

WHO IS GOD?

FUNMI ANU BANKOLE

*“The Literary Queen
of Domestic Fiction”*

Reader's Digest

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BY

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Dedication

To everyone out there personally searching for God's identity and a relationship with Him; to individuals who, for one reason or another, believe they can be great but aren't sure how to make this happen; to the struggling boy, girl, man, and woman daily praying that things will change, someday, for good; to people trapped under several misguiding teachers, advisers, and mentors who daily rob them of the truth about God's destined purpose for them; and to great partners in faith always setting the standards for God's enthronement here on earth.

Acknowledgement

This book is a product of a lifetime of personal search and learning processes. It is the sum of what many people around me have experienced, taught, and lived. I truly believe that everything in life is a part of something and, to grow this part, we must recognise the contributions of others in our lives which lead us to our destined purpose. There is no result without actions imputed; therefore, I owe every contributor, adviser, teacher, mentor, supporter, friend, and family member many thanks. This would have been impossible without you.

Finally, I acknowledge the Almighty Father who has made Himself a template for all that is contained in this book. I am forever indebted to Him for the privilege he has given me to share His deposits with my world—thank You for everything.

Introduction

My childhood stories lacked candies and cinemas. They were all sweaty and sun-burnt. Life as a 10-year-old street hawker made the difference. The daily runs after vehicles, trying to dodge touts and outrunning my peers to sell off my pan-sized goods, were the best of childhood. In doing this, did I lose more than I gained from selling to passengers on the running buses? Yes, I did but these losses were incomparable to the help my mother received from my daily gains. The street life was tough because it had nothing more to offer than a tough response.

As I grew older, I began to love a tiny space behind the people-littered bus stop. The choking odour balancing an indiscriminate stereo blast uplifting the ghetto were all that attracted me. Some days, I sat to dream about what life would be like if I never had to hawk again. Other days, I let my body find rest on the half-broken slab.

My little space was my fortress. There, I recited my favourite Psalm. Psalm 23 was my favourite because I could recite it from the heart. It wasn't as complex as the other psalms read to my mother and me on Sundays in our local parish church.

Another part of childhood that kept me going was my love for education. It didn't matter the time or what my health status was; my assignments were always given maximum attention. Education was my weapon against all I had to go through. It was the brightest side of life for me—a fair slice of God's empowerment. No one around me was fit to be called a 'model'—the best a girl could grow into was a housewife. The older men found comfort in being menial workers. Crime was something to be indifferent about; it was as regular as the air we breathe in and out. It was worthless shouting each time I saw my peers or some older colleagues cry. The real story was not too far from them being raped, robbed or recording the death of a friend.

Life on the streets was harsh and I daily kept my dream of leaving the street someday for a better life. It, at first, felt like a mirage but as I put the work into my studies, my dreams began to shape into reality. My favourite psalm also fuelled me on. I began to spend more time reciting and reading it even though I had no understanding of the mysteries

behind it. This scripture became a part of me and, over time, I could barely do anything without reciting and reflecting on this psalm. I made more gains when I read it and less when I didn't. Reciting Psalm 23 brought life into me and the opposite was the reality when I refused to recite it.

This is a glance into my childhood. It is indeed an experience worth remembering. A part of this story which I have chosen to keep till the end is the part where I sat in my little corner with my eyes shooting into the skies, birds racing after one another during the peak hour of a sunny market day. I had just finished the day's sales and was in my little space to catch some rest. The day had been fair and sales had also been good. But something felt odd and different in my view. It was as though I needed answers to some questions. I truly needed to know why God was considered God. A lot of questions flooded my mind, the same way it floods it now that I am far away from the streets and the hardship that comes with being there. I did ask questions like, "God, who are you?", "Where are you?", "Are you really there?", "Why am I on the street while other children are enjoying their parent's house?", "What if You are not really whom people say you are?" These questions, and more, I want to believe are among the reasons you have chosen to read this book. If not, I admit that I am wrong but I will love you to follow me as we explore answers to many of my childhood questions.

Part One

Chapter 1: Who Is God?

I repeatedly asked these questions since I clocked 10 years old: “who exactly are you, God?” “Who are you to me?” “Why am I created?” “What's my purpose in life?” This curiosity and more matured with me as a street hawker turned into an established woman. For years, I sought answers but, one evening, I was led by the Holy Spirit to read the first chapter of Genesis.

This was the story about creation. The emphasis in the first verse is on God creating the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1). It then explains how the earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. The scripture goes on to talk about the spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters before God makes the pronouncement, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3 KJV).

Now knowing that whatever it was that troubled me then was a deposit kick-started by the Holy Spirit motivated me the more into probing deeper into the person of God. I needed to be certain of God’s plan for my life. Was I ever in His plan? And if truly I was, what was the proof in my life?

I often asked in the place of meditation, “Who are you, God?”

As a little child, I thought about God as some big and invisible being watching over everyone from somewhere beyond the skies. And on maturing into a young adult, it began to sink in that God is always with me. He lives in me and His breath is my breath. His life is in me and this justifies my being, called a “living being” today (Genesis 2:7).

In Genesis 1:1-3, God created the heavens and the earth. His infinity quality as God is explored in this verse to the point of being in awe of Him. He, in this verse, proves himself to be omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, the Alpha and Omega, the consuming fire, and the one who is everlasting. In terms of needs, God shows up as our most dependable supplier; He stands tall as our great healer; He is our deliverer, and much more.

In understanding the illuminating quality and person of God, it is important that we peep into the reality of darkness as explored by God in Genesis 1:1-3.

Here, the Bible introduces us to the state of things before the creation of light. We are confronted by phrases like “without form”, “void”, and

“darkness”.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” (Genesis 1:1-2 KJV)

Darkness, the opposite of light represents negativity and all that is keeps one outside the light. It is stagnation, and in my life I had experienced a series of dark eras. Life had truly been dark since childhood. From hawking foodstuffs at a young age to sponsoring myself through higher education, I can tell a thing or two about darkness. We all have stories to tell but the meat here is that we remain in darkness as long as we are outside the Light, God.

There are many records of dark moments in the Bible but I will love it if we can read through these few below.

The man Bartimaeus perfectly captures what it means to be in darkness. Since birth, he had never seen a thing. He had never had that confidence of picking a bright or cool colour amidst a heap of materials. He was always sitting by the road side begging for alms. But on one particular day, Jesus chose to go to Jericho. Passing through His route, Bartimaeus seized the opportunity to cry to Jesus for light. He did not allow his limitations bar him from shouting the name of Jesus when he noticed Him passing by. The Bible explains that this was when he cried even more.

“Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging.” (Mark 10:46 NIV)

“When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, ‘Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!’ (Mark 10:47 NIV).

Bartimaeus knew that a sealed mouth was a sealed destiny, so he sought the healing of Jesus Christ. Many hunted him down with words; still he was resolute to the end. He kept on shouting “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47 NIV). For persons like Bartimaeus, there was really nothing to lose. He had lost his sight and was poor. He had no name and was but a stack of leftover pity in the society. Darkness had swallowed up the best of him but when he encountered the Light, things changed for him.

Another person who experienced darkness was the 38-year-old lame man at the pool of Bethesda. The Bible reads:

“Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.”

“And certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. (John 5:2-9 KJV)

It is arguable that this man must have lost all hope of ever walking again. He must have concluded that his case was forever defeated and he resigned to his fate. He had felt others jump into the water year in, year out yet he remained dependent on finding someone to help push him into the river. There was help in sight yet still he couldn't access it. What could be more frustrating than this?

The man at the Beautiful Gate adds more insight to this experience. In Acts 3:2, this man was said to be at the gate day in, day out yet still he never had anyone think about him. People went in and came out of the temple with varied testimonies but he had no share in this. It was as though he was doomed to remain in his condition until he met the Light resident in the life of Apostle Peter.

Jabez, too, was a known character in Bible. Imagine the shame of being called a “son of sorrow” and having to answer to that, because that was, indeed, the meaning of his birth name. If Jabez had not come into contact with the Almighty God, he would have died unfulfilled. His encounter with the Light, who is God, later made him a man of influence in his society. He was said to have a whole city named after him, as recorded in 1 Chronicles 2:55.

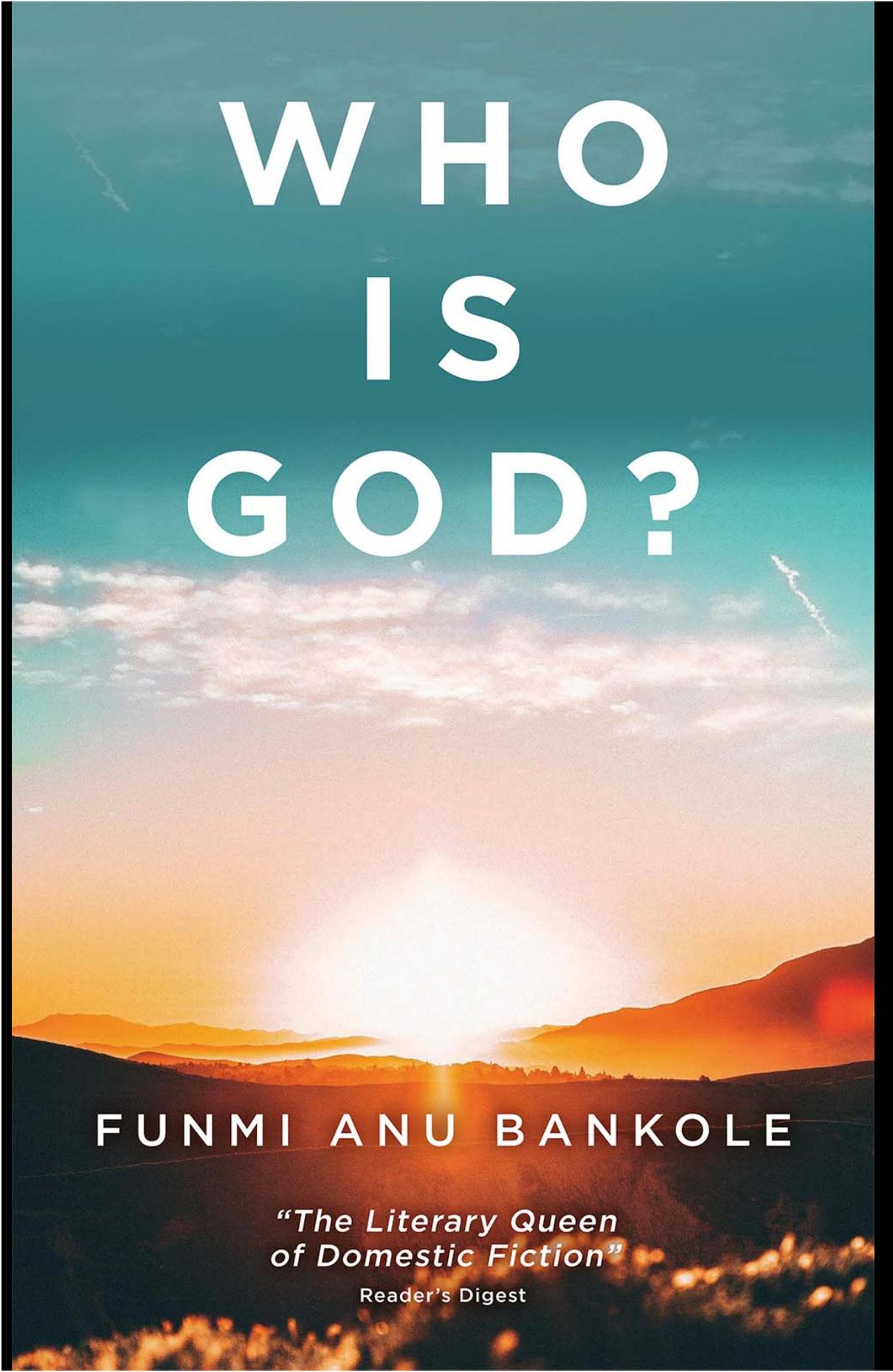
How many people are out there with such pain and sorrow greater than what Jabez went through? A few! Even with the numbers, it is obvious that many people in today's world are constantly struggling with their lives in different spheres.

Death, especially the death of a young person, can be very devastating in a family. It doesn't matter what the cause of the death is, as it was revealed in Luke 7:12 about a widow who was on her way to bury her only son. She had already lost her husband; now the only remaining child was dead. How easy would she have summed up her life if not as something close to Naomi's choice of being called "Mara" in place of "Naomi". But these women's lives changed into something better when they experienced the Light. There, darkness disappeared as the widow got her son back and Naomi also got her life back in a bigger way.

Darkness only exudes stagnation. It is always tedious trying to make progress in the dark because movements in the dark are never stable. It's just guesswork all the day, unlike the confidence that comes with the light. Everything stands still. This was explicitly captured in Exodus 10:21-23 when God commanded Moses to stretch out his hands so that the hovering darkness should cover Egypt.

"So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and for three days a thick darkness was all over the land of Egypt [no sun, no moon, no stars]. The Egyptians could not see one another, nor did anyone leave his place for three days, but all the Israelites had [supernatural] light in their dwellings. (Exodus 10:22-23 AMP)

Even though what is seen here centres on physical darkness, still the same condition is foreseeable in the innate darkness—that is, spiritual darkness. Anyone in this state becomes a walking corpse.



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