

IJEOMA OBI



*picture*  
~~IMPERFECT~~

an artwork of grace

# *Picture Imperfect*

An artwork of grace.

**Ijeoma Obi**

# *Picture Imperfect*

Copyright (C) 2019 by Ijeoma Obi

**ISBN:978-978-57479-9-7**

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by electronic, mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system except by the copyright holder's written permission. This excludes adaptation for religious or educational purposes and brief excerpts/reviews in newspapers, Newsletters, magazines and Journals.

Published in Nigeria by

Bookaddict Publications

2, St. Finbarrs' College Road, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos

Tel. [+234] 8028302454, 8160845020

Email [bookaddictpub@gmail.com](mailto:bookaddictpub@gmail.com)

Author's contact: +2348132829137

## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to everyone whose daily fight is to stay strong and at the top against the many pressures of human life.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To the entire Obi family, nuclear and extended: Thank you for teaching me how to love and how to make the best of God's blessing.

Thank you, cousin Chigozie Obi, artist extraordinaire, for creating the cover art. World, watch out for this one! Her mind and hands are blessed.

Debbie Ayeni, my soul sister. I appreciate your kind words. When I told you that I wanted to write and I expressed my fears, you strongly encouraged me not to back down as everyone has a story to tell. The 4<sup>th</sup> chapter is dedicated to you because you said to me "Ij tell your story, it will make your book real and relatable". Thank you Debz, for always believing in me.

Shola Aladesawe, thank you for cheering me on. You said to me 'Let's go' when I told you about the book. Your willingness to proofread it gave me joy. You are a blessing.

Dayo Egbedeyi, my number one cheer leader. Thank you for being a friend indeed. You were generous with your praise. When I doubted myself, I remembered your words.

Chijioke Udemezue, you've always wanted me to see beyond myself, I appreciate the nudges. Thank you for letting me bug you to proofread my book.

Dare Amusan, Chiemeka Anadu and Victoria Umahi, I shared my thought of writing a book and you gave me thumbs up. Thank you for having my back always.

Ruth Emaba, your kind is rare. Your readiness to help me all the time is overwhelming. Thank you for typesetting this entire book, you took the burden off me. I'm glad our path crossed.

Dominic Achon, I said to you that I'm writing a book and you said "When you're done editing send it to me". You were willing to help me figure out the design and publishing details. Thank you Domstorm!

Thank you Arch. Chidi Achifula for the giant Tree of the Spirit, you don't hesitate to help me always.

I know I have angels as friends and I'm happy that you all are living the grace life.

To my CYF family, no report would be made about me without a mention of you. Thank you for teaching me the importance of fellowship and helping me explore my gifts.

To the EXCO team I served with: Ernest Elue, Tolu Yusuf, Ikenna Ezeugwu, Sola Aladesawe and Dominic Achon, thank you for loving God and His word the way you do. Your life of worship rubbed off on me.

And to my 'best' of friend, the one who knows me inside and out. The one who is always with me in the cool of the morning, warmth of the noon and loneliness of the night, the Holy Spirit! Thank you for inspiring me to write this book. You gave me the title, the chapters and the words to capture exactly what you want to say through me. We will definitely crush life together.

## **CONTENT**

Dedication

Acknowledgements

A note from the author

### **Chapter one**

Ije-oma

### **Chapter Two**

Purpose in every Step

### **Chapter Three**

Amarachukwu (God's grace)

### **Chapter Four**

My gospel of grace

### **Chapter Five**

The Mask

### **Chapter Six**

Hello Fear!

### **Chapter Seven**

Here and Now



## **Chapter Eight**

The Word, the Holy Spirit and the *Grace Life*

**The story behind the book**

**A page for you**

## **A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

Man's position on earth was clearly stated from the very beginning of creation. At the top and nowhere else was his place of abode, reigning over everything else. The writer of *Genesis* boldly articulated that man was made in the image and likeness of God. God never gave up on His will for man to rule the earth even after the great fall. In His unconditional love, God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ sought man out, sanctified him and raised him to sit with Him at the right hand of His father(God); the place of dominion.

Many individuals, including some Christians, have not come to the full knowledge of all that God's grace offers. They live in fear, doubt, hopelessness and helplessness; letting the devil deprive them the abundant life in Jesus. Many have been beaten or are being weighed down by life's many troubles. So, instead of running towards grace, some have walled themselves up, fearful of the unknown while others have devised means of helping themselves look good. It therefore has become a Do-It-Yourself pursuit. Jesus' single purpose is to set man free from sin and every demand of the flesh that binds him from living the supernatural life. Therefore, this book brings to light the very thought of God for His children and His grace that

liberates us from life's many pressures. My prayer is that through this book, many will find Jesus and as many that have found Him, that they daily live in triumph; winning in every way.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Ije-oma

We are not Westerners, Ike! We don't bear Rice, Stone or Bush as names, my father tells his cousin. My father's cousin had come to enquire if he could change his surname (Okoye) to an English name, but instead got a lecture from my father on the significance of names in the Igbo culture. As at the time I overheard this conversation, I was a teenager but this knowledge has helped shape the way I regard names. There are Bible accounts that show that people of other cultures bear names representing certain seasons in their lives or families. No wonder man over the years ascribed names to God in relation to his encounters with Him. Obviously, God also cares about names as we see Jacob's name change to Israel, which was the birthing of his journey into his divine purpose as the father of Israel. Names can project people's fear, affluence, struggles and hope. Days before I began writing this chapter, I called home to ask my parents how my name (Ijeoma) came about. My Dad didn't give much details, he said the name was given to me by my mother's mum and because they didn't want to give me a foreign name, they called me Amarachukwu as a second name. My mother told me that her mum, my grandmother was at peace with her choice of family for her, hence the name

Ijeoma. What my grandma meant was that my mother's journey to the Obi's family is a good one. My name might have started off as a joyful remark but fast forward to 30 years after, the name has ruled my spirit and was a point of an audible encounter with God in 2018.

A United Nations report suggests that there are about 250 babies born every minute, more than 130 million in a year. The United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) estimates that average of 353,000 babies are born each day around the world. In modern times and for population control, records of children born must be kept. Although in some developing and under-developed countries where health care is not easily accessible to all, some babies are not delivered in a health centre. Therefore, records of such births are not kept. Another UNICEF report suggests that in Nigeria only one out of every three babies is delivered in a health centre. This is to say that despite the report from the UN and UNICEF there are more babies born than the world takes account and record of.

God said to Jeremiah, *"Before I formed you in the womb, before you were born, I sanctified you, I ordained you a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah. 1:5)*. Heaven takes note of every birth on earth. A task too enormous for the world's health care system is such a simple task for the

Maker. How would He not know? Irrespective of the circumstances of birth, God is aware of every conception. This should be a confidence booster for everyone especially children of God. Whether a child is born by divine providence or human error, God keeps record of all. At the instance of birth, the child born has begun a journey: one which everyone is hopeful will end well. Some parents express their hope of a better tomorrow in the names they give their children. So also, God's will for us His children is that our paths should be like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until it reaches its full strength and glory in the perfect day(Proverbs 4:18, AMP).

Journeys, especially long ones, are most often not as straight and smooth as we may have presumed or planned. The many turns, bends and diversions make them quite frustrating, and then follow disappointments and sometimes loss of different kinds. This is the condition of our life's journey on earth. The Israelites were caught up in a web of frustration when they lost their city to the Babylonians and were taken as slaves in the pagan country. What a shame for the people who were 'supposedly' God's chosen people. The Israelites were in crisis. Yes, everyone as well as Christians face challenges but crisis and chaos stem from disobedience to instructions. This, the

Israelites had a bitter taste of. Notwithstanding, God never backed down on his promise of good.

---

*The truth is, God doesn't jump process so as to win man's approval, He follows through His plans regardless of the pain or shame the human flesh may feel.*

---

God made a promise to the Israelites: "*For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope*"[Jeremiah .29:11 NLT]. What a word in a time of despair. God's plan was to reassure them of His goodness, to affirm the consistency of His character as a good Father, though the promise contradicted their state at the time. The word came when they were exiles in Babylon, mourning the loss of their city and their sacred temple to the Babylonians. The promise and their situation didn't match, but God had a plan to bring them to a good end. We know the story of the Israelites and their on and off relationship with God. They were supposed to be in a pact (*I will be their God and they will be my people; Jeremiah 31:33*), but they always failed to keep their own part of the bargain. As they continued to sin against God, He punished them.

Reading Jeremiah 29 from the first verse, it was obvious that their captivity was a process to their redemption and while they felt abandoned by God, He was with them every step of the way (Jeremiah. 29:1-10). When some Prophets came to confuse them bearing false news that they would in no time return home, God responded through Prophet Jeremiah telling them to get comfortable in Babylon, pray for its peace and prosperity as that is their gate way to prosperity and also marry and bear children. Not until after 70 years will they return home. Without question, their situation can make anyone doubt God's goodness. But the truth is, God doesn't jump process so as to win man's approval, He follows through His plans regardless of the pain or shame the human flesh may feel. About the end of 2018, I was wrestling powerful emotions of inadequacy and questioning the pace at which my life was moving. One Monday morning in November, I got to work early, and as I hadn't had a decent sleep in two nights, I decided to take a quick nap before the days' activities began. Some minutes into my quick sleep, I heard my name IJEOMA. It was a loud call and I raised my head, then I could hear the Spirit of God minister to me with my name. He led me to Jeremiah 29. Ijeoma literally means safe journey. Ije means journey, Oma means good or beautiful. The Holy Spirit told me that I am on a good journey. My prevailing situation may not completely suggest that, nevertheless,



my journey is to a good end not despair. This revelation lit a fire in me. Every time someone set out on a journey, it is expected that the person arrives safe at his destination. Road travelers can recount their experiences on the road, how sometimes they set out early but due to car breakdown or traffic congestions, got home later than planned.

Some years ago, I was en route Lagos from Anambra with my Uncle and his friend. As we were approaching the town Benin, my Uncle's car began to overheat. It was a situation we could not manage, so the car was towed into town to a mechanic's workshop. Our family in Anambra had wished us a safe journey, hoping to hear the news of our arrival in Lagos. Also, the ones in Lagos were expecting and waiting for us to get home. But there we were, stuck in Benin, a city I only knew by signpost. The mechanics could not fix the car that day and we had to lodge in a hotel. I remember we were at a place in Benin town called Ikpoba Hills. Our hope to get to Lagos was dashed again, on the second. We changed hotel and lodged in the town's popular 'Doris Day' Hotel hoping the next day will be better. When it got to day three, it was obvious the mechanic could not fix the car; we knew it was time to get a plan B. My Uncle ordered for a tow truck to take his car and we booked a taxi. While we were waiting for the car to get fixed, some of the fresh fruits and vegetables we brought with us had

gone bad. Was the delay totally a waste of time for me? No! I didn't think so because if we never had that stop, I wouldn't have known a Doris Day hotel existed. My reason may be trivial but it's an experience I hate to love. Did we lose some things? Definitely, we lost time, food and money. Did the journey end well? Of course, we got home safe. It will be true to say that in the process of our journey on earth, we may lose some earthly valuables but we are sure to gain spiritual virtues. It is worth knowing that recovery and restoration are also God's will for us. The Lord says, *"I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts. It was I who sent this great destroying army against you. (Joel 2:25, NLT).* This scripture affirms Job's story.

Our physical bodies may be weak but through the power of God at work in us, they can withstand the many beatings of life. Paul made bold claims when he wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 4:8 *"We now have the light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of*

*Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. (NLT)*

**Summary:** God's ultimate plan is to show us his goodness. He cares that we not only know but trust that he is good at all times. Our journey on earth is not one to end in shame, disappointments and despair but one with a glorious end. It is our call to believe God's promises and walk in the confidence assurance that He watches over His words to perform them (Jeremiah. 1:12)

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Purpose in every step.**

*Keep and live out the entire commandments that I'm commanding you today so that you'll live and prosper and enter and own the land that God promised to your ancestors. Remember every road that God led you on for those forty years in the wilderness, pushing you to your limits, testing you so that he would know what you were made of, whether you would keep his commandments or not. He put you through hard times. He made you go hungry. Then he feeds you with manna, something neither you nor your parents know anything about, so you will learn that men and women don't live by bread only, we live by every word that comes from God's mouth. Your clothes didn't wear out and your feet didn't blister those forty years.*

*You learned deep in your heart that God disciplines you in the same way a father disciplines his child. So it is paramount that you keep the commandments of God, your God, walk down the roads he shows you and reverently respect him. God is about to bring you into a good land, a land with brooks and rivers, springs and lakes, streams out of the hills and through the valleys. It is land of wheat*

*and barley, of vines and figs and pomegranates, of olives, oil, and honey. It's land where you will never go hungry - always food on the table and roof over your head. It's a land where you'll get iron out of rocks and mine copper from the hills. (Deuteronomy 8:1-9; MSG)*

About 3years ago the song "Intentional" by American artiste Travis Greene was one of the jams of the year. Every up-to-date Christian music lover knew the song. It was on every choir's Sunday best playlist. The song writer wrote "All things are working for my good; He's intentional, never failing". Not only did the song register in my spirit, I added a new word to my word bank. On one of my morning devotions, the Holy Spirit led me to read Psalm 105 and as I did, the word "intentional" kept re-sounding in my spirit and then I completely understood. God doesn't just make moves; He is purposeful in every step. The writer of Psalm 105 clearly stated the plan of God for the Israelites from selling Joseph into slavery, to their journey in the wilderness. All were intentional acts of God to bring the Israelites to their promise land. Joseph's prison to palace story is one of God's many deliberate actions. In Deuteronomy 8, the writer understood this character of God. A friend says all the time that to love God and faithfully follow him, we must understand the way he operates. The Israelites' forty

years journey in the wilderness was a boot camp experience in preparation for the Promise Land. God wanted them to enter into abundance with the right heart and mind, believing and trusting His supremacy over life's demand. The comforting part of their story is that in the seemingly long years in the wilderness, their clothes didn't wear out neither did their feet blister, God preserved them. We must understand that God is in every season of our life, the good and the bad. Paul stated in (Romans. 8:28, NLT) *"For we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them"*.

One very vital human need is loyalty. There was a time I felt alone. I have an amazing family support system and brotherly friends, but my heart questioned their loyalty. In that time, God shifted my gaze to Jesus and all that His love offers. Jesus' love is loyal and Paul reiterated this in (Romans. 8:35) when he asked *"What can separate us from the love of God?"* This verse affirms God's pledge of allegiance to His children, *"I will never fail you, nor abandon you"* as recorded in Hebrews.13:5. God's love for us overrides our human needs and frustrations, it trumps sin and insecurities.

*"Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep. No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>[b]</sup> neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." - Romans 8:35-39 (NLT)*

God wants us to understand that every detail of our lives matter to Him. The family we are born into (whether rich or poor); our friends; colleagues at work; neighbours (good and bad ones); towns and cities we live in; schools we attend; strangers who in just short encounters affect our lives. The break ups; the disappointments; staying out of job; waiting on God for marriage or fruit of the womb are all part of the plan to work out His good purpose. Most interestingly and comforting, God is right in the process,

fueling our faith and energizing our heart with His word. Our human minds may struggle to accept this method of God's dealing. God's intent is not to make us suffer but to work out faith in us and to bring us to a place of total dependency on him. God is never against us, He is always for and with us.

---

*God doesn't just make moves; He is purposeful in every step.*

---

Vanity and pride dwell in the heart of man; hence God brings man's flesh to discipline. He humbles the flesh so that it would not glory in itself. We ought not to be quick to erase or deny the ugly or the not so palatable periods in our journey. It depicts non-recognition of God's seasonless and ceaseless love. He was with us all the way through, irrespective of the situation. Each time we distort the truth in our story so as to appeal to others, we undermine God's grace upon our lives and we rob God of the glory He deserves. See what the bible says in Deuteronomy 8:10-18. *After a meal, satisfied, bless God, your God for the good land he has given you. Make sure you don't forget God; your God by not keeping His*



*commandments, His rules and regulations that I command you today. Make sure that when you eat and are satisfied, build pleasant houses and settle in, see your herds and flocks flourish and more and more money come in, watch your standard of living, going up and up - make sure you don't become so full of yourself and your things that you forget God your God. If you start thinking to yourselves "I did all this, and by myself, I'm rich, it's all mine" - well, think again. Remember that God, your God, gave you the strength to produce all this wealth so as to confirm the covenant that he promised to your ancestors as it is today ( MSG).*

**Summary:** I once heard a preacher say that God is interested in only two things, our good and His glory. These have been His exact pursuit throughout generations. Like the song writer said "All things are working for our good" because God is purposeful in His plan. He leads His own by the hand, in the rain and through the fire; He is right by us, never to abandon us.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Amarachukwu (God's Grace)**

*Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from big society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks, and exploits and abuses, chose these nobodies to expose the hollow pretentious of the "somebodies"? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. Everything that we have - right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start - comes from God by way of Jesus Christ. That's why we have the saying "If you're going to blow a horn, blow a trumpet for God" (1 Cor. 1:26-31 MSG).*

Before 2016, I had a vague idea of grace. I knew the sound of it and it happens to be my second name yet I had no proper knowledge of its empowering capacity. I am only beginning to realize that grace has availed for me in so many ways and places that I didn't take note of. Grace holds so many meanings to different people. My goal in

this chapter is to define grace in ways I have come to understand it.

---

*Grace finds the poor and makes them rich. It reaches out to the weak with strength. It clothes the sin laden man with righteousness. Grace gives voice to the voiceless, and to the unlearned, it fills with unimaginable wisdom.*

---

Grace is a person and his name is Jesus according to John. 1:14; "The word (Jesus) become flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth". Grace is Jesus destroying the works of darkness that we may live with Him in victory. Grace is Jesus dying for our sins while we were yet sinners. (Romans 5:8) Grace is lowly Joseph, the carpenter and his naive wife, Mary, birthing the King and Saviour of the world instead of mighty Herod. Grace is the once sinful demon possessed Mary Magdalene being the first to see and bear the news of the resurrected Jesus. Grace is fisherman Peter becoming a revered preacher of the word without any certification. Grace is Saul the self-proclaimed religious fanatic becoming Paul, the wonder working, Holy Spirit filled missionary. Grace

is poor orphaned Esther rising to the position of the queen in a foreign land and saving her people from annihilation. *Grace* lifts; it is that hand that pulls, the voice that propels and the love that compels a man to rise from the ashes into *God's* glory. The aim of *grace* is to give us an enabling ground by the empowering of the Holy Spirit to take our place and command our lives and environment.

*Grace* is fully loaded. It offers freedom from sin and self-loathing. It offers hope for the future no matter how bleak the present may seem. *Grace* is free and it's for all men regardless of human class segregation. In the anchor text, Paul explains clearly in verse 27 that *God* has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, *God* has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty (NKJV). James wrote that *God* opposes the proud but gives *grace* to the humble. What *Jesus* has done is to include the weak, the uneducated, and the nothings of this world in His big agenda. This is *grace*! What would have become of poor, uneducated fisherman Peter, if *grace* wasn't extended to all freely? *Grace* finds the poor and makes them rich. It reaches out to the weak with strength. It clothes the sin laden man with righteousness. *Grace* gives voice to the

voiceless, and to the unlearned, it fills with unimaginable wisdom.

A revered minister and writer, Kenneth Hagin in his book 'How you can be led by the spirit of God' told a story of a girl named Mary. Mary started school at age seven, she spent seven years in first grade, but still she never learnt to write her name. Her parents were asked to take her out of school. As at 18 years, Mary still behaved like a 2 year old, she sometimes crawled around on the floor like a baby. Hagin wrote that one night during an evangelistic revival meeting; Mary confessed Jesus and received eternal life. Here I must say, Mary began her grace journey. Her change was drastic because the next day at service she looked and behaved like an 18 year old young girl. Years later when Hagin went back to the city for a funeral, he asked about Mary and the story the church secretary told him was nothing short of a testimony. Mary had married though widowed. She had three well-mannered children. Mary handled her own money, she was building new houses in the city and she paid her tithes and offerings every Sunday.

Hagin wrote *"The life of God came into her! I am convinced we have never completely learned what we have received. Most of us have thought that the Lord just*

*forgave us saying that we're the same old creature we always were. We'll try to hold out faithful till the end. If we get enough people to pray for us maybe we can make it. No, thank God, the life of God has been imparted into our spirits. The nature of God is in our spirit; the Holy Spirit is living and abiding in our spirit."*

---

*The aim of grace is to give us an enabling ground by the empowering of the Holy Spirit to take our place and command our lives and environment.*

---

Grace ushers us into the life of the spirit, empowering us to become bigger and better than what or where we might have been. Bear in mind that we are all set on a journey, one which maybe full of hurdles and imperfect situations. Yet, it is a journey to good, because God's grace beautifies everything. The journey of grace is one which never starts off picture perfect. The human flesh seeks comfort and each time something doesn't go its way, it throws a childish tantrum; this makes the heart question God's goodness. But grace takes the pieces of our imperfect pictures and makes them into a beautiful collage; a memorable piece of art. I have known grace all

my life, writing this book is grace. I grew up in a small town in Anambra State, so visiting home is always an emotional trip; God puts my mind to thoughtful reflections. I see the people I grew up with, the primary school I attended and as much as I love my town and all it offers, I know that I have grown bigger than its offerings. I see the margin between where I come from and where I am now and it screams Grace. This has nothing to do with physical wealth, but has everything to do with who I have become in mind and in spirit. Grace has put me in positions that still marvel my human mind. Grace has given me reasons to be strong, bold and shine bright everywhere I find myself.

Grace took Joseph the 11th son of Jacob from a pit to the palace and from the prison to an elevated and influential position in a foreign land. We can see that God is intentional in building and shaping us into who He has purposed us to be. We may sulk about the bad days and the situation of our lives (regardless of how ugly it may seem), God's grace is at work furnishing and putting together every broken piece that we may enjoy a wholesome life. To live below what grace offers is to make a mockery of all that Jesus accomplished on the cross. With all that grace offers, it is careful not to puff up the heart, instead it humbles. In verse 28 and 29 of the

anchor scripture, Paul writes, *"God chose things despised by the world; things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result no one can ever boast in the presence of God (NLT).*If we truly accept and embrace grace, it keeps our heart from falling into the sin of pride. Grace gives us clear view of God and His gift of love through Jesus. Grace makes us see our wretchedness; notwithstanding, it protects and prevents us from falling into the ditch of hopelessness. These offerings of grace should make it easier for us to humble ourselves and only boast in the finished work of Jesus. For without grace we are nothing.

**Summary:** Grace is free; it is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9). Grace has been offered to everyone (Titus. 2:11). Therefore, instead of wallowing in wretchedness and hopelessness, we ought to seek Jesus, for with Him is grace.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **My gospel of grace**

My birth wasn't noble, it wasn't even anything dramatic. It was as lowly as that of Jesus except I wasn't born in a stable or laid in a manger. Interestingly, I often get reminders from one of my brothers about the place of my birth. My brother feels that I don't pay enough homage to our culture. On occasions of my supposedly denial, he says to me "We know where you were born oooo. Is it not at the maternity?" Maternity is a health centre that cares for pregnant women and nursing mothers. We didn't have a proper hospital at the time, all my town could boast of were maternities and drug stores-cum-provision stores known as chemist shop.

Because of what this book is about, I intend to share a bit of my story in this chapter. I grew up in a small town in Anambra state, in Eastern Nigeria, a little town full of people with big dreams. While most people sought greener pastures in cities, my father who as a young man had his share of city hustle, stayed home. My family lived a contentedly comfortable life. Before wealthy people generously shared their borehole water with the rest of us and before we dug ours, I went long distances to get

water from the stream. I worked in farms, ate ripped fruits off the ground. While city children watched cartoons and played with building blocks, we played ten-ten and built with sand. Every school day, I with other children thronged the public primary schools we all attended because in a small town at the time, private schools were not a thing. We lived, oblivion of the boisterous city life, ours was laid-back.

I remember my mum forcing me to make conversations in the English language with my cousins whenever they came home for Christmas. It was an awkwardness I had to deal with at every of their home visit. My parents did their best to give my siblings and I a good life. My Uncles' generosity played a major role in the way we were raised. They supported my family a great deal. My parents did not mind seeking help when needed. When I grew older, my mum told me that they did all that so that we would not feel a lot different from our cousins. And I give it to them; they did a pretty good job. I have lived on support most of my life. Though it sounds like something I should be ashamed of, but on the contrary, I choose to thank God for always sending help.

---

*Grace nurtures, it takes a man from nothing and raises him up to something great. Grace gives us a presence. You see, when grace finds us, it gives us a face to lift and a voice to speak.*

---

As clueless as I may have seemed, I knew a bright light shone in my path. My family is religious, so moral was strongly upheld and church activities were religiously observed. My basic knowledge of God was from the stories we were told at Sunday school. My first personal encounter with God was in my secondary school. I attended a boarding only, coeducational secondary school outside my town. It was my first major interaction with other young individuals from different backgrounds. We had people from Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and other towns in Anambra. Some of my mates sought expression through different means and I pitched my tent with the so called "Christian sisters and brothers". There, I gave my life to Christ. Notwithstanding, I still had my fair share of teenage indulgences.

After secondary school, I moved to Lagos in 2004. I had always visited during the long vacations but this time, I was in Lagos to stay. Small town girl in a big city, I battled

with insecurities of not fitting in for a long time. First, I didn't sound like the city bred kids, I didn't look like them either, I was wide-eyed. I have since found out that God is very mindful of me in that He places me in locations that I can learn and with people I can learn from. I have also reckoned that God gave me a strong thirst for knowledge, a gift I once thought was an "Obi thing". Moving to Lagos did not only grow my mind, my spirit grew too. My love for the things of God became obvious in my University days.

The more I came to know God, the better I came to know myself and the more my confidence grew. I discovered talents I didn't know I had and I built the ones already discovered. A student pastor told me one time that I bear a special kind of grace, looking back now; I believe that statement holds a lot of truth.

Grace nurtures, it takes a man from nothing and raises him up to something great. Grace gives us a presence. You see, when grace finds us, it gives us a face to lift and a voice to speak. I call myself a late bloomer, because I began to record major personal development in my late 20s. But I have since learnt that with grace, nothing is ever late. The care of grace is simply to grow us into the

design and purpose of God, age and time are not limitations. As long as we are willing vessels, grace has its way of covering up lost times.

My friend Debbie said to me one time, "The Ijeoma I knew when I left Nigeria and the one I met when I came back are totally different". Debbie is one of the friends that remind me that God intentionally brings people our way, something He does as part of his building plan. Therefore, it is important that we learn to see God in seemingly normal life occurrences. Debbie and I were raised in different environments. She is older and well-travelled and as for me, let's just say that I have no description. We met in church in my early years in Lagos. Her warm reception of me made me realize that something of worth lies inside of me. We never scheduled lesson periods but I learnt a lot from her. Her simplicity and love for God drew me in.

We talked about boys and cried over lost love. But most importantly, we fasted and prayed for everything especially the future. We call each other soul sister. My time with Debbie before she left Nigeria was nothing short of a divine arrangement.

---

*The gifts of God can only be harnessed in understanding. In ignorance, we can either waste or not fully utilize what we have been given and relationship is one of such gifts.*

---

Esther's grass to grace story would not be complete without the mention of Hegai, the king's official. When Esther joined the array of exotic Persian girls in a contest for the position of the queen, she needed the eunuch (who was called the keeper of women), a God appointed helper who taught her the way to win the king's heart. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's story of exploits in Babylon began with the tale of finding favour with the king's official. David and Jonathan's brotherly friendship attests to the truth that for us to step into the next level, God intentionally positions people on whose backs we can ride on. Joseph had help throughout his journey in Egypt, both in the palace and in the prison. God does not work in isolation.

There are two key things to note in our grace journey. First is that our story of grace involves people who has been divinely positioned to help us in becoming all that God desires us to become. We meet them in different seasons

of our journey. The second is that we can choose to be part of someone else's grace story. The realization of the interconnectedness of life should inspire us to always seek to understand the purpose of every relationship we desire to build. The gifts of God can only be harnessed in understanding. In ignorance we can either waste or not fully utilize what we have been given and relationship is one of such gifts. Grace doesn't just give us an idea of life, it hands life whole over to us. Today, in my very small world, I'm humbled by what grace has made of me. I'm amazed at how it has created something new out of nothing and I'm grateful for the extra that it is making out of the ordinary. Now, I'm sure of the life of Christ in me and I'm daily growing in confidence of the Holy Spirit's abilities within me.

**Summary:** I tell my story not to blow trumpet, for I yet have none. I tell this story to share my grace experience because of the future I see. And if we must preach grace, we have to unashamedly tell our story. Paul's grace story drove his ministry. We tell our story not to point to ourselves but to point to Jesus and all that his love accomplishes in our lives. Our story should draw people to God and bring glory to His Holy name.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Mask

How did we get here?

Over two thousand years after the Eden experience, man has not fully recovered from the great fall.

And here is the story.

God made man whole; perfect just as He is. He established man to rule over all things created. What a great honour that is! The first man and woman, Adam and Eve ran around naked in the Garden of Eden, enjoying God's presence without any care or concern because everything they needed, they had. As far as their eyes were on God, they lived oblivion of their nakedness but the moment they sinned, their eyes opened up to human realities. They immediately realized that they were naked. And their first reaction when God called to meet with them was to hide. Not only did they hide from God, they made attempt to cover their nakedness. You see, this seemingly inconsequential action brought us all to our constant battle with insecurities and the pressure to



cover them. You will wish that this was all. But their action made us begin to search for the things the devil said God withheld from them and then the curses. We became encumbered with all kinds of human trouble.

According to Romans 3:23 "for everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard" (NLT). The man who once lived in glory is now buried in ashes. The struggle over the years has been to get rid of the broken lines as a result of the fall. Many have found ways to patch the damages and with the patches come the coverings. Many are fearful of exposing their broken lines; they cover the lines and patches with different shades of leaves. It is important to note that everyone, man and woman are in this mess. The natural man is laden with sin and insecurities. The fall ushered in imperfection, it pulled us down from the place of glory. The great news is that by grace through Jesus, God has once again raised man to glory; the place of perfection. We have been given the privilege to step out from our hideouts, take off the coverings and live in the freedom that comes with grace. Anyone in pursuit of perfection without grace is on a depressing and fruitless journey.

Making heaven is not an option for I have since made a list of the people I specially want to meet. Paul and David are

top on my list. The openness and brokenness that characterized David's relationship with God, caught my attention, I coveted what they had.

The Psalm is a book of the Bible I find interesting. It documents prayers, songs and lamentations of people who held nothing back before God. Most Christians struggle to find the right words to express their most troubling thoughts to God, so they hide their true expression behind impressive man-made prayer languages. Emotion is the makeup of a natural man. God built man to feel, without which, man will be no different from other creatures. God himself is an emotional being but unlike man, He is stable and consistent in the way he wields his emotions.

We are created to think, feel and express. God didn't make us robots for a reason. Our emotion is what first draws us to God and helps us to connect with people around us. The truth is God feels, and He sure bares His heart when He is happy and when He is sad. Reading through the Old Testament, it is quite obvious that God is emotional, nevertheless, all that He feels is rooted in love. God's ability to love without condition is what stabilizes and solidifies His emotions. He doesn't go about throwing unnecessary tantrum. He paid attention to Job

in his distress; He didn't smite him or David when they expressed their most insecure thoughts about Him. These men at one point in their lives questioned God and His promised goodness; notwithstanding, they made the list of God's beloved.

I find David's Psalm very liberating, He cleared un-trodden path. David personified vulnerability and sincerity both in words and actions. He owned his dark, negative human emotions and he knew how to approach God with them. David understood that he couldn't hide from God even if he tried. How possible is it even to hide from our Maker? David knew the difficulty in such act that he asked in Psalm. 139:7 (MSG) "*Is there any place I can go to avoid your spirit?*" In verse 15, he wrote "*You know me inside and out*". David's psalm teaches us to go to God just the way we are. It taught me to approach the throne of grace with brokenness and sincerity of heart for God understands our human make-up (Psalms. 103:14).

---

*When we don't tell our story completely; the good, the bad or even the ugly, we deny all that grace has accomplished in our lives.*

---

The question then is, if God understands our incapacitation and insecurities and has availed grace to tend to these, why then do we still wear masks?

It is in man's nature to make impressions and to be appraised. There is this constant need to be recognized, approved and appreciated. These are our human experiences and they are nothing to be ashamed of. These needs have in recent times been aided by the coming of age of social media. Everybody wants to sound and look put together. Public exhibition of self and personal achievements affirms to the fact that we are most driven by these needs. It's quite impossible to see people put up not-so-good images of themselves on social media. We are most ready to take pictures of ourselves in our best wears and moods; no room for unhappy moments. There is absolutely nothing wrong with sharing our joy with the world but actions as frivolous as these should call to question the honesty in our human expressions.

What grace came to do is to unmask us. Unburden us from the demands and desires of the flesh. Women who wear makeup should know this feeling too well. The time and energy given to conceal the blemishes on our faces, the burden to wear it all day long, come rain, come shine. And

nothing beats the refreshing feeling that comes with washing off the concealer at the end of the day.

---

*Grace has simply exposed the weaknesses of the natural man but has opened us up to the power embedded in the spiritual man by the Holy Spirit.*

---

The natural man is broken and wretched no matter what is worn to hide the broken lines. He may wear masks of personal accomplishments: money, education but he can never hide the imperfections that characterize his makeup. But Glory be to God, Jesus has offered freely, His grace that we may be whole and live free of these veils and masks, for where the spirit of the Lord is, there we find freedom (2 Cor.3:17).

When we live with masks as Christians, we put grace to shame. Grace has simply exposed the weaknesses of the natural man but has opened us up to the power embedded in the spiritual man by the Holy Spirit. It is very human to be insecure or anxious about the future but rather than act like they don't exist, we must accept them. When we don't acknowledge our human needs, we burden

ourselves. We get pressured into building cocoons for hideout, giving free invite to depression and other unhealthy emotion. Some even die a sad and lonely death in their hideouts. What I'm saying is simple, we all are in this trouble together, and the fall brought us here. Instead of being ashamed, we ought to embrace the liberation that grace brings. And also, rather than pull each other down, we will lift knowing that our human needs and inefficiencies are barely different. Grace is that one picture editor who knows how to give perfect touches. When we take seemingly beautiful pictures of ourselves, grace spots the imperfections, puts them together and presents to us something to be proud of.

---

*To live without the mask is to embrace our failures and inadequacies, to accept our needs and imperfections yet live above and beyond them, basking in the elevated place of glory grace has positioned us.*

---

Telling lies and living falsely to look good to others is treating grace unjustly. Grace means nothing if we had no past. The story of grace is the story of our journey from imperfection to perfection. When we don't tell our story

completely; the good, the bad or even the ugly, we deny all that grace has accomplished in our lives. Every Christian has been commissioned to preach the gospel (good news), we must understand that preaching the gospel is telling our story of grace. He said to them, "Go into the entire world and preach the gospel to all creation". (Mark 16:15, NIV). Our story of grace is telling what Jesus has accomplished in our lives. To live without the mask is; to embrace our failures and inadequacies, to accept our human needs and imperfections yet live above and beyond them, basking in the elevated place of glory where grace has positioned us.

**Summary:** As humans, we struggle to find true expression, because we are plagued with the need to be approved by others. We are weighed down by the things we want hidden away from others. But the truth is that there is no need to hide as our human experiences are the same. And thank God for grace! To live a grace life is to live without the burden of tending to the mask. If we must live our best lives on earth, we must embrace grace.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Hello Fear!

*Dear fear! I know you well. I saw through your charade especially times you sounded like you cared. Yet I gave you room in my mind. Grace found me and faith came with him so there's no more space for you. You were never really my friend, for you held me back from being the best version of me; you clouded my dreams and blurred my visions. You thrived in darkness, bearing secrets of my past. You made clever speeches about how you are shielding me from disappointments and hurt. Your truth is all a sham. I'm off your grip now and I know you, you will never give up but I also know your voice too well to open up again and let you in. Take your walk of shame with every sense of pride you've got, it's over!*

Fear is an engrossing darkness. It is like that long dark shadow that emerges from under the bed or the small holes of a door in a horror movie. Though invisible, it fills the whole room with its presence. Getting rid of fear is every man's greatest battle. What makes this battle tough is that fear will never appear as it is. It most often presents itself as a voice of reasoning; a gripping force that empowers the mind and its sole intent is to disrupt



our thought process and wrap its negativity with a shiny cloth of positivity. Everything about this book began as a quest to conquer fear. I ended 2018 with the word FAITH resounding in my spirit. It was at my church's prayer conference that I got the phrase "Walking on Waters" and I knew that it was time to step out of the bubble of fear of the unknown.

Year 2019 held promises of exploits, but earlier in the year, the cold hand of fear gripped me that I began to think thoughts that contradicted the words I had received. Fear whispered to me not to disrupt my comfort but faith wanted me to step out into the waters. I was plagued with the thought of not being enough or having enough to pursue the things I wanted. Fear wanted me to remain in the circle where grace has pulled me from. These fearful thoughts had to do with everything about my life, marriage, career, ministry, everything. Fear thought to shrink my big dreams but the Holy Spirit wouldn't let him, for He armed me with faith. This book was birthed in the battle field; the messages are my victory badge. At first, when I received the message, I didn't know what to do with it. I thought, "If I am a pastor, I will make it a teaching series". Some weeks after, the Holy Spirit said to me, "Write a book" and here, I have my series.

A musical group, Bethel Music wrote a song "I'm no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God". This song was an anthem in most churches in 2018 including mine. We sang it like people who were truly let out of slavery. Jesus came to us full of grace to deliver us from the shackles of sin and human limitations that we might dwell in heavenly places with Him. All that is required of us is to believe. God's dream for us his children is bigger than we can imagine. Look at the story of Abraham, isn't it quite hilarious that God called out a childless old man to tell him that he will be the father of many nations? Yet Abraham believed Him.

God intends that we become fruitful, dominate and rule the earth. He reiterated these to Abraham, "*And I will make thee exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come to thee*". (Genesis. 17:6). That plan did not and has not changed, though Adam and Eve almost disrupted it, but thank God for Jesus and his offering of grace.

---

*We have received grace so that fear may be put to shame.*

---

Faith is the only antidote to fear. Fear is the devil's most powerful weapon; he has won many over with it. They walk about hopeless and depressed. Faith entails believing that God's promises are yes and amen, regardless of the situation. Faith is living to the effect that God has given us all that pertains to life and godliness. Faith is living in representation of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus bears all that God promises His Children; He came to remind us of them. And we can activate these promises if we believe.

To fight fear, our faith must grow. To entertain fear is to make God and all that He is small. Paul wrote to Timothy, *"I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us the spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline (2 Timothy. 1:5-7 NLT).*

We have received grace so that fear may be put to shame. Imagine young Timothy filling the shoes of almighty Paul. Timothy wasn't himself a complete Jew, his father was Greek while his mother was Jewish, but he found faith

through his grandmother and mother. He began to follow Paul and his teachings and soon enough become a trusted believer.

Paul saw his zeal and commitment to the faith that he made him head the church in Ephesus. What a task for young Timothy. Paul might have sensed his fears that he wrote these encouraging letters to him. Let's get into Timothy's mind; he has probably seen Paul perform miracles or suffer in the ministry. Timothy's fear may be that he was not qualified to take up such responsibility. It also could be the thought of living up to the standard of older people around him. Inasmuch as these kinds of thoughts sound reasonable, alongside what God has called us into, they stand in the way of God's big plans for us.

Fear pervades our thoughts. And like I said in the beginning, it disguises as a voice of reasoning and this makes it a tough battle to fight. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul wrote that we do not wage these wars as humans do; we use God's mighty weapons to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning. We capture the thoughts that are inconsistent with God's word and subject them to obedience to Jesus and his grace offerings (Paraphrased). We fight fear with faith generated from the word of God.

Just as Paul said to Timothy, so also we ought to fan our faith to flame. How do we fan our faith to flame? It is simply by studying *God's* word, praying in the spirit and taking faith inspired actions. *God's* abilities in us can grow if only our faith increases. *"Now all glory to God who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think"*. (Ephesians.3:20, NLT)

We can choose to be like Peter, who defied science, rubbished reality and stepped out into the water. He responded to Jesus' call with faith. As expected fear showed up but Jesus was right by him lifting him before he drowned.

**Summary:** To live in fear is to live with a mask; we've since learnt that grace has taken care of that. When we seek for approval from people around us, their thoughts about us may hold us back from living in the space *God* has made for us. Choose faith over fear. It may look like a roller coaster ride, daunting but the experience is of great and eternal value.

Here is my go-to song whenever the fear of the unknown raises its ugly head.

***OCEANS: Where Feet may Fail by Hillsong United***

*You call me out upon the waters  
The great unknown where feet may fail  
And there I find you in the mystery  
In oceans deep  
My faith will stand*

*And I will call upon your name  
And keep my eyes above the waves  
When oceans rise, my soul will rest in your embrace  
For I am yours, and you are mine*

*Your grace abounds in deepest water  
Your Sovereign hand  
Will be my guide  
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me  
You've never failed and you won't start now  
So I will call upon your name*

*Spirit lead me where my trust is without boarders  
Let me walk upon the waters  
Wherever you may call me  
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander  
And my faith will be made stronger  
In the presence of my Saviour*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Here and Now

Pictures are treasures, they hold beautiful memories. We capture and preserve the story of our lives in this still-life form. And because they have no breath, they outlive us and they continue to represent us when we are long gone from earth. What is beautiful about pictures is that they document our journey from birth till death and they tell our story to all who care to listen.

Each time I travel home, it has become a ritual to go over some old pictures of myself and my family. They remind me of how far we've come and they make me yearn for the future. Throw back pictures are delightful to view, the one-in-town fashion statements, long necks and the awkward poses. Inasmuch as I am not a fan of taking shots, I love the memories pictures arouse. I love that it bares the past, celebrates the present and propels us to a greater future.

---

*Grace reconciles our past with our present. It bridges the gap that exists between our yesterday and today.*

---

Imagine attending an art exhibition event and as you walk along the hallway, you catch a glimpse of a particular exhibit. The frame holds pictures of you from when you were a toddler to your present life. The picture frame presents at a glance all that you were and all that you've become. This is exactly what grace does with our lives. Grace reconciles our past with our present. It bridges the gap that exists between our yesterday and today. Grace intends to raise us up to become all that Jesus is; expanding in glory (2Cor. 3:18).

Sometimes, I feel unworthy to live in the now. Each time I reflect on my past and I think of how to carry on my life without appearing pretentious, I cringe in fear. This fear holds me back from living in complete dominion of where grace has brought me to. But you see, every time I'm faced with this fear, the Holy Spirit makes it a duty to remind me that grace didn't find me where I was to leave me there.



This is to say that here and now, having accepted and confessed Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we can't live any other way but the grace way. When we live the grace life, it means that we are not intimidated by our past or fearful of the future but that we are living boldly the abundant life Jesus has brought us into (John 10:10).

God deals with us as individual souls. Down the line, we may not look like where we've been or come from and many may want to tag us pretentious. There are people in our lives who will want to remind us of our past, that's okay because our past makes up our beautiful story of grace. Nevertheless, we are here and now, the narrative of our story has changed. The pictures are clearer, the long necks are fattened and the poses are sophisticated. We have learnt and grown. We must not be afraid to live the grace life in the now. The differences in the old and the present pictures are pointers to the amount of work that has been done to bring us to where we are now proud to be.

I have a friend who makes it a joke to tease me about everything. Sometimes when I try to speak correctly, my friend says to me "You know where you come from, that doesn't fit you". I'm always quick to remind my friend of my grace journey. We should not be robbed of living our

best life because of people's opinion and knowledge of our past. That you were born in a not so wealthy family or once lived an obvious sinful lifestyle doesn't require you to live in false humility the rest of your life. We must teach people to accept what we've become by grace and not let their criticism make us live below where grace has brought us to. Our past is what makes our story of grace worthy of telling.

---

*When we live the grace life, it means that we are not intimidated by our past or fearful of the future but that we are living boldly the abundant life Jesus has brought us into.*

---

A few times, I have watched my younger brother shred pictures of himself he doesn't feel good about. We do same today, when we take pictures, we delete the ones that do not outline our features rightly. This kind of action comes from that human need to look good and perfect all the time. Unfortunately, that is a lot to ask of life. I have always thought about Joseph's story. Would Joseph's Prime Minister Story be compelling if the pit and prison part were never told or if he never went through the process? Our past is what inspires the present.

Therefore, the past should not be rubbished or discarded, we ought to learn to appreciate where we were, what we had so that we can live confidently and dominantly in the now. When we accept our past, then we can truly appreciate grace.

The way we live in the now should depict our understanding of the work of grace in our life. We must allow grace frame our story, so that it will be worthwhile to tell.

**Summary:**

*Here and now,  
I stand tall with my head high  
I'm no longer a slave to fear  
I am a child of God*

*Here and now  
I live in freedom  
For I no longer hide behind a mask  
Grace has exposed my flaws and inadequacies  
But has given me a face to shine.*

*Here and now*

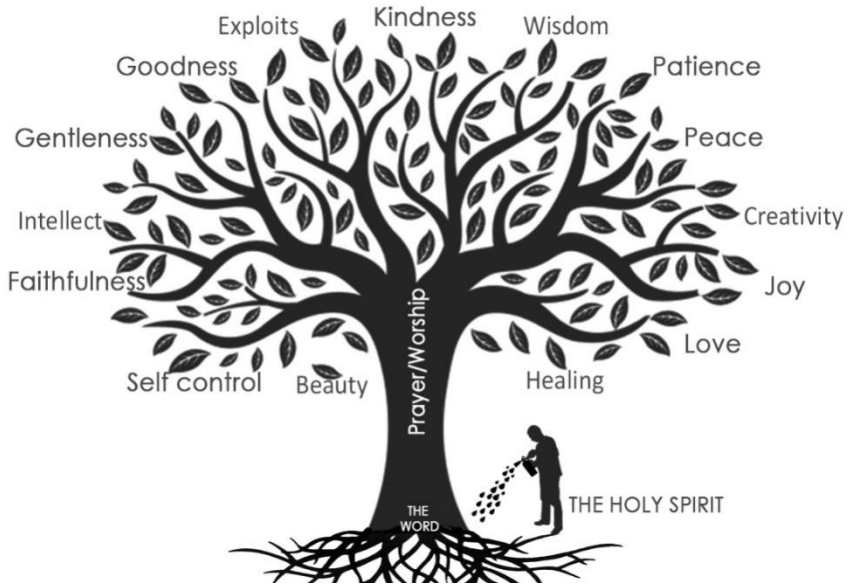
*I have chosen grace over everything else,*

*And the Holy Spirit empowers me,*

*To live daily, my best life.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Word, the Holy Spirit and the Grace Life



You may want to ask, what is the grace life? How can I live the grace life? These questions will be answered one after another.

## **What is the grace life?**

The grace life is simply life in Christ Jesus. It is life in the word. That is, living the promises of God. The grace life is a life in the Spirit. It is being led daily by the Holy Spirit. The grace life is a life of exploit.

The message Bible rightly captured the meaning of the grace life in its translation of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul wrote "*God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go. This resurrected life you have received from God is not timid, grave tending life. It is adventurously expectant, greeting God with a child-like, "What next Papa?" (Romans 8:14-16).*

Grace tells the story of people who were once dead and unproductive until Jesus came and offered Himself as a sacrifice to gain life. He also gave his name for authority and his Spirit for productivity.

---

*The grace life is not a small-man's life. It is life lived in authority and productivity.*

---

When we live the grace life, we live the plan of God, claiming the victory of Jesus over life. According to Daniel 11:32b *"The people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits"*.

When we receive grace, the Holy Spirit empowers us to begin to do things that we couldn't do before. He helps us to see ourselves in the light of God's word. The resurrection [grace] life we have received is not timid or fearful, it is adventurous. God wants us to be productive; He wants us to utilize every virtue, idea and opportunity He brings our way.

The grace life is not a small-man's life. It is life lived in authority and productivity. Gideon routed over 135,000 Midianities army. Little David stared giant Goliath in the face and made mockery of his stature and threat. He disgracefully killed the boastful Philistine giant. Fearful Peter spoke boldly to thousands of people and about 3000 of them became believers.

How were those men able to achieve these great feats? This leads to the second question.

## **How can I live the grace life?**

Peter wrote, *"For you have been born again but not to a life that will quickly end, your new life will last forever, because it comes from the eternal living Word of God .....And that word is the Good News that was preached to you". (1 Peter.1:23 and 25b)*

The word of God births us into grace. According to Peter, we received this life when the word of God was preached to us. Therefore, to live the grace life is to live by the very word that brought us in. Jesus said in John.6:63, *"The words that I speak to you are spirit and life".*

---

*The Holy Spirit through the word builds virtues in our spirit and this helps us to live fully the grace life.*

---

I introduced a tree at the beginning of the chapter. It is a pictorial illustration of our life when we become born again. The tree represents our spirit and at the root is the word. Everything we do and how we live the grace life stems from the word of God. We must study the word and also grow in understanding of it. In the word are embedded God's promises for us to live productive and



victorious lives. We will partake of God's promises if His word richly dwells in our hearts.

When we get born again, the Holy Spirit tends to our spirits; our sole responsibility is to get the word in our hearts. The Holy Spirit grows the word, He helps us watch out for weeds, He prunes and the end result is a renewed mind. The intention of the Holy Spirit is to build our minds to become like that of Jesus (Philippians 2:5). The human mind cannot reason beyond the realm of the human realities but a Jesus' kind of mind thinks supernatural and so lives supernaturally. The Holy Spirit through the word builds virtues in our spirit and this helps us to live fully the grace life.

The Holy Spirit also helps us to be consistent in the place of prayer and to pray into existence God's promises. The grace life means the Holy Spirit empowering and enabling us to live beyond our human realities and limitations. As the Holy Spirit grows the word in our spirit, our lives blossom and the fruit becomes evident. The fruit is the evidence of a life lived in the spirit. The fruits we bear are the revelation of our grace life to the world. We cannot live the grace life without the Holy Spirit, His task is also to teach us daily and to bring us to the knowledge of God and ourselves. This spurs growth. The more we

know God, the better we know ourselves and the more confident we grow in God's abilities in us. With these, exploits are inevitable.

**Summary: THE WORD + THE HOLY SPIRIT = THE GRACE LIFE**

## THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK

Vulnerability seems to mean being at the mercy of others or being stark naked to the full view of others. Nobody I know or have met wants to be in such state. So, everyone is guarded in conversations and relationships. Borderlines are boldly drawn. People hoard their messy stories and like every hoarder, the burden of shame and loneliness cripples their lives. I was almost caught up in this web but glory to God, the Holy Spirit invaded me with the messages in this book.

I've always thought about how my life has never been picture perfect, I have had to work for everything. I thought that if my parents were wealthy, I might have fought less for things and maybe dealt with less insecurity. I worried about many things: shame, fear, insecure thoughts plagued mind. I worried that I may not be good enough to marry the kind of man I pray for, that I don't have enough to pursue the visions I see. I thought! Just another backstage story, I'll end up living ordinary life despite the gifts I believe God has given me. Then, the Holy Spirit gatecrashed into my pitiable thoughts. He taught me that I have nothing to be fearful, ashamed or insecure about and there is no need adding burden to myself. He said that everyone that I'm hiding from or

trying to present the patched image of myself is also broken. There is no perfect picture of a natural man. It is only grace that breeds perfection.

Why wallow in self-pity when grace has turned my shame to glory? I learnt that in Christ, a new me has been birthed. All that I was not; now, I am by grace. And all that I never had; now, I have by grace. Therefore, I'm no longer afraid of being vulnerable or exposing my natural weaknesses. I am not ashamed to own my needs because I know that in the real spiritual sense God's glory is made manifest in my weaknesses and insecurities.

I shared this because there is a page for you. It is time you take a grip of grace, rise and address those issues that contend with your joy and peace of mind. Cast down those thoughts that bind your feet from making faith moves. The psalmist said that there is a river that makes glad the city of our God. The Holy Spirit is that river that wells up in us unto overflowing joy and with that joy we will draw from the well of salvation.

God's children must not celebrate depression or other unhealthy emotions; we are called to live in the joy of the Holy Spirit. We don't live in denial of these negative emotions but we should not engage or entertain them

either. When they show up, we ought to fight with every single word in our spirit. I tell you, you need to fight for your joy. Sometimes we consciously engage these emotions so that we can claim to be dealing with issues of life as others. It becomes a story we tell our friends or the world on WhatsApp status or Instagram update. God promised us joy unending; not joy today, depression tomorrow. Such way of life is inconsistent with the word of God. David remarked in Psalm 42 verse 5 "*Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again, my savior and my God!*"(NLT). Joy strengthens us to rise unto victory and praise is the right tool to use to claim it.

To wrap up, I do not stand as one who has attained the state of shamelessness or fearlessness. I do not speak as one who no longer struggle with demeaning thoughts. I speak as one who has embraced wholeheartedly the grace of God through Jesus. Each time the devil raises his ugly head, I recall these messages and the victory is swift.

So rise! Live your life without shame. Rise! Fight for your joy. Rise! Live super natural life!

## **A PAGE FOR YOU**

This is an opportunity to tell your story, it's a page for you to bare your mind.

Get your pen and pad, get real with yourself. Be sincere enough to write down your fears and frustrations, insecurities and inadequacies. Then write out God's words that address those concerns. Make a commitment to live above your realities. Finally seal it with a prayer.

My prayer for you is that you keep winning, that you'll be persistent in your pursuit of the grace life; a life lived in Christ and that you bear good fruit in and out of season. In Jesus Name. Amen!

For questions on the book, send a message to [obijeoma121@gmail.com](mailto:obijeoma121@gmail.com)