



Family MOULDING

Whither Choices and Outcomes?

—
IHUOMA JOY .O

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Dedication

I dedicate this book, first and foremost to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ who has been so faithful in my life. Also to my loving husband, Oga Sina, who faithfully prayed and encouraged me through out the period that it took to write this book.

Also to my precious children whom I thrive all day to create a good example and pattern. To my spiritual fathers, who made sure I stayed within the parameter of the Holy Spirit's direction in my writing. I appreciate you immensely.

Preface

The bitter truth that the society is currently losing touch with the value of proper child upbringing, necessitated the writing of this book. I realized that with the advancement in society, most families are wavering especially as it relates to their choices and how it affects those around them. Furthermore, I am saddened with the attitude of some parents who think that pampering their kids connotes love; such parents, give their kids everything they ask for to fuel happiness at the expense of instilling proper discipline and values in their kids. In all these, I came to the conclusion that, parenthood is indeed, a body of parental choices. Therefore, the most germane factor which moulds the attitude and behaviour of a child is the type of upbringing they receive from the family, connoting simply that parents have a key role to play, in moulding the character of a child. Although, the inspiration came from my observation of different families while I was single, I waited to become a parent in order to communicate better, from a point of personal experience and validate the ideas which I have recorded in this book.

This is not to say that I am a perfect parent. I am still learning and examining my choices and styles of child upbringing as well as the areas I need to improve upon with the help of God. To succinctly convey my message, I reflected on the choices made by some Bible characters, their outcomes and its implications for us; these truths and more are all, captured therein. In this book, I further discussed the certitude that when a family is blessed with a child, the responsibility of the parent increases because what the child turns out to be, whether in the present or future are all based on the choices and upbringing provided by the parent. With that in mind, I realized that nothing equals the love that parents shower on their kids hence; correcting them in the most appropriate way, whenever they make mistakes is another germane point captured by this book. This is because there is no responsibility more important for parents than bringing up kids in the way of the Lord, teaching them to love God and obey His commands. Of a truth, the survival of the society is threatened if parents refuse to raise their kids the godly way; however, if it is the other way round, it means that we have failed as parents.

Thus, considering the high number of children, losing hope, giving up on life and insecure about themselves at alarming young ages, writing this book became needful so parents can be more aware of the fact that their children form opinions on marriage and upbringing based on what they see daily from them. As such, whatever foot prints parents' leave (either good or bad) for their children will most likely; determine the path they will take. Thus, this book brings to fore the fact that parents are part of the solution, they can help reverse this trend by deliberately choosing to love their children, walk with them, guide them, pick them up when they fall and more importantly, teach them the way of the Lord by instilling and injecting biblical values in them. This is the only way parents can avoid contributing to the down fall of the family, church and the society at large as every choice made concerning children either have a positive or negative outcome. Therefore, to have a future generation of true Christians, parents must deliberately choose to teach their kids what God requires of them because soon, leadership will rest on their shoulders. To this end, the content of this book communicates the truth which can help parents to be better support systems for their children. I could not have achieved this success without a strong support group. Firstly, to my husband who supported me wholeheartedly in ways, too numerous to mention. Secondly, my Pastors; Rev Barrister Izuchukwu Oziogu, who was readily available to attend to all my questions, Rev, Adeyebga Adesanmi, Venerable Samson Sule, Rev Oluwatosin Adekeye and Pastor Olaoye each of whom read the book, provided their input, advice and guidance throughout the writing process. I equally appreciate my editors, my senior colleague and colleague, Dr Emmanuel Tsadu Gana and Shamagana N. Yusuf who polished, refined and further made suggestions that helped to improve the content and language of this book. To my parents and siblings, thank you all for your unwavering support.

Forward

It is a rare privilege to write the forward to a book, an extensive work done by another on the one hand, but particularly difficult especially when the topic of discourse is one that I am very passionate about. The first established organisation of human beings is the family and from the birth of a child, the race to mould the child into what society thinks it should be begins. Thus, the child's innocence ends at birth as attitudes are taught and behaviour is moulded. In this book, the author has examined how choices shape who we all become and the critical role parents play in the choices they make, knowingly or otherwise. Children model the significant adult they see and this modeling is not only in the area of instruction but more by observable behaviour. In fact, the sad part is that many times, parents are unaware that the children are watching. Carefully observing Lot's choice, Ruth's choice, the author goes on to the choices of David, one described as a man after God's own heart. We see that David suffered pain and loss because of his choices and actions, which resulted in a flawed family structure that not only affected his family, but the nation. This is a clear example of the wider impact of our choices. David had to grapple with rape/incest, fornication and murder to name a few, in his home, as a result of his choices. This brings to our consciousness, the fact that in spite of God's love for us, there are principles he has put in place before the world began, which remains unaltered.

The consequence of taking decisions in the flesh is also highlighted today in mental health profession. Today, we see a rise in issues such as depression, anxiety, drug abuse to name a few which often times, are the express manifestation of choices within the home. We see dysfunctional singles

getting married and producing dysfunctional children and the cycle continues unabated. The step to follow in breaking the cycle and tackling this menace is what I believe the author addresses in this book. Also, in our conversations and action in the home as adults, we ought to bear in mind that children are keen workers who will exhibit same without inhibitions. Therefore, in tying the knot, it is crucial that couples follow the manual of life and living (Bible), “The Maker's Manual”.

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Teaser

Choices

Ever since the Garden of Eden
Freedom was bestowed on mankind
Freedom to make choices
Right or wrong, God's word defined

Scores of references are recorded
Of those who exercised this right
And the Consequences that followed
Defining what would be their plight

Abraham and Lot were free to Choose
The city or open plains
Lot chose glamour and bright lights
There, immorality brought him and his family pain

The people were admonished
In Joshua twenty four, verse fifteen
To choose whom they would serve
Between good and evil, they could lean

Gehazi had the opportunity of getting a triple portion of
anointing from Elisha
But he became greedy
Choosing vanity over anointing
Which affected his generations yet unborn

Ruth chose to follow Naomi and glean in the fields
For that which reapers left behind
Her humble gestures merited grace
Rewarding her with peace of mind

Reuben the first son of Jacob
Chose to sleep with his father's concubine
A choice which affected him
Denying him the blessing of a first son.

Levi and Simeon's Choice
Put them in a Pandora 's Box
And Instead of receiving blessings from their father
They acquired curses which affected their generations yet
unborn

Choice is Power
Choice is authority
Choice is our inalienable right
but when not wisely exercised
Could lead to destruction

Choice has made humans
not freer but more paralysed,
not happier but more dissatisfied.
Saying YES to Jesus is the best choice
Parents can make

Today, Jesus still stands at the door
“Come unto me” is His plea
The destiny of all is determined
Choosing Him,- can set us free.
From every wrong choice that has been made.

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CHOICES AND DECISIONS: THE BUILDING BLOCK OF OUR LIVES.

If you don't want to reap it, don't sow it.



Every human being faces the challenge of making decisions as we journey through life. This has been the trend of events from the get-go, as portrayed in the poem above. God gives us the liberty to make choices, and for every choice we make, there is a consequence, either good or bad. More than earthly reward or repercussion, those choices determine our eternal destiny. Sometimes, we have plenty of options to choose from, at other times, the options are limited. While we are free to make our choice as moral agents, we are not free to alter the outcome, which is the reward or repercussion of our choice. This is because the outcome is naturally determined by the choice we make. In other words, our choices determine the success of our family and lineage.

Many of us spend countless hours pondering on what to do about various situations in our lives: what kind of jobs or careers we should pursue, whether or not to start a family or where we should live. Beneath these choices, we are also

faced with other daily choices like what we will eat, what we will wear or even which route to take. This inadvertently explains that as humans, we live through our choices. It further justifies why the second 'c' in choices stands for consequences thus, life becomes a tapestry of our choices and inherent consequences. Daily, decisions are ever before us to make. To make them wisely, courage is needed- the courage to say no, the courage to say yes. In fact, choices are to our lives what hinges are to a door; they define our lives and further determine our destiny. Any choice we make either attracts a blessing or a curse hence, the consequences of our choices can put some people in unnecessary pain. This explains why we need to be careful with the choices we make.

Practically, choices involve mentally making a decision, judging merits of multiple options and selecting one or more of them. Thus, one can make a choice between imagined options (what would I do if ...?") or between real options followed by the corresponding action. Simple choices might include what to eat for dinner or what to wear on a Saturday morning- choices that have relatively low impact on the chooser's life overall. However, more complex choices might involve who to vote for in an election, what profession to pursue, a life partner and so on. However, choices based on multiple influences have larger ramifications. Truth is that many situations of life are manifestations of our choices; poverty is a choice, wealth is a choice, sin is a choice and righteousness is a choice. It is a man that chooses what and where he wants to be in life. Many people do not want to hear this because it places responsibility on their shoulders, as some would claim that where they are in life is not their

choice, it just happened. They would love to blame their background, relative's witches, demons, the national economy or fate for their predicament. These set of people would never agree that their present situation is a result of the choices they made in life. This perspective and mindset of unwillingness to accept responsibility has made greatness elude many.

Again, choices are most times, a product of our actions and inactions. For instance, a believer whose closest friends and confidants are all unbelievers has chosen failure in life and destiny, this is because when he needs counsel, he goes to unbelievers' who would not give him advice from the wisdom of Jehovah but from the wisdom of the world that comes to nought (1st Cor 2:6). For this reason, Job 34:4 says "let us discern for ourselves what is right: let us learn together what is good". Most people regard having choices as a good thing, however, it should be noted that a severely limited or artificially restricted choice can lead to discomfort and possibly an unsatisfactory outcome. Similarly, a choice from numerous options may lead to confusion. Others make their decisions first before involving God; this is a wrong method of making choices because such people decide first without consulting God thus, making him their second choice. Therefore, the freedom to make our own choices is a very germane issue in our society. This explains the reason each of us chooses to do things that we do. Furthermore, some decisions are very easy to make while others require great wisdom. As believers, we need the wisdom of God Almighty to make life changing decisions. Soothingly, the bible provides us with a great deal of advice on decision making.

I was told a story of a young man who got a young lady pregnant and refused to take responsibility, leaving her to her parents. The mother of the girl on the verge of death rained curses on the young man. Years later, he gets married but whenever his wife conceives, she experiences a miscarriage. After a long while, he is told to go and make peace with the girl and accept the daughter, but on his way, he meets his waterloo. He had an accident and dies from the wounds he sustained. (The choice he made affected his life and that of the woman he got married). Another story exists of a lady who gets pregnant and refuses to go for ante-natal but prefers to go to a prayer house even on the day of delivery. At the long run, she ends up losing the child. Sometimes, Christians make choices without consulting God's word and when it backfires, they return to their pastors to pray for them. Again, a girl was once jilted by her boyfriend for the singular reason that his mom will not accept her. After sometime, the guy returns and begs for forgiveness, she agrees and tells her pastor about it. The pastor advises her not to accept the man in question but she turns deaf ears to the pastor and continues dating him. After sometime, the guy returns with the news that if she gets pregnant, it would be easier to convince his mom. She gets pregnant; unfortunately, the man's number becomes unreachable. He leaves the girl and runs away. The lady in question tries to abort the baby but loses her life in the process. The examples above reveal that one important choice we make is whom to marry. This is a serious life-time commitment and should never be undertaken without God's guidance. Making this choice foolishly or based on emotion alone has brought much heartache to many people.

From the stories above, it is clear that choices have various aspects which can be classified into three categories viz; The right of Choice, The responsibility of choice and The result of choice. We will always have the right to choose in whatever circumstance; with the right to choose comes the responsibility to choose; we cannot be neutral because there is no middle ground. Therefore, the choices we make will either result in something good or bad as all choices have outcomes. Truth be told, God has given us the power to overcome any temptation and pressure. Therefore, we should be ever ready to take responsibility of any wrong choice we make. Furthermore, it should be noted that messages going forth in our society today have emphasised our “right to choose”, but have not balanced it with the message that our choices also have consequences (especially in the area of lust and selfishness) For instance, most movies glamorize many things that are not too good for us and have not generally shown the destructive results of habits like smoking, drinking, adultery, fornication, gambling, and abortion amongst others. Often times, we only feel the consequences when a loved one gets lung cancer and is dying, a child is killed by a drunk driver, close friends divorce because of the unfaithfulness of a mate, a teen is infected with a venereal disease she will have for life, a family loses their home because of gambling debts, a baby is aborted because of the lust and selfishness of the parents leaving them struggling with guilt.

Today more than ever, relationships and marriages are shaped by personal choices that are in turn influenced by family circumstances and events in the society. Again,

changes in educational opportunities, employment trends, social policies, technological innovations, media representations and new ideas about human rights or personal entitlements exert enormous influence our choices. Thus, it should be noted that the measure of success and happiness in life, eternal destiny of our soul and that of our companion and children may well be determined by choice. This is because whatever happens to us, whether good or bad is strictly as a result of our choices; no one can rescue us from the choices we make because we are responsible for our choices. We aren't just a result of how our parents brought us up or a product of our environment; we are a result of the choices we make daily. What choices are you making daily? What choices are you making in your life? Are your choices going to reflect in positive and negative consequences? This is because the choices we make and the decisions we take have a lasting impact in our life. Whether we feel it immediately or not, our life is being shaped by the choices we make daily hence, the present is a gift we need to make the best of because the core of our future comprises each and every decision we have ever taken. The right advice to follow is succinctly captured by Anso Coetzer in the following words: "Decisions become easier when your will to please God outweighs your will to please yourself and the world". We cannot undo the past but we can learn from it. Therefore, the pertinent question we should always ask ourselves is "what process do I use in making my choices and how much consideration do I give to the consequences before hand?"



CHOICES AND FAMILY LIFE

The family is both the fundamental unit of the society as well as the root of culture. It is a perpetual source of re-fueling that empowers the child to venture with confidence into the greater world and to become all that he can be. (Marianne E. Neifert)



When a child makes all the wrong choices and chooses the path of destruction, parents often wonder whether or not they have laid a good foundation. This is aptly encapsulated in the African proverb, “A Child is the parable of the life of a parent”. The proverb also explains why the childhood years are crucial in forming character and personality patterns. With emphasis, the formative years are periods of early childhood, (between 0-8 years of a child's life). It is a period of rapid cognitive (intellectual), social, emotional and physical development of a child. This development occurs based on the child's response and interaction between genetics, environment and experience hence, the foundation, moulding and growth of every child lies within the family. This is why it is often advised that parents should strive to play an active role in constructing, interpreting and transmitting social values

especially in the formative years of their kids because a good home often makes a good farm.

With the creation of Adam, God bestowed on man the freedom of choice. This accounts for why He will not violate our free wills or make us do the right thing; neither will he make choices for us. There is no possible way man can just do his own thing and think he is not making a choice, this is because even the refusal to make a choice is in itself, a choice. Moreover, even when we refuse to choose, others will make our choices for us whether as individuals or family. This brings to fore, the fact that choices are a part of life for everyone. Therefore, four facts about the choices we make, as it concerns our families shall be discussed below.

Choices have Consequences

It should be noted that our choices have consequences. Truth is if anyone chooses to engage in a reckless and promiscuous sexual life, such a person will suffer the consequence(s), which may be an unwanted pregnancy. Also, such a person becomes prone to contracting diseases which may ravage the body even after forgiveness has taken place. Galatians 6:7 cautions us thus "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked for whatever a man sows, he'll reap. Gehazi was a man with an unusual amount of privilege; he spent his time witnessing the great miracles which were performed by his master. His incredible privilege of living with and observing Elisha would have earned him a very faithful contented follower of God. However, he made the wrong choice which affected his generation as we shall see in the subsequent chapters.

Choices Affect Those Close to Us

It should also be noted that our choices affect our family members. The Nigerian proverb which says that, "the home is where life is found in its fullness" explains the fact that the home and the people who live therein are meant to find fulfillment and rest. Sadly, this is not always the case as parents sometimes, make wrong choices. Thus, as parents, we should always bear in mind that the choices we make affect others connected to us either in a negative or positive way. Satan will always try to convince us that we are the only ones affected but usually others are hurt or helped by our choices. Parents who choose to live inconsistent lives can cause great damage to their children spiritual and emotional lives as it is impossible for an immoral father to advise his children well. On the other hand, parents who maltreat or treat their children with disrespect inflict upon them, a lasting emotional /physical scar. This is why the Ugandan proverb warns that "A child is to be treated very carefully". In the account of Gehazi, we are told that his choice caused his descendants to have the terrible disease of leprosy. David thought it was just a passing pleasure to lay with Bathsheba as no one would know but God brought great calamity to his family. We should therefore, carefully consider our choices as they do not only affect us but also those around us.

Choices either honour or dishonour God

The choices we make either bring honour or dishonor to God. In II Samuel 12:13, David acknowledged his sins and confessed the following words "I have sinned against the Lord". Thereafter, Nathan says "The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt both die howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to

blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall die” Nathan tells David that his choice to sin has given great occasion to the Lord's enemies to blaspheme his name which is one way of dishonouring His name. Despite stating the above, it is pertinent to state that the choices we make can sometime be changed but this can only happen when we allow God's word to saturate our thinking and influence our choices. The secret lies in a proper understanding of our relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is because the choices we make have eternal results.

Particularly, it should be noted that the choices we make, to a very large extent affect our family life. Bringing it down to a man and his wife, it should be noted that when Adam in Genesis 3 chose to eat the forbidden fruit by allowing his wife to have dominion over him, God told him that “Because you listened to the voice of your wife...”(v 17). As a husband, listening to your wife is good in fact, husbands, listening to the voice of their wife is the wisest choice they can make however, it is wrong to listen to your wife when she contradicts God's word. Adam abdicated leadership to her because he deliberately disobeyed God by setting his wife above God. This explains why God holds the man accountable for the direction his family goes as underscored in the Ethiopian proverb, “The father is a shield for the family”. Many Christian men are passive with regards to their family even when the Tanzanian proverb advises that, “parents should work the clay while it is still wet”. They deliberately refuse to take responsibility to train the children. They focus on their job and leave the home to the wife. When problems arise, they blame her. It should explicitly be stated

that as a man, it is not wrong to delegate things to your wife, but there is a big difference between delegating and dumping. When you delegate, you retain final responsibility but when you dump, you abdicate responsibility. Ephesians 5:28 clearly holds the man responsible for his wife and children hence, the man must consciously make the choice of caring for his family because choices made can either make or mar the children as further captured in 1 Timothy 5:8 which states that "but if any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel". This points to the fact that choosing to display the right attitude and behaviour in the presence of our kids is one pertinent way of providing morals for our family's hence, the need not to forget that "A stray chick is a target for birds of prey". Particularly, I have come to notice that parents of this age find it more important to be their child's best friend. To this end, they do not give the children rules as regards certain pertinent things until they become teenagers and by then, they have faced no real punishment, lessons or any real "this is how you are supposed to behave" moments. Even more, the phrase, "Kids must be kids" should not be found in the dictionary of Christian parents because if they are not corrected at the early stage, they will definitely get it wrong in the future; that is why an adult will comfortably insult another adult with their condition and claim that they were angry when they said it.

Choices affect Upbringing.

The choices we make as parents can and do influence our children's development. The parent-child relationship has a major influence on most aspects of the child's

development, our employment patterns can have long term consequences for the child's development because it plays an important role in shaping the adult lives of the children: This is aptly buttressed in Tanzanian proverb which says, "if parents cannot hold their child in their arms, they should hold them in their heart".

Often times, it should also be noted that children inadvertently pick up on their parent non-verbal actions and incorporate those elements into the way they chose to carry out their own lives. This accounts for the Tanzanian proverb, "The child of a snake is a snake". Thus, contrary to what some parents think, our kids do listen to us from the way we talk to the way we conduct ourselves. This points to the fact that our kids use our actions as a foundation to gauge what they think is appropriate and acceptable. Therefore, as parents, we need to be aware of the choices we make. Moreover, I have come to notice that our children naturally test our parenting ability to make sure that our words and actions go hand in hand thus, being consistent with our words and actions. When we are consistent, they relax, knowing that they have rules and expectations that will keep them safe and that they have parents who will always keep to their words; but if otherwise, they persist with whatever they are doing. This explains why a kid will deliberately engage in an action to see the reaction of the parent.

One pertinent point to note is the parent's use and choice of technology because it has adverse effects on children. In contemporary times, the rate at which a lot of parents use their phones more than they interact with their children is worrisome. A key question parents always need to

ask themselves is, how many times do I use my phone? (to talk, surf the internet etcetera). Limiting your phone usage when the kids are around is imperative as a parent so you can have ample time to focus on your children. Moreover, as parents, you do not want to send the message to your children that they are not as important as your phone. It is alright to answer a call or text but it is not healthy to rarely put the phone down. Remember, that also is a choice which has a consequence.

Again, parents need to be aware of the way they communicate with people around both verbally and non-verbally. Choosing not to be overly aggressive when you speak to others may not be too good because children pick up the way their parents communicate. This reminds me of the Botswana proverb, "what you help a child to love is more important than what you help him to learn". When frustrated with your spouse, yelling or becoming overly emotional is not advisable. Remember the kids are watching our actions to set standards of how to communicate when they are also experiencing complicated emotions. Rolling of the eyes, sighing or any other nonverbal gesture that we may subconsciously use should be deliberately controlled. Remember every choice has a consequence. Regarding moral and ethics, parents ought to remember that their lifestyle should teach their kids what is right and wrong. Always bear in mind the Ugandan proverb, "do not to give too much salt to a child" It is therefore paramount to show your kids the right way to work out their problems and how to treat people respectfully. The saying, "if you don't have something to say, then don't say anything at all" and "treat others how you

would like to be treated” should be implemented in the life of children. Parents therefore have the choice of teaching their kids the right way to act by being good and respectable.

Education remains another key area where parents need to choose wisely for their kids. Promoting and stressing the importance of learning is paramount. This is to avoid a situation where they will be found struggling in school. Children whose parents failed to set a strong educational foundation, will definitely struggle with finding balance and not possess the desire to learn. Therefore, parents should strive to educate themselves and read- to help set the precedence for their children as every choice made comes with a consequence. Even more, parents need to be consistent with their words and actions because if they do not go *pari paa su*, there will be a great deal of confusion and impact on the child. This explains why the Spanish proverb says, “what children hear their parents say and do by the fireside, they repeat in the highway”. If parents choose to use positive attributes when carrying out a positive action, then the child will put the course of action together. Even more, most parents forget that in recent times, there are other major contexts in which children are influenced like the peer groups and the school. Thus, in a situation where they choose wrongly, the consequences are usually not palatable hence, they need to lead by example so the children can emulate. Whether we like it or not, the words of Shinichi Suzuki which “states that “children learn to smile from their parents” should be held at heart.

Another vital aspect which parents ought to choose wisely concerning their children is religion. Parents make a

big impact on their children when it comes to religion- thus, the big question to ask is, how early should spirituality be introduced in the life of children? How often should parents teach children about God within the four walls of their own home because this will do more than the church will ever do. It is the kid's relationship with God that would spur and increase their desire to go to church. Parents have special responsibilities for their children's religious formation and should see to it that they apply Christian principles in their upbringing. Speaking further on how parental choices affect children, it should be noted that what parents say to their kids, how they are treated as well as the way they talk to them is of utmost importance. Therefore, it is the duty of every parent to correct their kids when necessary. Ensure to cultivate good manners in them and steer them from rude behaviour. Since you may not often pay attention to what you say and how you choose to say it, you can imagine yourselves recording your interactions with your kid (s) and playing them back. Would your voice sound patient and loving? Would you seem engaged or be interested in what your child is saying or subbing the child-chatting up with friends? If you actually recorded it, would you think you were at your best? If the answer is no, then, it is time to come up with ways you can best communicate with them.

This is important because when parents yell or speak aggressively to their kid (s), they are less likely to get good results and may go further to affect their relationship. This is why the North African proverb says, "Let your child shout but do not shout at it". In fact, yelling always may be toxic and this may impact negatively on the child. Moreover, kids learn

from our behaviour as parents hence, the surest way to get our kids speak nicely to us and others is to speak nicely to them because constant criticism and speaking harshly to them might not be pleasing in the long run. In fact, some parents have made it a point of duty to insult their children at the slightest misconduct while others nag their children often. However, we should always remind ourselves of the Kenyan proverb which says, "do not put fear into a child". Therefore, the choice of nagging children to correct their behaviour has a way of affecting the child psychologically. This often emanates when the interactions between the parent and children is less; thus, pointing to the fact that some parents don't speak to their children much. The truth is that the more positive interactions parents have with their children, the less likely it is that such parent will need to nag their children to gain compliance. While some parents have made the choice of saying positive things to their wards, others especially the typical Nigerian parent, deploy force and coercion towards their children. Some see it as an aberration to thank their children forgetting that children feel special when they are appreciated or rewarded for good behaviours. Some parents out rightly say NO to the demand of their children instead of using the alternative "let me think about it", while some others do not even acknowledge the child's positive behaviour. The truth is that children would grow in confidence when they realize that their parent also have things to learn from them.

Furthermore, some parents tend to underestimate how their choice of language impacts on their children. Many parents often find it hard to restrain themselves from using

obscene language with or in the presence of their children. On the contrary, someone might ask, "How do I tell my 8year old daughter to complete her assignment without yelling at her? To deal with the above, parents need to empower their children to reflect on their choices because every negative choice made has a consequence. However, in a situation where the parent is lagging behind in the area of making good choices, what then happens to the child? In view of all that has been said, it should be noted that choice itself is a power that we possess as humans. It is an inalienable right and responsibility which everyone possesses.

Bearing in mind all that has been stated, it should be noted that parenting involves co-operating with God especially in bringing up children in the right way. Since God loves children and wants what is good for them; especially in the aspect of becoming good and Holy- Christian parents should want and choose to do same. However, when we rebel against God and choose our own way in bringing up the children he gave us, we are choosing a path of destruction. Because much of our personalities are formed through our choices, Christian parents ought to develop the attributes of Christ and become like him. We have to let go of the old nature and receive the new. Therefore, as soon as one accepts Christ in his life, he should begin to make the choices that will put away his old ways of thinking, talking as well as acting and allowing the Holy Spirit to replace them in God's ways. Therefore, a Christian must deliberately choose God's way as against his own way in absolute faith that the Holy Spirit will do His own part and make the needed change. In order to achieve this, parents must deliberately choose to listen to God

all the way because God cannot lead anyone astray. Don't allow your friends to put pressures on you; don't allow your environment to put you on the edge. Of course there are many things you can do but what really does God want you to do? God wants to lead you in making the right choice. It's not something you beg for however, it should be clearly pointed out that walking with God is a deliberate decision. This accounts for the reason Gen 5: 24 says "And Enoch walked with God and he was not: for God took him" When you walk with God, he will lead you to making the right choices in life. The truth is that being a parent requires a whole lot of patience. It takes patience for you as a parent to ask and understand what your children are passing through in their daily lives. When my daughter ask me for something she needs, I often tell her to leave me alone, not until my son began to ask for some things and her response to the younger one was "mummy will tell you to leave her alone". Sometimes, the words aren't insulting or demeaning but they might not be appropriate for them at that age hence, the need to choose your words carefully.

Truly, children are a blessing from God; unfortunately, they don't come with an instruction manual. However, there's no better place to find advice on parenting than the Word of God which reveals a heavenly father who loves us and calls us His children. Sadly, we tend to neglect God's word and further make poor choices because we lack the capacity to think before we act. Therefore, the proper and immediate end of Christian education is to co-operate with divine grace in bringing children up in the Lords way. Hence, since the parental mission of raising children is a service to

CHOICES AND FAMILY LIFE

God and the church, parents can count on the grace of the sacrament of marriage to help them choose wisely for their kids. This is because children who eventually grow up to be good and holy people will however be good members of both the human society and the kingdom. Conclusively, raising children to be responsible, confident, successful and God fearing does not depend on luck. It depends on the choices you make as a parent.



CHOICES MATTER, PEOPLE MATTER.

Choice is something unique and justified for an individual as a decision one makes can be a domino effect upon another individual in life that can truly impact them for better or worse depending on the matter ultimately (Robert Frost)



Many people today make choices with little or no regard for the effect they will have on others. The individualism-obsessed culture seen today encourages people to only think of themselves when it comes decisions and not to worry about how it might involve someone else

It is an established fact that our lives are the sum of our choices because each choice we make whether big or small shapes and determines our lives. Every day, our lives are filled with choices and the most obvious result of our choices is the impact it has on us as well as those around us, especially our loved ones. Hence, while good choices can bring joy and blessings into our lives, poor choices on the other hand can haunt us internally. Therefore, we must be careful with the choices we make as they can have a positive or negative effect on the society as well. Life is a series of choices and all choices

lead to one of two things; life or death, blessings or curses as captured in Deut 30:19 which says

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and thy seed may live”.

In line with the foregoing, it is pertinent for us to always reflect on how our choices will affect people around us before making them. Therefore, one pertinent thing to consider when making a choice is how our choices would affect those around us. One vital aspect regarding this is our utterances. As humans, we come in contact with people daily; customers, students, parents, mate's friends and others hence, we ought to be mindful and consider carefully, the choice of our utterances as we relate with others and communicate with people daily. As regards, the story of a young teacher who supposedly murdered his student would be used to underscore the above point;

I was in class that fateful Friday after teaching my students when she raised her hand to ask a question. I permitted her and she asked a rather too simple question that I supposed she should know the answer. I had already covered that topic the previous week. “Will you sit down there! With your ugly face! Olodo! Was the only answer I gave her. The whole class busted into laughter and she looked embarrassed. I went on with my lesson but felt somewhat guilt over what I had said. I finished my class and left. On Sunday, I went to church, the preacher was talking about the tongue and its power. He spoke about how

you could bring down others by what you say. I remembered what happened on Friday and became guilty. I swore that was going to apologise to her on Monday when I got to the class. On Monday afternoon, I went to the class but I didn't see her. I asked after her from her course mates but they didn't seem to know what I was talking about. I then said I was looking for the person I insulted on Friday, "Oh that's Joy sir! She is not in class today they answered. Who is her friend, "Aisha" they chorused. But Aisha was not in the class either, suddenly, a girl with Hijab walked in . That's Aisha sir, my students informed me. Where is your friend? I asked her, "Which one"? she replied without looking at my face. Joy, I said. The reply shocked me! She is in the mortuary sir. Mortuary???? Doing what there? I asked, "She died on Friday sir" Aisha replied. How come???? I later found out that after my class on Friday, she was hit by a fast moving vehicle. She was crossing the road absentmindedly probably because of what I said. "Her burial is on Friday, "Aisha continued. As I stood trying to overcome the shock, Aisha said amidst tears, "You killed my friend sir. She was right! I should be the murderer. Some girls in the class were already crying, I didn't know whether to apologise to Joy or Joy's ghost...

Therefore, we ought to be careful with what we say to others as clearly stipulated in Proverbs 13:3 which says Be careful what you say and protect your life. A careless talker destroys himself.

Throughout scripture, Christians are enjoined to love others. Love does not harm its neighbour. We are not to hurt others physically or emotionally. Words do hurt people so we ought to think before we say whatever we wish to say to others because once they are said, they cannot be forgotten. One's choice to slander, gossip, lie etcetera is evil and Christians' should have nothing to do with these. Therefore, as we all come in contact with humans daily, the most germane question we ought to ask ourselves is: "Are my words bringing life or death to the hearers?" this is a deliberate choice every Christian ought to make because words scar more than we think therefore, as Ephesians 4:27 warns, "Give no opportunity to the devil".

Going further, it should be noted that often times, the biggest mistakes we make in life is forgetting how our actions influence people around us; this ought not to be so. We are expected to think more of others than ourselves, because, we will also be judged by God on how our decisions affected other people. If you are a parent, you should bear in mind that little eyes are always watching you. You have got to be careful about what you say and do because there are people who look up to you for guidance. For instance, as a parent, bragging in front of your kids and others around, about the ways you are deceiving other people is awful. This is why Rick Warren warns that people should evaluate themselves on how their choices will affect other people. (Rick Warren 22 Aug 2015)

Truth be told, a lot of people don't want to be responsible for the choices they make; they often don't want to admit that their decisions have real life consequences especially when it

affects others. However, we have to be cautious following the Nigerian proverb which says that, "A doctor who invokes a storm on his people/community cannot prevent his house from destruction" This brings to our consciousness the truism that, no matter how one tries, the consequences of decisions made cannot be escaped. In Genesis 1:26-28, we are informed of God's instruction to the first man and woman to be responsible for His creation, both the plants and animals but not to eat a particular fruit. God designed them in a way that they would reflect His nature, prosper and also manage the earth and other creatures therein. In a bid to destroy God's plan, the enemy came to Eve in the Garden and tempted her to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, assuring her that she and Adam would not die, but that they would "be as gods". Eve had the choice to refuse but she yielded to the temptation and ate the fruit. When Adam learned of what happened, he also chose to partake as seen in Genesis 3:6

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

The consequence of their disobedience is now known as "The Fall" in Christian parlance. It was a grave consequence that affected the entire world. Thenceforth, physical and spiritual changes occurred in their lives as a result of their transgression. The Lord sent them out of the Garden into the world and cursed them. Firstly, they suffered spiritual death. This meant they and their children could not walk and talk

face to face with God. Also, they became separated from God both physically and spiritually. As a result of their action, Romans 5:12 informs us that sin entered the world through Adam and death through sin, and spread to all men

Other curses include the fact that they and their children would experience sickness, pain and physical death. Their choice to eat the fruit affected them, generations yet unborn and the whole world. Therefore, in Adam's rebellion, he pulled all of us with him. We come into this world in sin due to the actions of Adam which have been imputed to us. But the good news is that through faith in Christ, we are tied to Him in righteousness.

In view of the above, one important point we ought to note is that when Adam and Eve sinned, God did not strike them dead on the spot as His holiness would have required nor did He say "That's okay, don't worry about it" as His love alone may have allowed; rather, God dealt with their sin as a serious matter. He imposed the penalty their sin required; but He interposed His Grace so that the fallen man could be restored to fellowship with Him thus, there was both the curse and the covering for their sin. This shows that although God allows us to suffer consequences for our choices, He provides salvation from the ultimate consequences of the choice made.

Also, after the choice to sin by eating the forbidden fruit, God graciously sought, confronted them and offered the promise of deliverance through the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. It was gracious because they deserved judgment, not the promise of deliverance. But then God deals with the woman and then the man. He does not

curse them directly as He did with the serpent but imposed penalties for their choice of disobedience. Even though God forgives the ultimate penalty of their sin, He still allows some of the consequences to continue. For example, God mercifully tempers the pain of childbirth for the woman with the great joy which children give. This is succinctly captured in John 16:21 which says “whenever a woman is in travail, she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for the joy that a child has been born into the world” Thus, God ordained the pain in childbirth, but graciously allows the woman to enjoy the act that leads to conception. In as much as God cursed the ground, he graciously allows it to yield sufficient produce; also, He cursed work with toil and sweat, yet work also is a blessing in that it forces humans to discipline their unruly fallen nature and yields the sustenance we need.

However, there is the need to understand that the penalties imposed on Adam and Eve did not affect them only but every person in history after them. Paul explains it in Romans 8:20-21 thus, “the whole creation was subjected to the sinful man”. Therefore, all suffering and pain ultimately can be traced back to the first Choice. Having pointed that out, it should also be noted that inadvertently, as we grow older, there are always younger people watching the things we do and listening to the things we say. Without even realizing it, we assume a leadership role simply because of our age and experience of life. The same is true for those who call themselves Christians. Young believers should understand that God is calling us to work with Him in loving people and making the right choices. Therefore, the questions

we constantly need to ask ourselves are; what have I done or said in the last twenty-four hours that would be good for others to imitate? How did I choose my actions today? Did I act impulsively? God has called us to work with Him in the world, to be restorers and caretakers so as to make the world a better place. This calls for individuals to strive in making the right choice deliberately.

In view of all that has been pointed out, it is clear that one cannot make a choice in isolation because every choice made whether behind closed doors or in the open affects other people, not only in this generation, but also in the generations to come. Therefore, it is imperative that we make responsible choices in order to enhance the physical wellbeing of the people around us and further make the world more like God wants it to be. We have immense power to shape our lives and the world around us through our choices and actions. Hence we should not abuse our lives with poor choices because it will return to haunt us in future; together with our loved ones as well. While we may survive some problems, we might not survive the ones that matter the most and this could cost us dearly. So, think before you act and choose wisely because decisions determine destiny. Therefore, while God graciously tempers the severity of the consequences with the glimmers of grace, the consequences and outcomes are real. Walking with God is the best way to ensure that the choices we make result in the best for us and other people around us.

It may be comforting to believe that the effects of our choices are isolated to our lives alone, but it simply is not true. This is because when the roots of a tree begin to decay, it

spreads death even to the branches. The decisions we make have ramifications for others whether or not we like it but while we may not be able to see the impact, we must reject the idea of isolation. Thus, as humans, God has given us choices. We can choose to walk with God, or choose to do our best without Him. However, the sad part of the afore-mentioned is that our best efforts will never ensure that we always make the right choices, because we are imperfect and will fail. Therefore, we need to consistently ask God to help us make choices that demonstrate our love for God Himself, people and God's word. This is because we are closely tied to each other through the choices we make. Though difficult, it is beneficial to consider others and think less of oneself when making choices. Choices matter, people matter but when there is awareness of the influence a choice can have, there will be better outcomes. To this end, our role is to contribute the best we can to the society by deliberately using our talents to make sure we add the greatest value possible to other people's lives. Though, today's culture teaches us that we are isolated individuals and the choices we make are ours so long as it doesn't cause harm to anyone else, this is not the portrait offered in the scripture. Drawing from Biblical references, we must consider the possible effect of the choices we make on our family and others around us.



LOT'S CHOICE (Genesis 13-5-18)

*"We desire to bequeath two things to our children,
the first one is roots and the second one is wings"*

(Sudanese proverb)



Many choices at times don't seem significant but those choices set in motion a series of events which shape our life and the lives of our children and grandchildren. If we all share how we met our spouses, many of the stories would begin with seemingly insignificant decisions to attend some social event. That decision led to a relationship which forever affected our lives. Some other people have made unwise decisions which aren't momentous but led to tragedies. For instance, a teenager who chooses to ride with a friend who has been drinking and loses his life in the process has made a choice. Truth is that small decisions can have momentous consequences; therefore, we need to ask ourselves how we protect ourselves from making wrong choices especially when it comes to our families. Truth is that we must choose in line with God's principles considering the fact that choices often result in eternal significant consequences.

Using Lot as a case study in this chapter, Scriptures make us to understand that there was an increased strife between Abraham and Lot; inadvertently this led to increased responsibility for choices. It should be noted here that Lot wasn't just deciding for himself and his family but for many servants and their families because they were also affected by his decision. After the fight between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's, Abram suggested that they part ways to avoid further trouble and to sustain their family relationship. He gave him (Lot) the liberty to choose despite being the elder. However, Lot surveyed the land and looked towards Sodom (Gen 13:10). That choice was the beginning of Lot's gradual loss because after sometime, God decided to destroy the land of Sodom. Lot is instructed to leave the city without a pin. In the process, he loses his wife and barely escapes death with his two daughters. To make things worse, his daughters make him drunk and commit incest with him. The offspring of those disgraceful nights were the Moabites and Ammonites, two of Israel's permanent enemies. It all began with Lot's choice to live near Sodom. Particularly, Genesis 13:10-13 reads “

And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go towards Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journey east.”

For Lot, choosing the plain of Jordan meant more riches and wealth. Although, his decision was good financially, there was not much wisdom involved because he was moved by what he saw (sight) rather than what God wanted for him. His choice meant that he and his family

would be dealing with people who were not known to be upright and have a good moral conduct. It meant that the people he would have around him were people who were exceedingly wicked and sinful. Though a great land, the people were terrible. His choice therefore reveals that he did not have a lot of foresight concerning the fact that he and his family would be corrupted by Sodom. As one bad decision leads to another, Genesis 13:12 reveals the worst choice. Though, he knew the people of Sodom were wicked and evil, he chose to live near them rather than separate himself from them.

Again, it can be adequately pointed out that Lot's decision was made on the basis of cool calculation. With the eye of someone who assesses, he looked over the land, probably, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of options. In fact, I can appreciate what he thought of as he surveyed the land... "my children would have good jobs in this city, they would go to the best schools and be sought for after graduation". He made a selfish choice – one that took all the best and left Abram with nothing much. He did a masterful job of looking out for the best what I call "number one". He had considered very carefully the economic factors of his decision but totally neglected the spiritual dimension. Probably, he would be thinking that he had actually played a fast one on Abraham. However, he was unaware of the fact that the spiritual cost of his decision was great.

Afterwards, we see that Lot chose to take his family to a place that was rich and green, he chose the seductive region because he probably figured out that he could protect his family from such evil influences and for this reason, he pitched his tent as far as Sodom. He did not actually move

into Sodom initially but at the long run, he lived in the city (Gen 19:1). To further buttress on the above, scripture tells us that Lot saw that the land was good, at that time, he did not involve his family in the choice he was about to take. All that controlled his thought was the amount he would make and how he would prosper and increase materially. He failed to take his family into account. This sheds light on why some decisions we make as parents may not seem very particular but they set a particular course for our lives and those of our kids; it may not seem important at first but the final outcome may be tragic. Just like Lot, some parents make the choice of choosing to live in a location where so many sinful activities take place thinking that they can shield their kids from being influenced. They focus on the fact that the place is the fastest growing city where opportunities abound, promising wealth and luxury forgetting the dangers and temptations that abound.

Of a truth, the location we choose to reside after marriage has a great influence on the outcome of our kids. I have seen friends moving from a particular location because they feel that it would not be a good location for their kids to grow. This choice is made with a view to protect the family and separate themselves from every sort of influence. Truth be told, it is difficult to raise godly children in a place where ungodliness thrives. Bringing up children in such a location requires that parents take extra time and effort to monitor their kids ; (what they watch, the music they listen to, who they interact with) to counter ungodly influences with daily devotions and regular church attendance. But can that be maintained? Therefore, just like Lot, most parents are in danger of losing their children because “they have set up their

tent in the suburbs of Sodom". If we do not separate ourselves from Sodom, Sodom will separate our children from us and from God.

Furthermore, many Christian families make a decision to move because the husband is offered a better paying job. But they never consider how their movement will affect them and their family spiritually. Many Christians like Lot decide where they are going to live based on finances not on spiritual reasons. Verse 11 states the problem "Lot chose for himself". Thereafter, he and his family paid an awful price. Lot chose poorly by putting wealth ahead of wisdom. Therefore, we are enjoined to choose family over finances, generosity over greed and wisdom over wealth. Choose in these ways and God will choose you. Even if the world is headed in the opposite direction, you will be on the road less travelled. In the long run, after the destruction of the city by God, we are told that Lot's wife died, and his two daughters made terrible choices after which they fled the destruction of the city. Simply put, he paid for the choice he made in his family. His wife turned to a pillar of salt because of her attachment to Sodom (19:26) while his surviving daughters got him drunk and seduced him to commit incest; no doubt, a reflection of the moral values they had learned in Sodom. (Gen 19:30-38)

The material benefits all became losses because of greed. This explains why the Swiss proverb states, "A greedy person and a pauper are practically one and the same", connoting the fact that material prosperity should never be sought at the expense of spiritual exposure. He paid a terrible price for his short-lived possession. (Genesis 13:1-11). The above explication succinctly tells us that to better our choices; we have to broaden our awareness on the impact of our

choices. We have to consider the possible consequences that our choices and actions can cause. Two pertinent questions that we have to ask ourselves before making any important decision are; if I make this choice or continue along this path, how are events likely to develop? Secondly, what kind of impact will my choice have on me, my loved ones, the world, now and in the future? These answers should guide us on how we make our decisions.

By and large, it should be noted that the choices and decisions reached by Lot are similar with those that confront every Christian. We must endeavour to put our total trust in God and not on our own schemes. We must determine whether to trust in the 'uncertainty of riches' or in the God 'who richly supplies us' (I Timothy 6:17). Lot chose to direct his life on the uncertain foundation of financial security and lost it all. He made a major life decision based on the unchallenged assumption that pursuing prosperity should be the main goal in life. However, his wealth was short lived. The Croatian proverb which says, "If you ask for too much at once, you will come home with an empty bag" clearly underscores this fact. In all, we should always remind ourselves that every choice made has a consequence



JOSHUA'S CHOICE

*Choose this day whom you will serve,
whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the
River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.
But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" ("Joshua 24:15)*



Joshua was born in Egypt prior to the great Exodus. He later became one of the twelve spies of Israel sent by Moses on a recon mission to the land of Canaan, which was the promise land. After the death of Moses, Joshua successfully led the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land. At the time of the proclamation as stated above, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to challenge the people with the utmost freedom to decide once and for all who they would serve. He gives the choice of their old ways of worship and their idols or the chance to serve the One True God who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

The Israelites were a stubborn generation that had grown up wandering in the desert for forty years. It was a punishment from God because of how they turned their backs on Him in the desert after being rescued from 400 years of slavery. In fact, the book of Deuteronomy is Moses 'retelling of Israel's history and a summary of the Law for a

new generation of Israelites, most of who had not been present in the Exodus from Egypt. Later, when Joshua became the leader, he called on Israel to follow the Lord. He says that they can choose between life (prosperity) and death (destruction) with his proclamation in Joshua 24:15 which says

...And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

From the verses, we can see that firstly, he challenges the people to, “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve”. Joshua commands them to choose “WHOM” you will serve, not “IF” you will serve. We all serve someone—either the enemy (intentionally or not) or the Lord. In fact, left to our own vices, we will serve idols: money, children, career etc. Joshua used his wisdom and love for God to set the example when he declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” Joshua was determined to serve God no matter what anyone else thought.

This speech from Joshua calls on parents to be witnesses just as he calls the Israelites: it doesn't end in speaking these words so we “look” like Christians, but imbibing and proclaiming them boldly, that from this day forth, our houses, families and we, will serve the one true Lord. As such, we should not only present ourselves and our families as surface Christians; (walking, talking and interacting as Christians) rather, we must deep down, live for and teach our children the ways of the Lord.

Truthfully, this statement adorns Christian homes in many aspects because it is a statement of faith, an affirmation of a family's commitment and covenant to serve the Lord. When parents or couples hang the verse on the wall in their home; they are proclaiming very much what Joshua was proclaiming. Parents have a responsibility to make sure what goes on in their home honours God. Just like the people of Israel re-dedicated their lives to God, this also prompts followers of Christ, to do same today. It is a reminder for Christian parents to check their heart and the activities that go on in their homes; for instance, the example they set for their family, and what their families are watching and listening to. It is a chance to check behaviours, actions, and attitudes to ensure all of what we say, think and do, align with Jesus. So we learn from this revolutionary moment that Joshua brought awareness to the Israelites, reminding them that all their provisions and survival in the wilderness over the past several years was from a loving God. Likewise, it is also the same reminder for us today as well as a bold proclamation which many Christ followers seek to apply in their daily lives today just as it was, yesterday. Truthfully speaking, few choices last a lifetime while most require daily deliberate reminders, and Joshua knew this well.

Regrettably, I have come to notice that most modern day wall plaques that quote this verse replace half of it with an ellipsis. This is because many Christian gift shops assume that the parts about "gods which your fathers served...or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living" have no bearing on twenty-first century Christian families and believers. How wrong! By principle, Joshua's words admonish Christian families, on importance of making good

choices. Though, we can choose to live the way our parents and grandparents did- following their poor priorities and choices. We can also choose to chase idols; but the best choice is demonstrated by Joshua when he says, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord".

Despite stating the above, it should be known that for those who grew up in Christian homes, making good decisions still remain a personal choice. Hence, every individual needs to come to the place where Jesus is his or her God, not just the God of his/her parents. This is where parents need to work in building their children's faith. What's more, although the decision to believe in Jesus occurs one time, the decision to obey Him occurs today and every day. As clearly stipulated above, Joshua used both history and geography to reignite a dedication to the Lord, we can do same. This is where setting reminders come in. The question then is, "what physical reminders can we keep in our lives to act as memory triggers of God's faithfulness to us?" Some ideas include; a photo album, a place we pass on the highway or a plaque on the wall, setting reminders on our phones etcetera. Simple reminders can prompt us to renew our personal decision to serve the Lord each day. Thus, in making good decisions, we need daily reminders in order to renew our minds, draw us close to God and pull us away from the carnal tugs of our culture. For this reason, Wayne Stiles writes, "Making good decisions begins by choosing to serve God today; every other choice starts there". This suggests that our dedication to serve the Lord, in sincerity and truth must occur today and every day.

However, it should still be noted that today, most Christian families face the same dilemma Jesus talked about

in Mathew 6:34. *"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other. You will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (NLT).* May be, money is not a problem for you. Perhaps something else is undermining your service to God. Like Joshua, have you made a clear choice for yourself and your family to serve the Lord alone? Joshua, made the choice to serve the Lord only, he made a once and for all choice, and still continued to do so daily, choosing God over and over again throughout his life. His choice was personal, passionate and permanent, putting his decision to action. Will you say like he did, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord?"

As in the days of Joshua, so it is with us today. As parents, one of the choices we must make is whether or not we will prepare our kids to serve the Lord. This is because we have the responsibility to prepare our kids to be worthy and have a desire to serve the Lord. We are stewards of our kids while they are our apprentices. The Lord has entrusted them to us, and we will be held accountable for them. One of the blessings of that stewardship will be preparing our kids to serve the Lord. Therefore, parents, have great powers in the lives of their children because when they are taught that there is a just God who wants every able and worthy young man to serve him, you have planted a seed in their lives; all you need to do is, nurture and watch them grow. Our prayer is that God will bless us with the commitment to prepare our young children to serve the Lord so they will become a light on the hill that shines brightly.

Even though we do not have a manual to take care of the kids, God Has given to us the Bible which functions as a guide for every area of life including parenting. It might not

teach us how to change a diaper, but it does give us insight about how we should raise our children. Thus, if you find yourself, struggling with a tough parenting situation, just turn to the Bible as God guides you towards what you need. Of a truth, a lifetime devoted to Christ begins with a childhood filled with Biblical teachings. Proverbs 22:6 states "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it". Though, the thought of our children growing up and making their own decisions might be terrifying especially when we think they may make the wrong choice; the truth is we cannot control what happens to our kids but we can choose to give them a firm foundation to build their life.

Therefore, as parents, being diligent in teaching our kids about God should be a deliberate choice, which does not happen only in Sunday school but every single day as we walk through life together. This must also go with discipline as seen in Hebrews 12:11 which states, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it". There is a trend right now where parents want to be their child's friend. In doing so, they forgo discipline so that their kids may like them. This is not a good idea at all. Your kids will love you no matter what. However, it is equally important to note that being friends with your child is not a totally bad thing if proper discipline is maintained. Discipline isn't fun for anyone, but it is necessary while training up our kids in God's own way. No child is created without God's hand upon him/her.

Therefore, as parents we should discipline our kids lovingly because parents who overlook or neglect discipline

JOSHUA'S CHOICE

can cause damage to the child's character. Finally, in leading our children to Christ, we need to be specific and stern in communicating certain facts from the Scriptures depending on the age of the child.



RUTH'S CHOICE

"We must keep in mind that we have limited time, and it is not wise to waste our time making the wrong choices" (Abhishek Ratna)



The story of Ruth begins with a tragedy and loss. There was a great famine in Israel during the time when judges ruled. As a result, many people relocated to foreign lands in search of food for their families. A man named Elimelek took his wife, Naomi and his two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, went to Moab to find food and ended up staying there. In the course of events, Elimelek died and Naomi continued to live with her two sons who married Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth. However, both sons also passed on leaving Naomi with her two daughters-in-law. When Naomi heard that the Lord helped the people of Israel and food had been provided back home, she decided to go back to Bethlehem in Judah; to this effect, she advised Orpah and Ruth to return, to their fathers' houses and find new husbands. While Orpah returned to her mother's home, Ruth clung to Naomi. Upon returning to Bethlehem, Ruth decided to go into the fields during the barley harvest to pick

up left over grains in the field of a man named Boaz who was a relative of her father-in-law. The Bible accounts that he later ends up marrying her.

From the account, three basic ideas shall be drawn and critically explained. Particularly, it is clear that the story begins with the family of Ephrathites from Bethlehem, from the tribe of Judah. Ironically, Bethlehem is translated as “the house of bread” and was known for its fertile ground. Yet, even in this fruitful district of the country of Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. Firstly, the names of these Bible characters should be examined. The Patriarch and Matriarch are known as Elimelech and Naomi. The name Elimelech means, “God my King” and his wife, Naomi means “delight, sweetness”. However, the names of their two sons were Mahlon, which means “sick” and Kilon, which is translated as “pining away”. In view of the above, the first thing to note as parents is that naming our kids remains one decision that should not be taken trivially because to a remarkable degree, names matter. The names parents choose to give their kids have a profound impact on them and reverberate well into adulthood.

People's names sometimes influence the way they think about themselves. It also influences the way others may think about them. Since names are wrapped up in our identity, the names parents choose to give their children communicate a wealth of social information. In fact, the idea that our names are intertwined with our destinies goes as far back as the book of Genesis in the Bible, where Abram's name was changed by God to Abraham which means, “Father of multitudes”. Thus, considering that names have influence on the bearer, parents should note that the act of naming their

children continues throughout their upbringing. Hence, a deliberate choice in bringing up the children in the way of the lord becomes imperative.

Secondly, Naomi's choice and character is one worthy of emulation. She was an Israelite woman whose family moved to Maob from Bethlehem during a famine. When her husband and children died, she became a foreigner without a family in the land and knew she could not remain there. So, she urged Ruth and Oprah to return to their families knowing that they could re-marry and have a chance of a happy life in Moab but Ruth resisted. Thus, despite her sad broken heartedness, she taught Ruth how she could provide for them. She wisely instructed Ruth to clean herself up, dress nicely and present herself to Boaz. Though, she had fully experienced the pain of loss, yet, she chose to hold unto her faith, acknowledging God's sovereignty and willingly submitting to His will. For this reason, her trust in His provision bore fruit, and both Naomi and Ruth were well provided for. Truthfully, Naomi and Ruth are a wonderful testament to the beauty of a healthy mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Unlike so many families today, both women acted out of love rather than jealousy. They demonstrated that love goes deeper than blood or nationality. Again, Naomi and Ruth's love for one another was inspiring. Yet, it was only a shadow of the love that was to come from Jesus. From the above, it can be deduced that Naomi as a widow, continuously sought to strengthen her relationship with God which further influenced and encouraged Ruth. This shows that the younger women need older women who are strong to guide them as they will be held accountable. This can be found on Titus 2:3 which says

“...The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things”

Going further, it should be noted that after the death of her husband, she reversed the direction she and her husband had taken. She turned away from Moab and headed back to Judah her homeland. There, we see Naomi coaching her daughter-in-law on how to behave when she sees Boaz at night on the threshing floor. (Ruth 3:2-4) She does so because she desires Ruth's happiness, as she explains from the outset: “Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy” (Ruth 3:1). Even though her daughters-in-law were willing to go with her, Naomi told them three times to go home to their own families and their gods. She knew she would not marry again, wouldn't have any more sons, and so, they had no future prospects of marriage if they followed her but Ruth lingered. Though, she couldn't control her life because she had suffered a loss, she was able to control her choices. She made redemptive choices in the midst of her loss. She made a choice to identify with God's people and trust in the God of Israel. From Naomi's choice, we see dedication, patience and love. The hand of God worked through her to effectively lead Ruth to Boaz despite her pain.

Naomi pressed through her pain and allowed God to use her resulting in substantive life changes for herself. This shows that her influence as the mother of Ruth's late husband led Ruth to follow her. Although, the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is scarcely discussed, In fact, Ruth's dedication to Naomi leads us to believe that this woman of God lived a life filled with love and compassions. Naomi lived a life full of ups and downs, similar to many people

today. However, her choice and desire to serve God and her family, led a young lady to marry and successfully begin the lineage of King David. Her strength and leadership in guiding Ruth is second to none. As a result of her choice, God helped her achieve importance as a mother-in-law. As against the character of some mother-in-laws in contemporary times, far too many women describe this relationship as fragile, tense and even competitive; some mother-in-laws have made it a habit to always criticize or even put high expectations on their daughter-in-laws. Naomi is seen as an independent, caring and gracious mother-in-law. Thus, the big question to ask is; as a mother-in-law, how is your relationship with your daughter in law? From the scripture above, it can be inferred that Naomi and Ruth deliberately choose to be friends, and indeed sisters, each seeking the good of another.

Focusing on the character of Ruth, it is clearly seen that Ruth made a choice to leave her family, and false religion for the true God and his family. A family that provided both temporal and eternal blessings (Mark 10-29-30). On the other hand, it can be argued that Ruth had a limited knowledge of God. Hence, she followed what she did know and refused to turn back to her pagan heritage of idolatry. Ruth followed Naomi and accepted her counsel. The result was that she became the mother of Jesse, the father of King David ancestor of Jesus. She is an example of faithfulness and commitment. Her loyalty to Naomi and her willingness to cast aside all her bonds to the previous religion is worth pondering upon. As seen from the explication above, it is clear that every good relationship between a mother and daughter-in-law starts with a choice. Although, I have a belief that the primary rule for a mother-in-law who wants to get along with her

daughter-in-law is to make a deliberate choice to avoid criticism, being possessive and pushy. However, choosing to have a relationship with God is the ultimate as seen in the person of Naomi. Thus, as a mother-in-law, can your daughter-in-law say positive things about you and vice-versa? How often do you pray for each other? How well do you advise and encourage your daughter-in-law? This is a choice that has to be deliberately made just like Naomi did. She cultivated a good and inspiring relationship with Ruth.

Naomi's life illustrates the power of God to bring something good out of a bitter circumstance. This is a resounding message that our disposition in times of bitterness determines what God would do in our lives and family. In view of this, we should never forget that as parents, our children will, for the most part, follow our examples, whether it is good or bad. Naomi's love for the Lord ran deep –so much so that it had a lasting influence on the life of her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Now, Ruth could have chosen to return to her own homeland and married again from among her own people. However, her deep love for Naomi compelled her to stay with her and care for her all the remaining days of her life. Perhaps, it can be deduced that in the brief time she had been associated with Naomi and her family, Ruth apparently came to see that Jehovah was the only true and living God.

The noble choice of Ruth to go wherever Naomi goes, to live wherever Naomi lives, to make Naomi's people her people, to make the God of Naomi her God, to die, to be buried where Naomi is buried and to let nothing but death come between them earned her a blissful life. It took the grace of God to befriend a bitter woman as Naomi, despite that; she

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was bound to her mother-in-law by cords of love. Amid a dark cloud of distress, Ruth maintained a poise and serenity which even her mother-in-law might have coveted. In the long run, Ruth gave birth to Obed, Obed to Jesse and Jesse to David. She became the chosen line through which later, the saviour of the world appeared. The true choice of God involves sacrifice; she committed herself to lowliness, homeliness, homelessness, perpetual widowhood, ready to work, to beg and to die, if need be. As a result of this noble choice, she became the great grandmother of a king of Israel, David and in the course of time, became an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Going further, it should be noted that Ruth's choice to leave her own family in Moab to stay with Naomi and serve the Lord is what Jesus requires of those who would be His disciples'. This is carefully captured in Mark 10:29-31 which states "so Jesus answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left houses or brothers for My sake and the gospel's who shall not receive a hundred fold now in this time-houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions-and in age to come, eternal life". This certainly proved true in the case of Ruth-as she received a hundred fold in her time, and in the age to come, eternal life.

Choosing to go with her mother-in-law to Bethlehem changed the course of her life. Suffice to state that Ruth had previously lived a crushed life. Firstly, she had known poverty and deprivation coupled with the fact that she lost her husband and father-in-law. As a result, she had a sentence of death upon her life. Like Ruth, we have a sentence of death upon us because of Adam. We all died through Adam's sin but the good news we have is recorded in 2 Corinthians' 5:17

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“If any man be in Christ, he's a new creature, all things are passed away but all things have become new”. When Ruth chose to stay with Naomi and serve the living God, all things became new. Thenceforth, there was new determination, new direction, new dependence, new desire, new devotion, new dedication and most of all, there was a new destiny. This shows that when we choose Christ, we too have a new destiny. This is aptly quoted in Romans 8: 38-39 “ I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love-not death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord” Ruth's decision to follow Naomi changed her life and God made all things new for her, likewise, when we choose to follow Jesus Christ, He makes all things new for us.

It should also be noted that Ruth and Naomi faced the same suffering we see in the world today. The story of Ruth reveals that our situations are nothing new. This explains why in John 16:33, Jesus tells His disciples “in this world, you will have trouble” hence, trials, hunger, violence and death will come because no one is immune to it. This is because we live in a world where we face consequences of good choices and bad choices. We face the consequences of our choices and choices of others. However, Ruth's faith is obvious, she leaves her homeland and declares that Naomi's people will be her people and Naomi's God her God. Note that her choice was made because of what she saw in Naomi. This is how she saw the life of faith in the God of the Jews. Like Naomi, can people make godly choices because of what they see in us? Therefore, aside the certainty that Ruth was influenced by Naomi's godly lifestyle, it is clear that Ruth had been so taken in by the

love of God's people that she pledged never to abandon them. This actually got me wondering... as parents, can we love God to the point where our children could not imagine life without Him? Practically speaking, much of life is about choices- we make them all day long-some so incidental we don't even notice. Ruth's choice to return with Naomi had consequences that reached far beyond her imagination.

Even more, her virtues; loyalty, strength, courage, and faithfulness worked well for her. As parents, our kids ought to see godly qualities in us thus; choosing to raise godly children remains the burden and responsibility of all parents. We cannot run away from the fact that we live in a crazy and mixed up world that is often anything, but not godly. At such a time like this, parents need to choose to follow the word of God. This is succinctly pointed out in Ephesians 6:4, Proverbs 22:6) which states, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord". This commitment reflects the desire of our heavenly father who seeks godly offspring" from the covenantal marriage of a man and a woman. (Malachi 2:15) and hopes that those children will pass along the faith of the generation after them (Deuteronomy 6:2, 7, 2 Timothy 2:2). The above suggests that a wise parent chooses to protect his children from sinful influences such as evil company (1 Corinthians 15:33) and worldly wisdom (James 3:14-16), helping them to pursue righteousness and practice self control as they recognise the judgment to come (Acts 24:25). It is not enough to isolate our children from evil- but we must choose to help them discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14) and encourage them to love and pursue the good (Psalm 34:14).

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Most importantly, as we help them, we should remember that “more is caught than taught” what our children see in us in terms of our attitudes, words, behaviours and choices can significantly influence them towards godliness or ungodliness just as Ruth saw in Naomi godly qualities. This is why the African proverb says, “An immoral father cannot advise his children well”. For instance, Paul fully recognised that his life provided a model for Timothy and others to follow, for this reason he carefully lived his life in Christ, knowing that others were observing him. Furthermore, Ruth lived with the belief that God's hand was behind everything. As parents, do we display this level of faith for our children to see? If children do not come to faith in Christ in their teens, the likelihood begins to quickly decrease that they will do so but, it is still not impossible that they will, eventually. This is why as parents; we need to make a deliberate choice of making sure that our children fully understand God's word. Hence, the need to ask God to help us discern the authenticity of their decision. This is because most children respond to the Gospel outwardly because of pressures from a Sunday school teacher or parent when in their hearts; they remain reluctant to submit to Christ. For this reason, Orlando Battista states that “the best inheritance a parent can give his children is a few minutes of their time each day to study God's word'. Therefore, believing that God's word is the source of guidance we need in life compels us to depend on it for direction on how to parent. On the other hand, parents should never forget that they cannot force children to have faith. You plant and water, but only Jehovah can make it grow. (1 Corinthians 3:6). So work hard to teach your precious children about Him and pray for his Spirit to

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help them have faith. You can be sure that God will bless your hard work. (Eph 6:4)

By and large, the character of Ruth illustrates how God rewards those who make spiritual choices and show steadfast loyalty to their family. As a result of her choice, she stands in the line of those through whom God chose to send his Son into the world to bring us salvation- our redeemer. Jesus with his own blood, out of great love for us, purchased our salvation. It also shows that God sends help when someone makes a right choice. Right decision has its great rewards, what Ruth feared proved only unsuspected blessings. Thus, whoever forsakes the Moab of this world for the true Israel, will at length, rejoice in the choice. By birth, Ruth was a descendant of the Moabites, those who troubled the Israelites but the choice of following Naomi, which sprang up from her compassion for the old woman coupled with the godly qualities she saw, led her to be in the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ.



DAVID'S CHOICE

The pressures of being a parent are equal to any pressure on earth. (John Lennon)



From the preceding chapters, we have learnt that as humans, we have the freewill and the power to choose as given to us by God. Hence, depending on the choice, (right or wrong), we might not be free to decide all that will result from it. The Bible characters that we have seen from the preceding chapters explain the above term better. For whatever choice they made, it was not within their power to determine the consequences. Going further, we will take a critical look at the Life of King David. David was a King of Israel who suffered pain and loss because of his own actions. He was the son of Jesse, a man who raised sheep near the small town of Bethlehem and the youngest of Jesse's sons. He showed his worthiness by bravely slaying the Philistine giant, Goliath when the army of Israel was afraid. He had a deep faith in God that allowed him to fearlessly face a giant in his shepherd clothing.

David's life and his rule had many ups and downs but

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for the most part, David was faithful to God in his life and actions. The most famous exception to that was his private romantic affair with Bathsheba. David, rather than going to war and being with his army choose to stay at home and in the process, saw his neighbour's wife naked. The result of his actions is that Bathsheba became pregnant. David became nervous that his sin of adultery would be found out. To this end, he called for Uriah to come home so that he could spend a night with his wife, Bathsheba, and cover up his sin because she was pregnant with his child. However, Uriah refused to sleep with his wife while his fellow men were off fighting. When it didn't work, David give instructions to place Uriah on the front lines and then have the army pull back and cause him to be killed. This gives him the leverage to take Bathsheba as his wife to make the baby legal. Not only was he guilty of adultery, he was also guilty of murder. In fact, he violated four out of the Ten Commandments written by God. Namely murder, adultery, covetousness and stealing (he never paid her bride price)

He was not repentant until Prophet Nathan trapped him with a parable, which resulted in his writing of Psalm 51. David repented of his sin and God forgave him but David suffered the consequences for the rest of his life. The consequences as recorded in 2 Samuel 12:10-12 states that firstly, the sword shall never depart from his house, God will raise up evil against him out of his house and the fact that God will take his wives and give them to his neighbours to sleep with them openly. As a way of confirmation, the child of David and Bathsheba's wrongful union dies. Secondly, Ammon one of David's sons lusts after and rapes his half sister Tamar. This happened because he chose to listen to the

evil counsel of his friend, Jonadab. David was infuriated, but he did nothing about it perhaps because of his past record of adultery. This angered Absalom who was the full brother of Tamar and he killed Ammon. This further leads to Absalom's rebellion against David, causing David to flee for his life. The outcome of that rebellion was Absalom's death. His mourning for the death of Absalom almost caused the soldiers to turn against him.

David is described as a “man after God's own heart”. He was a man who did most things right but he also made some bad choices. He repented of his sins and God forgave him but he did not take away the consequences. David experienced pain and suffering in his family and in his kingdom because of his own actions but in all, he was steadfast, repentant and looked to God. This vividly shows that the choices we make have consequences and sometimes, these consequences are seriously painful. (I Samuel 16: 1-11, 2 Samuel 24:25). He suffered the consequences of his choice after his rendezvous with Bathsheba. Looking critically at the above explication, it should be known that in the context of Nathan's parable about the rich man, (David), the poor man, (Uriah) and the ewe lamb, (Bathsheba), it could be inferred from Exodus (22:1) that God's law demanded four-fold restitution. The penalty for stealing and slaughtering an Ox or a sheep was not death but restitution. However, in Nathans' parable, the wrongful taking and using of the “lamb” (Bathsheba) pointed to David's adultery and subsequent murder of Uriah. Under the Mosaic law, both sins adultery (Leviticus 20:10) and murder, (Leviticus 24:17) were punishable by death. So when David pronounced his judgment on the rich man of Nathan's parable, David was

condemning himself to death.

It is very possible that the four fold restitution God required may be related to the tragic events of David's final years. The four fold restitution could be the death of the child-Bethsheba and David's child, the sword, God raising evil against David and God taking his wives and given them to neighbours. This was brought to fore in the death of four of David's sons which include Bathsheba's first son, (2 Samuel 12:18), Amnon, (2 Samuel 13:28-9), Absalom (2 Samuel 16:14-15) and Adonijah, (I Kings 2:25). It further foreshadowed the four disasters that happened marking the final days of David's reign. Firstly, Amnon rapes his sister, Tamar (David also took Uriah's wife) and his death in the hands of Absalom, Absalom's (2 Samuel 13:23-33) rebellion and death in the hands of Joab (2 Samuel 18:9-19), Sheba the Bichrites rebellion (2 Samuel 20:1-22) and the plague following David's numbering of the people (2 Samuel 24:1-25) and lastly, the plot of Adonijah to grasp the throne, endangering Solomon and Bathsheba's lives (I Kings 11:53). Thus, when Prophet Nathan pronounced that "The sword will not depart from your household" (2 Samuel 12:10), it included all the violent death that happened in the family of David as stated above. In fact, the New Living Translation captures it thus, "From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own"

In view of the above, one pertinent thing to note is that David's years of suffering began with his fall into sin with Bathsheba. In fact everything in his life from 2 Samuel 11 (Bathsheba) to 1 Kings 2 (David's death) was touched, affected and coloured by that event. In essence, the choice of David to commit adultery resulted in a life time of heartache

for him and his family. Another wrong choice David made was his marriage to eight wives. The most authoritative source for David's wives is 1 Chronicles 3, which lists David's descendants for 30 generations. They include; Ahinoam, Abigail, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah; later Michal and Bathsheba. It is true as many will hasten to point out, that polygamy was common among the ancient patriarchs. Yes, it was. But the scriptures consistently show that polygamy always results in fighting, rivalries and often-murderous intrigues. In fact, Deuteronomy 17:17a clearly states that "The king must not take many wives for himself because they will turn his heart away from the Lord". This is because the presence of many wives may stop the king from attending to the duty of his office, the care of his people and most importantly turning his heart away from worshipping the true God.

In Genesis 2:24, God said "a man (singular) shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two of them shall become one" As a Christian parent, it should be noted that diversions from this God-given model bring only sadness and even death as the case may be. David's many marriages and sons by different mothers are no exception because this flawed family structure affected not only to David's family, but to all Israel. Thus, apart from the fact that our choices as parent affect our immediate family, it can also affect those around us as well as the society. As a result of that choice, one of the tragedy that struck in his family is brought to fore when his eldest son and likely heir, Ammon grew desirous of, and eventually raped his half sister Tamar daughter of Maacah. This shows that "blended families" have a higher degree of sexual abuse for the rather obvious

reason that step-relations include less sexual reserve than full-blooded ones.

After the rape, the scripture records in 2 Samuel 13:21 thus; "And when David heard of these things, he was exceedingly grieved: but he would not afflict the spirit of his son, Amnon for he loved him because he was first born" Suffice to state that this is a mistaken understanding of love. For the love of a father for his son must include discipline and insistence on what is right. This remains one aspect where Christian parents are often found wanting; moreover, it is a very wrong choice to take considering the gruesome consequences it might bring afterwards. David remained quiet when he should have spoken and acted. Due to David's inaction, Absalom, Tamars', brother grew furious, plotted and eventually killed Amnon and fled to the land of Geshur. David now lost two sons and had a daughter who had been raped. Though eventually pardoned by his father, King David, he raised an effective rebellion against him. In the war that ensued, Absalom and his rebellion were put down, and Absalom killed.

Still on the consequences of his choices, the eldest and likely successor and son of David, Adonijah, was ousted from succession by David's wife Bathsheba who, working with Nathan, promoted her son, Solomon, while David lay feeble and largely forgetful. Claiming that she had earlier secured a private vow from David regarding Solomon's succession, she set loose a power struggle between Adonijah and Solomon. Eventually, Solomon prevailed over Adonijah, and after David's death, Solomon had his step-brother, Adonijah killed because he rebelled against his father, proclaiming himself king even before his father's death; and on trying the same

scheme with him, (Solomon), he got him killed. Solomon though a great king in his own right inherited some of his father's foibles. He ended up with one thousand wives and as Scriptures say of him:

King Solomon, however loved many foreign women...as Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done (1 Kings 11:4-6).

Shortly after his death, Israel broke apart into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Despite the fact that King David was gifted, he brought pain and sorrow to his family and to Israel, by extension.

Therefore, we have to be careful with the choices we make even in our neighborhood. The wrong choice made by David brought a sword upon his family. It happened as a result of one wrong choice, not to go to war. It was so bad that at a point he had to run out of his house and fled to Jerusalem because his son Absalom was plotting against him. It is not about the fact that you are a child of God so, it cannot happen to you. It happened to David but the positive effect of this is the fact that he admitted his guilt and as a result, God forgave him but the sword never departed from his family despite the fact that David's life had been one where God was always with him. However, the good news of the Bible is that, in Christ, we are delivered from the slavery of sin and from

eternal condemnation. (Romans 5:9-11; 6:15-20). As Christians, the scripture states that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us (1 John 1:9). However, inoculating us against all the ugliness that may result from our sinful actions might not be possible. For example, God will forgive the sin of gossip but He does not suddenly erase the bitterness and mistrust it has sown in the hearts of others. But the best news of all is that, by the grace of God, David faced every one of these consequences with the promises of God. His responses as recorded in the psalms comprise some of the most hope-filled pages of the Bible.

Therefore, David to us personifies the goodness and justice of the Lord. This shows that while God's Grace is free, the cost of sin is high- as John Mac Arthur writes:

Every sin I as a Christian commit is forgiven in Jesus Christ. But no sin is ever right or good, and no sin ever produces anything right or good. The price for doing some things is terribly unprofitable. Sin never brings profit, it always brings loss. David was a man after God's own heart and was greatly used of the Lord in leading Israel and even in writing scripture. But David was not exempted from the consequences of his sin. Through prophet Nathan, God told David that because of his sin, "the sword shall never depart from your household" and "the child also that is born to you shall surely die". David paid for those sins almost every day of his life. Several of his sons were rebellious, jealous and vengeful, and his family life was for the most part a tragic shambles.

In spite of God's love for him, He (David) still faced the consequences of his sins in a godly way. Thus, part of genuine

repentance is the grace to go forward, no matter what life may bring. His choice of responding in a godly way, even to the consequences of his sin, is what sets David apart as such an example for us today. Particularly, the central truth for whatever choice we make is found in (Gal 6:7-9). In the scripture, we find a statement from the Eternal God our savior, who speaks His word and declares to us an unchangeable truth we all need to heed.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows of the Spirit reaps everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season, we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

God always rewards every good choice and eventually punishes all evil. No details no matter how minute, escapes His attention. Many lost people and immature believers speculate that God, because He is good, grants some type of general amnesty to people, adding up good deeds, subtracting the bad and throwing in some extra mercy here and there. Remember that God's consequence engine is regulated by the law of sowing and reaping. He has never revoked, altered or amended this great Truth. The consequence engine connected with sowing and reaping is hundred percent (100%) reliable century after century in every generation...whatever a man sows , that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7) remember...he who sows to his flesh will reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit reap everlasting life (Galatians 6:8). Nothing could be further from Christ's word in the Bible.

Every human choice and every action has consequences, whether good or ill. We are all affected by the choices others make as well! This reality of consequences and God's laws that govern the physical and spiritual universe is what Mac Arthur calls, "The Consequence Engine" Through the pages of God's word, we can see God's Law in David's choices and as we see this inspired record of God's dealings with him, we can better choose our course-knowing that God and His Laws are unchanging. Though, I have come to notice that oftentimes, God's judgments are usually long delayed which makes many think that the Lord never judges at all. The truth remains that the record books of life are being kept up daily by recording angels who miss no details. Judgment is totally fair and just- even for the lost. Punishment is appropriately proportional following the great principle outlined in Romans 2: "God weighs the motives of the heart as well as behaviour, and He takes into account the individuals actual knowledge of God.

As parents also, consequences abound in our lives when we make decisions for our family based on flesh, our natural energy and strength. A number of New Testament passages like Galatians 5:19-21 highlight this:

Now the works of the flesh are evident which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

When we fail to see the negative consequences of bad choices right away, we are often persuaded to make bigger and more foolish mistakes. And if God's judgments are long delayed, many will begin to think that the Lord never judges at all. From the exposition above, the first thing we should note as parents is that, allowing our family to decay and drift away from God's intended structure and form brings great harm. David's polygamy, his unlawful and sinful acquisition of Bathsheba, his playing of favourites, and his refusal to correct and punish Amnon for the rape of Tamar, all contributed to serious and deadly consequences which expanded far beyond David's own family, and rippled through all Israel leading ultimately to its disintegration.

Again, some may argue that norms for marriage and family were less clear at this early stage. However, Genesis one and two clearly set the norms of Marriage as God intends: one man for one woman in a stable fruit-bearing relationship till death; put in another way, one man clinging to one woman, being fruitful and multiplying through their children. This is God's plan as set forth in Genesis two. Also, it should be stated that family struggles and modern departure from biblical norms regarding the family also have grave effects that extend beyond merely our own families. As divorce, re-marriage, single parenthood, homosexual unions and polygamy proliferate in our culture; increasingly grave effects befall our children and us. There is often lack of proper discipline and supervision, a lack of proper role models, and often gravely flawed settings. As a result, the society which we live in grows more dysfunctional.

Therefore, when the family fails to be spiritually strong, abortion, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted

DAVID'S CHOICE

diseases and divorce all rise. Again, when as parents, we refuse to amend our ways by choosing rightly, we act not only sinfully but also unjustly to our children, our community, the church and the nation at large thus, our future is tied to our choices regarding our families. Despite David's flaws and sins the Bible clearly attests to God's love for David. This brings us to the crux of the issue, God loves sinners. Are there consequences of negative choices, YES but does God withdraw His love? NO. Therefore as parents, the choice of setting foundations for good behaviour and spiritual upliftment in our children lies solely on us thus, for our families, we are free to choose between pleasing God and pleasing self.



THE LIBERTY OF SERVANTS IN CHOICES: GEHAZI AND NAMAAN'S SERVANT

*Real servants don't try to use God for their purposes.
They let God use them for His purposes (William James)*



The story of Gehazi is a sad story but it is one, which happens daily in the lives of believers to one degree or another. The story is introduced with Gehazi being described as “the servant of Elisha”, the man of God. He was not a man without opportunities. As a servant of Elisha, he had the privilege of knowing this great man of God. He had the examples of Elisha's life and the message of his lips as a tremendous source of instruction. Yet, he failed to capitalize and grow through this privilege. This story of Gehazi simply tells us that opportunities and privileges are no guarantee of success. Hence, we must take advantage of the opportunities God gives us or we lose the blessings and impact of those opportunities. Secondly, opportunity and privilege must be pursued diligently because failure to be diligent will result in the forfeiture of blessings and opportunities.

Firstly, we see that whereas Elisha made a right choice

and received a double portion of Elijah's spirit, Gehazi changed his destiny with a bad choice. Gehazi saw the result of Elisha's choice in the life of his master and later saw the result of his own wrong choice. Probably, every time he saw Elisha, he thought

I could have had a double portion of your spirit just as you had a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Oh, I wish I had left money alone. This shows that choices have a lot of power; positive and negative power. For Gehazi, the prophet announced the consequences of his choice in II Kings 5: 25-27. Gehazi's family would bear the reproach for his sin forever. Taking a critical look at Gehazi, we see that in his heart, he chose to be hypocritical and manipulative. He chose to be different even with the daily example of Prophet Elisha. Even though Satan had tempted him with silver, gold and fine clothing, Gehazi still had the power to choose to yield or not to yield, to discover and choose God's way of escape. Inwardly, Gehazi already had leprosy festering and eating away his soul. In fact, what the prophet proclaimed would happen externally, had already taken place internally. Understand that the interesting thing about sin is that its workings start from the inside before manifesting outwardly. This is why the Word of God says "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Gehazi saw his riches as a blessing but because they were acquired dishonestly, the curse followed. Thus, obtaining riches according to God's plan is the only way to avoid the curse of wrongful gain. This is because operating outside of God's guidelines by obtaining things unlawfully invites a curse, in our lives and the lives of our loved ones as seen in the scripture, "the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed forever".

Gehazi was responsible for every one of his descendants getting the dreaded disease of leprosy. How could I live with the knowledge that my choice resulted in terrible consequences that later on, affected my children as seen in Gehazi's choice, which resulted in terrible consequences? As such, we must be careful when making choices. We need to examine our motives to make sure our choices are motivated by our desire to serve God and not greed or desire for selfish ambition. Gehazi made his choice with the full awareness that he was being disobedient; he just wasn't aware of how devastating the consequences would be. He had the opportunity to get a triple portion of the anointing however, he ruined it all by greed. Probably, he had forgotten that there is a time to eat and also a time to accept gifts hence; believers ought to take note of the difference. It was recorded that Gehazi was running after Naaman to get something from him; this is therefore a reminder of the fact that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. The need to clarify this phrase is pertinent because people often mis-quote 1 Timothy 6:10 saying that money is the root of all kinds of evil. Truth is that money itself is necessary and is a blessing from the Lord. But like every blessing from God, the evil one and those who are evil, pervert the blessings from God, resulting in Love becoming lust; therefore, money which is a great blessing when used properly becomes a terrible taskmaster that never gives peace to those enslaved by their love for it. It is for this reason that Ecclesiastes 5:10 says that

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this is also vanity

This is where we find Gehazi, unsatisfied with what he had

because of his love for money. He was certainly provided for by his master but it is clear that whatever provision he received wasn't enough in his eyes. He had covetous eyes, and having seen the amount of gold and silver, his covetous mind went into action. This was a choice he deliberately made which affected his generations yet unborn. Not only do we see that one sin often leads to another, we also see that there is no way to hide from the Lord. As a result of greed, Gehazi lost everything and also acquired a curse which affected his generation. Therefore, the big question to always ask yourself as a Christian is; what is my choice costing my family members? Looking at Gehazi, it is quite clear that he suffered something worse than leprosy- do you know what that was? It was the loss of God's favour. Hence, the need to be careful that we don't engage in activities that will cause us to lose God's favour. Again, this account brings to fore the fact that God's judgments regarding our choices may either be immediate or otherwise, that of Gehazi was immediate. Truth is there are many like Gehazi today who are feign righteousness and seem to be working faithfully in the kingdom of God, but only as a cover up for their sins. Just like Gehazi, are you among those who have chosen to use the ministry as a cover up for your sins?

Before moving further to the critical role which the maid in Naaman's household played, there are some germane points worth noting. Firstly, we see that servants have always formed important members of the household and often times, their service have risen to a beautiful and holy ministry. In the same text, we see a great Eastern lady, Naaman's wife- and her little Jewish maid, whom resulting from the fortunes of war, landed in Naaman's home.

Probably, the fact that her lady was a leper's wife probably touched her heart. She knew of Elisha, she said what she knew and great things came out of it. She did this not as a slave of Naaman's wife but as a free human soul and servant of God. No wealth could pay for this golden secret. Even more, there is every possibility that she decided to relay this secret to her mistress because she was treated well in the house. This brings to bare the question: as masters, how do we treat those who work for us? Are we kind to them, do we treat them with respect or choose to overburden them with too much work? Truth remains that a house help or maid is also a human being who deserves to be treated with equal dignity. They cannot function optimally and effectively if they are not treated properly. As a result, getting the best out of them may be very difficult.

Truth is that the choice to take care of our servants and maids is far more than even giving them three square meals, buying cloths for them or paying their school fees... the moral and spiritual upbringing of that maid also lies in our care. Children are biological only when they are in the womb, once they are out, their upbringing remains every adult's responsibility. Thus, love, respect and understanding from every person in the family will to a large extent, help our maids to bond with us and our families. This can even make them divulge vital information that will be helpful, just like Naaman's servant. Thus, as parents and masters, it should be noted that the way we treat those who work for us is also a choice. Just like our children, Christian parents have the responsibility of bringing even their maids to Christ because the maid may have the power to turn the life of that family around. Sometimes, these servants and apprentices are

ministers of Christ but our attitude towards them tells whether they would be a source of blessing to our families or not. Naaman too was happy in his servant hence, we need to be aware of the fact that sometimes, a character appears but once in the course of a great drama. The man or woman comes, delivers one message and disappears. The servant in the explication above was sent to Syria to utter one speech, to speak one name and because she spoke her little speech kindly and clearly, things went better with so many people. As we see in the Scriptures, Naaman was a man accustomed to command; he expected miracles to be done in order, and prophets to toe in the line. And because he did not like Elisha's manner or his prescription, he was at the point of returning to Syria in rage. However, his little servant saved him from himself. The expedition had been suggested by a servant, who generously paid good for evil. He was saved from defeat by a kind servant; a kindness that no contract could have specified and no wage could have covered. They also were souls who knew at times that man was created for spiritual service.

But Elisha too, had his servant who was tactful. Elisha and Gehazi were almost like Father and Son. Elisha called him, "My heart" just as Paul called Onesimus his heart. Yet they parted so—"He went out from his presence a leper". The punishment was terrible isn't it? How dear he was to Elisha's soul, "my heart!, my other self!". Yet, he chose to lie, cheat, obtain gift by false pretence, and lowered the prophet in Naaman's sight. After all his years of noble service, his master smote him with a curse, and he went out of his presence a leper!. As we see, nothing could exonerate Gehazi. His lie remains a lie however; our business is to find out how such

things came to be, in order to guard against them in our homes. The truth is that if your servant leaves you weaker in faith than when you received him from home, it is a clear case for inquiry. This is because as parents, it is our duty to ensure that our workers are not exposed to moral infection in our homes. This is succinctly buttressed in the words of Jerry Falwell which says, "God created the family to provide the maximum love, support, morality and example that one can imagine"

Is there any form of danger to the spiritual life of the young people, children, and servants that minister to us? Do we deliberately choose to deprive them of their earnings even when they gaze at the cavalcades of wealth we possess? If this is the case, their choice to lie in order to receive becomes inevitable; this implies that we have further pulled them away from God. If your servant who sees the very core of your business says to himself, "My master's profession of religion is hypocrisy", then it is a sorry business to evangelize. Thus, the prayer of every master and mistress should be "search me, O God and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139: 23-24)

The choice of servants to be faithful and wise in carrying out their responsibilities is captured in 1 Peter 2:18 which say, "Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh". A cross reference of this is seen in Ephesians' 6:5 which says "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and sincerity of heart, just as you would show to Christ". The scripture point out better ways by which servants can be treated. In

fact, a master can treat his servant so well that the servant may voluntarily choose to remain in his master's service for life. These principles are reiterated in the New Testament in many parables (Matt 18:26). Therefore, Christian parents must take the lead in helping their society become fairer and more compassionate. Colossians 4:1 succinctly states; "And masters, treat your servants considerately. Be fair with them. Don't forget for a minute that you, too, serve a Master-God in heaven".

Gehazi who was the servant of God's prophet had a position of privilege that was unique in his day but his heart was set upon silver and gold. In fact, he failed to cherish the connection and relationship he had with Elisha thus, while it is important for every Christian to be familiar with this teaching, the theme is particularly applicable to parents. How can we bring children to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through the choices we make? It is easier to win a child than an adult hence, the spiritual welfare of our kids and servant is our responsibility. As regards Gehazi's choice, we too might question why God would give leprosy to a man and all his descendants for such an action. Admittedly, it was wrong and foolish behaviour but why did God consider this sin so serious that He imposed a legacy of leprosy on Gehazi?

Firstly, it should be noted that Gehazi's choice was a serious one because the testimony of the Lord was directly and negatively affected. He defiled the Lord's work, dishonoured the Lord's servant and distorted the Lord's gospel. His choice and action were not confined to his own private world but affected others as well. In fact, his choice did not only discredit the testimony of the Lord in Israel, but also disgraced the testimony of the Lord internationally! Gehazi's

choice was very serious indeed.

Again, his choice to defile the Lord's work was grave because he lied about the ministry. He told Naaman that two young prophets had dropped in on Elisha unexpectedly (v22). It is so easy to manipulate people with heartbreaking story's so as not to get into trouble. I know of a pastor who asked his daughter to feign an asthma attack in order to avoid being stopped for the normal routine check by law enforcement agents. Though not very related to the subject at hand, it is expedient to point out that every lie has a consequence. Normally, it is wrong to lie, however, going further to lie about the Lord's work is defiling.

Therefore, Gehazi's legacy of leprosy should be a warning to parents as well as everyone involved in Christian ministry. When big money is available from donors who want to give as Naaman did, the temptation to get at those funds is enormous, even if it means that the truth has to be stretched or compromised. Isn't it better to "create a need" rather than lose out on an opportunity for easy funding? After all, it is money that can be used in "the work of the Lord"! Lying almost seems justified but the end is what counts. In actuality, the end is a defiled work of the Lord and a legacy of leprosy! Would you like to be remembered as the decision maker who corrupted your ministry and family at the same time because of the irresistible temptation of available money? The choice is yours to make. In 1 Timothy 6:9-10 we read that "people who want to get rich fall into temptations, traps and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many

griefs". The Love of money even for ministry defiles the Lord's work and leads to a legacy of leprosy. In fact, the godly heritage of many Christian families has been lost because of the love for money. It has not only defiled the work of the Lord, but has had devastating effects on the families of those involved. The choice is yours.

Secondly, Gehazi also dishonored the Lord's servant. He lied about Elisha. Lying about the Lord's prophets is a serious sin that comes with consequences. Gehazi told Naaman that Elisha had told him about the two young prophets who had come from Ephraim; this story slandered the Lord's prophet. Not only did he lie about Elisha, he lied directly to Elisha. When asked his whereabouts, he responded without hesitation, "Your servant went nowhere". It is sad to state that some Christian parents tell lies without hesitation just like Gehazi. In fact, Gehazi compounded his sin with a cover up. As Christian parents, how many times do pride and the desire to "always be right" cause us to compound our sins by rationalizing our actions or attempting to cover them up? The Bible is warning us here that while God is always seeking to restore us, if we refuse to humble ourselves to His restoring process, we have chosen his judgment.

Even more, dishonoring the Lord's servants is a sin that is very easy to commit. In most churches or ministries, the Lord's servants do a lot of the "up front" work, and are therefore, subject to a lot of criticism. As a Christian, choosing to criticize the Lord's servant is dangerous business which comes with its own consequences. To adequately buttress the above point, Numbers 12: 1-10 gives an account of how Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses and the punishment

meted on Miriam by God. Interestingly, Aaron was not touched by God even though he was Miriam's accomplice. This simply implies that God does not dispense a one size fits all justice as every individual is judged uniquely according to his or her abilities and potential. A particular wrong committed by one person may be overlooked by God, but when it is committed by another, God may decide to punish the person in question. Though, it is believed that Aaron occupied an office that forestalled his punishment but the moment he left office, he died. Therefore, God's justice as regards the choice we make particularly as it relates to criticizing his ministers is custom tailored to each individual, based on who the person is and what God expects from him or her.

Therefore, Christians should be careful and mindful with regards to dishonouring the Lord's servants by deliberately choosing to desist from joining the bandwagon to criticize them through what they say as He alone knows how to get them back on track. There is also the need to be extremely careful that our comments do not put words that were never actually spoken in their mouths. Lying about anyone is a sin but lying about a servant of God is particularly a serious sin. In this case, it is not only the Lord's servant who is dis-honoured, it is the Lord Himself! If not careful, God may have to remove those who continue to misrepresent and criticize His servant from their church or area of service. On the other hand, He (God) may step into the situation and discipline with the "leprosy of Gehazi". God does not allow the sin of dishonouring His servants to be masked indefinitely. The choice of Gehazi not only renders the believer unclean to serve the Lord; it is also a reminder to

fellow believers that choosing to dishonor the Lord's servants involves serious consequences! The legacy of leprosy becomes God's warning to every potential Gehazi.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Gehazi's sin was also serious because it distorted the Lord's gospel. The gospel is God's good news. God's good news is that salvation and all of his gifts are free. By lying and taking money, he distorted the good news that God's gift of healing was free. Moreover, Gehazi caused the spiritual picture in this story to be distorted because the free gift of cleansing from the fatal disease of leprosy, pictures the truth that salvation is a free gift as captured in Romans 6:23 which says, "For the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". We can be sure that when word rippled out about Naaman's cure, the good news was distorted. The servants who were with Naaman would have told the story about the miraculous cure, but when they were asked "How much did it cost him?" They would have had to report that a price was paid. How sad! What a warning for Christians to avoid the Gehazi syndrome.

Anytime unbelievers observe us asking for money for the Lord's work, we support distortion of the gospel because many unbelievers will begin to assume that "God's gift are not really free after all; Christians are all the same looking for money! They always want bigger and better buildings for "the Lord's work" and bigger salaries for the Lords servants" Thus, Elisha's question to Gehazi in verse 26 should be a further warning to all of us, "Is this the time to accept money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants? Even though the problem of Gehazi was nipped in the bud by Elisha, it s effects was far-

reaching and far worse than mere physical leprosy. A distortion of God's good news was also part of the legacy he left to his lineage! In summary, Gehazi's legacy of leprosy should make us more aware of the seriousness of choices, which negatively affect the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. These sins not only bring God's necessary discipline on individuals who commit these sins; they also result in negative fall-out in the family for generations to come. Hence, we are enjoined as parents not to leave behind a legacy of leprosy.



SIMEON AND LEVI MASSACRE SHECHEM (Genesis 34)

*Youth is the best time to be rich, and the
best time to be poor. (Euripides)*



It is a great privilege to be young because the time of youth is the period of making good choices. The choices made at this prime time of life are ones that leave indelible marks on the life and destiny of the maker. Thus, the choices that will mark one's life out for greatness and glory are made when one is young. Likewise the choices that will predispose one to perpetual defeat and failure are also made when one is young. The unfortunate things about these choices are that whether they were made consciously or unconsciously, they are often irreversible. It is important to note that everything one will become in life is premised on the foundations of one's youth. This inspired the famous quote by Euripides which says that, "Who so neglects learning in his youth loses the past and is dead to the future"

With regards, Jacob's children knew he told his brother Esau he would go South with him but Jacob turned North instead. They picked up on this and other areas to

compromise and justify their own promise later in life hence, the need to be cautious of our words and actions as justified in the Nigerian proverb which says that, "What a child says and does, he has seen and heard at home". This scenario started with Jacob's choice to bring his family to a place God didn't really want him to be. First, it should be noted that it was at Bethel that God prospered him as seen in Genesis (28:18-22). This was the first indication that God wanted Jacob to complete his vow at Bethel. Secondly, it should be noted that Jacob, calls the Almighty, "the God of Bethel" when he confers with his wives about the journey (vs 13). If anything, this shows that that Jacob was aware that God wanted him to keep his oath in Bethel. For this reason, God directed him to return to Bethel (Gen 31:13) but the time spent in the city of Shechem did much harm to his family. Verse 19 of the above passage records that when he got there, he easily negotiated the purchase of land for a favourable price and built his residence. Jacob chose a place to live for all the wrong reasons. He wanted to be close to the city (Gen 33:18) despite being aware of the fact that the city was ungodly. God called him to Bethel but his choice of a place to live left his family open to ungodly influence. For the above reason, the consequence of disobedience hit his home. His compromise further made him less able to stand up to his own children and guide them as he should. The disaster that befalls Dinah in Chapter 34 is another hint.

With regards to the above, the scripture makes us to understand that on a particular day, Dinah, his daughter went out to see the daughters of the land but when the son of Hamor the Hivite prince of the country saw her, he took her and went ahead to lay with her, thereby, violating her. From

the above, it can be alluded that Dianah went out without adequate parental permission, to fraternize with some of the local young women. Looking at the story of Dianah, a pertinent question to ask is, where was the mother of Dianah? Truth is that she ought to have known where her daughter was. The pagan festival held there may have been familiar to her but was she actually allowed to go out because she was the only daughter? This question is germane because parents, particularly mothers are powerful influence for their daughters. The most common reasons I have ever heard from parents is that they don't want to say "no" to their children or limit them in any way, in order not to either crush their spirit or destroy their creativity. Some others think refusing their requests limits the child while a few others just relish the joy of seeing their kids happy.

Without mincing words, parents ought to make deliberate choices and decisions for their children especially, when they are teenagers. This is because as their caretakers, no parent will want their kids to thread the path that will hurt them. Particularly, children- especially teens at the Secondary School level often feel like they have the right to make decisions for themselves. Hence, parents ought to make the right choice as regards their upbringing because it will always reflect in the child's actions as they develop into what they have been taught by their parents. Without parents making decisions for their teenagers, such children will most likely make the wrong decisions as seen in the story of Dinah. Thus, when children are in their teens, they should have boundaries set for them, and further be guided in the right direction by their parents. This is not to dispel the need for them to be allowed to make some decisions; however, they

ought to be guided properly on any choice or decision they make.

Thus, as seen in the story of Dinah, the need for parents to guide the teenagers and young adults in making right choices comes to bare especially those who feel that they are missing out on the things this world has to offer. Firstly, it should be noted that she was deeply involved with the Shechemite teenage girls; in fact, it already seemed that she was enjoying spending time with these pagan girls. It is highly possible that she had been mixing with them freely before the day Shechem saw her. For this reason, parents should always guide their young adults in making choices because some of them are not mature enough to understand the fact that we live in a dangerous world. Jacob's lovely daughter, Dinah had to learn this bitter lesson. Therefore, none of our teens and young adults ought to repeat this grave mistake. Part of the mistake made by Dianah is the fact that she was in the wrong place at the wrong time, so she carries part of the blame.

Secondly, Hamor's son like the majority of all the young sons and daughters of the world today had little regard for God's seventh commandment, "Thou shall not commit adultery". It can be said that the world today is far more corrupted by lust than any time in history. In Genesis 34:3, the phrase, "he spoke kindly unto the damsel" can be said to mean her heart. Shechem was able to draw Dinah into his world because she desired to be part of that world in the first instance. As youths, teens and parents, what do you desire? The things of the world or the things of God? To succinctly shed light on the above, a Bukusu proverb has it that, "A child does not fear treading on dangerous ground

until he/she gets hurt". This proverb emphasises the need for teens to be properly guided and supervised in making the right choice to deter them from going astray. With the above, it becomes clear that parental control was lacking in the family of Jacob.

In our contemporary society, the consequences that this could bring on the child can have a far-reaching effect. Therefore, it should be noted that self-esteem, self-discipline, ambition and emotional development are stunted without parental guidance and involvement. This can have a serious effect on the child far beyond childhood and can put a child in danger. In fact, this is aptly captured by Aristotle who states that, "Young people are in a condition like permanent intoxication, because youth is sweet and they are growing". Therefore, as parents, we ought to understand the fact that kids need boundaries. For Dinah, we are told that she went out to see the daughters of the land. From the onset, the people she went out to see did not serve the God she serves. Hence, even if she wasn't raped, there's likelihood that her friends may turn her heart away from God. This explains why parental guidance is important. Parents ought to set boundaries for their children. Without boundaries, there are no guidelines and living without guidelines creates insecurity and may further open door for uncertainties.

Furthermore, with strategic involvement, parents can help children to develop interpersonal skills, guide them in socialization and teach them how to form relationships. In view of the afore-stated, parents should also have a significant control over their children's play mates especially when they are young. It is obvious that was lacking in the life of Dinah because through her action, we are made to believe

that she was not taught how to look for qualities in a friend. This is a deliberate choice that has to be made by parents in order to help create healthy relationships and further reinforce healthy behaviors in children. If these are not properly handled in the life of our children, there is a high tendency that it would lead to a variety of anti-social behaviours that could cause harm to the child just like Dinah. In fact, research has it that corresponding behaviors are developed through the family. Hence, the need for parents to lead by example is pertinent. Parents should be wary of permissive parenting which is a style that has no boundaries or rules just like the case of Dinah. This is because it could lead the child to destruction. On the other hand, helicopter parenting may be harmful to the child hence, the need to strike a balance. Truth is that a child without parental discipline is doubly cheated; the child might believe that the parents are not genuinely concerned about him. Therefore, depending on the age of the child, we should talk to our kids, give them strict rules and punish them when necessary; but in all, don't lose control and yell often. If we do, it shows that we are out of control; this can create a non peaceful environment for them.

Therefore, it should be noted that the way we raise our children will definitely have a great effect on them. This underscores the need for parents to serve as role models for their children through the examples they set with their attitude and behaviour, both within and outside the family. This is also a call on parents who have become increasingly busy with their job and seldom spend time with their children, to guide them in the right part. This is because a child's mind is like wet cement, whatever you put on it stays.

The choice is yours to make.

Looking further at verses 6-19, we see Hamor make a proposal of marriage between Schechem and Dinah; he goes further to ask for a marital treaty between Jacob's clan and his tribe but in the midst of this marital negotiation, Simeon and Levi were enraged because they were indignant at the way their sister had been treated. Even though they participate in the negotiations, they were planning to exert revenge against Hamor, Shechem and the whole tribe. In all these, the pertinent question to also ask is "why did Jacob give consent to such marriage whose bed was defiled? Truth is that Jacob didn't get Leah and Rachael on a platter of Gold; he labored fourteen years before he got them. As regards, I have noticed that in recent times, parents want their children to escape the discipline they passed through. If it is a godly heritage, it can be passed on as well. But aside that, had he forgotten the law of his people that they are not to marry strangers? Parents sometimes bend the laws they were brought up in, for their kids.

Looking at God's revealed truth, given directly to Abraham, the relationship should never have started because from the time Abraham stepped into Canaan, it was known that God did not want Abraham's family to mingle and intermarry with Canaan's inhabitants as seen in Genesis 24:3-4. Abraham, who was deeply obedient to God's will on this matter, fought hard to preserve this revealed truth. Therefore, it becomes a fair question to ask where Jacob was while Dinah was trotting off to the city of Shechem. Thus, one may be right to say that Jacob did not teach and stress to his daughter the vital importance of what God had revealed about dating and marriage. Therefore, every parent in God's

church has the responsibility to teach their children God's timeless principles on dating. Again, we ought to remember that friendship between the opposite sex should be subordinate to the family. However if as an adult, you have not made the choice to come fully out of this world, if there are parts of this society you still love, it will be difficult to teach and help your children, forsake it. To this end, such parents need to come out of this world, and teach their children to do same. Therefore, Christian parents should strive to set their affection, all their heart desire on attaining the Kingdom of God. In fact, Colossians 3:1-2 puts it thus;

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God! Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

Afterwards, verse seven (7) records that “the sons of Jacob, came in from the field and when they heard it, they were grieved and very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel”. This phrase, a disgraceful thing indicates that already, Jacob sons had a realization that they were different from the world. They knew they were set apart and distinct because of the covenant of God with them. As parents, how often do we let our children know that they are distinct in their outlook, attitude and behaviour because of the covenant Christ had with us? Are they aware that a Christian's life ought to be set apart?

In order for the marriage between Dinah and Schechem to be sealed, her brothers request that all men should be circumcised. The request of Dinah's brothers sounded familiar and reasonable to the family because circumcision was the mark of covenant between Abraham

and God since it was a sign of the covenant for Abraham and his seed. In fact, the prince of Shechem was so in love with Dinah that he was willing to enter the covenant by way of circumcision. However, the procedure crudely performed would have been very painful and debilitating to the men for several days. Now let me mention a couple of things. It should be noted that Jacob's consent to the marriage between the duo meant that he and his family would apparently inter-mingle with the people of the land. Hence, drawing closer to them than he ought. Truth is when single brothers and sisters, who are believers deliberately, choose to intermarry with unbelievers; its implications are usually grievous because that kind of compromise always brings spiritual disaster to the believer. Simeon and Levi had evil intentions in this plan yet they felt justified because the men of Shechem treated their sister as a prostitute. On the third day when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. For them, killing all the males was a worthy punishment for the people of Shechem who assisted in the abduction of Dinah.

At any rate, Shechem would have needed the assistance of no more than one or two servants to do it and not the whole populace. This is another example of how the choices of others can affect even those who had nothing to do with it. As seen, this singular choice affected all the men because they were all killed. This was not only a brutal and deceptive art but it also disgraced God's covenant of circumcision. Surely, with this clever act of violence and deception, Simeon and Levi showed themselves to be children of Jacob from a bitter competitive home environment. The boldness with which they executed their

foul plan shows the hardness of their hearts. Thus as stated by Sir Walter Raleigh, people should “use their youth so that they may have comfort to remember it when it has forsaken them, and not sigh and grieve at the account thereof”

Going back to Jacob's life, we see that Jacob passed his own deceitful nature into his children. Firstly, they heard him lie to Esau at Peniel to move Northwest after which he went Southeast. They saw his interest in the pastures when he pitched his tent in Shechem. He also said nothing when Dinah was violated. However, when Jacob was about to die, he prophesized over each of his twelve sons. Because of the reaction and bad deed of Simeon and Levi, there was no blessing for them. According to Jacob, Levi's descendants will all be scattered throughout Israel. They will live in every town, village and Hamlet, on distant hill sides. In them, the members of the tribe of Levi would live. They would not have a homeland where their kinfolk live, no home area at all. That is a curse that came upon their children and children's children to the fourth and fifth generation. That is where the curse rested for the killing of men in their anger. What a sorry situation that existed in the family of Jacob! Therefore, we need to think carefully before making a choice.

The next chapter would further dwell on the effect of their action.



THE CURSE: REUBEN, SIMEON AND LEVI

When a man curses his own child, it is a terrible thing. (African proverb)



Fathers leave an imprint like no other, in their children, whether for ill or for good through blessings or curses. This is why the Nigerian proverb, “Okra should not be stronger than the planter” (a child should not be above his father's authority) is always buttressed in most Nigerian homes. The word blessing is one of the most important words in the different stories in the Bible. It connotes special favour from a greater to a lesser being. God's intention in his word is to bless humanity. Hence, the blessing of a father involves several key elements, including meaningful touch, a spoken affirmation, and envisioning the future of their children. The blessing of a mother's love is certainly important but it is the fathers blessing that empower the son or daughter to stand among their peers with confidence. In a time such as this, a fathers blessing brings clarity and security as it helps children interpret life in light of God's perspective. However, whatever used for good can also be turned to evil. The word,

“curse” is often used in contrast with “bless”. Under religious interpretation, curse is an evil pronouncement which could either be a spell cast on someone or words spoken carelessly and stamped by wandering demons. This can go as far as working negatively against the good destiny of someone. When a curse is pronounced against any person, a supernatural force is set in motion to cause disaster or misfortune to envelop that person. Similarly, a blessing propels good fortunes and prosperity towards the direction of the blessed. Proverbs (26:2) reads, “As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come”. The above passage indicates that a curse does not just come upon someone except such a person has done something wrong to warrant it. Curses are dream killers and an impediment to the progress of one's destiny in life. Such curses once uttered, possess self actualization power.

It was customary for heads of families in the twilight of their lives to bless their children. Such a blessing is not simply a paternal wish for their children to prosper in life, but a potent factor in determining their welfare. Such blessings and curses were sometimes dependent on moral considerations. This shows that they are real powerful. If we all believe blessings work then it simply means that curses also work. Thus, if we expect our parents' blessings to work in our lives, we should also bear in mind that if they curse us, we will suffer the negative consequences as well.

Sequel to the above chapter, Genesis 49 is one chapter which has a record of Jacob's blessings upon his sons. When Jacob was about to die, he prophesied over each of his twelve sons. However, some pronouncements seemed more like

curses. For Reuben his first son, this is what Jacob says,

“Reuben, you are my first born, my might and my first fruit of my vigor exceeding in rank and exceeding in honor. Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer. For when you mounted your father’s bed, you brought disgrace to me...” (Genesis 49:3-4).

From the above, it is clear that Reuben lost his privilege as first born. By birth, he was entitled to a double portion of inheritance, but the above pronouncement meant that he would 'excel no longer' as pronounced by his father. However, the double portion will go to Joseph instead. The loss does not simply apply to Reuben's personal inheritance but also to the status of his tribe. By choosing to commit an unclean act with his father's wife, there would be reproach upon his tribe and the family to whom he ought to have been an example and a blessing. Though, he would still have all the privileges of a son but not the first born. Therefore, it can be said that Reuben's sin was a grievous one that cost him his birthright or status. Though, he tried to redeem it by saving or planning to save Joseph. Jacob's sad prophecy for Reuben certainly came true as no judge, prophet, ruler or prince came from that tribe or any renowned person except Dathan and Abiram who were noted for their rebellion against Moses. Reuben's tribe chose a settlement on the other side of Jordan, which was a further indication of the loss of godly influence on his brothers, to which his birthright entitled him. Although Reuben was the first born, the kingdom was given to Judah leaving Reuben's tribe to be small and non-influential. Actually, one should expect the first son to receive special status in any family but because of his wickedness this was forfeited. As the first born, he grossly sinned against

heaven and against his own father, doing things that are mentioned among the Gentiles. As a result, he lost the birthright. Thus, his sin left an indelible mark upon him and his family however, the good news is that he was still a part of Israel blessed by God as seen in Deut (33:6), which states, "Let Reuben live, and not die, Nor let his men be few". Though, Reuben deserve to be cut off or greatly diminished according to Jacob's prediction, yet, God spared them and gave them a name and portion among the tribes of Israel. This shows that Moses reversed the curse on Reuben's tribe but, his choice to sin against his father ensured that he was little before his brothers. His tribe did not perish because he remained one of the tribes of God's people but for his sin, his honour diminished.

For Simeon and Levi, Jacob started his prophecy pointing out that Simeon and Levi were brothers. Though, they were not brothers biologically but in their minds and disposition to commit evil. In fact, Levi was regarded as a brother to one who destroys. Therefore, what we hear from Jacob is "cursed be you- my son". According to their father, they fuelled each other's wickedness, depicting that one was as corrupt as the other. This is what he said about Simeon and Levi.

Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my honour be united to their assembly; for in their anger, they slew a man and in their self-will, they hamstrung an Ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce: and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel (Genesis 49:5-7)

He saw Simeon and Levi for who they were, but he rebuked

them far too late. However, the prophetic word of God through Jacob proved true. God did in fact divide the tribes of Simeon and Levi, and scattered them amongst Israel. But, significantly, the way it happened for each tribe was different. Thus, for these two, there was no place for them in Israel. Particularly, the scattering of Levi was to be an entirely different nature from the scattering of Simeon. The prophecy is this "I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel (7). When we look at the subsequent record of the lives of Simeon and Levi, we find that it is exactly what happened. There was no place for them in Israel. But looking closely at both tribes, one will discover that the scattering of Levi was of entirely different nature from that of Simeon. When Simeon was scattered, his tribe was slowly and imperceptibly annihilated. For centuries later at the Exodus, they still existed and numbered with Reuben and Gad. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, a striking change took place.

When Moses blessed all the tribes of Israel in Deut 33, there is no mention of Simeon. He was scattered so comprehensively among Israel that there was not a family left. Though, Levi too was scattered but very different from the destruction of Simeon. When Moses went to collect the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel made a golden calf. When Moses returned, he shattered the tablets on the calf and challenged them regarding their loyalties. "Who is on the Lord's side", Levi shouted out "Here I am", the righteousness of Jehovah was avenged by Levi's words-"here I am". Accordingly, not one section of the land was given to them because the curse rested upon him but he had the Lord as his inheritance. Though, it began with a curse but

it ended up in blessing.

However, the tribe of Simeon, because of their lack of faithfulness, was effectively dissolved as a tribe, and absorbed into the tribal area of Judah. The tribe of Levi was also scattered, but because of the faithfulness of this tribe during the rebellion of the golden calf, (Excedos 32:26-28), the tribe was scattered as a blessing through the whole nation of Israel. Both were scattered, but one as a blessing and the other as a curse. As expected, Jacob's words came true in the history of the nation of Israel. Simeon is the only tribe Moses does not bless in Deuteronomy 33 and he is given only a select number of cities in Judah's territory (Joshua 19:1-9). The tribe of Judah eventually absorbed the Simeonites, and they disappeared from history. Though, Levi is also scattered throughout Israel, his tribe fared better in the history of redemption. Moses, a son of Levi (Exodus 2:1-10), later mediates the old covenant. Moreover, God choose the Levites to be His priests (Numbers 3: 5-13), restoring honour to these displaced sons of Jacob. Indeed, God's incredible goodness unexpectedly shone forth, when that which was the punishment of Levi was changed into the reward of the priest.

The above brings to bare the fact that despite reaping the consequences of their actions, one came as a blessing because his generation followed the lord diligently, serving Him with all reverence while the other did not care to follow the ways of God. Despite stating the above, it should be noted that in the distribution of lands to the tribe of Israel, Simeon was actually mentioned as captured in Joshua 19, however Levi did not get any as they and Joseph were replaced by Ephraim and Mansaaeh as seen in Joshua (13:14) hence, there was no inheritance to Levi for God was their inheritance as

seen in the Scripture in Joshua (13:33).

Thus, the different destinies of Levi and Simeon show that Jacob's words could be tempered by grace. Though cursed and scattered, Levi was later exalted not of his own merits but because of the Lord's mercy. God is always delighted to extend grace hence; we should not be perturbed when sinners embrace His mercy. However, the bottom line of this chapter is to emphasize the importance of choosing our behaviours and attitudes rightly. A blessing and a curse have the same end-result. Both have the result of bringing people on their knees to God. While a blessing brings people to God in praise, a curse brings people close to God in repentance as such; both can be used as a means of deepening our relationship with him. But often times, a curse is the discipline of a loving father. Thus, any teenager, youth or adult that have been cursed by their parents should strive to seek for forgiveness and reverse it into blessings. The truth is curses from parents to their children are very potent because its effects are futuristic, long after the parents would have died and even when the cursed child or children would have forgotten. However, godly parents should make a deliberate decision to discontinue this act because curses are seeds that can germinate. Hence, the need to be slow to anger no matter the offence committed by our children. Again, as parents, words like, "This child no dey hear, his ears are for fancy, this boy go kill me etcetera" should be forbidden in our domain because there is power in the tongue. Children on the other hand should stay away from any act that would attract a curse. They should make a conscious choice to respect their parents and elderly people.

However, the good news as written in Gal (3:13-14) is

worth mentioning. It states "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Christ Jesus that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith". Thus, even if someone was cursed, if such a person truly seeks the Face of God in true repentance, the curse will be nullified. Even more, Reuben case (whose curse was broken by Moses) point to the fact that God is able to free one from any form of curse. There is no curse that cannot be broken by the power of prayer after true repentance but in all these, children must choose to honour elders generally so that their days may be long. This explains why, the African proverb states, "those who respect the elderly pave their own road towards success". This further account for why prosperity and peace come as a result of respect for the elderly. Although, disrespect for parents is inexcusable, some parents, on the other hand have not fared well in their parental obligation to their children.

By and large, parental training is paramount because when a child turns bad, such will need huge effort and the Grace of God to redeem. As well, every parent must choose to speak positive words towards their children.



THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

*Anger: an acid that can do more harm to the vessel
in which it is stored than to anything on which
it is poured (Marcus Annaeus Seneca)*



If we trace the lineage of Levi down, we will realize that Moses was a descendant of Levi as seen in Exodus (2:1-10). Also, if we critically examine the life of this great servant of God, especially in the event where he 'struck the rock' instead of speaking to it as commanded by God, one would realize that the spirit of anger abided in him. It is the spirit that eventually cost him the promise land. Moses, from the tribe of Levi, had anger issues as seen in the life of Levi who joined his brother, Simeon, to massacre Schechem. Without mincing words, our emotions and responses to life's challenges can sometimes result in moments of anger and frustration thus, how you handle those feelings can have a great impact on the outcome of your circumstances. As recorded, Moses struggled to manage his emotions. Therefore, the big question to ask is; how well was Moses prepared for the consequences of his emotionally charged choice? Emotions can affect not just the nature of the choice,

but the speed at which it is made. This is because anger triggers impatience, and rash choices. Often times, choices made this manner with little or no consideration of their potential consequences are quick. What this implies is that our emotions play a huge part in our choices, and many at times, it may be steering us wrong- as it often leads to poor judgment, and reckless choices. This lies in the fact that anger itself does more harm than the condition which aroused the anger. Hence, as Tyron Edwards quotes, "To rule one's anger is well; to prevent it is better".

It is important we know that Moses had an intimate relationship with God. He was one man who craved for intimacy with God even, huge miracles happened through him. He was a great leader who totally depended on God as seen in Exodus (33:13-23). Therefore, from the example of Moses, the most evident choice we see is anger. Just like Moses, we know our own faults more than anyone else as parents. Outside the home, we often give the appearance of being in control but our spouse, children and closest friends often see the other side of us. Sadly, we are all vulnerable. This explains the reason only a few people usually know some of our embarrassing moments. As recorded, was not so fortunate.

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for anger comes from the words "face" and "nostrils" as such, anyone who has faced a truly angry person understands why. When anger builds up, it distorts our appearance. Yet, anger is not all bad. In its healthy form, properly expressed and controlled, it can motivate people to work for needed change. Anger is perhaps the most powerful and complex of all human emotions. Consider Jesus' anger at the hypocrisy of

the religious leaders of His generation. Thus, when anger is checked, it refines but if otherwise, it becomes destructive. However, in all these, anger is a choice which can be overcome. Still from the story of Moses, we see that at the age 40, Moses made a critical choice by deciding not to be identified with the privileged life he grew into. He made the choice of leaving behind wealth, education, and fame but he had issues with anger. While Moses was following the clear direction of God, his anger would occasionally flare up and overtake him but even in the midst of divine judgment, God demonstrated his faithfulness and mercy towards Moses.

Firstly, he expressed anger over the Hebrews' idolatry (Ex 32:19). Secondly, he was angry over his disappointment with God as seen in Numbers 11:10 while in Numbers (20:8-11), Moses expressed anger over the Hebrews' unending complains. In his rage, he disobeyed the clear instructions of the Lord to speak to the rock. It seemed like a small thing. After all, one would say there's not much difference between speaking and striking, but in God's eye, the difference was enormous. As a result of the above, God forbade him to enter the land of promise that was now close after decades of leading God's people. What a sad ending! Moses choices often laced with anger finally robbed him of his 80-year old dream. In fact, Psalm (106:32-33) puts it thus; "They made him angry by the waters of Meribah, and Moses suffered because of them, for they aroused his temper, and he spoke rashly". For Moses, the battle with anger was not a struggle for a day, or a week or even a year but for a life time and it cost him dearly.

Particularly, Moses action of striking the rock instead of speaking to it as succinctly captured in Exodus (17:6), cost him greatly. Humanly speaking we all are capable of anger:

We all like Moses have either yelled at our kids or have gotten into arguments with those we love. We have lashed out and wished we hadn't, we have struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Sometimes, our emotions get the best of us because our kids can go, extreme to make us angry and before we know it, we holler from the top of our lungs. The truth is that our feeling of parental frustration is normal but that rarely solves the situation as it may quieten the children and make them obedient for a short while. However, it will neither correct their behaviour or attitudes. Therefore, when parents choose to always express anger towards their kids, they automatically become aggressive and non-compliant and to a higher degree, depression and alienation sets in. Hence, as parents, it is essential that we deliberately choose to deal effectively with anger especially towards our spouses and kids because it is so important in ensuring a healthy family.

It is often assumed that the children of great men and women are often swallowed up in the greatness of their parents. However; we are not really aware and know next to nothing about Moses' two sons. In fact, in all the great deeds of Moses, not a single word was said about his sons during his life time. Though, in Exodus 18:3, we are told about His second son. The Bible notes that when the time came to choose a successor, Moses requested that one of his sons be appointed but God told him that his sons were not fit. However, Joshua, who served him, is fitting to serve Israel. This shows that his sons did not carry the noble traditions of their father. In other words, God ordered him to pass authority unto Joshua instead of his sons, Gershom and Eliezer.

While we learn nothing about Gershom, the Bible records that his son Jonathan (Shebuel) becomes an apostate priest, leading the tribe of Dan in the worship of an Idol. For Eliezer, we seem safe to say that his progeny did not become Idolaters who led others into Idolatry. We find this in 1 Chronicles 23 "... but as for Moses, the man of God, his sons were to be reckoned among the tribe of Levi. In fact, I Chronicles (23:14-16), records that, "Moses sons were ranked with the Levites generally but not introduced in to the distinctive portion of the descendants of Levi who were appointed to special functions in priesthood. This is to say that the descendants of Moses are referred to in the first book of chronicles. In fact, seven chapters of the book go into great detail about the arrangements David made for his first temple (eventually built by Solomon) and specifically about the grouping of the tribe of Levi (of which Moses and Aaron were members) into families for assignment to various roles in the temple. Chapter 23:14 very clearly makes the point that in contrast to Aaron's son's who became the priests, Moses sons were merely included among the Levites who received miscellaneous roles as choristers, musicians, gate keepers and treasurers.

One therefore wonders why so little is made of Moses' descendants, considering that in Chronicles, he was referred to as "the great man of God". A significant passage in this regard is Numbers (3:1-4), which begins "These are the generations of Aaron and Moses" but goes on to list the children of Aaron. We don't know if Eliezer ever managed to forgive Moses for being an absentee father, entrusting all parental duties to Zipporah. Where in his fathers' crowded world of crushing responsibilities was there room for him?

Perhaps, when he matured, he came to value Moses' total engagement in the historic mission of leading his people from bondage to a great light but the truth is that a huge gap of parental care and guidance lingered. Probably, he was understandably disappointed with Moses his father but he quieted his discontent with the hope that through his tireless efforts, his father ensured that the future generations of the Israelites were secured.

As parents, leaving the entire responsibility of upbringing on one party (either the father or the mother) is a choice that comes with its own consequences. Choosing our jobs at the expense of our children also has its own consequences. Many parents in recent times are busy working in order to earn money due to the rising cost of living and in their pursuit for money; they tend to forget that they have a crucial role to play in the life of their kids. Home is the first school where children learn how to behave and act through observation of their parents' behaviour. When both parents are occupied with their jobs for more than eight hours, there are obvious effects and consequences on the kid. Thus, as quoted by John Locke, "Parents wonder why the streams are bitter when they themselves have poisoned the fountain"

Particularly, the hectic schedule of parents to provide a better and worthy life for their kids and family propels them to work harder and for longer time. However, this often times results in less time for self, kids and family. Thus, parents, in recent times forget that they are the first teachers in a child's life and play a pivotal role in shaping their adult lives. The, most sufferers are kids as they spend more time with maids, grandparents, on social media and less on learning and work.

This leads to poor results in academics and later on burden on their shoulder to do good to reach a certain level. Explicitly, it should further be stated that modern generation kids learn lots of things whether good or bad from their surroundings. Hence, because of their busy schedule, some parents do not take time out to get information about their children's life, activities and other aspects of life. This makes the kids become independent from a very early age, taking decisions themselves which may later have psychological effects on them. Thus, every choice we make towards our children has consequences which might either be positive or negative. There might be more disposable income for the parents to spend on the children but less time to engage effectively with them. Remember the Swahili proverb which says, "as you bring up a child, so he will be"

As parents and elders firstly, we should give respect to our kids and their feelings and behave in positive manner. This is one way of building a strong bond and building our kids' moral behaviour. When my niece was two, her mother asked her to greet whomever she greets; at the long run, she learnt to greet any elderly person she meets on the way. I had to cultivate that habit in my daughter by telling her to greet whoever I greet. This has helped a lot. As regards child upbringing, parents have to deliberately make the choice of spending time with their kids to prevent them from getting involved in any destructive lifestyle and activity which would eventually ruin their lives. Thus, expressing anger and inadequate child upbringing can have negative effects on the kids. However, it should be noted that the only antidote to anger and child upbringing is seen in the example of Christ, who humbled Himself in obedience to God's plan and

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

purpose (Phil 2:8). We are to have the mind of Christ (v5) by acting in Humility not in anger because it can have a long-term effect on children. Therefore, as parents, we should always make choices that improve our chances for a positive outcome. A good strategy is to control our emotions and contemplate what kind of results we desire to achieve. Thus, when faced with choices, do we go with our emotions? Do we make a careful list of the merit and demerits of our choices before choosing? As Mel Lazarus puts it “the secret to dealing successfully with children is to be their parents”



ELI AND HIS SONS 1 Samuel 2:30-36

*When you fold your arms and not do anything
but only wait for miracles, you have given God a slap on
His face. (Sunday Adelaja)*



To begin with, it is worth mentioning that God is concerned with how we serve Him. Therefore, our service to God must be with a right heart and not like Eli's sons who were called "Sons of Belial" or worthless men. This brings to bare the fact that walking with the Lord is truly a choice. In those days Israel had no king and everyone did as he saw fit, even the priestly sons of Eli were corrupted by the world. They did not care about their responsibility to serve God and his people. They misappropriated the offerings of the Lord, which literally connotes "turning their back on the God of their fathers". This point to the fact that the salvation of parents is never a guarantee that the kids will be saved. This is because they also have a choice to either walk with God like the parents or away from him.

Eli's son's cared less about God and his people whom they had been given responsibility to serve! They broke God's

law and robbed His people. Their actions were so bad that people did not want to come and sacrifice to the Lord anymore. They misrepresented God to the people, destroying the beautiful picture of what God provided for them. This was a terrible thing in the eyes of the Lord. However, just like Eli's son's, some believers who claim to know the Lord and serve him often misrepresent him. Truthfully, if we treat others poorly, they may decide not to have anything to do with the Lord. Thus, whether a priest in Old Testament days, a pastor, a teacher or Christian, our lives need to be about serving others in such a way that the people around us will be attracted to God and not vice versa. This suggests that our service to God must be with a right heart.

Although, Eli trained Samuel in the ways of the Lord, he failed in that same area with his own two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. It is also unfortunate that Eli with the infirmities of his old age did nothing further to prevent these horrible things from happening. He forgot that "The seeds of evil blooms in the fields of negligence". As regards, it was recorded that the only action he took was to say to his sons; "Why do you according to sayings, which I hear, sayings about you which are evil, of this whole people?" He talked to them but never did anything about removing them from office or making them stop. Could he have been a better father if he had removed them from office? Could the rebellion be prevented if his sons had been disciplined and attended to when they were younger? Oh! How important it is for us to listen to our parents and those in authority over us. Had Eli's sons only listened to him, and changed, God's judgment would not have come upon them and their descendants. However, God prepared to judge the sons of Eli

for their wickedness but before that He sent a prophet to warn Eli of the judgment coming upon them. In order to prick Eli's own conscience, He pointed out to him the grace that was manifested in the choice of his father's house (the house of Aaron). The Lord then described the terrible way that Eli's sons had abused that privilege. Though, the choice of the family of Aaron was still there but disgrace would come upon those that hated the Lord. Thus, because of negligence, he lost his most precious value- life. The prophet went on to explain that the strength of Eli's house would be broken and all the members of his house would die early. They would not, however, be removed entirely from the service at the altar (verses 31-34). But the Lord would rise up a faithful priest and cause him to walk before His anointed. From him all that were left of the house of Eli would be obliged to beg for their bread (verses 33-36)

The fulfillment of the faithful priest came in Zadok, who was from the family of Eleazar, also from the line of Aaron. He became the high priest in the beginning of Solomon's reign (several years after this). He was faithful in serving the Lord. All of the high priests that followed Zadok came from his line as long as the priesthood continued. This shows that God will always raise someone to carry on his work. Thus, even if the evil and sin of those who minister destroys them, it cannot destroy the ministry. God's work will never fail because of a lack of hands to carry it on.

But should parents be responsible for the unrighteous acts of their children? The Bible clearly stipulates that parents have a duty and are accountable before Him to bring up their children in light and truth and to set order in their families. Hence, no matter how well we may perform our duties in the

church, sorrow will come if we neglect to correct our children in righteousness. The sons of Eli used their authority as priests to extort from the people, the best of the meat brought before them for sacrifice as seen in 1 Sam2:13-16. This actually meant that they were taking their portion before giving a portion to God! They were also committing immoral acts with the women who gathered at the tabernacle. Eli knew what they were doing. However, when the people saw that the priesthood at Shiloh was corrupt, they “abhorred the offering of the Lord”. In the midst of all these, what was the role of the father (Eli)? The Bible records that Eli confronted his sons saying, “why do ye such things?...Nay, my sons for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress” (I Sam 2:23-24). However, Hophni and Phinehas ignored the pleading of their father and continued in their evil ways: Eli's warning was too late, moreover, he did nothing to remove them from office. Even when the Lord spoke plainly to Eli warning him to restrain or remove his sons, he still did nothing and allowed his sons to work at the tabernacle. To make matters worse, he said that, “it is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth good to Him.

From the above, we can see that there is a sense of resignation and submission to God in these words. Eli knew he had sinned and that the fates of his sons were certain. God was not satisfied with Eli's weak verbal warnings to his sons. He expected more. Even after receiving the rebuke from the man of God, Eli remained passive and took no action against his sons. Eli is an example of many passive parents, who lack the courage and backbone to enforce their directives on their children. The truth is that passive parents ruin both their children and their personal testimony by their inaction and

unwillingness to discipline their children. For this reason, James Merrit in his famous quote warns that parents should always remember that discipline is like a two-edged sword; it is not only to correct children when they are wrong, but to direct them to a way that is right". This further explains why Ronie Matthew Thomas buttresses the fact that "Life without discipline is like a ship without a rudder"

God demonstrated His holiness by taking action against Eli for his failure as a parent, and against his wicked sons, for the contempt they showed for God's offerings. There came a battle between Israel and Philistine where thirty thousand footmen died including Hophni and Phinehas. Israel fled in defeat and when the news got to Eli, he fell off from the seat backward, breaking his neck, and died. The unhappy events that befell Eli and his sons should be instructive to parents today. It is a case of parental negligence by one who had the sacred and nontransferable responsibility to teach, encourage, correct, and restrain his children in righteousness. Eli gave Hopni and Phinehas the freedom to commit serious sins without the necessary corrective action. Just like modern and self-indulgent parents, he verbally challenged his sons but God rebuked him because he did not restrain them. Hence, the results of this omission were disastrous for him, his sons and the nation of Israel. For this reason, John Trapp instructs that "it is better to be pruned to grow than cut up to burn".

Had Eli enforced his commands on his children when they were little, he would have speared them from severe judgment as adults. From Eli's interactions with his adult children, we can safely assume that he was a passive parent when his children were little. His young boys undoubtedly

learned that he warnings but did not enforce them, as most permissive parents do. Because of that, his children grew up believing God was also passive. Probably, they had concluded that God was just like their father and would not take any action against their blatant sin. They did not fear God, because as young children, they never learned to respect their father. How else would they be so bold as to blaspheme the name of God by their shameless conduct as priests before the nation of Israel? As parents, the Lord has placed on our shoulders the primary responsibility to discipline and bring up our children, teaching them to walk in the ways of truth. Hence, “a person's attitude towards discipline is the measure of that persons own orientation to order” (Max Van Manen)

In view of the above, some fundamental ways to make parental teaching effective are constant and caring communication between parents and children, with parents being aware day by day of what their children do and learn. Secondly, regular and well –prepared family meetings such as Bible Study as well as careful supervision of the contents of movies, television programs, the internet, books, magazines, music and other materials, so that children can be guided past the ambushes and dangers found in the media. This method and form of discipline as quoted by Bette Davis, “is a symbol of caring to a child, as discipline is guidance. If there is love, there is no such thing as being too tough with a child”.

A colleague from work told me that not long ago; she was driving her car along a busy road when she heard another driver behind her honking and flashing his lights. Thinking it was another impatient driver, she continued down the road. Soon the other driver pulled up beside her, shouted and asked her to pull over because she had an

important thing to tell him. When they both stopped, the stranger pointed to the bumper sticker in the back window of my friend's car and said, "I know that is true!". The sticker read, "No other success in life can compensate for failure in the home". In tears, this man proceeded to tell my friend how he had compromised his values, neglected his family and lost what he now knew was the most precious blessing in life.

Although, many endeavours may be worthy of our time and attention, we ought not to neglect our responsibility towards our family because of our devotion to other activities. As worthy and appropriate as other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely appointed duties that parents should perform towards their children. Given that, no other success can compensate for failure in the home. Hence, we must learn by the Spirit, how to strike the balance between family and other responsibilities.

Of a truth, parenting must be forceful in the face of disobedience. Some parents tell their young children what is right but do not follow up their directives with appropriate actions just like Eli. In the long run, this encourages children to be selfish, which ultimately leads to unrestrained evil conduct. Parenting is an awesome responsibility and parents must discipline themselves vigorously in order to enforce their commands. This is because discipline here according to Dan Doriani, "is like a vaccine. It inflicts lesser pain now to avoid greater pain later". Permissively raised children learn to despise both their parents and God's authority. God holds parents accountable for how they raise their children. This is therefore, a warning to modern day parents against being passive about the discipline of their children. This is because

it is like the “helm of a ship; it gives direction.” Hence, as George Washington once noted; “Nothing can be more hurtful to the service than the neglect of discipline”. Thus, when parents ignore Biblical truth in the family, the results are always unpleasant and usually have long lasting negative consequences and outcomes. However, God's blessings are specially reserved for those who seek Him and Honour Him by applying His word in bringing up their children.

How then do we deal with adult children who are rebellious and disobedient to God? It seems safe to say that many of the problems Eli handled badly with his grown sons are as a result of his failure to deal with them rightly as children. Therefore, there is the need for parents to learn a great lesson from Eli who devoted his time to God's work but failed as a father. Yet, it is also possible that children raised in a very godly home may turn out the way Eli's sons did. Therefore, we should not assume that parents are always culpable for the poor conduct of their children. Many righteous parents earnestly strive to teach their children from their youth the principles of the gospel, yet their children still go astray. At the same time, we must not down play the crucial responsibility of parents to instruct their children. As regards this, President Gordon B Hinckly has given the following counsel:

I recognise that there are parents who, notwithstanding an outpouring of love and a diligent and faithful effort to teach them, see their children grow in a contrary manner and weep while their wayward sons and daughters willfully pursue courses of tragic consequences. For such, I have great sympathy, and to them I quote the words of Ezekiel:

“The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son” (Ezekiel 18:20)

The above is the exception rather than the rule. However, this should not deter parents from making every effort in showing forth love, example and correct precept in the upbringing of those for whom God has given us responsibility. In view of the above, parents should learn to balance their work load, schedule and time with their families. This lies in the fact that the first ministry and work of every parent is their family as godly parents breed godly children. Yet, I must further add that I watch parents all the time whose children act inappropriately right in front of them, and they never seem to see anything wrong. Some believe that the child is still too young and does not know what he or she is doing. As a result, they postpone correction to a later time. The Bible adequately buttressed the importance of upbringing in Proverbs (22:6) which instructs parents to “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it”. Despite the above instruction, I still see parents wringing their hands today much like Eli, when their children refuse to obey. Such parents employ one means of correction and stop at that even when the options they have are many. Yet after one word of correction when the child blatantly refuses to obey, the parent shrugs his or her shoulders as if to say, 'what else can I do?' As aptly captured in Proverbs, (22:15), “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child but the rod of correction will drive it far from him (KJV). When we fail to discipline our children, it is not because we have no option to take, it is not because we do not know what to do, it is simply because we

are not willing to pay the price for doing what is right. Whether we like it or not, the choice to do right is simply for the best of us and our children. Many at times, some of us are afraid of losing the relationship we have with our children. Since Eli refused to heed to the instruction of the prophet, we can safely say that he honoured his sons more highly than God. I fear most parents are tempted to turn blind eye to those things which we simply do not want to address. Eli was virtually blind, but he certainly is not deaf. Thus, it should be stated that parenthood and procrastination in upbringing do not mix.

We may think that the conduct of Eli and his sons as priests has little to do with us as contemporary Christians. However, we must be reminded that we too are priests. 1 Peter 2:5 says “You also, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”. Therefore, we should be reminded that Eli and his sons, ministered in the temple of God, which was his dwelling place. Thus, as parents, we are his temple, His dwelling place and when we do harm to His dwelling place, He takes it seriously. Hence, we must bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This is in consonance with the words of Joyce Meyer which says “when discipline is sown, like a good seed, it yields a harvest of things that fulfill and satisfy us-things that make us happy and release peace and joy in our lives” We must not only verbally instruct and rebuke our children, we must correct them. This includes the use of the rod of proverbs. This is because all too many; Christians are controlled by their children. They choose like Eli, to turn a blind eye and hope the problem will go away. It will not go

away rather, it will get only bigger.

By chance, if we have failed in anyway, we may choose to turn to the savior for mercy, patience, tolerance and help as parents. By diligently seeking to know Him through prayer and word study, our knowledge and wisdom as parents will be expanded. Our desire to “live by every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God” will enable us to make Jesus Christ the centre of our lives and model our choices, actions and reactions as parents. As we do this, the Holy Ghost will be with us as evidence that God is near, and He is interested in our happiness. He will definitely help us succeed with our children.

In summary, we should always choose to follow a Biblical pattern of conduct in our homes. We should base our lives on the principles and methods that God has revealed to us in His written word. This is because parenting is a serious responsibility that carries grave consequences when responsibility is neglected. The good news is that He who requires us to raise our children in a godly way will give us the grace to do so.



GUIDING THE CHILD TO CHRIST: TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES



The Bible explains that the children of Christian parents are holy and that God is calling them into a relationship with Him (Acts 2:39, 1 Corinthians 7:14). Therefore, the best way to help our children to learn God's word is by being in constant fellowship with Jesus. Teaching and guiding them to knowing, speaking and living God's word is imperative. Hence, depending on the age of the child, there are spiritual markers that parents can use to guide and train their kids, as succinctly and aptly captured by Larry Fowler in his book titled "Leading Your Child to Christ" Therefore, this chapter is a review of the afore-mentioned book.

According to the author, the spiritual marker for early childhood is respect. Thus, for parents of young children between the ages of two to four, the journey of raising Christ followers starts with the task of instilling respect for God and

his authority. The psalmist tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). Therefore, while most of us enjoy teaching toddlers interesting Bible stories, we cannot afford to stop there. Awe, wonder and respectful fear of God lays the groundwork. As appropriately captured by the author, parents should teach their young children the following truths:

- God is strong. He can do anything.
- God always keeps His promises.
- God gives us rules that we must obey.
- Even if mummy and daddy can't see what you are doing, God sees it
- God disciplines us because He loves us

Furthermore, Fowler, explains that for early elementary years, wisdom is an important principle to be taught. Wisdom here connotes the ability to apply God's word to life situations. So to grow in wisdom, our kids must first learn God's word. From ages 5-8, add biblical teaching to your daily routine. At this age, your children love to learn. Make sure you emphasise the following areas

- Who is God? Use Bible stories to teach about God. Take the story of David and Goliath for example. What can we learn about God from it? You can do anything with God on your side. The story's application ought to be, "Make sure you are on God's side"
- What is truth? Kids will be bombarded throughout life by truth claims from the media, teachers and friends. If you are not successful in teaching them that truth and wisdom come from the Bible, they will struggle with

their faith later. This automatically connotes that parents must regularly include statements like the following in their conversation: “We can always trust what God says”, “God's word is always right”, “Obey the Bible and you will never be sorry”.

- Who is Jesus? Growing up in a society that professes to value tolerance will challenge your child's faith. They may be called “intolerant” and “hateful” for claiming that Jesus is the only way to God. When they sit in the midst of people who practice different religions, will their faith in Jesus stick? To withstand this pressure, children need a secure knowledge of who Jesus is and why He is the only way.

Going further, the author adds that the Spiritual marker for late elementary years is Grace. Accordingly, the primary goal from 9-11 years old is to receive God's Grace. The majority of people who trust Christ as Saviour do so before they are teens. This suggests that, if your children do not come to faith in Christ by the time they are teens, the likelihood begins to decrease that they will do so. This means that parents must do two things: First, make certain that their children fully understand the Gospel, and go ahead to ask God to help you discern the authenticity of your children's decision. Countless kids respond to the Gospel outwardly because of pressure from a Sunday school teacher or parent, while their hearts, remain reluctant to submit to Christ. To understand your children's faith, ask questions like, “can you explain why Jesus died on the cross? Why do you think you are a Christian? Responses such as, “I prayed a prayer” or “The teacher told me I was a Christian” may indicate they are

trusting in the wrong thing.

Beyond accepting God's Grace, your kids also need to learn how to extend that grace to others. "That's not fair" may be the most common complaint of this age group. Siblings war over the size of food, who sits in what seat in the car and who has to do what chores. This age group is especially concerned with getting their fair share. Grace forgets what is fair and gives others more than they deserve. This is how to live like Jesus.

However, it should be known that teaching kids Grace is a tall order. Their selfish nature will battle it. Friends will take advantage of it. So if they are going to learn how to give grace, they will need to see it consistently modeled by their parents. As hard as it may be for parents to comprehend, God loves our children even more than we do. He desires that they have a personal relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus. The most important introduction we have to make as parents is the one that would lead our children to God through a relationship with Jesus. Therefore, showing them Christ in our everyday life is essential in helping them to make this decision.

Also, for the middle years, Trust should be taught. At this stage, young adolescents begin to wonder what their lives will hold. These years are a primetime for discussing the importance of trusting God with their future. To begin the conversation, discuss proverbs 3:5-6 with them. Talk through it carefully: "What does it mean to trust in the Lord? How about "With all your heart?" Why is God's understanding so much better than theirs? What does the clause, "He will make your paths straight" connote? Buy a plaque with this passage

on it and hang it in their room. Have them memorize it. Underline it in their Bibles. Make it a strong focus in your conversations.

Even more, for the older teens preparing for higher learning, perspective should be the focus. Older teens may begin to wrestle with tough questions for the first time: “Why is there evil in the world?”, “Why is my teacher so unfair?”, “Why did God let my best friend die in a car accident?”. Lack of adequate answers to these questions can send their faith tumbling. First, provide the perspective that God is sovereign in all things. Your teens need to hear your stories about times when God worked difficult things out for good. They need to see you trust in God. Always stay open to their questions even if they are hard to hear. If you don't have the answer, admit it-then find the answer together. As the kids grow older, parents should take note of their life stage and adjust their spiritual training accordingly. Our prayer is that our kids will grow up to be as George Barna put it, “An irrepressible follower of Christ who accepts the Bible as truth, lives by its principles, seeks to impact the world and continually deepen their relationship with God”

In other to achieve the afore-mentioned, we have to deliberately create time to talk about faith with our children. Though, in the world today, time is one of the most precious commodity. Yet, in our increasingly busy lives, we must make the best of the time we have. Therefore, the best time is ANYTIME but the following times can also be considered: Firstly, Car Time can be adequately utilised especially while dropping them off at school. Sometimes, try turning off the radio and asking them about their day. Take time to pray

about where you are headed to next. Secondly, times when they fall sick and have to stay home from school remains another time that can be deployed. Though, no one looks forward to the child being sick, yet such times are good to have a healthy conversation. This time gives you a chance to watch videos or listen to music together. Choose videos that will naturally lead to talking about issues of faith and life.

Furthermore, at Bed Time, parents should cultivate the habit of sharing the highs and lows from the day and then take time to pray for each other. With teenagers, you can ask questions like: "What is on your schedule tomorrow that I can pray for? Do any of your friends need prayer for anything? In fact, at mealtime, taking a moment to give God thanks and praise before eating establishes a ritual that remains with children into adulthood. Particularly, travelling together over a long distance during vacation time or just getting away on a long weekend trip can be a great time to re-establish faith talk in your family. Do a family project, take some quiet time to read the Bible together, or have a family devotion each day. On the final evening of your vacation, spend time in prayer and worship. It doesn't have to be elaborate, take some time out to give thanks for the time, share what one is thankful for and one thing you look forward to when you get home. Lastly, the One-on-one time remains the best time. Establishing the ritual of one-on-one time with each of our children either weekly or monthly, should be built in to our life rhythm as parents. Taking advantage of some of these slices of time is imperative. It is a well known fact that most parents are busy but, we should deliberately choose to make out time for our kids to teach them God's word.

Aside the afore-mentioned, one other way, through which parents can guide their kids to follow Christ, is through family worship. In fact, the crucial nature of family worship was showcased in the nation of Israel, at the inauguration of the nation just before they were to cross over into the Promised Land. God explicitly commanded the parents (and grandparents) to carefully teach his Word to the next generation (Deut 6:1-9). Particularly, Deuteronomy (6:7) captures it thus, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way”

Furthermore, it should be noted that the New Testament church started with family worship because Jesus often taught in homes. For instance, in the home of Mary and Martha. Jesus also had fellowship in the home of Zacchaeus; as these home churches grew, buildings had to be constructed where all believers can gather together without neglecting family worship. This is because through family worship, parents give their children a full view of God in all His beautiful person and wonderful works. Our heavenly Father greatly desires our children to know and love him. Moreover, as earthly parents, we want the best for our children; thus, the best we can give them is a full view of God in all His splendor and wonderful works. We should glorify God –“make God big” –in the eyes of our children and encourage them to respond in reverence and love.

Family Worship helps in child training because as parents, helping our kids interpret life from God's perspective is paramount. In this way, we must have a God centered worldview based solidly on His Word. So we must

teach and meditate upon the Scriptures constantly, both individually, and as a family. This is because churches are formed from families. When families are strong in the Lord; the church is strong in the Lord and vice versa. As regards the way it should be conducted, it is imperative to state that there is no correct formula, setting or schedule. It should flow from hearts that love God. It is to be the practical expression of consciously living in the presence of the Lord. As such, it should be a natural part of our families' daily routines. With regards, some of the pertinent questions we ought to always ask ourselves are, "How can I speak God's Word into this moment? What do my children need to know about God in this situation? Thankfully, God has provided us with his own written Word where he "has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His Glory and Excellence, by which he has granted to us His precious and very great promises" (2 Peter 1:3-4). Our Gracious Father Has revealed himself in the pages of Scripture, written down for us as the infallible record of His person and work in history.

Therefore, within the greater context of living at all times for God's glory, there should be regular, formal times in which we gather our families together for Bible reading, prayer, and singing. Let us be sure to read the Bible and not just books about the Bible, honoring the Scripture as our God-given authority, and source book. We may also intersperse our reading with questions to encourage comprehension like, "what does this passage say? What does it mean? How must we respond?" We should pray also, blessing God, confessing our sins, giving thanks to Him, and asking him to work in

specific ways. This agenda can result to eternal dividends. It further explains why Mathew Henry says that “They that pray in the family do well; they that pray and read the scriptures do better, but they that pray and read and sing do best of all”. This shows that there is completeness in that kind of family worship.

Many factors challenge our consistency in family worship especially as it has to do with when to meet, what scriptures to read, how to pray, and what songs to sing. However, the good news is that devotionals, both online and hard copies are readily available; my family uses “the Open Heavens” devotional of the Redeemed Christian Church of God”, a thousand and one others are readily available and can also be used. In sum, Scriptures should always be in our minds and ready to be activated by our hands. Let us prove our love of God and our children as we strive to be more faithful in ministering the Word of God to one another. By so doing, God receives the glory while we grow in Grace.



TYING THE KNOT

*"Where you are now is as a result of either your choice or someone's choice.
If you neglect the ideas of choosing the ultimate things for yourself,
someone will hire you by choosing the average thing for you"
(Israel more Ayivor)*



In tying the knot, we ought to understand that the family unit is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This explains why parents have a sacred duty to bring up their children in love and righteousness, and further provide for their physical and spiritual needs. They also have the responsibility to teach them to love and serve each other, to observe the commandments of God and be law abiding citizens wherever they live. This lies in the fact that husbands and wife, mothers and fathers will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations. This is in a bid to avoid heartbreaking outcomes that can result if parents neglect this sacred obligation. In fact, the African proverb which says, "If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem" clearly buttresses this fact. The choice is ours to make.

From the explications in the preceding chapters, we see the outcome of bad choices manifesting in different forms

from the termination of a priestly dynasty (Eli and sons) to treason in the royal family of David (Adonijah), and a lot more. These emanated from the failure of some of God's greatest servants to discipline their children. It seems incredible –that men so close to God would be careless in the discipline of their children. To this end, parents must deliberately choose to keep their priorities straight because nothing must become all-consuming that we fail our children. Of a truth, parents today are bombarded by a battery of authorities, doctors, psychologists, bankers, and other experts, who give the impression that we know absolutely nothing about bringing up our own children. As the African proverb says, “A tree is straightened while it is still young” thus, Christian parents must not be intimidated to the point of relinquishing their God-given responsibility to guide their children on the straight and narrow course of life (Proverbs 29:15-17). Particularly, it is evident that God shows love to his children by disciplining them. This is well encapsulated in the French proverb which says that “he who loves well, chastises well”. The Bible further says, “Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:12). Therefore, parents who choose to ignore their child's misbehavior will receive disrespect in return. Truth is, repeated neglect of disciplinary action will have tragic life time outcomes and consequences.

This explains why Moses stressed the importance of teaching children God's precepts when he states in Deuteronomy (6:7) “...impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”. This connotes that the family is a place where spiritual

development should be nurtured and facilitated. This further brings to bare the fact that training of children is not primarily the responsibility of house helps, psychologist, the church or school. It is primarily the responsibility of parents (Eph 6:4). Thus, we render a doubtful service to God and mankind if we save the world, yet loose our children. Not only are they our children but also God's. Hence, as Jim Rohn quotes, "we must all suffer one of two things: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret or disappointment" However, it is God alone that can help us make them what he would have them be.

Inadvertently, some parents have made wrong choices in the past. Instead of wallowing in self pity; there is the need for such people to buckle up, get out of self pity, get the chip off their shoulders and further resolve to make right choices. Learn to take responsibility and stop living by excuses. For instance, while quarrelling and bickering may be inevitable, parents should try to keep it away from children. However, if they happen to see us fight or argue, always strive to apologise and say "we are sorry, we just had a disagreement but everything is okay now". The need to also admit our weakness and limitations to God is imperative. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us of the fact that" ... we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet, he did not sin." This explains that God is able to help anyone who calls on Him for help with an open heart. Therefore, the process to correct a wrong choice is repentance. Just like David, acknowledge your mistakes before God and ask for mercy and help to correct your mistakes. Just as our Saviour died to provide us with that blessed gift, may we be filled with gratitude for the right choice, accept responsibility of choice

and ever remain conscious of the results of choice. Remember, every choice we make should change the result of a wrong choice, made in the past. Though, something in our past may be the reason things are the way they are today, we should not allow them to become an excuse to stay that way. This implies that a wrong choice is not incorrigible. Hence, the need to trust God for help. This is succinctly buttressed in Proverbs (3: 5-6) where we are admonished to “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths.” We have to trust and believe in God to lead us in making the right choice for our families. When we put all our trust in him, He gives us the direction we need to move in. His faithfulness will come true for us as we press forward in faith in spite of the odds stacked against us.

Furthermore, we must come to a place of recognizing our utter dependency on God. Many times, decisions bring us to see both the good and bad within us. We cannot make excuses for our sins; rather, we must immediately confess them and seek the Lord's cleansing. There is no shortcut to dealing with sin-it must be dealt with quickly or it can pollute our choices. Afterwards, we can ask God for wisdom. The wisdom that comes from the world brings a pseudo-temporary peace followed by more frustration but the wisdom that comes from God brings peace and life even when it gets tough. When we pray in faith believing that God will give us wisdom to make the best choices for our family, he responds and gives us more than we need. Thus, James 1:5 says “if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”.

Again, people can have an opinion on what they think the best decision is for our families. However, it is important to screen out the wrong voices from the barrage of voices we hear by praying and asking the Lord to reveal His wise servants to us. Though, one can recognize the Spirit of God within them because their advice leans heavily on the truths of God's word without fear, anxiety or presumption. Still, it is pertinent to assert that sometimes, when we are pressed to make tough decisions, there is the temptation to be quick and presumptuous instead of waiting on God. Regarding this, Psalm (37:7a) admonishes us to "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him" Being still before God means that we will have periods of time when it seems like nothing is happening. Yet, the spirit is moving on our behalf. This is a time of quiet reflection and meditation with thankfulness because of the Lord's goodness. Hence, we should learn to search the Scriptures of God. Psalm (19:8) further states that "the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart; the commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes." Is the pressure of time forcing you to make a premature decision? Meditate on Proverbs (21:5) which says, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty" Don't let the fear of missing out drive your decision. When in doubt, leave it out and understand how your family background might affect your thinking. Also learn to consider the possible outcomes of your Choice. Proverbs (14:15) says "The naïve believes everything but the prudent man considers his steps". Make sure you assess the potential risks of your choice.

Thus, it should be noted that when making tough decisions that will affect our family, it is important to base our

final decisions on God's word, which speaks to our situations. In fact, it becomes a wonderful and joyful moment of discovery when we find a specific scripture that speaks to us in our choices or decision-making process. Memorization is simplified because we live and breathe his word while sensing His presence with us. Don't fall prey to wishful thinking or let your emotions get the best of you. No matter what our choices are today, they are ultimately creating our future and that of our children because every choice made, will either cause our families to be blessed or cursed. This is because all choices have consequences which will either be for our betterment or destruction. This further connotes the fact that we are responsible for our choices. The Bible challenges us with this admonition in Deuteronomy (30:19) " I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore, choose life that both thou and thy seed may live" Therefore, the Bible offers many principles to aid the process of making choices that honour God. Below are a few Biblical Principles that can guide our choices.

Firstly, it is imperative to begin with prayer. Luke (18:1) states "Men ought to pray always and not to faint". Also, 1st Thessalonians (5:16-18) says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" The above scripture connotes that as parents, the need to pray in all situation is pertinent especially in times of decision making. As we pray, we ask for wisdom because wise decisions are considered informed decisions.(James 1:5) It is also important to understand what options are available. Once the factors are known, options can be further considered and evaluated.

Therefore, parents should devote their time to pray for their children. Let us learn from Susan Wesley who took her time to pray for her children. Secondly, seeking biblical wisdom is of paramount importance. Some decisions become easy, if there is one option that is in consonant with God's word. Psalm (119:105) says "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" When we follow the teachings of God's word, He guides our path and provides knowledge to make wise choices. Again, seeking godly counsel is germane. Proverbs (15:22) says "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers, they succeed" Sometimes, consulting with a friend or family member is enough. At other times, consulting with a pastor or trusted voice can make the difference between a harmful choice and a helpful one.

Furthermore, trusting the Lord with your decision is very important. In other words, when we have made our decision with prayer, sound wisdom and biblical counsel, we ought to imbibe the habit of trusting God for the outcome. This is succinctly captured in Proverbs 3: 5-6 which says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths" However, we should also be willing to admit mistakes and adjust accordingly. In most cases, there is no wisdom in continuing down a wrong path after one has discovered it is wrong. Be willing to admit mistakes or failures and ask God for the grace to change.

Lastly, give praise to God for the success. When our choices result in personal success, we are usually tempted to attribute it to our own power, talent or genius. However, it is God who blesses our efforts and gives us strength. "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven" (John 3:27). I

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close this chapter with 1 John (5:14) which says “And this is the confidence that we have towards him that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us”. Praise God, we have an amazing God who so graciously left us a guide (His word) on how to teach and make the right choice for our families and further guide our children in the right path.



THE SURE PATH TO FOLLOW

*It is not a Church's job to spiritually develop your children.
Scripturally it is the job of the parents. The church body is
supposed to support parents in raising children, not replace them.
The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children
who follow them (Proverbs 20:7)*



Do we want good children or godly children? This question lies in the heart of our true desire for our children. In the midst of a secular society, it is easy to leave God out of our choices regarding the training of our children. Thus, for any child to be a “good”, they must be raised by God's truth. Therefore, if we desire our children to have love and passion for God, we should have the desire to know Christ as parents. The truth is, there are many voices telling us how to parent but majority reject God's purpose for our children. Considering the above, it should be noted that our goals for our children must go far beyond what we can do by our own strength, which often times, only feeds our pride. We must choose to train our children to trust God and live a super natural life in which they walk in his spirit. Now is the time to change the course of history through our families. In particular, Deuteronomy (6,1-9) gives parents a clear picture of the sure way to follow as would be discussed.

Owing to the above, families should learn to establish and live by God's standards. Deuteronomy (6:1) states;

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgment which the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do the in the land where you are going over to possess

From the above, it is clear that Moses taught the Israelites God's commands in order to help them live godly lives among heathen nations. As parents, our standards must come from God's standards; even more, we are not to think of our children alone but our children's children. This is seen in verses two which says

so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged

This explains that God wants us to think in terms of our generations. The knowledge of God must result in changing our lives. Therefore, Christian parents must choose to pass on the fear of the Lord to their children. In fact, if we live out godly lives before our children, they will most likely pick up that pattern. As a result, we need to be devoted to His word. In fact, we fool ourselves if we think that we can raise our children to become godly without having a passion for God's word. This brings to bare the question: how many times do we meditate on God's word through the week with our children? We need to teach God's word diligently to our children focusing on both the negative and the positive aspects. This is succinctly buttressed in verses 7 which states:

And you shall teach them diligently to your sons and

shall talk to them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you sit in your house and when you talk by the way and when you lie down and rise up (Deut 6:7).

With my little observation of the typical Christian father, I came to realise why many children of Christian families go wayward. Most fathers simply do not have the time to teach their children; On the other hand, some children have heard their fathers teach others but not themselves. Aside that, some parents are too busy to spend any significant time, engaging in worthwhile conversation with their children. The book of proverbs (23:13-14) instructs parents to bring up children properly as training children in godliness is their primary responsibility. However, one of the greatest problems of this concept of family devotions or personal discipline of our children is that some fathers' do not have a very good knowledge of God's word. This whole approach works only if the father really loves God with his whole heart, mind and strength. The passion for God should be normal, anything else is backsliding. Thus, we need to deliberately choose to expose ourselves regularly to God and His word, trusting that He will open our hearts and further give us the things to teach.

Sometime back, my head was extremely congested, I was hurt but my heart was joyful. When I lay down, I thought about God and His love towards my family and myself. Later, I shared with my daughter, how the Lord kept me from complaining or doubting His care for me during this time. We should choose to share our experiences with our children even as our goal should be to run after God's commands as portrayed in the Bible. This is the most viable way to

demonstrate a passionate love for God that would be worthy to transfer to the next generation.

Accordingly, It should be noted that the morning sets the pace and attitude of the day. Hence, parents should share some reflections from the morning devotion that help the children to properly face each day. Here, the father should be an early riser so that he can help encourage the family when they get up. Devotions should therefore begin before children are born so that when the child can sit up, we can start devotions with the child. This is a choice that we have to make as parents. Some will ask, how do I get my child to sit during devotions?

It should be noted that the time for prayer is the most difficult time but if we start early, that trouble will somewhat be eliminated. For instance, when the child is still an infant, the mother holds the baby's hands and gives thanks before feeding the baby. During devotions, I take my son and hold him in my laps and hold his hand. When the baby has learned to fold hands during prayer, they need to go through a time of keeping them folded. If they resist, we just go back to holding them again. As parents, we cannot force a child to be quiet, but we can help them sit still.

As regards praying with our children, it is proper to teach children to confess their sins, ask God for help and encourage them to pray for others. With many children, we can take turns but with fewer children, it is fine for each to pray. In this case, we can have the father open, while the mother closes. The children pray in between. Children usually want to start praying between three-four years and sometime earlier. Earlier on, we just take their hands and pray

for them. While the children are praying, we should carefully listen to their prayers during family devotions to see if there are thanks, worship, asking for forgiveness and mission (praying for the needs and salvation of others). This is part of the instruction that a father can give. Thus, while family devotion is mandatory, personal devotions is to be something they express to the Lord on their own. Above all, the father and the mother need to work together in harmony to positively instruct their children because every child needs to come to know the Lord. Parents should therefore have goals of raising godly children. We should hope that in their childhood, they come to know and encounter the Lord. We should ensure that they have a sense of love for God and the ways of God. Parents should insist that the children maintain these habits when they grow. As we prayerfully do this, God will stir their hearts. Again, parents should choose to surround themselves with and also display God's word. This is well captured in Deuteronomy (6:8-9) which says

And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

As parents, God's word should be all around us for our children to see and emulate. We can put scriptures on our walls, computer screens and plaques amongst others. While this is done, it should still be noted that the best place to store God's word is in our heart. Hence what we display and put up should reflect what is in our hearts. As a way of reflection, would anyone know that you have great love for God from walking in or around your home?

In all these, parents need to re-think their calling from

God. We need to deliberately choose to lead and teach. It is from such verses as Deuteronomy (6) we understand the true importance of the family to the great society. When the family fails to follow the precepts of the Lord, the society dies spiritually. Therefore, we should ponder on the kind of formal teaching we give our kids regarding God's word. There is no doubt that spiritual instruction stands as one of the most important aspects of parenting. How tragic, it is that it is one of the most neglected aspects of parenting! May God give each parent grace to be faithful; May He call up fathers who will be bold in their stand to train their children in love and the ways of the Lord.

Under these circumstances, choosing to invite God into helping us make our decisions as regards our families is germane. In doing that, it will determine whether our future and that of our kids will be secured and have God's blessing on it. Lets us be as Joshua who declared; "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD". God promised Joshua good success if he obeyed the words of the Bible and choose to follow Him. Joshua and his family were blessed because he made the right choices; even though he went through many battles, God was with him. He was an over comer!

Therefore, we ought to constantly remind ourselves that Life is a seed; it is what we put into life that we get from life. This is better explained in Galatians (6:7-8): "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked for whatsoever a man soweth, that he shall reap". What kind of seed are you sowing in your family? What can God say about you? Can he vouch for you? He said this about Abraham, "I know my son Abraham, he will command his household after me. He further said this to the devil about Job in Job (1:8)

“Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil?”

Through our attitudes and behaviour, we ought not to give the devil a chance in our family. Thus, as regards our choices to our families, we must choose what is best for our kids in line with God's Principles, and further base our choices on God's word, not on our assumptions. We should also deliberately make choices which value relationships over rights. Abram had the right to choose whatever land he wanted and to let Lot have the leftover but he refused. So much strife could be avoided in the family and the church if we put premium on our relationship and set aside our rights. When we choose by obeying God's principles, his hand will be evident in our families.

Furthermore, making choices which value godliness over greed is imperative. Lot chose by sight and ended up spiritually and financially bankrupt. The beautiful things he saw didn't give him a long lasting happiness, he chose by sight and not by faith. With regards to the above, parents should make choices based on God's eternal promises over immediate pleasure. If we make our choices based on God's principles regarding our kids, we will have everything. Seek him in all your choices and everything else is yours. (Matthew 6:33) More importantly, we ought to ask ourselves this question; How am I sure that I am making the right choice as a parent? There are many examples in the teachings of Jesus that give us a hint about how we can make wise choices. But let me suggest two examples. We can be absolutely certain that any choice we make will be the right one if we make it with these words of Jesus in mind: Matthew (6:33):

But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

In other words, seek to truly make the Lord the King of our life and family, and always seek to live by His standard of righteousness.

Even more, John (12:48) states that

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the words that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

Simply put, if our decisions aren't based on the words of Jesus Christ as found in his teachings and those of his inspired apostles, we will be judged on the last day.

The scripture above is a call for Christian parents to desist from making choices based on what seems right in their own eyes. Are we living every day, knowing that our choices only impact our eternal destiny and that of our family as well? Are we setting the right kind of examples for those around us—our family, and for our brothers and sisters in Christ? Is it our greatest desire to ensure that we are doing the Lords will in everything?

If your answer is YES, it means you have given your life to Christ in complete obedience to God's word. But if your answer is NO, it means you have not committed your life to Christ. Just remember that you are putting your soul in jeopardy, you are also risking the souls of those who look to you as a leader and an example.

Should, in any case there are changes you need to make in your life, this is why you have had the privilege and

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opportunity to read this book- an opportunity to make the right choices. You can do this today by choosing to stop doing what is right in your own eyes, and following the precepts of the Lord as regards your choices. Truth is the biggest decision we can ever make is to say yes to Jesus, he alone can help us choose rightly for our families.



FINALLY

Training involves more than instruction-it also includes living out our lives in front of our kids, modeling godly morals.

It includes giving children practice and correction to help them learn godly lifestyle.

It requires dedication on the part of parents.

Children are apprentices to their parents. (Ihuoma Okorie)



As parents, when we act otherwise in the presence of our kids, we should be aware that there are watching eyes. Children learn what they see because they form opinions on whatever we demonstrate in their presence which they later go ahead to actualize. This is why the African proverb says, “Train a child the way he should go and also go the same way” hence, setting a good example is definitely a powerful parenting tool. Thus, aside the fact that the children are watching, the world is also watching. Our children will imitate our honorable as well as our dishonorable behaviours. Thus, parents need to know that they deliver far more powerful lessons in their homes than anything they can teach in church hence, what our children hear us say and see us do, either reinforces or undermine whatever they learn in Sunday school. This intensifies and projects the fact that best way to instill a lively faith and Christian conscience in our children-is when we

model them after such, right from the home.

Truth be told, if our kids always see us criticizing others, they will learn to condemn. If they see us hostile, they will learn to fight. If we show forth kindness and consideration, they will learn respect. If we live out fairness, they will learn justice. If they see us angry, they will imbibe hostility. If they see honesty in us they will learn truthfulness. Likewise, when we live out deceit, they will learn deception. Truthfully, honesty is not only the best policy; it is one of God's commands, and always the best way to maintain both a reputation and relations in our families and with people around. As parents and followers of Christ, we are under an obligation to live like followers of Christ. This is because our children, the world and our Father in Heaven expects it of us and will respond accordingly. Teaching our children to be good people and having them make good choices cannot be accomplished by merely saying it to them. Living out that goodness as parents is paramount for them to emulate. Therefore, this is a call on parents to take the training of their children seriously- by way of guiding and shepherding their hearts.

On a whole, would you choose to make a positive or negative impact in your family and the world around? Today, take the lead and focus on making biblical choices that uplifts the community, improves the society and positively inspires the hopes and dreams of your children. In all, you need to trust God for help to achieve this great feat and not in your training capability. It is in Him alone (not in our attempt at training) that we must place our hopes for our children. To do this, we need to trust God. Therefore, now is the perfect time to shift your life paradigm because the right sets of choices can

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change your life and that of your family dramatically. However, be sure to be guided by the Spirit. Also ensure that your choices are based on God's word. Finally, tie your life to Christ; let His Word govern your choices. Allow Him to use the gospel in your life and those around you for generations to come.

Afterward

God give us Christian homes!

Homes where the Bible is loved and taught,

Homes where the Master's will is sought,

Homes crowned with beauty Your love has wrought;

God give us Christian homes;

God give us Christian homes.

God give us Christian homes!

Homes where the father is true and strong,

Homes that are free from the blight of wrong,

Homes that are joyous with love and song;

God give us Christian homes!

God give us Christian homes!

God give us Christian homes!

Homes where the mother, in caring quest,

Strives to show others Your way is best,

Homes where the Lord is an honoured guest;

God give us Christian homes;

God give us Christian homes!

God give us Christian homes!

Homes where the children are led to know

Christ in His beauty who loves them so,

Homes where the alter fires burn and glow;

God give us Christian homes;
God give us Christian homes.

God give us Christian Homes/ Baylus B. Mckinney.

The lyrics of this song should always remind us of what we should be striving for. We should make the Bible the centerpiece of our home, life, teachings and our choices in general.

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