

FACING CHALLENGES

Sylvester Onyemalechi

Life is full of challenges. It is a blend of ups and downs. It comes when you are not expecting it. The mistakes we make and the sins we commit open doors for failures and problems of different kinds. Things we have no control over cause them. Sometimes, we experience challenges when we have not committed any sin or made any mistake. Challenges are a common feature or occurrence in human life. You cannot wish it away. No matter how prayerful you may be, your prayers will not stop it from coming once in a while. Even the righteous experiences it. Abraham had his share of it. Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Apostles Peter, Paul and John all had their share of challenges. Paul even told us that through it he developed and learnt how to adjust to all circumstances of life.

The righteous goes through challenges of one kind or the other. John the Baptist had his despite his dedication of his life to God. He lived in the desert eating wild honey and locust, yet God allowed him to be imprisoned for preaching the truth to Herod. When he stayed in prison a long time, and Jesus didn't come to his rescue or pay him a visit, he started doubting the reality of the very revelation he had of Jesus being the Messiah. So he sent his disciples to Jesus to confirm if he was the Messiah or they should start looking for another. Elijah was a man of God's presence yet he came to a time in his life he said to God he was quitting. Who would have thought that after demonstrating the power of God at the Mount Carmel, and killing all the prophets of Baal, that on hearing the threatening words of Jezebel, that he would want to die? The Lord Jesus Christ had his own share of challenges. He faced the challenge of acceptance from his own brothers, community and the Jewish leadership. He faced the challenge of false accusations from false witnesses who were looking for opportunity to kill him. He had financial challenges, for he had to borrow many times that he didn't have. Finally, the very people he laboured for turned against him and had him crucified. The Apostles had lots of oppositions and challenges in their lives. Some of them ended up being martyred for the sake of the kingdom of Christ. Apostle Paul once was restrained by the Holy Spirit from going to some towns and cities he wanted to preach in, and was later directed to go to Macedonia, only for him to be beaten, arrested and put in stocks on getting there. He had so much challenges that he declared that he has learnt how to live in all conditions.

Phil 4:12-13

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

NIV

That you are righteous does not mean you will not face challenges. All you need to do is to learn how to deal with challenges and stay on top of it any time it comes your way. God never planned that His children will go under each time there is a challenge. His plan is that we overcome in faith. He wants us to come out of every challenge better and stronger than we were before the challenge came our way. He wants us victorious, and he provided for it in the new covenant.

Challenges sometimes come as oppositions, persecutions, failures, disappointments, rejections, losses, bankruptcy, stagnancy, financial needs, family problems, separation, threatened divorce, unemployment, academic problems, spiritual problems and health problems. A challenge is a barrier on

a man's way that needs to be removed. We all need to learn how to handle challenges in order to overcome without being broken by them.

Challenge is a trial period when we are expected to use the biblical principles we have learnt from God to manage and overcome. It is a time to prove the genuineness of our faith and commitment to God. God does not expect us to crash under a difficult circumstance, but to triumph over it and become better at the end. God uses challenges to strengthen and build our faith and life in Him. Challenge time is a time of perfection. It is a time for God to cleanse us from the unwanted, teach us some lessons and bring out the good qualities in us. It is a time to die to the flesh and become spiritually alive. It is a practical time to prove who we really are and what we really believe.

Many have fallen away from the faith because they passed through rough times, and they couldn't handle it. Many became depressed and frustrated to the point that they can't think straight anymore. Some ended up as psychiatric patients in the hospitals. Some have become atheists because of challenges that they passed through. Some even doubt the love of God for their lives because they called on God, and it appeared as if He will never answer or doesn't hear them. Whatever is the situation, God's love never fails, and He will never abandon His own in trouble.

Whatever be your situation right now, I want you to know that God loves you endlessly, and will never abandon you in your situation. In fact He is doing what He can to help you out of the situation. That is why this teaching reached you. Have faith in His love. He is able and willing to deliver you.

Josh 1:1-9

1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. 5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

NIV

God prepared the mind of Joshua to take over from Moses who had just passed on. God took time to remind Joshua of the relationship He and Moses had – How Moses trusted Him completely and never acted on his own, or failed to look up to God for direction, and how He (God) never failed to direct, fulfill His words and protect Moses and His people. God was promising the same kind of relationship to Joshua

who had witnessed the relationship between God and Moses. Joshua was not a stranger to what God was talking about because he was Moses' minister. In that commissioning speech, God gave the secrets of a successful and prosperous life in the midst of challenges. I have broken these secrets into three parts. Let's take a look at them.

1. Build a strong relationship with the Lord

Moses had a good relationship with the Lord, and God gave him full support and guidance. This brought him victories and success. To face and win over challenges without being broken and shattered by it, we need a sweet and intimate relationship with the lord. You must come to the point where you trust the Lord completely with all your heart and no doubt in you. In relating with God, you need to:

- Keep your eyes on the Lord,
- Identify His will in all things and submit to it without questioning the wisdom behind it,
- Keep your eyes on the faithfulness of God to all He has made and all His promises.
- Spend time with God in prayer and reading and meditating of God's word. The more time you spend with God, the more intimate you are with God. Moses was intimate with God, so also Joshua. You cannot succeed with God without intimacy.

When God told Joshua that He will be with him as He was with Moses, he was calling for a close relationship with Joshua. He wanted Joshua to draw near and become intimate with him and be willing to walk as He will lead and direct him. And Joshua did, and succeeded in his God-given assignment.

2. Be strong in the Lord

God told Joshua in verses 6, 7 & 9 to be strong and courageous. He emphasized this point because it is so important. The believer must look at life the way God looks at it to succeed in it. We need inner strength to overcome. We must come to the level of faith where we are not moved by situations or circumstances, but only by the word of God.

Ps 125:1

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.
NIV

Daniel the Prophet declared that those who know their God shall be strong and do exploits.

Dan 11:32

32 And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.
KJV

This proves that the knowledge of God brings inner strength. We gain knowledge by listening to, reading, studying, researching and meditating on the written word of God. It takes diligence and commitment to gain knowledge. God commanded Joshua to give attention to the word of God so he can be strong and overcome the enemy and have good success and prosper in all that he does.

Josh 1:8

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

KJV

Fill your mind and heart with the word of God and never allow what you see and experience to weaken your faith and create fear, worry and discouragement.

- Never allow fear to enter you or dominate your mind.
- Never allow discouragement. Be strong and full of courage. Always remember, He promised to be with us always till the very end of the age (Matt 28:20). He promised never to leave us or forsake us (Deut 31:6, 8; Josh 1:5). He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear or tolerate, and in every temptation, he will make a way of escape so we don't fail (1 Cor 10:13). Always remember, He is loving towards all He has made and faithful to all His promises (Ps 145:8, 9, 13 – 14).
- Have strong faith in the Lord.

Meditate so much on God's word that faith will rise within you. Wrap your faith around every truth you discover in the word of God. Build your faith to the level that fear, worry and discouragement cannot settle in you. Build to the point nothing but the word of God moves you.

3. Give yourself to the Word

God demanded of Joshua to give himself to reading and meditating on the word of God day and night, so he can walk in it and be successful and prosperous in all he does.

Josh 1:8

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

KJV

Whatever you give your mind to dominates, influences greatly and controls you. God knew that, so, He commanded Joshua to give his mind to the word of God. If you give your mind to an evil said or done against you, it makes you angry. The more you think about it, the angrier you become. So it is with any idea or thought that comes to your mind. The more you give your mind to a thing, the stronger its power over you, and the more difficult it is for you to free yourself from its grip. In the same way, the more you occupy your mind with God's word, the stronger its grip, influence, and control over your words, emotions and actions. King David of Israel knew that adultery was evil in the sight of God and he had previously vowed to keep the laws of God, but he committed adultery with Beersheba because he couldn't control his sexual thoughts towards her when he sighted her naked body from the roof of his palace. When he was told she was Uriah's wife, he couldn't say no because he has spent a long time imagining what he will do with her. The more you think on a thing, the stronger its power over you. Meditate on the word of God day and night and the word of God will take you over. You will suddenly discover that you are influenced in your thoughts, judgments, decisions and lifestyle by the word stored in you through meditation.

- **Watch your thoughts, words and ways to make sure that they are in line with the word of God.** Keep your eyes on the instructions of God. Be careful how you think, speak, respond and react to situations. Make sure you are always in line with the word of God. When you go through challenges, keep your eyes on the promises of God. Keep your eyes on the person of God. Remind yourself always, that God is faithful to His promises and covenant. Remember that your thoughts determine how you feel, and how you feel determine what you say and how you say it, and how you respond or react to situations and people. To feel good and keep your joy in time of challenge, you need to keep your eyes and thoughts on God and His words. When you do that, He will keep you in perfect peace (Isa 26:3). But

when you keep your mind on your challenge, worry, fear, anxiety, and discouragement will definitely set in.

- **Don't disconnect from God because of a challenge.** Stay with God and His word. Do not allow your experience to make you turn away from God. Whatever God allows to happen in your life will definitely bring you good somehow. You may not see the good in the present trouble, but, much later, you will know why and thank God for allowing you go through what you went through. If Joseph had not been envied by his brothers, they would not have sold him to slavery. If they had not sold him to slavery, he would not have gone to Egypt or entered Potiphar's house. If he had not known Potiphar, he would not have gained experience in leadership and administration, or chased by Potiphar's wife, or gone to prison for refusing her. If he didn't go to prison, he would not have known he had the gift of interpretation of dreams and he would not have met Pharaoh's chief bottler to interpret his dream. If he had not interpreted the dream for him, he would not have been remembered when Pharaoh had a dream that the magicians and astrologers could not interpret. At the end, he became the prime minister of Egypt to save the Jews and other nations. You can see how one bad experience led to another and all working towards the accomplishment of the revealed plan of God for his life. Relax in trouble times for God is in control. All things will eventually work out for your own good.

Rom 8:28

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

NIV

CONCLUSION

God prepared the mind of Joshua before he got started so that when he is faced with challenges he will not be taken unawares, and he will not respond as if he has no helper. God wanted Joshua to be prepared to face troubles and have the right attitude towards challenges and win every battle of life. In the same way, the Lord Jesus has promised his support even as he has informed us that in this world we will have many troubles, but he also encouraged us to be of good cheer, because He has overcome the world already for us. We don't need to lose our joy when we are faced with challenges. We are to have a positive attitude towards any and every challenge that comes our way.

To walk in victory, you need to first build an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, build strong faith in the word of God - be strong in the Lord. Finally, you need to give yourself to the word of God. Manage your thoughts and keep your mind from concentrating on negatives. Be positive about the challenge you are presently facing.

Let the understanding you have gained in this teaching guide you in facing challenges. Remember, it is your attitude to the challenge that is more important than the challenge itself. Your attitude determines victory or failure. It determines how long it will take before victory comes. Work on keeping your thoughts clean and positive based on the word of God. Victory is yours in Jesus Christ.

SUCCESS TIT-BITS

1. Success that cost one his salvation is suicide.
2. Success is worthy of pursuit but not at the expense of one's relationship with his Creator and Saviour.
3. Enthusiasm is the lubricant of the engine of success.
4. Success requires your best ideas, skills, ability and strength.
5. Those who look up to God in faith and in prayer always succeed.
6. Success is the heritage of the believer in Christ. (Deuteronomy. 28:8 ; 2 Corinthians 2:14)
7. It takes determination to succeed. Those who refuse to give up always make it to the top.
8. It takes strong faith in God, in your vision and in yourself to succeed.
9. The faithful application of the principles of God's word for success makes success happen.
10. Success can make a man to come closer to God and can take a man away from God
11. Your present level of success can become an enemy (a clog in the wheel of progress) and stop you from moving forward, for it can make you think that you have arrived.
12. The danger of success is that it can make one proud and arrogant, and this will lead to a fall and destruction. (Proverbs. 16:18; 29:23)
13. Success can enhance your relationships or alienate you from people who love you and have been around you and a blessing to you before the success came.
14. You cannot succeed alone. You need people to succeed.
15. Time management is essential to success.
16. You need management skills to have success.
17. The pursuit of divine purpose leads to success.
18. You can only succeed in the area of your call and gifting.
19. It takes focus to make it in life. Broken focus is the real reason why men fail.
20. A positive mental attitude is a criterion for success.
21. There is no substitute to information in the school of success.

WISDOM FOR ASSOCIATION

1. Those who do not respect your assignment disqualify themselves for a relationship.
2. Your assignment determines your close associates.
3. Never discuss your problem with someone incapable of solving it.
4. Those who will not respect your time will not respect your wisdom either. Avoid time wasters.
5. Define every relationship to manage your life and your time well.
6. Don't submit leadership of your life to friends.
7. Your friends are counselors, but you are the decision maker. Your decisions determine your experience.
8. Those you hear always have influence over you.
9. What you see friends do repeatedly, you are likely to copy consciously or unconsciously.
10. Evaluate your relationships from time to time in order to eliminate the unnecessary, and redefine the necessary.
11. Your friends are your future.
12. Sometimes, your family is bad company. Keep Company with those who will make your dreams come through.

13. "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Cor. 15 : 33).
14. The one whom you follow you learn his ways.
15. Friendship is transference of spirits, moods, ideologies, philosophies, and character.

RENEWING THE MIND

1. If you really want to know what you are likely to be five or ten years from now, all you need to do is read the thoughts that are now dominant in your mind. In time the continuity of your dominant thought pattern will activate the forces within and outside you to produce the outward conditions that correspond to your basic thinking. *Your thoughts form your future.*
2. *Thoughts materialize in the physical.* You cannot see a thought, but you can trace its effect. And all your thoughts add up to result. In due course you become precisely what you habitually think.
3. Watch what you think. Set your mind on what you want to be. Think on the word of God. Think positively and live positively.