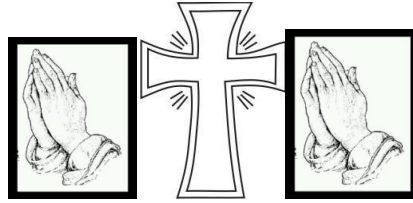


**CHERUBIM & SERAPHIM MOVEMENT CHURCH WORLDWIDE
HEADQUARTERS, DAKIBIYU DISTRICT, ABUJA**



LECTURE/TRAINING SERIES (2014)

(DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMMES FOR CHURCH GROWTH)

Coordinated by: Most Senior Apostle George Omenge

CHAIRMAN/GENERAL LEADER: Sp. Apostle A.A. BODUNRIN

Held @ CHURCH AUDITORIUM
(Saturdays/Sundays between 15th March and 13th April 2014)

CONTENT

| | |
|---|----|
| Lecture Preamble | 2 |
| Lecture 1: Effective Worship-Key to Spiritual Growth | 4 |
| Lecture 2: Interpersonal Relationships in the Church | 16 |
| Lecture 3: Place of Effective Communication in the Church | 27 |
| Lecture 4: Christian Growth and Maturity | 36 |

GENERAL PREAMBLE TO LECTURES

Most Senior Apostle George Omenge

GENERAL PREAMBLE

1) **Worship is different from Service**

- **Worship** is coming before God, praising Him, adoring Him, etc. and you get spiritually uplifted by God.
- **Service** on the other hand, involves engaging in issues concerning the church and its activities.

- 2) **There is need to get better entrenched in such seminars** where these contemporary issues will be brought to the fore of the congregation for their understanding and practice. The Bible says, “My people perish because of lack of knowledge”
- 3) There is **need for annual renewal in order to make progress and be dynamics** to meet the challenges of modern day church.
- 4) There is **need to understand the way we worship**.
- 5) There is need to **understand the challenges faced** by Christians in the modern global world and **what our roles are** to meet up with the challenges.
- 6) Are we **enjoying true fellowship with each other, our communities;**
- 7) **Are we our brothers' keepers?**
- 8) Do we play our leadership roles? What is leadership? When can you really say that you are exercising leadership? Do we have leaders?
- 9) **Dakibiyu is the mother church**. We need to **re-define our role as the mother church**. Are we living up to our expectations and set standards and targets?
- 10) We need to **redefine the role of the mother church with its Branches**.
- 11) Is our **growth and progression satisfactory, or is it stunted?** Year in year out, you see the same set of faces? Is this what we want as a mother Church?
- 12) We **need to identify major programmes that will galvanize us together** so that **everybody keys in into it**.
- 13) The issue of **title positions in the church** has taken a new dimension. Do we need to stay sedentary or everybody be on deck just watching. There is nothing wrong in ambition. But when you mix your ambition with pride, then there is problem.
- 14) There should be **standard for setting up Districts and Branches and in the mode of our worship**. Chairmen of some Districts cannot adequately chair the affairs of their family. When you see a Chairman and other Elders, they should be people who are worthy in terms

of good character, comportment and behavior. This should be the GOAL of the Church worldwide

15) Consequently, the **purpose of God for our Worship and Service should be emphasized.**

16) There is need to **redefine our relationship with God and with each other.**

17) We **need to look at the content of our worship in spirit and in truth.**

18) We should look at the five Ministries, and:

a) **Redefine ourselves** so that we can **work within the body of Christ**

b) **Engage in cooperative competition while maintaining your identity.** When you lose your identity, you become a nonentity. **Take what is good in other places but retain your identity.**

19) Our mission is to always showcase the C&S doctrine. Be yourself. Don't try to be like others

EFFECTIVE WORSHIP-Key to Spiritual Growth

Most Senior Apostle George Omange

1) THE MEANING OF WORSHIP

A. INTRODUCTION

One writer notes that “Worship in our time has been captured by the tourist mind set. Worship is understood as a visit to an attractive site to be made when we have adequate leisure. For some it is a weekly joint to the church. For others, it is occasional visit to special services. Some, with a bent for church entertainment and sacred diversion, plan their lives around special events like retreats and conferences. We go to see a new personality, to hear a new truth, to get a new experience; and so, somehow, expand our otherwise humdrum lives. We will try anything.... until something else comes along.”

B. WHAT IS WORSHIP?

- i. The primary Hebrew word for Worship, Shachah- means “To depress i.e. prostrate (in homage to royalty of God): bow (self) down, crouch, fall down (flat), humbly beseech, do (make) obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship”
- ii. Three Greek words, namely
 - a) **Proskuneo**: meaning “to kiss (like a dog licking the master’s hand), to fawn or crouch to, homage (do reverence to, adore); worship”, It occurs 59 times in the New Testament. It originally carried with it the idea of subjects falling down to kiss the ground before a king or kiss their feet.
 - b) **Sebomai**: “to reverence, hold in awe’- used 10 times in the New Testament.
 - c) **Latreuo**: to render religious service of homage’; used 21 times in the New Testament
- iii. Worship in English language literally means “to ascribe worth to something”. True worship begins with a deep respect or reverence for God, a frame of heart, an attitude.

C. KINDS OF WORSHIP

The Bible talks about several “kinds” of worship.

- i. **Ignorant Worship**: Acts 17:22-31. Paul perceived that they were very religious but he warned them that their religious service was not pleasing to God, for it was done without knowledge of what God wanted or even who God was.

Ignorant worship is not pleasing to God for He is not glorified by accident, but by a conscious praise of His name

- ii. **Vain Worship:** Matthew 15:7-9. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesized about you: “These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain. Their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

The Pharisees made their worship vain (useless) because they had relied on their commandments of men to their practices.

- iii. **Will Worship:** Colossians 2:23. Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in Will worship, and humility and neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh

This is worship that centers in satisfying self. This is the same type of worship that we often have today; that which calls for “Audience centered” worship.

- iv. **True Worship:** John 4:23-24. “But the hour cometh, and now is, when true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him

God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in Truth”

D. CORRECT ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

- i. Worship is God- centered. Ps 95:6. O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker.
- ii. Worship is to be done with good knowledge of what God wanted and who God is. Acts 17:23
- iii. Worship by continually offering the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.
- iv. One of the great errors in modern Worship is making it worshipper-centered; worship is to be centered on praising God, not entertaining ourselves.

We need to understand that the blessings we receive from worship are a by-product of our worship and not focus. In worship, we come to do and give, not receive.

The efforts to “get more” out of worship has led to all types of artificial, superficial and unscriptural gimmicks to “liven up” worship periods. Such is NOT WORSHIPPING GOD, it is bowing to altar of the social gospel.

- v. There must be a combining of reverence towards God and worshipping according to the truth of God’s will. 1John 4:2, Joshua 24:14

2) THE PURPOSE OF OUR WORSHIP OF GOD

The purpose of our worship is to glorify, honor, praise, exalt and please God. Our worship must show our adoration and loyalty to God for His grace in providing us with the way to escape the bondage of sin, so we can have the salvation He so much wants to give us. The nature of the worship God demands is the prostration of our souls before Him in humble and contrite submission. James 4:6, 10 tells us *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. **Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up**”*. Our worship to God is a very humble and reverend action.

Jesus says in John 4:23-24, *“But the hour is come, and now is, **when true worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth**, for the Father is seeking such to worship him. God is Spirit and they that worship Him **must worship Him in spirit and in truth**”* It doesn't say we can worship God anyway we want, but we **“must worship Him in spirit and in truth”**. The word “must” makes it absolute. There is no other way we can worship God and be acceptable to Him. The word “must”, according to Webster dictionary, expresses “an obligation, a requirement, a necessity, a certainty and something that must be done”. When “must” is used, it means that it is not optional. Here the word “must” is expressing that in spirit and in truth is the only way to acceptably worship God. God seeks true worshippers, and He identifies them as those who “worship Him in spirit and in truth”. Worshipping God in spirit and in truth is a serious matter which must not be taken lightly. If we have any regard for our own souls, we will want to make sure we are worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

Since God is the object of our worship, He and He alone has the right to determine how we are to worship Him. We read in Jeremiah 10:23, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” We are not granted the option of directing our ways in religion. God is the One who we look up to for guidance and direction in our lives.

Our very best in worship is due to God and is prescribed by Him in the Bible. The worship God has prescribed is the only way we can be pleasing to Him in this life and finally attain everlasting life with Him in eternity. The Christian's worship is of the greatest importance.

Worship is a time when we pay deep, sincere, awesome respect, love and fear to the one who created us. Acts 17:24-25 says, “God who made the world and everything in it, since He is the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives life, breadth and all things”.

God is the one who holds our eternal destiny in His hands. Philippians 2:12 tells us to *“work out your own salvation **with fear and trembling**”* Our salvation is a very serious matter and will not

happen by accident. We must work it out “with fear and trembling”. Our salvation depends on whether our worship is pleasing to God or not. On the Day of Judgment, it will be too late to make corrections.

Worship should cause us to reflect on the majesty and graciousness of God and Christ, contrasted to our own unworthiness. God does not have to have our worship, but we must worship Him to please Him. Our singing, praying, studying his word, giving and communion are designed by God to bring us closer to Him and to cause us to think more like He thinks, thus becoming more like Him. James 4:8 tells us to “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you”.

Our worship not only honors and magnifies God, but it is also for our own edification and strength. Worship helps us to develop a God-like and Christ-like character. We become like unto those we admire and worship. When we worship God, we tend to value what God values and gradually take on the characteristics and qualities of God, but never to His level. As Philippians 2:5 says “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ.” How do we take on the mind of Christ? In Romans 12:2 we read, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the reviewing of your mind.” We renew our mind as we study and meditate on God’s words and worship Him

When we worship God, we develop such traits as forgiveness, tenderness, justice, righteousness, purity, kindness and love. All of these are preparing us for eternal life in heaven with God and Christ; as we are told in Colossians 3:2 to “Set your minds on things above, and not on things on earth.”

3) ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

God has shown, in the Bible, His approval with those who follow His will and His displeasure and wrath with those who refuse to worship Him the way He has directed. An example of acceptable and unacceptable worship in the Old Testament is that of Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel both worshipped God. Abel did as God directed, but Cain tried to worship God the way he saw fit. We read in Genesis 4:3-5, *“And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.”*

Why did the Lord have respect for Abel’s offering and why did He reject Cain’s offering? Hebrews 11:4 tells us, *“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain”*. Notice Abel offered his sacrifice “by faith” but Cain did not. Romans 10:17 says “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”. So faith comes by the word of God. Abel

offered his sacrifice by faith or according to the word of God. If we worship God by faith, we worship as the word of God directs.

Abel offered the firstborn of his flock “by faith” and it was accepted because his worship was according to the instructions of God. But Cain chose to ignore God’s instructions and sacrificed an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Cain chose to sacrifice to God the way he saw fit. Cain did not offer his sacrifice according to God’s instructions; God rejected his sacrifice and worship, since it was not “by faith”.

From this example, we see our worship must be “by faith”, that is “by the word of God”. We read in Romans 14:23, *“For whatever is not from faith is sin.”* If our worship is not “by faith”; that is, it is not “by the word of God”, then “it is sin”. It will also be rejected just like Cain’s. It is a very serious matter if God rejects our worship. If He does, we are going to be lost. Many people accept from the Bible what they like and what they don’t like. They also add other things that they like. This is not Christianity but religious anarchy. We do not have the right to “believe as we please”. We must humbly submit to all that Jesus says. Anything taught or practiced by man in the field of religion which does not come from the Bible is false doctrine.

4) WE MUST GIVE OUR BEST TO GOD

As we worship God, we give Him ourselves. Romans 12:1 says, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a **living sacrifice**, holy acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.”* Under the Old Testament, some of the Jews were not offering their best and were condemned for it. In Malachi 1:8, we read, “And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, **is it not evil?**” Is it not just as evil today when we do not give God our best?

Under the New Testament, we do not offer animal sacrifices as the Jews did under the Old Testament; but we give Him our lives in service to Him as a living sacrifice. In doing this, we must give Him our all. Anything we do for God must be our very best. Jesus tells us in Matthew 22:37, *“You shall love the Lord your God with **all your heart**, and **all your soul** and **all your mind**.”* All our heart, soul and mind, or in other words, our total being must be in our worship; not half hearted.

How do we show our love to God? Our Lord says in John 14:12, *“He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me.”* We show our love to God when we keep his commandments. We do not show our love to God if we only keep the commandment we want to keep or if we add some of our own commandments.

In Matthew 28:18, before Christ ascended into heaven, He was giving His apostles some last minute instructions concerning those they would baptize. Jesus said, *“Teaching them to **observe all things** that I have commanded you.”* Everything the Lord has commanded us is to be observed. We are to do all that God says and in the way He says to do it. Jesus says in Luke 6:46, *“But why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not the things I say.”*

In worship, we must do all God has commanded and we must do nothing He has not authorized. Our worship must be from the heart with all reverence and sincerity. We must give Him our very best. Then and only then will we be worshiping God “in spirit and in truth”. The purpose and holiness of true worship to God is a precious privilege available only to those who are obedient to the will of God

5) ATTENDANCE OF WORSHIP

Worship is a privilege only children of God have. There are many blessings we receive from faithful attendance in worship. God has commanded us to assemble regularly to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Hebrews 10:25-27 says, *“**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. **For if we sin willfully** after we have received the knowledge of the truth, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation.”* When we forsake the assembly of the church, except for sicknesses or circumstances beyond our control, we are not only disobeying God, but we are **robbing ourselves of all the benefits of worship** which would have helped us to grow and become spiritually strong.

It will be a sad day for those who fall away because as we continue reading in Hebrews 10:29, *“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace.”* Then verse 31 concludes by saying, *“It is a **fearful thing** to fall into the hands of the living God.”* It will not be fearful but horrible beyond description when those who were “sanctified” children of God who have turned their back on the Lord when they find themselves in eternal punishment. The sad part will be they didn’t have to be there, but they became careless and indifferent with their souls.

When people fall away from the Lord, it is usually not a sudden thing. They usually start by forsaking the assembly of Wednesday Bible study. Then they start missing Sunday worship. Next they stop coming to Sunday Bible morning study; and then finally, they stop coming to Sunday morning worship. This is the usual path of apostasy for most people who fall away. Or some may come back and “visit” several times a year and a few may even attend only the Sunday morning worship with little regularity. These are described in 2 Peter 2:22 as, *“A dog*

turns to his vomit again, and a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” Some members have turned to their own vomit and are in the pig pen and can no longer smell the stench.

We are encouraged not to let this happen in Galatians 6:9, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” But for us to obtain our eternal reward, we must be consistent. Our Lord says in Revelation 2:10, “Be fruitful until death and I will give you the crown of life.” Only if we remain faithful are we promised eternal life.

When we are looking forward for the opportunity to worship God, we must prepare well. Think ahead about the worship service you are about to attend and plan ahead for the following:

- a) The time you want to arrive, taking note of the fact that you can only derive full benefits when you attend from the beginning.
- b) If you are playing any role, you must rehearse it before you come e.g. for Lesson reading, Praying, ushering, etc.
- c) Plan for what you will give. It is diversionary to start looking for change because you want to contribute. You will not be able to concentrate just as the person who is looking for change for you; you will not concentrate on the worship service.
- d) Hold your Bible and follow the lesson when they are read.
- e) Plan to give full attention to every bit of the worship service-remember, the devil has many diversionary tactics and is happy when you slip. Avoid distractions. Put off phones.

Going to heaven must be the number one priority in our life. Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, “***But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you***”. I want to “seek first the Kingdom of God” by not allowing anything to hinder me from meeting with the saints and the Lord, don’t you? We don’t want to miss the greatest gift God will ever give, which is our home in heaven. We are told in 2Peter 1:10, “*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure*”. We need to ask ourselves, is my calling and election sure? We are told how to make it sure in 1Corinthians 15:58, “*Therefore, my beloved brethren be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*” Also read Luke 14:16-24

6) PRAYER

In prayer, we show our total dependence on God who created all things and us and by whom all things continue to exist. In prayer, we give praise, honor, glory and reverence to His name for His greatness and goodness. We recognize Him as the source of all blessings. It is also the outpouring of our hearts desire. In Romans 10:1, the Apostle Paul says, “*Brethren, my hearts*

desires and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.” Our prayer must come from our hearts.

Prayer to God is only reserved for those who are obedient children of God. We are told in John 9:31, *“Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is **a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him.**”* There are people whose prayer God will not hear. Is 59:2 says, *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, **so that He will not hear.**”* To allow anything to separate us from the fellowship of God, so that He will not hear our prayers is a very serious matter. It is a sad situation for those who try to pray to God if God will not hear them. But it is their own fault, because they are not obedient to God. They could be obedient if they wanted to be.

Then we read Proverbs 28:9, *“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even **his prayer is an abomination.**”* God looks with disgust at the prayers of one who is not faithfully following His will. What a pitiful situation it is for us when our prayers become disgusting to God. Could anything be more hopeless? We also read in 1Peter 3:12, *“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”* The Lord desires to hear the prayers of His faithful children and His eyes are watching out for them. What a great and wonderful blessing this is.

When we pray to God, we must be humble and not self-righteous. Our Lord gave a parable which illustrates this requirement very well. In Luke 18:9-14 we read, *“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a Tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed this with himself, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.’ **I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**”* The attitude we have when we approach God in prayer and other worship is very important.

If we approach God with an attitude of showing great pride and arrogance in ourselves, but contempt and scorn for others, then God will despise this kind of prayer. Our prayer must be like the attitude of the tax collector. From what our Lord is trying to teach us here, when we approach our creator in prayer, we must be humble, not proud or self assertive, but modest, unpretentious and our prayers must be from the heart. We are told in 1Corinthians 14:15, *“I will pray with the spirit and I will also pray with the understanding”*

Our prayers should not be flowery and to impress other people, because God will not be impressed with such. Jesus says in Matthew 6:5, 7, *“And when you pray, you shall not be like*

the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Assuredly, I say they have their reward. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” The only reward someone who prays a prayer like this receives is the recognition he receives from men because God will not heed his prayers. We are also warned not to use vain repetitions, such as repeating something over and over. This type of prayer makes us hypocrites because it is pretentious.

Our prayer must be asked in faith. Concerning our prayers, James 1:6-7 says, *“But let him **ask in faith, with no doubting**; for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind; For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”* We must have faith in God and if we are faithful and obedient to Him then He will hear and answer our prayers, otherwise we will receive nothing. Jesus says in Mark 11:24, *“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them.”* So we must have faith if we expect God to answer our prayers.

Since Jesus is our advocate or go-between with God, Jesus says in John 14:13, *“And whatever you ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”* Our request to God must be in the name of or by the authority of Christ.

Another requirement of God answering our prayers is that we must be forgiving of others. Jesus says in Mark 11:25-26, *“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”* How important it is to be forgiving of others? Could the Lord be clearer as to what will happen to us if we are not forgiving? The Lord will not forgive us. We will be eternally lost. According to Isaiah 59:2, it is our sins that “separate us” from God so we cannot go to heaven. We must develop a forgiving attitude towards all people so that God will be forgiving of us so we can go Heaven.

How we treat others can also affect the way God hears our prayers. In 1 Peter 3:7 we read, *“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, as being heirs together of the grace of life, **that your prayers may not be hindered.**”* Our prayers can be hindered by the way we treat our wives, husbands, children, relatives, friends, acquaintances and strangers.

We must pray regularly and not just when we are in trouble and need God. As 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, *“Pray without ceasing.”* Also we are instructed in James 5:17, *“The **fervent prayer** of a righteous man avails much.”* If we expect our prayer to be effective, it must be fervent and we must be righteous. In our prayers we must, with all earnest, show great feeling and intense devotion to God.

The things we ask must be in accordance with God's will. 1John 5:14 says, "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Our requests to God must not contract His will but must be in agreement with it. We should not ask for anything contrary to His will or for selfish things on our part. Our prayers must be "in spirit and in truth" if they are to be heard by God.

7) OUR GIVING

The way we give is an indication of our love for God. All things belong to God. God says in Ps 50:10, "For every beast of the forest is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills." Everything we have has come from God. God has only loaned them to us. John 3:27 says, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from above." We can never out-give God. In Luke 6:38 we read, "Give and it shall be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." We give so that the Lord's church can better carry out its mission here on earth. The world must be **evangelized**, and the church must be **edified**, and the **needy must be helped**. These are the three essence of giving in the church.

Giving is a command of God. In 1Corinthians 16:1-2 we read, "*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given **orders** to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first day of the week, let each of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper that there be no collections when I come.*" We see the giving here was to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. Notice also that they were to make a regular collection every first day of the week.

Because of everything God has given us, including His Son to die for us, we should be anxious to give back to Him. In 2Corinthians 8:12 we read, "*For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has and not according to what he does not have.*" God expects us to give what we are able to give. How can our love for God be real unless it is expressed in our obedience and in our giving? Our giving is an expression of love, an act of praise and sacrifice to God.

How we give is an indication of where our priorities are. Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-21, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" Where is your heart?

Since we can't out-give God, we should at least be liberal in our giving. As we read in 2Corinthians 9:6-7, "*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he **purposes in his heart**, not grudgingly or of necessity; for **God loves a cheerful giver.***" Our giving is to be planned. We

should not give because we feel we have to give. Nor should we resent that we need to give to give to please God. We should be glad that we can give to the Lord.

We should never try to impress other people with our giving. If we do, we already have our reward. Giving should be a private matter. We should not seek recognition for the things we do. Jesus says in Matthew 6:1-4, *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen of them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”* We should seek the approval of God and not the glory of men.

Our giving should not only include materials possessions but we must first give ourselves to God. We are told in Romans 12:1, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice only, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.”* If we first give ourselves to the Lord, we will have no problem in being liberal in our giving. Our liberal giving is part of worshiping God “in spirit and in truth.”

8) CONCLUSION

The true and sure foundation of man is worship. Man was created to worship God (Rev 4:11).the desire to worship God is in every man. Unfortunately, many men abuse this privilege by worshiping idols. Worthless men worship what should worship them.

Modern day men tend to worship the following: Their Work; Their Money; Positions; Power; Women; Fellow Men; Education

WAYS TO WORSHIP GOD

- a) Worship God in spirit and in truth
- b) Worship God whole heartedly
- c) Worship God by their Prayers
- d) Worship God by their services to God
- e) Worship God by their services to Man
- f) Worship God by their continual obedience to the scriptures
- g) Worship God by their Thanksgiving and Praises
- h) Worship God by their regular and punctual attendance of church services
- i) Worship God with their substances
- j) Worship God with our whole being

k) Worship God in sincerity and truth

The child of God does not need special stimulant to bring about proper worship. He centers his life on pleasing God. Therefore he is happy to come before the throne of grace in praise to the King.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

Most Senior Apostle George Omenge

1 INTRODUCTION

From ages past, interpersonal relationship had existed even from the time of creation. God, the creator had interpersonal relationship with the rest of the Trinity in order to create man. In Gen 1:26, we read that “And God said, Let **us** make man in **our** own image, after **our** likeness and let them have dominion over....” The operative words ‘us’ and ‘our’ refer to God’s interaction with the Son and the Holy Spirit, who were also active participators in the creation process. *God the Father* could have created man without discussing with the rest, as He did for other creations.

After man’s creation, God engaged in another level of interpersonal relationship. Gen. 3:8 reads “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...” That means that God was always visiting them and showing that He cares for their welfare; in a personal relationship with them.

2 WHAT THEN IS INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP?

Interpersonal relationships are social associations, connections or affiliations between two or more people. These include friendships, family, romantic relationships, professional relationships, neighbors, members of a club or church groups. It is studied in a variety of social science disciplines such as Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology and social work. People in such relationship may interact overtly, covertly, face to face or even anonymously.

Interpersonal relationships refer to relationships that exist between two or more people who interact to fulfill one or more physical, spiritual or emotional needs. There was an article in the Times Magazine in 2010 that which stated that the *challenges in life may become less daunting to people with close interpersonal relationships*. The Magazine further noted that close emotional connections and relationships may provide a sense of safety and security that reduces stress and promotes good health. In many cultures all over the world, particularly in Yoruba land, family relationships take the center stage where everyone plays the role of being the *brothers’ keepers*. Also, it was advocated by Jesus Christ in Matt. 25:34-40. (*Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me!*)

The major challenge faced by the human race today is not lack of resources, but difficulty in the sustenance of relationships at different levels of existence; and how to deal wisely with each other. There is no doubting the fact that the world is greatly influenced by strong economies, oil and technology. This notwithstanding, it has been observed that those who are capable of giving wise counsel and know how to relate to others wisely, control the affairs of the world. This may be confused with diplomacy in modern world. But it refers to those who have the

correct message for this generation for physical, spiritual and spiritual rejuvenation in all spheres of human endeavors. That is, the Church!!! And as the church, we need God's wisdom.

Unfortunately, the activities of many families and social groups the world over are self-destructive because they are perpetually going against godly principles. People are becoming blind to the way godly ways of dealing with and administer our relationships.

3 ENHANCING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Interpersonal relationship can be said to be strong when it exists between people who fulfill many of each other's emotional or physical needs. These are likened to the relationship between a mother and child, husband and wife, etc. The extent of needs that a mother, for example, fills in the child is greater than that fulfilled between a person and say, a cashier at the bank or supermarket.

Relationships can be further enhanced when the people involved fills each other's needs in some way. According to marriage builders, needs that occur between married couples include physical attractiveness, sexual fulfillment, conversation, etc. Such relationships can be enhanced when expected specific needs of the partners that promote comradeships can be isolated and met. An example is meeting up with your spouse expectations during birthdays or other special occasions.

4 BASIC HINTS ON FACTORS THAT ENHANCE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

In considering the factors which enhance good relationships in the Church, the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* will be used as a pivot. In this parable, Jesus used the Pharisee to teach His people to examine the principle or law in which they administer their relationships (Luke 10:29-37). This parable applies to the reality within the Church today. It teaches that inside the Church, many people have fallen victim to robbers and thieves and their lives have been destroyed right inside the church.

Four basic laws on interpersonal relationship are taught in this parable. These are presented below:

4.1 THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." (LUKE 10:30)

This law applies not only to relationships in the church but also to family relationships. It refers to people in families who destroy other people. The law of the jungle refers to relationships of victims and predators, those who become victims and those who victimize others. This law teaches that in order for one to survive another must be destroyed. It is the survival of the fittest, the strongest and the smartest, the most agile and the slyest. Whether this applies to the context of family relationships or to relationships in the local church, it speaks of graceless treatment.

Many times, deep down inside, trickery and deception have been employed to take advantage of others for selfish reasons and personal interests without. No consideration is given to the crudeness of the methods used in achieving such objectives; whether other people are hurt or not. What matters is that the end justifies the means irrespective of how ungodly it is; i.e. to obtain what is desired at all costs. This often elicits the attitude of revenge; i.e. "So many people did this to me, now it's my turn to do it to them."

Many times, leaders who had earlier suffered at the hands of unloving leaders before getting to the position of authority, feel that it was now their turn to exercise authority and oppress their subordinates. This expresses the motivation that comes from the law of the jungle. However, this is how Satan attempts to conquer the world. This is the tendency to see the world as a 'threat and lash out against it' in the attempt to survive.

This situation is very descriptive of many relationships. One person trying to tire out and exasperate another. There is no goodwill or collaboration; nobody wants to serve anybody. The law of the jungle teaches that, in order to win, someone else will have to lose. This breeds many vices including scarcity, misery, lack, jealousy, greed and unhealthy competition. In such cases, relationships are wrongly based on the blind ambition to win at any or all cost.

The law of the jungle breeds Greed which brings turmoil people and families. Incidentally and most unfortunately is the observation that many times, people in families and Churches operate according to the law of the jungle. People throw tolerance to the wind based on the idea of not losing, not being overlooked or being forgotten and not being surpassed by peers or even subordinates. There is always the penchant not to the feeling of inferiority. All of these feelings serve as a platform for emergence of rebellious and ungodly behaviors as people tend to take the dispensation of the law into their hands. This was the law that moved Cain when he lifted he struck down his brother Abel. He could not tolerate his own brother's success and became a murderer.

This was also the spirit that motivated Joseph's brothers in taking ungodly action against Joseph. They could not bear to look at his coat of many colors and the fatherly preference that it represented. They 'murdered' Joseph in their hearts and sold him into slavery. These two passages speak of the principle of brothers who assault and destroy other brothers. This scenario pervades today even in this present age under different disguises.

4.2 THE LAW OF INDIFFERENCE

"Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." (LUKE 10:31)

Many people who have become victims of the law of the jungle have also fallen victim to the law of indifference. This is another law through which Satan rules, although it is more subtle. This is a law of minimum effort, that is, to take the easiest way out; and this leads to the loss of the opportunity to be a blessing. It describes people who have many opportunities to be of use

to others but consciously neglected to do so. The issue in this scenario is not a matter of doing evil but of neglecting to do good and the needful. How many times does God try to get our attention and awaken us to the needs around us and we simply ignore them. Many times, problems and challenges are idolized by people, so much so that, the needs of others are overlooked. Once this negative orientation self consciousness is reversed and adequate attention is given to the welfare and needs of other people, God has a way of providing adequate compensation. “Whenever you take care of the things of God, he will take care of your things”. This passage does not speak about people who are ignorant of the needs of others but those who know other people’s needs. This was a priest that passed by the man. Today, we take part of a kingdom of priests and ministers. Our problem is not that we are ignorant of the good that we should do, we know what we must do, but we are overly complacent with respect to our God-given duties. When Jesus used the example of the priest and the Levite, he referred to people who have learned how to intercede for the people but that for some reason, lost their priority. Here, we see how religiosity robs us of God’s vision as well as the inspiration to please him. We begin to serve ourselves. The greatest crisis of the church is not the lack of knowledge but the lack of a sense of responsibility and love. It takes a lot of work to love. Very few people are willing to put forth the effort to love.

4.3 THE LAW OF BAD EXAMPLE

“Likewise a Levite when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.” (LUKE 10:32)

Here we have the propagation of the preceding law. This is the law that determines that some people feel good when they observe other people doing wrong things. When the Levite observed the priest pass on the other side of the road and neglected to help the wounded Samaritan, he thought: “since the priest didn’t stop to help him, why should I stop?” “He didn’t do anything, so why should I do anything?”

This attitude numbs the conscience of people. This corresponds to people who have lost godly zeal. These people defend their wrong decisions on others’ bad example. These people do not like to assume responsibility. They attempt to hide and justify their errors and complacency by always blaming others. They make the mistake of thinking that other peoples’ mistakes justify their own sins and mistakes. They are constantly fleeing from responsibility; and merely criticizing and accusing others. These people have a tremendous ability of finding faults in others. They are constantly pointing out the faults of others. However, they never present themselves as the answer or the solution. They constantly criticize others irresponsibly. Many times, these people have been deeply disappointed by others and have decided to give up on relationships with others. People who are deeply disappointed normally become complacent and insensitive to the needs of others. They are too wounded and touchy to care about others. Because of this, a genuine experience with Jesus quickly deteriorates and a religious façade soon emerges. This describes people who walk in the law of bad example.

4.4 THE LAW OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’” (LUKE 10:33-35)

The lesson from this law is that it is not important to know who your neighbor is; but whether you are a good neighbor or not. The law of the Good Samaritan emphasizes the capacity to care about others unselfishly. This implies a divine attitude that produces responsible attitudes. Jesus described the Samaritan who had almost no knowledge of God, but the little he had was put into practical action.

The law of the Good Samaritan emphasizes six abilities:

- a) The ability to identify with others; the Samaritan had compassion on him.
- b) The ability to draw near to others; he drew near to see how he was.
- c) The ability to heal
- d) The ability to carry the burdens of others who are no longer able to bear them
- e) The ability to depend on others to help those who need it
- f) The ability to meet needs

Many times, your neighbor could be your spouse, who is gradually being consumed and destroyed by your actions and inactions. It is just like the wick of a candle that is about to burn out. You approach the flame that is about to burn out and you pinch it and extinguish it through a cruel word that ministers death to the person who hears it.

5 FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR BETTER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

I would like to begin this segment with a poem. The author is unknown, but the poem reads....

*“A careless word may kindle strife;
A cruel word may wreck a life;
A bitter word may hate instill;
A brutal word may smite and kill;
A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day.
A timely word may lessen stress;
A loving word may heal and bless.”*

Five (5) principles that can improve interpersonal relationships include the following:

5.1 Engage in Self-Control

Have you ever heard some people say...? “I always speak my mind, no matter what.” What is your reaction when you hear this comment? Do you start to slowly move away from that person, because you really don’t want to hear what might be said without thinking?

When we hear this statement, we generally perceive that such people are likely to say the first thing that comes to mind, no matter how hurtful or damaging it may be. They often will make statements with a certain sense of pride, and expect that whatever they say will be respected and acceptable to those hearing their comments. It also tends to suggest that they are always on the edge and may be out of control. That's why we move away – we don't want to be the target of their thoughtless remarks.

Proverbs 25:28 tells us that, *"A man without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls."* This is a very simple verse, but we may recall what our parents used to tell us.... "Think before you speak." This is a still good advice that helps us have positive relationships with those around us.

We should never assume that our age or experience in life is a license for us to say anything we want, at any time; to anyone we want, at any place. Our thoughts and attitudes toward others make a difference in how successful we are in our relations with others. What we **don't** say can sometimes be just as important as what we **do** say.

Let me digress for a moment on this statement of *what you don't say can be important*. We all remember the words of wisdom which says, *"Silence is Golden."* The real saying is, *"Speech is silver, silence is golden."* [From: *30 Days to Taming Your Tongue*, by Deborah Pegues, page 125].

In *Ecclesiastes 3:1-7*, we find a familiar passage that reads in part... *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... a time to be silent and a time to speak."*

Recently, I read a story about a husband and wife who became angry at each other over some infractions or slight that neither of them really remembered what it was about. They just knew that it was the other person's fault and they both were looking for an apology from the other. Anyway, they were giving each other the *silent treatment*, and neither one wanted to be the first person to speak until the other one gave in first. The husband had an out-of-town trip the following day, and left a note for his wife to wake him up at 5:00 am the following morning so he could catch his flight on time. His wife was the early riser in the home, so it was not unusual for her to wake him up when he needed to get out early. In the morning, he woke up only to discover that he overslept and missed his flight. As he started to get out of bed, obviously angry and proceeding to confront his wife on why she did not wake him up, he saw a note on the bedside. The note read, "Its 5:00 am wake up." [From, *30 days to Taming Your Tongue*, by: Deborah Smith Pegues, page 124].

You are in control of your attitude and actions towards others and we must always exercise self-control in our relationships.

To engage in self-control, we also need to have a reasonable level of self-awareness and an understanding of how our emotions come into play in how we **respond**, rather than **react** to

certain situations. How we respond may be shaped by our life experiences, but we still control our ultimate response. When we exercise self-control, we “consider the interest of others.”

5.2 Do Not Engage in Verbal Abuse

Most of us would never think of physically abusing a child or a spouse, but we don’t think twice about being verbally abusive to others. When you think about it, verbal (or mental) abuse is just as destructive as physical abuse.

Verbal abuse may come in the form of terse comments that are **belittling** to others and can damage their self-esteem. It might come in the form of **harsh** words or **accusations** that are made without consideration for the feelings of others. It might come in the form of **intimidating** behavior that is threatening to the person on the receiving end.

How many of you remember the **bullies** from the playground when we were children? Bullies can also be adults and they engage in activities or behaviors that coerce others into believing that the bully has control over them. Have you been the victim of a bully? Were you ever a bully yourself?

How did you feel the last time someone was just downright **rude** to you? Did it spoil your day? Did you remember how rude they were long after the episode occurred?

The book of *Proverbs* gives us guidance and life instructions on how we should or should not interact with each other. Consider these in connection with how we should speak to each other...

Proverbs 10:11 and 14 – *“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked. (v14) Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.”*

Proverbs 10:19 – *“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”*

Proverbs 15:1-2 – *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.”*

Proverbs 16:23-24 – *“A wise man’s heart guides his mouth and his lips promote instruction. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”*

Proverbs 25:11 – *“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”*

Proverbs 31:26 – *“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.”*

These verses can help remind us that we need to be positive in our communications with each other. We need to be **affirming, supportive and encouraging** each other.

When we refrain from verbal abuse, we “consider the interest of others.”

5.3 Don't Be Judgmental of Others

This one may be tough for most of us to do because every day we make judgmental comments (or have judgmental thoughts) about other people, many of whom we don't even know. We can see people in passing, and immediately our thoughts go to.... “Her dress is too short,” or “He needs a haircut.” Or “Who sold him that suit?” We find fault with others and make these kinds of casual comments without any thought to the other person's circumstances. It is even worst and hurtful if we give voice to these thoughts directly to the person to which the criticism is directed. In *Luke 6:36-37*, Christ reminds us,

*“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not **judge** and you will not be **judged**. Do not **condemn**, and you will not be **condemned**. **Forgive** and you will be **forgiven**.”*

The message from this passage is that, we should not engage in certain behaviors because it is likely that we could not stand up to scrutiny if we applied the same evaluation criteria to ourselves.

In *Matthew*, Chapter 7, Christ gives a clear message about being judgmental of others. *Matthew 7:1-5* - “Do not **judge**, or you too will be **judged**. For in the **same way you judge others, you will be judged**, and with the **measure you use, it will be measured to you**.”

There is no doubt about what Christ is telling us here. The passage continues....

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brothers eye.”

You might admit that it is easy for us to find fault in others, but not in ourselves. As Christian brothers and sisters in the Church, we are admonished by God not to be hypocritical or self-righteous in our actions with others. Christ reminds us that we must first examine ourselves, before we can expect to help others.

When we are not judgmental of others we “consider the interest of others.”

5.4 Practice Forgiveness

There are many passages on Forgiveness in the Bible. But one of the key passages can be found in the book of *Matthew*, where we can come to understand the spiritual dimensions of Forgiveness and the role it plays in our lives.

Matthew 18:21 reads...

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

This is a powerful message, and it tends to suggest that forgiveness is limitless. So what does this say to us? I would suggest that as brothers and sisters in Christ, we must move beyond hanging on to resentment that we may feel when someone makes one of those off-handed comments to us that we feel was undeserved or unwarranted. We must be willing to forgive that person for what we may perceive as a slight or a disrespectful remark.

How many people do you know that hang on to anger or resentment for someone because of something someone said or did many years ago? If you ask them why they are still angry, they may be vague as to what happened to make them angry in the first place. They just remember that they are supposed to still be angry with that person.

The classic story on forgiveness is told by Bishop Desmond Tutu in his book titled, ***There Is No Future Without Forgiveness*** (page 272), where he recounts the story of two former prisoners of war from the Viet Nam war. They had not seen each other for many years after the war, but just happened to run into each other one day at the Viet Nam War Memorial just by chance. They were happy for the reunion, and as they talked and spent time getting caught up with each other, one of the veterans said to the other, *"Have you ever forgiven those who held you as a prisoner of war?"* The other veteran replied in a strong voice, *"I will never forgive them!"* The first veteran was surprised at the response, but said to his friend, *"It seems as if they still have you in prison, don't they."*

In Ephesians Chapter 4:31-32, Paul tells us,

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

When we practice forgiveness, we "consider the interest of others."

5.5 Don't talk about the Pastor or Others in a Negative Way

In *Colossians 4:5-6*, we see this admonishment....

*"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. **Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**"*

Imagine for a minute what your reaction would be if you visited another Church and the members had nothing but negative things to say about the Pastor. Would you want to visit that Church again? What if the members frequently referred to other members in a negative way? Would you want to be associated with that Church? The same scenario applies in our respective churches. If we refer to our Pastor or other members in a negative way, will we ever achieve

our mission of being a community Church and making disciples of others? I don't think so. No one wants to be in an atmosphere that is negative and generates a poisoned environment.

This does not connote that our Pastor or any of us is perfect; and I know that some of us will be the first to admit that we are not perfect. But we must give ourselves the "benefit of the doubt" and we must remember that we have indeed been called by God to be Shepherds of His flock. Moreover, we should strive to be one of the few people that truly work hard every day of our lives according to God's requirements.

This is not easy, and we will make mistakes from time to time, but we are going to get it right more times than we will get it wrong. Can any of us as Christians say that we live our lives on a day-to-day basis in the manner that God would have us to? Probably not. Now don't get me wrong, each of us will continue to work at it, but we are more likely to get it wrong more times than we will get it right. Thank goodness, our God is a forgiving God.

Along the same lines of thought, how many people do you know that have turned away from the Church because of a perceived slight from the Pastor or from someone in the Congregation? Or how about... *they are angry about something that was said to them, and they decided to withhold their donations that support God's work no matter what was said or done?* Some people can find very frivolous reasons to leave a Church, and our church is no exception in experiencing these same situations. When we respond in this way, we are **not** hurting the Leader or our fellow church members; we are punishing the work of God in the broader community.

When we don't talk about the Pastor or other members in a negative way, we "consider the interest of others."

5.6 There are three other fundamental principles which can enhance better Interpersonal Relationships in the Church. These are:

5.6.1 Take responsibility for your own actions – Do not be quick to blame others when something goes wrong. More often than not, we tend to respond to stressful situations with our emotions and not on a rational basis. It is so much easier to blame others than accept responsibility for the possibility that we (you) may be a major contributor to discontent. Be sure to "take a look in the mirror."

5.6.2 Be willing to change – Be open to new ideas or alternatives. Do not get locked up into a rigid position, for the sake of maintaining a "position." For most of us, it is much easier to remain firm in our position because it's the "principle of the thing that matters." We have to recognize that this is just being stubborn and we can't expect to bring resolution to problems if we are not willing to consider another point of view.

5.6.3 Reach out to others – Engage others in conversation. You may never know when your efforts may make a difference to that person. The fact that you paid attention to them and

displayed concern for their well-being could be very important to a person. This may be especially true if the person is feeling down and out (and you may not know it at the time). Somewhere in the process, you also make a new friend.

6 CONCLUSION

So in summary, these are thoughts on “Five (5) Principles for Better Relationships in the Church,”

In some respects you might call this “*Sticks and Stones*” approach. In other words, we remember the saying... “*Sticks and Stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.*” I think we can see that words can indeed hurt us. In closing, let us recap the five principles...

- a) Engage in Self-Control,
- b) Do Not Engage in Verbal Abuse,
- c) Don’t be Judgmental of Others,
- d) Practice Forgiveness, and
- e) Don’t talk about the Pastor or Others in a Negative Way.

Moreover, to be engaged in sustainable interpersonal relationships in our environment, especially in the Church, there is also the need to engage more in the following virtues:

- i. Taking responsibility for your own actions
- ii. Be willing to Change
- iii. Reaching out to others

When we take responsibility for our own actions, are willing to change, and reach out to others, we “consider the interests of others.”

In *Colossians, 3:12-14* we find the *Rules for Holy Living*, and the Apostle Paul writes, “*Therefore as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*”

This is the ultimate requirement... that we must model our behavior after our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. God’s compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience give us direction on how we need to respond and treat each other. If we do this, we are saved by God’s grace and united in his love as brothers and sisters in Christ. Antagonism will not separate us because we are truly considerate of the interests of others.

PLACE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE CHURCH

Most Senior Apostle George Omange

1 INTRODUCTION

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Church: literarily, it is a building used for public Christian worship.

What is the Church? Is the Church a building? Is it the place where believers gather to worship? Or is the Church the people- the believers who follow Christ? How we understand and perceive the Church is quite important in determining how we live out our faith.

The Church in the New Testament: Jesus was the first to mention the Church:

Matthew 16:16-18

Simon peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, /Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (ESV)

This shows that the Church is not just about Buildings, Chapels and Cathedrals.

So, Who is the Church?

The founder of the "HOME CHURCH" movement in England, Canon Ernest Southcott said it is best:

*"The holiest moment of the **church service** is the moment when God's people-strengthened by Preaching and Sacrament-go out of the Church door into the world to be the Church. We don't go to Church. We are Church."*

The Church therefore is not a place. It is not the Building. It is not the location. It is not the denomination. We- God's people, who are in Christ Jesus- are the Church

Effective: It is an Adjective, meaning that the thing or the issue or the person is adequate to address a purpose, producing the intended or expected results. We could talk of an effective Teaching Methods for Children. It could also mean something that is operational or functioning or can produce a deep or vivid impression.

Communication: Communication is the art and process of creating and sharing ideas. It goes beyond talking or listening. Communicating effectively depends on the richness of those ideas and having the information relayed while retaining the same in content and context.

2 WHY IS COMMUNICATION IMPORTANT IN THE CHURCH?

Communicating effectively and productively is one of the most important skills in life and in a good Church. Effective Communication is being willing to convey our honest thoughts,

attitudes, feelings, and actions to others in a kind and active listening manner that reflects and glorifies Christ. This is the foundation of successful and healthy Church.

All the attributes of Communication as we know it today are all expressed in the Holy Bible. In the Table below are some bible passages and the deduced implications for effective communication.

| S/N | BIBLE PASSAGE | QUOTE | IMPLICATION |
|-----|---------------|---|--|
| 1 | Prov. 29:20 | Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him (NKJV) | Think before you talk |
| 2 | Matt. 21:22 | And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive (NKJV) | Prayer is communication and has potentials for feedback |
| 3 | Luke 8:18 | Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him (NKJV) | Seek for understanding and interpretation |
| 4 | Rom. 12:10 | Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another (NKJV) | Communication is not just about talking and hearing |
| 5 | Eph. 4:15 | ..but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head-Christ (NKJV) | Love should take preeminence in all things |
| | 25-29 | 25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor", for we are members of one another. 26 "Be angry and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. 29. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers (NKJV) | The efforts must bring changes to your life |
| 6 | Col 3:5, | Therefore put to death your members which on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (NKJV) | Earthly members hinders communication with God |
| | 16 | Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (NKJV) | The best form of communication is the one based on the word of God |
| | Col 4:6 | Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each other (NKJV) | Put dexterity into your communication and embellish it |
| 7 | 1Tim. 4:12 | Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity (NKJV) | Stand firm on the heritage given to you and be a good example |
| 8 | James 1:19 | So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (NKJV) | Watch your tongue, manage your response |

Inarticulate, not listening, not expressing and not communicating are the opposites of effective communication. These bad characters will hinder us from seeking to understand someone, which will lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and strife. God created us as

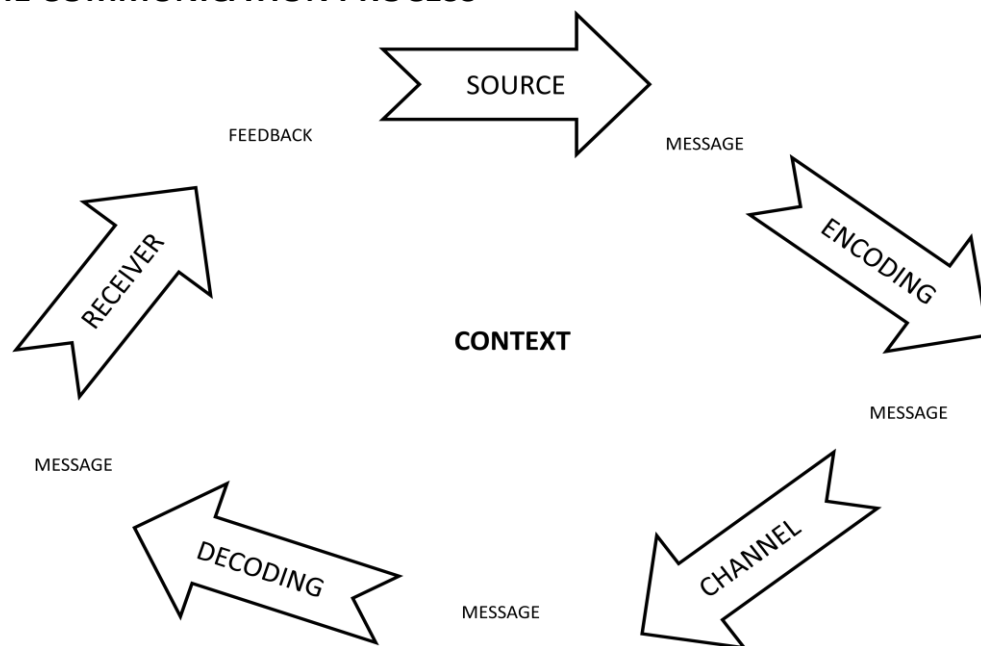
communal beings to commune with Him and one another; we must do our best to seek this and without prejudice.

Communication is, in essence, all about giving and receiving a message. Whether we are deaf and mute or polished public speaker, we all communicate. We send and receive messages everyday to one another several times each day. Preferably, we should desire to do this effectively, sincerely and positively; but in most cases, the message sent is not always the message received by the other person, and rarely are the messages from the sender and the receiver identical.

Good Communication is a must in your Church

This is essential to the understanding of one another. However, although the goal of perfect communication is unattainable, that does not mean we should not seek to be effective, as all our relationships and dealings in life will depend on it. The first thing we can do to be better communicators is to have the desire to be heard and to hear the other person fairly. We can do this when we are sincere, enthusiastic, refrain from over-talking, be truly open, and make eye contact. Open communication is the vital foundation for every relationship, be it at work, home, church, etc. where it is necessary in order to understand and help each other. Without it, one cannot see what is truly motivating the other, or what his or her ideas and intentions are.

3 THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS



THE SOURCE: The source of the message is the sender. He or she must know why the communication is necessary and what result is needed

ENCODING: It is the process of taking your message and transferring it into the proper format for sharing it with your audience. It requires knowing your audience and ensuring that your message provides all the information they needed.

THE CHANNEL: It is the method of communication that you choose such as face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, sermon, motivational talk, training and education.

DECODING: This is the process of receiving the message accurately and requires that your audience has the means to understand the information you are sharing.

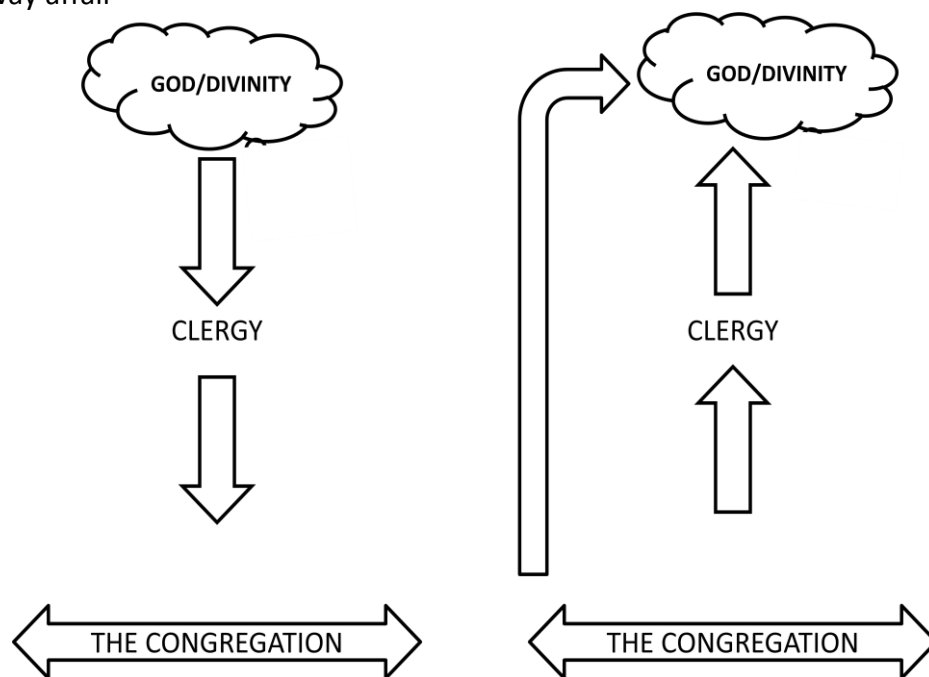
RECEIVER: You have expectations for a response from the receiver when you send a message. You can increase the chances of getting this result by addressing your audience's concerns or addressing specific benefits as part of your communications.

FEEDBACK: It lets you gauge how successful you were at communicating. It also offers a chance to adjust your communication process for the future.

CONTEXT: It involves things such as your relationship with your audience, the culture of your organization and your general environment.

3.1 THE BIBLICAL AND THE SERAPHIM MODEL

It is a two-way affair



3.2 COMMUNICATION SKILLS MODEL

- A. Active Listening
- B. Empathy
- C. Reflection
- D. Summarizing
- E. Understanding

F. Confrontation

In order to achieve the above, we need to be able to do the following:

- a) Create the right environment
- b) Effectively manage emotions
- c) Ask “open” questions
- d) Identify the problem(s) or challenges
- e) Recognize the barriers
- f) Know how capable the other party is
- g) What can you do to assist?
- h) What support is needed?
- i) Reality check
- j) What actions should be taken?
- k) Follow-up

4 HERE ARE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXAMPLES FROM HE SCRIPTURE

- a) **Nehemiah 8:4-8** So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and **beside him, at his right hand**, stood Mattithaia, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah and Maaseiah; **and at his left hand**, Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, **all the people stood up**. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands. And they **bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground**. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Pelaiah, and the Levites **helped the people to understand the Law**; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, **and helped them to understand** the reading. (NKJV)
- b) **Proverbs 12:17** He who **speaks truth** declares righteousness; But a false witness, deceit (NKJV)
- c) **Proverbs 15:28** The heart of the **righteous** studies **how to answer**; But the mouth of the **wicked pours forth evil**. (NKJV)
- d) **Proverbs 16:32** He who is **slow to anger is better** than the mighty; And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. (NKJV)
- e) **Acts 6:8-10** And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenaians, Alexandrians and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were **not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke**. (NKJV)
- f) **Ephesians 6:19-20** and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an Ambassador in chains; that in it I **may speak boldly, as I ought to speak**. (NKJV)
- g) **Hebrews 3:7** Therefore as the Holy Spirit says: “Today if you will **hear His voice**” (NKJV)
- h) **Hebrews 3:15** while it is said: “Today, if you will **hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion.” (NKJV)
- i) **Proverbs 18:13** He who **answers a matter before he hears it**, IT is folly and shame to him. (NKJV)
- j) **Job 32:6-10** So Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, answered and said: “I am young in years, and you are very old; Therefore I was afraid, And dared not declare my opinion to you. I said, ‘**Age should speak, And multitude of years should teach wisdom.**’ But there is a spirit in man, And the breadth of

*the Almighty gives him understanding. Great men are not always wise, Nor do the Aged always understand justice.” Therefore I say, ‘Listen to me, I also **declare my opinion**’(NKJV)*

- k) **Zechariah 8:16** *These are things you shall do: **Speak each man the truth to his neighbor**; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice and peace. (NKJV)*
- l) **James 4:11-12** *do **not speak evil of one another**, brethren. He, who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. **Who are you to judge another?** (NKJV)*
- m) **Peter 2:10-12** *and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and **despise authority**. They are **presumptuous, self willed**. They are **not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries**, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. But these, like natural brute beast made to be caught and destroy, **speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption.** (NKJV)*

5 BREAKING THE BARRIERS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION IN THE CHURCH

- i. Be willing to be open and honest. Be willing to express feelings about the other, and the desires, aspirations and plans you see for yourself and the congregation. This will build communication and trust! If you cannot express yourself, then get help. Otherwise, it will only escalate from bad to worse. You cannot gain anything by lying or playing games!
- ii. The care we give is usually more important than the words we say! Courtesy is contagious!
- iii. Show interest in others; be positive and sensitive. Do this by asking questions, listening without dominating the conversation. When you see him or her again, remember the important details so you can bring up what was communicated before and ask how it is going, what you can do to help, etc.
- iv. Always communicate without blame; always show the love of Christ.
- v. Seek first to understand what the other person is saying and make sure the other person feels understood; this inspires openness and trust.
- vi. Be sincere; saying what you mean and meaning what you say is the golden rule to effective and edifying communication.
- vii. You are only responsible for what you say and how you treat others; you are not responsible for what other people say to you or how they treat you!
- viii. Be yourself; be genuine, honest and real. Do not pretend or be manipulative. . Remember, integrity is imperative at all times.
- ix. When there are disagreements, explain your position with logical reasons for it. Do not jump to conclusions or be emotional or manipulative. Any good position will be open for comments, evaluation, criticism, and the opinion of others.
- x. Make sure you hear the other’s position correctly. If you are not sure, are confused, if it does not make sense, or it is incongruent, ask questions for clarification. Compliment the other person’s ideas, whether you agree or not, and be courteous. When giving a critique, be constructive, positive, true and respectful.
- xi. Paraphrase back what was said for clarity. If you think there is a misunderstanding brewing, ask a question, “May I restate what I am hearing from you?”

- xii. Be aware of your body language. Make sure you are not giving off negative signals nor have a callous or insensitive tone. Remember, you may be doing this and not even realize it.
- xiii. The choice of our words and the tone of them will have dramatic effects as it greatly affects the meaning, interpretation and distortion of the message. Choose your words and tone carefully through prayer with encouragement in mind! Remember that most people will not attribute the same meaning to the same word! Clarify what and how you say something.
- xiv. Allow others to give you constructive feedback whether it is ideas, suggestions, critiques, or confrontation; incongruent or not, listen and be in prayer about what you can learn and improve about yourself.
- xv. Being defensive or condescending, name calling, labeling people, being proud, and arrogant are killers of communication and relationships!
- xvi. Having selective hearing, ignoring other important information and only willing to listen to what you want to hear will seriously hamper your relationships as well as ability to communicate.
- xvii. Do not jump to conclusions or be judgmental or legalistic. Having assumptions of the other person that may or may not be true hinders listening and communication.
- xviii. Not speaking or communicating clearly, or being dishonest so the other person cannot hear what you say will lead to others forming untrue assumptions to causing serious and detrimental misunderstandings
- xix. Keep in mind that when a person's feelings are hurt, he or she will retaliate, not negotiate.
- xx. Do not overreact! Always ask for clarifications.
- xxi. Whether you are a Pastor, Doctor, Lawyer, or Dogcatcher, keeping confidence is paramount!
- xxii. Always be a learner; seek what you can learn from people, situations and from mistakes made by you or others.
- xxiii. To effectively listen, we need to give the other person our full attention. We must be willing to build the skills of empathetic and active listening. To do this, we first need to concentrate on quieting our own thoughts and concerns so we can hear theirs. We all have a natural, internal commentary going; try to shut it off until afterwards. This will help you engage the person and remember what he or she is saying.
- xxiv. If you want to interact effectively with and/or influence another person, you first need to understand that person!
- xxv. When talking to someone, develop rapport by demonstrating sincere interest in him or her; focus on him or her as a child of God by investing time. This should be the most important person in the room for you.
- xxvi. Be empathetic; consider how you would feel in their situation. Good listeners will be sensitive and show care by identifying and having compassion for the other person and not be disconnected or detached. Sometimes, it is necessary in professional type relationships to have set some boundaries when interacting with patients, clients or colleagues. However, it is essential to show empathy and care.

- xxvii. Honor and hear other peoples' thoughts and feelings; express positive feelings and feedback
- xxviii. Listen to the words and try to determine the essence of those words. Keep in mind that what you think you are saying is not always what they are really saying. So ask question to clarify and gather more information
- xxix. Do not jump into conclusions! Do not form your impressions by preconception, stereotyping or generalizing

6 ADVANTAGES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

When leaders don't first communicate with God, they tend to lean too much on their own understanding which often leads to trouble. Trusting in God brings good direction and success. (Proverbs 3:5-6, 14:12). In addition, they tend to rely on their own abilities which often lead to burnout. Depending on God brings renewal and ability to soar. (Isaiah 40:28-31; Philippians 4:13)

When leaders fail to communicate with the people, they often open doors for possible misunderstandings. This can eventually lead to divisions in the congregation. They deny people a sense of ownership in the process, making endeavor appear more as the "leader's thing" than a joint effort.

The importance of communication both with God and people cannot be overstressed. When leaders learn to be better communicators, everything else seems to go much more effectively. As leaders, we must take communication as an on-going, never ending process, not a once-and-done event-before, during and after.

The unfortunate thing is that so often in churches, we find too many consultations with others about what to do without first going to God, too many meetings in which the Church's affairs are discussed without first seeking God's guidance and too many decisions made without adequate prayers but nonetheless expecting God to bless it.

7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

7.1 Tips for communicating with God

- Keep clean slate with Him, not allowing integrity breaks to block your communication with god. ----Leadership has lots of temptations but God's grace is always sufficient to not only keep one from sinning but also to restore open lines of communication if one fails. (Titus 2:11-12; 1John 1:5-10).
- Pour your heart out to Him as your confidant, someone with whom you can tell anything and everything. ---- Leadership can be a lonely place but God is always with you. (Ps 62:8).
- Take your concerns to God but also remember to express thanksgiving. ---Leadership can be discouraging but God is always in control (Phil 4:6).

7.2 Tips for communicating with people

- ✓ Keep lines of communication open always, not just when there are changes coming or conflict. ---Why should people listen if that is the only time you try to engage them in the process?
- ✓ Connect with people as you communicate, maintaining eye contact and expressing interest in them and what concerns them. ---Why should people care if it is just about your agenda?
- ✓ Engage people, making sure the communication is two-way, not you simply telling them what they need to know. ---Why should people attend if their opinions do not matter?
- ✓ Be honest yet speak the truth in love. --- Why should people hear you out if they feel they are going to be condemned, not feeling accepted and safe?
- ✓ Be patient and persist until people seem to understand. --- Why should people agree with what you propose if they need more information or time to process what you are saying?

CHRISTIAN GROWTH AND MATURITY

Most Senior Apostle S. S. Oyelola

A. INTRODUCTION

Let us thank God for allowing us to witness this year's Lenten season and also appreciate Him for making it possible for us to attend today's lecture. Praise the Lord!

Lenten season is the *period for repentance*.

- It is *a period for sober reflection of our past* and *a change for a better living to Christians all over the world*.
- It is *the period from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday*.
- It is *forty seven days including the Passion Week devoted to fasten and penitence in commemoration of the Temptation, Trial and Death of Christ*.

It is believed, *as devoted Christian, to grow and mature everyday being children of God particularly during this period*. Therefore, *it is necessary to remind ourselves of the need for our growth and maturity in Christ, our Saviour*. This lecture is therefore ideal for this period.

A. OVERVIEW

The lecture will cover the following areas:

1. Who is a Christian?
2. The Characteristics of a Christian.
3. Stages of Christian Growth.
4. Conclusion.

1. WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

(K & S 830 "Mo fe ki ndabi Jesu" Vs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6) reads

1. mf Mo fe ki ndabi Jesu,
 Ninu iwa pele;
 Ko s' enit' o gboro 'binu,
 Lenu Re lekan ri.
2. Mo fe ki ndabi Jesu,
 L'adura 'gbagbogbo,
 L'ori oke ni On nikan,
 Lo pade Baba Re.
3. Mo fe ki ndabi Jesu,

*Emi ko ri ka pe,
Bi nwon ti korira Re to,
O s' enikan n' ibi.*

4. mf Mo fe ki ndabi Jesu,
*Ninu ise rere;
K'a le wi nipa temi pe,
"O se won t'o le se.*

6. p *Sugbon nko dabi Jesu,
O si han gbangba be;
Jesu fun mi l' ore-ofe,
Se mi ki ndabi Re. Amin.*

The question **"Are you a Christian?"** is simple and **the answer will be affirmative**. But frankly speaking, **we are not true Christians** (Mat. 7:21-24, Luk. 6:46-49).

*Mat 7:21 **Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.***

Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Mat 7:24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

*Luk 6:46 **And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?***

Luk 6:47 Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:

Luk 6:48 He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

Luk 6:49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

- **If we are Christians, are we growing in His word and teachings?**
- **Do we mature to disciple others in all our ways?**

Let us now see who is a Christian

The word **“Christian”** was derived from the name of **Jesus Christ**. We know Simon Peter was spirit filled when he delivered his longest sermon to the people and about **three thousand people were converted as the first congregation and were baptized**. They were **blessed with the Holy Ghost** and **stayed together in one faith** (Acts 2:38-44).

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

They were called Christians. Therefore, **a Church was established** (Acts 11:26).

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

i. A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

“And He said unto them, follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19).

The **call of the twelve disciples by Jesus Christ** could be seen as **a “Call of salvation of the people”**. The **Salvation of the world was paramount to Jesus Christ** hence His call of the disciples and the entire believers.

Any believer that answers the call of Jesus Christ by confessing Him and decides to profess Him everywhere is termed to be a Christian. He **should be able to do the will of Him that calls him**- that is Jesus Christ.

ii. A CHRIST-LIKE BELIEVER

“Jesus Christ said, “If a man loves me, he will keep my words and my father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him”. – (John 14:23).

He was full of love during and after His ministry on earth, even on the cross, he showed love. A **Christian** who is able to **emulate the good work of Christ** and the **mercies shown by Him will inherit the Kingdom of God** and **wear the glorious crown**.

iii. A SUFFERING BELIEVER

A believer who suffers for Christ in his confession or ministry is believed to be a Christian. His suffering on earth will earn him a glorified seat in heaven. Simon Peter said:

"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on his behalf" (1 Peter 4:16).

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; (1Pe 3:14).

If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: (2Ti 2:12)

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. Rom 8:17.

As a suffering Christian, you are assured of good end and good judgment for He that sends you will never leave you.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN

It is obvious that not all Christians are true Christians; some profess Christ but not Christians. True Christians must possess Christ and be practical in their belief. We should know that not all that go to Churches are Christians. Jesus Christ said

"Not all that call me Lord shall enter the kingdom of God but only those who do the will of God" (Mat. 7:21-24, Luk. 6:46-49).

"By their fruits, thou shall know them" (Mat 7:16-18, 20).

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit...

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them".

Certain characteristics are expected from a Christian that really possess Christ and are growing in spirit. These attributes are:

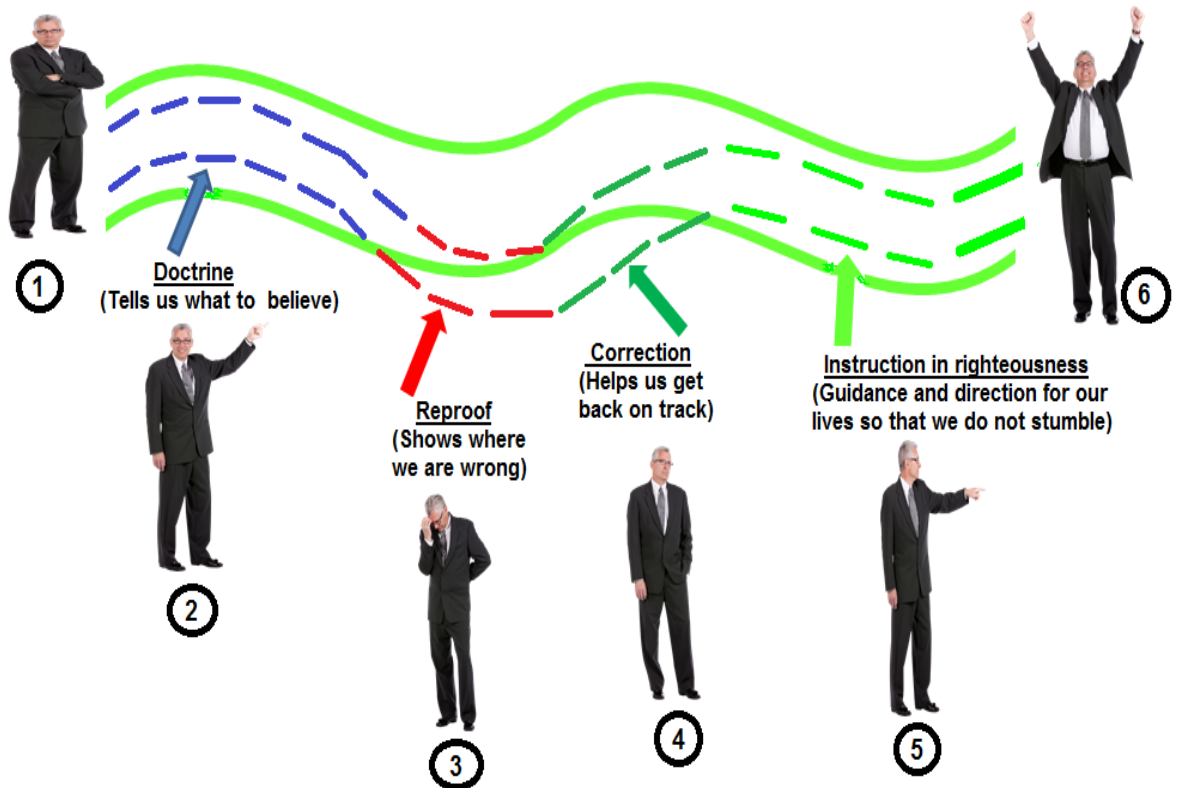
i. Knowledge of the Word of God (The Holy Bible):

The Word of God is God's way of communicating with us. As we read, we should expect God to speak to us personally. God's Word does many things for the growing Christian among these are:

❖ The Word is Profitable – (2 Tim. 3:16):

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

- | | |
|---|--|
| - Doctrine:- | <i>Tells us what to believe</i> |
| - Reproof:- | <i>Shows where we are wrong</i> |
| - Correction:- | <i>Helps us get back on track</i> |
| - Instruction in righteousness:- | <i>Guidance and direction for our lives so that we do not stumble.</i> |



- ❖ The Word of God gives Light and Understanding – (Psm. 119:130)
The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.
- ❖ The Word of God is a Light Onto Our Paths – (Psm. 119:105)
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
- ❖ The Word of God is Spiritual Food that Help us to Grow in Christ – (1 Pet. 2:2)
As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.
- ❖ The Word of God is Weapon for Spiritual Warfare – (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17).
For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12).
And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God – (Eph. 6:17)
- ❖ For Prosperity and Success - (Joshua 1:8).
God appointed Joshua as the successor of Moses and commanded him thus:-
"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

This commandment was necessary so that he can prosper and have good success in all his ways.

Paul also advised Timothy thus-

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of God” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Timothy took this advice seriously that he did not allow (heresies) false teachings in his service of God.

A good Christian that aspires to grow in spirit should study the Bible daily and apply it to his life. People should be able to attest to the character of a Christian at any time not by the number of Bible quotations they know.

ii. **Be Prayerful All The Time:**

Prayer is communication with God, that is, **calling upon God at any time**. God is never busy that He will not listen to us any time we pray to Him. As we study the life of the Lord Jesus, time after time we are confronted with His prayer life:

- ❖ **Early in the Morning** – (Mark 1:35):
And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.
- ❖ **During a Busy Schedule** – (Luk. 5:15-16):
But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.
- ❖ **An Entire Night** – (Luke – 6:12-13):
And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.
- ❖ **After a Busy Day** – (Matt. 14:23):
And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.
- ❖ **During His Last Hours** – (Luk. 22:41, 43-44):
And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Jesus Christ, the begotten son of God, prayed always while He was on earth and always victorious, likewise, all Christians should always pray to God. Furthermore, since Christians denote Christ, therefore, the life of a Christian should be full of prayer. Jesus Christ said:

Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened” (Matt. 7:7-8).

Apostle Paul concluded and also advised thus:

“Pray without ceasing” – (1 Thessa. 5:17)

Life is full of ups and downs and in order to succeed in all ramifications, Christians should be able to live a life of prayer, fasting and complete faith in Christ Jesus whose footsteps they are following.

iii. **GOOD WORK:**

People usually judge a Christian by his action and word. Since Jesus Christ was the MENTOR of all Christians, **we should be full of good work.** **Jesus Christ’s teachings and miracles were of good work that Christian should emulate.** This is the first good work of a Christian to God. Jesus Christ confirmed this in His teaching that:

“Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy strength” – (Mark 12:30.)

Christians are duty bound to love God first in all their dealings on earth. **Faith in Him is a kind of love** and **gives room to growth in Christendom.** Every **Christian owes a duty one way or the other to another Christian.** Jesus Christ explained further:

“Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself” – (Mark 12:31).

Among the good work to others are **fellowship and alms giving.** It is a belief that when you give alms, your Christian life will be different and answers to prayer is guaranteed.

3. STAGES OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

The growth of a Christian is gradual. The **attitude of a Christian to God** will enable him to grow spiritually. There must **be total submission to the will of God.** Therefore, it is necessary to examine the **stages a Christian goes through before his maturity.**

i. **Born Again:**

Jesus Christ said to one of the religious leaders of the time, Nicodemus,

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” – (John 3:3).

Nicodemus, though a believer, ruler and religious man yet he has not grown in spirit. Jesus Christ talked about spiritual birth not physical. **For if there is no spiritual birth, then there is no possibility of spiritual life.**

Being born again is the first outward step or stage in the baby life of a Christian. **It can also be described as being a new creature** – (2 Corin. 5:17).

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2Co 5:17

At this stage, **the old ways of life will be a thing of the past** (Gal. 5:19-21).

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envy, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God - (Gal 5:19-21).

Paul talked to the Corinthians though they have heard of Christ but yet they are not in spirit and therefore, called them babies in Christ – (1 Corin. 3:1-2).

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able (1Corin. 3:1-2).

The full stages of being born again are:

- a. Believe in Christ
Faith cometh by hearing and believing the word of God- Rom. 10:17.
- b. Confess your sins
There must be confession and turning away from sin- repentance and do the will of God.
- c. Accept and confess Christ as follows:
“I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God” – (Acts 8:37b)
- d. Be baptized by immersion so that the Holy Spirit will take control of your life.

It must be known that spiritual growth is not only for the babies in Christ but religious leaders, ordinary good citizens, in fact all members of the congregation of God. Christians must grow in faith and in spirit immediately after baptism.

ii. REGENERATION (NEW BIRTH / HEART):

The Bible says:

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” – (Rom. 3:23)

The first man created by God (Adam) sinned, therefore all men have sinned. People decided to live in sin and do not want to get out of sin. They love things of the world. They are full of enjoyment.

This stage gives room to all lusts of life without minding the consequences. People at this stage of life turn deaf ears to all advice or spiritual directives because they are natural men.

Paul said-

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually deceived” – (1 Cor. 2:14).

But regeneration, a spiritual quickening, a new birth and a new creation can take place. Thus is faith generated by learning of the word of God – (John 3:3-8).

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit – (John 3:3-8).

The Holy Spirit is the first to convict the sinner and then to convert him to do the actual work of bringing him into the kingdom of God – (Ezel. 36:26-27).

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them – (Ezel. 36:26-27).

Regeneration is a creative act on the part of God. It is not reformation by man. Man is to believe and receive Jesus Christ as his personal savior. Regeneration therefore means an act or the process of regenerating; the state of being regenerated, spiritual renewal or revival.

God is the author of regeneration and it is channeled by Jesus Christ while the executor is the Holy Spirit. The median of regeneration is through receiving Christ by believing the word of God.

The results are noticeable thus the heart is changed, sin is hated, Christ is loved and life is changed from a natural man to a spiritual man.

iii. SANCTIFICATION:

Sanctification means separation from the world. It is also setting apart. It is holiness. Sanctification is the fruit of a justified life. Christians need to be sanctified for our savior was sanctified (John 10:36).

“Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” Joh 10:36

Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit – (Psalm 4:3).

Psa 4:3 But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him.

In most cases, the Trinity performs the job.

- ❖ **Father** – (1 Thes. 5:23-24),
And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.
- ❖ **Son** – (Eph. 5:26),
That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
- ❖ **Holy Spirit** – (2 Thess. 2:13):
But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

There are three aspects of separation in the word of God.

- ✓ First God has set every believer apart as belonging to Himself and sharing in Christ's righteousness.
- ✓ Second, each believer is to be set apart to Christ-like living.
- ✓ Thirdly, when believers receive their glorified bodies in heaven, they will be set apart from the very presence of sin.

Every Christian is to be a full time ambassador and witness for the Lord doing His will. We cannot accomplish this by making up our own minds what we are going to do for God, but only by being available to Him for His directions and His workings.

Our separation / sanctification is the result of our presenting our bodies to the Lord and beginning to operate by His principles.

Christians are to be set apart for God in our everyday lives. God does not do things the way man does. Therefore, it is quite obvious that if we live in accordance with the word of God and the Leadership of the Holy Spirit, our manner of life will be affected. In many ways we will not live as we used to. We will be set apart from the unbelieving world and the ways.

iv. **ADOPTION:**

Adoption is the placing of a son.

"But ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father – (Rom. 8:15).

Adoption admits man into the family of God with joy to our Father, God. It is the act of God whereby He places the justified believer as adult son to enjoy the privileges and responsibilities of the position.

Christians grow to this position.

For examples, Moses became the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter with all the rights and privileges when he came of age – (Exodus 2). But he rejected his position for something better – (**Heb. 11:24-26**).

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

"By faith Moses, when he was of age refused to be called the son of Pharaoh".
Christians who are adopted are to abide in Christ and unite with Him.

Adoption is a gracious act on the part of God entirely of mercy. It actively **occurs the moment that one believes in Jesus Christ.** God usually adopts us so that we will be steady to worship Him. **An adopted Christian is always led by the Holy Spirit** – (Rom. 8:14).

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God".
He can call Abba Father - (Rom. 8:15).

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father".

A slave was never allowed to address his master as Abba, Father.

The blessings of adoption are numerous:

i. **Peculiar love of God** - (John 17:23):

"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me".

ii. **Father's fatherly care** – (Luk. 12:27-33):

"Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not

old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth”.

iii. **Use of family name** – (1 John 3:1):

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not”.

iv. **Likeness** – (Romans 8:29):

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren”.

v. **Love** – (1 John 3:14):

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”.

vi. **Gathering** – (John 14:23):

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him”.

vii. **Fatherly comfort and inheritance** – (2 Cor. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:4):

“Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God”.

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”,

Adopted Christians are members of the Royal family of heaven and must behave with becoming dignity. Must walk worthy of this high honour in keeping with the position. Must love and serve one another as brothers and sisters in the same family – (John 13:14).

“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet”.

4. CONCLUSION

Poser:

- ❖ Which of these categories do you belong?
- ❖ Are you a Christian still sucking milk?
- ❖ By your word, character and thought, can you be adopted into God's family totally?

It is the wish of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for us to live, grow and mature as Christians so that we will inherit the kingdom of God – (John 14:16).

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever”.

God Bless!