

L I V I N G W O R D B O O K S

MENSA OTABIL



MASTERING
YOUR LIFE

LIVING WORD BOOKS

MENSA OTABIL



MASTERING
YOUR LIFE

MASTERING YOUR LIFE

MENSA
OTABIL

MASTERING YOUR LIFE

© 2006 Mensa Otabil, 2006

ISBN: 9988-643-27-6

For enquiries contact:

International Central Gospel Church

P. O. Box 7933,

Accra-Ghana.

Tel: 233-21-688000

E-mail: otabil@centralgospel.com

Cover Design by OXYGEN

Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural references are from the New King James version of the Holy Bible.

All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Archimedes was a pre-eminent Greek mathematician and inventor who committed himself entirely to investigating life and uncovering what was otherwise unknown. History has it that after many years of researching he uncovered the law of hydrostatics, but almost by accident. The discovery is said have been made when he stepped into his bath one day and perceived the displaced water overflowing. What had been a mystery to him for years suddenly became clear to him.

What came to be known as Archimedes' Principle in Physics was subsequently applied to the behaviour of objects in water and to help explain floating and sinking as well as why some objects seem lighter in water. It also applies to the behaviour of balloons. It is said that he was so excited about his discovery that he ran out shouting "EUREKA! EUREKA!!" - which means, "I've found it!"

Mystery is but another name for our ignorance; if we were omniscient, all would be perfectly plain. Tryon Edwards

Our lives are filled with mysteries. Almost all of us have experiences that we may not understand. Some of the questions on our minds border on our very existence and its implications for our future. Why, for example, were we born into particular families? Why should tragedy visit us? Why should bad things happen to good people? These are things that have been concealed from us, and which we find difficult to comprehend.

There are several things in this world that are concealed which we do not understand and which we know nothing about; they may be physical or spiritual. As we grow closer to God and understand His word better, the things that have been concealed are revealed.

New discoveries are being made every day of things that were first hidden. Discoveries bring excitement. They also trigger a hunger for new knowledge and greater discoveries. There is always a great feeling when you are able to eventually understand what has for a long time been hidden from you.

CHAPTER 1

SEARCH OUT THE HIDDEN

It is the glory of God that a matter is concealed, but it is also the glory of king to reveal what has been concealed. When God conceals something, He expects us to search it out. He wants us to have understanding so that we can become kings and rulers in His world. Remember, when God created man he said, “*Let us make man in our own image, and let them have **dominion** over everything.*” God does not want us to live in an unrevealed world.

Two expressions stand out in verse 2: they are 'conceal,' and 'search out' (or reveal).

1. **To conceal**

To conceal is to hide something from view. It is part of God's nature and character to conceal a matter or situation. God did not reveal everything on the first day of creation. Adam, when he was created, was naked and did not enjoy some of the luxuries we have in life today. He did not have the most basic of clothing, a table to write on, a house to live in or even a bed or pillow to sleep on. None of these things were given to Adam. Yet, all of those were concealed in the world around him. Similarly, there are many opportunities and blessings concealed around us which God wants us to search out.

Abraham in Genesis 22 faced what must have been the most trying moment of his life. After years of trusting God for a child and after having his prayer answered in his old age, God asked him to sacrifice his son. If Abraham had been like any of us, he would have asked a thousand and one questions as he climbed up the mountain of Moriah. What had he done to God? Would he not have been better off without a son? Could God not have asked for anything else? How would he explain things to Sarah when he got home? Would his neighbour not think he was mentally deranged? Did he have to obey God in this matter? Was it worth serving God at all?

Tears must have filled his eyes when, after three days of journeying, his son looked into his eyes and asked him what they would be using for the sacrifice.

Even at this most crucial point, Abraham demonstrated his faith in God.

And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. Genesis 22:8

A new list of questions must have come streaming through his troubled mind. What if God didn't show up? Did he deserve to go through all this? At that point, when he bound his son and laid him on the altar he must have wondered why God was doing this to him.

And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked and there was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord- Will- Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided." Genesis 22:10-14

It is to the glory of God for a matter to be concealed. God had concealed the ram from Abraham as he struggled through the test. He knew He would provide for him at the appropriate season. Abraham's example can be a source of hope for some of us who are trusting God to provide for us in one area of our lives or another. There may be a blessing concealed in the thicket about to be revealed to you. Begin to search it out.

2. To search out

'But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.' To 'search out' is to reveal or uncover. It means making a thing known or open. The word 'but' which starts the expression underscores the contrast between the two situations - to conceal and to reveal. You have to make a choice between leaving things hidden or searching them out. God expects us to make the effort to know more about the mysteries of life, because it is the glory of a king to reveal what has been concealed.

Abraham had a learning posture which was revealed in his declaration that God would provide. He did not have all the answers but he trusted God. Eventually, apart from experiencing the hidden provision of God for that

particular situation, he also understood a new dimension of God's power to provide that became an eternal revelation. The Bible records that it is written till this day that on the Mount of God, He will provide. Every such experience will reveal God to you in a different way. That is why you should seek to understand the things of God and search out that which is hidden.

If the glory of a king is to reveal a matter, then it stands to reason that it is a shame to keep what is concealed from being revealed. Kings are expected to diligently search out a matter to make it known. People who are not kings or who lack the kingly attitude leave things as they are. You may want to look at your attitude towards the unknown and ask yourself if you are exhibiting the attributes of a king or not.

CHAPTER 2

DON'T MYSTIFY THE UNKNOWN

Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.
Matthew 14:25-26

It is very easy for us to mystify what we do not understand. The disciples of Jesus were caught in a bad storm at sea. As they struggled for their lives in their storm-tossed boat, they saw a figure approaching them and apparently walking on the face of the waters that were tossing them about. They exclaimed, "It is a ghost!" They could not understand how any human being could walk on water without sinking, so they concluded that what they were looking at was a ghost. That response is very common to all of us. When we do not understand what is going on in our lives, we build mysteries around them.

The hardest part is that the moment we build a mystery around anything, we make it impossible to fully understand and use it to our advantage.

When life is a mystery, it baffles us. For hundreds of years, our forefathers lived in a world with very little understanding of all that occurred around them. They did not fully understand the dynamics and potential of the world they occupied. They saw and experienced things they had no inkling about, and therefore built barriers of mystery around them. For example, in many African cultures, if a woman gave birth to twins the children were received with a lot of ritual and regarded as peculiar 'spiritual' beings. Just because twins did not conform to the norm, a fetish was created around them. Even in today's scientifically advanced world, some still hold on to such beliefs.

It is the nature of most humans to create a whole cultural mystery out of something that baffles them. However, the more we understand, the less confused we become. The more understanding there is, the easier it is to demystify events. God wants us to grow in knowledge concerning Him. He does not want us to

worship Him in ignorance. The more we understand and know God, the closer we get in our relationship with Him.

Our lives should not revolve around taboos and mystified cultural restrictions but on the need to master the principles of life. Whatever we have no mastery over will have the mastery over us. What we do not fully understand, we cannot fully use to our advantage. For many of us, the taboos we grew up believing turned out to be behavioural preferences of previous generations or precautionary measures introduced to address a cultural or environmental concern.

To become (kings and) masters of our lives and our environment, we must develop an enquiring mind, not just to probe, but, more importantly, to understand. That, I believe is a major challenge for us here in Africa. Instead of assigning a mystical interpretation to everything that happens to us, we must seek out the knowledge behind the experience.

Don't conclude that something you are experiencing is the result of witchcraft, a curse or spiritual attack just because you do not understand why you are going through what you are going through. Cultivate the habit of asking: why, how, who, what, which and when? The quality of questions you ask as you seek direction from God about the mysteries of life will determine the answers you get.

There are reasons why sometimes couples marry and struggle to have a child; or why people experience tragedies; or why businesses fail. Before we conclude that the origin of these occurrences are always unknown and mysterious, we must take time to seek out the matter from both the laws of nature and the provisions of Scripture.

Before you scream, 'It's a ghost!', take a second look; it may be the Lord.

CHAPTER 3

HAVE THE HEART OF A KING

As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, so the heart of a king is unsearchable.” Proverbs 25:3

What the Bible is referring to here as a king is not just about a monarch; it is about every individual who has come to the point where they exercise dominion or governance over their own lives. One characteristic that sets kings apart from others is that they have a high capacity for knowledge and learning.

The Bible says their hearts are unsearchable. That means:

- They have depth.
- They have capacity.
- They have expanse of understanding and wisdom.

Take away the dross from silver, and it will go to the silversmith for jewellery. Proverbs 25:4

You cannot fashion jewellery out of silver that has impurities in it; but if you are able to remove the impurities, then the silver can be used to maximum effect. The more impurities you harbour in your life, the less you are able to use your life profitably to the glory of God. In order to maximise your potential, you must determine to uncover everything that is concealed in your life that serves as a barrier to your progress.

The heart of the king searches out the deep things of God. The Scriptures affirm that the same God who conceals, also reveals by His Spirit. Therefore, the attitude of a king must be one of submissiveness to the Spirit of God so that he could receive from the Spirit the things that have been concealed and hidden by God the Father, the Almighty.

“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age, who are

coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

However, as it is written:

'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him -'

But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." 1 Corinthians 2:6-12

The passage confirms that:

- a. There is hidden wisdom that God has ordained for your glory; and because it is concealed, you might not know that certain things have also been ordained for your glory.
- b. You do not understand these hidden things, therefore they remain mysteries to you.
- c. Because you don't understand them, you don't also see that those things are for your glory.
- d. As a result of this ignorance, you may often be liable to question things happening in your life which are meant for your glory.

The typical person complains about everything that happens to them that does not conform to their expectation. We have interesting ideas about the things that we want to see in our lives. What we often fail to realise is that life does not progress in a straight line.

CHAPTER 4

APPRECIATE THE TWISTS AND TURNS

The fabric of our lives, are woven with inexplicable twists and turns. Let us, for example, examine the life of Joseph. Do you know that it was good for Joseph to be sold into slavery? Do you know that it was good for his brothers to be jealous of him; to sell him; for the traders to buy him; for them to take him to Egypt; for his master's wife to tempt him and for Joseph to resist the advances of the woman; and for him to be blackmailed and thrown into prison?

With the benefit of hindsight, we can look at how he ended up and judge that it was good; but at the time it was happening to Joseph it probably was not fun. This is because God had concealed the end from him. It had not been revealed yet what would happen in the long run. Even though what was happening was for his glory or promotion, he could not see the total picture. Everything seemed so hazy, and so far as he couldn't see a promising future, he couldn't accept or embrace it. Joseph was, perhaps, going through life with a lot of unanswered questions. That was the mystery of his life. He didn't understand that what seemed to be hidden from him at that point in his life had been ordained for his glory.

Things happen to us in life that we don't understand; and because it is the glory of God to conceal a matter, God hides the reason from us. That is why we have to go to Him to reveal the meaning of what has been concealed from us. Because if we don't understand the meaning of what has been concealed, we may destroy our lives out of ignorance.

I lost both of my parents whilst I was still at school. They died one after the other. I did not understand what was going on at the time, but now I look back and tell myself it was good it happened that way. This is because out of those experiences emerged a new man, a new strength, and a ministry. Romans 8:28 indicates that God uses all things, including those things we see as bad for our good, because we are called according to His purpose. When I look back, I don't harbour any bitterness in my heart concerning events that occurred earlier in my

life. God makes all things beautiful in His time.

There are things you may be going through now which may seem like a mystery to you. You may be asking yourself several questions as you try to fathom the reasons for the setbacks in your life:

- Why am I not married?
- My biological clock is ticking. Why doesn't anyone propose to me?
- Is there something wrong with me?
- Why do I seem to be the unfortunate one in my family?
- Why does every project I attempt fail even where others have succeeded?
- Will I ever find decent employment in my life?

These are legitimate questions you might be asking. Something may be happening in your life which at the moment is concealed from you. It might be painful today, but remember that God knows the end of your story. Ask the Holy Spirit of God to uncover the mystery surrounding your life and give you answers to the questions that cloud your mind.

Lack of clarity about your situation may make you fight against God. You might be giving Him an ultimatum to force His hand to work promptly in a particular way. Your prayers to God might be full of accusations. You may even blame God for every challenge or difficulty you may be going through. At the time when you are so frustrated because you cannot understand clearly what is happening in your life, know that what is mysterious to you at the moment has been ordained for your glory.

CHAPTER 5

SEE THE GOOD IN THINGS

After all his painful experiences, Joseph could tell his brothers: *'It was good that I was sold into slavery. You meant it for evil, but God worked it out for good'*. He could confidently affirm this because what God had concealed from him had at last been revealed, and he could now see the hand of God at work; the footprints of divine destiny unfolding in his life. Even when he did not understand, God was still guiding his life. If you have put your trust in God, know that even when you feel lonely and abandoned in your difficulties, God is at work to bring you to a glorious end. God is in control all over the world.

There are things that happen to us that we assume do not make sense, because God has hidden the real meaning from us. When we don't understand what is going on, life does not make sense to us. However, everything we are going through or have been through is for a purpose; but not every purpose is easily understood. The assurance we have from the Scriptures is that everything we are going through will eventually lead to the revelation of God's glory in our lives.

How do we see the good in difficult situations that threaten to overwhelm us? Remember Abraham. He had the courage to say that God would provide when all seemed to be lost. See God at work in every situation in your life and know that He is never too late. He will reveal a new dimension of Himself to you as you trust Him day by day.

CHAPTER 6

SHUT OUT THE CROWD

Most of the challenges we face in life are difficult to bear. Because we have to contend with the court of public opinion - what people say and think about what we are going through. In addition to the pain, shame or frustration we may be facing, we also have to contend with the negative comments of other people.

If no one was worried about your problem, if tradition did not frown on it, you probably would take it easy and handle every situation gracefully. Your life would then be much more fulfilled. Public opinion mounts unnecessary pressures on us. We go through fire that God is not taking us through. We could handle our problems better if we disregarded the court of public opinion.

The story of Hannah recorded in 1 Samuel Chapter 1, gives us a classic example of how negative attitudes or the comments of others bring pressure to bear on us. Hannah had been barren for years while her rival, Peninnah, kept bearing children for their common husband, Elkannah. As a result, during every yearly sacrifice, Elkannah had to give Hannah a portion of the sacrifice while he loaded Peninnah with portions for herself and each of her children.

This must have been even more difficult for Hannah to bear than her barrenness. However, the most humiliating part was the provocation that came from her rival. Peninnah's taunts were responsible for the desperation and pain with which Hannah marched into the temple to pray.

In our society, stories abound of women who have resorted to stealing children, committed suicide or suffered broken marriages because of the societal pressure that was brought to bear on them when children were not forthcoming after a few years of marriage. Some have lost their careers while others have developed mental conditions because they felt inferior or rejected as a result of pressure from the court of public opinion.

When you understand what you are going through, people's comments and opinion about what is happening in your life become immaterial, insignificant and meaningless. Sometimes God will allow things to happen to you that you

don't like. Until His glory is revealed, the mystery God has concealed is confusing and senseless. That is God's nature. He will conceal a matter, but His Holy Spirit will help the king to reveal it.

And when the matter is revealed, you will then see the glory that was ordained within the mystery and understand the workings of God. That is when you can look back at calamity and say: "It was good that I went through that."

CHAPTER 7

ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT

For us to understand and make meaning out of senseless occurrences in our lives, we must be in touch with the One who knows the heart and the mind of God: the Holy Spirit. When you are in touch with the Holy Spirit, you will begin to know the mind of God. Then everything begins to work out and make sense to you, and you begin to realise that everything in your life is working towards a plan and a purpose.

The Holy Spirit helps us to unravel and untie the knots of life. He helps us to break that code of mystery and secrecy which shrouds our lives. He decodes our lives so that our days become more meaningful.

Keep on searching out the mysteries of life. That is the attitude of a king. When things happen that you don't understand, don't fight God, but rather seek understanding of the situation. Allow God, by His Spirit, to systematically reveal to you the mystery behind what you are going through.

Seeking other people's opinions will often leave you more confused. Don't allow what people say to become your focus. God will not allow anything to happen in your life if there was not a greater glory to be revealed. Seek the mind of God through prayer, and gradually you will begin to see the purpose behind all that is happening in your life. When that happens, problems lose their momentum because you see your life in perspective.

Sometimes, certain chapters in your life do not make sense. Don't ever give up! The all-knowing God whom you serve will decode the mysteries of your life and release His joy in your heart. When you come to a chapter in your life that you do not understand, don't fight God, keep on reading.

As you move on, God will reveal His plans and purposes for your life to you, because He is working for your greater good and glory.

Shalom - Peace and life to you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mensa Otabil is a respected Christian statesman, educator, entrepreneur and motivational speaker. He oversees the multifaceted network of ministries of the International Central Gospel Church with its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, and serves as Senior Pastor of Christ Temple.

His passion is to see the timeless principles of the Bible made applicable to the renewal and transformation of Africa. His messages speak to the pertinent concerns of a continent and its people seeking solutions to their perplexing challenges.

Dr. Mensa Otabil is Chancellor of Ghana's premier private university, Central University College. He also serves on several Boards and Trusts of organisations. He is committed to human upliftment, and presents the inspirational radio and television broadcast, "Living Word." He and his wife Joy reside in Ghana's capital city of Accra.

ALSO IN THIS SERIES

Anointed to Start and to Finish
Pursuing Your New Year Dreams
First Things First
Choosing a Life Partner
Handling Offences
How to Have a Lasting Marriage

For further enquiries contact:

International Central Gospel Church

P. O. Box 7933,

Accra, Ghana

Tel: 233-21-688000

E-mail: otabil@centralgospel.com