



It is often quoted, even though wrongly applied most of the times, that a man's gift will make room for him. Many suppose that being gifted means that success and great accomplishments in life are almost certain. But this is not the way things turn out most times. The fact is that majority of gifted people do not succeed, and there is a reason for that. That reason is what this book is about. Reading this book you will learn the true meaning of a man's gift making room for him, the difference between a gift/talent and skill, and how to convert a gift into a skill. The book also explains how not to shipwreck a career the way Samson did in the book of Judges. It shows how to defend one's self against the cunningness of the Delilahs of this world. Take heed to the lessons and you would have jumped over a major obstacle on the road to success

BEYOND GIFTS AND TALENTS
(Why Gifted People May Fail)

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INTRODUCTION

I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them. Eccl 9:11-12

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, using the words of Solomon from another portion of the book, I have seen many gifted people fail hopelessly in life despite the gifts, I have seen many anointed people fail in ministry; they appear skilled in what they do but they can hardly stand before kings like the Bible promised. Why is this so? That is what I wish to answer in this short teaching.

1

WHO ARE LEADERS?

For a long time, and largely till now, I would get confused quite a bit when I am asked to speak on leadership. Please don't get me wrong, I usually know what to say to leaders; my problem is usually with the topic of leadership. My reason is that most of the things I have to say about the concept of leadership apply to everyone and not to those who are already leaders alone. Those things seem like the principles of life which every man or woman should know if they want to go anywhere serious in life. I recognize that there are people that are chosen by God to lead in the assembly of people, but I also know that every single person was created to be a leader in a certain place in life. As a matter of fact, every person is a leader currently in something or at least a leader in training. No matter your call or profession, leadership comes to you with age and with experience. People will come to you who will have to learn from you. Being a leader becomes something like being an elder—just be there long enough and you automatically become one. Of course there are leaders who are not worth their offices, just like there are elders who refuse to show enough responsibility over time and therefore differ little from juveniles, but they are the abnormal specimens of life.

As you grow up in anything, you become a worthy leader if you learn diligence, discipline, patience, and everything that one needs to succeed in life. There is really not much that is specific in being trained to be a leader, everyone who is faithful in anything he or she does becomes a true leader after a while. Becoming a leader is not about practising to be a leader but about being responsible and being faithful as a habit in life. Paul wrote to Timothy about what it would take for him to be a true leader; he told him to be an example in all the things that people are supposed to do. As people would copy him, then he would be proving to be a leader indeed, after all a leader is the person people follow.

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 1 Tim 4:12

A leader is the person who does with excellence what his followers are supposed to do.

Character, not gifts

Now, this teaching is not about leadership but about why gifted people fail, I just mentioned the above to bring out a principle.

So why do gifted people fail? Just as practising diligently the general principles of an endeavor is what makes a person a leader rather than a specific call to leadership, in the same manner, the general principles of life is what it takes to succeed whether you are specially gifted or not. What makes for true success in life is not the gifts one has, it is rather the character and discipline that people develop into their lives. Gifts do not make a man, character does.

2

TWO IMPORTANT VERSES

Let us quickly examine the following two verses of scripture which we often quote. I will present them one by one and examine each so as to get the true meaning.

A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men. Prov 18:16

This is often interpreted as a person's abilities, talent, gifting, or anointing as being the thing that make room for him or her. But that is not the correct interpretation. The word 'gift' there in the verse refers to a present which someone bears when he goes visiting. It is not at all his gift as referring to his ability. As an illustration, he was not saying that being a good writer will get you to the publisher, but the present you bring along will cause the man to see you. Solomon was teaching essentially that everyone loves a gift and that we must all learn to bear gifts in our lives. Once we read other simpler translations of the Bible we easily see it. Check versions like the New Living Translation, New International Version, etc. An example here is this:

*Do you want to meet an important person? Take him a gift and it will be easy.
TEV*

I believe that is settled. Let us remove from our minds that the verse of scripture there teaches that someone's gift as in endowment, ability and talent is what will take him forward in life. Many gifted people are takers rather than givers, and for that reason they close doors against themselves so often.

The second verse is this:

*Do you see a man skilled in his work?
He will stand before kings;
He will not stand before obscure men. Prov 22:29*

What I want to bring out from this verse is the meaning or implication of the word 'skill.' If you read this verse in a version like the King James', the word used there is 'diligent.' In fact the Amplified Bible renders it thus:

Do you see a man diligent and skillful in his business? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men. (Prov 22:29 AMP)

A skill is different from someone's gift or talent. Skill comes with practice; it is only acquired by putting in the necessary effort and time. You may be endowed with a gift, but skill comes into you as you use your gift again and again. As you practice to do something for long periods you become skilled at it; you can actually acquire skill in many things you are not naturally gifted in through learning and practice. What I am implying is that Solomon was speaking there more about a tenacious and diligent character than about a naturally endowed talent.

I have quickly looked at these two verses of the scripture because oftentimes people are confused as to what they actually mean. Some think that an anointing is the same thing as skill, and so someone possessing the former should go far in life. Or sometimes they think that the fact that a man has a gift means he should succeed, and this is supposed to be based upon the principle Solomon taught about a man's gift making room for him and bringing him before great people. I have endeavoured to show that these are wrong concepts.

3

ALL-ROUND LEARNING

Like I was saying earlier when talking about leadership, what actually makes someone succeed in life is not whether he thinks he is called or not, or whether he has a special gift or not; it is whether he or she applies the general principles of life. Your general character is the thing that will help your gift or anointing work its way into success in your life.

I remember the story that was told me of a young man who was exceedingly good at playing football. The person telling the story compared him to one of the top Nigerian internationals then and remarked that he thought this man was better than the international player. So what was the problem? He said the boy smoked too much of 'weed'. The weed smoking was a manifestation of a deep character flaw and he never made it into the local leagues not to talk of international football. The same thing works with special anointings from the Holy Spirit.

Many people do a little better than others in that they try to hone their gifts into skills, but I want to say that that is not enough. I have seen people who do not work on the general things about life, but are focused on their gifts and passions, and they fail. They are anointed, they seem to become skilled and yet they fail. The reason is because the way life is designed, you cannot succeed just because you have honed your gift alone; there must be success in many supporting areas of life for you to stand. This is why I believe that the Lord doesn't often send people for training in the area of their gifts only.

Let me explain.

David loved to read, write poetry and play the harp. He was gifted and became so skilled that everyone knew of him. When the king needed such services, this David was the one that was called upon. He was indeed to later become king himself. Yet God sent him for training as a shepherd. He passed his tests to be king while being a shepherd.

Sometimes we think if you are going to be a preacher, the best place to be trained is in a theological seminary, but it doesn't always work like that. The Lord can send a man or woman who he wants to be a preacher to university to study physics or mathematics.

What?! Physics? What will that do for your ministry?

No, it is not about physics; it is about the discipline infused into you as you wake up early; sometimes staying up late reading, doing homework, studying for exams, etc. It is about seeing the wonders of God in the physical things and interacting with students in every discipline, among others. He is teaching you the respect of authority and how to be responsible. No, learning the subject of physics or mathematics may not have much to do with the preaching anointing, but it has everything to do with succeeding in life and surviving the glory of the anointing.

The good thing about having a calling or gift in an area of life is that the calling comes with a grace that makes learning in that area easy. If you are anointed to be a preacher, you 'learn' to preach easier than other people, but you are not to exercise yourself in that alone. It is true that the Lord expects us to exercise ourselves in the area of our calling so as to become skilled therein (Rom 12:6), but that is not all. I presume that while writing the admonition in Romans chapter 12, Paul focused on one area while assuming that the people should understand that the other areas are important too. I know this because when he wrote to Timothy, he focused more on faithfulness than ability.

4

FAITHFULNESS IS KEY

Paul wrote to Timothy,

*And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.
2 Tim 2:2*

Faithfulness is first as a requirement for success in ministry and anything in life, before ability or the gift/calling. Faithfulness is a character trait which we must work hard to cultivate if we will make it in life. This is where the problem often lies. This is what makes anointed and gifted people fail. There are gifted men who do not know how to keep their word or how to keep away from the temptations that often accompany their gifts, yet they expect to succeed in the ministry.

Yes, every gift has its temptations.

When you work in a quarry, stones might fall and crush you. When you chop wood, there is danger with each stroke of your ax. Eccl 10:9

What Solomon was writing here is that each profession has a danger, and when John the Baptist called people to repentance, notice that he highlighted how each profession has a temptation that goes with it. The soldiers tended to abuse their power and the tax collectors too (Luke 3:12-14). The pulpit in like manner has its power, and it is so easy to abuse it. These are the temptations of each profession.

Every gift has a temptation, and falling for the temptation is often what ends the career or ministry of people. The Lord is unwilling to promote many people because He knows that they will ruin everything and bring shame to the cause of the gospel if they are lifted. Preachers often start using their power and influence for collecting money from people and pursuing their own personal ambitions rather than pursuing the plan of God. When they do this, the ministry soon comes to an end, and they erroneously blame the devil and their perceived enemies.

I remember the story told me by a man of God. A young preacher went somewhere to start a work of ministry. He established a church and in just a few years they had thousands of members, but so was it too that just a few years after this boom, the ministry and church fell apart and closed down. Why? The young preacher fell into financial impropriety and sexual immorality. The older minister discussing this with me explained what happened. He said what happened was that the young man was overwhelmed by the glory. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for glory (*kabhad*) has the root meaning of weight. It means 'to be heavy'. No wonder Paul described the “weight of glory” in 2 Cor 4:17. The fact is that glory is weighty.

It happened that the young man could not withstand the weight of the glory which the apparent success in ministry brought to him. It crushed him and he fell. That was the end. I remember another man who I observed his ministry for some time. The ministry was 'booming' and there was the manifestation of the supernatural easily by his hands. People followed him everywhere he went so that the crowds filled large arenas. Then one day the ministry just crumbled until there was so little of it left. When I heard inside stories later, it was the same things – money and sexual immorality. Falling for the temptations was the manifestation of the lack of personal energy to withstand the weight of glory and it led to decay in everything.

No wonder when the great prophet, Kenneth E. Hagin, was visited by the Lord in a vision and given a special anointing to heal the sick, the Lord Jesus warned him to ensure he never forgets to return all the glory back to Him, and He also said to him, “be careful about money.” The Lord emphasized this by repeating it.

“Be careful about money. Many of my servants whom I have anointed for this type of ministry have become money-minded and have lost the anointing and ministry I gave them.”

Visions do not guarantee success

Having an anointing and a divinely granted ministry do not guarantee success. That is what the problem is with a lot of people. When the Lord gives you a dream or the vision of a brilliant destiny and ministry, it is not a guarantee of success at all; it is more of a call to discipline. The Lord is calling you to realize

that you have a great work ahead of you so that you can start exercising yourself in every godly thing that is necessary. Every vision of God requires godliness to come to pass. If the word of God comes to pass without the exercise of personal discipline, then the vessel will be destroyed after being used to partly execute the plan of God. It is very unlikely the person will fully fulfil the call. That was the story of Samson. Anointed as Samson was, he failed woefully and died shamefully. The power to succeed was leaked out of his life by his sexual immorality. Delilah was not the problem; the problem was that Samson's energy had been leaking away before that fateful night in which his head was shaved. This is a story almost everyone knows well, but for those who may not be acquainted with it, please read it from the book of Judges, chapters 14 to 16.

The only thing that keeps you alive for God to continue to use is the spiritual discipline that comes into your life as a result of the vision you have concerning what is ahead of you.

5

HOW SAMSON LOST THE POWER

The story of Samson is one we must learn from. Samson was born by a supernatural manifestation, something akin to the birth of John the Baptist. His barren mother was visited by an angel to announce his conception and birth. This angel actually rode back to heaven in the smoke of the sacrifice which Manoah the father offered. There was everything supernatural about the life of this Samson. His parents of course knew he was special and they treated him as such. I suppose that may have been the beginning of the problems – they knew he was special and they inadvertently spoiled him.

Though I can't be dogmatic about it, reading the story in Judges Chapter 14 in which he insisted on a woman he wanted as wife, despite his parents' clear and sincere objections, tells me that this young man was used to having his way. For one reason or another the parents didn't succeed in instilling the necessary discipline into his life. I noticed that the angel who came to prophesy about his birth told them what to do while he was in utero – what his mother could not eat and what she couldn't drink, but he didn't bother telling them how to raise a child. I suppose he assumed they should know that, just like every parent should make sure they know these things, whether they feel their child is special or not. This 'special' child was to be raised as any other child should be raised and so there was no point giving any special instructions.

Now Samson grew up being self-indulgent, and this extended to his sexual life. The story of Samson was told in just a few chapters, and in those chapters, apart from his fights, his story was mostly about one woman, one harlot and another woman. In fact many of his fights broke out because of women. When the Philistines would wait for him, they often tried to catch him when he went into the house of a harlot. When eventually he was reduced to nothing and captured, it was in the house of Delilah, a woman he didn't marry but was staying with. This is the summary of the habits of Samson. He was violating a spiritual principle which Lemuel was to teach us later.

*Do not give your strength to women,
Or your ways to that which destroys kings. Prov 31:3*

Samson's strength was depleted in the houses of those women that he wouldn't keep away from. I am speaking of his spiritual strength – that inner fortitude and energy which the Lord endowed us all with so as to enable us tackle the temptations and the challenges of life. It is the strength which we use to maintain our sanity and not go crazy when the adverse events of life seem to overwhelm. It is the strength with which we keep our heads clear when others are getting into confusion. It is the ability which makes one face the giants of life and still remember that God is on his side, just as Caleb and Joshua did.

This strength helps you to keep on course in the plan of God for your life; it is the thing by which you keep clear the connection you have with the spiritual realm so that you can always tap the power of the Spirit for a sustained victorious living. That strength is simply the power with which we hold unto God; it manifests as faith and obedience to the word of God. That was what Samson was donating to strange women through sexual encounters.

Beware

That is the problem with a lot of people today. As they engage in sexual immorality, and other forms of immorality for that matter, they think they are enjoying but they do not realize that what is really happening is that they are losing the ability to connect with God, the ability for faith, and the ability for victory later in life. Billy Graham said, in one of his sermons, that faith is very hard for a promiscuous man. That is so true. The energy people who engage in sexual immortality are losing is spiritual and it affects every aspect of their lives. Lack of this energy makes them mentally unstable; the lack causes them to make foolish decisions while thinking they are being smart about life, and makes them walk in unbelief. It is indeed a tragedy.

Samson's problem was not Delilah; she was just the manifestation of a life that had lost its spiritual energy. Samson fell for Delilah's pressure, not just because the woman was cunning or persistent, but because the man had no inner strength to withstand anymore. The Bible teaches clearly that the reason why people fall in the time of pressure is because their inner strength is small; it is not because of the pressure in itself.

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Prov 24:10 AMP

One day, everyone's Delilah will come, but it is not always a woman. The spirit of Delilah is in every thing which will be the final temptation that will take a person off the road of victory permanently. It is often something the person has done again and again but which the consequences did not show up. It makes the offender confident, not knowing it is a matter of the final straw that would break this camel's back. What will matter in the day of coming of everyone's Delilah is whether we have our inner strengths intact or we do not. We don't need to try and discern who or what our Delilahs will be; we just need to keep our strengths intact.

Please note that being specially anointed didn't help Samson at all against Delilah, and that is what I'm trying to get everyone to understand through this teaching. Notice also that the anointing on his life was still flowing, as we would say, even as he was losing his spiritual energy. He was still slaying the Philistines and lions, and still getting answers to prayer. In Judges chapter 15, around verse 19, we see a supernatural and enduring spring of water which came to be because he cried out to God when he was dying of thirst. This man was getting results. Maybe that was part of what deceived him. He didn't know that even though the anointing is present, it doesn't mean all is well. Many men of God are being deceived like that – they think that since they are still preaching powerfully, healing the sick, working all kinds of miracles and having large crowds follow them, everything must be alright; but it is all deception. I can just imagine the Lord sending a message to Samson and persons like him saying:

“You say, 'I am strong, feared and have become influential,' yet you do not know that you are weak, miserable, blind and naked.” (Adapted from Rev 3:17)

Yes, the man was spiritually exposed and leaky. A time came when Samson's inner strength was all gone, that was when Delilah was able to make him cross the final barrier of disobedience, and this led to the loss of his anointing and of his life. Like I mentioned earlier, if the visions and plans of God seem to begin to be fulfilled in the life of one who is not sanctified, the person will be destroyed by the weight of the glory. Samson was so destroyed.

Sanctification is vital

Personal sanctification and faithfulness is necessary in the life of every one of God's children, whether they feel anointed or not, whether there is a special

call or not. It doesn't matter whether you have had angels visit you or not. Do not think the angelic visitors will give special attention to telling you how to behave; their duty, and that of the Holy Spirit, is usually limited to calling you; they won't bother to tell you anything concerning how to behave unless there is a special danger or temptation you might face. What kills those who are not specially anointed and cause them to fail is the same thing that kills those who are powerfully anointed. If you don't want to be destroyed suddenly like Samson was, then plug every leak to your spiritual energy.

Watch out for and conquer that sin that easily trips you over (Heb 12:1).

Flee from sexual immorality (2 Tim. 2:22).

Cultivate faithfulness. Seek it and practice it.

Learn diligence, integrity, good manners and every virtue just like every Christians should.

Make sure you take your eyes away from your special call as if it is a guarantee of success; it didn't save Samson, and it will not save you. The Lord will not say because you are specially anointed you will get by with bad behaviour. If it appears like you are getting by with it, it is just for a while, Delilah is coming soon to expose your hidden weakness. Beware!

6

EXERCISING FAITHFULNESS

Let me take a small detour here and explain something about the exercise of faithfulness.

You see, I mentioned earlier that the Lord may send a young man to study physics when preparing him for a preaching ministry. We saw that it is the general disciplines of life that is the real training rather than learning the Bible. I want to extend that again to explain why people remain in tutelage under people.

Sometimes a Christian is working somewhere, for example in civil service, and this is not really a part of his or her mission in life, but it is the place where God is training him for the next phase of life. It is as he proves faithful here in the affairs of life that he qualifies for the next phase of his life. For such a person, God is not lifting him up for the service done in church so as to place him into ministry. No, no. It is as he proves faithful as a civil servant that he becomes a man of God. God doesn't primarily follow us to church to see how diligent we are there; he checks our secular offices to see if we are truly faithful.*¹

Sometimes the Lord calls a student and he runs away from school to obey the call; my understanding is that unless there is a specific reason or instruction to do that, it is not the way to go. I seriously recommend against it. It is not because the certificate the school will give is vital for your future, no; it is because you have to fulfil faithfulness there before you can move to another level in life. There is no need to hurry into the next phase. The next phase will happen to you by itself. Paul actually gave an admonition about such a situation. Let's see what he said.

Everyone should remain as he was when he accepted God's call. Were you a slave when God called you? Well, never mind; but if you have a chance to become a free man, use it. 1 Cor 7:20-21 TEV

*For more on this please read my book 'How to Work for God'

Now Paul was speaking about the calling into Christianity, but there is a great lesson in those words. He wanted people to know that there is no need worrying about what would become of their calling if they remain as they were. I am saying that until the chance comes for you to step into the next phase, do not force it.

Many people have forced themselves into a phase that God is not ready for them yet. Like I mentioned earlier, if you were in school when you saw your vision, don't worry. Keep that vision in mind and continue schooling, knowing that the Lord is judging your faithfulness there in school as He prepares you for the next phase. In that place there will be many challenges for you to face and overcome beyond just academic work. You will interact with other students, with teachers and other forms of authority. Beginning from that environment you will do some degree of ministry work. Unless specifically instructed to leave, please do not leave until the appropriate time, which is the time of graduation. While you are there, be a good student too. You cannot say because you have a calling into ministry you will start failing; that wouldn't be right at all. Faithfulness in today's matter is crucial if you will make success of your ultimate calling. The vision you wish to pursue is usually for an appointed time. Many people hurry into the vision when the time is not yet right.

There is a time for everything

Everything has its right time; if you try to go ahead of the time you will ruin it. Many times I counsel with people; they say they have a passion for something else apart from what they are currently doing, and so they want to depart and pursue that calling. The truth however is that a great number of times what they describe as lack of passion is just a result of the fact that they are bored (the work doesn't seem to challenge them), or there are many frustrations there (e.g., with co-workers, wages, bosses, etc.). There are a variety of other reasons they may find themselves generally unhappy that may have nothing to do with the matter of calling. Sometimes the thing is not yielding the fruit the person desires, like the financial returns or the social status associated with the job. All these things may lead to dissatisfactions which someone may use the Christian term 'not my calling' to express.

Whether what you are doing right now is your so called calling or not, there is definitely a time for everything. See, your current calling from God is the

thing which you have been given to do now. It is not what you will do later. The knowledge of a future calling does not automatically inactive the current duties you have to do. A student that believes he or she has been called into ministry even while a student should please follow the natural order of studying until graduation unless the Lord specifically says otherwise in the vision or by other manifestations. It is not required of you that you immediately run in another direction. Failing in school does not mean you have not been called to study; it just means you are not being diligent.

When David was anointed as king by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13) he didn't head for the palace or create his own; he went back to where the sheep were left behind (note verse 19 of 1 Sam 16). Events later took him to the palace and to the place where he saw Goliath. Many times I see students drop out of school needlessly, and I have observed again and again that it hardly did anything for them in making success of ministry. The unfortunate aspect is that the period of training in faithfulness that would qualify them for great ministry is often lost; they get into an arena where there is no one to keep them in line and the flesh takes over. The man oversleeps, works little and doesn't have a habit of honouring his word. He develops an entitlement mentality thinking people should be serving him just because he is a minister. These are all things that could have been cured off him if he had stayed longer under the structure of a school system, under the authority of a corporate environment or under a human boss.

Sometimes I see a jobless and hungry man and he either tells me that the work available is not his calling or that his passion doesn't lie there. I always laugh at this. Many times this is nothing but laziness; this kind of fellows are just incapable of working and so they blame it on lack of passion or wrong calling. I remember one such fellow who met me to tell me the long story of his life, how the Lord saved him from the lowest places and how he had dreams of the future as an evangelist. At that time a particular church was helping him and for certain reasons he was not happy. He told me he dreamt of a man who lifted him out of a pit he found himself in (apparently insinuating that I was the one). Why was he unhappy? Well, where he was at that time he had to learn some metal works as his daily work to earn both some income and to qualify for the continued support of the church. They had rented a place for him to live in.

I spoke with this man and gave him some counsel about life, but he seemed determined to leave the environment of that church and workplace. I explained to him that he had to make it a goal to be able to pay by himself and from his labours when next his rent would be due. I guess I was speaking with a wall. All he ever did after that was to beg me for money for everything. Each time I saw him he needed money for transportation, or to buy some medicine or something else. One day he called to ask if I had some food stuff at home as if it was an unusual thing for a comfortable family man. It was just the first step to his begging for a portion of it. The fellow was just lazy and he loved to beg. For him it was more blessed to beg than to work; it was the sake of his type that Paul commanded that whosoever would not work should not eat. He became unhappy when someone tried to make him responsible. The problem was not at all his calling or passion; it was laziness.

The passion for every idle man especially when he is hungry must be for labour. If he is indeed not just lazy, then he must be ready for labour in anything that is honest and productive which the Lord brings his way. In his set of messages titled 'How to receive God's best', Andrew Wommack described how as a young preacher he erred in refusing to take up a secular job to earn money even though he was pastoring a church of less than ten people and was desperately broke. He said he has since learnt that it was not right for him to have expected to live well while pastoring full-time such a small congregation. Anyway the lesson I want to draw is from when his rent was about to be due and he didn't have the money to pay. He went before the due date to speak with the landlord and the man offered him a job to work off his rent. At that time he didn't feel he should be working a secular job but he couldn't refuse to work for the landlord he was owing. He took up the job as an assistant in a photography laboratory which belonged to the landlord, and he did it so well that just after a few months the man offered to give him 50% of the business if he agreed to stay on. See, it was better to displease God by working than do the same by owing the landlord and other people.

Follow Paul's example

I like our big brother Paul in this regard.

There he met a Jew named Aquila... with his wife Priscilla... Paul went to see them, and stayed and worked with them, because he earned his living by making tents, just as they did. Acts 18:2-4 GNT

There is no indication that making tents was apostle Paul's calling or that he had a passion for this job. We know his calling and passion was to preach the gospel of Jesus. However, this great one among apostles decided to make tents so as to feed himself and the men with him when there was no other source of money. Our study of the scriptures clearly shows that ideally he should have been supported by Christians who believed in his ministry and by those he ministered to.*

But when the circumstances wouldn't allow the ideal to happen, the man took to the next legitimate level. He also used it to set an example for lazy Christians (see Acts 20:34, 2 Thess 3:7-9).

Many of the people who argue about their callings and passions while desperately broke and doing nothing end up having a passion for begging or for borrowing (which they can't pay back, and which the Bible teacher David Pawson believes strongly is then nothing but stealing). I always wonder whether such people do not realize that if they must disobey God, it is better to disobey him by honest labour rather than by begging or being dishonest. Even if both of these constitute disobedience, one is definitely a lesser sin.

I am not at all saying that people should not pursue their missions of life; I am just saying that we do not know how God will bring things to pass. He will bring us to the place where we are meant to be if we fulfil the assignments and duties of today. Being faithful on a daily basis in whatever we have the opportunity to do is part of the pursuit of purpose. Paul emphasized here and there that we must use opportunities well (Gal 6:10, Col 4:5, 2 Tim 4:2, etc). Opportunities are things the Lord gives to us again and again in preparing us for greatness. Neither Joseph nor David had a passion for being rulers; they just did what they were meant to do and they did them excellently, and the Lord elevated them at the right times.

7

HOW THE LORD PROMOTES

When the Lord wanted to appoint rulers for His new kingdom, what do you think he did to prepare them? He sent the men into business!

A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' Luke 19:12-14

The men were assessed based upon their ability to handle money and organize a business, and not primarily on how much they ruled people. Yet their destinies were to be in charge of cities.

And the first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' vs16-18

The better any of these men did in what could have been considered mundane, the greater the place that he was established upon when the master returned. We can easily see therefore where anyone who wanted great placement would have put his or her energy into. It wouldn't have been into trying to be great but into multiplying the little money the master gave to trade with, and in being as successful as possible in that. Many people trying to make it big in life neglected to 'do business with this' when little things were handed to them; they were too busy looking for the big thing.

We often neglect the little things of life to pursue the big things, not realizing that our positions in the big things are decided by how much we handle the small things. That is one major reason why people fail in life. They miss out of pleasing God when they have the opportunity to do small things. They are waiting for the big things of ministry not knowing that they will never come. They are surprised that with all the anointing they have, they never preached in great places, or sang to multitudes. Yes, they are talented, but it is the Lord that lifts people up, not talents. Promotion is not a natural consequence of anything; it is the result of a deliberate action by the Lord. The Lord refused to lift them up because they failed in the small things.

How you are doing right where you are as a student or as a worker in another person's business is what is determining what your life will be later; it is not the level of your anointing or gift. Instead of praying for God to give you more anointing or make you the boss in your own business, use that prayer to get more power to serve and perform where you are. Promotion is something that God gives to His children when they have proven faithful in the place where they are right now. Until you have proven faithful in that which belongs to another person, the Lord will not give you your own.

And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? Luke 16:12

The power for restraint

Like I have been saying, a vision is not supposed to guarantee success. It just helps you know that there is a purpose to this walk with God. When Jesus saw the joy that was set before Him, He drank of the spirit of endurance so that He was able to endure the cross (Heb 12:2). He didn't see that joy ahead as something that will come to pass no matter what He did. No, rather the vision drove Him to endurance. The Lord Jesus had visions of what His life was going to achieve; the result was a life of self-denial. Everything was weighed in relation to the purpose and vision of God for His life.

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour John 12:27

Many people had visions, and because they just assumed that it would come to pass whether they do anything or not, they became totally lax with the result that the Lord left them long ago and they do not know it. I need to emphasize this point.

When God shows us a vision or reveals the future to us, the reason He does that is so that we can begin to cultivate it and keep it (Gen 2:15). We are held responsible for the vision not coming to pass if we do not do what we must to cultivate and to keep it. Now, please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying we are to start working to try and bring the vision to pass (which many unfortunately do), but we are to make our hearts clean and prepare a spiritual climate for it to be able to happen in us. Solomon did not try to take

the throne but he prepared to be a king; he learnt the proper prayer to pray when the opportunity finally came. Visions are given to restrict us into the path of righteousness.

Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law. Prov 29:18

Lack of restraint is why people's destinies do not come to pass. When the Lord grants dreams and visions, they serve the purpose of bringing people into focus in their lives. Visions of greatness and of God restrained Joseph. I believe those were parts of the reasons why he conducted himself so impeccably in the home of Potiphar and in prison. There are many Josephs today who saw great visions, and have been marvellously delivered by God, being prepared for a great work, but they slept with Mrs Portiphar, and we never heard of them again. They did not allow the vision to put restraint into them; a great ministry thus dies or is never born. The deliverance of God is thus being delayed for the earth.

We need to know that every call or promise of God has conditions implicit in them. The Lord may not say anything specific about these conditions, but He expects that once we receive the vision, it becomes for us a call to holiness. When you ignore the holiness aspect, He reserves the right to change His mind. This was what happened with Eli and his sons.

"Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the Lord declares, 'Far be it from Me — for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. 1 Sam 2:30

The household of Eli lost the promise of the priesthood because they did not realize that implicit in it was the need for honouring God. If you remember the story of Eli's sons, they were men who showed disregard for God by treating the sacrifices that Israel would bring to the tabernacle of God without due regard. They also committed sexual immorality with the women who worked in the place. I can imagine that the young men thought that since they had a promise of priesthood from God they were safe. They did not realize that the promises required holiness for fulfilment and for sustaining that fulfilment.

8 FINAL WORDS

We must pursue personal godly character in all that we do. That is the foundation for succeeding in everything. Whether the Lord showed them a vision or not, He actually called everybody. The fact that you were showed a vision doesn't mean you are so special that the general rules do not apply to you anymore. It rather means that you must make special preparations since you have something special to do beyond that which is common to everyone.

There is always something to add to the sense of calling or clear vision that you saw. I like the way Peter put it; he *said "add to your faith moral excellence..."* That moral excellence is what I want to encourage everyone to get into by this short teaching.

Learn to be accountable.

Learn to be trustworthy and honest.

Learn to be diligent.

Learn to honour those you are supposed to honour.

Learn to be clean morally.

Make sexual integrity your watchword.

Never defraud anybody.

It is interesting to note that when Paul was going to define the will of God, he said it is sanctification. So what is sanctification? He said it is to abstain from sexual immorality and from financial impropriety. Just that simple.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality. 1 Thess 4:3

If you have a calling and special divine power in your life, then know that your own sanctification must be above what is common. Failure to do this is why many people fail even though they have a special calling and are heavily endowed with divine power.

PS

Choosing To Follow Jesus

Jesus died to save us all from our sins and from everlasting damnation; He came to make us children of God. Anyone who dies without receiving Jesus is damned forever; you must not let that happen to you. I challenge you today, if you have not done it before, to accept to follow and live for Jesus from today.

If you want to accept Him into your life, from your heart say this simple prayer:

“Jesus, I realise that I am a sinner and helpless without you.

“Today, I accept you as my saviour from sin and the one who is giving me life.

“Forgive me of every sin I have ever committed and please cleanse me from every form of defilement.

“Come and take your place in my life and make me yours.

“Thank you for hearing me.

“Amen”

It may even be that you just need to rededicate your life to Him; if that is the case, just ask Him to forgive you and take you back. You may say the prayer above as a re-affirmation of your faith.

To obtain spiritual help as a new believer, send a mail to: choosingchrist100@gmail.com or pastorbankie@yahoo.com

About

Kingdom-Word Ministries

Kingdom-Word Ministries is a non-denominational teaching ministry based in Enugu, Nigeria. Activities of the ministry include weekly Bible classes at the ministry office, publication of free teaching tracts and books, radio/TV broadcasts and organizing teaching seminars in various towns and cities.

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