

DON'T WASTE YOUR PAIN

Godman Akinlabi

 **Enthusia**
P U B L I S H I N G

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Dedication

To anyone who has been through unfavourable circumstances and wondered why. This is for you.

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Introduction

We all feel pain at some point in our lives, be it physical or emotional, little or intense. Whether from being smacked as a child, the devastation of having your heart broken, or the inevitable pain of saying goodbye as a loved one passes away, pain is an unwelcome companion in the journey of life.

We would all probably prefer a pain-free life, but as Christians we must realise that we have not been promised a life without pain, rather, we have been promised the presence of an everlasting companion and comforter. Remember that even Jesus felt pain while He was on earth. He felt emotional pain of Lazarus' death when he wept at his tomb, His heart broke with compassion as He looked upon the

Israelites as they wondered around like sheep without a shepherd and He felt both physical and emotional pain on the cross as His body was bruised and battered for our sins.

In John 14:16, Jesus promised to send us another comforter (The Holy Spirit) after His ascension because He was aware that there would be moments of hardship, moments of tears and moments when we would just want to give up. In spite of His delivering on this promise, many times, we still struggle with why we must face tough times at all. We ask, 'Why does God allow us to go through pain? Why do bad things happen to good people? Can pain possibly have a higher purpose? Is it part of God's master plan?'

If you have ever asked, 'where is God when I'm hurting?' I hope that as you thumb through the pages of this book, you will see God's answer ring through. He says, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you. I am right there with you, even to the end of time.'

Godman Akinlabi

Chapter 1

E is For Experience.

The acronym S.H.A.P.E. stands for:

S = Spiritual gifts

H = Heart (in other words your Passion)

A = abilities

P = Personality (Temperaments)

E = Experiences

Your SHAPE reflects how God equips you to fulfil your destiny. Most people readily accept that spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, temperaments and good experiences play an important role in discovering and executing their God-given assignments, but when it comes to bad experiences? They tend to believe that those are mishaps that are best left buried.

I had the pleasure of meeting a popular Nigerian comedian who goes by the stage name *Akpororo*. Our church invited him as one of the main acts to feature during one of our outreach programs and he did a great job of blending humour with scripture. A tall, lanky fellow, he cracked up the audience as he poked fun at his upbringing while comparing his past to his much better present. In between bouts of laughter, I realised that *Akpororo* was a prime example of someone who used the misfortunes of his past to chart a new course for his future. On further thought, it dawned on me that adapting tales of suffering into comedy was a common trait with many of the comedians in Nigeria. Many of them grew up in abject poverty. In fact, if they weren't so busy making us laugh with their tales of woe, we might be tempted to cry. Their jokes hit home not only because they were humorous, but also because they were heartfelt and ring with truth. They don't pretend to have rosy pasts, but they have turned their pains into fortunes. They refused to let the experiences of the past get the better of them.

'Well, poverty is a common occurrence in sub-Saharan Africa...' you might be thinking, 'nothing special about that.' Well, how about the experience of

having physical challenges or *anomalies*? In 2007, I attended a conference in the United States and had the distinct privilege of being addressed by the father-son team of Patrick John Hughes (father) and Patrick Henry Hughes (son). Patrick Henry was born with *Bilateral Anophthalmia*; a condition where one is born without one or both eyes, *Pterygium Syndrome*, a condition, which did not allow him to fully extend his arms and legs, *Congenital Bilateral Hip Dysplasia* – an incomplete formation of his hip sockets and *Scoliosis* a malformation of his spine. Conditions like *Anophthalmia* and *Pterygium* are rare and occur roughly in one in one hundred thousand births and a combination of all four conditions is even more rare. Most children with such severe disabilities would have been aborted or left to die, however Patrick John decided that he would look after this child and use this experience for God's glory.

At nine months of age, Patrick John introduced Patrick Henry to the piano and watched, as his infant son seemed to magically pick at the keys and make music. Apparently, Patrick Henry had extraordinary musical ability and went on to play tunes from his heart in spite of having incomplete fingers. Patrick John was also determined that his son would attend school, but the schools required that an adult always be with special

needs children during school hours. To achieve this, he took a job at a graveyard, dug graves overnight till 6.00 A.M. and took Patrick to school in the morning. At the time of the conference, Patrick Henry was on his way to the University of Louisiana, was already an accomplished musician and singer and would later be a member of his university's marching band. The father-son duo travel the country sharing their story and inspiring thousands all around the world. Was there pain and disappointment in the Hughes family when they were first faced with Patrick's disabilities? Yes, there was. Did it hold them back from living meaningful lives? No, it didn't. They chose not to waste their pain.

Patrick Henry Hughes in an interview on *The Today Show* said, "You are going to face problems on a day to day basis and obstacles that you might not be able to conquer, but if you set your mind to achieve a goal then you can do it. There are goals that you want to accomplish but things are going to get in the way. Don't let them get in the way. Just do what you have to do and there is a big reward at the end." He went on to say that his can-do attitude stemmed from being able to count his blessings: good food on the table, a roof over his head, a comfortable bed to sleep in. He

had purposed to embrace life with a grateful heart. If there is anybody who should feel angry with God for being disabled, it is a person who was born that way, who had no say in how their bodies would turn out. Yet Patrick speaks words of encouragement. Imagine what Patrick Henry would say to anyone born with disabilities. He doesn't need to pretend to understand them; he lives the pain everyday, but not as a victim; as a victor. God wants to use those experiences we have and go through to touch somebody else who is going through similar situations.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 (The Message) Paul said, “All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. We have plenty of hard times that come from following the Messiah, but no more so than the good times of his healing comfort—we get a full measure of that, too.”

YOU CAN WITHSTAND IT.

It might be hard to read this if you have been through much hurt and pain, but I want you to know that your

experience, no matter how harrowing, can enhance your life and set you on a path to significance. Life will always throw curveballs at you, but no matter how badly the odds seemed to be stacked against you, you can play a good match. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” The trying times will not last forever, and right behind them will be blessings in abundance. Remember Job received a double portion for his torments; Nelson Mandela became the president of South Africa after years of incarceration, and Joseph who was sold into slavery became the prime minister in Egypt. Their experiences made their lives significant. They were not pleasant to go through and I have no doubt that they had moments of tears and despondency, but God strengthened them and helped them through the tough times. I believe that if you can turn over your experiences to God, He will also sustain you through your trials and get you to the point where you will experience great victory.

“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His

eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” 1 Peter 5:10

Chapter 2

Familial Trials.

George and Lori Schappell are conjoined twins who share 30 percent of their frontal lobe brain tissue and critical blood vessels. In other words, they are joined at their foreheads and cannot be separated. While Lori, who is 5ft 1, was born able-bodied, 4ft 4 George suffers from spina bifida, which has caused severe mobility problems. As George cannot walk, he sits in a wheelchair-type stool, which Lori pushes so the two can move together. George says: “Most people don’t believe us but we do have very normal lives.” Throughout the nineties, George had a successful music career in the United States and won the LA Music Award for Best New Country Artist. The famous pair have been the subject of television documentaries, appeared on talk shows and even

made a cameo appearance on the hit American TV drama, *Nip/Tuck*.

There are certain experiences that are completely out of our hands. Right at the top of the list are the familial ones. We have absolutely no say in where or to whom we will be born; it is completely at God's discretion. You could be born into wealth or poverty, royalty or the laity, ability or disability, as an only child or one of many children, a monogamous or polygamous family, born as a single child or as part of a multiple birth i.e. twins, triplets, quadruplets, etc., slavery or freedom and so on.

How did you grow up? Were you loved and doted over or were you battered and broken by the pain of abuse? Unfortunately some children are born into abusive homes and bear the scars of mistreatment from as young as two years of age. Even worse, their abusers could be their caregivers; parents, close relatives, teachers and other people who would ordinarily be expected to protect them. These children are robbed of their innocence early in life and come to view the world from a discoloured perspective. Many times, regardless of the fact that they were the victims of cruel crimes, they often assume responsibility for

their misfortune and experience pain, shame and a loss of their self-esteem. While positive childhood experiences can give wings to ones future, negative experiences can often cripple a child.

There are also others who though were not born into abusive circles, enter into painful experiences as life unfolds. For instance, when one enters a marriage or relationship where physical and emotional abuse occurs. Perhaps your husband turns out to be a mean drunk or your wife turns out to be promiscuous, thereby making necessary a separation and possibly a divorce. The experience of getting a divorce and fighting for child custody is a very painful experience that can haunt you for the rest of your life.

Sometimes also, you are born into bittersweet situations. You might have been born beautiful and talented with a measure of intelligence that exceeds those of your siblings. This can bring both admiration and envy from those who should love you the most. You may have been born as the first-born and the heir to your parent's fortune. That might secure your future, but can also make you a target for annihilation. You might simply be a favourite child, but that favouritism can get deadly ... as it was in the

case of Joseph.

JOSEPH: ON A VOYAGE OF PAIN.

From the book of Genesis chapters 37 through to 50, we are introduced to Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son who, being the first child born by Jacob's favourite wife, Rachel, secured his father's love and favouritism. Jacob loved and favoured Joseph so much; he didn't care who knew it. He gave his son a special multicoloured coat, which Joseph wore with pride. To make matters even sweeter for Joseph, Almighty God seemed to have smiled down on him as He gave Joseph dreams that spoke of a life of prestige and significance. This was all well and good for Joseph, but for his ten older brothers, Joseph's charmed life was a thorn in their sides. So green was their envy, that they plotted their own brother's demise, only changing their minds when they found an even crueller option: selling him into slavery; a fate which in those days was in many ways worse than death.

Joseph is an example of a person born into both favour and disfavour. He didn't do anything to deserve his prominence, and his preferred status later caused his life to sour in a way that would embitter

most people. For 13 years Joseph lived as a slave and a felon. It appeared on the face of it that he had sufficient reason to curse God, but he didn't. When it looked like he was nothing but a middle-aged slave, his life took a sharp turn for the better and he became the Prime Minister in Egypt. Please don't gloss over how long Joseph lived in pain: 13 long years! Yet at the end of it all, Joseph understood that God allowed the pain for a purpose. Without Joseph getting to Egypt and rising to such a position of authority, the Israelites may not have survived the famine. It is with this understanding that Joseph was able to forgive his brothers and embrace both his past and his future. Read what transpired between Joseph and his brothers:

“When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.” So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, “Before your father died he commanded, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.”’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also went

and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we are your servants.” Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? **But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.** Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” Genesis 50: 15-21 (emphasis mine)

MOSES: THE PRINCE OF EGYPT.

The story of Moses might sound like a bestseller but it was probably easier read than experienced. Moses grew up in a dysfunctional set-up; knowing he was Hebrew and not Egyptian, yet having to call Pharaoh's daughter, mother. Imagine being told two different things by the two women in his life on a daily basis. One would whisper in the morning that he was a Prince of Egypt, while the other would remind him at night that he was a deliverer for Israel. As he grew up, he identified that his relatives were slaves while he ate choice meats in the palace. Furthermore, these relatives must have known this as well, and this disparity caused a huge gulf to grow between

Moses and his people. Moses must have looked at the sufferings of his biological family and the rest of Israel and shrunk a little more inside each day. He must have felt shame at being in the home of their tormentors yet relief at not being a slave. One day, he couldn't take it anymore, and in defence of a Hebrew, he killed an Egyptian. Yet this act didn't endear him to the Hebrews, it further increased the tension between them. At the end of the day, he ran from both families: the family of pharaoh and the family of the Israelites. (Exodus chapter 2 retold)

What a way to be born. Moses didn't ask to be into the situation in which he found himself and at a point, he felt so burdened by his family experiences that he ran away from it all, determined to bury that experience and make new less painful ones. For 40 years afterwards, he tried to forget the past and embrace a new life as a Midianite, but when faced with his destiny, he had to make a choice about whether to face the hurts and failures of the past, or to learn from them. Thankfully, Moses made the choice to learn from his tumultuous upbringing and took his place as Israel's deliverer.

Here are some of the experiences that made up the foundation for what God needed to make Moses the

tool for Israel's deliverance.

- Being born a Hebrew at the time when Hebrew children were being slain was key to his being strategically positioned. That was his ticket into the palace and brought about the means to preserve his life.
- Being raised in the palace as a prince, he was schooled in their language and culture and was not intimidated by the Egyptians. Unknown to him, he developed the intellectual capacity he needed to fulfil his calling.
- Having his mother as his nursemaid was also crucial. She was the one who passed on the Israeli heritage and gave him a sense of identity.

No matter what family experience you have gone through, like Joseph and Moses you must realise that God allows you to go through some trials for a reason. I was born into a Moslem family and my father was so devout, we had a mosque in our compound. When I came to Christ in my early teens, for the first year, I was an undercover Christian. I had no idea how to tell my father that I had turned away from Islam. If I had a choice, I would probably have chosen to be born into the family of a pastor so that I could have

a smoother journey into ministry. When my father found out, he made me choose between being his son and being a Christian. Being a Christian meant that I would have to fend for myself; my schooling, my upkeep, everything. I chose to follow Jesus and gave up having access to my father's wealth and influence. It hurt to be estranged from my family but that was a price I had to pay. The years rolled by, and even though the early years were tough and I had my fair share of pain and sacrifice, God used my siblings and I to shine the light of the gospel in our family. Many of us are thriving Christians today. Also, today I have an understanding of how to reach out to a Moslem man or woman because I was once in their shoes. I also understand how to counsel and encourage someone who may be estranged from his or her family because of a choice to follow Jesus because I have lived it. These are experiences I can share because I have chosen not to shun the experiences of my past. I realise today that God placed me in my family deliberately, because He had an excellent plan for all our lives.

It is time to stop living in regret concerning the circumstances of your birth. You may be orphaned, poor, disabled or maltreated. God has a plan for each of our lives. Even if your mother threw you in a

trashcan and left you for dead, there is a reason why you have that story to tell. It is all about positioning you for greatness. Even if you don't understand it today, be assured that in God, your tomorrow will be triumphant.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1: 5

Chapter 3

Vocational Trials

We spend a huge chunk of our lives working. On the average, five days a week, an adult spends eight hours of each day working, another eight hours resting and the last eight hours working on how to work or rest. What you do for a living is very important, which is why the concept of job satisfaction forms a huge part of a person's overall happiness. It is great when you are handsomely paid for doing what you are competent at, but it is even better when you are paid for doing what you love to do. Some people are very blessed to get high paying jobs doing what they love right after they graduate from school, and they go on to live happily ever after. The reality though is that many of us don't get to do what we want to do or love to do right from the start. Sometimes you find that to

make ends meet and to pay your bills, you have to put aside your dream career and do what is available in the hopes that eventually, you will get the chance to do what you really have a passion for.

Vocational experiences include the lessons you learn working in the secular world as well as the spiritual work you do to advance God's kingdom. Not surprisingly, these experiences could be sweet or sour. Life's journey is a learning curve that comprises of successes, mistakes, hard knocks and great victories. We often describe the low points as valleys and the high points as mountains. Having low and high points on the job is a normal part of life that many people handle fairly well. The real problem starts when people find themselves in vocations that constitute a perpetual valley. In Nigeria for instance, the banking industry is one of the toughest there is, and even though there are some people who excel in banking and cannot imagine any other life, there are others who daily go home morose and with the same prayer point: 'God deliver me from banking.' Other examples of typical workplace challenges one may face which include sexual harassment, victimisation, office politics and inequities, stagnation and a general feeling of incompetence. If you face any of these on

a daily basis, the question becomes, 'how can any of these problems amount to something that will one day give God glory?'

TYPES AND SHADOWS:

Moses

Sometimes we can garner experiences that we can later use to fulfil God's ultimate plan. After Moses fled from Egypt, he became an under-shepherd for his father-in-law Jethro, in Midian. He had to learn how to care for sheep and put their needs above his own. He learnt how to lead them to green pastures and how to defend them from predators, and after 40 years, God called him to be the deliverer who would shepherd the children of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3). A good shepherd has to be unendingly patient with his flock and Moses certainly needed patience as he led the children of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years. Who would have thought that in spending 40 years with a flock of sheep, he was in actuality practicing to spend 40 more years with a flock of people. God was truly preparing him. It was also under Jethro's tutelage that he learned people management and the fundamentals of delegation. Exodus 18: 13-27:

“And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.

So when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?”

And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.”

So Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of

truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.”

So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.

Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.”

It was with Jethro's advice that Moses was able to appoint under leaders and relieve himself of the burden of leading a multitude all by himself. Our experiences have a way of showing up to help us

when we need them the most.

Jacob

Moses was blessed to have had a great boss in Jethro, but that will not be the case for everyone. Take Jacob for instance. His boss, Laban, was his father-in-law who at best could be described as a crook. While Jethro was willing to invest his time and knowledge in helping Moses, Laban was committed to cheating Jacob at every turn. He tricked him into marrying his older daughter and cheated him of his wages on several occasions. (See Genesis chapters 29-31) Why would God allow this? I believe that Jacob needed to learn the value of tenacity and faith in God. Until meeting Laban, Jacob had made a practice of being smart and shifty in his dealings. He had wheedled his way into getting his brother's birthright and his father's blessing. In Laban's employ, he realised that being smart was not sufficient; He had to find his sufficiency in God. It was in the process of building his dependency on God that he experienced God's miraculous provision with Laban's flock. Exodus 31: 1-13:

“Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, “Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and

from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favourable toward him as before. Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you." So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not favourable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. And you know that with all my might I have served your father. Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked. So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.

"And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks were streaked, speckled, and grey-spotted. Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and grey-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing

to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.””

After Jacob left Laban to return to his homeland, he humbly made peace with his brother, Esau. His difficult experience with Laban made him a better man and a better patriarch of God’s chosen people.

Joseph

Joseph started getting dreams from God from a very early age. In Bible days, dreams were not taken lightly because they were a major means through which God communicated with His people (today we have the Holy Spirit living in us, so dreams are not the only way we hear from God). Usually, people who had dreams were inducted into the league of the wise men. Ideally, Joseph should have been a notable wise man from his youth, but his ability to interpret dreams made his brothers to hate him, and he was rather sold into slavery. After that experience, Joseph could have decided never again to have anything to do with dreams; whether his own or interpreting other peoples. However, even though his gift got him into trouble, it didn’t deter him from using it when he saw those who needed help. He could have chosen

to be sullen and discouraged but rather, he stepped up and gave accurate interpretations when the baker and the butler shared their dreams. Joseph could again have lived in bitterness and cursed both God and man after the butler forgot to tell Pharaoh about his gifts, but he didn't. Years later, when Pharaoh had a dream he couldn't explain, the butler finally remembered Joseph and the rest as they say is history. (Read Genesis 40 and 41 for the full account)

Joseph also had administrative skills. In the 13 years he lived in Potiphar's house and in prison, Joseph worked hard and developed his leadership abilities. Remember that Joseph was a slave. How many house helps or stewards have you met that are so committed you can entrust your entire business into their hands? Many times, when people find themselves having to do menial tasks they become resentful and bitter. It is not uncommon to hear of people who don't give their best in their respective places of work because 'it isn't their father's business'. Joseph, being a slave had sufficient reason to be slothful and negligent but he had the right attitude even when he was punished rather than rewarded. He experienced pain repeatedly for 13 years but he didn't waste a moment of it. Later, when he was made prime minister, all his diligence

again came into play. Though he was just 30 years old, he had 13 years of leadership and administrative work experience and was able to lead as the prime minister in a foreign land.

Joseph's spiritual experience with God was what enabled him to look at his brothers and state as recorded in Genesis 45:7-8 "And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." What a testimony. Can you look back over the years and see the hand of God in all your experiences as he is guiding and shaping you? How have you served God in the past? What were your highs and lows during your service? How can you apply those experiences to bless people today?

The disciples

Another good example of how your vocation can be a preparatory ground for your calling would be the lives of Jesus' disciples. Peter, Andrew, James and John, were all fishermen. When Jesus called them he said, 'follow me and I will make you fishers of men',

and after he ascended into heaven, that is exactly what the disciples became. Everywhere they went, they spoke of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like true fishermen, they braved the waves and storms of life to get the catch, and each time they stepped out in faith, God gave them victory.

I grew up in a polygamous home with four mothers and 25 siblings. I was one of the runts of the litter both in age and stature. Today, people tell me that I have good people skills. Why wouldn't I? I grew up in an environment where I had to learn how to get the best out of people or be pummelled constantly. Those skills have helped me manage congregations of thousands. It was an experience that started out not so pleasant, but I can see how valuable it has become today.

TRIALS MAKE YOU STRONGER.

James 1: 2-6:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If

any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

What should you do when you face difficult situations at work? You should trust God to make the experience count for good and ask Him for the grace to act in wisdom. Also, don't underestimate how trials strengthen your backbone. If you are constantly faced with a temptation to cheat or compromise, consider it an opportunity to prove to be a worthy steward. If God can trust you with little things, He will trust you with big things. In the first chapter of the book of Daniel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego proved that God could trust them in little matters of obeying His law. Even though they were captives in a strange land, they refused to compromise and they were eventually placed in positions of authority all over Babylon; and yet they were slaves! Many times, you may find yourself in positions where you feel you have no choice when it comes to how your life will turn out. The truth is you always have a choice, be it in action or attitude, even when you may be punished for doing the right thing. Shadrach, Meshach and

Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's graven image and were thrown into the fiery furnace. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. Joseph was imprisoned. Elijah ran for his life when Jezebel threatened to kill him. Paul was stoned, whipped and imprisoned on several occasions. It was all in a day's work! All these were bad experiences that God made good.

Don't despise the days of little beginnings. When Ruth chose to return to Israel with Naomi, she returned not only to be an outcast but also to live a life of abject poverty. She could have stayed in Moab instead of sticking with her husband's family, but her commitment and willingness to stick out the tough times paid off and she ended up being in the lineage of Christ.

In her previous life, Rahab was a prostitute. The Bible does not tell us how she became one but it was clear that she engaged in acts that were despicable considering God's law. However, when she decided to make a change and follow the God of the Israelites, it was that vocation that helped her hide the spies and secure the lives of her family. Today, she too is mentioned when we recount those in the lineage of

Christ.

HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE?

When you apply for a non-entry level job, the biggest selling point in your personal profile is your work experience. Prospective employers always want to know what you've done, how you weathered storms or handled challenges. The more you have been able to overcome, the better qualified you appear in their eyes. In fact, when an applicant is too rosy and claims that everything always goes the way he wants all the time, their gaze usually shifts elsewhere. Apart from wanting problem solvers, every job interview is a leadership interview. 'Will this person be able to encourage other people who falter or stumble as they go about their duties in the workplace?' Experience not eloquence is what seals the deal. So this is a hard truth. You must have withstood some of life's storms to qualify for promotion in life.

THE MINISTRY HIDDEN IN PAIN.

I have met people who have had to trust God for years for several things, ranging from healing, to financial breakthroughs, to finding a life partner, to having children to fighting for their marriages ... an

endless list. One thing that each of them realises is that a ministry evolves from their struggle. If you've had to trust God to heal a terminal disease you were diagnosed with, then you are in the best position to help other people develop their faith in the area of divine healing. God has made you strong in that area for a reason. If your marriage was on the brink of disaster and God repaired your union, there are hundreds of couples that God can use you to help restore. I know a Christian lady whose life took a wrong turn and she ended up having two children out of wedlock. It was as though she had truly fallen from grace, but she refused to stay down. She got back on track with God and today she is married and is a pastor; her mess has become the thrust of her message. So what if you are a single parent? Don't cower in shame or self-pity; open your heart to God and let Him heal and strengthen you. God can use your mistakes to help others.

While I can counsel a rape victim for instance, I believe that God can use me to bring healing to her heart, still I know that another woman who has been through sexual abuse and come out whole can minister to her on a level that I cannot. There is an undeniable connection that comes from that shared

experience that I do not have to offer. I can tell a widow or widower who is now a single parent that God won't leave or forsake them, but a living, breathing, witness who has been through the same fire and has come out strong will probably drive the point home quicker. Experience makes a powerful witness.

John the beloved received the book of Revelation, the final book of the Bible, on the Island of Patmos where he had been banished into exile. He may not have seen the events to come so clearly if he wasn't alone with no one but God to talk to. Nobody wants to be banished and separated from the people they love, but from that painful isolation came a revelation of what happens to humankind at the end of time. Considering that treasure, John's pain was worth it.

We should never despise our vocational or spiritual experiences. Were you exposed to corruption in your workplace? God is raising you to fight corruption in your environment. Did you have to start at the bottom of the rung in your organisation? Every good CEO must know how to serve as well as lead. Were you a victim of a staff layoff? God is repositioning you in a different organisation or field to fulfil your destiny. Don't let disappointments get the better of you. Your

experiences form an integral part of your calling and you can come out of each one better and wiser than you were before you started.

“I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you” Psalm 32: 8 (New Living Translation)

Chapter 4

Don't waste that Pain.

It Is Well With My Soul (Original lyrics)

*“When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Refrain:

*It is well, (it is well),
With my soul, (with my soul)
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
A song in the night, oh my soul!"*

'It Is Well with My Soul', is a hymn penned by hymnist Horatio Spafford and composed by Philip Bliss. It is possibly the most influential and enduring hymn in the Christian community. This hymn was written after traumatic events in Spafford's life. The

first was the 1871 Great Chicago Fire , which ruined him financially (he had been a successful lawyer and had invested significantly in property in the area of Chicago which was decimated by the great fire). His business interests were further hit by the economic downturn of 1873 at which time he had planned to travel to Europe with his family on the SS Ville du Havre. In a late change of plans, he sent the family ahead while he was delayed regarding business concerning zoning problems following the Great Chicago Fire. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship sank rapidly after a collision with a sea vessel, the Loch Earn, and all four of Spafford's daughters died. His wife Anna survived and sent him the now famous telegram, "Saved alone . . ." Shortly afterwards, as Spafford travelled to meet his grieving wife, he was inspired to write these words as his ship passed near where his daughters had died.

How does a man who suffered such devastating losses write a hymn that still moves people to tears over a hundred years later? He refuses to waste his pain. Horatio and his wife later had three other children, even though one of them, his only son, was lost to scarlet fever at the age of four. Even after that, he, his wife and their two daughters moved to Israel on a mission to help the poor. I like to think that Horatio

Spafford was encouraged by the story of Job, who lost everything he had including his wealth, health and children. Just when you think life has dealt you the worst possible hand, remember Job and Horatio, and then sing, 'It is well with my soul'.

Eryca Freemantle is an award winning celebrity, international make-up artist and a lifestyle guru. Eryca's career started by accident; she was involved in a major car crash which left over 200 scars on her face, the loss of her hair and a near amputation of her left leg. Upon realising that her dream of becoming a model would soon be history, she sought solace in make-up artistry and fitness. This motivated her to learn about corrective make-up techniques and application to camouflage her facial scars and blemishes. She had to make and design her own make-up for herself to disguise her scarred face and attend regular fitness classes to learn to walk again. Her positive attitude towards life encouraged her determination to proceed and be successful. It was also her motivation that gave her the courage to embrace her beauty at a time of such low self-esteem. Eryca's heart is dedicated to her industry, educating women globally about their bodies, makeup and inner beauty needs.

The account above is about someone who wanted to

be a fashion model but instead faced disfigurement. This was the exact opposite of what she wanted to offer a world that celebrates external perfection. Many people in her position would have retreated into their respective shells and hated God and life for the rest of their lives. I think that her life story has an impact that would not have been the same if she were one of the thousands of female models around the world. Her pain made her into an expert in the Lifestyle and Beauty industry.

In the same vein, Kanu Nwankwo, the Nigerian footballer opened his 'Kanu Heart Foundation' after he had a heart surgery. He refused to waste his pain.

I have counselled numerous people who have been through all sorts of hurts. I would be lying if I would say that some of those accounts did not cut me deeply. Sometimes one truly wants to ask God, 'why?' What good could possibly come out of being raped by a gang of hoodlums, watching a village being razed during a war, or experience the horror of being sold into prostitution? These are hard things to ponder particularly when you are going through them, but I have learned that the past makes sense as you keep living. In the game of connect the dots, the dots only

make sense when you look back after you reach the last point; then you can see the work of art that your pencil created. It is later in life that you will see where the pains you experienced formed a part of what makes you the beautiful person that God ordained that you would be.

Shortly after I preached this message in our church, one of our members who volunteers as a teacher in our children's church called me and said, "Pastor the message about God wanting to use my painful experiences touched me. Remember the miscarriages I experienced some years back? In retrospect, I can indeed say that that was the best time of my life. At what I thought was the lowest point in my life when it looked like God has forgotten about me, God drew me back to himself took me to a deeper level of fellowship with Him. My understanding of God and the way I interact with my family today is all attributed to the experiences that God took me through that time." She now has two wonderful sons.

I know of ex-rapists, drug users and idolaters who have become Christians. Their stories are both painful and amazing. When I see the pits that God drew them out from and how He has made them

ambassadors to other people who they can identify with, it simply amazes me. Each of these people has a sense of purpose. They know they are called, and even though their pasts still cause them pain, they all testify that if they had the choice, they wouldn't rewrite it. Sometimes, the end explains the means.

Sometimes, God brings the pain to keep us on the right track and to preserve His will. When David and Bathsheba sinned as recorded in 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12, though David repented, God told David through the prophet Nathan, that the child Bathsheba carried would die.

“So David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.” 2 Samuel 12: 13-14 (Emphasis mine).

Even though the child did die, God gave David and Bathsheba another son, Solomon, who ascended to the throne after David's death. God also made David an everlasting promise that the royal sceptre would

never depart from his family.

Genesis 32:24-28 “Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” So He said to him, “What is your name?” He said, “Jacob.” And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

Jacob left Laban very rich, and he planned to use his wealth to appease his brother, Esau. It seemed that all God had taught him about trusting him while he served under Laban was about to be of no effect, because again Jacob wanted to rely on his natural intelligence to get himself out of a fix. So God threw his hip out of joint, conveying that Jacob could not rely on his own strength, intelligence or ability to succeed. He had to trust in God. Jacob finally got the lesson and finally said, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me!’ Sometimes a wound is a very special act of God’s grace. Jonah had to be swallowed by a whale to

realise that he couldn't hide from God. God used an uncomfortable situation to reach him, touch him and save him. I know of people who missed planes that later crashed. One minute they were complaining bitterly about the loss of their ticket monies, the next minute they were thanking God for preserving their lives. Sometimes we are slow learners and God has to do some drastic things to get our attention. Sometimes pain doesn't only hurt; it pays.

What will you become if only you will allow God totally take over your life? For richer for poorer, for better or worse? For Jacob he became Israel, God's chosen people. For someone else, what you will become may be a better spouse, a better businessperson, a better parent or a better minister. At the end of the day, God's work is always for your benefit.

NO MORE SHAME.

If you are a woman and you have ever aborted a child, it is probably an experience that you want to forget, but the hard truth is that covering up that experience is a waste. You are now in a position to share God's forgiveness with someone in a similar position, or better still, encourage young women not

to commit that sin. If you were once imprisoned for a crime you committed, you have the voice to talk to other convicts. It takes courage to air your laundry, but remember: your laundry is clean! It has been washed by the blood of the lamb. You have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. If the devil tries to tell you otherwise, remind him of where he's going to have his final painful experience: in the lake of fire.

Many times we want to appear perfect before our peers or friends. First, you are fooling no one. Nobody is perfect. Second, if your friends cannot accept your past, present and future, you are hanging with the wrong crowd. The very experiences that you have resented and regretted most in life, the ones that you have wanted to hide and forget, are the experiences God wants to use to help others. Once you honestly admit your faults, failures and fears and receive God's forgiveness, you move from being a victim to a victor. No matter how many people may sneer at you, there are many more who will be greatly encouraged when you share about how God's grace turned your weakness into strength. The truth is that ministry is not about your strength; it is about God showing up strong in your weakness.

Tell your testimonies with confidence. Your past does not define you; God does. He says your path shines brighter and brighter unto a perfect day. Your past is merely a landmark on your path of significance. A landmark is a feature that is easily recognisable even from a distance. People look out for landmarks when they want to get to their desired destinations as landmarks help to ensure that they do not lose their way. If God has blessed you with certain landmark experiences, consider them blessings and investments into your destiny. God is ensuring that you will not lose your way, and that your life will be a testament for others to follow.

LET IT GO.

This is for someone who is going through a situation that seems to be tearing you apart. You are hurt, bitter and can't let the hurt go. Pain can hold you captive and hinder your progress in life. There are people who cannot love others because they were abused. There are others who suffer sickness and other plagues because they cannot forgive those who wronged them. You need to be made free. I want to entrust your pain to God. In 1 Peter 5:7, God asks that you cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you.

Whether it was something you did, or something that was done to you, God can handle it. He loves you with an everlasting love and wants to deliver you from the grip of this pain. Tell God in your own words how you feel. Ask Him to take the pain away. Ask Him to strengthen you so that you can let the hurts of the past go. Ask Him for the grace and courage to embrace the plans He has for you and to do so without any shame bitterness or regret.

I pray that your life experiences will always be used to the glory of God's name, and that when you get to heaven, you will connect the dots as God says, 'well done good and faithful servant.'

Don't waste your pain.

Everyone goes through trials that they would rather forget. How do you move on from the pains of your past? Is it even possible to use a harrowing experience in a positive way? In *Don't Waste Your Pain*, Godman shares on how to liberate yourself from the hurts of the past and to convert them to steppingstones for your future.

If you have found hope and encouragement from reading this book and would like to receive more information about the author, or this ministry, please contact us. God bless you.

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