



WHAT MAKES A MAN
CHANGE

By Christopher Mukinga

What makes a man change

Christopher Mukinga

Copyright © 2021 Christopher Mkinga

All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. ® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

www.chrismkinga.com

www.facebook.com/ChrisMkinga

www.instagram.com/ChrisMkinga

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and appreciate my family for their continuous love and support that is always there to cheer me on in all my endeavours. Honorary appreciation goes to my mother Josephine for her unwavering faith and wisdom. May God continuously bless her.

Special thanks to my siblings Ireen, Moses and Lukumo for their love and support.

Thanks to my Maranatha Church family for their kindness and love for God and his people. By far one of the best decisions of my life was deciding to walk with the God breathed vision of this great fellowship and walking in the leadership of Bishop Gaity Simuusa.

I would also like to recognise the support from my friends Noel, Faith and Greyson in the putting together of this piece of work. May God richly bless you guys.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my late father Christopher Mukinga Snr who went to be with the Lord on 29th June, 2021. Words alone cannot express how much of a blessing he was to me. Nothing in this book would have ever been possible if it wasn't for his faith and obedience to the call of God. He was and is the patriarch of the faith in my family and I pray that by God's grace, me and all the lives he has ever touched honour him by pressing on and fighting the good fight of faith.

Contents

Copyright © 2021 Christopher Mukinga..... 1

Acknowledgements 2

Dedication..... 3

Foreword 5

Prologue 6

Far Away 7

Life before Salvation..... 9

When you simply don't believe in God 11

My Agnostic years 14

The dark days 17

The pursuit of happiness..... 20

Wild, young and free 22

The prodigal son..... 24

What happened 27

Faith..... 29

Revelation..... 31

Prayer works..... 33

How God reveals himself 35

Testimony of men..... 36

Different levels of testimony 40

Testimony of Miracles 41

Testimony of God..... 43

Epilogue..... 45

A message from the author..... 46

Foreword

For the past four years, I have been privileged to be the pastor of the author. During this time I have seen him grow and advance in ministry to the extent that this unique publication comes as no surprise to me. The way in which he has candidly outlined the path he has trodden on the road to true change is an experience that has, can be and will be replicated in many lives. I recommend this book without any hesitation whatsoever, to all, but especially to young people who have grown up cocooned in a Christian environment who, upon entering the real world, find that their religious experience and knowledge hitherto are not sufficient to keep them afloat.

The book will also assist parents, pastors, Christian workers etc. gain a better perspective of the forces at play in the lives of young people across the globe. It is a short, very concise treatise which can be read in one sitting. Please read it and see how the author has skilfully shown how fundamental Christian principles and virtues of the word of God, prayer, revelation and faith interplay to bring about real and lasting change of which I am a witness in the life of Christopher.

Bishop Gaity Simuusa

Senior Pastor, Maranatha Church, PAOGZ, Kitwe, Zambia

1st Assistant Presiding Bishop, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Zambia.

Prologue

A few months after I become a believer of Jesus Christ, numerous questions started running through my mind.

Before I met Christ, I was zealous and passionate about sin. I was a radical worldly person. I preached worldliness to everyone around me. My life was all about self-pleasure and preservation. I was a bad influence to everyone I spent any time with.

When God started his work on me, I was appalled. I was humbled and blown away. I never thought I would ever become a Christian [again]. Up until then, Christianity was nothing but a joke to me. I never saw myself bowing down and becoming something I so often made fun of.

In his work, God altered my passions and interests. Instead of pursuing my selfish ambitions, I was pursuing God's ambitions. I was no longer living for myself; I was living for God. My friends and everyone around me could not help but wonder what had happened to me. My whole life trajectory was altered.

What happened for me to change like that? What makes a man change?

For years, I struggled with the answers to this question. However, in this small book, I will be sharing some of the few things I have learnt about this whole phenomenon. I pray that you will be blessed and may God's grace shine upon you and your family.

Far Away

Life is like sending your child to school for the first time. It is a sweet-and-sour moment. Naturally, the child wants to remain home with his parents. It is his place of safety, comfort and love. The child is typically very content with staying at home. That is why world war three breaks out when he is sent to school for the very first time.

Interestingly, the battle to take the child to school only lasts for a short while. Soon he is attached to the school, makes friends, and becomes comfortable with it. To some extent, the school becomes like home to him. It is very easy for the child to forget the purpose of school and just go there to play and have fun. I was such a child growing up. I used to go to school just for the fun of it. It was just a playground to me.

That's how life is. God placed us on earth for a specific purpose. Most of us don't know why we were placed on earth and as a consequence get caught up in the lights and the daily routines of life. We are far away from home and we don't think our heavenly father is watching us. It is really easy to do crazy stuff when we think no one is watching. In the same vein is a son sent to college. Usually instantly, he has freedom to do whatever he wants without the fear of meeting any disciplinary rod. It is a completely new world to him.

This is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God created man in his own likeness and gave him authority over the whole earth to manage and develop it. God gave mankind a lot of power and authority in my opinion. But

that's how a loving father is; always believing in the ability and wisdom of his children.

Unfortunately, the plot of mankind on earth thickened quickly. Not so long after having everything, we lost it all. Adam and Eve got so excited in the garden that they did the one thing they were told not to do. They ate from the forbidden tree. They initially were so happy and comfortable moving around the garden naked. But that all came to an end because of the deception of a cunning serpent. Adam and Eve gave in to the voice of the enemy and because of that, all mankind was kicked out of the garden and life as we knew it changed.

Since the fall of man, we have been living in strange and unnatural circumstances. Our natural habitat was in the Garden of Eden and in the presence of God.

The whole of scripture is a guide on how we can survive the foreign influences of the ages and retain our position in God and in all he created for us. Additionally, the word of God is a love story between God and man. God has a specific plan for man that he has been unfolding from the beginning of time till date.

Life before Salvation

I have been a Christian for a couple of years. By far, it has been greater than I could have ever imagined. It has been heavenly.

My story of salvation, like many of yours is a peculiar one. I was born and raised in a Christian family. Every Sunday, I would go to church because that was just what was expected of me. Growing up, my father was a very God loving individual. He was a prominent member of the body of Christ at our local church and the community at large. Consequently, Christian values and beliefs were enshrined into my heart at a very young age. I knew several bible stories, just as any church going child ought to. I loved the Sunday school classes a lot. I enjoyed the discussions, quizzes, interactions, dances, plays, and many other activities that were a part of our Sunday school curriculum. But I wasn't born again as yet.

Even though I had a good sense of what was right or wrong, that did not stop me from living life the way I wanted to. You see, Christianity is about making a commitment to Jesus Christ. Christianity is giving your life to God and deciding to live your life for him. And that is what I wasn't willing to do. I was okay with keeping a few commandments here and there, quoting a few scriptures to impress people, and having a great time at church with my friends. But I wasn't willing to give my life to God.

Even though I was like that as a child, I know many mature people are like that today. There are so many people in

the world who know the bible, go to church, have church friends and even pray once in a while. But they have not given their lives to God.

In my country, Zambia, most people claim to be Christian. This is partly because Zambia is a Christian nation and the gospel has been preached in all four corners of the country. There are churches everywhere. So most people are very familiar with the word of God. But not all of them know the word of God.

In Zambia, gospel music plays even in night clubs! I remember being in a night club several years ago and dancing to gospel music (I use to sweat myself silly dancing in clubs). It was on new year's eve. I didn't have the foresight or understanding to perceive what was happening. I just thought it was interesting that gospel music was playing as I guzzled my bottles of beer. The music playing was from a well known artist and worship leader. I could hear what the song was communicating but I didn't pay any thought or attention to it. I was "far" away from God. I didn't care or have the fear of God in me. I was living in rebellion to the God who created me.

When you simply don't believe in God

There was once a time when everyone I knew had an inclination towards God. Every one I knew believed God was real. Every one had a sense of the power and love of God. Even though they didn't always behave like godly people, they all feared God in one way or the other. But sadly today, there are so many people who just don't believe in God and his existence at all.

As I was growing, I got exposed to People that had very diverse opinions and ideas about life and faith.

Generally, I have a unique grasp of how it feels like to be a religious and a non religious person on the other hand. I have a lot respect for people who like to ask "why?" and question the status quo. These are the people that God is fond of using in so many ways. And, I can humbly say that I'm one of such people. I don't take much pride in it but that's how I used to be.

Even though I was raised in the fear of God, when I was about 16 years old, I stopped believing in God and his existence. I am fully aware that the probability of someone who doesn't believe in God to read this book is very slim (though with God, all things are possible). But if for any reason you don't believe in God or have doubts about him, only God knows how excited I am that you are reading this book today. I understand exactly what you may be going through.

Firstly, I would like to apologize on behalf of all the well meaning Christians who tried to reason and debate you into salvation. It is shocking how brazen Christians get when erroneously talking to agnostic individuals. Many Christians find it strange and scary that a person doesn't believe in God at all. Like the saying goes, "People fear what they don't understand."

Be of good cheer though, God's word is more than enough for anyone to come to the saving knowledge of him.

Paul in the book of 1st Corinthians 1:18-31 clearly explained that the gospel (the truth that can liberate the heart and soul of any man) is the power of God for the salvation of all people of the earth. God basically makes a fool out of all human reasoning and attempts to know him. The gospel, which is the word of God is the only way one can know God. In addition, the book of John chapter one, declares Jesus Christ as the "word" of God. In simple terms, **you can not know God without knowing Jesus Christ**. He is the only way to God.

In the book of John, Jesus told Thomas,

"Jesus said to him, I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by (through) Me." John 14:6

Thomas was the most "practical" disciple that Jesus had. He was the evidence seeking kind of person, popularly known as doubting Thomas. It makes perfect sense that this statement was made to him.

The only way to know and understand God is through his son Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of the word of God.

I am sorry to disappoint you for not trying to prove God's existence through human reasoning and logic. That would simply be an insult to God. God doesn't need my help in making you believe in him. All I have to do is share his word with you.

I understand how painful it can be to have nothing to believe in. It is tormenting to live a life without core beliefs and values. I know the hopelessness that ambivalence about such matters can have on people. So many people in the world today are even going through depression because of the many unanswered questions in their hearts. The search for a reason to live seems to be the reason most live for, when they could be living because of the reason to live.

My Agnostic years

My road to salvation (Christianity) was a peculiar one. The fact that I was born and raised in the church community didn't deter me from the personal experiences I needed to go through in order to know and follow God for and by myself.

When I was a teenager, I was bombarded with multiple questions of which I had no answers to. It was a gradual process that almost pushed me over a cliff. As a more mature Christian today, I understand that it was the enemy (devil) who put all those questions into my head. The devil uses deception to try and snatch the truth from us. I believe I went through temptations, similar to those which Jesus went through in the wilderness after praying and fasting, though in my case I never overcame the temptations (nor did I fast). I failed the test like my ancestors Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden. I ate from the tree of knowledge.

In all my exposure to the word of God and the church, I believe there was something that was missing in my heart. I never truly knew and understood what I believed in.

One evening, I was watching a Christian television channel when the preacher essentially challenged my faith in God. He was talking about challenging what we believe in and proving if what we believe in was real. I was about 16 years old at the time. It was a very foreign teaching to me, but still very interesting. At about the same period of time, I started watching a lot of scientific Christian shows. I was trying to satisfy my intellectual thirst with Christian centred theories

about creation and life. And there were plenty of such shows. The topics of discussion would range from the big bang theory to evolution. These so called preachers were trying to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ through human logic and philosophies. Sadly, I was a victim of such careless and misleading teachings.

I slowly drifted away from the “word” of God and started pursuing the truth in strange places. In a matter of time, “Christian centred” scientific arguments were no longer enough for me. I broadened my scope into all research regardless of religious affiliations. After all, science is not subjective right? I started searching for books and articles about the beginning of all things- the big bang theory. I started reading whatever I could get my hands on concerning creation. I was just a young boy hungry for nothing but the truth. And I was willing to do whatever was necessary in order to find it.

I would like to tell you that I was disappointed with the findings of my research, but I wasn’t. It made a lot of sense. Basically, scientists were able to calculate the age of the universe through factors such as the speed of light and the rate of expansion of the universe. The findings were that the universe is about 13 billion years old. Impressive huh?

Of course there are so many counter arguments that can be made concerning these findings, but that’s not my concern. The truth is, after satisfying my curiosity to this point, I opened up Pandora’s Box. I was raised as a Christian, all my beliefs and attitudes towards life were guided by this core belief. Now that I found a different and opposing opinion, was all of my life a big fat lie? If there is no God, does anything have a meaning?

In as much as I wanted to believe that there was no God, I was also prudent enough to know that no human being is smart enough to rule out the existence of God.

So there I was, a young boy split between two worlds. The best way I can describe my life at that point is that it became dark. My whole world turned dark. All of a sudden, I wasn't sure about anything. I did not trust anything or anyone.

The dark days

Have you ever had feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, fear or depression? I have. I used to feel like no one understood what I was going through. Questioning traditional Christian beliefs, let alone the existence of God was too taboo at the time I was growing up. You simply weren't ever expected to ask such questions. Ergo, deep within my heart, I was extremely sad and depressed. Sometimes when I was alone I would shed tears. I was in a lot of emotional stress and pain.

From the outside view, I was becoming a nuisance or going through a [teenage] phase. I am not sure of the extent to which the people around me were worried, but I am sure it was a lot for them to chew. The truth is, I changed exponentially. Up until that point, I had always been a jovial and outgoing child. But I became very resentful and reclusive.

In addition, since I was very academic, school became more of an escape for me. I spent a lot of time studying and reading; thinking to myself, "If I work hard enough, maybe I could pursue a career in something that would make me really happy and satisfy my most burning questions." I wanted to be a physicist.

At school, I started withdrawing from my friends and any sort of company or companionship. Of course once in a while I would engage in conversations with my classmates, but I kept them at a minimum. I became very resentful. Frankly, I don't know what many of my classmates thought of me, or

even my teachers' opinions, but typical of me, I didn't care much. I had enough problems of my own.

In hindsight, with all the drama that became of my simple life, I wonder why I was never suicidal. By God's grace, I always had a sense of fight and perseverance within my soul.

Today, I understand that I was going through depression and many people, especially teenagers usually self harm when faced with such pressures.

To make matters worse, I stopped watching TV and listening to music. I stopped reading the bible, and yes, I stopped going to church. All I wanted was to be alone. But as you can probably imagine, wanting to be alone is wishful thinking in an African home.

Because of my change in beliefs, I had a lot of unfortunate clashes with my father. My father got born again as a teenager in the 80s at a crusade where a famous evangelist- Reinherd Bonkee was preaching. He got saved then and never turned back. As you would expect, me refusing to go to church did not sit well with him. So every Sunday, before he went to church, we would get into an argument. It was our Sunday ritual. I wonder how those Sundays used to be for him when he got to church. As for me, I was just happy to stay away from pretending to be something I wasn't- a Christian.

When I look back, there are many things that the people around me could have done to help me, but if they did, I don't know if I would be writing this book today. I believe God allowed all that happened to me for a very special reason, and you could be that reason.

The confusion I had went on for a few years, and the dimensions of my wondering around in the world changed every now and then. But in all I went through, I came out stronger and better than before. I praise and thank God for everything I went through and survived by his grace. It was all part of his plan. Nothing catches God by surprise.

The pursuit of happiness

Do you know what comes after consistent sadness and depression? The pursuit of happiness!

After being persistently despondent, I knew I needed a change of pace and add more colour to my life. I decided to remove the weight of the world from my shoulders. I just wanted to remember what it was like to smile and be happy again. I had a shift and transformation of my core beliefs. Instead of living in fear and honour of God, I decided to live at and for my own pleasure. My life became a high risk experiment. High risk because my very life was on the line. Every once in a while, the thought of “what if God is real” would cross my mind. But I would encourage myself by saying, “if God exists, it is his responsibility to reveal himself”. I did not tolerate any sad, depressing and philosophical questions. I just lived like everyone else. Day by day, and pursuing happiness.

I started doing whatever I wanted. No one and nothing was going to ever limit or hold me back again. I started watching whatever I wanted, listening to whatsoever music I wanted and hung with whoever I wanted. I just didn't care anymore. My goal was to be happy and keep my feet on the ground. I had no restraints.

I started intentionally breaking away from my reputation as a Christian kid. I started attending house parties I wouldn't normally attend. I made friends with people I never imagined I would ever get along with. Some of them turned out to actually be very good individuals.

Basically, my pursuit of happiness started in my final year of high school. With all the drama going on in my life, I was still at the top of my class academically. So, going to University was not much of a worry for me, especially when my results were released- I passed with flying colours.

In my gap year, my friends and I planned out how we'd be partying and having fun when we went to college. I watched a lot of movies about college life. The parties, girls, clubs, and other miscellaneous experiences all appealed to my euphoria seeking persona. Of course if you are an adult even by the slightest degree, you know that most of what is portrayed in movies is very different from real life. But being young and susceptible to all different tenets, I believed what I saw. I purposed within myself to have a rollercoaster ride during my time in university.

Wild, young and free

With my mind reset and the operating software of my spirit deleted, I went to the Copperbelt University to pursue my studies in Business Administration. To me, University was my opportunity to live outside the limitations of my family and friends back in Mazabuka. It was my time to be whoever I wanted to be. I was no longer afraid of people catching me in my vices. As you can imagine, I grew up in a small town where everyone knew everyone. So naturally, I got fed up of such a livelihood.

University gave me the second chance I always wanted. I branded myself the way I wanted to. In high school, I was the A plus student. But in University, I was the fun loving guy. Academic prowess did not matter to me anymore. I no longer studied to be the best, I became comfortable with being an average student. Alcohol became a very good friend of mine. I would even usually have a beer while I studied. I was “living the life”.

Because of my personality, I attracted friends who were just like me. One thing about people who drink is that they rarely like to do it alone. So, I had a new clique of friends who I would drink with.

In case you are wondering, no, I never smoked. It is not like I never tried it (I did). It just never appealed to me. Growing in my Christian faith over the years, I came to understand that God did not let me smoke, like he didn't allow many other things. There was a limit to what God allowed the

devil to tempt me with. God never lets us go anywhere he can't find us. Whatever you may be going through, God is near and can always save you- if you call for him.

By the time I was in my second year of University, I would drink almost every day. I had a stash of liquor in my room all the time. And I would take some shots at night before I slept. My drinking habit reached an alarming level. It was no longer a casual thing, I started drinking rather religiously.

With the drinking came one of the worst habits you can ever have; clubbing. If you have never gone clubbing, it will be a bit hard for you to understand it's allure. Clubbing is the epitome of partying and wild living. A night club is the place you find like minded individuals. You can drink, smoke, dance, listen to music and meet girls.

There is nothing quite like a club. The lights, the smoke and the music you feel in your body with the bass drum beating in synch with your heart. It's a very memorable experience (please forgive me for being melodramatic on this issue).

As nice as it is, clubbing is not cheap. It is literally expensive, especially for a college kid with limited finances. On so many occasions, I would empty my pockets just so I could go clubbing. It was not unusual for me to wake up after a night of club hopping with empty pockets. I was very generous when it came to having a great time, and my friends were fond of me because of that.

The prodigal son

I love the story of the prodigal son. Basically, this parable is a great illustration of my life. At a very young age, I was comfortable in the kingdom of God. My heart was filled with joy and peace. I had purpose and love deep within me. I was a child of my father; God. Unsatisfied with the life I had, I thought it would be best for me to shun Christianity altogether and try out a different lifestyle. Like the prodigal son, I left my father's kingdom and started living a wild life. I squandered and abused all the God given gifts I had.

I fell so low in the things of the world and for the first time in my life, I experienced what the song writer meant when he said, "I once was lost..." I was lost. At first it was "fun" but later on, it became an unbearable burden and weight upon my back. It was not fun anymore. My heart realised that partying and drinking wasn't so fulfilling after all. Selfish ambition became too heavy a burden for me to carry. I wanted and needed more. I had a fallout with people I really thought loved me. I started to hate the person I was becoming. I took an inventory of the friends I had and it worried me. I was watching people ruin their lives on a daily basis and it became apparent to me that if I didn't make any changes, I would be next.

It would be a good story if I told you that my life was tumbling down physically, but that wouldn't be true. Physically, I was still doing pretty well. But spiritually, I was sick to the core and I needed help.

It is very common for us as humans to project an image of perfection when in actual sense, all is not well. Smiles and charisma can be very deceiving. There are a multitude of conflicts that go on in our hearts all the time. Not all that glitters is gold.

One of the turning points in my life was when a “friend” of mine was breaking down the costs of hiring a prostitute. Initially, we were just drinking and telling stories then the whole thing came up. I listened to what he said attentively, but I was a bit too drunk to comprehend exactly what he was talking about. He thought I was of such lowly character. Maybe he had a good reason to think I was up for such a thing. I might never know. But all I know is that I hated that I had sunk so low to a point where I would have such conversations. I had a prodigal son moment. I slowly started coming to my senses.

As I was going to my room that night, I thought to myself, “is this the person I have become?” for the first time in years, there was a new hope and spring bubbling up within me.

For a couple of weeks that followed, my soul was troubled. It’s not that I was depressed or anything like that. I just wasn’t my usual self anymore. I started to spend a lot of time in my dorm room and barely went out drinking or clubbing.

One day as I was laying in my bed, resting (I wasn’t feeling physically well) two first year students came over. They had an evangelic program that day and were visiting students to share and preach the gospel. As they came in and introduced themselves and what they were up to, my friend Greyson jokingly said, “Chris here needs Jesus!”. He said this because for some time, I had been talking to Greyson about

how I felt I needed to make some changes in my life and become a better person (Christian).

When the gentleman and the lady talked, more than anything, I was impressed with their zeal and confidence. They were first year students and in all my time in University by then, I had never seen anyone do evangelism the way they did. The gentleman seemed to be a leader of the program and did most of the talking. He talked about the power of words and why we should be careful with the things we say. He was preaching to the choir. I had very bad language at the time, and I passed it on to all my roommates. It was a time of reckoning. That day, I decided to stop having a dirty mouth. And my roommates made the commitment as well.

A few months (or years) later, I learnt that the gentleman who paid me a visit that day was my birthday mate. We were both born on the 28th of May, though I am slightly older in years. I don't believe it was a coincidence, it was God winking at me- it was a miracle. That gentleman's name is Barry Ilunga, and today he is a good friend of mine.

What happened

By now, you must be wondering what happened between the extremely earthly gentleman and the spirit filled ambassador of Jesus Christ. This question took me several months to understand and even now I'm pretty sure there's a lot more for me to learn. I have not gone clubbing or drinking for years now. My priorities in life have completely changed. I care more about God's plans and purposes than I do mine. I no longer live for myself. Every single day, I constantly think about how I can make life easier for someone by introducing them to Christ. All my life goals and ambitions have Christ and the gospel at the centre.

I have experienced the power of God in a tangible and real way. By far, the greatest miracle I've ever experienced is the change of heart God granted me. I would laugh at the prospect of me ever devoting my life to Christ again. I never saw it ever coming or happening to me. I thought I was too far away from God. I thought I was beyond redemption. But God picked me up from the slums of wickedness, washed and raised me up. Within a short period of time, God led me through the scriptures to learn the foundations of my new found faith. I learnt and understood things I hadn't ever known despite all the years I spent in a Christian family and community.

Since my conversion, I have had a burden placed upon my heart to teach and preach the gospel of Christ Jesus. And it

is my prayer that someone's life trajectory alters towards Christ through this piece of work.

Faith

Faith is the basic building block of Christianity. Like the bible records, “without faith, it is impossible to please God”. Faith is a basic Christian principal. Like the way the physical world has principals such as gravity and motion, the spirit realm has faith. Faith is the most important characteristic of the spirit. I sometimes like to call faith the currency of the spirit. Without faith, you can never acquire anything of spiritual significance.

Faith is the strongest force in the world. The whole universe was formed by faith (Hebrews 11:3). By implication, faith is stronger than even physical principals because everything started with faith. Without faith, there would be no light, earth, stars or moon. Every now and then, God reminds us that faith is higher than physical facts when miracles happen. For example, when Jesus calmed the storm, he was simply showing us that the winds and nature are under his authority. Just like sickness and death are subject to his command.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11.1). Faith is what gives us the assurance of things we can't physically determine. Faith is a virtue of the highest realm of power. It's influence falls through to even the physical realm. Faith is the standard that God set for anyone seeking any form of relationship with him (Hebrews 6:11). So, if you want a relationship with God or to know him, the first thing you need is faith.

By now, I know you are probably wondering how you can acquire this same faith. Well, the answer is simple. Faith comes by listening to the word of God (Romans 10:17). The word of God is what gives people faith.

This is one thing that many people don't understand. For anyone to come to Christ, faith has to be preached to them- nothing else. It is an insult to preach the gospel of Christ with anything other than the word (as recorded in the bible). For true transformation of an individual to occur, the true word of God has to be preached.

The Apostle Paul in the book of 1st Corinthians talked about how God has made foolish the wisdom of this world through his son. Many of the methods people use to preach the gospel of Christ are blatantly wrong. For the salvation of people, the gospel has to be preached. It is foolishness to start preaching Christ through scientific methods or worldly philosophies. In fact, such preaching only draws people away from God.

Revelation

Revelation is something that is revealed by God to humans. For anyone to convert to Christianity, he needs to have the gospel revealed to him. Anyone who is a Christian has an understanding of the gospel. This understanding is equal to spiritual enlightenment. Revelation gets us to a point of transformation where we forsake our previous lives and start living for God and his will. The difference between Christians and non-Christians boils down to revelation. The difference between you (as a Christian) and your heathen friends is revelation. Revelation is the difference between the committed Christian and the laissez-faire one. A revelation from God is what changes people. As humans, more than anything else, we ought to seek revelation. We need to be hungry for revelation. Revelation allows us to see things in a new light.

Because of revelation, I was transformed from an agnostic young man with earthiest tendencies to a passionate Christian. I became what I never imagined I could be even in a million years. Becoming a Christian seemed impossible for me. I was so lost and far away from God. But in his own special unique way, he captured my soul. Revelation has the power to do the impossible.

One of my favourite biblical examples of someone who had an encounter and revelation from God is the Apostle Paul. Before he became born again, Paul was a persecutor of Christians. He despised Christianity and all its followers. Paul

did everything in his power to destroy the Christian movement. He was “far away” from Christianity and was the last person anyone could have ever expected to be converted. But lo and behold, he converted to Christianity and his zeal and passion for Christ was mind blowing. Do you know what caused his transformation?; Revelation.

I am truly and fully convinced that anyone can become a Christian. No matter what you have done before or the sins you carry in your life, you can become a brand new person in Christ. Paul was a blasphemer, persecutor and violent man, the worst of sinners. But he found salvation in Christ. Over and over again in the scriptures, other people of extremely questionable character found favour and forgiveness of sins in God. Prostitutes, thieves, murderers, adulterers, etc found forgiveness and salvation. This is testimony enough to let you know that salvation is open to everyone.

Prayer works

Prayer is simply the communication between God and his people. There are many kinds of prayer, but all in all, they boil down to relationship and communication with God.

One of my treasured blessings from God is that I was born into a Christian family. This is a blessing that not many people ever get to experience. I have been privileged enough to have parents who have been praying for me since I was born (even before I was born). Though I never particularly made parenting an easy task for them, they always showed me love and raised my name to God in prayer.

I believe their prayers were a very important factor in my transformation. Actually, when I started going to church again, after being essentially away for about 5 years, they were on a prayer and fasting program. My whole family was fasting. It wasn't a fast specifically for me (I assume), it was an annual church fast. And I was one of their major prayer points. For about 2 weeks that year, as they were fasting, I barely slept in peace. I would stumble out of sleep in the middle of the night shouting 'Jesus!' At the time, I was sharing a room with my friend Greyson. And every time I did that, he would give it a good laugh. But eventually one day, when I leaped out of bed shouting Jesus, he in a simple friendly way told me that I probably needed to repent, turn from my evil ways and follow Jesus. I took those words to heart. For months up to that point, God had been slowly softening my heart towards himself, and that day marked an interesting turning point in my life.

I immediately called my mom and asked for her bible. She had a very nice version of the bible which I was fond of- the Amplified Version. I asked if she could find a way to send it to me. I needed it urgently. My dad made arrangements, and in no time, it was sent over to me. From the day I got that bible, I became a student of the word of God. I would read it each and every day. God gave me a unique ability to understand certain elementary truths of the gospel of Christ. In the few months that followed, I read and understood things that I was never able to grasp in all my years of being in a Christian family and being a church boy. In those private moments, God worked on my heart till it was completely made new.

Through the prayers of my loved ones, I found salvation in Jesus Christ. Through their prayers, I got the revelation of the gospel of Christ.

How God reveals himself

In my study of the bible over the years, God taught me something very important about how he reveals himself (revelation). And this is what I'll be sharing with you as I am about to conclude this book.

Testimony of men

This is the first and most common means by which the gospel of Jesus Christ is shared. People will usually tell others about Jesus Christ, and how he has been good to them. People will tell and narrate bible stories about Jesus Christ to their audiences. Powerful sermons are prepared and preached to the multitudes. This is a commendable thing to do. Jesus instructed us to preach the gospel wherever we go. This form of testimony is the foundation of our faith. The bible says faith comes by hearing the word of God.

In the many times that we preach or share the gospel, we love to see immediate changes in people. Though that occasionally happens, it's not how it usually occurs. The word of God is a seed. When we preach it, someone has an opportunity for that seed to grow in their hearts and cause real change and transformation. The kind of change and transformation I am talking about is not a casual or passive change. I am talking about people who completely turn their lives around and start living for Jesus Christ. This real wholesome and complete change only comes from God.

In the New Testament book of Luke chapter 8, Jesus illustrated this point through the parable of the sower:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it

and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

*"This is the meaning of the parable: **The seed is the word of God.** Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*

Luke 8:5-8; 11-15

In this scripture, Jesus described the word as a seed which was sown into people's hearts. The first group of people are described as the path on which some of the seed fell but it was trampled on, and the birds snatched the seeds away. In his explanation of the parable, Jesus describes these people as those who hear the word but the devil comes in and steals it away from them so that they may not believe and be saved.

From my years of observations, I have come to learn that the devil works overtime to steal away the word from the hearts of men before they believe. Imagine how far and wide the gospel is being preached today. More than any time in history, the word is being preached all over the world. But are people's lives being changed in proportionate numbers? Or

maybe let me bring it home a little. Of all the sermons you may have heard in your church over the last couple of months, how many of them do you remember? Most of you don't even remember what your pastor talked about last Sunday. Why is that so? Well, the devil is at work. Before we even reach a point of believing the word, he steals it away. This, I believe is one of the most unfortunate reasons why people don't come to the saving knowledge of Christ and change their ways. The devil doesn't even let many people have a chance towards believing in Jesus!

Furthermore, the bible says, the seed that falls on the path is trampled on. This I believe could imply the deliberate distortion of the word of God. The enemy will distort the word of God by all means so that the seed planted in our hearts may not be able to grow because it is distorted and damaged. A flawed gospel will never bear any fruit.

The second illustration given by Jesus in these scriptures is about the seed that fell on rocky ground. The meaning of this part of the parable is that sometimes, when the word is preached, people receive the word with so much joy and excitement. They actually believe in the word for a moment, but because they have no root (understanding), when things get difficult, they fall away from their faith in the word. It is a surface kind of faith.

How many times have you listened to a really 'life changing sermon' but after a short while, it just evaporates into obscurity? Well, this is probably because we don't seek understanding in the word of God. There are certain things about God that we just have to study and understand on our own. I am still a passionate Christian today for the most part

because of my deliberate study of the bible and my prayer life. Going to church once a week and listening to a sermon that we barely even study through afterwards is not enough to sustain our faith in this wicked world. God gave us his word so that we can dwell on it day and night, no matter what is going on around us in the world. There is so much hidden in the scriptures for us to dig into. All the answers to life's questions are in the bible. But the problem is that, when we encounter certain challenges, because of our lack of understanding of God's character and his word, we fall away and lose our faith.

Thirdly, in this parable, we learn about the seed that fell among thorns that grew up with it and choked the plants. In his interpretation, Jesus explained that this occurs when people hear the word but as they go on, it is choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures. If the devil can't keep you from believing and understanding God's word he sees to it that life's worries, riches and pleasures kill the word planted in your heart before it bears fruit. This is the enemy's last line of defence against you. He distracts you by trying to keep your eyes set and focused on life's affairs and pleasures. Very few people ever get to master and overcome this temptation. It is very difficult for a lay person to discern when the enemy is at work. To them, they may call it just living and trying to survive. But the gospel is revolutionary in nature, It says leave everything behind and follow God! Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and all the other things you need for life will be given to you (Matthew 6:33).

Different levels of testimony

In the book of John, Jesus graded the effectiveness of human testimony of him.

You yourselves have sent [an inquiry] to John and he has been a witness to the truth. But I do not receive [a mere] human witness [the evidence which I accept on My behalf is not from man]; but I simply mention all these things in order that you may be saved (made and kept safe and sound). John 5:33-34 AMP

This means that though important, human testimony is not enough. Jesus calls it “mere” human witness. This is the kind of testimony I received about Jesus for the greater part of my life. People told me about how good God was. How he loves and cares for me. And that he wants me to give my life to him. What I knew about God was just what I heard others say; I had no personal testimony or revelation of him. I knew what my father, pastor and Christian friends said about him. I loved what people would say about him. But I never got to a point where I knew from deep within my heart the truth about God and his plan and will for me.

Testimony of Miracles

Have you ever wondered why miracles happen? Why does God heal and deliver people publicly? Is it only because he loves them and wants to heal and make them whole?

In the recorded life of Jesus Christ, a big portion of it concerned him performing miracles. He healed the sick, made the blind to see, raised the dead and freed the oppressed. Why did the authors find it relevant to record all these miracles?

Furthermore, miracles are emphasized even before the New Testament. God split the Red Sea, brought down the walls of Jericho, sustained the Israelites in the wilderness miraculously, created the whole universe out of nothing in six days and authored life itself. Why did God see all this to be necessary?

Apart from his love and care for us, there is a deep and rich reason why God performs miracles; he performs miracles so that we could believe in him.

“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the sake of the [very] works themselves. [If you cannot trust Me, at least let these works that I do in My Father’s name convince you.]” John 14:11 AMP

Miracles are very important in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Miracles ought to be embraced and welcomed by all Christians and God seeking individuals. God proves his word through miracles.

*“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and **confirmed** his word by the signs that accompanied it.” Mark 16:20 NIV*

God confirms his word through miracles! There is no true servant of God who has ever lived a miracle free life. Miracles follow each and every God given mandate.

Haven't you ever wondered why many miracles happen during evangelistic programs? I have had people come testifying to me about how mightily God used them during an evangelism program. Why is that so? Well, God gets excited every time we step out to preach his word, and to confirm it, miracles follow!

It is sad that we live in a time where many people have started demonising miracles. Understandably, this might be because of the mushrooming of false prophets and sorcerers who perform magical acts and claim to be servants of God. But we can't afford to throw the baby out with the bath water. Miracles are very important to God in his ministry and ought to be embraced by all Christians. Miracles are supposed to be the lifestyle of all Christians.

Testimony of God

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” Matthew 16:16

Out of all the means through which God reveals himself and his will, my favourite is when he does it himself and opens up the heart and eyes of an individual. There is nothing as important and gracious as having a direct word from God placed in your heart. This testimony is what turns the timid into bold witnesses of Christ. This is what turns a sinner’s life upside down.

The Israelites in the bible experienced so many miracles. They witnessed the plagues that God unleashed on the Egyptians, they saw the red sea being opened for them to walk through, and they even drank water out of a rock! Yet even after all these miraculous experiences, their hearts constantly turned away from God.

The testimony of men and miracles are but just a means through which God communicates with his people. Every time we hear the word of God being preached or experience miracles, we ought to pay attention to what God is actually saying. God doesn’t just perform miracles because of the love he has for his people, he also performs them to prove his word and himself as almighty God. He declares the presence of his kingdom through miracles and these declarations are what we ought to pay attention to.

As God speaks and reveals himself, he instils faith in us. And that faith is what brings about transformation and change in the lives of people.

People can listen to the testimony of God from people and witness mind blowing miracles but still remain unchanged. Just like the Israelites. After all that God spoke to them and the miracles he performed, their hearts were still wondering about. Sometimes, people see but don't perceive, hear but don't understand. Just like Jesus said in Luke 8 verse 10.

Every time God spoke to individuals himself, total life changes occurred. For example, God spoke and revealed himself to Abraham, Moses, Jacob, David, Noah, Joshua, Elijah, Isiah, Peter, Paul, and John. Every time God spoke and revealed himself to someone, not only was his life changed, but history was changed as well. These people lived righteous lives and pleased God. They became favourable vessels of God. They did exploits on earth all to the glory of God. The world became unworthy of them (Hebrews 11:38).

Epilogue

The greatest gift I have ever received in my life is the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. He took me as a broken, lost young man and turned me into his child. I have been walking passionately with God for 5 years now and I have never regretted my decision to follow him. He has been nothing but good and gracious to me. He has brought joy into my life and that of my family. He is the foundation of my livelihood.

Be that as it may, I think it's important to also let you know that my walk with God has not been all rosy and sunshine. I have made several mistakes and fallen off here and there. But his loving hands have always been available to pull me out of trouble and bring me back to him just as he promised he would. And for that, my heart is always full of thanks.

I may not know everything or have the answers to all of life's questions, but one thing I know- life with Christ is better than anything else. I have seen and tasted that the Lord is good.

A message from the author

Since my transformation, it has been my life's goal to share this hope and faith I have in Jesus Christ to everyone around me. It is my prayer that God uses me even in a small way to help someone get a revelation about God and his salvation plan for man. There is no greater joy than that for me.

It is my prayer that even just one soul would get convicted by the Holy Spirit and turn to a new life in Christ Jesus through this book. If that happens, my joy would be fully complete, because I know what it's like to walk in darkness and how much I needed to hear the true gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray God transforms your life just as he did mine. And that you would carry on the tradition of sharing the good news to others. In Jesus's name I pray, amen.