

Say Yes

to Mental Health



TOFUNMI AKINYEMI

Say Yes to Mental Health

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In commemoration of the author's 60th. Birthday. All glory to the Almighty GOD!

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Verses marked:

AMP = The Amplified Bible

GW = God's Word

GNB = Good News Bible

KJV = King James Version

NLT = New Living Translation

NASB = New American Standard Bible

RSV = Revised Standard Version

TLB = The Living Bible

This book is presented to

By:

On

*"... I have come that they may have life, and that they
may have it more abundantly."*

John 10:10b

*"He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them
from their destructions."*

Psalms 107:20

APPRECIATION

An immense gratitude to my Awesome and loving Heavenly Father; for His immeasurable mercy and faithfulness. Thank You Daddy for preserving my life, sustaining me in the race; and for Your all-round healing. I am forever grateful.

My God and my Father, I pledge my life to You afresh; to live and work for you till the end, in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen. Please, help me (and generations after me) to always live for Your glory; in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

I am grateful to Pastor (Dr.) Morakinyo & Mrs. Oluwatoni Olumodimu; for making their home a place of retreat for me in the course of writing this book. May the Almighty God thank them for me, in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

My thanks go to Mr Tomiwo Akinyemi; for his painstaking proof-reading, and constructive criticisms of the initial manuscript of this book; and to Tosin Akinyemi, Esq. who collaborated with him for the second proofreading, and value-adding suggestions. I also thank Mrs Toni Morakinyo-Olumodimu, for her encouragement and invaluable contributions; and Mrs Tokesi Akinola, for obliging whenever I asked her to appraise any newly written chapter.

Also, to all who have been God's instrument of help to me on life's path, I am grateful. May the Almighty God bless us all in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen." 1 Timothy 1:17 (KJV).

Tofunmi Akinyemi
(Mama Jochebed)

DEDICATION

This Book is prayerfully dedicated to all who are struggling with their mental health; that on its pages, they will find help, hope, healing, and restoration through God.

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Prologue

It is very essential to first state that "Say Yes to Mental Health" is:

- Inspired by my recovery from the emotional disorders of anxiety and depression through Christ; and my heart's desire that people struggling with any form of disorder will also be victorious through Christ.
- Comprising of information from both Biblical and academic sources. However, we do not necessarily agree with all the contents of some of the academic articles consulted in the course of writing this Book.
- A Christian Book. Its perspectives and proposals are Bible-based.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

This Book is not a substitute for receiving help from a licensed Mental Health Professional. If you are having suicidal thoughts, please, quickly seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area; or confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian.

HEALTH IS WEALTH

The importance of being healthy is seen in this popular saying that "Health is wealth". A person needs to be healthy to truly enjoy life, and maximally fulfil purpose. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined "Health" as:

"... a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

The above definition is expansive; however, in line with the aim of this book, we want to add spiritual well-being. Thus, I define health as "a state of complete physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being".

THE SCOURGE OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

The prevalence of mental health disorders is becoming increasingly

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alarming. The accompanying pains and devastations have taken a negative toll on people's productivity, relationships, overall well-being; and life expectancy.

Therefore, governments and non-governmental organisations worldwide are gearing efforts towards combatting mental ill-health. This is done through the application of knowledge from the Medical and Behavioural Sciences.

COMBATTING MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

The people struggling with mental ill-health are managed through therapy, medication, and counselling; or through a combination of these strategies. All these have greatly contributed to the fight against mental ill-health.

The mental health practice recognises an aspect of therapy which is referred to as spiritual therapy. This is "the use of beliefs, religious practices, and prayer to treat disease."²

AN ESSENTIAL THERAPY TO EXPLORE!

There is an aspect of spiritual therapy worthy of being explored in the fight against mental health disorders. This is the spiritual therapy of Jesus Christ's abundant life (See John 10:10b); this I call "Jesus Christ's Therapy" (JCT).

Jesus Christ's Therapy (JCT) is the application of God's Word as contained in the Holy Bible, coupled with prayers to the living God in the Name of Jesus Christ; to effectively tackle mental ill-health, and every other challenges of life.

I am a living testimony to the efficacy of Jesus Christ's Therapy in treating the mental ill-health of anxiety and depression; and their attendant symptoms like trauma, insomnia, depressive thoughts; feeling helpless and hopeless etc.

My testimony of recovery is shared in detail in a later chapter of this Book. This is to encourage others; and let them know that recovery, and complete restoration are possible through the living God.

Also, JCT has been effectively applied to people struggling with depression and anxiety in my counselling ministry of more than two decades. Therefore, JCT is highly recommended as an effective tool in treating anxiety and depression.

In life, there is always room for expansion. Therefore, in the days ahead, I believe that JCT can be effectively applied to the treatment of other forms of mental ill-health. *"For with God nothing will be impossible."* Luke 1:37.

JCT AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

In the light of the foregoing, JCT is extremely important in the fight against mental health disorders. Our Lord Jesus Christ says, *"... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* John 10:10b.

Also, Jesus Christ says, *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* John 14:27.

Above all, Jesus Christ came into the world to deliver mankind from sin, save souls; give access to His abundant life, and hope of eternity. Also, to deliver us from all satanic oppressions and afflictions; and this includes mental ill-health.

"... For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8b.

AN IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Perhaps you feel rejected, forsaken, and you want to commit suicide; please, do not end your life. God cares about you, and will help you; *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."* Psalms 46:1 (NLT).

You might have been battered, shattered, and despised; hence you feel worthless, helpless, and hopeless! I want you to know that no life is too shattered beyond God's healing and restoration; so, do not give up on life!

Please, suicide is not the end of life's pains, but rather the beginning of greater and eternal pains; so it's not worth it. God is the Giver of life; and owns the final say on it. *"... since He gives to all life, breath, and all things."* Acts 17:25b.

As earlier stated, please, quickly seek help! A burden shared is a burden lessened; so, do not struggle alone, seek help now! You may wish to see a Mental Health Professional; or a genuine Pastor, or true Christian.

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GET CONNECTED!

There are many challenges on life's path which can sometimes be overwhelming. These may sink a person deeper into disorder, confusion, self-harm, substance abuse, and suicidal tendencies; except one receives help.

Therefore, get connected to the Power Source through the new birth; mainly for your eternal well-being. That is, you are to turn to God through genuine repentance from sin; then, receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

The new birth gives you access to Christ's abundant life. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you as your Helper; empowers you to live holy, cope with life's challenges, and make heaven at last. This is the perspective of this Book.

ABOUT THE BOOK

"Say Yes to Mental Health" delves in-depth into the issue of mental health. It offers hope and help through God's grace to people struggling with mental ill-health.

It challenges us all; individuals, and corporate bodies (Governments, Non-governmental organisations, all Employers of labour, and the Church of God) to uplift society; by standing for mental health.

The Book is hereby sent forth in the Name of Jesus Christ; that through its pages, the reader will be adequately equipped to enjoy Jesus Christ's abundant life on earth, and make heaven at last, Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:20 & 21.

MARANATHA!

Tofunmi Akinyemi
(Mama Jochebed)

*The Retreat Place,
The King's Throne Room.
Saturday, June 22, 2019
www.mamajoch.com*



Part One

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The Uncreated Creator

INTRODUCTION

The Almighty God is the Creator of Heaven and earth, and all therein. This includes humans, whom He created in His Own image.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them." Genesis 1:1 & 27.

God is Self-existing; He exists by Himself, and not created by any! It is written: *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." Psalm 90:2.*

Also, the Bible says, *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24).* In the physical, we see God through the beautiful natural habitat He created for our use; and through His wondrous acts.

God continues to sustain His creation by His great power! *"He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together." Colossians 1:17 (NLT).*

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The Holy Bible severally gives us the description of God, some of which are listed below. God is:

IMMORTAL

God is eternal; He never dies, He lives forever. "... You, O Lord, shall endure forever, and the remembrance of Your name to all generations." Psalm 102:12.

AGELESS

God has no beginning and no ending. He has been self-existing before the foundation of the world and will be in existence forever!

"... Your years are throughout all generations. Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end." Psalm 102:24-27.

HOLY

The Bible says: "... "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). Also, "... Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty— the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come." Revelation 4:8 (NLT).

ALMIGHTY

God is all-powerful; He owns all the power in heaven and on earth. "... O Lord... You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against You!" 2 Chronicles 20:6 (NLT).

The Almighty God is great; this can be seen in this description of Him in the Holy Bible: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?"

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counsellor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?

Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing." Isaiah 40:12-15

SIMULTANEOUSLY PRESENT EVERYWHERE

God is present in all places at the same time; His Presence fills the heaven and the earth. "Can anyone hide himself in secret places,

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so I shall not see him?" says the Lord; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord." Jeremiah 23:24.

ALL-SEEING

The Bible says: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Proverbs 15:3 (KJV). Also, "... His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps." Job 34:21.

ALL-KNOWING

The Almighty God knows all things; and He alone has this attribute. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" Romans 11:33.

Also, the Bible says, "With Him are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding." Job 12:13.

LOVING

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:16-17.

The love of God for humans is so great that: "... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

God keeps loving us even after one becomes born again. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" 1 John 3:1a.

KIND

"... the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, ... that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:4-7.

MERCIFUL

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy." (Psalm 103:8). "... You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth." Psalm 86:15.

FAITHFUL

The Almighty God is dependable; therefore, His promises are true. God will always keep His Word; He cannot fail, as this is contrary to His nature.

"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." 2 Corinthians 1:20.

SOVEREIGN

God has supreme power and authority over all His creations; humans, animals, rocks, wind, seas, rivers, mountains, valleys etc. *"For the life of every living thing is in His hand." Job 12:10 (NLT); and "... He changes the times and the seasons...." Daniel 2:21a.*

THE PROVIDER

God created crops to serve as food for His creatures. *"... to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"...." Genesis 1:30.*

The Almighty God continues to make crops grow; to provide food for both humans and animals. *"He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth." Psalm 104:14.*

The Bible says, *"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Matthew 6:26.*

THE KING OF ALL THE EARTH

The Almighty God is the King of all kings and Queens. *"... O Lord... You alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth...." 2 Chronicles 20:6a (NLT).*

God is also the President of the Universe! God reigns over all the people on earth; He is the Ruler over all Presidents, Prime Ministers, Governors, Mayors, and citizens. The Throne of God is holy!

"For God is the King of all the earth.... God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne." Psalm 47:8.

KING FOREVER!

God's Kingship is everlasting; He will not abdicate His throne, and cannot be replaced! *".... His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall*

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JUST

God is just in all His acts and dispensation of justice; He "... will render to each one according to his deeds.... For there is no partiality with God." (Romans 2:6 & 11). God is the Honourable Chief Justice of the entire Universe!

The Almighty God "... shows no partiality nor takes a bribe." (Deuteronomy 10:17). "... for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He." Deuteronomy 32:4.

MAJESTIC

God is "His Royal Majesty, King God Almighty"! "The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty...." Psalm 93:1.

"It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in." Isaiah 40:22.

GLORIOUS

God is glorious in His Majesty, holiness, power, wisdom, ways, acts, praises etc. "Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord." Psalm 138:5.

"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all." 1 Chronicles 29:11.

AMAZING

The Almighty God inspires awe; He does not get fatigued, neither does He faint. "... the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary...." Isaiah 40:28.

Also, God does not sleep nor slumber. "... He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Psalm 121:3 & 4.

THE MIGHTY WARRIOR

"The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is His name." (Exodus 15:3). "... The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." Psalm 24:8.

THE UNCONQUERABLE WARRIOR

The Almighty God is the Warrior that cannot be conquered by any!
"O Lord, God You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against You!" 2 Chronicles 20:6 (NLT).

UNQUESTIONABLE

God does as He pleases, and no one can question Him; He is answerable to none! "Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places." Psalm 135:6.

"... He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"" Daniel 4:35.

However, because the Almighty God is holy, just, loving, kind, and merciful, He is fair in all His dealings with us. "As for the Almighty, ... He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice; He does not oppress." Job 37:23.

UNFATHOMABLE

God is infinite; therefore, it is impossible to find out all about Him. The Bible says, "... His understanding is unsearchable." (Isaiah 40:28). The more we know about God, the more there is to find out about Him; and the search continues!

"Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." Job 11:7-9.

UNCHANGABLE

God does not change, and cannot be changed by any. He is forever the same in all His attributes; in His power, wisdom, ways, understanding, justice etc. He is constantly who He is; He does not diminish, neither does He need to improve! He says: "... I am the Lord, I do not change...." Malachi 3:6a.

INCOMPARABLE

God cannot be compared to any; there is none like Him. The Bible says: "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Exodus 15:11.

THE HEALER

The Almighty God has power to heal. He says: "... I am the Lord who heals you." (Exodus 15:26b). God can heal us wholly; physically,

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emotionally and spiritually.

THE CONSUMING FIRE!

As Fire, God has power to burn the "evil garments" of rejections, frustrations, afflictions, stagnations, illnesses; the fetters of guilt, shame, and destructive habits like substance abuse, addictions, self-harm etc.

Also, the Almighty God has power to burn the "spiritual cobwebs" of a sinful lifestyle, hypocrisy, spiritual lukewarmness, and backsliding; if one will turn to Him in true repentance.

As the Consuming Fire, God can bring fiery judgement on a person who keeps toying with sin! Therefore, to avoid seeing this other side of God, one should not take God's goodness for granted through careless living.

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29); and: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 10:31.

THE I AM

"... And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:13-15.

THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Revelation 1:8.

God is the "Beginning and End" of all humans; He is our Beginning in this world, and will be our End in eternity. God had been in existence before all things and humans; and will continue to be in existence after all are no more!

THE ACTS OF GOD

The Almighty God is great; and does wondrous things. *"He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth...." Daniel 6:27.*

There are numerous examples in the Bible of God's miraculous interventions in the affairs of people and nations. God still does

great things now, and will continue to do so forever! Below are some of His wondrous acts:

God parted the red sea (Exodus 14:15-22); delivered Daniel from the lions' den (Daniel 6:1-28); and made the walls of Jericho to fall as the Israelites praised Him (Joshua 6:1-27).

The Almighty God gave a son to Sarah in her post-menopausal age (Genesis 18:1-15; Genesis 21:1-7); and gave children to Hannah in answer to prayers (1 Samuel 1:1-28; 1 Samuel 2:21).

God raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44); son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17); Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42); and fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread, and two pieces of fish (Matthew 14:13-21).

Also, God healed the paralytic man (Mark 2:1-12); blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52); the madman of Gadara (Mark 5:1-20); the woman with the issue of Blood (Mark 5:25-34); Peter's mother-in-law, and many others (Luke 4:38-41).

The Almighty God delivered Peter from prison and death (Acts 12:1-19); judged King Nebuchadnezzar for his pride, by sending him to live in the bush for seven years (Daniel 4:28-33).

Afterwards, Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself before the Almighty God, realised that God is Supreme; also extolled and honoured God. God restored him to the throne. (Daniel 4).

THE GREATEST MIRACLE

The greatest miracle is the miracle of salvation. Rahab was a harlot who chose the living God of Israel above the idols of her land. Thus, she and her family were delivered from destruction. (Joshua 2; & 6:1-23).

Zacchaeus the dishonest tax collector repented from his sinful lifestyle; and promised a fourfold restitution to the people he had defrauded (Luke 19:1-9). God will save the worst of sinners who come to Him in true repentance.

GOD STILL DOES WONDERS

God is still doing wonders, and will continue to be amazing in His deeds forever. He saves souls, answers prayers; and gives all-round healing. He protects, provides, encourages; and delivers from afflictions etc.

These facts should always put our minds at rest; and encourage us to continually put our trust in God. *"For with God nothing [is or ever] shall be impossible."* Luke 1:37 (AMP).

FACING DIFFICULT TIMES?

Perhaps you are struggling with anxiety, depression, and rejection; and you feel worthless, helpless, and hopeless? There is help for you in God; for *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."* Psalm 46:1 (NLT).

GOD IS ENOUGH

The Almighty God is limitless in His ability to help; He is enough for you in life and eternity. Therefore, commit your challenges to Him in prayers. He is:

"... able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21.

WHAT THEN?

All humans should stand in awe of this great God; and have absolute and unshaken trust in Him. In reverence for Him, and appreciation of His loving kindness to us, we should daily live to please Him till we exit this world!

Please, be reminded that He is our Alpha and Omega. Therefore, when life's journey is over, and the curtain of life is drawn, each of us will meet God as the Omega (or "the End"); to give account of our lives to Him.

"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Hebrews 4:13.

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, ensure that your soul is anchored in Christ through the new birth. Then live in obedience to God till the end of your earthly sojourn.

Thus, you will enjoy Christ's abundant life and a sound mental health on earth; and gain eternal life at last!

2

The Tripartite Creation

INTRODUCTION

As earlier mentioned, God created human beings in His Own image. He created male and female; and each human being consists of three parts viz: body, soul and spirit.

A person is not only the physical body which we can see and touch; the other components are the soul and the spirit; and these are invisible. The body houses the soul and the spirit.

The Bible talks about the body and the soul in the Book of Matthew: *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28.*

Also, in one of the Epistles, we were told about the spirit, soul, and body:

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

In the light of the above Bible verses, we can safely say that the Holy Bible confirms that a human being consists of the spirit, soul, and body.

THE SUSTENANCE OF MANKIND

The Almighty God has made provisions for how mankind can be sustained on life's path. He stipulates in the Holy Bible how we

can cope with the demands of life during our sojourn on earth.

The needs of the spirit, soul, and body must be met for mankind to have all-round good health. Our spiritual need is met through embracing God's salvation gift through Jesus Christ; and living holy till the end of one's life.

Our emotional needs are met through living by God's Word; and trusting Him with all our needs and challenges. Obedience to God is also very crucial to our physical health; in addition to eating balanced diet, having adequate rest etc.

JESUS CHRIST'S THERAPY (JCT)

As mentioned in the prologue, Jesus Christ's therapy is a highly effective tool in combatting mental ill-health; and all other challenges of life. JCT meets the total needs of mankind; that of the spirit, soul, and body.

JCT is comparable to a total uprooting of the tree of mental ill-health; rather than cutting off its branches. JCT brings total restoration; thus enabling people to live a fulfilling and productive life, despite life's challenges.

Therefore, to effectively combat mental ill-health, it is essential to meet man's complete needs; that is, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Again, this is the perspective of this Book.

CONCLUSION

My dearly beloved reader, if you want to have a fulfilling life despite life's challenges, quickly embrace God's salvation gift through Jesus Christ; more so for your eternal welfare. Then, continue in obedience to God till the end.

3

God Loves You

INTRODUCTION

The Almighty God greatly loves mankind, whom He took great efforts to create. "... for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works..." (Psalm 139:14). God placed us in dominion over all other creations.

"Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1:28.

GOD'S CARE FOR MANKIND

We see God's care for mankind through nature. He created different types of crops, fishes, birds, and animals for our use. He provides water for us to drink, cook, and do our cleanings; also supplies rains to make our plants grow.

He created the trees through which we have oxygen to breathe; and this is free! This should fill us with limitless gratitude to God. If air were to be bought like fuel, can you imagine the huge bill we would have to regularly pay?

God created a beautiful environment for us to enjoy; the trees, green grasses and beautiful flowers that adorn our surroundings; the rivers, waterfalls, mountains, and valleys; the singing birds, multi-coloured butterflies etc.

He created all we need for sustenance even before we came into existence; there is no afterthought in all of creation. What mankind does is to harness things from nature as raw materials to

manufacture other needs of man.

GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR YOU

Our caring God wants to connect with each of us along life's path. This is to help us navigate this very complex and wide world; so that at the end of life's journey, one will be able to enjoy with Him in eternity.

However, due to the fallen nature of humans, there is a barrier between mankind and God. Thus, Jesus Christ came to reconcile people with God; and to redeem from sin and its deadly consequences.

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:10.

PROPHECIES ABOUT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

It has been prophesied before the birth of Jesus Christ that He will be born. "... Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14b.

This means the birth of Jesus Christ was not accidental; it was something that the Sovereign God has planned to happen. (See also Isaiah 9:6-7). It did happen; and Jesus Christ was born for the salvation of all mankind.

GOD'S GREAT GIFT TO YOU

The Almighty God showed His great love for you (and all mankind) by providing the unique gift of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He was sent by God for the salvation of mankind.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:16-17.

Jesus Christ died on the cross, was buried; and rose from the dead. *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit," 1 Peter 3:18.*

After Christ's resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and some others; then ascended into Heaven. *"So then, after the Lord had*

spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." Mark 16:19.

JESUS CHRIST IS COMING AGAIN!

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up... two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "... This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Acts 1:10-11.

Jesus Christ is coming back with His reward; He says: *"... behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." Revelation 22:12.*

WHAT THEN?

In appreciation of God's great love for mankind, individuals should ensure one has a living relationship with this loving God through the new birth.

This means having a true repentance from sin; then to receive Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour, and afterwards live holy till the end of one's earthly sojourn. Thus, one will maximally enjoy God's loving care, a fulfilling life, plus a robust mental health in this world; and in the end, eternal life.

CONCLUSION

It is a great privilege to be loved by God, and so wonderfully provided for; also to have a relationship with Him. We ought to be continually grateful to God, and daily live to please Him; for we were created, and are existing to give Him pleasure. The Bible says:

"Thou art worthy, O LORD, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Revelation 4:11 (KJV).

4

The Fatherhood of God

INTRODUCTION

When a person is born again; that is, truly repents from sin, receives Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour; God gives you the privilege and power to be His child. The Bible says:

"... as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." 1 John 3:1.

GOD'S PRINCES AND PRINCESSES

You are a child of King God Almighty. *"For God is the King of all the earth...."* (Psalm 47:7a). Therefore, you are Royalty; a member of God's Royal Family; a Prince or Princess of the King of all kings.

The Almighty God now doubles as your King and Father. The king of a town or country is king to all; but king and father to his children. There are special privileges for children; so, you are special to God; courtesy Jesus Christ.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26); and of course, daughters too.

ABOUT FATHERHOOD

A father is to train, and provide for the upkeep of his children; be a good example to them; spend time with them, lovingly correct them; be interested in their all-round progress; and cheer them to greater achievements in life.

The reality is that not all earthly fathers fulfil their roles; and maybe your father is/was one of such. I am glad to tell you that God is a responsible loving Father; and One who is ever alive to always be there for us on life's path.

Perhaps you do not even know your father; maybe your mother didn't tell you, or doesn't even know who fathered you; or he denied your paternity etc. These may be expected to be embarrassing, and emotionally distressing.

However, be assured that God can heal your wound, fill the void in your life; and make you whole, if you make Him your Father through the new birth. *"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."* Psalm 147:3.

When God is your Father, He brings all-round newness into your life. He can provide you a father figure who will truly love, accept, and mentor you; also, Christian brothers and sisters for a value-adding Christian family interaction.

GOD'S FATHERHOOD

This is used here to mean how God relates with those who have become His children through the new birth. God's children are expected to abide under His Fatherly authority, by daily living in obedience to Him till the end.

It is very exciting to have the Almighty God as one's Father; the Father who never dies, and whose Kingship does not end. He is a good Father; for His thoughts towards us are good!

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11.

God is the Father who is infinitely powerful, Selfless, wise, faithful, responsible, merciful, caring, kind, loving, just; and genuinely interested in us. This should always put our minds at rest; that we are in safe Hands with God.

OUR LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER

Our loving Heavenly Father is very mindful of us, and ever ready to help us. *"For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'fear not, I will help you.'" Isaiah 41:13.*

God wants to provide for our needs, longs to spend time with us; to bless us, and cheer us to greater achievements in life. He jealously guards over us, as His eyes are always on us; therefore, He can never forget us.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me." Isaiah 49:15-16.

Our loving Almighty Father wants to guide and nurture us in godliness; to make us worthy of eternal rest with Him. He says: *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye." Psalm 32:8.*

Also, God wants to lovingly correct us when we err. This is for our own good; in time, and eternity. *"For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights." Proverbs 3:12.*

Therefore, it is in our best interest to obey God's loving discipline and instruction. The Bible says:

"... have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, 'My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those He loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.' God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. Hebrews 12:5-10 (NLT).

A positive response to God's discipline leads to godliness, God's peace, good mental health; and heaven at last. *"No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." Hebrews 12:11 (NLT).*

THE BENEFITS OF GOD'S FATHERHOOD

As earlier mentioned, a Christian is a child of God; courtesy Jesus Christ (John 1:12). Having been born into God's Royal Family, you have all the privileges of the Prince or Princess of His

Eternal Royal Majesty, King God Almighty.

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom." Psalm 45:6.

As God's Prince or Princess, you have access to Christ's abundant life; with the attendant power to live a righteous life. Thus, you enjoy Christ's peace which is crucial to a good mental health.

Jesus Christ says: *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you...."* (John 14:27a). Also, *"... God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* 2 Timothy 1:7.

The Fatherhood of God gives us the privilege of access to His Royal Presence; His help, guidance, loving discipline, power, protection, provision, deliverance, support, favour, peace, and grace for the race; to make heaven at last.

WHAT THEN?

As God's children, what then should be our individual attitude to such a very caring, responsible, and awe-inspiring Father? We should always be grateful to Him; and daily live in a way that will make Him happy with us.

"As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." 1 Peter 1:13-16.

Therefore, *"... be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen."* 2 Peter 3:14-18.

PLEASE, HEAR THIS

The fact that you have God as your Father does not mean you cannot have challenges. Our Lord Jesus Christ says: *"... In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* John 16:33b.

Therefore, do not be surprised, afraid, or discouraged when you are faced with challenges. You can be assured of victory because of Whose child you are; a Prince or Princess of the King of all the earth. Our Father says:

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you." Isaiah 43:2.

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, be assured that you have a loving Father who always has your back. This should constantly put your mind at rest; thus, your mental health is sustained.

Also, ensure that you constantly live holy till the end. Thus, you can be assured of spending eternity with this our great and loving Heavenly Father.

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure... for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:10-11.

5

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God; He is a Spiritual Being, and not a thing. Therefore, phrases like "He", "Him" are used to refer to the Holy Spirit; and not "it". He has been in existence before the beginning; and was there at creation.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Genesis 1:1-2.

Also, our Lord Jesus Christ was there at creation. He is the Word that was with God, same with God, and which became flesh; and dwelt among mankind as the only begotten Son of God. All things were made through Him; and by Him.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:1-3; 14.

In view of the above, God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are One; and the Creator of all things in Heaven and on earth. As One with God, the Holy Spirit is Immortal, Holy, Compassionate, Almighty, All-knowing, All-seeing etc.

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit works in the lives of both the Christian, and the unsaved. He is the Helper to the Christian; and the One who convicts the unsaved of sin.

To the Christian

The Holy Spirit lives in all who are truly born again. He is the Helper; to empower Christians to study, understand, and obey the Bible; and to preach the Gospel. The unsaved cannot, and do not have the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ says: "... I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." John 14:16-17.

To the Unsaved

The Holy Spirit's work in the life of the unsaved is to convict them of their sins, bring them to genuine repentance and Salvation: "... when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." John 16:8.

Therefore, if you are not yet saved, please, quickly respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction; truly repent from your sins, and give your life to Jesus Christ now before it is too late. Then the Holy Spirit can indwell you as your Helper.

THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

As earlier mentioned, the Holy Spirit is not a thing; He is a Spiritual Being. He can guide (John 16:13); teach (John 14:26); intercede (Romans 8:26); and can be grieved through sin (Ephesians 4:30) etc.

The Holy Spirit helps Christians to live holy; gives joy and peace; thus boosting one's mental health. "*For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" Romans 14:17.

Also, the Holy Spirit gives hope. "*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" Romans 15:13.

In view of the above, the Holy Spirit keeps one calm, joyful, and

hopeful during tough times; thus protecting us from emotional collapse and disorders. Some symbols are used to describe the Holy Spirit in the Bible; some of these are:

DOVE

The Dove is a very gentle and sympathetic bird. The Holy Spirit is gentle, caring, and compassionate. He gently leads us on life's path, convicts us when we err; and encourages us as the need arises.

"When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him." Matthew 3:16.

OIL

Oil represents the anointing; and is used for consecration, healing, and the breaking of yokes. This includes the yoke of sin, sickness, afflictions, frustrations, heaviness of heart etc.

The Holy Spirit has power to heal, break all satanic yokes, and set people free to enjoy Christ's abundant life. He can also empower Christians to preach the Gospel, and do great exploits for God. It is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound to comfort all who mourn ... to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." Isaiah 61:1-3.

This means that the Holy Spirit can comfort the distressed; deliver from discouragement, depression, hopelessness, fear, and confusion. He also gives joy, and a heart of praise; and thus enhances one's mental health.

WATER

Water is essential to life; humans, plants, and animals need water to survive. Water is used for drinking, cleaning, washing, irrigation; and for generating hydro-electric power etc.

"... Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him

come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive...." John 7:37-39.

As water is essential to physical life, the Holy Spirit is indispensable to spiritual life. The Holy Spirit is the "Power Source" for Christians; He supplies the needed grace to run the Christian race.

He satisfies our "thirst"; gives us spiritual refreshing, and all-round fulfilment in the wilderness of this world. He cleanses us through the Word, helps us to live holy; and do exploits for God.

As water brings about growth, freshness, and fruitfulness to plants, the Holy Spirit helps us to grow in Christ, brings freshness to our lives; and makes us fruitful for Christ. He is our constant Source of refreshing and growth.

WIND

"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Acts 2:1-2.

When the wind blows, energy is generated; also, changes are produced. Energy is synonymous with strength or power; and so changes take place.

When the Holy Spirit moves, He supplies Christians the needed power and ability to be physically and mentally active. Thus one is equipped to cope with daily tasks; and be sustained in a balanced mental health.

Also, the Holy Spirit strengthens spiritually; thus using Christians to do what is supernatural. He empowers to do great exploits for God in soul-winning and discipleship; and in healings and deliverances from satanic afflictions!

The Holy Spirit changes people's lives by setting them free from the power of sin and guilt. Also from shame, self-hatred, self-rejection, self-harm, self-destructive habits; depression, legalism; anxiety, people pleasing traits etc.

FIRE

Fire refines by burning off impurities from metals; softens iron,

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and makes it bendable; provides warmth; wards off intruders; cooks food, and makes it palatable and digestible; melts hard substances etc.

"Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:3-4.

As Fire, the Holy Spirit softens the Christian's heart to make it tender, and Christ-like; also burns off the "impurities" of one's heart, so that like raw gold that passed through fire, one comes out more refined, and shining for Christ.

He shows affection to us, thus providing us with emotional support and encouragement; wards off "spiritual intruders"; helps us to understand and "digest" God's Word for our spiritual growth.

The Holy Spirit can also melt hardened hearts; and bring sinners to genuine repentance and salvation.

THE WONDERFUL HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit indwells all who are truly born again, and daily living in obedience to God. He strengthens them to live for God, and to have resilience during life's challenges; thereby helping to sustain their mental health.

Those who are not yet born again do not have the Holy Spirit. They can be compared to a toddler left alone in a shopping mall, or an Airport; amid unfamiliar faces! The child will be fearful, tearful, and confused; except such receives prompt help.

This means that a person without the Holy Spirit is exposed to fears, tears, and confusion. These jeopardize one's mental health, except one promptly seeks God's help; starting with the new birth, and then a life of obedience to God.

WHAT THEN?

In view of all the above, we all need the help of the Holy Spirit on life's path. You need His help; either to convict you of sin unto salvation, if you are not yet born again; or to help you in the Christian race, if you are already born again.

If you are already born again, abide in obedience to God till the end. If you are not yet born again, quickly repent, and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour; not only to have resilience during challenges, but mainly because of your eternal welfare.

Perhaps you have been born again, but you are not living right; maybe you are backslidden, living in hypocrisy; or neither cold nor hot for Christ. Any of these is very risky; as it grieves the Holy Spirit, and limits His influence in your life.

The Bible says: "... do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Ephesians 4:30);

"Do not quench the Spirit." 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

The Holy Spirit is very gentle, so He will not force Himself on you; but will draw your attention to your sins. He wants you to repent from such, and thereby renew your relationship with Him; so you can live a victorious life.

If you heed the Holy Spirit's conviction, God will forgive and restore you; disregarding Him is dangerous! He may take His leave, whether in the short or long run; this makes you vulnerable like the toddler left alone in the mall.

CONCLUSION

It is wise to ensure you are connected to the Holy Spirit (through salvation, or restoration to Christ). This saves you from being spiritually stranded, and emotionally vulnerable; thus risking your mental health, and eternal welfare.

As you remain connected to Him, you experience His joy; even during life's challenges. *"So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you..."* 1 Thessalonians 1:6 (NLT).

All the above gives you a balanced mental health; equips you to fulfil God's purpose for your life; and to live life to the fullest through Jesus Christ. As you live in obedience to God till the end, you will make heaven at last.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." 2 Corinthians 13:14.

6

What is Mental Health?

INTRODUCTION

Mental health has been defined as: “A state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life.”³

“Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.”⁴

A SOUND MENTAL HEALTH

According to Mental Health Foundation, “Good mental health is not simply the absence of diagnosable mental health problems, although good mental health is likely to help protect against development of many such problems.

Good mental health is characterised by a person’s ability to fulfil a number of key functions and activities, including:

- the ability to learn.
- the ability to feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions.
- the ability to form and maintain good relationships with others.

- the ability to cope with and manage change and uncertainty.”⁵

Therefore, having a good mental health does not mean the absence of life’s challenges. It rather means that one can cope productively with life’s stresses and the demands of everyday life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND MENTAL HEALTH

The state of your mental health determines the quality of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. It influences your relationships, physical health; and your ability to cope with challenges. “Positive mental health allows people to:

- Realize their full potential
- Cope with the stresses of life
- Work productively
- Make meaningful contributions to their community.”⁶

THE BENEFITS OF SOUND MENTAL HEALTH

When you have a sound mental health, you are equipped to cope with life’s stresses and demands. Thus you are shielded from stress-related symptoms like confusion, depression, anxiety, fear, anger, eating disorders, self-harm etc.

You are also free from stress-related complications like hypertension, stroke, heart attack, and financial difficulties etc. Some of its other benefits are:

- Reduced anxiety level; and improved energy.
- A balanced and positive mood.
- Clarity of thoughts; and enhanced creativity.
- Self-acceptance and balanced Self-esteem
- Greater emotional balance and calmness.
- Healthy and value-adding social interactions.
- High productivity at work, or School.
- Achievement of life’s goals.
- Increased enjoyment of life; and personal fulfilment.

CONCLUSION

A sound mental health is vital to our well-being; so, we need to be intentional about staying mentally healthy. Therefore, as you journey on life’s path, always seek to maintain, or be restored to good mental health.

7

Signs of Mental Health Risk

INTRODUCTION

As the saying goes “A stitch in time saves nine”; this Chapter aims at discussing the early signs of the onset of a mental health disorder. This is to enable it to be cut in the bud through timely professional intervention and God’s help.

A breakdown in a person’s mental health doesn’t just happen; it is a gradual process with signs of its impending approach. Perhaps, these were ignored; or were thought not to be serious enough for action.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

“There is no physical test or scan that reliably indicates whether a person has developed a mental illness. However, people should look out for the following as possible signs of a mental health disorder:

- Withdrawing from friends, family, and colleagues.
- Avoiding activities that they would normally enjoy.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Eating too much or too little.
- Feeling hopeless.
- Having consistently low energy.
- Using mood-altering substances, including alcohol and

- nicotine, more frequently.
- Displaying negative emotions.
- Being confused.
- Being unable to complete daily tasks, such as getting to work or cooking a meal.
- Having persistent thoughts or memories that reappear regularly.
- Thinking of causing physical harm to themselves or others.
- Hearing voices
- Experiencing delusions.”⁷

ADDITIONAL WARNING SIGNS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Feeling numb or like nothing matters.
- Having unexplained aches and pains.
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared.
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends.
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships.⁸

A STITCH IN TIME

If you are experiencing any of the above signs, quickly seek help! You can talk to a Mental Health Professional. You can confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian for the needed counsel; plus prayerful and emotional supports.

CONCLUSION

When the warning signs of impending mental disorders are quickly addressed, people will be restored to sound mental health. Thus, they are enabled to live productive and fulfilling lives.

8

What is Mental ill-health?

INTRODUCTION

Mental ill-health is "... a wide range of mental health conditions - disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behaviour. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviours."⁹

According to the World Health Organisation, "One in four people in the world will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Around 450 million people currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide."¹⁰

THE NATURE OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

"Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function.

A mental illness can make you miserable and can cause problems in your daily life, such as at school or work or in relationships...."¹¹

The incidence of mental ill-health cuts across age, sex, socio-economic class, race, religion, and profession. Mental ill-health can affect the young or old; male or female; rich or poor; skilled, semi-skilled, or the unskilled.

It can begin at any age; from childhood, teenagehood, or later in adulthood. Mental ill-health does affect one's emotions, thoughts

and behaviours; and this can be temporary, or long lasting.

Also, a person can have more than one type of mental ill-health at the same time. Somebody may have an eating disorder like bulimia, and still struggle with self-harm, or drug-addiction etc.

CAUSES OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

There are many factors responsible for mental ill-health, depending on the type and circumstances. Some of the causes of mental ill-health includes stress, abuse, biological, or environmental factors.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

These refer to the traits indicating the presence of a mental health disorder (s). These can vary depending on the type of disorder; and below are some general symptoms associated with mental ill-health:

- Feeling of sadness.
- Confused thinking, or reduced ability to concentrate.
- Excessive fears or worries; or extreme feelings of guilt.
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows.
- Withdrawal from friends and activities.
- Excessive anger; becoming hostile or violent.
- Significant tiredness, or low energy.
- Inability to cope with daily tasks and life's challenges.
- Eating problems; either too much, or too little.
- Sleeping problems; either too much, or too little.
- Losing touch with reality: delusions, hallucinations; and paranoia; that is, showing unjustifiable distrust or suspicion towards people, or their actions.
- Alcoholism, addictions, and drug abuse.
- Suicidal thinking, or attempt etc.

There are times that the symptoms of mental ill-health can appear as physical ailments like stomach-aches, backaches, headaches; or other unexplainable aches and pains.

TYPES OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

There are diverse types of mental health disorders that we cannot possibly cover them within the scope of this book. Therefore, it shall be briefly discussed under the generalised headings below:

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1. DEPRESSION

"Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Also called major depressive disorder or clinical depression, it affects how you feel, think and behave; and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. You may have trouble doing normal day-to-day activities, and sometimes you may feel as if life isn't worth living."¹²

Some of the causes of depression are stress, job loss, bereavement, divorce, abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional); serious medical ill-health, genetics, social isolation, and financial difficulties.

Also, depression can arise from good events like starting a new job, newly getting married, or relocating to a new place. A mother can be depressed after having a baby; this is called post-partum depression.

Depression can be caused by a combination of factors. Its symptoms include sadness, confusion, fatigue, moving or talking slowly; restlessness or agitations, forgetfulness, decreased energy, anxiety, and mood swings.

Also, feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, or worthlessness; unexplainable headaches, cramps, or digestive problems; insomnia, hypersomnia, bulimia, anorexia, self-harm, thoughts of death; suicidal thoughts or attempts etc.

A person who is depressed may experience a few of the above symptoms; while some may experience many.

2. ANXIETY DISORDER

This is "... a common mental illness defined by feelings of uneasiness, worry and fear. While anxiety occurs for everyone sometimes, a person with an anxiety disorder feels an inappropriate amount of anxiety more often than is reasonable."¹³

A person may sometimes be faced with anxiety; for example before a job interview, or writing an examination; but having an anxiety disorder is much more than any of these.

Anxiety disorder is persistent, and can get worse over time. It can also cause interference with a person's daily activities like job performance, schoolwork, and relationships.

There are many types of anxiety disorders; here are the five ma-

major types: Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder, (or social phobia); and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

Some symptoms of anxiety disorders are restlessness, fatigue, muscle tension, insomnia, being irritable, difficulty in concentrating; and inability to control being worried.

3. SCHIZOPHRENIA

"Schizophrenia is a serious mental disorder in which people interpret reality abnormally. Schizophrenia may result in some combination of hallucinations, delusions, and extremely disordered thinking and behaviour that impairs daily functioning, and can be disabling.... Schizophrenia involves a range of problems with thinking (cognition), behaviour or emotions."¹⁴

The exact cause of schizophrenia is not known. However, researchers believe that "a combination of genetics, brain chemistry, and environment contribute to the development of the disorder."¹⁵

Its symptoms are delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech as a result of disorganised thinking; extremely disorganized or abnormal motor behaviour; suicidal thoughts or attempts; little or no ability to function normally, in which:

"the person may neglect personal hygiene, or appear to lack emotion (doesn't make eye contact, doesn't change facial expressions, or speaks in a monotone). Also, the person may have lost interest in everyday activities; may socially withdraw, or lack the ability to experience pleasure."¹⁶

4. EATING DISORDERS

"Eating disorders are serious medical illnesses marked by severe disturbances to a person's eating behaviours. Obsessions with food, body weight, and shape may be signs of an eating disorder. These disorders can affect a person's physical and mental health; in some cases, they can be life-threatening...."¹⁷

"There is a commonly held misconception that eating disorders are a lifestyle choice. Eating disorders are actually serious and often fatal illnesses that are associated with severe disturbances in people's eating behaviours and related thoughts and emotions...."¹⁸

“Eating disorders can affect people of all ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, body weights, and genders. Although eating disorders often appear during the teen years or young adulthood, they may also develop during childhood or later in life (40 years and older).

Remember: People with eating disorders may appear healthy, yet be extremely ill. The exact cause of eating disorders is not fully understood, but research suggests a combination of genetic, biological, behavioural, psychological, and social factors can raise a person’s risk.”¹⁹

“Eating disorders affect several million people at any given time, most often women between the ages of 12 and 35. There are three main types of eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder.”²⁰

Anorexia nervosa

“Anorexia Nervosa is an eating disorder manifested when a person refuses to eat an adequate amount of food or is unable to maintain the minimal weight for a person’s body mass index.”²¹

“Anorexia nervosa is diagnosed when patients weigh at least 15 percent less than the normal healthy weight expected for their height. Hallmarks of anorexia include:

- Limited food intake.
- Fear of being “fat”.
- Problems with body image; or denial of low body weight.

People with anorexia nervosa don’t maintain a normal weight because they refuse to eat enough, often exercise obsessively, and sometimes force themselves to vomit or use laxatives to lose weight. Over time, the following symptoms may develop as the body goes into starvation:

- Menstrual periods cease.
- Osteopenia or osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) through loss of calcium.
- Hair/nails become brittle.
- Skin dries and can take on a yellowish cast.
- Mild anaemia; and muscles, including the heart muscle, waste away.
- Severe constipation.
- Drop in blood pressure, slowed breathing and pulse rates.

- Internal body temperature falls, causing person to feel cold all the time.
- Depression and lethargy."²²

Some of the other symptoms identified by the American National Institute of Mental Health are:

- Growth of fine hair all over the body (lanugo).
- Damage to the structure and function of the heart.
- Brain damage.
- Multiorgan failure.
- Sluggishness, or feeling tired all the time.
- Infertility."²³

"Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any mental disorder.... many people with this disorder die from complications associated with starvation, others die of suicide."²⁴

Bulimia nervosa

"People with bulimia nervosa have recurrent and frequent episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food and feeling a lack of control over these episodes.... followed by behaviour that compensates for the overeating such as forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise, or a combination of these behaviours.... Symptoms include:

- Chronically inflamed and sore throat
- Swollen salivary glands in the neck and jaw area
- Worn tooth enamel, and increasingly sensitive and decaying teeth as a result of exposure to stomach acid.
- Acid reflux disorder and other gastrointestinal problems
- Intestinal distress and irritation from laxative abuse.
- Severe dehydration from purging of fluids.
- Electrolyte imbalance (too low or too high levels of sodium, calcium, potassium, and other minerals) which can lead to stroke or heart attack."²⁵

Binge eating disorder

"A person with binge-eating disorder lose control over his or her eating. Unlike bulimia nervosa, periods of binge-eating are not followed by purging, excessive exercise, or fasting.... people with binge-eating disorder often are overweight or obese. Symptoms include:

- Eating unusually large amounts of food in a specific amount of

time, such as a 2-hour period.

- Eating even when you're full or not hungry.
- Eating fast during binge episodes.
- Eating until you're uncomfortably full.
- Eating alone or in secret to avoid embarrassment.
- Feeling distressed, ashamed, or guilty about your eating.
- Frequently dieting, possibly without weight loss."²⁶

Additional Information

According to an article titled "What Are Eating Disorders?"; on the page of the American Psychiatry Association, and medically reviewed by Ranna Parekh, M.D., M.P.H. in January 2017:

"In many cases, eating disorders occur together with other psychiatric disorders like anxiety, panic, obsessive compulsive disorder and alcohol and drug abuse problems.... Without treatment of both the emotional and physical symptoms of these disorders, malnutrition, heart problems and other potentially fatal conditions can result.

However, with proper medical care, those with eating disorders can resume suitable eating habits, and return to better emotional and psychological health.

".... Because of the serious physical problems caused by these illnesses, it is important that any treatment plan for a person with anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa or binge eating disorder include general medical care, nutritional management and nutritional counselling. These measures begin to rebuild physical well-being and healthy eating practices."²⁷

5. ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOURS

"The compulsion to continually engage in an activity or behaviour despite the negative impact on the person's ability to remain mentally and/or physically healthy and functional in the home and community....

The person may find the behaviour rewarding psychologically or get a "high" while engaged in the activity but may later feel guilt, remorse, or even overwhelmed by the consequences of that continued choice."²⁸

Below are some of the major types of Behavioural Addictions:

- Gambling Addiction (Compulsive Gambling Disorder).

- Porn and Sex Addiction (Compulsive Sexual Behaviour Disorder).
- Food Addiction (Compulsive Eating Disorder; or Binge Eating Disorder).
- Shopping or Buying Addiction (Compulsive Spending Disorder).
- Drug Addiction (Substance Use Disorder).
- Internet Addiction.
- Video Game Addiction.

People with behavioural addictions feel compelled to do what they are addicted to. They find it difficult to stop if they want to; or even when they know it's wrong, and that it will lead to negative consequences.

Some may hide the addictive activity from their friends and family members. Others may deny that they have an addiction; or refuse to admit that it is having a bad effect on them.

Behavioural addiction can become obsessive. The person may choose to engage in the behaviour rather than work, spend time with family, or engage in other activities that were once enjoyed; thus harming their relationships.

The people struggling with addictive behaviours may experience depression, guilt, shame, low self-esteem; and a sense of feeling trapped. The other consequences are school absenteeism; problems at work, or maintaining a job.

Also, financial problems; debt, bankruptcy, crime, legal issues; health challenge; divorce, imprisonment, homelessness; obesity in the case of people with food addiction; overdose and death as per people with drug addiction.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

Mental health disorders are physically, emotionally, and financially tasking and devastating! If you are struggling with any of the above-mentioned disorders, please, quickly seek help from a Mental Health Professional.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, please, quickly seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area; or confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian.

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THERE IS HELP IN GOD

I also want you to know that there is help for you in the Almighty God. He is our Creator, and has solutions for all of life's problems. He is "... *an ever-present help in times of trouble.*" Psalm 46:1 (GW).

God wants us to be happy, fulfilled; and enjoy all-round health. It is written: "*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*" 3 John 1:2.

The Bible says, "*He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*" (Psalm 107:20). God's Word is backed by His power and faithfulness; and can heal from all forms of disorders if you have faith.

The Almighty God says, "... *I am the Lord, who heals you.*" Exodus 15:26 (GW). If you are experiencing any mental health disorder, be assured that there is help in God. "*For with God nothing will be impossible.*" Luke 1:37.

CONCLUSION

Please, ensure that your life is anchored in Christ through the new birth; and afterwards live in obedience to God till the end. These give you a fulfilling life, sustain your mental health; and guarantee your eternal rest.

9

Myths about Mental ill-health

INTRODUCTION

Mental ill-health refers to "... health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work, or family activities...."²⁹

MISCONCEPTIONS OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

There are many misconceptions of mental ill-health. This chapter aims at addressing these myths, by presenting their correct perspective; thus equipping people to handle them appropriately. Some of these myths are:

(1). The belief that struggling with a mental health disorder is synonymous with suffering from psychosis; and therefore, such people are on the streets, or in mental hospitals.

Psychosis is a severe mental illness that negatively affects a person's character. It is not synonymous with mental ill-health; but one of the different types of it. Some of the others are anxiety, depression, dementia, schizophrenia etc.

(2). The notion that all people suffering from depression are suicidal.

The truth is, not all people with depression do attempt, or commit suicide. However, it is true that people with depression have a higher risk of suicide; and may commit suicide if they do not have emotional and prayerful supports.

Please, if you are feeling suicidal, quickly seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention hotline in your area; or talk to a mental health Professional, or a genuine Pastor or Christian; please, just do not keep quiet!

(3). Another myth is that children and youths do not experience mental ill-health; that whatever challenges they have are part of the normal processes of growing up.

The fact is, there are children and youths going through mental ill-health. It has been reported that some mental health disorders experienced in adulthood began during the childhood or adolescent years.

(4). The belief that people having mental ill-health are inferior to other people; and therefore do not deserve equal treatment with other members of the society.

The person going through mental ill-health is just like any other person with medical illness like flu, pneumonia, asthma, diabetes etc. Therefore, people with mental ill-health are not inferior to others.

(5). People struggling with depression are emotionally weak.

In life, things do happen; and anybody can be weighed down by life's challenges. If someone having headache or diabetes is not termed weak, then, a person struggling with depression ought not be labelled as weak.

(6). Depression is just having the blues; therefore, cheer up!

Depression is more than just been sad or unhappy. It is deeper, heavier and persistent. It alters one's mood, thoughts and behaviour; so, it's not just something a person can easily shrug off without intervention.

(7). Mental illness happens to the poor; or people with low intelligence.

Mental ill-health cases cut across socio-economic class, age, sex, profession; and levels of intelligent quotient. However, a disorder like dementia can make people have memory loss; communication, or social interaction problems; thus making them seem cognitively challenged.

(8). Another myth about mental ill-health is that people struggling with self-harm are merely seeking attention.

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Self-harm or self-injury "... is the act of deliberately harming your own body, such as cutting or burning yourself. It's typically not meant as a suicide attempt. Rather, this type of self-injury is a harmful way to cope with emotional pain, intense anger and frustration."³⁰

This means that there are underlying problems that led to self-harm; and not necessarily for attention seeking. Some people adopt self-harm to cope with emotional stress, and the attendant pains.

(9). The wrong belief that a person who have had a mental ill-health can never recover.

People can, and do recover from mental ill-health through strategies that meet man's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. The new birth opens you to Christ's abundant life; thus safeguarding your all-round health.

CONCLUSION

Mental ill-health is not the end of the road for a person; healing and recovery are possible through God. Therefore, let us be empathetic, and supportive of people with disorders; and encourage them to seek help. Christians are to:

*"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."
Galatians 6:2.*



10

About Stress Disorders

INTRODUCTION

Stress is “a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stresses can be external (from the environment, psychological, or social situations) or internal (illness, or from a medical procedure).”³¹

The challenges of life are the major sources of stress. Scientific researchers have found stress to be detrimental to people’s wellness; and this includes one’s mental health.

“Diseases whose development has been linked to both stress and inflammation include cardiovascular dysfunctions³², diabetes, cancer, autoimmune syndromes³³ and mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorders.” Agnese Mariotti.³⁴

There are different types of stress disorders; three of which are discussed below:

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD has been simply put as “... an anxiety disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events.”³⁵

Also, PTSD has been defined as “... a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault.”³⁶

People can develop PTSD immediately after the traumatic event;

or it can occur weeks, months, or even years later! "PTSD is estimated to affect about 1 in every 3 people who have a traumatic experience...."³⁷

CAUSES OF PTSD

As above-mentioned, PTSD can be caused by distressing events like natural disaster; a serious accident, terrorist act, war; rape or any other violent personal assault.

PTSD can also result from abuse (physical, verbal, emotional, sexual etc); bereavement, job loss, mugging, serious health problems; or any traumatic event. Also, emergency personnel and rescue workers can develop PTSD.

SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

Someone with PTSD often relives the traumatic event through nightmares, flashbacks, and hallucinations. They avoid people, places, things, or memories that remind them of the traumatic experience. People with PTSD may also:

- Experience dizziness, or nausea when remembering the trauma.
- Be in a continual state of high alert.
- Belief that the world is a dangerous place.
- Lose trust in self, or others.
- Have difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Be startled by loud noises.³⁸

PTSD can make people to have mood swing, intense fear, negative thoughts, fits of rage or hatred, emotional flatness; feelings of isolation, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness; and inability to respond to the world around them.

These symptoms are often severe and persistent; and do have great negative impact on the person's day-to-day life; that is, PTSD negatively affects people's normal life and functioning. This negative impact can be lifelong!

In young children, PTSD may result in delays to respond to toilet training, in manifesting fine motor skills, or language development.

ACUTE STRESS DISORDER (ASD)

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Acute stress disorder (ASD) can be developed after experiencing one or more traumatic events; and these can cause significant physical, emotional, or psychological distresses.

CAUSES OF ASD

There are many traumatic events that can lead to ASD, and some of these are; the death of a loved one; threat of death or serious injury; natural disasters; motor vehicle accidents.

Some of the other causes of ASD are financial stress; sexual assault, rape, or domestic abuse; receiving a terminal diagnosis; and surviving a traumatic brain injury.⁴⁰

SYMPTOMS OF ASD

These are like those of PTSD and other stress disorders. A person may experience negative thoughts, sadness, and low mood. Some of the other symptoms are:

- Inability to stop thinking about the trauma. This results in re-visiting the traumatic event through flashbacks, memories, or dreams.
- Altered sense of reality; lack of awareness of one's surroundings; and inability to remember parts of the traumatic event.
- Avoidance symptoms. Somebody having these symptoms avoids thoughts, feelings, people, or places that they associate with the traumatic event.
- Arousal symptoms. These can include insomnia and other sleep disturbances; also having difficulty concentrating; aggression (verbal or physical); tension; and becoming extra-vigilant, or easily startled.

People with ASD may develop other mental health disorders like anxiety and depression. This implies having additional symptoms like excessive worrying, fatigue, restlessness, racing thoughts; and a sense of impending doom!

Also, persistent feelings of hopelessness, sadness, or numbness; crying unexpectedly, loss of interest in activities that were once pleasurable, changes in appetite or body weight; and thoughts of suicide, or self-harm etc.

Unlike PTSD, ASD is a temporary condition, its symptoms typically persist for at least 3 to 30 days after the traumatic event. If

a person experiences symptom for longer than a month, a doctor will usually assess them for PTSD.⁴¹

This means that some people can develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after having Acute Stress Disorder (ASD).

COMPLEX POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (C-PTSD)

"Complex PTSD may be diagnosed in adults or children who have repeatedly experienced traumatic events, such as violence, neglect or abuse."⁴²

"A doctor may diagnose complex PTSD when a person has experienced trauma on an ongoing basis. Most frequently, this trauma involves long-term physical, emotional, or sexual abuse."⁴³

CAUSES OF C-PTSD

The following are some examples of trauma that can result in complex PTSD:

- (i). Childhood neglect, and other types of abuse early in life.
- (ii). Psychological and domestic abuse.
- (iii). Sexual abuse.
- (iv). Sweatshop working situation.
- (v). Human trafficking, kidnapping, and hostage taking.
- (vi). Being a prisoner of war.
- (v). Living in a region affected by war etc.

SYMPTOMS OF C-PTSD

According to Medical News Today, the symptoms of C-PTSD are same with those of PTSD mentioned above; plus the following:

- A negative self-view. Complex PTSD can cause a person to view themselves negatively and feel helpless, guilty, or ashamed. They often consider themselves to be different from other people.
- Changes in beliefs and worldview. They may hold a negative view of the world and the people in it; or lose faith in previously held beliefs.
- Emotional regulation difficulties. These conditions can cause people to lose control over their emotions. They may experience intense anger, or sadness.

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- Relationship issues. Relationships may suffer due to difficulties trusting and interacting; and because of a negative self-view etc.
- Avoiding unpleasant situations by becoming people-pleasers.
- Suicidal thoughts.⁴⁴

In addition to the above-mentioned symptoms, NHS (UK) identified the following symptoms of C-PTSD:

- Periods of losing attention and concentration (dissociation).
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, dizziness, chest pains and stomach aches.
- Cutting yourself off from friends and family.
- Destructive or risky behaviour, such as self-harm, alcohol misuse or drug abuse.⁴⁵

The NHS (UK) went further to state that “Complex PTSD is thought to be more severe if:

- The traumatic events happened early in life.
- The trauma was caused by a parent or carer.
- The person experienced the trauma for a long time.
- The person was alone during the trauma.
- There’s still contact with the person responsible for the trauma.

As it may take years for the symptoms of complex PTSD to be recognised, a child’s development, including their behaviour and self-confidence, can be altered as they get older.

Adults with complex PTSD may lose their trust in people and feel separated from others.⁴⁶

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

Please, if you are experiencing any of the above stress disorders (or any mental health challenge), do not keep quiet. Please, speak out and seek help! You can speak to a Mental Health Professional; and a genuine Pastor or Christian.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, please, quickly seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area; or confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian. Please, do not struggle alone, seek help!

CONCLUSION

Also, I want you to know that there is help for you in the Almighty God, or Creator. He is our "Manufacturer", and can fix anything that is dysfunctional in a person's physical, emotional, or spiritual systems; if we trust Him to do so.

"He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." Psalm 107:20.

Therefore, ensure that you are spiritually connected to God through the new birth, not only to receive healing; rather because of your eternal well-being. After salvation, continue to abide in obedience to God till the end.

Thus, the Holy Spirit constantly supplies you the inner strength to withstand the stresses of life, enjoy sound mental health, and eternal life at last.

11

Mental ill-health's Complications

INTRODUCTION

It is challenging enough for a person to struggle with any form of mental health disorder; it becomes more challenging when left unattended to. This gradually worsens the situation and leads to avoidable complications.

The failure to address a disorder may be due to people's reluctance to share their mental health status. It can also be due to shame, apathy, ignorance about the seriousness of the disorder; or fear of stigmatization etc.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

If you are well-informed about something, you are empowered to handle it. Please, know that neglecting your mental health issues can cause serious physical, behavioural, and emotional problems. Here are some of them:

- Unhappiness; and decreased enjoyment of life.
- Family conflicts.
- Relationship difficulties.
- Social isolation.
- Problems with tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.
- Missed work or school; or other problems related to work or school.
- Legal and financial problems.
- Poverty and homelessness.

- Self-harm; and harm to others, including suicide, or homicide.
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviour.
- Weakened immune system; so one's body has a hard time fighting diseases.
- Heart disease and other medical conditions.⁴⁷

UNTREATED MENTAL ILL-HEALTH

In an article titled "Untreated Mental Illness (Understanding the effects)" written by Joel L. Young (M.D.); and posted on the page of Psychology Today, the author stated that:

"Mental illness makes it difficult to cope with the demands of daily life. Whether it's struggling to get out of bed for work because of depression, or experiencing communication difficulties due to schizophrenia, the longer mental illness is left untreated, the more likely it is to interfere with your ability to do your job and effectively interact with others. This can lead to financial troubles, job loss, and potentially even homelessness."⁴⁸

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

In view of the above submissions by Mayo Clinic and Psychology Today, we can safely deduce the complications that may arise from neglecting each of these different disorders. Here are some of them:

(A). Continuous depression can lead to relationship difficulties, family conflicts, social isolation, school or work-related problems, suicidal thoughts or attempts; substance abuse, addictions; or suicides etc.

The disorder of drug addiction may lead to criminal behaviours, legal and financial problems; and homelessness. Any of these can further complicate the initial problem of drug addiction etc.

(B). Prolonged anxiety disorders can cause relationship difficulties, family conflicts, difficulty coping at school; job-related problems, and maybe job loss; unhappiness, decreased enjoyment of life, suicidal thoughts and behaviour etc.

(C). If "left untreated, schizophrenia can result in severe problems that affect every area of life. Complications that schizophrenia may cause or be associated with include:

- Suicide.
- Suicide attempts, and thoughts of suicide.
- Anxiety disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

- Depression.
- Abuse of alcohol or other drugs, including nicotine.
- Inability to work or attend school.
- Financial problems and homelessness.
- Social isolation.
- Health and medical problems.
- Being victimized.
- Aggressive behaviour....⁴⁹

(D). Some of the complications from eating disorders are self-harm, relationship problems, social isolation; suicidal thoughts, or attempts; or suicide.

Also, people with binge eating disorder are prone to obesity; and its complications include heart diseases, and other medical conditions etc.

(E). When addictive behaviours are left unattended to, they can cause work or school absenteeism, job loss, divorce, debt, bankruptcy, crime, imprisonment, and homelessness.

In the case of people with food addiction, prolonged addictive behaviours can cause obesity, with its attendant heart-related diseases; while people with drug addiction are at a higher risk of drug overdose and death.

CONCLUSION

A mental health disorder may cause other health complications; a person with depression may have insomnia, and subsequently migraine, or other health challenge. A disorder may result in a neglect of an already existing ill-health.

"... chronic mental health issues may cause you to neglect your health, as when a diabetic is too depressed to monitor her blood sugar levels.... Chronic stress is associated with a risk of heart attacks, stroke, obesity, and premature death, and many other symptoms associated with mental illness can also lead to serious health issues."⁵⁰

As the saying goes, "A stitch in time saves nine". A mental health disorder will not go away on its own, except you attend to it; otherwise avoidable complications set in.

Therefore, if you are feeling any symptoms of mental ill-health, do not keep quiet; quickly seek help!



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Going through Mental ill-health?

INTRODUCTION

It is not easy going through any form of mental health disorder; they are physically and emotionally taxing; also, very devastating. However, things sometimes happen, and you find yourself struggling with your mental health.

At such times you may feel helpless, hopeless, worthless, sad, anxious, or confused. The condition may also be taking a negative toll on your finances through the attendant medical bills; thereby compounding your stress level.

Also, society's stigmatization may put an additional strain on your emotions. However, do not allow the challenge to define you; it does not, and should not define you; neither is it the end of the road for you.

SEEK HELP!

Please, do not keep quiet about your mental health challenge; refuse to struggle alone. seek help! This is not a sign of weakness, but of strength; your well-being is more important than the stigma attached to mental ill-health.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

If you are feeling overwhelmed or suicidal; please, seek help immediately! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area, or see a Mental Health Practitioner; or confide in a

genuine Pastor or Christian.

THERE IS HELP IN GOD

Always bear in mind that God did not "design" you to carry your burdens by yourself. God knows you will collapse under its weight if you do; hence, the Bible says: *"Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."* 1 Peter 5:7.

Therefore, refuse to be anxious; neither give in to despair, or self-pity. Be grateful to God for His blessings on you; then commit the challenges to Him in prayers, and thus have His peace in your heart. The Bible says:

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6 - 7 (TLB).

The peace of God in your heart is calming; and *"A calm and peaceful and tranquil heart is life and health to the body...."* Proverbs 14:30 (AMP). This will enhance your mental health.

BE ASSURED OF THIS

God wants you to enjoy all-round health; and this includes sound mental health. *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* 2 Timothy 1:7.

Also, it is written: *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."* 3 John 1:2.

Therefore, as you look up to God for help and healing, you can be sure He will arise to help you. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* Psalm 46:1 (KJV).

CONCLUSION

There is help in God for all of life's challenges. He made us, and all our body parts; so He has power to fix any dysfunctional part, or situations in your life; if you have faith. *"For with God nothing will be impossible."* Luke 1:37.

13

God is Mindful of You

INTRODUCTION

The Almighty God loves you deeply, and wants the best for you in life and eternity. The Bible says, "... *God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*" *Romans 5:8 (TLB).*

Have you received God's salvation Gift through Jesus Christ? If No, quickly repent and give your life to Jesus Christ! If already saved, keep going for Christ till the end. Thus, you will enjoy Christ's abundant life, and the privileges of being a child of the King of kings!

GOD'S THOUGHTS ARE ON YOU

Perhaps you are despised and rejected; or battered, shattered, and you feel worthless? Please, know that God values you, is mindful of you, and will surely help you! "*The Lord has been mindful of us; He will bless us....*" *Psalm 115:12.*

- The Almighty God knows you by name, where you are, and what you are going through; for "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place....*" *Proverbs 15:3a.*
- God jealously watches over you! "*Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*" *Psalm 121:4.*
- You are always in His thoughts; "*Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you.*" *Isaiah 49:15.*

- He has a good plan for you; *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."* Jeremiah 29:11.
- God will heal you; *"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."* Psalm 147:3.
- He will give you victory; *"What then shall we say to all these things? If God is for us, who can be [successful] against us?"* Romans 8:31 (AMP).
- God is your Place of safety!

"The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my Saviour; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety" Psalm 18:2 (NLT).

YOU ARE NOT HOPELESS

God is in control of all things in His universe; including your situation; and will surely help you; as you continually abide in Christ.

"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him..." 2 Chronicles 16:9.

God wants you to have all-round wholeness; to be happy, have peace in the heart, joy in the soul, and strength in the body. *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."* 3 John 1:2.

Therefore, you can always be assured of God's help as you trustingly look up to Him. *"For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty Saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."* Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT).

CONCLUSION

In the light of all the above, whenever you are getting weary and discouraged; look up to our very caring God and Father! *"He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might He increases strength."* Isaiah 40:29.

HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW

1. *Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come?*

Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home?

When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He:

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain: *I sing because I'm happy,*

I sing because I'm free,

For His eye is on the sparrow,

And I know He watches me.

2. *"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,*

And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;

Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

[Refrain]:

3. *Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,*

When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,

I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;

His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

[Refrain]:

Written in 1905 by lyricist Civilla D. Martin and composer Charles H. Gabriel.

14

Applying God's Word for Recovery

INTRODUCTION

The Word of God is used here to mean the Holy Bible. God created and sustains all things by His Word; that is, His Word is powerful, creative, and sustaining. *"For the word of God is living and powerful...."* Hebrews 4:12a.

The power of the Almighty God backs up His Word. Therefore, God's Word will accomplish whatever God wants; and this includes effecting healing from mental health disorders. God says:

"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:10-11.

THE LORD OUR HEALER

Perhaps, you are struggling with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, self-harm, bulimia, dementia, suicidal thoughts or attempts, psychosis; or you are experiencing mental health's complications like hypertension, stroke etc.

The Almighty God has power to heal; He says in His Word: *"... I am the Lord who heals you."* (Exodus 15:26b). Therefore, have faith in God, that He can heal from all forms of ailment; including mental health disorders.

HEALING THROUGH THE WORD

The Word of God can bring all-round healing, and deliverance from all afflictions. It is written: *"He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."* Psalm 107:20.

The Word Therapy (TWT)

The Word Therapy (TWT) is the application of God's Word as contained in the Holy Bible, to achieve healing from diseases and mental health disorders. TWT is a component of Jesus Christ Therapy (JCT).

THE "DOCTOR'S" PRESCRIPTION

According to Psalm 107:20 quoted above, we can safely say that the Almighty God sent His Word to heal people from all ailments of the spirit, soul and body; and to deliver from all forms of oppressions and afflictions.

The Word of God can heal from the spiritual sickness of sin; by bringing one to conviction and conversion! Also, from the emotional sickness of depression, anxiety, and addictions; and the physical sickness of migraine, stroke etc.

God's Word can also deliver from all forms of afflictions like stagnation, disappointments, disfavour; delay in marriage, or child-bearing; rejection, generational and foundational curses etc.

A patient will religiously follow his/her Doctor's prescriptions by using the prescribed dosage of the medications. In the same manner, we are to apply the ever-reliable Word of God for our all-round healing.

Therefore, we should build up our trust in God by regularly filling our hearts with God's Word; studying, meditating, obeying, and applying it to our needs. We must also regularly offer quality praise, worship and thanksgiving to God.

THE KEY OF FAITH

The higher your faith in God, the more your level of trust in Him for solutions to life's challenges; including mental ill-health. Thus you have God's peace in your heart; and healing in your emotions and body. Also, God's Word is:

- Restorative; as it brings you total healing and restoration.
- Without any negative side-effects.

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- Faith-building; builds up your faith and trust in God. It draws you closer to God, heals your wounds, and sustains your mental health.

It is very important to have a heart knowledge (not just a head knowledge) of God's Word. It is when we claim God's promises with implicit faith in Him that we see the creative, restorative, and healing power of God's Word in action.

"When you ask for something, don't have any doubts. A person who has doubts is like a wave that is blown by the wind and tossed by the sea. A person who has doubts shouldn't expect to receive anything from the Lord." James 1:6-7 (GW).

WHAT THEN?

As you claim God's promises for healing, you have a part to play. If for example, due to overwork, you have the symptoms of stress; and you refuse to slow down to rest, but quoting God's Word for healing; it will not work!

Also, if one is claiming God's promises while indulging in sin, it will not work. The Bible says: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear."* (Psalm 66:18). Therefore, repent from all sins; especially because of your eternity.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

Please, if you are feeling overwhelmed, or having suicidal thoughts, quickly seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area; or see a Mental Health Professional.

You can also confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian; or a Christian relative or friend. Please, do not struggle alone, quickly seek help!

CONCLUSION

As you keep filling your heart with God's Word, and living in obedience to God; you will continually experience God's peace and joy. This boosts your mental health; and helps you to enjoy Christ's abundant life.

15

Your Role in the Recovery Process

INTRODUCTION

As you start the journey to recovery, ensure you are connected to God through the new birth; and daily living in obedience to Him. If you are not yet born again, quickly repent and give your life to Jesus Christ now; more so, for your eternal welfare.

If you are already born again, continue the path of holiness. Then, let these be firmly settled in your heart; that:

- You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and have been redeemed with the precious Blood of Jesus Christ; so, you are not a nonentity.
- You are Royalty; a Prince or Princess of the King of kings!
- The challenges you are facing doesn't make you inferior to anyone; neither should it define you and your self-worth.
- Your worth is not determined by challenges, people's opinion, or comments; but in who God says you are in His Word.

"... you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." 1 Peter 2:9-10.

YOUR JOURNEY TO RECOVERY

In view of the above, here are some of what you need to do as you go through the processes of your journey to recovery:

- Believe that the challenges you are facing do not define you, nor your self-worth; but who God says you are!
- It is important that you believe that you are not inferior to anyone; for you are fearfully and wonderfully made by the Almighty God (Psalm 139:14).
- Also, that you are an honourable person; and therefore, you deserve to be treated with great respect and politeness.
- Refuse to allow your worth to be based on people's opinion or utterances (which can often be subjective and unfair); but only on God's Word.
- Also, do not define yourself, or your worth by the number of followers you have on any social media outlets; nor the number of likes, or upvotes on your photographs or postings.
- Say "No" to low self-esteem!
- Say "No" to self-hatred!
- Say "No" to self-doubt!
- Say "No" to self-shaming!
- Say "No" to self-rejection!
- Say "No" to self-stigma!
- Say "No" to society's stigmatization!
- Say "No" to self-harm!
- Say "No" to suicide!

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

Please, be reminded that suicide is not the end of life's pains, but rather the beginning of greater and eternal pains; so it's not worth it. Instead, let God have your concerns, and you His peace.

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank Him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus." Philipians 4:6 - 7 (TLB).

BE WORD-LOADED

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Colossians 3:16.

Therefore, regularly study, meditate, and obey God's Word; also

share it with others. As part of your schedule, create time for Bible-based songs, hymns, books, magazines, films; and other value-adding Christian resources.

As you do your laundry, or other house chores; as you commute to work, or on a journey; you can listen to God's Word, Bible-based sermons, music, or hymns. This makes you to be in contact with the Word everywhere you go!

Thus, you create a 'Wordmosphere' around yourself; by constantly saturating your spiritual atmosphere with God's Word. This gives you all-round wholeness. (The need to be Word-loaded is discussed more in Chapter 45).

The Word of God in your heart, coupled with obedience; will increase your faith in God, fire you up to pray, and help you to regularly share the gospel. All these give you great confidence, fulfilment, and a sound mental health.

BE STRONGLY DETERMINED

Please, refuse to be discouraged as you journey to recovery and restoration. *"The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?" Proverbs 18:14.*

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

Please, if you are feeling overwhelmed, or having suicidal thoughts, quickly seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area; or see a Mental Health Professional.

You can also confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian; or a Christian relative or friend. Please, do not struggle alone, quickly seek help!

CONCLUSION

It is important that you always believe who God says you are; and firmly reject all contrary voices; whether from within you, or from external sources (people, societal values, social media postings etc) You are who God says you are.

"... a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." 1 Peter 2:9.



16

How the Church can Help

INTRODUCTION

The word "Church" refers to the Church of God, or "the Body of Christ". This consists of all who have truly repented from their sins, trusted Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour; and daily living in obedience to God till the end.

"... you are the body of Christ, and members individually." (1 Corinthians 12:27). "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." Romans 12:5.

The Church of God is headed by Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd. *"and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." 1 Peter 5:4.*

THE CHURCH OF GOD

Christians are the custodian of the Christian faith; to uphold its sanctity, live out its precepts, and propagate its message of God's love for mankind. We are to be a united Body; and show care for one another.

"That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it." 1 Corinthians 12:25-26.

BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDEN

In view of the above, all believers must see it as a joint respon-

sibility to help our brethren who are struggling with their mental health. We are to *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."* Galatians 6:2.

Therefore, we should not neglect members facing mental health challenges, or any other trials. We are to be God's instrument of nursing them back to sound mental health; and this without being disrespectful and judgemental of them.

Also, we are to reach out to people outside the Church. We are to tell them about God's love for them; presenting Christ as the Answer to the issues of life and eternity. The Bible instructs us to *"Preach the word!"* 2 Timothy 4:2.

EMPATHY AND NOT APATHY!

Empathy; yes, empathy is the keyword. People having mental health disorders are faced with a challenge that has affected their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours; they must be attended to. They need empathy and prayers; not judgement and disdain.

THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

As we offer our supports, we need plenty of prayers, and the help of the Holy Spirit. He alone can guide us to know when to talk, and when to be quiet; and just be there for them with the needed emotional support.

When the Holy Spirit permits us to talk, we need His guidance to know what to say, and how to say it. It is then the Church's intervention can be effective and beneficial to those on the journey to recovery and restoration.

WHAT THEN?

As Christ's Ambassadors, the Church must be in the fore-front of standing for mental health! All must be involved; Pastors, Church workers; Christian employers of labour; Christian parents, guardians, and those 'in loco parentis'.

Also, Christian owners of non-governmental Organisations, non-denominational Ministries etc. We have Christ's message of hope that can help people stand in victory over life's problems; including mental health disorders.

Therefore, we must seize every opportunity to present the gospel to the unsaved. As people get born again, they have access to

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Christ's abundant life; thus laying a solid foundation for a sound mental health.

HOW THEN?

The Body of Christ (Churches; non-denominational Christian Ministries and NGO's) can be a solution to the scourge of mental ill-health in many ways. Some of these are outlined below:

- Our sermons to be geared towards salvation and holy lifestyles as prerequisites to making Heaven. *"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord."* Hebrews 12:14.

This will birth true conversion in sinners; and Christian growth in believers. Also, it will give spiritual stamina to believers to stand firm during challenges; and thus be sustained in their mental health.

- We much preach Christ to the unsaved, and lead them to Christ. Thus, they can enjoy Christ's abundant life, and have a balanced mental health. Above all, the new birth, and steady Christian growth prepare people for eternity.
- Altar calls for salvation, rededication; and renewed commitment to Christ to be made during all programmes; sermons, Bible study, Sunday School; drama, musical concerts etc.
- Create consistent awareness of mental health; some are experiencing mental ill-health, and do not even know that's what they are going through.
- Enlighten people on preventive and restorative measures. This can be done through seminars, Bible studies; at conferences, retreats etc.
- Offer Biblical counselling to believers on their areas of challenge. Remember to uphold confidentiality in counselling cases; this is very important in retaining people's trust.
- Encourage people to seek help if they are struggling with any mental health disorder.
- Please, do not stigmatize them! This will discourage people from talking about their struggles, and mental health status.
- Also, do not describe them by their symptoms; please say, "he or she is experiencing depression"; rather than saying "the depressed woman, man" etc.
- Show them respect and God's love. They are made in God's image, and are precious to God despite their challenges; they

- should be precious to us too.
- Give them prayerful and emotional supports; it may be needful to support them with cash, or kind. However, ensure that people do not abuse this kindness.
 - Believers to receive training and retraining on mental health; this will equip us to offer informed help to brethren struggling with disorders.

The above list is not exhaustive. As we remain connected to the "Power Source"; that is, the Holy Spirit our Helper, He will teach us ways to handle different cases as the need arises.

THIS IS IMPORTANT

People who are just getting over a traumatising experience (especially from relationship issues) may sometimes be emotionally distant. Please, do not take this personal, neither give up on them; just keep praying for them.

They have been bruised and heartbroken; so out of fear of being wounded again, they may feel unsafe with people. However, as they progress in the healing process, they will be able to trust, and receive help from brethren.

When they open to us about their challenges, please, do not belittle, or rubbish what they shared with you. Please, be empathetic and patient with them on their journey to recovery; they will cope better as they gradually heal.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH

Christians are to be God's instrument of salvation to the unsaved. We are to let people know that the gospel is relevant to their needs; thus providing solutions to their challenges. This helps people to have steady mental health.

There is the need for a consistent demonstration of God's power; to deliver people from oppressions and afflictions. This confirms our message; builds up our faith; and draws more souls to Jesus Christ as in the days of the Apostles.

"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen." Mark 16:20.

REVIVE US O LORD

In view of the above, we should cry to God to reignite the fire of Revival in our individual lives; and corporately as a Church. "... *O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known...*" Habakkuk 3:2.

As we call on God for revival, sin must be decisively dealt with; individually and corporately. This is for the spiritual health of the Church; to enable her birth and sustain spiritual revival; and be equipped to affect the world for Christ.

CONCLUSION

As the Church makes herself relevant to people's all-round needs, souls will be won and disciplined for Christ. They in turn will go out for the salvation of others; and the cause of the gospel prospers.

It is therefore essential that believers are fed with balanced spiritual diet; being taught the whole counsel of God. This will sustain spiritual fervency in the Church, and strengthen us to fulfil God's purpose to our generation.

17

The Role of Family and Friends

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings; created to interact with one another; and not live like a recluse, or a hermit. Therefore, social interactions are crucial to humans; companionship is one of the main reasons for which God instituted family life.

WE NEED ONE ANOTHER

As family and friends, we are to be there for one another on life's path. We are to be our brother's (and sister's) keeper; especially during challenges. *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."* Proverbs 17:17.

BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDEN

It is written: *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:2). A relative or friend going through a mental health disorder needs help and careful handling; and here are some tips on this:

- Please, lovingly and prayerfully minister the salvation message to them if they are not yet born again. This gives them access to Christ's abundant life, God's restorative power; and hope of eternal life.

However, you must have been saved to effectively lead another to Christ. If you are not born again, repent from your sins, receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour; more so, be-

cause of your eternity.

- Pray for them; treat them with love and respect.
- Encourage them to read and meditate on the Bible; also to live by it. The word brings healing. Remember, "*He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*" *Psalm 107:20.*
- Be empathetic and understanding with them.

When people struggle with depression for example, they may be drained of physical energy; and be unable to take care of their physical needs and hygiene; nor do chores etc.

It is not a time to nag them; nor think they are lazy and dirty. The best approach is to help with their chores, and lovingly encourage them to attend to their personal hygiene etc. Some other ways to help them are:

- Express your support for them, let them know they are not a nuisance on you; and be attentive to what they have to say. However, do not push them too hard if they are not ready to talk; just be there for them.
- Please, do not stigmatize them; neither be judgemental of them.
- Find out more about mental health disorders; and about the specific condition of your relative or friend. This arms you with the knowledge of what they are going through; and helps you to offer them the best care.
- Please, ensure their safety; for example, people with suicidal thoughts or behaviour should not be left alone. Also, remove from them medications, firearms, knives; or any item that can be used for self-harm.
- It is important to strive for an atmosphere of cooperation within the family; this helps them in their recovery process.
- Parents are to safeguard their children's mental health; by prayerfully and carefully handling them. Also by teaching children (through example and training) what to do to be mentally healthy.
- Please, take good care of yourself too! This is to prevent you from breaking down; as it is not easy to take care of a person who is ill.

CONCLUSION

It is essential for relatives and friends to always bear in mind that the road to recovery from disorders is a process; and the duration may be short or long. Therefore, be persevering; victory is certain with God's help.

"... thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57.

18

The Duty of the Government and the Society

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter aims at discussing the role of the Government, and the general public in helping those struggling with mental ill-health. Below are some tips on achieving this.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

- To create an increasing public awareness for mental health disorders.
- Encourage people struggling with disorders to seek and receive help.
- Evolve policies geared towards enlightenment; educating more people on both preventive and restorative measures.
- Continually vote funds into solving the scourge of mental ill-health; and ensure that such funds are not misappropriated.
- Implementing research findings geared at preventing and curtailing mental ill-health.
- Ensure there is no discrimination against them in employment opportunities; and any other areas they can enjoy government facilities.
- Enlighten the public against stigmatizing those going through mental ill-health; but rather, to be empathetic and helpful to them.

- Evolve policies that will guarantee efficient, good, and affordable housing; clean water; effective environmental sanitation programmes; efficient sewage system, and waste disposal etc.
- Establish green spaces in residential and public places for wholesome recreations; especially in urban centres. This has been reported to lower anxiety, improve mood; and boost mental health.
- Give grants to charities that are complementing government efforts to curtail mental ill-health. However, the grants are to be properly monitored to ensure they are utilized for the purpose for which they were disbursed.
- Enact regulations (where these are not yet in place) to protect the interest and well-being of workers; by ensuring fairness in contractual agreements, training opportunities, work schedules; and the workload of employees etc.

This is very important because it has been reported that some illnesses are caused by acute occupational stress. In an article titled "Occupational stress and hypertension" by Rosenthal et al.; it was recommended that:

"... in the case of illnesses caused by heightened occupational stress, priority should be given to preventive interventions with the purpose of creating and maintaining work conditions respectful of human physiological, emotional and social needs; in other words, the work environment should stimulate growth and productivity while supporting each individual in their challenges."⁵¹

The writers went further to recommend that "... certain measures could be implemented through official regulations that assure, for example, fair contracts, training, and sensible work schedules in relation to the type, and load of responsibilities; and the levels of physical and mental engagement implied by the job...." Rosenthal et al.⁵²

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS OF LABOUR

Employers of labour includes the government, non-governmental organisations; industries, people in legitimate private businesses; and all who offer work to people in exchange for wages. Employers are to:

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- Be genuinely interested in the welfare of their workers; by paying them well and promptly too! The wages and allowances paid to workers must be commensurate with the volume of work they do; not less!
- Treat workers with utmost respect and courtesy; making workers truly happy working for them; thus promoting their mental well-being.
- Ensure the provision of affordable or highly subsidized meals; also medical, dental, and mental care. These are to safeguard the all-round health of their respective employees.
- Provide an enabling environment where employees can work without physical, emotional, and financial stress. This is to safeguard workers against occupational stress.

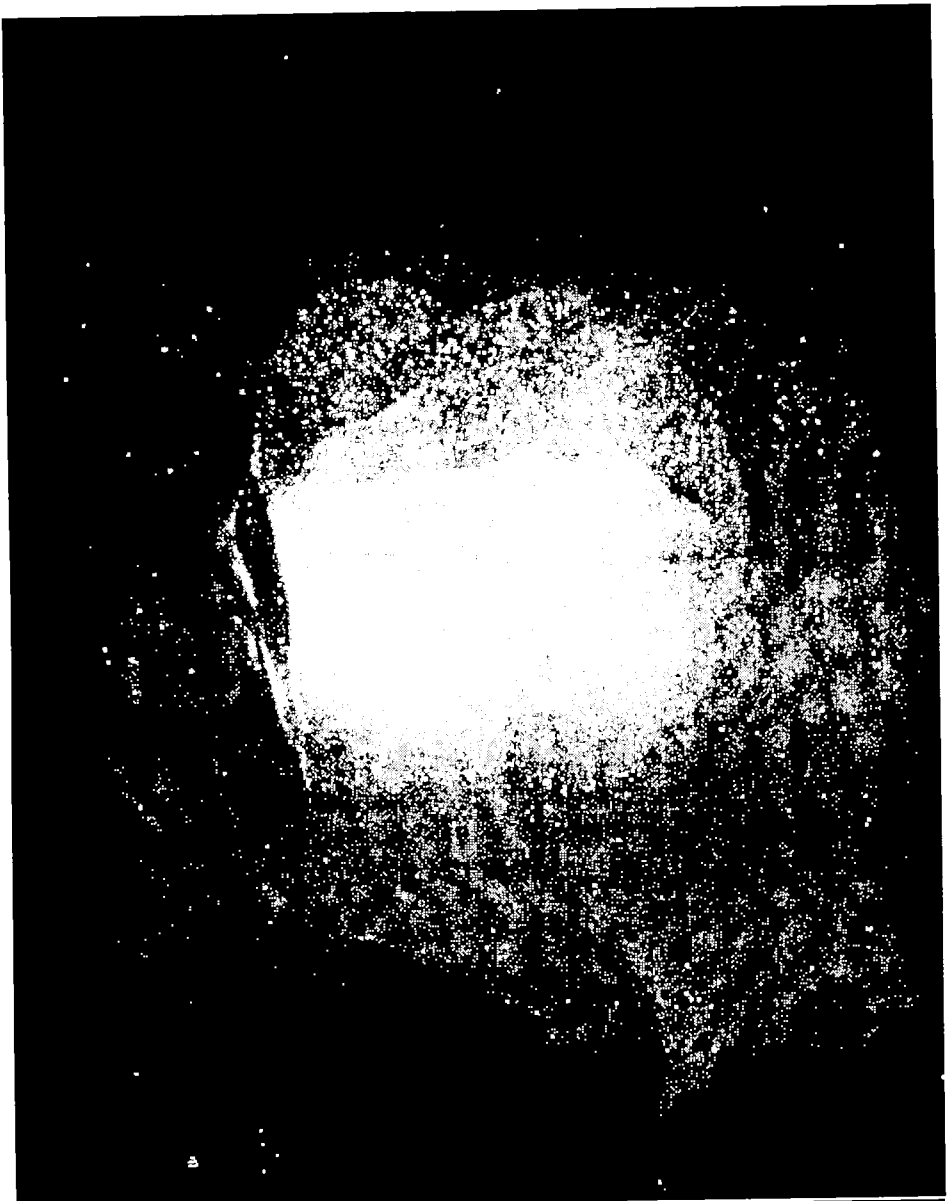
THE ROLE OF THE SOCIETY

- We are to be our brother's (and sister's) keeper.
- We should not stigmatize, nor look down on those struggling with mental health disorders.
- We are to encourage them to seek help, and be supportive of their efforts; especially those known to us.
- We should show them empathy and understanding; and be supportive of them on their journey to recovery.
- We are to be non-judgemental of them.
- We should not discriminate against them in the society.

CONCLUSION

As we do all the above, the incidence of mental health disorders will be drastically reduced; if not completely eradicated. Everybody will be happy and fulfilled; and the society will be a better place for all.

Above all, the Almighty God will surely bless you for caring for others. *"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name...."* Hebrews 6:10a.



Part Four

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Mortals just like us

INTRODUCTION

As earlier mentioned in this book, life is full of challenges; and the godly is not exempted from them. There are Biblical examples of godly people who have gone through fierce trials and distresses; and came out victorious.

This includes Job, Joseph, Jeremiah, Elijah, David, Daniel, Prophetess Anna, Peter, Paul, Silas etc. These were distressed and discouraged like any mortal would; but they towered above their challenges through God's grace.

This Chapter aims at highlighting their respective challenges; how they coped, and did not have a mental breakdown! This is to challenge you to trust God with life's challenges; and thus enjoy a sound mental health.

MR JOB (*The book of Job*)

Mr Job was a very God-fearing and righteous man. *"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil."* Job 1:1.

Also, Mr Job was a lover of God's Word; and he lived by the tenets of God's Word. *"I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."* Job 23:12.

Job lost all his children and properties in one day (Job 1:13-22); he later had painful boils. (Job 2:7). Job was devastated! *"Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshipped"* Job 1:20.

He was in great sorrow, confusion; and agony of heart. We can have an idea of Job's unpleasant situation through these verses:

"My heart is in turmoil and cannot rest.... I go about mourning.... My skin grows black and falls from me; my bones burn with fever. My harp is turned to mourning, and my flute to the voice of those who weep." Job 30: 27-31.

In his distress, *"... Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong."* (Job 1:22); rather, he maintained an implicit faith in God by declaring: *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him...."* Job 13:15.

At the end of it all, God came through for Job. *"And the Lord restored Job's losses.... gave Job twice as much as he had before.... blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning...."* Job 42:11-12.

MR JOSEPH **(Genesis chpt.37:2 to chpt.50:26)**

Joseph was one of the children of Jacob, and much beloved by his father. Joseph's brothers were envious of him; more so when he told them the dream of his future greatness.

This made his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery. Joseph's buyers took him to Egypt, and resold him to Potiphar (Genesis 39). This must have left Joseph very distressed; but he did not lose his confidence in God.

God was with Joseph, and gave him favour with Potiphar, who made him the head of all the slaves in his household. For the sake of Joseph, God blessed Potiphar (Genesis 39:2-6).

However, Mrs Potiphar was a seductress who tried to lure Joseph to sleep with her; and Joseph being God-fearing resisted her. One day, Mrs Potiphar grabbed Joseph, and demanded he sleeps with her; but Joseph refused, saying:

"... How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Genesis 39:9.

When her husband came, Mrs Potiphar lied to him that Joseph at-

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tempted to rape her; and the latter was imprisoned (Genesis 39:20). However, Joseph held on to God, and a godly lifestyle; and God was with Joseph.

"... the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison.... did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper." Genesis 39:21-23.

Afterwards, Joseph interpreted the dreams of two fellow prisoners (Genesis 40:1-23); later interpreted Pharaoh's dreams; and advised Pharaoh on the policy to pursue for maximum benefits from the dreams. (Genesis 41:33-36).

"So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?"

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph.... You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.... I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Genesis 41:37-41.

Joseph was married to Asenath (Genesis 41:45); and God greatly blessed him. *"And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him." Genesis 41:50.*

Below are some of the traits in Joseph's life that made him soar above the challenges:

- The enablement from the Spirit of God. *"And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Genesis 41:38.*
- The fear of God. *"There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Genesis 39:9.*
- A heart of forgiveness. Joseph forgave his brothers who mishandled him, and sold him into slavery when he was a teenager.

“... they sent messengers to Joseph, saying.... please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we are your servants.” Joseph said to them.... you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.... do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” Genesis 50:15-21.

KING DAVID

David was a youth when God used him to kill Goliath; and to gain victory for Israel over the Philistines (1 Samuel 17). King Saul was impressed with David and brought the latter to serve in his palace. (1 Samuel 18:5).

In recognition of David's bravery in killing Goliath, the women sang to praise him, and King Saul; assigning greater tributes to David. (1 Samuel 18:7-10).

King Saul became jealous, and made attempts to kill David. He fled from Saul, and some people followed him (1 Samuel 27:1-6). Eventually, David and his men (together with their households) settled in Ziklag; in the land of Philistine.

One day, while David and his team were not around, the Amalekites came to attack Ziklag; they burnt it with fire, and carried away the women and the children as captives. When they returned, and found out what has happened:

“... David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him.... David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.” 1 Samuel 30:3-6.

Eventually, God rejected Saul as King; because he did not fully obey God (1 Samuel 13:1-18). David became King in place of Saul. David faced many other challenges; incessant wars with the Philistines, and constant threats to his life.

King David faced rebellion from his sons, Absalom and Adonijah (1 Kings 1:5-8:5; & 2 Samuel Chapters 15-18); betrayal from his officers and Advisers (1 Kings 1:7; 2 Samuel 15:31) etc.

David sometimes felt forgotten by God. He wrote about his anxieties, agony, and despair in the Psalms; however, he had great

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confidence in God, and poured his heart to Him. He also encouraged himself in God. (Psalm 42:6-11).

Some of the other attributes of King David that helped him to maintain a steady mental health during life's vicissitudes are:

- God-conscious lifestyle: David was constantly conscious of God's ever-abiding Presence. "... *where can I flee from Your presence?*" (Psalm 139:8a). This God-consciousness made David to live in the fear of God.
- Deep thirst for God: "*As the deer pants [longingly] for the water brooks, so my soul pants [longingly] for You, O God. My soul (my life, my inner self) thirsts for God, for the living God....*" Psalm 42:1-2 (AMP).
- Heart loaded with God's Word: "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*" Psalm 119:11.
- A Word-compliant lifestyle: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" (Psalm 119:105). God's testimony about David is: "... *I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart....*" Acts 13:22.
- A lifestyle of praise, worship, and thanksgiving to God: "*I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.*" Psalm 34:1.
- Implicit trust in God: David declared, "*The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.*" Psalm 28:7.

There is the peace of heart that comes with having an implicit trust in God; this shielded David from emotional collapse amid life's challenges.

- Tender heart towards God: When God rebuked David (through Prophet Nathan) for committing adultery with Mrs Beersheba Uriah, he was truly sorry and repentant. He pleaded for God's mercy, cleansing, and revival.

"Have mercy upon me, O God... blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions.... Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.... Create in me a clean heart. O God... renew a steadfast spirit within me.... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" Psalm 51:1-4; 10-12.

PROPHETESS ANNA

(Luke 2:36-38)

Prophetess Anna lost her husband after seven years of marriage; this must have been heart-rending. However, she was not bitter against God, nor give in to depression; rather, she dedicated her life to God's service in the Temple.

"Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess.... She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Luke 2:36-37.

In the place of service, she was privileged to witness Christ's dedication. *"And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Luke 2:38.*

THE APOSTLES

The Apostles were God's instruments of propagating the gospel; also of delivering people from satanic afflictions and oppressions! These accounts can be found in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts; and the Epistles.

The Apostles include Peter, John, Paul, Silas, James etc. They were greatly persecuted through imprisonments, beatings, stonings, mockeries, blackmails, threats; and stern warnings to stop preaching about Jesus Christ.

Apostle Stephen was stoned to death! (Acts 7:54-60); while James was beheaded (Acts 12:1-3). In all these, the Apostles did not give up their faith: neither did they stop preaching Jesus Christ. At a time, Paul declared:

"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.

There was a time Peter was imprisoned, but the Church interceded on his behalf. God sent His Angel to deliver Peter from Prison (See Acts 12:1-19); and *"... the word of God grew and multiplied." Acts 12:24.*

The persecutions raged on, but the Apostles were undeterred. They continued with their aggressive Evangelism drive! *"So the*

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churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." Acts 16:5.

At another time Paul and Silas were imprisoned; however, they were not depressed, but sang praises and worship to God. (See Acts 16). This resulted in mighty deliverances; and the salvation of souls. (Acts 16:25-34).

SEEING THE REWARD AHEAD

The Apostles must have looked beyond their distresses, to the reward ahead. This must have made them hopeful and joyful; and thereby enjoyed steady mental health. This is worthy of emulation; thus we too can confidently say:

"Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

CONCLUSION

The above-mentioned people were able to cope with life's stresses without collapsing emotionally through God's grace. This is because they each had a strong relationship with the living God; so, their coping strength was from God.

Please, remember there is an expiry date for each challenge; and there is reward for standing for Christ. Always look beyond the challenges to the sure reward ahead; thus you are continually helped to keep holding on to the end.

If you are yet to receive God's salvation gift through Jesus Christ, quickly repent, and give your life to Jesus Christ now! This is not only to receive help to cope with life's challenges; but more so because of your eternal welfare.

20

In Quietness and Confidence

INTRODUCTION

The challenges of life are many, and variant in nature and intensity. At one time or the other, people may go through a challenging situation; and this happens to both young and old, male and female; the saved and the unsaved.

FACING LIFE'S CHALLENGES

The challenges we face can sometimes be overwhelming that one becomes discouraged and weary. Below are some examples of life's challenges that are capable of making one distressed:

Sickness, a pandemic; bereavement, job loss, business failure, debts, marital or parenting challenges; separation or divorce; delay in getting married, or delay in childbearing after marriage.

Also, good things like newly getting married, or giving birth to a baby; having a new job; moving to a new home, neighbourhood, town, state, or country; the normal daily responsibilities of child-rearing, career pursuit, or gospel work.

Some other sources of stress are heavy workload, long working hours, poor working conditions, job insecurity; workplace discrimination or harassment; increased financial needs without a commensurate increase in income etc.

HANDLING LIFE'S STRESSES

God did not design you to bear the weight of life's stresses by

yourself; this will weigh you down, and make you an emotional wreck. It is comparable to always crowding a car with more than it is designed to carry; it will not last long.

The Almighty God wants to handle the stresses Himself, and give you victory; if you will allow Him. Therefore, let go, and let God. *"casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."* 1 Peter 5:6-7.

BE ASSURED OF GOD'S HELP

Our ever-caring God is always ready to help us. He says: *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."* Isaiah 41:10.

He who loves us enough to give His only Son will come through for you! *"He who did not spare [even] His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"* Romans 8:32 (AMP).

However, have you received God's salvation gift through Jesus Christ? If No, repent and give your life to Jesus Christ now. This is not only to receive God's help on earth; but more so, because of your eternal welfare.

BE GOD-CONFIDENT

In view of the above, you should be confident in God, and thus be assured of His help during life's challenges. *"For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel ... in quietness and confidence shall be your strength..."* Isaiah 30:15.

In the quoted Isaiah 30:15, God rebuked the people of Israel for forsaking His way; and choosing to go their own way. God counselled them to return to Him; be calm, and have trust in Him; for therein lies strength.

This means there is strength in being calm and confident in God; so, during life's challenges, do not be troubled in mind; be calm and confident in God. This will cushion the effect of stress, and safeguard your mental health.

CONCLUSION

Always remember that being born again does not mean you cannot face challenges; you sure will, just like the godly people in the

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"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you." Isaiah 43:2.

Therefore, be encouraged and peaceful in God. He will bring beauty from the "ashes" of your situation; as "... all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28.

Please, always remember that in the midst of life's challenges, "... in quietness and confidence shall be your strength...." Isaiah 30:15.

21

A Ministry from your Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The Christian ought to be deliberate in utilizing the lessons from life's pains for the benefit of others. This could be informally shared in our daily interactions, or through a formal ministry setting; depending on how the Lord leads you.

NO WASTAGE PLEASE!

Our Lord Jesus fed five thousand people with five barley loaves and two pieces of fish. (See John 6:1- 14). *"After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." John 6:12 (NLT).*

As Christians, our pains are useful; the lessons gained from them must be used for the benefit of others. The challenges of life (even our mistakes) have a way of developing our Christian virtues, which otherwise may be impossible.

The lessons gained, and God's comfort received are to be sown back into the Kingdom to encourage others. They must also be harnessed for soul-winning and discipleship; for the expansion of God's Kingdom on earth.

GOD'S AGENT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Have you ever been faced with overwhelming life's challenges that made you anxious, distressed, and depressed? This couldn't have been an easy situation to be; I know, because I have been there.

In distress, you cried to God for help; He encouraged, healed, and restored you to mental health. God also sent people to give you emotional and prayerful supports; it is your turn to be God's instrument of comfort to others in need.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." 2 Corinthians 1:3 & 4.

WHAT THEN?

Firstly, one must always remember that victory is from God; courtesy Jesus Christ. Therefore, all glory must continually go back to the Almighty God; because *"... no flesh should glory in His presence."* 1 Corinthians 1:29.

The above mindset will keep us constantly reminded that we are where we are by the grace of God. This helps us to be humble; and to also show empathy to people struggling with life's challenges, especially mental health disorders.

Tips on sharing your testimony

- Pray to God for the opportunity, and the wisdom to share your testimony to bless lives; to encourage others. Also, pray that people will thereby be helped to trust God for healing and restoration.
- Share your testimony with the right motive; to glorify God, and bless lives. *"... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.... not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many...."* 1 Corinthians 10:31-33.
- Let your sharing point people to God; and not to yourself.
- Present Christ's message of hope to the unsaved. The new birth is crucial to assessing victory; and for their eternal well-being.
- You can share your story in a book; or through drama, seminars, or songs of encouragement etc.
- Pray continually to God to uphold all He has used you to minister to; and that they too will go out to be a blessing to others.
- Always give God all the glory for the positive impact of your testimony on people's lives; for God will not share His glory with anyone.

- Please, "Watch and pray..." (Matthew 26:41). Also, "Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18.

The above list is not exhaustive. As you continue to abide in Christ through a life of obedience to God, and in constant tune with the Holy Spirit; you will receive fresh ideas on how to share your testimony as the need arises.

THE BENEFITS OF SHARING YOUR TESTIMONY

- People's attention is directed to God the Healer; that healing from mental ill-health, and restoration to mental health are possible through God. This glorifies His Holy Name.
- The salvation message reaches the unsaved; restoration to the backslider; and encouragement to other Christians to forge ahead in the race.
- People are challenged to have faith in God; to trust Him to heal them too.
- The power of your pains over you is broken. This boosts your mental health, and equips you for the fulfilment of God's purpose for your life.
- Also, the power of the stigma associated with mental health disorders is broken; this will be encouraging to people still struggling with theirs.
- People with mental ill-health are emboldened to speak about their status; also to seek, and receive help.
- God rewards your labour of love; both in this world and eternity. "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name...." Hebrews 6:10.

CONCLUSION

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:58.

My Testimony of Recovery

INTRODUCTION

I was born on Wednesday, April 13, 1960. I repented from my sins, and received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour on Tuesday, November 28, 1978; that is, I became born again. Alleluia!

I am 59 years old as I write this book, "Say Yes to Mental Health". I thank God for preserving my life, saving my precious soul, sustaining me in the Christian race; and for His all-round healing. I am eternally grateful.

FACED WITH LIFE'S CHALLENGES

It is a known fact that life is full of challenges; I have had my own share of hardships on life's path. My thoughts were centred on the challenges I faced so much that I couldn't help thinking about them; this became overwhelming!

Along the line, I was confused, and was often crying. I felt helpless and hopeless; suffered from migraine and insomnia; struggled with sadness, shame, fear, self-pity, low self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

DRIVEN TO GOD'S WORD

The challenges drove me to dig deep into the Holy Bible for solace, help, hope, healing, guidance; and sustenance in the Christian race. I constantly claimed God's promises in the Bible; applying His Word to my situation.

LOOKED UP TO GOD

My eyes were on God, as I held on to His Word as my lifeline. *"They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed."* Psalm 34:5. I will keep looking to God and His Word till the end in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

Also, read relevant Bible-based Christian Books. I regularly listened to spiritually healthy songs and sermons; which I often put on "repeats"; for them to sink deep into my spirit!

Having been raised in the Anglican Church, I really love hymns; and sang many of them. I offered praise, worship and thanks to God; a sort of "I know I am safe in Your Hands Dad."

I also prayed and fasted; I really did! I cried and poured my heart to my very caring Heavenly Father. I told God how depressed, discouraged, emotionally depleted, helpless, and hopeless I felt; I was greatly relieved by these.

Please, always remember that God is aware of all that we pass through in life, but He wants us to talk to Him about them; we are never a nuisance to Him! *"Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."* 1 Peter 5:7.

Please note: Pregnant women, and people with medical challenge may not fast food. They can "fast" time spent on the social media (or other things); to spend more time on praying, studying, and meditating on the Bible.

BUSY FOR GOD

I served (and will continually do) in the children ministry. The teaching of God's Word to children is my greatest passion; closely followed by my Book writing ministry.

Whenever, I got to minister to children in those days of chronic anxiety and depression, I often experience an immense joy in my heart; and felt fulfilled. Even now after my recovery, I still enjoy ministering God's Word to children.

CLOSENESS TO GOD

As I regularly spent time to pray, study and meditate on the Bible, I enjoyed more time in God's Presence; and my heart was lightened. The glory of God robbed on me; this made me very radiant, healthier, and fresher.

I drew closer to God, and became increasingly bonded with Him. I have more intimacy with the wonderful Holy Spirit, a steady growth in Christ, a boost for my writing ministry; and great fulfillment.

THE JOY OF THE LORD

My smiles returned, as my heart is full of the Lord's joy; that joy that is unaffected by life's challenges. This renews me for the race, and for my daily tasks; as it is written; "... *the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" *Nehemiah 8:10c.*

THE LIFELINE

I held on to God's Word in the Holy Bible; and I was delivered from anxiety and depression. I was never on anti-depressants; indeed, God's Word is therapeutic if one has faith in it! The Bible says:

"He sent His word and healed... and delivered... from... destructions." *Psalm 107:20.*

Even now, I continue to delve into God's Word that brought me thus far; to regularly renew my mind to abide in victory till the end, in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

God's agents of help

It is important to mention that during the challenges, God blessed me with some true Christian friends and family members. They gave me emotional and prayerful supports; and ministered God's Word to me as the need arose.

A WORK IN PROGRESS

Please, note that I went through a process to get this far; there were times I relapsed into depression during the healing process. However, like a toddler learning to walk, and wouldn't quit trying because of a fall, I kept keeping on.

By God's grace, with persistence, a regular heavy dose of God's Word; and a stubborn faith in God, I am on top of situations now. Sometimes, depression wants to envelope me, but I quickly get over it than I used to. Alleluia!

As I grew in my trust in God, I gained control over my thoughts; and was no more filled with the depressive thoughts of my chal-

lenges. My thoughts are now on God; His Word, power, and love for me. This has been empowering.

God has been carefully sorting me out layer by layer; going into the recesses of my life to clean my wounds, heal me, and give me His peace. God truly "... *heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*" *Psalm 147:3.*

My face is radiant; I look fresher and younger now than I was many years ago. It may interest you to know that that my photograph at the end of this book was taken less than four months to my Sixtieth birthday. Our God is good.

The Almighty God has not finished with me yet. He daily showers me with His love; also prunes, encourages, and empowers me to remain victorious in Christ. All these build me up in the faith; and in my confidence in God.

I stand in awe of God. I am full of hope for each new day; for the future, and the hereafter. I pledge my life afresh to God; to live and work for Him till the end; and pray same for generations after me, in Christ's Name, Amen.

THE WORD WORKS

In view of all the above, you can see that my testimony shows that God's Word is living, powerful, and therapeutic. The Word healed me from anxiety and depression; and gave me restoration. The Bible says:

"He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." *Psalm 107:20.*

Therefore, if you apply God's Word to your situation in simple child-like faith, you will experience healing, deliverance, and restoration. The Word of God delivers from oppressions, afflictions, and destructions! The Word works!

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

Please, if you are feeling overwhelmed, or having suicidal thoughts, quickly seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area; or see a Mental Health Professional.

You can also confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian; or a Christian relative or friend. Please, do not struggle alone, quickly seek help!

MY SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY

I am usually grateful to God for each new day; for making me see it. Also, each birthday fills my heart with immense gratitude to God; especially because I was born a twin, but my twin sister is dead. I learnt she died around age one.

It could have been me that died then; only God knows why I was the one spared. Therefore, I do not want God to regret keeping me alive; this has challenged me to purpose that my life will not be a disappointment to God.

The Bible says: *“Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should.” Psalm 90:12 (TLB).*

My heart's longing has been to please God; and be constantly on fire for Him. I want God to use me to win and disciple souls for Christ; to sharpen fellow believers; bring hope and healing to the hurting; to be all God wants me to be.

As I work on this Book, each new day is significant to me; as it draws me nearer my sixtieth. I have been waiting on God in prayers; fasting, studying, and meditating on God's Word; seeking to know His plans for me after age sixty.

I have been having sober reflections on my life so far; asking God for a sense of direction in the days ahead; and to help me get my priorities right in the light of eternity. Also, asking for a fresh oil for the task ahead etc.

The birth of a vision

This book “Say Yes to Mental Health” is to commemorate my sixtieth birthday by God's grace; if my Lord Jesus Christ has not arrived. Alongside this will be the dedication of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) on mental health.

The NGO is: “Christ Abundant Life Maximized” (A Mental Health Initiative); its acronym being: CALM (A Mental Health Initiative). Our anchor verse is:

“For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty Saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.” Zephaniah 3:17 [NLT].

The mission statement of CALM is: ‘To equip individuals to live

life to the fullest through Jesus Christ'; while the vision statement is: 'Touching lives to soar above life's challenges through Christ'. Our core values are: The Word, Godliness, Faith, & Hope. Our motto is: 'The Word Works!'

I pray that the Almighty God will fulfil these goals through us; send more labourers into His Vineyard; anoint us afresh; and uphold us to the end, to the glory of His Name; in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

A PROVEN PATH TO VICTORY

As above-mentioned, I went through a process to have the healing and restoration I now enjoy. You too can experience God's healing and restoration; if you will sincerely embrace this path of victory.

- Salvation through Christ; this will give you access to Christ's abundant life. (Please, see chapter 50 for how to be born again).
- A regular heavy dose of the Word of God as contained in the Holy Bible. This is faith-building and empowering for victory. *"For the word of God is living and powerful...." Hebrews 4:12a.*

A heart (not just head) knowledge of God's Word builds up your faith, and increases your confidence in God. A heart filled with God's Word draws you closer to God; gives you His peace, and safeguards your mental health.

On the other hand, little or no knowledge of God's Word; or a head knowledge of it, will drive one to destructive habits to cope with life's challenges; e.g. substance abuse, self-harm, bulimia; or any other disorder.

- A steady growth in Christ through a life of obedience to God. This will make God happy with you, produce His joy in you; and boost your mental health.
- Being busy for God by serving God with your talent. Remember, you have been saved to serve; to win and disciple souls for Jesus Christ.
- Implicit faith in God and His Word; trusting that God cannot fail.
- Perseverance; refusing to be discouraged, nor give up when there is a relapse during the healing process.
- Prayerfulness; coupled with fasting. Your heart will be light-

ened, and you are brought to rich fulfilment.

Please, as earlier mentioned, pregnant women, and people having a medical challenge may not fast food. Such can “fast” some of the time spent on social media (or other things) to enable them to spend more time in God’s Presence.

I also had emotional and prayerful supports from trusted family members and friends. Please, confide in a genuine Pastor, or Christian about your struggles; to receive the needed support.

CONCLUSION

Please, permit me to conclude my testimony with this hymn.

IN CHRIST ALONE

*In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.*

*In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

*There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.*

*No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.*

Hymn composed by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

About Clothing and Car Manufacturers

INTRODUCTION

There are manufacturers of different items all over the world. They usually accompany their respective products with instructions on how to correctly handle it for functionality; and this includes clothing and car manufacturers.

ABOUT CLOTHING MANUFACTURERS

For the benefit of buyers, it is typical for clothing manufacturers to include a size guide label on their clothings. They also include 'care instructions' on how best to handle their products. Examples of such instructions are:

- Dry clean only.
- Professional dry clean; do not use direct steam or hot iron on ornamentation.
- Handwash; do not wring or twist; reshape and lay flat to dry; do not iron.
- Machine wash with like colours; gentle cycle; do not bleach; cool iron if necessary.
- Machine wash; delicate cycle; use only non-chlorine bleach when needed; low iron; dry clean for best results.
- Cool iron on reverse side if necessary, etc.

Everyone who wants their clothes to be long-lasting will heed

these instructions; to have value for money. This is especially so with very costly clothes, or ornamented ones which require extra carefulness in handling.

We trust the manufacturers' instructions. We consciously or unconsciously believe they know the nature of the fabric used, and how best to handle each for lasting usage.

ABOUT CAR MANUFACTURERS

The manufacturers of motor cars do accompany their respective products with instruction manuals; on how to handle the car for functionality and efficiency. Also, the type of fuel to run the car; whether petrol (gasoline) or diesel.

We are instructed on where to put the fuel, engine oil, gear oil, brake fluid; and to put water in the radiator etc. The instruction includes how regularly to service the car for optimum performance, and long-lasting usage.

A motor car is costly; and some are quite costly. Every responsible car user obeys the manufacturers' instruction in handling their cars; for functionality and durability. We put fuel in the fuel tank, engine oil in the car's engine etc.

It will be very ridiculous to put engine oil in the radiator, and water in the car's engine; or gear oil in the fuel tank. If you mistakenly, or deliberately did any of these, the car will not function.

ABOUT OUR MANUFACTURER

As earlier mentioned in this Book, the Almighty God is the Creator of all things; including mankind. This means that God is the "Manufacturer" of human beings; and we are "God's product".

God has instructions on handling His product (you and I) to make us functional. Therefore, for our all-round well-being (in life and eternity), we must heed our Manufacturer's instructions; by obeying God's Word in the Holy Bible.

This begins with embracing God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ; through genuine repentance from sin, and then accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Afterwards, daily live in obedience to God till the end of your life.

This produces God's peace in your heart, and joy in your soul; guarantees good all-round health (and this includes mental

health) during your earthly sojourn. As you abide in obedience to God till the end, you gain eternal life in Heaven.

WHAT THEN?

We heed the clothing manufacturers' instructions for our clothes to be long-lasting; so that we wouldn't be repeating expenses through frequent replacements.

We also heed the car manufacturer's instruction because doing otherwise will cost us the use of our cars; and additional money to restore functionality.

We do all the above about our clothing that will one day become rags, or unfashionable; and our cars that will eventually end up as antiquities; or perhaps in the scrapyard!

How much more should we obey God ("our Manufacturer") to enjoy our stay here on earth; and for our priceless souls to enjoy eternal rest with Him in Heaven. Ponder on this!

Be Obedient to God's Word

INTRODUCTION

As earlier mentioned, God is our "Manufacturer". We can only fulfil purpose by obeying our "Manufacturer's instruction"; that is, God's Word as contained in the Holy Bible. It is written:

"... 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment." Matthew 22:37-38.

The acid test of our love for God is to live in obedience to His Word. It is written: *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* (John 14:15). Therefore, we are to embrace a lifestyle of obedience to God till the end of our lives.

LIFE'S BALANCED DIET

The Word of God as contained in the Holy Bible is very crucial to our survival in the Christian race. It is written: *"... 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4.*

This means that apart from the physical food for our physical growth, we need the spiritual food of every Word of God for our spiritual growth. Therefore, the Bible admonishes us to hunger for God's Word as a baby does milk.

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." 1 Peter 2:2.

The above verse reminds me of my grandchildren; how they thirst and cry for milk, if it was not quickly forthcoming. This experience drives home the importance of God's Word to the Christian's survival in the race.

SPIRITUAL IMMUNIZATION AGAINST SIN

The Word of God is our "spiritual immunization" against sin; to equip us to live godly and make Heaven at last. *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."* Psalm 119:11.

It is also the spiritual compass to guide us safely Home; as we journey through the wilderness of this world to eternity. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* Psalm 119:105.

Therefore, we should make God's Word the standard for our choices, motives, words, and actions. This preserves us in the race; helps us to grow in Christ, enjoy Christ's abundant life; and thus have a sound mental health. It is written:

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Joshua 1:8.

BEWARE OF SIN!

In view of all the above, shun sin in its entirety. If you have been living in sin, and all "seems to be well"; this is the deceitfulness of sin. Please, repent now; *"lest... you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."* Hebrews 3:13b.

A sinful lifestyle enslaves, hardens one's heart; and results in a warped sense of right and wrong. Also makes one to feel easy in sin; and sinning begins to look normal. This surely pays deadly wages; physical, spiritual, or both.

"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death." James 1:14-15 (NLT).

THE DANGERS OF CONTINUOUS SINNING

Judas Iscariot was one of Jesus Christ's disciples, and the Ministry's Treasurer; but he lacked integrity. He was a thief, and habitually stole from the common purse. When Mary anointed Jesus

Christ's feet with very costly oil, Judas said:

"Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it." John 12:5-6.

Eventually, Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus Christ for thirty pieces of silver. He regretted his action, returned the money to the Chief Priests and Elders; and went to hang himself. (Matthew 27:3-5). Indeed, sinning brings destruction!

HEED THE WARNING NOW!

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

The lifestyle of sin makes one lose God's Kingdom; and sends one to hell in the end. *"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."* (Psalm 9:17). This is not to scare you, but to warn of the dangers of sin.

"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" Matthew 16:26 (NLT).

Our God is merciful and gracious; however, He is just, and will surely judge sin. Therefore, *"Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul."* 1 Peter 2:11 (MSG).

A sinful lifestyle deprives you of God's peace on earth, and will rob one of eternal life in the end; except one quickly repents and turns to God. *"... Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." Hebrews 3:15.*

THE BENEFITS OF OBEDIENCE

Obedience to God is for our benefit; both in life and eternity. Our Lord Jesus Christ says: *"... blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28).* Some of these blessings are as follows; you will enjoy:

- **God's Presence:** *"... God is with the generation of the righ-*

teous." Psalm 14:5b.

- **God's pity:** "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him." Psalm 103:13.
- **God's help:** "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him." 2 Chronicles 16:9.
- **God's favour:** "For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favour You will surround him as with a shield." Psalm 5:12.
- **God's goodness:** "... do not My words do good to him who walks uprightly?" (Micah 2:7c).
- **God's protection:** "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." Proverbs 18:10.
- **God's deliverance:** "The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them." Psalm 34:7.
- **God's blessings on your work:** "He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." James 1:25.
- **Answered prayers:** "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.... The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles." Psalm 34:15-17.
- **Sweet and refreshing sleep:** "... let your heart keep my commands.... When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet" Proverbs 3:1 & 24.
- **Good health:** "... fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones." Proverbs 3:7 & 8.
- **Long life and peace:** "... let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you." Proverbs 3:1 & 2.

When you have a lifestyle of obedience to God, you enjoy all the above-mentioned blessings; and lots more! God's peace will pervade your heart, and produce all-round refreshing; thus, boosting your mental health.

When you have God's peace, His glory reflects in your life; and your face will be radiant. A lifestyle of obedience to God is the Christian's gracefully aging formula; and it is safe, effective, and devoid of any negative side-effect.

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HEAVEN AT LAST!

As we live in obedience to God till the end of our earthly sojourn, we will enjoy eternal life with God in Heaven; forever to be with the Lord, where we shall have everlasting joy! (See Revelation 21:4-27 for the description of heaven).

What a very wonderfully glorious place of ultimate joy, peace; beauty, and satisfaction Heaven will be. Heaven is worth living for at all cost! May we make this place of everlasting fulfilment; in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

CONCLUSION

Obedience to God is for our own good; both in life, and in eternity. You will have peace of mind, (even amidst life's challenges); a stable mental health on earth, and eternal rest with God.

25

Be Tender-hearted

INTRODUCTION

The importance of obedience to the Word of God was stated in the preceding Chapter. The possession of a tender heart is crucial to a lifestyle of obedience to God; including living peaceably with others. This is the aim of this Chapter.

DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

Words (spoken or written) are very important and powerful; they convey our hearts to others who are listening, or reading. A word can have more than one meaning; so, "tender-hearted" is used here in the following two ways:

- "Of a kindly, considerate character; gentle, mild, soft, soft-hearted, tender."⁵³
- Also, "... it means "penitent"⁵⁴; and penitent has been defined as: "feeling or showing sorrow and regret for having done wrong; repentant."⁵⁵

In the light of the fore-going, tender-hearted is interpreted as having a tender-heart towards God, and fellow mortals. Therefore, tender-heartedness will be discussed under two headings viz:

A TENDER HEART TOWARDS PEOPLE

We are to be kind and considerate in our social interactions; and be empathetic with those who are hurting. "... *be kind to one another, tender-hearted....*" *Ephesians 4:32a*.

A tender heart towards fellow mortals will help us to be readily forgiven when people fall short of our expectations; knowing that we too can offend others.

It also includes being truly sorry when you offend others, refusing to ignore, or gloss over it; then, you sincerely apologise to them. This gives you God's peace, and boosts your mental health.

A TENDER HEART TOWARDS GOD

(a). This is the Christian's prompt and unconditional obedience to God's instruction; either from God's Word, or through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This may sometimes mean an interruption to one's plans; even at short notice.

God may prompt you to fast to avert an impending disaster, or for your personal consecration; to refrain from a course of action; or to give you a sense of direction in different areas of your life.

Also, God may instruct you to give sacrificially to others, or for God's work; to urgently share the gospel with someone; or go into full-time gospel work; etc. Obedience to God's leading is for our good; in life and eternity.

(b). Also, a tender heart towards God means to humble oneself before Him in true repentance from sin. This entails asking for God's forgiveness, and forsaking sins.

"Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you," says the Lord." 2 Kings 22:19.

BENEFITS OF TENDER-HEARTEDNESS

It is important to mention that being tender-hearted is a Biblical instruction, and not something optional. When we are tender-hearted, we reap its benefits; and some of these are:

- A tender heart will help the unsaved to promptly respond to the gospel, and get born again before it's too late. Thus, one is saved from the penalty of sin; and have access to Christ's abundant life.
- After salvation, as you respond promptly to God's guidance or correction, you record a steady growth in Christ; and are

drawn closer to God.

- A closer walk with God equips you to do great exploits for God; and be a blessing to generations.
- Also, you will be able to live at peace with others; to the extent to which it depends on you. *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* Romans 12:18.
- You will be delivered from physical and spiritual dangers.
- You are enabled to avoid regrettable decisions and actions.
- You will have God's peace and joy.

"Tenderness of heart is always essential to peace of mind and joy in God. And where the heart is really tender and it has been thoroughly searched and emptied, its peace will be like a river, and its joy purely spontaneous." Charles G. Finney.⁵⁶

- God's peace and joy in your heart will result in a sound mental health for you.
- As you abide in obedience to God to the end, you will make Heaven at last.

DANGERS OF HARD-HEARTEDNESS

When a person is hard-hearted, such will have stubbornness of heart towards God and His Word; and this is very risky! *"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."* 1 Samuel 15:23.

Also, hard-heartedness can cause unkindness to other people; or being inconsiderate of their needs or feelings. Hard-heartedness have negative consequences, and some of these are:

- A loss of all the above-mentioned benefits of having a tender heart; and lots more.
- Coming under God's wrath. *"... in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."* Romans 2:5.
- A fall into calamity. *"... he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity."* Proverbs 28:14b.
- Forfeiting God's rest. This can be explained in two ways; one will miss God's peace in this world, and eternal rest in heaven in the end; except one quickly repents! *"For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.'*

So I swore in My wrath, "they shall not enter My rest." Psalm 95:10-11.

- Hard-heartedness can make one to be susceptible to pride, which is satanic and destructive! *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."* Proverbs 16:18.
- Also, a hardened heart is a fertile ground for resentment and unforgiveness towards others; and these are unhealthy to one's spirit, soul, and body.
- Unforgiveness exposes one to demonic torments (spiritual, mental, and physical); thus, putting one on the path to hell. Our Lord Jesus Christ warns against unforgiveness in the parable of the unforgiving servant. (See Matthew 18:23-35).

"... his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him." Matthew 18:32-34.

Please, be reminded that the Bible says: *"... if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* Matthew 6:14-15.

- Hard-heartedness makes the unsaved to sink deeper into sin; while it gradually separates the already saved from God, and eventually leads to backsliding! The Bible says, *"... this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; they have revolted and departed."* Jeremiah 5:23.
- A hardened heart will eventually lead a person to hell; except one quickly repents.

WHAT THEN?

- If you are not yet born again, and the Spirit of God is convicting you of your sins, please, promptly repent, receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour; and live in obedience to God till the end.
- After you have been born again, if there is any besetting sin that the Holy Spirit is pointing your attention to repent from; please, act fast! Stop grieving the Holy Spirit; quickly repent and forsake such sins, then rededicate your life to Jesus Christ.

- If God is prompting you to take, or dissuading you from taking a course of action; obey quickly! God's leading is dependable; because He has unfathomable knowledge of all things.

CONCLUSION

As earlier mentioned, God's instruction to us to be tender-hearted is for our own good; in life and eternity. When you are tender-hearted, you will have a lifestyle of obedience to God. This gives you God's peace, and a sound mental health on earth; also, eternal rest with God in heaven.

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Be Busy for God

INTRODUCTION

The Christian has been saved to serve. After our salvation experience, we have been left here on earth to be instruments of taking the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the unsaved.

The converts won must be properly followed up to stand firm for Christ, so they too can join the workforce to win and disciple others; and on and on. Our Lord Jesus Christ has promised to always be with us on this Assignment.

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." Matthew 28:18-20.

A MUST-DO ASSIGNMENT

Christians must be actively involved in evangelism and discipleship. These are two sides of the same coin; and the Heartbeat of God who is "... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9.

The Assignment to evangelise and disciple souls is a command. Therefore, Christians do not have a choice in the matter; it is a work that must be done! As earlier stated, it is God's Heartbeat; it must be our very own heartbeats too!

Also, the Assignment must be wholeheartedly done; remember, you are "... to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your

heart and with all your soul..." Deuteronomy 11:13b.

A NECESSARY CLARIFICATION

The fact that Christians are to be busy for God may not necessarily mean quitting your secular job for fulltime gospel work; for some of us, it may mean just that. Please, sincerely find out from God what His will is in the matter.

If God wants you to keep your paid employment, please, do not quit; and if He wants you to quit your paid employment for fulltime gospel work, please do. God's grace and provision can only be available for what He wants you to do.

However, the Assignment is for all Christians; so, those in paid jobs, or private businesses are "full-time gospel workers" in their workplaces too. They are to uphold holiness, share the gospel; do their work with diligence and integrity.

The Christian Entrepreneurs, Doctors, Nurses, Lawyers, Teachers, Architects, Engineers, Administrators, Accountants, Journalists, Caterers, Pilots, Drivers, Scientists etc. are Christ's Ambassadors in their respective professions!

In view of the above, all Christians are full-time gospel workers; whether they are in paid jobs, private businesses; or full-time ministry. Therefore, every opportunity must be seized to win and disciple souls for Christ.

THE NATURE OF THE MESSAGE

As we share the gospel, we must always remember it is not about us; it is all about Jesus Christ our Lord! Apostle Paul said, "... *we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord....*" 2 Corinthians 4:5.

Also, like Paul, we must resolve to "... *preach Christ crucified....*" (1 Corinthians 1:23); and consciously guard against delivering Christ's message of hope with human wisdom, and sweet words.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:1-2.

Please, be reminded that there are no "holidays" as per the assignment. We must keep doing it; when it is convenient, and when

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it is inconvenient. *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season...."* 2 Timothy 4:2a.

LIVE RIGHT!

The assignment cannot be done in the power of the flesh, but only through the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit; and we can only access this through holiness. A godly lifestyle is the most effective tool for Evangelism and Discipleship.

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." 2 Corinthians 4:1-2.

PRAY THROUGH!

It is crucial to regularly uphold our personal and corporate evangelistic efforts in prayers. We must pray for the opening of the eyes of understanding of the unsaved; to appreciate God's love for them; and be receptive to the gospel.

Please, be reminded that the unsaved are people *"whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."* 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Therefore, Christians are to fervently pray to be used of God *"To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in the darkness from the prison house."* Isaiah 42:7.

We must pray for the work; for ministers of God and their families; especially missionaries on the field. Also, for one another; to live holy, have clarity of vision, constant fresh fire from God; God's protection and provision etc.

"... The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." James 5:16b.

REACH OUT!

Christians are to reach out with the gospel; to our household, in our neighbourhood, marketplaces, stores, shopping malls, parks, offices, business places; villages, towns, cities; and on the mission fields etc. The Bible says:

"... How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" Romans 10:14-15a.

The gospel can be preached through Bible-based drama, music, tracts, and literature; one on one evangelism; outreaches to the hurting; those in prison, juvenile remand homes, hospitals, schools and colleges; the social media etc.

DANGERS OF NEGLECTING THE ASSIGNMENT

As earlier stated, evangelism and discipleship are two sides of the same coin; and a command from Jesus Christ, our Commander-in-Chief! There are serious consequences for disobeying this divine instruction; and some of these are:

ONE BECOMES A 'MURDERER'

"... I have made you a watchman... When I say to the wicked... you shall surely die!" and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul." Ezekiel 33:7-9.

In the earthly court, a person found guilty of the blood of another is sentenced for murder. It is the same in God's heavenly court with whomever God finds guilty of murder, through failure to evangelise!

HELL FIRE IN THE END

A murderer's lot is hell; except one quickly repents. The Bible says, *"... the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters; and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Revelation 21:8.*

REPENT NOW!

In view of the above, repent from being a 'murderer' now; ask for God's forgiveness, *"... for He will abundantly pardon."* (Isaiah 55:7). Refuse to be idle in God's House, and vineyard; find a place to serve, be busy for God.

Henceforth, seize every opportunity to evangelise, and disciple souls for Jesus Christ our Lord. God will be happy with you; and will surely reward you.

THE REWARDS FOR SOUL-WINNING AND DISCIPLESHIP

The Almighty God will reward the soul-winner; both in this world, and eternity! Below are some of these great rewards:

BRIGTH SHINNING

"Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:3.

ANSWERED PRAYERS

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." John 15:16.

GOD'S ABUNDANT BLESSINGS

You will reap God's abundant blessings for obedience as stated in chapter 24. Thus, you will have joy, peace, and fulfilment; and thereby enjoy a robust mental health.

ROLLING AWAY OF REPROACHES

As we faithfully serve God through evangelism and discipleship, God can meet us at the point of our needs; and thus take away our reproach. An example that readily comes to mind is that of Pastor Zechariah.

"... a certain priest named Zechariah.... His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God.... But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years" Luke 1:5-7.

However, while Pastor Zechariah was faithfully serving in God's House, God promised him a son.

"So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God.... Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him.... said to him.... your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.... he will be great in the

sight of the Lord....” Luke 1:8-17.

The Almighty God made good His promise to Pastor Zechariah.

“... his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, “thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.” ... Now Elizabeth’s full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son.” Luke 1:24-25; 57.

HEAVEN AT LAST!

As we continue the path of obedience to God till the end, one will make Heaven at last! It is not surprising therefore that the Bible says, *“... he who wins souls is wise.” Proverbs 11:30.*

BE STRONGLY DETERMINED

You need to be strongly determined to successfully do the Assignment to the end. There are times that discouragement, distractions, or persecutions may come; however, keep at it.

It was this strong determination that helped Nehemiah to fulfil his God-given mission of rebuilding Jerusalem’s broken walls; despite the attempts of Tobiah, Sanballat, and Geshem to stop the good work.

These opposers used mockery, intimidation, distraction, blackmail, and false prophecy to deter Nehemiah from accomplishing his task; but Nehemiah was undeterred! Hear some of Nehemiah’s brave responses to them.

(1). *“... I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.” Nehemiah 6:3-4.*

(2). *“Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.” For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, “Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.” Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.” Nehemiah 6:8-9.*

(3). *“... I said, “Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!” Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that*

he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him." Nehemiah 6:11-12.

It is important to note that Nehemiah prayed for God's help on the work, and God came through for him. We ought to do likewise; to finish well and strong. Please, be reminded that all glory must always go to God, our Enabler.

"So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God." Nehemiah 6:15-16.

CONCLUSION

As you fulfil the Assignment, you will have the joy, peace, and fulfilment that come with obedience to God. Thus, you are positioned to enjoy a steady mental health.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Be Renewed by God's Word

INTRODUCTION

The mind is the seat of our thoughts. Our thoughts are powerful, as they affect our feelings and behaviours; hence, you are what you think. *"Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts."* Proverbs 4:23 (GNT).

This means that the Bible identifies a correlation between thoughts and the quality of one's life. It is therefore essential to have healthy thoughts for a healthy life; and by implication, a sound mental health.

If you fill your mind with defeatist and depressing thoughts, you will feel defeated, hopeless and depressive. If your mind is filled with hope, joy and courage, you will feel hopeful, joyous, and courageous; even amid life's trials.

The need for healthy thoughts for a healthy life is also recognised by Science. The outcome of Scientific researches has proved that healthy thoughts, emotional response, and behaviour are necessary for a good mental health.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

Science has come up with the idea of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT); also called Cognitive Therapy. CBT is used in treating some disorders like anxiety, depression, anorexia, bulimia, substance abuse etc. CBT has been defined as:

"Psychotherapy that combines cognitive therapy with behaviour

therapy by identifying faulty or maladaptive patterns of thinking, emotional response, or behaviour and substituting them with desirable patterns of thinking, emotional response, or behaviour."⁵⁷

As good as the goal of CBT is, the inner strength to do its prescription is only possible through God's grace! Again, this is where having Christ's abundant life through the new birth becomes very vital for a sound mental health.

The new birth qualifies a person for the Holy Spirit's empowerment; to replace unhealthy thoughts, feelings, and behaviours with healthy (Bible-based) ones. I call this "Christ's Cognitive Behavioural Therapy" (CCBT); or Christ's Therapy.

"CHRIST'S COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY" (CCBT)

CCBT is the spiritual therapy of applying God's Word in the Holy Bible, to identify and prayerfully gain victory over unwholesome thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

This is achievable through the new birth; a regular studying, meditating, and obeying God's Word. CCBT can be effectively used for both preventive and restorative purposes. CCBT is a component of Jesus Christ's Therapy (JCT).⁵⁸

In view of the above, we can safely say that; to protect, or restore your mental health, ensure that you are truly born again. Afterwards, keep growing in Christ through studying, meditating and obeying God's Word etc.

CCBT AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

The application of CCBT to your life shapes your thoughts, feelings, and behaviour by the Word of God. This renews your mind; gives you healthy thoughts, feelings, and behaviour; and a balanced mental health.

We regularly plug our cell phones (or laptops) to the power source to recharge their batteries to make them functional. In the same way, you must regularly "recharge" your mind through God's Word to achieve a steady mental health.

"... be continually renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh, untarnished mental and spiritual attitude]." Ephesians 4:23 (AMP).

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WHAT THEN?

If you have been dwelling on negative, pessimistic, or ungodly thoughts, the time to throw them out is now! Then, replace them with the truth of God's Word, and believe who God says you are in Christ. Below are some starters:

- I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14); so I am good-looking, smart, and confident.
- I am greatly loved by the Almighty God (John 3:16). I am very important and not a nonentity.
- God has cleansed me with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and has forgiven me my sins; I am now God's child. (John 1:12). Therefore, I am a Prince or Princess of the King of Kings. I am Royalty.
- I am the apple of God's eyes (Zechariah 2:8); so I am very precious to God.
- I am beloved, blessed, bold, intelligent, loving and kind. *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* 2 Timothy 1:7.
- I might have gone through a lot in the past, or in recent times; however, the Almighty God has my back; so, I am coming out victorious. (Isaiah 43:2). I am not inferior to anyone. (Job 12:3; and Job 13:2).
- The challenges I am facing does not define me; neither people's opinion. I am who God says I am; a peculiar person, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).
- I am not defeated, nor hopeless. This can only be a temporary setback; I will bounce back; I am victorious through Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57) etc.

You can find more Scripture verses that speak hope, courage, victory; and the affirmation of who God says you are. Then sincerely confess them out regularly, and you will see your confession becoming your possession.

PLEASE, WATCH OUT

As you renew your mind through God's Word, guard against pollutants. These are what cannot help you to live holy; ungodly songs, films, books, magazines, posters, cartoons; also ungodly internet sites, and chat rooms etc.

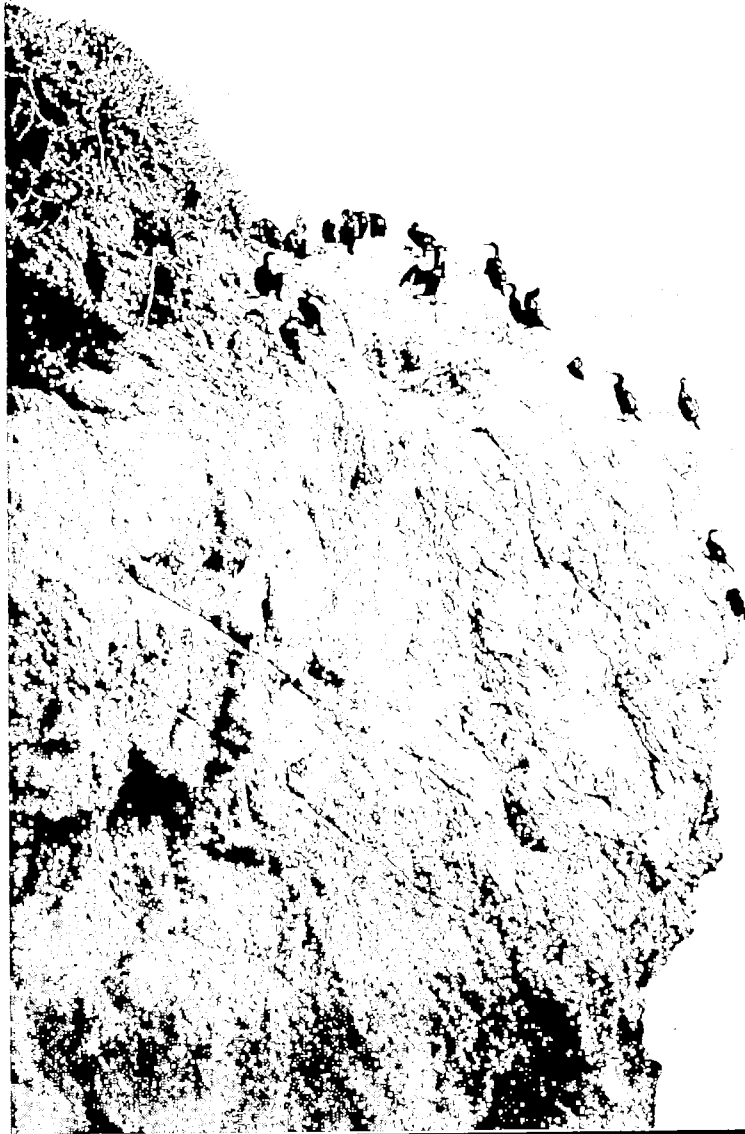
Also, watch out against cultivating friendship with the ungodly; *"... for 'bad company corrupts good character.'" (1 Corinthians*

15:33b). This is not to mean we should shun them; but that we cannot be in a close friendship with them.

CONCLUSION

The only healthy source of mind renewal is God's Word in the Holy Bible; therefore, regularly study, meditate, and obey it. Thus your mind is constantly renewed to have healthy thoughts, emotion, and behaviour.

"And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.... May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Philipians 4:8 & 23 (NLT).



Part Five

Guard your heart Diligently

INTRODUCTION

The heart is central to the body, and its condition determines the physical health. Also, the heart is the seat of affection; so, the people you allow into it (in terms of the relationship you cultivate) determines your mental health.

It is not surprising therefore that the Bible says, "*Keep your heart with all diligence....*" (*Proverbs 4:23a*). The issue of relationship is a major source of stress in mankind; and therefore, a major threat to a person's mental health.

The people you open your heart to in relationship cannot leave your life neutral; they will make, or mar your life. This means that a relationship will either add, or subtract value from you; depending on its quality.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AMONG HUMANS

Human beings are social beings; that is, we have been created and configured to interact with one another. Therefore, humans are involved in a network of inter-personal interactions with other people in the society.

We interact with family members, neighbours, colleagues at work, and school; fellow Church members; and there is interaction between two people in a marriage relationship.

Everybody wants to have a relationship that is full of love, joy, and fulfilment. In order to achieve this, ensure you are truly born again,

and daily living for God; more so because of your eternity. Thus, you have access to God's guidance and help in cultivating healthy relationships.

A NECESSARY CLARIFICATION

The word "marriage" is used above to mean the union between a man and a woman as ordained by God; He joined a man and a woman as husband and wife in the garden of Eden. This clarification becomes necessary because of the perversion of marriage today through homosexuality.

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"." Genesis 2:21-23.

THE NATURE OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS.

Social interactions can be healthy or unhealthy. Some interactions enrich your life, while some cause pains and devastations. *"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."* Proverbs 13:20.

Therefore, be very careful who you call your friend. This is especially important because, you are likely to choose whom you will engage (in preparation for the life-long relationship of marriage) from among your circle of friends.

CHOOSING A LIFE PARTNER

The choice of the person you will spend the rest of your life with is a serious matter that must be carefully handled. This is very essential, so as to avoid entering into a toxic relationship.

The quality of the choice of who to marry will to a great extent determine the health of a marriage; and by extension, one's mental health. If you get it right, you are in for a glorious marital life, despite the sure challenges of marriage.

If one fails to get it right in the choice of who to marry, then one is set up for a life of avoidable stress. This will negatively affect a per-

son's life, mental health; and maybe one's eternity too. Therefore:

1. ENTRUST YOUR CHOICE TO GOD

You must have first entrusted your life to God through the new birth, before you can trust God with your choice of a life partner.

Therefore, ensure you are genuinely born again, and daily living for God. Then, trust God with your choice of a life partner! The Bible says: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes...."* Proverbs 3:5-7a.

2. AVOID BUILDING ON A WEAK FOUNDATION

Please, do not let money, position, profession, connection, charisma, popularity, wealthy family background; or sheer sentiments be the basis for entering (or continuing in) a relationship with someone.

There are people with charisma, but no character, nor integrity; or some with material wealth, but are spiritually bankrupt. Always remember that the friendship you cultivate should be value-adding in the light of eternity.

3. GUARD AGAINST EMOTIONAL ENTANGLEMENT.

In your social interactions, be deliberate about avoiding unnecessary familiarity with the opposite sex; talking, texting, chatting, e-mailing, telephoning, video-callings, exchange of pictures, Facebooking; and sharing of personal issues etc.

Please, know that spending time together, whether in person, on the social media, or on phone do not leave you the same. These have ways of bonding people together; thus making one vulnerable to emotional entanglement.

You may be thinking "we are just friends". The truth is, close interactions lead to emotional intimacy; and things can progress from a shoulder to cry on to a body to sleep with! Also, it can negatively affect your choice of a life partner.

It is also very important to guard against careless interactions with people of the same sex. This is due to the issue of homosexuality in these perilous times. You cannot be too careful, but one can be too careless.

"A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences." Prov-

erbs 22:3 (NLT).

4. REFUSE TO BE MANIPULATED INTO A RELATIONSHIP.

Please, do not allow anyone to use fabricated prophecies and dreams, or a twisting of God's Word to manipulate, pressurize, or threaten you into a relationship. Guard your heart diligently!

5. BEWARE OF FALSE BRETHREN

The Apostle Paul spoke about "... *false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage) ...*" Galatians. 2:4.

False brethren can be said to be people who pretend to be born again but are not; and so are unfaithful to the cause of Jesus Christ our Lord. They are deliberately out to deceive; to bring true brethren into bondage.

Therefore, in your social interactions and quest for a life partner, be discerning; beware of false brethren! This is why it is essential for you to maintain a steady growth in Christ; more so to avoid a shipwreck of your Christian race.

6. DO NOT GET ENGAGED TO A STRANGER

Make sure you know the person very well, and be spiritually discerning. Also, ask questions where necessary; and be open to questions from the other person too. Thus, you are enabled to make an informed decision; this saves you from future heartaches and regrets!

7. AVOID UNEQUAL YOKE

It is important that you enter courtship with a fellow believer in Christ. This is in your own interest; and for the glory of God. The Bible warns believers against unequal yoke in relationship.

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." 2 Corinthians 6:14-16.

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When you avoid an unequal yoke courtship, you have a very solid foundation to build a godly Home. When you are eventually married, your marital journey will be smooth; despite the inevitable challenges of marriage.

However, if you are unequally yoked in courtship, you have successfully laid a weak foundation for your home. Thus, you will reap stress that could have been avoided! *"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" Amos 3:3.*

The marital journey will be anything but smooth. The believer will not have a spouse to enjoy Christ with; and the unbelieving spouse will not have one to enjoy the world with! A situation like this may jeopardise one's mental health.

AN UNEQUAL YOKE COURTSHIP?

It is wise for you to break it now before it breaks you; for it will surely break you if you do not break it. A broken courtship is better than a broken life, or marriage; or staying in a stressful marriage just to save your face! Therefore:

"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you; and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:17-18.

Afterwards, keep abiding in Christ, keep serving, keep trusting God; and do not rush into another relationship. As you do, God will heal your heart and emotions; perfect all about you in His own time; and God's timing is the best!

HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR COURTSHIP?

Perhaps you are already in a courtship, here are some questions to sincerely appraise its quality. This is to know whether your courtship is value-adding, or value-subtracting:

- Is the person you are in courtship with truly born again; and steadily growing in Christ? This is non-negotiable!

If such is unsaved; run for your precious life! If you are not sure of his or her salvation status, put all sentiments away; prayerfully and sincerely find out. If the person is not born again, bow out of the relationship without looking back!

- Did you seek God's guidance before entering the courtship?

- Can you sincerely say that you have God's peace in your heart about the courtship?
- Does he/she have the fear of God?
- Does he/she have integrity, or is dubious?
- Is he/she hot for Christ, or lukewarm?
- Does he/she have a pure motive in entering the relationship?
- Is he/she in a relationship with you for selfish reasons: your status, or financial worth; your parents' financial worth, or status in the society? Please, be sure it is none of these, but because of true love for you?
- Is he/she professing Christ, but living hypocritically by indulging in secret sins? "... when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning...." 1 John 3:8a (NLT).
- Is he/she indiscriminate in cultivating friendships? A person "... of too many friends [chosen indiscriminately] will be broken in pieces and come to ruin...." Proverbs 18:24a (AMP).
- Is he/she careful, or careless, in social interactions?
- Is he/she straightforward, or manipulative?
- Is he/she selfless, or selfish?
- Does he/she have a balanced self-esteem; that is, neither proud, nor struggling with low self-esteem. A proud person may be abusive; while one with low self-esteem may not value the people in their lives etc.
- Does he/she truly accept your person; or is out to keep "editing" you to conform into who he/she thinks you should be?
- Does he/she value and respect you as a person?
- Are you conveniently compatible for a smooth relationship? The higher the degree of your compatibility, the smoother and value-adding your relationship will be.

It is essential for you to sincerely apply the above to yourself too. This will help you to appraise your life, and take necessary action; whether to be born again, or be revived in your Christian life; be humble, or value yourself more etc.

WHAT THEN?

If you do not have true peace about the relationship, please, do not rationalise things; have an honest and prayerful re-appraisal of the courtship now. Sincerely ask God for a sense of direction; and be open to His leading.

If your courtship is unhealthy; where this is due to sin; quickly repent, and forsake same. If it is due to abuse in the courtship, stand against abuse in your life; you will feel good about yourself, and also enjoy a sound mental health.

If the appraisal shows that your courtship is God-ordained, and mutually value-adding in the light of eternity, Congratulations! Please, keep yourselves pure; keep busy for God, be prayerful; for each other, other people, the Church etc.

HEARTBROKEN?

Perhaps you are just out of a relationship that left you wounded and heartbroken. Be encouraged in God; for "... *there is a [true, loving] friend who [is reliable and] sticks closer than a brother.*" *Proverbs 18:24b (AMP).*

Please, pour your heart to the Almighty God in prayers. God will heal your wounds; for, "*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*" (*Psalm 147:3*); and perfect all that concerns you in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Healthy and unhealthy relationships

A healthy relationship is fulfilling, and emotionally empowering; an unhealthy one is stressful, and emotionally draining. These will be discussed in relation to marriage; however, most of the points apply to all social interactions.

SIGNS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

There are some signs that show whether a marital relationship is healthy or unhealthy; and below are some of them.

1. Mutual love and respect: The husband and wife have true love, and mutual respect; not taking each other for granted. They relate very politely and kindly with themselves; and respect each other's boundaries.

2. Mutual trust: They trust each other. Trust is a vital ingredient in Home building; its absence makes the Home comparable to a building whose foundation is exposed to erosion. Such a Home will soon collapse.

3. Mutual acceptance: They acknowledge and celebrate their respective individuality; respecting each other as a unique human being. One is not trying to "edit", or manipulate the other person to

fit into a specific identity.

4. Self-care: Self-care is very important to having a healthy relationship. Therefore, each of the spouses attend to their personal needs as they nurture their marital relationship; and keep working on improving themselves.

The above safeguards them from stress and emotional breakdowns, equips them to take good care of one another; and strengthens their marital bond.

5. No idolization: They do not idolize each other, as this will make one to expect too much from a fellow mortal. This can be stressful to the other, and to the marriage; thus negatively affecting their mental health.

In a healthy marriage, spouses have reasonable expectations from each other; and each seeks his or her fulfilment in God who alone can fill the vacuum in man, and bring true satisfaction.

6. Taking charge of one's happiness. They each take responsibility for their respective happiness; for it depends more on them than their spouse. This is not to mean that spouses cannot seek emotional support from each other.

7. A balanced relationship: Marriage is not a master/servant relationship. The husband and wife jointly discuss, and agree on decisions to be made in the Home; and for the Home.

Each of them shows genuine interest in the activities of the other; and give emotional support to each other. They enrich their lives by cultivating healthy relationships with other godly people.

8. Absence of domestic violence; or any form of abuse. A healthy relationship is such that no domestic violence is perpetrated by one against the other. This removes stress from couples, thus sustaining their mental health.

9. Marital commitment: The couple are committed to making their marriage work, and do things in the interest of their union. They are happy to be together and enjoy spending time with each other.

10. Marital faithfulness: They are honest with each other in their marital relationship. Each of them is committed to their marital vows at all cost, guarding against betrayal; whether through sexual or emotional adulteries.

Sexual adultery refers to engaging in sexual activity with someone

other than your lawfully married spouse; while emotional adultery occurs when you have emotional intimacy with someone other than your lawfully married spouse.

Emotional adultery can also be explained as allowing another person to occupy the space in your heart and thoughts; which should be occupied by your lawfully married spouse alone. This gradually weakens a marital relationship.

Emotional adultery is toxic to a marriage as sexual adultery. It is the precursor to sexual adultery, except it is quickly nipped in the bud. As earlier stated, interactions can progress from a shoulder to cry on to a body to sleep with!

Therefore, in a healthy marital relationship, each spouse keeps off sexual and emotional adulteries. This makes lawfully married couple to be increasingly bonded together in their holy matrimony.

11. Good communication: Each of them does not repress their true feelings or their fears. They freely share their concerns with each other without fear of being disdained, ridiculed, bullied, judged, or victimized.

They both respect each other's feelings. Also, each of them acts in the best interest of the other, their marital relationship; and the glory of God.

12. Amicable conflict resolution: Conflicts are part of a healthy relationship. Therefore, they are not repressed; but promptly, prayerfully, and politely resolved; seeing it as a tool for learning and growing together.

13. Ready forgiveness: In a healthy relationship, each spouse is readily forgiven of the other's lapses and would not keep berating the other for them. They learn from their mistakes to improve themselves and their marriage.

14. The God-factor: They do not leave God out of their marital life; He is their all-round Anchor. They daily live in obedience to Him, and run their Home by God's Word. This strengthens their marital bond; and gives them sound mental health.

The Bible says: "*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it ...*" Psalm 127:1a.

SIGNS OF UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

As earlier mentioned in this chapter, unhealthy relationships are value-subtracting, stressful; and emotionally draining. These can cause problems in other areas of a person's life. Here are some signs of unhealthy relationships.

- Pressure to change who you are; or to quit the activity you enjoy doing in order to please your spouse. This makes you to "edit" yourself and your activities to please the other; this leaves you unfulfilled.
- Lack of mutual respect; or where one of the spouses treats the other with disrespect.
- Lack of respect for the spouse's family or friends.
- The marital interactions can be described as "boss/servant" relationship.
- A spouse's opinion is repressed, or cannot be freely expressed without fear of rejection, reprimand etc.
- Lack of fairness in handling conflicts.
- One or both may manipulate and put pressure on the other person to agree with him or her.
- Self-neglect instead of self-care. Also, one may be neglectful of the other in the marital relationship.
- Feelings of worry, or guilt when one disagrees with the other.
- One becomes too critical of the other's actions, opinions, dressing etc.
- A gradual drifting apart through failure to spend quality time together.
- The presence of emotional, verbal, or physical abuse.
- There may be sexual abuse in the marital relationship, and one partner is forced to have sex against his/her wish; or in a way such feels uncomfortable with.
- Also, financial abuse may be perpetrated by one against the other; a spouse may exercise unfair control over their jointly owned resources like car, money, house, food etc.

We can infer from the characteristics of unhealthy relationships outlined above, that a person in such situation may be expected to be greatly stressed; and become vulnerable to mental health challenge.

RELATIONSHIPS AND MENTAL HEALTH

The issue of relationship is one of the major sources of stress in life. Please, remember that the people you allow into your heart as friends, or spouses cannot leave you neutral; such will make, or mar you.

"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed." Proverbs 13:20.

In fact, the outcome of Researches in the Behavioural Sciences has shown that healthy relationships boost a person's mental health; while unhealthy (or toxic) relationships jeopardise one's mental health.

Therefore, to keep your sanity, be careful of who you open your heart to; whether in friendship, courtship, or marriage.

IN A TOXIC RELATIONSHIP?

If you are already caught up in a toxic relationship, please, do not keep quiet, seek help; a burden shared is a burden relieved! You can talk to a genuine Pastor, trusted Christian friend, or family member; or a Mental Health Professional.

Above all, tell it all to our caring Almighty God; *"casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. "(1 Peter 5:7); "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Psalm 147:3.*

CONCLUSION

The quality of your relationships hugely determines the state of your mental health. Therefore, be careful of the relationship you cultivate. Remember to always *"Keep your heart with all diligence...."* Proverbs 4:23.

29

You and your Finances

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Bible is a well of wisdom for godly living; including the correct handling of our finances. The Bible is to guide, correct, instruct, encourage, and thoroughly equip us with all we need to cope on life's path. It is written:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

POWER TO MAKE WEALTH

All we have is through God's grace; He is the Giver of good health, and the wisdom to make wealth. *"And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...."* Deuteronomy 8:18a.

In view of the above, we are mere custodians of all we have, and will one day give account to God how we used them. God's provision is not only for our personal upkeep; but also for God's Work, and to help the poor etc.

TIPS FOR A HEALTHY FINANCIAL LIFE

1. BEWARE OF THE LOVE OF MONEY

The Christian is to passionately love God; with all of one's heart, soul, and mind (see Matthew 22:37-38). We are not to love money.

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil...." 1 Timothy 6:10a.

This is not to say we should not work hard to earn money; but rather not to love money. The love of God and the love of money cannot co-exist in a heart; it must be one or the other.

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Luke 16:13.

We are in perilous times, where people are "... lovers of money.... without self-control...." (2 Timothy 3:2-3). The Christian must be very vigilant not to catch this end-time "spiritual flu" of the love of money (See also 1 Timothy 6:9-10).

2. LIVE WITHIN YOUR MEANS

Do not live beyond your means; either to be like the Joneses, or for whatever reason. Avoid a flashy life to impress people, or attract attention to yourself; especially where you cannot afford such luxuries.

3. HAVE CONTENTMENT

Be contented with what you have. This will help you to truly enjoy each stage of your life. *"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have...." Hebrews 13:5.*

This does not mean one should be apathetic about making advancement in life and career; but rather, to shun an obsessive pursuit after wealth. Always be grateful to God for where you are per time. This boosts your mental health.

4. BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS

Avoid a greedy thirst for material acquisitions; *"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Luke 12:15.*

5. PLAN YOUR FINANCES WELL

According to a popular saying, "when you fail to plan, you plan to fail". Therefore, have a budget ahead of spending, and keep to it. However, give room for flexibility as the need arises.

6. ENDEAVOUR TO SAVE

Save something regularly; no matter how little!

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7. BE HARD-WORKING

"He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." (Proverbs 10:4). However, trust God to bless your work. "... for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...." Deuteronomy 8:18a.

8. AVOID OVERWORKING YOURSELF.

It is important to take time to rest, to avoid stress through overwork. The Bible says, *"Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit." Proverbs 23:4 (NLT).*

When you are stressed, your mental health is negatively affected; and you incur avoidable additional expenses to restore your health.

9. HAVE INTEGRITY

God wants us to be honest in all dealings with others; and in your financial transactions with individuals or corporate bodies. *"Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight." Proverbs 11:1.*

The lack of integrity deprives of God's blessings on one's finances; because cutting corners cut short in the end! *"The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them." Proverbs 11:3.*

"Two classes of people lose money; those who are too weak to guard what they have; those who win money by trick. They both lose in the end."⁵⁹

10. DEAL JUSTLY WITH YOUR WORKERS

If you are an employer of labour, pay for services rendered to you. *"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness... who uses his neighbour's service without wages and gives him nothing for his work." Jeremiah 22:13.*

Also, pay your employees well, and pay them promptly! Ensure that their salaries or wages commensurate with the volume of work they do for you; not less! This makes them happy working for you, and God blesses you for this.

"You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy.... Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he... has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you." Deuteronomy 24:14-15.

11. ABIDE IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD

This gives you God's blessings. *"The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you...."* Deuteronomy 28:8. (See Deuteronomy 28:1-14 for the full blessings).

God's blessings will bring you His peace, provision, and fulfillment. These shield you from all forms of stress; and make you enjoy a sound mental health.

12. BE A GIVER

Firstly, ensure you provide for the needs of your family. *"If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever,"* 1 Timothy 5:8 (RSV).

As earlier stated, our money is not for us alone. We must give to the needy; *"He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given."* (Proverbs 19:17); also to gospel ministers, and for God's work.

Apart from money, our time and talent must be utilized for the spread of the gospel. Giving will not always be convenient, but it is beneficial; it breaks the hold of materialism off your life, and God blesses you in return.

".... remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:35b.

GOD'S WORD TO THE RICH

"Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." 1 Timothy 6:18-19.

Also, they should not shift their trust away from God. *"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy."* 1 Timothy 6:17.

THE WORTH OF A LIFE

Life is to be measured by a rich relationship with God, and not by material acquisition. The parable of the rich fool shows the futility of riches without a rich relationship with God (See Luke 12:10-21).

Also, King Solomon's life shows that wealth alone does not satisfy (Ecclesiastes 2:3-11). The longings of man's heart for fulfilment can only be met in God; through a living relationship with Him, and daily obeying Him till the end.

THE ISSUE OF FINANCIAL STRESS

Apart from relationship issues, another major source of stress is financial challenges. Financial stress (FS) can cause a change in your thoughts, feelings and behaviours; thus causing a decline in one's mental health.

FS can bring persistent negative thoughts and difficulty to forgive oneself over past financial mistakes. Also, you can have feelings of regrets, fear, or guilt in relation to your finances; and thus try to avoid social ceremonies.

Scientific research has reported a correlation between FS and migraine, insomnia, diabetes, and heart disease. If prolonged, FS can degenerate into "Acute Financial Stress" (AFS):

ACUTE FINANCIAL STRESS (AFS)

AFS is "a pattern of intrusive thoughts, disordered feelings and avoidant behaviours related to your finances."⁶⁰

Its symptoms are like those of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: regret, guilt, acute anxiety, insomnia, feeling isolated; hyper-vigilance, denial, emotional numbing, avoiding stress reminders; and flashbacks to past stressful events.

In view of the above, we can safely say that prolonged financial challenges can lead to Acute Financial Stress (AFS). This often have a negative effect on a person's mental health.

GOING THROUGH FINANCIAL STRESS?

Perhaps your finances are in a real mess, or you are knee-deep in debts? Maybe your business is failing or has gone bankrupt, and your creditors have sued you; thus compounding your financial situation through legal fees?

Please, do not despair; help is available in God. As you look to Him, He can send you help; or give you creative ideas to improve your finances. "... for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...." Deuteronomy 8:18a.

A WIDOW HELPED BY GOD

There was this widow in 2 Kings 4:1-7 whose late husband had some debts; and their two sons were to be taken as bondmen. She had just a jar of oil at home. She sought help and God used Elisha to do the seemingly ridiculous!

She was instructed to get many empty jars as she could get and pour oil into each of them. The woman obeyed; and as she did, all the empty jars were filled with oil until no empty jar was left.

Elisha instructed the widow to go and sell the oil, use part of its proceeds to pay the creditors, and live on the rest. Perhaps you are wondering how God will solve yours; please, just put your trust in God, and He will surely help you.

This may take a process, but God's Presence will be with you through the process. "... For He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear..." Hebrews 13:5-6.

WHAT THEN?

Please, cry unto God in prayers. Give your life to Jesus Christ if you have not done so; more so because of your eternal welfare. This gives you access to the Holy Spirit's help and encouragement to remain calm.

Then, tell God about your financial challenges; and the guilt, fear, anxieties, depression, legal issues, physical ailments etc. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7.

Please, do not try to figure out how God will do it, as this will stress you further; just trust Him to help you. God is an Expert in setting the stage to accomplish His purpose in people's lives; He can use anything, or anybody.

The Almighty God will come through for you in the nick of time; and you will not be put to shame. It is written, "This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Psalm 34:6.

God is "... the Father of mercies and God of all comfort..." (2 Corinthians 1:3a); He will encourage your heart. Please, no matter how long it takes to sort things out, keep trusting God. He will arise to help you, and you will testify:

"Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my sup-

plications! ... my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him." Psalm 28:6-7.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

If you are experiencing financial stress which is becoming overwhelming; or you are having suicidal thoughts, do not struggle alone. Please, urgently seek help! You can call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area.

Also, you can talk to a genuine Pastor, Christian friend, or relative; or consult a licensed Mental Health Professional.

CONCLUSION

There is a co-relation between our financial situation and mental health. Therefore, have a full grip on your finances and disallow it from getting out of hand, by following Biblical guidelines on financial matters.

Thus, your life is opened to God's blessings, peace, and fulfillment; and you will thereby enjoy sound mental health.

A Healthy Diet and Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

It is usually said that “you are what you eat”; that is, a person’s overall health is determined by one’s eating habits. Therefore, having a healthy or balanced diet is an important part of maintaining a good physical health and fitness.

Apart from your physical health, it is reported that the food you eat also affects your energy level, mood, and behaviour. This means that a healthy diet positively impacts our mental health too.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY DIET?

A healthy or balanced diet is “one that gives your body the nutrients it needs to function correctly. To get the proper nutrition from your diet, you should consume the majority of your daily calories in: fresh fruits; fresh vegetables; whole grains; legumes; nuts; lean proteins.”⁶¹

“A healthy diet starts early in life - breastfeeding fosters healthy growth, and may have longer-term health benefits, like reducing the risk of becoming overweight or obese and developing non-communicable diseases later in life.

Feeding babies exclusively with breast milk from birth to 6 months of life is important for a healthy diet. It is also important to introduce a variety of safe and nutritious complementary foods at 6 months of age, while continuing to breastfeed until your child is two years old and beyond.”⁶²

A balanced or healthy diet provides all the vital nutrients for health, without exceeding the required daily calorie intake. This includes foods from these five groups:

- Fresh vegetables: leafy greens, red or orange vegetables, starchy vegetables, beans and peas (legumes); other vegetables, such as eggplant or zucchini.
- Fruits: A balanced diet includes plenty of fruits. We are to eat whole fruits instead of getting fruit from juice. Fruit juice contains fewer nutrients as the manufacturing process often adds empty calories due to added sugar.
- Grains: Whole grains include all three parts of the grain; the bran, germ, and endosperm. The body breaks down whole grains slowly, so they have less effect on a person's blood sugar.
- Protein: Nutritious protein choices include lean beef and pork, chicken and turkey, fish, beans, peas, and legumes.
- Dairy: This includes food items such as yogurt, cheese and butter. Dairy and fortified soy products are a vital source of calcium.

It is recommended that people who are lactose intolerant can opt for low-lactose or lactose-free products; or choose soy-based sources of calcium and other nutrients.

TIPS FOR A HEALTHY DIET

1. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables; at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. We are to eat a variety of vegetables to avoid boredom in our meals. Fruits and vegetables are important sources of:

"... vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre, plant protein, and antioxidants. People with diets rich in vegetables and fruit have a significantly lower risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and certain types of cancer."⁶³

"People may enjoy vegetables raw or cooked. However, it is important to remember that cooking vegetables removes some of their nutritional value. Also, some methods, such as deep-frying, can add unhealthful fats to a dish."⁶⁴

It is recommended that people should opt for fresh or frozen fruits, or fruits canned in water instead of syrup.

2. Daily eat some grains (wheat, barley, rye, maize, or rice); or starchy tubers (potato, yam, taro, or cassava). At least half of the grains that a person eats daily should be whole grains; e.g. quinoa, oats, brown rice, barley, buckwheat.

Whole grains are rich in fibre, making you to feel full and satisfied; and thereby helping you to maintain a healthy body weight. They contain more fibre and protein than refined grains.

Also, whole grains are said to “lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers; and other health problems.”⁶⁵ Potatoes with the skins on are sources of fibre and vitamins; so, eat your boiled or baked potatoes with the skin.

3. Choose lean cuts of meat, and skinless poultry whenever possible; this is to cut down on fat. It is important to always cook meat thoroughly; and to eat less red and processed meat like bacon, ham and sausages.

4. Eat low fat dairy products as much as possible. “The USDA recommend consuming low-fat versions whenever possible. Low-fat dairy and soy products include ricotta or cottage cheese, low-fat milk, yogurt, soymilk.”⁶⁶

5. Eat balanced meals. In view of all the above, eating a healthy diet means that we should eat foods from the five major groups. You are to consume the right amount of food and drink; to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

“According to the USDA’s recommendations, half of a person’s plate should consist of fruits and vegetables. The other half should be made up of grains and protein. They recommend accompanying each meal with a serving of low-fat dairy, or another source of the nutrients found in dairy.”⁶⁷

People with a health challenge, or special dietary needs are to ask their Doctor, or a registered Dietitian for advice.

6. Be regularly well-hydrated. There is this popular saying that “water is life. Our bodies need water to survive. “.... Every cell, tissue and organ in your body needs water to work properly. For example, water:

- Gets rid of wastes through urination, perspiration, and bowel movements.
- Keeps your temperature normal.

- Lubricates and cushions joints.
- Protects sensitive tissues."⁶⁸

Water is the best choice of rehydration because it hydrates you without adding any extra calories to your daily intake. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine determined that an adequate daily fluid intake is:

- About 15.5 cups (3.7 litres) of fluids for men.
- About 11.5 cups (2.7 litres) of fluids for women.

These recommendations cover fluids from water, other beverages and food.... You've probably heard the advice, "Drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day." That's easy to remember, and it's a reasonable goal.

Most healthy people can stay hydrated by drinking water and other fluids whenever they feel thirsty. For some people, fewer than eight glasses a day might be enough. But other people might need more."⁶⁹

Guard against these

7. Limit intake of sugars. It is reported that "... for a healthy diet, sugars should represent less than 10% of your total energy intake. Reducing even further to under 5% has additional health benefits; to reduce sugar intake:

- opt for fresh fruits instead of sweet snacks like cookies, cakes and chocolate.
- limit the intake of soft drinks, soda, and other drinks high in sugars (fruit juices, cordials, and syrups, flavoured milks and yogurt drinks).⁷⁰

8. Eat less saturated fat. It has been said that too much saturated fat can increase the amount of cholesterol in the blood; thus increasing the risk of developing heart disease.

9. Avoid eating too much salt as it can raise blood pressure. This increases the risk of getting heart disease, or having a stroke.⁷¹ Limiting the amount of salt and high-sodium condiments (soy sauce and fish sauce) when cooking and preparing foods helps reduce salt intake.⁷²

THE BENEFITS OF A BALANCED DIET

When your diet consists of fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy

fats, whole grains, lean proteins and low-fat dairy foods, you are set to reap the benefits of a balanced diet. Some of these are:

GOOD ALL-ROUND HEALTH

A balanced diet supplies all the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients you require to function well. This boosts your energy level, and your all-round health; and by extension your mental health.

GLOW AND IMPROVED MOOD

If you consistently eat a variety of healthy and whole foods, they will give a healthy glow to your body and hair. Also, you experience an improvement in your mood; thus enhancing your mental health.

AN ENHANCED IMMUNITY

The vitamins and minerals contained in a healthy diet builds up our resistance to diseases and encourages healthy development.

A REDUCED RISK OF DISEASE

The boost to our immune system helps to reduce the risk of diseases; this frees one from extra medical expenses. It has been reported that:

"A healthy diet can protect the human body against certain types of diseases, in particular noncommunicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases⁷³, some types of cancer and skeletal conditions.⁷⁴

Also, according to New York University's Langone Medical Centre, when combined with regular physical activity, a balanced diet can help prevent serious health problems.⁷⁵

A HEALTHY HEART AND BRAIN

A healthy diet helps to maintain a healthy heart. Also, a lifestyle of balanced diet enhances the health of your brain.

".... Eating high-quality foods that contain lots of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants nourishes the brain and protects it from oxidative stress⁷⁶ — the "waste" (free radicals) produced when the body uses oxygen, which can damage cells."⁷⁷

ADEQUATE BODY WEIGHT

A healthy diet helps to maintain an adequate body weight which is essential to good health. This protects against obesity, or being

underweight; thus helping to maintain a Body Mass Index (BMI) that keeps one in good health.⁷⁸

AN ENRICHED LIFE

Healthy eating is a good opportunity to enrich life by experimenting with different foods from different cultures, origins and with different ways to prepare food.

The benefits of eating a wide variety of foods are also emotional, as variety and colour are important ingredients of a balance diet.⁷⁹ All these give us fulfilment; and a sound mental health.

A FINAL WORD

In as much as it is beneficial to our overall health to eat balanced diet as specified above, it has added advantage when we eat together as a family unit. It is more enjoyable, and produces greater bonding with one another.

The society is getting increasingly complex that family mealtimes are gradually disappearing. There were days when family members sit together at table, bless their meals, eat relatedly, and close with prayers.

During such times, proper meals were served (not junk food). Children were taught what constitutes good table manners; proper use of cutleries; not filling one's mouth with food; proper mastication of food etc.

However, these days, it is common to see people (young or old) eating their meals while driving; or as they commute to work, or School. This can increase parents and children's stress levels; thus taking a toll on their mental health.

Even where meals are eaten at home, each member may be on their own rather than eating together at the dining table. The teenagers may go off to their rooms to eat as they play computer games, or chat with friends.

All the above scenario has robbed families of their togetherness. There is increasing isolation and loneliness within some family units; thus making members more vulnerable to mental health disorders and complications.

In order to avert an increasing family disintegration and mental breakdown, let us restore family mealtimes; among other factors

(BMI)

that make for family cohesion. Thus, we enjoy enhanced emotional support and family bonding; one's mental health also receives a boost.

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The Importance of Adequate Rest

INTRODUCTION

The Almighty God our Creator has configured us to require sleep. This is to rest our bodies and minds, in order to be renewed in strength. The Bible says: "... *He giveth his beloved sleep.*" *Psalm 127:2b (KJV)*.

God rested after His creative work. This is not because He was weary; for "... *The Everlasting God... does not become weary or tired....*" (*Isaiah 40:28*); but perhaps to show us the need for rest.

If the immortal Almighty God rested, not because He needed to; how much more should mere mortals like us take time to rest. Therefore, we really need regular and adequate rest for the benefit of our all-round health.

In view of the above, you need to regularly cease from work to have sufficient rest; to relax your body, mind, recover lost energy; and be renewed in strength. This is buttressed by our Lord Jesus Christ when He told the disciples:

"... *"Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."* For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat." *Mark 6:31*.

REST AND MENTAL HEALTH

There is this popular saying that "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". Please, permit me to say, "all work and no rest makes Jack a stressed man"; and "all work and no rest makes

Jane a stressed woman.

When we refuse to rest, or fail to rest enough, stress becomes unavoidable; and stress does no one any good. It jeopardises a person's health, including one's mental health.

Also, research findings have shown a correlation between stress and diseases like cancer, diabetes etc. Therefore, do not sacrifice your health by overworking; it is just not worth it. The Bible says:

"Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit. In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle." Proverbs 23:4-5 (NLT).

As much as it is good to work hard, it is essential to regularly take time off for rest and relaxation. This continually equips you to be your best at work, and life's endeavours. It also safeguards your mental health.

WHAT REPRESENTS ADEQUATE REST?

It is necessary to know how much of rest is adequate for good health. This is to enable you rate your hours of sleep, to know whether you are having enough rest or not; and make necessary adjustments in the interest of your health.

According to Eric J. Olson (M.D.) of Mayo Clinic, "The amount of sleep you need depends on various factors - especially your age. While sleep needs vary significantly among individuals, consider these general guidelines for different age groups:

Age Group	Recommended amount of sleep
New-borns	14 to 17 hours a day
12 months	About 10 hours at night, plus 4 hours of naps
2 years	About 11 to 12 hours at night, plus a 1- to 2-hour afternoon nap
3 to 5 years	10 to 13 hours
6 to 13 years	9 to 11 hours
14 to 17 years	8 to 10 hours
Adults	7 to 9 hours

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In addition to age, other factors can affect how many hours of sleep you need. For example:

Pregnancy. Changes in the body during early pregnancy can increase the need for sleep.

Aging. Older adults need about the same amount of sleep as younger adults. As you get older, however, your sleeping patterns might change. Older adults tend to sleep more lightly and for shorter time spans than do younger adults.

Previous sleep deprivation. If you're sleep-deprived, the amount of sleep you need increases.

Sleep quality. If your sleep is frequently interrupted, or you are not getting quality sleep. The quality of your sleep is just as important as the quantity.

Some people claim to feel rested on just a few hours of sleep a night, but their performance is likely affected. Research shows that people who sleep so little over many nights don't perform as well on complex mental tasks as do people who get closer to seven hours of sleep a night."⁸⁰

THE HEALTH RISKS OF INADEQUATE SLEEP

Scientific research has found a link between inadequate sleep and many health challenges. It can also affect one's feelings, thoughts, behaviour, and memory; thus negatively impacting one's mental health. Inadequate sleep can cause:

LOW CONCENTRATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

Inadequate sleep makes you tired and stressed. This reduces your level of concentration and productivity; whether at work, or generally.

POOR RETENTIVE MEMORY

When a person does not have enough sleep, one may be unable to retain much of what one hears, reads, or see.

LACK OF ENERGY

We all know from observation and experience that when a person has not had adequate sleep, one tends to lack energy, and get light-headed. As soon as one gets enough sleep, everything returns to normal.

EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY

When people do not get enough sleep, they tend to be moody, or easily angry. Even, a baby in need of sleep is usually very cranky and irritable; so also adults. Sleep disruptions can cause negative thinking and emotional vulnerability.

WEAK IMMUNE SYSTEM

It has been reported by researchers that inadequate sleep weakens a person's immune system; thus resulting in a decreased ability to resist infection. One's body becomes vulnerable to viruses which can cause diseases.

"During sleep, your immune system releases proteins called cytokines, some of which help promote sleep. Certain cytokines need to increase when you have an infection or inflammation, or when you're under stress. Sleep deprivation may decrease the production of these protective cytokines. In addition, infection-fighting antibodies and cells are reduced during periods when you don't get enough sleep."⁸¹

INCREASED RISK OF DISEASES

Scientists have found a correlation between inadequate sleep and some chronic diseases. "... Not getting enough sleep is linked with many chronic diseases and conditions—such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and depression...."⁸²

Also, "there is some evidence of a link between insufficient sleep and the risk of cancer. In particular, people with circadian rhythm disorders⁸³—in which the body's biological clock is disrupted because of shift work, for example—may be at increased risk."⁸⁴

According to Cappuccio, F. P. et.al⁸⁵, "Research has also found that inadequate sleep increases blood pressure levels in people who already have hypertension. This finding may be one reason why people who lack sleep over time have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease⁸⁶."

The increased risk of diseases due to inadequate sleep can increase a person's financial burden. This is because of decreased productivity and the cost of health care services needed for restoration to good health.

ACCELERATION OF THE AGING PROCESS

Inadequate sleeping habit can result in stress; thus making one

to age fast. "... we all age ... but a tired person usually ages before their time ... as opposed to someone who is stress-free and relaxed."⁸⁷

AUTO ACCIDENTS

Inadequate sleep has also been reported as one of the main causes of auto accidents. "... Not getting enough sleep can lead to motor vehicle crashes and mistakes at work, which cause a lot of injury and disability each year...."⁸⁸

THE BENEFITS OF ADEQUATE REST

Scientific experts have suggested that adequate sleep is as important to our wellness as good nutrition and wholesome exercise. Therefore, getting enough sleep daily should be on our priority list. Below are some of its benefits:

1. RESTORATION OF LOST ENERGY

"While sleeping well is no guarantee of good health, it does help to maintain many vital functions. One of the most important of these functions may be to provide cells and tissues with the opportunity to recover from the wear and tear of daily life. Major restorative functions in the body such as tissue repair, muscle growth, and protein synthesis occur almost exclusively during sleep."⁸⁹

2. MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL BOOSTS.

When one is well-rested, you are free from stress. This helps you to stay mentally and emotionally fit by fostering mental and emotional resilience. This is value-adding to your mental and emotional health.

3. IMPROVED CONCENTRATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

The report from Scientific studies have shown that relaxation can reduce mood fluctuations, and result in higher concentration. It can also bring increased productivity at work; or any other life's endeavours.

4. IMPROVED IMMUNE SYSTEM

A regular and adequate sleep boosts your immune system; and strengthens one's body against viruses which can cause diseases. Also, rest is key for muscle regeneration.

5. RENEWED BODY AND BRAIN CELLS

"When you sleep, your body and brain re-energize cells, clear

waste and create memories. These processes are key to protecting your overall health and regulating specific functions that guide your mood, appetite, cognitive abilities, and libido."⁹⁰

6. IMPROVEMENT OF ONE'S MEMORY

When we get enough sleep, something is activated in our brains that improves our memories.

"Healthy sleep puts us in the right state of mind to take in information as we go about the day. Not only that, we need a good night's sleep to process and retain that information over the long term. Sleep actually triggers changes in the brain that solidify memories—strengthening connections between brain cells and transferring information from one brain region to another."⁹¹

7. ENHANCED CREATIVITY

It is reported that quality sleep boosts one's creative ability. When we are well rested, we can think better and sharper; thus new ideas begin to spring up within us.

8. ACCELERATED HEALING PROCESS

We have often heard that a recuperating person is instructed by the Doctor to have bed rest. This shows the importance of a good sleep to one's quick recovery from sickness.

9. SLOWING DOWN OF THE AGING PROCESS

Apart from a godly lifestyle, a major factor in slowing down the aging process is having a good night's sleep regularly. This relieves you of stress, makes you to enjoy good mental health, and helps you to age gracefully.

Scientific research has found a correlation between the quality of sleep and the aging process of the skin. The outcome of the Research shows that sleep deprivation has adverse effects on skin aging.

"Researchers found that those who didn't sleep well exhibited more signs of skin aging including fine lines, uneven pigmentation and reduced skin elasticity.... that those who enjoyed quality sleep were quicker to recover from stressors to the skin such as sun and environmental toxins."⁹²

10. GOOD ALL-ROUND HEALTH

When you have a quality and quantity sleeping habit, there will be

improvement in your mental, emotional, and physical health; all other factors being equal.

"In the meantime, sleep experts say there is ample evidence that shows that when people get the sleep they need, they will not only feel better, but will also increase their odds of living healthier, more productive lives."⁹³

11. SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

Adequate rest can position us to receive spiritual inspiration and guidance from God.

WHAT THEN?

The above analysis of the health hazard of inadequate sleep, and the benefits of rest is to be an eye opener, or a reminder to us. This is to challenge us to stand for quality rest for the sake of our health. It is essential therefore to:

ADDRESS YOUR SLEEP ISSUES.

If you have challenges about your sleep pattern, try to resolve it; or seek help from sleep experts. Above all, seek help from the Almighty God who invented sleep for humans. "... *He giveth his beloved sleep.*" *Psalm 127:2b (KJV).*

ADOPT A GOOD SLEEPING HABIT.

Ensure you have a sleep schedule, and stick to it as much as humanly possible.

"... Go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Try to limit the difference in your sleep schedule on weeknights and weekends to no more than one hour. Being consistent reinforces your body's sleep-wake cycle⁹⁴."⁹⁵

ENSURE YOU REGULARLY HAVE ADEQUATE NIGHT REST.

Please, work during the day, and sleep at night. You may wish to check the table at the beginning of this chapter, to know the expert's recommended hours of sleep relevant to you.

CREATE A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR REST.

"Create a room that's ideal for sleeping. Often, this means cool, dark and quiet. Exposure to light might make it more challenging to fall asleep. Avoid prolonged use of light-emitting screens just before bedtime"⁹⁶

MAKE UP FOR YOUR SLEEP DEBT⁹⁷ IF YOU ARE A SHIFT WORKER.

People who do shift work are normally required to be awake at night when on duty. If you are engaged in such a job, please, ensure you have adequate rest during the day. This is for your overall health, safety, and quality of life.

GIVE GOD ALL YOUR CONCERNS

Please, remember that anxiety and worry are enemies of rest; therefore, give all your worries to the Almighty God. This lightens your heart to sleep well.

"casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully]." 1 Peter 5:7 (AMP).

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, adequate rest and relaxation are vital to our overall well-being; and by implication one's mental health. Therefore, make it a high priority in your life to regularly get enough sleep; both in quantity and quality.

Physical Exercises and Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Exercise is physical activity that is planned, structured, and repetitive for the purpose of conditioning any part of the body. Exercise is used to improve health, maintain fitness and is important as a means of physical rehabilitation.⁹⁸

In fact, increasingly robust evidence suggests that exercise is not only necessary for the maintenance of good mental health, but it can be used to treat even chronic mental illness.⁹⁹

It is reported that without regular activity, one's body "... slowly loses its strength, stamina and ability to function properly. It's like the old saying: you don't stop moving from growing old, you grow old from stopping moving...."¹⁰⁰

TYPES OF PHYSICAL EXERCISES

There are different types of physical exercises, ranging from moderate to vigorous intensity activities. Some examples are brisk walking, dancing, cycling, jogging, swimming, and playing basketball.

Some of the others are push ups, pull ups, sit ups and squats; working with resistance band and weight training. Also, hopping, skipping, jumping, jumping rope, running; and sports that involve jumping, or rapid changes in direction.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

The Experts recommended that "... if you have not been active and have a medical condition such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes or asthma, do consult your doctor on the type and amount of physical activity suitable for you."¹⁰¹

Remember to check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program, especially if you have any concerns about your fitness, haven't exercised for a long time, have chronic health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes or arthritis.¹⁰²

Also, for people without any medical challenge, it is very important that you get involved in the physical exercise that will not be too strenuous for your age and ability.

THE BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL EXERCISES

It has been reported that we need to stay active to keep our bodies healthy. A regular physical exercise is said to improve our overall wellness, and the quality of life we enjoy. Below are some of its other benefits:

1. MOOD IMPROVEMENT

Physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier, more relaxed and less anxious.

You may also feel better about your appearance and yourself when you exercise regularly, which can boost your confidence and improve your self-esteem.¹⁰³

It has been proved that aerobic exercises¹⁰⁴ help to reduce anxiety and depression; for example, jogging, swimming, cycling, walking, gardening, and dancing. Regular physical activity is said to be a natural mood lifter:

It "... can relieve stress, anxiety, depression and anger. You know that "feel good sensation" you get after doing something physical? Think of it as a happy pill with no side effects! Most people notice they feel better over time as physical activity becomes a regular part of their lives."¹⁰⁵

2. QUALITY SLEEP

Regular physical activity can help you fall asleep faster, get better sleep and deepen your sleep. Just don't exercise too close to bedtime, or you may be too energized to go to sleep.¹⁰⁶

3. ENERGY BOOST

Exercise delivers oxygen and nutrients to your tissues and helps your cardiovascular system¹⁰⁷ work more efficiently. And when your heart and lung health improve, you have more energy to tackle daily chores.¹⁰⁸

4. MENTAL ALERTNESS

When we have an improvement in our energy level, there is reduced tiredness; and this increases one's mental alertness

5. ENHANCEMENT OF BRAIN HEALTH

When we exercise regularly, it can cause an improvement in our cognitive function.¹⁰⁹

The benefits of exercise have been best defined for learning and memory, protection from neurodegeneration¹¹⁰ and alleviation of depression, particularly in elderly populations.¹¹¹

6. WEIGHT CONTROL

Exercise can help prevent excess weight gain or help maintain weight loss. When you engage in physical activity, you burn calories. The more intense the activity, the more calories you burn.¹¹²

7. PROTECTION AGAINST CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES

"... being active boosts high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol¹¹³, the "good" cholesterol, and it decreases unhealthy triglycerides¹¹⁴. This one-two punch keeps your blood flowing smoothly, which decreases your risk of cardiovascular diseases.¹¹⁵

8. STRONGER MUSCLES AND BONES

Muscle strengthening exercises like push ups, pull ups, sit ups and squats help to develop stronger muscles and bones; thus, they help to:

- Increase bone density and reduce the risk of osteoporosis.¹¹⁶
- Reduce the risk of injury. Stronger muscles are able to support your joints better, and preventing them from injury.
- Increase neural¹¹⁷ functioning, improving reaction time, thus preventing injurious falls.¹¹⁸

9. ADDED YEARS AND GRACEFUL AGING

"... People who are physically active and at a healthy weight live about seven years longer than those who are not active and

are obese. And the important part is that those extra years are generally healthier years! Staying active helps delay or prevent chronic illnesses and diseases associated with aging. So active adults maintain their quality of life and independence longer as they age.¹¹⁹

10. ENJOYMENT OF MORE SOCIAL AND FUN TIMES

Exercise and physical activity can be enjoyable. They give you a chance to unwind, enjoy the outdoors or simply engage in activities that make you happy. Physical activity can also help you connect with family or friends in a fun social setting.

So take a dance class, hit the hiking trails or join a soccer team. Find a physical activity you enjoy, and just do it. Bored? Try something new, or do something with friends or family.¹²⁰

11. OPPORTUNITY FOR MORE OUTDOOR TIME

A regular habit of doing physical exercises gives us more opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty of our environment; and to also appreciate the majesty of the Almighty God who gifted us with such beautiful environment!

WHAT THEN?

"The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. You can knock that out in just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. And every minute of moderate to vigorous activity counts toward your goal.

So, this is easy! Just move more, with more intensity, and sit less. You don't have to make big life changes to see the benefits. Just start building more activity into your day, one step at a time.¹²¹

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, no reason is good enough to neglect physical exercises; even the Holy Bible affirms its profitability. "*For bodily exercise profits a little*" 1 Timothy 4:8a.

Therefore, take advantage of that 'little profit', by embracing a lifestyle of regular physical exercises for your all-round well-being; including sound mental health.

The Value of Wholesome Recreation

INTRODUCTION

It is good for us to take time off work in order to relax our minds and bodies; and thereby be renewed in strength. However, we are to engage in leisure activities which are conducive to our moral well-being.

In view of this, any recreation that does not promote our moral wellness must be avoided. Therefore, before engaging in any recreation, please, ask yourself:

- Does this recreation agree with the Word of God?
- Does it glorify God?
- Does it teach godly virtues, and encourage a godly lifestyle?
- Does it teach violence; and encourage an ungodly lifestyle?
- Can it lead others astray?
- Can I glorify God in my body while doing it?
- Will it arouse indecent thoughts; in me, or others?
- Can it expose me to avoidable temptation?
- Will it gratify the work of the flesh?
- Can it bring reproach to the Name of Christ?
- Will the recreation put me under an evil influence? etc.

It is important to remember the Biblical injunction which says: *“... don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's*

good. Throw out anything tainted with evil." 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 (MSG).

"A list of about 100 different recreational activities, suitable for Christian young people was compiled on a Christian college campus recently. Included were games, sports, social activities, music, arts, crafts, drama, nature study, linguistic studies, collecting and service activities...."¹²²

Some other forms of recreation include family vacations; outdoor recreations like fishing, boating, cycling, hiking; also organised trips to the museum, places of historical values, zoo; or a theme park with edifying activities etc.

This means that apart from physical exercises, and a good sleeping habit; a change of scenery, taking a stroll, going on vacation, playing games; or just having a break, are all ways of improving our mental and emotional well-being.

It is important to partake in age-relevant recreation; and such that will not put one's physical health in jeopardy. Therefore, for your safety, take a recreation that is not strenuous for your age and physical health.

THE BENEFITS OF WHOLESOME RECREATION

A regular involvement in wholesome recreation is beneficial to our bodies and mental health; and some of these benefits are, it:

1. Refreshes and strengthens us physically; thus renewing our mental health. This gives us improved efficiency in our work.
2. Relieves us of stress. This improves one's mood by lowering anxiety and depression. Also value-adding to one's all-round health.
3. Is therapeutic; as it brings healing, and restores a person to good health. Recreational therapy is a component of treatment in achieving mental wellness.
4. Strengthens the bond between family members; and creates good memories among them. These are psychologically fulfilling.
5. Encourages social interactions. For example, in games like bowling or golf, you have opportunity to play with friends, or meet new people; thus enriching your social life, and by extension your mental health.

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This can also be a great opportunity to share Christ's message of hope with others; whether before, or after the game.

6. Helps people (even children) to develop attitudes of healthy competition and good sportsmanship. I observed these traits in the children of my "Maranatha Bible Club"; a forum for children evangelism and discipleship.

We meet for fellowship on Saturdays. The first Saturday of the month is tagged our "Super Saturday", during which we do wholesome recreational activities, after reviewing the previous week's lesson.

We play games like Ludo, Jenga, Football; and the highly educative "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" etc.

When we first started, some children were in tears when they lost a game, and had to be pacified. However, as time went on, such were able to accept defeat with more grace; and readily accepted to try the game again.

7. Produces some health benefits. Some games are said to strengthen and tone the muscles; as well as help to achieve weight loss; for example bowling.

8. Educates us, and broadens our outlook on life; e.g. a visit to a new country, or to an important historical site.

9. Helps us to appreciate the greatness of God through nature as we recreate in green lands, parks, or around waterfalls etc.

Access to green space (whether around the home, or in designated green areas) has been reported to have positive, long-term effects on mental health. It produces decreased anxiety, improved mood; and enhanced mental health.

In an online article by Nancy Wells (Ph.D.), a Cornell University Environmental Psychologist, it was reported that:

"Spending time exercising in a park leads to an increase in positive moods and a reduction in cortisol levels, a hormone released when the body feels stress. Similarly, increased access to green space for activities such as walking decreases stress -- especially for children...."¹²³

Access to green spaces, such as parks, has been linked to improved mental health. These 'natural' areas are thought to contribute to stress reduction and an increase in general wellbeing....

a greener environment has a positive and lasting effect on mental health.¹²⁴

The natural habitat has a way of calming one's mind; thus enhancing our creative ability. Also, its importance is seen through the fact that God planted a garden full of trees, fruits, and rivers for Adam and Eve (See Genesis 2:8-15).

When our Lord Jesus Christ was physically on earth, He often went to a garden with His disciples. This must have been very relaxing; and perhaps also utilized to enjoy a refreshing time in God's Presence. The Bible says:

"When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.... Jesus often met there with His disciples." John 18:1-2.

10. Above all, wholesome recreation gives us a balanced life as it produces a balance between work and leisure. This enhances one's productivity and mental health.

WHAT THEN?

In the light of all the above, below are some suggestions of wholesome recreational activities you can partake in.

- You can partake in indoor games like bowling, Ludo, Table Tennis, Scrabble; or outdoor games like Golf, Squash, Hockey, Baseball etc.
- Regularly take time off your normal routine to relax. You could just sit to listen to edifying songs or hymns, or watch your favourite Christian film etc.
- You can visit a park or a waterfall to enjoy the beauty of nature, and appreciate the awesomeness of God.
- Go on a leisure stroll alone, or with your friend, or spouse.
- You can go for sight-seeing or visit important historical places.
- Make room for more green space around your home. This serves as a boost to your mood and mental health.
- Enjoy regular holidaying outside your Home; breaking off from your normal routine in order to relax. Remember to exclude those office files or business proposals from your travel items. It is a time for leisure, not work.

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EMBRACE SPIRITUAL RECREATION TOO

It is also important to have a regular time for 'spiritual recreation'. This is a time set apart to be in God's Presence for spiritual retreat and renewal.

The Christian is to regularly "plug" into the Holy Spirit for spiritual recharging, just like we plug a cell phone battery to electricity for recharging.

A time of spiritual retreat is to study and meditate on God's Word, fast, pray and listen to instructions from God: about your life and Christian race, ministry, career, business; the Body of Christ, Nations etc.

This may be for a day, three days, a week, a month, or more; depending on God's leading and the need at hand. It is important to spend it for what it is meant for; and that is, quality time in God's Presence.

There are tremendous all-round benefits derivable from such times of "plugging in" to God through the sweet Holy Spirit. By God's grace, I wrote the substantial part of this Book, "Say Yes to Mental Health" during such a period.

It was a time of deep insights into the Scriptures, and clearly defined divine guidance. It was during the retreat I received the leading to start an NGO called "Christ Abundant Life Maximized" (A Mental Health Initiative).

I returned from the retreat physically and emotionally strengthened. Also, I became spiritually refreshed, renewed, equipped, emboldened; and determined to soldier on for Jesus Christ. To God be the glory!

CONCLUSION

Wholesome recreation is necessary for a well-balanced life. Therefore, having read some of its benefits above, do yourself a favour; stand for regular wholesome recreation; and thus experience a boost in your mental health.

Abuse and Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social beings. We are created to interact with one another; whether at home, school, Church, neighbourhood, work; and the general society.

However, abuse¹²⁵ has been observed in many of these social interactions. The magnitude of abuse in relationships all around us is becoming alarming; and this is very saddening.

The abuser's aim is to gain power and control over the life, action, and decisions of another! Abuse cuts across sex, race, age, socio-economic backgrounds, religion etc.

In an abusive relationship, one party fears the other and attempts to comply with the other's wishes to avoid harm.¹²⁶

Abuse may happen in close relationships like between a husband and wife, parent and children; engaged couple, employer and employee; against people trafficked for sex, and for cheap labour.

This chapter aims at exposing what constitutes an abuse; so that people can recognise it, and guard against it. It would also help a person who is experiencing abuse to refuse further mistreatment.

Also, we shall discuss the different types of abuse, their detrimental effects on people and their mental health; and the way out through God. *"For with God nothing will be impossible."* Luke 1:37.

TYPES OF ABUSE

There are many types of abuse: emotional or psychological abuse; physical abuse; verbal abuse; sexual abuse; financial abuse; Elder abuse etc. Some of them are discussed below:

1. EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

This appears to be the most common form of abuse. This is repeatedly done through behaviours (words, actions, or inactions) meant to hurt the abused; e.g. yelling, threats, ridicule, blaming, shaming, taunting, and neglect.

It is also perpetrated using coercion, insults etc. All the above are aimed at controlling the abused. Emotional abuse leads to self-doubt, low self-esteem; and the belief by the abused that he or she deserves the abuse.

2. PHYSICAL OR DOMESTIC ABUSE

".... Physical abuse is any physical act or threat of a physical act designed to harm another person physically. This type of abuse includes actions like slapping, punching, hair-pulling and kicking. Physical evidence such as bruises need not exist for the act to be physical abuse."¹²⁷

3. VERBAL ABUSE

Verbal abuse is generally a form of psychological abuse. This type of abuse occurs when an abuser uses words and body language with the intent to hurt another person. Verbal abuse includes put-downs, name-calling, and unreasonable criticisms.¹²⁸

This may also include abuse perpetrated with written words; e.g. letter writing, electronic mails, cell-phone messages; or postings on social media etc. These are capable of being used, and are being used for the purpose of abuse.

4. SEXUAL ABUSE

This type of abuse is often perpetrated against women although men can be victims of sexual abuse too. Sexual abuse includes any unwanted sexual act forced on the victim. This form of abuse is also often known as sexual assault or rape. Sexual abuse can include anything from unwanted touching to forced intercourse, or forced sexual contact with another person.¹²⁹

5. CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse has been defined as "doing something or failing to do

something that results in harm to a child or puts a child at risk of harm. Child abuse can be physical, sexual or emotional. Neglect, or not providing for a child's needs, is also a form of abuse."¹³⁰

This often leads to great emotional damage in the child. In the case of physical abuse, they may suffer physical damage. Some other negative consequences of child abuse are:

"Most abused children suffer greater emotional than physical damage. An abused child may become depressed. He or she may withdraw, think of suicide or become violent. An older child may use drugs or alcohol, try to run away or abuse others."¹³¹

(The issue of child abuse is explained in detail in the next chapter).

6. ELDER ABUSE

This type of abuse happens between an elder and another person, typically younger, such as the elder's child. Elder abuse consists of other forms of abuse perpetrated against an elder. This form of abuse often consists of financial, emotional and even physical abuse.¹³²

7. ABUSE BY PROXY

A situation whereby the abuser involves others (family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours, organisations, the police, and media etc.) to threaten, embarrass, harass; and manipulate his object of abuse to do what he wants.

This is committed through harassment, provocations, spreading malicious rumours to discredit the abused; using children as bargaining instrument to influence and control the abused; through social isolation and exclusion etc.

In an article titled "Abuse by Proxy" written by Vaknin, S. (2009, October 1); and posted on the page of HealthyPlace, the author gave the following explanations:

"When the abuser can't directly inflict abuse upon his victim, he may find accomplices to do his dirty work.... If all else fails, the abuser recruits friends, colleagues, mates, family members, the authorities, institutions, neighbours, the media, teachers - in short, third parties - to do his bidding. He uses them to cajole, coerce, threaten, stalk... tempt, convince, harass, communicate and otherwise manipulate his target....

... One form of control by proxy is to engineer situations in which

abuse is inflicted upon another person. Such carefully crafted scenarios of embarrassment and humiliation provoke social sanctions (condemnation, opprobrium, or even physical punishment) against the victim. Society, or a social group become the instruments of the abuser...."¹³³

The condition of a person put in such a situation as described above is better imagined than experienced.

"... the victims are often on the verge of a nervous breakdown: harassed, unkempt, irritable, impatient, abrasive, and hysterical...."¹³⁴

The writer went further to identify the group of people used as proxies by the abuser. According to Vaknin, S. (2009, October 1), "... These - sometimes unwitting - accomplices belong to three groups:

I. The abuser's social milieu

Some offenders - mainly in patriarchal and misogynist societies - co-opt other family members, friends, and colleagues into aiding and abetting their abusive conduct....

II. The victim's social milieu

Even the victim's relatives, friends, and colleagues are amenable to the considerable charm, persuasiveness, and manipulativeness of the abuser and to his impressive thespian skills. The abuser offers a plausible rendition of the events and interprets them to his favour....

Confronted with this contrast between a polished, self-controlled, and suave abuser and his harried casualties - it is easy to reach the conclusion that the real victim is the abuser, or that both parties abuse each other equally....

III. The System

The abuser perverts the system - therapists, marriage counselors, mediators, court-appointed guardians, police officers, and judges. He uses them to pathologize the victim and to separate her from her sources of emotional sustenance - notably, from her children."¹³⁵

The abused "... acts of self-defence, assertiveness, or insistence on her rights are interpreted as aggression, lability"¹³⁶, or a mental health problem."¹³⁷

8. FINANCIAL OR ECONOMIC ABUSE.

This is a situation whereby the abuser controls the other's "... ability to acquire, use, and maintain financial resources. Those who are victimized financially may be prevented from working. They also may have their own money restricted or stolen by the abuser. And rarely do they have complete access to money and other resources. When they do have money, they often have to account for every penny they spend."¹³⁸

It is a powerful tool by the abuser to gain power and control over the abused; to keep them trapped in a toxic relationship. The abuser uses manipulations; and at times, open and intimidating demands.

Financial abuse often leads to other forms of abuse; and is equally prevalent as other types.

"In fact, a study by the Centre for Financial Security found that 99% of domestic violence cases also involved financial abuse.... Consequently, knowing how to identify financial abuse is critical to your safety and security."¹³⁹

The abuser can perpetrate financial abuse against the abused through any, or a combination of the following means:

(A). Controlling shared assets and resources: by taking complete control over money, and you have little or no access to what you need; for example:

- Criticizing every financial decision you make.
- Reducing your freedom to plan or budget.
- Making large financial decisions without your input.
- Refusing to collaborate on finances.
- Hiding or taking funds and putting them in a private account.
- Insisting you share your income but refusing to share theirs.
- Refusing to work or contribute to the family income.
- Controlling the "purse strings", or establishing unrealistic limits or allowances.
- Requiring you to account for every penny you spend (may even ask for receipts and change).
- Having a double standard when it comes to spending (they may spend money on entertainment, dining out, and clothing but criticize you when you make similar purchases).
- Withholding financial information such as account passwords,

account numbers, and investment information.

- Limiting your access to the overall financial picture as a couple.
- Withholding money from you, or requiring you to ask for money.
- Demanding that you ask permission before spending money but not consulting you when they make purchases.
- Requiring that large, joint purchases be in their name only (such as car loans, mortgages, cell phones, or apartment leases).
- Limiting your access to money by not allowing you to have bank accounts, or credit cards.
- Forcing you to sign financial documents without explanations.
- Making threats to cut you off financially when you disagree.
- Becoming enraged over money, and then engaging in other forms of abuse like name-calling or physical violence.

(B). Using or controlling the money you have earned, or saved. This is done through:

- Trying to control your use of, or access to money you have earned or saved.
- Using your assets for their personal benefit without asking.
- Taking money, or using credit cards without permission.
- Ruining your credit history by running up limits and then not paying bills.
- Claiming to make payments, or pay bills in your name but not following through.
- Borrowing money, or making charges without repaying it.
- Feeling entitled to your money or assets.
- Demanding that you turn over your pay cheque, passwords, and credit cards.
- Expecting you to pay for their bills, or their obligations.
- Using offers to help with your budget or financial decisions as a cover for gaining control over your finances.
- Requiring you to bail them out of difficult financial situations.
- Confiscating your pay cheque, or other sources of income.
- Intercepting or opening your bank statements and other financial records.

(C). Interfering with your Job: through attempts to control your ability to earn money or gain assets, thus interfering

with your income potential. Here are some examples of job interference.

- Pressuring you to quit your job—sometimes even using children as an excuse.
- Telling you where you can, and cannot work.
- Sabotaging your work responsibilities.
- Harassing you at work by calling, texting, or stopping by.
- Preventing you from working by hiding your keys, unhooking your car battery, taking your car without permission, or offering to babysit and then not showing up.

The impact of financial abuse on the person going through it is often very devastating. They feel insecure, inadequate, and lack confidence in themselves as a result of the emotional wounds from financial abuse.

The abused also find it difficult to provide for their basic needs like food, clothing, transportation etc.¹⁴⁰

THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS OF ABUSE

All forms of abuse are harrowing, demeaning; and lead to emotional damage to the abused. If left unchecked, abuse endangers people's mental health; and can result in life-threatening complications like stroke, hypertension etc.

The parenting style of the abuser may be expected to be harmful to children. The abuser's toxic parenting negatively affects their children's mental health.

THE WAY OUT THROUGH GOD

When you identify you are being abused, now is time to stand against it in your life; to say enough is enough! This may be a difficult task, but not an impossible one. Therefore, for your safety and sanity, you must do it! Here is how:

Ensure that you are genuinely born again, and daily living to please God; especially because of your eternal welfare. This gives you the needed grace and confidence to resist every form of abuse. Then:

- The first major step on the journey to freedom from abuse is this; call it what it is - ABUSE!

If you do not call it what it is, you will call it what it is not! Thus,

you would not see the need to address it; and the cycle of abuse continues to your hurt.

- It is also very important not to live in denial; admit the fact that you are being abused. It is then you can work on solving it; and prayerfully, but firmly stand your ground against abuse!
- Take time to regularly study, meditate, and obey the Word of God; be heavily Word-loaded! This strengthens you to muster the needed courage to pursue your freedom from abuse; and to be at peace amid it all.
- Trust God for help to firmly stand against abuse in your life; He sure will. *"He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength."* Isaiah 40:29.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

If you are going through any form of abuse, and you are getting overwhelmed; please, do not keep quiet, quickly seek help! You can see a Mental Health Professional; or confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian.

If you are feeling suicidal, quickly call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in your area; or confide in a genuine Pastor or Christian.

BENEFITS OF STANDING AGAINST ABUSE

There are many benefits derivable from refusing to be mistreated by anyone; some of these are outlined below:

- Your self-esteem will be restored.
- You feel good with yourself, and about yourself for resisting abuse.
- You will be enabled to set healthy boundaries around your life; and protect your healthy boundaries without feeling guilty about it.
- You will command respect from others; and this may include your former abuser.
- You will enjoy balanced mental health.
- You will be enabled to achieve your life's goals.
- You will fulfil God's purpose for your life, be a blessing to others; and thus have rich fulfilment.
- As you live in obedience to God till the end, you will make Heaven at last.

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WATCH OUT FOR THIS!

As you stand against abuse, the abuser will do everything possible to stop you; to retain the power of control over you. The abuser may increase the magnitude of abuse by resorting to blackmail, threat, violence; or 'bribery'; that is, being nice to you, so you can lower your guard!

All these are to manipulate you to bow out of your stand against abuse in your life, so that the cycle of abuse can continue. Therefore, please, do not give up; keep at it, for therein lies your freedom and sanity. If you feel unsafe with the abuser; please, quickly seek help!

CONCLUSION

Abuse is dehumanising and life-threatening! "Say No to abuse"; in your life, your sphere of influence; and wherever you have opportunity to stand against abuse. You can save a life thereby; yours, or others.

Please, note that the healing from abuse takes a process. However, as you persevere in your efforts, coupled with God's help, you will get there; to enjoy sound mental health and life's fulfillment.

Please, remember to forgive your abuser. Also, be God's instrument of encouragement to somebody going through abuse; be there for them as they transit from abuse to healing and restoration. God will reward you for this.

The Issue of Child Abuse

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse has been defined as "... doing something or failing to do something that results in harm to a child; or puts a child at risk of harm. Child abuse can be physical, sexual or emotional. Neglect, or not providing for a child's needs, is also a form of abuse."⁴¹

In most cases, child abuse is committed by people known and trusted by the child. This could be any (or both) of the parents, relatives; or people outside the Home; maybe a caregiver, or a person in authority over the child's life.

When children are going through abuse, they often think they are to be blamed for the behaviours of their parents, or other authority figures in their lives. Therefore, they may have feelings of guilt, shame, and confusion.

Also, such a child may be afraid to tell anyone about the abuse, or try to hide some of the evidence of the abuse; especially where the abuser is the parent/s, relatives, or a family friend.

Child abuse do negatively affect a child's mental health; whether in the short-run, or long-run.

Some facts about child abuse

The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States of America reported that:

- 676,000 children were abused or neglected in 2016 in the Unit-

ed States. But many more children may have been harmed in episodes of abuse or neglect that were never reported.

- Around 1,750 children died as a result of abuse and neglect in 2016.
- Research estimates 1 in 4 children will experience some type of child abuse during their lifetime.
- Children younger than 1 year old are most likely to be a victim of child abuse.¹⁴²

CAUSES OF CHILD ABUSE

There are underlying reasons behind child abuse. A parent (or any other child abuser) may perpetrate child abuse for many reasons; some of which are:

(1). History of child abuse, or neglect during their own childhood. Individuals who were abused as children are more likely to repeat the cycle of behaviour with their own children.

(2). Personal mental health issues; for example, depression, anxiety; or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

(3). Having a substance use disorder; that is, struggling with alcohol abuse, or the abuse of drugs; or any other substance.

(4). Physical health challenge.

(5). Poor parent-child relationships.

(6). Socioeconomic stress from financial issues, unemployment, or medical problems.

(7). Lack of understanding about basic childhood development; thus expecting children to be capable of doing tasks before they can do so.

(8). Lack of parenting skills to help cope with the pressures and struggles of raising a child.

(9). Lack of support from family members, friends, neighbours, or the community.

(10). Caring for a child with intellectual or physical disabilities; thereby making adequate care more challenging.

(11). Family stress or crisis caused by domestic violence, relationship turmoil, separation, or divorce.

(12). Low self-esteem, shame; and feelings of incompetence.¹⁴³

SIGNS THAT A PARENT MAY BE ABUSIVE

There are times that the behaviour of parents can signal that they are abusive towards a child. This means there are parental behaviours that can be signs that a child is being abused by them; for example when any of the parents:

- Show little concern for the child's welfare.
- Are unable to recognize that a child is going through physical or emotional distress; or they blame the child for the distress he/she is experiencing.
- Consistently belittle or berate the child; and describe him/her with negative words like "worthless" or "evil" etc.
- Use harsh physical discipline. Any parental discipline that is harsh enough to cause physical injury, or emotional trauma becomes an abuse.
- Demand an inappropriate level of physical, or academic performance.
- Severely limit the child's contact with others.
- Offer conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanations for a child's injuries.¹⁴⁴

SUGGESTIVE SIGNS OF ABUSE IN A CHILD

There are some signs which are suggestive that a child may be going through an abuse, or neglect; some of these are:

- Changes in behaviour; the child may become hyper-active, aggressive, hostile, easily angered etc.
- Withdrawal from friends, family, or usual activities.
- Frequent absence from school.
- A drop in the child's performance at school.
- Reluctance to leave activities; such as school, sports, or extracurricular activities.
- Depression, anxiety, unusual fear; or a sudden drop in self-confidence.
- Deviant, or rebellious behaviours.
- Self-harm, suicidal tendencies.
- Attempts at running away from home; or leaving the home.

TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE AND THEIR SYMPTOMS

"Abuse can be hard to recognize. Kids can get cuts and bruises, or show signs of stress for lots of reasons that are a normal part

of childhood. So it helps to know specific signs to look for, and trust your gut as you look at the whole picture of the child's physical and emotional health."¹⁴⁵

The specific signs and symptoms to manifest in a child suffering abuse will depend on the type of abuse; and this can vary from one child to another. Below are the different types of child abuse; and their specific symptoms.

1. PHYSICAL CHILD ABUSE

This is when a physical injury is purposely inflicted on a child; or a child is put at risk of being harmed by another person through hitting, striking, or anything that causes physical harm. Some of its symptoms are:

- Bruises, fractures, and burns. Also, other injuries that cannot be explained, or do not match with the child's story, or the given explanation from the adult in the child's life.
- Injury marks that have a pattern; like from a hand, belt, or other objects.
- Injuries that are at different stages of healing.
- Medical or dental issues that go untreated.
- An avoidance of any kind of touch, or physical contact.
- Fear to go home.
- Being on high alert.
- The wearing of clothing that doesn't match the weather; for example, wearing long sleeves on hot days in order to cover up bruises!
- Withdrawing from friends; and activities formerly enjoyed by the child.¹⁴⁶

2. SEXUAL CHILD ABUSE

This refers to "any sexual activity with a child, such as fondling, oral-genital contact, intercourse, exploitation, or exposure to child pornography."¹⁴⁷ It also includes raping. Some of its symptoms are:

- Avoiding a certain person for no clear reason.
- Sexual behaviour; or knowledge that's inappropriate for the child's age.
- Bloody, torn, or stained underwear.
- Bruising, or bleeding around the genitals.
- Pain, or itching around the genitals that might cause problems walking or sitting.

- Refusing to change clothes in front of others.
- Statements that he, or she was sexually abused.
- Inappropriate sexual contact with other children.
- Pregnancy; or a sexually transmitted infection, especially for boys and girls under 14 years old.
- Running away from home.¹⁴⁸

(3). EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

This means the injuring of a child's self-esteem, or emotional well-being; by exposing the child to verbal and emotional assaults. This is perpetrated by isolating, ignoring, or rejecting a child.

It also includes continually belittling, shaming, teasing, bullying, berating, threatening, yelling at a child; or withholding emotional connection. Its symptoms are:

- Constant worry about doing something wrong.
- Speech problems; or delays in learning and emotional development.
- Depression, lack of self-confidence; and low self-esteem.
- Doing poorly in school; or loss of interest in school.
- Loss of previously acquired developmental skills.
- Extreme behaviour; such as being way too obedient, or way too demanding.
- Headaches and stomach-aches with no clear cause.
- The child doesn't seem close to a parent or caregiver.
- Social withdrawal; or a loss of interest, or enthusiasm in things hitherto enjoyed.
- Desperate seeking of affection.¹⁴⁹

4. CHILD NEGLECT

This is withholding, or failing to provide the child's essentials; food, shelter, clothing, affection, protection, supervision, education, dental, or medical care; heat in cold weather; and conducive housing with clean living conditions etc.

Neglect includes leaving a child alone for long stretches of time; or putting the child under dangerous conditions. Here are some of the signs that a child is going through neglect:

- Poor personal hygiene; or always looking dirty.
- Being left alone; or in the care of other young children.
- Lack of adequate clothing; or supplies to meet physical needs.
- Taking food or money without permission.

- Eating more than usual at a meal; or saving food for later.
- Poor record of attendance in school.
- Lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental, or psychological problems; or lack of necessary follow-up care.
- Poor physical growth; this may result in the child being underweight. Sometimes, the child may gain weight; or become overweight.¹⁵⁰

5. MEDICAL CHILD ABUSE

This is a situation whereby false information is given about a child's illness, or denying a child the needed medical attention. These put the child at risk of unnecessary medical care, or injury respectively.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse harms a child's body, emotional health, development, and well-being. This can result in physical, behavioural, emotional, or mental health issues later in life.

We need to understand these negative effects, so that one can make healthier choices for one's children. Some of these harms are listed below:

(A). Physical issues: Premature death; physical disabilities; learning disabilities; substance abuse; health problems, such as heart disease, immune disorders, chronic lung disease, and cancer.

(B). Behavioural issues: Delinquent or violent behaviour; abuse of others; withdrawal; suicide attempts, or self-injury; high-risk sexual behaviours, or teen pregnancy.

Also, problems in school, or not finishing high school; limited social and relationship skills; problems with work, or staying employed.

(C). Emotional issues: Low self-esteem; difficulty establishing, or maintaining relationships; challenges with intimacy and trust; an unhealthy view of parenthood; anxiety; depression; sleep disturbances. Other consequences are:

Inability to cope with stress and frustrations; accepting violence as normal in relationships; eating disorders; personality disorders; behaviour disorders; attachment disorders; and post-traumatic stress disorder¹⁵¹

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“A 2009 study examined the role of a variety of adverse childhood experiences on health in adults. Experiences included: abuse (physical, emotional, sexual); witnessing domestic violence; parental separation or divorce; growing up in a home with family members who had mental health conditions, substance use disorders, or were sent to prison. Researchers found that:

- Those who reported six or more adverse childhood experiences had an average life span 20 years shorter than those who didn't have these experiences.
- Individuals who were abused as children are more likely to repeat the cycle of behaviour with their own children.
- Child abuse or neglect may cause substance use disorders in adulthood.”¹⁵²

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THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT

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Child abuse is really damaging to a child's life and mental health. It negatively affects a child's overall wellbeing; and can sometimes be life-threatening. A child that has suffered abuse may need medical examination and care.

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The need for medical attention is especially essential for children who have experienced physical, sexual, and neglect abuse. Also, there will be need for counselling, emotional support, and non-judgemental handling.

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“If you think someone like a babysitter, day-care worker, relative, or teacher has abused your child, keep the child away from that person, and give your child the needed support. It is recommended that you do not confront the abuser yourself; rather, contact the police.”¹⁵³

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If you suffered abuse as a child, please, seek help to overcome the effects of the abuse on you. This will enable you avoid being an example of destructive behaviours to your children; and thereby break the cycle of abuse.

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Always know that nobody is too wounded physically, emotionally and behaviourally beyond God's redeeming power. Therefore, look up to God for help; “*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*” *Psalms 147:3.*

If you, (or your child) are not born again, please, give your life to

Jesus Christ; mainly because of your eternity. Also, this is a very solid foundation for the healing process. Afterwards, continue to live in obedience to God till the end.

Please, always remember to pray for the child; and with the child; coupled with studying the Holy Bible together. All these build up your trust in God, bring peace to your hearts; and facilitate the healing process.

Perhaps you have been abusive to your children; please, stop it. Ask forgiveness from God (and your child); and for God's grace to stop the abuse. These bring healing to you and your child; and strengthen parent/child bond.

Encourage your child to forgive his/her abusers; whether you, or others. This is God's will, and it helps the healing process. As the child learns more about God's Word, such will understand this is for his/her good; and for God's glory.

PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

It is important for parents to be intentional in protecting their children against exploitation and abuse. This safeguards their mental health; and helps them to achieve their highest potential in life, and in God. Below are some tips:

(1). Please, do not leave a young child home alone; or in the care of other young children who still need to be supervised too. In public, keep a close eye on your children; to ensure they stay safe.

(2). When children are old enough to go out without supervision, train them to always tell you where they are going; what for, with whom, and for how long?

If they have to sleepover, ensure, there is a solid arrangement for proper supervision. Please, find out who will supervise them, and be sure such can be trusted with children.

(3). Be involved in your children's life, by spending quality time with them; to give your attention, supervise their mealtimes, play times; also their school assignments etc. All these boost the bond between you and your children.

(4). Always give them moral and prayerful supports in their academic, and co-curricular events. Be there to cheer them on during co-curricular activities like sports, debates, drama, or musical

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presentations. These boost their morale.

(5). Give your children free access to you; and ensure you gain their trust. Encourage them to tell you of their challenges; be empathetic and non-judgemental. If something happens, let them be free to talk to you about it.

When a child has a supportive family environment and social networks, the child's self-esteem and sense of self-worth are enhanced.

(6). Children are to be taught to stay away from strangers, and people of questionable character.

Please, encourage your child not to stay alone with anyone, or group of people in a secluded place; to leave a threatening or frightening situation immediately; and seek help from a trusted adult.

(7). "Know your child's caregivers. Check references for babysitters and other caregivers. Make irregular, but frequent, unannounced visits to observe what's happening. Don't allow substitutes for your usual childcare provider if you don't know the substitute."¹⁵⁴

(8). Teach your children to glorify God in their dressing by always being decently dressed. Children are to be properly covered; not exposing part of their bodies, nor wearing transparent clothing etc.

Please, be reminded that dresses are to cover our nakedness. Inculcate this to your children very early in life; and when they are old enough to dress for themselves, they will embrace decency in dressing.

This commands respect for them; saves them from attracting the wrong attention to themselves; and the likelihood of sexual harassment, or defilement. Above all, it glorifies God. Be an example of decent dressing too.

(9). Train children not to allow anybody to touch them inappropriately; uncles, aunties, carers, teachers, playmates etc. Encourage them to tell you about any act, or attempted act of indecent handling without fear of getting into trouble.

(10). Teach your children how to stay safe on the social media:

To stay away from strangers on the internet; not to chat, nor share

personal information with them; to tell you if an unknown person contacts them online; neither arrange to meet an online contact in person without your permission.

(11). Teach children to be disciplined in the use of social media; to guard against addiction. You may put the computer in a common area of your home; using the parental controls to restrict the types of websites your child can visit.

(12). Above all, give your children godly training. This helps them to be God-fearing and God-conscious children; always aware of God's Presence with them. They will not misbehave, nor misuse social media; even in your absence.

CONCLUSION

Parents are to ensure they are truly born again, and daily living for God; also, introduce your children to Jesus Christ very early in life; and raise them up in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

Thus, parents and children can be empowered to do their respective parts; to guard against all forms of abuse, and enjoy stable mental health.

You and Your Upbringing

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of a building is very important to its durability. It must be strong enough to carry the superstructure to be built on it; otherwise it will collapse and be unable to fulfil its purpose.

A child's upbringing is comparable to the foundation of a building. If a child's upbringing is solid, it will guarantee a glorious life; and if it is "weak", it leads to a life of struggles and afflictions.

The childhood days

The words spoken, and things done (or neglected) concerning a child's life when young often determine his/her thought flow, self-perception, values, belief systems; and character traits.

These words and actions (or inactions) could either be godly (in conformity with God's word); or ungodly.

CONSTRUCTIVE UPBRINGING

Where the words and actions were godly, they will be constructive, and thus build up the child's life. The solid foundation for constructive upbringing is to lead the child to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour very early in life.

Thus, the child will have the fear of God, and a life of obedience to God. As the child keeps growing in Christ, such will develop into an adult that is spiritually, and emotionally balanced in his/her overall character traits.

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ed. Later in life, they often need stronger affirmation than usual to boost their self-esteem.

- It also negatively affects their cognitive and social developments.
- They may be unable to have self-acceptance which is a key ingredient for emotional well-being.
- They struggle with low self-esteem.

In adulthood, such may drive themselves too hard to achieve great things to boost their self-esteem. This is often short-lived, because achievement is not a substitute for positive affirmations from our loved ones.

- They find it difficult to receive genuine care; but rather may become suspicious of it when it comes their way.
- Such children are often too critical of themselves; and others.
- They have struggles will feelings of shame and guilt; as if the hurtful words spoken to them by their parents is their fault.
- Children may become people-pleasers; eagerly wanting to please others, even when it may not be convenient for them. This means that such children may be unable to set healthy boundaries around their lives.
- Some children may be extremely aggressive in behaviour; and become domineering over others.
- Constant comparison with their siblings (or any other child) can lead to low self-esteem. It can also cause sibling rivalry, or breed resentment against such children being compared to.
- They can fall into substance abuse; or have suicidal tendencies.

THE WAY OUT THROUGH GOD

Perhaps you were brought up with hurtful words that has marred your emotional and social development; and maybe your cognitive development too. Please, know that there is healing and restoration through God.

God cares about you, and wants to heal you of the pains and wounds caused by toxic parenting; or any other factor. *"He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."* Psalm 107:20.

Therefore, go to God in prayers. Please, forgive your parents for the pains caused you through their toxic parenting. If you are not

yet born again, give your life to Jesus Christ; for your all-round health, and your eternal welfare.

Go ahead to pour your heart to the Almighty God about your pains and struggles; and ask Him to heal you; and give you restoration; for *"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."* Psalm 147:3.

Afterwards, constantly load your heart with God's Word; this will strengthen you to abide on the path of holiness, and in all-round victory. Then, live in obedience to God till the end; thus, you will gain eternal life.

CHRIST'S COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CCBT)

As earlier mentioned in this Book, CCBT is the spiritual therapy of applying God's Word in the Holy Bible, to identify and prayerfully gain victory over unwholesome thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

This necessitates having the new birth; also, a regular habit of studying, meditating, and obeying God's Word. Therefore, ensure you are truly born again, and growing in Christ; more so because of your eternal welfare.

Please, constantly renew your mind with God's Word; to "flush out" all the toxicity in your heart as a result of negative parenting; and to heal you of how this has impaired your self-perception so far.

- You can start by outlining the faulty beliefs you had about yourself as a result of toxic words spoken into your life; by your parents, siblings, friends, teachers, or any other person.
- Go ahead to review each of the negative words, note how each has negatively affected you; then use God's word to nullify the harm such words have done to your life.
- Here is how to use Scripture to gain victory; for example a negative word like "you are ugly" can be firmly refuted with "I am beautiful (or handsome); *"... for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...."* Psalm 139:14a.

Also, "you can't amount to anything in life" can be firmly refuted with *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:13). Tell yourself, "I can succeed, and will succeed

through Christ who is my Source of strength.

These scriptures and Bible-based confessions need to be repeatedly affirmed till they sink deep into your spirit; a sort of heart knowledge, and not mere head knowledge.

- Constantly re-affirm the relevant Bible verses to yourself, and mean it. This renews your mind, and your thought flow. Also enhances your self-esteem, self-confidence; and general outlook on life.
- Please, spread the message of restoration through Christ; and stand against toxic parenting.

A MESSAGE TO PARENTS

Please, use Bible-based constructive words in raising your children; coupled with fervent praying. Avoid negative and destructive words which devalue children, and open them up for all sorts of afflictions.

Where you have hurt your children with toxic words, please, repent; ask for God's forgiveness, and that of your children too. Also, pray to God to heal your children; and to nullify the negative effects of toxic parenting on them.

If you are not yet born again, please, quickly confess your other sins to God, and ask for His forgiveness. Accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, because of your eternal welfare; then, live in obedience to God till the end.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the fore-going, parents are to avoid exposing their children to negative and destructive words; but rather raise them with Bible-based constructive words.

Thus they are equipped to cope with life's demands, get along well with people, live a fulfilling life; and have sound mental health. When your children turn out well, you will be happy, fulfilled, and enjoy a steady mental health.

Tips on godly Parenting

INTRODUCTION

The term godly parenting is used here to mean raising up children according to the Holy Bible; training them to know, and reverence God through a life of obedience to His Word. The Bible says:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6.

This means godly child training is a God-given assignment to parents. One day, we shall give account to God how we fared in this important parental role. Therefore, parents must be intentional about godly training for their children.

THE GOD-FACTOR

The Bible says: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes...." Proverbs 3:5-7a.*

The above Biblical counsel is relevant to all aspects of our lives; including godly child-training. Therefore, like Mr and Mrs Manoah, parents are to ask God for the needed wisdom for godly parenting.

"Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born." Judges 13:8.

PRAYING FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Godly child training must be coupled with prayers for it to be effective. Please, let no day pass without you praying for your children (and grandchildren); even generations yet unborn.

Always cover your children and their offspring with prayers; even right from the womb. It is important to regularly cover them with the "spiritual insurance cover" of the precious Blood of Jesus Christ; for protection, preservation etc.

Please, pray that they will understand God's salvation plan for mankind, be receptive to the gospel; and live to honour God all their lives. Pray for their choices; of course of study, life-partner, career, where to live in adulthood etc.

It is only with God's help that parents can succeed in this important role of godly child-rearing. Thus, children will be equipped for a godly lifestyle, healthy social interactions; and all-round wellness, including sound mental health.

There is no "retirement age" in praying for our children and their offspring. The prayer covering must continue in their teen years, even to adulthood; and when they start their own families, we include their spouses and children too.

MINISTERING GOD'S WORD TO BABIES

In the Book, "How to minister God's Word to Babies" by Mrs Bisi Chukwudile of the "Children Evangelism Ministry" (CEM); which was founded by her husband, Evangelist Egbuna Tony Chukwudile; the author stated that:

"The principle of ministry to babies is based on the age of the spirit in man whether, a child or adult, and the means by which man receives from God.... The age of the spirit in a child is irrespective of the age of the child. The spirit of a child is the same spirit from God. The spirit of a child is ageless."¹⁵⁵

She went further in the above-mentioned book to say that:

".... The Spirit of God can minister to the spirit of a child just as well as He can minister to that of an adult. God can minister to anyone at any age level because we can perceive and are able to receive the things of God by our spirits, not by age, intellect or experience. A child therefore, even though he cannot talk, question and does not have a developed mind, can still receive the things

of God by his spirit."¹⁵⁶

This is not to mean that a baby can get born again; far from it. It is rather to challenge us to start early in introducing our babies to the things of God, as their spirit can receive them; thus preparing their hearts for the salvation message.

By the grace of God, I used this style of child-rearing; it helped our children to be receptive to the gospel by committing their lives to Christ. Our married children have started exposing their children to the things of God early in life.

In another book titled "The Newborn Baby's Bible" by Mrs Bisi Chukwudile; which is actually to be used in conjunction with "How to minister God's Word to Babies"; she stated that:

"... babies no matter how young can understand and respond to God's word, as we minister not to the intellect but to the spirit. It is now proven that babies who are thus taught from the very early days of life are better than their peers in their understanding of the things of God and their relationship to God."¹⁵⁷

Therefore, let us expose babies to the things of God; the Word, wholesome Christian songs, films etc. Thus their hearts are been prepared to be receptive to the gospel when they are old enough to decide for Jesus Christ.

THE SOLID FOUNDATION

Parents are to let their children know early in life that God loves them. They should be prayerfully presented with the gospel in an age-relevant way. Then encourage them to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour.

However, to be enabled to lay this solid foundation for a child, a parent must have truly repented from sins, received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour; and daily living in obedience to God.

CHILD TRAINING AND DISCIPLESHIP

After the children have embraced Christ's salvation, they need to grow in Christ; so, parents are to teach them God's Word precept upon precept. Also, parents must be examples of godliness to their children.

"... you shall lay up these words... in your heart and in your soul,

and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates...."
Deuteronomy 11:18-20.

PERSONAL QUIET TIME.

This is a time for children to build their personal intimacy with God through praises to God, Bible study/meditations, and prayers. Each child is to be provided with a Bible, notebook, and an age-relevant Bible-based devotional.

As children daily study and meditate on the Bible, they are to jot down the lessons learnt; and pray for grace to put them into practice. The parents can read Bible stories to the younger ones who are yet to start reading and writing.

PROVISION OF CHRISTIAN RESOURCE MATERIALS.

Christian resources like age-relevant Christian Books, films, and magazines are to be provided for children. This sharpens their appetite for wholesome materials, boosts their reading culture; and draws them closer to God.

Parents can buy Christian songs like "The Donut Man" series by Rob Evans. These are Bible-based stories and songs presented in child-friendly, fun-filled, but constructive manner; to teach children the timeless truth of God's Word.

"The Donut Man" series was effectively used while raising our children; and our married children have started using it for their own children. Some of the titles are: The Best Present of All; The Resurrection Celebration; On Tour.

Also, The Donut Man Hole 1 (Jesus shows us God's love); The Donut Man Hole 2 (Jesus helps us to share God's love); At the Zoo; Barnyard Fun; The Donut Repair Club. These and other good ones are available on CDs, and on You Tube.

Therefore, children are to be encouraged to embrace edifying Books, magazines, songs, cartoons, films, posters; and healthy internet sites. These boost their Christian walk; while unhealthy materials lead to ungodliness.

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Also, parents are to balance discipline with appreciation; children must be commended when they do well. This encourages them to do better, gives them a sense of achievement; and boosts their self-esteem.

FAMILY DEVOTIONS

This is a time to pray with your children; to regularly gather together to sing praises to God, study the Bible together; and share lessons learnt from God's Word. It is a time of fellowship with one another, and with God.

We present our personal prayer requests to God, intercede for other families and individuals. Also intercede for the Church of God, and the spread of the gospel; the sick, needy, hurting; our nation, the nations of the world etc.

The family devotion time (or the "family altar") is a good way to teach children about God and His ways; and therefore vital to child-training. It encourages children to have a living relationship with God; and to care for others.

GOOD HOME TRAINING

A godly upbringing includes giving good home training to children; how to comport themselves, and relate well with other people; in and outside the Home. This is achievable through parental example; and then instructions to:

- (1). Accept God's salvation gift through Jesus Christ; and daily live in obedience to God till the end. This is the solid foundation for godly child-training.
- (2). Accept who they are, and not wish to be somebody else; while they work on self-improvement.
- (3). Have a balanced self-esteem.
- (4). Take care of their personal hygiene and space; and be neatly dressed.
- (5). Set healthy boundaries around their lives; let people know what is acceptable and unacceptable to them.
- (6). Say "No" to requests which are ungodly, or violates their personal healthy boundaries; without feeling guilty about same.
- (7). Respect the healthy boundaries of others; their parents, sib-

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alright; yes, you may; good morning; goodbye; good night etc.

(22). Be involved in house chores; even if you have house-helpers! This gives them a sense of responsibility; and helps them to be useful to themselves, and to humanity.

My Mum trained me to do chores; though I didn't appreciate it then. I now look back with gratitude to God, for giving me a Mother who didn't mind being unpopular with me then; so I can embrace hard work, and be useful to myself.

I did same in my child-rearing; all my children did chores, and it's a blessing to them now as adults. I recall how my first son fetched water for family use; my first daughter stood on a kitchen stool to reach the sink to wash dishes etc.

There is dignity in labour; hard work is not demeaning! ".... Recent studies have found that giving children chores from an early age will help teach them work ethic, responsibility, self-reliance, and other vital life skills."¹⁵⁸

BENEFITS OF GOOD HOME TRAINING

When children have good home training, they are well equipped to cope with life; in the Home, neighbourhood, Church; at School, College, workplace; and any situation they find themselves. This gives them stable mental health.

They have self-control, and good communication skills. Thus, they communicate well with others in a clear, calm, honest, and respectful manner; irrespective of whether such are in the low, middle, or upper societal class.

Children with good home training are considerate in how they relate with others; young or old. They can also politely assert themselves when they need to; either to resist ungodliness, or protect their healthy boundaries etc.

Also, they take responsibility for their actions. This helps them not to give lame excuses for their mistakes, or pass the buck on others; rather, they learn, and grow through them.

HAVING CHILD-REARING CHALLENGES?

Perhaps you have done all the needful for godly child-rearing, and a child has become wayward, or living life in the fast lane. This may be heart-breaking, and sometimes embarrassing for a

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please, do not despair. Tell God about your pains; and get born again if not yet saved. God will heal your wounds; and give you and the baby a beautiful life and future.

*"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."
Psalm 147:3.*

Accepting a child is very crucial to his/her balanced development. Also, children should not be badly treated for whatever reason; let alone because of the circumstances of their birth, which was not their own making!

- Assure your children of your unconditional love for them; and make them feel valued.
- Parents are to handle children with courtesy. This boosts their self-esteem; and serves as a good example for them to treat people with courtesy.
- Please, do not compare a child with his or her siblings; or any other child.

Always remember that each child is unique, and have their own special abilities that must be discovered, developed, and celebrated. Thus, children are challenged to keep improving to become a better version of themselves.

- Avoid transferred aggression through venting your frustrations and anger on your children; rather take your concerns to God in prayers. *"Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7.*

This safeguards your relationship with your children; and their emotional health. It gives you God's peace, and a boost to your mental health.

WHAT THEN?

In view of all the above, children's upbringing must not be left to chance; they must be deliberately guided to know God, and live to honour Him. This prevents them from growing like wild plants, and becoming delinquent adults.

"May our sons flourish in their youth like well-nurtured plants. May our daughters be like graceful pillars, carved to beautify a palace." Psalm 144:12 (NLT).

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CONCLUSION

As you train your children for God, coupled with fervent prayers; God is faithful to keep them on the path of godliness; and *“All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.”* Isaiah 54:13.

Thus, they will be useful to themselves, to humanity, to God; and enjoy sound mental health. They will do you proud, give you great fulfillment, and peace of mind; thus enhancing your mental health.

The Importance of Self-acceptance

INTRODUCTION

It is important to first mention that self-acceptance is preceded by self-discovery; you must first discover yourself before you can accept yourself.

DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

Self-discovery is "the act or process of gaining knowledge or understanding of your abilities, character, and feelings." Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Self-acceptance is "an individual's acceptance of all of his/her attributes, positive or negative." It includes body acceptance, self-protection from negative criticism, and believing in one's capacities."¹⁵⁹

As mortals, we always need God's help to achieve our goals; and this includes self-acceptance. *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."* 2 Corinthians 3:5.

SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND YOU

In the light of the fore-going, self-acceptance is an unconditional and total acceptance of who you are (your strength, weaknesses, and past mistakes); accepting your body; truly feeling happy with, and about yourself.

It is contentment with being you; not wishing you are somebody

else, nor feeling inferior to anyone. Remember, you are "... *fearfully and wonderfully made...*" (Psalm 139:14). Self-acceptance is crucial to a sound mental health.

A NECESSARY CLARIFICATION

Self-acceptance does not mean neglecting working on your weak areas for self-improvement. We must regularly strive for personal growth and development; spiritually, emotionally, academically, career-wise, financially etc.

THE BENEFITS OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE

When you truly have self-acceptance, you appreciate yourself, have self-confidence, and balanced self-worth. These propel you to great achievements in life. Some of the other benefits of self-acceptance are:

- You can protect yourself from negative criticisms; and "say No" to requests which violates your healthy boundaries without feeling guilty about it.
- You command respect from others.
- You are not too critical of yourself; rather, you accept your mistakes, learn from them; and seek how to improve. These remove tension from you, and enhance your mental health.
- You are rid of the fear of failure, or of what people will say. This helps you to be free to be yourself; to take your own decisions, and take responsibilities for the outcome.
- You are able to use your initiatives, and thus make giant strides in your life's endeavours. All these result in self-improvement and growth; great fulfilment, and a sound mental health.

WHAT THEN?

Always be happy and contented with being you; no matter the situation around you! Also, keep learning; and always leaning on God's Holy Spirit, to continually work on you to be a better version of yourself.

As you continue in godliness, you will be happy, fulfilled, and enjoy a sound mental health. Above all, you will keep receiving grace for the race, do great exploits for God; and make heaven at last.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the fore going, always accept yourself; this is an essential gift to give to yourself. However, remember that self-ac-

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The Need for Healthy Self- esteem

INTRODUCTION

"Self-esteem is your overall opinion of yourself - how you feel about your abilities and limitations. When you have healthy self-esteem, you feel good about yourself and see yourself as deserving the respect of others. When you have low self-esteem, you put little value on your opinions and ideas. You might constantly worry that you aren't good enough."¹⁶⁰

Self-esteem is also called self-worth, or self-respect. A healthy self-esteem is about having a balanced opinion of yourself (not overrated, or too low); and recognizing both your abilities and flaws.

Also, self-esteem is about having love and respect for yourself, despite your faults; while you keep working on your weaknesses for self-improvement.

"Self-esteem tends to fluctuate over time, depending on your circumstances. It's normal to go through times when you feel down about yourself and times when you feel good about yourself. Generally, however, self-esteem stays in a range that reflects how you feel about yourself overall, and increases slightly with age."¹⁶¹

THE DETERMINANTS OF SELF-ESTEEM

A person's self-esteem begins to form in early childhood as we relate with the people around us; our parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, peers; and other important contacts in our lives.

The messages received from the above-mentioned people over the years determine your self-perception, or how you view yourself. This in turn determines your self-esteem, or how you value yourself.

When a person has strong relationships, and regularly receives positive affirmations, one is more likely to value oneself; and thus have healthy self-esteem.

On the other hand, where one is often criticized, teased, shamed, and devalued by others, one feels worthless; and likely to have poor self-esteem.

Apart from a person's relationships, some of the other determinants of self-esteem are; thoughts, age, experiences (at home, school, work, and in the community); including role and status in society.

TIPS FOR HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

Having a healthy relationship with the living God (through the new birth, and a lifestyle of obedience to God) is the solid foundation for a healthy self-esteem. This helps you to base your worth on who you are in God. The Bible says:

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God." 2 Corinthians 3:5.

Therefore, if you have not experienced the new birth, quickly repent, and give your life to Jesus Christ now. This is not only to have a healthy self-esteem, but mainly because of your eternal welfare. Other tips for healthy self-esteem are:

- Disallow other people's words and opinions from destroying you; reject all unkind and destructive criticisms. However, receive constructive criticisms with grace, and learn from them.
- Cultivate godly and trustworthy friendships; such will keep cheering you on to greater achievements.
- Do not measure your worth by people's social media post about their lives. Remember, "... they, measuring them-

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selves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." 2 Corinthians 10:12.

- Also, do not determine your self-esteem by the number of followers you have on social media; or the number of likes on your posts, or pictures! Your worth is based on who you are in God; precious and peculiar.
- Refuse to give up when faced with setbacks; get up, and try again. You are able through Christ. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13.*
- Know what you are good at, and passionately work very hard at it.
- Appreciate and reward yourself when you record an achievement.
- Above all, give God all the glory for all you are; and will ever be.

BENEFITS OF HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

A healthy self-esteem is important to a person's life and progress. It propels to greater achievements in life. Some of its other benefits are; a person with a healthy self-esteem is more likely to:

- Feel confident, secure and respectable.
- Be able to say "No" without feeling guilty about same.
- Have the ability for good social interactions with people.
- Cultivate healthy interactions; this shields you from the pains and heartaches of toxic relationships.
- Be comfortable with learning and receiving feedback from others; both of which help in learning new skills for further self-development.
- Feel confident in his or her ability to make quality decisions.
- Confidently express his or her ideas, opinions, and needs.
- Have realistic expectations from himself or herself; and other people.
- Be less critical of himself or herself; and others.
- Have a positive outlook on life, and therefore, more resilient in coping with life's stresses and setbacks.

All the above enriches one's life and social interactions; brings fulfilment, and results in having a steady mental health.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM

- Lack of self-confidence. This deprives one of the personal drive that is essential for success; whether at school, or work.
- It paralyses a person's initiatives; so such cannot achieve their full potential.
- Makes a person have little or no regard for one's ideas and opinions. Instead, you focus on your perceived inadequacies, and fail to appreciate, or utilize your personal skills and assets.
- Difficulty to accept positive feedback from others; thus limiting one's growth potential.
- It can make a person feel defeated and depressed.
- It can also lead people to make bad choices, or fall into toxic relationships.

CONCLUSION

Please, be reminded that you are fearfully and wonderfully made, so you are of great worth! Don't put a zero or 'clearance sale price' on yourself; also disallow anybody from doing so!

Above all, always remember that it is only in God, and through God that we can find true fulfilment. Therefore, define your worth by who you are in God, and not by people's perception; neither by your personal achievement, or social connections etc.

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Healthy Boundaries and You

INTRODUCTION

"Boundaries can be defined as the limits we set with other people, which indicate what we find acceptable and unacceptable in their behaviour towards us. The ability to know our boundaries generally comes from a healthy sense of self-worth, or valuing yourself in a way that is not contingent on other people or the feelings they have toward you."¹⁶²

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOUNDARIES

Healthy boundary setting is an important aspect of our social interactions and relationships. This is necessary to maintain our sanity, and to realise one's personal goals in life.

Therefore, you need to set healthy boundaries with the people in your life; siblings, spouse, children, friends, Church members, colleagues at work etc. Ensure you protect your boundaries; and respect the boundaries of others too.

The boundaries you set defines how much of your time is available per time, how you want to be treated; also, what is acceptable and unacceptable to you from others.

Also, your boundaries represent your identity, and a reflection of your values. They show how much, or how little you value or re-

spect yourself; and will determine how people will treat you.

If the boundaries are weak, one becomes vulnerable; and if too rigid, you disconnect yourself from useful interactions with others. A healthy boundary ought to be flexible as the need arises; it can be flexible and still be healthy.

YOUR TIME IS YOUR LIFE!

Our lives are measured in time; so, time is precious and important; time is life! Therefore, time must not be wasted; because once it is used up, it can never be recovered. If you value your life, then value your time!

In view of the above, you need to have control over people's demand on your time; and by extension your life. This is where healthy boundary settings become crucial; otherwise your life witnesses many toxic encroachments.

TYPES OF BOUNDARIES

There are physical and emotional boundaries; to protect your physical space, and emotional health respectively. Also professional boundaries; by being intentional not to mix your private life with your professional practice.

It is crucial to also set boundaries around your Christian race; that is, your relationship with God after the new birth. Make known your stand for Christ, be unapologetic about this; do not compromise holiness; at school, work etc.

THE BENEFITS OF HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

The setting of healthy boundaries in our social interactions is necessary for our mental health. Healthy boundaries are an important part of self-care; to protect and take good care of yourself. Some of the other benefits are:

- It provides you the opportunity to develop and express your identity; and thus enable you record personal growth.
- Setting healthy boundaries helps you to make decisions on what is best for you; this frees you from a life that is subjected to the control, or desire of others.
- It enables you to take responsibility for your own individual life and choices; and allow others to live their own lives, and make their own choices.

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- Also, affords you more time to focus on what really matters to you.
- Setting healthy boundaries saves you from unnecessary pain, stress, and misunderstandings that may arise from weak, or no boundaries at all. This preserves your emotional health.
- It also protects you against burnout; that is, you are shielded from physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.
- You feel good about yourself, accomplish much for yourself; and feel fulfilled in life. You also command respect from others.
- Healthy boundaries protect your mental health.
- Above all, your spiritual health is enhanced. Thus, you are helped to steadily grow in Christ through a life of obedience to God, be a blessing to generations; and make heaven at last.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF POOR OR ZERO BOUNDARIES

Poor boundaries have been used here to mean where boundaries are not clearly defined; while zero boundaries refer to, no boundaries at all. Some of these consequences are outlined below:

- You lose the control over your time; and by extension your life.
- You also lose the control of your life's endeavours.
- You put limitation on your personal achievements, due to uncontrollable encroachments on your time and life.
- Also, you are likely to experience stress through overwork.
- Stress can lead to avoidable financial burdens, and relationship issues.
- Poor or zero boundaries can cause resentment and anger; when people stress you beyond your limit.

In view of the above, we can see that lack of healthy boundaries can negatively affect all aspects of a person's life; and this includes one's mental health.

GENERAL TIPS ON HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

- It is essential to set boundaries in all aspects of your life; whether in physical interactions, or on the social media. Boundary setting is an important part of leading a mentally healthy life.
- A balanced self-worth is essential to setting healthy boundaries; that is, you need to have a healthy sense of your worth

- before you can set healthy boundaries around your life.
- People who are not used to boundary settings may first find it difficult when they want to start. They may feel guilty, or feel selfish saying “No” to others; yet, this is crucial to your mental health, and all-round well-being.
 - Boundary setting differs from one situation to another; for example, the boundaries you will set with a co-worker is different from the one you will set with your spouse.
 - As much as healthy boundaries ought to be flexible, a change should only be made when necessary; not just to please somebody. Therefore, avoid adjusting your boundaries just to please people; there may be no end to it.
 - Express your intention in boundary setting, rather than “judging” the other person’s action. Instead of saying, “Stop bothering me after Church on Sundays”; you can say “I usually need time to rest after Sunday services”.
 - One must learn to politely, calmly, but firmly say “No” to unacceptable, or inappropriate demands on your time and life. Also, to unacceptable behaviours that violates your healthy boundaries.
 - You do not necessarily have to explain the reason for refusing any request; whether the person is encroaching intentionally or not.
 - Do not over-explain when you cannot meet people’s requests; or when you refuse their actions that violate your healthy boundaries. This is crucial to boundary setting; and can command respect for you and your boundaries.
 - Always remember that each person has the right to determine what is acceptable to him or her, and what is not; this includes precious you.
 - Also, you have control on how, and to what extent you want to relate with the people you meet on life’s path; and you have control on handling these in a way to safeguard your healthy boundaries.
 - Always bear in mind that you cannot change the people you relate with; whether in their choices, utterances, actions, or inactions. However, you can control your response to them; by sticking to your healthy boundaries.
 - People may sometimes test your boundaries. They may do, or say things you have made clear is unacceptable; politely stand your ground in protecting your boundaries. Remember

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- Always recognise and respect other people's boundaries! "*Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you....*" *Matthew 7:12a (NLT)*.

WHAT THEN?

Setting and respecting boundaries are important to every kind of relationship. Therefore, always set healthy boundaries around your life; and ensure you protect your boundaries without feeling guilty about same.

It is equally important for you not to violate other people's boundaries; whether they are young or old. When you do, it shows humility on your part; and that you value and respect others.

The Bible says: "*Don't visit your neighbours too often, or you will wear out your welcome.*" *Proverbs 25:17 (NLT)*.

CONCLUSION

Healthy boundary setting is not selfish; it is self-care! Therefore, guard against every form of encroachments on your time; and by extension, your life. It is morally right and fair that you respect the healthy boundaries of other people.

When you set and protect your healthy boundaries; and you recognise and respect the healthy boundaries of others; you will be happy and fulfilled, and thus enjoy a sound mental health.

Refuse to be a People Pleaser

INTRODUCTION

The phrase "people pleaser" is used here to mean: "a person who has an emotional need to please others often at the expense of his or her own needs or desires."¹⁶³

It is good to be kind to people, and want to make them happy; but not at the expense of your own needs and interests. The Bible says:

"... you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:30-31.

There are two important instructions for us in the above Bible verses; and both are equally important. You are to:

- (1). Love God fervently.
- (2). Love your neighbour as yourself.

You are to put God first by obeying Him; then, you are to love your neighbour as yourself. This means that God wants you to love yourself too; but being a people pleaser is contrary to this instruction.

In view of this, as you care for others, you must care for yourself, and your own needs too. Remember, you are fearfully and won-

derfully made by God; so, you are not a nonentity; you are very precious, and greatly important.

We can safely say that self-care shows appreciation to God who has taken great efforts to create you; and sent His only begotten Son to save you. Therefore, neglecting your needs can be a lack of appreciation to God, who wonderfully made you.

RECOGNISING A PEOPLE PLEASING PERSON (PPP)

One of the major descriptions of a PPP is the desire to always want to be all things to all people. People pleasers find it difficult to say "No" to people; they think it is unkind and "selfish" to do so. Some of their other traits are:

- People pleasers find it difficult to express their opinion.
- They often behave in ways which are contrary to their values.
- Also have schedules filled with what other people expect them to do; and thus unable to fulfil much of their personal goals.
- People pleasers often struggle with low self-esteem.
- They base their self-worth on the approval of others; that is, their sense of self-worth is determined by what other people think of them.
- They only feel good when others are pleased with them; and vice-versa.
- They are usually too hard on themselves; they self-blame excessively, and give frequent apologies.
- They often ignore their feelings when they are hurt by others. Therefore, they fail to admit, or express their displeasure when others wound their emotions; mainly because of their desire to make others happy with them.

REASONS FOR PEOPLE-PLEASING HABITS

There are different reasons someone can become a people pleaser. In an article written by Amy Morin; titled "10 Signs You're a People-Pleaser"; and posted on the page of (psychologytoday.com); she stated that:

"Over the years, I've seen countless people-pleasers in my therapy office. But more often than not, people-pleasing wasn't really their problem; their desire to make others happy was merely a symptom of a deeper issue. For many, the eagerness to please stems from self-worth issues. They hope that saying yes to every-

thing asked of them will help them feel accepted and liked.

Other people-pleasers have a history of maltreatment, and somewhere along the way, they decided that their best hope for better treatment was to try to please the people who mistreated them. Over time, for them, people-pleasing became a way of life."¹⁶⁴

This means that people pleasing habits may be a trauma response. It can also stem from a low opinion of oneself. Thus, people pleasers do what they feel will make others happy in order to gain their approval.

Also, a person can be a people pleaser because of the fear of what people will say; for example, "what will people say if I do this, or if I do not do this? This emotional fear is real; and can be very overwhelming for some people.

CONSEQUENCES OF BEING A PEOPLE PLEASER

It is good to be nice to people, or to want to impress your boss that you are an amiable worker. However, to be everything to everybody has its negative consequences; on you, and your overall well-being. Some of these are:

- People pleasers are often treated like doormats; and this can be expected to have a negative effect on their self-esteem.
- They cannot be constant; they keep changing based on what they think others want them to do. This will adversely affect their self-worth, personal fulfilment; and mental health.
- People pleasers lose control over how they spend their time; and on how they live. Thus, such are unable to achieve much in terms of personal goals.
- Also, they may be frustrated when their good gesture is not appreciated; and may become bitter against others.
- It has been reported that people pleasers may become overwhelmed, fatigued, and stressed. This is risky because Scientific research has found a correlation between acute stress and illnesses like cancer, diabetes, and mental illnesses.¹⁶⁵

SIGNS THAT YOU ARE A PEOPLE PLEASER

- (a). If you cannot set healthy boundaries around your life.
- (b). If you cannot say No to requests from people.

TIPS FOR VICTORY

The first step to victory over being a people pleaser is connection to God through the new birth; especially for your eternity. Thus the Holy Spirit helps you to be victorious over all enslaving habits; including people pleasing habits.

- Purpose to be a God-pleaser, and not a people-pleaser. Resolve like Apostle Paul; "... *I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant.*" *Galatians 1:10 (NLT)*.

Please, be reminded that we were created to live to please God. "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*" *Revelation 4:11*.

- Let God be your source of healthy self-worth; and not the fleeting goodwill of fellow human beings.
- Do not let the reason for your action or inaction be because of the fear of what people will say, or not say. "*The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.*" *Proverbs 29:25*.
- Be yourself; stop being all things to everybody.
- Learn to say "No" without feeling guilty about it.
- Express your opinion; politely, but firmly. Take a stand for what you believe, without feeling guilty about it.
- Take care of your needs; self-care is healthy, and not selfish. If you do not take care of yourself, you will be unable to do any good thing for others.
- Learn to set healthy boundaries around your life; ensure you protect your boundaries by requiring others to respect them.
- Always remember that you can never please people all the time, no matter how much you try; and people cannot always please you too.
- Also, no human being can fulfil another, only God can; humans have been "configured" to be fulfilled in God alone. A person's soul is restless until it is anchored in Christ through the new birth; and a life of obedience to God.
- Do not expect too much from mere mortals; the best of mortals are still subject to human frailties
- Above all, let your motive for doing something good be because you want to please God, not man. It will then not matter to you whether mortals appreciate your kind gestures or not.

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"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31.

All the above will give you real joy, true fulfilment, a stable mental health; and great reward from God. *"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name...." Hebrews 6:10a.*

CONCLUSION

In the light of the fore going, be a God-pleaser, and not a people pleaser. Always remember to have a pure motive for your good deeds; and this is, to bring glory to God.

Also, make God your Source of joy; and not any mortal, thing, or your personal achievements etc. Thus, you will be fulfilled, and enjoy sound mental health; you will gain eternal life as you keep living in obedience to God till the end.

Guard against Sensitivities

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social beings; and as such, we are daily involved in a network of inter-personal relationships. This brings us across different people with varying temperaments, values, mindsets, and life experiences.

This chapter is about the need to avoid being easily offended, hurt, upset, or shocked by what others do or say; or what they fail to do, or say. This is for our sanity, and the glory of God in our lives.

People's offences against us are sometimes not deliberate; maybe they just do not know how to behave better. Perhaps they are going through difficult seasons that has negatively affected their mental and emotional balance etc.

Even if the hurt was deliberately "hurled" at us, it is in our own interest to let go of all offences. This relieves our hearts of the heavy burden of offences, and enhances our all-round wellness; including our mental health.

KEEP SAFE AND SANE

As we interact with other people on life's path, we should always be aware that they will sometimes fall short of our expectations. We too will sometimes fall short of people's expectations from us.

This mindset will keep you calm when people fail you, and vice versa. Also helps to settle issues with others rather than harbour

offence; or sometimes to just let go. This guards your heart against bitterness and undue guilt feelings.

The harbouring of offences spoils a person's joy, negatively affects one's health, results in spiritual defilement; and sends a person to hell in the end, except one quickly repents. Offences must be avoided like the plague.

Therefore, when an offence comes, do not dwell on it for long. This is not to deny the fact that you were hurt by what someone did or say; or fail to do, or say; but that God wants you to forgive.

"... be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:32.

We are to give our unconditional forgiveness to others; whether they are sorry or not. However, if the person is not worthy of trust, do not give it; always remember that trust must be earned!

WHEN OFFENCES 'PERCH'

However, if you are finding it difficult to let go of offences, go to God in prayers. Pour your heart to God about how wounded you are; that you feel bitter towards ---- (mention his/her name); yet God has warned against this.

"... Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many." Hebrews 12:15b (NLT).

Then, ask God to forgive you, and to purge your heart of bitterness, give you the grace to forgive ---- (his/her name); remember to pray for him/her too. These may sometimes be tough; but God can help you as you look up to Him.

It is equally important that you extend forgiveness to yourself when you err. After you have confessed your lapses to God, and asked for His forgiveness, do not beat yourself about same. The Bible says:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9.

CONCLUSION

All the above will keep your minds and hearts at peace in Christ Jesus. God's Holy Name will be glorified in you, and

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As you continue a lifestyle of obedience to God till the end, you will make heaven at last.

Cast off the Baggage

INTRODUCTION

Sporting activities are usually held in Schools and Colleges; and there are laid-down rules which must be strictly adhered to. An athlete for example must not cross to another lane during the relay race; otherwise he/she will be penalised.

Also, an athlete is to wear sportswear which are very smart, and thus conducive for running. If an athlete wears a big flowing gown, apart from inability to run well, such will be disallowed from running the race.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

In the same manner, the Christian race has rules guiding it; and these must be obeyed to avoid being penalised. The Christian race must be according to God's laid down instructions, so that we can be crowned in the end.

"... since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...." Hebrews 12:1-2.

DROP THE EXCESS BAGGAGE

In view of the above, refuse to carry any load of emotional garbage with you as you run the race; its stench will pollute you and

others. Also, its weight will slow you down, and disallow you from running the Christian race well.

Some of these are low self-esteem, self-pity, self-harm; feelings of rejection, worthlessness, helplessness, and hopelessness; people pleasing habits, self-stigmatization, and body shaming.

The others are fear, doubts, shame, guilt, covetousness, bitterness, unforgiveness; anything, and everything that can defile and hinder you in the race. Therefore, throw off every weight, so you can run the Christian race well.

CONCLUSION

As you run the Christian race according to instructions, you will have grace for the race, spiritual growth, a positively impactful life on others. Also, you will have joy, fulfilment, God's peace, and a sound mental health.

When you successfully get to the finishing line, and you finish strong; you gain life eternal.

Weighed down by your Past?

INTRODUCTION

There are times a person may allow oneself to be weighed down by the sins from which one has truly repented and forsaken; but this should not be so. The Bible says:

"There is... now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1.

PLEASE CONSIDER THIS...

If a Judge sentenced an offender to prison, having been found guilty under the Law; such will be behind bars till the jail term is completed. At the expiration of the jail term, such is officially released from prison; now free to go home.

Also, when you truly repented from sin, and received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, you have been "officially released from prison"; courtesy Jesus Christ who shed His Blood for you, and paid the full penalty for your sins.

When you are weighed down about your past, it is comparable to choosing to remain in prison after being officially released. You will agree with me that this is incredible! Therefore, enjoy your freedom in Christ; the Almighty God says:

"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins." Isaiah 43:25.

YOU ARE FREE!

You have been set free; refuse to allow yourself to be brought under the bondage of self-condemnation. If God has so greatly forgiven you, and no longer sees you as that wretched sinner, stop flogging yourself over your past.

It is great to be free from the power and penalty of sin; so, embrace and enjoy your God-given freedom and victory. Then, continue to live in obedience to God till the end; this grants you access to God's eternal life.

WHAT THEN?

It is essential to let the past be past, together with its failures; or successes. Learn from the failures; then confidently move on to achieve great things with your life through God. It is written:

"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead." Philipians 3:13.

CONCLUSION

Beloved, get up from the valley of guilt and shame, and enjoy your freedom in Christ. It is only one life; therefore, make the best of it while it lasts! Thus you will have peace, joy, fulfilment; and a sound mental health. Please be continually encouraged by the following hymn of assurance.

MY FAITH HAS FOUND A RESTING PLACE

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.*

Refrain:

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

*Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him,
He'll never cast me out. [Refrain]*

*My heart is leaning on the Word,
The written Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's name,
Salvation through His blood. [Refrain]*

*My great Physician heals the sick,
The lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed,
For me His life He gave. [Refrain]*

Hymn composed by Eliza Edmunds Hewitt (1851-1920)

Be Word-full

INTRODUCTION

The Word is used here to mean the Word of God as contained in the Holy Bible. It is written, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...."* Colossians 3:16a.

We should always be full of God's Word; to be continually filled and refilled as we run the race Home. It is our lifeline on life's path; to guide us to live holy, help us cope with life's challenges; and also make heaven at last. It is written:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

GOD'S WORD HOLDS TRUE FOREVER!

The Word of God is true; *"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."* 2 Corinthians 1:20.

GOD'S WORD DOES NOT EXPIRE

Entrepreneurs often have product promotions by giving discounts, coupons, freebies, or product samples to their customers. The offers must be redeemed before the expiry date, after which it lapses; but unlike the promises of Entrepreneurs, God's Word does not lapse! *"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever."* Isaiah 40:8.

GOD'S WORD IS EFFECTIVE

The Word of the Almighty God will always accomplish whatever God says, and wants it to achieve.

"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:10-11.

GOD'S WORD AS A LIFELINE

The Word of God is our Source of stability on the sea of this world. Amid life's sometimes changing seasons, God's Word provides the needed courage to stay strong. The Word of God has been compared to:

(1). Fire and hammer: *"Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" Jeremiah 23:29.*

As "fire", God's Word burns off every "chaff" of our lives; that is, all that is ungodly, and thereby unhealthy for one's life and mental health. This could be negative thoughts, self-destructive habits, afflictions; or sins generally.

It can also refine us, just like gold that passed through fire; thus burning off every spiritual dross of our lives. This makes us to shine for Christ; and strengthens us to be more useful for God.

A hammer is for shaping metals, breaking rocks; or driving nails into woods. The Word can break the sinner's stony heart, so that such can be saved; and also the hold of besetting sin in a Christian's heart, so as to be more Christ-like.

(2). Water: *"that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word..." Ephesians 5:26.*

As water, God's Word cleanses from "dirt" (sin or sickness); and makes us holy and whole. As water rehydrates, refreshes, and satisfies, God's Word renews us spiritually, gives fulfilment; thus enabling us to do exploits for God.

(3). Lamp: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* (Psalm 119:105). The Word of God illuminates our paths, guides us in the path of holiness; so that we would not stumble or fall as

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(4). The sword of the Spirit: "... take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..." (Ephesians 6:17). God's Word is the spiritual sword with which we record victories in the battles of life.

(5). Also, the Word of God is:

- The truth: and it sanctifies us: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." John 17:17.
- Alive and powerful: "For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." Hebrews 4:12 (NLT).

The Word of God can quicken all the dead situations of our lives, and give us healing and restoration. It has power to effect any needed change in a person's life; whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

God's Word can also help us to see ourselves the way we really are; so that we can amend our ways as the need arises. This keeps us going on the path of holiness; thus producing in us, joy, peace, and sound mental health.

- Pure: It purifies us: "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." Psalm 12:6.
- Curative: It cures from all ailments, and gives all-round wholeness. It also delivers from destructions: "He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." Psalm 107:20.
- Liberating: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32). The Word sets free from all satanic bondages, oppressions, and afflictions.

In view of all the above, it is not surprising that the Bible says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...." (Colossians 3:16a). If a person's heart is not constantly full of God's Word, such heart will be constantly full of worries and anxieties; thus jeopardizing one's mental health!

God wants us to be continually full of His Word, so as to live holy, maximally enjoy Christ's abundant life on earth; and gain eternal life at last!

WHEN YOU ARE CONTINUALLY WORD-FULL...

- You will be rich in God's Word. The more of the Word you have, the more you are strengthened to live holy.
- You will increase in the knowledge of God; and in your trust in Him.
- You will be empowered to do great exploits for God. *"... the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits."* Daniel 11:32.
- You are fired up to be increasingly prayerful. God's Word is fiery, and therefore ignites us to be much in the place of prevailing prayers.
- You become more "God-conscious". This challenges you to be careful how you live; thereby helping you to live holy, and be drawn closer to God.
- God's glory rubs on you as you constantly delve into His Word, and draw closer to Him. This brightens your face, and attracts others to Jesus Christ.
- You become a carrier of God's power; and a blessing unto generations.
- You are equipped to cope with life's challenges; thus making you enjoy a sound mental health.

WHAT THEN?

We are to continually read, study, meditate, believe, speak, keep, obey, and preach God's Word; allowing it to guide our decisions, choices, motives, actions, and inactions. Thus, one is enabled to live holy, enjoy sound mental health; and make heaven at last!

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Joshua 1:8.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing, the Word of God is crucial to our well-being in life and eternity. Therefore, our hearts must be full of God's Word continually; having a heart knowledge, and not just a head knowledge of it.

This helps us to live life to the fullest through Jesus Christ, and enjoy sound mental health. As we abide in obedience to God till the end of our earthly sojourn, we shall gain eternal life.

Be Prayer-full

INTRODUCTION

God wants a relationship with mankind as we journey through the wilderness of this world. The foundation for this is true repentance from sin; then to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and live for God till the end.

After salvation, one major way to sustain our relationship with God is through communication. God wants to speak to us, and have us speak to Him too; praying is one channel of achieving these.

PERSIST IN PRAYERS

We must pray continually, coupled with gratitude; not only when we have a place to kneel down; but also as we mow the lawn, cook, and do other chores; as we stroll, commute to and from work, Church, mall; or on a journey etc.

"Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). Also, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving...." Colossians 4:2.

AVOID THE BLOCKAGE!

As you go to God in prayers, be sure to remove the obstacle of sin. The Bible says: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear."* (Psalm 66:18). Sin makes the Lord to be inattentive to our prayers; let alone answer them!

It is when the obstacle of sin is removed that our prayers achieve

results. *".... The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." James 5:16b.*

BE AN INTERCESSOR

Our prayers should not be about us and our loved ones alone. We should pray for other people too; the hurting, sick, needy; the yet to be saved, backsliders, and the weary. Also the Church, Government, and nations of the world etc.

"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth." 1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NLT).

OUR BURDEN BEARER

The Almighty God cares very much about us; and always want to help us on life's path. He wants us to be joyful, calm, unafraid; and live life to the fullest through Jesus Christ. God doesn't want us to be anxious about our concerns.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7.

He wants to carry our burdens for us; and He alone can handle our cares and fears. We are to commit all to Him in prayers, coupled with thanksgiving. This makes us peaceful during life's challenges; thus enhancing one's mental health.

"Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved." Psalm 55:22.

PRAY WITH GOD'S WORD

Whenever you are faced with challenges, or you want to intercede for others; please, delve into the Bible to find the Word that addresses the situation. Then, war with it in prayers; for example, when faced with:

- Fears: God says: *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will*

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uphold you with My righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7.

- Insecurity: *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe." Proverbs 18:10.*
- Overwhelming challenges; God says:

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you." Isaiah 43:2.

- Frustrations; disappointments, stagnation, delay in getting married, or in childbearing etc. God says: *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." Psalm 50:15.*
- Doubts: The Almighty God says: *"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" Jeremiah 32:27.*
- Desertion and loneliness: Our Lord Jesus Christ says: *"... I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen." Matthew 28:20.*
- Life's battles: *"The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." Exodus 14:14.*
- Confusion *"... the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." Proverbs 2:6.*

The above list is not exhaustive. As you regularly delve into God's Word, you will get more verses to apply to the situations of life as the need arises. You can be assured of victory through Christ.

In the light of the above verses, always take your needs and intercessions to God (coupling them with thanksgiving); and leave them there. As you do, God will work on your "case file", and turn the situations around to His glory.

ASK IN FAITH

When you bring your requests to God, *"... ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord...."* James 1:6-8.

After praying, believe you have received. The Bible says, *"And*

whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."
Matthew 21:22.

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." 1 John 5:14-15.

WHEN YOU ARE FULL OF FAITH

When you have complete trust in God and his ability to help you, coupled with a life of holiness; and you pray according to His will, your prayers will be effective like those of the godly people of old:

"who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Hebrews 11:33-34.

This implies that your prayer of faith will:

- Subdue kingdoms.
- Accomplish righteousness.
- Obtain promises.
- Stop the mouths of 'lions'.
- Quench the violence of fire.
- Deliver from the edge of the sword.
- Replace human weakness with God's strength.
- Make valiant in battle.
- Put to flight the armies of 'aliens'!

In the light of the above, constantly have a very stubborn faith in the Almighty God with whom nothing is impossible!

UNBELIEF IS RISKY

When you harbour unbelief about your prayer requests, or God's Word; you risk God's best for you. Also, unbelief exposes one to danger; this is seen in God's reaction to Israel's display of unbelief on their way to the promised land.

"Then the Lord said to Moses: ".... how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them...." Numbers

14:11-12.

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14:11-12.

The above verses show that God detests unbelief! Unbelief casts doubts on the faithfulness of the Almighty God with Whom “... nothing will be impossible.” (Luke 1:37). This is a great insult on God, and must be repented of.

“For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not. Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar....” Romans 3:3-4.

GOD HAS THE FINAL SAY

We should always leave the outcome of our prayers to God; for He has our best interest at heart. God will answer us in accordance with His will for us, and in His own time; His will is the best, and His timing is very perfect.

Please, be reminded that God is all-knowing, and therefore has the comprehensive details of our situation and future. Therefore, His answers to our prayers can be unreservedly trusted.

EMBRACE A FASTED LIFESTYLE

It is essential to couple our prayers with fasting; that is, abstaining from food, or any other thing; to devote more time for prayers. Also, studying, meditating on God's Word; offering quality praise, worship, and thanksgiving to God.

A fasted lifestyle is to have a regular time of fasting; and this must be observed in a way that will not put one's health at risk. Those with health challenge, and expectant mothers may not have to fast while their conditions last.

When you fast regularly, coupled with a lifestyle of holiness, you enjoy a closer bond with God; and a sharpened spiritual antenna to hear from God. It also helps to discipline the flesh; and put it under subjection to God's will and way.

Also, there are situations that require the combination of prayer and fasting to achieve the needed results. “... this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” Matthew 17:21.

THE POWER IN THE BLOOD

As you war in prayer, remember to invoke the power in the Blood of Jesus Christ against the spiritual forces of wickedness. “And

they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...." Revelation 12:11.

The devil is the one who drives people to self-destructive habits; anxiety, depression, self-harm, substance abuse etc. Those who have received Christ's atonement have been delivered from the devil's oppressions and afflictions.

"When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision - the cutting away of your sinful nature.... Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.

He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, He disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by His victory over them on the cross." Colossians 2:11-15 (NLT).

The devil and his demons cannot withstand this Blood that was shed for us on the Cross. It has disarmed, disgraced, and defeated them all; thereby giving Christians victory over the devil and his team. Alleluia!

Therefore, they no longer have power, nor the right to attack your mind and emotions. They neither have the right to make you feel hopeless; and push you to self-destructive "solutions" to life's challenges.

ENFORCE JESUS' VICTORY!

In view of the above, disallow the devil and his team from messing with your mind and emotions. Do this by constantly enforcing the victory of the Cross against them concerning your life; and also in your intercessions.

Anytime he tries to toy with you, rebuke, resist, and silence him in the Name of Jesus Christ; reminding him of the shed Blood that brought you victory over his oppressions. *".... Resist the devil and he will flee from you." James 4:7b.*

Also, remind him of his future doom! *"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Revelation 20:10.*

TOO OVERWHE

Sometimes, one may not know how, or what to intercede for us acco

"... the Spirit also help what we should pray for intercession for us with

Now He who searches the Spirit is, because He knows the will of God." Romans 8:26-27

When the Holy Spirit intercedes for you, your peace and joy, and your mental health is established.

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, there are challenges (trials) that you must bear. Do not let the devil put you to shame. It is worth it.

"I sought the Lord, and He answered my fears. They looked on me and were not ashamed. They saw me and saved me out of all my troubles."

TOO OVERWHELMED TO PRAY?

Sometimes, one may be weighed down with cares that you do not know how, or what to pray for; at such times, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God.

"... the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8:26-27.

When the Holy Spirit intercedes on your behalf, your burdens are lifted. The peace and joy of the Lord flood your heart anew; and your mental health is enhanced.

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, refuse to panic, or be anxious whenever there are challenges (in your life, or others). Allow the Burden Bearer to have your concerns; and you His peace. You can never be put to shame. It is written:

"I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Psalm 34:4-6.

Be Joy-full

INTRODUCTION

The Bible says, "*Rejoice always.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Also, "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*" (Philippians 4:4). These are clear-cut Biblical instructions that must be obeyed.

Also, the emphasis on rejoicing shows how important it is to humans. God as our 'Manufacturer' knows what is best for us; so, His instruction to us to always rejoice can be trusted to be in our best interest.

In the light of the foregoing, we can safely say that continual rejoicing is obedience to God; and also essential to our sustenance and sanity in the wilderness of this world.

REJOICE ALWAYS

We are to always rejoice, not because there will be no challenges; but that God has our backs. Amid life's problems, we are safe in God's Hands; and all things will work together for our good, in life and eternity.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."
Romans 8:28.

In view of this, keep rejoicing; both when things go the way you want, and during trying periods. It shows implicit faith in God, and this honours Him. He will arise to help us in the nick of time, and we shall testify to His faithfulness.

THE JOY OF THE LORD

The joy of the Lord is independent of happenings around us; it comes from within us, through the indwelling Holy Spirit. After the new birth, and one is growing steadily in Christ, we can be truly joyous; even during trials.

“And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

As one continues to grow in Christ, the well of the joy within keeps deepening; and we shall continually experience a calmness that is indescribable. This surely results in sound mental health.

In view of the above, if you are not yet born again, please, repent and give your life to Jesus Christ now. This is not only to have joy on earth, but because of your eternal welfare.

THE BENEFITS OF JOY

It is written; *“... the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)*. As you remain joyful, you are strengthened to face life's challenges; and your mental health is sustained.

The joy of the Lord gives you an inner peace, which results in an outer calmness that makes your face radiant; and attracts others to our Lord Jesus Christ. It also boosts your all-round health.

“A happy heart is good medicine and a joyful mind causes healing, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.” Proverbs 17:22 (AMP).

There are situations that will want to make you downcast; but refuse to let go of your joy. Some people may hurt you, whether deliberately, or mistakenly; however, hold tightly to your joy, and always remember that:

“You have little control over events and actions of people towards you... but make up your mind, not to allow anything or anyone steal or spoil your joy...” Tolu Akinyemi. You are able through Christ; so, say this to yourself, and mean it: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13.

CONCLUSION

As you travel on life's uneven paths, always remember that God's Word says: *“Rejoice always.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16)*. So, keep rejoicing no matter what; God has your back.

Be Hope-full

INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that life is full of challenges. However, there is hope in God, for He is the God of hope. God's Spirit can empower us to be full of hope, joy, and peace; even in the face of seemingly hopeless situations. It is written:

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
Romans 15:13.

HOPE IS OUR SOUL'S ANCHOR

In the manner in which an anchor is used to stabilize a berthed ship from drifting on the sea, so also hope is the anchor that stabilizes our hearts on the 'sea' of life's challenges. The Bible says: *"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast..."* Hebrews 6:19.

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, the word 'anchor' is "... used metaphorically for that which supports or keeps one steadfast in the time of trial or of doubt. It is an emblem of hope."

Therefore, amidst life's challenges, look up to the God of hope. As you do, the Holy Spirit empowers you to be hopeful; and He supplies the needed strength to face life's challenges without collapsing under its weight.

"... the strength of those who wait with hope in the Lord will be renewed. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and won't become weary." Isaiah 40:31 (GW).

KEEPING HOPE ALIVE

It is gladdening to know that the God of hope is that same powerful, loving, faithful, merciful, unfathomable, and unconquerable God of the Holy Bible. This should encourage us to be continually hopeful in Him.

However, to abide in hope, our faith in God must grow; and this is achievable as our hearts are continually full of God's Word. When you are full of God's Word, you will be full of hope in God.

GETTING WEARY?

Perhaps you have been trusting God for help, but your situation remains the same; or even seems to be getting worse. Please, refuse to give way to despair; rather, continue to be hopeful in God.

Always remember that hope is the anchor for our souls; giving up hope makes one like a berthing ship without an anchor! This makes one to be tossed 'to and fro' on the 'sea' of life's challenges; thus jeopardizing one's mental health.

Please, you can be rest assured that the Almighty God can never fail, He will come through for you in the nick of time. The Bible says, *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."* Psalm 46:1 (NLT).

Also, it is written, *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all."* Psalm 34:19.

BENEFITS OF BEING HOPEFUL

As you keep hope alive despite the challenges you face, you will have the joy and peace of God in your heart. Thus, there will be no draining of your emotional and physical strength through anxiety, depression, self-pity etc.

As you look up to God with hope, you can be assured of His help; and you will not be put to shame. It is written: *"They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed."* Psalm 34:5.

Also, looking up to God with hope makes your face radiant. This boosts your mental health; and attracts others to come to know our Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour.

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CONCLUSION

It is certain that keeping hope alive will eventually birth victory; and you will testify.

"In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears.... He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters." Psalm 18:6 & 16.

Be Gratitude-full

INTRODUCTION

The Almighty God is the King of all the earth; and He reigns over the nations. The Bible says: *"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name."* Psalm 100:4.

We are to praise God for His wondrous acts; and worship Him for Who He is (by extolling His attributes); and to continually thank Him for all He has done, is doing, and will continue to do for us.

The greatest gratitude we can give God is to live holy throughout our lives; as a sign of our appreciation for His love, goodness, and faithfulness; daily yielding all our body parts as *"... instruments of righteousness to God."* Romans 6:13.

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice - the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him." Romans 12:1 (NLT).

WHY BE FULL OF GRATITUDE?

- It is God's will: *"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
- It is good: *"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your loving-kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night."* Psalm 92:1-2.
- For God's care: *"By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall*

be continually of You." Psalm 71:6.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I BE GRATEFUL?

- At all times: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Psalm 34:1.
- Morning and night: "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name... to declare Your loving-kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness every night." Psalm 92:1-2.
- From sunrise to sunset: "From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name is to be praised." Psalm 113:3.
- For as long as I live: "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being." Psalm 104:33.
- Forever: "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever." Psalm 145:1-2.

IN WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES?

(1). When things go the way we want. "I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvellous works." Psalm 9:1.

(2). When things do not go the way we want.

"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labour of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls - yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Habakkuk 3:17-18.

WHERE DO I OFFER MY GRATITUDE?

- In private: "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds." Psalm 149:5.
- In the great assembly: "I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people." Psalm 35:18.
- In my spirit: "... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24.

We are to continually stay in tune with God through a lifestyle of

sincere gratitude. We deny, mowing; while and from School, or w

HOW DO I OFFER MY GRATITUDE?

- **In the beauty of holiness:** "I will give thanks to the Lord in the beauty of holiness!" Psalm 145:2. This is an introduction to this section. It is the attitude we can give to God.
- **Wholeheartedly:** "I will praise You with all my heart; I will tell of all Your marvellous works." Psalm 145:2.

As I come before God, I want to offer my gratitude.

- **My whole being:** "I will praise You, O Lord, within me, bless His name continually." Psalm 145:2.
- **Singing:** "Oh come and let us sing joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us give thanks to You, O Lord, because You are gracious and merciful." Psalm 95:1-2.
- **A new song:** "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; and His praise in the firmament of heaven." Psalm 149:3.
- **Dancing:** "Let Israel be joyful in the Lord, for He is good. Let them dance; let them sing with the tambourine, and with the organ and harp." Psalm 149:2-3.
- **Rejoicing:** "Shout joyfully in song, rejoice, and sing psalms to the Lord." Psalm 149:3.
- **Clapping:** "Oh, clap your hands, O Jerusalem; God with the voice of shouting." Psalm 149:3.
- **Hands lifting:** "Lift up your hands to the Lord." Psalm 134:2.
- **Kneeling and bowing:** "Bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our God." Psalm 95:6.
- **Face to the ground:** "I have bowed down before the Lord with my face." Psalm 134:2.
- **One Accord:** "Indeed, the Lord is one. And singers were as praising and thanking Him." Psalm 134:2.
- **Musical instruments:** "I will praise You with the lute and with the organ and harp." Psalm 149:3.

sincere gratitude. We can praise God as we do our chores, gardening, mowing; while trekking, driving, shopping; commuting to and from School, or work etc.

HOW DO I OFFER GRATITUDE?

- **In the beauty of holiness:** "... Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!" (1 Chronicles 16:29). As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a holy lifestyle is the greatest gratitude we can give to God.
- **Wholeheartedly:** "I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvellous works." Psalm 9:1.

As I come before God with praise, worship, and thanksgiving, I am to offer my gratitude with:

- **My whole being:** "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" Psalm 103:1.
- **Singing:** "Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving...." Psalm 95:1-2.
- **A new song:** "Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints." Psalm 149:1.
- **Dancing:** "Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp." Psalm 149:2-3.
- **Rejoicing:** "Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises." Psalm 98:4.
- **Clapping:** "Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!" Psalm 47:1.
- **Hands lifting:** "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord." Psalm 134:2.
- **Kneeling and bowing down:** "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Psalm 95:6.
- **Face to the ground:** "... they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." Nehemiah 8:6.
- **One Accord:** "Indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord...." 2 Chronicles 5:13.
- **Musical instruments:** "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; ... with the lute and harp! ... with the timbrel and dance;

... with stringed instruments and flutes! ... with loud cymbals;
... with clashing cymbals! Psalm 150:3-5.

- **Harmonious sound:** "On an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp, with harmonious sound." Psalm 92:3.
- **Loud voices:** "Then the Levites of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with voices loud and high." 2 Chronicles 20:19.

THE BENEFITS OF GIVING GRATITUDE TO GOD

1. GREAT PEACE AND JOY

A lifestyle of gratitude to God sets one free from heaviness of heart; and gives you great peace and joy. It also safeguards you from depression, stress-related diseases and complications; thus enhancing your mental health.

2. AN ATMOSPHERE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

When quality praise, worship and thanksgiving are offered to God, His Presence is enthroned. "You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel." (Psalm 22:3). Where the majestic God is enthroned, He descends in all His glory!

"... and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord.... the glory of the Lord filled the house of God." 2 Chronicles 5:13-14.

The Presence and glory of God come with His anointing. Thus, chains are broken, yokes are destroyed; and people are set free from all oppression, depression, and afflictions.

3. SPIRITUAL REFRESHING

A lifestyle of gratitude grants us constant access to God's Awesome Presence. Thus, we are refreshed spirit, soul, and body; empowered to live for God, and to enjoy all-round wholeness.

Also, God's glory rubs on us, making our faces radiant. God renews His anointing on us, making us His instruments of deliverance to the afflicted and oppressed.

4. VICTORY IN THE BATTLES OF LIFE

As above-mentioned, intense praise, worship, and thanksgiving bring down God's Presence, glory, and power: to save, help, heal, and deliver people from all forms of afflictions and oppressions.

Below are some examples:

- The evil spirit in King Achish fled through David's praise through David.

"And it came to pass, when Saul was angry because David had departed, that David took an opportunity and was refreshed, and was strengthened in the Lord." 1 Samuel 16:23 (KJV)

- The walls of Jericho tumbled down.

"So the people shouted and sang as they marched around the city. It happened when the people had circled the city seven times and the people shouted and sang, that the walls of the city fell flat...." Joshua 6:20.

- The Israelites had victory over the Philistines (2 Chronicles 20:1-30)

"Now when they began to sing and dance against the Philistines, who had come against Jerusalem, the Lord made an end of the inhabitants of the city. He made an end of the inhabitants of the city." 2 Chronicles 20:22

- Paul and Silas were delivered from prison.

The power of praise resulted in the breaking of "chains"; and the prisoners were delivered.

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were singing and praising God, and the prisoners were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were loosed." Acts 16:25-26

Also, the prison warden and his family were converted to Christ; and gave their lives for the Lord.

5. HEAVEN AT LAST

As we embrace a lifestyle of gratitude to God till the end, we will enter Heaven.

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Below are some examples:

- The evil spirit in King Saul could not withstand the power of praise through David. (1 Samuel 16:14-23).

"And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." 1 Samuel 16:23 (KJV).

- The walls of Jericho tumbled through praise (Joshua 6:1-20).

"So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat...." Joshua 6:20.

- The Israelites had victory in battle under King Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1-30).

"Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. For the people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another." 2 Chronicles 20:22-23.

- Paul and Silas were delivered from prison (Acts 16:16-34).

The power of praise resulted in the opening of "prison doors", the breaking of "chains"; and the salvation of souls.

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed." Acts 16:25-26.

Also, the prison warden and all his household received the salvation message; and gave their lives to Jesus Christ (See Acts 16:25-33).

5. HEAVEN AT LAST

As we embrace a lifestyle of gratitude to God; and live in obedience to God till the end, one will have eternal rest with God in Heaven.

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be

shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." Heb. 12:28.

THE DANGERS OF INGRATITUDE TO GOD

If you are not grateful, you are likely to embrace murmurings and grumblings; and these do not glorify God. Some of the evil harvests from an attitude of ingratitude are:

- An ungrateful person will lose the above-mentioned benefits of a grateful heart; and much more.
- Also, will become more miserable and distressed; and one's mental health will be jeopardised.
- Such will attract God's anger, because God hates complaining; His anger was kindled against the people of Israel because of this.

"... 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: the carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness....'" Numbers 14:28-29.

WHAT THEN?

We are to be continually grateful to God; when things go the way we want, and when we do not even understand what is happening to us. This shows implicit trust in God, is honouring to Him; and He will arise to help us.

GRATITUDE AND MENTAL HEALTH

It is interesting to know that evidence from Scientific Research in the Behavioural Sciences shows a positive correlation between gratitude and mental health.

There is an article titled "Developing Gratitude Amidst Life's Struggle" by Cortney S. Warren (Ph.D.); posted on December 13, 2019 on the page of Psychology Today. According to the author, "Research suggests gratitude can improve emotional well-being."

She mentioned that a group of Researchers, Jans-Beken and colleagues (2019) recently reviewed a research that was carried out to examine gratitude as a predictor of health-related outcomes. They reported that:

"... gratitude is positively associated with emotional well-being; and can facilitate increased social connection ... Actively developing gratitude... can help us cope with negative life ex-

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periences and realities.”¹⁶⁶

Cortney S. Warren, (Ph.D.) concluded her article thus:

“When faced with life’s challenging realities, it can be difficult to see the positive aspects of our lives. Yet, one of the best ways to cope with the struggles that we are bound to grapple with is to develop a spirit of gratitude. For there is a gift in every experience. There can be learning in the struggle. There can be growth through pain. And sometimes, we even come out of an objectively challenging reality with tremendous appreciation because the experience made us a better version of ourselves....

The Naked Truth is This: ... focusing our attention and energy on existing life challenges can lead us to feel sad, anxious, and depressed. Actively developing an appreciation for the good things about your life can help you cope....”¹⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, “... let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” Hebrews 13:15.

Also, be “... *filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” *Ephesians 5:19-20.*

Abundant Life through Christ

INTRODUCTION

The Almighty God greatly loves mankind; and He wants to maintain constant interactions with us in this complex world. However, sin is a barrier between God and human beings.

In order to restore mankind to fellowship with Himself, God sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, to save humanity from the power and penalty of sin. The Bible says:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life". John 3:16.

GOD'S SALVATION GIFT

This is the opportunity to repent from sin, truly turn away from such sins, receive Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour; afterward live the rest of one's life in obedience to God; and gain eternal life at last.

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:16.

Have you received God's salvation gift through Jesus Christ? If No, this is risky. You can avail yourself the opportunity now by sincerely taking the steps below:

(A). Accept the fact that you are a sinner. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". Romans 3:23.*

(B). Believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins; and rose on the third day for your justification.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." 1 Peter 3:18.

(C). Confess your sins to God; repent and be truly sorry; that is, be sincerely ready to forsake sins. *"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit." Psalm 34:18.*

- Ask God to forgive you; He will cleanse and forgive you all your sins.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." John 1:9.

- Invite Jesus Christ into your life as your personal Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ says:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Revelation 3:20.

As you sincerely take the above steps, be assured that the Almighty God has forgiven you all your sins; courtesy Jesus Christ. God no longer sees you as that lying, immoral, or dubious person; or that lazy, disobedient child. God says,

"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins." Isaiah 43:25.

CHRIST'S ABUNDANT LIFE

The new birth gives you access to Christ's abundant life; He says: *"... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:10b).* Also, you are now a member of God's Royal family.

"... as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13.

This means that you are Royalty; a Prince or Princess of the King of all kings! *"For God is the King of all the earth.... God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne." Psalm 47:7-8.*

You are now a member of the Kingdom of God on earth; and this is characterised by righteousness, peace and joy. "... *the kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" Romans 14:17.

You will continually enjoy all the above privileges as you live in obedience to God till the end. Thus, you will enjoy a sound mental health on earth, and gain eternal life at last; forever to be with God in Heaven. Accept my hearty Congratulations.

For more on the Christian race; and tips on Christian growth, please, see 'Now that you are born again'.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps, you have given your life to Christ, but finding it difficult to stand for Him. Please, tell God about your struggles with sin; ask for His forgiveness, then rededicate your life to Christ. God will forgive and restore you.

Maybe you have been born again; but you are living in hypocrisy; or have backslided? Quickly repent from all besetting sins, ask God to forgive you; then renew your commitment to God. He will not cast you away. The Bible says:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart - these, O God, You will not despise." Psalm 51:17.

Perhaps, yours is lukewarmness; you are neither cold, nor hot for Christ. This is risky! Jesus says, "... *because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*" (Revelation 3:16). Repent, and be hot for Christ.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Remember: JESUS IS COMING SOON!!!

(Revelation 22:12).

Epilogue

Thank you for reading this Book "Say Yes to Mental Health". As mentioned in the prologue, having Christ's abundant life is a sure foundation for mental health; and this is only possible through the new birth.

This brings to mind a popular song we enjoyed singing in the late 1970's when I newly met Christ; and I believe it is still very relevant today. It goes thus:

(Chorus)
Jesus is the Answer,
For the world today,
Above Him there's no other,
Jesus is the Way.

1. If you have some questions
In the corners of your mind,
Traces of discouragement,
The peace you cannot find,
Reflections of your past,
Seem to face you every day,
But this one thing I do know,
That Jesus is the Way.
(Refrain)

2. I know you've got mountains,
That you think you cannot climb,
I know your skies are dark,
You think the sun won't shine,
But in case you don't know,
That the Word of God is true,
Everything He's promised,
He will do it for you.
(Refrain)

Bridge: Jesus is the Way
(The Truth and the Light).

Song by Andrae Crouch (1973)

However, if people keep neglecting God's salvation gift through Jesus Christ; and continue to "push" God out of their lives and governmental systems, the society may be expected to become progressively decadent and chaotic.

HEADING TOWARDS DISINTEGRATION?

The society's chaotic situation will lead to increasing confusion and emptiness. Thus, people will be increasingly driven to seek fulfillment in things, rather than God who alone truly satisfies! Below are some of the possible outcomes:

- An increasing incidence of mental breakdown in people.
- Increasing substance abuse and crime rate.
- Poverty and homelessness.
- Family conflicts and breakdowns.
- Increasing juvenile delinquency cases.
- More cases of self-harm and suicide.
- Increasing cases of medical health challenges.
- A reduction in the quality of life; and life expectancy.

HEAD BACK TO GOD!

The only way out of the above harvest of woes is for all to return to God our Creator now through the new birth; and afterwards live in obedience to God to the end. God will embrace all who turn to Him in true repentance, because He:

"... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus," 1 Timothy 2:4 & 5.

"So repent [change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins] and return [to God—seek His purpose for your life], so that your sins may be wiped away [blotted out, completely erased], so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord [restoring you like a cool wind on a hot day].... " Acts 3:19 (AMP).

When individuals maintain a healthy relationship with the living God, each person will relate with others in the fear of God; the rulers will rule in the fear of God, and thereby rule well. Thus, the society will be a better place for all.

SOME SUGGESTED PRAYER POINTS

My loving Heavenly Father, I am sorry for being anxious, depressed, and allowing my challenges to weigh me down; when your Word says I should not be anxious (Philippians 4:6 & 7). Please, forgive and cleanse me.

Please, help me to henceforth trust You with all my cares; constantly casting my cares on You; and thus, allowing Your peace to reign in my heart; I pray in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen. Also, that You will:

- Open the eyes of my understanding to Your Word; to strengthen me, and fulfil Your purpose in my life. *"And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."* Luke 24:45.
- Help me to trust You to heal me through Your Word in the Holy Bible; for it is written: *"He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."* Psalm 107:20.
- Help me to daily live to please You; to be a God-pleaser, and not a people pleaser.
- Help me to accept myself; have a healthy self-esteem, set healthy boundaries around my life; and respect the boundaries of others.
- Deliver me from the torment of the fear of men; the fear of what people will say, or do.
- Give me grace to guard against sensitivities; not to allow people's action or inaction to determine my mood, nor dictate my joy.
- Help me to always give room for human frailty; so that I can flow in ceaseless joy; and nothing will hinder my joy.
- Rid me of all bitterness, anger, self-pity, shame, feelings of rejection and worthlessness etc. *"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise."* Jeremiah 17:14.
- Please, go to all the recesses of my life, all layers and compartments, and sort me out. Break down all inhibiting walls; purge me of all the pains that have emptied and broken me, and heal my wounds (Psalm 147:2 & 3).
- Help me to be tender-hearted towards people, without making myself vulnerable to them; nor compromise holiness.
- Also, give me a tender heart towards You my Heavenly Father; by cooperating with You as You work on me to be

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- Help me to find fulfilment in You alone; and not in people, things, or my achievements; in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.
- Help me to trust You in all situations, even when You seem far away; knowing that You will make all things work together for my good, as I continue to live for You.
- Help me to always be prayerful, joyful, hopeful, and grateful to You; my loving Heavenly Father.
- Use me to win and disciple souls for you; to be your instrument of comfort and hope to the hurting and weary; and to fulfil all Your purposes for my life. Help me never to share in Your glory; in Jesus' Name, Amen.
- Help me to stand firm for Jesus Christ till the end, finish strong, and make Heaven at last; in the Name of Jesus Christ I pray, Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

My loving heavenly Father, I pray that You help those who are at the verge of giving up on life; thinking of committing suicide. Show them You care for them, and that You love them unconditionally; in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

Please, break the hold of the spirit of suicide, and send them timely help; to lovingly restrain them from self-destruction. Empower them to soar above their pains; and to seek help from You, in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

Please, Daddy, send encouragement to those who are discouraged; hope to those who feel hopeless; help to those who feel helpless; strength to those who are weary; I pray in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Help those who feel worthless, rejected, and unloved to know that they are precious to You; and that You will help them. Also, the unsaved to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and live to honour God; in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21.

NOW THAT YOU ARE BORN AGAIN

Congratulations on your decision to truly repent from sin and receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour; that is, you are born again. You are saved from the dangers and punishment of sin; you are now a child of God.

"... As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12 & 13.

What a great privilege to be the child of God; the Prince or Princess of the King of kings. Please, accept my hearty Congratulations.

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Please, believe that God has forgiven you your sins; so, do not feel guilty or sad over your past. God says: *"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins." Isaiah 43:25.*

THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When a person becomes truly born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live in him/her; to guide and help in the Christian race. Our Lord Jesus Christ says:

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." John 14:16 & 17.

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth; ... and He will tell you things to come." John 16:13.

Therefore, be assured that the Holy Spirit is with you, and in you, to help you; both in the good and challenging seasons of life. As you cooperate with Him, He will help you to run the Christian race successfully to the end.

TIPS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Salvation is the beginning of a life-long journey with God. God

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wants you to grow in your new relationship with Him; and here are some tips on achieving this.

(A). Please, get your own copy of the Holy Bible, and a daily devotional that is based on the true Word of God; also, a notebook to jot down the lessons you learn daily from the Bible.

(B). Read your Bible every day; study it, and meditate on the lessons learnt.

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby." 1 Peter 2:2. (See also Joshua 1:8).

(C). Obey God's Word. God says, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* John 14:15.

(D). Pray every day. *"Pray without ceasing."* 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

(E). Fellowship with other Christians where the undiluted Word of God is preached, and lived out. Thus, you learn from others, and others learn from you too. Also, you can use your talent for the progress of God's work.

"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near." Hebrews 10:25 (NLT).

(F). Share with others how they can receive God's salvation gift. Our Lord Jesus Christ want us to share His message of hope with other people (see Matthew 28:18-20). We must be deliberate in seizing every opportunity to do this.

You can start by prayerfully sharing the testimony of how you became born again; and how God turned your life around. This will challenge you to be careful how you live. Indeed:


"... he who wins soul is wise." Proverbs 11:20.

(G). Expect the second coming of Jesus Christ; living each moment as if Christ will come that very moment. *"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."* (1 John 3:3). Congratulations yet again.

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." Jude 1:24-25 (KJV).

Books by the Author

1. The Complete Woman
2. A Tasty Meal for the Man of Taste (Guidelines on Overcoming Sexual Temptations)
3. Building Your Home for God's glory (Gems from the Life of Nehemiah)
4. Teenage Friendship (A Guide to Healthy Social Relations)
5. Dynamics of Marital Harmony
6. A Place of Beauty and Satisfaction
7. Ibugbe Ewa ati Itelorun (Yoruba version of 6 above)
8. Thy Will be Done (Biblical Guidelines on choosing a Life Partner)
9. Oneness not Sameness (Tips for Harmony in the Home)
10. Rescue them From the Fire (A Call to Aggressive Evangelism/Follow-up)
11. The Whole Duty of Man
12. This Faith is Real
13. Igbagbo Yi Daju (Yoruba version of 12 above)
14. Flee This Plague Now
15. In Quietness and Confidence (Gems from the 33 Trapped Chilean Miners)
16. The Knowledge of God
17. Fulfilling My Designer's Purpose
18. Welcome to the Family
19. Jesus Christ Loves Me (An illustrated Children's Book)
20. Living Victoriously in These Perilous Times
21. The King's Child (A Book for Children and Youths)

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22. The Sleeping Giant (A Call to an Urgent Spiritual Reawakening)
 23. The King, the Saviour and the Comforter (For children and Youths)
 24. The Power at Work in the Christian (A Sequel to No 22 above).
 25. The Greatest Gift (A Book for Children and Youths).
 26. Here I am Again (A Call to Persistent Praying).
 27. The Unique Prize-Giving Day (A Children's Book).
 28. Say Yes to Mental Health.

Information about the ministry

The Maranatha Ambassadors is a non-denominational Christian Organisation committed to the propagation of the gospel of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. To achieve this, we currently offer the following services:

Evangelistic Outreaches (Maranatha Evangelistic Crusade); Family Harmony Crusades; Children and Teens' Concerns; Youth Mentoring; Counselling Services; Publication of Christian Books and Tracts; Sale of Bibles, Christian Literatures, CD's, Gift items etc.

MARANATHA BIBLE CLUB: For children and youths. Meeting Time is 4pm – 5pm every Saturday at the Ministry's premises. *This is free.*

LIFEGATE CRECHE: For Baby-care and Playgroup services. We provide a physically and spiritually healthy atmosphere, where parents can restfully keep their children while away to work.

VICTORY & GLORY BOOKSELLERS: For the sale of different versions of the Holy Bible; colourfully illustrated children Bibles; Christian Books; Christian audio and video CDs; gift items; toys etc.; all at moderate prices.

INVITATION TO MINISTER: Churches, Christian fellowships and organisations can invite us for Talks and Seminars for Children, youths; handling Youth work and Children Ministry; mental health issues; and on the Christian life generally.

THE LIFEGATE SCHOOL: We are glad to announce that plans are on the way to expand our Creche to include a Nursery and Primary School. It is: The Lifegate School (TLS). Our vision statement is: Raising an Army for the Kingdom.

THE BIRTH OF A VISION

I am immensely grateful to the Almighty God for the birth of "Christ' Abundant Life Maximized" a.k.a. CALM (A Mental Health Initiative); in commemoration of my 60th. Birthday. It is an arm of "The Maranatha Ambassadors".

The focus of "CALM" is both preventive and restorative; that is, how to abide in, or be restored to mental health. Our strategy includes the teaching of God's Word, prayers, counselling, seminars, and Christian publications.

We shall minister to people's all-round needs: those who are hurting, battered, shattered, rejected, lonely, traumatised, feeling worthless, helpless, hopeless; struggling with addictions, or any other mental health challenges etc.

The Mission Statement: To equip individuals to live life to the fullest through Jesus Christ.

The Vision Statement: Touching lives to soar above life's challenges through Christ.

Our Core Values: The Word, Godliness, Faith, & Hope.

Our Anchor verse: *"For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty Saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." Zephaniah 3:17 [NLT].*

Our Motto: The Word works.

HELLO THERE!

Are you burdened, troubled, confused, or traumatized; maybe you are beaten, battered, and shattered; and you need an empathetic and non-judgemental listener? Or you just got born again; or rededicated your life to Jesus Christ?

Perhaps you want to know about God's salvation plan for mankind through Jesus Christ, thirsty for more of God; or have been blessed through this Book, we will be glad to hear from you. Please, feel free to get in touch with us:

The Maranatha Ambassadors, Tel. +2348038041113

E-mail: themaranathaambassadors@gmail.com

TMA: Preparing Souls for the Soon-coming King.

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Tofunmi Akinyemi

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About the Author

Tofunmi Akinyemi is a child of God, having received Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour on November 28, 1978; while undergoing an Advanced Level course at 'The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Nigeria. She is God's instrument in spreading this same gospel that brought salvation to her soul.

A Sociologist, and an alumna of the University of Lagos, Nigeria; she fellowshipped with the Lagos Varsity Christian Union (LVCU) while on Campus.

After graduation, she served in the old Sokoto State (Nigeria) in 1982/83 under the mandatory one year National Youth Service Corp Scheme (NYSC). During this period, she was the Prayer Secretary of the Nigeria Christian Corpers Fellowship (NCCF).

A former Secondary School Teacher, she voluntarily retired in June 1996 from the Ondo State Teaching Service Commission, Akure, Nigeria; in obedience to God's call on her life.

She is the founder of 'The Maranatha Ambassadors'; a non-denominational Christian Organisation committed to aggressive Evangelism and Discipleship.

The 'Christ Abundant Life Maximized', a.k.a. CALM (A Mental Health Initiative) was later established as an arm of the Ministry. CALM is an organisation that adopts a Christian approach to mental health issues.

She is very passionate about living for God, and sharing the gospel with people; especially Children and Youths. 'SAY YES TO MENTAL HEALTH' is her 28th. Book.

She is married to Kola; and their union is wonderfully blessed. She enjoys cooking, writing, reading, singing hymns, beholding the beauty of nature; and taking care of her grandchildren.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

This book delves in-depth into the issue of mental health. It offers hope and help through God's grace to people struggling with mental ill-health.

'Say Yes To Mental Health' challenges us all; individuals, organisations, and the Church to uplift our society, by standing up for mental health.

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