quickly woke his wife up, leaving out the children as they prayed before they set- out for their journey to Ilu-Oke. Before they left, he gave Aduke some money for family up keep and tasked her on the need to look after the children very well. Similarly, he gave his wife tips on how to manage the business well in his absence.

Ajose was glad to be the driver for the journey to Ilu-Oke. He remembered how he used to ply the Ajede - Ilu-Oke route before. He confessed to Atanda that he has really missed driving and would wish to start driving again if he only finds someone that will provide him with a bus.

Pastor Seun replied him, "Ajose, put your faith in God. He is very capable of answering your prayers. Just put your faith in him and be prayerful". Ajose's comment hit Atanda but he decided to keep mute because he does not want to make promises yet. He aligned with Pastor Seun and counselled Ajose too to be patient and also trust the Lord.

Atanda wanted the journey to be an enjoyable one unlike when he was coming to Ajede, so he supplied Ajose plenty cassettes of gospel songs which he changed at intervals for their listening pleasure. He also provided them with food and drinks. They had fun throughout the journey till they got to Ilu-Oke in the evening . Ajose dropped off Pastor Seun in his house before taking

Atanda to his house. Atanda thanked Ajose very much and asked him to visit him the next day.

When he got to his house, Atanda noticed that the surroundings of his house was kept clean and the house refurbished contrary to his expectations. He was really surprised to see his house in that good shape after a decade he left the village. Only one person could have been responsible for that - Olapade his friend and the new Atona of Ilu-Oke.

He even got a bigger shocker when he discovered the interior of the house had been given a facelift. . Old things replaced with new ones and some maintained. He praised his friend Olapade - the Atona of Ilu-Oke for this act which he described as a true sign of real friendship.

He wished he could inform Aduke about the transformation that has taken place in their house courtesy of the new Atona, but could not do so because Ilu-Oke lacks means of communication like telephone, Internet and fax. This made him very angry, but he later consoled himself that Ilu-Oke will boast of these things someday with the cooperation of the people.

It is not a hidden fact that Atanda's desire is to see Ilu-Oke develop. But to achieve this, a lot of things needed to happen. He acknowledged that someone has to take the initiative and lead from the front. Equally, he expected that such leader has to be very committed, passionate , and also possess the ability to propel the community members in to action.

Atanda later shifted his thought away from the worries of Ilu-Oke. Smiles beamed on his face as he remembered that that he would be seeing his friend , the Atona the next day again after a decade. He planned to express his gratitude to the Atona when he set his eyes on him for revamping his house in his absence when he gets to the Palace. This made him to wish that the day should break quickly. Few hours later, Atanda slept off and was woken up by the alarm in his little clock the next morning.

Chapter Seven

AMBITION ACHIEVED

As soon as Atanda woke up, he had his morning prayers and quickly brushed his mouth before heading to the Palace to see the Atona. In ten minutes, Atanda was in the Palace already. He greeted the guards and requested to see the Atona. They asked him to introduce himself and also state his mission to the Palace. Atanda did as instructed by the guards, yet he was denied entry into the palace by the guards because they were not really impressed with his explanation. Atanda will not budge, he begged them to inform the Atona that his friend - Atanda would like to see him.

Incensed by Atanda's refusal to leave the Palace, the guards tried to throw him out. As they were trying to do that, the Balogun (the General of Ilu- Oke) walked in to the Palace. Atanda recognised him and quickly prostrated to greet him. He acknowledge his greetings but could not recognise Atanda's face any longer because he has grown older and Atanda changed drastically too. Atanda introduced himself and immediately the Balogun shouted. He asked him where he had been all this while and why he left the village without visiting for a decade.

Atanda replied the Balogun, "Baba they are plenty words in the book sold for a kobo (meaning a lot has happened). I will explain to you later. Mean while It is nice to see you again. Again, congratulations on the installation of the new Atona and also my condolences concerning the death of our former King".

The Balogun acknowledged by nodding after which he asked Atanda to follow him into the palace. Atanda smiled and

followed the Balogun into the Palace to the displeasure of the guards. The Balogun instructed one of the guards to inform the King of their presence in the Palace. While the guard went to inform the Atona of their visit, the Balogun apologised to Atanda concerning the behaviour of the guards towards him earlier, and also eulogised him for his exploits in the world of farming.

The Balogun stated, "If only they knew that you are Okurin Meta (an appellation for describing a strong man), they would not have acted in that manner. Atanda, Agbe toju agbe lo - (the great farmer). Akobi Orisha oko (the first child of the deity of agriculture) ma bi nu. (Don't be annoyed). Forgive them please". Atanda thanked the Balogun for the eulogies and quickly added that he was not angry with the guards. He maintained that the guards cannot be blamed for his absence in the village for a decade which was why they acted in that manner. He added that they were only doing their job after all.

While the men were still talking, the King entered and the guard shouted Kabiyesi to herald the entrance of the King in to the Palace. The men prostrated in reverence and also chorused Kabiyesi too. The Atona asked them to take their seat. He looked at Atanda and wondered if his friend was actually the one in front of him because Atanda has actually changed greatly, though a closer look will reveal his identity to those who were closer to him when he was at Ilu-Oke. To clear his doubts, he asked the Balogun for the identity of the man sitting beside him, hence they do not discuss sensitive community matter in the presence of a stranger.

The Balogun replied, "Kabiyesi, indeed it is quite a long time. Plenty water has passed under the bridge. But, I will like the man to introduce himself. Perhaps this saying that it is from the Archer's mouth you hear I shot it" (which literally means hearing from the horse's mouth) will aptly suffice here".

The King smiled and beckoned on Atanda to introduce

himself. Before he stood up from his chair to respond to the King's command, he had observed the drama playing out with disappointment that his friend, the Atona could not recognise him again, after all it is only 10 years since he left the village. But he contained his disappointment inside, and instead he put up a smile, as he is expected to behave well in the Palace even though his friend is the King.

Atanda answered, "my name is Atanda Adeoye, a great son of this village. Immediately the King cut in, "Atanda, my great friend. The great farmer that sends shivers down the spine of his colleagues. The one whose gigantic crops dwarf the collective harvest of twenty great farmers. My dear friend, am very pleased to see you again. I had little doubts in my mind because you have changed greatly, but retained some level of conviction that you were the one in front of me. Ten years you left without looking back. What happened? This was not our discussion".

Tears rolled down the eyes of Atanda as he tried to explain to the King his experience in Ajede and why he stayed away for that long. He paused to comport himself. Yet, as he tried to explain again, he cried the more and the King became emotional but must not be seen crying in the open before his subjects because it is a taboo.

The Atona "killed" the cry surging to burst from his eyes when he remembered that. The king quickly asked Atanda to sit down, which he did. The Balogun, a wise and intelligent man, diffused the mood in the Palace, by broaching up the issue of threat posed by the neighbouring village on their ancestral land which some government officials had visited some years ago for the purpose of building a factory.

The King decoded the message and pretended to be worried even when he knew that the issue of the threat had subsided since the amicable resolution reached at a meeting brokered by the

State government between the people of Ilu-Oke and their neighbouring village.

They knew the trick will catch the attention of Atanda as a great Patriot of Ilu-Oke and peace maker. Immediately he wriggled out of his earlier mood and wore a troubled look as a concerned party. Atanda said, "we must stop the warring parties from escalating tension. Peace is the only way out. It is not negotiable. We must act fast before it is too late".

The Balogun later discussed with the King the real issues of development and politics that originally brought him to the Palace before departing for his house. He promised to see Atanda later in the evening for more discussions. After the Balogun left the Palace, the King ordered the guards out to have a private discussion with his friend without been restricted to any traditional protocol.

He heartily chatted with his friend and they laughed loud to some jokes cracked by Atanda. Both men reminisced on the past. Their days at Egbe Agbe Omo Ilu-Oke (The farmers' club of Ilu-Oke), the competition of the best farmer at the agriculture fair at Ilu-Oke Day celebration, and how they survived Afuye's attack.

Atanda narrated his experience in Ajede to the Atona. He disclosed how God raised helpers for help him in Ajede. He also told him how he became a successful business man in Ajede, as well as becoming a University graduate despite not attending a secondary school before.

The Atona was really happy and impressed by Atanda's achievements. The Atona thanked God on account of his friend - Atanda for all he has achieved in Ajede, and also prayed for him to continue to soar higher in all his endeavours.

Atanda on his part, thanked the King for refurbishing his house as well as being a great friend to him. The King told Atanda

that he was worried and frustrated that he had lost him when he did not set his eyes on him for 10 years, hence the reason he decided to keep the memories of their friendship alive by refurbishing his house.

He treated Atanda to a sumptuous meal before he left for his house. Atanda got to his house and found Ajose waiting for him as agreed. He has been waiting for him for the past three hours. Atanda quickly apologised to Ajose for keeping him waiting for a long time. He told Ajose that his action was not deliberate nor disrespect for him.

He further explained to Ajose that the King insisted he spent more time with him since they have not seen each other for a very long time. Ajose replied him, "it is important to attend to the King first. Am not angry at all. I understand your situation. It was a great reunion with your friend, the Atona I guess. Am really happy for him as the new Atona. Am sure you did not only chat and relived old times, but had fun too".

Atanda pulled a chair, and sat very close to Ajose. He cleared his throat and said, "am really grateful to you for being instrumental to my success today. God used you to connect me with my helpers in Ajede. I thank you too for all your effort that fateful night. I have longed to have this opportunity to show my profound gratitude to you. I thank God that the opportunity has presented itself today. I will put smiles on your face again in my little way".

Ajose did not know the kind of help Atanda had in stock for him, but at that moment any sort of help is welcomed. He prostrated immediately thanking Atanda profusely. Atanda ordered him to stand up as prostrating for him on account of the intended help, makes him uncomfortable.

Atanda asked Ajose if he still wants to be a commercial bus driver or would prefer to venture into a new business, Ajose replied him that driving remains his calling hence would prefer to

stick to it rather than venture into business. He then asked Ajose if he knew a Car Mart close to Ilu-Oke. Ajose ecstatically answered, "yes, yes I know. The closet one is in Omitutun town. It is just an hour drive to Ilu-Oke. If we hit there early, we would back in no time".

Atanda went inside his house and returned with his car key which he passed to Atanda to get his car ready for the trip to Omitutun while he prepares. Twenty minutes later, Atanda was ready and the two men commenced the trip to Omitutun to purchase a bus. Ajose was particularly happy that he would have the chance to start his driving job again after many years of joblessness.

He thought Atanda was going to purchase the car for himself while he makes him the driver of the car, but unknown to him, Atanda planned to gift him the car. Ajose fantasised over how he would drive the new car even more carefully than he has ever been and also ensure that he deals with Atanda honestly. In no time, they were at a Car Mart in Omitutun town. Immediately they alighted from Atanda's car, he asked Ajose to go and select a very good bus suitable for business.

Ajose looked round the Car Mart and finally settled for a small durable and cheaper car. He saw other cars better than the one he picked, but opted for it because he did not want to force Atanda to spend big. After all he was not sure if Atanda has the financial capacity to buy a bigger one. After he had made his choice, he gleefully asked Atanda to come and inspect the car, which he described as superb, before payment is made.

Atanda liked the car though, but was not impressed by its size particularly. He enquired about the price, the car dealer told him with an assurance that that he offers the best prices as well as sell the best cars around the town and its neighbouring communities.

He continued the talk to convince Atanda to buy the car, thinking why Atanda's countenance was not brightened when he saw the car was because of the price. But Atanda surprised the car dealer

when he demanded for the price of an 18 seater bus. The seller felt Atanda just wanted to ask for the sake of it, as he did not really appear a rich man to him. The car seller pretended as if he did not hear Atanda as he tried to persuade him further to settle for the smaller car.

Atanda read his mind, that he was trying to underrate him based on his simple look, repeated the question again. This time around he was forced to reply Atanda, "Sir, the price of the 18 seater bus is very high. Am of the opinion that you should concentrate on the smaller cars. The 18 seater Bus may be beyond your financial capacity.

After all, my people would say, that the size of the hand of a rat, determines how much it can scratch its head (cut your cloth according to your size) so I suggest you settle for the one your finances can carry."

Atanda replied him, "thank you very much for underrating me. It is okay. But that will not make me walk away from your Car Mart. I must confess, your perception about people is very poor. Regardless, am determined to buy the bus any ways. Change your behaviour about how you treat your customer. You do not know who the big customer could be. May be you should note this saying too, since you spoke to me in proverbs; "that wearing big clothes does not signify that one is rich". At that point, many thoughts started running riots in the mind of the dealer. He said to himself, "could he be rich after all and just decided to dress simple? Can he really afford this bus or he just want to rescue himself by merely ranting? Who could he be? Ajose too, joined in the confusion as he asked himself rhetorical question inwardly, "Is he serious or just bluffing about buying the bus? Today, we shall find out."

Atanda noticed Ajose's worried countenance which obviously was written all over his face. So, he said inwardly too, "Ajose, I can see

your worried face because you think I cannot afford the bus. But, my friend, I will prove you wrong today”.

Atanda offered the car dealer a cheque to the astonishment of both the dealer and Ajose. He perused it carefully before offering to drive Atanda and Ajose to a nearby Commercial Bank where he cashed it. He thanked Atanda for the patronage and apologised profusely for his behavior towards him. He assured him that he would never treat a customer badly again as he has learnt a huge lesson from his encounter with him.

The dealer drove them back to his Car Mart a very happy man. He respectfully demanded for Atanda's full details to enable him issue him a receipt. Instead, Atanda asked Ajose to provide his details to the car dealer. Ajose and the Car dealer were confused at his order. He walked up to Atanda and said to him, “Sir, the name on the receipt indicates the owner of the bus. If you allow Ajose's name on the receipt, the bus could become his own”. Atanda answered him, “thank you for the information. Am very much aware of that. The bus belongs to Ajose, do as instructed please”.

Ajose wanted to be very sure he heard what Atanda said clearly, he asked him if he actually understood the question the car dealer asked, Atanda replied him that there was no ambiguity in his order. Greatly stunned by his action, Ajose rolled on the floor in excitement not minding the white T- shirt he was spotting on.

He thanked Atanda profusely while prostrating. Atanda asked him to stand up, but he begged him to allow him stay him in that position because he deserved to be honoured so. Atanda laughed and asked Ajose to stand up which he later did. Atanda said to him, “Ajose, you are simply reaping the fruits of your good deed. That fateful night, you ensured that we got a good place to sleep before you left us. You did not abandon us when we were

stranded. That is love and loyalty”.

Ajose told Atanda he would forever remain grateful to him and also his acts of generosity would remain indelible in his mind. He added, “I cannot contain my joy. I thank God and thank you too for this great gift. If one should ride a horse in my stomach, the horse would will not stumble at all. So, God can still remember me like this? Thank you Lord”.

Ajose sang God's praises all through their way back to Ilu-Oke, while Atanda was full of joy for touching a life in the manner he did to Ajose. When they got to Ilu-Oke, Atanda advised Ajose to be magnanimous to people too, when he starts generating money from the bus. Ajose promised to touch lives in any little way that he can. He thanked Atanda once again for what he did for him before both men drove to their houses.

The next day, which was the eve to Atanda's return date to Ajede, news had spread the whole village of Ilu-Oke concerning Atanda's magnanimity towards Ajose. Even the King has heard of it. Atanda was shocked to hear from the King's mouth his act of generosity towards Ajose when he visited the Palace to inform him of his departure to Ajede .

The Atona said, “Atanda the whole village is proud of you for your kind heart. You have not only lifted Ajose and his family out of poverty, but others who may depend on Ajose too for support. Indeed you are a great son of Ilu- Oke. Continue to do well, the Lord will crown your effort in a mighty way”. Atanda answered amen before informing the Atona of his plan to return to Ajede the next day.

Before he left the Palace, Atanda suggested to the Atona that the community should create a Committee for the sake of Ilu-Oke's development. The King was very delighted with Atanda's suggestion. Just like Atanda, the development of Ilu-Oke was also very dear to the Atona.

The King quickly summoned an emergency meeting in order to discuss the formation of the Committee with his chiefs.

After hours of deliberation with his chiefs, they agreed on the formation, composition and mode of working of the Committee. They also unanimously agreed that Atanda will head the Committee. Atanda was later informed by the King that he has been selected to head the Ilu-Oke Development Committee. He thanked the King and the Chiefs for selecting him as the head of the Committee, while also pledging his commitment and unwavering loyalty to the Ilu-Oke people.

Very early in the morning the next day, Ajose and his family members stormed Atanda's house to show their gratitude for what he did for Ajose. They all prostrated to thank Atanda. He quickly ordered them to stand up and stop embarrassing him. He told Ajose to stop thanking him, that he has done enough of that already.

Ajose replied him that, failure to show gratitude will portray him as an ingrate. Atanda agreed with him, but insisted regardless, that he should stop thanking him because he has done that enough. He later informed Ajose that in few hours he would be returning to Ajede. Ajose offered to drive him to Ajede, but Atanda assured him he could drive himself without hassles. Ajose wished him well in his journey back to Ajede, before leaving Atanda's house with his family.

Immediately Ajose and his family members left Atanda's house, Atanda quickly took his bath and arranged his luggage in his car. 30 minutes later Atanda was on his way to Ajede. All he experienced at Ilu-Oke in the last one week enveloped his mind as he drove to Ajede. He thought about how his gesture to Ajose was received by the Atona and the other villagers. Spurred by the reception that greeted his gesture to Ajose, he vowed to even do more to affect lives positively at Ilu-Oke.

After six hours of driving, Atanda finally arrived his house to a warm welcome from his family members who have been longing to see him.

Aduke offered him water to drink before she served his dinner. Atanda, after taking his bath, took his dinner. He later he narrated his experience at Ilu-Oke to Aduke, while she in return briefed him concerning the family and their business in Ajede. Impressed by the way Aduke handled family matters and also the business in his absence, Atanda thanked her which she acknowledged with a satisfying smile. Atanda and his wife gist into the night, before going to bed.

Just one week that Atanda spent at Ilu-Oke, he realized how much his presence and support to the community is needed more than ever before. Since a decade that he left the village, much has not changed there in terms of development. This did not gladden his heart in any way. Angered by the backwardness of Ilu-Oke compared to other neighbouring communities, Atanda reached a conclusion to return to Ilu-Oke permanently, rather than shuttling between Ajede and Ilu-Oke.

He vowed never to depart the village again, until he has achieved his goal to develop his community. He called Aduke and informed her of his decision without minding what her reaction would be. Aduke was surprised by his decision, but decided not to kick against it, because she knew how much Atanda love Ilu- Oke and his desire for his community to develop.

"My husband, I will not object to your decision to move to Ilu-Oke permanently until you have achieved your long time ambition. It is a big sacrifice to make. Sacrificing your family for the cause of your community. God will help you to realize your ambition for Ilu-Oke. He will help me too, to take care of the responsibilities that have been entrusted upon my shoulder".

Aduke's word touched Atanda, he kept a long silence, before

replying Aduke. "I must confess that after listening to your talk, I felt like cancelling my decision because of the family. But again, I concluded that it is better to serve my community now, that I have the capacity. You and the children will be fine by the grace of God. The community really needs me now. It is better to make this sacrifice for our children and the unborn children. I am irrevocably committed to this cause. Am sorry Aduke, I will go to Ilu- Oke, my fathers land".

Aduke, after listening to Atanda, conceded totally and wholeheartedly supported Atanda's quest to engineer the development of Ilu-Oke. She also prayed for Atanda's protection and guidance from the Lord. Atanda smiled and hugged his wife for genuinely supporting his decision to chase his long time ambition- which is to develop his community.

He later drove to Pastor Segun's house where he told him the same thing he said to Aduke. Pastor Segun gave his blessings to his decision, and also assured him that the Lord will grant him his wishes. Atanda thanked him, before returning home to meet a sumptuous meal already prepared for dinner by Aduke. After dinner, Atanda gathered his family and explained his decision to them. The children cried, but Atanda and his wife placated them. Atanda assured Aduke and the children that he will always get in touch with them by sending messages across to them through Ajose.

The next day, Atanda had the morning devotion with his family earlier than the usual time because of his journey to Ilu-Oke. He has to start the journey very early, otherwise he will arrive Ilu-Oke late in the night. The prayer was brief and precise. While the chunk of the prayer points dwell on ensuring Atanda's safe trip to Ilu-Oke.

After the prayers, he counselled the children to always exhibit good characters everywhere they found themselves and

also ensure that they remain good Christians that they are. He added that they take their studies very seriously too. The children in return, pledged to obey his instructions at all time. Thirty minutes later, Aduke and the children saw him off to the car, before he drove off.

The thoughts of his family which captured his mind, left him downcast. But he found solace in the song of his favourite gospel artiste, that says "I will always be with you". The song sparked him back to life, as he suddenly started singing and occasionally nodding his head to the song. Atanda enjoyed good tunes from the cassette of his car stereo till he got to Ilu-Oke in the evening.

When he arrived his house, he removed his luggage from the booth of the car gently to avoid breaking some fragile things in the luggage like plates, cup, and lantern . He also washed off the mud that stained his car. Done with the removal of the luggage and washing of the car, Atanda took his bath, ate his dinner before retiring to bed very early.

He woke up early as usual, prayed and ate his breakfast before heading to the Palace. This time around, the guards gave him easy passage to the Palace, unlike his first experience. He demanded to see the King concerning urgent issues that affects the development of the community. In a short moment, the King joined him . Atanda immediately prostrated and hailed him Kabiyesi.

The Atona acknowledged by raising his staff. He asked Atanda to kindly have his seat. A happy looking Atona smiled and said to Atanda, "what a pleasant surprise! Am glad to see you. I thought you said you will be visiting Ilu-Oke fortnightly only. Sincerely, I was not expecting to see you at all. I just hope all is well". Atanda replied the King, "I realized that there is a whole lot of work to be done concerning the development of our community. We cannot achieve our goals if we do not have someone present

in the community to drive our plans from the front. I need to be on ground to ginger others to follow suit, hence my reason to abandon my family, business and friends for the development of Ilu-Oke". The Atona was very glad with Atanda's resolve to lead from the front. He prayed for Atanda and his Committee members to excel in their new responsibilities.

Atanda outlined areas he considered as priorities for the development of the community like; establishing a Secondary School, refurbishing of the dilapidated Local Education Area (LEA) primary school at Ilu-Oke, (which incidentally is the only school in the community), Health Centre, Skill Acquisition Centre, a new community market, a befitting Palace for the King, a Sports Centre etc.

These things look a tall order to the Atona, but reluctantly, he agreed with Atanda on his plans. Atanda noticed his countenance which clearly expresses his pessimism, and he said to him, "Kabeyesi, do not worry. I can see clearly that you are worried over the list of things I mentioned. They are achievable with God's support and the total cooperation of the members of the community. Besides, it is one after the other".

The Atona smiled and gave Atanda the express order to report anything he considered as obstacle to the set-out objectives of his Committee on the development of Ilu- Oke. Atanda also informed the King of his intentions to establish a Foundation for the support of indigent women and children in the community. The King welcomed the idea and also pledged his support to the Foundation. Atanda thanked him greatly for his support. Few days later, Atanda launched his foundation at the village hall. The attendance was fairly huge. Women and children dominated the launch. He stated his plans for them and they welcomed it with open arms. Atanda combined the work of his foundation with that of his Committee.

In a very short time, Atanda had series of meetings with his members. Weeks later, the members gathered at the Palace to officially present their development plans to the Atona and his chiefs. Atanda made every member of the Committee important by giving them sense of responsibility. This made them happy as they felt as real partners of the Ilu- Oke development project.

Members of the Committee were levied certain amount of money, while every man in the village too were billed. The contributions were not forth coming as envisaged by the committee members, especially from the non-members of the Committee. This discouraged members of Atanda's Committee, but Atanda was not dissuaded.

He instead, encouraged them to be united and also focus on their goals. Atanda explained their challenges to the King, and he promised to appeal to the members of the community to support them. The Atona gave them land and some financial support too. Despite the Atona's appeal to the members of the community, the contributions did not "flow" as expected. Atanda informed the King that with or without the contributions from the members of the village, he and his members were determined to commence work. The King prayed for him and asked him to go ahead. Atanda reiterated his position to his members and some welcomed it while some doubted it based on the contribution they had gathered.

Atanda realized that time was not on their side any longer, decided to lead from the front by immediately mobilizing workers to site with his money. He asked his members to support the workers at the site of the project in a bid to hasten the building of the Secondary School which was the first on their list of plans. Atanda pumped his resources into the project, and in one month, the school was ready for use.

The Atona could not contain his happiness when Atanda told him that the school was ready for use, signalling the end of halting

the progress of their children from advancing to secondary school after primary education. The establishment of the school will also stop the sufferings of the few, who in a bid to further in their education, walk several kilometres on foot to the nearby village to attend Secondary Schools there.

During the unveiling of the newly constructed School, the Local Education Officials who came for the event, praised the community for their effort to establish the Secondary School, describing it as great and exemplary. The Atona while speaking too, praised Atanda and his team for their patriotism and commitment to the development of Ilu- Oke.

The encomiums showered by the Atona to Atanda and his members made them very proud as they pledged to even do more to develop Ilu-Oke. Their resolve to do more for the development of the community, excited Atanda.

Atanda, a man with two caps, had his mind on his Foundation too. Days after the unveiling of the school building, Atanda supported some indigent women and youths with various amount of money to acquire tools for their businesses and also to start petty trading. The recipients of Atanda's kind gesture, danced and sang his praise. They also prayed for his success in all his endeavours. The smile on their faces made Atanda a happy and fulfilled man.

Every day Atanda spends in the village, he realizes that there is much to be done concerning the development of Ilu-Oke. And this worries him because, the quantum of work to be done is not one meant for only for one person or few individuals, but the collective effort of the people of Ilu-Oke. Atanda is a man in a hurry to develop his community, but many of his people do not share his passion and optimism. Though worried about the attitude of some of the community members towards contributing money for the growth of the village, he vowed not to be discouraged by

that. Instead, he vowed to sacrifice all he has to develop his community to the level his financial muscle can carry him.

Seven weeks later, Atanda wrote a letter to Aduke and his children, chronicling all that has happened since he arrived Ilu-Oke. He attached a picture he snapped with the Local Government officials and the Atona at the unveiling of the new Secondary School at Ilu- Oke. He stated also how he has missed them, but reminded them that he has given up himself for the service of his community. After writing the letter, he sent it to Ajose who took it to his wife in Ajede the next day.

A month later, Atanda and his members went back to the King to ask for land to build Skill Acquisition Centre for the community. The King immediately obliged their request and also offered his support. They thanked him and promised to always partner with him for the growth of the community.

Just one week after the land was allocated to the committee headed by Atanda, work commenced at the site of the Project. Two months later, the project was completed, thanks to Atanda, who contributed more than ninety percent of the resources used for the Project. They honoured the Atona by naming the Project after him. The Atona was very delighted by the honour bestowed on him. He in return, conferred Atanda with the title of Asiwaju of Ilu-Oke.

In a very short time, news of the gradual transformation taking place at Ilu-Oke has spread beyond Ilu-Oke to its neighbouring villages. The wonderful work of Atanda and his team got the attention of Mr. Alade Ibukun, a politician and business man from Oke - Ayo community in the same Adun Local Government Area with Ilu-Oke.

Mr. Alade, intrigued by what he heard about Atanda, decided to visit Ilu- Oke. When he got to Ilu-Oke he headed straight to the

Palace where he met the Atona and his Chiefs. Atanda was in attendance too. He congratulated the King on behalf of the village for the feat they have achieved, before telling them that the story of the gradual transformation taking place in Ilu- Oke informed his choice of visit to the village.

He also added that though, he did not plan to discuss politics with them, but he felt it that it was right, since it can provide opportunities to develop their community even further, if the people of Ilu-Oke can join his political party - The Peoples Advancement Party (PAP).

Immediately he mentioned that the community can benefit from politics, Atanda looked at the Atona and the Chiefs with a curious eye. He does not trust politicians, especially not after his experience with the Chairman of Adun LGA who failed in his promises to develop Ilu- Oke.

After listening to Mr. Alade, the Atona thanked him on behalf of the people of Ilu-Oke for his visit to their village. He said, "we are pleased with your visit to our community, as well as the suggestion you made to us too.

But unfortunately, many of us here do not trust politicians like you. In fact, we would have out rightly rejected your proposal to have the people of Ilu- Oke join your political party, but for the possible gain of developing our community which you mentioned, we will not do so.

Mr. Alade replied the Atona, "Kabiyesi, am not for fit to say a proverb in your presence. But I honourably recalled the words of our elders that says, that 'one cannot close his eyes because he does not want to see the wicked ones pass, doing so, one may miss out too, when the good ones are equally passing".

After his speech, the Atona replied Mr. Alade, "we would like to give you a chance but not after making our demands. Our

demand is very simple: since you said it can provide the chance to advance the development of our community, we demand that you zone the position of the Local Government Chairman to our community, then we will mobilise our people to vote for your party. We possess the second largest population behind Ayowole in Adun LGA and also plenty wards here at Ilu- Oke too".

Mr. Alade responded by saying, "consider your proposal to have the position of the Chairman of Adun LGA zoned to your community granted, so far the people will join us and vote for us in the coming elections. I know that it is hard to trust people nowadays especially politicians because of their failed promises. But having said that, we must remember also that, our people use to say that, "one cannot stay at home and determine if the river is full or not. So, I urge you to join us and we will prove to you that we are different from others. We are fidelity. Am happy you are ready to give us a chance, we will not only concede that position to you, we will bring greater development from the state level to your community if you vote for us".

They were all stunned by Mr. Alade's reply, as they had expected him to lie or stutter when speaking, which would have indicated to them that it was going to be a futile exercise. But alas, he was very confident and appeared from his countenance to be telling them the truth. Still harbouring some level of doubts in their mind, because the deal look too good to be real, the King told him that they have heard all he said, but will wait till his party fulfil their promise before mobilising their people for PAP.

To prove his seriousness, he promised to visit them the following week with the Executive of the Party to negotiate the deal with them so that they can start keeping their own side of the bargain, which is to mobilise their people for their Party. At that point, Atanda conceded that Mr. Alade appeared real.

His desperation to corner the votes of Ilu-Oke for his party and the

confidence with which he spoke, convinced Atanda that Mr. Alade appeared different from the others. But he decided to wait and see what the verdict of the Atona will be before expressing his thoughts. The King agreed that the meeting be postponed till next week when the Party Executives will be present , before final deals will be sealed.

The day came, and Mr. Alade arrived Ilu-Oke with a very large team that consists of the Executive and some loyal members of the party. They were treated to a cultural dance at the Atona's palace. After their introduction, they discovered that Mr. Alade was the Chairman of the party yet he never mentioned it or brag about it when he visited Ilu- Oke earlier.

That singular act endeared Atanda to Mr. Alade than ever before. After two hours of meeting, the deal was sealed and Atanda was unanimously selected as the Party's flag bearer for the LG elections.

It was a mixed feeling for Atanda. Before his emergence as the PAP flag bearer, he detested politics because he considers it a grubby game, but here is an opportunity to fulfil his long time ambition of developing his community even further as the Chairman if he wins.

The choice of Atanda was greeted with joy from the Ilu- Oke representatives at the meeting and also from the Party Executives. Mr. Alade described Atanda as an honest, patriotic and intelligent man. He considers Atanda a huge transformer that will leave great legacy in the history of politics in that state. One after the other, glowing tributes were rendered by the Atona and his Chiefs to Atanda.

Overwhelmed by the outpouring encomiums showered on him, and also the need to serve his people, Atanda obliged to be the Party's flag bearer at the elections, but with a warning that

any attempt to compromise his integrity, will force him to resign.

The King ordered the town criers to summon all the men and women to the village Hall the following day. Immediately the town criers did as instructed by the Atona. The next day, all the men and women gathered at the village Hall. The Hall was filled to the brim thirty minutes before the commencement of the meeting. The Atona addressed them and told them the need for the meeting. They were all happy as they promised to follow his instructions.

One month to the election, other political parties (the usual suspects) stormed Ilu-Oke and tried to bribe them with little gifts to vote for them. This time around, the people were very united to support a party that will help develop their community. Sensing that bribing the people with petty gifts was not going to work this time around, they approached the Atona with gifts to appeal to his subjects to vote for their Parties. But when he asked them to give him assurance that they will receive slots for political positions, they failed to assure him.

Campaigns commenced in earnest as the elections drew nearer. Surprisingly to the Party and even Atanda, everywhere they visited to campaign, the people welcomed them with open hands courtesy of Atanda's popularity. Atanda's popularity transcended even beyond the Local Government. Some knew him because of his farming exploits, and others, his kind heart. He became the poster boy of the Party that had initially struggled to win elections. Every Aspirant attached Atanda's photo to his. After months of vigorous campaigns, the election was held, and Atanda's Party, Peoples Advancement Party (PAP) won massively. There was massive jubilation in his party and also at Ilu-Oke. One month after, The LGA Chairmen were inaugurated into office.

Atanda settled in quickly, and in four years, he had constructed roads that link the communities together in the LGA;

built modern primary and secondary schools across the communities in the LGA, cited many Skills acquisition centres in all the communities in the LGA, and also built maternities and health centres across all the communities in Adun LGA. He also provided electricity to link all the communities in Adun LGA; establish Food Processing Centre at Ilu-Oke , and also built new Sports Centres in the LGA.

The list of Atanda's achievement also includes; offering Scholarships to intelligent and indigent students of Adun LGA and also paid for the fees of all the final year Secondary School students of Adun LGA. He equally built ICT hub, increased the salaries of the LGA staff and also sent them on training regularly.

Atanda boosted the traditions and culture of the LGA, by organising Adun LGA Carnival, resuscitated the moribund Ilu-Oke Day celebration, and established good relations with the monarchs in the LGA through regular meetings. He also supported many small businesses in the LGA as well as organised a Sports fiesta tagged the Chairman Sports Competition to harness talents in the LGA.

Atanda emerged the Best LGA Chairman in the state for four consecutive years that he served his first term. He turned Ilu-Oke from a rural village to a beautiful town while exposing it to economic prosperity. The biggest farm market with modern facilities was cited at Ilu-Oke because of its prowess in farming.

It was accolades after accolades for Atanda throughout his first term. The people of the Local Government were blown away with the kind of transformation that has taken place there. They were surprised that it was possible to do so much like Atanda did. Previous administrations had little or nothing to show for their time in office. Atanda's success was largely hinged on his background in Finance and Accounting as well as his honesty.

Atanda did not enrich himself while in office; he served the people diligently and sincerely too. No scandal was recorded throughout his term.

When it was time for another term, Atanda's party offered him a chance to serve as a State Legislator. He consulted with his people and his friends - like Pastor Seun and Pastor Segun. They encouraged him to accept the chance to serve his people. He accepted, and contested for the position of a State Legislator under his Party- PAP. Again, he won the elections. This time around, it was a walk in the park for him. His intimidating list of achievement, soared his popularity to a higher level.

Atanda proved that he was a performer anywhere he found himself. He sponsored a bill in the State Assembly to establish a state University of Agriculture at Ilu-Oke. His reason was based on the fact that Ilu-Oke as the food basket of the state, will provide the opportunity for Agriculture Research and also generate employment. Atanda's unrelenting effort saw that the bill was passed and signed into law by the governor. He shed tears of joy and considered it his biggest achievement in politics.

The Governor honoured Atanda for his service to humanity by naming the University after him. His community honoured him too by naming different monuments, and a street after him. They also erected a giant statue of Atanda at the entrance of the community. He made significant contributions to bills that improved Education, Health, Businesses, protection of Women and Children Rights in the state. He sponsored more than 50 indigent students in Adun Local government to different universities across the region.

Atanda finished his term as a State legislator on a very high note. He won many awards and received many traditional title offers for his great performance as a legislator. He accepted few, and politely turned down some. He resisted the chance to return to

the House of Assembly the second term despite the pressure from his party, and honourably retired to Ilu-Oke to a rousing welcome from his people.

He was really a fulfilled man after achieving his ambition of transforming his former rural community, Ilu-Oke to a developed and prosperous town. In his honour, drums were rolled out and musicians sang his praises as a hero of the community.

After retirement, he continued with his charity work through his Foundation as the Chairman. His son, Ademola, who graduated from the City University like him, later assumed the position of the Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation running its affairs daily. Even in retirement, Atanda continued to promote good governance through his engagements and writings that inspired leaders and the youths in the State and other places.

