

SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

*Going back to God's ancient ways and
returning to our first love*

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INTRODUCTION

Spiritual intimacy. Two powerful and uncommon words. Indeed, they are words known only to the uncommon Christian.

A pastor friend of mine once said, “I’m capable of hard work and faithfulness but totally incapable of intimacy with God. Prayer is a hard thing for me; it is just not my cup of tea!”

How shocking! However. I am sure this man is not alone in his confession. The ministry is full of people like this - men and women who are capable of doing almost anything and everything for the Lord except getting down on their knees and being intimate with Him. They cannot prevail in His presence. This is why I say spiritual intimacy is enjoyed only by the uncommon Christian.

The common Christian today knows everything from prophecy to anointing, from home cells to music, from miracles to visitations, from missions to running errands etc. but they simply cannot enter into intimacy with the Lord or prevail in His presence. Seeking His face is just too much for them.

Spiritual intimacy does not mean waiting in God’s presence with a passive mind and waiting for the time to just tick away! People who do this will be greatly disillusioned. They do not know why they are spending so much time in God’s presence, yet they experience no solid changes on the inside. They find themselves still bound to bad and disgusting habits and wrong soul-ties, or they are still obsessed with the wrong things in life. They perpetually make wrong decisions and their taste for ‘forbidden fruits’ still prevails.

When the Bride of Jesus Christ cries out, “Kiss me” and “Draw me” (Song of Solomon 1: 2, 4) she is actually crying out for intimacy with the Bridegroom. Do you not realise that this is the deepest and the greatest need in your life?

The cry for reality and the cry, “Oh, God touch me, touch me!” is actually the cry for intimacy with God. Heed that cry within your own heart and get connected with Him - He has put it there.

Physical intimacy is the joining of two physical bodies through which fruit (a child) is produced. Spiritual intimacy is the joining of two spirits and it should also produce fruit. Unfortunately the lack of fruit within the church today is clear evidence that the Bride has not been intimate with her Lord.

We do have many works and activities but really not much fruit, especially the fruits of self-denial, holiness and the fear of God. Such fruits had always governed revivals in history but why, in spite of so many revivals today, are self-denial, holiness and the fear of God still painfully missing in so many lives? The answer is simple. We have lost intimacy with Him.

It is painful to find ourselves ending up with so many spiritual activities and so much hype and no spiritual reality. Indeed, it is a curse to get ourselves involved in so many church programmes and projects and end up with no solid moral changes on our inside. Why is this happening? Why is our spiritual worship of God and our wonderful up-to-date church programmes not bringing changes to our inward moral state? The answer: we have lost intimacy with Him.

Oh, that we will go back to our first love! Oh, that we may return to intimacy with Him! This is the cry of His Heart. Will you heed it?

When Jesus chided the church at Ephesus with the words, “Thou hast left thy first love,” He meant, “You have lost intimacy with Me!” Every married couple knows what happens to a marriage when the intimacy is gone - the loneliness in them leaves them both so vulnerable to outside attacks. Yes, when a marriage has become only a physical relationship with no intimacy, it is ready to break up.

This was what happened to the church at Ephesus. Look at the outward physical activities the church engaged in. God called them `works' (plural!) Unfortunately, years later, her candlestick (testimony) was gone. Why? Because she had lost intimacy with God, and therefore, she lost her prevailing power. None of us can keep our testimonies, maintain the standard of God

or prevail in His presence, especially in these end times, if we have left our first love or if we have lost intimacy with Him!

Revelation 2: 2-5

I know your works, (plural - you have plenty! - emphasis mine) your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; “and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name’s sake and have not become weary. “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.

I did not plan to write a book on SPIRITUAL INTIMACY and was pleasantly surprised when the Lord directed me to do so in the middle of the school term (STATION OF LIFE March 2000). Although I had some struggles at first, God in His goodness led me to finish the book in just five days.

I felt the impact of the Holy Spirit all through the writing of this book as I began to draw from my own personal experiences and also from fresh revelational knowledge from the Psalms and the relationship between David and Jonathan. May the reading of this book impact you too.

I pray this book will give you a clearer comprehension of what spiritual intimacy is all about. I do not purport to know everything about spiritual intimacy but I do know enough to write this book. I pray and pray that it will bless you by spurring you into deeper and more meaningful intimacy with Father God. Enjoy the book and share it with others.

PRINCIPLES THAT GOVERNED DAVID'S RELATIONSHIP WITH JONATHAN

When Jonathan died, David cried and lamented publicly over his loss. He also said something that was really strange. He lamented that none of the beautiful women or wives in his life was able to give him what Jonathan gave him.

In essence, David was actually saying, “Your love, O Jonathan, was so marvellous it far surpassed (or eclipsed) the love of all the women in my life. What you put into my life can never be compared to what those women gave me.”

II Samuel 1: 26

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant has thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing (eclipsing or excelling) the love of women.

What did Jonathan actually give to David? Why was his relationship with David so special? What did his intimate friendship with David, (which the Scriptures describe as ‘soul-ties’) consist of?

Three uncommon features stood out in the relationship between these two great men. Read I Samuel chapters 20 and 23.

- I. Their mutual exposure of their heart's condition, desires or feelings to one another.
- II. Their absolute giving to one another. They were totally at each other's disposal.
- III. Their ability to draw strength from one another so they could carry on in adverse circumstances.

This is what an intimate relationship is all about. Jonathan was able to give the above three things to David unreservedly, things which none of the

women in his life could contribute. David drew mental, emotional and spiritual strength from Jonathan but he drew only physical or sensual pleasure from all the beautiful women in his life.

David knew intimacy with Jonathan. I believe he applied these same principles of intimacy when he came to Father God. We can find these principles in the Psalms. The Psalms are powerful and unique writings and many of them are uncommon prayers. The church of Jesus Christ must come back to intimacy with God, seek His face and pray these uncommon prayers if she wants to return to apostolic power and authority.

Anyone who wants to learn intimacy with Father God must read the Psalms -- over and over, again and again. The major reason why this book is so powerful is because it tells of how a man exposed his heart to God - it is about 'deep calling unto deep.' It is about the depths of a man reaching out for the depths of God and vice versa. Let us not forget that the man who wrote these prayers had gone through extreme situations in life and he was often close to breaking point. He had gone through all of life's 'ups and downs'. This is why the whole spectrum of human emotions is found in the Psalms - fear, discouragement, distress, depression, discontentment, lust, jealousy, hatred, guilt, anger, humiliation, a sense of worthlessness or low self esteem etc. God had indeed taken this man through them all!

Can a man really go through so much in life and yet remain sane? ("an a man be walking on the edge of a precipice and not fall over? Not only did David remain sane, he continued to remain in constant praise and maintained a spirit of thanksgiving! How did he manage and how did he keep his sense of equilibrium?

David's secret is INTIMACY WITH FATHER GOD. YES, DAVID'S ABILITY TO RELEASE AND RELIEVE HIMSELF IN GOD'S PRESENCE KEPT HIM ABOVE THE FLOOD WATERS. IT GAVE HIM THE ABILITY TO GO THROUGH GREAT ADVERSITY WITH GREAT DIGNITY.

The Psalms taught me other truths about intimacy with God. They taught me to:

- I. Reminisce about the goodness of God.
- II. Commune with myself or be willing to ‘soul-search.’

1

EXPOSE YOUR HEART BY DECLARING YOUR WAYS, DESIRES AND HONEST FEELINGS

1 Samuel chapter 20 tells us that Jonathan told David to expose his heart feelings and his desires to him. In verses 12 and 13, he promised David that he himself would hold nothing back from David even if it meant betraying his own father. Well, will you expose yourself to the son of your would-be murderer? “Blood is thicker than water. So do not trust any of your enemy’s relatives!” But David did! He exposed his heart and his plans to Jonathan and what is even more amazing is this: Jonathan took sides with David even though he knew this would cost him his throne. He knew that when he sided with David, he would actually lose everything.

The love shared between these two men was not natural - it came from above. God in His mercy had given Jonathan to David, someone whom David could be intimate with. Such friendships are rare. In His own divine timing, God took Jonathan away so that David might, for the rest of his life, *learn intimacy with Him and be soul-tied to Him.*

One important lesson we must learn in life is to know when to “hold and when to release.” King Solomon called this, “*A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing and a time to keep and a time to loose*” (*Ecclesiastes 3: 5-6*).

God will, in His own timing, send us people to stand by us and with whom we can be intimate with. But in His timing, (not ours) He will also remove them - just like He did to David. He does this because He does not want us

to be soul-tied to any living being on earth but only to Him. Indeed, lifelong spiritual intimacy must be known only between you and the living God. **Yes our life's greatest consuming love affair must only be shared with Him and Him alone.** This, Jesus said, is the greatest commandment. Yet so many of us have failed to keep it.

Matthew 22: 37-38

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

Spiritual intimacy is only possible when we are willing to expose our heart's condition and desires before God. This is what David said to God: *"I have declared my ways (scribed my ways in detail!) and Thou art acquainted (accustomed) with all my ways"* Psalm 119:26, 139:3. He said further in Psalm 38: 9, *"All my desires are before Thee "* (I expose all my desires to You!).

Spiritual intimacy with God should be a time when you declare all your ways and your desires before God, whether they are good, bad, rotten or disgusting. It should indeed be the time where you air the desires of your heart, however unhealthy, ungodly or lustful they may be, because prayer time is time spent in the light and light exposes. Light reveals! Yes, Lord. *"In your light we see light"* (Psalm 36:9).

Intimacy with Father God is time spent in the presence of **His face!** When we come into the presence of **His face**, the scriptures teach us that we must unveil or unmask our faces, and see ourselves as we really are; otherwise we cannot be changed. Now we know the reason why so many today spend time in the presence of God and yet they do not change. They have refused to unveil their faces.

The apostle Paul taught very clearly that if we want to change into His image from glory to glory we must **first unmask or unveil our own faces** (expose, reveal). Then only can we see His Face (sense the reality or enjoy the presence) and in beholding His Face, we can then be changed.

"But we all with open faces (exposed or unmasked faces) beholding the

glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit “ (2 Corinthians 3: 18).

We can never grasp His reality or truly enjoy His presence and be changed if we are incapable of exposing ourselves before Him or if we are unreal, because the love of God cannot touch unreality. If we want to be changed, then we must be real. We have to unmask before Him and confess, “Yes, Lord I may speak in tongues and go to church faithfully but I am still a pervert at heart. I cannot control my imagination; Lord, I cannot love my mum-in-law and I seem to enjoy hating her; it may be I have materialistic lusts, I have homosexual or lesbian tendencies or other forbidden appetites.”

David was a man who definitely knew how to unveil his face before God. He was not afraid to declare his ways, his feelings and desires before God. Many of us know that some of David’s ways and desires were really rotten and ungodly. He abused his kingly authority and slept with another man’s wife. He tried to cover up his sin by making it look like it was Uriah’s doing. When that failed, he abused his kingly authority again by having Uriah killed. This gory and unpleasant story is found in 2 Samuel Chapter 11.

Some of David’s ways and desires are indeed shocking. So are many of ours. The difference is that David dared to expose them before God and to confront them himself. But many of us dare not do so. We dare not and we do not want to because confronting self is hacking it to death and self does not want to die. So what do we end up with? Secret sins and secret pains that later form yokes and bondages to hinder and prevent us from fulfilling our destinies in the Lord.

David even went a step further by asking God to “dig out” or ferret out all the `demons in his basement’. He prayed this very uncommon prayer in Psalm 139: 23-24:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts.”

David’s greatness lies in his courage to confront himself, whereas many great and renowned men dared not. Surely David’s courage was displayed not only when he slew the lion, the bear or even Goliath - his true courage

was displayed when he dared to confront those “dragons in his depths.”

I read in a magazine some years ago that Sir Winston Churchill caught his servant doing something that he considered disgusting. He rebuked the servant and made him promise that he would not repeat it. A few months later, the servant caught this great man doing the same thing. As the servant watched him in disbelief, the embarrassed Churchill blurted out, “I... I... but..., I’m a great man nevertheless!”

Well, no one can debate this - indeed he was a great man, but unfortunately he did not have the courage to confront himself like he confronted others! Bad habits are bad habits whether in a great man or a lowly servant! Yes, true greatness lies in the ability to confront oneself and David, of all men, is truly great!

Transparency is mandatory to healing and the Psalms are powerful because they are so transparent. The Psalms teach us that intimate experiences with God are possible only when we are willing to unveil our faces and be real.

In the Psalms, we see the extreme display of David’s emotions. He is either soaring in ecstasy or sinking in deep despair or melancholy in the presence of God - he does not hide his feelings. There is no need to because he knows that prayer time is both release and relief time. Yes, prayer time or intimate time with the Father should be therapeutic. This is what he meant when he said, “*I poured out my complaint before Him; I shewed before Him my trouble* “ (*Psalm 142: 2*).

David knew that only the honest and truthful will really be granted an audience with God. He said, “The Lord is nigh to all who *call upon Him in truth*. “

Yes, to “call upon Him in truth” means we must be willing to expose our heart’s true condition or inner state (often hidden from public eye) as well as our honest feelings. Look at the way David released his very honest (sometimes impolite) feelings before God.

FEELINGS OF DESOLATION when he felt God had deserted him: Psalm 22: 1-2, 43: 2

FEELINGS OF APPREHENSION that God would let him down or call his sins to remembrance : Psalm 25: 2-3, 7.

FEELINGS OF INSECURITY/FEAR that God would not hear his prayers : Psalm 27: 9.

FEELINGS OF DEEP AGITATION/DEJECTION when God hid His Face from him: Psalm 30: 7- 9, 13: 1-2

FEELINGS OF ANGER/DISCOURAGEMENT that God had not met his need according to his timing: Psalm 42: 9, 44: 9-15.

FEELINGS OF DEEP SORROW/HURT/SHAME over his own sins and the consequences : Psalm 31: 9-13, 51: 9-10.

FEELINGS OF HUMILIATION over the way he was treated : Psalm 22: 6, 31: 12

FEELINGS OF GUILT over his own sins and wrong doings : Psalm 51: 3, 14.

To help you understand further what it means to express yourself honestly before God, I have to share a chapter from my book, “*HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR BROKEN HEART.*” Unfortunately most men, thinking it is a woman’s book, do not read it.

One man who bought it told me, “Aiyah, my gender does not know what they have missed lah! Please put down on the cover “FOR MEN ALSO!”

In the chapter on “Express Your Hurt”, I shared the following: “If ever we need to talk to God, it will be during this time of our hurt. O, how we need to talk to Him. If we only communicate with men without communicating with God or to God, it is useless, for man cannot do wonders or (bring) healing but God can and He will, if we allow Him.” I said “if we

allow Him” because so many have chosen to go further away from God at the time of their hurt, blaming Him for all their troubles instead of drawing close to Him. What a costly mistake!

Even if we talk against God (which we are bound to in times of hurts and troubles), we *must still talk to Him!* God sees all our crying, whether we are crying to Him, for Him or even against Him as a form of prayer. You may cry or talk to challenge Him or you may cry or talk to deny Him, but whatever it is, TALK TO HIM! Talk to Him. Please do talk to Him!

Never rule out talking to God when you are hurting. If you do, you will hurt even more. You must talk to Him. He is there. He knows. He cares. This is absolute. It does not matter what you feel. The fact remains: He is there and He knows and He cares, so you just talk and talk and TALK HONESTLY to Him.

It is vital that you come to grips with the depths of your own feelings at this time. They may not be pleasant but they must be acknowledged and expressed to the One Who cares to hear them all. HONESTY IN PRAYER AT THIS TIME IS CRUCIAL. Politeness may have to be forsaken, if need be. I am not advocating impoliteness in prayers - I am advocating honesty and this means you may sometimes sound impolite.

Not too long ago, I read a very touching article about how a man, after the death of his son, found healing and spiritual restoration through his seemingly rude and honest confrontation with God. When the news hit him that his seven-year-old only son, Ernie, had been run down by a lorry and had died instantly, this middle-aged father went into numbness of pain and shock. His pastor and church friends kept telling him to “just praise the Lord, just give thanks to the Lord and everything will be all right.”

Sometimes this works but not all the time. God does not have one formula for all situations because people are all so different from one another. This man tried very hard to do what they told him. Nothing happened. The pain was still there, the shock remained, the anger and resentment continued to linger and, in fact, became bigger and bigger by the hour.

Finally, on the day of the funeral, as he was taking a last look at his son's battered little body, he couldn't contain himself anymore. With gritted teeth, clenched fists, a face contorted by pain and agony and with every ounce of vehemence he could summon in his spirit, he lashed out against God.

“God! I hate You! You just wait, I will get You for doing this to me. I hate You for allowing me this pain, for taking away my only son. Don't You know I have only one son?” Then he broke down and wept uncontrollably and bitterly. It was a pitiful sight. His friends and relatives kept away, knowing that none of them could reach Jim in this insane and intense moment of his pain. His grief and hurt were almost tangible.

Jim wept and wept and wept until all of a sudden, he heard Someone whisper in his ear, “Jim, I too have only one Son. Your Ernie is safe with Me now; he has only changed his address.”

Jim turned around but no one was by his side. The voice came two more times. By the third time, Jim knew that he had heard the voice of God because as it spoke, it brought immediate and unexplainable comfort, healing, freshness, relief and insight into his wounded spirit and broken heart.

He felt a warmth, a warmth of overwhelming love and peace, descend upon him and as it did, a glow came across his agonised face. His face relaxed, his clenched fists opened. Slowly, very slowly and painfully, Jim lifted his hands towards heaven, knelt down at the foot of his son's coffin and worshipped the Lord!

O what a testimony! O what tremendous victory! What restoration and what healing! And it all came about in his moment of utter honesty with God. It came about because he was willing to be honest about his feelings towards God at the time of his hurt - and God was not jolted or shocked by his honesty. Neither was He insulted by his impoliteness.

I believe God would rather we be honest than polite when we talk to I Him. Politeness in prayer may make us feel good but ***honesty in prayer touches God***. Which would you prefer: feeling good or touching God? It behoves us then to remember that it is never our words that touch God in prayer, but

it is our spirit that touches Him.

No, *I am not advocating rudeness* when we talk to God. God forbid. We must never dare to when we are talking to One so great. I am merely saying that it is vital we come to grips with our feelings, our true feelings, when we are talking to One so great, for unless we are honest and real, He cannot help us.

The great prophet, Jeremiah, was apparently rude and impolite to God when he accused God of being deceitful and having cheated him. Jeremiah, I believe, had a right to his feelings at the time of his hurt (just like Jim or the man or woman who feels cheated in a relationship) and he had to “let God have it” out of the depths of his feelings. In a moment of honesty and anger, he blurted out, “*O Lord, You deceived me and I was deceived!*” (*Jeremiah 20: 4*)

My, what terrible things to say to One who is so great and holy and true and righteous! How could Jeremiah talk like this to the One Who had made the kidneys in his body, designed his voice box, given him hair and toe nails? How could he accuse God of being deceitful and of having cheated him?

In fact, the prophet’s language becomes more and more shocking as we read on in Jeremiah chapter 20. He blurts out curses like, “*Cursed be the day I was born,*” and “*Cursed be the man who announced my birth.*” Then he goes on to lament and question, “Wherefore come I forth out of my mother’s womb?” Do you think God could not hear this? He heard all right but He did not smite Jeremiah dead.

Others may see him as rude and blasphemous and may be angry and appalled at the prophet’s insolence. I believe God saw him as someone hurting badly and God knew that Jeremiah had a right to his feelings and a right to release his bottled-up emotions.

King David once accused God of bringing reproach to the nation of Israel and of being asleep, having forgotten the miseries of His people. “*You have made us a reproach to our neighbours. Why do You sleep? Get up! Why do You hide Your face, forget our miseries*” (*Psalms 44*).

David! How dare you! Have you forgotten who you are talking to? My, what kind of a man would talk like this? The man after God's own heart! God's kind of man! The kind who is always honest about his feelings and real about his needs. Of course, God was never what David said He was but David felt God was responsible for all his personal miseries and he had to "let God have it." He was not rude, he was just hurting.

Many of us may not say it but many times, we feel the same way David felt. We feel that God is no longer there, no longer in control, no longer cares, is no longer alive. The difference between David and us is that David, being the real and open man he was, allowed his feelings to get past his lips whereas we allow ours to smoulder and ferment within.

"Listen, if you are really hurting and need to talk to God, BE HONEST, even if you have to be impolite. Do not worry, God is big enough to take it all. He won't be hurt." (From Chapter Two of HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR BROKEN HEART).

So often we come to God with our nice, but lifeless and "don't mean it" prayers like, "Oh God, You are wonderful, thanks for being good to me. You are great and I love you and blah... blah... blah...." (God may be saying, "Time out, time out! I know you are not real). All the time, deep down on our inside our bottled-up feelings may be those of resentment, doubt, anger and discouragement. The root problems and feelings often reveal themselves in our sub-standard Christian living and lack of zeal for the Lord. Intimacy is only possible when we are real with God, so the next time you come into God's presence, unmask your face. And be real!

O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.
John Wesley

BE AT GOD'S DISPOSAL - PRAY "MAKE ME"

The way David and Jonathan gave themselves to each other was so complete and so absolute. I find it frightening, yet God must be in it - for it to become so beautiful! This principle of being at the other's disposal was later seen in David's intimate relationship with God.

We see David completely at God's disposal whenever he was intimate with I-lim. David's prayers are full of pleas: "Teach me, cause me, enlarge me, deal with me, incline me, make me." When David prayed like this, we know he wanted to be at God's disposal. He really wanted God to lay His hands on him because he wanted to change and to live the way God would have him live. Read through the whole of Psalm 119 and use your marker!

Unless we are willing to change (and change is painful and difficult) we should not pray, "Teach me, make me, cause me, etc." because God will indeed answer such prayers! Unfortunately, whenever He does, we fight Him so hard that in the process we make some irreparable tears by defiling, people, souring friendships and severing meaningful relationships.

The major reason why so many of us are not growing and getting out of our spiritual mediocrity and blindness is because we have stopped praying, "Make me, O God." We pray a lot of "give me," prayers but not "make me" prayers. The prodigal son in Luke 15 said to his father, "Give me!" The father gave to him. That's right. The father gave even though he knew the son was not ready for it.

The story goes on to tell us that the young man squandered away all that the Father gave him. Then he went through shame, humiliation, brokenness etc. before returning to the Father. This time around his request was so different! So was his attitude! When he saw his father, he totally abandoned himself to the old man and kneeling at his feet, he cried, "Father, make me!"

Oh, how Father God in heaven longs for each one of us to pray, “Make me!”

“Give me” is something that every Christian can pray - it is so common that even a cat or a dog can do it! They may not verbalise it but they can certainly convey it through their eyes and body language. Every time I pass by my dog, a Doberman named Lady, she seems to be telling me through her eyes, her tail and her salivating mouth, “Give me, give me!”

To pray “Make me” is uncommon and oh, unless God lays His hands on us and draws us into deep intimacy with Him, we are totally incapable of voicing such a prayer - it is far too costly and alien to the flesh and totally abhorrent to self. But to pray “Make me” we must, because only such prayers can get the Potter’s hands to come down on us and alienate us from self. Yes, to pray “Make me” is abandonment into His hands while to pray “Give me” is abandonment to self.

All that David went through was extremely painful but he abandoned himself totally into the hands of the Divine Potter. He took every trial, every difficulty and pain as coming from the Lord. This is why adversities did not destroy him, instead they worked on his behalf to make him conform to the image of his Messiah - Jesus, the greater David.

Adversities and pain had put such a depth into David’s character. This is why his writings, his prayers, his understanding of God and his perspective of life - its sufferings and trials - are so uncommon! David became what he became because he allowed Father God to make him. It is a painful process but a necessary one. Yes, necessary because it is upon the anvil of pain and adversities that the character of a man of God is hammered out. Spiritual intimacy means we must be at God’s disposal - willing to take any hammering and let Him make us into whatever vessel He wants us to be. Yes, we must leave the choice in His hands. As His hands mould us, shape us and make us, we must be willing to cooperate with His hands for only then can our lives be shaped and sculptured.

Psalm 39: -1

LORD), make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am.

Psalm 51: 6-8

*Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will **make me** to know wisdom.*

Psalm 119:27,35

***Make me** understand the way of Your precepts; so shall I meditate on Your wonderful works. **Make me** walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.*

The willingness to be “made” is indispensable. None of us are born with ways (character or personality) that are pleasing to God. God has to make us pleasing in His sight. This is how David and the prophet Jeremiah expressed it:

Psalm 119: 5

Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!

Jeremiah 10: 23 -24

O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing.

Even Jesus Christ, God’s own Son had to go through this “making” process. He had to subject Himself to living in a human body and He learnt obedience through the things He suffered (like David). The book of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 2: 9, 17

*But we see Jesus, who **was made** a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. Therefore, in all things He **had to be made** like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

Hebrew 5: 8

*Though He was a Son, yet **He learned obedience** by the things which He suffered.*

These scriptures must be meditated upon, not just hurriedly read through. The same goes for the apostle Paul. The following verses tell us how 'disposable' he was and how willing to be in the Father's hands.

1 Corinthians 9: 19, 22

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

1 Corinthians 10: 23

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

Philippians 4: 12-13

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Have you, in intimacy with God, ever said to Him, "Father, make me?" Then in the days ahead of you, as you continue in intimate relationship with Him, totally abandon yourself to His moulding and breaking process. The moulding and the breaking may come from very ordinary people - your boss, your colleagues, neighbours, church members, your pastor, housemates, in-laws etc. Recognise them as the hands of God! David's trials came from every direction. The Psalms show us that he had difficulties at almost every level of human relationship. Some of the attacks in his life were so overwhelming, he had to cry out, "Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand" (Psalm 39:10).

Psalm 31: 11-13

I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and am repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see me outside flee

from me. I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. For I hear the slander of many; Fear is on every side; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life.

Psalm 38: 11-12

My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off. Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, and plan deception till the day long.

Psalm 51: 1-9

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight - that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Do you know, David was tried so much that often he was close to breaking point and he did not want to live! This is why the Psalms are impregnated with prayers like, "Make me live, O God!" ("**Quicken me.**")

Psalm 71: 20

Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

Psalm 119:25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159

*My soul cleaveth unto the dust: **quicken** thou me according to thy word. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and **quicken** thou me in thy way. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: **quicken me** in thy righteousness. **Quicken me** after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth. I am afflicted very much: **quicken me**, O Lord, according unto thy word. Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O Lord, quick-*

*en me according to thy judgment. Plead my cause, and deliver me: **quicken me** according to thy word. Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: **quicken me** according to thy judgments. Consider how I love thy precepts: **quicken me**, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness.*

Psalm 143: 11

Quicken me O Lord, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.

The word, 'quicken' actually means 'to make alive.' Many people, even Christians, lose their will to live because they cannot take the m and the pressure. When David lost the will to carry on, he screamed out to God many times, "O God, make me live!" He would not give way to suicide because he knew life came from God and it was not right for him to end it himself.

There is such power in intimacy with God. Even when David lost the will to live, he realised he could still carry on living when he allowed God to impact into him the purpose of living - to live for Him! Through intimacy with God, David knew he had a destiny to fulfill, and this gave him the strength to carry on. Yes, we can definitely derive meaning and strength to live on when we know intimacy with Father God.

DRAW STRENGTH FROM GOD

1. INTIMACY BRINGS GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

2. INTIMACY BREEDS IDENTIFICATION

3. INTIMACY RELEASES SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

1. INTIMACY BRINGS GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

David drew strength from his intimate relationship with Jonathan. The scriptures described it in this way: “Jonathan strengthened David’s hand in God” (1 Samuel 23:16). The ability to draw strength, be it mental, emotional or spiritual through a relationship is wonderful. What would have happened to David if God had not in His mercy and timing given Jonathan to him at this crucial period of his life? David’s history and destiny may well have turned out very differently!

Too many threatening clouds of opposition, pain, rejection, trouble etc. can cause us to lose our 20-20 spiritual vision. It is easy to develop a spiritual squint, to see things in the wrong perspective, and to start to panic or wallow in deep depression. This was not so with David.

Through intimacy with God, David developed the right insight into his own sufferings. Through intimacy with God, David was able to see things in God’s perspective and this gave him strength to go through great adversities with great dignity. One of the demands the heavenly Bridegroom made upon the Bride in the Song of Songs was to “look from the top!” (Song of Solomon 4: 8). What the Bridegroom wanted was that His bride would look at things from His perspective. Let me share from this chapter of the book ‘DEMANDS OF LOVE.’

“Having the right perspective in Christian life is vital. The child of God must be able to see things as God sees them. When the Bridegroom demands that the bride “look from the top”, He is telling the bride to see the way He sees, to have His perspective in life.

There is no way we can do this unless we are elevated by Him because perspective depends on elevation. This is why He first demands that we be related to Him (“come with Me”) before He demands that we “look from the top”. (Relationship before perspective.)

“Many Christians cannot forget their past disappointments and hurts because they do not have God’s perspective of such experiences. They look at their entire experience from merely their own perspective or viewpoint instead of allowing God to elevate them to His position and to look at their experiences from God’s perspective or from eternity’s viewpoint. I tell you, everything looks very, very small and insignificant from God’s perspective.

I remember being called into a home one evening to settle a family squabble. When I arrived at the house, I found the husband seated in a corner with wet eyes. As I sat and listened to him, I found myself agreeing with everything he said and I immediately sided with him. I became very angry at the wrongs that his wife and his mother had done to him.

When I began to talk with his wife, I realised that the wife was more right than he was and I found myself agreeing with her instead. Later on, I spoke with the man’s mother in the kitchen and I came to the conclusion that both the husband and wife were wrong, the old lady was right! I was glad I did not have to talk to a fourth person that day! I had heard three different versions of a story given from three different perspectives and I was confused. Each person was telling me the story from his or her own perspective and thus, each one had a “right” side to it. I had a problem concluding who was right and who was wrong.

We can be sure that God does not have such a problem. He looks at everything from His perspective and He demands that we do the same. “Hey, look from the top,” He says.

God wants us to come away from the lowlands of mud and self and soar with Him high into the heavens. He wants us to ride upon the high places of the earth and feed on the heritage of Jacob.

Isaiah 58: 14

Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

God knows that if He can get us into an elevated position, He can get us to have a whole new perspective on things in life. If I stand at the foot of a mountain, there is no way that I can see the whole mountain. In fact, I will be intimidated by its size because from where I stand, my eyes will not be able to properly size up its length and its breadth. All I get to see of the mountain is just a part of it.

But if I get into an aeroplane ... aha, everything will look so different. The aeroplane elevates me and when I look down at the mountain from up there, I can see the whole mountain. In fact, what had looked so big and intimidating before now looks so small and insignificant. The big, intimidating mountain now looks tiny.

What had happened? How did a big mountain become a tiny dot? Well, nothing happened to the mountain, but something happened to me - I got elevated, and it changed my perspective. Yes, spiritual intimacy with God elevates us and from our elevated position we see things differently!

We see this happening often in the life of King David. He would become depressed and fearful because of his enemies and other problems that had come up. Then he would get into the presence of God to pray and seek help. By the time he finished praying, his whole perspective of the situation would change. Instead of complaining, he would start to praise. Fear had given way to faith! Why? Because through prayer and communion, God had elevated him and he was able to see the situation as God saw it. Everything which had been so big before now seemed so small.

No wonder Jesus said if our eye is not single (if our perspective is not right), our whole body will be filled with darkness and we will walk round in circles. Many today are walking around in circles because their eyes (their perspective on life) have been darkened by grief, unforgiveness, bitterness, hurts and worst of all, self-pity and self-righteousness.

Matthew 6: 22-23

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

I have often told my students in the school (STATION OF LIFE) that saints like Jacob, Joseph, Moses and David did not go through any inner healing or deliverance from their past hurts they just learned to die to self. And see how well they turned out. They became great channels of blessings, not sour plums. These men had the right perspective of all their hurtful experiences because they had intimacy with God. They may have abhorred the hurts but they accepted them as part of God's dealings in their lives. This is why David is able to say:

Psalms 119: 71

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

Joseph was able to look his treacherous brothers straight in the eye and tell them not to hate themselves for doing him ill because he believed that the ill done to him was simply part of God's dealings in his life.

Genesis 45: 5, 8

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.

How wonderfully said! Joseph suffered much because of what his own brothers did to him but he saw God in the picture. Because he had the right perspective, he was able to forgive and move on to fruitfulness and

usefulness. Right perspective comes when we are in an intimate relationship with God.

Having God's perspective on these things is important. The next five or ten years of your life will depend on how well you have forgotten and forgiven. See God in the picture and believe that although the experiences have humiliated you, hurt you, shamed you and caused you to lose everything, they will and can turn out for your good because God is in control. The Bible says that "*ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD to those that love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8: 28).

Do you love the Lord? Are you called by Him into salvation, sanctification and glorification? Yes. Yes. If so, ALL things, even bad and evil things, can work out for your good. God will see to that but we must not give in to any bitterness and unforgiveness. If we do, every good thing that God has in store for us will be forfeited.

When I was 12 years old, I spoilt a beautiful painting that had been laid out to dry in my classroom verandah. I accidentally knocked over my wet paint and it fell right on top of the painting, leaving an ugly blob of colour. When the owner, a talented artist named Hajah, saw it, she quickly grabbed her own paint brush, dipped it into some colours and began to stroke it over the offending spot.

Soon, the ugly blob was turned into a beautiful cloud. It blended so well with the rest of the picture; it was all due to the artist's creativity and ingenuity. I stood there speechless and amazed. Hajah had saved the day and saved me from being scolded by the art teacher who had chosen that particular painting for an exhibition. What a specialist Hajah was - a master artist, a hero!

Well, God is just the same. He can take the ugly black blob of your hurt, disappointment, loss or shame and turn it into something beautiful to bless you. Each negative experience taken by itself is not much of a blessing but the Bible says that all things work together (mingle together, fuse together) in order to produce the good. The bad with the good, the

good with the bad, all mingled and fused together like coloured threads woven into a beautiful pattern of gold, green, black, purple and blue. Just as the threads must be woven together, so must our bad experiences be entwined with our good experiences and the goodness and love of God in order for things to work out for our good.

God knows how to work it all out for us. He even knows how to turn the bad and evil into good. Here is what Joseph said:

Genesis 50: 20

Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

The Bridegroom demands a relationship before He calls us to view from the right perspective. When we have a close, cleaving and intimate relationship with the Bridegroom, we can see from a much better perspective than others. Without an intimate relationship with Him we cannot have the right perspective on things. This is why spiritual persons and carnal persons look at things so differently.

One of the most powerful declarations of the bride is found in Song of Solomon 4: 16:

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits.

The north wind is a terrible wind, a cold blustering gale that comes with so much force that it is likened to a northern tornado. Farmers dread this northern monster. When it blows into your garden, you may not have much of it left. Yet the bride invited the north wind to come and blow into her garden, her life. Because she had intimacy with the Bridegroom, therefore, she was neither afraid of the consequences nor of the devastation. She affirmed that the only thing the north wind could do was to cause the fragrance of her garden to flow out.

Yes, north wind, blow if you must in all your might and ferocity, but as my fruits lie dashed to the ground, their fragrance will be released for all

to enjoy. It will invigorate, it will stimulate, it will refresh and even bring a healing effect on the many who will pick it up. So blow, north wind, blow! Yes, do the worst you can, but you can never destroy me because I am hidden in the hands of my Bridegroom.

The bride also issued an order for the south wind to blow into her garden. This is the wind that comes with much heat, causing the fruits to ripen faster.

Both winds, the bride says, are needed for her garden, so she freely lets them come. After the winds have done their devastating work, she invites her Bridegroom to come into her garden to enjoy the pleasant fruits. Praise God, she still has pleasant fruits left, even after the two terrible winds have blown through her garden. Isn't this amazing?

The Lamb's bride is always undefeatable and invincible and so should you and I be - we are this bride. Let us live up to our high and lofty calling. We can face cold and hot blasting winds, have them blow into our lives, work us over and still produce pleasant fruits, so pleasant that when the Bridegroom walks in and tastes them, He is totally overwhelmed with delight. So delighted will He be that He invites His friends into this amazing garden to share His joy. All this is possible to the men and women who know intimacy with Him and are hidden within His presence.

Psalm 31: 20

Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence, from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

Song of Solomon 5:1

I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

Adopt God's perspective on everything in life: hurts, disappointments, losses, tragedies, failures or even successes, blessings or prosperity. Look at it all from the top. We can if we have intimacy with Him. Indeed, our perspective on life depends on how intimate we are with Him." (From Chapter Four of THE DEMANDS OF LOVE.)

In Psalm 4: 1 David expressed his understanding of sufferings, pain and hard times as times when God wanted to build *into him* a greater capacity for Himself. Man is born with little or even no capacity for God but with a large capacity for selfish pleasure and pursuits. However, when adversities such as sickness, death, loss of loved ones, marriage breakdown, betrayal etc. come, we can suddenly develop a capacity for God! We pray like never before. We search the scriptures, we fast, we ask forgiveness from people - we just run one spiritual marathon after another! Yes, pain and suffering have a way of penetrating beyond the surface to create depth in us.

It is said that many hard-core atheistic soldiers turned to God in earnest prayers when they came face to face with danger, torture and death in the battlefield! Yes, times of adversity should be times when we develop a greater capacity, a greater volume within us for God. It should be the time when we learn greater and deeper intimacy with Him.

Psalm 4:1

*Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: **thou hast enlarged me** when I was distressed; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.*

The word 'enlarge' means to make more room or to increase its capacity or volume so that it can take in more!

2. INTIMACY BREEDS IDENTIFICATION.

Spiritual strength also comes whenever we learn to identify with the God of pain. Not many of us know that the Almighty God is also a God of great pain. I remember a sobbing, near-hysterical woman blurting out, “What the ***! Stop telling me to cast it on the Lord, Pastor Susan! I do not think God understands pain - He has never been engaged or jilted, never suffered such shame as being left at the registration office while your fiance takes off with another woman!”

Oh woman, God understands pain all right - it is we, in our shallowness, who do not understand identification with Him in our trials and sufferings - if we knew identification with Him our pain would be alleviated. Many of the Old Testament prophets knew God as a God of pain. In fact, they had such intimacy with God that they could actually feel His pain and this made it easy for God to express Himself through them.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God expressed His pain of rejection and betrayal:

Isaiah 1: 2-3

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider”

Through the prophet, Jeremiah, God sounded like a forsaken, dejected and broken-hearted lover when He declared:

.Jeremiah 2: 5-8, 32

Thus says the LORD. “What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters? Neither did they say, “Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed and where no one dwelt” I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, You defiled

My land and made My heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, "Where is the LORD? And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit. Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.

Jeremiah 3: 7, 14, 20

"And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. "Return, O backsliding children, " says the LORD, for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the LORD.

In Ezekiel 6: 9 and Jeremiah 23: 9, He expressed His brokenness:

"I am broken by their whorish heart which hath departed from Me and with their eyes which go a whoring after their idols. "

Jeremiah 23: 9

"Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets. "

When God sent His only begotten Son to us, He made sure that He too was totally identified with the pain and sufferings of mankind. Isaiah 53 gives as a full report of the type of man Jesus was when He penetrated into our world.

Isaiah 53: 3, 7-11

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him: He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked - but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He

has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

In describing His own experiences, God used words like despised, sorrows, rejected, grief, oppressed, afflicted, dumb, stricken, bruised and travail. Surely this should tell us that God knows human pain and He can be identified with it! The question is: can we be identified with Him and feel His pain too? No, we cannot. Why? Because of a lack of intimacy with Him.

Many of us are shallow today, with no capacity for self-denial or pain because we do not **know** and we do not **want** to be identified with this God of pain. We surely know how to be identified with His blessings (riches, honour, anointing, power, glory etc.) but definitely not with His pain or His sufferings! If we rule out this integral part of the gospel how can we advance to spiritual excellence, nobility and greatness? Now we know why so many lives are like heaps of ashes on the grate - they have no fire but all smoke.

The apostle Paul was great because he knew identification with Jesus Christ. Paul's intimate relationship with Jesus made him feel as Jesus felt. He knew this so deeply that he was even willing to fill up the lack of that identification within the church. He expressed this willingness in ***Colossians 1:24***.

Colossians 1: 24

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

Paul is actually saying, "Too many within the body do not want to identify with the sufferings and the pain of Jesus. It is all right with me. I am willing to fill up all the lack of it for I am willing to be identified with all of His pain." What greatness in a man, yes, what nobility, and what excellence!

Roman 8: 17

And if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Philippians 1: 29

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer, for His sake,

Identification with the God of pain is only possible when one is drawn into intimacy with Him - anyone who knows intimacy with God will know identification with Him: in His sufferings, in His death and in His resurrection! This is the full gospel! This is why pain and sufferings should not draw us further, but nearer, as never before to God!

“Hast thou no scars, no hidden scar, on foot or side or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land!
I hear them hail thee, bright ascendant star Hast thou no scar?
No wound, no scar, yet as the Master shall the servant be
And pierced are the feet that followed Thee,
But thine are whole -
Can he have followed far who has no wound, nor scar?”
Amy Carmichael

Yes, may God at this strategic hour of the church age bring back the Ittais who will shout from the bottom of their hearts, ***“In what place my Lord the king shall be ... there also will thy servant be”***
(2 Samuel 15: 21)

This pledge and promise came from a rugged Philistine soldier to David when he had lost everything and was running away from Absalom. What devoted allegiance! How selfless. If God can work this type of selflessness and uncompromising devotion into the heart of a rugged Philistine warrior, He can do it for us too.

My personal prayer is that God will raise up more intercessors who know identification with Him. GOD MUST INDEED RE-LAY THE FOUNDATION BY GIVING US APOSTOLIC INTERCESSORS WHO KNOW HOW TO BEAR THE BURDEN OF GOD AND NOT THE BURDEN OF MEN. They must be intercessors who can feel the pain of God and be

identified with His suffering and travail especially in this strategic hour in history.

Too many intercessors today are bearing the burdens of men - they are suppressed by men's needs instead of rising to bear the burden of the Lord, and be identified with His pain. God in this new millennium wants to put the apostolic edge into intercessors and when this comes, they will automatically know how to rise above being suppressed by the needs of men and bear only the burden of God for the nation.

3. INTIMACY RELEASES TRUE UNDERSTANDING

David knew that much of his own sufferings was due to his own sin or the sins of his forefathers. Though a godly man, David knew he had secret sins and secret pains and God had to deal with them drastically.

In Psalm 119 David himself named the three problem areas in his life. They were deception, lust (covetousness) and vanity. Are these your problems too? Then, may you pray as David prayed, seek God like David sought God - (with all his heart), and may you subject yourself to God's dealings like David subjected himself to all of God's dealings in his life.

Psalm 119:29, 36-37, 113

Remove from me the ***way of lying***: and grant me thy law graciously. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to ***covetousness***. Turn away mine eyes from ***beholding*** vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way. I hate ***vain thoughts***: but thy law do I love.

David talked plainly of the pain he had to go through as God dealt with him to extricate the deception, lust and vanity out of his life, to correct him, to cleanse and to stop him from straying further away.

Psalm 39: 9-11

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth: because thou didst it. Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man from iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity.

Psalm 119: 71, 75

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes. I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

Because David had the correct understanding of his own problems and difficulties, he had the strength to go through the 'purging' process and wait on the Lord. He remained yielded and silent during these very trying times. He did not complain, curse, murmur, blame others, gossip, wallow in anger

or self-pity - instead he gave thanks and praised God for His dealings and judgments in his life.

Psalm 119: 39, 62, 65

Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word.

The prophet Jeremiah went through the same thing. The sufferings of his people almost ‘floored’ him. At first he gave way to grief, hopelessness and anger. (Jeremiah 1:16, 2:5, 11, 3:6-9). When fresh understanding came through his intimacy with God, he was finally able to say:

Lamentations 3: 26, 31-33, 40-41

It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn hark to the LORD, Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.

The prophet Habakkuk suffered the same fate when he witnessed the destruction of his nation. He became angry, confused and desperate. Listen to his cry:

Habakkuk 1: 2-3

O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

His faith went through a crisis and almost took a tumble - but as he waited on God and received fresh understanding he was able to rejoice. At the close of his book this is what he wrote:

Habakkuk 3: 17-19

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the

labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Yes, an intimate relationship with God will release divine understanding and supernatural wisdom to us in trying times. Intimacy with God will undergird us and cause us to rise to the occasion and to raise up our standard against the flood waters of our enemies. May you return to intimacy with Him.

REMINISCE ABOUT THE GOODNESS OF GOD

- 1. GOD'S GOODNESS WILL STRENGTHEN US FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE TRIALS.*
- 2. GOD'S GOODNESS WILL HEAL PAST WOUNDS.*
- 3. GOD'S GOODNESS WILL GIVE RISE TO PRAISES AND THANKSGIVING.*

1. GOD'S GOODNESS WILL STRENGTHEN US FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE TRIALS

In the development of Christian character, some moments may come when darkness seems to fall, the sun seems completely hidden and everything may seem to be lost. Yes, it is not easy to walk with God or to pursue His highest purposes because the air at that height is somewhat rare and our fleshly human lungs fight it. But remember, it is pure air - though it may be hard to breathe.

David had such experiences. But because this man had tasted the reality of God's goodness in the past he was able to draw from the past. Every time when he was 'in the dumps' we find him reminiscing about the goodness of God. As he meditated on what God had done for him in the past, it never failed to nourish his soul. It brought him out of his despair and put the joy back into his spirit. Yes, spiritual intimacy with God means you keep on reminiscing about His goodness in your life!

Psalm 31: 19

Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up, for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!

Psalm 42: 6

O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.

Psalm 144: 1-3

Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me. LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! Or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!

Psalm 103: 2

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:

Psalm 116:12

What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?

God Himself commanded that we reminisce about His goodness and meditate on His past works so that we can find courage and hope to move on in the difficult days ahead. God's past goodness and mighty deeds are not to be forgotten or thrown away like an old pair of shoes. When He told the nation of Israel to preserve the manna in the Ark of Covenant, He was telling them "Don't ever forget what I did for you! Eaten bread is not to be forgotten bread!"

Psalm 78: 3-7

Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they

may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments:

Hebrew 9: 4

Which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on the sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of 'the covenant;

Exodus 16: 32-34

Then Moses said, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: 'Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations." As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept.

David declared that after God's people had reminisced about and meditated on God's past goodness they will have confidence to set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep His commandments. Yes, reminiscing about the goodness of God shown to us in the past will certainly strengthen us for present or future trails.

In Psalm 44: 6, David went further to say that "when he thought of God's goodness and greatness in the past, he was so encouraged that he no longer wanted to trust in his own warfare skills or weapons.

Psalm 44: 1, 6-7

"We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in the days, in the times of old ... for I will not trust in my bow neither will my sword save me. But Thou hast saved us from our enemies and had put them to shame that hated us."

Whenever terrible things happen to us, the first thought that smites us is: Why did God let this happen to me? Why didn't He protect us from this? What type of a God am I serving or is there no God? The oppression and the confusion can be very vexing and your faith can take a tumble! But oh, this need not have to happen when you know you have experienced God's good-

ness in the past. God is a God who honours His covenant to man. If He had been faithful to us in the past, He will continue to be so; that is, if we have not breached our covenant with Him.

2. GOD'S GOODNESS WILL HEAL PAST WOUNDS

Anyone who knows intimacy with God should be able to 'get back on' as he or she reminisces about the goodness of God in the past. Joseph had been so hurt and traumatised as a child and youth that he could not forget or 'let go' for a long time. The scriptures tell us that he could only do so at the time when his first child was born!

People in Old Testament days usually name their children after their experiences or the condition of their hearts, so when Joseph named his first son, "I have now forgotten/forgiven" (Manasseh), we know he meant that only with the arrival of his first son, was he able to let the past go. Yes, he needed that length of time to let God do the healing in him and his healing came as he reminisced about the goodness of God.

As Joseph looked into the face of his first child (a boy!) he must have felt his 'cup running over.' He remembered how God first gave him the most powerful position and job in Egypt; then God gave him the joy and fulfillment of seeing so many lives saved and preserved through him. Next came his wife - he married the most powerful and beautiful woman in the kingdom - Pharaoh's daughter! Next came the birth of his child, a male and an heir! As he reminisced about God's goodness he realised that this 'weight of glory' that God had given him could not and should not be compared to that little bit of suffering in the past!

Genesis 45: 13

"So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here."

Romans 8: 18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

This is why as he looked into the face of his son, he could declare, "I have finally forgotten!" And what did he name his second son? He named him "I am now fruitful!" (Ephraim). Yes, friends, we can never be fruitful or pro-

ductive until we are willing to forget and to let the past go! Yes, Manasseh must come before Ephraim - forgetting (the past) must come before we can be fruitful!

Do not wallow in self-pity, anger, unforgiveness and bitterness - reminisce about the goodness of God in your life and then let the past hurts go! People may be bad to you but because God is always good He can turn even their bad intentions towards you into good, just like He did in the life of Joseph.

Genesis 45:5

“But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you (God turned things around) to preserve life.

3. GOD'S GOODNESS GIVES RISE TO PRAISES AND THANKSGIVING.

Have you ever wondered how men like David and Paul can erupt into praises and thanksgiving so easily? Today, we seem to have the best of everything and yet we do not break out that easily in praises and thanksgiving.

David's writings are punctuated with praises and thanksgiving and yet this man had had so many problems! His secret lay in his unfailing reminiscences and meditations of God's works and goodness to him in the past. In Psalm 27: 13, David said, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord. "

David knew that God's goodness would endure forever. Men may change but God will remain the same yesterday, today and forever. This truth spurred him on to more thanksgiving and praises.

Psalm 52: 1, 9

"The goodness of God endureth forever... I will praise Thee forever."

Psalm 65: 1, 11

"Praise waiteth for Thee, O God of Zion; Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and their paths drop fatness. "

Spiritual Intimacy means reminiscing about God's goodness. This will cause you to break out in praises and thanksgiving. When a man has no intimate experiences with God, he can never reminisce about His goodness - in fact, there is nothing for him to reminisce about except the ugliness of sin and self. Recall God's goodness in the past and let your spirit soar in high praises and thanksgiving! Yes, spiritual intimacy with God means you keep up the life of praise and thanksgiving - this can be done as you perpetually reminisce about God's goodness.

Yes, to smile when your heart is heavy, and when joy has taken flight is always a courageous thing, and so precious in God's sight! When we are giving thanks, amidst our pain, sufferings and trials, we are indeed bearing great adversities with great dignity.

COMMUNE WITH YOURSELF OR SEARCH YOUR SOUL

1. DAVID COMMUNED WITH HIMSELF.
2. ASAPH COMMUNED WITH HIMSELF.
3. NEHEMIAH COMMUNED WITH HIMSELF.

1. DAVID COMMUNED WITH HIMSELF.

David communed and talked with himself a lot. Do you talk to yourself besides talking to God? Anyone who knows how to talk to God intimately will also be able to talk to himself or to counsel himself in honesty. I call this soul-searching.

David talked very honestly with himself and on more than one occasion he was able to talk himself out of his own depression and dejection. This is why he is 'save-able' even in seemingly 'unsaveable' situations! If we refuse to expose ourselves to God, are unwilling to talk to ourselves honestly (unwilling to soul-search into our own lives) we can become unsave-able.

When David was discouraged and deeply depressed he talked to himself by asking questions like:

Psalm 42:5, 11

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, for the help of His countenance. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

Psalm 43:5

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

When things really got `tight` and he found himself staying awake through the night, he talked to himself again and did some deep soul-searching.

Psalm 4: 4

Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

Psalm 119: 59

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

Do you ever search yourself by bombarding yourself with questions and thoughts like, “Surely this is not all their fault - I believe I am to be blamed too. Did I have to react like I did? Am I jealous of him or her? Do I feel threatened? Am I creating trouble for the church because I did not get voted in? Why do I feel so much antagonism to this person - is it because she looks like my ex-wife? Is it right for me to talk about my pastor like this - am I not biting the hand that feeds me? It is wickedness, but why can't I stop it? Am I soul-tied to him or her? Is it right for me to use so much money on myself?”

To be able to question and soul-search oneself in honesty is vital to spiritual growth - and only mature people and people who know intimacy with God can do it. We must remember that `in His light (His presence) we must see light (see our own wrongs).

Psalm 36:9

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.

2. ASAPH COMMUNED WITH HIMSELF.

We read of Asaph in 1 Chronicles chapter 16.

1 Chronicles 16: 4-5

And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the Lord God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals;

This man was chosen by David to lead a group of priests to worship and to minister before the Lord. His job was to literally stand or prevail in the presence of God. Much time spent in God's presence awakened this man to soul-searching and to talk to himself in honesty when he was going through some very tough times and when he realised that he had no other human answer.

Psalm 77: 6-12

I call to remembrance my song in the night; / Meditate with my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search. Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favourable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? And I said, "This is my anguish; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the "Most High. " I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate on all Your work and talk of Your deeds.

Asaph's answer seemed to lie within himself! He said the only thing he could really do at this time was to (like David) reminisce about - God's past goodness and faithfulness and hold on!

Yes. Yes. There will be many times in life when there will be no outward answers - we have to turn inward. We need to commune with ourselves and do some deep soul-searching. (Where have I gone wrong? What can I do to change the situation and if I cannot change it, then what can I do in order to live with it?)

If we have really built intimacy with God and have built inward resources, then we do have the answer inwardly, within ourselves. We can rise to the occasion! In the darkest hour when even your pastor, deacons etc. have no answer, the answer will come to you because when we live in intimacy with God, God will make a way when there is no way!

I read a touching story a long time ago about a young widow with three beautiful children aged one, three and five. She was smitten with cancer and was given only a year to live. She was not afraid to die but the thought of having to abandon her kids to an orphanage tormented her as she herself had been brought up in an orphanage and had been abused. Her husband too had been an orphan.

For days, she cried out to God for an answer. One day as she was bathing her kids, and talking to herself, “O Emma, what are you going to do with the kids? You’d better be strong enough to release them to the orphanage - the earlier you do it the better.” She was shocked by an inward voice that said, “No you don’t have to! Leave the two older ones with this elderly couple and the baby with your pastor!”

She was shocked, but followed the direction of her inward voice. Events turned out wonderfully. Not only did the elderly couple take the two older children but they also nursed Emma when she was sick. As for her youngest child, the boy grew up to be a village preacher.

3. NEHEMIAH COMMUNED WITH HIMSELF

Nehemiah talked about how the answer came to him when he sought God. Nehemiah was another man who knew how to talk to himself or counsel himself when the going became tough. He had to because there was no one else in sight who could give him any answers. What God had called him to do was too dangerous to disclose to anyone in those difficult pioneering days - so Nehemiah had to work alone and all the time he had to talk to himself, counsel himself or consult himself. Pioneers are indeed lonely people!

Nehemiah 2:12

Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.

Nehemiah 5: 6-7

And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one his brother. And I set a great assembly against them.

The reason why Nehemiah could do it is because the man had such an intimate relationship with God! The book of Nehemiah reveals to us the powerful prayer life he shared with God - he is literally living in the spirit of prayer and intimacy with God.

Wherever he is, whether in the king's palace in Shushan or back in Jerusalem building the wall, he is always talking to God intimately. The thirteen chapters of Nehemiah are saturated with the man's prayers.

Nehemiah 1: 4-6

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, "Please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day

and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned."

Nehemiah 2: 4

Then the king said to me, "What do you request? " So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 4: 4-5

Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

Nehemiah 5: 19

Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah 6: 9,14

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. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Nehemiah 13:14, 22, 29, 31

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services! And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy! Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. And for bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good!

Surely the man who lives in intimacy with God is the man who has the answers. Today we are so used to consulting people (pastors, church members, relatives, friends) and seeking counsel from man that we no longer know how to counsel ourselves or listen to the inward directions from the Lord. We can no longer hear the still small voice!

When God told Elijah that He was in the still small voice, God was trying to tell him, “Turn inward for awhile, Elijah. Can’t you listen? I am talking to you!” You see, Elijah had always been very caught up with the outward: outward activities, noise, drama or the attention-grabbing events. This is why he looked for God in the earthquake, the wind and the fire BUT GOD WAS NOT THERE!

Many of us are like this today - always looking for God in the outward things. Well, do not be surprised when you do not find Him there! When Elijah finally tuned in to that voice on the inside, it became so loud he had to wrap himself in his mantle!

1 Kings 19: 11-13

Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD. “ And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah? “

The prophet Micah prophesied that when the dark and trying days come upon Israel, he would not be worried because he had the answers and the resources to go through them!

Micah 3: 6-8

“Therefore you shall have night without vision, and you shall have darkness without divination; the sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them. So the seers shall be ashamed and the diviners abashed;

indeed they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer from God. "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

The prophet Daniel said almost the same thing when he declared that in the end times when terror reigns, those who are intimate with God will be strong and do exploits!

Daniel 11: 32

Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits!

Yes, when you come into God's presence, learn to listen to yourself inwardly. Commune with yourself and let your spirit (like Asaph's) make diligent search of your own life - take an inventory of your own life! Anyone who knows intimacy with God does this! If you have built this life of intimacy with God, you do have the inward answers when the times get tough.

Yes, build intimacy with Him! Build intimacy with Him! When you are intimate with God, you can definitely talk to yourself, counsel yourself scripturally and honestly and find the answers that no one else will be able to give you.

SPIRITUAL INTIMACY: EXCERPTS FROM 'DEMANDS OF LOVE'

Intimacy and communion with God is so powerful and vital that when God was cut off from Him at the cross, Jesus ejaculated this heart-piercing cry, "I thirst!" I cannot believe that He cried out because of physical thirst. If He could endure the excruciating pain of the cross, He could endure the physical thirst. When someone is dying in excruciating pain, he has no time to think of a coke. Jesus screamed "I thirst" not because He was physically thirsty but because He felt a spiritual thirst when the flow of communication and intimacy with His Father was broken.

Matthew 27: 44-48

The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there when they heard that, said, this man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

Coming into His presence to drink long and deep and to release is mandatory. If I had not known how to release in the presence of God, I would be a ruined person today and my ministry would have been ransacked - which is just what the devil wants. There are good ministers of the Lord who are ruined because they do not know how to release in the presence of God. They allow the accuser of the brethren to use people to sow wrong and hurting words into their spirits and they do not know how to come free. Because what we do not release will hurt us. Ministries are aborted and lives are ruined.

God Himself can teach us how to drink, how to pray and how to commune with Him. The bride says in Songs of Solomon 1:16, Our bed is green. The bed is always for intimacy and green has always stood for life and growth. What I understand from here is that intimacy with God can be developed and it must grow. As the years go by, we should be praying more, not less. However busy we may be in ministry, intimacy with God must never be neglected or substituted. The more we minister, the more we should pray. Our private life of intimacy with God must always exceed our public world of ministry. When we reverse the order, we will get into trouble.

Ministry is only a working out of what God has already worked into our lives.

Colossians 1: 29

Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

If we do not allow God to work into our lives, then either one of three things will result: we will have nothing to work out; we will be copying someone else's working or we will work out the flesh.

In times of communion and intimacy, God gives us His directives. As we walk accordingly, we can accomplish much in a very short time. Like the disciples, we only need to cast our nets where He tells us to cast them in and voila! Our nets overflow with fishes.

John 21: 6

And he said unto them, cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

What is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm. Conception takes place in times of deep intimacy with the Lord. As we become intimate with Him, we begin to conceive His desires and His burdens. When we become one with Him, these desires and burdens are birthed as visions. There is no other way to conceive a lasting vision. I do not believe in catching a vision; I believe in having visions birthed into one's spirit and soul as

one becomes intimate with the Lord.

The Indians have a proverb which says, “ Do not dance in public without first dancing in private.” Good advice. Do not enter into any public ministry without first receiving ministry for yourself in His chambers. Intimacy with God puts a cutting edge in your spiritual discernment and perception.

Anna, the widow who spent much time in spiritual intimacy and fasting in the presence of God at the holy temple in Jerusalem, could immediately discern and perceive that the baby which nestled in the arms of Mary was the promised Messiah of Israel. Thousands of babies must have been presented to the priest in that temple year in and year out but Anna was able to discern and perceive that one baby who came in on that special day was the promised Son of God. She was “spot on” in her discernment.

Luke 2:36-38

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was raised up by God during some very dark days in Israel to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. It takes someone with a Nehemiah’s ministry was both prophetic and apostolic - he laid the foundation and the walls of something that had been broken down - old Israel. It was a tough job which no ordinary priest could do.

Nehemiah faced hindrances, threats and harassment from a satanic trinity embodied in the persons of Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, but he triumphed. One major factor that contributed to his triumph was his ability to perceive, both the evil lurking in the hearts of the men who were close to him (Nehemiah 6: 14, 13: 17) and the heart and mind of God even in his darkest hour.

Nehemiah 6: 14

My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their

works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

Nehemiah 13: 7

And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

When a string of false prophets and a false prophetess arose to intimidate him to stop the work and go into hiding, he rejected their false counsel and prophecies because he could perceive or discern that they were not from God.

Nehemiah 6: 4-10

Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort and I answered them after the same manner. Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; Wherein was written, it is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, there is a king in Judah; and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. Then I sent unto him, saying, there are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. For they all made us afraid, saying, their hands shall be weakened from the work that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel who was shut up; and he said, let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.

When Nehemiah finally returned to Jerusalem after taking a long leave of absence, he could again perceive that not everything was all right with the priesthood and he went about setting it right. No one had told him, but he perceived with an “inward knowing” of such things from within himself. Inward knowing is birthed through spiritual intimacy with God.

Nehemiah 13: 10

And I -perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled everyone to his field.

The enemies of Nehemiah tried all ways and means to hinder his work and ministry, but they could not. Nehemiah prevailed and finished what God wanted him to do. None of his attempts to build was aborted because this man could “put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.” (Leviticus 10: 10) In other words, Nehemiah had Holy Ghost discernment and perception. This was needed to keep God’s work intact and up to His standard. May we have many more Nehemiahs in our days.

Many today cannot wait to be in the banqueting hall. They want public attention and the limelight. Before long, their ministry gets aborted. When we violate this principle of first developing spiritual intimacy with God we cannot last long in ministry. We get burnt out, stressed out, tired out, or worst of all, we have nothing to say behind the pulpit. Many pastors preach from books and tapes; otherwise, they have nothing to preach. Men who have no messages behind the pulpit tell story after story, then try to cover themselves up by saying, “The Lord did not give me a message.” No. No. The truth is: you did not wait long enough to hear from Him.

Pastors, learn to hear from God yourself. You must hear from Him and not rely on prophets alone. Some prophets, such as in the days of Jeremiah, are not trustworthy and are prophesying vain and deceitful things out of their own hearts (Jeremiah 23: 16). Instead of helping you to get closer to God and encouraging you to set your mind on things above, these so-called prophets do the exact opposite.

You may come under bondage when you believe in their prophecy because you would have set your heart on what they said. For example, you may find yourself becoming dissatisfied with your house and your car and begin coveting a bigger house and a more sophisticated car because the prophet had said, “Thus saith the Lord; I Will give you a bigger car and a mansion.” Or, you may lust after expensive jewellery and clothes because the `man of God’ prophesied, “God will give you exquisite jewellery and beautiful clothes.” I

know of folks who have borrowed money to buy expensive articles, believing that God will give them money to pay their creditors later on.

Jeremiah 23: 16

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord.

Jeremiah 14:14

Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.

Jeremiah 23: 22, 32

But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my wordy, /then they should have turned them from their evil way, and evil from the evil of their doings. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness.

Do not change your direction just because of what the prophets say. You must confirm every prophecy within your own heart and check it with the word. There are some quacks in the ministry and we should be able to discern them. Hear from God. Hear from God yourself.

The prophet Isaiah lamented that in the end times, seven women will take hold of one man for the purpose of being called by his name so that their reproach of singleness will be removed.

Isaiah 4: 1

And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, we will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.

These people are not interested in intimacy. They only want to have their reproach taken away. This is a picture of many Christians today. They are

not interested in intimacy with God. Like the seven women who only want the reproach of singleness to be taken away, such Christians are interested only in having the reproach of sin with its guilt and condemnation removed. They want only the forgiveness and the love of God. They do not want spiritual discipline and they are not interested in His spiritual bread (“we will eat our own bread”) because His bread, His word is too strong for them. They are not keen on righteousness or godliness (“we wear our own apparel”) because they believe they can go to heaven as they are in their own filthy rags of self and carnality. What a deception.

Let the true bride of Jesus arise and be intimate with Him! Let us learn to build a strong river on the inside. Let us be so one with Him that we can hear His heartbeat. The man or the woman who can hear the heartbeat of the Lord will not be misled or intimidated by the many so-called prophets of today.

Bible School students who have so much to catch up with in their studies that they have no time to pray for one or two hours a day had better leave Bible School ***because they are defeated even before they begin.*** It’s so sad to see so many Bible School students not knowing how to pray or how to fast. It’s equally sad to see this in some of their lecturers. Many have doctorates and degrees but they still do not know how to fight in the realm of the spirit. May God send a revival into our Bible Schools all over the world! It must begin there because those are the ‘factories’ that ‘manufacture’ the ‘product.’

Pastors, friends, do not substitute your times of intimacy with Him with anything else. One major reason why the Lamb’s people cannot take on the Lamb’s spirit and nature is because they have missed out on intimacy with Him. The Bible clearly teaches that in times of intimacy with Him, we become one spirit with our Lord, just as in the physical realm, the husband and the wife become one flesh.

Help us, O God, to be intimate with You. Help us not to desire to build mega churches or to cover more mission fields or move into signs and wonders. Help us to stop performing or producing because we want to catch up with others. Just help us to be intimate with You, for when we are, all these things will fall into their proper order.

Yes, yes, yes! Spiritual intimacy with God is vital to longevity and effectiveness in ministry. We have no choice in this matter because we are not given one. We are to be in intimacy and communion with Him before we engage in any active ministry. Remember the bride's declaration that she was first brought into the private chambers of the king before she was brought out into the banqueting hall.

AFTERWORD

DESPERATION DROVE ME INTO INTIMACY AND PREPARED ME FOR THE APOSTOLIC CALLING

I have always been passionate about my calling into the apostolic ministry. When God lays such a mantle on you, you have no choice but to speak honestly, directly and strongly. To be popular and to be a speaker enjoying favour and demand is not on my agenda - to be able to touch lives with God's voice and have my work stand the test of time is.

John the Baptist should have kept his mouth shut and saved his head but he preferred otherwise. "Stupid man," - some may say - but not in the sight of God. He had an apostolic mantle on him and he had to speak up in honesty, directness and strength.

I write what I am writing now for the many who will rise up into the apostolic calling. They must know that there is a price to pay. Those called into the apostolic ministry do not bear the burdens of men but the burdens of God. This is why they have to say things which others dare not say. They must not live for the ministry but live for the Master. They must not lust for 'multitude' audiences but be contented to impact strategic lives - knowing that this has always been the focus of Jesus and that it is God's method - going for strategic individuals. Yes, those in the apostolic ministry must learn to enter into the quietness of God's purpose and find rest in just living for Him.

To them what is real in the spiritual realm must be translated into actual life. "Let reality become actuality" is the constant cry of their hearts. This is why it is hard for them to find favour with God and with man. Jesus Christ found favour with God and with man *before* He entered into ministry, *before* he broke into His destiny and *before* He opened His mouth to speak! **NOT AFTER!**

When Jesus finally opened His mouth to preach, so many including His followers, found Him so offensive. Many left Him (John 6: 66). The religious hierarchy hated Him and the things He said so much that they wanted Him dead. Like John the Baptist, He should have kept His mouth shut. If He had, He would have avoided the cross and headed for the throne! But He chose otherwise. He had no choice but to speak up because the ‘working of the apostolic’ was too overwhelming upon His life. To shut His mouth would mean to burn His bones!

Jeremiah 20: 9

Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.” But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back and I could not.

Those in the apostolic calling must be totally committed to their call - and the call is not to deal with rotten fruit but to axe the rotten roots. This is why the anointing within them will evoke an uncompromising antagonism towards facile optimism, sub-standard living and professional “self-made” prophets and priests, who like leeches, make gain from God’s people by living off them.

I am deeply grateful that God caught me, worked into me and allowed me to be the ‘link’ to many of the strategic vessels that He will raise up in this nation. Yes, I am thankful that I can be one of the many candles to light the way for many who will be raised up into the apostolic ministry and be God’s strategic vessels in this land. I have met many of them in my meetings, in the schools (SOL) and I am sure ‘in absentia’ through my books and tapes.

I hail you, I honour you and I pray for your soon manifestation!

You are the true sons of Isaac who will live on your father’s heritage: intimacy with God. Because you are living on your father’s inheritance or heritage, you will prevail in the end times whereas your half-brethren, the sons of Ishmael or the sons of the flesh - who live only on the father’s gifts (anointings, blessings, gifts of the Spirit, talents etc.) will lose out.

I hail you, apostolic sons and daughters of the Spirit. I saw your coming a long time ago! Welcome and welcome apostolic generation!

Genesis 25: 5-6

And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country on the east.

Master, thank You for laying Your call upon my life. This piece of material is poor, but You have wrought such an excellent workmanship into it. You actually chose to work on this platform of human impossibility. Oh Lord, You took my life from the dunghill and set it among princes. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

Knowing that I was a poor piece of material and also an 'impossibility' for the ministry, I learnt to spend much time with God when I was in Bible school. Every morning before dawn at 5 a.m. I would slip out into the balcony of my dormitory and cry, "Oh God, release me from the call upon my life. You chose the wrong person and You will regret it. I am here not because I love You but because I am scared to go to hell! God, you will be humiliated by my failures if you do not release me. **Give me** a break. Please give me a break."

Every evening before dusk, at five o'clock I would lock myself in the classroom with my pillow and again pray for an hour. However, the evening prayers were totally different in content. I prayed, "Oh God, **change me. Cause me** to love You. **Make me** spiritual. I love the world more than I love You so how can I serve You unless You change me? I do not want to be a pastor's wife and be poor. I do not want to be a Bible woman or church worker because they are all so dull-looking; they do not know how to dress, do not put on make-up and some of them even look hungry and depressed! (All of those I came across in those days looked like this to me!)

I sought God fervently not because I was spiritual but because of the conflicts which raged within me - my higher self was wrestling with my lower self. I was determined to abandon my call but was defeated by an inability to evade it. These fierce internal conflicts compelled me to seek His face, morning and evening.

Now after all these years, you know God did not answer my morning prayers but He **did answer** my evening prayers. Thank you, Jesus. He is still in the

process of answering my prayers and working in me. Though my conversion may have taken just a moment, manufacturing me into a saint will be the task of a lifetime! Spiritual intimacy with Him has changed me and given me the assurance that He will not give up working in my life - for I am His possession and His inheritance. So are you. Great may be my stubbornness, BUT GREATER STILL HIS FAITHFULNESS AND HIS WORKING.

Psalm 138:8

The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands.

Isaiah 43:13

Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work and who will reverse it?

Isaiah 64: 8

But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand.

Finally, may I encourage you by saying that I believe the last anointing God has reserved for His church on earth is the apostolic anointing. God will anoint every true vessel of His with total devotion to the Cross - and with it, the capacity for self-denial and suffering. This indeed, is the apostolic anointing!

The devil has no strategy against anyone who has died to self and who is not afraid of suffering. This is why the devil will not have any strategy against the endtime church. She will be indomitable and indestructible because she has died to self and she has the capacity to suffer. She has become apostolic!

If this book has blessed you, think about what the school (STATION OF LIFE) will do for you! A team of four other apostolic teachers will speak into your life! See you at THE STATION in MARCH, JULY OR NOVEMBER.

SUSAN TANG

LAHAD DATU, SABAH