

A SPEECH BY DR. EMMANUEL T. ABRAHAM, AS A GUEST SPEAKER ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2021 INOYO-TORO FOUNDATION TEACHER EXCELLENCE AWARD CEREMONY HELD AT THE E- LIBRARY, UYO ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2021

It is my pleasure to have been invited as a Guest Speaker on the occasion of the 2021 Inoyo-Toro Foundation Teacher Excellence Award Ceremony. It is yet another wonderful opportunity for me to join in appreciating the roles, place and value of teachers in education as well as the society in general. As a matter of fact, humanity has relentlessly developed ways to foster comfort, break new frontiers and attain perpetuity in the sustenance of life. Humanity has also, over time, established some values and institutionalized learning systems transferable from one generation to another. In the midst of this continuous efforts to uplift humanity, the TEACHER is the pivot. The Teacher is saddled with the responsibility to custody and disseminate set instructions, knowledge schemes, skills, models and behavioural patterns for the advancement of human existence. The teacher, therefore, is the backbone of our development and the light of our society.

I thank the Inoyo-Toro Foundation for initiating a giveback programme that recognizes and celebrates the Teacher, the real-time driver of the world's civilization from time immemorial. Thanks again to this Foundation for keeping the initiative alive for many years now.

Obviously, the philosophy of Inoyo-Toro Foundation is a testament affirming the teacher as the custodian of the essence that keeps the world in place even while it turns around; Inoyo-Toro Foundation is a saving grace to a world that has in many ways neglected the responsibility to fan the embers of the source of its life. The Teacher deserves celebration and reward!

Let me specifically congratulate all the Teacher awardees who have been invited for honour today. By all standards, you are heroes, considering your impacts towards grooming sound human capital in character and learning. Congratulations for being found worthy of honour amongst equals. I urge this audience to accord you utmost special regard as the custodian of societal ethos and values through your professional philosophy, disposition and functions.

I have been privileged to be raised by teachers. I am a teacher to a large extent. In fact, I have taught in Kizito Comprehensive Secondary School,

Adiasim as an Auxilliary teacher and Muslim High School, Shagamu as a Youth Corper. I have contributed to the production of teachers. I have also worked and collaborated with teachers.

In this ceremony and at this moment, I am required to share the story of my life journey with everyone here present. This story is made sensible, reasonable and valuable because of my experiences with teachers. I have benefited from the 'home school' where my first teachers were my dear parents and other family members. They put into play every resource at their disposal to fashion out a boy, called Emmanuel, to become a man that would today showcase the fear of God, honesty, integrity, faith, transparency and prudence. Permit me to assert and emphasize that home is the first and greatest school where moral lessons, crafts, skills, daily chores and etiquettes are learnt with the mother as the nurturing Teacher and the father as the moderating Headmaster. These are teachers of no mean repute!

Ladies and gentlemen, as teachers your core responsibility starts from home as fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunties, uncles and as grandparents where you have the opportunity to engrave in the "tabular racer" of the child some guiding principles, academic knowledge and life skills.

I have attempted a documentary of my life journey of over sixty years in an autobiography that I have carefully titled "The Previous Hours of My Present Days". The book x-rays my humble beginning, the challenge of material poverty, my determination to succeed, risk-taking, submission to discipline and faith in God. The book is not only applicable to all but also a source of inspiration and guidance regardless of age, status, gender, occupation and religion. I am therefore pleased to use this opportunity to donate fifty copies of the book to Inoyo-Toro Foundation for onward presentation of a copy to each of the awardees and one copy to the library of their respective schools.

Today, I appreciate with excitement and profound gratitude to God the life I have lived which I have tried to summarise in my aforementioned autobiography. I am a man who has lived more than 60 years on planet earth, nurtured from a humble rural home setting. I am an experienced 'village boy'. I have been educated right from primary school through to the university level, with the ultimate degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). I have served in the National Youth Service Corps.

My very humble beginning in a rural setting with poor but honest and humble parents who lived in a cranky thatch house imposed on me the responsibility to imagine a future with greater value. I enjoyed participating in typical rural house chores/activities such as sweeping, fetching of water from the stream, fetching of firewood from the bush and trekking for many kilometres to school. I did not only trek to the primary school. One very significant trek that constitutes something to remember in my life journey is the one that took place on Sunday, October 2, 1977. I had to trek a distance of about 8 km from Mkpatak to Obo Annang Junction just to save some amount to enable me pay my way to resume studies at the University of Calabar. I did not have enough money to enjoy the luxury of a paid cyclist or taxi. This 'great trek' eventually turned out to be the foundation of a great turning point in my life journey. The trek resulted in my ultimate acquisition of a Valedictory First Class Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics from the University of Calabar. The trek was a precursor to my becoming a great Malabite! The trek connected me to 'superman' of Inoyo-Toro Foundation, Mr. Udom Inoyo.

Ladies and gentlemen, part of my life journey has been the luck to grow and come of age to supervise the ceremonies of the departures of my parents, my wonderful home teachers. I have intentionally inherited their virtues of hard work, honesty, peaceful life, obedience, good character and reliance on God's guidance.

I have had a successful career in the financial sector for seventeen eventful years. I have been actively engaged in entrepreneurial activities in the past twenty five years, (nineteen of which have been in the consultancy and educational services). As at today, I have been married for 34 years, two months, three weeks and six days, to one wife. I have parented three wonderful children from infancy to adulthood and I am a father-in-law. The children have progressed from the home school (where I assumed the role of a headmaster), primary, secondary schools, and university education to gain BSc to PhDs and one is a medical doctor.

I saw and experienced the Nigerian civil war. Given the material poverty background of my parents, I did not escape starvation and hunger. I faced challenges and struggled to overcome obstacles right from infancy. Such embarrassments as being sent home from school for non-payment of school

fees could not break my ambition. With God on my side, I remained focussed under the burden of the challenges.

I have a definitive Christian background. I am a strong believer in hard work, merit, goodwill, integrity, truth, obedience, authenticity, and humility. I read profusely, widely and explore multi-disciplinary subject matters. I cherish great mentors and role models. My mentorship/role model books include the Holy Bible, Weep Not Child, The Animal Farm, The Great Expectation, Thriving Under Chaos, What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School.

I am a lover of Peace and peaceful life and believe strongly in Romans 12:8-20. I am an Author of books and many Seminar/Conference/Symposium Papers. I am also a motivational speaker, a good organizer, planner, prudent and careful financial manager. I love to play some philanthropic roles to the best of my ability, believing that "givers never lack". I am versatile, a positive thinker with admirable sense of humour. I am very quality conscious, careful and a stickler for Excellence. I am someone who has enjoyed ABRAHAM'S BLESSINGS as in Genesis 12.

My Life Vision is "Commitment to Service of Value to Humanity for the Glory of God". Indeed, the service of value to humanity is to teach value, guide diligently and celebrate excellence at all times.

From the background of the "Previous Hours" of my life journey, it could not have been easily predictable that Emmanuel, born to a village carpenter as a father and rural petty farmer as a mother, both of whom lived in a cranky thatch house in a typical rural setting, could today stand out as a husband, father of Doctors, a successful banker, a successful entrepreneur, Proprietor of the famous Topfaith Schools, and founder of Topfaith University. This same Emmanuel has had the privilege and opportunity to travel to at least four of the seven continents of the world. Thus, reflecting on my life roadmap, it is obvious that it has been characterised by doggedness, inspirations, focus and commitments. It is therefore important to advise that one should not despise the days of humble beginnings but remain determined to honestly succeed against all odds.

In conclusion, be it known that my life is a true story of outstanding belief in God, belief in myself and a commitment to serve humanity!

Thank you all for listening.