

### Zoom In

“A man who dreads trials and difficulties cannot become a revolutionary. If he is to become a revolutionary with an indomitable fighting spirit, he must be tempered in the arduous struggle from his youth. As the saying goes, early training means more than late earning.” – **Kim Jong II**

“Yes, I quote dictators like Kim Jong II and Adolf Hitler. Sue me. Dictators are some of the best leaders the world has seen.”

These are trying times. On many fronts, these are tough times. What with abducted school girls 1 (those 276 girls are still missing many months on), missing jetliners and bomb blasts all over the place, I still can't come to terms with #GarrisaAttacks.2 Gunmen killed 150 students in the name of religion. And you must have heard about the earthquake in Nepal too. It was all over the news. Trust CNN, more than 6000 lives lost. You see, these are troubling times and I know you are going through you own trials as well. I will be failing in my responsibility if I don't write you this letter.

I recently rekindled my love for photography and noticed something rather curious. Pictures are made up of small squares known as pixels. No matter the beauty or quality of an image, it is comprised of squares. I didn't realize this until I began to zoom into the image. As I zoomed in, the edges of the squares began to appear. They are blurry at first but as I continued to zoom in, the details of the jagged edges began to emerge. However, looking at an image on full scale from a substantial distance, I couldn't always see the micro rises and falls. I may have seen some defects here and there but the image texture and depth of field was smoother. In other words, it all depended on how closely I zoomed in and what metric of intervals I examined. I found that this whole idea mirrors the life of any man or woman. Life is full of ups and downs on many levels. Because we are not close to the details of the lives of others, we can't see the micro mountains and valleys that make up their existence.

Let's take the life of any successful man—say Richard Branson. From a distance it appears smooth. How much trouble can you have with all those billions, right? But his life appears so because we're not looking at his day-to-day struggles. We're probably looking at his life over a 10-year span, and at that scale everything appears smooth. But those who are close to Richard Branson will probably tell you

otherwise. They'll tell you about his emotional quandary when he had to leave school at the age of 16 because of his struggle with dyslexia (a learning disability that affects reading comprehension). They'll tell you about his financial dilemma when birds flew into an uninsured engine as they prepared for the inaugural flight of Virgin Atlantic. They'll tell you the anguish of his soul when he narrowly averted imprisonment because of tax evasion charges.

No man's life is without bumps. It only appears so from a distance. There are things we can't see from a distance. There are hidden and shameful things. No man's life is devoid of them. Zoom into any man's life and it begins to lose quality and clarity. Life has its trials. I can't afford to present you with an adulterated version of life. I must tell you the truth. Life is not all "Honey, darling, sweetheart, apple pie, chicken pie, tantalizers, cheesecake factory." No, life can be gritty. Blurry at times, like the image when you zoom in. Trials are a reality of life. And trials can be tricky. You must approach each one deliberately. The outcome of each trial might determine the magnitude and intensity of the next.

Life in general is made of chunks of time called seasons. Each season has its predominating theme and experiences. There was a season in my family when it was a luxury to have a toothpick in the house. Our motto was, "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."<sup>a</sup> We were devout in poverty. It was a season. God is a God of seasons. And seasons are often in contradiction. So there's the season of lack and seasons of prosperity. There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens.

Life is not a straight line, neither is it a smooth exponential curve. If it was, Pi (the mathematical irrational number that never ends) would be the solution to all of life's entangled equations. Mathematicians would have all the answers. But they don't. Life is a continuum of painful experiences and happy ones. The polarity in seasons is indicated in the Holy Writ: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."<sup>c</sup> This is the cyclical rhythm of life that Yahweh himself has set into orbit. You will not meet a successful man whose life is all rosy and who hasn't experienced some harsh winters and heat. That man simply does not exist. The Richard Branson of those days, one Mr. Job, (No, not Mr. Steve Jobs of Apple computers) I'm talking about the Job of biblical times—that man faced atrocious trials. The kind of trials in which you'd rather die than endure one more minute. It was severe to say the least. But he somehow came out of it. It turned out God set him up by boasting about the trueness of his heart. Talk about God being the catalyst to his troubles. God can be like that sometimes.

Now, how life distributes its collection of trials remains a puzzle. To some, life dispenses trials in wholesale, to some in retail measure and to some in scoops. The system is hazy. But at least we know the system seems to match intensity of trial to capacity. God will not allow us to be tempted more than we can bear. Trials by their very nature are not meant to annihilate us. They are packaged to prune us, to straighten out our jagged edges because we all have a tendency to go out of order every once in a while. Trials keep us on track. Trials remind us of our humanity. From the story of Mr. Job, trials sometimes can be a matter of materials testing or materials reengineering—you know, checking the performance, hardness or quality of something. And you should know there are false trials. You cannot rape and impregnate a teenage girl and, when you're caught claim to be going through a trial. Unless of course, you are literally in a court of law; but clearly that's not the definition God had in mind. The thieves on both sides of Jesus' cross were not going through the trials of life. They were thieves.

So you ask, "What do we do in times of trial?" Well, theory is very easy. Enu dun ro'fo, agada owo se begi, means it's easy to make a sumptuous vegetable soup with the mouth and a tree felled by a swing of the hand. It is easier said than done. I'm sure anyone who is not facing some trial is the author of a book (see the irony?) on how to cope with trials. You know those kinds of books, 9 steps On How To Breeze Through Trials (And Come Out Smiling!), Overcoming Trials for Dummies...Enduring trials come at a cost; you have to pray for strength and perseverance even though you just want to get out. The kind of stick-to-it-tiveness you need to make it through certain trials, only God can give. You have to seek God in your trying times. It would keep your sanity. James wrote about sticking it out through trials, bearing up under it. He wrote, "Happy is the one who endures testing, because when he has proven to be genuine, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love him."d Anyone who meets a testing challenge head on, and manages to stick through it, is very fortunate.

Regarding the abduction of the #ChibokGirls1 by Boko Haram, many people don't know this truth about God. God is the ultimate human rights activist. He is a fair God. He's particularly jealous about defending the defenseless (children, widows, orphans, the poor and those who don't have a voice). He says so several times. Abubakar Shekau\* should remind anyone of Sennacherib king of Assyria.e If the similarity in their names surprises you, wait until you see the similitude of their ends. Shekau and his demons have their retribution coming without doubt. Unless God is not God.

If you would like to give your life to the One who has gone through the trials you are going through, please say this prayer with me.

Father, I know I'm a sinner. Please cleanse me with the precious blood of Jesus. I accept Him as my Lord and personal savior. I am a new creature. Amen.

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1 On the night of 14-15 April 2014, 276 female students were kidnapped from a Government Secondary in the town of Chibok in the Northeastern part of Nigeria.

2 Garris Attack was carried out by the Somalia-based Al-Shabaab terrorist group. It was the deadliest attack in Kenya since 1998

a1 Timothy 6:8 (KJV)      b Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)      c Genesis 8:22 (NIV)      d James 1:12 (NET)      e Read 2 Chronicles 32

\*Abubakar Shekau is the leader of the Boko Haram terrorist group