

Finished Stone

Tried & Tested

Abram S Mvubu

Finished Stone

Tried & Tested

Abram S Mvubu

Copyright © Abram Sontaga Mvubu

ISBN: 978-0-6397-3943-4

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers/author.

Book Cover, Editing & Layout:

Graceworx Publishers: 0817677828

Dedication

I dedicate this book to everyone who played a role in my life; destiny helpers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends, and mentors.

Acknowledgment

Thank God Almighty for giving me the strength and ability to write this book. Throughout my journey of life and the hardships I went through, God has been good to me. I could have succumbed to life's pressures, but God has given me hope whenever I thought of giving up.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family for their support. My late mom Eva Mvubu, for continuously believing in me and supporting my endeavors. Appreciation also goes to my younger sister Mpho and my brother Mahlatse, who supported me throughout my academic journey.

My sister Anna and her two boys for believing in me. Thank you for the cheers, helping me reach my full potential, and encouraging me to work on this book. Your support is highly appreciated.

To my fellow and former classmate Moabs, for supporting me while at varsity and never judging me. You have been a good friend; may God continue to enlarge and increase your territory.

My primary school teacher Mam Ramokolo saw the best in me and supported me. Your treatment gave me the courage to study more and to anticipate the next day at school. I could have

given up on school if it weren't for you loving your job. This world needs teachers like you.

Endorsement

Finished Stone is a masterpiece written from personal experience and wisdom. It is a must-read for every young person or anyone on a journey full of unfavorable circumstances and on the verge of giving up. This book is practical and balanced with some spirit nuggets as well. It is a true life journey of a young man who rose from ashes to glory, from failure to success. Abram refused to be defined by circumstances but chose to rise above them against all odds to fulfill destiny and purpose. This book unequivocally shows that dreams are achievable with determination, resilience, and dependence in God almighty.

Lebogang Matsheta

Table Of Contents

Acknowledgments

Endorsement

Introduction 2

Chapter One: *Started From The Bottom* 4

Chapter Two: *Caught In The Web* 25

Chapter Three: *Driven By Hunger* 32

Chapter Four: *Dusted And Refined* 39

Chapter Five: *Finished Stone* 45

Chapter Six: *Construct Bridges* 48

Chapter Seven: *Rebuilding The Walls* 53

Chapter Eight: *No More Procrastination* 59

Introduction

Finished Stone is written from my personal experience, the journey of self-realization, and general observation of life.

Where a **Finished Stone** refers to a complete journey towards maturity and the experiences that establish one's strength and tenacity against all odds.

When a person is mature enough, all these other forces of life are a mere storm, it stops raging eventually, and life has to progress as if there was never a storm. This book also highlights the events that shaped the person I have become and am becoming daily. I moved from failure to failure, from rejection to rejection, from lack to lack, and from an unsuccessful relationship to another unsuccessful relationship.

To some extent, there were times when I identified myself based on the circumstances I had been going through. I understood that one needs to realize that circumstances don't define them. All circumstances are seasonal, and they are not meant to last forever. If you are attached to a seasonal event, you are limiting yourself. That will lead to you thinking that you are incapacitated and inadequate.

Your inadequacy will not be attributed to a lack of resources, but a lack of thinking, in and out of season. If you fall today, there

is still a chance to rise tomorrow. Gather the strength while on the ground and think of ways to overcome the missteps so that you won't fall again.

In this book, I take the reader through my life's journey, all the failures and victories. It will help you understand that your purpose is constant in the midst of the hurts, rejections, failures, and self-doubts. All the hurts are shaping you, the rejections are redirecting you to your set purpose, and the failures are building your knowledge and wisdom.

When things don't go as anticipated, we tend to doubt ourselves and question our worth. As I navigate my journey of self-realization and worth, you will understand that we are built differently, and our purpose is unique. Through such an experience, your view of life is broader, and you are strong enough to face anything.

Chapter One

Started From the Bottom

"Be rooted and anchored"

Every tree starts from seed, and the roots are drilled down to anchor and feed the tree. The process of becoming has hard surfaces and dry seasons; it is important to invest in your roots. The deeper the roots, the stronger the tree. Be rooted and anchored strong enough into the ground so you can survive every storm in your life.

"A tree with the strongest root laughs at the storms" - **A Malay Proverb**. This proverb highlights the importance of strong roots to survive storms in and out of season. A tree is identified by its fruits, but every tree's survival depends on its roots. A good family sticks together so they may be able to survive every storm that life brings, as a unit, while also working together on ways to continue to thrive amid all the curves of life.

I grew up in a big family of 16, and my mom had three children; my brother, me, and my younger sister: my two aunts and their children (my cousins whom I call brothers and sisters). Sometimes, I felt like I didn't belong, as if I was sharing my privilege as a son with my cousins, and I always had to fight for my rightful place.

My late mother was a rock meant to cover the weaknesses of the family as the only breadwinner and fulfilling her purpose, which was to bring glory and honour to her household. She became the object of ridicule and sacrificed her peace by sharing it with those around her. A memory of my mother and all the lessons I learned from her illumines my path within my purpose.

Her glory and splendour glitter to those who see those she impacted with her life. We grew up in lack in my family; some of us might have ended up in the streets doing only God knows what. To achieve most things within our state was not a walk in the park; we had to work ten times more than ordinary family.

For a family of 16, depending on the single salary of a kitchen attendant, it was a struggle to reach one's goal of financial stability, academic excellence, and emotional wellness. When no one before you conquered poverty or laid a foundation for those coming after them to start from and follow the footprint, you are sometimes overwhelmed by the pressures of being inadequate.

While at the bottom, build a strong foundation that will live forever; that's how generational wealth is created, from the bottom, not the top. By creating a way from one place to the other for generations after you to follow. My late mom put her sisters and their children in her heart. Although it looked like they were taking her children's place, she was a generational trendsetter. She showed us that family is important and that lifting others is a way to escape poverty.

Whenever, when it rained, the one-roomed *mokhukhu* couldn't hold the water from getting in. My mom and her sisters would be like chickens covering their chicks from the rain. The best protection they gave us was to take us to the best schools in the community so we could get the best education, which they had never managed to get. Imagine going to the best school and yet no food when you return home, or there's only a Millie meal to cook, no *sishebo*.

This was the sacrifice our parents made to invest in our education despite the scarcity of food and clothes. Psychologically and emotionally, I was a wreck, which affected my performance at school and how I related to others. I knew I could do better academically and in this life, but when I think of going back home to lack, there was a twist in my mind that affected my mood just like that. I felt like an ant returning to a hole with nothing to give, only to find out there was nothing to eat.

It was just survival at that time. Fortunately, ants are not barricaded down there; they always find a way out. They leave a footprint for their kind to use, and they travel together to find

food for the future which will be stored within their reserves. God gave my family more breadwinners as years went by. Lack and scarcity were a thing of the past.

Like an ant in the nest, invest in a way you will be sustained until you reach where your growth and success are not restrained. Educate yourself and find ways to become the best, even when all odds are against you. Being educated gives you a broader view of life and the advantage of having options on what can work for you. Wisdom is birthed out of a learned mind and curved by experiences one has gone through.

We all have memories of events that contributed to whom we have become. Some memorable experiences from varsity include when I had no food and textbooks relevant to my study.

One fellow called Moabs would always be there to help with his study guides and food; he would even use the money he was supposed to offer at church to give it to me so that I could meet my needs. He went to the extent of accommodating me in his room when I had no place to stay. The way he treated me and

others has taught me to be humble and understands God's ways to meet one's needs through the good ones around us.

All I see now upon his life is the blessing of God manifesting itself, and he is reaping what he sowed while he did not have much. Right at the bottom of my life, I had support from a good fellow in him. Even after I dropped out of varsity, he would check up and encourage me. I believe that is a role he had to play in my life, and meeting him was not in vain. He did not only sow the seed in God but also in me to be good to those who have no one to run to. One needs a support system from the bottom, so one can rise above their circumstances and conquer from ashes like a phoenix.

Great people have been through hard times and found a way out. For every top moment, there is a difficult moment at the bottom that you have prevailed and conquered. Many people relate the great only to their success, not the process that made them. The progress of whom you have become is not as important as the process of becoming. You are despised because people don't want to be attached to the process. They don't know that the process is what makes you.

A farmer growing the grapevine will always enjoy the fruit of their labour when they harvest the grapes and make the wine out of them. Grape juice and wine are the pride of the vinedresser. They were involved in the growth and pruning of the grape tree for it to produce good grapes. It started from the bottom, and now we are here, so they shall say.

The Journey of Life

I used to think that I'm left behind in life, and that other people were doing better than me until I realized that our journeys are personal and the destination is different. Everyone I meet along the way is my acquaintance, not a competitor. You should only compete with yourself; everyone is running their race.

We may have gone to the same schools and universities and come from the same community, but our journeys lead to different destinations.

As you may find many people in the same airport, they are not all going to the same destination. Every trip is allotted its time for departure. So if you missed the flight because of the time, you might still catch the next flight. You are only late if you are

running against time. But if you only want to get to your destination regardless of the time constraints, then you are not late. As long you are still living and have a will, there is a way.

Late is defined by time, but chance happens to all of us. Even though I'm growing daily, I'm not constrained within the parameters of time; chance happens to us all. If I measure my success in life within the parameters of time then I would regard myself as unsuccessful. Only if there was a schedule for every event in our lives, timing will be a factor and we will all be constrained within the parameters of time. You are never late to work on your dreams.

Life is full of crossroads, where everyone starts to choose ways that best suit their desired goals in life. Some roads lead to instant success, and some may take longer to reach where we want. No one is ever wrong for their choices unless there is a moral code that has been broken. Until one is made aware that they are wrong and their conscience tells them they are wrong, they will never admit their wrong. Admitting that you made a wrong turn is a sign of growth and maturity.

Other paths seem good and easy to travel, but the destination is not as desirable as the path itself. A road travelled by many sometimes lacks adventure, and the spoils are shared among you. Sometimes you have to choose your path and work on your goals without seeking the easiest way out if you want to be different in life.

But sometimes, you need a helping hand to guide you through life's journey because sometimes we choose paths that are not easily travelled. We end up being overwhelmed to the extent of yielding to the pressure that comes with it. People may make fun of your predicaments, making you doubt yourself and your skills. Never doubt yourself, and never compare yourself with anyone. We are all built and equipped differently, and the comprehension of our surroundings is different. All the anxiety and depression that lingered over my life resulted from me not realizing that my path is different from that of my acquaintances and that failing to accept that purpose in life is unique.

In my village, we used to have an athletics club with exceptionally talented athletes around the community. The team would sometimes compete with other teams in the

province, and some of us would finish first with all the pain of running on a synthetic rubber without running shoes.

I have seen people with proper running attire and shoes loose to those without shoes. We need to know that attire does not define a person; it only complements who you already are as a person. If you are a great athlete, having proper attire and shoes will add value to the brand you have become.

If the ones without running shoes give up on running because they don't have proper gear, then they are failing themselves. The resources others have shouldn't be a filter for one to determine their ability as an athlete. When you have no resources, you have nothing to lose in the race but your strength as an athlete.

Those with resources always find it easy to run the track. So is the person whose background has made it easy for them to live the kind of life they desired. They only lose in this life if they don't work on their craft and find ways to make more money for themselves. Those that have zero resources always find it hard to progress in life. They must work harder than their

resourceful counterparts with resilience and determination to be the best in this life.

In life's journey, those on top of a hill can see where they are going, so they can easily adjust their direction. And those down the valley have to climb the hill first to see where they are going. Those in the valley will experience more failures before they reach the top of the hill, and those on top would have had their share of failures before reaching the top.

All the teams' viewpoints are different, some see a way to their destiny, and some have a blinded view. For those traveling down the valley and navigating their way in the valley, only chance can put them at their desired destination. In this lifetime, you don't need to be the best to be where you want to be in life; you just need to work on your craft while pushing towards your destiny.

Those who want to be the best before they do something have no place in the land of opportunities. The journey of life needs people ready to fail while trying to live their best lives. If you have never failed, you have never tried. If you have never tried, then you have not lived your life.

In the words of 50 Cent, he says, “Get rich or die trying.” It simply encourages one to live to the fullest and never be afraid of failure. Those who have experienced hard times have more to tell, and their experience has channelled their hope to one day be where they want to be.

One needs to seek knowledge and acquire wisdom to know the best ways to deal with things in this lifetime. The best ways are a wise man's delight, for they seek counsel from those with the knowledge to make proper decisions. Wise people are not those that know everything but those that listen to those with more knowledge and align the knowledge with experience to make best decisions.

“How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is be chosen rather than silver”-Proverbs 16:16 (NKJV). This passage is extracted from King Solomon's wise counsel, making us aware of the importance of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. When you have all these three in order, it is easy to make it in this life. Money can run out if you don't know how to use it, but you can keep your reserves

overflowing with wisdom because wisdom is a merger of knowledge and understanding of the domain.

Only the wise survive in this jungle; those who rush into the jungle without knowing where the danger is, end up becoming prey to the beast in the jungle. So it is good to seek knowledge and understand the dangers ahead so that you may know how to best survive in this journey.

One might go to the nearest garage after securing a paying job; the other may search for houses, flats, or land to build a house. Neither of the two is wrong. One might be looking for convenience and the other looking for future investment. So, either of the two is right in their way, and no one is better than the other.

Though the car's value is diminishing daily, they can travel to work and many places at their convenience. The one who owns a flat or a house will need transportation to and from work, which adds more costs to them than they end up needing to buy a car. Their priorities differ, and their financial decisions don't

make one better than the other. It's just a matter of what you want to attain first.

These are the few stops we have in life where one has to choose which ones are best suited for them. Don't do things because of pressure, do them because they are aligned with your destiny, so you don't regret the things you did or didn't. Your first stop might be your neighbours' last stop, and so on.

When I was young and frail, I used to measure myself through the lens of society. All my thoughts were contained and constrained in the bubble of what others thought of me. I took on life's journey with all the frailty and accommodated what people thought I was until my life was shaped by what others say I am.

The limits that come with where you are born and raised are not visible until you are made to believe you cannot go anywhere in life. In the journey of life, it is easy to be defined by your struggles and conditions; this happens if you give the outside voices more recognition than your inner voice. Your inner voice always speaks and directs you to the path that is good for you.

This voice will always tell you that you are good enough, can make it, and it is possible.

The first day of riding a bicycle is a life lesson. As you begin to ride, you will fall several times before you learn how to balance yourself without support. I used to define myself by the falls I encountered until the day I knew they were for me to know my strengths. I used to be comfortable in my falls and tell myself I couldn't do it. That is not true about you; your falls are just there to remind you that you are human. Get back up again and continue the process until you make progress.

Your weakness reveals the power of the great I AM, for His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:10). The Word of God removed the veil on my eyes and renewed my mind. I learned not to conform my thinking to that of the world by transforming and channelling my thoughts to what God says I am and can do. Everyone needs a source of motivation and the one that will direct their steps in this jungle.

I saw God come through for me in ways I could not imagine. When I feel down and out, God would always bring people

around me that will encourage me to get back up and face this long journey. I'm grateful that on this journey of life, I had an encounter with divinity, my spirit was awakened, and my thoughts are transformed daily.

Environmental Contagiousness

"Break out of the nest to experience a new environment. Comfort is the silent killer to your destiny."

The environment you find yourself in and the people you allow within your circle will impact your life and personal growth. It is important to bring about an awareness of the contagiousness of one's surroundings and where one draws motivation from. With the pace of life and the trends set by the media (social media, TV shows, and films), the need to instil moral revolution is necessary for every society.

Life is more of a trend than a reality; social media influencers set the trend, and followers keep it on top. The need to move with the trending cloud has led many into debt. To some extent, many people would not mind spending on trends, only to

return home to the reality that doesn't complement their online lives.

It's all about 'soft life,' so they say; what is seen on social media and TV dramas sets a standard of living amongst the confused communities. These issues can be easily solved by one limiting their engagement on social media and TV shows to only those that influence their lives positively.

Your life goals are easily attained when placed in the right environment and around the right people. If you want to be motivated, be around people that motivate you. Be drawn towards energies that will impact your energy in the most relevant way. The environment that one lives in or spends much of their time in can be the defining factor in one's progression in life and how their character is shaped.

Some people are confined within the poverty borders, and their thinking is limited to their surroundings and food source. Growing up in a poverty-stricken environment can limit your thinking to only fixing what to eat today or the next day. Some exploit others by always begging, while some resort to stealing.

Riches and poverty are related to one's thinking. Poverty doesn't exist because there is no food or a place to stay, but it is the inability to think of positive and sustainable ways to survive and still have much, even after meeting the desired needs. Dealing with poverty, first, adopt the mindset of a rich man or even how they deal with certain issues related to a rich lifestyle.

I have seen people get million rand settlements or even win millions in the lottery and soon return to a life of poverty. Why is this happening? The easiest way out of poverty is a poor man's demise because it's the easiest way to travel back. The thought pattern of people within your environment should not be limited to splurging to show you are rich, but to how to grow the money and still have the desired life.

When you get more money, don't change your lifestyle by spending more money to fit into an imaginary lifestyle that is fading away but draw from those that inspire you and are where you want to be in life. That will help you see or do things differently. Draw inspiration from the rich; don't try to fit into their circle.

In the quest to make it and live the dream life, check your surroundings. Are your surroundings reciprocating the same energy you give out? Let's look at the life of a farmer. As a farmer, your growth and farming are dependent on the land. So if the land is not conducive for apples to grow in, you won't grow apples on your farm. If you try growing apples, you will run at a loss which will affect the farm's growth, and also, as a farmer, you will not be able to get a return on investment.

The land where farming is conducted is the main factor to look at above all else. If your life is stagnant, not progressing, or not yielding the desired results or goals, check the environment and then check what you might be doing wrong.

I have been to many places and met a lot of people, and in all these experiences, I got impacted both in a good and a bad way. All these places and people I met left a mark that is worth reflecting on and filtering on which ones are worth keeping within my circle as per the influence and motivation each one has brought into my life.

I remember praying that my destiny helper may show up some time ago. During that time, I lacked motivation in life, was jobless, and was too comfortable in my distress to the extent that I gave up on applying for jobs and suppressing the idea of seeking assistance from other people.

Then one day, my close relative called and asked me to move in with them for some time in a new environment, to come and be next to opportunities in the Land of Gold. By then, the idea of the destiny helper I prayed for was not in my mind. But the more motivation and cheering I got from them, the more I felt the impact of a destiny helper who saw the best in me and encouraged me to reach my full potential. I learned to speak positivity in every place I enter, for that place to yield more opportunities and peace of mind.

Ever since I moved to that new environment, I have been surrounded by positive energies to draw from. Not that I never got support from my other family members and friends, but I was barricaded within an environment that was not conducive to my personal growth and development. Every environment

has its energies. You can go to a place and like it from the spot or just dislike it.

What you draw from the environment influences your feelings about that particular place. You become the product of your society and what you spend much of your time on. Your life reflects the events you went through and the people you spend much of your time around. People around us are the mirrors that we are reflected on and so are we on them.

Chapter Two

Caught In The Web

“When you are constrained and confined within intergenerational traits set by those before you, pen down a new life story and set a new footprint for those who will come after you.”

No one chooses where they are born or into which family they are born, which means the act of conceiving and the choice of giving birth has nothing to do with the one born. We are all born where our purpose and God's will are aligned. Man only has a choice if there is a pool of options to choose from, and they are intellectually capacitated to identify the need to choose.

One is given the power to choose when they are trusted to make the right choice. When God gives man an option to choose between life and death, he trusts him to make the best possible choice.

When you know that your choice can either make or break you, your responsibility is what goes on in your life. You either choose to do something about your life or let your comfort allow you to sit and wait to be fed. Those who wait to be fed have the proclivity of entitlement to what they never worked for and harbor laziness.

One of the reasons why we are born and raised in our respective families is because we are the end product of the union of our parents; their choices did reproduce us. Being born in poverty means one is given the ability and capability to endure the process to succeed against all odds. You are born capable of dealing with lack, inferiority complex, rejection, and many more.

Succumbing to pressure exerted to you by circumstances, does not mean you are incapacitated, but it is because you allowed

your life and timing to be defined by those around you. Never compare your life journey with others. You define your journey, so you must fight against all odds to get where you want. Other people's journeys should be a motivation for you, not a standard to align your life to. Those born in abundance are also born with the ability to deal with the life they are exposed to or raised into.

In life, we are all born with gifts and talents; multiplying and growing what we have should be our life's main goal. Whether born poor or rich, if you learn to accept what you have and work with it to achieve more in life, you are on your path to success. There is nothing wrong with being born poor, but there is something wrong with remaining poor and letting your background determine your future.

In my primary school days, after changing to a new school, the treatment I received from my teachers and fellow learners almost led me to be a school dropout. My self-esteem and performance in class dropped. My mom would force me to go to school though all interest was lost, not because I was not capable but because I was caught up within a web of rejection, and an inferiority complex started building up.

When going up the grades, one class teacher was very inspirational and supportive of me. She would confront me when I behaved in a particular way or my performance dropped. And to ensure other learners don't see that I don't have a lunchbox, she will bring two lunch boxes, one for me and one for herself.

Her impact on my life helped me confront the issue of low self-esteem because, through her involvement in my academics and life, I managed to be one of the top learners in the class. The webs we find ourselves in can sometimes drag us far from our desired breakthrough by isolating us from those that can help us along the way.

Whatever happens in our lives is a result of our choices or someone else's choices.

Growing up in church, **the subject of "generational curse"** always came up in sermons and during prayer sessions. A generational curse refers to what is happening in your life based on the habits you or someone within your blood lineage chose to harbor and continue to feed until they are inherited traits

within your lineage. Though I never knew or met my biological father, whenever I do something that triggers his memory to my mom, she will say that I'm like my father.

My love for music developed from an early age of 4, only to find out my father was a musician. Every time I take a bath, put on new clothes, and look good while going out, they say, "Your father would take a bath, look good and go play music." As a child, you are proud when you see your father in you, but as you grow, you then learn certain things that define him that you don't want to inherit or be associated with.

I fought the thought of inheriting my father's characteristics to the extent that the thought of engaging in a serious relationship bored me. Yes, I want to have a successful relationship and marry one day, but whenever the relationship gets serious, I would pull my heart from the relationship. **What if I'm like my father? What if I lose interest in her and leave just like my father? What if I have kids and they never have a relationship with me?** Those were the questions on my mind before getting attached or being serious in a relationship.

I was contained by that web and my life was standardized by the thought of who my father was. But all those traits will depend on my choices, not because of my father's choices. I'm the author of the life I want to live, not according to my father or anyone in my lineage. Be the first to overcome the curses and achieve your success. With the pen in your hand, write a new story and be the point of reference for future generations.

Some people are contained within the spells imposed on their lives by their families and others. The confessions and declarations have now become a hedge, restraining you from reaching your full potential. Your struggle to make it in life doesn't mean you are a failure. One who never experienced failure has never succeeded in anything.

After passing my matric, I went to varsity and was in the field of computer and mathematics. Even though I was good and engaged with lecturers, I failed 94% of my modules during my 1st year. I believed that I was not meant to study anything in life and that I even dropped out of school. But what you hope for is what you will work hard to achieve.

After almost nine years as a college dropout, I returned to college with a new mindset. I told myself I'm not a failure; I was the best. A positive confession coupled with working hard will automatically yield the desired results. I completed my degree in record time, with a lot of distinctions. I was the anchor of my class, and some even thought I was not doing the modules for the 1st time.

The hedge of failure, anti-progress, and low self-esteem will be broken with resilience and determination. I have seen a lot of kids in my community giving up on school and roaming the streets. Some are involved in substance abuse, and some live a life of crime. If we only see the bad in them, that's what we feed, and it will grow in them that we end up unable to control or manage them.

This means we can choose to water the good in them, like my primary school teacher, who saw the potential in the unruly boy. Out of our confessions and belief in them, we can channel the positive energy in them.

Chapter Three

Driven by Hunger

*“Channel your hunger in the right direction; don’t live beyond
your means.”*

Anyone driven by hunger can do anything needed to get something to eat. At times, it is difficult to trust a person who can do anything to feed themselves or do anything that only benefits them. Hunger can make people do the unexpected. Some people kill when they are hungry to make it in life, while others sell their souls just to feed their being and ego. What is the point in gaining the whole world and then losing your soul?

Hunger is a drug; if you allow it to drive you, you will be lost in the cloud of destruction.

As a young boy in a family that worked hard to make ends meet, I would steal money from the house to buy some biscuits or anything that would feed my hunger for that moment. Not even thinking of what this is doing to those the money was taken from, them having worked very hard to get that money and sometimes hoping to use it for better things. I may have gained the world by getting the money but losing my soul by lying to protect myself, hurting my family, and protecting that lie until everyone believes it's the truth. The habit grew to a level where it would no longer be my family experiencing that but other people as well.

I went for a winter school program when I was in my matric at a local university, and I had no food for some time during the program. One day I decided to eat my roommate's food in their absence because of hunger, which continued for some time. And when asked about the food, I would act like I didn't know anything. The stress of not having food and wearing the same clothes repeatedly got to me.

I joined a group of high school classmates in the same program as me; I started smoking and drinking alcohol with them. Just before that became a habit, one of my classmates, who was a Christian, drew me away from them. He would give me food and always encourage me to go to church.

One day on my way back from a late class, I heard the church music, and I decided to join the fellowship. From that day's experience, I was transformed and never turned back. An encounter with the Word changed my perception of life; I also learned to develop the character wrapped up in the Word through the revelation of who I am in God.

A lot of people can sell their bodies to get work, promotions, seal a business deal, and make a living. The drive in all these decisions is the hunger to succeed and be on top. With our country's economic state and high unemployment rate, hunger is more physical than emotional and financial. To feed their families and maintain their lifestyle, I have seen many having to settle for anything that can pay them.

The psychological impact of lack of finance on an individual is huge, especially if you have people looking up to you or expecting much from you. Even if your finances start blooming, the need to close the gap between you and your peers will always pull you down into the pool of debts and back to where you started.

My first salary was spent on fancy clothes, and I was back to zero the next day. By buying those clothes, I was trying to close the gap of lacking them while growing up. The life of debt seems good, but how can you live on next month's salary before you can even get it? Wanting to satisfy your pride while feeding on your financial reserves is an error we sometimes make out of hunger to look like other people or fit into a certain class.

You can't satisfy the hunger of the past years by starving your finances and personal peace. Since you can't satisfy all your desires at once, why not work with what you have and try not to strain your reserves because you feel the need to be identified a certain way? The only hunger you can satisfy is the present and future. The past is gone; focus on the present and the future.

At times we fail to put a balance in our lives that other spheres lack attention. We are busy feeding the other and starving the other. The areas in our lives that are starved often feed on the ones we are feeding or focusing on.

Let's say a zoo keeper separates the lions into two groups. He separates them by caging the other group and starving them to do population control. The keeper does this by allowing the other group to roam freely while feeding them to have time to reproduce before they turn into prey. If this happens for a long time, the lions in the cage will end up feeding on each other till there is none to feed on. And when they are freed before they can finish each other, anything that is meat will become prey out of hunger. Even the zoo keeper is in danger of becoming prey to the lions he caged and starved.

Everyone is in charge of their life affairs, and not giving attention to all the areas of your life will compromise you at some stage. An African saying says, *'thupa e kojwa e sale tala'* meaning you can only twist and bend a freshly picked stick. Once it dries up, it will be hard to shape it, and you will break it. Live a

balanced life, now before you are the victim of your choices, and it's no longer easy to start over.

I was one person who tended to overlook the importance of balancing my career, academics, spirituality, relationships, etc. If I make up my mind, for example, that I want to get that degree or maybe focus on my spirituality, all other things in my life are considered distractions. Whenever the hunger to do or achieve something kicks in, one might overlook the consequences of their choices.

I've seen people eat after they've gone through a fast or hunger strike. They happen to eat everything that seems good to feed their hunger at that moment and time. One day we were returning from a long fast at church and when we arrived home, my sister prepared a variety of food to help us regain our strength. We ate and forgot that we are from a fast. In our mind, the food is to close the gap of the days we spent without food but feeding the hunger of fasting will never replace the days we spent without food, it only feed the craving for a moment and then you are full.

Living in the moment can sometimes be a blind spot for you to regard balance. Don't let hunger be the drive but allow it to be an indicator that you need to balance your life by feeding the starved areas while considering the other areas of your life.

Most wrong choices were made out of the moment of pleasure, where one felt the need to satisfy their desire without considering the harm it could bring into their lives.

Chapter Four

Dusted And Refined

*“A stone's value is shrouded in mystery because of its impurities
and improper shapes.”*

Every stone can be treated anyhow unless it's worth and value are identified. Unrefined stones are worthless in the eyes of the one who is not knowledgeable about stones and their worth. One can pick gold or diamond in its natural or uncut form and never know they had millions in their hands.

In the eyes of an ordinary person, it is easy to identify the refined and cut gold stone. But the one who studies or works with stones easily identifies them from underground in their dusty condition and amid all other worthless stones. With its impurities and improper shape, the value is a mystery.

The stone goes through crushing to powder, then into mercury to separate the gold from the unwanted stone particles. The value of a person is sometimes shrouded in mystery until they are separated from the rest. That is when their absence is felt, and the importance of their role is recognized.

The rejections you faced in your life didn't mean you were worthless. You were looked down on because you were covered in dirt and filthy to be recognized. I was told a lot of negative things in life that left my ego bruised and my self-esteem dropped to the lowest. Anything or anyone that is perceived to lack value is easily rejected and tossed aside for better options.

During the storms and rejection, we are tested and proven to be strong; we are able to withstand opposition from those above us. Rejection has the proclivity to channel and redirect us to a better

place regarding how we think and do things. I observed all these when going through rejection by many companies, so I applied for more job opportunities. These rejections will break you emotionally and psychologically, only to help you mature and learn how to put pieces of yourself together after being broken.

Emotional Intelligence becomes the only solution to keep you sane amid rejection. You look beyond your current stage by learning to manage your emotions and stress and be able to make sound decisions. Know who you are by discovering your strength and how to control yourself through rejection. Let all the rejections redirect you to self-awareness, which will help you focus more on yourself than anything else.

Never give up on developing your skills and growing your craft just because people fail to see your worth. When people think you are not good enough, continue doing what you are good at, sharpening your skills till they open doors to many rooms for you. There is a season and timing for everything in life. One's sorrow can be turned into joy the next day; only time will tell.

When you have faith that your season of favor is coming and are persistent enough to push for your breakthrough, you shall be grateful in the latter stage. When your season comes, everyone will notice you and esteem you of high value, just as gold when it goes into the market.

Your worth and value are never affected by people's perceptions, so you should never let an inferiority complex push you into believing that you are nobody. I taught myself never to give up or allow people's opinions about me to affect how I view and conduct myself. When people see the dust or dirt on me, I look beyond that. Because my worth isn't in how I look now but in who I am with or without dirt. Money trampled upon and covered in the dirt will never lose its worth; it will constantly remain valuable even when covered in dirt. Whether covered in dirt or not, your value is constantly intact. All the dust will soon be blown away, all the dirt washed away, and all the treasures in you will come to light.

Some people were on the verge of taking their lives or even substance abuse because of rejection and the pressure of people's perception of them. If people's views are given

preference in your life, and their thoughts of you somehow influence your life, then you have lost power over your life. Just so you know, you were created to handle everything you go through in life, and the process of refining you is never easy. You can never be tested beyond your comprehension.

You can handle the heat and the pressure that comes with being you. If that is your stand, all other views are null and void. You are gold going through the refining process, and the time for your glory in the market is nearing. Just endure now and rejoice later when your value opens all doors that were shut.

“For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing” James 1:3-4 NLT. Our faith is tested now and then, but with endurance, we can stand strong, knowing it's just but for a season. No matter how long you have been going through the season of weeping, your endurance will take you to your season of joy. Hold on a little longer, for your crown of beauty for ashes is at hand.

The strongest people endured pain and never allowed it to deviate from their main goal. When one's endurance is well matured, one can deal with anything that comes their way without fearing losing. They know it will bring out the best in them, and they can withstand all the pressures that come with every test.

Chapter Five

Finished Stone

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” II Corinthians 4:8-9 (NIV)

In pain, nothing makes sense at all. People will try by all means to encourage and empower you through words that seem like noise to your ears. In all the hardships I have been through, I never thought that it's for a reason and I was being prepared for a greater reward. Your season of hardship is only preparing and making you if you know where you are going in life

Everything you go through makes you stronger and hard enough to stand any situation. In the process of your making, you were pressed on every side to shape yourself. You felt perplexed, were persecuted, struck down, and trembled upon, and all these were to help show forth your power. No stone is called finished without passing through the process. In the process of making, we identify ourselves, our Maker and our weaknesses are dealt with to perfect us. Every broken piece in us is restored and put to balance by the Chief Corner Stone, Jesus, whose strength is made perfect in our weakness.

The day I left college, I felt betrayed by my family and let down by my God that I even conceived the idea of leaving the house to stay at my aunt's place. Going to church was just a norm, I was angry at those that had the power to help me reach my career ambitions through my academic success but have withheld their giving hand.

Psychologically, emotionally and spiritually, I was a mess. Dropping out of varsity after three years of hard work of study and never achieving my desired degree was frustrating. When going through hardships, you are blinded to identifying and

understanding the purpose of every situation. A testimony is birthed through one's life story as we leave footprints of faith amid hardships for those experiencing hardship to understand that others have been here and have conquered against all odds. For a wounded lion, there is still hope for recovery. You are wounded because you are in the process of shaping yourself for your purpose.

If it's painful and hard enough to endure the process of waiting for your open door, check how big your dreams are and how much room you have to accommodate your long-awaited blessing. I kept on searching and applying for jobs and nothing came up. I wanted to give up because the stress of job hunting was getting to me.

That pain of going through your emails and all you see are disappointing emails with regrets; to some, you have never landed an interview. But whenever I helped others, they always progressed. The faith that my situation won't be like this forever kept me strong and hopeful. In the waiting process, we can work on our weaknesses, we are refreshed, and our Maker can refill us for our set purpose. Jesus brings balance into our lives.

Chapter Six

Construct Bridges

“Building relationships with your loved ones and people you meet will build bridges for you were there seems to be no way.”

When in isolation from other people, it feels good till your life is so shaky that your social life is just a mess. Even though it's a good thing to be alone and just focus on yourself sometimes, you should learn to accept that no one can survive by being an island.

Let it be a temporary event where you reflect on yourself and awaken your inner peace within the freedom of solitude. Sometimes I need to be alone to refresh and redress my psychological and emotional affairs. At this moment, I reflect on my life and restore order to my well-being while strengthening a relationship with myself.

Social Capital

Social capital can go a long way for you and those around you. I have witnessed someone getting a job that other candidates and I have applied for just because of his mentor's social capital. He never applied, but his mentor recommended him to the hiring manager, and all other applications were put aside.

His good relationship with the mentor and his mentor's good relationship with the hiring manager paved the way for his career growth. Relationships have a major role in our lives, so we should learn to socialize and be good to those we meet. Those you have been good to will always remember you, and that memory will keep them attached to you wherever they are.

Building relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and other people around you is also important.

Family Relations

I grew up in a family that hardly communicates, and the only time there is some form of communication will be when one has done something wrong or when one is asking for something and commenting on something. Which I never regarded as communication but a reaction and one-way expectation since there is no response from the other party needed. Nothing is added to the relationship, but a lot is taken: pride, self-esteem, and peace.

If one's relationship with their loved ones hangs on the string of one being a giver or taker, when there is nothing to give or take, that string will break because of pressure. In some cases, most families and relatives divide because of their personal beliefs. As much as one is a believer in God and the other is not, unity must prevail in every household and between relatives.

If one puts their belief system in high regard over the other, and their thoughts suppress the other, unity will be an imaginary

goal that will be difficult to attain. When there is no common ground for all to live in harmony without one questioning or undermining another's beliefs, every gathering will be done as a norm and not as something everyone eagerly anticipates. God encourages unity and harmony among brothers and sisters. **"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"** Psalm 133:1 NIV. If your belief in God is the reason you can't relate with your family, then you don't know God. God will never author confusion and cause conflict among brethren.

Personal Relations

In my failed relationships and attempts, lack of communication was one of the reason for the failure. These experiences have all played a role in me preferring to be alone and believing I don't need anyone for me to enjoy life. All the friends and acquaintances made at school or varsity were cut off because I had accepted that I'm not a good communicator and to keep my pride intact, I had to stop communicating with most of them.

Whether or not you are good at communicating, you need people in your life. A void will keep affecting your life by not

allowing people to play some roles in your life. Some might be your destiny helpers, some your mentors, some your good friends, and your life partner. Invest in making sure that every communication you make leaves a mark on the next person.

Chapter Seven

Rebuilding The Walls

"In life, one needs to set up boundaries. Not everything goes"

Setting boundaries and limits for people allowed within your circle is very important if you want to grow and mature within your craft. There will be people to criticize your efforts; you should keep them far from your reach for your peace's sake. Let them criticize from afar.

Don't let them contaminate your energy. A city without walls is vulnerable to attacks, and the enemies can come in as they wish. Protect your energy against those that can do anything to demotivate you. As much as there is a need to build relationships, there is also a need to build walls to restrict negative people. Never be afraid to lose people. Some people need to get out of your life for you to grow and succeed without the restriction of your surroundings.

I lost many friends when I started to put order in my life. When I set my priorities right, many around me started to wither. When one starts filtering the influence they receive from people around them, they slowly lose friends and are regarded as boring. Real friends will remain because they are the ones who accept your personal growth and respect your boundaries.

I've been that boring one since I chose to live a different yet meaningful life according to my principles. I realized that a lot of people don't like it when one lives an orderly life and is selective about everything. Discipline is key to an orderly lifestyle.

While rebuilding walls and setting order in your life, some will work against your progress. Nehemiah experienced opposition from the likes of Sanballat and Tobiah immediately after they learned that he was rebuilding the walls to bring order (*recover from the disgrace of Jerusalem's nakedness*) and be a refuge to those in Jerusalem. A lot of people became furious just to hear that the walls were being rebuilt and the cracks on the wall were being repaired.

The enemies of your progress will never be happy when you're covering your shame, and your weaknesses are no longer visible. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, and Jerusalem was restored to its former glory against all the negativities and destruction from those who wanted to delay the rebuilding progress. After the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt, gates were constructed as per the purpose (Sheep gate, Fish gate, Old gate, Valley gate, Dung gate, Fountain gate, Watergate, Horse gate, East gate, and the gate Miphkad).

Order was restored, and no one entered through the Sheep gate except the shepherd and the sheep. To use the Fish gate, you

must be a fisherman. Every gate was used as a filter or a way of identifying intruders and being able to be on guard at all times.

We need to restore order in our lives and know for what purpose one is in our lives, where one serves their purpose and nothing more than we have allowed in our lives. Communicate your principles and boundaries to your acquaintances and friends so they may be aware. The most vital need in this life is knowing the roles that other people have to play in your life and working on collaborating with them for that particular course. Also, remember that every project has an expiry date, but the relations among team members will go a long way. There will be a recommendation for other projects in the future. So you need to leave a mark that will be a point of reference to your acquaintances and colleagues about your craft. Every boundary set helps you attract relevant people in your life.

If you know that certain interactions and relationships are not adding value to your life, learn to close such chapters. Don't let some past characters continue to influence your character in the new chapter. Whenever you allow the past relations to affect the

present relationship, you are failing the present by letting the past frustrate it; and those you love will be the ones that suffer.

The healing process helps your body set up walls that will protect the wound against bacteria and other infections. A wound that is not covered up is easily infected, and so is a city without walls and boundaries; it is vulnerable to outside forces.

Some people's lives are stagnant only because they listened to many voices, which resulted in them not taking a step further in their lives. Learning to filter everything said will help us take relevant and cautious steps as desired.

Being the gatekeeper of your life

One needs to become the gatekeeper of their own life, managing what comes in and out of their life. In this case, we are the ones who decide what is best for us and what is not. Back in the day, there used to be a gate called **Sebalamakgolo** (in Sepedi). This kind of gate would restore order and require patience when you enter it since it allowed one person at a time.

Counting and filtering who has to enter were made easy through this kind of gate. It's easy to identify the impatient and unruly as they start to create other ways to avoid going through the system. Everyone need to have this kind of gate to help them know and understand people in their lives. So when restoring order, you then know whom to allow and whom to prohibit in your life.

Chapter Eight

No more procrastination

“Why set goals that are not easy to attain? Nothing is impossible.

It is possible, and you can do it.”

Most of the time, in our failed attempts or inaction, we have a pool of responses that seems relevant and good enough to be accepted by other people. But they are just excuses for us not doing good and not taking proper action to make things happen.

Many are the excuse in the mind of a sluggard. People with excuses tend to render themselves victims of a system or other people. Procrastination is an end product of excuses you entertain; it will keep wasting your time, whereas time waits for no one. After dropping out of college, I harboured many excuses not to go back to school. Whether I go to school or not, whatever I find to be an excuse will always be there. If it's the age, I will still grow and be the same age with both options. So I would rather choose the one that will benefit me.

I eventually completed my degree in record time after starting from scratch. It's easier to make excuses than to take responsibility. Accountability and responsibility are the keys to an excuse-free life. You are set to achieve great things once you take charge of your life and do something about it.

A failed attempt is better than an excuse not to do something. Out of that attempt, you have a lesson learned. If you never try, you will never get a chance to know and do better next time. Never be afraid of failure; most people with excuses and reasons not to try again have failed to fulfil their purpose. The best way

to fulfil one's purpose is to flush out those excuses by one taking action.

Faith without action is dead. If you don't act on what you hope for, you will remain stagnant until you make a move. Don't just plan, work on achieving every goal you've set. Many are the plans in a man's mind; if no action is taken, they remain fading ideas. A vision is for a set time, so you need to write it down. Even if you have many ideas, write them down orderly and work on prioritizing your approach to achieving them.

Plan and execute

Every plan needs to be strategically executed. When your plan is big, you must divide it into small manageable, easy to work on strategy. Those small milestones are the best way to finish your project or achieve your plan without considering how hard it is to accomplish. Sometime back, I wrote a list of things I wanted to achieve to be where I wanted to be in life. The list is almost complete because I ensured I didn't bite more than I could chew. If I could have pushed to do all these things at a go, I

would have set myself up for failure. A journey of a thousand miles is completed one step at a time.

Every milestone is an achievement

No matter how small your progress looks, it's an achievement worth celebrating. I created a checklist for every item on my list, and every tick eliminated the item from the To-Do list of accomplishments. Every tick on my progress checklist is an achievement. When put together, these little achievements show much progress on what is needed for you to reach your desired goals. I've learned not to take smaller achievements in life for granted and to cherish every moment. Every day there is something worth to be celebrated.

No excuses

Almost everyone with more excuses in their lives has bigger plans which were never executed. They always have compelling reasons not to start, constraining them and delaying their progress. Yes, lack of resources can sometimes be a constraint for you to do something, but never allow it to stop you from

breaking down your plan into smaller, easily completed activities.

Scarcity is never a reason enough for one to sit within their comfort waiting for a miracle. Looking back on my life, I used to believe that certain things are impossible to achieve if you don't have the resources; that seemed a good reason for me not to do some things. I ended up not acting on anything but waiting for a miracle to happen. Laziness was my fellow, and excuses were my daily bread. Excuse produces laziness, and laziness produces comfort in one's condition.

Invest on yourself

If it is hard to do something, work on ways to be good at that. You are the best option of investment for your life's goals. If you have to study, do it. I've made it my mission to acquire as many skills as possible. Whenever I'm doing a job search and see that a particular skill is needed, I go all out to learn more about it.

Everything is available on the internet for your convenience. Go to YouTube, search for videos about your desired skill, and you will never regret it. One day a lady was asked to help with a

printer, and I saw her search on YouTube for how to fix that particular problem. She completed the job exactly as she was asked and I believe she will not refer to YouTube for the same problem next time. She gained a skill for free.

Every time you invest in yourself, you are building yourself to become a solution to the problems that you or other people may face. Educate yourself about things you need to be the best version of yourself.

Opportunities never ceased

We close many doors due to the fear of the unknown, fear of failure, and fear of being in new environments. We must take into cognizance the reality of the excuses related to fear of taking action. One needs to go through counselling and work on the psychological impact that triggers the fear in them.

Many times when I had the problem of the fear of failure and environmental change, I let opportunities pass. It seems acceptable to prefer things to be done in a way they can relate to easily, but that is just an excuse not to challenge yourself beyond your regular experience. A lot of us are filled with

regrets about opportunities we never ceased and the time we wasted feeding our fears.

Get up and seize that opportunity. Even if it doesn't work according to your expectations, what matters is that you have the guts to face your fears. With this bravery, you will be able to break into doors that have been shut and emerge prosperous in all your ways.

It is possible

With God, nothing is ever impossible. If you have tried it all and nothing worked, try God, for He is the Author of your faith. The only language that God understands is faith. If you have faith that God will give you the strength and the ability to do something, then ask him and act on it. If your faith in God is not accompanied by action, it's null and void.

One's actions should be fuelled by unwavering faith then, it is easy to do all that you desire. When doubt kicks in, then failure is a possibility. For every assessment I wrote at College, I would ask God to help me process everything I learned, studied, and

understood, reproducing them as answers. This is what I failed to do in my first attempt at tertiary.

I saw what many would say is the Hand of God, but it was just the grace of God released according to the level of faith I have in Him and my acting on it. The grace of God patches where our weakness would have failed us and covers us. If your strength and ability say, “It is impossible,” Grace says, “You can do it.”