

Raising Prince

A MANUAL ON HOW TO HELP THE BOY-CHILD

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*The counsel of the Lord stands
forever, the plans of His heart to
all generations.—Psalm 33:11*

Introduction

The young man of today has found himself between a rock and a hard place, sandwiched between a demanding society and lack of sufficient, reliable income to deliver the lifestyle he desires so as to feel like he is living up to the expectation of society. The result has been a frustrated person who looks down on poorly paying jobs and uses the little cash he earns to drink so as to tune out of the painful reality, a young man who mismanages the little he has as he waits for an elusive time of plenty and in the process gets into debt, a young man who hates society, especially the older generation, unjustifiably blaming it for his woes.

There is no better way to understand the attitude of many of our young men towards work and life in general and towards other people than to watch what happens in some *matatus* in the city of Nairobi. First of all there is the scratchy, wax-compacting cacophony that ironically is supposed to be background music and that they will not switch off, no matter how much you plead. Then when the vehicle gets to the traffic jam, you hear them making hostile remarks such as: “Look at these owners of private cars who drive like they are on a wedding procession! You feel like banging them on the rear!” Even when there is no space to move to, they keep barking, “Move! Move!” Their contempt for rules is familiar, and it is not unusual to see them accelerate when approaching the zebra crossing and honking to scare supposedly slow pedestrians to give way. On the highway, they race with reckless abandon, making dangerous moves like overtaking on the right those who are themselves signaling to turn to the right. Meanwhile, the conductor makes dangerous antics while dangling on the half-open door. They will not hesitate to hold traffic by stopping in the middle of the road to pick or drop a passenger where there is no stage. Whether joining the roundabout or

when inside it, they move as if they have the right of way. When the vehicle gets to its destination, the conductor suddenly gets impatient with the passengers and starts banging the sides of the vehicle, shouting, “*Tokeni! Dondokeni haraka! Gari inachelewa! Come out quickly! The vehicle is getting late!*”

But even the graffiti on the sides and inside the vehicles reveals a lot about the hopelessness, self-pity and bitterness that is domiciled in these young people’s minds. For instance: “Prison Break”, “Ex-Street Gang”, “Born to Suffer,” “Insured by the Mafia”, “Down with Those Ma-haters”, “*Unasema gari haina watu, kwani dere na konda ni nini?*” This is not to mention that the songs that they play inside the vehicle—some by people calling for emancipation years after the last African nation became independent—are a reflection of a generation that feels entrapped, experiencing general disillusionment, anger and alienation and therefore vulnerable to anxiety disorders. Normally people identify with those who sing about situations similar to theirs.

A debilitating sense of failure, sometimes emanating from unrealized real or perceived parental and societal expectations, has destroyed the self-esteem of many young men. As a result, they have retreated from work (they do not feel like it can deliver their dream), marriage, parenting and other aspects of the real world and, instead, got hooked to alcohol, drugs, gambling, interacting in the social media, etc. (Many people are wondering why boys are taking long to marry or not marrying at all. But even in the Western world, the social media is said to be facilitating young men’s withdrawal from the real world, for instance fascinated by AI girlfriends whose personality one can program. Definitely such a young man will have a hard time living with a real human being as a wife. This is why, among other things, we need to teach young people tolerance so that they can be able to live with

real human beings despite all their weaknesses.)

But ladies generally do not entertain such sense of failure arising from trying to defend a false status. They therefore deal with life more realistically. When faced with challenges of life, they demonstrate fortitude, pick up the pieces, make rational decisions and move on with life. And not just that: women leverage relationships and other connections, work hard at whatever they find to do, spend the little income wisely and end up feeding their families and getting children at least basic education. Today in poor neighbourhoods in cities, it is the *mama mbogas* who are putting food on the table. Having entertained the feeling that they have nothing to live for, many men can no longer deliver on their historic role as providers; instead they spend the day moving from one drinking joint to another.

Even some who are working have become enslaved by the bottle. Next to almost every garage and car wash in Nairobi these days, there are sheds with front doors closed to give the police the impression that there is no business going on there. Yet from time to time, the mechanic sneaks there and you are told that he is going to “*kutoa lock*”, which in their parlance is euphemism for drinking as a way of fighting last night’s hangover. They lack the stubbornness necessary to push through common obstacles of life and, instead, allowed themselves to be disoriented by everyday challenges. Unfortunately, the alcohol and drugs that they use merely compound their situation.

Many people would want to believe that the problems with our young men will sort themselves out. But that is closing our mind to the reality, and the policy of passing the buck will not help, either. It is in our interest to mind the welfare of all the young people. Their peace is our peace, and that is what makes the stakes high. If our young people are not helped, their problems will persist and expand, culminating in a society you would fear

to belong in. Already we have been experiencing insecurity, but if we fail to help our young men and give them hope, things are sure to move from bad to worse.

There other day I was in the city centre and some city askaris spotted a shabbily dressed man in his late thirties who looked drunk, borrowing money “to buy food”. They stopped him and told him to go home immediately or else they arrest him. Then I wondered, *What will happen wherever this man comes from, with so many young men like him who are hungry and with no money?*

Later, I heard a matatu driver narrating what he saw from the balcony of the flat in which he stays, a story that hints on how dangerously vulnerable to criminals people in informal settlements are. At the crack of dawn, a man and a woman and their child were walking, apparently going to catch an early matatu. Then a motor cyclist riding with one passenger intentionally hit the man with his bike and knocked him down. With this man lying down helplessly, the motor cycle rider and his passenger grabbed the woman, stole from her and also emptied the pockets of her husband as their child looked on. Then the motor cyclist took his bike, and with his accomplice zoomed away. But this is not unusual in places where we hear of groups of as many as 20 young men who move together robbing people at night as they go home and early in the morning as they report to work.

Not long ago, doors in the village were for protecting people from draught. That is why they were made of wood. But people there no longer enjoy that luxury. Today, people in the village are also forced to go for metal doors, windows and gates for keeping out burglars. People used to wander freely along paths that wound around bushes without fearing to meet any person with ill motive. Today, some of those places are infested with muggers at night.

But we cannot afford to have a traumatized generation in our hands by choosing to be passive observers of what is happening

to them. We ought to assist them, not regard them with callous indifference or just criticize them. To make the rosy, harmonious future that is bandied about in political rallies a reality, it is important that all of us participate in ensuring that we inculcate the right attitude and values that will build resilience in our young people as they grow up and help rehabilitate those ones who are already in a mess. We are our brother's keeper!

Leaders have repeatedly reminded us that the youth are the nation's greatest resource, the engine of the economy. That is why the youth agenda is the defining agenda of our times. So we need to do everything possible to prepare our young people for the future. If there is any industrialization to take place, they are the ones who will drive it. When it comes to farming, they are the ones who are able to work with the innovations necessary for feeding a fast-growing population like ours. Where the digital divide is concerned, they are the haves, and we of the older generation the have-nots. The other day I went to a restaurant in the city of Nairobi that is frequented by young people. Here, every table has a unique code. Whenever a techno savvy customer wants to order a meal, he or she just scans that code and beautiful images of the dishes available and prices come on the screen of one's smart phone. That is how the management of this food joint even eliminated the use of hard copy menus that change hands and therefore required regular sanitation during the time of Corona. But most of us who are above 55 are equipped for a world that no longer exists. When it comes to serving food, for instance, we have persisted in the old River Road style of crying out, *Nani mbuzi, nani ng'ombe?*

This country will not reap the benefits of the coming industrial revolution—which actually seems to be underway, already—without serious participation of our young people. But how will they play their role effectively when so many of them cannot

carry their weight because their energy has been usurped by alcohol and drugs? Certainly there are more than ample reasons for us to help them find their way in today's constantly changing socio-economic landscape.

Part of the aim of writing this book is to give the reader the tools that he or she needs to help himself, their son or any other struggling young man manage in today's world that seems to spin out of control. Though there is high value in making the boy-child himself aware of what is ailing him, every stakeholder—the parent, the educator, the community, the church and the government—should also be involved in helping him if we are going to give him hope for the future let alone prepare him to become the leader of tomorrow. This book seeks to provide information to enable people do this noble work intelligently.

The scope of the problem calls for even forums where all stakeholders could come together to brainstorm in an effort to co-create solutions. That is how even those young men who are in the shadows as a result of coming from poor background and others who have spent years headed in the wrong direction will get help and then be assisted to re-enter normal society so that we move together forward as a people. As alluded to somewhere in this book, we ought to—as individuals of goodwill, groups, churches, and even the government—consider coming up with kitchens to feed the very poor people in informal settlements, even if the feeding were to be done once per day, besides expanding our programs of rehabilitating street families.

NOTE: *In studying this manual, it is advised that you do not start a new lesson before doing the homework or attempting the question at the end of the last lesson. Also if you are a parent and happen to be studying this book with your son, let the book speak to him, not you. Anyone reading this book assumes the role of Prince's parent.*

Lesson 1

Birth of Prince

About seven years ago when you were a cyber café attendant at the shopping centre next to your home, God made you cross paths with the love of your life, a young lady called Kalekye, who worked at a local salon. Earlier, you had a beautiful girlfriend but broke up with her upon realizing that you were not financially endowed to deliver on the kind of lifestyle she yearned for. So, by the time you met Kalekye, beauty was not the sole criterion when choosing your wife-to-be. You were looking for a realistic lady with a good heart, and Kalekye soon proved herself to be that kind of girl.

After six months of courtship, you married her in a wedding that was attended by even the Assistant Chief of your village. It was a big day when, for the first time, you saw your graying father who was then a watchman at the local coffee factory donning an old tie borrowed from your uncle. Of course like those who are not used to such level of grooming, he had to be assisted to tie it, but still wore it on a shirt that was not tucked. Excited about what was unfolding before his eyes, your father had even tried to hold your mother so that they walk into the church hand in hand, but your mother had extricated herself, not used to such open expression of love.

The motorcade comprised an open pick-up that ferried your parents and clan elders to the church and the tiny car of your pastor into which Kalekye and two maids had squeezed themselves. You yourself and two groomsmen had arrived in church earlier by matatu. A banana stem had been planted at the gate of the tiny mabati church where the wedding was going to take place for all and sundry to know that something great was about to

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happen inside there. And not just that: Though you had remained with little money after buying four crates of bread and a number of packets of milk that guests would feast on at the party that would follow the vows, you had also paid a number of boys to blow whistles to announce the arrival of the bride at the church compound as a way of adding glamour to the occasion.

Less than two hours later, you and Kalekye exchanged rings and vowed to remain as one till death separated you. Isn't that, after all, the ultimate goal of any wedding, regardless of the money invested in it?

Two years later, your wife conceived and bore you a baby boy whom you came to love so much that you had a hard time choosing his baptismal name. Eventually you settled on the name Prince which, though not from the Bible, made you feel like a king. Who, apart from kings, father princes anyway?

It has been an exciting journey watching Prince grow. Now he is 5 and ready to join kindergarten, and you are determined to do your best in giving him guidance so that he succeed in life. You are acutely aware that parents need to be involved in guiding their children navigate life today. We are living at a time when there are many sources of negative influence, peer pressure and social and economic challenges that have forced many young people to embrace self-destructive habits, and you just don't want Prince to be one of them.

Question: *What should be the first step in raising your son responsibly?*

Lesson 2

Importance of Availing Yourself

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. —Proverbs 22:6

The first thing to do when it comes to raising Prince responsibly is to avail yourself to be with him. It is unfortunate that many parents have become too busy with work or catching up with friends in bars and other social places that they have abandoned their parental responsibility. A story is told of this man who has been arriving home late from work, almost always after the children have gone to bed, and leaves for work shortly after the crack of dawn. But he is never home during the weekend, either, spending most of his waking time on Saturday and Sunday in bars “socializing with friends”. Then in an effort to contain the spread of Coronavirus disease, the government restricts movement and some organizations and businesses close temporarily under partial lockdown. The curfew also affects social places, making this man grounded in the house day in day out, a black mask hiding his occasional smile. Two weeks later, his four-year-old child asks the mother, “Mum, has Dad come to stay with us?”

Many homes have been on autopilot, with some parents too busy with work and therefore not having enough time with their children. It has been rightly argued that the alarming number of pregnancies among school girls during the time of partial lockdown when schools and churches were closed is evidence of the great responsibility that parents have passed on to teachers and church leaders. The other day there was even a report in the newspaper about working mothers who pick their children from the daycare past midnight. Other parents are just moving from

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one watering point to another, “connecting with friends”. But as my pastor told us concerning what he read in a book on family matters, we ought not waste our time on people who do not need it while denying the same to those who actually need it.

It is your wife (or husband) and your children who need your time more than anybody else. What parents, especially fathers, need to know is that the impact you have on your child is a function of the time you spend with him or her. Today, some of the well-known entrepreneurs in Kenya credit their success to their mothers who, they say, motivated them. True, it may have been the fathers who paid the school fees, but ladies spend more time with children than men do. The attachment that results from this presence is strong and continues even after children grow up. This explains why old ladies can be welcomed to stay with their married sons for months as the old man is languishing in loneliness in the village.

We ought to work to provide for our dependants and also set apart time to be with them. It is not enough to invest for your child; you need to invest in him as well by spending time with him to introduce him to the realities of life. In fact if you invest for him and never invest in him, he is likely to destroy that investment that you worked for so hard. So you ought to invest time to hang out with your children. Moreover, it is during such time that you will find out and debunk any lies that he may have domesticated in his mind, leading to wrong values and beliefs that have the potential to destroy his life later. Upon establishing these wrong values and beliefs, you will have the opportunity to tactfully replace them with healthy values and beliefs in an effort to reprogram him for success. Those quality moments that you share with your son could make the difference between a man who lives in fear and one who approaches issues of life with confidence and arrives at sensible decisions. As a parent you may

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not fight your son's battles, but you can build in him capacity to approach them confidently and deal with them sensibly.

Moreover, this is not something to be delayed. Time waits for no man. According to Abraham Lincoln, you cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today. In old age many parents are tormented by regrets, imagining times they should have spent with their children but they became too busy and lost the opportunity. They remember second-hand bicycles they should have bought but waited to get money to buy new ones and the children outgrew bicycles before money came, resulting in wasted opportunity to make children happy.

We are leaving our children to be guided by what they are watching on TV, yet media celebrities have a lot of influence on our children that is not good; so as a parent you need to warn your son against getting mesmerized by their persona to the extent of forgetting that these people are just acting. My wife, a teacher, told me about this pre-primary child who went up a climbing frame as he was playing with other boys and jumped to mimic Superman who is portrayed as floating in the air on TV. It is only lucky that the boy had not gone up very far up, but still he broke quite a number of bones. This may have happened to a very young boy, but generally, our young people embrace whatever they pick from the media without rational reflection.

Even in America life is not lived the way of soap operas. In addition, being a celebrity does not necessarily mean that you are leading a happy life. Let your son know that some of these people require external help to deal with issues of life. We have heard of some ending their life, after all. Apart from debunking wrong messages, you should help your son replace the wrong values and beliefs he may have domesticated in his mind with healthy ones.

As a parent, you have lived longer and therefore understand the world better than your son, so give him a chance to benefit from this knowledge. There are also wrong teachings that are

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being instilled in children by elders who are guided by outdated traditional perspectives and others by peers, which are ultimately producing destructive beliefs and attitudes in young people. Not everything that is said by the elders is beneficial, yet what one hears and believes influences their thoughts and hence actions. This is why one should change to the right beliefs—beliefs that are in line with God’s Word—so that what he thinks, feels and does can also change for the better.

We have heard of cases where outdated traditional views even endanger the lives of young people as they seek to live up to unrealistic expectations, whether expressed or perceived. I heard about a *moran* who got pierced by a poisonous thorn and his leg became swollen and very painful. When he went to hospital and the clinician removed the tiny thing and gave it to him to see, this warrior thrust it back to where it had been and walked away majestically. He could not bear the shame of allowing people to think that such a small thing could inconvenience him. Unfortunately the infection that followed ended his life. Another time I read about a doctor saying that whenever they take medical camps to certain parts of the country, they find themselves being woken up in the middle of the night by young men to treat them. Why? One of the reasons is that these community warriors are socialized to project the image of people who are beyond common weaknesses like getting sick, so they cannot come out during the day when women and children are being treated.

As we have already seen, being available for your son will give you the opportunity to disprove or debunk any wrong teaching that you sense he has domesticated in his mind. This of course may mean availing yourself for events like *barazas*, men’s or ladies’ fellowships in churches and other social forums through which you can be sharpened in counseling him. It will also call for reading books that unravel complexities of behavior and those that help you keep up with developments affecting young

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people. True, generally our people do not value reading. But if the modern parent is to be able to help the son or daughter navigate in the present world, he or she must invest time in studying so as to keep in touch with the changes that are taking place and tested ways of dealing with them. It is critical that you get to know what is happening in the world of your child and understand what is at stake. That is how you will be able to help your son replace wrong teachings with correct ones that will produce healthy beliefs and attitudes to enable him navigate through life confidently while realizing his full potential.

Some parents have been trying to give advice that turns out to be out of step with the times because of lack of understanding the challenges that young people of today are facing. Not long ago, my mother who is in her late 80s hired a casual worker in the village, a man who apparently never made it beyond lower primary. This man happened to overhear that young people were getting jobs after acquiring computer skills. So after the daughter sat for KCPE, he used the money he should have paid Form One fees for her to study computer. After she spent a year familiarizing herself with simple packages at a local cyber cafe, her father then learned that she would not get a job without a secondary school certificate. By the time he opened up to my mother, he was now looking for money to take the daughter to Form One. His daughter had lost a year.

In the past, there was minimal exposure to the outside world, so young people faced less danger emanating from wrong influence and therefore did not require much in terms of counselling. But today as we have already seen, there are a host of sources of negative influence and unprecedented socio-economic volatility, making the house help incompetent to guide the child of today. Children need help to mature psychologically, and the grandparents are not up to the task, either. So whisking the children to the countryside immediately school closes is not

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a solution. Do not hook up your child to a smart phone and hope that he will glean the wisdom necessary to navigate through life from the social media, either. (Social media has become a threat even to governments of the world because it abounds with fake news that is characterized by hate speech and incitement. So, even mature people should not consume it without chewing.) True, our young people need mentors, but there is no one who is better placed to play this role than the parent himself or herself. Many young people who feel disoriented and are therefore messing in different ways have never been sat down to be taught how to manage in the grown-up world. Indeed many social problems in this country today can be traced to young people's inability to handle pressure and challenges in life. Even in schools, the many strikes and destruction of property witnessed in the not-distant past were traced to the growing number of students who have become social misfits because they have never been taught how to deal with issues of life, including handling parental and societal pressure.

The mind of your son is a blank paper that you can write whatever you want, but if you do not move fast enough to write the right things on it, the world through the TV, radio, and other media, peers, house helps and others will overtake you and write whatever they want and thus snatch your son from you. You will then be left with the body alone to be feeding. It pays to introduce the realities of life early, before bad attitudes take hold. The Bible in Proverbs 22:6 KJV says: *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

Question: *Which is the best resource to consult when teaching your son about life?*

Lesson 3

Bible, the Ultimate Resource for Guidance

There is no better resource for guiding people in this life than the Bible. Advice that is based on human wisdom alone is basically subjective opinion that could change with the appearance of new information because the human mind is not exposed to all the information it requires at any one time. But God knows everything. According to Isaiah 46:10, He knows the end from the beginning. Nothing is new to Him, and He does not need new information to make decisions. That is why the wisdom in His Word applies all the time. It is God who brings people into this world, and only His counsel can enable them to become all that He intended them to become. Everything that you are taught should therefore be tested with Scripture and ignored if found to conflict with what God's Word teaches.

Good as it is in many ways, the social media does also have bad influence on young people. Unfortunately, young people, especially in the highly developed nations, are spending too much time glued to smart phones, giving the social media leeway to instil in them an unhealthy view of themselves and the world in general, besides reducing their concentration span when it comes to doing other things. It also creates a sense of emptiness in their lives that they try to fill with a dangerous pursuit of pleasure seeking that involves rowdiness, drinking and even using drugs. The social media also feeds our young people with unrealistic solutions to common challenges, even making the idea of forgiveness when they are hurt alien to them. This is why we need to move quickly to give our children the true (biblical) view of themselves and of the world and also biblical solutions

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to problems in an effort to save them from self-destruction. The way you face life and its challenges depends on your beliefs, and the source of what you believe can be the wisdom of men or what is in God's Word, which we call the Bible.

Post-modernists teach that there is no absolute truth, but that is not the case. According to John 17:17, God's Word is the truth, and one way to prove this is that the wisdom contained in the Word of God is timeless. Besides, the God behind the Bible is so powerful that whatever is prophesied in His Word always comes to pass. For example as mentioned elsewhere in this book, about 500 years before Christ as we see in Daniel 12:4, it had been prophesied of a time that was then future when knowledge would increase, with people moving to and fro. And today we are witnessing the fulfillment of that prophecy through unprecedented technological advancement.

In summary, the God behind the Scriptures exists outside time, knowing the end from the beginning. That is why it is advisable that you be guided by God's Word while raising Prince. Of course for you to be able to guide Prince in a godly way, you yourself need to be conversant with what the Bible says. You also need to take him to Sunday school in a Bible-teaching church so that they complement what you teach him and link him with Christian friends to influence him positively. Beliefs influence choices and eventually actions. By having Prince taught the Word of God, you will have ensured that his beliefs are based on Truth and is thus shielded from negative influences and positioned to exploit his potential fully. Having a Biblical view enables one make sense of the world and its realities and is therefore able to deal with life's challenges in the most logical way.

Homework: *Give Prince a brief overview of the Bible.*

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Behind every creation is the creator, and behind heaven and earth and everything that is therein is the Creator whom we call God. According to Jeremiah 10:11, the difference between the true God and idols is that the true God made heaven and earth, whereas idols are the gods that did not make the heavens and the earth.

According to John 4:21, we are living at a time—after the coming of Christ—when you do not need to go to Jerusalem or to a certain mountain in order to worship or pray to God. The true God is not the God of this or that mountain; after all, no mountain hangs in space. The Psalmist in Psalm 121:2 is emphatic that his help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Verse 24 of John chapter 4 shows that God can be worshipped anywhere so long as He is worshipped in spirit and in truth. This means that worship of God ought to be heart-deep and also be done according to His Word, which is the truth. Also, the account in God's Word that it is God who created people is true. If human beings were the product of evolution, people and monkeys would not exist at the same time; everything would be in the same phase of evolution.)

God is a Spirit, John 4:24, and has revealed His plan for people and the rest of His creation through the Bible. According to 2 Peter 1:21, the Bible (or holy Scriptures) reached us through the prophets through whom God spoke by His Spirit. The Bible comprises 66 books and is divided into main parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

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The Old Testament reveals how God created heaven and earth and everything therein, including angels to minister to Him. Then in Ezekiel 28 beginning verse 12 and Isaiah 14 beginning verse 12, it shows us how an angel called Lucifer sought to be like the Most High and this demonstration of pride caused him to be cast as profane out of the mountain of God in heaven, thus becoming Satan, meaning the enemy of God. That is how sin started. Moreover, Lucifer did not sin alone. This 'old serpent' was followed in rebellion by a third of all the angels (stars) in heaven, Revelation 12:4 and 9, who were also cast into the earth.

The other thing that the Old Testament makes us privy to is the decision recorded in Genesis 1:26 by the three persons of the Godhead to create man, and how the actual creation took place according to Genesis chapter 2. Then God placed man in the Garden of Eden and all was well until Satan tricked Adam to eat the fruit that he had been forbidden to eat by God. It is at that point that 'sin entered into the world' through Adam, Romans 5:12, and, accordingly, man's enmity with God.

But according to Genesis 3:15, God out of love for man made the greatest promise ever: some time later, One among the seed of the woman would come and bruise the head of the serpent (Satan). And this was the Man Christ Jesus—made of a woman, made under the Law, according to Galatians 4:4—by His death on the cross. The other Scripture that shows that Jesus is that seed of the woman is Galatians 3:16. By the blood He shed at Calvary, Jesus provided a

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way of reconciling man to God, 2 Corinthians 5:18 and 19.

The Old Testament is mainly about God dealing with the Children of Israel (grandson of Abraham) as He prepared to bring Jesus through them, Romans 9:5. The Law that God had given the Children of Israel by the hand of Moses had a purpose: to make people aware that before God they were sinners, Romans 3:20b. No one was able to fulfill the over 600 dos and don'ts that constituted the Law of Moses, Acts 7:53, being evidence that no one by their effort could do what would reconcile him or her to God. And though the Law concerned the Israelites of its dispensation, through it all people were concluded to be under sin, Romans 3:23.

The New Testament is about the coming of Jesus, His ministry on earth, death and resurrection. The other thing that the Bible shows is that reconciliation to God required remission (cancellation) of sin, and according to Hebrews 9:22, without the shedding of blood is no remission. And not just that: it was not possible for the blood of animals to take away sin, Hebrews 10:4. From Psalm 32:1, we see that the animal sacrifices made under the law merely covered sin. Taking away sin required the blood of the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ, John 1:29. (Calling Jesus the Son of God does not imply that God had a family; it is a way of saying that Jesus has all the attributes of God. As God, Jesus Christ lived in heaven with the Father from the beginning, John 1:1, and even the discussion that preceded His taking on

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a human body to come and die for the sins of mankind is recorded in Psalm 40 beginning verse 6 and quoted in Hebrews 10:5-7.) And since Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh, 1 Timothy 3:16 KJV, and God is more valuable than all His creation combined, Jesus' blood is sufficient for the atonement of the sins of the entire humankind, even if all people were to repent toward God and place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

According to John 1:17, the Law came by the hand of Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus. In Galatians 3:24, the Law is described as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, meaning to prepare them for the grace of God that would come with Christ. The Law could not provide salvation to anybody. That is why Jesus came to redeem even those who were under the Law as we see in Galatians 4:5.

It is expected that once saved, people will do good works, Ephesians 2:10, and those works will be rewarded in heaven, 2 Corinthians 5:10. But works themselves cannot save somebody, Ephesians 2:8. If works could save, then Jesus need not have died the painful death on the cross when He came. He would just have taught people how to do good and then go back to heaven. Jesus did not die by accident. He had come specifically to give His life as a ransom, Matthew 20:28, providing the blood to wash away sins, Revelation 1:5b. In Romans 10:13 we read that everyone who will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Salvation is by grace that comes from appropriating the blood of Jesus in one's life

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by faith, not of works. In Acts chapter 10 we read of a man called Cornelius who was rich in good works, giving much alms to the people. But even he needed to hear about Jesus from Peter and believe Him to get saved.

Though the Law was given to the Children of Israel of a certain dispensation, through it God was working out a bigger plan, which was to prepare the world for the grace which would come by Jesus. The Law concerned the Children of Israel of its time, Luke 16:16 and Romans 9:4, but the grace of God that brings salvation concerns all people, Titus 2:11. That is why Jesus Christ before going back to heaven commanded His disciples, according to Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19, to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, thereby giving everybody an opportunity to be reconciled to God.

People may differ slightly in their understanding of the timing of future events and how they will occur, but this does not matter so long as they all believe that what the Bible prophesies will happen somehow, since with God nothing is impossible, Luke 1:37. The next great event in the calendar of the Church is the Rapture. This is the term used to describe the event recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 when all those who died having repented toward God and placed their faith in Christ will resurrect and together with those who will be alive and they too have put their faith in Jesus will meet our Lord in the air and together proceed to heaven for the rewards of the work that one did after salvation, 2 Corinthians 5:10. This will be followed

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by the marriage supper of the Lamb spoken of in Revelation 19:9. (Matthew chapter 24 up to verse 35 addresses the future of the Jews up to the time of Christ's second coming. Verse 36 and those that come after it address the future of the Church, beginning with the taking of the believers that defines Rapture, in addition to allusion to the rewarding of the saints that will follow.)

As those things will be happening up there, tribulation of unprecedented magnitude will be taking place in this world that will then be under the rule of the Antichrist, also called the Beast, man of sin or son of perdition, 2 Thessalonians 2:3. At the same time, angels will blow trumpets, open seals and pour vials of the wrath of God upon those who will have been left on earth after the Rapture. You may think that there is trouble in the world today, but it is nowhere near the distress spoken of in Luke chapter 21 and Matthew chapter 24 that is characterized by widespread wars and pestilences. That is the time when, according to Luke 23:30, people will be crying to the mountains to fall on them and to the hills to cover them. Most Jews will remain on earth after the Rapture because not accepting Jesus as the Messiah, following the blindness in part that happened to them as written in Romans 11:25. At some point, Jerusalem will be compassed with the armies of the Antichrist and, as recorded in Zechariah 14 beginning verse 3, the Lord will go forth to fight the nations, even splitting the Mount of Olives to create a valley through which the Children of Israel will flee from the wrath of the Antichrist. This

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is the flight that is mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24:20.

Seven years following the Rapture—this period is the 70th week in the dream that Daniel had according to Daniel Chapter 9—Jesus will come back with the saints to rule from Jerusalem for 1000 years. Read Revelation 19 beginning verse 11.

Christ's millennial rule will be characterized by unprecedented peace. Our Lord is the Prince of Peace, Isaiah 9:6, and will have Satan tied and thrown into the bottomless pit, Revelation 20:3. By then, the Antichrist and the False Prophet who will be heading the coalition of false faiths that will exist in the world during the time of the Tribulation will have been thrown into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:10. This is the time when there will be true peace even in the Middle-East to the extent where Jeremiah 33:16 says Jerusalem shall dwell in safety. (Believers have the personal responsibility of seeking peace and pursuing it, Psalm 34:14, but they should not expect true global peace until Jesus' second coming.) This is also when, according to Isaiah 35:6, water will break out in the desert, as a result of which people will not need to fight for arable land as they do today. Even people who will not be in glorified bodies will be living for a very long time. Believers will rule with Christ; that is the time the apostles of Jesus were promised, according to Luke 22:30, to sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

After the 1000-year reign of Christ as we see in Revelation 20 beginning verse 7, Satan will be

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released and try to mobilized the nations to fight the saints. Then fire from heaven will come and consume those who will have surrounded the saints and Satan thrown into the lake of fire to join the two persons of his evil trinity there, Revelation 20:10.

The next thing that the Bible talks about is the resurrection of the unbelievers of all times and their being tried at the Great White Throne and all of them thrown into the Lake of fire reserved for the devil and his angels, Matthew 25:41. This is the same place where death and hell will be thrown, Revelation 20:14.

Then, as we see in 2 Peter 3 beginning verse 10, the present heaven and earth and its works will burn up and in their place come a new heaven and new earth and new Jerusalem, Revelation 21 beginning verse 1. And with the evil forces having been defeated, the sinless state that existed at the beginning will have been restored. According to Matthew 13:43, the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in this kingdom of their Father, and according to Revelation 22:5, they will reign for ever and ever. The Lord God Almighty and Jesus the Lamb of God will be there continually. And since it is in the presence of God that people experience fulness of joy, Psalm 16:11, in the New Jerusalem this state of bliss that has proven elusive in the present world and in this body will finally be realized. (Excerpted from a book by the same author titled *Know Your Bible Better*.)

Lesson 4

Overview of God's Word

The Bible is the tome of tomes, a library of 66 books with a total of 1189 chapters. According to 2 Peter 1:21, what is in the Bible is God's message that was received through holy men as they were moved (guided) by the Holy Ghost. Indeed though the Scriptures were penned down by 40 different writers over a period of about 1600 years and hence many did not even know each other, the Bible is not a host of disjointed sayings of men; it has a running theme and Scriptures do not contradict at all.

The theme of the Bible is salvation in Christ Jesus. Intent on downplaying the superiority of Jesus, Bible critics conveniently ignore the Old Testament prophecy concerning Christ, making it seem like the story of Jesus started when He was born in Bethlehem of Judah. But Jesus is not the ordinary me and you: Christ is the central character in the Word of God, who in the Old Testament is spoken of in prophecy, whereas the New Testament is about the revealed Christ. According to John 5:39, Jesus wanted people to refer to the Old Testament writings because they testified of (prophesied about) Him. Actually every book of the Bible contains reference to Christ.

Jesus is so great that His first appearance on earth required a forerunner, John the Baptist, who when introducing Christ in River Jordan said, according to John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" The world, however, hates Christ, but not even trying to remove Him from the dating system by replacing BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini) with BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) diminishes His centrality in God's plan for man.

Jesus, being God manifested in the flesh, is unique, and even the Bible, which is the book that tells about Him authoritatively is

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no ordinary book. As we have seen earlier, it was authored of God through the Holy Spirit, 1 Peter 1:21, who alone is able to write history in advance. The Holy Spirit is God, and we see in Isaiah 46:10 that God is able to declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.

With Jesus gone back to heaven, the church was left under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, not Peter. That is why disciples including Peter had to wait for this Leader in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49) before going out to witness Christ. The Holy Spirit is the One who was to guide the disciples into all truth, and the church that is yielded to the Holy Spirit is the one that uplifts Christ, which is what this Comforter came to promote, John 16:13-14.

Critics try to discredit the Bible by saying that the Gospels differ when giving the account of Christ on earth. But that is not the case. Through the Gospel of Matthew, the Holy Spirit wanted to show that Jesus is the King of the Jews. So in Matthew's writing, the Holy Spirit made the writer confine himself to the things that happened in the life of Jesus that proved just that. Mark portrayed Jesus as a servant and actually did not even bother about His genealogy. Luke emphasized Jesus as the perfect man, as evidenced by His life of prayer. John wrote about Jesus as the Son of God, meaning God manifested in the flesh. It is in Jesus alone that these 4 offices rested in one person perfectly, a fact that a single, linear narrative could not have brought that out clearly.

The Bible is inerrant (without errors), and contrary to what false teachers say as they try to discourage people from studying God's Word, the Bible is easy to understand for anyone willing to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and believes in the centrality of Jesus Christ in God's plan for man. If the message of the Gospel were too difficult to comprehend, Jesus would not have asked children to come to Him. He would have asked to be surrounded by philosophers.

It is not possible to invalidate the Bible; according to John

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17:17, God's Word is the truth, and according to Psalm 117:2, the truth of the Lord endures for ever. Jesus in Matthew 24:35 said His words shall not pass away. Even the technological advancement that we are witnessing today does not disprove the Bible; it supports it instead. Years before Christ, Prophet Daniel according to Daniel 12:4 had said that in the last days knowledge would increase, with people moving to and fro. So, the Bible is relevant in the 21st century just as it was in the past.

The importance of becoming aware that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16) is because there are false teachers who say that the Bible contains the Word, thereby implying that there are parts of the Bible that are not the Word of God so that they can introduce their false teaching, supposedly to make the Word of God complete. But the Bible contains the entire plan of God for man; indeed in Revelation 22:18-19 are warnings to whosoever would add or take away anything from the now complete revelation, that is the Bible.

Moreover, God never does anything without a purpose, and the purpose behind His inspiring of the Scriptures is written in John 20:31 where the Bible says: *but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.* This verse is the Bible's thesis statement and it shows that the purpose of studying the Bible is to make the reader know that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah, the Son of God and hence God manifested in the flesh, so that by believing that and trusting Him for the forgiveness of one's sin, the believer becomes a beneficiary of everlasting life. Sinning against an eternal God leads to eternal damnation, whereas forgiveness by Him leads to everlasting life.

Question: *After hearing the message of the Bible presented so clearly, Prince has decided to get saved. How will you go about leading Him to Christ?*

Lesson 5

Leading Prince to Christ

As we saw earlier, the message of the Bible condensed into a single statement is John 20:31. This Scripture reveals that Jesus the Son of God is the central character in God's Word and that the purpose of studying the Bible is to make the reader trust Jesus over his or her sins for salvation so as to get everlasting life. This is to say that if you studied the Bible and did not get to believe Jesus for salvation, then the Word of God will not have benefitted you the way God would like it to benefit you. We learn from 1 Timothy 2:4 that the will of God is that all men (people) be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Involving yourself in good works is good, and the good works done by those who are saved will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:10). But good works themselves cannot save you, Ephesians 2:9. Cornelius of Acts chapter 10 was rich in good deeds, but even he needed to know about Jesus Christ from Apostle Peter so that he (Cornelius) could believe Jesus and get saved. If salvation were by works, all that Jesus Christ would have done when He came for the first time would have been to teach people to do good things and then go back to heaven. But He did 2 things: He taught how to live right and then died on the cross. Forgiveness of sins required a sacrifice. The Bible in Hebrews 9:22 says that *without shedding of blood is no remission* [cancellation of punishment]. Moreover, it is only the blood of Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, that sufficed when it came to taking away sin.

According to Romans 3:20b, the whole purpose of the Law of Moses was to prove that before God, all people are sinners. The first thing to do in leading Prince to the Lord is therefore to have

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him acknowledge in his heart that before God he is a sinner, since that is what the Bible says concerning everybody in Romans 3:23. When the Spirit of God is working on a person, He does not begin by making him or her feel good about himself or herself. In 1 Timothy 1:15, we see the kind of attitude of meekness with which to approach the Lord for salvation: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*

Faith is acting on God's Word. When the Bible says that all have sinned and you acknowledge being one of the sinners, you demonstrate faith in God by agreeing with what He says.

After acknowledging in your heart that you have sinned and asking God to forgive you because of Jesus' death on the cross, the Bible in Romans 10:9 says that if you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. What you are being asked to do in this Scripture is to believe that Jesus is the Christ (or Messiah) who had been promised in the Old Testament, that He came in the flesh and all the things prophesied about Him were fulfilled, including dying and resurrecting as evidence that God had accepted Jesus' sacrifice for sin. After believing all this in your heart, you are then supposed to confess faith in Jesus openly before the people. As we read in Romans 10:10, with the heart man believes to righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.

Being by faith and not by works, salvation does not take a process. In Luke 23:43 we see Jesus telling the thief who cried to Him on the cross that he (the thief) would be with Jesus that very day in Paradise. Immediately upon trusting the Lord for salvation, one receives forgiveness of sins and is translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Colossians 1:13. Unlike the unbeliever, you are no longer destined for eternal damnation; instead, according to John 6:47,

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you become an inheritor of everlasting life, and everlasting life in Christ Jesus is such a great gift that in 2 Corinthians 9:15 of the KJV it is referred to as God's unspeakable gift.

An important thing that you ought to let your son know is that salvation in Jesus Christ is complete and he does not need to engage in any traditional practices to complement it. The book of Hebrews shows that Jesus, the great High Priest and mediator of the New Covenant, is superior to angels, superior to Moses and superior to priests under the Law of Moses. As a result, according to Hebrews 7:25, Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Jesus). This is the same message that Apostle Paul is trying to convey when he says in Colossians 2:9 that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, as a result of which he adds in the following verse that the believer is complete in Christ because Christ is Head of all principality and power. The Church is not united in an organization; it is united in a Person, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:28 shows that believers are one in Christ and in Colossians 3:11 Christ is said to be all and in all.

Not even the do's and don'ts of the Law of Moses qualify to complement salvation in Christ Jesus. The believer is told in Colossians 2:16, 17: *Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.* (It is worth mentioning that the reason why Bible-believing Christians gather for worship on Sunday and not Saturday, which is the Sabbath, is because with the change of the priesthood from the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament to the priesthood of Christ —Hebrews 7:12—there was of necessity a change also of the Law. We believers are under the law of Christ, and we gather on the first day of the week, which is Sunday when our victory was won with the resurrection of Jesus. Even the early

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New Testament believers met on the first day of the week as we see in Acts 20:7.)

At the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes (adds) you into the body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:13, something that does not require the believer's effort. Salvation should be followed with water baptism as the person who has been saved is immersed into water, identifying with Christ's death and resurrection, Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12. This is the point at which one joins the local church, Acts 2:41, for fellowship and to get an operation point when it comes to serving God.

Some people think that water baptism is required for salvation. But that is because of misunderstanding Mark 16:16 NKJV where the Bible says: *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.* In this Scripture, what the first part seeks to do is to communicate the fact that baptism ought to follow believing (salvation). But the fact that baptism is not a prerequisite for getting to heaven is evident from the fact that the word 'baptism' or any of its conjugated forms does not appear in the second part of the above Scripture that just reads: *but he who does not believe will be condemned.* Indeed the thief of Luke chapter 23 who acknowledged his sinfulness and cried to Jesus on the cross didn't have the opportunity to be baptized, yet Jesus according verse 43 promised to be with him in Paradise that very day.

The brethren whom God will provide your son to fellowship with in church will not be perfect people and may rub him the wrong way from time to time. But he ought to learn to bear with their weaknesses and continue fellowshiping and serving with them because according to Hebrews 10:25, believers are not to forsake the assembling together of the saints.

Homework: *Give Prince a brief overview of what the Bible says about prayer.*

Lesson 6

Lesson on Prayer

Just as it takes the grace of God (also called the grace of Christ) to get saved, Ephesians 2:8, it takes the same grace to live a victorious Christian life and serve God in all other ways. Jesus in John 15:5 said that without Him one can do nothing, by way of serving God of course. And we invite the Lord into our situations through prayer. Apostle Paul according to 1 Corinthians 15:10 acknowledged that he was what he was—in terms of being saved and accomplishing what he was accomplishing for God—by the grace of God. And the grace to serve God effectively comes through prayer. When Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:18 admonishes us to grow in grace, he is encouraging us to be a people of prayer. And to show how willing God is to help us in His service when we pray, we read in Hebrews 4:16: *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Life in this world is generally characterized by hardships and all manner of challenges, and these happen to both the rich and the poor. Jesus, according to John 16:33b, warned the disciples that in this world they would have tribulation. And when faced with challenges, we ought not fret or start to bombard God with questions; instead, we ought to pray. God does not answer questions; He answers prayers. As they say, worry about nothing; pray about everything. It is unfortunate that the first thing most of today's young people do when faced with a challenge is to post what they are going through on the social media. But what they get in response is often ridicule and other forms of negative feedback that lead to disappointment. But under such circumstances, your son ought to pray God and continue doing what is right and God will come through for him. At the same time, warn your son that

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he ought to be careful what he posts on the Internet because it remains there and some employers could refer to it to establish his position on issues during job interviews.

Christian life is a constant battle with the devil who, according to 1 Peter 5:8, is like a roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour. So the exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is that we pray without ceasing. Moreover, you do not need to go to (or face) a particular place like a mountain for your worship or prayer to be heard of God, John 4:21. God can hear you from anywhere; He even heard Jonah while praying from the belly of the fish, Jonah chapter 2. People go to secluded places for prayer retreat just so as to focus on God without outside interference.

The other thing is that you do not need to go through a fellow human being for your prayer to be heard. There is nothing wrong with asking fellow Christians to pray with you over an issue, but they do not do so as mediators between you and God. As a believer you have only one mediator between you and God, the man Jesus Christ, 1 Timothy 2:5. That is why we pray to God in the Name of Jesus.

When you go before God in prayer, you need to believe that God is there—He exists and is hearing you—and that He does reward those who diligently seek Him, Hebrews 11:6. The beginning of faith is the persuasion that God is there and He is all-mighty such that nothing is impossible with Him. But the fact that God is able to do everything does not put Him under obligation to do whatever we ask. What God does for us after prayer must be in line with His will. No one can claim that Jesus did not have faith in God when in Matthew 26:39 He prayed: *O my Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou [you] wilt.* In the same way, no one can claim that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego of Daniel chapter 3 did not have faith in God when we hear them pray, according to verse 17 and 18, that their God whom they serve is able to deliver them

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from the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, but even if He was not going to do it, they would not serve the gods of Babylonians or worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar. Actually the measure of spiritual maturity is not just praying but also being able to go by God's decision after prayer.

We are people of faith if we are surrendered to the will of God in every way, and faith speaks into existence what God wants, not what we want. People of faith pray and still submit themselves to the will of God. That is what God's Word means when in 1 John 5:14 it says: *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.* This is also to say that if you pray for something and it does not happen, that does not mean that you did not have faith.

Really, it is not faith that answers prayers but God. Faith merely moves God to act, but God will never violate His will to do yours. You can have faith and not have your prayers answered the way you want if what you are asking for is not within God's will. Faith does not make God obligated to do what is not in His will; what you are asking for has to be in the will of God for God to give it. That is why we should stop "decreeing and commanding" things into being in the name of prayer and instead learn to come to God in humility, pleading with Him to do things for us, not commanding Him. People who seek their own glory like to make it look like God answers prayers because they are the ones doing the praying. But God will answer the prayer of any one who demonstrates faith in Him—and if what they are praying for is within God's will.

God does not require any special language or tone of voice to hear prayer. Apostle Peter did not have time to learn a special language to pray when he found himself sinking in the rough sea. According to Matthew 14:30 he just cried out, "Lord, save me," and Jesus saved him from drowning.

The other very important condition to satisfy for effective

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prayer is for the praying person to be walking in righteousness. In James 5:16b the Bible says that the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much. In John 15:7 we are told that if we abide in the Lord—be in obedience to His Word, that is—we shall ask what we will, and it will be done for us. This means that if we are going to be prayer warriors, we must be good students of God’s Word so as to know His will and do it.

According to 1 Timothy 2:8, we ought to approach God in prayer lifting holy hands by not entertaining wrath in our heart. For God to declare you righteous, you need to repent of your sins and ask Him for forgiveness. And that is repentance that comes from the heart, not a show. In Joel 2:13 we are taught about the need to come to God in repentance, rending (tearing) our hearts, not our garments. Psalm 51:17 shows that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. Moreover, God forgives you if you have been forgiving those who sin against you. That is why we ought to forgive those who trespass against us if we are to be prayer warriors. And having done that, we are assured in Psalm 86:5 that the Lord is good and ready to forgive and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon Him.

(In secondary school, some students walk in front for salvation every time a new preacher comes, imagining that they lost their salvation over a recent sin. But what one needs to know is that once saved, you remain saved. Though we are discouraged from sinning, we also see in 1 John 2:1 that if we sin, we have Jesus Christ the righteous to cry to for forgiveness and continue with our walk of faith. Even then, availability of grace is **not** a licence to continue sinning, Romans 6:1-2!)

The ultimate purpose of praying or singing Christian songs is to give God the glory, not the person who is doing the praying or singing. That is why the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9 opens with words of worship “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy [your] name”, and ends with the worship of God in verse

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13b: For thine [yours] is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.” In fact sometimes we pray and fail to receive what we had asked for because of asking with the wrong motive: to show off or receive the glory in the answer. That is what James means in James 4:3 when he says that *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss*. Perhaps you have heard some Gospel singers singing: God, give me this or that so that my enemies may see and know who I am. That is not the kind of prayer that God wants. We are to pray that the will of God be done in earth as it is done in heaven.

We tend to assume that God has not answered our prayer if He does not do exactly what we asked for. But that is not necessarily the case. God has the right to give you what you are asking for in prayer or not. But irrespective of what He decides, He remains God and hence worthy of worship. Even after God allowed Satan access to the things Job had, as a result of which the devil destroyed Job’s property and children, Job still worshipped God, Job 1:20. Really, we have a loving God to whom we sometimes pray in our foolishness but He answers us in His wisdom. There may be things that you prayed for in the past and upon reflection realize that you would be worse off had God answered exactly as you had prayed. So let us always thank God for what He decides to do for us after we pray.

At this juncture we need to also mention that the way some preachers are presented gives the unjustified impression that they are a special group of people, miracle workers through whom alone God answers prayers. What we need to know is that just by going to God in prayer is an expression that you believe God has what it takes to do miracles, and anyone is justified to make his or her request known to Him because we are all His creation. But God does miracles when He wants and in His own way. This is also to say that just because someone prays for you and no miracle happens does not mean that he is not a true preacher. The

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Bible in John 10:41 says that John (the Baptist) did no miracles, but all the things that he said concerning Jesus were true. So, miracles are not what says whether or not the truth is being preached. Your life as a Christian may not be characterized by spectacular happenings, but if you continue praying and living right, God will from time to time send “rain” in form of a miracle to confirm that you are His and that He is still working in your life. This used to happen to the Children of Israel also as we see in Psalm 68:9 NKJV where the Bible says, *You, O God, sent a plentiful of rain, whereby You confirmed Your inheritance, when it was weary*. Sometimes God would be quiet for a long time and then do something (a miracle) to remind the Children of Israel that they were still His people. That is why we too should not entertain the feeling that God has stopped to love us just because we find ourselves going through challenges.

In our prayer, we ought to be persistent (keep returning to God in prayer) like the widow and as meek as the publican, both of Luke chapter 18. But after praying, you are to leave God to answer your prayer at His own time. God is sovereign and we cannot force Him to do things or make Him do them by our timeline. By choosing to go to God in prayer for something instead of considering sinful options is an expression of faith. Waiting upon the Lord to answer our prayer in His time is an expression of continued faith in Him. There are people who prophesy things on themselves or on others out of wishful thinking, and of course nothing happens no matter how long they wait. But when it is God who has promised something, we read in 2 Peter 3:9 that he is not slack concerning His promise. He is sure to fulfil His promise when the fullness of His time is come.

Question: *God’s goodness is too great to express fully in words. We owe what we are and everything that we have, including the great salvation in Christ Jesus, to Him. With this awareness, in what state should your son abide in his walk of faith?*

Lesson 7

Importance of Thanksgiving

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night.—Psalm 92:1-2 NKJV

God is the One who gave Jesus to die for us and make us beneficiaries of His unspeakable gift that is called everlasting life. He is the One who gives us life, food, clothing, shelter, ability to think and even work. (By the way, God is good such that He has created this world with enough resources for everybody's needs; it is the devil who inspires selfishness and makes millions languish in desperation. It is also the devil who inspires wars, thus forcing leaders of nations to commit vast resources in defence and leave their people in want.) What we are and everything we have we owe to God! Indirectly emphasizing this fact, Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:7 NKJV asks this rhetorical question: *And what do you have that you did not receive?*

It is from God that all blessings flow. With this awareness, as a believer you ought to live the rest of your life for God and live in a state of thanksgiving. Apostle Paul had this to tell believers in Thessalonica and even us today, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:18: *In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.* Despite being a Christian you could be going through challenges in life that make you start wondering, *Is this an indication that I have unrepented sin in my life?* But storms of life are not always an indication of sin or being outside the will of God. You might be like Apostle Paul who had a thorn in the flesh that God had allowed and therefore did not go away even after prayer (2 Corinthians 12:9) so that he could continue relying on God's grace. Besides constantly repenting of any known sin, you should continue thanking God irrespective of your circumstances.

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Instead of wasting time brooding over what you suppose God should have done for you or given you but has not, you should be busy counting the many blessings He already has given you—starting with salvation in Christ Jesus—and being alive to serve Him.

Healthy thoughts that are characterized by thanksgiving are very important. There are many people who may not be languishing in a physical place designated “prison” but have jailed themselves by their thoughts until they are depressed, sometimes to the extent of contemplating suicide. Such unhealthy thoughts include hating how you look, where you were born, the fact that you are not rich, the fact that you are not a celebrity, etc. What such people need is to come to terms with their reality and learn to thank God for everything that is going for them, no matter how seemingly insignificant, aware that no one will carry anything physical from this part of the world.

There is nothing wrong with having a lot of money, but it is not wealth that makes you experience joy. Joy comes from abiding in a state of godliness and contentment. In 1 Timothy 6:6, we are told that godliness with contentment is great gain. Moreover, you need to know that the two must go together, hence the use of the singular linking verb “is”. Godliness is what brings about the presence of God in our situations, and we see in Psalm 16:11 that fullness of joy happens in the presence of Lord. The screaming that revelers make when drunk is just noise, not a sign of joy.

There is something that tends to undermine the joy you ought to experience from any achievement, and that thing is over-expectation. Encourage Prince to work hard but not entertain unrealistic expectation; instead, he should be content with his current achievement and standard of living and thank God for it. An American missionary who visited a group of Christians in Mũrang’a during the E.A. Revival days in the ‘60s came back to Nairobi surprised by what he had experienced in a house

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fellowship there. The Christian meeting had taken place in a mud hut with no electricity or modern conveniences like TV, gas cooker or fridge. All that there was in this room that was used as guest room, bedroom and kitchen was a narrow bed, a few utensils on the floor and a fire in the middle, fed with chopped wood. But as the new converts sang to the Lord, they radiated the kind of joy that this missionary had not seen before. Today you can be sure these people or their descendants have a better standard of living, having put up semi-permanent or even permanent houses with electricity, piped water, etc. But they may not be feeling better off if they happen to have revised their expectations upwards to an unrealistic level. One reason children are happier than grown-ups is because they have achievable expectations, like being bought chips and sausage during the weekend, getting friends to play with or visiting the grandmother when school closes. And once that happens, they are happy.

Many young men live to impress. When it comes to starting a business, they are not willing to start small and grow over time. But even when hired, the male ego makes them dissatisfied with the money they are paid, as a result of which they squander it in frustration. Consider this man who hears stories—unverified of course, but which captivate men more than women—of certain people whose accounts are “busting at the seams” with money. And so when this man who works at the building site is paid Shs 600 at the end of the day—he actually receives Shs 500 after paying *mama wa chakula* about shs 100 for 10 a.m *chapati* and *uji* and lunch—and recalls what he heard about those people with billions in the bank, the value of the money he has in his hands suddenly shrinks and he is assailed by a deep sense of self-pity. The next thing he does is to enter a *kumi kumi* (a type of cheap alcoholic concoction) joint, saying, “*Wacha nikamwambie mwili yangu pole,*” as if work has suddenly become a painful experience. Before long, he drinks all of his money or a big portion of it

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and the rest stolen when he gets inebriated. Needless to say, such response to frustration flies in the face of commonsense.

Meanwhile, his wife, a *mama mboga*, gets home with Shs 250 and uses it to prepare a frugal meal and the children go to bed with something in the stomach and still saves Shs 50 to buy exercise books for children. Occasionally, the lady goes to the area MCA for bursary for the child in secondary school. That is how attitude makes the *mama mboga* who earns much less than the husband become the one who puts food on the table and takes the children through school.

When it comes to living purposefully, there are ways in which men ought to borrow a leaf from women. Men and women live in the same world, and women also experience challenges of life that make them vulnerable to distress and anxiety. But the attitude with which each group faces its challenges is what makes the difference. When there is shortage of resources for instance, ladies because of having a healthy attitude and control over their ego do not get confused and start making irrational decisions. They look for what to do using what they have on hand to survive as they wait for a better day. Many men, on the other hand, become bitter and start looking for what to do with the little money they have—like drinking—to escape the unpleasant reality. So, the little they have ends up facilitating their harm instead of helping them.

Money is not what brings joy; joy comes from your attitude to life. Waiting until you become a millionaire before you start living is like chasing a honeymoon where the honey is literally on the moon. Tell your son to start to be happy irrespective of his circumstances because in the present world there will really never be a time when “everything is gonna be alright”.

God wants you to be contented which, after all, is to your benefit. That is why, with your interest in mind, He commands in Exodus 20:17, “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his male servant, nor

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his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.”

Discontentment is a tool of the devil that can reduce the quality of your joy, upset your priorities or even break your home. And the way to counter this enemy is through being contented with what God has given you and abiding in a state of thanksgiving. It is said that in women's *chamas* today, some ladies upon learning about the wealth of their friends tend to take for granted what they themselves have and start feeling as if they are falling behind in some imaginary competition. As a result, they start harassing their husbands, demanding that the latter pull up their socks. The upshot is that some of these men start passing through drinking places on their way home from work for fear of arriving early and find themselves contending with questions that have no easy answers. That way, these men lack the opportunity to bond with their children and help them with their homework as they watch the TV and eat dinner together.

Teach Prince to always compare himself with those who are worse off than he. This way he will remain in a thankful mood and, better still, see the reason to help such people and earn blessings from God for that.

Finally, your son may have grown with a certain career in mind, and if he happens to have got into it, well and good. But if the work he now does is different from what he dreamt of, encourage him to love what he does and thank God for it. Work is work so long as it puts food on the table, clothes on your back and a roof over your head. Moreover, God could bless whatever you do and you end up becoming all that He intended you to become.

Question: *You have noted friends who spend a lot of time discussing the performance of their children in school, and by the way they look at you, they want you to get involved by saying how your son is faring. How do you think you can approach that wisely?*

Lesson 8

Real Purpose for Going to School

School should not be for competition but for identifying your son's gifts and growing them through guidance and training. Psalm 127:3 says that children are a heritage of the Lord, the fruit of the womb His reward. Your work as a parent is to prepare your son to be used of God, His Maker, not for you to use him for competition with your peers.

Exams have their place, which is helping establish the student's gifts, but they are not a way of separating the good from the bad. Every child is important—even the one who, after working hard, gets a zero!

Once school helps one discover their strengths, it should then guide him or her on the training opportunities that match those strengths. Lower school should always be for introducing children to different subjects as a way of finding out what one is good at. But later—and this ought to happen as early as possible—one should focus their mental energy on what they are good at in an effort to specialize. Skills are what will give young people an edge in the competitive world of today, and schools should tailor their training for the job market. The other day, Labour and Skills Development Principal Secretary Shadrack Mwadime lamented that though there were about a quarter of a million opportunities in Germany that Kenyans could take advantage of, the latter did not have the skills needed for the jobs. For education to be relevant, it should be responsive to today's constantly changing socio-economic landscape.

The most important responsibility of the teacher is to help the learner discover where his or her talent lies, where possible

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guided by childhood clues provided by the parent. The teacher, the parents and career mentors who understand the direction that the world is taking ought to work closely in shepherding the young person to his destiny.

God has created people with different gifts so that the earth can be self-sufficient. We have farmers, doctors, cooks, name it. Supposing all people were pilots, where would engineers to manufacture the aircrafts come from? Where would the food to be eaten inside the aircrafts come from?

Do not give your son unrealistic goals that he cannot attain because he may start seeing himself as a failure when he is not. Even when it comes to evaluating your son's performance in school, begin by establishing his ability and do so while confining yourself to reasonable expectations. There are some parents who have succeeded very much in their area of endeavour and are giving their children goals they are unable to achieve. The result of this are frustrated children who become habitual drinkers and drug abusers as they seek to deal with the feeling that they are failures. Some end up joining the in-crowd in the backstreets and the rest is history.

As we have already established, there were more opportunities in the past when the population was small. Those days there was also plenty of vacant land and jobs were more readily available. So were the opportunities of going up the corporate ladder. Demanding that your son replicate your success much less do better than you in the world of today may be asking too much and therefore setting him up for frustration, considering the diminishing opportunities and the constantly changing economic landscape. Encourage him to work hard but also learn to appreciate him even when all he is accomplishing is giving himself the basics of life and those of his family if he is married.

You ought to be careful the way you respond to your son's desire for validation so that you do not build his ego to the extent

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where he will have an unhealthy craving to impress. Like the boy of every other period in history, the boy of today starts to seek significance from an early age, always drawing his parents' and other people's attention to whatever he is doing, sometimes even pleading for compliments. As a parent, you ought to be very careful how you respond to that. Unfortunately the way most parents respond to this builds the ego of their son to a dangerous level. "You are good at everything, Son. Think big," they tell him. As a result, he begins to get the impression that life is all about doing things to impress parents and the society in general.

And so he joins school with bloated ego, only to get a shock. Woe unto him if he does not turn out to be a bright student! That time he realizes that there are brighter boys, and that even some of the girls are better in class than he. This deals a blow to his ego, making him frustrated and even fearful from that early age. Such a child may resort to unsocial behavior, like stealing the exam, in an effort to live up to his parents' lofty expectations. He may also hate the children who are doing better than he instead of making them allies and exploiting the help God has provided him through them. Things turn out for the worse if parents are not understanding what is going on with their son and continue making more demands and spelling out more expectations.

Using the performance of their child to compete with friends does not make things any better. And not just that: Some parents keep saying that education is the sole prerequisite to success in life, tacitly making children who are not doing well in class regard themselves as doomed. This heightens the young man's feeling of self-pity, hopelessness and injured pride. But fearing to express what he is going through so as to get help, he feigns strength, no matter how much it pains inside. That of course is not unlike men. They are said to hide even the symptoms of killer diseases until it is too late, since they do not like to be associated with any sort of weakness.

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Many parents are in competition with peers and want to use our children as objects in that competition. That is also how people end up meddling in their children's selection of career and even spouses. As a parent, do not use your children's performance as a way of competing with friends. The spirit of competition upsets realistic planning and sensible judgment and, in the end, the child's future is interfered with. Your son was not born to be number one at everything or even live to make a point. As we have already established, he has a superior purpose, which is to do God's will as he enjoys life responsibly.

The other thing is that unhealthy competition in schools sometimes makes students who are performing poorly resent colleagues who are doing better than they instead of leveraging the abilities of those who are doing well to improve themselves. As a parent, do not compare your son with others while evaluating his performance. Let your son know that you do not demand that he perform like someone else. His competitor is someone within himself who has similar potential like his. That way he will exploit his full potential without risking the frustration that comes with comparing himself with others.

Encourage your son to work hard in school and at work but let him know that his worth does not depend on his accomplishment. He is valuable because he was created by a great God, so he does not need to crave for affirmation from parents or from fellow men. So long as he is not living in sin, he should relax in the hands of that God and do his best as he savors every moment of his life.

As a parent, you should never talk in a way that makes performance in class seem important to the extent of making those who are not doing well in school begin to feel as if they are not worthy children of their parents and as if they will not amount to anything in life. People are gifted differently, and it is God who does the gifting. Performing well in class makes one feel good,

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but academic success does not necessarily mean success in life. A child may score highly in class but lead a miserable life because of unhealthy attitude toward life after school. Yet with the right attitude and determination to live within your means, you can enjoy life even when you do not have a lot of money, connections or degrees behind your name.

In school, young people should also be made aware of the need to conserve critical resources like clean drinking water. Of the clean water that is pumped to Nairobi from Murang'a, Kiambu and Kinangop today for example, about 30% is said to go to waste through pipes that have been burst deliberately to get water to wash vehicles, etc. This water that is lost could serve many industries and houses built in the city's environs like Kangundo, Machakos and Kajiado and lead to generally affordable housing. Let us remember that the future will depend a lot on how well people manage critical resources for the common good.

In this country, there is a disturbing trend of many young people committing suicide over land issues. But besides reclaiming more land to feed the burgeoning population through irrigation and better water management, the government should build many affordable houses to try to make sure that every young person has a place to retreat to at the end of the day. We should also embark on a campaign to make young people understand that there is life even without a piece of this dwindling resource called land to your name.

Finally, school should not just teach you how to make a living but also how to live. It should teach young men to manage relationships as they interact with others in class, at work when they get employed, as lovers when they are courting, as spouses when they get married, and even how to deal with in-laws. Managing under the challenging and constantly changing circumstances of today could be made a subject in class, even if

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it is not examinable. That is how our learning institutions could produce three-dimensional men, not just educated tall boys.

The other thing that school should educate young people on is how to handle personal finance and live within their means. As we have already established, inability to handle money results in stress, undermines the quality of one's life and could lead to a lifestyle that is detrimental to one's personal well-being.

Question: *What is the work of God, and how is it done?*

Following is the first stanza of a song by James McGranahan that emphasizes the need to go witnessing Christ and which we should therefore keep singing as the church and as individuals:

Far, far away in heathen darkness dwelling,
Millions of souls for ever may be lost.
Who, who will go, salvation's story telling,
Looking to Jesus, minding not the cost?

*All power is given unto me,
All power is given unto me:
Go, ye, into all the world
And preach the Gospel,
And, lo I am with you always.*

Doing Spiritual Work

Let Prince know that in the walk of faith after salvation, he is to be guided by the Bible. He ought to emulate the Psalmist who in Psalm 119:105 tells the Lord: “*Thy [Your] word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*” Our Lord desires that His church be guided by the Scriptures, saying in John 8:31 that it is those who continue in His Word who are His disciples indeed. Following the Word of God is the same thing as being guided of the Holy Spirit, since according to 2 Peter 1:21, prophecy or God’s Word reached us through people who had spoken as moved by the Holy Ghost. To remain victorious after salvation, Jesus in John 8:32 showed that people would need to know the truth (God’s Word) and the truth would set them free—from the evil tricks of the Devil, of course. According to Philippians 2:16, Apostle Paul constantly held forth the Word of Life (the Scriptures) for guidance so that he does not run the spiritual race or labour in vain, whether in living or in serving God.

It is unfortunate that there are many congregations today where believers are guided by the ideas of men rather than by the Scriptures. But the Bible ought to be the authority of faith and practice. With this awareness, you should encourage your son to study the Word of God and stay true to it. The Bible is the source of correct doctrine. Requiring the church to be guided by anything else is something that Jesus was against when in Mark 7:7b He complained about people who taught for doctrine the commandments of men. On the other hand, to be guided by the Scriptures is what Jesus in John 6:45 referred to as being taught of God.

We learn from Acts 2:42 that the first New Testament church

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continued in the Word of God—what is referred to here as apostles' doctrine—fellowship, breaking of bread and in prayers.

(At this point it is worth mentioning that true churches may differ on minor points of doctrine, but all true churches subscribe to the following fundamental beliefs: The divine inspiration of the Bible and its authority for faith and practice; the virgin birth, death and resurrection of Christ; the fact that Christ is the Son of God and hence God manifested in the flesh; the sinfulness of man and justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone; and Christ's second coming. Deviating from any of these or all of these distinctives is what makes a cult or hereticized Christianity.)

We have already seen that God's Word is the truth, John 17:17, and the Bible-preaching church the pillar and ground of truth, 1 Timothy 3:15. Proclaiming the truth of the Gospel and living it out is what makes the church (believers) the salt of the earth that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 5:13.

As we have already seen in the case of Apostle Paul, one of the benefits of getting grounded in the faith through the knowledge of Scriptures is that you do not run the spiritual race or labour in vain. The other benefit is that you are shielded from being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine by false teachers, Ephesians 4:14. Encouraging believers to study God's Word so that they get to know what they believe and why they believe what they believe is the only way to guard against a repeat of what happened in Shakahola.

False doctrines are inspired by the devil; in 1 Timothy 4:1 they are actually referred to as doctrines of devils. And the devil is not a joke when it comes to wiles or tricks that he uses to deceive people. I read about a community in South-East Asia that believes that evil spirits can be warded off with cigarette smoke. The result is a population that is ever puffing away on pipes and

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cigars and hence one with proportionately large number of deaths associated with lung cancer.

The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12); it is capable of seeing through the tricks of the devil and exposing false teaching and doctrinal deviations. Acts 26:18 gives a breakdown of the many things that Bible-based witnessing accomplishes. These include opening people's eyes so that they turn from (spiritual) darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inherit eternal life.

We are not to believe teachings based on the status of the person who is behind them; we should believe teachings because they are backed by Scripture. Behind every teaching is a spirit, and according to 1 John 4:1 we ought to test every spirit (teaching) to know whether it is of God or of the devil. You overcome falsehood with truth. Apostle Paul according to Acts 17:10-11 was more pleased with believers from the Berean church than those of the church in Thessalonica because the former searched the Scriptures to find out whether the things they were taught were so.

The other thing is that knowledge of the Word of God equips one to be an effective workman for God, 2 Timothy 2:15, KJV. Let your son know that man is always looking for something to live for, and whenever one chooses something that is outside the will of God—like drinking and revelry—he ends up frustrated and eventually realizes that it is all vanity. It is while doing the will of God or work of God that you experience real joy. As we read in Psalm 16:11, fullness of joy is found in the presence of God.

But what is the work of God? Guided by their own ideas, people are doing all manner of things in the name of working for God, but Jesus according to John 6:29 said that the work of God

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is to believe the One whom God has sent, that is, Jesus Himself. This is to say that one qualifies to be a worker for God at the time of salvation. Actually that is when one's name is written in heaven, thus opening, as it were, an account where the spiritual work that they do after salvation abounds to be rewarded at the Judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) after the Rapture. No investment compares to having an account in heaven where the good works you do for God abound. Indeed Jesus in Luke 10:20 told the disciples not to rejoice because the evil spirits were subject unto them but rather rejoice because their names were written in heaven. And so we are urged as follows in 1 Corinthians 15:58 NKJV: *Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

The first thing that God wants of us as individual believers to do by way of serving Him is to seek righteousness by living as commanded in the Scriptures. Let your son know that after salvation, he should avoid falling back into patterns of sin and, instead, walk in newness of life, Romans 6:4. The other important thing that is demanded of us is to witness Christ. According to 2 Corinthians 5:18, besides being reconciled to God through salvation in Christ Jesus, we are also given the ministry of reconciliation to go and tell others about Christ so that they too can be reconciled to God. The Great Commission is set forth in Matthew 28 beginning verse 19, where Lord requires His followers to go and teach all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe the things He had commanded them. This is the same message in Mark 16:15: *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* It is through the Great Commission that every believer—not just pastors and a few televangelists—was anointed to go and tell others about Jesus.

Many believers who hold offices in church are busy honouring themselves and honouring one another with titles instead of

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honouring Christ by making Him known through the preaching of the Gospel. As a result, millions are dying and going to a Christless eternity in a country that God has blessed with freedom of worship. Let us be busy lifting Christ instead of lifting ourselves.

Other believers have become rich and are now lulled into the feeling that they have reached their destiny. But we need to heed Christ's warning in Luke 8:14 and Matthew 13:22 where our Lord warned against the spiritual unfruitfulness that could come with the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. While there is nothing wrong with working hard and making money, the destiny of a Christian is not riches. The destiny of a Christian is living a righteous life, reaching as many lives for Christ as possible and grounding in the faith those who get saved as commanded in Matthew 28:20.

We should not be like those of Philippians 2:21 who *seek their own, not the things which are Christ's*. Even the peace that results from praying for kings and those in authority, 1 Timothy 2:2, should not be wasted on selfish interests. It should be used to bring about the realization of God's will that is spoken of in verse 4—that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth—through witnessing Christ and teaching Bible.

As much as God brought Jesus through the Jews (Romans 9:5), the plan that God had through Jesus did not involve the Jews alone. Through Adam, all had sinned and come short of the glory of God, and through Jesus, God had availed the opportunity of reconciling the world to Himself, 2 Corinthians 5:19. Every one of the 66 books of the Bible makes reference to Christ. Books in the Old Testament refer to Him in prophecy, whereas books in the New Testament refer to the revealed Christ. And of significance is the fact that in Haggai 2:7, our Lord was prophesied as the *Desire of all Nations*.

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The Bible requires that we love God and also love the neighbor (Matthew 22:37 and 39), and that neighbor includes the unbeliever. Jesus, according to Luke 6 beginning verse 32, does not consider us as good enough if we love only those who love us and do good to only those who do good to us. So you can never claim to show love to the unbeliever if you have never witnessed Christ to them. Witnessing and grounding people in the faith is the greatest act of mercy. According to James 5:20, he who converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death. It is with this awareness that we ought to be zealous in reaching out to the others for the Lord.

After salvation, we should not spend the rest of our life chasing selfish dreams; we should make time to serve the Lord who has saved us, and as mentioned elsewhere, the work people do for God will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The importance of any work depends on the authority of the one giving that work. And to show that reaching sinners with the Gospel is the most important work ever given in this world, Jesus before giving this work invoked—and hence showed—the incomparable authority by which He was giving it, saying, according to Matthew 28:18, *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

Jesus according to Luke 6:46 was unhappy with people who called Him Lord, Lord but didn't do what He said. And since He commanded in Matthew 28:19 that we go and make disciples of all nations, He would regard us as hypocritical also if we called Him Lord, Lord and never did any witnessing.

But how does one go about witnessing Christ? Preaching or witnessing Christ is not trying to win an argument or to win your listener to your denomination, though there is nothing wrong if he or she willingly decides to be fellowshiping in your church. Preaching is pointing people to Christ. So, whatever you say in the name of preaching should underscore the fact that Jesus is the only way of salvation (John 14:6 and Acts 4:12), and that He

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died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and rose again the third day, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

One could wonder, are there people who are endowed with special gifts to do God's work and others who are not? The answer to this question is no. Through the Holy Spirit, God has given all believers ability to live righteous lives and serve Him according to the talents or abilities that He has given them. This is what God's Word means when in 2 Peter 1:3 it says that the Lord by His divine power has given the believer all things that pertain to life and godliness.

The other thing to know is that the work of God is not for people who are devoid of human weaknesses, so you are not to wait until you start to feel adequate in order to start doing it. Getting saved does not remove our human weaknesses. What happens is that when the Holy Spirit sees our determination to obey God, He comes to help us in following through with our decision to obey God. The Holy Spirit never obeys God on our behalf or forces us to obey God; He helps us to obey God, but the decision to obey is ours.

As in doing any other work, accomplishing something for God calls for determination and self-control. Victory over the devil is about doing the will of God as stipulated in the Bible at all costs. It requires self-control and prayer to work until you achieve something for God in a context where the devil is working day and night to hinder anything of God. Serving God even in the case of Apostle Paul did not happen effortlessly. From Romans 7:15, we establish that he sometimes found himself doing the things he hated to do. And that is why, as we have seen in 1 Corinthians 9:27 he brought his body into subjection lest when he had preached to others, he himself become a castaway. ('Castaway' as the word is used here should not be misconstrued as losing salvation but getting disqualified for a crown. In 1 Corinthians 3:15 we read of believers whose works when tested with fire at the Judgment Seat

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of Christ will burn and they suffer loss but they themselves be saved. It will not be an encouraging thing, though, having spent a lifetime in the world, only to go Home empty-handed. So it would be unwise to get saved and fail to do work with spiritual value.)

True, we need to give of our material resources in doing the work of God, but even more of ourselves by yielding to the Holy Spirit. It is not just material resources that enable people do God's work. In Acts 3:6, we see Apostle Peter testifying that silver and gold had he none. This is evidence of the fact that the disciples were generally poor people, yet they still accomplished the work the Lord had for them.

The other work of God is helping the less privileged in the community. Unfortunately, altruism and self-sacrifice do not rank high in the hierarchy of important things so far as young men of today are concerned. The media has made it seem like life is about competition and seeking self-gratification and even given respectability to selfishness as the way to have an edge in that competition. Many young people do not think that they owe society anything. According to them, it is the society that owes them something, and that thing is the kind of good life modeled by celebrities on TV. But we believers are to cultivate social conscience and get involved in charity work, which is a way of demonstrating love for the neighbor. Besides, we should use charity work as a vehicle to reach the unprivileged members of society for Jesus. Cult members use their resources to draw followers from impoverished neighborhoods to themselves, and we Bible-believing Christians should do better because we know and walk in the truth.

There is this young man who opened up about his past and told me that upon doing his O-levels and performing poorly, he left his home in Murang'a and went to Mwhiko in Nairobi to look for whatever work that he could get. Soon, he joined an age mate who

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made a living out of doing odd jobs like moving merchandise on his back or by hired cart (*mkokoteni*) for open-air retailers. One day it got to midday before they got any work and all that they had between them was shs 30 which was only enough for one plate of *ugali madodo*. In this dilemma, his friend suggested that they use that money to buy two glasses of *kumi kumi* brew to numb pangs of hunger as they waited to make enough money for two plates of food. Unfortunately that became the beginning of this young man's journey with addiction to alcohol and substances. It took his understanding father coming for him and taking him to the village to wean him off the addiction. By God's grace the time I was talking to him he had already conquered addiction and trained and become a matatu driver.

The lesson here is that the young man's problem had been triggered by lack of food, something that characterizes life in informal settlements. You might even have heard that in such places some mothers use local brew to tranquilize small children to sleep when they have no food to give them. Bible-believing churches should therefore engage in programs of feeding the poor and other missions of mercy, in addition to minding their spiritual affairs. If someone begs you for food, do not start reasoning, "But he is not disabled." There are times when there is no work to do even when one is willing to work. Before God, the down-and-out in our slums are people like me and you. The half-dazed young men and women strolling in the streets, some with children strapped on the back, are people like me and you, and we should not reason indefinitely before we drop them a shs 20 coin or more as the need demands. Some of these people were born in the streets, so they have never found themselves in an environment conducive enough to go to school or to learn a trade. So we just have to be extra gracious in dealing with them. You better suffer to be defrauded as you try to have that child in the street eat something out of your pocket.

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In Bethsaida, according to Mark 8 beginning verse 22, Jesus spit on the eyes of a blind man, put His hands upon him and asked him if he could see. The man looked up and said, “I see men as trees, walking.” As a result, Jesus put His hands upon his eyes again, and that is when the man started to see people clearly. In the same way, what we believers of today need is, as it were, to start seeing people for what they are—God’s creation whom we are supposed to show love by witnessing Christ to them and helping address their material needs.

Sometimes the church wonders why God is not answering her prayers, but very often the reason is that we are not doing for others what we would like God to do for us. How you treat others when they are in problems determines whether God will come through for you or not. Psalm 41:1 says: *Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.*

In 1 Samuel chapter 30 is the account of David coming back from the war with the Philistines, only to find that the Amalekites had invaded Ziklag, burned the city and carried women—the wives of the soldiers David had gone to war with and his—captive. David was distressed because besides suffering loss of his wives, his soldiers were now thinking of stoning him to death. After consulting the Lord, David and his battalion went after the Amalekites. On the way, they found a young Egyptian who had been left behind by his master after falling sick and had not eaten for 3 days and 3 nights. They stopped to feed him, despite the urgency of their mission. This is the person whom, after regaining energy, God used to show David the direction in which the Amalekites had gone with their wives and children. In the end David and his battalion recovered everybody and everything. If we want to see God in our situations, let us not only pray but also be a blessing to those who are in need.

Reading about the US of the 1930s, we realize that life there was very much like it is in many parts of Africa today. The

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economy was depressed and many people were out of work. At some point, some churches came up with food kitchens where they prepared free food so that even the down-and-out could get at least one meal a day. Moreover, this provided Christians with the opportunity to share the Gospel because food was not served before prayer and sharing of the Word. Churches with resources could emulate that example by not turning a blind eye to those suffering, especially in informal settlements and in orphanages. Besides providing physical food, churches could also try to avail free Bibles and Bible study materials and sponsor classes for teaching to read and write in local languages to those who never had the opportunity to do so. In 1962, my mother, a Standard Four whose education was cut short by the declaration of the State of Emergency, had started an adult class in the village, teaching ladies who wanted to study the Bible how to read in Kikuyu. And she was not charging anything.

Society teaches us to do what will eventually make a name for us. But we ought to work with the underlying objective of giving glory to God. John the Baptist, for instance, did not work for any praise. He wanted the Lord glorified instead. Concerning Jesus Christ, we hear him saying in John 3:30, *He must increase, but I must decrease*. The other one to emulate is the Psalmist who beseeches God according to Psalm 115 verse 1: *Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake*. Regardless of the success of what we do for God, Jesus according to Luke 17:10 advises that we should then humbly acknowledge that we are but unprofitable servants who have done that which was our duty to do.

Question: *How do you go about instilling in Prince the culture of working with one's hands as a way of preparing him for survival, and what other benefits will accrue from that?*

Working with Own Hands

In this country there was a time when only those who worked in an office with a pen and paper were supposed to be employed. The rest of the people regarded whatever they were doing, no matter how financially rewarding, as travails of people who were waiting for their opportunity “to start working”. People had bought into the idea that employment was to be on the payroll of the government or of some organization with a foreign name that paid its workers with a pay slip at the end of the month.

But what was the origin of this misconception? During the colonial days, the *mzungu* stayed in the office while the African did the manual work. This is what made Africans look down on manual work. And since it is mainly in towns that office work was found, urban migration after Independence got to a point where President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta started his call, *Turudi Mashambani*. Yet what we had not considered is that a lot of manual work went into mining the metal that the white man used to make metallic things that he sold to us, let alone feed his people. And back home in Europe it is the white people themselves who did that work.

Do not do your son the disservice of shielding him from the real world. It is said that if you try to help the pupa in its stages of development, it will not have strong wings to make it the kind of beautiful butterfly you would like to see. In the same way, over parenting and over protecting your son will not produce the desired man. Elsewhere in the book I have mentioned the need to train your son to work with his hands from as early as possible. If you don't, he will not learn to cope with the rigours of everyday life but will grow up to be like those young people

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who spend the whole day in the cyber café watching movies and betting. Moreover, if you don't start giving him work early and try to do it later, he may misconstrue it as punishment and it becomes a source of frustration. Domestic chores introduce one to the realities of life and are a way of arming young people with survival skills, besides strengthening muscles. (Even when it comes to school work, though you may be a teacher and are perhaps involved in coaching your son, do not take over the homework and do it on his behalf.) Working with one's hands is recognized even in the Bible. In Psalm 90:17 we see the Psalmist praying God to establish the work of their hands.

Unfortunately even today we still have people who do not want their children doing manual work and also young people who have a low opinion on working with their own hands. There are also elders who perpetuate this unhealthy perspective with their words. You probably have heard some wazees supposedly advising young men like this, "If you do not work hard in class, you will end up becoming a rodent trapper (in Kikuyu, *mũtegi wa huko*).” Yet if there were no such people who trap rodents, whole crops could be destroyed. Really, even those jobs that are not celebrated are essential in keeping us going on as a society.

Behind the many buildings and residential houses that make up the city of Nairobi is that unsung hero called *Mama wa Chakula* who, unfortunately, has had her fair share of harassment from city askaris. She is the one who takes food to the building sites and sells it at an affordable price to casuals. Then there are those rickety structures in informal settlements and in the Industrial Area that many simply call 'kiosks'. This is where the poorest of the poor get affordable dishes like *ugali madodo* and take-aways like *chips za kobole* that even feature in the lyrics of our music because of their popularity. Let us learn to value work by the contribution it makes to society, not by its glamour.

As alluded to earlier, real life is not lived as portrayed in the

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soap opera; it involves putting in the work. To boost his capacity for survival and realize his full potential, you ought to have Prince train his hands to work, and you begin this by involving him in domestic chores. Let him learn to make his bed, wash his clothes and even how to prepare basic meals. The skills that he acquires by so doing will come in handy when he starts living alone. When they start working, people who do not know how to cook for themselves, wash their clothes and clean the house have a hard time making ends meet let alone save because a lot of their money goes towards buying food in hotels, doing laundry and also with the person they hire to clean their dwelling.

One reason why many young men are taking long to move out of their parents' houses is because they do not feel prepared to do so; they lack the skills to take care of their basic needs and manage their resources. And it seems as if this is a global phenomenon that the media has had a role in fuelling because we are reading that even in the West, the Millennials are falling back on parents for money to go for holiday. Of course the media generally promotes fun, not work.

But you need to take time to give Prince a healthy view of work. He should not see work as a punishment or as if it is for the less privileged. It is not uncommon to see young men who think this way loitering aimlessly throughout the day, a people given to mourning their unfulfilled life, and indeed a peek into their life prompts sympathy. They lack the willingness to do the least that it takes to be able to take care of their basic needs.

Having the house help doing everything for your son is ruining him because by so doing you will be denying him the opportunity of learning the basics of taking care of himself. If you are in business, you should even familiarize your son with how your kind of business operates. With the Asians, grooming starts early when they begin to go with their children to their shops. In the process, the young people learn how business is done and business

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decisions made. As a result, business succession among Asians is smoother and more successful than is the case with indigenous Africans whose estates often shrink in value when passed to the next generation. Why? Our people who are successful in business generally do not allow their children to soil themselves as they learn the ropes!

Ironically, parents of today's teenagers and adolescents were themselves born into a harsher environment and were familiarized with responsibilities when young, and that could be contributing to their handling life's challenges with more ease. In the past, life was far from the sheltered existence that we attempt to create for our children. There were even families with 2 boys who shared the same pair of shorts: one would go to class with it in the morning while the other one waits at home to go with it in the afternoon.

When I grew up myself, there was no nursery school in my village, so one had to go to Standard One straight from home. Then my follower was born in October of the year before the one I was supposed to start school. And since my parents could not afford a house help, my reporting to Standard One was put on hold so that I babysit my sister. Those days, instructions in the beginning classes were in vernacular, so I was bought a Kikuyu book called *Mũthoomere* which my parents taught me how to read from home. When I eventually reported to school, I happened to know more than what Standard Ones knew in terms of reading and counting in the local language which was used for instructions at that level. So I was taken straight to Standard Two. That is how my parents killed two birds with one stone: use me to help in raising my sister and study.

In every child is the desire to do something challenging or else they get bored. As a parent, take advantage of this by ensuring that that "something" is more than roller skating, as much as there should be time for the latter as well. Those who grew up in the countryside where children were made to work in the house

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and in the *shamba* or look after domestic animals in addition to studying never claimed to be bored. But if the desire to do something challenging is not satisfied, especially as happens in some rich homes in the city where all the chores are done by domestic workers, young men often end up involving themselves in bad things as they try to keep themselves busy. It has been established that children who are made to do household chores since the time they are young acquire a healthy attitude towards challenges, make sensible decisions and work hard until they succeed in life. As a parent, have your son's desire to be busy satisfied by allocating him beneficial work at home.

Growing up without any responsibility in the home has resulted in young men who have difficulties managing their individual affairs, people whose careers are sometimes stunted by the inability to put in much effort in the job. Many of these young men are driven by the misguided imagination that one can become rich without working. Small wonder gambling has become so common. In our society, real work has been de-emphasized. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, almost every young man has become a broker. Employees on their part seek for more privileges but less work. But we need to encourage our young people to acquire skills—not just arm themselves with general education!—and work hard when hired. Acquiring skills and putting in the work is the way to deal with challenges related to lack of resources. Some young men imagine that their salvation from hard work would come with getting a visa to go to the UK or to the US. But what such need to know is that life is more stressful in the West, especially for a foreigner, than in Kenya. If you are not hardworking enough to survive in Kenya, you will be worse off out there.

You would not be justified to tell your son to leave your house until you have armed him with a skill. In addition, you need to teach him not to be resistant to training, supposing that he knows

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enough of what he needs to know about his field. Encourage him to keep retraining so as to keep up with the changes that are taking place and be in a position to take advantage of emerging opportunities. If the recent changes in the workplace have taught us anything, it is that technological development will provide opportunities in future that did not exist before. And exploiting those opportunities will require a lot of preparation through retraining and upgrading one's skills.

Today, a lot of the foreign money that helps us balance the nation's current account so that we are able to pay for imports comes from remittances made by Kenyans working abroad. Unfortunately, some of our people do not seem to value skills, let alone those who impart them, yet it is through skills that nations develop. My son teaches piano and he tells me that when he is being paid for teaching children of those who value the skill, the parents call him for the money and pay happily. But others just give money to the children to pass it to him.

Finally, tell your son to learn to operate even in less than perfect conditions. That is one of the traits of those people who are said to be street smart, people who succeed where others are failing. Perfection paralysis has seen many watch lifetime opportunities come and go, never to present themselves again. The world of business is not as harmonized as it appears to be to those outside it. As I have mentioned in another book of mine, all that one needs is to go to Marigiti (Nairobi County market next to KPCU, whose name is actually a corrupted pronunciation of "market") at 4 am when the market is at the height of its activity. Here, you will see hosts of people vying for space in narrow passages with carts and *kuua* (the name given to those who carry goods, and which is actually Kikuyu for "carry"), their legs shaking under bags of potatoes on their back and sweat streaming down the forehead. Yet it is in the midst of such "chaos" that money is made.

You need to familiarize your son with life in the real world,

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emphasizing that it is by taking advantage of the real situation that you are able to get to the ideal situation. He should learn to handle inconveniences without getting unduly frustrated, since in the real world you will not always get things with ease. Growth and comfort do not go together.

Yet men have the women to borrow a leaf from. The latter are more practical than men and deal with challenges using the available resources. I always admire my wife because of the way she makes the best out of what is available to deal with any situation. For instance whenever there is little water in the house and unclean utensils filling the sink, I myself get immobilized and frustrated. But she herself uses the little water to clean the most necessary utensils and soon there is a meal on the table. Women are generally very practical.

From time to time in the '80s in the city of Nairobi, there used to be bomb scare. One time when that happened in a seven-storey building that housed government offices, people rushed down through the stairs. But there was this disabled man who was limping down slowly because one of his legs was very short and he was using clutches. When one of the ladies who was last to leave found that he was not moving down the stairs fast enough she told him, "Throw that stick down and get on my back." The man did so and this lady walked down with him on her back, making men feel challenged when she reached with him on her back where the rest of the people were gathered.

Question: *At some point you realize that you would like to take your son out so as to get an opportunity to give him a healthy view of himself and of other people, besides debunking wrong perspectives about life that he may have embraced. How will you prepare for the outing, and how will you conduct yourself out there?*

Healthy View of Self and Others

It is important to begin by saying that all your children, both boys and girls, need individual attention. All of them are your children and you should make time for each of them separately. Children crave for individual attention and sometimes we unknowingly force them to act up so as to receive what we ought to willingly give them.

As alluded to earlier, the time that you as a parent spend with your son is not wasted time; it could be wonderful preparation because, among other things, it will give you an opportunity to teach him to view life and respond to its challenges in a healthy way. No doubt turning dreams into reality is in your son's hands, but that is only possible if you first work on his view of himself and of the world in general. We could be thinking that all we require is to work hard to give our children a good start in life, but there are problems with our young men that emanate from unhealthy mindset, and these must be addressed if they are to navigate life successfully. There are problems that are brought about by outdated perspectives that young men domesticate in their mind and that have the potential of impacting life negatively.

When you go out with your son, it is advisable that you organize for some food. Some people may not think of food as important, but you need to remember that food is what made the Prodigal Son desire to go back to his father's house. Availability of enough food for children is important even in the home. As much as possible, we ought to enrich our houses with food (even if it is frugal meals), love and forgiveness. That way when our children experience difficulties out there, the option will not be

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alcohol or drugs or a rope to commit suicide but to go back home, seek forgiveness and start enjoying like the rest of the people in their parents' house.

When the discussion begins, let your son know that other people's opinions are not the only ones that matter. His opinions and plans are important too, so they deserve to be heard. God has given him the ability to create his own life and realize his own dreams. Giving respectability to his opinions will give him face and encourage him to open up.

Another way of encouraging your son to open up and share his concerns freely is to make yourself as the parent vulnerable. Tell your son about people—including yourself—who were once in trouble or dilemma but persevered and made sensible decisions and over time triumphed. That will really encourage him. One time when my brother was not performing well in school, my father told him about a time when he himself was in Githunguri School of the 1940s that we hear was later razed down by the colonialists during the State of Emergency, and there was this girl called Gacigi who always outperformed boys in class, including Dad. My brother never forgot this. Whenever he found himself performing poorly in class and our father's words broke into his consciousness, he sensed a new energy boost.

On the other hand, self-pity, which comes from feeling like you are a failure and the only person in your kind of circumstances, clouds your thinking and usurps your energy or desire to address issues or to try anything by way of self-development.

Let your son know that you too as the mother or father have human weaknesses and challenges that you struggle with. Hearing that will encourage him to open up and reveal any fears that may be tormenting him. Let your son know that just like him, you too have struggled or are struggling in life, only that being older, you have accumulated some experience that you draw upon when dealing with issues of life—and that he can tap into

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that experience by listening to you so that he does not repeat the mistakes you made and suffered.

Parents should foster a close relationship with their children so that the latter can be free to share their anxieties with the former. As a parent, you should also invest time and resources in understanding the challenges that the young people of today are facing and how to help them navigate through life. As we have already seen, all that many parents do is to emphasize the importance of performance in school, sometimes even using their children's performance to compete with their peers. This ends up being very frustrating, especially if the child is not bright in class. We need to know that God has gifted children differently. We have even heard of A-students who ended up serving C-students after school.

During your outing, make your discussion as casual as possible. Begin by encouraging your son to accept himself just as he is and letting him know that you too accept him just as he is and thank God for him, an important creation of God. When your son tells you his goals, do not start criticizing or downplaying them, even if you happen to be eager to persuade him to change. Putdowns and other forms of negative remarks could affect your son's view of himself, yet he may be having good personal qualities that you are overlooking in your criticism of him. For talking to be truly therapeutic, you should not interfere or engage in condemning the person you are seeking to help. Scorn, ridicule and put-downs destroy child-parent attachment, leaving your son seeking peer support. (By the way, when dealing with your children, you should avoid public put-downs. Boys, particularly, have fragile ego. If your son does a mistake, reprimand and correct him in privacy.)

Avoid making your son get the impression that his weaknesses are being sought all the time. It is scary and discouraging to live with the feeling that you are under a microscope whereby some

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perfectionists are constantly monitoring your every utterance and action with the one intention of proving that your performance does not measure up to their expectation. Let your son know that he is living his life, not performing for anybody, and that if he lives wisely and works hard, it will be to his benefit.

Parents begin to lose their children to the peers when they start to come across as insensitive by not appreciating anything their children do. That is why you need to give your son a dose of face by going along with his wishes from time to time and applauding even if it is just his good behavior. As they say, a good friend is that person who remembers your song when you have forgotten it or reminds you that you are beautiful when you feel ugly. If you find your son becoming freer with other people, especially peers, more than with you, that ought to send a signal that he is feeling frustrated with your demands. A friend told me about overhearing children saying how much they liked it when their father when home received calls that made him stay on phone for long because he used every moment that he was free to complain about their poor performance in class. Whoever you are, the mother or father, refrain from becoming a habitual complainer to the extent of making your presence a source of stress to your children. Making your son feel as if nothing he does is recognized can make him frustrated to the extent of engaging in self-destructive practices.

You may be wondering why your son keeps the company of certain boys, yet they give him nothing. Very often, the reason is because they validate his opinions and actions and sometimes come across as empathizing with his situation while you yourself only complain about whatever he does. As parents, our goal should be to make our children free with us to the extent where we, rather than peers, become the sounding board for their ideas.

When out there, let it be your son's opportunity to speak as you listen. Resist interrupting or talking about the need to work hard at school during such times. Doing that will make him form

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a mental blockade. But the opposite will happen if you start by appreciating any effort and achievement he has made, no matter how seemingly insignificant. This, in addition to making yourself vulnerable and empathizing, will make your son gain your confidence and open up. Do not claim to be “impatient with young people”. Normally, we tend to be extra patient with our bosses, so why do we find it hard to be patient with our relatives, especially our children? Be patient with your son the way you would be patient with your seniors at work.

After establishing his view of the world, his values and beliefs, then skillfully open his eyes to understand the harm that wrong values and beliefs do to people, and then embark on replacing the wrong values and beliefs that you find domesticated in his mind with good ones. Invest time to teach him the useful values that will set him on the right path in navigating through life. Caution: As you do whatever you are trying to do by way of advising him, try as much as you can to avoid an accusing finger. Where possible, weave your messages into stories or experiences to make them palatable.

Young people do not like to be lectured on or feel as if other people’s convictions are being imposed on them. The other thing is that when raising teenagers and adolescents, you need to learn not to be unduly offended by answerbacks. At this age, parent bashing is not uncommon, but it does cease when those teenagers themselves marry and get children; that is when they realize that parents were justified to deal with them the way they did.

First of all, teach Prince to have a healthy view of himself. Let him know that he is important and has special gifts from God, and so are other people. Knowing that other people are also gifted will contribute to his having a balanced view of himself. Putting your son on a pedestal is a way of building his ego to a dangerous level as a result of which he may start making unrealistic demands on people, thereby becoming vulnerable to frustration because

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those expectations will be impossible to satisfy. As a parent, be the cheer leader of your child, but do it wisely, always tempering his expectations of others with reality.

Some parents are unknowingly contributing to promoting a narcissistic (selfish) personality in their children, thus undermining their children's ability to relate well with other people and work with them. So, guard against making Prince get the false impression that he is more important than others and that the world will treat him in a special way. Boys who entertain the feeling of self-importance have a problem even with siblings because they expect special treatment from them also. When they join school, they get a shock upon meeting children who are brighter than they. Then they get frustrated for failing exams that they had unrealistically expected to pass without working. At work, they nurse the simplistic belief that they will be promoted without the requisite qualifications or without putting effort in whatever they do. All that because the reality of life is alien to them. Actually one reason why young men from congested households generally tend to be street smart is because of growing under circumstances that teach them the reality of life early enough, how to relate with people and also how to manage under difficulties. Such do not expect to be given special treatment but value others like themselves and cooperate with them. They also learn early enough the need to work hard and save so as to manage in the competition that characterizes the real world.

Teach your son to have realistic expectation of himself and come up with realistic goals in life. In addition, assure your son that so long as you see him playing his part well, you will be behind him in whatever lies ahead. As they use their children to compete with friends, many parents are making impossible demands on their children as a result of which they frustrate them. Intent on proving parents right, children themselves are grappling with lofty goals that may not even match their gifting and availability

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of opportunities. For too long we have been telling our children to think big, but it is now time to change the mantra and start telling them to think realistically as they evaluate their strengths and use them to deal with life issues. Doing that is what will unlock their potential.

Second, let Prince know that like other people, siblings are not competitors but God's channel of blessings. Unbridled ego that we sometimes unknowingly fuel in our children encourages a sense of competition and the desire to shine alone while undermining the spirit of cooperation and collaboration. What you need to tell your son is that managing life in future, let alone thriving, will call for a lot of cooperation and collaboration.

As the parent, never speak ill of others before your son because paranoia of other people will mean that he will not be able to leverage the gifts that God has given such people. Do not be one of those people who keep telling their children, so and so is a thief, or so and so is a witch. Christ did not tell us to hate others; He told us to love them, irrespective of their human weaknesses because we too have shortcomings. All we need in dealing with people is to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16), and we have been given God's Word to test their advice in case the devil tries to harm us through them.

Third, teach your son the healthy view of women, taking this opportunity to discredit outdated traditional views on how to treat ladies women and replacing them with what God's Word says about women. According to Galatians 3:28 and 1 Peter 3:7, men and women are one in Christ or fellow heirs of the grace of God. Part B of 1 Peter 3:7 even shows that failure to honour your wife as the weaker vessel could result in your prayers being hindered.

The culture that guided the way the older generation was raised treated sons as special children. Whenever there wasn't enough money to pay for one's son's and daughter's school fees, preference was given to the son. Our parents regarded the boy-

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child as their old-age insurance. Simply put, the boy-child was more valued than the girl-child. The girl-child was to be married off to go and serve the interests of another family. The boy-child, on the other hand, was supposed to advance the interests of his family of birth and perpetuate the family name as a way of immortalizing it. There were days even after Independence when educated women were hired on contract, receiving gratuity every 3 years because it was not expected they would need to work until retirement. But today we know better: a child is a child. In fact many elderly people will testify to having been helped more by their daughters than by their sons. Among the Kikuyus, a new practice called *kamweretho* has started whereby children who are married or are working team up with friends and go back to visit their elderly parents, showering them with gifts and praying with them in appreciation for bringing them up. Of interest to note is that this is being done only by daughters. The most inspiring story when India was in the grips of Coronavirus was that of a teenage girl who cycled 1200 kilometres to take her injured father to the village after they were evicted from their city dwelling over rent.

Gone are the days when it was the work of young men to protect the community from external threats and from cattle rustlers. That is now the work of the police and the military.

Also, everything today is bought with money, so women need to be empowered with education so as to step up their earning power. Even the girl-child needs to be equipped for the life of today, and you ought to make your son understand that. With the modern girl-child empowered through education and skills, there is also need to socialize the boy-child to come to terms with this reality and not fear proposing to this empowered woman. He should also learn to live with her as a wife, accommodating her ambitions without feeling threatened.

Finally, you need to give Prince a healthy view of people of other communities. Very often elders encourage the herd

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mentality, besides giving respectability to evils so long as they are done to promote the interests of their community. For instance, many elders have no problem with corruption so long as it is being practised by members of their community. And not just that: Some of the views of elders tacitly encourage tribalism (ethnicity), and you need to warn Prince concerning this also.

God is the One who created people of different skin colour and tongues. According to Acts 17:26, He has made of one blood all nations of men. This is to say that before God all people are equal irrespective the colour of their skin or the language they speak, and this is the same attitude that we should have towards each other. And if it has pleased God to do so, who are you to question it or look down on people of different races and tongues? Practising tribalism or racialism is tantamount to questioning the Creator. And of course it is unwise to lock horns with your Maker because you are sure to lose.

There are even some people who argue that the Jews have their God and we in Africa have ours. But the true God is One, and He had one plan of salvation for all people. As we saw earlier, God chose the children of Israel of the dispensation lasting up to the time of John the Baptist (Luke 16:16) to bring Jesus Christ the Saviour. But Jesus was not coming to deal with the sins of the Jews alone. According to John 1:29, He was the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world. Indeed with the coming of Jesus, we read in Titus 2:11 that the grace of God that brings salvation appeared to *all men* (people).

Fortunately, we now have many young men who are defying certain “wisdom” of selfish elders who promote tribalism with their selfish views as evidenced by the many cross-cultural marriages that are taking place today. Teach your son to accept all people irrespective of their skin colour or language because as we have already seen, they are all created by God. Young people need to be continually reminded that we are one people,

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so perspectives that will not promote oneness are out of step with the times. People, regardless of where they come from, their colour or tongue are the greatest asset of any nation.

In the past when people were confined to their tribal areas, individuals easily turned to their relatives for help whenever they fell on hard times. But the search for opportunities in cities and sometimes out of the country has meant living far from home these days. You should therefore advise Prince to learn to make friends with people from other communities as a way of establishing a new support system or diversifying the existing one.

Finally, teach your son to derive satisfaction from serving or helping other people, aware that he frustrates the work of the devil by so doing. Satan's work is to destroy lives and inflict pain, so by helping people you frustrate the efforts of this thief whose work, according to John 10:10, is to steal, to kill and to destroy. Actually, whatever your son does for other people is noted by God and he will be blessed for it, no matter how seemingly insignificant it is. Having learned to help others, he will also not feel cheated to help his parents and siblings when need arises, or fear to marry and start fending for a wife and children.

Question: *Recently, your son heard a mzee say that anyone without rental houses in Nairobi is doomed, and Prince has repeated this at the family table twice. What will you do to prevent him from assuming that this is the standard measure for success and source of hope?*

Healthy View of Money and Riches

Earlier on, we have seen that you ought to help your son cultivate a healthy view of himself, his siblings and other people. But you need to also give him a healthy view of money and riches.

Young men these days are generally bitter with the society, especially with the older generation, supposing that the latter are the ones who robbed them of hope by taking their opportunities. This unfounded assumption is making some young people start to give the vice of corruption unwarranted respectability as a recent study of the attitude of university students towards corruption showed. To them, misusing one's office for personal gain no longer carries a stigma. Self-enrichment, even at the expense of others, has become an all-consuming passion.

As a society, we have generally become highly commercial and materialistic. You might have probably heard of this mzee who is introduced to the daughter's boyfriend. Unimpressed by the background of the young man, he whispers to the wife, "Young people these days marry for something that they call love, but what amazes me is that they find this thing only among the poor." We also have *wazees* who influence those who are marrying off their daughters to demand huge dowry and thus contribute to making young men start families with debt.

The get-rich-quick mentality is now ingrained in our young people as well, with many glorifying wealth irrespective of how it is obtained. Recently, we read in the newspaper about people somewhere in Githurai 44 or Githurai 45 who were caught having mixed dough with *bhang* (cannabis sativa) to generate craving

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for the cakes they made. By our words, we are knowingly and unknowingly giving our young men the wrong impression that poor people are worthless, making many want to do anything to cross the so-called valley of poverty. Yet the attitude that is destroying young men is being formed in the crucible of their families and members of the society in general, so, we all need to be careful what we say in the presence of our young people or even what we tell them directly because of the influence it could have on them.

First, the yardstick that we are using to evaluate success has frustrated many young people who can hardly rent themselves a decent dwelling let alone think of buying property in the city where almost every undeveloped property has the sign “This Property is not for sale”. Advise your son to work hard but not to hold himself to too high a standard that may make him frustrated for failure to realize.

The other thing is that portraying menial work negatively is making egoistic young men shy from taking the job that is available, even when one is out of work, if he imagines that this job will not contribute to sustaining or, better still, raising his image in society. This is also one of the reasons why many young men with fragile ego shy from seeking technical skills that the industry demands, preferring to wait for highly paying office work that is not forthcoming. What we need to tell our young people is that *kazi ni kazi* (work is work) so long as it puts food on the table. The person who unclogs the sewer and the one at the cockpit of a passenger airliner are both working, and the shopkeeper will not care how they got the money they use to buy goods from him or her. Also, people who live to serve their ego tend to live beyond their means and easily get into debt as they seek to protect their false status. The upshot is that they are stressed and do not even save for the rainy day.

Disparaging remarks directed at those who do menial jobs could

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also make Prince choosy or hate occupations like farming which, though not known for high income, have a future. Today, almost every young man has become a “broker” because of feeling as if working with their hands is beneath them. If you go to places where they grow maize, for example, you will see few young people when manual work like planting, weeding or applying fertilizer is being done. That time, you mainly see elderly people and small children. Young men appear at the time of harvesting as they move around influencing farmers to give their ‘friends’ the contract of shelling maize and deciding whom the maize will be sold to, at a commission of course. The question is, will our country manage to continue feeding its growing population if farming remains the occupation of the elderly and children?

Many people do not understand why there are more suicides related to career and business failure in some communities than in others. But often, the community’s attitude towards money has a bearing on this. Stress is our reaction to pressure around us, and if you come from a highly materialistic, competitive community, the remarks they make when you are processing failure are likely to be toxic and hence magnify stress and the attendant sense of hopelessness instead of helping you manage it. This is why parents, the church and the rest of the community should work at promoting a healthy outlook towards property and success. In addition, tell Prince that when processing failure, he should keep reminding himself that he is so important that his value cannot be expressed in monetary terms. He should also surround himself with people who have the right attitude towards money and riches, people who will also give him a sense of belonging and thus provide a supportive environment for dealing with stress.

Money is important, but riches are not a prerequisite for happiness. I read that even many in the US have realized that the so-called American dream is just a dream. As a result, they have opted out of the rat race and “started living”. Money is just for

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enhancing your well-being, not to be accumulated for the sake of it. It should not be regarded as an end but means to an end. Unfortunately many of us are busy quantifying people's worth as if their value is a function of what they own. These are billionaires, they say. These are millionaires. These ones are worthless. And the list goes on and on. But God never creates anything that is without value. God Himself is great (Psalm 48:1), and that means every human being whom He creates and has His breath has great worth. There is no such a thing as a worthless human being; indeed according to Hebrews 2:9, Christ tasted death for every man. Every man who provides his family with a roof on top of their heads—whether rented or owned by him—food to eat and clothes on their backs is worthy to be celebrated.

Finally, tell your son to desist from celebrating those who have got their money corruptly because by so doing he will be encouraging selfishness and promoting the so-called politics of the stomach. Young men should be encouraged to live outside their self-interest and work hard as they play their role in the society. There is nothing wrong with being rich, but God did not bring us into this world just to amass wealth. He brought us to worship Him (Rev 4:11) as we enjoy the resources that He has provided. Encourage Prince to work hard but know that the idea that you cannot enjoy life unless you are rich is false. At the same time, help him come up with goals that are achievable for evaluating success, like being able to feed his family with whatever legal work he finds to do. Many have built their life upon money and that is all they fight to own. But the Bible shows that there is more to life than abundance of substance.

Question: *Prince is now 12 and you have noted that he is working too hard to win the approval of peers. What will you do to make him stop this so that he can focus on more beneficial endeavors, like studying and, by so doing, also shield himself from manipulation?*

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The father of Kevin, whom age mates call Kevo, is a senior government officer and his mother a deputy vice chancellor in a reputable university. Like most people occupying senior positions in the academia, she enjoys a six-digit monthly income. She has her own house in the up-market Lavington Estate in Nairobi. She goes out of the country at least once every 6 months and has even been given a personal assistant to take care of her travel arrangements and other official and personal issues so that she can focus on her work without distraction.

But she has her cross to bear: Kevo, her only son, who is into alcohol and drugs.

When Kevo was younger, his father and mother were living together. As he grew up, he yearned for his parents' company and attention, but they were wrapped up in their work and their social life and had little time for him.

His father patronized a golf club in the outskirts of the city where he passed every evening to chat with friends and sometimes ate supper there. And this may have been because Kevo's mother had filled the children's hearts with anger towards their dad whom she claimed was not working hard enough to be as rich as their friends. As a result, even the children had become rude in addressing him.

In the house, Kevo and his sisters had no chores. Even making his bed was the work of the house help. His sole responsibility was studying, and in the evenings he was confined in his study room doing homework. His parents'

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expectations when it came to his performance in class were too high for him, and the fact that his dad kept repeating that those who did not do well in school would not amount to anything did not make things better. At some point he stopped trying to please his parents altogether.

Kevo adored celebrities and wished to become a musician, an ambition that he felt like classroom and regular employment could not deliver. He wanted his hobby to be his job. But when he shared the desire with his mother, she cringed and her voice changed to a whisper as she said, "If you become a musician, your dad will never get over the embarrassment of your choice of career."

Over time, the marriage of Kevo's parents started experiencing problems. Initially, their disagreements were characterized by barking at each other, sometimes in the presence of children. Then with the mother giving his father "cold treatment" (acting unhappy to manipulate him) too often, the father started to feel frustrated and their communication dwindled to notes scrawled on small pieces of paper. Before long they started living separate lives and spending their money separately. By then, their marriage was just a cold alliance for social privilege. Eventually, Kevo's father dropped all pretence, moved out and married another lady.

Around the same time, Kevo started drinking, influenced to do so by a clique of boys from similar privileged background. At first he hated the taste of fermented stuff, but drinking was his

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only way of buying his way into the group. His friends' motto was "*Jibambe mara hii*" (Sheng for "Enjoy life right now"), and he respected them too much to argue. Henceforth, these are the people who set the agenda for the day when the school was in recess; they are the ones who decided whether it was a day for thrill-seeking by roller skating on busy roads or for 'bash'. He subserviently acquiesced to their whims.

Little did Kevo know what he had got himself into by starting to drink. But choices have consequences. Before long, he got hooked to the bottle and now also frequents dens of crime that are camouflaged as entertainment joints to buy stuff that he uses to get a new high.

Recently, friends visited his mother. As they were talking, Kevo, apparently desperate for a fix, entered the guest room and told the mother to give him Shs 1000. At first she hesitated and then realized he was getting irritated and she feared he might raise his voice and cause a scene. With an imperceptible grin of pain she told him, "Give me that bag."

He walked to the end of the room, got the mother's bag and proffered it to her. She opened it, fished out a high denomination note from her purse, gave it to him and continued discussing with her visitors. But after they left, tears that she had tried hard to suppress broke through.

Six years after joining a private university, Kevo has still not yet finished his first degree. At 27, he lacks a steady girlfriend and has not even shown any signs of wanting to move out

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of his mother's house and become independent. Moreover, his mother has, albeit unknowingly, been contributing to this in some way. Reacting to life with her estranged husband, she is openly critical of men, and by keeping on talking about matrimonial tribulations, she has reinforced in her grown daughters and Kevo the impression that married tenderness and happy family are unreal.

These days Kevo is becoming deaf in one ear from travelling back and forth by matatus with loud music. There was a time his mother used to release her car to him whenever he was going for parties, but he banged it severally and the mother said enough is enough. He now keeps to himself most of the time and rarely unplugs from his mobile phone. Sometimes he mutters incoherent stuff while shaking his head. Other times he just stares dreamily into the void, occasionally smiling like someone who is watching a movie that is playing out in his mind. His mother, fearing that he might soon lose grip of life, is planning to take him to a rehab near Kiambu town. (Excerpted from a book by the same author titled *How to Help the Boy-Child*.)

Peer Pressure and Manipulation

Uncontrolled male ego tends to thrust young men into imaginary competition, for ever seeking validation for the things that they do, thereby yielding to the slavery occasioned by the craving to impress. Such people are indwelt by a subduing complex that makes them try to do everything with flair in an effort to show off; actually they fear to participate in anything in which they don't feel like they will wow the onlookers. Unfortunately, this makes them go through life scratching the surface of their potential or fail to take advantage of lifetime opportunities that they could cherish to remember in future.

A few years ago, there was a joint fellowship of our churches somewhere on the outskirts of Nairobi where the hosting church was celebrating 30 years of its existence. On this occasion, singing groups from different congregations were making presentations and the youth group of one of the churches had requested to sing. When they were given the opportunity to do so, no boy came out. As the young ladies were singing, people started asking each other in low tones, "Where are the young men? I thought this presentation was being made by the youth." Wanting to do only what they can do exceptionally well so as to impress is inhibiting young men from serving God with all the potential that He has endowed them. On May 16, 2024, I happened to visit a venue where the Boy-Child day was being celebrated. But what amazed me is to find that though there were boys, the program was being coordinated and run by ladies.

As mentioned earlier, boys are egoistic, and the fact that our society overemphasizes the importance of riches and rates

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people by how much they possess does not make things better for them. Most boys tend to be intimidated by the fact that they do not come from rich homes, possess symbols of affluence like expensive mobile phones, flashy cars or a lot of money. Lack of these things makes them assailed by a sense of failure that usurps their self-esteem and paralyzes them to the point of inaction so far as self-development is concerned. Unfortunately even those from rich homes have their source of discouragement also, and that is the prospects of their being unable to replicate the success of their parents, let alone outdo them.

Young people like to “make a splash” whenever they enter where their peers are. Even the way they dress—sometimes in torn clothes that are said to cost more than new ones—is dictated by what they imagine will impress the peers, very often the way celebrities dress. They also do other things that cost them a lot but are regarded as trendy by those they revere.

To some young men, not being appreciated by peers alone is a big deal and can even affect school grades or make them experience mild depression. This explains why some of them have ended up acting out of character, for example by stealing exam in school or getting involved in corruption later in life. To buy acceptance in some revered group of acquaintances, they could also do irresponsible things that will lead to self-harm. Some young people have involved themselves in binge drinking, leading to addiction to alcohol and substances that have weakened them to the extent where they are unable to carry their weight or made them shirk their parental responsibility. Not so long ago, we were treated to an unedifying spectacle of ladies from Nyeri demonstrating over the fact that their husbands were spending too much time in bars, thus neglecting their families.

Male ego also makes men vulnerable to peer influence and feelings of frustration upon setting themselves unrealistic expectations to impress peers and the rest of the society. Let

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your son know that reducing life into a competition with peers or committing time and resources to do things to impress others is wasting life or making it hard for nothing.

Many people are unaware of the power that peers wield over boys, even when they are young. My son, a piano teacher, tells me of a time when he took a certain young boy he was teaching to play the instrument during a recital. After the performance, the mother, having been impressed by the way the son had played, congratulated him. His teacher did the same. Yet their words would not move him to repeat the songs he had played. But that was until the age mates expressed appreciation; after that he played again and again and again.

If your son lacks self-esteem, he will become a slave of age mates, succumbing to peer pressure as he seeks their acceptance. So, let him know that sensible living is more than doing what impresses a parent or any other person in the society. Anybody can live a happy life, and the first step towards that kind of life is to accept himself for who he is while thanking God for the opportunity to live. Also, tell your son not to hold himself to a frustrating standard as he seeks to impress, or get bothered about what people say or think about him if he is not doing something that is hurting others. If you happen to be bothered about what people think about you, then you have given up control of your life to them. If you allow yourself to think that you need the acceptance of somebody or group of people to feel worthy and experience joy, then you have set yourself up to be manipulated by them at will. It has rightly been said that you will never get to where you are going if you keep stopping every time someone says something negative about you.

Unlike ladies who easily take whatever comes their way when they are out of work, we are seeing young men who look down on poorly paying jobs while waiting for unguaranteed highly paying ones. They frown upon what they consider to be “slave

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wage”, preferring to spend the day in cyber cafes gambling or just watching movies. Other men prefer to live out the fantasy of registering businesses and appointing themselves CEOs of companies that exist only on paper.

Feeling as if employment cannot deliver the kind of lifestyle they see in soap operas, many young men have refused to go for training to acquire a skill, yet you can never make money at anything you are not good at. Nor do they change when hired. There is complaint that many young men exhibit lack of stamina and enthusiasm for work or are not keen enough to deliver good services or make quality goods. Driven by the desire to get rich in a hurry, many keep changing jobs, as a result of which they do not qualify to climb the corporate ladder.

As they seek to acquire ostentatious goods to keep up appearances, some have been sucked into the debt trap “buy now pay later”. Others have been lured by today’s host of mobile lending apps to borrow to the extent where all they can do at the end of the month is to renew the debt by paying the interest alone. They have dug themselves into a hole without trying. But let Prince know that having access to credit does not mean that he must borrow!

Tell Prince to resist the temptation of using debt to buy things that he cannot afford as he seeks to impress. Lenders are in business, not in charity, so there is a way in which they impoverish their customers. Debt causes stress in life, and stress impacts negatively on happiness, besides undermining one’s health. He should therefore do everything possible to live within his means. Someone has said that when you are driving an expensive car, it is that car—not you!—that most people admire and picture themselves at its steering wheel going places. That shows the futility of getting into debt so as to do things to impress.

Aware of the influence that peers and control freaks have over our children, we should make extra effort to demonstrate empathy

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and understanding in dealing with them if we are to make our young men do what we say instead of what age mates tell them. To promote a healthier view of him and build your son's capacity to deal with fear and the craving for acceptance, keep reminding him that you have established that he has a capable brain and that he ought to use it to think for himself rather than letting peers think on his behalf. Doing so will build in him capacity to resist group think and herd mentality.

The first thing to do as you guard your son against manipulators is to teach him to identify them so that he can flee their influence. Of course no one will come boasting that he is a manipulator; it is their actions that give them away. Manipulators try to make you do things you do not want to do or try to control you in other ways. They are always trying to get their way in your life and will not hesitate to even shame you into submission, if necessary.

Second, your son should detach himself from anyone whom he finds himself respecting to the extent of fearing to give his honest opinion on anything in their presence in case he hurt them. When you are over-awed by people, they tend to manipulate you effortlessly because you will start saying or doing things the way you imagine they will approve of, sometimes at your expense. In a way you become your own manipulator through them.

Third, your son ought to detach himself from negative people so that their negative comments do not drain his energy or undermine his self-esteem. Instead, he should surround himself with positive people who respect him for who he is and also uplift him. Your son should never question his self-worth. He finds his worth in God his Creator, not in the things he owns, what he thinks about himself or what any fellow human being thinks about him. Having been created by a great God makes him very important, so he should not waste precious moments of life seeking validation from fellow human beings. He is not a product of evolution. According to Psalm 100:3, it is God who

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made us we people, not we ourselves. And God brought us into this world for His purpose, Proverbs 16:4; therefore, we should live to give Him glory, Revelation 4:11, not to impress peers or any other people.

Then, teach your son to work hard and thank God for the ability to do so but come to terms with his position in society after doing his best. He should know that he is, first and foremost, answerable to God. This is because all that he is and all that he is able to do find their source in God. The breath that God put into the nostrils of the human being at creation is the one that gives him intellect. The other person he is answerable to is himself, and let him know that you are willing to help him in striving not to fail God and himself so long as his goals do not conflict with the will of God and are therefore realistic.

As mentioned elsewhere, seeking to live up to people's unrealistic expectations as you try to impress them is often what is behind poor planning and mismanagement of finances at individual level and every problem that comes with it, yet according to Romans 13:8, all that we owe one another is love.

The other thing to tell Prince is that he should not hold himself to too high a standard. If he did so, he will be setting himself up for frustration through unrealistic expectations. There are a host of ways by which unrealistic expectations and demands destroy lives. Unrealistic demands of self and machines are even what is behind the many boda boda and other motor vehicle accidents we are experiencing in our country today. It is not unusual to see a boda boda speeding with 3 passengers balancing precariously. Then there are those riders who while trying to impress passengers and make a lot of money in a short time engage in dangerous maneuvers, even driving on the wrong side on busy streets. The next thing is an accident. There are also bus owners who while trying to repay the loans of their vehicles faster than is practically possible put pressure on the driver to move faster or make him

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remain on the steering wheel for so long that he begins to doze off while driving.

As we have seen earlier, your son should work hard but learn to be satisfied with whatever he achieves upon doing things realistically. Like any other person, your son, according to Revelation 4:11, was created by God for His pleasure, meaning, to serve God's interests. He was not created to live life in a way that proves a point. God understands him and loves him more than any fellow human being can love him. And what is most encouraging is that God's expectations on people are realistic and hence achievable. God has your son's best interests at heart. In Jeremiah 29:11 KJV the Lord promises: *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you... thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*

As a parent, give your son biblical values to live by and be in the forefront of satisfying his desire for affirmation so that he does not go looking for approval from peers and from the other members of the society who will only be eager to exploit his craving for validation to their advantage. Your son's self-esteem arises from feeling that he is generally successful and that other people appreciate what he is doing, not when he feels like there is no significance in whatever he does. That way he also feels a sense of belonging. And this is only possible if he and the people who matter to him have set for him realistic expectations and appreciate the seemingly small steps that he makes in life. Even then, you need to also remind him to outgrow the need for affirmation so that this does not become a snare in his life. He should not always look to hear how amazing and how incredible he is, since most people who will cross his path will not be that gracious.

Of course you would not want to raise a son who is a victim of codependency, a person who moves around in an adult body but reasons like a child so far as his expectation from society

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is concerned. Your son should not take upon himself the burden of doing things to make himself come across as relevant to a group of people he reveres. Just by having created him, God has declared him relevant and nobody can contest such a high-level decision. Sadly, there are many people who, upon destroying their life while seeking to impress a bunch of acquaintances they call friends, become internally bitter that people are not returning the “favour” in kind or through recognition.

A mature person should be able to withstand criticism without getting frustrated. Everybody is eager to get someone to appreciate what they are doing, but we should not allow this craving to become an Achilles Heel, a weakness that interferes with the way we think about ourselves or do things. Fortunately, if your son works with the aim of pleasing God, he will never be frustrated because unlike fellow human beings, God never makes unrealistic demands on people. Freedom and realistic management of your life begin when you have God alone to please, after relieving yourself of real and perceived expectations of people of course.

Ironically, there are young people who would like to do or to stand for what is right but fear losing friends who may have contrary views. But let your son know that his joy and satisfaction should not depend on his friends’ view of how he does things or his position on issues. His joy is a function of his attitude; it comes from within him. It does not depend on things external, whether the class of his friends and their view of how he does things, the kind of work he does, the size or generation of his mobile phone, or the caliber of the car that he drives.

There are even young people who imagine that their life would be more interesting if they went abroad. But in many ways life out there is more challenging, and many who have lived there will attest to that. If you cannot put up with the rigours of life here in Kenya, you have higher chances of getting frustrated in a foreign land.

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Emphasize the importance of your son being proud of what he gets through his sweat and the need to spend it responsibly. Also, let him know that he is more important than any sum of money, a big house or car that he could buy, so he should not engage in destructive tendencies for not having these things. Let him know that while you are not discouraging him from working towards getting these things, he should enjoy what he has at present and refrain from destroying himself as he waits for the supposedly rosy future. You get the most out of life by enjoying every moment of your life, not by having everything you want at once.

Power and money-making are not all there is to life. Encourage your son to work hard, but let him also know that the idea that you cannot enjoy life unless you're a millionaire, have a big house and a big car is false. These things are good, but attitude has a big role in determining whether or not one experiences joy in life. Your son should learn to use the money he has, no matter how little it is, to live a meaningful life. One could entertain a sense of failure until they end up becoming depressed while in actual fact they are very much blessed. Also, he should not be obsessed with what is not going for him, always focusing on it. Even the rich have their own kind of challenges. He should learn to count his blessings. In this world no one who is endowed with everything. If you wait until you have everything in order to be happy, you will have condemned yourself to a life of sorrow. To be at ease, embrace humility, living without any status to defend, work hard in whatever you find to do, value other people and recognize their gifting, and take advantage of the talents that God has given them by cooperating and collaborating with them.

Then teach your son something that is very important in this life for joy and happiness: having control over one's thoughts. The thoughts that you entertain have a bearing on the quality of your life. Positive thoughts chase away any dark cloud that could be hanging over one's life and give the anxious person inner drive.

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Your son should not entertain self-pity if he happens to have done his best in studying or working and things do not work out as he hoped. He should thank God, be contented and press on with life. Bad thoughts or attitude make you your first enemy. As a result, in Philippians 4:8 we are urged to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. Studying the Bible to know the God who created you, His power and His character of love fills one's mind with a sense of security and peace that are a prerequisite of joy.

Let's summarize by asking, what brings fulfillment in life? As already alluded to, what brings fulfillment in life is not much money or what people say or think about you but a godly attitude. And a godly attitude goes together with contentment.

With this awareness, advise your son to pursue a higher purpose for living, which is to serve God and help fellow men who are in need of assistance. He should not build his life around fellow human beings. People can unravel and leave him disillusioned. Instead, he should build his life around the Lord and His will. In this age when some people almost worship others and even believers identify themselves with church leaders more than with the Lord, let us remember that Jesus remains the standard by which to fashion our lives. Apostle Paul according to 1 Corinthians 11:1 urged people to follow him only as he followed Christ. Jesus is the Author and the Finisher of our faith, Hebrews, 12:2. The rest of us, according to Matthew 23:8, are brethren regardless of the office they hold.

Question: *Prince is now in secondary school and the other day when school was in recess, he came back home behaving funny and you learned that he had been drinking with age mates. What will you tell him concerning alcohol, drugs and vices promoted by the media?*

Alcohol and Vices Promoted by Media

If there is anything that the devil has used over the ages to facilitate evil and destroy lives, then it is alcohol. You have probably seen a common sticker in matatus that reads: *Jikakamue kama bibi ya mlevi*. This is Kiswahili for “Confront your situation with the bravery of the wife of a drunkard”. And this is evidence of the fact that drunkards take their relatives, especially wives, through hell.

When people are in court and are pleading for mercy before the magistrate, it is not unusual to hear one say, “I did what I did under the influence of alcohol,” being indirect admission to the fact that being drunk and having a sound mind do not go together. But the Lord requires His people to have a sound mind. In 2 Timothy 1:7 KJV the Bible says: *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

People have contracted all manner of diseases after drunkenness undermined their sense of judgment, making them mess. In the developed world where they have managed to capture data on misuse of alcohol, it has been established that 40% of all crimes are carried out after people have been drinking. Through alcohol and drugs, we have seen the character of people we admired disintegrate before our eyes as they lose control of their life. Marriages have been broken and children suffer. Many in Kenya have died or become blind after drinking “kumi kumi” or similar concoctions. You probably have heard of a *matatu* driver *ambaye ameshikwa na sitima*. That is the case of one who is addicted to alcohol getting to a point where the body starts to demand a drink

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and he starts shaking at the steering wheel to the extent where he cannot continue with work until he takes “something”.

The devil, being the thief of John 10:10 whose work is to steal, to kill, and to destroy, really exploits things like alcohol to cause oppression. In our country it is now an open secret that we do not have enough rehabs for all the young people who need to be weaned off addiction to alcohol and substances.

Defenders of drinking keep arguing that a little alcohol is not bad. But the Kikuyus say that *njoohi ndĩrĩ mwarimũ*, meaning that there has never been anyone with control over alcohol. They also say that *njoohi nĩ njohi*, meaning that alcohol ensnares. This explains why it is not to be sold to those under 18 and buyers warned not to consume it excessively, although sellers do not say what quantity is enough. Many people who are now struggling with addiction started by taking a little and ended up getting hooked. Others who started to drink for recreation then graduated to drugs as they sought to experience a new high. Before long, they started needing external help to be freed from the oppression in which they found themselves.

Nor is alcohol a respecter of persons. There are many priests from churches that serve strong drinks during Holy Communion who are also seeking help after getting addicted.

In trying to justify the use of alcohol, many quote John chapter 2, but Jesus in Cana of Galilee did not make strong drink. Our Lord was aware of what the Old Testament said concerning strong drinks, for example in Proverbs 20:1 where strong drink is described as a mocker and Proverbs 31 verse 6 where wine (strong drink) is said to be for those who are ready to perish. What Jesus made in Cana of Galilee was the equivalent of the fruit juice or soft drink that we use even today in weddings to down the *mchele* that we eat at the reception. Such is the kind of drink that is referred to in Matthew 26:29 as “fruit of the vine”. The KJV version of the Bible uses the word ‘wine’ for both strong

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and soft drinks, but those who have done exegesis of ancient languages tell us that the Greek and Hebrew words for strong and soft drinks are different, and the Greek word that is used for the wine that Jesus made in Cana of Galilee is that for soft drink.

Rather than drinking wine (strong drink), the Word of God admonishes believers to be filled with (or be yielded fully to) the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 5:18. The same way the various parts of a person who is drunk gets under the control of alcohol, believers ought to yield all aspects of their life to the control of the Holy Spirit. Just as strong drinks and drugs are instruments that the devil uses to perpetuate evil, the Holy Spirit is the Lord's tool for promoting righteousness.

Not everything that is taught or encouraged by peers or by the media is worth embracing. A friend who studied in the city in the early '70s loved mathematics and was eager to perform well in this subject in his O-level exam. When he shared his desire with a friend, *a jamaa wa mtaa*, the latter advised him to smoke *bhang* (*cannabis sativa*) on the morning of the day he was going to sit for the paper. Doing this, he was told, would bring all the formulas he had crammed to remembrance. And smoking he did, but the effect was contrary to what he had been promised. By the time the papers were given out, his mind had gone blank. He just managed to write his name, sit back and then stared into the void. When the effect of bhang wore off, he could only tackle a couple of questions and the bell rung. That is how he ended up performing dismally in the subject he loved and had worked so hard to prepare for.

One of the benefits of knowing the Scriptures is that you can use them to test whatever you are taught. Behind every teaching, whether of God or of the devil, is a spirit, and in 1 John 4:1 we are admonished not to believe every spirit but try (or test) the spirits. Many young people started to drink and got into all sorts

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of addictions as they sought the acceptance of peers and as they mindlessly emulated celebrities.

Apart from alcohol and drugs, there are a host of vices that are gaining undeserved respectability. These include premarital sex and pornography that are being pushed down the throats of young people by peers and the media. Premarital sex happens between you and a lady who is not your wife, so it is a form of fornication. Concerning porn, our Lord said in Matthew 5:28 said that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her in his heart. And God takes the sin of adultery very seriously as evident from the many bad things that befell King David upon sinning with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

Question: *Prince looks weighed down by common challenges, and as the parent you feel it is necessary to explain him the genesis of this world's problems so that he is not frustrated by a reality he has no way of changing. How will you go about that and at the same time give him tips on how to interact with these hardships without losing his peace?*

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Karanje is the first child of very poor parents. He was born and raised in the squalor of an informal settlement where he and his siblings contended with hardship in its raw form. Home is a leaky shed next to Nairobi River. There are no landmarks to guide a visitor there. Sometimes the stench from this highly polluted river is overpowering.

Inside their dwelling when food is available, people sit on rickety stools and overturned buckets and eat with bare hands from metal plates that could scald you when food is served hot. They get by on one meal every 24 hours, sometimes just *ugali* that is washed down with true tea, known there as *turungi*. Hunger is a reality of daily life here. Many pre-teens spend the day scavenging dumpsites in rich neighbourhoods for carrot shavings and anything else that is palatable. There are no beds. At night, they spread empty gunny bags on the floor. With no blankets to cover themselves, one gets warmth from the person sleeping next to him or her.

Karanje's mother operates a tiny retail outlet as a *mama mboga* and sometimes walks for miles to Kasarani to wash clothes in rich people's homes. Her dresses are creased functional garments picked from Gikomba open-air boutique. Her hands are so rough that they can smother a pineapple, and they speak of the sacrifice that she has made for her family. She has always been the breadwinner. It is also her meagre income that clothes her household. Much of what her husband gets in doing odd jobs like unclogging sewer lines in middle-class neighbourhoods and pulling carts goes to the bottle. Even when he is

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hired by a brewer called Mama Njeri to hoist heavy canisters of liquid from Nairobi River, he is paid using intoxicating stuff. Every day he gets home stumbling about, stammering and drooling saliva. In this place, many use alcohol to keep spirits high in the face of so many difficulties. As a result, almost every argument leads to a brawl and many people have two or more front teeth missing.

Karanje's father grew up in the countryside those days when pain was supposed to build character. He was taught that being a father is to be hard when dealing with children, and that is the wisdom he applied to raise Karanje and his siblings. If Karanje said he was hungry or reported to his father that boys in the neighbourhood were molesting him, his father's reproving glance was worth ten punches in the mouth. Sometimes it would even be accompanied with a slap. Over time Karanje stopped asking for anything from his father or opening up to him in any way because it was like exiting the dragon and entering the tiger.

Due to lack of school fees, Karanje joined school at ten after the government came up with the free education policy. But though he persevered until he got through primary school, his parents could not afford to take him to secondary school.

Thereafter, Karanje became a familiar figure in building sites in Embakasi and Njiru areas where he hacked at concrete, conveyed stones to masons and carted away debris, getting Shs 600 at the end of the day.

But with fewer houses coming up now, he has lately started hanging out at *matatu* terminus, waiting for the rare "squad" (contract to wheedle for

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passengers). The day he does not get someone to hire him, he settles for what matatu operators call *kupiga seeti*. This is to sit in the vehicle to promote the misperception that it has passengers and is about to leave in order to attract travellers, including those in a hurry. At some point the conductor who is wheedling for passengers cries out, “*Mmoja wa ukweli!*” Once Karanje sees the last passenger at the door, he walks out, pretending to go to receive a call, and the vehicle leaves. All that for shs 20.

Over time, he has resigned to the feeling that he will always be poor. He has been living from hand to mouth and does not see himself saving to start any kind of business. A friend had recently introduced him to betting, telling him, “*Hii kitu itakufanya uomoke teke teke*, This thing will make you rich very fast.” This had roused him to hopes of a fortune. He imagined himself buying a house, moving his relatives from their current depressing neighbourhood and even marrying. But he never won.

Karanje imagines life is very interesting for people with money and really pities himself. Moreover, pondering the odds against himself has reinforced the feeling of hopelessness and, like his father, sought solace in cheap liquor. Lately, he has also started the vicious behaviour of beguiling girls, putting them in the family way and refusing the responsibility that comes with fatherhood. He is, as it were, trudging through life while inflicting pain. (Excerpted from a book by the same author entitled *How to Help the Boy-Child*)

Healthy View of Everyday Hardships

Earlier on we have seen the importance of giving your son a healthy view of himself and other people. But there is also need for him to have a healthy attitude towards day-to-day challenges of life. Life is a game, and you win it by choosing to enjoy it even in the face of the chaos that characterizes it.

The Bible is the book that enables us to understand the genesis of what is happening in the world today and what to expect in future. And God's Word shows that the devil is the one behind sin and all the hardships that we experience in the world. In Isaiah 14:17, we learn that it is the Devil, also referred to as Lucifer in the KJV, who has made this world as a wilderness, destroyed the cities and does not open the house of his prisoners. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 the Devil is referred to as the *god of this world* (evil world systems, that is). In John 10:10 we are introduced to the devil's character by none other than Jesus Himself. Here, our Lord shows that the Devil is a thief who comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. God only **allows** trials or hardships with a reason—like when He allowed challenges in Job's like to prove a point to the devil, or to punish His people when they sin.

Since the devil introduced sin into this world through Adam as we see in Genesis chapter 3, the world has been in a crisis mode. History is but a boring series of wars and crises. (These are those groans and travails mentioned in Romans 8:22 that will end when Christ returns to rule from Jerusalem the time when, according to verse 23, we will have received redemption of our body and Satan thrown into the bottomless pit.) At the time of writing this

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book, there were, according to the President of the International Rescue Committee, 54 conflicts going on concurrently around the world, all needing humanitarian aid. Recently, we have witnessed a virus by the name Corona that caused many deaths and what experts describe as one of the sharpest economic contractions in modern times. This is not to mention the negative impact of individual and national debt that many nations of the world find themselves contending with.

Satan is behind the hardships that characterize life in this world—hunger, war, joblessness, business failure, heartbreaks and even tragedies. Just by listening to the news or reflecting on one's experiences confirms that this world is full of challenges. Prince should therefore not even blame himself or the other people because of the difficulties that go with putting food on the table. According to Genesis 3:19, God told Adam following the entry of sin that he would eat his bread in the sweat of his face. This world does not exempt those who do the work of God from trouble, either. Jesus according to John 16:33b warned His disciples that in this world they would have tribulation. And the fact that Jesus added that He had overcome the world is evidence of the fact that if your son relies on the Lord, he too will accomplish all that God intended that he accomplish in the face of all the Satan-inspired inconveniences.

Moreover, philosophers and politicians are not the ones who will end the problems in this world. The work of politicians is to create a healthy environment for people to work and develop themselves as individuals and their nation, not to toil on behalf of those who elected them. True, you ought to play your role in voting the right representative. In addition, as a good Christian and citizen you ought to seek peace and pursue it (Psalm 34:14). But do not get the mistaken impression that politics can deliver tranquility. Lasting peace and tranquility must wait until Jesus, the Prince of peace, returns to this world to rule from Jerusalem.

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Jesus is the One who, according to Revelation 20:2, will have the Devil bound and cast into the bottomless pit for the 1000 years that our Lord will be ruling. The most that good politics can do is make life in the present world manageable. No individual human being, even if he or she wanted, can satisfy the needs of so many people. That is why your son ought to come to terms with the hardships that characterize the present world and move on with life, enjoying it as he serves God.

Politics cannot make people equal, either. Jesus showed in Matthew 26:11 that the poor will be with us always. At best, good politics can only ensure that even people at the lower end of society have the basics—food, clothing and shelter—but there will always be those who are richer than others, and this should not cause the poor people any frustration. It would be unwise of your son to fight with this reality or allow himself to be depressed by it.

The other thing to tell Prince is that when he starts working, he should live within his means or, better still, below his means so that debt does not compound his hardships. Living realistically preempts or reduces stress. By living below his means, he could also save for a rainy day.

Also, encourage Prince to be a reader. Reading exposes you to knowledge that you can exploit for self-development. Also, history books and biographies will make him aware of other people who faced similar circumstances like his and how they dealt with them. Being aware of the past helps in dealing with the present and with preparing for the future. Failure to read about the past, on the other hand, makes one feel like the challenges they face are unique with them and as if they have no solution.

Really, there is no new thing under the sun, Ecclesiastes 1:9b. This is to say that the problems we are experiencing today are not a new phenomenon, either; they are just a mutation of those that other people experienced in the past and survived to do the work

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that God had for them. During the First World War, there was this German general in Tanzania, then Tanganyika, called Von Lettow Vobeck who withstood the British and even continued fighting in East Africa when the war had already ended in Europe. And so around 1916, Senior Chief Njiiri Karanja of Mūrang'a was approached by the British to provide people to go and fight on their side in Tanzania, and my grandfather Thunu wa Hũūra was one of those who were forcefully conscripted. Grandfather told me that they walked from Gĩkoe village, a place in Mūrang'a County not far from the Aberdare ranges, to Nairobi because Thika Road would not be built until around 1924. In Nairobi, he was given a pair of shorts to put on because all he had was a *shuka*. In the train that took them to Voi so that they could then walk to Korogwe in Tanga, he was in the wagon that carried horses that the Britons would use in the war so that he could go washing them. Actually Grandfather was not going to be a combatant; he was going to be based at the camp in Korogwe where he would be washing horses for *wazungus* who were going to the frontline.

The conflict ended in 1918, but he was not compensated for the work. Worse still, the pair of shorts that he had been given was recalled after the war. I guess the British people wanted to keep the *suruali* for those who would be forced to fight alongside them in future hostilities. And so he went back to his *shuka*. But this great man took this unfairness in his stride, came back home to his wife (he had just married when he was picked to go and fight) and raised the family of which I and many others are descendants.

I read somewhere that in the London of the 1840s, some people went around collecting dog poop that they then sold to cobblers to soften the leather of the shoes they made. That is how they put food on the table, if such people had tables in their houses at all. History shows that everybody, including leaders, have faced problems. So it would be unwise to let yours weigh you down.

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You will not have demonstrated good parenthood until you make your children aware of the challenges they should expect, promise to stand by them, and also show them how to deal with life issues. Your son will not be overwhelmed by what he anticipated. Let him know that life is generally chaotic so that he is not surprised to come across any challenges. Even wars are not a new phenomenon. In fact whenever the world has experienced peace, that has merely been an interlude to set the stage for yet another war. It is said that the 20th century started with a lot of optimism after centuries of feudalism and all manner of oppression. People with too much faith in technological advancement and also embracing supposedly progressive ideas like evolution reasoned that it was only a matter of time before all the problems facing humanity were dealt with. But that century turned out to be violent, too. Before the first 50 years were over, it had witnessed 2 world wars. And as we already seeing, we are no better off in the 21st century.

Finally, the quality of one's thoughts has a bearing on their resilience and ability to deal with the issues of life. So, advise your son to shun anxiety-inducing thoughts as much as possible. There are many anxiety-producing circumstances people contend with daily, but Prince should learn to face them with courage. And as we have seen, that courage has nothing to do with being a boxer or a wrestler. It is that healthy attitude that gives one the ability to face whatever life puts in his way, come to terms with it and deals with it realistically, fully convinced that God is in control. It is not the situations that we face that define us; it is the way we think about them and react to them.

Question: *In addition to today's hardships, experts forecast further socio-economic instability fuelled by technological advancement, among other factors. What will you tell Prince by way of helping him deal with fear concerning the future?*

Addressing Fear Concerning the Future

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.—Psalm 46:1-3

Among young people, the uncertainty of work and business are the major causes of fear concerning the future. Over time, we have seen IT change the way work is done, sometimes making people redundant and some business models obsolete. And this trend seems set to continue.

These days there are many people who do not go to some physical office to pay for electricity, water or to renew one's driver's licence. They do it from the comfort of their house or at the cyber cafe next door. Workers in towns no longer queue in post offices to send money to dependants in the countryside. They use mobile money transfer platforms like MPESA, Airtel Money, etc. This means that the job opportunities associated with giving such services are no more or they have been drastically reduced.

Long ago, your cheque could only be paid at your bank and branch. Also if you went to the bank and presented a cheque to the teller, she would forward it to the clerks who sat in the backroom with mandates to have the balance checked. Then the cheque would be brought back by the messenger for the teller to pay if there was money in the account. But with the introduction of computers, the teller of today checks the balance himself or herself from their desk and pays or refuses to pay on the basis of

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information provided by the digital records. That is how those who checked mandates were made to go home.

Today, those who are techno savvy are able to check their bank balances using devices like mobile phones. Also, a lot of money is changing hands through platforms like M-Pesa, Airtel Money, etc. Then there are agents—sometimes just kiosks in the neighbourhood—that are able to carry out transactions that in the past meant one walking to their bank and branch during working hours. The other day I gave a cheque that found my account with Shs 200 less than its value because the bank had deducted its fees without my knowledge. But they didn't have to dishonour the cheque or do impromptu lending to pay it. It was late in the evening and the clerk called me on the mobile and told me what was happening. Then he suggested I go to the nearby back agent, deposit the Shs 200 and he would pay the cheque once this money reflected on my account. That is how I did a banking transaction at night from a kiosk, something that would have been unimaginable in the '90s.

Publishing is another example of the areas in which IT has rendered past business models unsustainable but also created a world of broader horizons. These days it is possible to write and publish electronically without lifting a pen. Besides the threat of e-books, some publishing houses outsource certain tasks and processes. A lot of offset printing is being done in Dubai and places in the Far East. As a result, whole publishing departments in our country have closed or cut down on staff after shrinking operations. Once prepress tasks like editing and layout of manuscripts are done in Kenya, the artwork is uploaded on the Internet, printing done overseas and the finished product shipped into the country.

When it comes to accounting work, gone are the days when you waited to balance your books after three or six months to know how much you have made during a particular period. These

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days there is software that enables you to update all the books instantly upon making an entry. That way you are able to know how much you made in your business transactions at the end of the day or earlier. This of course has meant doing away with a host of clerks who used to update records in hard copy books of accounts.

Sometime in the late '90s, the then Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya, Micah Cheserem, expressed concern over long queues in commercial banks as people withdrew and deposited money or sought other services. Bank managers did not know what to do about the problem, either. But IT development came, brought ATMs and solved this problem. These days many people are not even going to the bank to meet managers for loans; they are borrowing through mobile applications. This explains how what used to be the banking hall of a major financial institution on Thika Road next to KCA University has become a food joint. On Kenyatta Avenue in the city's CBD (Central Business District), another erstwhile banking hall has converted into a supermarket. In government offices, work that used to be done there, like renewal of driving licences, is now done in the cybercafé next door or just in the comfort of the houses or cars of those who are computer savvy.

Also, working online during the time of partial lockdown when Corona was at its peak has made some organizations realize that they can lay off some of their staff while requiring most of the remaining ones to work from home so as to reduce on the office space that they need to lease.

What is making things worse is that all this is happening in the backdrop of growing population. In 2017, KCPE was done by about 900 thousand children. The following year, it was done by 1.1 million. Assuming that most of those young people who sit for the exam are born the same year, it means more than a decade ago, our population was growing by 1 million people per year.

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Beside bleak job opportunities, diminishing productive land in the face of growing population is the other factor that is impacting negatively on the hopes of today's young men. In the village, many families do not have enough land to bequeath each child to cultivate and live on. But it is not just in the countryside that land is diminishing: the same thing is happening in towns. The most common notice in the suburbs of Nairobi wherever there is an undeveloped property is: This Land Is Not for Sale. As a result, housing, especially in towns, has become generally very expensive.

Generally, times are hard and they seem poised to become harder. Already, the number of employed people who are living in want is high. This section of society that is dubbed the working poor because their income cannot take care of even basic needs is expanding by the day. Despite the foregoing, misery is optional because our loving God with whom nothing is impossible will always be there. Every age has its opportunities, and you should teach your son to appreciate what is going for him, not just what is going against him. Instead of always seeing roses with thorns, he needs to learn to see thorns that have roses.

The same technology that God has allowed and has affected some jobs and businesses has also shrunk distances. In the '70s, money sent by post office in Nairobi took 3 days to be received in Nakuru. Today you could be in Kisumu and after putting water for *ugali* on the *jiko* realize that there is no maize flour remaining in the cupboard. And by making your son or daughter in Mombasa aware of the dilemma by mobile phone, you may receive money to buy the flour before the water boils so that time for the meal is not affected.

We may not know the other discoveries that our loving God will enable people to make to help manage challenges occasioned by developments in IT (Information Technology) and the implementation of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in the face of

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burgeoning population. So no one should spend sleepless nights worried about the future. In the early '70s, the world feared that with the then rate of consumption of fossil fuel, it was only a matter of time before the oil wells dried up. But manufacturers came up with more efficient vehicles that consumed less fuel, besides discovering oil in the sea to complement what was being produced by wells on dry ground. Today, the number of electrical vehicles is growing, further allaying fears of the transport industry being brought to its knees by the drying up of oil wells.

All that Prince needs to do is to pray and walk in righteousness because it is the prayer of the righteous person that avails much. Then he should be ready to adapt to any change brought about by technology while at the same time continuing to learn and upgrade his skills so that he can leverage innovations brought about by technology to his advantage. Reading or studying empowers people to face emerging challenges. As alluded to earlier, employees who are refusing to embrace innovations brought about by technology are becoming irrelevant, while businesses that reject innovation are becoming obsolete.

While IT may be taking some jobs, it is also bringing with it new opportunities, and if your son is ready to keep reinventing himself, he will always have some work to do. Potential employers are constantly looking for technologically adept workers. And if he happens to be self-employed and keep adjusting his model and constantly innovating, he will take advantage of technological development and never lack business.

Fortunately, even the Government seems set to make the burden of living lighter for the youth. Our young people have been parting with as much as half of their income to pay rent instead of the internationally recommended one fifth of one's income. But with the government set to develop more houses, your son is assured of paying less in future for a decent dwelling. If as a nation we can then adopt a flexible employment policy

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that will encourage starting of new businesses that will hire more people, and then come up with flexible working time that will enable employees to commute from far where cheap houses are, life for young people will be eased considerably.

Being aware of what the Almighty God promises His people is alone enough to make us face the future with confidence. In Deuteronomy 31:6 NKJV, we see Moses telling the Children of Israel what their attitude ought to be as they faced hostile nations while entering the Promised Land under Joshua: *Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them: for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.* In Isaiah 41:10 NKJV we hear the Lord repeating the same thing to His people, saying, *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* The same Lord according to John chapter 14 requires us not to let our hearts be troubled and, instead, cast all our cares to Him, 1 Peter 5:7. In Matthew 28:20 our Lord promises to be with us always to the end of the world. The Lord is behind your son for whatever is ahead.

Question: *Despite working hard in secondary school, Prince did not attain the qualifications necessary to be sponsored for piloting, his preferred course, yet you cannot afford to pay for it out of your pocket, especially while educating his siblings. Crestfallen, he has therefore agreed to embark on a teaching course. What will you tell him to make him come to terms with his failure so that he focuses on the opportunity before him?*

Dealing with Failure and Crisis

Lately, we have become used to newspaper reports about jilted lovers killing their wives and children and then taking their own lives. Definitely this is not the way to deal with the issue of love gone sour or any other crisis. A pastor friend told us that he read about a doctor who received a patient, a lady who had a deep wound on her wrist and was in excruciating pain. But when he checked the hand critically, he noticed that the burn had not been caused by fire and therefore asked, “What happened?” As it turned out, this lady—I heard as if her name was Jenifer—had fallen in love with a man called John. This had led her to go for a tattoo on the wrist that read: “John loves Jenifer forever.” Unfortunately she later learned that John had two more active relationships and in bitterness tried to erase the tattoo with acid. But acid is not discriminative and had not only eaten up her tattoo but also the skin below and was now working on raw flesh.

This may have happened outside our country, but recently we read about a young man somewhere in Kiambu County who borrowed a bicycle and it was stolen while in his custody. When he was given a deadline to produce it or “face the consequences,” he committed suicide. Even those of us who did not know the boy personally found ourselves shedding tears upon reading the story and comparing the value of a bicycle with human life.

You should teach your son not just how to celebrate success but also how to handle failure without resorting to self-destructive tendencies. The first step when it comes to handling failure is to forgive himself. Asking others for forgiveness when one does a mistake is not enough; one needs to learn to forgive himself also. Your son should not be like those people who take everything to heart, brooding and reproaching themselves endlessly for past

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mistakes. He may not like the things he did some time ago, but since he cannot destroy the past or change it, he should come to terms with it, determined to make the most of his future with the time and resources that God gives him.

The reason why you should encourage your son to take his mind off discouraging things is that inability to forgive himself will usurp his energy and could lead to self-destructive behavior as he seeks to distract himself from any pain that is domiciled inside. Forgiving others and forgiving himself, on the other hand, is one way of keeping his mind at the best level of well-being. So he should never think of how bad he is without also thinking of something good about himself. If your son has been going through a crisis, encourage him to acknowledge any painful experiences that he has gone through, let go of them and move on with life on a clean slate, aware that crises are a normal part of life.

Tell Prince not to be hard on himself whenever things do not go according to plan. What he should do is to come to terms with the new reality and move on with life. Life is short and you cannot afford to waste it on anxiety-inducing thoughts that undermine one's quality of life. Negative thoughts can affect your mood, your overall health and even relationships.

Failure to realize lofty dreams that they held themselves to and unrealistic expectations of society have seen many young men seek solace in alcohol, and there are still others who have opted for worse ways of dealing with sense of failure.

If things do not go according to plan after you have done your best, you should not misconstrue that as failure; you will have merely discovered one way that the thing you wanted to do cannot be accomplished. The healthy way to view failure is to see it as a learning experience. You may fail today and succeed tomorrow, so you should not see failure as what defines you. While on this point, it is important to mention that self harm should never be considered as a way of escaping the results of failure or of

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making a point when one is angry. The number of young people committing suicide is alarming, and this is very discouraging.

Healthy thoughts and happy life go together. Unhealthy thoughts and imaginations, on the other hand, cause fear and unnecessary stress, as a result of which the quality of one's life is undermined. Many young men are worried about what people think about them when the latter are too occupied with their issues to accommodate anybody else in their mind. In the Bible, 'the heart' and 'thought life' are sometimes used interchangeably, and in Proverbs 4:23 we are advised: *Keep [guard] thy [your] heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.* Instead of entertaining sinful, oppressive and fear-inducing thoughts, in Philippians 4:8 we are encouraged to dwell on thoughts that are true, pure, just and honest, thoughts that are in line with the Word of God which, according to John 17:17, is the truth.

It is not that people who get depressed have more problems than others. Such people destroy their lives as they fight battles of self-blame and as they grapple with perceived and real enemies in their mind. Life is lived from inside out, so what you think often will tend to influence the way you do things and end up becoming your reality. So, for your son to lead a fulfilling life, he needs to learn to control his thoughts.

Let your son know that maturity includes developing shock absorbers to take criticism without losing his cool or getting overwhelmed. Negative or disparaging comments that people make should not immobilize your son or occupy his mind for too long, since he would thus be wasting his precious time. Instead, he should learn to take the feedback he gets from people positively. If he is unable to take criticism with grace and decides to wallow in the thought that he is hated or despised, even sincere friends, parents and close relatives who certainly have his welfare at heart will seem as enemies, making him feel even more insecure. True, he will not have the power to change what people say or do, but

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he can change what he feels as a result of their uncharitable words or actions. It would be unwise to allow himself to be manipulated by what people say and start making irrational decisions that negatively impact his life. People will not always be fair and sensitive; that is a fact of life. But he should learn to forgive others so as to be able to work with them and move on with life.

If your son is in debt, help him explore ways of paying and adopt a new lifestyle that will enable him to live within his means or, better still, below his means so that he can start saving. As mentioned elsewhere in the book, many young men aspire to live like highly paid entertainers whom they see on TV. To them, life is supposed to be all fun. Consequently, many who are employed are living from pay cheque to pay cheque and sometimes borrowing to get to the end of the month. But more opportunities to borrow are not the solution; after all you can never borrow your way out of debt.

Teach your son to handle conflicts and crises bravely and sensibly, aware of his worth and that of other people because of the greatness of the God behind his (your son's) creation and the creation of the other people. Needless to say, for you to treat others like they matter, you have to be treating yourself like you matter in the first place.

Let your son know that the other way of demonstrating maturity is in the ability to handle challenging or painful experiences sensibly. Generally, it is important for parents to teach children to be courageous, open up and share with relatives and friends about the challenges that they could be going through instead of harming themselves or harming others. The teaching that men must take pain and disappointments with stoicism has failed people more often than not.

As a journey, life is punctuated with ups and downs and we should even teach our children to anticipate disappointments and to respond sensibly to issues of life without feeling overwhelmed

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as to lose hope in life. Let your son know that as much as you love him and wish him well, you cannot rule out the possibility of his life taking an unpredictable trajectory and he find himself for instance jailed on trumped up charges. And even if that were to happen, he should not take it to be the end of everything. He should adapt to the new reality in prison and make the most of it. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and Nelson Mandela were also jailed unfairly, the former for 7 years and the latter for 27 years, and they came out to lead their countries to independence. In life, no circumstance should be wasted with immobilizing emotions like fear and worry. As the American called David Jeremiah says, worry never accomplishes anything, and it never will. Once you have done your part, leave the rest to God and continue thanking Him irrespective of your circumstances. Apostle Paul and Silas when they found themselves in jail in Philippi, according to Acts 16:25, did not waste their time brooding over what had befallen them. They took the opportunity to sing to the Lord and eventually He intervened for them.

Keep reminding your son that even when he finds himself experiencing challenges, he should know that he is not the first person or the last person to face problems. He needs a perspective that takes into account the fact that challenges are common with everybody. It is even worth mentioning that thinking about one's challenges from another person's perspective reduces stress and enables one to make rational decisions in addressing their problems.

The other thing to teach your son is how to handle refusal and disagreements. Let your son know that if a certain girl refused him, that is not the end of the world. He should just pray that God give him another one. Remind him that he is as valuable as the person over whom he would be killing himself.

As early as possible, let your son know that this world is full of challenges and even crises, and that these are to be weathered,

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not allowed to overwhelm somebody. Let him know that the unpleasant realities that he may be experiencing are not unique with him. If it is lack of money, he is not the first one to be broke. Thus forewarned, he will not be unduly weighed down by negative consequences of failure if things do not pan out as he thought they would or start to see a crisis where none exists.

In this life, what you have founded your joy and hope on matters. If you are a young man whose joy and hope are founded on being in good health and you fall sick or be involved in an accident, you will be shaken. If founded on performance in class and you fail an exam, you will be shaken. If your joy and hope are founded on being loved by a certain girl and she leave you, you will be devastated. If your joy and hope are founded on belonging in a certain revered group and their attitude towards you change, you will be shaken. If your hope has been to become rich and respected in society and you find years going while still jobless or earning meagre income, you will be shaken. In the village these days, there are old people who fall sick when time comes to share out their land to children because they drew comfort from seeing it intact. As a parent if your joy has been founded on the good behaviour of your children and their behaviour changes, you will feel shaken. But upon reading Psalm 11:1-3 critically we see that if the foundations be destroyed, we ought to put our trust in the Lord. He is the only foundation that will never be shaken, and in the first place it is He we should live to please.

Question: *Upon being employed as a History teacher, Prince saves and starts a side hustle with a friend. But over time you note that Prince is getting frustrated because his friend, though a good marketer and is also full of ideas on how to expand the business, has fiery temper. What will you tell your son concerning relating with people with human weaknesses?*

Collaborating with Flawed People

It is important to work hard, but you can never succeed without leveraging the skills of other people. Life is approached and managed both individually and corporately. Even when it comes to Christianity, though you get saved individually, you are required not to forsake the gathering together with other believers, Hebrews 10:25. People, despite all their human weaknesses, are a precious gift and we should never stop to thank God for them. God has created this world in a way that you cannot be self-sufficient or enjoy life without the input of other people. You cannot grow and manufacture all the food you need, make all the clothes you wear, and build the house to live in with stones that you have dug from your quarry and mortar that contains cement that you have manufactured. Actually if you are unable to take advantage of other people's assistance, then you are disabled indeed. No one is truly self-made. Everyone has been a beneficiary of some assistance from somebody. That is why it is important to help your son to be socially skilled. Our success is inextricably intertwined with others, and to be able to leverage other people's skills, you must learn to put up with their human frailties, which you also have because you too are human.

Even when it comes to working for God, do not wait for perfect brethren to fellowship with or serve with. Some people keep changing churches as they look for brethren they can effortlessly cope with. But you will never get such. What you need is to learn to live with the brethren who are available, and that is only possible when you make forgiveness your way of life. The Lord attaches so much importance to reconciliation of the brethren that

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Jesus in Matthew 5 beginning verse 23 said if you bring a gift to the altar and remember that there is something unsettled between you and a brother, you ought to go and reconcile with him first and then come and offer the gift.

The Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in us after salvation does not take away our human weaknesses; what He does is to come to empower you when He sees you determined to obey God against all odds. As evidence that human weaknesses do not go away even when one gets saved, we hear Apostle Paul according to Romans 7:15 and 19 saying that he found himself not doing the things he wanted to do and, instead, doing the things he hated. As a result, according to 1 Corinthians 9:27, he had to bring his body to subjection lest by any means after preaching to others he becomes a castaway.

The gifts and skills that you need to succeed in life and in business are in people with human flaws just like you. That is why you should even teach Prince to never overestimate his intellect or capabilities as to start looking down on the viewpoints of others on issues. It is actually people who admit that they do not know everything who are smartest. Of course he should also make sure to subject every view or piece of advice to the test of the Word of God.

People are endowed with different gifts, and by learning to cope with them, you are able to take advantage of their different gifts so as to get the most out of life. It is critical that you learn to cooperate with and collaborate with others, despite their human weaknesses, if you are to experience success in business or employment. That is why your son should learn people skills also so as to be able to manage rivalry at work. When people hurt you, forgive them and move on. Actually this is part of carrying one another's burdens as encouraged in Galatians 6:2.

Through marriage, we have a very great lesson on the fact

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that God wants us to learn to relate with people despite their imperfection. Your brother maybe the most handsome and the richest young man, or your sister maybe the most beautiful and understanding young woman, but when it comes to marriage, God through nature disqualifies you from considering them. You must approach a person you are not related to and learn to put up with their looks and weaknesses to start a family.

Some people while talking with their children keep warning them, saying: “So and so hates you. So and so is a thief. So and so is a witch. So and so is...” Just about everyone is bad so far as they are concerned. But while your son needs to be careful in dealing with others, you need to also be careful about how you portray others in case you instill people phobia in his mind and deny him the assistance God could give him through them.

By portraying other people negatively, you ruin your child's chances of advancement in life while thinking that you are destroying those people whom you hate. No one is perfect, including you yourself. Let your son have a chance of exploiting the good traits and gifting of everyone whom he comes into contact with. Teach your son to cope with people and to see something good in everybody, those who come across as difficult and those who are easy to relate with. Rarely is one bad through and through. That way he will be able to leverage the help that God has given him through other people. Some of the people through whom God intends to deliver help to your son are not necessarily likeable, yet your son needs their help. Worse still, if our young men are not helped to love others, they will grow into people who have no consciences or capacity to empathize with others, even with their relatives.

There are people who think that there is nothing about themselves that is offensive. But that is self-deception. Such people are too preoccupied with themselves such that all they see in other people are weaknesses. But warn your son against

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entertaining the feeling that he is too good to put up with the “flawed” others. Let him know that he too has flaws and if he cannot put up with the weaknesses of others, he cannot function in the market place. If he chooses to see only the bad side of people, he will be building his own barrier to prosperity.

Most people today are depending on freelance jobs, and very often you get such jobs through networking. That is why the future will favour those who are willing to cooperate and collaborate with others. If God has gifted you with the ability to make tyres and you collaborate with somebody who is gifted with the ability to make engines and another one who fabricates metal bodies, you may end up producing cars. If you want to go into business, you will need the mentorship of those who have been in that line for long, regardless of their temperament. Even if you disagree with people on something, you do not make life better by making permanent enemies, and our politicians teach us this all the time. One time they are in this camp, the next time they have buried the hatchet and moved to the camp of one who was previously their avowed enemy.

The Kikuyus say business is not done with trees; it is done with people to whom you sell your products, despite their human weaknesses. Indeed the businesses that succeed are those that are customer-centric. Even in designing products, Steve Jobs of Apple Computers said that you should start with the desired customer experience in mind and work backwards towards the technology that will facilitate that experience, not the other way. The difference between those people who make it in business and the rest of us is that the former are good students of society and are therefore able to anticipate its needs and position themselves with capital and the necessary systems to exploit those needs for their financial gain. Good businessmen and businesswomen also overlook human weaknesses for the sake of remaining connected with people. As already mentioned, survival in future will not

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only call for innovation but also endless alliances and networking. Instead of fighting people or hating them, love them and thus position yourself to exploit their strengths.

I had a relative whom people in the village used to say had a knack for hiring good workers who served him for a long time. But I later discovered that what my relative had was a lot of patience because when the same workers were poached and moved to other homes, they did not last there for long. You can never become rich by working single-handedly, and for you to get the services of other people, you must learn to overlook their human weaknesses. So teach your son not to see just faults in other people. There is a gift in every person that he can leverage. There is a novel by a Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah with the rather catchy title, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. To me, this title beautifully captures the essence of the reasoning that we ought to promote in our young men: The flawless people who exist in their mind are not yet born and will never exist. With this awareness, they should learn to work with the flawed ones who dwell among us, loving them for what they are, not for what they could be. And that calls for exercising patience. If your son is hurt by somebody, let him know that forgiveness is the way to rise above pain and the attendant desire for vengeance. And not just that: if one person happens to treat you badly, do not use that experience to draw the broad conclusion that all people are bad.

Finally, your son should treat even those who are doing better than he as allies, not competitors, so that he can seek their assistance or collaborate with them as he pushes forward to realize his destiny.

Question: *Eventually, Prince has made up his mind to marry the girl he has been courting. How will you advise him as he embarks on this phase of life?*

Lesson 19

Advising Prince on Marriage

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.—Mark 10:7-8KJV

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. —Hebrews 13:4KJV

Prince may have been watching soap operas that are almost always about dysfunctional families, with spouses cheating on each other, and therefore come to fear marriage. But you need to let him know that these people are just acting. In private, those among them who are blessed to come from stable families are happy about it.

Marriage as an institution was started by God at the Garden of Eden when God brought together Adam and Eve, and everything that has the stamp of God is good. In James 1:17 we learn that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. According to Hebrews 13:4, marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled. Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:9 urges those who cannot control themselves to marry instead of burning with lust.

Behind the scenes these days, a lot of ground work is being done under the inspiration of the devil to re-define marriage so as to integrate perverse lifestyles into society and give them respectability. But the Bible supports only marriage between persons of the opposite sex. In Genesis 2:24, God's Word speaks of a man leaving his parents and clinging to his wife, not to another man. Romans 1:27 makes reference to men who angered

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God by burning in their lust one toward another, having left the natural use of the woman. This is a clear indication that same-sex marriage is, before God, an abomination.

We live at a time when some young people do not want marriage vows that read “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, preferring that this part be recast to read “for better, for better, for richer, for richer”. But this is just a way of escaping reality and, instead, choosing to abide in fantasy. Like any other aspect of life, family life has challenges, but, successful married life is possible between any two people—a man and a woman—who will come to terms with everyday ups and downs and be ready to deal with them by yielding to the will of God concerning their lives, abandon selfishness and work hard while living within their means. God could never have made married life a goal too difficult to achieve, while desiring it for everybody, both rich and poor. Happy married life is no rocket science. God has given people capacity to realize it if they decide to follow His blueprint.

As shown earlier, relationships generally have challenges and marriage is no exception. But the benefits of marriage far outstrip its challenges. Marriage between a man and a woman has the stamp of God to whom nothing is impossible, so no man should fear approaching a lady for a hand in marriage because that home is sure to stand if both are willing to bring God into the picture and avoid selfishness.

Tell your son that his wife is very important to him and to his children. In Eve, God according to Genesis 2:18 was making a help meet to (comparable to) Adam. It has been rightly said that mothers are like buttons; they hold everything together. That is why we cannot afford not to keep thanking God for our wives. Even if your son’s wife were to call him a fool, let him know that she is still more genuine in her love for him than peers who may be flattering him with praises as they use him to serve their selfish dreams and aspirations.

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Earlier on, we became aware of the negative impact of over-expectation on joy because of the way over-expectation undermines contentment. This happens in the institution of marriage also. Today, many young men are waiting to marry when they accumulate enough resources to deliver the kind of lifestyle that they associate with celebrities. But big money and youth do not go together. Except in the case of very few who benefit from inherited wealth, most of the rich people are generally old, having made their money over the years. An even in the case of the academia, professors are normally in their fifties and above. The idea of putting off marriage until you are “ready in every way” is therefore unrealistic.

Though preparation is important, there will never be a time when you will be ready for marriage in every way. Let the challenges that arise in areas in which you feel unprepared by the time you are getting married be what will draw you closer to God through prayer and make family life interesting as you deal with them; a life without any challenges is like a journey without adventures and hence boring. Encourage your son to do what God’s Word requires by living with that woman till death separates them, challenges or no challenges.

The media has been subtly promoting the impression that you get the most out of life by being selfish; as a result, many spouses while pursuing individual interests have contributed to breaking up their marriages. But we need to be aware of the strategies of the devil. People’s selfishness and desire to live up to unrealistic expectations of the society—some expressed and others just perceived—are often what makes happy married life appear hard to achieve. Many spouses are demanding their way, with no one willing to make concessions or adapt to the other person’s needs so as to promote harmony and synergy.

It is said that there is an inherent desire in almost every woman to have a family. And since God has decreed that marriage be

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between a man and a woman, the advisable thing is for girls to be taught how to dwell wisely with boys and with their husbands after marriage, the way men in 1 Peter 3:7 are advised to dwell with their wives according to knowledge.

When it comes to marrying, problems of the man in most cases start with himself if he decides to do the kind of wedding that will impress people. Then there are the parents-in-law who—sometimes influenced by relatives and friends—make the day of the dowry negotiations the time to recover everything they have spent on the daughter, with some interest on top if possible. But even if you get reasonable parents-in-law, you may find a bride who assumes that a wedding becomes a wedding because of the amount of money spent on the occasion. As a result, many young men are forced to borrow heavily and end up starting a family with debt.

Not so long ago, BBC carried the story of a newly married couple in one of the East African countries coming from the photo session but refuses to go to the reception and instead requires the driver to take them direct for honeymoon. Reason: They feared to be held by police for being unable to pay for the feast they had contracted a high-end restaurant to prepare in the hope that friends would contribute money but the latter had raised much less than was expected. What an embarrassing way to start a home!

On the other hand, our pastor told us about simple weddings that were officiated by the missionary in the '60s. The bridegroom and the bride would be called in front of the church at the end of the service so that the congregation become the witnesses. The two would be dressed as usual because they were often recently converted people working in quarries that were later filled to build today's Nairobi's Mwiki Estate and therefore could not afford wedding dresses and suits. (Fortunately, for a long time the marriage certificate cost shs 5, the amount called in Sheng *kobole*.) Meanwhile, the missionary and his wife would remove

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their rings and give them to the bridegroom and the bride for the purpose of saying, “With this ring I thee wed...” at the time of exchanging vows, and then get them back for use by the next couple on the queue. And by the time our pastor was sharing this information with us, those marriages had lasted over 40 years. Whatever God commands or is part of His will, He also makes possible to accomplish if people demonstrate willingness to play their part.

As mentioned earlier, the institution of the family was started by God at the Garden of Eden. So, those who work towards facilitating its survival by not making things hard for those who are wedding and those already in marriage are cooperating with God, whereas those whose words and actions undermine the existence of families are unknowingly helping the devil, whose work is always to frustrate whatever has the rubber stamp of God.

(At this point it is worth mentioning that Bible-believing Christians do not regard church wedding as a sacrament, that is something by which one earns grace. According to Romans 5:15, grace is by one man Jesus Christ and does not require any human effort to get. Just like embarking on any other thing, it is important for a believer to start a family with prayer, which is something that a church wedding facilitates. But that does not mean that people like our parents who did not do a church wedding are living in sin. There is no indication in the Bible that God regards the believer who wedded in church as being superior to the one who did not. Going to heaven takes repenting toward God and placing one’s faith on the Lord Jesus, not wedding in church.)

There is nothing wrong with having a big wedding if you can afford it, but a wedding does not become Christian wedding because of the amount of money spent on the event. In a wedding, the availability of the bride and the bridegroom is what matters most. Everything else is secondary, and its lack may even give the Lord the opportunity to do a miracle. This is not to glorify

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lack, but if the wedding in Cana of Galilee that we read about in the Bible's book of John had all that was needed, perhaps Jesus might not have had an opportunity to do the first miracle there.

Many girls today are said to be waiting to marry the boy with a good job, a good car and perhaps a house. But one ought to be guided by a more realistic consideration in making this important decision. And even after getting married, there is need to live realistically. The wife should learn to appreciate the effort her husband makes to provide for the family. She should be the number one fan of her husband. Having something to live for can make you to tolerate a lot in life. When as parents we hear our children acknowledge that they benefit from what we do, it gives us a lot of joy. The same thing happens when a husband hears the wife appreciate what he does. He looks forward to leaving work and going home straight every evening. The workplace has become a hectic and energy-draining environment and wives would do well to make home a peaceful place to cool off. Home is where people ought to resort to when harassed elsewhere.

Seriously speaking, some people do not have genuine problems because their income can afford them food, clothing and shelter. But in their minds they have entertained a social ranking system that is supposedly managed by friends and others whom they interact with, making them feel like they are falling behind and constantly pestered from inside by the question: what will they say? Little do they know that these supposed evaluators are often too occupied with their own issues to accommodate anybody in their thoughts.

In some cases, the man upon foreseeing lean times so far as his income is concerned has floated the idea of moving into an affordable dwelling or taking children to a cheaper school. But the wife has refused, supposing this to be conceding to change of class. The upshot is stress on the part of the husband. Living realistically and seeking to defend your status in society do not

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go together. Yet your responsibility is to protect your sanity by living within your means.

In evaluating your success, do not use the achievements of the Otienos, the Kamaus and the Kipng'enos as a benchmark. Being rich is a relative sort of thing. To some people, you are rich if you can prepare tea in your house without rushing to the neighbour's house to borrow tea leaves and cups to serve that tea. Unfortunately we always compare ourselves with those who are better off than we, and this makes us feel sorry about our situation, thus undermining our joy.

We have already seen that any man who provides his wife and children with food on the table, clothes on their back and a roof over their head, whether this is his house or a rented one, is worthy of honour. The kind of maturity that keeps a marriage is characterized by empathizing with your spouse, not minding your feelings alone. Unfortunately emphasis on money has made spouses start doing things their way and hence grow apart. According to God's Word, the man should love the wife, and the responsibility given to the wife is to submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-25). Understandably, some ladies are unable to submit for fear that their men will squander the resources they surrender to them. So, men should prove that they are responsible enough so that ladies do not fail to fulfil their part of being submissive. By the way, money is a point of contention in many relationships because it is necessary but never enough. And since women are generally more frugal with it than men, advise your son to consider letting his wife be in control of family resources if he finds himself easily parting with his cash. There are those who may want to misconstrue this as *kukaliwa* (suppression), but God gave her to him as a help mate.

Finally, if your son feels anxious about his future and that of his wife and children, the solution is to continue to work hard and live honestly, knowing that there is a God in heaven who

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controls the affairs of men and minds the interests of those who fear Him. The Psalmist had walked with God and his testimony in Psalm 37:25 is: *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.* And so he advises in Psalm 55:22 NKJV: *Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.* The writer of the book of Hebrews has similar exhortation, saying in Hebrews 13:5 NKJV: *Let your conduct be without covetousness: be content with such things as you have. For He [the Lord] Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.* And in Isaiah 26:3 we learn that the Lord keeps in perfect peace whose mind is stayed in Him. With this awareness, your son ought to move on with life, looking to the future positively.

....Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and glory, the victory and the majesty: for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honour come from you, and you reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name. —1 Chronicles 29:10-13 NKJV

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