

Guarding your mind



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to every Christian.

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Chapter One

The panic

In recent years, in a country like Nigeria, the news cycle has been swamped with numerous distressing headlines like multiple mass-kidnapping, Biafra agitation, revolution Now, Niger-delta militancy, killer Herdsmen, banditry, the Boko-Haram insurgency and more. Covid19 headlines and the hash tag EndSARs did take over the entire airwaves and social media. From increasing cases of the pandemic to raising death toll at the Lekki-tollgate, while such stories had been critical to public awareness and sentiment, Nigerians were already confused and disintegrated.

It is a common saying that the world feels like it is coming to an when you are in Nigeria, the emergence of COVID19 in the country at the early quarter of 2020 did not make things any better, news flew around from different quarters, there were theories of conspiracy by Elite to use the new 5G network to wipe out a significant proportion of the human race, that caused a lot of panic and unnecessary arguments among citizens. Mind you that as at the end of the first quarter of 2020 there were neither any confirmed usage of the said 5G network anywhere in Nigeria. The government did not immediately respond to that controversy, rather the people were left to wallow in their speculations and fear of the unknown.

A couple of weeks later came the last straw; the lockdown. When a nationwide lockdown was first announced, many did not know what to make of it because it was unprecedented, such as had never been experienced in the country, most people got to spend a lot of time with their families. But then, businesses began to fold, people lost their jobs, local authorities found an excuse to make life more miserable for the locals, in fact it did actually feel like it was the end of days to emphatically state, everything came crashing, the level of panic was alarming. This was when for me the real damage occurred.

Diligence in panic

You hear about pestilence, violence, insecurity and ungovernable space in your society and how the government is doing very little to sanitize these

situations. At some point, an incident occurs in your region involving unknown gun men and there is panic. You are charged to be cautious, defend your territory and so on. Receiving this news, suddenly your receptor cells send impulses to your nerve, which sends an urgent wave of distress to your brain to be on the alert, and therefore, at every little disturbance or loud noise outside, you quiver and you rush to the window to see, your flight hormones are triggered. The sad thing is that your health silently suffers consequences of those episodes, whenever you instantly act upon those distressing thoughts and impulses, your health suffers when anxiety sets in, along with it trouble with sleeping and other indicators, sequel to that, health starts to deteriorate opening gateway to all kinds of risk factors.

Only when we begin to realize the negative effect of these external influences on our well being, shall we know the importance of seeing, reading and listening to what is important, when it is important and to the right degree, rather than letting things go to a fever pitch of panic and urgency. This calls for diligence on the part of the individual to control and discipline their thoughts. In Proverbs 4:23, the bible in this light admonishes us to keep our hearts with all diligence; that for out of it arises the issues of life.

Just as a man must learn a trade in order to be successful in that trade, so does a man need to learn the principle of diligence in the guarding the mind, because whether we like it or not the news of this world or rather the assaults of this world will never cease, the struggle is to guard our mind diligently as it processes received information, from whence arises the issues of life. After all the intention of the media is not to cause panic but to inform and create awareness of the latest news around the world. If that be the case, then one begins to wonder if the joke is on the mind, which surges out of control at the reception of most news from the media.

The tyranny of the urgent

Drawing on Charles Hummel's postulation in describing the life of highly effective people, introduces the phrase "tyranny of the urgent", it distinguishes between what is urgent on one hand and on the other what is important. Most times we misplace our priorities in our daily lives, we tend to

pursue less important things which may seem urgent but they become a problem. Things like waking up first thing in the morning to check the latest news on your tablet or to turn on the TV to see the live broadcast of a riot happening thousands of miles away from you, become very urgent matters for us, whereas we forget to do things that may not seem as urgent, but are important, things like doing morning devotion and committing your life into the hands of its creator.

The simple maxim of doing first things first allows you to rigorously prioritize your activities so the important things are taken care of first while others are dealt with accordingly. We can watch the news, but it should be at the right time and to the right degree. We can apportion time for watching or reading the news, say thirty minutes every morning or evening or at whatever time we decide. It also does not have to be a do or die affair, it is okay not to watch or read the news the whole day, we can give ourselves a break from consuming so much news especially when it begins to negatively affect us, but how do you know that you are being negatively affected? In the subsequent chapters we will look closely at some of the warning signs of such effect.

Again, let us leverage on Hummel's tyranny of the urgent to help us understand which things are important, simply by classifying or categorizing activities into dimensions: important and urgent. This gives us a 2x2 matrix with four quadrants. In the first quadrant, we have tasks that are important and urgent like crisis and emergencies, say your child is critically ill and needs to be hospitalized. In quadrant two, we have tasks that are important but not urgent, like saying your morning and night prayers. The third quadrant involves tasks that are urgent but not important, like grabbing your phone during work hours to call friend to confirm a terrorist attack in their state. The last quadrant contains neither important nor urgent tasks, a complete waste of time. When you think about it, you will understand that when you work enough in quadrant two you will find fewer crises in quadrant one but let us not drift further away from our subject.

The subject of guarding our minds against external influence has not only become a matter of urgency but also that of importance. It is imperative that we be conscious of what news we watch, listen to or read, if it is the sort of

news that will destabilize our inner peace then it best left alone. There is nothing new under the sun, there has always been troubling news way before we were born and there always will be when we leave this world. There is a need for you to mind gate what content you allow into your mind, as a matter of urgency, immediately you notice any form of negative vibes, be mindful enough to recognize it, stop and unplug at once!. The consequences of failing to unplug may or may not be immediate but most times are irreversible when the damage is done, we will look at this in two perspectives, the spiritual perspective which will be discussed in the last chapter of this book and health perspective, which we can now divulge in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Your mind, your health

The body is the servant of the mind; it follows every lead of the mind whether they be conscious or subconscious, at the slightest provocation of the mind the body responds accordingly. We witness this concept in our daily lives, take for instance when a certain threatening situation befalls a man, even before the mind can fully grasp or have time to fully absorb and think about the situation and how best to respond; the brain which is the physical organ of the mind will instantaneously send out stress signals throughout the body and the body's sympathetic nervous system then stimulates the adrenal glands, triggering the release of catecholamine which prepares the body to flee or to fight. The body is flushed, and looks pale.

Over the years, researchers have extensively studied this cause and effect and have gained insight into the long-term effects it has on the physical and psychological health. Overtime, repeated activation of this biological activity takes its toll on the whole body. Research have shown that some of its long-term effects to include high blood pressure, formation of artery-clogging deposits, and that it also causes brain changes that may contribute to anxiety, depression and addiction. Dr. Leaf had this to say on thoughts:

"When you think, you build thoughts, and these become physical substances in your brain."

Many people are unable to filter what information they receive into their minds thereby not being able to apply brakes too their thoughts, consequently, robbing themselves of the beauty of calmness and peace, after a while, Alas! Several health challenges associated with stress begin to spring forth. Now, do not get me wrong the fight or flight response is as vital as the human sense of smell, as a matter of fact it could even save one's life in the advent of a life threatening situation, say standing in a head to head stance with a fast approaching vehicle or a vicious serpent, before you can even have time to process the state of affairs, your reflexes would have rapidly prompted into action: to flee to safety or attack an adversary. Your recent activity will have short-term effect on you, for example, the release of cortisol (stress

hormone) will increase your appetite, so you will want to eat more to replace lost energy.

However, that is not the crux of our deliberation; you should focus more on the long-term effects of this activity especially when it has to do with unnecessary stress conditions over unsettling news incautiously gathered from the mainstream media or via any other means. Emphasizes here is placed on being guarded over what your mind receives. If a man will have absolute health let him first filter what contents enter his mind, before he brood over the affairs of his stomach. As Manly Hall puts it:

An unhealthy mind, even in a healthy body, will ultimately destroy health.

Change of diet can only go as far to deliver a man's health, but a mind which goes a thousand mile per hour has very little to no salvation from even a clinically prescribed diet. Thoughts of distress, fear and anxiety have been known to kill a man faster than a bullet. A troubled mind will express itself through a sickly body.

"If you would protect your body, guard your mind, if you would renew your body, beautify your mind." –James Allen

Mental wellbeing

During the Covid19 Lockdown in Nigeria, what the many people did not realize was that whilst they were indoors and busy absorbing all kinds of news from different sources by watching, listening to and reading whatever that mentioned 'Covid19', a lot of damages were done to their mental health. A lot of people became depressed and others showed signs of trauma, not just by being locked inside but by digesting all kinds of negative news giving birth to depressive thoughts and other forms of negativity.

Personally, I downloaded apps and visited almost every digital news site, even in the middle of the night I would wake to read the covid19 updates, I wanted to be the first to know and share updates with my friends on social media, often these information would be forwarded many times and sometimes find

its way back to me, a vicious cycle. This behavior became a ritual, doing the same things all day and every day. I seemed to spend my day running after my thoughts on trending news even when I did simple tasks. It got to a point where I would think of what I needed downstairs and took off after it, only to get there and forget what I intended to get, this leads to another trip upstairs to go where I was standing when the thought occurred to me. I had to start keeping a pen and paper handy as I tended to forget things more often.

Many people do not realize that every time they bewail or clamor over disturbing news and rumors, every gate of their mind is opened to all sorts of medical conditions, to intended manipulation and to external forces; therefore one must always be self-conscious of what goes into the mind to cloud it and make it apparently vulnerable.

“Everyone takes a shower to get rid of the dirt in the physical bodies, so does not it only make sense to clean your mind of the garbage from the outside world”—John Di Lemme

While it is justifiable to stay up to date on recent happening around the world and everything else, overconsumption of these dreadful streams of information can be detrimental to whole body by causing stress, overdrive and anxiety. Anxiety demoralizes the whole body and opens it up for all kinds of malady.

Chapter Three

Perfect calmness

Serenity of the mind is one of the beautiful trinkets of wisdom; it is a result of long-suffering because it takes relentless self-discipline and steadfastness. Its presence is the indication of experience and practice, it is no small matter to be able to remain poised and calm even in threatening situations it is thought evolvment and self-awareness. The more tranquil a man makes himself in the face of adversity the more he flourishes in felicity.

“The secret of life, of abundant life with its strength, its felicity and its unbroken peace is to find Divine Center within oneself and live in and from that, instead of in that outer circumference of disturbance—the clamors, cravings and argumentations which make up the animal and intellectual man, these selfish elements constitute the mere of husks of life and must be thrown away by him, who will penetrate to the central heart of things—to life itself.”—James Allen

During a world cup match between Nigerian and Argentina on the 2nd of June, 2002, a certain aged man was said to have collapsed and passed away when the Nigerian side lost in the close call match, which dashed the last hope of Nigeria qualifying for the next round in the tournament. His demise may have been sudden, but presumably anxiety and stress accumulated overtime may have caused him high blood pressure which triggered the heart attack. He made his mind vulnerable, alas! On that faithful day he paid the price, perhaps if he had set his mind at peace, enjoyed a hobby or did something for himself while the match was going on, then just maybe he would have better received the disappointment. Just how much of our daily live is hijacked by the thoughts of insecurity and every other things happening in our communities, cities and nation at large.

Say to yourself, all that the disturbance and noises outside shall not take away my inner peace, all that tries to steal my joy away I will not be susceptible to; I am not ignorant of vices. He who resolves that he will not rest until he finds out what is going on here or there, shall by the piercing consequence of that

resolve, digest every fleeting thought to the detriment of his own mental health and the torment of his sacred peace. But the wise and conscious shall enter into the substance of life, he shall learn how to live in desperate times and he shall live.

He shall not be a servant to confounding opinions; he shall be no slave to worry and anxiety neither shall he be at the mercy of manipulators, false reporters and fake news; he shall be strong, sound and perfectly calm at all times. An unstable mind cannot be relied upon to make sound judgment; it cannot think clearly to make the best decisions. It takes calmness of the mind to make the best decisions in any circumstance.

Peace that passes all understanding

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4:7.

When you receive God's kind of peace, other people around you, your family and your friends will perceive it, they will be infested by it, and they will not hesitate to seek your opinion, to confide in you or rely on your discretion. In John 14:27, Jesus tells us that he leaves His peace with us, and that His peace is not as the world gives. He also urges our hearts not to be troubled, neither to be afraid.

Do you remember the bible story of the great tempest in the sea? Let us read it below:

²⁴ And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

²⁵ And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

²⁶ And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

²⁷ But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! —Matthew 8:24-27

You see hereinto, Jesus was able to calm the raving tide not just because he had the authority but also because he had peace within him. Remind me again when a man void of peace was able to establish it with others. Notice that one person who is always at loggerhead with everyone else? Could be in your school, in your work place, in your church or in your neighborhood, yes, we all have them, they are liked a troubled sea, a raving tide, how can they possibly give what they do not possess themselves; you cannot give what you do not have.

Tempest blown-away mind is an unstable mind, It is time to put away your economic socio-political opinions and argumentation, take a break from the trending news and your vicious circle of endless worrying, they are eating you up, put out your hand now and receive the peace of God that passes all understanding. The kind of peace that eludes the world, the resting that keeps you settled even when everyone is else is running helter-scamper, but you are composed, you are calm and you are diligently carrying your duties knowing that your peace is with God.

Chapter Four

Avoid copy and paste

The social media has increasingly become a source of information about the COVID19 pandemic. According to a survey by Digital Third Coast, 68% of Americans said that the COVID19 news and subsequent updates has left them feeling anxious during the pandemic. Meanwhile, 65% and 67% of respondents reported feeling overwhelmed and burnt out by the news respectively. 54% even said they were cutting back on their news consumption to escape these feelings. This survey is just one out of several carried in various countries of the world, they all seem to be in tandem on the negative effects of the trending news.

In today's world, basically everything is commercialized and news is not left out. Many journalists these days can write anything just to sell, there are also fake websites out there reporting on fake news for personal gain or propaganda. You do not have to lend your voice to every news you come across, you must not read every news with a malefic or disturbing headline, unfortunately that is the kind that draws our attention the most. You could read about a woman on a Facebook post, who poisoned her newly wedding husband over a trivial matter, you could hear about the story of the mother-in-law on radio, who got pregnant for her son-in-law and many more like these. Well, you do not even know if these stories are true and most importantly those stories are not going to be your portion, that something happened to somebody out there does not mean that it is going to happen to you.

You consume too many news that you become afraid of the future, afraid of marriage, afraid of people, men growing skeptical about women and women turning bitter over men and so. As much as whatever is happening out there is affecting your gender, your denomination, your tribe, you name it, and as much as it may be okay for your voice to be heard, do not make the mistake of personalizing or bring these filtered news reports into your life and family. Most times we make that mistake of copying and pasting other people's situations into our lives out of fear, fear of the unknown, fear of the same occurrences happening to us, but the good news is that you do not have to be

afraid. II Tim. 1: 7 tells us that *God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and sound mind* (KJV). Why should we be afraid when He has not given us the spirit of fear? All we need do is leverage the power of God to discipline our minds. The Amplified bible interprets the text “sound mind” as personal discipline [abilities that result in a calm, well-balanced mind and self-control].

How to unplug

Almost every mobile phone user in the globe today receives some sort of news on a daily basis; through a mobile device a user can feel the pulse of the nation, scroll through news around the globe all in the palm of their hand. The nature of journalism demands that news outlet report and updates their pages with daily news, and 80% of the times these news carry headlines of recent crises and disturbing incidents, which of course are more likely to captivate the interest of readers or viewers. Today, news papers go into one of every five homes, the news is never ending and the publishers are never wealthy enough to stop selling them.

Every cell phone gives some sort of indication to the user to notify them when it is fully charged, some make sounds or flashes light and displays a prompt to the user to unplug cable from power source, to avoid causing damages to the battery. This is exactly what happens with the human brain which is the physical facility for the mind. Our minds when it is overwhelmed with worries, fears, anxieties and toxicities prompt us to unplug from the sources of those, but many times we do not recognize these prompts. They come in the form of headaches, tense, restlessness, panic, increased heart rate, hyperventilation, trembling, weakness, difficulty with concentration, disrupted sleep, depression, insomnia and others.

When these notifications from our mind beacons us to unplug and we continue to neglect them, just as the battery of a cell phone would, our mind and body go into overdrive which overtime reduces life expectancy by causing damages that lead to premature death. These simple and useful techniques can help you unplug from power source.

Unplug your attention

When you become mindful enough to recognize what you are feeling at the moment, get resettled and put away the source of your present predicament. Turn off the TV for a while; put your phone and gadgets down for a moment. Our minds are designed to tend towards the most stimulating things around us, and these electronic gadgets have become daily parts of our lives and interestingly the most stimulating things around us. Whenever you notice the signs of distress from watching, listening or reading news, it is time to discipline yourself by unplugging from those sources and giving yourself a break.

It is like this, when you want to charge your phone and you plug the charger to a wall socket and suddenly the socket begins to burn and spark, making cracking sounds, what do you do next? Of course you disconnect your phone from the charger; your primary reflexes will propel you to unplug the charger from the wall socket, because as long as the charger stays connected there is bound to be a passage of current which will definitely cause more damages. This same principle applies to the “current” of trending news and media influence on the human mind, but why do our primary reflexes not propel us to unplug our minds from the power source? We must learn to unplug from the vicious attack of the media for the sake of our mental well being, because your mental well being is non-negotiable.

Focus on positive thoughts

Mental overdrive is a serious business, and not staying in charge of your own mind every second can affect not just your performance at work, at school and other places, but can also ruin your life and relationships. Every second you spend dwelling on a negative thought influences the next ten seconds of your thought process, whenever you notice yourself drifting away on negative thoughts, get up from the spot where you are, take a walk get some fresh air and focus on the positive areas of your life. If it is at work think of how far you have come in your career, in school think of the successes you have achieved so far, in the home think of all the blessings you have received. When you find yourself worrying about tomorrow, remember that you survived yesterday;

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