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DISENGAGE 2023 TO ENGAGE 2024



**PREPARE FOR RETIREMENT: A
PASTORAL REFLECTION**

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ECCLESIA TODAY

INCLUSIVE & TRANSFORMING GOOD NEWS

ECCLESIA TODAY

MAGAZINE



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MANAGING EDITOR

Kimion Tagwirei

About Us

Ecclesia Today (*meaning Church Today*), is a free digital Christian magazine, published quarterly from Zimbabwe, Southern Africa.

We are inspired and informed to advance the integral mission of the Church (*proclamation and demonstration of the gospel in all areas of life*) by John 10:10, which says that "the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; but I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly".

We publish inclusive and contextually transformative articles from various contributors in different denominations and countries.

We welcome new contributions; readers' feedback and suggestions. For enquiries please email the managing editor @ kimion22tc@gmail.com ; Call/WhatsApp +263777430283.

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DISENGAGE 2023 TO ENGAGE 2024



**KIMION TAGWIREI
CHITANDO**

EDITORIAL NOTE

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Inclusive & Transforming Good News

As the year 2023 draws to a close and we anticipate the arrival of the New Year, 2024, it is important to acknowledge that every ending marks the beginning of something new. Whether we have experienced prosperity or faced challenges, found joy, endured hardships, or faced death, the transition from one year to another represents a significant turning point in our lives.

These moments deserve our utmost attention and should inspire us to pray, reflect, and plan for the days ahead, guided by the grace of God.

Reflecting upon the year 2023, let us consider its impact on our lives. What were our individual plans, desires and experiences throughout this year? What prayers did we fervently offer? What engagements and strategies did we pursue to bring our dreams to fruition?

It is equally essential to assess the successes and failures we have had in our personal lives, families, and in organisations that we are part of. What lessons did we glean from these

triumphs and setbacks? By earnestly addressing these inquiries and delving into related aspects of our journeys, we can gracefully bid farewell to 2023 and usher in 2024 with clarity and purpose, ensuring a smooth transition to the New Year.

Without thoughtful reflection and answers to these questions, our shift from the passing year to the coming year may be turbulent, challenging, and ultimately unfulfilling.

While we acknowledge that human planning alone cannot guarantee success, it's essential to remember our God-given wisdom in Proverbs 19:21, which reminds us that God's purposes ultimately prevail. Therefore, we should commit our plans to the Lord, as stated in Proverbs 16:3. This commitment is further reinforced by the reassuring words of John 14:13-14, which emphasise the power of prayer and the promise that God hears and answers our supplications.

Simultaneously, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of strategic planning in our preparations. It is highly recommended to engage in a thoughtful and prayerful process that involves reviewing the past year, anticipating the upcoming one, evaluating our accomplishments, learning from our failures, identifying our strengths

and weaknesses, recognising opportunities and challenges, and finally, establishing new goals and crafting action plans.

To cement all the above, it is needful to recognise that faith is a catalyst for producing tangible results, as conveyed in Mark 11:24. Keeping in mind that faith is nurtured through hearing God's word, as emphasised in Romans 10:17, we should develop a habit of reading the Bible and immersing ourselves in the teachings of the gospel on a daily basis. This consistent practice not only strengthens our faith but also informs and shapes our actions and engagements. It paves the way for holistic transformation, ultimately leading to improvements in various aspects of our lives. While this reflection is not comprehensive, it provides a valuable starting point, awakens us to avoid becoming overly fixated on the transient nature of time, our triumphs, or our setbacks. It serves as a gentle but compelling reminder to prepare ourselves for the arrival of the New Year 2024, fortified by the empowering grace of our benevolent and loving God.

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

AS GOD GRACIOUSLY GIVES US THIS FESTIVE CHRISTMAS SEASON,
LET’S MEDITATE AND LIVE THE FOLLOWING BIBLE REFERENCES.



John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”.

John 15:12-13

“12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (NIV Online Bible Gateway)



GOSPEL REVIEW

KEEPING UPRIGHT WITH CHRIST



BY DAVID STEPHENS IN
BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE.

David Stephens is a BA Religious Studies and Theology student with the Theological College of Zimbabwe (TCZ) in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

It is widely publicized that keeping upright with our Lord Jesus Christ is life-bearing. But, how do we keep up with Him? This writing points us to the law of Christ, and shows us why it matters.

While Paul said that we are “no longer under the law”, he meant that God’s people are no longer justified by the law.

However, it’s important for us to note that we should not take God’s grace for granted. Thus, we should still obey the will and law of Jesus Christ.

First, what is our status? We are sinners by nature. This nature separates us from God because He is holy (Isa. 59:2). We were created holy, but since our predecessors sinned against God from the Garden of Eden, we all by default became wilful sinners, children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 3:23).

The bible is clear that the result of our sin and disobedience to God is the reason for the evil, tragedy and suffering in the world. It also declares that the consequence of our sin for each of us is physical and spiritual death (Rom. 6:23).

Second, what is God’s Solution? Jesus, the Lamb of God was sent to take away our sins. He lived a perfect, sinless life and willingly died the death

we deserved on the cross. In His death, Jesus both pacified the righteous anger of God, put away our sin and clothed us in His righteousness (Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2: 1-2 & 4: 8-10). The apostle Paul tells us that fulfilling scripture, Christ rose three days later, removing the penalty and destroying the power of sin (1 Cor. 15: 3-4). Now, with this gracious provision comes a wonderful gift.

Third, what is God’s promise? The assurance given to every person who calls upon the name of the Lord is that when call unto Him, they will be saved (Rom. 10:13). Jesus and His apostles preached repentance of sins and belief on Him by faith (Mk. 1:5; Acts 3:26 & 8:22), whom God sent (Jn. 16:28). If we would do these things, then we shall be saved from Gods judgement (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 3:22 & 10:9).

I would like to believe that this is not the first time that you have encountered the gospel. If it is, then I pray that the Lord may minister life to you.

Building on the foundation of the gospel message, it is important to know who you are and what purpose God has for you. In other words, you have a new identity and destiny. It is a privilege and responsibility which each of us bears. We must, as Paul encourages us, now run our race

with perseverance holding on to the hope that we have in Christ (Heb. 12:1). It is the Law of Christ which gives us hope. This Law outlines the boundaries within which we run our race. It is what provides for us our identity and destiny. The Law of Christ is to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength and to love our neighbour as our self” (Lk. 10:27; Mt. 22:36-40; Mk. 12:28-31). This is the moral law of Moses or the Ten Commandments restated by Christ. In Christ the ceremonial laws were fulfilled. Him being both the High Priest and the offering/sacrifice, which was acceptable to God on our behalf (Heb. 4:14-16; 1 Jn. 2:2). Jesus restated our responsibility to uphold the moral law in a more personal fashion in Mt. 5-7. In these chapters relationships are re-conceptualised by Christ, the way they were intended to be practiced. From negative to positive interpersonal and personal introspective ones. For instance, you shall not murder to whoever is angry with a brother. Also, you shall not commit adultery to if you look with lustful intent. Or, whoever would divorce for no reason should now only do so on grounds of adultery. Finally, we shall consider when people retaliated, they would do so equally – an eye for an eye. Jesus not only espoused but commands us to turn the other cheek and pray for our enemies. These two commands of Christ as we know, are what all the law and prophets hang upon.

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GOSPEL REVIEW

KEEPING UPRIGHT WITH CHRIST



DAVID STEPHENS

Identity – The Heart of the Matter

The first command, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength is what provides us with our identity. It helps us to rightly relate to God. For so long, we have been self-centred and worshiping idols, that our hearts need an adjustment and this command is what does that. Understanding that the covenant we are in is not purely transactional. Where we do, give or say things expecting that God will give back to us more than we have given. Our relationship is to involve true commitment, regardless of whether we have abundance or not. We become God-centred, putting away from us our idols (whatever they may be). Realising that we exist to honour, worship and serve Him, not the other way around. He is our Father and will discipline, correct, guide and direct us as He sees fit. We must have faith, that He knows what is best, even if it is not what we want or is painful at the time and we do not understand our situation. Through it all we keep our eyes firmly fixed on the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

Destiny – A Matter of the Heart

The second command provides us with our destiny or purpose. It is what helps us to rightly relate to God's community. Honouring, caring for, counselling, teaching, reaching out to, worshipping and fellowshiping with your new family refocuses our heart. The Holy Spirit begins to work to sanctify and mature us in Christ. Helping us to love our neighbours, as we discover what our gift and passion is. This is why honouring Godly leaders is essential, as they help us to grow in our personal and ministerial walk with the Lord.

GOSPEL REVIEW

GROWING THE CHURCH: REFLECTIONS FROM AOG BTG IN ESWATINI



BY PASTOR STEVE MANOMANO, IN
MANZINI, ESWATINI

Drawing from in-depth conversations with one of the senior Pastors in the Assemblies of God BTG Eswatini, Rev Hezekiah Nkambule, Eswatini work grew as a result of the late Rev Nicholas Bhokinkosi Hepworth Bhengu from the Republic of South Africa (RSA), as well as complementary team work involving Dr Elijah Maswangani, Mrs Hlapo and others from RSA. Beginning with crusades in October 1973, the work started massively and quickly spread to all provinces across the kingdom.

Eventually, the church raised gospel ministers such as Dr. Douglas Simelane, and many others who joined, like Pastor Lukhele. Together, they produced many other ministers such as Pastor Mabuza who moved to Namibia as a missionary.

Structure of the work and leadership style

The Eswatini AOG BTG operates as a region of AOG (BTG) Southern Africa under a seven membered 'National' General Executive team that leads South Africa, Eswatini,

Pastor Steve Manomano is a Chartered Quantity Surveyor and professional project manager. He runs Manos Consult, a built-environment consulting firm.

He currently resides in the Kingdom of Eswatini. He is a Zimbabwean bi-vocational minister who got saved in 1981 in Marondera town. He served in the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe as a youth organizer and later pastored some churches in Harare and Midlands. He is married to Prisca Manomano and blessed with four children.

He writes in his own capacity and this submission is based on his personal observations.

Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana and Mozambique.

Unique features of the work: Leadership style

The church leadership style is consultative and office bearers are so humble. Their humility is the hallmark of the church's growth. Leaders respect senior pastors through various ways such as tasking them to introduce speakers at regional, national events as well as closing events with prayers.

The profiling of ministry is something that one cannot fail to notice. Nobody goes to the stage unless they have specific tasks to perform. That way, one can hardly notice who the leaders, i.e. chairman of the Regional council is or even who the members of the team.

Currently, Pastor Mamba is the regional chairman.

He sometimes leads by absence. When anyone thinks he will go up to say something he delegates or is strategically not at that point. Such aspects seem to advance missionary servant-hood!

Values

There is deep godly values embedded in the work. Sin is treated as such with expressive love for the sinner. Those who flout agreed standards still get public rebuke. Other notable features include respect for the long established emphasis on prayer. The church conservatively holds fasting and prayers on Mondays, worship and main service on Sundays. Someone once remarked that if you need to 'experience'

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GOSPEL REVIEW

Growing the Church: Reflections from AOG BTG in Eswatini

the Assemblies of God the place to be is Eswatini.

Evangelism

Evangelism and witnessing have been a unique feature and growth factor. This continues to be celebrated in all major gatherings with the BTG tent team giving reports and the new converts being introduced to the church at large. As John Maxwell writes in one of the books about the things that are monitored, the things that are reported and monitored get done.

The church developed a template for men's quarterlies with some interesting features to monitor evangelism and soul-winning efforts in the men's work. The template has a column for numbers of saved men, preaching points, spiritual growth and miracles experienced.

As such, the church has a huge following attracting people from all walks of life. It has branches throughout all the four regions of the country. It owns a farm on which a national centre will be erected. Additionally, the church boasts of many church buildings as well as church sites being developed.

Groups

It is reported that from the very onset, groups played a key feature in the growth of the work. 'He directed the disciples to sit all the people in groups as though they were having a banquet on the grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties' Mark 6:39-40 CEB. In the miracle of the feeding of the multitudes, there is the emphasis that the people sat down in groups. The work functions with special emphasis on the groups namely men, women, youth (Boys and girls), Girls, and Sunday school.

Group leadership

Each group is led by organizers. These are recognized church officers who run

the groups throughout the work. They carry sufficient respect and authority for the effective achievement of their given

goals for the group. 'This happened even though he was one of us and received a share of this ministry' Acts 1:17. The organizers take their work seriously and diligently. They elect committees for their specific groups and visit regularly to monitor the work. Something worth noting is the depth of the leaders both spiritually and the level of understanding of their group needs. They teach and preach often in the gatherings of their respect groups with such anointing that every encounter with them is an experience.

One recent case in point is the Men Quarterly in the Manzini East Region where Organizer Jerry Ndlovu was teaching on the subject 'How to prepare for retirement and live after retirement'.

Organizer Ndlovu also shared the word of God on the subject of prayer. Another outstanding leader of the group is Mrs Simalane. She recently was invited to teach on the women's ministry in the new BTG work in Zambia. There are similar cases for youth and Sunday school work. Youth organizer Sandile Makanya is also another amazing bundle of creativity and commitment. These few names feature as those whose international appeal beyond Eswatini is becoming very evident.

Areas that need attention

This glorious work still has areas they need to improve on in so far as the Cape to Cairo mantra is concerned.

English language as a tool

An interesting story is told of a teenager in one of the assemblies. He struggled to testify and recite scripture in the Siswati language simply because he had memorized it in English. He then revealed that his grandmother had told him it was not being respectful speaking in the English language. Gogo's philosophy had affected his thinking. One hopes that the work gets to adopt a radical approach towards this 'gogo's spell. This manifests in the following areas:-

- a) Youth/Girls do invitations for their meetings in the vernacular
- b) Reports for monthlies, quarterlies, and conventions for most regions are presented in the vernacular.
- c) Preaching at Conventions including youth needs interpretation to allow a wider audience.

Improvements in the acceptance of English will make the work more inclusive and friendly. This is also for the children of parents in church. Currently, the work is quite unfriendly and it is hoped that in due time the leadership will give guidance on this.

One could safely say that the international brand that the Assemblies is has sadly been too localised. There is need to raise many leaders in the mould of the late I.D Hleta, Pastor Hlophe, Pastor Lukhele, Pastor Mabuza who saw the work beyond the kingdom of Eswatini.

One recommendation would be to send Pastors for Bible school training in other countries. That will help to produce leaders who will think globally and act locally. Globalisation is an urgent need of the work.

GOSPEL REVIEW

LOVE OTHERS AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF



BY SIMPLISIO KOMBONI IN GWERU,
ZIMBABWE

Simplisio Mukondo Komboni is a police officer and one of the African Apostolic church leaders under Arch-bishop Paul Mwazha. He also writes novels, short stories and poems.

Peace be with you! Well, it's my pleasure to welcome you, ladies and gentlemen to this article with which I deliberate much on the four-lettered word called LOVE. This word looks small alphabetically, and might sound common to many, taking into cognizance the fact that almost everybody knows it; but it carries deeper meanings that influence human nature right across the orb. It is so challenging and demanding that if you take it for granted, you might simply be caught off guard. In fact, the word calls for total concentration from everyone involved because it is practical. Hence, the reason why I thought to talk about it in greater detail.

Biblically, love has four got four types with Greek names which are: Agape, Eros, Philia and Storge. The Agape kind of love

is unconditional/sacrificial. It is a major term in the Christian Bible, which is why it is often defined as "Christian Love". This is love between God and His earthly people, and vice versa. John 3 v 16 explicitly shows this kind of love when God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Eros love is romantic, i.e. between a husband and wife or boy and his beloved girlfriend. It involves passion and/or lust. Philia is the brotherly love—that kind of love which obliges you to love one another as you love yourself. It calls for friendship. Strong friends feel for each other. Storge is familial love whereby family members have passion for one another.

Form the above definitions, Philia and Storge look very similar. They bear almost the same meaning. It is all about loving one another as you love yourself, and that is what I am talking about. Their definitions come back to the above topic hence the need

to scrutinize them closely.

Dear brothers and sisters, what I really know is that most of us claim to be God-fearing and Christ followers. Of course, there's nothing sinister about that. But the striking factor is, are we genuine God-fearing church-goers or pretenders? Are we real Christ followers or we assume to be? These are multi-million questions which require deeper contemplation. If we are fervent stalwarts of our Lord Jesus Christ, let's live by example. Do it in style. Be like Christ. The Lord, Himself, clearly put it across on Matthew 22 verse 39 that we should love one another as we do to ourselves. He said, referring to love, and I quote: "And the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

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GOSPEL REVIEW

LOVE OTHERS AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF

If you prudently read through the first three books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark and Luke—commonly referred to as the synoptic gospels—you will realize that Jesus' ninety-five percent of the message was centered on brotherly love. He concentrated much on this type of love, trying to cultivate in human mind a sense of selflessness, togetherness, benevolence and consideration for others.

He, in deed, highlighted that one cannot love God whom he is not seeing if he fails to love his own neighbor. If you love your neighbor, you won't do anything bad against them at all, no matter what. True love seeks not her own and thinks no evil, as read with verse 5 of First Corinthians Chapter 13. The question is, are we correctly interpreting the word love or we just go through it in the Bible like any other?

It boggles the mind to see how people treat each other in various facets of life every day. You wonder if this is done by God-fearing people or not. There's so much practice of injustice, corruption, maltreatment, racism, and tribalism. Be it in the public or private sector, people are engaging in abhorrent practices which leave a lot to be desired. Nowadays it's the money which does the talking! If you don't have a fat wallet my friend, then forget about getting deserved help.



For instance, to get your child's place at a better school, you have to bribe the authorities first. For your application letter to be accepted at a job-offering company, you have to meet the manager's demands, either in cash or kind. To be promoted at your work place, it's all based on who you know not what you know. No wonder why we are having so many substandard products and poor customer service in the market, it's solely because of corruption.

Because of selfishness, jealous and hatred, so many families are divided. The word love is now history to them. Churches are splitting every day because of greedy and inconsiderate leaders who value money more than the congregants whose spirits they are supposed to guide. They engage in nasty fights before the courts only to seize total control of the church and its proceedings. What a shame!

In the social scene, bloody sisters are not seeing face to face only because they clashed over a potential suitor. Brothers from the same womb are now wild antagonists, hating each other like they are in a war-torn situation, only because they suspect each other of witchcraft.

Where are we going as the people of God? What are we really doing? The Bible tells us to seek peace with everybody, for without which nobody shall see God. How can you see God if you fail to support the needy? How shall you inherit the Kingdom of Heaven if you hate your sister like hell? How can you justify your status as the disciple of Jesus Christ if you fail to support your parents who are languishing in abject poverty? How can you stand your ground if you turn a blind eye to those who look up to you as their messiah? My dear, let's practice love because love binds it all.

Lastly, as we are approaching the Festive season, let's embrace the spirit of giving. The Bible says blessed is the hand that gives. Let's prepare to extend the generous hands. What you think is very small and valueless to you might be very useful to others. Remember there are so many orphans, widows and vulnerable people out there who expect a little from you for their morale boost. Just give them what you have. They will surely remember you for that in future. Let's learn to love.

GOD BLESS YOU

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Reverend Mathamsanqa



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON PASTORAL MINISTRY

Pastor Mathamsanqa Dube is a Veteran Educationist, ex-Principal of different Colleges, former General Secretary of the Assemblies of God (AOG) church, and incumbent senior pastor of AOG Tshabalala Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

In realms like pastoral ministry, artificial intelligence (AI) is a catalyst for profound change. This piece explores AI's intricate influence on pastoral ministry, highlighting both its potential benefits and challenges. By examining AI's effects on outreach, support, and communication within the context of pastoral care, we can better grasp the intricacies of integrating technology into this honorable pursuit.

Opportunities

1. Efficient Communication

With the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into pastoral ministry, a new era of efficient communication emerges. AI-driven chat-bots and virtual assistants respond promptly across emails, Facebook, Twitter, and more, minimizing delays. For example when one uses ChatGPT exciting opportunities present themselves with prompts that can shape the current and future aspirations. Pastors can now swiftly engage with congregants on various platforms, offering quick support for service schedules, spiritual advice, and urgent matters. The COVID-19 period highlighted AI's communication value, effectively handling a spike in inquiries and providing instant responses, underscoring its pivotal role in enhancing pastoral ministry.

2. Personalised Assistance

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in pastoral ministry has ushered in an era of personalized care. AI's data analysis capabilities allow pastors to understand the needs and preferences of congregants. Pastors can use this information to tailor their advice to individual members, creating a stronger sense of connection. By analyzing historical data, AI enables pastors to offer guidance on a personal level, enhancing the pastoral bond. AI's deeper data analysis helps pastors anticipate congregation needs, enabling them to provide relevant resources or advice. This personalized approach strengthens the community and support structure, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of pastoral care.

3. Strategic Resource Allocation

The infusion of AI into pastoral ministry revolutionizes resource allocation. Pastors can gain insights into congregational demographics, program preferences, and attendance trends. This data-driven approach aids resource allocation, adapting services to changing needs. AI's insights aid

short-term decisions and long-term growth planning. Pastors spot engagement patterns, prioritizing development areas, maximizing impact. This lets pastors focus on spiritual and community growth as AI handles allocation, inaugurating a new era of intentional ministry.

4. Enhanced Outreach

AI's ability to analyze historical data empowers pastors to predict patterns of interest and engagement, enabling them to tailor their outreach messages accordingly. By understanding congregants' preferences and needs, pastors can craft messages that resonate on a personal level, deepening the impact of outreach efforts. This personalization nurtures a sense of belonging within the congregation and the broader community. With AI as a guiding compass, faith communities can extend their influence and engagement beyond their physical walls,

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THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON PASTORAL MINISTRY



BLUE PLANET STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES

forging meaningful connections with those they seek to reach.

5. Strengthened Congregational Bonds

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of pastoral ministry, it plays a pivotal role in fostering strengthened congregational bonds. AI-powered tools contribute to creating a more connected and engaged faith community by enhancing various aspects of congregational life. Through AI-driven communication, congregants receive timely updates, event reminders, and personalized messages, fostering a sense of belonging and involvement within the community. AI's ability to analyze congregational data allows pastors to identify and address specific needs, enabling them to provide targeted support and guidance that resonates on a personal level.

Challenges

1. Ethical Considerations

Incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into pastoral ministry introduces a labyrinth of ethical concerns that demand careful navigation. As AI interacts with congregants' personal data to provide

insights and support, questions about data privacy, consent, and responsible use come to the forefront. Balancing the benefits of data-driven insights with the imperative to protect congregants' privacy poses delicate challenges, for example, when it comes to hacking or being hacked this is a double edged sword because we need hacking skills when we are attacked by the hackers yet it will be unethical to hack others. The ethical framework surrounding AI in pastoral care must be meticulously constructed to safeguard the trust and confidentiality inherent to spiritual relationships. Pastoral leaders must grapple with the ethical dilemmas of AI's capacity to process and analyze sensitive information while preserving the sanctity of spiritual interactions on social platforms. Failing in which the majority of the people of faith find themselves victims of AI manipulations such as deepfakes and other forms of misinformation, and the resulting phobia for technology.

1. Diminished Human Connection

With AI's integration in pastoral ministry, efficiency increases but human connection diminishes. AI streamlines interactions, risking the loss of warmth and support pastors provide. Human connection is vital for the sacred pastor-congregant bond. Despite AI's efficiency, it can't replicate human understanding and compassion. Balancing AI and preserving human touch is essential to maintain authentic pastoral care.

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THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON PASTORAL MINISTRY

1. Limitations in Spiritual Discernment

Incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) into pastoral ministry presents a hurdle in spiritual discernment. Despite excelling in data analysis, AI's grasp of spiritual intricacies remains limited. It can't replicate pastors' depth of insight and empathy during spiritual moments. Balancing AI's analysis with congregants' spiritual needs underscores pastoral leaders' vital role. Technology should support, not supplant, pastors' intuitive guidance, fostering an environment where AI enhances their work without replacing their expertise.

1. Theological Implications

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into pastoral ministry leads to profound theological reflections, raising questions about humanity's essence, the merging of spirituality and technology, and unforeseen consequences. As AI takes on pastoral roles, concerns arise about its impact on the human spiritual journey, prompting a reevaluation of theological principles and ethical boundaries. The collision of technology and theology prompts pastoral leaders to foster thoughtful discussions within the faith community, ensuring that technological advancements align with core faith principles. The church has to be student continually in these transformations if it is to remain relevant in the transforming society. The saints have to be equipped with survival skills in the transforming terrain of artificial intelligence (AI).

Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into pastoral ministry brings about a transformative era in churches with various advantages and challenges amongst the brethren. AI enhances communication, personal support, resource allocation, outreach, data insights, and congregation bonds. However, ethical concerns, potential loss of human connection, limitations



Pastor Mathamsanqa Dube

in spiritual understanding, and theological implications must be addressed on an ongoing basis as technology also continues to evolve at an exponential rate. Pastoral leaders need to balance AI's potential with core values of compassion and empathy, maintaining the sacred human touch in ministry. Embracing AI thoughtfully allows pastoral care to evolve while preserving its essential human aspect.

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1 John 4:7-12

"7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (NIV Bible Gateway)

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

"6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (NIV Online Bible Gateway).



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CHURCH, ECONOMICS
& DEVELOPMENT

PREPARE FOR RETIREMENT: A PASTORAL REFLECTION



By Pastor Blessing Makwara in Harare, Zimbabwe

Blessing Makwara is a disciple of Jesus Christ, ordained pastor with Assemblies of God church in Zimbabwe and a diversified entrepreneur; married and blessed with two lovely gifts. He is a former General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). He can be contacted on WhatsApp +263772461429.

In life such cycle seems to be a fact. The question is; are you ready to retire or be retired? One of my mentors told me that young man as you step into this office immediately begin to plan leaving the same. This was true wisdom!

Ever thought why people everywhere agree that there is a certain age and stage in life that one must work and then stop. They talk of efficiencies at the workplace. A debate rages even today about whether a pastor can say I am now 'tired' so am stepping aside to focus on tasks that a tired person can only do. Others see it unimaginable that a pastor can be forced to retire. This is especially said by those who believe only in full-time Ministry, giving up the vocational to only serve the Lord - to avoid serving two masters, God and Mammon.

Our reality

I think our theologies contribute much to our state of affairs today. This is about our views on money, wealth, work, rest and the world generally which knowingly or unknowingly influences our choices and actions in life.

Many times we have heard reports of pastors collapsing at the pulpit, or on their way down from the pulpit, or right in front of everyone.

Today we have cases of pastors who think it is evil to listen to their bodies, abuse the flesh till the flesh gives up on them - forcing retirement. A few statistics indicate

pastors committing suicide while mental health is fast becoming a thorn in the flesh for church workers. Some don't even believe in conventional medicine and only believe prayer alone is what God has ordained as means to ensure health. Sadly, the reality is that many suffer silently till death and the slogan "nguva yaMwari yanga yakwana" (God's time had come) is echoed everywhere yet scripture talks of full life beyond 70 years.

With poor job security in Zimbabwe, high formal unemployment and underemployment in the informal sector, it is not guaranteed that you will still earn that pay, salary or allowance from church as the sheep are not producing any milk. Since the days of COVID-19 many churches have struggled to raise money through tithes and offerings. Chenjerai kukama mombe kusvika kwakungobuda ropa chete (Be careful to avoid milking until only blood oozes). Here you here some pastors citing the widow of Zarephath case and not the widow of one of the prophets case.

Today, there are no more cities of the Priests and Levites except

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monasteries run by a few mainline churches. Yes Paul had a right like we do (servants of the altar), yet this was not absolute. In fact he argues that he didn't claim lest some may be offended with the money thing in church, as many surely do today. Money as it is needed to answer all things, has become a stumbling block for the poor and vulnerable.

We have pastors today who refuse to be assigned to a new local church outside the cities and towns. It's because apart from earning through tithe and offering, most don't want to use other skills and talents. Some hold on to the teaching that store your treasure in spiritual terms and not on earthly things yet the main emphasis of that teaching seem ignored. Church administration systems must look at this area and empower pastors to prepare for retirement, but much more this period before one turns 55 or 65.

Invest in your health

Don't just think of income, think about your body, your health and act accordingly. Our Zimbabwean musical hero Oliver Mutukudzi (aka Tuku) sang the track "mupfumi ndiyani" (Who is rich?) messaging that mupfumi ndiye uyo ane hutano (the rich is one who is healthy). As our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, we must pay attention to live healthy lifestyles watching how and what we eat as well as having frequent bodily exercises, this Apostle Paul affirms as beneficial/profitable. Let us not just exercise our tongue and jaws while eating but as well our muscles and flex the joints too. You may still be fervent in Spirit but can't do much when your body is frail! Even if we give you one more mountain, you may not even be able to clear the land yourself. Maybe for a legacy project, yes. Pastor, find time to walk around, jog, do the press-ups, or skip the rope. It's part of investing in retirement. I have also learnt to say NO to some invitations to minister or serve, especially when my body tells me so. Life expectancy is Zimbabwe is said to be under 40 years, think about it.

There is a time for everything! Think about this reality. As we think so we become. Instead of being shocked with the thought of a time when you can't work to earn, instead, embrace it and plan for it.

Real story

There was a time in my working episode that I used to get airtime and fuel allowance every week, which oftentimes I didn't exhaust before the next signing. I could call anyone anytime, and travel anywhere without stress. I got used to this and adjusted my lifestyle accordingly. Ever heard that there is never a time money is enough? But a time came when all this was gone, you can imagine the discomfort, anxiety and frustration.

I used to drive different vehicles associated with wealthy persons and yet my personal car was a Honda Fit. It came a time that those nice off-roads had to be taken away, it was Honda Fit's time. Thank goodness I had the Honda Fit, imagine if I didn't own this small car. Back to public transport – kombi, mushikashika and all right?

My point is think, plan and act regarding how life will be when you are no longer doing that job or getting that monthly pay.

Invest in diverse income sources

Even when one has been formally employed and paying pension contributions, the volatile economy will humble you. The monthly pay-out today is how much compared to cost of living monthly? You cannot bank on this. Worse, most churches don't follow labour laws and most pastors don't have pension even. Saka uchaite sei? (So, what shall you do?) You need another income avenue.

While you still can earn it, think of the dry season ahead (retirement).

Real story

Like Joseph (the second in command in Egypt at one point the greatest civilisations), during the days of good earning, I realised my contract will not be renewed even though I loved my job. I recalled my passion

and interests that were elsewhere, in farming. So my wife and I managed to secure a small piece of land, fenced it, build a decent cottage, drilled a borehole, constructed house for broilers and a shed-net greenhouse from savings. It was not a roller-coaster. First drilling produced a dry hole, more than a thousand United States dollars lost in a moment. Still, we drilled again after a while. Sometime later, we thought of introducing piggery, built the pigsty and later secured breeding stock. This definitely was not a short-term project, we were preparing for the long haul.

I invested in knowledge and became hands-on while still formally employed. When it was time to go, at least the projects could self sustain. We had assets that could be monetized to cover the years of unemployment. For me actually it was about seventeen months jobless, no income coming.

Invest in a saving culture

Saving money and not enjoying it through consumption is not easy but if you have a goal, you endure all the self-denials of leisure and shopping and traveling. No matter how small your income currently is a pastor, learn to save money. Those gifts, "sown seeds" and allowances should be saved. Saving is not keeping the remainder but making an intentional act of removing and saving a certain amount. These days it's not best to put money under the pillow, consider an asset to buy and store value. Please buying a car is not saving, most cars depreciate value fast. As part of saving, learn to live

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within your means, the remaining income. Don't compare yourself with another pastor or family.

Invest in your spouse

I am so grateful that my spouse is not a lazy person but very intelligent and diligent. Young people, when thinking of marriage, calculate well and ensure your loved one is not lazy. Haisingori yemafeatures and feelings nyaya iyi (It's not about body features and beauty). Two are better than one in many respects. Some pastors don't allow their wives to do any work or selling, hanzi zvinodzikisira hufundisi hwavo, shuwa here? (They say it belittles their pastoral status. Is it so?) Today the tide is no longer easy for man to be sole breadwinners, those days are long gone. Invest in your spouse, let them learn and earn. We need the Priscila and Aquila of today. Like Apostle Paul, he provided for his needs and those around him from his tent-making project/business/skill so that he never became spiteful for those churches who didn't support him materially/financially.

Even if you are a pastor, as gifted as you are, you don't have daytime all-time.

Imagine a pastor being a farmer, a marketer, an entrepreneur as well as a community resource? Surely you won't starve. Your family won't curse your G-d or Ministry. I know in my church movement, many pastors are now overdue retirement as per labour laws in the country but it's a sad state to see very few who own any property, or have a thriving income generation venture or with social capital that can catapult them from suffering. Life expectancy in Zimbabwe is said to be under 40 years, think about it. Even my favourite poet spoke about the age of 25 as



normal stage in life for one to live independently and sustainably, yet alas it is not so anymore. He still has dreams, so he encourages us all to never give up.

Be shrewd with your time, talent and talents.

Invest in social capital

Relations are the lifeblood of human civilization, that's why God created the first community called family and then nations. In Shona we say "maoko anogezana", kandiyo kanoenda kunobva kamwe, rume rimwe harikombe churu, chara chimwe hachitswanye inda (meaning we help each other and achieve much collectively) among other idioms.

The Lord tells a parable of a shrewd manager, who was about to lose his job. He was honest to himself that apart from his job he wasn't good in many things. He was too proud for manual work and too prideful to beg for help. He realised there were

people who owed his master, so he negotiated with them to settle something and so he earned favour off the job. His master commended him- at least he recovered part of his dues. The point is, if you don't want to beg, then be willing to dig. Unfortunately retirement due to old age brings little avenue for digging jobs lest you break your back.

This is not to say do unrighteous things to guarantee safe retirement. Adopt the principle. Learn to win hearts of people so that it's easier for them to come to your aid when in need.

Invest in your family

In the past, our grandparents invested in having more than eight children. This was part of creating labour force for the farming, security against enemies as well as the hope that when the children are grown, they will be many to afford taking care of their parents who by then would have retired. Those were the days. Even then, not all children turned being that responsible to look after their

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parents. Even today, the culture of individualism has also taken route, with negative connotations in the form of "black tax" being widely frowned upon. So pastors, your family is the first church, love your spouse and children. Invest in them so that they too may be the last defence line for you. Send them to school, don't just emphasise on academic excellence but nurture talent and skill, Be there for your children. I have seen pastors bitter with spiritual children while their biological children are very bitter with them their pastors/parents. They say blood is thicker than water, don't close doors and cut ties with your family members even if they don't believe the same with you, they remain family. In difficult times, they are the ones who can always be there for you and me. Chawawana idya nehama nekuti mutorwa anehanganwa! (Literally translated as enjoy what you have with family and relatives)

Parting shots

Human beings are designed to function effectively during the day while most animals thrive at night. The Lord knew this wisdom, that night will soon come, so He had to do most if not all of His assignment before He was arrested and killed in Jerusalem (night time came) "I must work while it is still day...". As the famous sons of Issachar, everyone needs this gift and wisdom to know the times and what one must do. Indeed, it is about knowing the existence of evil days so you place yourself to redeem the time. You may be young but that doesn't last forever. You may be old but there is yet another level of older till being the oldest.

If you have been insulted by this piece, am sorry, it wasn't the aim. If you found this challenging, you are the right person to have read this piece!



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LIFE SKILLS & DEVELOPMENT

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE



BY TAMIRIRAI SHE NYEVERA IN
GOKWE, ZIMBABWE

Tamiraishe Nyevera is a National University of Science and Technology (NUST) graduate in Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering, IBM and Google Certified in Data Analytics currently employed by Chick n Fresh

Artificial Intelligence (hereinafter referred to as AI) basically allows computers or system to make decisions without explicit programming. Hence, it can imitate how people think, present good opportunities but can be equally problematic. So, it needs proper management to harness its cutting edge.

Opportunities of AI for Youth

Education: AI-powered educational tools can provide personalized learning experiences, making it easier for young people to grasp complex concepts. AI has different tools, for example, the recently booming Chat-GPT. Challengingly, it has been controversial as some students use it in doing their assignments. Having algorithms that select or scan through the user's favorite, this often helps users to receive blogs, updates, books or even videos concerning the areas of interest. Thus, the education is then enhanced due to such powerful algorithms. On a lighter note, when one likes a post on Facebook or YouTube, videos or posts relating to the one liked appears more often, which

narrows down the scope of the content the user wants to have or has interest in.

Career Opportunities: AI skills are in high demand, and youths can acquire valuable skills for future job prospects in fields like data science and AI development.

While there is a serious outcry of how robotics and AI are taking over the world as well as replacing people at workplaces, more jobs are also being created that will help govern and manage AI. This article will highlight some of the different jobs in this sector. There is data collection done by the collectors, leading to analysis of data, done by the data analyst, from there data scientist create the algorithms, there are data engineers etc. All these roles a decade ago they weren't being even advertised especially here in Zimbabwe but as of late such posts have been in demand due to the high rise of AI.

Social and Professional Connection: AI-powered communication platforms enable youth to connect with friends and peers worldwide, promoting cultural exchange and understanding. Platforms like LinkedIn for example have AI driven algorithms that suggest people who are in the same business or profession with you based on your profile. Some platforms like Up-work helps some people to sell their skills and business hence earn young people

a living, AI will lead the rightful people/clients to your doorstep based on the given work that one young person can offer.

Entertainment: AI-driven content recommendations and virtual reality experiences offer engaging entertainment options for young people. AI has given a wide option and indirectly can be a great deal to fight drug and substance abuse. Recently there has been more of a crisis in different parts of Zimbabwe and the world because of drugs due to different causes. For the young people there are different social media platforms with AI-generated algorithm that enhances one's experience for a better or worse, as the user is given a choice. This entertainment can save young people from engaging in any form of drug abuse.

Challenges of AI for Youths

Privacy Concerns: Youths may be more vulnerable to privacy breaches and data exploitation as AI collects and analyzes personal information. As mentioned earlier, AI deals with data, they say "the greater the amount of data you have the better the

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LIFE SKILLS & DEVELOPMENT



Picture: DM magazine

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

performance of any algorithm". This breaches the privacy of an individual which leads to some content creation which might be harmful. This has been seen on the battle between the Huawei smartphone company based in China and the USA government as there were allegations to steal the American people's data through their devices which somehow led to the banning of the Google services on some of Huawei smartphones as Google is based in USA and banning of some of those gadgets in USA. This data can help in creation of civil wars and society manipulation.

Addiction: AI algorithms in social media and gaming can contribute to addiction and excessive screen time. This kills the production time for any young person to learn new skills or even start a business. It can lead to laziness which probably destroy the future of church and country at large. There has been reported that there is a total of a million of hours spent within a week on Tik-Tok in Africa only. Though the entertainment can help fight drug addiction it can be an addiction on its own it needs proper management.

Job Disruptions: As AI automates certain tasks, it may affect entry-level job opportunities for young workers. There is a serious need of continuous improvement in almost every sector of operation as AI can do the human jobs in less time and more accurate and from the world market perception this leaves the employers with no choice but to let go their long serving members as they are after productivity. AI achieves these feat by the use of robots, 3D printing etc.

Ethical Issues: Exposure to biased or harmful AI content and decisions can impact a young person's worldview and behavior. There is an almost defined trend of the new generation comically termed "Ama2K", the content they are consuming has given them almost non-acceptable uniform dressing, vulgar language, pornography appetite and drug abuse, though all these were present before but they have highly trended on this young generation through how fast information is travelling on their gadgets and found consuming such content.

Mental Health Concerns: Excessive social media use driven by AI algorithms can contribute to mental health issues like anxiety and depression. AI generates pressure from all angles to the young people, starting from social media, jobs, exposure, competition etc. Unless properly managed by an entity it can present serious mental health issues as it has taken over almost every technological sphere especially when users are not aware of its operations.

Balancing the benefits and drawbacks of AI usage is crucial to ensure that young people harness its potential while being aware of its limitations and potential pitfalls.

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SOCIAL LIFE



BY CHAMUNORWA
WILSON IN MACHEKE,
ZIMBABWE

INVEST IN MARRIAGE AND REAP HAPPINESS

I grew up in a society where elderly men used to tell us that marriage is no child's play while others would say it is not sadza nederere (pap and okra).

The same society frowned upon older unmarried men as it was believed that marriage completes a man.

As we grew older, we began to understand more about the marriage institution. Not only is it a physical and psychological requirement, it is also expected of man by God.

In Genesis, the word of God expressly mentions that "It is not good for man to live alone..." (Gen 2:18).

Because marriage is a union of two different individuals from different social backgrounds, it will be too much to expect that no conflict will arise from time to time.

When conflicts arise, they have to be dealt with and solved amicably so that they do not rise up from the ashes at some point to rob the future of its joy.

Marriages have been known to curtail the progress of partners in their professions, Christian ministries, business enterprises, academic studies and, in fact, in almost every sphere of life. Because "...the two shall become one..." (Gen 2:24), the behaviour and attitude of one has a way of affecting the progress of the other. Once the marriage front has challenges, the full potential of all the other facets of life is compromised.

Recently, I stumbled upon this post on the Positive Energy Facebook page; "Great relationships aren't great because they don't have problems. They are great because both partners care enough about each other to make it work." The saying effectively places the duty of making a marriage work right on the doorstep of each of the two partners! Marriage is a team effort and therefore the two teammates must play the game for each other.

What has killed most marriages is bad communication. As mentioned earlier, marriage is about two different "backgrounds" trying to find and understand each other, communication becomes the basic and most potent tool to break misconceptions and mistrusts. Communication

brings about understanding and appreciation in couples. The only way that one will ever get to know what the other person is thinking or feeling is if the other opens up and communicates.

Through communication comes understanding and from understanding, respect is born. Once assumptions take centre-stage, respect takes a quick retreat into the shadows. Couples should communicate clearly and often.

The other very important piece of advice for couples in a marriage is expressing gratitude for having your partner in your life. Never fall into the habit of thinking you have said it enough and the other partner has grown tired of hearing it. Say it as many times as you feel until you leave your partner with absolutely no doubt about their value in your life.

As I mentioned earlier, conflicts are a part of life and they mainly stem from divergent views on things and issues. It is okay to have views different from those held by your partner, it does not mean they do not love you. We are made to be different, therefore, expecting one to be like you is going against the will of God! Partners should embrace different perspectives from their spouses, it only builds stronger relationships.

Whenever conflicts arise, it is always wise to settle them amicably. Different couples have different approaches on this but to some, the best time to solve conflicts is when they have just happened. If we do it respectfully, we might be able to resolve them and make peace. The reason why I prefer this approach is because issues have a way of adopting a stratified syndrome where one conflict leads and feeds into another until we have several of them lined up for solving when we finally decide the time is right.

I remember visiting a couple that seemed to compete with each other. Every time the husband did something worthy praising, the wife did not seem as excited as is normally expected in such scenarios. This can also happen the other way around. I mentioned that a couple is a team and once teammates start playing against each other then all chances of a victory

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SOCIAL LIFE



INVEST IN MARRIAGE AND REAP HAPPINESS

dissipate. Partners should be able to build and empower each other. The golden rule is, build and keep building your partner!

The other disturbing trend that I picked up along the way is when one partner talks bad about the other to other people. This is a big NO! NO! If you want your marriage to work. The first and last line of defence for your partner is YOU! You should defend and stand by your partner always and confront him or her in your closet.

The other aspect of building stronger relationships that is normally ignored by some couples is creating time together. No matter how busy your schedule is, you should always create some "couple time" and have fun. I know of a couple that taught me what they termed "Special Fridays". They made time every Friday to be alone, just the two of them, to bond and to freshen up from the pressures of the whole week. It offers an opportunity for couples to rekindle their friendship.

Lastly, I want to remind us all that a couple that plays, jokes and have fun is assured of good healthy. May I also add that a couple that prays together stays together? Have a common spiritual reservoir which you tap into in times of troubles.

Remember marriage is a commitment to walk with someone for the whole life. If you do not take care of your partner, they might grow weary, or grow blisters, or even break down and faint before the journey is over. For one to enjoy perfect company, the partner needs to be eager to be on that journey.

Importantly, once the couple enjoys each other's company, the children will also enjoy having their parents around. He who invests in marriage will reap happiness!

SOCIAL LIFE



BY OBEDIENCE NORUPIRI, IN
ZHEJIANG, HANGZHOU, CHINA

BETTER THAN GRAVE FLOWERS: HONOURING OUR PARENTS TODAY

Obedience Norupiri is an upcoming engineer. She studied Mechanical Design Manufacture and Automation Engineering at Zhejiang Sci-tech University in Zhejiang, Hangzhou, China

The definition of honour in Greek is 'to revere, prize, and value'. Honour is demonstrating respect for both merit and rank. This honour is not contingent on your parents' actions towards you or even on whether they were excellent parents.

Instead, they deserve respect for who they are. The respect that children have for their parents nowadays does not need to change once the meaning of the word honour is understood. This commandment has, however, been interpreted differently for some people as a result of contemporary societal changes.

We may better understand the appropriate ways to honor parents if we first understand how not to do so.

However, on Mount Sinai thousands of years ago, the Lord established His own commandment honouring our parents. In order for your days to be lengthy and for everything to go well for you, Jehovah your God instructed that you honour your parents (Deuteronomy 5:16). The respect that children should have for their parents is highly valued by God. This importance is clear from the fact that He included this advice in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12). Because it is so significant to our Father, He opted to include it in the text.

Obedying the Lord is rewarded. The Lord outlines the numerous blessings He will bestow upon His children in Deuteronomy 28, one of my favourite passages of Scripture, when we obey His voice and His commands. "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God (1-2)".

Considering that, when we pay attention to God's voice and

carry out His commands, He will bless us. The abundance of joy, good health, divine favor, and provision are just a few of these blessings. What incredible promises, and all we have to do is obey and listen to His voice!

But the world in which we live has forgotten how to hear God's voice. We are now more accustomed to paying attention to the many voices that surround us every day. Sadly, only a small portion of these voices guide us down the route that God has predetermined for us. Is it feasible for us to teach our kids to talk and act with respect and attention towards their parents, grandparents, and other people in authority in a culture that encourages individuality, contempt, and insolence?

Yes, it is the answer. We live in this world, yet we are not of it, as the Bible teaches.

The underlying principles revealed in the Word of God enable parents to establish a family atmosphere infused with a spiritual standard of living. Children need to be taught to respect people in positions of authority. The success of your child in the future will change as a result of this lesson, which is imparted via both word and deed. You must uphold honour if you demand it.

The only command in the Bible that confers long life and blessings on your descendants is to honor your parents. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; it is right to do so. According to Ephesians 6:1-3, "Honor your parents, for this is the first and great commandment, with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may live a long life on the earth. "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your

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SOCIAL LIFE

BETTER THAN GRAVE FLOWERS: HONOURING OUR PARENTS TODAY



father and have kept all his precepts and have done according to all that he commanded you, therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab son of Rechab shall never fail [to have] a man [descendant] to stand before Me" (Jeremiah 35:18-19).

The wisest man King Solomon, exhorted kids to respect their parents (Proverbs 1:8, 13:1, 30:17). We never outgrow God's command to honor our parents, even if we are no longer directly subject to their authority. Even Jesus, God the Son, deferred to both His heavenly Father (Matthew 26:39) and His earthly parents (Luke 2:51). We should strive to honor our parents in a way that glorifies God, following Christ's example. In both our actions and attitudes, we should respect our parents (Mark 7:6).

Through our deeds, words, and actions, we seek to please and glorify God. God rewards us with a promise when we pay attention to and follow His commands. You should therefore pay attention to His voice and carry out His command. In accordance with Colossians 3:20, children should always obey their parents.

God promises those who honour their parents a life, joy, and security that others will not know. Take note that this applies to the modern church as well as Old Testament Israel. The promise and the edict are both renewed by Paul. But now, instead of being in Canaan, the Promised Land is in the wide-open spaces, atop the high mountains, and alongside the pristine shores of a new land where God now dwells (Revelation 21:1-3).

And even now, as we travel through this cursed and crumbling world in Christ, our souls breathe that air and enjoy that pleasure.

YEAR 2023 REFLECTIONS

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON YEAR 2023



KINGSTONE MAZANHI, TEACHER, IN
MARONDERA, ZIMBABWE

I am a passionate and avid reader of Ecclesia Today. I enjoyed its comprehensive coverage on all aspects of human life. Reading transformed my attitude towards life in general, and my Year 2023 undergone a complete metamorphosis.



BENARD MASINA, TRUCK DRIVER, FROM
MARONDERA, ZIMBABWE

2023 was a tough year economically to an extend that I could not realize what I am working for. However, I have not and will not give up as God graces me.

2023



DANIEL CHIWEDA, PASTOR, IN
HARARE, ZIMBABWE

Our pre Appointed times and boundaries are with the Lord. He makes all things beautiful in His time!



TINASHE MANOMANO, ECONOMIST, IN
MANZINI, ESWATINI

It was an eventful year, full of challenges, but I can testify of the faithfulness of God.

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YEAR 2023 REFLECTIONS

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON YEAR 2023



ELIJAH MUSORO, OPERATIONS MANAGER,
RENEWABLE ENERGY, IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE

2023 has not been a good year, not allowing a normal human being to lay down his plan and walk in it. But I have learnt how true the word of God is – Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” It is true! Our God is Abba Father! The God who sustains His people. WE are making a living not because of our capabilities but because our God is sustaining us”



BUSANI MASINA, PASTOR, IN
BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE

I am a living proof that God has taken us this far, and yet to take us further!



BOANERGES MUDIMBA, IN
HARARE, ZIMBABWE

It was such a great year of the Lord, so much to learn from the economic and political struggles but also so much to contribute, God saw us through.

EXTRAS

GOING BEYOND PRAYERS: STRATEGIC PERSONAL PLANNING FOR THE NEW YEAR



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Towards the end and beginning of every year, a significant number of believers come up with written and unwritten resolutions in preparation for the New Year. Few of these resolutions come to fruition. The major reason of failure is lack of personal strategic planning. A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim. Every resolution should be backed up by a strategy. Personal strategic planning is all about rightly placing yourself for success. Failing to plan is planning to fail. Faith without personal strategic planning is a recipe for failure and frustration. God is a planner (the story of creation aptly sums it up all). Likewise, believers should also plan strategically. Jesus Christ also worked strategically. Here are two good examples of how he valued planning and being orderly. He said to his disciples, “have them sit

down in groups of about fifty each” (Luke 9:14). Luke later on recorded Jesus teaching, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it” (Luke 14:28). If God the Father and Jesus the Son could operate strategically, you and I should do likewise. In the Bible, the success of Joshua is demonstrated by how he strategically planned for the fall of Jericho and for the battles he won resoundingly. Nehemiah didn’t just woke up and started rebuilding the fallen walls. He assessed the situation first then mobilized the resources and started working. David needed men who could think and plan strategically, and God gave him the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32). Paul, in the book of Acts, and in his epistles showed that he worked with strategic plans that were governed by the Holy Spirit. This is just to mention few notable figures in the Bible who backed their work with personal strategic planning. Here are some of the basic principles of strategic planning which we should understand and apply when it comes to making resolutions: have a mission, have a vision, formulate objectives, carry out SWOT analysis, have core values, carry out a feasibility study, and have action plans. These principles should also apply to personal strategic planning. Many times believers come up with resolutions at the beginning of a year accompanied by prayer and fasting but without personal strategic planning hence the failure of most of the resolutions.

As an individual do you have a personal mission? That is the reason or purpose for your existence. Do you know why God brought you on earth? Are your resolutions in line with your personal mission on earth? Are you making your resolutions according to your personal vision? That is your dream intent – where you want to be in the future. Have you formulated objectives which indicate what is critical to yourself? In other words, objectives are the goals or resolutions you are trying to achieve in the following year or so. These objectives should be SMART. Are they Specific? Do you really know what you want to achieve in the following year? Are your objectives or resolutions Measurable? Are the objectives or resolutions Achievable? Do not formulate extremely difficult resolutions though they should be challenging and motivating to pursue them. Objectives should be Realistic. Do not come up with ridiculous

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resolutions. Objectives should be Timeous or Time bound. When will they be attained or achieved?

You need also to analyze the environment using SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis tool in which these resolutions will be applied. Find out the areas you are Strong at and maximize your efforts and resources there, make sure that your resolutions have a strong bias in those areas and minimize them where you are Weak, the good thing is that you have got control over yourself (internal environment).

You have got no control over the market or task environment, and macro environment (external environment) but you can maximize on the Opportunities that can be brought about by these other two environments but minimize aligning your resolutions in areas where there are Threats.

Do you have the core values which are the fundamental beliefs of yourself? These guiding principles (core values) dictate behavior and can help you understand the difference between right and wrong or otherwise navigate the difficult challenges that you may face as you try to fulfill your resolutions.

Do you have the character to pursue your objectives? Carry out also a feasibility study. That is an assessment of whether your resolutions will succeed by analyzing your core competencies (self analysis), the market or task environment, and macro environment. Feasibility study has got an impact on the achievement of the resolutions.



Finally you have to come up with action plans. Just having objectives or resolutions without actions is what the Bible equate to Faith without action which is dead (James 2:26). An action plan lists what steps must be taken to achieve an objective or resolution. It breaks down the resolution into actionable steps that can be easily followed and tracked. The purpose of an action plan is to clarify what resources are required to achieve the objective and formulate a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed. These actions needs to be monitored, evaluated, and where possible adjusted accordingly because the external environment is dynamic and volatile.

An effective leader (believer) execute the strategy and follows up on it. Personal strategic planning should be carried in partnership with God, for Bible says, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans" (Proverbs 16:3).

Further on the Bible mentioned that, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

It is my earnest prayer that as the year comes to an end as believers we should upload and exercise the strategic planning principles mentioned above, being lead and directed by the Holy Spirit under the Lordship of Jesus for we are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ.

May the following two verses strengthen and give you hope as you plan for the New Year – "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6); "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND FRUITFUL NEW YEAR.....FOR NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD!

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