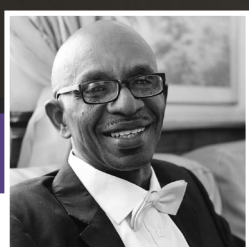




HELP FOR THE DRUG USER



By Dr. Dokun Adedeji

Today, the 26th of June 2023, Nigeria, with other nations of the world are gathered to commemorate the United Nations International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking.

This is in continuation of its sustained desire to increase the global awareness about drug abuse and illicit trafficking since the declaration of this day by the UN General Assembly in 1987.

This year, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, UNODC, in conjunction with the NDLEA will work to raise awareness about the importance of treating people who use drugs with respect and empathy, providing evidence – based, voluntary services prioritizing prevention and leading with compassion.

In 2018, the UNODC released the report of the global survey conducted to determine the drug use prevalence rate. The results

were staggering as well as frightening particularly for us in Nigeria, but this should neither discourage nor deter us from putting structures and systems in place to checkmate this destructive scourge. Yes, we can! In the words of the former American President, Mr. Obama, we can if we truly want to and work towards it.

This affirmative assertion probably gave rise to the theme for this year –

‘People First: Stop stigma and discrimination, strengthen prevention’.

This speaks to the need for a collective and concerted approach to the understanding and management of addiction.

Today, we now know that addiction is a public health issue, just like diabetes and hypertension.

Unfortunately, and for far too long, we have seen addiction as a criminal enterprise that has to be dealt with, with the severest punishment to force deference.

When we were young and innocent, we thought that masquerades were spirit beings who came visiting from their celestial abode!

This was simply because we never knew that behind the garments and masks were men. Now we know that they even take

off their masks to drink water when they are thirsty!

We can liken the case of the drug user to that of the masquerade because, in our ignorance and poor understanding of the dynamics of addiction, society has worn masks over the faces of drug users and thought them different from the rest of us.

We have imputed to them every form of criminalities imaginable.

But this is not truly so. Drug users are not criminals, though criminals use drugs to perform their activities. Let us punish criminals for their actions and not for drug use. Even God said, sins I hate but not the sinner; otherwise, He would not have sent His Only Begotten Son to save us from our sins.

Our easy predisposition to judge has therefore been to stigmatize them and ostracize them, confining them to the fringes of human existence.

If we, therefore, are patient and willing to remove the masks we have worn on them, we will find out that these folks are our children, our husbands, wives, sons, daughters, colleagues, and our neighbors. They are us! They live amongst us.

In my over 30 years as a member of a Christian NGO called CADAM – Christ Against Drug Abuse Ministry, under the Redeemed Christian Church of God, I have mingled with these men and women, ei-

AN ADDRESS PRESENTED DURING THE
COMMEMORATION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST
DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT DRUG
TRAFFICKING,
JUNE 26TH, 2023, AT THE STATE HOUSE,
ABUJA, NIGERIA. By Dr @AdedejiDokun

IN THIS EDITION:

HELP FOR THE DRUG USER

DRUG ADDICTION

SIMON OF CYRENE. -WITH HIS TWO SONS-LESSONS FOR TODAY

FATHER'S DAY CLASSIC: THE FATHER WON'T LET GO

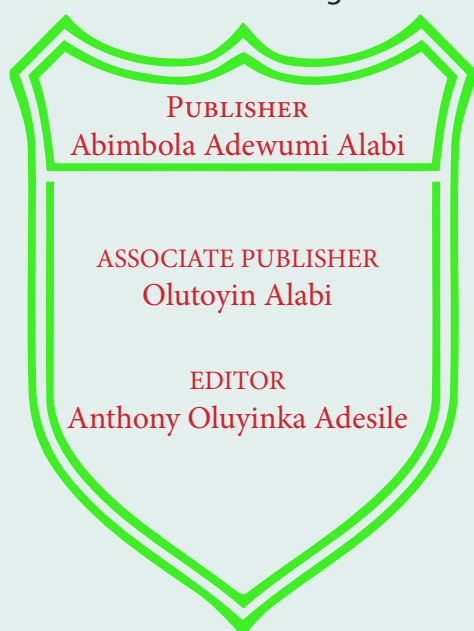
FAITHFUL TO THE END

UNEXPECTED BLESSINGS

Welcome to Panoplia.

The mission of Panoplia is to help believers develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. It emphasises spiritual growth and leadership.

It is published quarterly by City Of Refuge Ministries Inc. and is distributed free of charge.



Most quotations in this newsletter are from the **Holy Bible, King James Version.**

Feel free to write to us if you have comments, contributions, observations or reactions to articles published in this journal.

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ther at the drug joints or at our Centers in Araga, Epe and Abeokuta. I have eaten with them, danced and wept with them, and I have slept in their midst, and not once have I suffered any form of violence. I see dejected and rejected people living with regret at the poor choices they had made. Unfortunately, we have never let them forget their misadventure because we seem to want to define their future with the mistakes of the past. They cry daily for help, for understanding, for our empathy and love, but we are too preoccupied with judgment and punishment to hear their plea for help.

For those of us who are Christians, we were taught in Sunday School about the story of the Prodigal Son. In spite of the route, he chose to travel on, on his return with contrition, the father opened up his arms to receive him, and he even caused a party to be arranged for him. The brother who stayed home was furious about the reception of the errant son. This older brother represents us and our attitude to those who have committed errors. How many of us here today will like to play the role of that father? This is our chance, and we must seize the moment.

Love and empathy are Siamese twins. They are instruments of helping these victims just as stigma and discrimination are projected human feelings riding upon the wings of ignorance and fear. Today, we have a choice to make. Let me borrow from the statement made at the Press Conference by the Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of the NDLEA, Bri. Gen Buba Marwa – he said stigmatization and discrimination make recovery and reintegration difficult for drug-dependent persons who submit themselves for treatment. This is true, but we can make it easy for these folks to return home if we so choose.

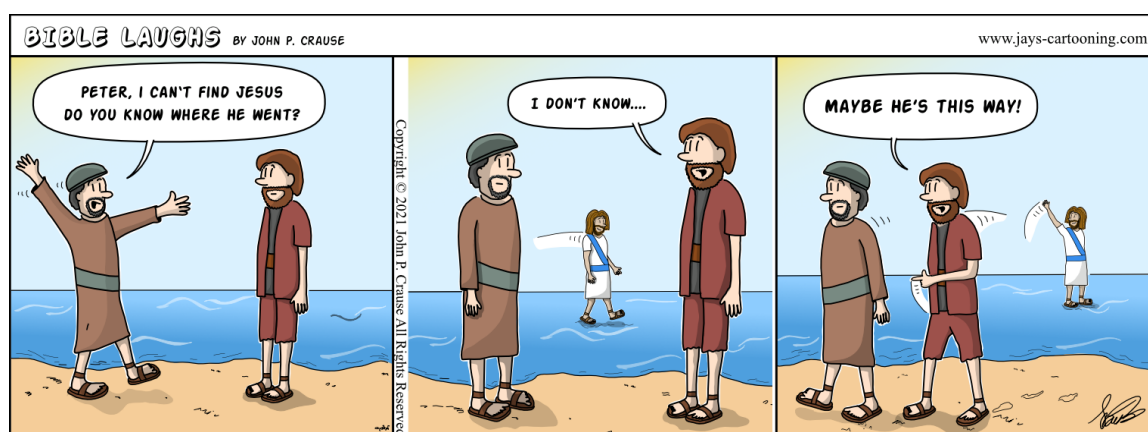
Stigma and discrimination are the manifestations of bias and prejudice which deter us from offering helping hands in their recovery.

I have been privileged in my work with them to see many who cleaned out and have returned to their professions and businesses, living productive and drug-free lives with the same families who thought all was lost. Those who were students have been readmitted back to school and have graduated to become doctors, lawyers, pilots, and the likes.

These were the same people hitherto considered useless and hopeless and of no use to society. The theme this year is asking us to look beyond the present, show more compassion and empathy to these victims, for that is what they are, and therefore offer them respite for a second chance at life. They deserve it.

So, what do we need to do to help us change our disposition towards these fellow citizens? Our language of discussion must change, as well as our attitude towards them.

The real work begins with the family. We must search for the broken pieces within our homes, which probably led our children to drugs. We must in-



crease our own knowledge about drugs and the failings within the family that predispose them to drug use.

The stories of 2 families will suffice to drive this point home, and they have been documented in books. Mr. Hunter Biden, the son of President Joe Biden, documented his many years of addiction in a book titled, 'Beautiful Things.' So is the story of Harry Cunane, the son of an American Congresswoman, Ms. Madeleine Dean Cunane, in a book co – authorized by both Mother and Son, 'Under Our Roof.' I will encourage us to get these books and read them.

In both books, we will see how the love, respect for the humanity of their children, and empathy for them led their sons from the brink of addiction to normal life.

Here at home, we heard the cry of anguish of Chief Ebenezer Obey Fabiyi over the loss of his son to drugs. We need many more parents to speak up about their harrowing experiences to help demystify addiction and help victims seek treatment.

There was one man who stood up and spoke about the devastation of HIV/AIDS in our country many years ago. That boldness and forthrightness disrobed HIV/AIDS of its garment of fear and death. Many Nigerians were able to open up about their status and consequently accessed treatment. That man was our Health Minister at that time, Prof. Olikoye Ransome – Kuti.

That is the character, boldness, and attitude we need now. Our media must rise beyond the sensational and dive deep to get the proper information to pass to our people. They can lead us to the facts to let people make informed choices.

If we truly want to strengthen prevention, every segment of our society must recognize its role in this collective fight.

@ndlea_nigeria alone as an agency cannot do it. In the NDLEA today, we have seen what the commitment and passion of one man and his invigorated Team can do. Bri. Gen. Marwa and his Agency need our support to successfully prosecute the War Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking.

The government cannot eradicate stigma and discrimination by fiat or by tokenism, that is, by directing the appointment of a few survivors into positions. We need a concerted and collective approach to stem the tide.

This is the time for our higher institutions of learning to reconsider their draconian method of expulsion when a student tests positive for drug use. If not checked, it will encourage more use underground and experimentation with substances that our tests cannot detect.

Our corporate organizations must develop a responsible workplace policy in the management of drug use within their office space. A positive drug test should not foreclose either the employment or promotion of the affected individual...

Very pivotal to the success of this initiative is our religious institutions – our mosques and churches. Messages of awareness and

how to stop stigma and discrimination must sound loud and clear from the pulpits.

All these people are mere victims of the failings of society, and they need our understanding and help. The initial help offered may extinguish any further desire for drug use.

Finally, let us not be carried away with the glamour, pomp, and pageantry of today's celebration in this hallowed chamber of power.

Let us leave here encouraged to face the reality of the challenge we face and therefore be committed to be involved to save the soul of our nation.

We must decide to make the lives of our fellow citizens better, save ourselves from the consequences of unchecked spate of addiction, give the victims and their families some measure of comfort. Our show of love and empathy must be unlimited in these their moments of difficulties, pain and despair.

They are part of us and will always remain so.

Let us not define their future by the misadventure of the past or today.

Together, we can make the changes we want to see. Let us begin the work today.

I thank you all for listening and God bless you.

Dr. Dokun ADEDEJI

Director – General, CADAM

Member, Special Purpose Committee of the CCEO, NDLEA.



The books are available
at Amazon.com,
Barnes and Nobles
and other leading
Christian bookstores



By Professor Moyo Okediji

This topic is serious, and most people avoid it for several reasons.

There is no family in the world that doesn't suffer from drug addiction.

If you don't suffer from drug addiction, there is a family member, however remote, or a friend or acquaintance experiencing the problems of drug addiction.

It might be a child, brother, sister, cousin, aunt, nephew, etc.

I sympathize with you.

Let anybody whose family, friend, or acquaintance does not have a drug addiction problem be the first to cast the stone—whether you are a pastor, Islamic cleric, or a free thinker.

But, also, I want you to realize that you are not alone.

The problem is pandemic—and it kills and devastates more people than the deadliest disease in the world.

It is also something shameful. Therefore, we avoid the topic.

It is mostly treated as a moral issue: X is a bad or weak person, therefore, s/he suffers from drug addiction, whereas, I am a good and strong character, therefore, I am clean.

Drug addiction is not a moral issue.

It is a chemical issue.

Our body is 100% chemical plus the spiritual dimension—which is also subject to chemicalization.

The definition of drugs here includes alcohol, and extends to others such as nicotine, marihuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, mushrooms, and may even include sleep disorder drugs, prescription drugs, as well as designer drugs that we are not familiar with.

Creative people, whether they are scientists, artists, musicians, engineers, designers, writers or philosopher, lawyers, doctors, judges, teachers, pastors or clerics, or mere students suffer from drug addiction.

The traditional way to deal with drug addiction is to condemn the addict, humiliate them, disown them, imprison them, or even kill them.

All of these approaches have failed.

In the United States, for example, the War On Drugs was started by President Nixon in 1971. He declared drug abuse as “Public Enemy Number One.”

All he managed to do was increase the prison population. When he died several decades later, there wasn't a reduction in the crisis of drug addiction. In fact, the use of addictive drugs has only gotten much worse, not only in the US but all over the world.

The “Just Say No” approach also initiated in the United States failed.

Going to church and mosques, or other religious places is not a solution.

I remember Èjè (his nickname), the son of an archdeacon, and my roommate in 1976/77 at Awolowo Hall. He smoked pot regularly and didn't hide that addiction from us.

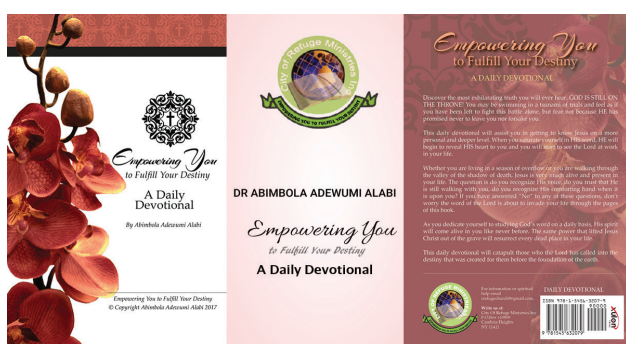
But his real hidden addiction was amphetamines. He realized that I was not judgmental and didn't hide his amphetamine struggles from me.

He studied philosophy and graduated in 1978.

His drug problem grew worse after he graduated and started working, earning money to feed his addiction.

Soon, Èjè was unable to keep his job. He started roaming the streets.

Whenever I encountered him on the street where he isolated himself, wearing rags, or sometimes roaming around naked, he recognized me. I would hug him—because I knew he needed human touch and gave him some money and new clothes.



The books are available at Amazon.com, Barnes and Nobles and other leading Christian bookstores

His religious family came together and declared him a disgrace to the family.

They poisoned him, and he died.

I could name other friends who suffered similar fates and were murdered to save the face of their families.

Or have you never encountered someone with a drug addiction problem?

I think we must find other approaches to handling chemical problems beyond rejecting and sending people to prison—or even murdering them.

What do you think is the solution to this problem?

*You are never too old to
set a new goal
or dream a new dream.*

- C. S. Lewis



Simon of Cyrene. -With His Two Sons- Lessons For Today

By Abimbola Adewumi Alabi

Mark 15:20-21 AMP

“After they had mocked Him, they took off the purple robe and put His own clothes on Him. And they led Him out [of the city] to crucify Him. They forced into service a passer-by coming in from the countryside, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to carry His cross.”

Mark 15:20-21 TPT

“When they finished ridiculing him, they took off the purple robe, put his own clothes back on him, and led him away to be crucified. As they came out of the city, they stopped an African man named Simon, a native of Libya. He was passing by, just coming in from the countryside with his two sons, Alexander and Rufus, and the soldiers forced him to carry the heavy crossbeam for Jesus.”

Have your plans been interrupted once or twice? How easy was it to readjust back to your normal after that unplanned interruption? Yes, most interruptions are not really planned. An African proverb says that “May what you are not thinking of never interrupt what you have been thinking about” Such was the day when Simon of Cyrene was walking towards Jerusalem with his two sons, Alexander and Rufus. They saw the crowd ahead, some jeering, some weeping, others standing aghast as to what was going on. They, too, had to stop because, by now, the Roman soldiers were clearing the way as they led some criminals for crucifixion. Wait a minute. It was not just criminals. They were leading Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for crucifixion too !!! Jesus was apparently tired and could barely carry his crucifixion cross again. “What a pity” and “ He must be in great pains” must have been some of the thoughts going on through Simon’s mind as they watched as the procession crawled past them. “ Hey, You Come Here,” the order rang out

from one of the soldiers, “Me,” Simon put his hand to his chest, must have responded, “Yes You, Come out here”. As he responded, the Roman Soldier said, “Take this cross off this man and carry it to Golgotha, where we are going to do the execution.

In those days, when a Roman soldier gives an order, people obey because they literally have the power of life and death over other people that they have conquered. Simon obeyed, and as he made to shift the cross of the shoulders of Jesus Christ, their eyes possibly met. He bent his shoulders to carry the burden. Just as Jesus had earlier taught his disciples that HE was their burden bearer that has come to carry away their loads of sins. However, physically Simon of Cyrene carried the cross on which Christ is to be crucified that day. Wait a minute, what about the two sons who were with him as he stepped out of the crowd to obey the Roman soldier’s instruction? Did they tag along and follow from a distance, or were they too shocked at the “just like that” manner their father was just conscripted? Did they try to hide themselves after Daddy was taken away from them?

However, whatever the time Simon was released from his assignment, they all later met in their home.

Simon, In relating his experience as a believer, must have gone back home to relive his experience positively because, as the scripture shows us, his family later embraced the Good News of the Kingdom.

Romans 16:13 NLT

“Greet Rufus, whom the Lord picked out to be his very own, and also his dear mother, who has been a mother to me.”

We find in the above text showing Apostle Paul acknowledges Rufus, one of the sons of Simon, not only being in the faith but significantly pointing out that he is fulfilling his God-given destiny. In effect, the father carrying the cross of Christ and him witnessing it with his brother were all part of the package that God had designed before the foundations of the world that they would not only serve the Lord but impact their own generation.



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Let us recognize the public acclamation that Apostle Paul also gave to Simon's wife, the mother of Rufus, that she was like a "mother to me."

Romans 16:13 TPT

"And Rufus, for he is specially chosen by the Lord. And I greet his mother, who was like a mother to me."

The Gospels variedly talked about Simon of Cyrene, from Libya- The African Man.

Some said he was coming from work with his two sons, some said he was coming to the Passover, but all agreed he was coming from the country-side.

They agreed he was forced into this seemingly humbling or humiliating situation to carry the cross of this deemed criminal. Offender of the Jews- Jesus Christ.

As we look at Simon again let us ask ourselves the following question, why was he chosen to pick up this demeaning assignment???

- He was an upright man, doing honest work. Worshipping God and leading his sons on the right path?

-We could choose to read meaning to occurrences in our lives from the viewpoint of the World or from the Viewpoint of God.

- There are never mistakes or chances with God. They are always well-laid-out Plans!

- Simon walked in with his two sons. They saw the situation their father was put in, but they also SAW, for Whom he carried the cross.

As seen earlier, the two sons were specially chosen by the Lord! They both were missionaries, the scriptures say!!!

- Simon's wife was also affected by the gospel and became a mother to Paul the Great!

How Does this apply to you and me today?

The Lord says My Yoke is easy.

- That assignment that has been placed on you, that appears currently demeaning, beneath you, or humiliating if looked at through the eyes of humans, may well be your ticket to generational honor and fame!

- You studied Medicine, Architecture, Engineering, IT, or Law, and when you completed the course, the Lord is saying, Go into Full-time Ministry.

- You think you are nuts, and your family thinks you are out of your mind?! The Lord says my Yoke is easy!

Do your children know what you are doing?

Bring your children into the know of your ways. Your life purpose and assignments. They do not have to do exactly what you do but be open. What they see will speak to their own life purpose also.

Alexander and Rufus, Simon's sons, walked with their father, whether it be in work ethics or church service. They later became missionaries.

- Never interpret your life experiences by the standard of the world. Always look through the futuristic lens of the Holy Spirit.

- God, indeed, set Simon and his sons up for greatness and fame in his kingdom. Not only Simon but all his family, for the singular act of obedience through what he suffered.

Indeed God's Yoke is easy, and His burden is Light.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." **Matthew 11:28-30(NIV)**

My Yoke is easy- says the Lord. My Yoke is easy!

My work is before me. My reward is with me.

II Peter 3:18 NKJV

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen."

Father's Day Classic: The Father Won't Let Go

John 10:28 ". . . neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Some years ago, on a hot summer day in south Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole behind his house. In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out of the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt as he went. He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore.

His father working in the yard saw the two as they got closer and closer together. In utter fear, he ran toward the water, yelling to his son as loudly as he could. Hearing his voice, the little boy became alarmed and made a u-turn to swim to his father.

It was too late. Just as he reached his father, the alligator reached him. From the dock, the father grabbed his little boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. An incredible tug-of-war between the two began. The alligator was much stronger than the father but the father was much too passionate to let go, and dug his nails into the little boy's arms.

A farmer driving by heard the screams of the child, and after retrieving a rifle from his truck, raced to the water's edge and shot the alligator. Remarkably, after weeks in the hospital, the little boy recovered.

The local newspaper reporter interviewing the boy after the trauma asked if he would show him his scars. The little boy lifted his pant legs and said, "These are the scars from where the alligator tried to pull me under the water." Then, he rolled up his shirt sleeves and said, "Now look at my arms. These are the scars where my father wouldn't let me go."

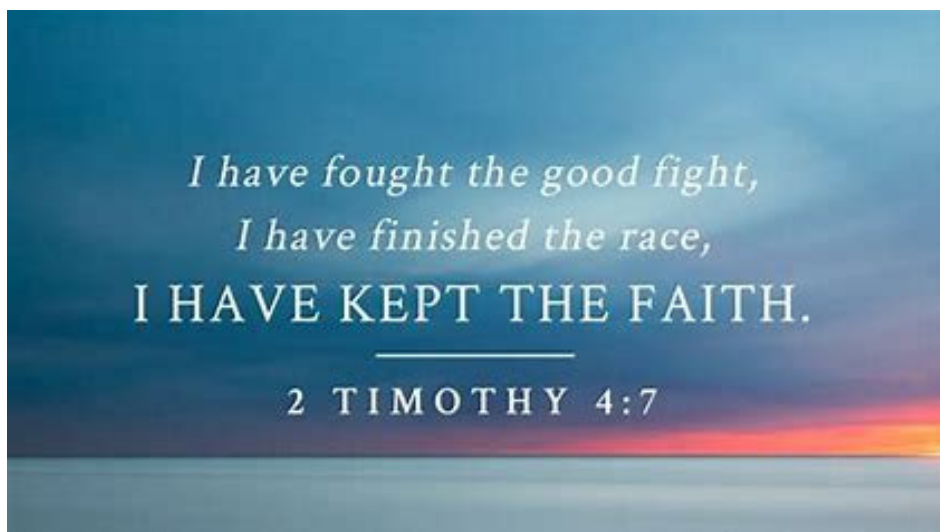
Each of us is marked. Yes, there are scars we bear in our lives because of poor choices we have made. But if we look closely, there are other marks we have incurred, where a loving sovereign God has refused to let us go. At the time, His grip of grace may seem painful, but it is all for our protection, so that we may be preserved to live, and testify of His tender mercies that He reveals to us with each new day.

*** Source - The Daily Encourager

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;
neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

John 10:28





Faithful to the End

In the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico, John Stephen Ahkwari of Tanzania was excited. He was about to run the marathon with runners from around the world.

The starter's pistol fired and the race began. A little over 2 hours later, the first runner crossed the finish line. Other runners finished the race shortly afterwards, but John was not among them. Over an hour after the winner had crossed the finish line, with only a few spectators remaining in the stands, John Stephen Ahkwari finally entered the stadium.

Bandaged and bloody, John finally crossed the finish line. Bud Greenspan, the renown sports reporter, asked John why he didn't just quit. He answered, "My country did not send me 5000 miles to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me here to finish."

John Stephen Ahkwari did not receive a prize or a medal, but he did endure. He didn't just start the race, he finished it. God did not call us to start the Christian race, he called us to finish it!

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." **(2 Timothy 4:7)**

"But this one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." **(Philippians 3:13-14)**



The greatest last place finish ever

UNEXPECTED BLESSINGS

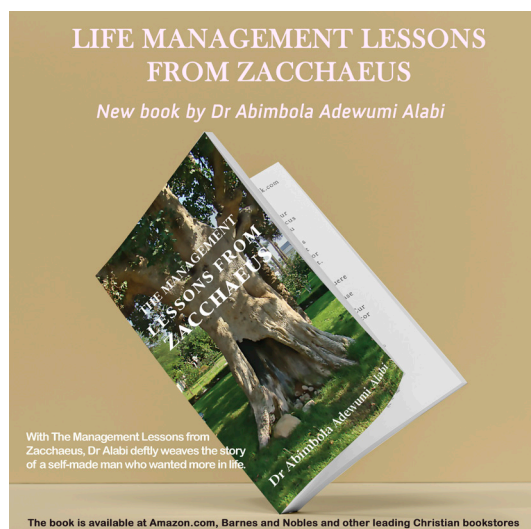
"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."
(Romans 8:28)

During World War II, a man in Sussex, England, sent some money to the Scripture Gift Mission. He enclosed a letter saying that he longed to give more, but the harvest on his farm had been very disappointing because of a lack of water. He was also fearful because German bombs were being dropped in the area, and his family and farm were at risk. He asked the workers of Scripture Gift Mission to pray that no bombs would fall on his land.

Mr. Ashley Baker wrote back from the mission and said that while he didn't feel led to pray that exact prayer, he had prayed that God's will for their lives would prevail. Shortly after, a huge German missile crashed down on the farm. None of the man's family or livestock were harmed, but the bombshell went so far into the ground that it liberated a submerged stream. The stream yielded enough water to irrigate the man's farm as well as neighboring farms. The next year, due to a bountiful harvest, the man was able to send a large offering to the mission.

Sometimes even "bombs" are blessings. They fall from heaven, make a lot of noise, and liberate something wonderful within us - streams of living water that refresh us and draw us closer to Christ.

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'How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.'

ACTS 10v 38

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