

Introduction

“Obi nkyere abofra onyame” a popular Akan proverb which means no one shows the child the sky. The sky symbolizing God. Thus, in my cultural background the concept of God, the almighty creator of the entire universe is well known and accepted by all. His attributes as all powerful, all seeing, etc are accepted by my people. This God is worshipped by all. He is the giver of rain, sunshine, life, and the sustainer of the universe. He is honored and worshipped through our ancestors, the gods “abosom”, habitat spirits and witchcraft. It is believed that “ Onyankopon” God is so powerful that mortal men cannot approach him directly but he cares for the affairs of men. Our ancestors are the ones who continue to intercede on behalf of the living. Prayers are offered through the pouring of Libation and the sacrifice of sheep goats and chickens. Every community had its own fetish priest “witch doctor” who is the guardian and custodian of public order and morality. This in a nutshell is the cultural and religious background in which I grew.

Personal walk with God

At the age of six my parent took me to Formanso to live with my grandparents, who were devoted worshippers of Tigari the river god of the area. Shortly after my arrival my grandmother converted to Christianity through the mission work of James McKeone a Scottish missionary. She was baptized and became a member of the Church of Pentecost. Not long after that my grandfather also gave up all his fetish charms and amulets and got baptized. My grandparents took me to church every morning and evening from Monday to Friday and also on Sundays. Since both of them could not read, I was instructed daily to read portions of the Bible for them. The more I read the Bible for them the more knowledge and insight I obtained myself.

When I left my grandparents to go to boarding school, I took with me both the knowledge of the traditional religion as well as Christianity. I became a member of the Campus Bible study and Scripture Union club. We met regularly every afternoon after classes, prayed together sang and shared testimonies. All this time I continued to hold on to my traditional religious beliefs, Why not? Because the majority of the church members of the village I came from resorted to the traditional priests for answers whenever they faced crisis in their lives. There is a strong belief that every occurrence had a spiritual component so a

native doctor will be consulted before a sick person is taken to the hospital. This is to verify the source of the sickness and deal with it in the spirit.

My faith in Christ started to grow through my participation in the Scripture Union and so were my frustrations. We were called names by other students who saw Christianity as an imported religion. Two of the subjects in Secondary School that helped to shape my faith but also deepened my frustrations were Bible knowledge and African History. My Bible knowledge teacher was not a Christian but he had a degree in Religions. He helped the class understand the apparent contradictions and discrepancies in the Bible narratives. One question I still remember to this date is, if Moses turned all the waters in Israel to blood, where did the Egyptians magical get the water to perform the same feat? How come two accounts are given for the appointment of Saul as King of Israel?

My history class was no different. I became very sad when my teacher told the class that the first ship that brought the Bible to the Gold Coast now Ghana also brought the gun and rum and took slaves back to Europe. Thus my exposure to the history of Christianity in Africa made me very angry. How contradictory it was to realize that the key plays who promoted Christianity in Africa, were also engaged in trans-Atlantic slave trade and the colonization of the African continent. Even though I had these internal struggles I did not quit the Bible study and Scripture Union. As a group we were continually reduced by our class mates. They used to call us “holy holy”, “Chri Fe”, “weak brains” etc. A lot of my friends tried to impress upon me that “the Christian message was used by the Europeans to tame the Africans. “They told us to close our eyes and recite the Lord’s Prayer. By the time we opened our eyes they had taken over all the Lands” said a friend. “It is a sign of religious immaturity to say that it is only through Christ that one will be saved.” Said a teacher I tried to seek help from “By accepting the Christian message we are agreeing by default that our own cultural norms and religious traditions are inferior to the white man”. I knew in my heart that the Christian message is not an European culture. So I stopped asking people questions and kept reading the Bible. I prayed in my heart and forgave all those who have used the Bible as a ploy to exploit others. In spite of my prayers I could not make a firm decision to follow Christ because my parents and all the adults I knew were torn between the cultural religion and the church. As said earlier, people resorted to traditional religion to find answers in crisis situations. It was on one occasion when I fell

critically ill that my parents took me to the Gadawu Shrine in the Ashanti Region for healing. What happened there changed my life completely and put to rest all the internal struggles I was having.

As their custom demands, a new client to the shrine is initiated through the slaughter of a chicken. The chicken's throat was slashed and allowed to struggle to die. If it dies showing the breast or legs up then it implies that the gods are willing to attend to the client. In my case, they were not accepted. The maximum number of chickens to be slaughtered at a time is seven. Because of this, they stopped at six and started to search my body. They found a silver necklace with the crucifix of Jesus on it and instructed me to put it in the garbage with which I complied. Immediately after that, the seventh chicken was slaughtered and was accepted by the gods. This little occurrence marked the turning point of my faith in Jesus Christ. I did not need a professor of theology or a priest to tell me that Jesus is greater than these African gods. There was no need to wear a cross around my neck which could be taken and dumped in the garbage. I allowed Him to dwell in my heart and become Lord and Master over my life. I became stable mentally and focused on my Bible Studies. I did not allow any comments about the Bible or Christianity to worry me anymore. I got baptized that very year and obtained a membership into the Methodist Church of Ghana.

Upon the completion of my GCE Advanced level, I went to Sierra Leone. It was here that my faith in Christ was tested and shaped. Fellow Christians in Freetown who were supposed to host me turned their back on me. I was however accepted by Ahmadiyya Moslems who showed me great hospitality and offered me employment as an assistant teacher in one of their schools. I studied the Koran and every Islamic pamphlet I laid my hands on. For a whole year I had no choice but to worship and pray with Moslems. When I finally decided to go to the University of Sierra Leone, they offered me a full scholarship. In my second year, they decided that I had to become Moslem before the scholarship could be renewed. With prayer and consideration, I decided to remain firm in Christ. The Moslems did not believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. They did not believe in his deity or his resurrection. Due to this, I could not make a decision to become a Moslem and lost their scholarship. The Lord did not allow me to drop out or be disgraced as in that same year the Rev. Robert Smith and his wife Valerie came from Scotland as SIM missionaries to teach Old Testament theology at the college. They offered me free accommodation and I found a part-time job to pay my fees. The Lord met all my needs for the rest of my stay at the college. When we lean on Him He will not put us to shame. The events that followed after my graduation from the

University of Sierra Leone, led me to absolutely trust and depend on God in every area of my life. I was trapped in a civil war situation for three years. Everyone close to me got killed and I was held captive by the rebels for ten months. I appreciated every passing minute and hour as God's grace and protection. People were captured and killed regularly by the rebels. I prayed to God constantly to spare my life and use me for any purpose. When God finally paved the way for me to leave Sierra Leone alive and return to Ghana, it became clear to me that I serve a real and living God who is so close to me and listens to my cry.

Upon my arrival in Ghana, I was posted as a national service volunteer to teach in a remote secondary school in the Brong Ahafo region. It was here that the enemy came again to test my faith in God after I had completed a week of prayer and fasting. "Prophet" John from the nearby Centre for God Consciousness came and told me that my light was shining and offered to connect me with angels in the heavenly realms. I was very curious and excited at the same time. I visited his centre a day later and he took me to a secluded area about two hundred meters into the bush where he had placed two chairs and offered me one to sit on. After almost three hours of listening to his teachings, I was exposed to the realm of occultism. Even though he constantly used the name of God, all his teachings were contrary to the Bible. According to him, there is no difference between the Holy Spirit and evil spirit. All spiritual powers come from one source and it becomes evil or holy depending upon how we use them. When I tried to speak he told me to forget about that faith in Jesus. This did not square very well with me so I gathered some strength and rebuked him in the name of Jesus. He kept mute and refused to speak for about five minutes so I got up and left without saying goodbye. Upon arrival at the main road I came back to my senses and realized how trickery the devil operates. This encounter helped me to understand the reality of the demonic world and how it functions. When I returned from Sierra Leone, I found to my surprise that my father had become a founder and a Prophet of a healing Church. My encounter and the teachings from the occultist helped to confirm my suspicion that the powers my father is consulting for his healing ministry is satanic. I had a strong burden to share the true message of salvation in Jesus with him. I revealed this desire to the occultist after he had told me about habitat spirits and how we can consult them for healing. He strictly warned me not to go and advised me to first take stock of myself before I ventured. How foolish and naïve I was at the time! After all he's my dad why can't I share Christ with him? I went with a simple message in the form of a story which he gladly accepted and promised to do some changes immediately. A day after

that I fell very sick with a fever. As my dad is well versed in traditional African herbs, he prepared some herbs in a bucket of water and told me to drink three handfuls and bath with the rest. After drinking he told me that I would never live to see his secrets again. My stomach started to swell and for two days I could not go to toilet or urinate. My father told me my type of sickness was spiritual and that I should go and seek permission from the school where I was teaching. His intention was that I should return to his healing camp for him to heal me. On my way, I met a lady at the bus terminal named Rebecca, who told me not to return to my father's healing camp. She offered instead to take me to her sister's husband in Kumasi Aburaso who had a prayer ministry. I remember vividly that it was a Tuesday evening around 6pm local time when we entered the school where the service was held. It was a women's fellowship night and the Pastor named Anthony was the only man among them. He told me to kneel down and all the women surrounded me and started to sing spontaneously, praising the lord. The Pastor suddenly clapped and shouted out prayer! They all prayed simultaneously. I felt a sudden push in my stomach as they prayed for me and I started to vomit all sorts of greenish and yellowish stuff. The scent was so repulsive which made them run outside to bring some dust to cover it up. I was poisoned by my own father! God works in miraculous ways. He used simple uneducated village women to restore my health. This incident was the beginning of my spiritual battles. Word had quickly spread throughout the town where I was teaching that my father had cast a spell on me for daring to challenge him. I was shunned by everyone and branded as a madman. I drew closer and closer to God by prayers and fasting. I was disowned by my parents and Monica who I married upon my return from Sierra Leone had gone to her parents to give birth to my son Andrew. One day I heard that the Christ Apostolic church at Tepa-Ashanti which is about seven kilometers from where I was teaching, was having a three day prayer tarry camp. I joined them for the entire three days at the end of which the pastor advised me to stay with him. This was at the end of my national service and I had no means of income. Again the lord allowed his face to shine upon me by providing for me not only a place to sleep and food to eat but a caring and supporting Christian community. One day I shared with the church what I went through in Sierra Leone and how I was offered a scholarship to Canada for further studies but couldn't go due to the war. The pastor named Bernard Sarbah, gave me the equivalent of forty cents Canadian to write to the college and find out the status of the scholarship. I got a positive response from the college and they praised the lord that I was still alive after they had lost communication with me for five years! I was instructed to

proceed to Canada immediately. This took me by surprise as I was not prepared at the time besides I was very ill and asked for deferment to the following year that was 1996. When I shared with people that I would be traveling to Canada in a year, that helped to confirm my insanity. Here I was with no place of my own to sleep, no money to buy food, absolutely dependent on the generosity of others, telling people that I was traveling abroad. When I started to process my student visa the following year, I had no clue where the plane ticket would come from. As I discussed this with Pastor Sarbah, he told me to ask God to provide the ticket since I was coming to study to do his work. The Lord did not disappoint me as the ticket to fly to Canada was provided by some anonymous people in Nova Scotia without my request. The Lord clearly answers prayers and I have seen his hands working closely with me. I arrived in Canada on full scholarship with no bank account of my own or money in my pocket. I was embraced by a caring Christian community at Acadia Divinity College who loved me and provided all the basic necessities for a start up of life in Canada. Barely two months after my arrival my appendix ruptured and nearly burst in my stomach. I was rushed to the hospital where I underwent a successful surgery. My bill was \$14,500 dollars Canadian. My Blue Cross insurance paid a maximum of \$10,000 dollars and the university paid the balance. I saw this as a divine intervention because I would have died if this had occurred in Africa where I had no money to go to the hospital. I went back to Ghana upon successful completion of my program at Acadia. However, I came back to Canada shortly after that to save my life from danger I was again homeless with no money in my pocket as a refugee claimant in Toronto. My vision of starting a skill training ministry had been crushed I had escaped to Canada with no sense of purpose or vision other than a safe place to go. I got very depressed but took consolation in the word of God that says "I will not leave you neither will I forsake you". "If you pass through the fire I'm with you.". Clearly the Lord provided his people to care for me as I was transferred from the downtown shelter to Matthew house where I felt very much at home and went through some grieve counseling. My application for status in Canada as a refugee was rejected and I filed an appeal which was also denied. I therefore applied to remain in Canada on humanitarian grounds. Throughout this period I supported myself by working in a factory as a general laborer. One afternoon while I was busy fixing the doors of the television stand that I used to assemble, the supervisor came and told me to stop and start folding the cardboards nearby for the shipping of the units that I had completed. Barely a minute after I left, a pile of board on the rack close to where I was sitting tumbled and crushed

the chair and the unit which I was fixing. I realized at that moment that the protective hand of God was still upon me in spite of all the immigration difficulties I was encountering. My application for humanitarian and compassionate grounds was rejected and I was scheduled to be deported from Canada. It was through this deportation process that the Lord appointed his people to champion my cause. I did not do anything on my own other than comply with the government to leave. The whole Country advocated for me to remain in Canada. The God I serve had a bigger plan than that. He allowed me to be deported and used His people in Canada to get me back with my family in ten month. Our immigration fee and air fares were all paid for us. What an awesome God we serve. All things work for the good of those who love him. God has indeed fought my battles for me and I have seen his goodness in the land of the living

Call to Ministry

My sense of call to Christian ministry was revealed to me in 1988. I applied for admission to Acadia University's Master of Theology program upon completion of my course at Fourah Bay College the University of Sierra Leone. Dr. Andrew MacRae, the head of faculty at the time replied that, he sensed God was calling me into full time ministry and offered to give me admission into the Master of Divinity program . This was confirmed by the Reverend Robert Smith who encouraged me to apply for the Master of Divinity program which would give me adequate preparation for ministry. I was awarded a full scholarship and admission into the Acadia Divinity College Master of Divinity program. Rather unfortunately, my preparation to proceed to Canada the following year was cut short when I got trapped in the civil war and eventually captured by the rebels. It was in captivity when I knew I could be killed in every minute that I kept praying for God to spare my life and use me for whatever purpose he pleases. I witnessed first hand the atrocities the youth inflicted on the people the captured. They had little or no education and no skilled trade to make a living. The majority of them were happy to join the rebel movement because the gun gave them new status and power. It was in this situation that my calling to reach out to the youth was formed I was quite certain that God was calling me to minister to the youth in Africa. When that plan was aborted and I found myself in Toronto as a refugee claimant, I still nurtured the desire to go back. In the interim, I started to reach out to the youth in the Jane and Finch area where I resided. As I made friends with the youth on the streets and the Community centres, they led me to their homes where I discovered the open acceptance of their parents. The demand for my time by the youth and their parents

became so great that it became impossible for me to juggle the factory work and the community outreach at the same time. I continued as a volunteer for two years under the direction and supervision of Rev. Mel Finlay of Fallingbrook Heights Baptist before he approached Youth Unlimited on my behalf for the possibility of full employment. At the appointed time, when Friendship Community Church went to Youth Unlimited looking for a Youth worker for the Jane and Finch area, they were referred to me and I eventually got hired By Youth Unlimited under a partnership with Friendship Church. This partnership has now expanded to include Lisle Memorial Baptist Church, Agape Ministries, and the Yorkwoods, Salvation Army Church.

I came to Youth for Christ so that I could be part a team of an existing Youth serving organization. Apart from the fact that I did not want to work in isolation, I wanted to benefit from the training and direct supervision which Youth for Christ offered.

It has been such a blessing to be part of this outreach Ministry because it naturally fits into my way of life. Many a time, both the youth and their families have wondered about the type of job I do for a living. This is because I am often seen by most families as a friend who is interested in helping them or an uncle to the youth. It is not my nature to impose myself on people and this ministry has helped me to reach out to people in their natural environment with the message of Christ's love for them.

Experience of Ministry

I did not know the extent at which God has been using me to bless the lives of the people I have been ministering to, until I was ordered to be deported in 2003. The show of support by the youth and their families and the entire community bore ample testimony of how God has blessed their lives through this ministry. On my part I could see clearly that God is at work in this ministry and I am just following his leading to reach out to people that he wants me to serve. I can not boast of any incredible gift or ability to do this work yet people have time to listen to me and confide in what I have to say. Young people who are termed as "at risk" do not turn me away. It is very humbling to know that God can use someone like me who came to Canada as a homeless refugee claimant, deportee-returnee, brought back and stricken with cancer. I have learnt through all this that it is not by my might or power that this ministry is functioning but by the spirit of God. He has assigned people to pray for me and support me financially so that through him I can bring the message of hope to the helpless. The greatest challenge has been the enormity of the work

that needs to be done in this area. Dealing with peoples problems continually can be emotionally draining. But I take consolation and joy in the fact that, at least I am here as a point of reference and support for people who have nowhere else to turn to. I have seen how the youth in the programs have grown physically, socially, academically and spiritually over the past six years that I have been in contact with them. Families that were on the brink of collapse have stayed strong and intact. Young people and their mothers who have no one else to talk to can confide in me. People in detention and those with cases in the law courts resort to me for help even though I am not a lawyer. The schools in the community have come to recognize the invaluable service provided through this ministry and continue to seek my help when needed. The entire Jane and Finch community, the city of Toronto, the Province of Ontario and the Federal government have all come to recognize this ministry. These types of recognitions is not something that I seek or covert as I am not in this ministry for personal aggrandizement. God has also been faithful by bringing alongside me, dedicated volunteers, prayer partners and financial supporters who have helped to meet the needs of the ministry. This ministry has completely altered my life. Whether I like it or not, the Lord has brought my name into the limelight. This comes with a greater sense of responsibility. And that is to continually lead a life that is full of virtues and worthy of emulation. My greatest joy comes from my innate realization that I am one of the Lord's laborers working in his vineyard. This has changed my focus in life from striving to acquire all the material things in this world to kingdom building. Through all these, I have learnt to depend on him to supply all my needs.

Philosophy of Ministry

My philosophy of ministry is based upon my passion and conviction that God desires to know and be known to his children, and that I am an extension of his heart and love to those I serve. I believe that the primary purpose of the church is to equip the members to reach out to those who are outside of its confines and reconcile them with God. "How will they believe if they have not heard" As Christians, if we believe in justice, mercy, salvation ,faith, stewardship, reconciliation, and redemption then we must go beyond believe to valuing. My method is to bring Christ to people where they are through word and deed. This involves reordering my lifestyle to identify with and invest in the down trodden and neglected. Love is at the epicenter of it all and it is experienced deeply in relationships with other people.

. When it comes to impacting and transforming lives, my abilities and skills can only get me so far. To be relational instrument in peoples lives requires me to actively see others through the eyes of God. I seek to do the following:

- take the time to enter into relationship with them and listen to them;
- take the effort to love them as though I am the only person who ever will;
- and take the opportunities to lead and walk alongside them towards a deeper relationship with God as they learn about His love for them.

To accomplish the above, I must pursue the goal to model and create a ministry climate where people are valued, feel safe, desire to be, and where Christ is the lens where ideas come into focus.

I believe that being real, relevant and relational is the hallmark of successfully imparting truth, challenging personal growth and character transformation, and equipping them to pursue the God-given purpose for their lives.

I believe that the church must be an extension of the real world classroom where people are allowed to explore life issues in an open, forgiving, and healing environment. Through relationships, individuals learn how to integrate, live and reflect Christ according to spiritual insights that apply to their situations.

In order to meet the spiritual needs of this generation I contend that these values must be integrated into my philosophy of ministry:

- **Authenticity** - Being real and being okay with that
- **Relational connectedness** - Transformation happens in community and we belong to something bigger than ourselves
- **Elasticity** - Change is expected and encouraged
- **Practicality** - The truth applies to real, daily life stuff
- **Interactivity** - There are no spectators on our journey together to "become"
- **Experiential learning** -The integration of faith applied to the individuals personal life encourages transformation in character, knowledge and belief

- **Simplicity** - The truth is easily understood, translated and applied
- **Holiness** - God is real, powerful and He cares about us
- **De-institutionalizing the church** - Its not about our organizations numbers, its about the Kingdom...and the Kingdom is where we live, work *and worship* ...and those "numbers" are His children who need to know Him.

Realizing that the first step in any philosophy of ministry must be establishing priorities, I have established the following personal and pastoral priorities.

Personal

- Seek God first as the central priority in life (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 6:33)
- Model a character of Christ (1Tim. 4:12,15-16; 1 pet. 5:3)
- Continually build a strong marriage relationship (Eph. 5:25; 1Tim 3:4)
- Model the great commission by doing the work of an evangelist(1 Tim 3:7; 2Tim 4:5)

Pastoral

- Lead others by establishing loving relationships (1John:3:8)
- Bible study, prayer, and spiritual preparation for teaching (Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim 2:15)
- Disciple and mentor the youth in my programs
- Visit, counsel, encourage, and love the youth and their families as well as the body of Christ.

What I have come to see most of all is that ministry is not a position to be acquired in the church.

It is not an occupation held by people who have gone through the proper channels of interviewing and questionnaire answering. Ministry is a vocation, one that all people can participate in. You can serve right where you are, with or without any official sanction

Ministry Development

1. Lead weekly sports program

2. Bring in new young teens from the community to join the sports program and the boys and girls (WAVE) club.
3. During the programs, have a discussion time about personal and spiritual issues
4. Develop 1- to- 1 mentor relationships between leaders and youth that extend beyond regular program in order to engage in whole-person ministry: addressing social , physical, material, emotional, mental and spiritual needs.
5. Befriend parents and families of participants, providing help and counseling as needed
- 6 Direct youth and families to other sources of help in community, as needed

Special summer program

- 1 Seek federal grants for summer student workers (through Youth Unlimited and coalition of local churches)
- 2 Recruit summer student workers
- 3 Research, plan and promote an extended summer youth sports program
- 4 Prepare and fund raise for summer program
- 5 Implement and evaluate summer program

Ministry team Development

- 1 Enlist suitable senior teen grads from last year's program as assistants
- 2 Recruit a team of adult volunteers from the coalition of local churches and other partner churches to help with the existing programs
- 3 Screen Candidates
- 4 Orient and train team members to their responsibilities
- 5 mentor the teen leaders individually, coaching life skills and faith development
- 6 Provide pastoral leadership and encouragement to the team

Church Partner Relations

- 1 participate in local church coalition
- 2 Speak in partner churches, presenting ministry and involvement opportunities
- 3 In consultation with church leaders , recruit volunteers in partnering churches
- 4 Guide and encourage the process of involving community youth in churches

5 Provide quarterly written report /letters to partner and supporting churches

6 Visit supporting churches, at least annually

Future Development strategy

1 Continually update research of community needs and services

2 Build relationships with relevant social agencies and key community players

3 Assess needs of local youth

4 Evaluate effectiveness of current program, including feedback from youth, parents and volunteers

5 Research other programs to similar populations

Personal Stewardship

1 Pursue a vital spiritual life and growing relationship with God

2 Develop and maintain life balance ensuring social, mental, emotional, physical well being

3 Develop a personal support team for the purpose of encouragement

4 Participate in regular accountability and development with Youth Unlimited supervisor

5 Participate in regular accountability with church partners

6 Pursue other learning needed for responsibilities. Eg. youth culture, community development, mediation,
etc

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