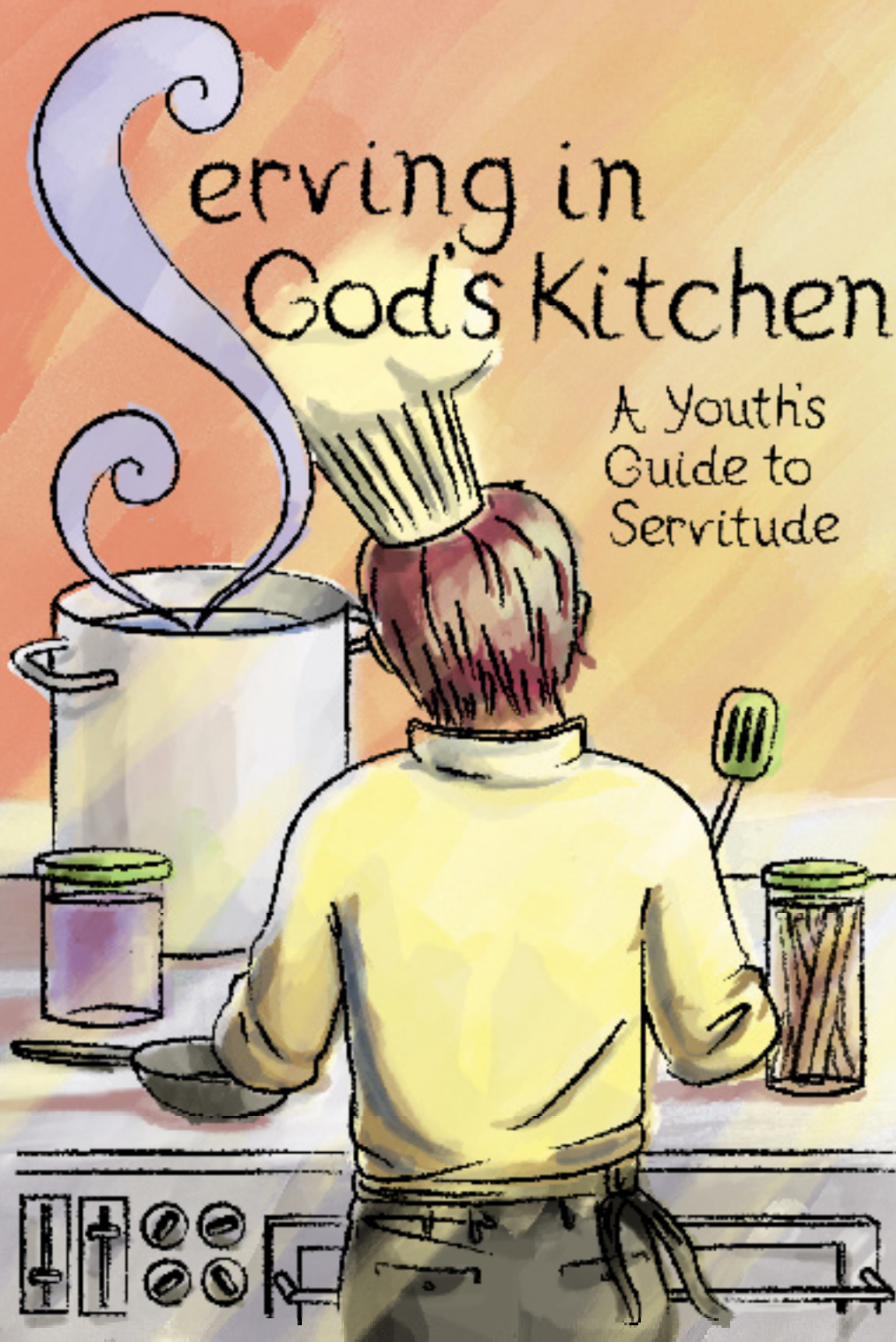


Serving in God's Kitchen

A Youth's
Guide to
Servitude



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Preface

When we were little, many of us lifted adoring eyes up to parents and older brothers and sisters who served in the house of the Lord. We wondered when we'd be able to join the work and whether we'd be able to serve as faithfully when we grew up. Or maybe we came to the church on our own when we were older. Either way, the question remains the same: how can I enter into this most precious service of the Lord?

There comes a point when we no longer want to be the ones at the dining table being served, enjoying the food others prepare for us. The sounds of cooking and the aromas wafting out from the kitchen intrigue us. We can't wait to enter the kitchen and try our hand at the dishes we've seen the chefs make time and time again.

But stepping into the kitchen is just the beginning - questions and problems will inevitably follow. As you start out, it is impossible to perfect the difficult dishes right away. You find out that tossing pizza dough isn't as easy as it looks. Your mousse cake may cave in on your first try. After the initial excitement of putting on the chef's hat wears off, there will be times when the glamour fades. You will realize that a large portion of time in the kitchen is spent on repetitive tasks such as washing dishes and mincing garlic. Disagreements may arise between chefs and fill the kitchen with tension. On some days, the kitchen can even catch on fire.

These are all experiences that youth everywhere commonly face in servitude. May this booklet remind you that we are all going through these challenges and that we should not allow them to keep us from serving.

May many happy cooking days be ahead for you, and on the not-so-happy days, may the Master Chef Himself keep us inspired and strengthened to remain in this lifelong work of serving in the Lord's kitchen.

Happy cooking!



Chapter 1: New Chef in the Kitchen

The sun shines through your window as you wake up to a new day. It's not just any old day. It's the day you become an official chef in THE kitchen- the kitchen all your friends and family have been working in, the kitchen you've wanted to work in ever since you could remember.

As you walk through the thick doors to greet the other chefs, you feel a knot in your stomach. Questions, fear, and anxiety strike your mind as you are about to enter a world unknown. All these new feelings coming at once are overwhelming, but you knew this was the process you had to go through when working under the Master Chef.

Similarly, when we are finally able to start doing holy work at church, we experience the same mixture of feelings as a new chef in the kitchen. Growing up, we have seen people surrounding us immersed in serving God. As a result, we develop the will to serve God as well. When the opportunity actually comes though, some of us may become fearful and anxious.

Starting out in servitude is like becoming a new chef in the kitchen. It is up to you to get familiar with the environment while getting along with the other chefs. You need to share the cooking ingredients when faced with the dinner rush and trust the Master Chef when things go wrong. As you face the heat of servitude, we hope that this guide can help you orient yourself around the kitchen.

Just starting out – spiritual cultivation

Keywords: Spiritual cultivation, change of heart, guidance of the Holy Spirit, age

Throughout most of my middle school and high school years, I felt that I was still too young to do anything for God. I felt that it wasn't my responsibility, but rather the responsibility of the college youths or for those who were older. "Just be a good RE student for now", I foolishly told myself, thinking that I would just start doing church work once I got older. Evidently, I didn't think that I was going to serve God in any way other than cleaning the bathrooms and washing the dishes anytime soon. Little did I know that a two-week church seminar would change my persisting unwillingness to serve God.

Since I didn't really like to go to church seminars, I would go to Taiwan with my family for a whole two months in order to stay away from people who always insisted on me going to church seminars. But for some odd reason, during the summer of my junior year in high school, I felt like giving RHTS (Regional High School Theological Seminar) a shot. After my first week at RHTS, I was disappointed by the atmosphere and was ready to pack my bags to go home. Before making my final decision, however, I knelt down before God and asked Him to change my heart so that I would not waste the time I had already spent at the seminar and go home empty handed. I told Him that I wanted to have a heart that desired to do work for Him instead of being disappointed in everything and afraid of it all the time. There were so many aspects of my life that I wanted to change. For example, I wanted to change the way I would judge others and get easily annoyed or disappointed by them. I also wanted to be able to incorporate daily spiritual cultivation into my life and live a life of servitude. I prayed that I'd be able to kneel down in my own room every day to pray to Him and also to read His words daily as well. Soon after that prayer, I found myself sitting alone with a sense of peace in my heart. I made a determination to learn as much as I could before leaving RHTS and to transform myself into a whole new person. Knowing myself, I thought that in about two weeks after the seminar, I would probably end up failing, unable to reach my set goals. At the same time, however, I also felt that this time around things would actually be different. I felt ready to begin my new way of life as a servant of God.

After RHTS ended, I was able to maintain my changed heart through the guidance of the Holy Spirit up to this day. I prayed daily, read the Bible daily, gained an optimistic mindset, and became less easily angered and much gentler. I was so changed that even my own father, who doesn't usually say much to me, exclaimed that he noticed a real difference in me and that he was truly happy for me. Thank God, it was after I had completely changed my heart that I was suddenly called to be a servant for Him. A little while after RHTS, I was asked to hymn lead, join the evangelical team, act as an MC for an event, and become an RE teacher all on one Sabbath day. After that, I was called to do other holy work that I would have never imagined doing before even starting college. Through this experience, I realized that it doesn't matter what age you are when you begin to do holy work for the Lord. God doesn't say, "oh, you're in college now

so you can serve me” or “now that you’re 20, you can start serving me.” No one is ever too young or too old to serve God. As long as you have the willing heart to serve Him and the determination to have a changed lifestyle of daily spiritual cultivation, He will open up the perfect opportunities for you to serve Him at the right time.



I have never performed this holy work. How do I start?

Keywords: inexperience, spiritual cultivation; abidance of God

Performing holy work is a great blessing from the Lord. However, there may be times when we are presented with work in which we are inexperienced. Despite such challenges, we have to remember that we are serving a faithful God who will always give us what we need to serve Him. When I moved to college, I also had to make the transition between churches. I grew up in a large church and was accustomed to that environment. However, there was no established True Jesus Church around my university. Rather, there was a fellowship area where a few families, students, and working youth gathered to observe the Sabbath. A typical Sabbath service for them would consist of watching a sermon recording in the morning and having Bible study in the afternoon. Thank God that though this fellowship was still very young, the members were able to rent a chapel and have a regular worship location. Nonetheless, as a relatively undeveloped area, there was a great need for holy work and holy workers. Some of the work that needed to be done I had done before, but others I had never performed and was unsure of where to start.

Shortly after moving into the area, I was asked if I could help lead Bible studies and teach religious education. Prior to this time I had never led a Bible study before, nor had I ever received any training; needless to say, I was very intimidated and afraid. However, I had attended the Religious Education Teachers’ Seminar and had been teaching for a few years already, so teaching religious education (RE) classes was not an issue. That is, until I realized that though there were children, there previously had not been any RE classes. When they asked if I could teach RE, they actually meant for me to establish a religious education system, and then start teaching. These were both services that I had never performed before, and I was clueless on what to do.

In regards to leading Bible study, all I could do at first was try to imitate the leaders of all the Bible studies that I had previously attended, but my memory could only take me so far. There also seemed to be many differences in the styles of Bible study, depending on who was leading. I did not notice one set way to lead Bible studies. When I led my first Bible study, I was a debacle of anxiety. I was too nervous to clearly state my thoughts or effectively lead a discussion. What was supposed to be an hour long analysis seemed to last an eternity. Afterwards, I decided that I needed help and that it would be better if I did not lead Bible studies until I was truly ready. The local sister who arranged

the scheduling of holy work saw my distress and referred me to a ministry guideline that had just been released by the National Youth Ministry. After reading the guideline, I found that my most lacking area was prayer. Without the abidance of God, our services are unworthy and vain. In all kinds of holy work, prayer is the most vital step of preparation. Especially with holy work like leading Bible studies or sermon speaking, it is the Holy Spirit that must speak for others to be edified. Having read the guidelines and spent much more time in prayer, the subsequent Bible studies I led were definitely much more trouble-free.

Unfortunately, there was no guideline on establishing a religious education system. However, I was able to find a description of the infrastructure of a church and its departments in the church council members' guide published by the General Assembly. In addition to this publication, I found that consulting older members who were more experienced was also very helpful. They encouraged me to continue trying, use my best effort, and pursue God's guidance. Their support comforted me and pointed me in the right direction, which was God. After much consultation and prayer with the members of the fellowship, we were able to start an RE system catered to the needs of our special circumstance.

Overall, there were many things that I learned from this experience. Firstly, in all services, even if it is not your first time, prayer is the most vital step of preparation. The holy work we do must be through God's strength alone. He is the one who allows others to be edified and experience spiritual growth. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Additionally, on our journey of faith, we are never alone. God has graciously provided us with many brothers and sisters, who have many experiences to share and from whom we can learn many things. They, as well as church publications, are an excellent source of guidance and counsel when doing holy work for the first time.



Serving away from home

Keywords: spiritual cultivation, initiative, willingness to serve God

Growing up in a small prayer house, participating in holy work was natural seeing as there were not many members. From a young age, the youth were trained in tasks such as hymnal leading and kitchen help. Others were gifted in playing the piano or translating. Each Sabbath, we would go to church already knowing which task we were assigned to that day. It all seemed so organized and systematic. I was comfortable with this and took it for granted until I went on a long-term trip away from home.

When I arrived at my destination in Taiwan, everything went smoothly. Thank God that I could attend Sabbath every week at a church that was close to where I lived. I had visited this church before, and every time the local members were

hospitable toward their visiting guest. However, this time I was staying for the duration of 6 months, and because the members were used to treating me as a visitor, I was not assigned any holy work. I enjoyed the break from running around on Sabbath, but after a while, I grew weary of not contributing. I slowly adjusted to my environment and no longer felt that I was only a visitor. When I realized that I had grown attached to this church and saw my friends serving, I felt it was time I resumed serving the Lord.

Although I was shy and did not know who to turn to, I knew I had to pray to God about my worries. I felt that I did not want to be a bother and break the orderly schedule by asking for a task, but I knew that repaying God for His love and mercy was something that needed to be done continuously. Miraculously, after several sincere prayers, a sister came and asked me to help out in a new tutoring program at church. God had heard my prayers and provided me with an opportunity that would not clash with the church's routine. Even when I did not know who to talk to, God had sent this sister to ask me if I was interested in the work! This taught me that even if the initiative to do God's work is in our hearts, by simply expressing our willingness to serve Him, we are giving Him room to use us as servants. It also reminded me what it was like to want to serve out of my own will and not out of routine. Just starting out, a lot of us don't know who to turn to or how to take the initiative. Praying is a great way to give ourselves courage. We need to remember that God listens to our sincere prayers and if we are praying for that opportunity to serve, He will not pass us by!



Working around my speech impediment to serve God

Keywords: obstacles, reliance on God, inexperience

Since childhood, I have had a speech impediment that prevents me from speaking articulately. In the past, when I wanted to talk to others and start new friendships, my difficulties in communicating well left me feeling lonely and useless. I became discouraged when what I said was expressed wrongly than what I had initially intended, or when other people found it hard to understand and carry a conversation with me.

The turning point came after a literal overnight transformation when God heard my sorrowful cries, lifting this burden from my heart and filling the hollow hole with courage and joy. Although my speech was still poor, I felt like a totally different person, motivated to talk to people without fear. It was this courage God gave me that became my first step to tackling my fears of communicating with people inside and outside of church.

Not long afterwards, a preacher inspired me to help in the divine work of the church. I didn't know what I could do, especially as I don't have any ability or eloquence to talk to others on a social scale. Nonetheless, I took the courage to ask a sister if there was any work I could help with and gladly received the duty

of printing out and mailing a national youth newsletter to all the local lost youths. From doing this basic administration work, I found the first type of church work I was able to participate in without needing any exceptional ability to carry out this task or having the necessary communication skills which was my weakness.

Later on, I was surprised that I was assigned to be one of the 'watchmen' to oversee the needs of a particular age-group of youths in my local church. Although I willingly accepted the role, I was a little perplexed as to why, regardless of my speech impediment, they let me have this important role.

I started to wonder about how I could look after the youths and as time went by, talking to them became a tough challenge. Gradually, the difficulties I encountered became a distress for me, making me question my suitability of being a watchman.

Upon reflection of my service to God, I now wonder why I became distressed in my experiences. Why didn't the joy last long? I have learnt that serving in God's house does not absolutely require us to have the adequate skills and experience to carry out the tasks that we have been assigned to; it is about trying and persevering through the problems we encounter and to seek for God's help and wisdom every step of the way. Although in some circumstances, it may help to have acquired expertise in a certain line of work, God doesn't expect us to succeed in what we do; He wants us to obey and to give our best in serving Him so God's glory can be manifested.

In reality, our successes are from God. We are God's servants and all the glory belongs to our Master. In order for God to be gloried through our work, we must rely on and obey God. Without our obedience, it is difficult for God to work in us. It is not our ability, but our obedience and willingness that give God the chance to work in us.

My communication skills continue to improve each day. Although I still have a speech impediment, I work around this weakness and rely on God's power to do His work. He has given me the opportunity to face my fear of speaking in a role where I would be positively challenged to communicate with the youths in church. From initially having no ability, God has instead given me the gift of courage to serve Him by tackling my problems head-on and now, I can serve God with joy because I understand that I need to serve God to let others see His glory.

Let us not let our lack of ability affect our service to God, for God is a God who gives and can see and hear those who are in need. He can give ability to those who lack it, just as He gave sight to the blind to show His glory, and just as He gave me courage as a motivating force to do His work. If you lack the ability in doing the work, turn to God for His mercy and grace so that you can successfully complete the work, for God's glory can be seen through our reliance on Him.

Do not be disheartened

Keywords: getting involved in holy work, starting out

Timmy grew up in church. For the most part, he would just come and go to church. He was always under the impression that holy work was for older brothers and sisters. Because of this, Timmy would simply mind his own business after Sabbath services. Week in and week out of his middle school and high school years, he never involved himself in any holy work other than his usual Sabbath cleaning. The years passed by and Timmy was about to enter college. Timmy thought the time had finally come when he would be asked to take up more responsibilities at church. However, he slowly realized that this idea had backfired on him. Despite being older, he was still only cleaning. Nothing had changed except that now Timmy was older and was also left with quite a dilemma.

Some of us are just like Timmy. At some point in our lives, we begin to understand and experience God, which leads us to think about what we can do to repay His love. We may think that as we get older, we will naturally take up more responsibilities at church. However, as we see from Timmy's case, this doesn't always happen. Having grown up in church myself, I sometimes wondered too if there were any more church duties left for me to do. So how can we ourselves get involved in holy work? This is a fair question and, more importantly, a natural and spiritually healthy one. It shows that our youth indeed have the desire and heart to serve the Lord. However, like Timmy, there are many young and growing brothers and sisters in our church struggling to get involved in holy work. Therefore, I believe there are two main ways we can consider to get involved in more holy work.

First of all, we have to start from somewhere. Whether it's taking out the trash, cleaning bathrooms, or helping to cook, we must begin with the simple tasks. Though cleaning may seem like lowly and menial work for some of us, we must continue to do it with a diligent and humble heart. Over time, these little works will go a long way for our own service as well as our own spirituality. Therefore, as we begin to develop this mentality in our servitude, it will become more and more apparent not only to ourselves but to others as well. This in turn will allow for older members to approach us about other holy work. For myself, Timmy and I were in very similar situations. I would often clean and help out with other related tasks, but I always wanted to do more than just clean so I adopted this attitude and desire to serve over time. One Sabbath afternoon, my RE teacher finally approached me. At first, I thought he was going to talk to me about the usual cleaning duties, but this time it was different. When he had started talking to me about being a hymn leader, I was surprised. I believe it was because of this consistent and continuous effort to serve I was even considered a candidate for hymn leading.

A second approach may be just as simple as asking what needs to be done. After I had already been actively leading hymns for over three years, I thought

it was about time to try my hand at something new. That was when I considered the idea to become an RE teacher. After all, I always liked playing with kids and I also thought to share my knowledge and personal experiences with them would certainly be edifying as well as beneficial. I thus decided I was going to ask the RE coordinator if I could start helping with RE teaching. After I asked her, I made the determination to do away with my previous bad habits and truly transform to live a holy and righteous life fit for an RE teacher. To make sure of this, I set for myself a strict and specific prayer and Bible reading regimen. Moreover, I took it upon myself to also get involved in more church activities, such as the local Bible studies and youth fellowships. Along with this new commitment came the love and support I needed from fellow brothers and sisters. As I continued this effort to transform my spirituality, the RE coordinator gradually caught on. She mentioned that she had indeed seen such a spiritual makeover in me. As a result, she informed me that I could continue to pursue my goal in becoming an RE teacher. By reshaping my spiritual life, I was then able to live a life fit for an RE teacher and more importantly a Christian. In our lives of servitude, there may be times when it is simply difficult to find any holy work to do because nobody is asking us. Therefore, the last lesson I learned from this trial was to be strong and courageous in order to take the initiative to ask for holy work ourselves.

I'm sure there are some of us that are still going through this stage in our servitude just like Timmy. However, we should not be disheartened because we know our God is a living God who will always provide a way for us. At the same time, we must also take action ourselves. First, we must make a commitment to truly transform our lives; this is done by the renewing of the Holy Spirit and by meditating upon the word of God. Since there is always a need for holy work to be done, the next step as His humble servants is to always be patient and always be willing to wait and accept the abundant opportunities God will provide for us. It is with this attitude that God will eventually allow us to partake in His work. Lastly, we must understand and utilize our God-given talents and also be strong and courageous. With this approach, we can then actively seek out holy work based on God's will. However, this attitude cannot just stop when we receive the holy work we want; we must continue to grow in the Lord and continue to do His will. I hope my experience can serve as an encouragement to those who are struggling with involving themselves in holy work. After all, we are put through these trials for a reason, so do not be disheartened and just reach out to Jesus because He's reaching out to you.



A Pillar in the House of God (Manna 11)

Keywords: aspiration, selflessness, meekness, determination

“He who overcomes. I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God; and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.” (Rev. 3:12).

Elder John was commissioned to write to encourage the believers of a spiritual church. He exhorts them to be victors and to become pillars in the temple of God. Pillars are the support of a building. The building collapses when the pillars fail to support it. Hence, pillars have a far-reaching effect on the entire building. Young believers must determine to become the pillars in the temple of God and take on greater responsibility. The life span of man lies in the hand of God and life is soon over (Ps 90:10). No one can add a cubit to his life span by being anxious (Lk 12:25). All those who work for the church now will one day rest from their labors (Rev 14:13) and return to heaven. Their task will be taken over by the younger generation. Hence, while we are still young, we must be concerned in all church work. The day will come when the responsibility will fall on us and we will not be unprepared. We must build ourselves up to be the future pillars of the temple of God, but how?

Build up a Godly Aspiration

We have believed, and have come to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God (Jn. 6:69). Moreover, we know whom we have believed (2 Tim 1:12). Since we have such a firm foundation of faith like a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (Heb 6:19), we must go on to build up the godly aspiration. This is the aspiration mentioned by Paul: “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” (Col 1:28, 29). Jesus said, “...Freely you have received, freely give.” (Mt 10:8). God in His great love once drew us up from the desolate pit and pulled us out of the deadly quicksand (Ps 40:2). Now it is our turn to save others by snatching them out of the fire (Jude 23). By the power of God, we can achieve what we aspire. The weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:4, 5). Just as Paul said, I am sure that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6). Dear brothers and sisters, do strive on to achieve your aspiration!

Look Beyond the Horizon

Abram and Lot both reared their cattle between Bethel and Ai. When the herds grew bigger, quarrels broke out between the men who took care of Abram’s cattle and those who took care of Lot’s cattle. Abram felt that he should not quar-

rel with Lot who is his nephew. He asked Lot to choose the land he wanted for his cattle. Lot, who was selfish and short-sighted, chose the whole Jordan Valley for himself. But Lot later lost all his possession in a catastrophe. Abram had no choice except to move to the land of Canaan. The Lord said to Abram, "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever." (Gen 13:14, 15). If God were to ask us to look in all directions and give to us the land our eyes can see, would we not go up to a hill and try to look beyond the horizon and hope for a bigger piece of land? The further away we look, the more we will receive. It is good to be able to look beyond. One must always look beyond the horizon when doing the work of God.

We must not just be immersed in the immediate work of our local church. We must widen our vision and bring the gospel to all nations. The era for preaching the gospel to all the world is here. We must resolve to go to a place far away because many of God's people are there in that city. We preach the gospel so that their eyes may be open and that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ (Act 26:18).

By the wisdom of God and the spirit of revelation, and having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we must look beyond the horizon through the eyes of our hearts (Eph 1:17, 18). We hope for a bountiful harvest. The eyes of the flesh cannot see the great plan of God. We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Cor 4:18). For the sake of the great harvest, we must persevere to do the will of God even though it may appear to be difficult and full of obstacles. Our labor is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

Cultivate the Spirit of Sacrifice

Paul said, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love." (1Cor 13:13). The possession of faith and hope leads to blessing for oneself. The possession of love is not just for oneself but for God and for man. For this reason, love is the greatest of the three. Every spirit of sacrifice springs from love. God so loved the world that He sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. This is how the love of God is manifested. He sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. This is the great love of God - to sacrifice for the world (1 Jn 4:9-10). The sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus is the outcome of his love for us.

Service entails the sacrifice of one's money, time, energy and spirit. This cannot be achieved without love. When the disciples of Jesus were quarrelling over who among them was the greatest, Jesus taught them and said, "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mt 20:27-28). It is a sacrifice to offer service in the household of God. If it is

not for the sake of love, no one is willing to become a servant of all man. The Lord loves us and He willingly laid down His life for us. This shows that love and sacrifice are closely related. He loves us and died for us. His love controls us. Let us not live for ourselves but for Him (Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 5:14-15). Let us be like Him in loving man and in service. Let us carry our cross and follow Him and live for Him (Mt 16:24).

Paul urged the people in the church not to look only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others, and to have the mind of Jesus as their mind (Phil 2:4-5). To be the pillar in the temple of God is to be a slave of all man. He is often called upon to endure hardship and suffering and to show the spirit of sacrifice. All the hardship and suffering become bearable because of love.

The Ability to Forbear and Forgive

Those who are successful in life are often marked by their ability to forbear and forgive others. As the Chinese proverb says, "The belly of a Prime Minister can 'bear' a ship." Most of the great people in this world possess the ability to 'bear' the shortcomings of others. The ability to 'bear' others comes from forbearance and forgiveness, which need to be cultivated.

To be the pillars in the temple of God and to lead in the church work, one will inevitably come across people who are not cooperative. Directly or indirectly, one would also hear some insulting criticisms. More often than not, some simple-minded and impulsive people will jump into conclusion and start criticizing about a certain matter before the matter is clarified. And there are those who are jealous and who will point their fingers at everything. If one does not have the ability to forbear and forgive, one would have given up the job in a moment of anger. All the efforts will go down the drain. For this reason, we must learn to forbear and forgive the shortcomings of others.

The Chinese proverb says, "Lack of forbearance in a small thing will upset a great plan." We must succeed in our forbearance and not to give up halfway. The key to success in forbearance is to begin with love. Paul said, "Love suffers long and is kind..." (1 Cor 13:4). Love is manifested when the mother shows patience and forgiveness to her naughty children. There may be members in the church who go around and offend people by their words or attitude, but they usually harbor no ill feelings. Perhaps they are a little stubborn or they just want to show off, but their behavior will not harm the rest of the party as a whole. We must forbear and forgive them and let them have a chance to repent.

The Lord Jesus, after washing the disciples' feet, said, "...you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:14). The teaching here is that of forgiving one another. It is a common fault of the people of this world not to admit one's own mistake. If there is any dispute, it is the other party who is at fault. But who is faultless? Must it be another who is at fault? We too need to reflect upon this. When opportunity arises, forgive one another just like washing one another's feet.

When Isaac dwelt in the valley of Gerar, the wells he dug were either robbed or filled with earth by his enemy. An ordinary person in Isaac's place will not tolerate such injustice. But Isaac's forbearance and forgiveness soon put his enemy to shame. The enemy admitted wrong and made an agreement with Isaac that they will not harm each other. Isaac's ability to forbear and forgive is indeed admirable (Gen 26:18-31). Paul exhorts us not to repay evil with evil or to take revenge but to give in to the enemy. When the enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing we will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom 12:17-21).

In order to cultivate our ability to forbear and forgive and to become the pillars in the temple of God, we must bear in mind the following verses, "Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must* do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." (Col 3:12-14).

A Heart Lowly and Meek

Meekness is called upon especially in the household of God. If the pillars in the temple of God, that is, the slaves of all men, are proud and autocratic, how would they gain respect from the believers? Believers are brothers and sisters to us and should be treated with love as such. It is not like an autocrat exercising his power over his subjects. Otherwise, the believers will gradually depart like lost sheep and become food for all the wild beasts. Then the Lord God will require from the shepherds. The wicked shepherds will be rejected by God (Ezek 34:7-10).

Paul wanted us to have the heart of Christ as our hearts. What is the heart of Christ? Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Mt 11:29).

God chose Moses and entrusted him with a great responsibility because Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth (Num 12:3). If the Moses who led the people was a proud and autocratic man, then either he would have been killed by the people he led or he would have given up the task halfway.

The meek are the great leaders who remain calm and not driven by impulse when dealing with things. James said, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." (Jas 1:19-20). The Proverbs also taught us when it says, "*He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.*" (Prov 14:29). And again it says, "*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city*" (Prov 16:32). It is not easy to have full control over one's emotion and anger and to manifest gentleness. We must make effort to cultivate meekness in order to attain perfection.

Paul taught and exhorted the young preacher Timothy and said, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and *that* they may come to their senses and *escape* the snare of the devil...” (2 Tim 2:24-26). A gentle speech will not stir up the anger of the opponent. It saves oneself and at the same time guides others to the way of life. The scriptures say, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1) and “A wholesome tongue *is* a tree of life...” (Prov. 15:4). A gentle tongue brings forth the way of life, while the tree of life gives forth the fruit of life so that those who eat of it will receive eternal life.

A Firm Determination

An athlete must possess a strong determination to persevere to the end. In a marathon race, speed is of no avail if one fails to reach the destination. In the journey to the heavenly kingdom, without a strong determination to press on to the end, one can only look to the holy city and sigh, unable to reach the entrance. The Bible recorded, “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Heb 3:14). In other words, if our faith is not steadfast till the end, then we have no part in Christ. There are those who will say to the Lord, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” (Mt 7:22). But the Lord will declare that He never knew them. What a tragedy! The Lord said, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Mt 24:13). Thus, we need to have endurance so that we may do the will of God and receive what is promised (Heb 10:36). James also exhorted us and said, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (Jas 5:7-8). The strong determination to persevere to the end comes from the growth in endurance.

We must have a faith, which will take us to the end. As the pillars in the temple of God and as slaves in the household of God, we must also take our tasks faithfully to the end. Even on the day when we are to depart from this world, we are able to join in the chorus with Paul, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:6-8). We must imitate Paul, just as Paul imitates Christ.

Conclusion

As the pillars in the temple of God, we must train and nurture ourselves in our godly aspiration, in looking beyond the horizon, in sacrifice, in our ability to forbear and forgive, in meekness and steadfastness. We must continue to press forward and be a strong pillar in the temple of God. When the Lord appears again in His glory, He will say to you, “Well *done*, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your lord” (Mt 25:21).

May the lord take delight in us. May we be the vessels of noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house (2 Tim 2:21). May all glory be to the Holy name of Jesus.





HOLY
BIBLE

Chapter 2: Reading the Cookbook

Recently, the Master Chef has asked you to make a dish that you have no clue how to make. You've settled into your new kitchen and now you're thinking of where to start. You look on your counter to see that the sunbeam is shining directly on your cookbook! You pick it up and begin to flip through the pages. Each page is filled with instructions on how to prepare for that certain dish on the page. Things like "preheat the oven to 350 degrees" or "defrost the meat by leaving it out for an hour" are some examples. You begin reading about the dish your Master Chef has asked you to prepare and are comforted knowing that you have this cookbook to direct you down your cooking career.

Like this cookbook directs you down your culinary pathway, spiritually cultivating yourself will direct you down your spiritual pathway. As a holy worker, it is important to spiritually cultivate yourself because you will have peace as well as a sense of direction. In the book of Psalms, it states that God's word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. What is God's word? The Bible. So by reading the Bible daily, you are reminded of what your duty is as a holy worker and what kind of attitude you should have as a holy worker. Likewise, praying daily allows you to be filled with the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of God. With spiritual cultivation, you find it easier to overcome sin, which is needed in order to be a holy worker for God. Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ have experienced serving for the Master Chef, so let's see what they have to say about reading cookbooks.

Importance and impact of prayer

Keywords: spiritual cultivation, seeking after God

When we were young, we heard many sermons and teachings on the importance of prayer, whether it be in our daily lives, during our spiritual walk of faith, or during difficult encounters. To this day, we are constantly reminded of the benefits of praying. As we continue to grow in the church, sooner or later we will be asked to participate in holy work. Likewise, the importance of prayer is significantly greater when we serve God.

Why is the need for prayer significantly greater when we are serving God? Let's think of it in two aspects: when we aren't serving God and when we are. When we aren't (or haven't started) serving God, prayer is mainly used for our own spiritual cultivation and growth. We need God's power to keep our faith firm and combat sin, and we can attain this through prayer. In the case of servitude, there are more than just our individual selves in the picture. There are also our fellow holy workers and those on the receiving end of our servitude. For instance, when we evangelize, the parties involved are ourselves, maybe some fellow holy workers, and the ones to whom we are preaching. In religious education classes, the teachers are explaining spiritual teachings to the students, who are receiving these lessons. In these examples, prayer is much more important because we, as servants of God, are sending spiritual messages to others. We are not just concerned with our own faith, but the faith of others as well. To keep our own spiritual cultivation and help establish/develop others' requires much more effort. Furthermore, we need to be able to understand, communicate, and demonstrate the correct teachings in accordance with the Bible, which requires having God's power.

I've had the fortunate opportunity to experience the impacts of prayer in my servitude. There were times when God guided me through a holy work because I spent time in prayer prior to the work. One experience I had occurred during a Sabbath in August 2008. I was assigned to teach RE (E1) in the morning and hymn lead before the afternoon service. For someone who had just started teaching, I was nervous because instructing a group of young and lively E1 students can be quite challenging. I was also afraid that if the students could not pay attention in class, they would not hear the message from the lesson, and I would not have done my part in this service.

I took time the week before to pray to God, asking Him to guide and assist me in the lesson that I was to teach. I specifically prayed that I would be able to convey His Truth to the students from the Bible story and activities (I chose to do a skit with the students). I also prayed, asking God to guide me in the other works I was participating in that day because having multiple holy works can be tiring. I prayed about this throughout the week.

I really thank God because the students that day were very cooperative and attentive. God calmed their hearts so that they could hear the messages. God guided me so that the class was smooth, and I was able to teach the Word of God to them. I can honestly say teaching that day was one of the most encouraging experiences for me. It was truly a blessing from God!

After class, I went into the chapel to pray for a little while as part of an agreed schedule between myself and a few prayer buddies. In that prayer, I thanked God for the smooth and edifying experience in class and asked Him to guide me throughout the rest of the day.

Surely enough, His guidance continued on through the day. When I led hymns before the afternoon service, I remember asking the congregation to sing Hymn 526 – *Hosanna, Loud Hosanna*. I was truly amazed and edified at the sound created by the voices of the congregation and the accompaniment from the piano. The harmony and unity was something I had never experienced before while leading hymns. It was as if the lyrics in the hymn came to life: “O may we ever praise Him with heart and life and voice.” God moved everyone to sing and praise Him with their hearts and voices. As the one standing before the congregation, I was greatly moved by the powerful and unified praise. It seemed as though God wanted to show me why we serve Him – to glorify and magnify His Name. To this day, I use that experience to continually remind myself that I serve God to praise Him and that God is among us, watching over us as we serve Him. I believe this was because of prayer. I turned to and sought after God for His guidance and wisdom. In the end God let me witness this amazing scene, allowing me to be edified. Like God says in Jeremiah 29:12-14,

“Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”

Though this passage was written during the Israelite exile to Babylon, I feel that it can relate to prayer and servitude today. Throughout the time of the exile, God wanted the Israelites to know that He is the Almighty God; but they will only understand that when they call upon Him, seek after Him, and put their trust in Him wholeheartedly. When they do, like in verse 14, they will experience God’s power when He brings them out of captivity:

“I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.”

Likewise, I learned that if we seek after God (i.e., through prayer) in our servitude, God will show Himself to us and let us experience His power and strength.

From these experiences, I came to understand the importance and impact of prayer while we serve God. First, because our servitude is to praise God and bring people closer to God, we need to be prepared for the work so that whatever we say and do glorifies God. One way that we can, and should, prepare is to pray. Second, when we pray to God, we must ask Him for strength to take on the holy work. If we spend quality time preparing ourselves and praying, and if it is God's will, He will definitely give us the strength we need. Looking back at my experiences, if God was not with me during the class or hymn singing, I'm sure the outcomes would have been very different. Lastly, if the preparations and acts of servitude we perform are pleasing to God, He can edify us and others through them and bring glory to His Name.



The importance of cultivation while serving

Keywords: spiritual cultivation, power of God

In our service to the Lord, consistent spiritual cultivation must never be compromised. Without cultivating ourselves through prayer and studying the Bible, there is no way we will be able to carry out holy work. Since holy work is from God, it is only by His power through cultivation that we can effectively fulfill our responsibilities.

The importance of cultivation while serving was made most obvious to me during a missionary trip to Africa. The holy work schedule during the trip was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. During the four week trip we volunteers went out preaching, encouraging, or evangelizing almost every day. Initially, I thought I would not be able to adequately fulfill my responsibilities there because I had seldom experienced this type of work, even at my local church. I remember feeling very heavy my first night there because I was already scheduled to speak at a church the following morning. Fear of failing the Lord and letting down the members in Africa flooded my heart, and it just seemed impossible for me to carry out my duties. However, in hindsight I realize that there was one factor that made the impossible possible; that was God. God knows that in order for us to do any holy work, the abidance of His power is absolutely necessary. Thus, He provided us many opportunities throughout the trip to cultivate ourselves through prayer and Bible study. Almost every morning all of us were able to pray together for an hour and we were also always able to find time to study the Bible as we traveled. As a result of this regular cultivation, I immediately experienced the power of the Lord in our work.

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

For instance, while I was studying the Bible, I came across a verse in Acts 1:8. Jesus promised His followers that when they receive the Holy Spirit, they will also receive the power to preach. This promise dispelled all the anxieties I had at the time in regards to the pastoral and evangelical work we were doing. I realized this promise was not only to His followers at the time, but to anyone who would ever receive the Holy Spirit, including me! I know that the promises of the Lord are unshakable and true, so I felt confident that the Lord would help me to preach as long as I relied on His power through the Holy Spirit. In my next prayer, I very simply and wholeheartedly asked the Lord to grant me that promised power to preach for Him. Sure enough when the time came for me to go to the pulpit again, I first felt this surge of power and courage come from within me and dispel all my feelings of fear and anxiety. When I began to speak, I felt a sense of peace build inside of me, allowing me to speak with confidence and conviction. I knew with every fiber of my being that this was the fulfillment of the Lord's promise. More importantly, I knew that this could have only come about by the Lord's power cultivated through consistent prayers and Bible studies. Truly, it is only by the power of God alone that we can be faithful and effective in our service to Him.

Looking back on this experience, I can now truly understand why spiritual cultivation while serving the Lord is indispensable. Without it there is no power from God. God is Spirit and God is Word. If we do not regularly pray and study the Bible, we are cutting ourselves off from His abidance and power. It is through the words of God that we gain the wisdom and direction to guide our work and it is through prayer that we gain the courage and inspiration to carry it out.



Who do I look like?

Keywords: missionary, reflecting the image of God, selflessness

Praise God in February 2010, my co-workers and I returned back to the UK from our missionary trip to Zambia in Africa.

On my first Sabbath Day back in London church, I was constantly greeted with the question, "How was Africa?" Indeed, it was a very memorable and wonderful experience of how great and evident God's works were during the trip: sicknesses were healed, demons were cast out, visions were seen, many were blessed with the Holy Spirit, whole denominations were converted to the True Jesus Church, and many people were baptized!

One of the most powerful works I experienced was the fellowship amongst my three co-workers and me. While we all served together, walked long journeys together, and ate nshima together, we also began to understand one another better as servants of God.

Serving God in Zambia has greatly edified me in knowing myself better, knowing God better, knowing where we differ from the image of Christ, and where we need to make efforts to improve. In the many situations that arose, I discovered that my face as a servant of God was manifested to my co-workers. In a mixture of frankness and gentleness, we each suggested areas of improvement to one another, using our love to point out one another's weaknesses. By doing so, I came to understand that as God's child and servant, I need to reflect the image of Christ, the image He has given me to bear. What does it mean to bear the image of God?

Today we may be strong in making sure we do the work correctly and dutifully, but we need to ask ourselves these questions: in doing God's work, what image am I showing? Do I have the image of Christ whilst I carry out His work?

Often, we want to make sure that people can see and commend the work we are doing in church. In reality, this is not the correct mindset to have as a servant of God. People do not need to read a report about us, or see the works that we do. Our service to God is not for show and cannot be used as a means to glorify and elevate ourselves, but for God to see alone. The gospel of Christ should be clearly seen in us in our actions, our words, and the feeling we give to others. This is not something that can be faked; it can only spring forth from a pure and simple heart. Therefore, the work we do for God must reveal and illumine God's glory to others for God's image to be manifested in us.

How has the length of our servitude affected our character? Do we reflect the image of Christ even more or has His image disappeared from our character? We need to be careful to not solely place emphasis on the work itself but to also take time to examine ourselves, reflecting and asking God to let us see what we look like.

When our character is tested or our hearts are hardened, do we still reflect God's image in our actions? Are we quick to point the finger at others when things do not go smoothly and do we constantly insist on our own methods? Or are we able to humble ourselves to see what lessons we can learn? In these instances, do we reflect the image of Christ?

We can adopt the teachings from James 1:22-25.

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

Very often we may be touched by a sermon, by the words of God, or through a prayer. In these moments, the love of God is flowing into our hearts and causing our hearts to soften. God reveals to us our weaknesses by filling us with His love. However, after these reminders from God, do we change our ways for the better or are we quick to forget who we should be like?

A valuable lesson I learned from a co-worker is that when the work we do is not smooth or if there is a problem in the church, instead of pointing the finger and complaining, we can put the blame on ourselves. We remember that there is more for us to do to find a solution to the problem; we have not prayed enough, we have not done enough. In this way, we will prevent ourselves from grumbling and losing patience when things do not go the way we would like and reflect further on the long-suffering and mercy of our Lord, remaining positive and joyful in His will.

We need to ask ourselves if we are able to individually and collectively shine out the image of God. Are “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18)?

So how was Africa? It was amazing! The strongest memories of Zambia are the faces of the members who bore the image of Christ. When I think of such members, the picture of their faces brings a smile to my face; I cannot help but give thanks and praise to God. Through them, I was able to vividly see the face of God.

May God help us to realize that when your own image diminishes, the image of Christ increases. Let us truly be servants that bear the image of Christ. Look in the spiritual mirror and ask yourself now: do I look like Christ when I am serving Him?



Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow (Manna 10)

Keywords: thanksgiving, trusting God, dedication

Life comprises a series of yesterdays, todays and tomorrows. Those who live these days meaningfully are those who fear the Lord and keep His commandments, realizing that their lives are entirely in His hands. What should our attitude towards yesterday, today and tomorrow be in order to receive God’s blessing?

Let Us Give Thanks for Yesterday

All that we have, life, family and livelihood, come from God. And the world, with all its beauty, is His free gift to us. But most precious of all, the Lord gave up Himself for us. Willingly he died on agonizing death to redeem us. Through Him, we have the hope of salvation. Therefore, let us learn from King David and give thanks to Him.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies you with good good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Ps 103:2-5)

Just as the Lord blessed the leper who returned to thank Him, so will He bless us. And not only that, our heartfelt gratitude will act as a constant reminder of the divine providence and motivate us to serve Him all the more.

Let Us Dedicate Today to His Service

Time is life, and while we may, we must make good use of it, to seek spiritual advancement and to propagate the Lord’s holy work. It is said that the way a person organizes his day is indicative of how he will spend his life. The Bible also says, “...as your days, so shall your strength be.” (Deut 33:25)

Many people toil and labor in order to better their standard of living, but is the end result worth the effort? Jesus said, “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?” What we must pursue, then, is eternal life, the true life. Jesus Christ is the way to this tile. The Apostle Paul recognized this fact and declared, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Throughout his ministerial service, he was true to this affirmation. He lived each day to its fullest by cultivating his spirituality and following God’s word. In return, the spiritual food he received from the Lord refreshed him and enabled him to convert many lost souls through his preaching and his miracles. Paul had offered every moment of his life to God, and God delighted in his dedication. When he was near the end of his life, he was able to utter these inspiring words: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness...” (2 Tim 4:7-8)

Let Us Entrust Our Tomorrows to God

We often make extensive plans for the future and hold high hopes for what is to come, neglecting to entrust it all to God. In fact we do not even know what will come to pass tomorrow. Only our heavenly Father can control our destiny. So, as the Apostle James instructed, we should say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this and that.” Since tomorrow lies in God’s hands, we need

to understand His will. The Lord Himself has promised to be our counselor (Is 9:6), and we need only to trust in Him through prayers and manifest an active faith in our daily living.

While we entrust our future to God, we must also remain spiritually alert, living as we are in the lost days. As in the parable of the ten virgins, we must emulate the five wise maidens who are always prepared to meet the Groom, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is because the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. We must be sanctified through prayers and meditation on His words.

If we look back on yesterday with thankfulness, dedicate ourselves to the Lord today, and at the same time, entrust our tomorrows to Him, we can be assured that He will always be with us on our journey to the heavenly Kingdom. He will protect, encourage and strengthen us, until we reach our goal.



Be a Constant Gardener for God (Manna 52)

Keywords: spiritual growth, guarding your heart, cultivation, cleansing yourself

I have always loved gardens. I enjoy picking and eating the fresh herbs, vegetables, and fruits that my parents grow in our backyard. When life is hectic and stressful, I can always depend on leisurely strolls through the Botanical Garden on campus to clear my mind and lift my spirits.

Since I was a child, flowers have brought so much joy and beauty to my life,

but it was not until I grew up that I understood that behind each flower is the labor of a diligent gardener. Unfortunately, I have never been very successful at growing plants or at keeping them alive. But there is much more at stake when we neglect to tend to the spiritual garden within each of us. . .

In the spiritual realm, our heart is the soil and we are the gardeners assigned to its care. The garden of our heart requires as much attention and preservation as a real, physical garden does. Just like a physical garden, a carefully cultivated heart will not only be filled with abundant life but also benefit others by producing many times what was originally planted there. "But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred". (Mk 4:8)

As we know from the parable of the sower, the quality of our heart's soil makes a vast difference in whether we can please God and edify others. As we become spiritually mature, it is important that we also yield thirty-, sixty-, or a hundred-fold to provide nourishment for others. I believe that all of us aspire to be

this type of fruitful garden for God.

Let's take a look within. What does God see when he looks in you? Do what we produce bring joy to God and to others around us? Or do you feel that your garden is helplessly overgrown with your own desires and pleasures of this world?

No matter what state our inner garden is in, it is never too late to make the determination to dedicate our hearts for God's purpose and take the steps necessary to replant and maintain its spiritual health.

Build A Fence

Wherever we go each day, we fill our hearts with what we see, think and experience. Different people we meet along the way plant good or bad seeds within us. Media also leave a long-lasting impression on our hearts, be it images or messages. It's not fair to God if we fill our hearts indiscriminately all day and expect Him to clean out the accumulated junk for us at the end of the day.

Instead, let us guard our heart carefully and jealously for it is one of the few things in the world that is solely our own. Be aware of what enters, because the Bible tells us that its contents affect the quality of our lives. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov 4:23). Since God is faithful to forgive our sins when we confess, let us in turn strive to be faithful by not allowing sin to enter so freely. Pursuing holiness, purity, and righteousness to be more like Him touches His heart and is the first step to building a close relationship with Him.

So build a fence around your heart. In a "garden enclosed," the influences of the outside world will not be able to drown out the Word and the Holy Spirit's attempt to help our gardens flourish. And only inside a "garden enclosed" can you find the most fragrant garden imaginable:

"...an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices." (Songs 4:12-14)

A garden contains such wonders when it is not of this world. By shutting itself from the rest of the world, the garden can attract others with its scent, beauty and lushness.

At this point, you may be thinking: There is no way that I can be completely cut off or isolated from the rest of the world! This is true. God wants us to live among the world, as our Lord Jesus did, but we must be different. Gardens left to run wild lose the power to attract because there exists no difference in them to be admired.

Because we are different, it is inevitable that we will meet those who mock our

values and standards. However, many actually want, and wait, to see whether we have something to offer them that is different and better than what they have already found in the world. If we persist in maintaining the beauty of our heart's garden, our entire lives can be a living testimony used to lead others to God.

Pull Out The Weeds

The longer a garden is neglected, the more time weeds have to firmly root themselves. Even if there are good crops, weeds that grow beside them become intertwined with them, making the weeds even harder to completely pull out.

Any weed we don't pull out jeopardizes our holy work and good deeds. Therefore, we need to weed out the sins that try to enter every day. As we reflect on God's word and develop the habit of carefully examining our heart, it becomes easier to spot the weeds before they sprout. This is a duty that we must perform faithfully throughout our entire lifetime as our heart's caretaker.

What about the weeds that have been rooted in our hearts long before we put up a firm fence? These sins require more than a cursory prayer before bed to be removed. One must spend a long time in prayer in order to dig down to the root of the weed. Then, it is time to pull out the weed by truly repenting and figuring out how to change.

Pulling out resistant weeds can be very painful. However, such discipline is a demonstration of our faithfulness to God. Don't expect these deeply-rooted sins to be removed overnight. Often, we recognize our sins and understand the need for change but do not know how to fully rid ourselves of sins that have been abiding in our hearts for so long. Even thinking about the numerous times we have struggled with sin and lost can be enough to discourage us.

Yet, do not despair! No matter how long the process, God is always by our side helping us. He is the Great Gardener, who planted His truth within us in the first place. Under His watchful eye, the seed of truth will not be choked, no matter how much the weeds may threaten to overrun the garden. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil 1:6)

God has the ability to weed out the most defiant of sins but first we must be willing to part with our sin and ask for His help. God knows all of our foolishness and none of our sins are hidden before Him. Even so, He waits for us to want to change first. Place your "trust in Him at all times...Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Ps 62:8). Tell Him of each sorrow. Tell Him how you struggle with the sin. Tell Him of your desire to change. If we place our faith in Him, He will advise us on how to remove sins that we do not know how to get rid of.

God is the best gardener. In His wisdom, He knows whether it is better for us to have more sunshine or more storms at any given point in our life. While we

may crave endless sunshine, let us remember that difficulties are also given by God to wash away impurities in our hearts. When the storms have passed, our gardens will be more spiritually healthy and beautiful in His sight.

Maintain A Consistently Beautiful Garden

After continuously producing crops, even the best soil can become depleted of nutrients if not fertilized. When we serve God continuously without cultivating, we also become devoid of spiritual nutrients.

A physical gardener would let the ground lie fallow until the soil has recovered, but this not something we can afford to do in our spiritual lives. Time does not stop for anyone. As life continues, new responsibilities are added to us. We meet people day to day, and our actions at that time either glorify God to them or not. We cannot say, "Please wait while I recover!" Missed opportunities are missed. Relationships with our families and friends can suffer if not constantly maintained.

Therefore, we need to learn how to renew ourselves while bearing fruit continually. The secret lies in the continuous watering of His Word. God can create in us a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within us (Ps 51:10), but we need to open up the Bible and accept that nourishment for ourselves.

In addition, continually bearing fruit is linked to being continually found in the house of the Lord. "Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age..." (Ps 92:13-14). Keeping the Sabbath and maintaining fellowship with spiritual friends are ways to refresh and fertilize our hearts as we work side by side for Him.

Maintaining a beautiful spiritual garden takes constant effort and does not end until we finish our journey here on earth. Until that day, let us keep looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). He has begun the work for us and He is the one who will sustain us to the end.





Chapter 3: Checking the Ingredients

You have just figured out the customers' orders and looked in the cookbook to learn how to cook each dish. Now it's time to gather the ingredients! You take the meats out from the freezer, count the number of eggs you need, wash the vegetables, and give the dressing bottles a shake. You are ready to get some serious cooking done.

But hold it right there! Before you start chopping that head of lettuce, take a closer look. Do you see any wilted leaves? Are the meat and eggs still fresh? Check the dressing bottles too. Are they past their expiration dates? A piece of rotten meat here, a piece of wilted vegetable there, and your dish goes from a delicacy to something borderline inedible.

When we serve God, we also need to double check the quality of our spiritual ingredients, which consists of our attitude behind serving God. God has chosen to give us the honor of participating in His holy work so that we too can have part in the glory of accomplishing His work on earth. All He asks is that we understand that it is His grace and love, not our own qualifications, that allow us to serve Him. So we should approach all holy work great or small, new or routine, with an attitude of holiness, love, humility, and diligence. When we display the proper attitude as we serve, it does not matter if we fall short of our objectives. At the end of the day, a correct attitude will allow our servitude to be a pleasing aroma to God because He looks not at our outward performance, but at our hearts.

To get a better taste of how to attain the holy work attitude that pleases God, it's helpful to look into the learning experiences of fellow brothers and sisters. Here are some of their experiences.

Setting a good example while serving

Keywords: attitudes of servitude, setting examples, spiritual cultivation

I looked in the mirror again and again to make sure my shoes matched my outfit. The next thing I knew, I was almost late for Sabbath service. Running out the door as fast I could I jumped into my car and rushed to church. As I got to church, I thought to myself, “Phew, it’s only hymn singing. Service hasn’t started yet.” I sat down in the pew and took out my hymn book and began to sing.

This Sabbath is probably very similar to your Sabbath routine where everything happens in a rush. We might not think it is too significant because at least we made it to service before the sermon started, thus, considered obeying the Sabbath. It was not until one day, during RE class, when the lesson I was teaching was about being faithful in the little things, when suddenly I felt the Holy Spirit rebuke my heart for not being faithful to the Lord by not coming to Sabbath on time. Matthew 25:23 says, “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’” With the few duties God had entrusted me with, I was not able to faithfully obey his commands. How could God trust me with other works in the future? If I was not setting a good example for my students, how then would I be qualified to “teach” them?

Setting a good example is so important when serving the Lord; it not only affects our own faith but the faith of others when they witness our actions. Perhaps you are an RE teacher, many little eyes are looking up to you. They are listening to what you are saying. They are observing your behavior and attire. They also look at who you are with and where you go. Do we teach lessons about not lusting over the physical materials of the world, but constantly search the net to look at things to buy or things we wish we could buy. Not only do these children look up to you, but they also wish to one day be just like you. We must ask ourselves, “What are we like then?” Do you really want them to be just like us? Do they know what we REALLY do during our spare time when we are not in church?

This brings me to believe that every single thing we do has a greater effect than we think it does. However, we could use the influence we have on others as a good influence. Here are some very simple things we can do that are good for others to follow in the future:

- During lunch hour, we can clean up after ourselves after eating.
- Be proactive when we see a new face at church; do not just sit with our friends and enjoy our lunch hour.
- Being respectful to elders of the church by greeting them with a smile and acknowledging them by saying, “Hi!” even if you do not have much to say.

- When at church, do not always talk about worldly matters, such as what we did during the week with friends, what we bought, and gossiping. Instead, share about our weeks in ways relating to our faith. For example, sharing about what we are thankful for or our weaknesses.
- Often saying words of thanksgiving such as, “Thank God!”
- Attending services even if it is not Sabbath.
- Talk to your students even after class. Care for them outside of class time. They will feel your love and thus, understand how to care for one another when their fellow brothers and sisters are feeling down

As we work for God we should manifest the likeness of God. We need to learn to be godly. If we pray for the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit, the things we do will be of glorifying the Lord. Setting a good example would then be something that comes naturally, because Christ lives within us as well as our speech, action, mind, and heart. This would then strengthen our students’, brothers’ and sisters’ faith to feel that serving the Lord is not just a mere fulfillment of duty, but also a way of life. When we offer ourselves as living sacrifices for the Lord, it is not a part time job, but a commitment made to God, just as Jesus made the commitment to drink the bitter cup for the remission of our sins.



Pride versus sincerity

Keywords: attitude of servitude, humility, learning from others

For my undergraduate education, I had decided to go to a university that was located near a prayer house with very few members. Following my arrival there, I was almost immediately assigned to do holy work. Since there were only one or two members that could play the piano, I was asked to contribute in this aspect. At first, I was elated. I had never had the chance to serve God during my junior high or high school years, and He was finally blessing me with an opportunity to serve Him. Here was my chance! However, throughout the week leading up to my first assignment on Friday night, I became increasingly troubled. My nerves were getting to me, and I could clearly feel one specific emotion: anxiety.

There was one thing in particular that I was anxious about. I was afraid of making mistakes because I felt that people would judge me and that I would ruin my family's musical reputation. Growing up, I had focused more of my efforts on developing skills for playing the violin and had never practiced the piano much. Sight-reading hymns on the piano was therefore a nightmare for me. During that first Friday night service, the only thing I could focus on while I was playing was how well I was doing. Although I did not fail miserably, I could hear that my playing did not have any expression or emotion behind it. Without these important elements, I knew that God was not hearing beautiful music from me, but rather dreadful noises.

A few weeks later, as I stood up to sing a hymn during Saturday morning service, I heard the assigned pianist begin to play the introduction. Startled by the simplicity of the playing and also by several misplayed notes, I initially felt quite perturbed. The same two chords were being repeated by the left hand while the right hand plunked out the single melody line. However, as I listened closer, I became quite touched. This sister may not have been the most skilled pianist, but she played with such sincerity and sentiment. Whenever she made a mistake, she continued on with perseverance. I could see that she didn't mind if people judged her playing simply because she was laboring solely for God and His glory. At that moment, I realized that I had been so blinded by upholding my reputation that I was unable to focus on the true purpose of doing holy work: glorifying God. Why did I need to care so much about what other people thought of me? God is the true judge, and as long as you try your best, He will not judge the results, but only the intentions behind it. It honestly didn't matter if I played with mistakes here, there, or even everywhere as long as I put my heart into it and helped the congregation reach God.

Of course, many things are easier said than done. My pride would not allow me to just forget about it in an instant. Only through prayer and constant self-reminders was I able to improve my mindset. To this day, I still struggle with my pride, but now I understand that only God's opinion about my holy work matters. According to 1 Samuel 16:7, "...the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." If my heart is in the right place, not only will God be pleased, but perhaps others will feel the sincerity in my servitude the same way I felt the sincerity of the humble sister.



Am I serving for the right reason(s)?

Keywords: competition, purpose of servitude, humility, translating

As I sat in the pews listening to her translate, I could not help but compare myself to her. Instead of paying attention to the sermon, I would wonder if she was better than me. She was my fellow worker in church and just recently we were both assigned to translate for church. We were the same age and grew up together in the same church. However, I was scheduled to translate Wednesday night services while she was assigned to translate Friday night services. I felt that I was just as good as her, and was a little upset that the church had scheduled me for the service with fewer attendees. I constantly thought in this way during my first year of service to the Lord and I did not realize that I was serving the Lord for the wrong reasons.

Church is just like a miniature version of society. We ultimately bring the work ethic of the world into our holy work. This is why we often feel jealous and desire to achieve more than others. However the truth and teachings in the Bible teach us otherwise. For example, during the ministry of the apostles, none of them tried to assert themselves as better than the others. Instead they had one goal in mind, and that was to make disciples of all nations. This is the mindset we must have when we are serving the Lord. I came across this realization during a prayer in which God reminded me why He allowed me to translate for Him in the first place. It was during a time when all my friends in church were already serving God by playing the piano, but because I did not know how to play the piano, I humbly prayed to the Lord and told Him that I was sorry I could not serve him. God loved me so much that He prepared me for translating as another way to serve Him.

I had forgotten that the main purpose of my service was to repay the Lord's love for using a useless vessel like me for His great work. I felt very ashamed of myself for wanting to improve my translating skills just so I could be "better" than my fellow worker. I realized I was doing God's work as if I were putting on a show to gain man's approval instead of God's. In Matthew 6:1-2 we are told, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." The praises that I enjoyed receiving were hindering me from receiving my reward in heaven. I am sure God was not pleased with the mentality of service that I was offering to him. I thank God that He was merciful enough to reveal my sin to me. In the end I felt as though He accepted my repentance by allowing me to continue serving Him.

Now the reason I want to improve in my translating skills is not so I can surpass all the other translators, but it is so I may remember that God gave me such an honorable opportunity to serve Him. God reminded me that the

purpose of my servitude was to help the English listeners hear the sermon speaker's message. How unfair would it be if they only got half the good news of the Lord, or a jumbled up version of it. I now know the purpose of my servitude, and I constantly remind myself of it every time I pray before I translate. In my prayer I tell God, "God, I have no ability to serve you without the words that you put in my mouth. I am not only translating words spoken by the speaker but more importantly, your words of truth. May you fill me with Your words and Your Spirit so that I may work for You. Please humble me and let me know that I am useless without You." Every time I pray in this manner, God's Spirit always fills me. When I let His Spirit guide me, doing his work becomes so easy and smooth because I am relying on God's strength and not my own. We must always remember that serving the Lord is a blessing that He has bestowed upon us. He does not actually need us specifically. We need to remind ourselves that if we are not serving for the right reasons, God can replace us.



Beware of pride and judging others

Keywords: helping others, humility, spiritual cultivation

Have you ever thought your own spirituality was pretty good? Although our faith could always be better, there may seem to be many around us who appear worse off. We may feel that we have friends at church who are not as spiritual

or zealous as ourselves and therefore we really want to help them. Although

there may be many around us who seem to need help, we need to be watchful that we are not motivated to act out of pride or self-righteousness. We also need to remember that it is not by our own effort that changes can be implemented in church. I learned this when I moved from a large church to a small house of prayer. When I first arrived, I saw that there were a lot of things that could be improved. I thought to myself: "if I don't do this holy work or help that person in their faith, then who will?"

I thought I had to be the one to initiate change since I could see the problems and had seen what it was like in a "better-run" system. Why else would God have brought me to this new church if not to use my past experience to help them? In my pride, it never occurred to me that God may have called me there to work on my own spiritual cultivation, rather than to be the self-appointed "problem-solver."

I thought I could handle it, but I was actually in over my head when trying to tackle the church's problems. I lost the sense of peace I used to have at church and felt a heavy pressure instead. Because I wasn't able to put the church's problems in God's hands and completely turn them over to Him, I often felt worried and sad. These feelings of frustration caused me to realize that I wasn't in any position to be attempting to influence other church members; I needed to worry about myself and my spirituality first.

During the summer, I went home to see my parents, and during that time I prayed a lot for the church. I felt unable to help in the problems I saw there so I could only bring them before God and beg for His mercy. When I returned to the house of prayer after summer, I felt like I had stepped into a completely different church! Before, when I had given my utmost, things didn't seem to improve and may even have gotten worse! But now the church was filled with smiling faces and harmony. A few friends had also started attending regularly to seek the truth. I was shocked.

Through this experience, God changed my thoughts to "If I don't help that person, it doesn't mean that he or she won't be helped." God is the one in control. Without anyone lifting a finger, the whole church can be changed and edified, for it is God who changes a man's heart and helps His people.

At the same time, I realized that when I was close to God, even if I wasn't even trying to help others, it happened naturally. Through doing our own daily cultivation – listening to sermons, studying the Bible, singing hymns, or journaling our blessings and reflections –our friends can be encouraged when the right time presents itself. Opportunities will arise for us to use what we gain from God to benefit other people.

Here is a verse someone shared with me that I found very interesting:
*"Therefore **judge nothing before the time**, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then **each one's praise will come from God.**"*
(1 Cor 4:4-5)

This verse is very applicable to the way we treat our fellow brothers and sisters. When we think others are weak, we need to be careful that we are not judging that person. God can make anyone He wants to stand, so we don't need to worry about it (Romans 14:4). Not to say that we cannot encourage others, but every time we do, let us be aware of how we ourselves stand before God. It is easy to judge others, but hard to live with a completely clear conscience in front of God. Before looking at others, let us be watchful of ourselves so that when God reveals the hidden things in each of our hearts, we can be praised by Him and deemed worthy.



A labor of love

Keywords: campus fellowship, love

When I started helping to coordinate campus fellowship in college, I felt like I knew what I was doing. I had already talked with a handful of previous coordinators, and all of their advice was the same: pray, pray, pray. I looked at other fellowships' guidelines about what to do. I had an overview in my mind of what I thought was going to happen throughout that school year. I made note of the places to go to register for this or that, and key events that were supposed to happen. I thought of ideas to help keep our spirituality alive. I also had previous experience in coordinating activities/fellowships so I thought to myself: I know what I'm going to do and I know what's going to happen; it may not be easy but at least everything I need to know, I know.

But soon after the school year started, my concept of how the fellowship was supposed to be coordinated quickly changed. From what I tried to do for the fellowship and my view of the fellowship, I learned a lot about myself. Sometimes I would find myself directing the fellowship to focus on what I thought were the member's weak points in faith, such as being more loving and forgiving toward brothers and sisters, praying longer, or attending Bible study and fellowship. The problem with this is that I chose to focus on those specific things because I thought I was doing well in these aspects as compared to them. However, there were times I could barely keep up with my own spiritual cultivation. I realized I couldn't practice what I preached, or do what I asked the fellowship to do. I further realized that oftentimes, I was prideful, judgmental, and lazy. My attitude and motivation for doing holy work were often wrong.

My attitude started to change when I realized that serving was a labor of love. I never really understood what a "labor of love" meant. But I feel that I do now more so than before. When I first started coordinating the fellowship, there seemed to be a to-do list and a job description, but these didn't take into account the people in the fellowship or their needs. When we focus too much on the job description, we lose sight of the bigger picture.

As a coordinator of the fellowship, isn't our job and our goal to pastor each one according to his need? To do things specifically for each person and, ultimately, to love them? If there are lost sheep, we cannot disregard them. If the members are becoming weaker, we have to adjust the fellowship in order to strengthen them. If there are truth seekers, we have to adjust our planned activities and fellowships to make it more evangelical, facilitating it to make it easier to talk to them and especially sharing with them the words of God. If there is only one person that seems to be less and less motivated, there should be actions to lift the person back up. Serving is a continuous struggle, a constant battle, a spiritual warfare, a labor of love.

I previously had the attitude that I planned events, did evangelical work and

coordinated meetings for the fellowship because I love God. Because God loved me, I should give back to God my time and my effort by fulfilling those duties. The problem with this attitude was that I often neglected to love man - to actually love the sheep we are entrusted with. As Romans 13:8 says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law." I remember a pastor once said that if you want to know if you love a person, just look at the person and you should have a feeling. If there's no feeling toward him, there's no love. Another brother that helped out with the fellowship once encouraged me saying, "If you truly love the person, you'd pray for them every day."

In the story of the prodigal son, the older brother was very diligent in working. He stayed with the father for so long, laboring. Yet when his very own brother came back from the filth, he couldn't accept how much love the father gave his lost son. He was so focused on what he was doing in the field that he could care less about the brother who had left his side. He served a lot, yet forgot the essence of what it meant to serve and to love.

To conclude, I would like to encourage you with a verse that the co-coordinator of the fellowship shared with me:

"He said to him again a second time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'"

He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'

He said to Him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

(John 21:16)



A wake up call from God

Keywords: faithfulness, courage

Hallelujah! In the name of the Lord Jesus I testify for the glory of God's name.

This incident happened a while back, but I still remember it clearly because through it, God showed me how to serve Him better by being ready to work for Him at any time, despite any prevailing circumstances.

In August 2008, Preacher T.K. Chin asked Brother Boneface and I to go to Sigulu, a small island on Uganda's border of Lake Victoria, and find out the situation

of the brethren there. It had been quite some time since anyone had visited or heard news from them. Our mission was to go see if there were still any members there, to locate them wherever they were, encourage them to keep the faith, and assess the general situation of the church in Sigulu.

We began making the necessary preparations for the trip. We gave ourselves to prayer, bought the necessary provisions, and were soon ready to go and help our brethren in the faith.

It takes several hours to travel to Sigulu by road and boat, so we left early in the morning, and constantly prayed to God to show us how we were going to help our brethren. We arrived on the island just before sundown. Not long after sundown, we were able to contact one family. After much discussion, we learned how desperate the situation was for the Sigulu members who had tried to keep the faith.

The following morning, we met Sister Victoria who was a widow and one of the three members who had kept the faith. When she saw us, she immediately started praying aloud, thanking God for having remembered them at last by sending brothers from Kenya. At first, I thought she was being rather effusive but I soon came to learn her real reason for being so happy to see us.

Sister Victoria explained that sometime back, a number of brethren had changed the faith and tried to deceive the other members into following them. Some did, but Sister Victoria and two others refused to follow them. They resorted to using intimidation and threats, and even sent them away from using the schoolroom which they had been using for Sabbath. This never stopped the sisters from keeping the faith and they started using one of their houses for worship. The persecution did not end there. Their tormentors used unscrupulous means to discourage them, like dispossessing a sister of the plot of land which she farmed, and ridiculing them in the villages to stir up hatred against them. They even falsely accused them before the government officials, who found no fault with the sisters and consequently never bothered them.

We asked the sisters whether they still had the courage to keep the faith despite all these trials. They responded that rather than dampening their faith, this encouraged them to proclaim the truth even more. These sisters hardly had any formal education and at best, can only read words one by one in their own local dialect. When I heard their testimony, I could not help the bitter-sweet feeling I felt. There was a lump in my throat, but at the same time I felt so happy and thankful to God in my heart. I was sad because of all the tribulations they had gone through, yet happy because despite all these trials, they had held on to the truth.

I suddenly realized how feeble I was in my faith back at home in Kenya. I had many comforts: loving brethren to encourage each other, a society that did not

persecute us, workers to take care of us, just to mention but a few. However, I was still so weak and hesitant in my service to God. One question I kept asking myself was if I was persecuted just as the Sigulu sisters were, would I have still kept my faith and served God like our sisters had? This was a wake up call to me from God; to be ready to serve Him without self-consideration, despite the prevailing circumstances.

As we finally boarded our boat back home, I felt that I was the one who had been helped by our brethren, rather than me having helped them. I felt greatly challenged in my service to God, but God used this experience to show me how to offer myself more in serving Him.

May all the honor and glory be unto His name forever. Amen.



Four Don'ts of an Evangelist (Manna 11)

Keywords: evangelism, selflessness, honesty

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he exhorted himself, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God...For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake." (2 Cor 4:1-2, 5). In this letter Paul encouraged evangelists, who are chosen by God for this honorable position in the Gospel, to fulfill the four essential 'Don'ts'; namely not to lose heart, not to use underhanded ways, not to tamper with God's word and not to preach themselves. Evangelists should strive to observe these "don'ts".

Do not lose heart

One must possess courage in serving God. After the death of Moses, God encouraged his successor, Joshua, to lead the Israelites, On numerous occasions, God said to him, "Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:6,7,9,18). As we serve God more, the Devil will intensify his efforts to hinder and destroy our works. To this end, he places obstacles in the form of trials and physical

afflictions. Others may misunderstand us, slander us and become jealous of us. If we lose heart, we can never fight the spiritual battle successfully (ref: Deut 20:2,8). We need to ask God for courage so that we can fight a good fight (Acts 4:29, 30). "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Tim 1:7).

Paul told the Corinthians, "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." (2 Cor 4:8-10). Paul's courage in the face of death enabled him to fight the good fight and do much. Indeed, if a soldier views death as returning home, he will be able to fight bravely in the battlefield. In like terms, an evangelist must have sacrificial spirit. He should put the welfare of the church and the battle for righteousness above his personal gains, even above his life. He needs to rely on divine power to destroy strongholds, arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Chr 10:4-5). We pray to God to strengthen our courage so that we will not shrink from battle when facing difficulties. We pray also that each one of us will follow Christ's footsteps in serving God loyally.

Do not use underhanded ways

"Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD..." (Prov 11:1). "He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house" (Ps 101:7). As such, an evangelist should all the more avoid evil intentions and behavior.

In speech, an evangelist should not be double-tongued, use flattery, cause divisions, harm or judge his co-workers. David in his psalms, said, "Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit." (Ps 34:12-13). Sincerity in speech is an essential part of spiritual nurture. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" (Jer 17:9). Again, he who hates, dissembles with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart (Prov 26:2L1). The saying is indeed true: Never judge a book by its cover. Divine workers should be sincere in their hearts because God looks into our hearts although men will judge our physical attributes (1 Sam 16:7). Co-workers should not harbor hatred and jealousy or slander one another. In church, elders, deacons, leaders and evangelists are coworkers. "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph 4:31,32).

Honesty is the best policy in our life. We hope every evangelist today would be a modern 'Nathanael' receiving the praise of God, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." (Jn 1:47).

Do not tamper with God's words

Paul encouraged Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15). An evangelist needs to search and examine the Bible daily (Acts 17:11) so that he can be guided by God's words and not lose God's light. This accompanied by prayers for the Spirit's guidance will prevent him from distorting the truth and destroying the faith of others (ref: 2 Tim 2:17, 18; Gal 1:6,9).

Besides speaking the truth accurately, an evangelist should manifest the truth in his lifestyle. Paul said, "We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." (2 Cor 6:1-10).

Today we ask: how much do we practice what we preach from the pulpit? We preach the truth, but have we practiced it? This is an important question which warrants our consideration (Jas 1:22-25; 2:14-20).

Do not preach ourselves

For the sake of the Gospel, Paul decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and his crucifixion. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

An evangelist should exalt the name of God and give all glory and praise to His name (Ps 115:1). So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do." (Lk 1:10) and magnify God in his heart (Lk 1:46). An evangelist must never preach himself and boast of his abilities. Neither should he rely on his

wisdom to gain fame. An evangelist should not aim to be famous. For a famous evangelist is not necessarily a successful one and vice versa. If an evangelist preaches himself and becomes famous through all his works but fails in the eye of God, all these become without value.

Evangelists are given ministries by God's mercy and not by profession (2 Cor 4:1). They are servants of God and not servants of men (Phil 1:1). They should please God rather than men (Gal 1:9; 2 Cor 5:9). "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ." (Col 1:28). Take some time to consider: do we preach Christ as our Lord? The faith of the believers should be rooted in the Rock, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11; Mt 7:25). This will indeed make the church united (Jn 17:20-23), without divisions and power struggles. Every member will then be able to work diligently and harmoniously together (1 Cor 1:10) and to submit to one another in the fear of the Lord (Eph 5:1). In all matters, we should please God, rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance and pray to the Lord to be with us so that the Gospel will be propagated quickly. With God manifesting signs and miracles in our works, we will be able to accomplish the entrusted commission of preaching the Gospel to all nations (Mk 16:15, 20; Acts 1:8).



Learning from the ass (Manna 11)

Keywords: humility, diligence, faithfulness

Asses are close cousins of horses. They enjoy less glamour compared to their cousins. However, they have valuable characteristics as recorded in the Bible. Their red-letter day came about when the Lord Jesus rode on one of them into Jerusalem. The Lord had rejected all other animals but chose the ass to take Him into Jerusalem. This incident alone is enough to make us reconsider the position of the ass.

Asses are tame and peaceful animals

Practically all Biblical and historical records of the horses are connected with wars, illustrating the fact that horses are meant for war. "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD." (Prov 21:31)

On the contrary, mention of the ass is always connected with peace. For instance,

Abraham in his bid to please God rode on an ass to Mount Moriah to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen 22:3). Moses, obeying the great commission of God to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, mounted on an ass with his family for Egypt to confront Pharaoh (Ex 4:20). Besides these, there

are other instances mentioned where asses provided a means of transportation (Jos 15:18, 1 Sam 25:20, 23, 42).

It is known that asses are an especially good means of transport in mountainous areas. Szechwan, China is very hilly. The residents depend largely on asses for land transportation. Despite the road condition being rugged, they seldom meet with accidents. Credit should go to the good-natured asses which are groomed for easy maneuver.

On one occasion, the Lord Jesus overlooked the horse, mounted on an ass and went to Jerusalem. The Bible recorded it in the following manner:

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" (Mt. 21:1-5)

The Old Testament passage of the Bible prophesies:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'" (Zec. 9:9-10)

Only the ass, a tame and peaceful animal, is deemed worthy to transport the Prince of Peace into Jerusalem. May all of us emulate the characteristics of the ass to be a peaceful, gentle, fruitful believer greatly used by the Lord to preach the gospel of peace.

Faithful and hard working

Asses are greatly used by men in their daily lives especially in the olden days. When a country went to war, the generals would ride on horses while transportation of food and supplies were done using asses. In some parts

of China, where the system of communication is backward, the people depend largely on asses for communication. The farmers, in particular, use asses to transport their produce to the market. They even use asses to grind their mills. These animals are very faithful and hard working.

When Jacob was in Canaan, he met with a severe famine. On hearing that there was food in Egypt he said to his son, "Who do you look at one another? Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt, go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live, and not die." On their return they used their asses to load the grain they had bought from Egypt (Gen 42:26).

Prophet Isaiah rebuked the Israelites severely because they proved themselves unfaithful to God. He scolded them saying that they were worse than the ox and the ass which were faithful to their masters, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: 'I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider.'" (Is 1:2-3).

The Bible records about an ass which once spoke human language. And from the conversation we gather that the animal had been very faithful to its master. The following is the story: "And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?' And Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!' So the donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?' And he said, 'No.'" (Num 22:27-30). Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with the drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed his head and fell on his face. Then only did Balaam realize that he had wronged his ass. Balaam would have been slain by the angel of the Lord if not for his faithful ass. The spirit of the ass is indeed worthy of pursuit by servants of God today. The Bible exhorts, "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ." This is basic knowledge, and every worker should know. It is also the goal that everyone should strive after.

Working silently

It is not wrong to say that asses can contribute much more to mankind than horses can. But generally, horses enjoy better privileges than asses do. In the eyes of man, horses are always welcome, for they look good, bright, proud and happy. On the other hand, asses are often linked with stupidity, clumsiness and disappointment. But asses are faithful animals, always working silently for their masters.

Incidentally the life of man is similar to that of an ass. Some lives are full of silent toils, yet uneventful. Others are very successful, enterprising and highly esteemed in terms of status and wealth. Subordinates are often being scolded as silly asses by their superiors. But many of these subordinates are not stupid at all. These so called 'silly asses' share common characteristics: they are silent workers; they will not live against their principles; they hold fast to righteousness and will not compromise with injustice; they do not work for fame neither do they flatter others; they will not be enticed by material gain and they will not defect by blackmail but always press forward, not neglecting their duty.

Generally people love money and high position. When one is better off than others in his performance and talents he may become puffed up and self-conceited. Even Paul, a highly spiritual apostle was afraid that he might be tempted to become proud because of the abundant grace he had received from God, what more of us? So he often pummeled himself by bringing his body under subjugation; he said, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." (2 Cor 12:7).

After Gideon the judge had delivered Israel from the hands of the Midianites, the Israelites requested Gideon to rule over the Israelites as a show of their gratitude. But Gideon replied, "But Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you.' Then Gideon said to them, 'I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder.' For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites. So they answered, 'We will gladly give them.' And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were around their camels' necks. Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house." (Jdg 8:23-27).

In church we must conduct ourselves properly, not working for fame or for other gains, never seeking favor nor acting at the expense of our principles. We should guard ourselves from being tempted by material gains and must not falter when facing with threats and blackmail. On the other hand, we should not be haughty even if we have made some achievements in Church to blow our own trumpets.

Instead, emulate the spirit of the ass. Render our service to God not for self-glory, but do all things according to His will. We must be sober and serious in our work, to please God and to always press forward in order to accomplish the great commission which God has entrusted to us.



Heart of a servant (Manna 45)

Keywords: zealous heart, selflessness

*For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (Ps 84:10)*

This message holds true for those who love to serve the Lord. A day in the Lord's courts is better than a thousand days elsewhere, and to be a doorkeeper in God's house is better than living comfortably in the home of the wicked. The heart of the Lord's servant is always set upon God's dwelling place, for that is where God's kingdom and people are found. Prophet Daniel loved God's people (Dan 9:19), and he made it his practice from an early age to kneel down three times a day in prayer with his windows open towards Jerusalem (Dan 6:10).

Like Daniel, the Lord Jesus loved Jerusalem because it was the city of God's people, and He spent much time teaching in the temple (Lk 19:41-48; Jn 2:13-22). John 2:13-22 records how Jesus once cleansed the temple as the Passover of the Jews was at hand (Jn 2:13). Some probably viewed Jesus' cleansing of the temple as an extreme and dishonorable act. If we view the act in human terms, we also might interpret Jesus' anger in the temple as a sign of over-zealousness on His part, but it was Jesus' zealous heart that was the key to the renewal of God's temple. Today, those concerned with the business of God's kingdom often wonder how to revive the church.

Actually, Jesus' actions are an example for us, teaching us what it means to possess the heart of a servant (cf. Mt 20:28). If, as servants of the Lord, we can comprehend the Lord's heart of servitude, we too can discover the keys to reviving God's kingdom.

A Heart Full Of Zeal

When Jesus entered the temple, He saw many merchants selling animals and moneychangers seated for business and changing currency for the use of the temple (Jn 2:14; cf. Mt 17:24-27). But as the Lord saw all these activities going on in God's house, He became angry, made a scourge of cords, and drove all those doing business out of the temple.

Jesus took this seemingly extreme approach because of His zeal for God's house, which was born out of love for God. As His servants, we likewise should be full of zeal for God's house out of love for Him (Jn 2:17; Ps 69:9).

Zeal born out of love is like a fire, and its strength like a death from which there is no escape. Such zeal can consume a person because it is a most vehement flame (Song 8:6-7; cf. Rom 8:35-39).

In our service for the Lord's house, we must have this type of zeal born out of love. If our love remains set upon the things of this world, we will go the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness (2 Pet 2:15).

The apostle Paul is a good example of one who possessed great zeal for God.

But before he came to know Christ, his zeal for God was misguided (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:6). After apostle Paul came to know Christ, however, he counted as rubbish those things he could have profited from before. No longer considering his own selfish gain as a servant of God, he was zealous for the treasures he possessed as a servant of Christ (Phil 3:7-14). His example teaches us that a true servant of the Lord will never focus his heart on material gain (1 Cor 9:7-12; 1 Thess 2:4-9, 2 Thess 3:8).

Jesus taught us saying, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt 6:24). If the zeal of our heart is set upon material gain, our heart will always be divided between two masters.

Although this teaching seems extreme, like Jesus' cleansing of the temple, it is meant to compel us to rethink our priorities. The Lord's teachings about zeal are worth pondering as we, His servants, continue in our service for Him.

A Heart That Isn't Self-Seeking

The Lord's servant will never simply seek his own self-interests but His matters and the concerns of His church (Phil 2:19-22; 2 Cor 4:5; Eph 2:21-22, 1 Pet 2:5ff). That is why God's servants are found in God's temple (Rev 7:15; Lk 2:46-49), and that is why the concept of a "servant" naturally implies serving something outside of "self."

Modern society today is very self-centered. So much of the media is geared towards individual development and self-fulfillment. Even in Christendom, there is a tendency to focus on the personal relationship with Christ and downplay the shared relationship between Christ and the church. Yet, we do not just exist as community; we also exist as individuals. Therefore, the concept of "self" plays an important role in our relationships, and this includes our relationship with the Lord (Jude 20; 2 Thess 3:8-10; cf. Phil 2:12).

There is a fine line that distinguishes self-interests from selfish interests. The Bible never denies individual needs or the needs of particular groups. In fact, personal needs often provide an opportunity to serve and manifest love (cf. 1 Jn 3:17; Acts 6:1-3; Rom 16:1-2).

However, Philippians 2:4 encourages us to look beyond our self-interests, saying, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." This is an important principle to be applied in the church

and in our service of God's people. John 2:13-22 teaches a similar principle—in the church, self-interests and self-motivations should not overtake the interests of God's kingdom and the people that dwell therein.

Self-interests can often turn into selfish interests if we do not guard our heart. If the heart of the Lord's servant is not aware of his own self-interests while doing the Lord's work, it is very easy to be led astray and anger the Lord in our service. Therefore, to serve God to His favor, we must be ever watchful of our own spiritual development and place a priority on our own temple (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Cor 6:15-20).

For example, in Numbers 16:1-40, Korah and others rose up in a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. They charged Moses and Aaron with taking too much authority upon themselves as God's appointed leaders over the people. They argued that all the congregation of Israel was holy and no one was over and above another.

It was true that the whole congregation of Israel was holy (cf. Ex 19:6). But the rebellion of Korah was motivated by self-interests by those who desired to undermine the priesthood of Aaron (Num 16:10).

Many self-interested motives stem from greed and a desire for personal glory and power. These can seep into the church and blemish our service for the Lord. It seems like we are doing good things by serving the Lord and the interests of God's people. In truth, however, we are simply serving our own selfish interests.

God detests selfish motivations and will cleanse them from His temple (cf. Acts 5:1-10). Therefore, even if it appears we are doing good works for the Lord, if our faith or works spring from an impure or wicked foundation, we will still not receive God's approval (cf. Mt 7:15, 22-23).

Shift Towards God's Glory and Presence

A servant of the Lord is always concerned about where God is (Jn 12:26; cf. Lk 12:42, 45-46). True servants of the Lord will not focus so much on their own presence and place in life as they would on God's presence and placement of them.

The selfish interests expressed in John 2:13-22 reveals a shift away from God's glory and presence. The Jewish temple authorities were unaware of this shift because they only saw the glory and grandeur of the physical temple (Jn 2:18, 20).

From the time of King Solomon, who finished the temple his father, King David, intended to build for the Lord (2 Sam 7:1ff), the glory of God's presence was known to reside at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:11). By Jesus' time, however, the temple's glory had faded as selfish interests tarnished the temple worship (cf. Mk 12:38-44; Jn 11:47-48). The temple merchants selling animal

sacrifices and the moneychangers exchanging foreign currency made it convenient to worship in the temple, and these services appeared to serve the interests of the people. But in reality these services placed self-interests above God's glory.

If we put ourselves above God, His glory and presence will quickly leave us (Phil 3:19). So in John's gospel we discover that God's glory finds fulfillment not in the physical temple in Jerusalem but in the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 17:1, 4-5).

Though many thought God's glory rested in the temple in Jerusalem, God's glory had, in reality, already shifted (Jn 4:20-24). But, as we shall see, through the Lord Jesus' zealous heart for God's house, He would restore God's glory to the temple (cf. Hag 2:3, 9; Eph 2:21-22).

A Heart Of Self-Sacrifice

The heart of the Lord's servant must be willing to sacrifice itself for God's people.

Earlier we studied how God's glory was known to reside in God's temple. When King Solomon dedicated the temple, he earnestly prayed that the Lord would heed the prayer of those who prayed towards God's temple, for it meant that their hearts had returned to God (1 Kgs 8:29-53; Jon 2:4).

Yet, Solomon, in all his wisdom, knew that the physical temple could not truly contain God's glory. Therefore, he asked rhetorically, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth?" (1 Kgs 8:27). The answer was obviously, "No." But God did indeed dwell on the earth in the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14). The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, showed us what it means to live the life of a servant.

Solomon said: "The heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain the Lord's glory" (1 Kgs 8:27). Yet, God took the form of a servant and came to us in the likeness of men (Phil 2:5-8). From Jesus' example, we can understand that the highest expression of being a servant of the Lord means a life of sacrifice. So it is fitting that as the Passover drew near, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), came to God's temple to awaken it from its slumbering state (Jn 2:19). This awakening of the glory of God's temple is the daily concern in the heart of the Lord's servants (cf. 2 Cor 11:2, 28).

Like a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings (Mt 23:37), the Lord understood that in order to gather God's children, who were scattered abroad, a sacrifice of His own life would be required. This was a price the Lord was willing to pay to restore and re-gather God's people to Himself (Jn 11:49-52; 12:24, 32).

When Jesus said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple..." He did not mean the physical temple but "the temple of His body" (Jn 2:19, 21). By releasing His own

temple for the higher uses of God, being obedient to death, Jesus was able to raise God's temple anew and establish it in Himself. In this light, we can understand what Jesus said in John 12:24-26:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

With His own example, Jesus taught us to lay down our life as a sacrifice for God's people (Phil 2:17). This is the essence of love (1 Jn 3:16; 4:9). But how do we sacrifice our life today?

Jesus Has Set The Example Of Love

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave us a new commandment: “[L]ove one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

John says that whoever has this world's goods, sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart, he does not have God's love abiding in him (1 Jn 3:17). “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn 3:16). “Laying down our lives for our brothers” encompasses all the ways we show love to others (e.g., giving to another in their time of need).

Service to the Lord does not require memorization of a complex set of rules or the following of a detailed formula for behavior; it really boils down to something very basic: how do you show love to others?

The type of love and zeal possessed by the Lord Jesus for God's people is an example for us to follow, so that we might know what is required of each of the Lord's true and faithful servants.

Even though each of us may have a zeal for God's house, it is hard for us to make the sacrifices the Lord made. So Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master” (Mt 10:24-25).

When the disciples saw Jesus' act of cleansing the temple, they remembered what was written in Psalm 69:9: “[Z]eal for Your house has eaten me up.” Now John 2:17 also repeats, “Zeal for Your house will eat me up.” But why did the New Testament account shift to the future tense?

Jesus' zeal for the Lord's house would indeed end up consuming the Lord, that

is, it would lead to His death. But the death of His body released the old temple and reawakened God's temple anew. Therefore, the Lord's cleansing of the temple was an act of prophetic symbolism that the disciples were blessed to behold. For in this way they could understand how the Lord would renew God's temple and once again draw in and gather God's people to Himself.

To always have a zealous heart that is concerned with God's temple and willing to sacrifice is not easy, but an easy sacrifice is no sacrifice at all, really. If we do not love God's house or possess a zeal or concern for God's house, it will be hard for us to follow the Lord as His servant. The sacrifices required would cost too much and we might then lay God's work aside. But the Lord has given us Himself as an example of the heart of a servant, so that we could both witness and know what it means to possess the heart of a servant.

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (Jn 13:17).





Chapter 4: You Pour, I'll Stir

As water overflows from the pot and the roast starts to burn, you scramble around the kitchen to try and resolve the situation. One hand is beating the egg as the other is opening the oven to save the meat. As you lean over the counter, out of breath from the labor, you feel an arm around you as a fellow chef encourages you, saying that everything is going to be ok.

Teamwork is very important in the kitchen. During crunch time, everyone needs to put their efforts together. If one chef decides that he wants to make an extravagant appetizer all by himself and not care about anyone else's work, how will the meal be complete on time?

Servitude follows the same concept. Having spiritual friends to help guide you when things get tough is vital to maintain a healthy attitude towards serving God. Not only can they pray with you but they can also share their spiritual experiences with you when you need concrete advice. They keep you in check when you walk astray and are the companions God has provided in your life to walk with you on this spiritual journey.

Let's look at how other members have received comfort and aid from their spiritual friends in times of need...

Importance of spiritual companionship

Keywords: spiritual companion, intercession, spiritual cultivation

As I started to serve God in college, I had difficulties practicing the correct lifestyle and mentality of service. Oftentimes, my spiritual cultivation was lacking. When teaching RE, I would not spend nearly as much time as I should have in preparation. When attending church, I would not always actively listen to sermons. I would only do simple tasks of servitude that I was told to do and never actively tried to find church work that needed to be done. Church seminars would help to motivate me, but the effect often dwindled and disappeared after they ended. During this struggle to serve God, I could not keep my focus on the main purpose of servitude—repaying the love of God. More than once, the burden of the task or my lack of motivation would overcome me. As time passed, I began to gain a better understanding of how to serve God. Perhaps, I was better informed in the areas of servitude or more observant of opportunities. However, a definite factor in my growth was the transformation of my church friends into my spiritual companions. Through this spiritual companionship, we were able to spiritually cultivate and serve God individually and as a team, all for the purpose of repaying God’s love.

Our friends strongly influence us in both positive and negative ways. This is explicitly declared by King Solomon in his great wisdom in Proverbs 13:20, which states, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.” As humans, we naturally imitate each others’ actions, speech and thoughts. When we make spiritual companions, we will subconsciously observe their spiritual lifestyle and mimic it. Therefore, if we want to have a strong spiritual life and live a life of servitude, our companions should also have this same mentality. Since “two are better than one” as described in Ecclesiastes 4:9, both parties can strive toward this wonderful goal with confidence and strength.

Through daily interaction with my spiritual companions and discussions in Bible studies and group sharing sessions, I was able to see God’s love in their lives. I clearly saw God working through their mentality of servitude and their understanding of God’s words and mysteries. This not only gave me a mindset to imitate, but also the quiet understanding that we are all trying to serve God throughout our lives. Serving God gives meaning to our lives and without this servitude, our lives are filled with emptiness which we try to fill with meaningless tasks. Through teamwork and combined efforts of servitude, my spiritual companions and I are able to motivate each other and build each other up. I am truly comforted knowing that there is always someone who can answer my questions about God’s words, pray for me, and help me in serving God.

I was blessed with the opportunity to live with my church friends, which allowed us to always be exposed to each others’ acts of servitude. Because of their strong spirituality, we would constantly talk about the Bible and other spiritual topics, but best of all, we would pray together. For those of us who do

not have the opportunity to live with spiritual companions, we should share more during Bible studies and discussions at church, and fellowship with one another. This will help others understand our view on servitude through our thoughts and actions. We will gain mutual edification by sharing with each other, knowing that we are all working for the one body of Christ, the church. When serving with spiritual companions, we become a much stronger force, not only overcoming our own weaknesses and lack of motivation, but also strengthening the church as a whole while magnifying our efforts.



How to get peers motivated to join in the work?

Keywords: motivation, first love for God, encouragement, being lukewarm

As one of the youth class coordinators, getting peers motivated to join in holy work is a perpetual challenge I face. I often see youths stand around idly or sit on the side chatting on their blackberries or playing games on their cell phones when there is plenty of church work they can help out with. What is even more disappointing is that, most of these youths were either both born and raised in church or have been members for a long time. Yet the ones that truly voluntarily participate are usually the members who did not believe until later in their lives or had encountered extreme predicaments and then returned to the bosom of God. Why is it that the youth who have had smooth, peaceful lives are often the ones that do not feel the urgency to give back to the Lord? Perhaps they have never felt the first love that their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents experienced when first coming to Christ. They feel a great distance between them and God, and are unfamiliar with His love. However, I believe there are a couple issues that we can improve without the help of miracles and wonders to help motivate peers to join in holy work.

As youth coordinators, we schedule other youths, and not always ourselves, to lead Bible studies. However, some youth, for whatever reason, refuse to lead Bible studies. It is helpful to take the time to sit down with them, pray for them, and give encouraging words, such as, "Oh, just try it out and see, it's not as bad as you think it is. You don't have to be a theologian, just prepare whatever you can. I'll be there to help you." If they receive the confidence they need to take that first step, it will greatly help their faith, because as a leader of the Bible study, you actually learn more than the listeners. Once they feel more comfortable, they will gradually enjoy leading Bible studies, which can eventually lead to other types of holy work.

Untimely employment is also an issue that may prevent youths from serving in the church is their work life. A brother from abroad, who is currently studying

in the city, has to work on Saturdays. As a result, he does not attend church services anymore. Many youth begin working part time jobs in high school for a variety of different reasons. Perhaps, they want some spare change in their pockets without having to beg their parents for allowance; perhaps due to their family's financial instability they need to support themselves, lightening the burden of their parents. Like many things in life, once you are in the habit of doing it, you feel uneasy if you stop. Therefore, the habit of working usually carries on to their college life. Since college is expensive and takes up most of their weekdays, working on weekends becomes an alternative they might take up. However, working on weekends prevents keeping the Sabbath holy and creates a hindrance in serving God. One must remember that it is the Lord who provides job opportunities and career success. "Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who built it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain." (Psalm 127:1). Therefore, if the necessity of financial stability rises, as long as the words of God are held in first regard, the Lord will provide.

Another major problem that distances the youth from serving the Lord is the absence of the love of Christ within their hearts. The need to return the care and mercy God has graciously bestowed upon them is missing. The connection between the blessings in life and God's providence is unfelt. Taking the time to reflect and count the blessings will remind us of how much God suffered for our salvation. When we empathize and sympathize to His agonizing and selfless sacrifice, we will realize the importance of permeating the same love of Christ to the cold or lukewarm members. As they witness God's love in our servitude and lives, hopefully, they will feel the same affection we feel from God and in return, give back in service.

Serving the Lord is a job of great significance. However, sometimes we serve with the wrong motive or without a motive. Unfortunately, one can "have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God." (Acts 8:21). For instance, some brothers participate in as much holy work as possible in order gain the attention of sisters in the hopes of attracting a spouse. Also, some youth are highly affiliated with worldly matters, drawing their time and hearts from God. Thus they serve merely out of a duty. For example, a brother from my church dated a non-believer, and he only did whatever he was scheduled for. However, after service, he would leave church right away, avoiding all other events, such as choir, Bible study, etc. He completed his duty, but nonchalantly, and as a result, he told me in person that he does not care much about church, let alone God. Therefore, daily cultivation and having God involved in all the decisions you make and all the steps you take are critical in developing and maintaining the correct motive to serve the Lord.

In order to motivate peers to join in the work of God, the presence of God's love is necessary both within the hearts of the youth and among the fellowship. The passion to pursue the things of the world must also be annihilated. For those already in the service of the Lord's military, never forget the motive. The

impetus ought to be focused upon God, the giver of all good things. Therefore, we must encourage the rest of the youth to remember God's love and not focus on worldly matters. For the things of this world are only temporary, but the riches we store in heaven are forever. Taking the time to encourage the less motivated peers with constant intercession, reminding them of the grace of God, and giving them the confidence that they may lack can ignite their flame and zeal to serve the Lord.



Lessons learned from other faithful workers

Keywords: attitude of servitude, learning from others

This is an transcript of an interview with a church pastor.

Q: What was the most memorable act of servitude you've seen?

One of the most memorable acts of servitude I have seen was during a ministers' seminar. During this particular seminar, there was not enough space to accommodate all the attendees, so many of them had to sleep on the floors of trailers. As a result, one of the elders awoke the next morning covered in ant bites. Rather than fussing over it, he just carried himself as if nothing happened. Although this was not a specific act of servitude, from this elder's conduct I came to understand the heart of servitude that exists in our church. In other denominations you would never see ministers sleeping on the floor. They would, instead, be staying in hotels. It is so wonderful to see ministers in our church exhibiting this type of heart in their servitude.

Another example that has touched me is the attitude with which our senior ministers serve while in Africa. While serving over there, they adopt a very simple lifestyle, similar to that of the local members. When traveling, they opt to walk on dusty roads like everyone else. When making lodging arrangements, they opt to stay, sleep, and eat with the local members. This type of heart really touches me because although these ministers come from regions better off than Africa, they choose a lifestyle like that of the local members to show them that we are truly one body in Christ.

Through these examples I have come to see that the love and sincerity our ministers have towards the church is a result of their recognition of the God they serve.

Q: How has this affected your servitude?

These examples of servitude have greatly inspired me, as a young minister, to serve God faithfully. In their acts of service, the senior ministers not only

faithfully fulfill their responsibilities in action, but they also fulfill them in heart. How else could you explain why the ministers would live in such poor conditions in Africa when they could very well be staying in hotels? This can only be explained as the love of Christ compelling these workers to serve with their entirety. The fact that I can see the love of Christ motivating the actions of our church workers lets me know I am in the right place and motivates me in my service to God.

Message of encouragement:

For the youth of True Jesus Church, I'd like to share a few words of encouragement:

- Never lose your first love when you're serving God
- Know that you are the chosen people of God. As the chosen people of God, it is your duty to serve Him with your totality.

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:5)

- Know the God you worship. If you don't, you won't be able to love Him or your brothers and sisters unconditionally.
- In every aspect of your servitude, you have to give your all and hold nothing back, just like Paul did before he left the church in Ephesus to go to Jerusalem. All the members there loved him because they knew that Paul loved them by giving them his entirety.

"How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you..." (Acts 20:20)





Chapter 5: Facing the Dinner Rush

For your first day you're doing quite well. Cutting, grating, boiling, frying, seasoning, baking. You are loving your job...so far.

"I need more bread!!! Where is the bread???"

"Its not ready yet!!!"

"Steak and tilapia!!! The diners are getting impatient!!!"

"Yes, they're *coming*!!!"

Before you know it, the stress-free daytime has evolved into a frenzied dinner rush. You have to handle five different orders simultaneously, making sure each dish is perfectly seasoned, ooked, and arranged. The waiters and waitresses are leaning on the counters, tapping their feet in and reminding you that the diners have been waiting too long. Finally, you just can't handle it any longer. There's simply too much on your plate!

When some first start serving God, the feeling is so wonderful. They get the hang of their assignments and are glad to finally give back to God and the church. Soon, however, the church council members ask for help in several other areas as well. Leading hymns, teaching RE, organizing events, interpreting...the list goes on and on. Thinking they can handle it and feeling eager to serve God as much as possible, they say yes to everything. However, only when they're completely burnt out do they realize that they have been far too ambitious.

Others get caught up in things in their worldly lives. Classes, sports, clubs, internships, jobs. With so much to do, holy work is pushed to the back of their mind and they procrastinate on RE class preparation or "forget" to pray before going to sleep.

Neither situation is a good example of a balanced life. To be able to continue serving in the long run, we need to learn how to prioritize, manage our time, and delegate responsibilities. Here are a few eaxmples of how our own brothers and sisters handled everything on their plates.

Am I accepting too much holy work?

Keywords: balance, quality over quantity, RE teacher, church projects

Though serving the church is a valuable aspect of the Christian life, there is a limit to the amount of work we should undertake. Throughout the course of my holy work experiences, I have definitely had to deal with having too much on my plate. It is a lesson that I learned the hard way. It started around the year 2003. At that time, I had just started to attend a newly formed church on the East Coast, and my only holy work responsibilities were interpretation and religious education. In addition, I felt that I wanted to do even more for the Lord and so I started praying to God for more opportunities in which I could help and hopefully excel at.

I had two opportunities to start helping with more holy work. A couple members approached me to join the Ministry Guideline Project. At first, I thought they were looking to recruit someone that I would recommend, but it turned out that they asked me if I was interested. I immediately said yes and thought this was something new and exciting for me to do. Basically, I was on a team that compiled and drafted holy work guidelines to benefit our US churches. Another opportunity came about, which was to join the East Coast branch of TJC Global, a graphics and video production team that started in southern California. I was so excited to join this team and work on innovative projects. I knew that I could exercise my creativity here.

I was definitely overjoyed to have these extra opportunities to serve God. However, I noticed a trend in the coming months. I had been asked to support other church work that would undoubtedly further divide my time. It was tough to reject this work since I knew those who were asking me really needed the help. I remembered that I would accept all of them because I felt bad declining them. It may also be because of my “nice guy” personality that forces me to accept everything.

I quickly realized that I was loading too much on my plate. The reason I could tell it was too much was because I felt inundated and short on time. It seemed as if I was always doing church work and had less time for family and hobbies. It had become a great concern, and I had to start reevaluating my life. I remembered the prayer that I made to God asking for more opportunities to serve Him, and how it did come true. However, I knew that in the pursuit for greater and better things, one has to remember to be grounded. I realized that for me it had become more about quantity, instead of quality. Furthermore, my faith was not matching the level of servitude I was engaged in. I had to root my faith better, improve my spiritual cultivation, and be honest with myself. I needed to understand the reality of my situation and that as workers of God, we are merely fragile vessels. Workers of God can be tired and frustrated, which are definite learning experiences.

I prayed to God again, asking Him for more wisdom and what to do. He revealed to me in prayer and His Word that I should focus on the existing holy work that I was involved in and put my whole efforts into them so that with His guidance, the results would turn out to be fruitful. Isaiah 40:29 says, “He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.” I had to learn how to tell the truth in expressing how I actually felt about taking on additional work. Usually, I would respond that at the current time I was involved in other holy work that occupied my time and that I would reconsider helping in the future. The reaction in others was that they were very understanding.

In general, we have to realize that without God, we are not able to accomplish His work. We really need Him by our side so that He can grant us the energy and strength to keep going. In life, we will continue to get busier and busier because of our accumulating roles, such as student, employee, spouse, parent, etc. Praying to God for a source of balance and energy can really help us in our journey of holy work. We also need to understand our limits and know that as human beings, we can only do so much.



Balancing holy work with school life

Keywords: time management, procrastination, preparation, extracurricular activities

There are several ways to balance holy work with school life. Once I entered college, I realized that time management would be more important than ever. Before college, my days were almost planned out for me. Every day, I had the same school schedule, and every week the same activities. However, at college, I could decide when to take my classes and which events to attend. At first it can be quite difficult to figure out a good schedule, but once I was more comfortable with the new way of life, I learned to balance my responsibilities. An important thing to remember is that as much as I would like to, it is impossible for me to join every organization and take every class that interests me. Holy work is not something that hinders these opportunities, but it is a duty that every Christian should be devoted to. It is easy to balance holy work with school life if you recognize where your priorities should be. For example, every day I am in school, I study for different classes, but I still make sure to have time to relax. I also make sure I have time to work on my spiritual life by reading the Bible. An effective way to improve on holy work is spiritual cultivation. Thus, no matter how tired or lazy I may have felt, I read the Bible in the morning and before bed. Sometimes the chapters are a bit long, but thank God I am almost always able to start and finish the Bible reading. Even if I have much work to do, I take out some time to read the Bible. I also put my Bible in a drawer at my desk so that it is easy to access.

It is great to get more involved in school activities, but they cannot conflict with, or take priority over, holy work. If the meetings are on Saturdays or Friday nights, you should be able to find many other organizations that do not meet on those days and are just as interesting. For instance, I hold an executive board position for a certain organization; whenever we plan our events, I make sure to deny participation if it is on the Sabbath. Everyone respects my decision and does try to accommodate by planning events around everyone's schedule. If we must hold an event on Sabbath, it is not the end of the world if I do not attend that event.

Moreover, many students are known to procrastinate with schoolwork, but holy work should be treated with a different perspective. Procrastination is bad enough and we should not wait until the last minute in any assigned work, but to procrastinate in doing holy work is especially unfavorable. For example, if we are going to teach religious education on Saturday, we should not wait until after service on Friday night to start preparing. We may be very busy with school every day of the week, but if we manage our time wisely we can start preparing on Sunday and steadily pray and prepare for the lesson. This is better than procrastination for many reasons. First, if we need to buy any supplies, we do not have to fret on Saturday morning. Also, spending much time preparing on Friday night will guarantee a lack of sleep that will lead to fatigue on Sabbath. Finally, if God sees that we care about working for Him much more than other tasks, He will help us in every aspect of life.

Matthew 6:26-27 reads, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" Do not worry about excelling in your school life or whether or not the best grades will guarantee a better job and life. Do not feel that you must study or focus on school in every moment that you are awake. Focus on God's work first and He will make sure that you are successful in His eyes. He will make sure that both the results of your holy work and school work will reflect your effort.



Feeling overburdened or overwhelmed from serving

Keywords: feeling overwhelmed, juggling church and college, strength from God

Overall, being a steward of God is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling jobs we can have. James tells us that faith without works is dead and that faith is demonstrated by deeds (cf. Jas 2:17-18). Thus we know that serving God is a testament to our faith, a vital part of growing in the Lord, and essential for the maturity of our faith. However, once in a while, we may feel overwhelmed during the course of our servitude. Because of the numerous other responsibilities

in our busy schedules or because of the vast amount of holy work, our hearts can be heavy-laden and our ability to serve suffers. When I first entered college, I experienced that exact feeling. However, through my experience, I have learned that all this can be mended by remembering that nothing comes before God and that we can rely on Christ, our cornerstone, for strength.

For my undergraduate studies, I attended a school where there was no local church. However, there was a fellowship nearby where I could attend Bible studies and weekly Sabbath services. There was a need for workers to lead Bible studies there both Friday nights and Saturday afternoons. The fellowship also had a few children, so there was a need for teachers and a religious education system. As a young fellowship, the number of holy workers available was severely limited. Those able to serve typically had a lot on their plates. Having grown up in a relatively large church, I was new to this situation. Shortly after joining the fellowship, I found myself overwhelmed from serving. During that time, I had begun to lead Bible studies and teach RE classes very frequently, while still trying to adjust to many aspects of college life – the unfamiliar environment, the classes and workload, the new mode of social life, and the new-found independence.

While trying to adapt to my new college environment, I had put a great emphasis on finding my new niche. I was on a varsity team, which began to consume a substantial portion of my time. Between daily practices and weekend competitions, I found that I no longer had the time to sufficiently prepare for church work. Though I really enjoyed it and got along well with my teammates, it was impeding my service to God. After two semesters on the team, I decided that this particular extracurricular activity was utilizing too much of my schedule and, therefore, was not healthy for my spiritual life. After leaving the team, I found that I had much more time to serve God properly. I was no longer preparing lessons the night before. I noticed that with a good lesson plan, RE classes went much more smoothly and the students enjoyed it more as well, since I was actually able to plan activities rather than just tell Bible stories. Furthermore, I had much more time for personal spiritual cultivation, which also helped me to devote my heart to servitude. This new breathing space brought a great sense of peace to my mind, and subsequently, I did not feel as overwhelmed from serving the church.

If you are also faced with a similar problem, a good first step is to determine the cause. Feeling overburdened from serving may be the result of several sources. Below are good questions for us to ask ourselves.

Am I relying on my own strength instead of on God?

Oftentimes, we have the desire to serve the Lord, which is good, but take the job into our own hands. In serving God, we put forth a great deal of effort, which can be draining. Before long, we find that we have so much to do, but we are just completely beat. As a steward of God, it is imperative that we understand that God alone is our strength. By ourselves, we are weak and lowly, unworthy

to do God’s work. He gives us power and by relying on Him, we can faithfully do His will. As Asaph eloquently stated in Psalm 73:26, “My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” Man is fragile, but God’s strength knows no bounds.

Are there other things in my life that are not allowing me to serve God to my fullest?

We may also feel overwhelmed because another portion of our life is interfering. When other pieces of our lives are consuming a great deal of our time and attention, we lose the ability to serve with our whole heart. For example, we may spend so much time engaged in studies or school work that we no longer have the time to adequately prepare to lead Bible studies or RE classes. Instead, we spend an hour the night before scrambling to organize a lesson plan and hence feel overwhelmed. In such a case, we need to step back and reflect on where our priorities lie. We may have idolized certain aspects, such as academics, and need to build our lives on God. “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1Co 3:11).

Never forget that as a steward of God, He must be first-place in our heart. In our servitude, we may become overwhelmed and heavy-burdened. However, by relying on His power and the Holy Spirit to do His works, we cast our burdens and cares onto Him. He is the only source of our strength.



Taking breaks from holy work

Keywords: feeling overwhelmed, spiritual friends, spiritual cultivation, renewed strength

Whenever deadlines or action items of a certain holy work abound, mentally, I long for a break from holy work. It seems most natural and even at other times, you may want to quit holy work altogether due to the stress and anxiety involved in some projects and work. May 2008 was a tough month due to the onslaught of hardship coming from school, work, and church. It seemed like my life was spinning on a top and so many items that had to be completed—essays, group projects, deadlines at work, countless requests for improvements on church facilities, and monthly coordinator duties at church.

As a board member of my church, I take care of general affairs. The tasks of this position can become very complex since things inside a building constantly need repair or replacement, and sometimes it is hard to predict what will happen next. “Expect the unexpected” almost seems like an appropriate statement. Adding to this, I had other church work that I was devoted to, such as

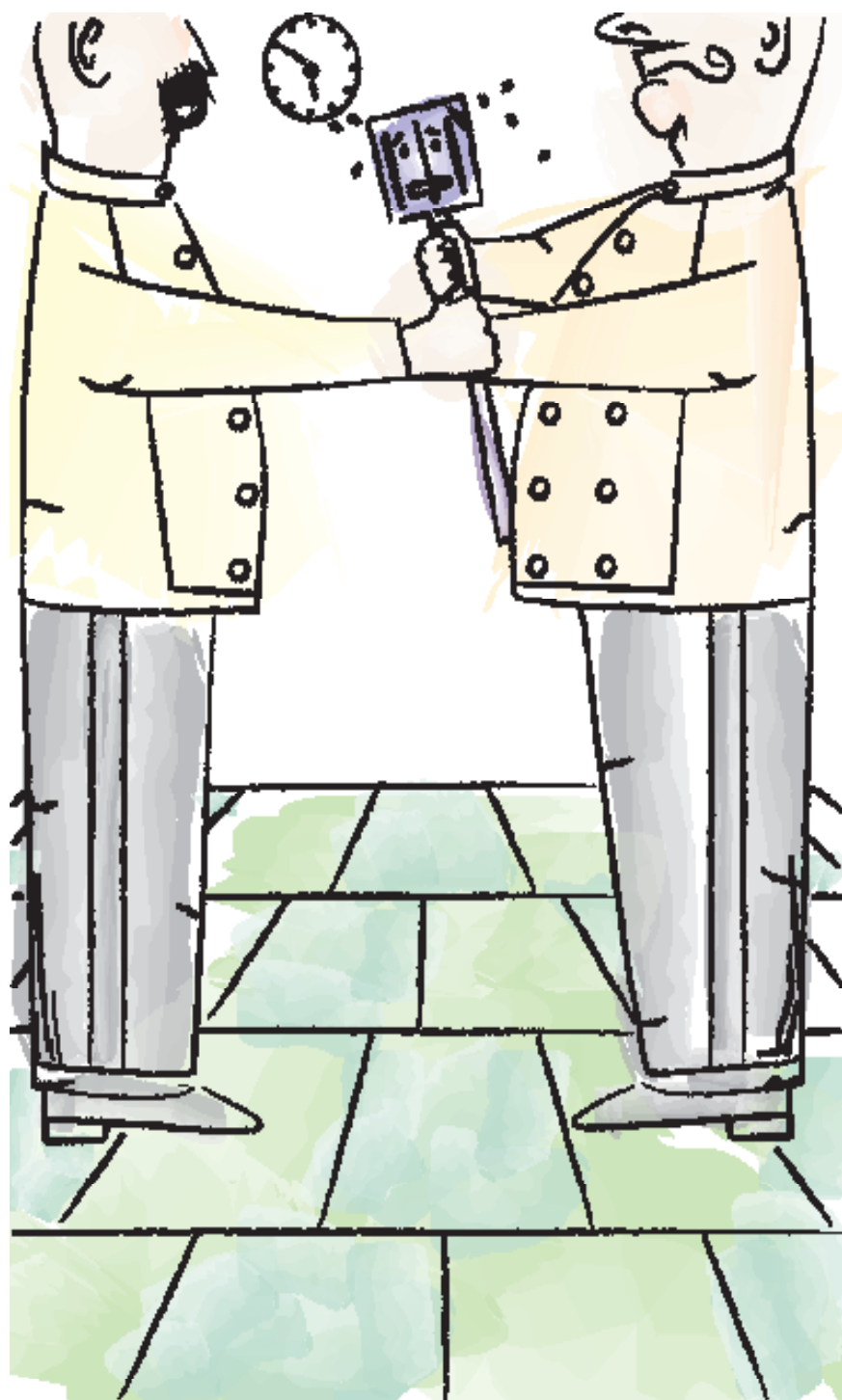
the National Youth Ministry. Within the local church, I was also involved in choir, teaching, and interpretation. Not to mention, I had a full-time job and attended school part-time at night. It was indeed a challenging combination.

I realized that I needed to take a break from my board member duties. It was apparent to me that I was not feeling very joyful when going to church and partaking in the duties. Sometimes, I would even get a headache when I stepped into church. Coming to church on Sabbath no longer provided me with any rest since it was spent working on behind-the-scene tasks such as replenishing bathroom supplies and taking care of church logistics and transportation. I realized I was at a dangerous point in my faith, and I really needed the Lord to recharge me. I started to put this matter into prayer.

Thankfully, God comforted me and told me that He was listening. My close spiritual friends were also there to listen and provide invaluable advice. Many a time, I spent the noontime hours fasting and praying to God and crying out in my anguish. The Lord helped me reevaluate my thought process, and I decided to ask more people to help me out. I began to delegate more as that helped reduce stress on me. More importantly, through my prayers and encouragement from others, I finally understood that as the Lord's servants, we need to spiritually cultivate ourselves at all times. I continued to work for the Lord and as I focused more on spiritual cultivation, I felt more joy in working for the Lord. I found my situation to be similar to Elijah's during his escape from Queen Jezebel and how he asked God to take his life away (c.f. 1 Ki 19:4). I had felt the same level of misery Elijah did, but his story was encouraging as I too received comfort from God's presence in a gentle whisper.

The fact of the matter is no one can really take a definitive break from holy work as holy work never ends. Perhaps, a good two-week break may exist, but then another round of holy work emerges. Usually, I feel this way after a spiritual convocation, in which all the efforts of evangelical and pastoral works appear to culminate on the concluding day of Spiritual Convocation. Then, two weeks later, we must resume the spiritual battle and not grow complacent in the Lord as the work of the Lord must continue. The most important thing is to continue to pray to God for renewed strength. Only His Spirit and Word can sustain us. A break may definitely be refreshing at times, and as humans, we need that. However, that break should be seen as a slice in time amidst the continuum of God's work and mission. May we continue to encourage one another and share with one another in our valiant labor for the Lord.





Chapter 6: Fighting Over the Spatula

After entering the kitchen as the new chef in town, you've read the cookbook, checked the ingredients, started working with others, and faced the dinner rush. The modern-day kitchen is a place filled with shelves of various ingredients and spices, a collection of unique and diverse cooking utensils, and, of course, groups of other chefs, both new and old alike. Like many demanding professions, a good chef needs to be well-trained in order to safely and efficiently carry out his or her duties in the kitchen. Also, a good chef must work well not only by himself, but also with other chefs.

However, working as a chef can be quite stressful at times and working with other chefs doesn't necessarily make the job any easier. Therefore, one of the key elements when working with others is communication; it is also one of the harder fundamentals to keep up. Throughout the communication process, you may stumble upon disagreements between yourself and other chefs, which in turn will cause uneasiness and friction between coworkers. For instance, you may fight over something as simple as a spatula:

"I need a spatula!"

"I'm using it right now!"

"But I need it now!"

"I grabbed it first! Go find your own spatula!"

"Ahh, fine!"

Such conflicts certainly are not conducive to a well-organized and fully-operating kitchen. In addition, if there is no order in the kitchen, things can easily get out of hand and turn into a huge mess - literally.

Likewise, there may be times in our own servitude when we disagree with others. Whether it's expressing conflicting opinions or having trouble managing different personalities, we must learn to work together as a team. As Christ is one body, we must also be one body in our servitude. We must learn to serve with humility with God and with man. In addition, we must be patient and understanding with one another. As a result, our servitude will obtain a sense of teamwork and unity, which will also provide organization and stability as well as peace and harmony to our service. There are other brothers and sisters who struggled while working with others, too. Let us learn from their experiences how they managed to overcome these conflicts and be victorious in their servitude.

Personal conflicts

Keywords: personal conflict, grudges, prayer

Some time ago, a church sister held a serious grudge against me. She would give me the cold shoulder and deliberately avoid every type of activity at church in which I was involved, even though she was once a part of those same activities. Though it was not clear to others that she was avoiding me, I was troubled by my conscience and I felt guilty in this matter. I felt as though it was my fault she was no longer part of those activities.

I tried to reconcile my relationship with her a few times, but it was clear that she did not want to speak to me. The only thing I could do was pray for her. Initially, I mostly prayed that we would be able to let go of the past and forgive one another. I really longed for peace between us; however, this did not happen for a long time.

Seeing no concrete results from my prayers, it became difficult for me to serve God, especially whenever I felt the tension from being around her. However, I continued to do what I had always done and did not let this issue deter me from participating in holy work. After all, I strongly felt that our personal issues should not affect our participation in holy work or cause others to become concerned about our faith. To me, her actions were not correct but I knew that this was something between her and God.

There were times when it was so difficult, that I would cry to God about how helpless and miserable I felt. I would even ask God to have mercy on me because I could not fix the problem on my own, nor did I have the courage to confront the sister. Amazingly, shortly after each one of these deep prayers, I could feel that her heart was softened towards me and she would mildly communicate with me. However, as soon as I did not pray about it, she would go back to ignoring me and I would feel great disappointment and frustration once again.

After awhile, I came to realize that her behavior could not be explained by just the grudge she had against me. She had many personal issues to deal with herself, especially in terms of forgiveness and her attitude towards servitude. I also remembered the verses: “ ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’ ” (Mt 18:21b-22).

At this point, I began to pray more for her than for the situation itself. I realized it did not matter when or how frequently she spoke to me. What was more important was her spirituality and the struggles left to be resolved in her heart. Because there was nothing else I could do, I just prayed for her and forgave her every time I felt burdened or discouraged.

Thank God, though, she was slowly able to speak to me again and being around each other was no longer a big deal. Although occasionally there is still difficulty

communicating for us, I am certain she now knows that I am always open and willing to talk to her. Furthermore, I am thankful to God that this ordeal did not affect other members negatively, nor did it stop me from doing holy work.



Being considerate when assigning duties to others

Keywords: coordinator responsibilities, leadership role, consideration when assigning duties

As a co-coordinator of my college campus fellowship, my entrusted duties included planning several special fellowship events throughout the school year. One of the major steps in event planning was to delegate specific duties to other fellowship members to help spread the work more evenly. Both my fellow co-coordinator and I were relatively new to the leadership role for holy work. Our lack of experience led us to erroneously feel that we could get away with focusing purely on duty assignment and leave the assignees with the flexibility of deciding how to carry out the duties on their own.

Our approach was soon proven problematic as we received complaints that some duties were assigned in an inconsiderate manner because they were not timely, well thought out, or detailed enough. Additionally, we often overlooked and failed to address potential event issues when assigning duties, and if the assignees did not catch them and point them out, these issues would surface and cause problems during the course of the events.

As my fellow co-coordinator and I investigated the causes of these event planning and execution issues, we realized that while our leadership approach fulfilled the role of delegating duties, it ignored the need for these duties to be conceived and delegated in a considerate manner. While many fellowship members were willing to assist with the fellowship's events and day-to-day operation, us coordinators should not take their support for granted and cause them unnecessary burden due to our sloppiness in duty assignment. Rather, as their fellow brothers in Christ, we should make the effort to show courtesy and consideration when requesting their assistance in all tasks great or small and express gratitude for their voluntary contributions.

Under the guidance of a previous campus fellowship coordinator, my fellow co-coordinator and I reformed our duty assignment process. We made sure to assign duties on a voluntary basis with plenty of time given for everyone to fulfill their roles. We also paid greater attention to event details so we could better spot potential event issues and design the assigned duties to address them. Most importantly, we made sure to show our appreciation to all fellowship members when they volunteered for duties and also after they carried through with them. I truly thank God because while this more considerate approach

meant that the two of us had to exert more time and effort to plan for fellowship events, everyone carried out their duties more smoothly and our fellowship was able to develop a closer bond through the successfully executed events.



Responding to criticism from others

Keywords: criticism, pride, appearance, humility

One morning at church, as I was walking through the chapel, an older brother suddenly beckoned me to come over. Because I had only moved to this area a month ago and had just begun playing piano for Sabbath service the day before, I thought he might want to ask about how I was adjusting to this new environment or comment on my servitude. Slightly apprehensive, I approached him and leaned forward to hear him whisper, “You’d best not wear those shoes to church.” I nodded my head in agreement and immediately said, “Okay, no problem.” But after pondering for a bit, I then asked, “Is it because they have heels? Or are you talking about my other shoes—are we not allowed to wear boots to church?” He said, “No! It’s because you are wearing ‘tuo xie’ (Chinese for slippers or flip flops)! When you come to church, you should be dressed more formally.” At this, I did a double take. No, I explained—although my shoes don’t have a heel strap and are open-toed, we don’t consider these shoes to be flip flops in America; but he then just explained that actually, somebody else was complaining about this and had asked him to relay this message. With mixed emotions, I returned to my seat. Just the other week, my good friend had told me I should be more careful about my clothing (apparently because my shoulder was exposed for 3 seconds when I was removing my thick and heavy jacket in the chapel). Somebody had asked her to pass this message to me as well.

Looking around, I noted that the majority of the congregation wore jeans, cheap T-shirts and ruddy brown sandals or sneakers, with nonchalant attitudes. I then looked at myself with a skirt, heels and blouse every week—attending church services more often than over 80% of the congregation—I couldn’t help feeling like I was being singled out and attacked. Wasn’t I already doing a good job? Wasn’t I sincere and good enough in everything I did? How can you say that when you yourself or everyone else is like *that*? And why are you only criticizing *me*? The more I thought, the more wronged I felt, and the more I felt that this was a very unwelcoming church. For a moment, I even entertained thoughts that I didn’t want to attend service or serve in “this church” anymore. Although I knew I was being unreasonable and overreacting, I considered traveling an hour away to the other church where I was warmly welcomed in comparison.

After a while, I was finally able to re-evaluate myself. My retaliation to this seemingly harsh but reasonable constructive criticism revealed that for a long

while now, my motivation and attitude in church was wrong. Somewhere along the way, pride and self-righteousness had crept in, and my servitude and worship was no longer purely for God’s glory. I was no longer simply serving and focusing on God alone, with a desire to only love Him and Man more abundantly; instead, I was easily offended at the slightest criticism, allowing my desire for Man’s respect to rise above my desire to draw near to God. Instead of humbly acknowledging the truth in my fellow brethren’s words, or realizing that their criticism was for my benefit, I was shown to be poorly rooted in my faith, shaken and wavering upon the slightest breeze. A good soldier and worker of God is able to accept suggestions and constructive criticism with a humble attitude because he is forever learning to correct, improve and perfect himself to be a better vessel for God. Instead, I was just focused on myself, blinded with conceit and self-righteousness.

The first step to dealing with criticism is being able to acknowledge our own shortcomings and weaknesses. God values an obedient heart more than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22-23)—so our service is meaningless if we are clouded with anger and the inability to humble ourselves, love, and listen to the brethren who criticize us. Instead, our attitude in servitude should be “the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5 NIV)—humble, obedient, loving and patient.

Of course, we must be able to distinguish constructive or harmless criticism from those with intent to injure, such as malicious criticism or gossip. We should evaluate ourselves carefully whenever receiving feedback, to see whether this suggestion is good. If we indeed suffer undeserved complaints, then consider the experience a trial and take joy (1 Peter 4:12-19; James 1:2-4). Christians will certainly face trials in life, but the key is to overcome them so we may be refined like gold (Job 23:10, 1 Thess 3:3). Grasp hold of our motivation and purpose in servitude and continue with a willing and joyful heart. It is a pity if a few words of criticism defeat us and separate us from the love of God, so it’s important not to give up our faithful servitude and to retain a humble heart. When Paul was criticized by people as well, he himself even said “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court...but He who judges me is the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 4:3-4). The important thing is simply to “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Ephesians 6:7 NIV). It’s also quite helpful to review the qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, which reminds us not to be violent or quarrelsome but gentle and even-tempered—especially important since holy workers are bound to face criticism. And continually strive to be faultless, like Jesus, whose conduct was beyond reproach because He spoke only the truth and was responsible, blameless and faithful in all His work. As Philippians 2:3 states, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” This kind of humble reflection is the key to dealing with criticism.





Chapter 7: The Master Chef Steps In

Whether you just started in the kitchen or you have many years of experience under your belt, there will always be a time when something goes wrong while you cook. When that happens, will you notice the problem? Even if you do notice the problem, do you know how to resolve it? Chances are that sometimes you will not be able, and need some kind of help from others. Your fellow chefs could try to help you, but even then, the problem threatens to overwhelm the entire kitchen. So what can you do?

In comes the Master Chef. The Master Chef is an expert at all things pertaining to cooking, and is familiar with every inch of the kitchen. He comes up to your station, points out exactly what is wrong, and guides you step by step to fix the issue. When things get *really* bad, He simply takes over and whips up the perfect solution to your disastrous meal.

When we accomplish holy work that has been assigned to us, we don't exactly see God showing up physically to guide us. However, this does not mean that we are able to successfully complete our tasks through only our own abilities. God's invisible hand works behind the scene so that everything goes smoothly. Without God's guidance, anything and everything can go wrong. Let's see how our peers have learned this valuable lesson.

Serving as an SSC counselor

Keywords: reliance, humility, inexperience

An important part of serving with humility is remembering that it is God who makes the work prosper; we may do the work of planting or watering, but ultimately God gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6). It was not until I served as an SSC counselor for the first time that I was able to witness this principle in action.

When I was first asked to help in this capacity, I felt very unsure and unqualified for a couple reasons: My own spirituality was often quite unstable and I had never been to RETS as well as not knowing anything about teaching RE. I was scarcely out of J2 and I felt that it would be more appropriate to attend SSC as a participant than as a counselor. Thank God, however, that a brother encouraged me, saying that serving as a counselor was a very good and meaningful experience for him, and that I should give it a try despite my uncertainty.

Since I was so inexperienced, I was afraid that I might say something wrong or contrary to the church's teachings. Because of this, I knew that I had to rely on God in prayer so I could have spiritual wisdom to teach only what was in accordance with His Word. Starting from the opening ceremony prayer and all throughout the SSC, I continually asked God for guidance in teaching my students, not wanting to risk having my words cause trouble or confusion later in the students' spiritual lives. I think this humility gave room for God to perform His work in the students.

During the convocation I started to realize and witness that it is really God who works and teaches the students. In every SSC there are always some kids who are particularly troublesome. They don't listen, they don't like class, they don't like to pray, etc. Yet, gradually and amazingly, their attitudes change. They become more submissive and cooperative, and they begin to reflect and pray more on their own. It occurred to me that even if I were to say something that was really eloquent and really effective and powerful, the students would eventually forget about it after some time. But the experience of God teaching and changing them Himself, along with an awakened desire to live for the Lord, are feelings they will remember for much longer.

In retrospect, my uncertainty was actually a good thing because it allowed me to approach this work with a humble attitude. Once we become experienced and feel that we know how to do things the right way, it becomes easier to forget that it is God who completes the work, not us. From this experience I learned that regardless of whether we are new or experienced workers, we should approach the work as if we are doing it for the first time, praying and pursuing God's way with all diligence.



Rely on God and God alone

Keywords: reliance on God, attitude, God's guidance

It was a Friday night service. I was once again scheduled to lead hymns before the sermon. I didn't think much about it because I had already been hymn leading for six years and by now it just felt like a routine to me. I would go up in front of the congregation, lead a few hymns, and then return to my seat. It seemed like it was one of the simplest and trouble-free holy work that one can do.

However, this hymn singing session was different. As the pianist started playing the intro to the first hymn, I tried to follow the beat of the hymn so I could conduct using my free hand as I usually did, but this time I was unable to do so. I started to worry because I didn't like making mistakes in front of others, but I thought to myself that I could recover on my own. However, as the first verse went on, I was still unable to find the rhythm and began panicking. I was bothered to the point that I felt mentally lost and was unable to sing, and I needed others to show me the hand motions to help me get back on track. Although the rest of the hymn singing session went smoothly, I had lost confidence in myself and just wanted the session to be over. When I concluded the hymn singing session and headed back to my seat, I felt ashamed of myself because I had failed to serve the Lord to the best of my abilities. Looking back, I can see that I had reached the point where I could not see that I needed God's guidance for everything, even for a simple task such as hymn leading. Without His guidance, things would not run as smoothly as they had previously when I had relied on Him.

God gives us different gifts so that we may serve Him in various ways such as playing piano or leading Bible study. For me, one of my God-given talents seems to be hymn leading, since I have been doing it so often and smoothly. But at that time, I felt that I had been hymn leading long enough that I could handle it easily even without God's guidance. God used this experience, however, to show me that this was not the case. Without God, we are unable to do anything, even the things that may seem simple and routine to us. No matter how easy or straightforward our work may be, we must recognize that it is God alone who allows us to accomplish all things. Therefore, we must rely on God alone to guide us as we do holy work for Him.



Reliance on God vs. relying on yourself and responding to praise from others

Keywords: reliance on God, prayer, glorifying God, responding to praise

When we serve God, it is important to remember that our ability and our strength comes from Him and Him only. No matter what type of holy work we do, whether it is sermon-speaking or leading hymns, we must allow God to work through us. More importantly, when God does work through us and we receive positive responses, we must remember that these are to glorify His name.

Growing up with Student Spiritual Convocations and religious education (RE) classes, we are taught that we need to serve God. When we read Romans 12:6, which says, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;” we ask, “How do we know what our gifts are?” My RE teachers often answered by saying that we would never know our gifts if we always turned down holy work for fear of failure. With this in mind, I agreed when asked to accompany my church choir, although I felt I was lacking in skills.

There was one season when the conductor chose songs with incredibly quick tempos, filled with several octaves and arpeggios. I practiced day after day, with seemingly no improvement. One day, however, I surprisingly began to play the piece fairly well. My mother came to the piano while I practiced and said, “You’ve improved a lot, eh? Thank God. I saw you struggling so much with that piece that I’ve been praying for you a lot about it.” I realized then, that it was through her prayer that my playing had improved.

It is a custom at our church to sing for two nights during the spiritual convocation. The first night, the two songs we presented were easier to play, and thank God, the presentation went smoothly. No one complimented or criticized the presentation afterward. During the second night, the choir presented two difficult songs. By this time, I had already spent much time practicing and praying for the presentation of these two particularly difficult songs. I thought that as long as God was with me, I would be able to play well. However, during the presentation, I played the songs worse than when I practiced at home or during the rehearsals at church. Throughout the last prayer of that night, I asked God, “Shouldn’t have the presentation glorified your name? I prayed so hard and practiced so diligently for the presentation. I did my part, so why did it go so badly?”

Later, while everyone was having refreshments, three people complimented me on how well I played that night. I found this strange, as no one had said a word the night before when I felt I played the songs almost flawlessly. Either they really did think I played well, or they thought I played so badly that I needed consolation and encouragement. One of these people was a close friend of mine, with whom I often served with.

I asked her to truthfully tell me whether or not the presentation had gone well. She looked at me with a confused expression and said, “I seriously thought it was really good.”

I realized that although I played well the first night, I had not prayed as much about those particular songs because I felt that they were easy enough to rely on myself. Perhaps people did not find the presentation very touching because no one said a word about it. When I relied on God for the more difficult songs, it was then that God allowed the audience to be touched.

From this experience, I learned two things. Firstly, I realized that it really doesn't matter how many wrong or right notes I play. As long as I trust that God will lead me in my service, through prayer and practice on my own, He can make something that sounds terrible in my ears sound wonderful in the ears of other brothers, sisters, and friends. In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” Although this verse is most often used to describe personal evangelism, it can also apply to holy work in general. When doing holy work, it is important to remember that we can put in all our effort, but it is God who moves others. Only God gives the increase.

Secondly, when other people feel that we've done well in our service, we need to realize that, rather than us, God is the one to be glorified. Philippians 2:13 says, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Whenever we serve, God works in and through us. When His name is glorified through our service, it is only because *God* is working and has allowed us to fulfill His purpose. In this incident, it was obvious that it was really God who touched the hearts of the audience, not the fact that I had talent or played beautifully. It is important to remember Psalm 16:2, which says “O my soul, you have said to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You.’ Any talent or any outstanding quality we have comes from the Lord. Without Him, we are nothing and we have no good thing. From this, we know that as long as we pray for God to lead us as we serve, while at the same time doing the necessary preparations, God can make our service beautiful, and His name will be glorified.



Relying on God versus relying on yourself

Keywords: reliance on God, pride, God's abidance

As we continue to serve the Lord, there is one problem we are all likely to face. That problem is the tendency to rely on ourselves more than on God. It is something that creeps up on us slowly. Without us realizing it, we begin to do things more and more the way we think they should be done.

However, this is not the way holy work should be done. Our service should always reflect the will of God. Without it, our work will encounter many barriers and difficulties.

Serving God has been and continues to be a learning experience for me. I began my servitude as a Religious Education teacher when I was sixteen. At the time, I had the faith and attitude of what our Lord Jesus Christ calls a "little one." My Biblical knowledge was lacking and my servitude experience was next to none.

The one quality I did possess was a pure heart to serve the God that I knew to be the one true God and my God. I had received the Holy Spirit only two years earlier. I remember how hard I had prayed for it. Before I received it I had felt so alone. When I came to church, the children that were my age did not talk to me. That is something to be expected of teenagers. But the fact was I felt lonely.

During the Winter Student Spiritual Convocation that year, I made a determination that I would pray for the Holy Spirit. Since other people did not really talk to me, it was easy to focus on God. I set a goal that I would not eat until I received the Holy Spirit. One by one the meals passed. Until, finally, after the fifth meal, I felt a tremendous surge of heat. My hands began to shake. At that moment, all the sadness in my heart disappeared, leaving only one thought on my mind. I knew God loved me very dearly. Since that time that I wanted to repay God's love for me. I made a determination that I would serve Him to the best of my ability.

I started out teaching Religious Education. Over time I was given other responsibilities including hymn leading and audio visual duties. At the time, I was able to handle these different tasks while maintaining my daily spiritual cultivation. However, after becoming a church council member, my attitude towards servitude changed.

We often fail to detect gradual differences in our lives. They have a way of masking themselves behind the larger changes. Through the years, my attitude of service had evolved into one of confidence and independence; confidence in myself and independence from God.

It is easy to look back and see how proud and self-reliant I had become. But it is almost always easier looking from the outside in. I thank God

He provided a friend to point out my weakness. That summer, I took a short vacation. Since I was relying a lot on myself, holy work had become burdensome for me. Things just did not go smoothly. I needed a temporary break. So I took a two week excursion.

On my last day there, my friend ate lunch with me to see me off. After both of us finished eating, she said very bluntly, "You are proud. Your attitude is not befitting of a council member." These were eye opening words. They pierced

through my heart and I was left speechless. I had gone on my trip to escape from the business of church work. And a few thousand miles away, far away from my home, God had sent a messenger to tell me that I had gone astray. I had the entire eight hour flight back to reflect on those words. But thank God, just as quickly as my friend had pointed out my weakness, I realized what had happened and what needed to change.

In my experiences with holy work I had truly seen the abidance of God. For that reason, I took on more holy work. However, as my responsibilities increased, I had less time. Ultimately, the days felt shorter. There were nights when I would forego my own spiritual cultivation to finish up church tasks. Once I started this, it became almost a normal occurrence. In my heart, I told myself I was doing work for God, so it was the right thing to do. I began to rely on myself more than God. I felt like I knew how to do holy work because I had experienced the sweetness of God's power before. But this was the incorrect attitude.

*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.
(1 Corinthians 3:6)*

I had failed to realize that in all my work, it was God who made the efforts successful. God gave the increase; He made the work prosper. I had merely served as a tool to perform his work. For that very reason, it was wrong for me to suppose that my methods had caused the holy work to be successful. Those eight hours on the plane were extremely long. But they gave me a chance to reflect on my spirituality; this was something I had not done in a while.

It is not easy to realize or admit that our labor is in vain without God's abidance. As humans, we like to believe that we can do things if we can set our mind to them. This is what the world teaches us.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

But we should not follow the way of the world. We must understand that we are merely vessels and that our labor is utterly useless if it is not in accordance with the will of God. It is by the blessing of God that our labor bears fruit. I realized this only after my friend pointed it out to me.

I made a bad choice in choosing to finish church work over praying and reading the Bible, and I continued to follow that same path for some time. We should always do the opposite and cultivate ourselves first. We feel pressure and from a human perspective, we worry. However, God always provides a way. Once I changed my priorities and placed cultivation first, the time issues I faced before went away.

I pray that all who read this can learn from my mistakes. I hope that in Christ we can learn to rely fully on the power of the Holy Spirit in our servitude. The second we feel our labor can succeed by our own methods we should reevaluate our intentions. When performing Holy work, we should always remember to cultivate ourselves first.



Afterword

This is only the first edition of *Serving in God's Kitchen: A Youth Servitude Guide*. There are still many topics and experiences that have not been covered. If you have any relevant experiences, lessons, or testimonies that you would like contribute to future editions, please do not hesitate to contact the National Youth Ministry.

