



**Servants'**

# Preparation Program



Coptic Orthodox  
Diocese of the  
Southern  
United States

*"For I have given you an example,  
that you should do as I have done to you"  
John 13:15*

# **Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States of America**

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## **SPR 101 SPIRITUALITY OF THE SERVANT**

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### **Servants' Preparation Program**

**2002**

**High School Boys (July 22 – 26)  
High School Girls (July 26 – 30)  
College (August 6 – 10)**

**Nashville, TN**

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# **Spirituality of the Servant**

From Part II of the “Paradise of the Spirit” by the late Bishop Youannis

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### **1. Introduction**

“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

#### **1.1 What is service?**

Service is not an art that one can acquire through mere practice as other types of fine arts may be. It is not a subjective study in which one can excel by personal effort. It is not a science like the physical sciences. It does not start in seminaries, but it starts, rather, in the heart. Its school is the school of the Holy Spirit, which inflames the heart, sanctifies it, teaches it everything, and reminds it of the words of the Lord Jesus. Moreover, it takes from what it has and gives to the individual.

#### **1.2 Holy Love**

Service is a holy love, which fills the heart of a person who loves God and has lived with Him, and who has thus tasted how good the Lord is. Therefore, he starts telling others, “Taste and see how good the Lord is.” It is a holy love; therefore, it is not limited to a definite place or to a definite time. Its message does not stop for a specific class or group of people. But rather it works with power in every place, in suitable and unsuitable times, in all human beings, regardless of race or class.

The goal of service is to let God’s love penetrate into every person who is deprived of it. Therefore, it destroys individualism and makes the individual change from loving himself to loving others. Therefore, it makes him exit from his private sphere to a broader one.

#### **1.3 Spiritual Happiness**

Service is an important source of happiness. The Lord Jesus defined happiness when He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). True happiness lies not in possessing everything for myself, but rather in letting others share with me what I possess. One’s happiness is not fulfilled when one has all he needs, but in letting others share what he is enjoying. Lakes are divided into two types: salty lakes and fresh water lakes. Salty lakes are closed and water pours into them, without an exit; that is they receive but do not give. However, fresh lakes receive and give water; therefore their waters are fresh.

Service gives the soul great happiness. The Lord Jesus clarified this when He illustrated the day of judgment by saying, “I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matthew 25:35,36). Happy is the believer who gives spiritual food, rather than the physical one. This leads a person to the Living Fountain, from which, when one drinks, he will never thirst again. Happy is the believer who visits a naked person and offers him clothes, not to cover his body, but clothes of righteousness, which he lacked because of sin. Happy is he when he visits a spiritually sick person and introduces him to Jesus to heal him like the four friends who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Happy is he when he visits an imprisoned man, who is in bitter captivity to tell him about the One who can liberate him from the dominion of sin “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin and a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34-36). This is the message of the Lord Jesus: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). See how beautiful are Jesus’ comments: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). This is the essence of service and its blessings. This is the depth of spiritual happiness.

#### **1.4 The Field of Service**

“The Word of God is not chained” (2 Timothy 2:9). Service cannot be restricted. Listen to the apostles Peter and John after the miracle of healing the paralytic and after the chief priests had commanded them not to teach or utter any word about Jesus. They replied courageously, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). In fact, this is the feeling of everyone who has experienced the Lord and tasted His love. It is impossible not to speak of the things he has seen and heard. What does the believer see or hear in his fellowship with the Lord? He sees and hears much. He sees what the physical eye cannot see and hears things that cannot be uttered. He has joy and peace, which surpass all understanding. Didn’t the Lord Jesus say, “He who loves Me, will be loved by My Father and I will love Him and manifest Myself to him ... We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:21-23). Therefore, we find that everyone who is inflamed with the love of God cannot sit quietly or stop serving the souls for whom Jesus died. He says with David, “I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob” (Psalm 132:4,5). He keeps searching for a place for the Lord and a dwelling for the God of Jacob in every heart in which the Lord would be pleased to be comfortable. Truly the Word of God cannot be restricted. Serving the souls, which the Lord loves, cannot be restricted. Everyone, whose heart is full of God’s love, can always look for opportunities to serve the Lord in His brothers. He serves with his words, his teachings, his writings, his private life and his prayers for those whom he serves. He becomes like a magnet creating an atmosphere around him wherever he goes.

Anyone who does not believe in serving others, by any means, is not a true Christian because he is selfish. There is nothing worse in Christianity than a Christian who thinks only of himself; for loving one’s neighbor is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10).

As service cannot be restricted, it does not mind obstacles or dangers, or even death itself. On the contrary, death multiplies its power and helps it and makes its fruits plentiful. We feel this in the lives of those who preached, and were “slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held” (Revelation 6:9). They were given white clothes and were told to rest until their fellow servants were martyred like them. Look at the apostles who went on with their service with exceeding joy after they were persecuted and whipped. Moreover, listen to St. Paul saying, “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the

gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:22-24).

Our Lord Jesus Christ was sent by God “As the Father has sent Me, I send you” (John 20:21). He didn’t come to be served, but to serve. His last commandment while He was on earth was concerning service and mission; “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Since that time, He has been commanding men, women and young people to preach and declare His Holy Name and love to all people. He who refuses to obey God’s voice to fulfill his duty in serving others and who does not share in extending the kingdom of God on earth is denying himself the great work for which Jesus came.

## **1.5 The Blessings of Service**

The New Testament has blessed service and the servant and has made him a means to bring hearts close to God, to renew souls and to attract them to the kingdom of God. Didn’t the Lord Jesus bless the peacemakers calling them the sons of God? They make peace between man and his Creator. The Son of God came to fulfill this great act. When we participate with Him, that is, when we serve to bring souls close to God, we deserve to be called the sons of God. St. Paul clarified this when he said, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Service is a great work by which we reconcile men to their Creator. We continue the work, which Jesus Christ began, and we fulfill His good will for the salvation of all people “Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:14).

In another verse, St. Paul explained the greatness of this service when he said, “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). See the beauty in this expression “God’s fellow workers”! There are many comforting meditations in these words. They show how honorable the message is which the servant of the Word of God has to fulfill. He works with God personally. What an honor! It guarantees a carefree life for the servant who works with God. The servant is not responsible for the service, but God is. The servant only works with God.

We repeat that the word “servant” is great, and extremely blessed is his service. This greatness is derived from our Lord Jesus Himself: “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Therefore, the Lord Jesus has rewarded His faithful servants with great honor in heaven and on earth. He said, “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” (John 12:26). Daniel the prophet said, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). When St. Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea and was taken to Felix the governor, he spoke about righteousness, and was told, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you” (Acts 24:25). The judge trembled in front of the prisoner! Also, Emperor Falnez trembled in front of St. Basil the Great and almost fell to the ground before him, but St. Basil helped him up.

## **2. God’s Servant**

### **2.1 The Spiritual Level of the servant**

Wherever there is a faithful servant, there are plenty of fruits. Before we discuss the topic of God’s servant, let us first define the qualities of a servant.

A servant is a person who knows God, whose heart is full of His love, and who has tasted how good the life with Him is; henceforth he goes telling others about God. To do that, he has to be at a higher spiritual

level than those whom he is serving. He has to be pure in his thoughts, his behavior and his life in general. Through his life, he shows to those whom he serves, the true way of life. He shows his superiority by his example more than by his words. His words enter the hearts of those who hear him if his life corresponds with what he says. The prophet said, “O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God” (Isaiah 40:9). This means that whoever teaches others about the heavenly matters has to leave the earthly levels and has to stand on a high mountain. The servant has to be at a spiritual level higher than those whoever he is serving. It is obvious that the water flows from an upper level to a lower level and not the opposite.

It is not the duty of the servant to teach others the Word of God but to lead them to it. It is not his duty to describe to them the Lord’s way, but to let them walk in His way and to accompany them. It is not enough that he gives an overwhelming speech, but he must help them accept Christ. He should not be satisfied with doing some good deeds, but he must surpass the good deeds of those whom he serves. He must also be an example of virtue. The hand that cleans has to be clean itself to be able to clean, lest it makes other things dirty. Therefore, the prophet says, “Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing. Go out from the midst of her, be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord” (Isaiah 52:11). Who are those who carry the vessels of the Lord except those servants who carry souls to bring them closer to God? The Lord said to Ananias concerning Paul, “He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

St. Paul emphasizes this in his writings to the Corinthians: “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” (2 Corinthians 6:3-7). He wrote to his disciple Timothy saying, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16).

Notice how St. Paul is correlating the life of Timothy to his service among the people. Mere words emerging from an unrighteous soul cannot change the lives of those served and reach the depths of their souls. St. Mar Isaac said, “The man who does not talk from experience is like a photographer who takes a picture of water on a wall, but that water cannot quench his thirst.”

## **2.2 The Personality of the Servant**

The servant is a leader of the group, which he is serving. Therefore, he should have a special character, which makes him eligible for that leadership role. Besides his fellowship with God, he has to avoid all the spiritual mistakes, which may be stumbling blocks to others. He has to be mentally and psychologically stable so that he may be an example to others and not a stumbling block. He has to avoid such weaknesses as anger and slips of the tongue, which are apparent to others and may offend them.

Moreover, he has to command a certain mental ability besides his spiritual one. We mean that he should be intellectually active, able to discriminate, and wise so that he does not panic when asked unexpected questions. This is regardless of his general academic level, for there are illiterate people who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and who are serving fruitfully.

Notice, also that the servant has to be a gifted speaker. The wise Solomon said earlier, “He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend” (Proverbs 22:11). It was said about Jesus, “So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). Also, the servants of the chief priests said, “No man ever spoke like this Man” (John 7:46).

They were amazed not only by the topics He used to teach, but also by the way in which He spoke. What Matthew the Evangelist wrote after the Sermon on the Mount is so wonderful: “When Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28, 29).

Do we have that authority? No doubt, Yes. It is written, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His” (John 1:12). Not only that, but, through faith, we can do the works which the Lord Jesus did and greater than them “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12). Peter was able to win three thousand souls to Christ through one sermon. Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogue in Iconium and were also able to win a great multitude to Christ “Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).

### **2.3 The Authority of the Servant**

Before the first mission, our Lord Jesus called His twelve apostles and gave them power and authority and sent them to preach about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:12). This is the secret of the power of the servant that this divine authority is his only weapon. The Lord commanded them not to carry staves, or scripts, nor bread or money (Luke 9:3).

The servant derives this authority from His Lord and Master who used to teach with authority, and not like the Pharisees (Matthew 7:29). The teachings may be the same, but through the Spirit, it is alive and with authority in one servant whereas it is dead in the unspiritual person.

When Jeremiah tried to be excused from service because of his young age the Lord touched his mouth and encouraged him with some words saying, “Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:9,10). Also, “Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them” (Jeremiah 5:14). Isn't this exactly what happened on the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in the form of tongues of fire? This was followed by Peter's sermon, which attracted three thousand souls to the faith. Isn't this the fire which Mar Ephraim the Syrian saw coming out from the mouth of St. Basil the Great during one of his sermons?

Can anyone dare to resist God's faithful servant or humiliate him? Listen to God's reply again, “I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them” (Jeremiah 5:14). Didn't the Lord say about His servants that they are “a flame of fire” (Hebrews 1:7).

The secret of success in service is this divine authority “For by fire and by His sword The Lord will judge all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many” (Isaiah 66:16). The servant overcomes them with the weapon of the spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

### **2.4 The Responsibility of the Servant**

The faithful servant feels that those whom he serves are his glory, his joy and the crown of his rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20). Also, they are the seal, which proves how correct his mission is. No mission is acknowledged by official places unless it is sealed with an official seal.

Therefore, a faithful servant feels that he is responsible for the life of every individual whom he serves, a direct responsibility in front of God. His struggle does not stop until he “presents every man perfect in Jesus

Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

What heightens this feeling of responsibility is the realization of the value of the human soul. The value of every soul is the blood of Christ for He died on the Cross to save it from this evil world. In as much as the soul is valued in the eyes of the servant, he multiplies his struggle and sacrifice for its salvation. For this reason, missionaries struggle and labor in their service and shed tears for every soul. Faithful servants follow their Lord Jesus, the Servant of salvation, who loves us and sacrificed His life for our redemption. He is the One who sought the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the Samaritan woman. He said, “it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:14). We notice this in the life of His apostle Paul, who did not count his life dear until he had finished his course with joy and had completed the ministry which he had received from the Lord Jesus, namely to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

We notice the enthusiasm of this great missionary and this faithful servant in his speech to the Ephesians, in which he said, “Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:26-31).

Please pause and think of every word. Behind these words stands a great soul, which realized and appreciated the value of the salvation of the Lord and the value of every soul for which the Lord has died. Notice his last words, “warn everyone night and day with tears.” This is an apparent characteristic in the life of St. Paul. He wrote to the church of the Colossians saying, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28).

In spite of the fact that this great apostle did not stay in one place but was constantly moving, he felt that he was responsible for every soul. Henceforth, he fulfilled his mission with tears. He was able to say at the end, “I am innocent of the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26). “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

St. Paul used to warn everyone with tears. No doubt, he knew his full responsibility. He was like His Master who knows his sheep and calls them by their names (John 10:3). No doubt, these tears which the apostle shed were accompanied by fervent prayers as is apparent from his letter to the Romans: “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” (Romans 1:9).

We hear of many servants who never ceased when they saw one soul outside the flock deviating from God’s way. St. Macarius, Bishop of Kaw, was one of those who would be seen weeping during his sermon. He had been given grace to see others’ sins. Whenever he gave a sermon and saw some of his children not repenting, he would weep, for he felt it is his responsibility to give an account of every soul.

We want to direct your attention to an important matter. The outlook of the faithful servant and his prayers are not limited only to believers, but they extend to everyone, believers as well as nonbelievers. Jesus died for everyone so that all may enjoy the blessings of His salvation. The servant cannot be quiet when he sees many sheep outside the flock, while the Good Shepard, our Lord Jesus Christ, calls everyone “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).



## **2.5 The Selection of the Servant**

Choosing servants is a difficult task in itself. Besides the qualifications that should prevail in the personality of the servant, we have to emphasize that we cannot bring a person in whom the love of God is not rooted and who does not have a growing relationship with God and entrust him with a teaching service, regardless of his level of education, whether scientific or religious. This would result in double harm. Besides the fact that he would not benefit those who hear him and might even cause them to stumble by his behavior, he would also harm himself. He would have two characters, one outside service and one while he is serving as he tries to look religious. The religious attitude of the servant should spring from his inner life. Such a double-faced person is a hypocrite. St. John Chrysostom said, "Those who are still repenting, cannot be teachers." The teacher has his own dignity, which does not fit in with repentance.

One of the fathers said, "If mothers deliver before their due time, they will fill the graves with dead persons, not houses with living ones." This means that if the baby is born before its due time, it will be a dead fetus. Likewise, those who start serving before they are spiritually mature, might fill the world with talk, but the words will come out of their mouths dead. Solomon the wise said, "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth" (Ecclesiastes 11:3). This saying applies to teachers. Therefore, St. Eronemeous explained this verse saying, "The clouds are the teachers. When they are full of water, they can water the earth. If they are empty, then they are 'waterless clouds drifted along by winds, fruitless in late autumn". This is also explained by Jude the apostle saying "They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots" (Jude 1:12).

Moreover, this matter needs God's guidance through many prayers and fastings. This is what our Lord Jesus, the Great Teacher who knows everything, the Examiner of hearts, did before He chose the twelve disciples. He spent the night before, all alone in prayer (Luke 6:12,13). Also, His disciples did the same thing before choosing a disciple to replace Judas Iscariot. They prayed saying, "Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen" (Acts 1:24).

The various needs for service in all St. Mark's See cannot allow us to compromise the principles of service. Our Lord Jesus Himself felt these needs when "He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23). He noticed those needs when He saw the people harassed and helpless like the sheep without a shepherd. Those needs made Him say, "The harvest truly is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37,38).

In spite of the abundance of the harvest, our Lord Jesus Christ was very cautious in His divine wise plan, for He did not choose except a few disciples whom He charged with preaching. He taught us what to do toward the various needs of service: "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Therefore, whenever we feel the urge to help our harassed and helpless brothers who are like sheep without a shepherd, we have to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send the needed laborers. No doubt, He will send them for He is eager to have the souls for whom He died.

## **2.6 The Preparation of the Servant**

After the servant is chosen, he must start preparing himself. Preparing a true servant is not easy. It is not enough that a Sunday School servant listens to some lessons and then starts teaching. It is not enough that a student in a seminary fills his mind with religious sciences.

### **2.6.1 The Period of preparation**

We should not give anyone the responsibility of teaching without preparing him thoroughly. Our Lord Jesus, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3), the Perfect in every good deed, did not start His service until He was thirty years old, even though He was able to teach when He

was still a young boy. Didn't He overwhelm the teachers of the law when He was only twelve years old?

Our Lord Jesus did not send His disciples to preach immediately after His crucifixion and resurrection. But He told them to wait. He appeared to them and taught them for forty days till His ascension. Even after His ascension, He told them to wait till they receive power from above. Therefore, we should not wonder at how Peter's sermon on the Pentecost attracted three thousands to the faith. It is very important to know that service is not simply the art of speaking.

Therefore, we should not hurry in giving a service to those chosen unless we prepare them thoroughly, regardless of the circumstances and the causes. Let's reflect on how Jesus Christ chose His disciples. We are in a class of preparing servants. Jesus Christ Himself is the teacher. The students of that class are the twelve disciples. The visual aids are the miracles He performed. In spite of all that, preparing the students in that class lasted three years. The study was daily and included most of the day. In comparison we now prepare servants in a very short time!

Let's see the great difference between the Lord and us. Christ, the Examiner of hearts, is the One who chose the disciples. He knew their readiness to carry His great mission. But we may find some youth who are kind and gentle and invite them to serve, without knowing their inside, which may be burdened with spiritual problems. We see the Lord Jesus spent three years preparing His disciples; while we take less time than that in preparing them, find what a great difference there is between the Lord and us! Some Churches give the responsibility of service to some young people, feeling that this is a means by which to protect them from deviating away from the church. We are sorry to say that this logic is humiliating to God and causes many problems and weaknesses in the field of service.

### **2.6.2 How to prepare the servant?**

We are concentrating here on how to prepare Sunday School servants. The curriculum should include the following: First, religious education such as Bible study, church dogma, rituals, church history, as well as spiritual studies. A servant serves different levels; therefore, he needs to have a high religious education to answer those whom he is teaching, especially in our present time where many movements like atheism, materialism and liberalism are taking place.

Secondly, the curriculum should address basic principles of psychology. This will help the servant to understand the personality of his students and to deal with them. The servant should be instructed in, for example, the different stages of growth, the characteristics of each stage and how to apply them in giving the lesson in order to make it more appealing and interesting for the children. Also, the teachers should learn how to use visual aids.

Furthermore, apprentice teachers should be given practical experience in service. They should be given the responsibility to teach under the supervision of older, more experienced teachers who would be able to direct them. An important point we have to discuss here is the discipleship in the church. The teacher should keep the spirit of discipleship no matter how long he has been serving. Christianity, in its deep roots, is based on the idea of discipleship. The Lord said to His disciples, before His ascension, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20). The early church followed its Master's command; therefore it was strong. The society of believers grew in number, virtue and knowledge. When we lose this spirit, we lose all the blessings, which the Lord has stored in it.

Discipleship in its true meaning is the individual service, which is the first foundation in the building of souls. The individual service is based on obedience and humility on the part of the student, and love and zeal on the part of the teacher. We can fulfill this idea in service meetings, where there is a chance for

constructive benefit without discussing administration, which should be dealt with in a separate meeting. What we really need is true discipleship and individual service, especially for beginning servants.

## **2.7 Superficiality in Service**

### **2.7.1 Meaning of Superficiality**

Superficiality, in itself, is a dangerous disease and a sign that does not lead to growth or progress. We mean superficiality in all domains of life. For example, superficiality in science does not lead to its advance, or to new discoveries and inventions. Superficiality for the student does not lead to a prosperous future. Even if he passes the examination, his success does not qualify him to be one of the top students.

Nature, itself, teaches us this lesson, for the soil does not give its treasures except to those who dig deeply into it. We have never heard of a mine on top of the soil, but it is rather in the depths. Therefore, all those who live a superficial life are deprived of the blessings of the deep life. If superficiality is so dangerous in carnal matters, what about in spiritual matters? Our Lord Jesus commanded Simon Peter to go into the deep and cast his net. When he did that, he caught a great number of fish. Likewise, when we obey God's voice to be spiritually deep, we receive abundant blessings. We are not going to discuss superficiality in the spiritual life, but rather in service, which is, no doubt, a sign of superficiality in spirit.

### **2.7.2 Signs of superficiality**

One of the signs of superficiality in service is emphasizing the outside appearance, without looking at the points of weaknesses. Some leaders out of their zeal try to let as many of the youth serve and to establish new branches of service that have a definite place, time, servants, curriculum, students, etc. However, the life of those servants might be corrupt and they may not be prepared to teach the curriculum given to them. They might answer incorrectly some basic questions, not deliberately, but out of ignorance. They might cause problems, which would require much effort to remedy. They might be stumbling blocks to the service. They may also be a bad example, which may harm other branches carrying the same name.

The effort exerted in curing those servants is greater than the effort needed in preparing new righteous ones. We have to emphasize that this is a wrong procedure, when some servants try to establish new branches of service without any preparation and without calculating the cost. The result is that these branches eventually die out, and even if they last for some time, they are like the flower of the plant, which may wither away. They may have a detrimental effect on the servants and those whom they serve.

Superficiality in spirit may lead a person to wrongly evaluate himself in his relationship to God. Some are satisfied with the outside practices like prayers, spiritual readings, attending church, communion, fasting, even if they are done in a routine way. We are all required to live a perfect life, as the Lord Jesus said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Therefore, we are required to grow continually in grace, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). These words do not concern certain members of the church who devote themselves to worship, but rather everyone. St. Paul made this clear when he wrote to the Colossians: "Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28). Therefore, every person is required to live a perfect Christian life. Some people measure success in service by superficial means like the number of Sunday School children, or the number of church attendants, or the number of those partaking in the Holy Communion. However, Jesus Christ said, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). True joy is when the souls of those we serve, know God and have fellowship with Him. There is nothing more dangerous in the church than superficiality. It is like the plant, which grew on stony soil. It dried for it had no roots (Matthew 13:5). We will discuss how to avoid superficiality in service in the following sections.

### **3. Factors of Strength**

The strength of the service as a whole is directly dependent on the servant's spiritual condition. If he is strong, the service will be strong, and if he is weak, it will be weak. We shall not discuss all the spiritual factors in the life of God's servant common to all believers, such as being regular in prayer, fasting, confession and communion, for these are taken for granted; but we shall discuss some factors which touch the life of God's servant.

#### **3.1 Love**

Love should be the strongest factor that governs our private lives, our relationship with the Lord and our service in His vine. The devil entered the early church, which St. Paul established in Corinth, and divisions resulted between the members. St. Paul consequently wrote his excellent words about love in the thirteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians. He made it clear that love surpasses faith and the gift of prophecy, and that asceticism is useless without love. Even if one speaks in the tongues of men or angels and has no love, he is like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Any work we do or virtue we accomplish, without the spirit of love, is rejected by God. Strenuous effort and work without love create complaints. God hates any work we do with grumbling.

Love is a great power that cannot be rejected. Love raised the Son of God on the cross and attracted millions of people. Love attracted Saul of Tarsus at the doors of Damascus and made him a "prisoner of Jesus Christ." It made him say, "The love of Christ surrounds us." It converted the persecutor into a great apostle and missionary, after uprooting the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Love overcomes all obstacles in service. Love endures all difficulties. Love was the incentive for which the apostles struggled in order to spread the Good News. Love changed the bitterness of persecution into joy. Jails could not imprison love and iron chains could not bind it. Love has fulfilled what great leaders could not accomplish. Love has reigned over the hearts and emotions. It has a special language, which all people understand.

When the believer's heart is full of love, he becomes zealous for the salvation and the happiness of others. He cannot be quiet when he sees his brothers and sisters committing sin. This was what made Daniel pray for himself and all the people (Daniel 9). This was what made Nehemiah enthusiastic in building the gates of Jerusalem, saying, "Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach" (Nehemiah 2:17). Jerusalem is the church and the society of the faithful. It needs zealous servants like Nehemiah. Our Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it did not know the time of its visitation (Luke 19:41). Yes, the Lord did weep for His own people who did not accept Him. Likewise, His disciples and servants, in every place and age, should follow His example.

We often read in St. Paul's epistles about his great zeal for the salvation of others. He said to the believers in Corinth, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation" (2 Corinthians 11:29). He said in his letter to the Romans, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:3). He was jailed in Caesarea and plots were conceived against him. Yet his main concern was for his brothers' salvation, not his own freedom from his enemies. When King Agrippa told Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian. And Paul said: I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26:28, 29).

We often read in St. Paul's letters about his service of tears. He told the priests in Ephesus, "Watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Tears are a sign of love, holy zeal, warm hearty emotions, and a language, which many understand. It is a means

which cannot be overcome whether by God or by men. The Bridegroom said to the bride, “Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me” (Song of Solomon 6:5).

Since love is a great stimulus to service, it also saves us from a dangerous disease, which has often weakened the church and religious communities; this disease is division. Some of the characteristics of love are, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

We cannot completely cover a topic like love, its power and its effects, when discussing service. However, we ask the reader to pause on every quality that St. Paul mentioned, and to realize that we often do not abide by love. Rather we despise it and create fights and divisions with the excuse of defending some sound principles. But the greatest principle of all is not to fight and divide ourselves! Didn't St. Paul write, “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are you not carnal” (1 Corinthians 3:3,4).

Love is free from those who despise it. It has nothing to do with those who divide the church of Christ under the pretext of principles and spirituality, and who set up wars within the church, regardless of how pious they are for “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

### **3.2 Faith**

God gave faith all the power to work and to give. The Bible is full of the promises of faith and its effects, and is full of stories of heroes of faith and God's work through them. When Jesus sent His apostles on their first mission, He commanded them not to carry gold or silver or brass or manger or two robes or shoes or a rod (Matthew 10:9,10). Yet He granted them His divine authority to perform great deeds through faith in His Name (Luke 10:17).

In contrast to the blessings of faith, unbelief is in itself a sin (Romans 14:23). Believing in God means putting our trust and confidence in God and His promises. Unbelief is an insult to God, for it is written, “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

There will never come a time when God's promises do not have their first power and effect. When we hear about the struggles of the first missionaries, we wonder, asking what type of person has that kind of faith and can do the great deeds, which they accomplished through faith? Anyone who has their faith can do better deeds than theirs. The Lord Jesus said, “he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do” (John 14:12).

Let us all beware of fear and doubt for they are the enemies of faith. According to God's commandment, Moses sent twelve men to spy the land of Canaan. Kaleb and Joshua were among those men. These men returned after 40 days. Ten of them stirred fear and a spirit of failure and weakness in the souls of the people and told them about the giants of the earth. However, Kaleb and Joshua said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it” (Numbers 13:30). This is similar to what happens with us nowadays. Many believe that the evil in this world is too strong and that they cannot overcome it. However, we are in great need of such people as Kaleb and Joshua, and the faith of the young shepherd David who killed Goliath by the power of the Lord of Hosts. God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He does not change.

The harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few. However, we do not need laborers who have the faith of

devils, who believe and tremble, but rather true faithful laborers who are convinced of their mission and preach His Name and salvation with power and courage. The number of God's servants is not important, for Gideon overcame the army of the Midians and the Giants with only three hundred men. It was written that the enemy was like locusts in number and their camels were as numerous as the grains of sand in abundance. Gideon had an army of 32,000 soldiers. He was frightened when he knew that the size of the Midians was greater than his. Nevertheless, the Lord said to him, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me. Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying: Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead. And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained. But the Lord said to Gideon: The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go. So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon: Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink. And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the Lord said to Gideon: By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand" (Judges 7:2-7).

Let us purify God's servants from those with the traits of doubt and fear, which some call wisdom. Let us believe in God's promises and read about the heroes of faith "who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Hebrews 11:33,34).

At the wedding in Calla, when St. Mary noticed that they needed wine, she told the servants, "Whatsoever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). We, too, need to obey the voice of faith till the end. The servants obeyed, and the Lord Jesus performed His first miracle. When we obey God, submitting in complete faith, we shall see miracles in our service, also.

### **3.3 A Good Example**

Christianity, as a mission, has spread by good example more than by preaching. A good Christian is sometimes called an open gospel. Christians, through their love to God, their holy, fruitful life and their steadfast faith, glorified God. Through their meekness, they overcame evil and paganism, fulfilling God's commandment: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Since this is the case with the ordinary members of the congregation, how much more important is it for God's servants and leaders to be responsible and to present themselves as good examples to believers! Our Lord Jesus, the Great Teacher and Minister of the Holies said, "Learn from Me". He also said, "For them I sanctify myself" (John 17:19). St. Paul wrote to the believers, asking them to follow his example. He told his bishop, Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16).

The importance of presenting a good example in the life of God's servant is evident from what the Lord said to Ezekiel the prophet, "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet" (Ezekiel 34:11,19). The Lord means that God's servants should live by what they teach. The Holy Spirit has illustrated this clearly by the words, "trampled with your feet" that is, treading the teachings. Those who are being served do not follow teachings so much as the example being set. They stumble as a result of what

they see. The Lord said through Ezekiel, “they ministered to them before their idols and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity” (Ezekiel 44:12).

There is nothing more dangerous to the church than an evil person who carries a holy position. Anyone who does not deserve to serve, should get away from it, fulfilling God’s commandment, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

God’s servant should let his teachings and sermons reflect his personal life. A servant was once asked, “How long did it take you to prepare that sermon?” He replied, “Forty years.” What he meant was that it was the summary of his past life.

### **3.4 Prayer**

An obvious fact is that a Christian is dead spiritually if he neglects prayer. There is no other door through which he can receive divine help except by prayer. If this is the case with the regular believer, what about God’s servant! The secret of our strength as believers is our prayers. The secret of strength in the life of God’s faithful servants is the life of prayer. Nothing but prayer makes the servant a true man of God and guarantees that his service is a “proof of spirit and power.”

God’s commandment to his disciples after his crucifixion was not to leave Jerusalem until they had received power from above (Luke 24:49). These words were a warning for them that they should not dare to serve without this power. God’s promise to them was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The writer of the Book of Acts showed how to receive this power when he said; “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His” (Acts 1:14).

The secret of the power of service is in the work of the Holy Spirit when it accompanies the Word of God. The way to obtain the Holy Spirit is through regular spiritual prayers. The power from above cannot be granted except by fervent prayers raised up above. God’s servant needs great power for his salvation and for his service to be effective.

In the early church, service was accomplished through the power of prayer: “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:20). Prayer solved all problems and performed miracles. The fundamentals of faith were made steadfast by the power of prayer. The kings and governors who were against the church were defeated through the power of prayer.

When the disciples were attacked from all sides, they all prayed with one spirit saying, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (Acts 4:29). The result was that “the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

Didn’t the jail doors open by themselves for Peter for “constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:5)? Didn’t the jail doors open in Philippi, and weren’t the chains of the prisoners loosed because of the prayers of Paul and Silas, causing the guard of the jail to believe (Acts 16:25-33)?

When the social service increased due to the increased number of apostles, they did not forget prayer. When they gathered to discuss the matter, they said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4). Notice the sequence here: giving ourselves continually to prayer comes before the ministry of the word.

The faithful servant does not cease to pray for those whom he serves. In the meantime, he urges them to pray for him and for his service. Let us take as an example St. Paul, the faithful servant and the great missionary, who called us to be like him (1 Corinthians 11:1). These are his zealous words full of spirit:

“Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Ephesians 1:15, 16).

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love” (Ephesians 3:14-17).

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy... For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:3-9).

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints... For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Colossians 1:3-9) .

Let us meditate on St. Paul’s words to find out how the faithful and successful service should depend on the power of prayer. Moreover, he urged those whom he served to pray for him:

“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints” (Romans 15:30,31).

“You also helping together in prayer for us” (2 Corinthians 1:11).

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints-- and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:18, 19).

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains” (Colossians 4:2,3).

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you” (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

### **3.5 Self-Denial**

Self-denial is the strong foundation on which God’s servant should build his personal life and also his service. In St. Paul’s speech to the believers in Corinth, after comparing the old sports and the spiritual struggle, he said, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in



such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus, not with uncertainty. Thus I fight, not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

One wonders, how can this great missionary and apostle not be accepted? How can the one who attracted thousands to the Lord, lose his soul? However, this is a good reminder for us to watch ourselves and be careful for our salvation, to struggle till the end, even to the shedding of our blood, and to feel that God’s grace is everything in our lives. Even if we have been serving for several years, we have to feel everyday that we are just starting our service. This is the strong foundation on which every servant should build his service.

When God’s Word came to Jeremiah the prophet to preach, he apologized because of his young age. God answered him with encouraging words and His divine promises after touching his mouth, saying: “Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:9-10).

We have to feel that we are not worthy to serve, regardless of our academic qualifications and the number of years we have been serving. We have to feel that every success, in our service and people’s admiration and appreciation, is due to the words that God has put in our mouth. Let us follow St. Paul’s example as he said, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:5,6).

The same matter was repeated with Isaiah, the prophet: “So I said: Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then I said: Here am I! Send me. And He said: Go, and tell this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand, keep on seeing, but do not perceive” (Isaiah 6:5-9).

We hope that you feel that the hand of the Lord touches your lips, especially if you are regular in partaking of Jesus’ Body and drinking of His Holy Blood, which are a symbol of the live coal of the altar. Every time you serve and talk about God, feel that God has put His words in your mouth. Moreover, lift your heart to God asking Him to put His words in your mouth whenever you tell others about Him.

### **3.6 Filled with the Spirit**

We have to remember always that God is spirit and all those who want to serve Him, have to be filled with the Spirit, in order to serve Him with the spirit. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The spirit is the substance of life. When the spirit departs, death approaches.

What God’s servant says is not important, however, what matters is whether his words are accompanied by the power of the Spirit. The word comes dead out of the mouth of the servant who does not have a spiritual life. St. Paul said to the Thessalonians, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Preaching is done through words, not ordinary words, but words accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The lack of the Spirit is the reason for our weaknesses. You may agree that preaching and teaching have

increased, but the fruits have decreased. Sermons have become monotonous. The main reason for this is that since the teachers do not have life, the Word comes out dead. It is true that “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). However, it needs a believer who uses it well. A strong sword needs a smart person to use it. St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians calls the Word of God the “sword of the Spirit.”

How true is this expression! It is a sword, but it is associated with the Word of the Spirit. The Word without spirit is a dull sword that does not cut. It looks like a sword from the outside, but does not perform its duty.

St. Paul clarified this point when he told the believers in Corinth, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Let us pause at St. Paul’s words, “In demonstration of the Spirit and of power”. These are the keys of successful service. These are the secrets of the strength of the early church and of the spreading of the Word.

The enticing words of man’s wisdom are philosophy and logic. St. Paul, the philosopher of early Christianity, could have used logic and philosophy to talk with the believers in Corinth who were the grandchildren of the Greek philosophers. Yet he refused because the message of the kingdom does not spread by logic and philosophy, but by the demonstration of spirit and power. What is the demonstration of the spirit?

The mind can convince the mind. The spirit can convince the spirit. When the spirit speaks, it does not use mechanisms of normal speech, but the special method of the day of Pentecost. What kinds of philosophy and logic characterized St. Peter’s words in his sermon on the Pentecost, such that all his listeners were pricked in their hearts and said, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Complete yielding on the part of the listeners: What shall we do? The answer of the apostle was “repent.” This is the demonstration of the spirit through which the church has fulfilled the will of her Master and Savior to preach the Gospel to the whole world. The demonstration of the spirit does not need any argument, “for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist” (Luke 21:15).

What happened on the day of Pentecost after Peter’s sermon was a proof of the work of the spirit. The listeners did not argue this new call, nor did they ask for a special conviction. The reason was that the spirit worked in them and pricked their hearts.

St. Paul said that his ministry was through the demonstration of the spirit and power. The power is the same power which the Lord promised His disciples when He commanded them to remain in Jerusalem till they be endued with the power from on high (Luke 24:49). “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

The world is now in the age of the intellect, an age that glorifies the mind and that attempts to subdue everything to its dominion. The mind of the world is bigger than its spirit. The reason for weakness in service and in the spreading of the kingdom of God is that we have forgotten the commandment of our Master and Teacher. We have started to serve with the intellect, not with the spirit. We have neglected the demonstration of the spirit, with its power and effect. We have adopted the logic of the mind, accompanied by human philosophy and psychological methods! The servants of this generation are all qualified with high educational degrees. Yet they are nothing compared to the uneducated fishermen of the Sea of Galilee who

followed their Master to the end and waited in Jerusalem for the “Promise of the Father.”

### **3.7 Self-deprivation**

Self-deprivation is a Christian virtue, which all believers should possess. By it we mean a disregard for the love of the world in all its forms. “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). This virtue varies from one believer to the other. Self-deprivation may reach the extent of selling one’s property, as was done in the early church. The apostles themselves illustrated their faith in this virtue when they said to their Master, “we have left all and followed You” (Matthew. 19:27). If self-deprivation is a Christian virtue required from all believers, then it is even more so from God’s servants, both those who have completely devoted their lives and volunteers.

The idea of self-deprivation is based on uniting the heart to the love of God. David, the king and prophet, asked God in one of his prayers, “Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name” (Psalms 86:11). Often the heart is divided in spite of the commandment saying, “My son, give me your heart” (Proverbs 23:26). Also, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). There is a great danger when the heart is divided and cares for other things that compete with the love of God. The person starts to justify his behavior and his weak love to God and begin to give many excuses. David the prophet said, “Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity” (Psalms 141:4). May our hearts be all united and perfect toward God’s love. “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

It happens sometimes that after a volunteer servant graduates from college and starts working, he looks for an overtime job. Hence, he occupies the time in which he previously used to serve the Lord. This youth keeps struggling in the world till all his spiritual desires are dissolved by the society in which he lives.

Many are deceived by the world’s glittering temporary-positions. There is no doubt that they have deviated from the life of self-deprivation, which is appropriate for God’s servants. We have to clarify that we are not against ambition. This is very appropriate for regular Christians; however, we are talking here about a small group of people whose hearts are inflamed with God’s love so they want to serve His children. There is no doubt that God compensates those faithful servants who preferred His service to the love of high positions and much money.

There are some devoted servants who do not experience self-deprivation. They may have forsaken their jobs for the sake of service, but they may not have given all their love and hearts to God. We should tell them the same words that Peter said to Ananias and Sapphira, “While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4). Before devoting your life to God, was it not your own? Did you sell the world for so much? You have not forsaken all the love for the world, but you have kept some for yourself! Sit with yourself and examine your vows and past promises before devoting your life to God’s service and remember whether you have kept some of the price of the land, which is part of your heart and part of your life.

In the miracle of feeding the multitude, the disciples told the Lord, “We have here only five loaves and two fishes.” His answer was, “Bring them here to Me” (Matthew 14:17,18). Then the Lord took the five loaves and two fishes and blessed them. So everyone ate and was filled and had leftovers. God asked them to give all that they had, and they gave it all. This allowed the miracle of the blessing to happen. What would have happened if one of the disciples had kept some for himself, because of lack of faith?

The experience of self-deprivation is a profound one, which gives the faithful servant spiritual power, complete dependence on the Lord and courage in His service. Concerning financial matters, it gives him the ability to rise above the level of material matters, which often create problems and hamper the growth of his service.

### **3.8 Love and Compassion Toward the Ones We Serve**

There is no doubt that love and compassion from God's servant to those whom he serves build them up spiritually, for love and compassion are the characteristics of true Christianity. We have seen the Son of Man's view towards sinners. He considers them sick and in need of treatment. He attracted millions of people by His love and His kindness. Rightly, St. Paul said, "Love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1). Jesus was a friend to the publicans and sinners; He ate, drank and sat with them. For this reason the scribes and Pharisees objected to his doings. It was written that, "Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew. 9:35, 36).

Love and compassion are main traits of God's disciples. St. Paul said, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:7,8). In another place, he told the Galatians to be kind to sinners: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Being severe to a sinner does not win him. On the contrary, it drives him away from God and the church. "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, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

Absalom, the Son of David, was thrown away from his father, the king, for he had removed his father from the throne. He despised the fatherly love and was even sought his father's life. However, David did not change his love to his son. When David asked his soldiers to go and fight Absalom, he told them, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:5). David is analogous to our Lord Jesus and Absalom to the sinner. The Lord has the same feelings toward sinners. As He is very kind to them, we should be like Him. Joab, the brutal old man, killed Absalom in spite of his master's commandment.

There are many like Joab. While Jesus is asking us to treat sinners kindly, there are some who, like Joab, kill them with brutality. The Lord Jesus is saddened by this, as was David over his son Absalom's death.

### **3.9 Wisdom and Flexibility**

How sweet is the word "wisdom" and what a supreme blessing is it? "For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her" (Proverbs 8:11). Christ was pleased to be so called "but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23,24). "Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Therefore, it is not strange to find that our Lord Jesus Christ "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). He commanded us to be wise: "be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). He promised His children and disciples wisdom during difficult times saying: "for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist" (Luke 21:15). How wise was His behavior when He answered those who wanted to entangle Him with the government, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

We must admit that many of our problems in church and in service are caused by unwise behavior. We stand inflexible, believing that the truth is on our side. The result is division and failure. This does not mean, however, that we should not live by values. We have to be wise for the unity and salvation of souls. This is what we feel clearly in St. Paul's sayings, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). This makes it clear that the apostle did not offend all these groups, which he served. He did not criticize their beliefs or opinions. By his great wisdom, he led them all to the faith.

Two situations illustrate these words, one with the Jews and the other with the pagans. In spite of his objection to the idea of circumcising the Gentiles, he acted according to the opposite view with Timothy "He took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek" (Acts 16:3). Likewise, in Athens, the center of philosophy, St. Paul stood in the midst of the Epicureans and philosophers saying, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 17: 22-24). Surprisingly, St. Paul who said these words is the man about whom it was written; "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols" (Acts 17:16).

Wisdom is a basic Christian trait, which God's servant should possess. When the book of Acts describes how deacons were chosen for the apostles, one condition was that "they should be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). This was shown to be accurate when the opposition disputed with Stephen (the first deacon) and were unable to resist the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke (Acts 6:10).

Wisdom is a commandment to all apostles. St. Paul, "the wise master builder" (1 Corinthians 3:10) commanded to "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4:5), and to teach one another "in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16). He also told the Corinthians, "But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning" (2 Corinthians 12:16). St. James, the apostle, urged the believers to obtain wisdom when he wrote: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

No doubt wisdom is one of the most important principles of service. It goes side by side with the winning of souls. Solomon the Wise said, "He who wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). Our Lord Jesus clarified this when He compared fishing to winning souls (Luke 5). Fishing needs wisdom and care as does winning souls.

God's servants need to be flexible and wise, not with the wisdom of this world which St. James the apostle described as "earthly, sensual, demonic ... But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:15-17). Yes, we are needful of flexibility and divine wisdom. Many problems are created in service because of lack of wisdom. Therefore, we warn the leaders of Sunday Schools not to leave matters to the youth who lack even the wisdom of this world, due to their young age. Job said, "Age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom" (Job 32:7).

### 3.10 Focus in Service

One of the important factors for God's servant to acquire strength is to focus his efforts in his service. This is a concern for both the devoted servants and for the volunteers. There are many servants who, due to their zeal for service and for the salvation of souls, serve in more than one field and in more than one place. The result is that they often lose concentration, which leads to weakness and superficiality, not only in service, but also in the lives of those servants themselves. Often, diversity in service is at the expense of the private spiritual life of the servant, unless the number of assistants is increased.

There are twelve hours in the day, and one's time and efforts are limited. Service is not restricted to those who devote their full time to it, but also includes lay people. These may be employees or students who should be honest in fulfilling their duties to God, society, and their conscience. When we neglect our duties, we "hinder the Gospel of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:12). Time is limited for many servants and must be used wisely. They should not exaggerate their service, thus neglecting their spiritual growth. One should be careful to follow the middle road.

The Lord of Glory said, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matthew 16:26). If I serve the souls of the whole world at the expense of the salvation of my soul, I will gain nothing. Therefore, watch yourself and put St. Paul's words before your eyes: "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Hence, it is possible that a servant, who preaches the Gospel, may be rejected at the end, because of his personal negligence. Let us remember what our Lord Jesus said: "Many will say to Me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them; I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:22,23). This expression, "I never knew you," means that those servants did not have a personal relationship with God, and did not know Him privately. Who is that servant who puts his body under subjection, lest he becomes a disqualified? He is St. Paul, the teacher of all the universe and its missionary who ascended unto the third heaven and saw things, which no one can express!

Our Lord commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). He did not command us to love our neighbors more than ourselves! It is good if we love them more, but in reality we want to escape from ourselves! If I unknowingly neglect visiting a sick person or helping others, I would have an excuse. But what is my excuse if I neglect my soul, of which I am conscious at all times? What answer shall I give God? Therefore, be careful and watch over yourself. Never shirk your responsibility to yourself, but be honest until death so that you may receive the crown of life.

The Lord Jesus spent many hours with the multitudes teaching them and performing miracles. He would spend the whole day serving. But do not forget that the Lord Jesus is different from any other person, for He used to spend the whole night in prayer (Luke 6:12). We can't reach the spiritual level of our Lord Jesus, which would enable us to spend the whole day in service and the whole night in prayer!

Some servants fall into a state of deviation because of their love to service, and their zeal for the salvation of souls. We may call this "the devil of service." Service rules every thought of such a servant. He does not think any more of himself, but of those whom he serves. Whenever he listens to a speaker and likes his talk, he copies his words, not for his own benefit, but because they can be appropriate for a topic, for a sermon or a youth meeting or a Sunday School class! Likewise, whenever, he reads a book, his only concern is to try to find useful points for a topic; thus, he forgets himself.

My dear brethren, this is deviation, so be careful. It is necessary that what we teach others should spring

from our personal experience. There is nothing wrong in listening and enjoying, or reading and admiring what you read. However, your main concern should be for your own benefit. Only when your own soul has come closer to Christ can you spontaneously help others.

### **3.11 Courage in Service**

There are many situations, which require wisdom in a faithful servant. There are others, which also necessitate courage. Nothing makes God's servant lose courage more than weak faith and hypocrisy. When a man of God is dead to the world and has strong faith, he is ready to endure all difficulties, even to death, for witnessing to the truth. We have seen how Elijah the prophet rebuked King Ahab not caring for the king's authority. The end result was that Elijah ascended alive up to heaven in a fiery chariot while dogs licked up Ahab's blood as foretold by Elijah. Likewise, John the Baptist rebuked King Herod for transgressing the law. The first scene of this tragedy ended by the severing of John's head, which was worth more than half of King Herod's kingdom. However, the story has not ended, for up until now John's voice is still heard rebuking the sinner, crying, "It is not lawful to you."

All the prophets, apostles and faithful servants who received their heavenly mission were courageous for they were not afraid of death. The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). The Lord told Isaiah, the prophet, "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isaiah 58:1). He told Ezekiel, the prophet, "And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious" (Ezekiel 2:6,7).

If the faithful servants had not been courageous in every generation, the truth would have been lost amidst all that is vain. How many servants were martyred for "the Word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Revelation 6:9)? The blood of those martyrs has watered the seeds of faith as they grew into a large tree under whose shade we are now sitting.

When King Nebuchadnezzar obliged the people to abandon God's worship, the three youths answered him courageously, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18). The result of that challenge was that they were thrown in the fiery furnace whose heat was increased sevenfold. Nevertheless, since the Lord was with them, the fire did not hurt them, and God's name was glorified.

We feel this courage in the life of the apostles and their writings. When St. Paul was warned not to go to Jerusalem for there was danger to his life, he answered courageously, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). St. Peter said, "Do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled ... but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" (1 Peter 3:14,15).

The faithful servant must explain the Word of truth rightly, with no hypocrisy. It is a great sin if we do not say the truth in spite of our knowledge of it. Be sure that God is with you, and do not commit the sin that King Saul committed. He confessed to Samuel, the prophet, saying, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24). No wonder God rejected him and gave the kingdom to David who often praised God in his psalms saying, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my

life; of whom shall I be afraid” (Psalm 27:1).

The faithful servant must be sure that the Lord is with him and be confident in God’s power, care and promises as long as he dwells in the secret place of the most High and abides under the shadow of the Almighty. The Lord said, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

#### **4. Spiritual Leadership**

Spiritual leadership is a divine gift, which the Lord grants to a person who has been made especially ready by deep faith, complete obedience, strong love, and who has sacrificed worldly glory and everything material “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ” (Philippians. 3:7).

Spiritual leadership is not inherited, nor is it obtained through an important social position. It is not attained by seeking false knowledge, or the best seats in church, but by counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

Spiritual leadership is not given without regard to those who occupy positions of religious leadership, but it is given only to suitable persons. Where the lion dwells, that is its den, but if the lion leaves that place, the place has no value anymore.

In Egypt, Joseph was only a slave in Potiphar’s house. Yet he found grace in his master’s eyes, and became a leader in his house. While he was a slave in body, he was free in spirit. As a result, he was not enslaved by sin, even though he was unjustly imprisoned. Leadership followed him even into prison “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man” (Genesis 39:2). In this manner he eventually became the second man after Pharaoh in command over Egypt, with leadership over all the country.

St. Paul on his way to Rome to be judged in front of Caesar’s court was a prisoner in the ship under guard by Roman soldiers. The sea raged and the waves rose higher until everyone was frightened. St. Paul stood, as their leader, saying, “But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you’” (Acts 27:21-24).

Moses, whom Pharaoh’s daughter adopted and taught in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and who “was mighty in words and in deeds” (Acts 7:22), did not become a spiritual leader in Pharaoh’s palace but in the Sinai desert: “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26). Let us compare now Moses’ position before he was given leadership from God and his position later, after God appeared to him in the burning bush. In his former position, we see physical zeal and human methods. We see murder, fear and failure. But in the latter position, we see spiritual power and divine awe. We see a heavy tongue speaking clearly. We see brave acts and miracles and the first organized evacuation in human history. In the wilderness, we see great wise leadership.

Jeremiah the prophet was called when the Israelites were in the worst of times, when sin, hypocrisy and superficial worship prevailed. It was not easy under such circumstances, when his society was evil and full of stumbling blocks, for Jeremiah to get any good response to his mission! The Lord called him and when he



apologized, the Lord encouraged him and gave him leadership over His people. Then He stretched His hand and touched his mouth saying, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:9,10).

Hence, we see that spiritual leadership is not achieved by attending service meetings, nor by reading books, nor by imitating other leaders, but only through God. That is what the Lord did with both Elijah and John the Baptist, who were feared by King Ahab and King Herod, respectively. Also, Samuel, a young boy, was given the words of prophecy, and David, the young shepherd, became a king.

God is not biased. He foresaw in them complete obedience, great faith, strong love, and readiness for work. He consequently prepared them for the great role of leadership. He said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you” (Joshua 3:7).

A spiritual leader does not lose his leadership because of old age, for there is no retirement in spiritual leadership. Nor is there old age in spiritual life that is unless we forsake God’s love and our fellowship with Him.

## **5. Avoiding Service**

Earlier we spoke about the importance of focus in service and we advised not to widen the field unless there are enough servants. We would like to discuss now the other extreme, which is the avoidance of service. Both are considered deviations. If someone, who has the spiritual, intellectual, and cultural capabilities refuses to serve, he is doing wrong. Some of the excuses given for avoiding service follow.

### **5.1 The Desire for Spiritual Growth**

We can never distinguish between a person who is growing in his spiritual life and a person who is not growing. Growth is associated with the spiritual life and there is no limit to it. We keep growing until we die. A person who avoids serving until he feels he has grown spiritually will never serve, for there is no definite measure to tell him he has matured.

Moreover, the more a person grows spiritually, the more he will discover his mistakes and may feel that he is the worst of sinners. That is how the saints look at themselves. Therefore, we have to proceed to serve God without pride, as long as we have the necessary capabilities. We should never forget our spiritual growth during our service, for the spiritual growth of the servant means the growth of the service itself. We must do one and not abandon the other. The lazy servant, whose master had given him one talent, which he then buried, was punished because he had not gained anything, not because he had spoiled the talent (Matthew 25). As long as God has given us special talents, we must win others for the Lord. St. Augustine said, “We have to serve others with the spiritual gifts that God has given us.” Let us be zealous for our brothers and their salvation. St. Paul wished to be deprived of Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh (Romans 9:3). St. John Chrysostom explained this deprivation as his readiness to stop the divine conversation with God for the sake of his brothers.

We must stress the point that service itself gives growth and consolation to the servant. St. Paul described the Word of God as “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). This beautiful illustration shows the effectiveness of the Word of God. The two-edged sword is a symbol of power. It influences both sides: the speaker (or the servant) and the listener (or the ones served). Never think that when you serve, you give and do not take. You take as much as you give. St. John Chrysostom made this clear when he said that “the words of our Lord Jesus ‘Give and you will be given,’ can be applied to those

who care for the salvation of others.” In as much as you are faithful in your service, the Lord will comfort you. Moreover, service pushes us to care for ourselves spiritually.

## **5.2 A Feeling of Unworthiness**

No one denies the honor of service and what it requires by way of preparation. It carries responsibilities in front of God, our consciences and the church. However, we should never be afraid, for we have not received the spirit of bondage to fear, but the spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15). We do not deserve anything from God’s grace and His blessings, but we have received all our worth in the Savior’s blood. The feeling one may have of deserving any grace indicates a sin of pride due to a feeling of self-consciousness. The feeling of unworthiness, which stems from humility, is an effective factor in the success of service, on the condition that it is without despair. This feeling of worthlessness becomes a fruit of humility with its abundant blessings. Let us distinguish between the feelings of unworthiness, which accompany self-denial, and those due to pettiness.

After the miracle of the great catch of fish (Luke 5), Simon Peter felt the burden of his sins and his unworthiness for the coming of the Lord onto his boat. Therefore, he cried, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). The Lord’s answer was, “Do not be afraid, from now on, you will catch men” (Luke 5:10). Entrusting him with service came from his feeling of unworthiness. It is beautiful to feel at all times our weakness and our unworthiness to carry the vessels of the Lord, to preach to others the word of salvation and to feed the living sheep. This feeling, though, must accompany one of zeal for our brothers who are living in the darkness of sin and in the shadow of death and a desire to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth. We must be sure we know that no one is without sin, even if he lives only one day.

We must struggle along two roads at the same time, our life with God and our service to others, with the feeling of how honorable it is to serve and how unworthy we are to do it. St. Paul’s words should encourage us; “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

## **5.3 Waiting for God’s Call**

Some people avoid service (especially the service of complete devotion of one’s entire life) with the excuse that they are waiting for a clear call from God. They cannot define this call and it becomes vague in their minds. Some may visualize this call as an extraordinary scene or a heavenly revelation in a vision, or a dream, or a heavenly voice.

We cannot deny that this has happened with some people, but it is not the rule. God does not always reveal his will through angels, visions, or dreams to a person who prays for a certain matter. Still there are many other ways by which we know God’s will. St. Paul said, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1,2).

God has different ways to speak to us. He does not speak to you in the same manner He speaks to me. He does not reveal to me a certain matter in the same way He reveals it to another person. There are certain people who, due to their spiritual condition, cannot withstand visions or the sight of angels. Furthermore, if the devil finds that a person trusts in this method of communication, he may use it to deceive him.

The rule is that whenever somebody requests us to perform a certain service and we feel the desire to fulfill it, we pray for it and ask others to pray with us. We may even ask the priest to officiate liturgies dedicated to it. If after all that the thought persists to fulfill the service and we feel lasting comfort about it, then it is a proof of God’s acceptance of that matter. This is understood on the condition that it does not conflict with God’s commandments or with a teaching from the Church’s doctrines.

When we speak about prayer and comfort, we have to understand the factor of time. That is, we do not pray just for a day or two and we say that we have prayed enough. We have to pray for a longer period of time and persist in prayer especially in matters such as devoting one's life to God. Moreover, we should not depend on our own thoughts alone. We must also take the advice of spiritual persons, whose correct teachings and faithful advice are trustworthy.

We must clarify an important matter: we are all invited to serve. A supernatural proof is not required to verify what is already established. People are of two kinds. Some have the desire to serve while others are obliged to do it. We clearly see this in the lives of two prophets. For example, when Isaiah heard God's voice saying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for Us" He replied, "Here am I, send me" (Isaiah 6:8). But Jeremiah was obliged to go, after he said humbly, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth" (Jeremiah 1:6).

We have to mention that the idea of God's call has a certain desire behind it. For example, we all do things, like get married, find a job, travel abroad to obtain scientific degrees without asking for God's call! However, in God's service, specifically in devoting one's life, we ask for a clear strong proof for God's call. It is obvious that in the former case, we do not insist on God's call for we fulfill a favorite desire in our souls.

#### **5.4 Family Hindrances**

Sometimes, the family hinders one's service. No wonder, the Lord Jesus said, "A man's enemies will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:36). We point here to two factors related to the family, marriage and parents.

It is strange that marriage hinders service. We do not blame marriage, for it is a holy sacrament that God has sanctified and blessed. But we speak of the marriage that pulls the servant outside the sphere of service. We blame the servant who changes the style of his life because of marriage. Marriage should become a blessing to the servant and help in his service. He may undertake new responsibilities in the sphere of service. Marriage should not become an excuse to neglect service.

A wife may become a great blessing to the servant in his service. Isn't she his partner in life? Why doesn't she share with him his service? If she had once been a servant, she could help him in the field, which suits her. If she has the gift of service she could help in educational services or in the guidance of youth or women. She could contribute to the social services, like visiting widows and the poor or in doing manual work like sewing for the needy. Marriage is a blessing, which should lead the wife to believe in the message of service, so she can help her husband in carrying the tasks of life and service. It is better for servants who are thinking of marriage, to choose their wives from among women interested in service. Hence marriage becomes an encouraging factor to their service and not a hindrance to it.

We all love and obey our parents according to God's commandment. But if this love conflicts with God's love, then we have to follow God's way, according to what the Lord Jesus said: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). Also, He said to His Mother, St. Mary, when she found Him in the temple among the teachers, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49). If there is a conflict between our obedience to our parents and our obedience to God, we should give priority to God "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). This does not mean that getting parents to understand this is impossible, for everything can be solved through love and prayer. We have seen many cases where parents were at first objecting to their sons' devotion to service, but when they saw how their sons were steadfast and were faithful in their private responsibilities and service, they encouraged them and honored their service.

## 5.5 The Problems of Service

It is in the nature of God's service that it be full of problems, difficulties, and hardships. It is a form of the narrow gate, which the Lord said all believers should welcome because it leads to spiritual freedom.

When the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples, He sent them as lambs among wolves (Luke 10:3). This is the true picture of the servant in the field of service: "lambs among wolves." It is a unique scene to see lambs, still meek, serving wolves, without being harmed by them!

Since then, faithful servants have built their service on that foundation. St. Paul said, "For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now" (1 Corinthians 4:9-13). The apostle enumerated these hardships in his second epistle to the Corinthians, chapter twelve. The faithful servant is the one who carries the spiritual armor enduring hardship to conquer the kingdom of the devil (2 Timothy 2:3). If we understood all this, we would realize that the problems of service are caused by the devil who does his best to set obstacles to the spreading of the kingdom of God on earth, and that he is helped by evil persons who want to do his will.

The problems in service stem from various issues: money, rebellious people, those whom we serve, persecution from without, division from within, or the nature of the work itself and its difficulties. Although we have discussed some of these points, we would now like to elaborate on them.

### 5.5.1 Money

Money may be an important issue, which, when servants meet up with it may cause some to avoid service. The problems relating to money may be divided into two types: the servant's personal needs and the needs of the service in general. Truly, money has never been an obstacle hindering the devotion of the faithful servant, especially regarding his personal needs. When we look at what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-34, we find assurance and promise that He will give us what we need. The Lord wants us to have confidence in our Heavenly Father as a child has complete confidence in his earthly father. The servant should be free from worry, regardless of whether he is responsible for himself only, or for his family or for the whole congregation. It is impossible to have faith and worry at the same time, as it is impossible for fire and water, or light and darkness to come together. When the believer believes in God's promises, he can follow Him with victory over hardships and difficulties. When the Lord Jesus sends His servant into the field of service, he takes care of his personal needs:

"Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" (1 Corinthians 9:7).

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

When Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them not to carry a purse, or script, or shoes (Luke 10:4). We wonder how can God, "who cares for the birds who do not sow, nor reap nor gather to barns," not care for His servants? "The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalms 145:15,16). We have talked about self-deprivation as a virtue, which a servant should acquire. The servant who sacrifices a certain standard of living for the sake of service, will surely be rewarded by the Lord a hundredfold, not with material blessings

but with spiritual blessings. “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:10). Let us follow the Lord’s example who “though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). The Lord praised the servant of the church of Smyrna saying, ‘I know your works, tribulation, and poverty but you are rich’ (Revelation 2:9). These Words apply to all devoted servants.

There is another point of view that applies to volunteer servants, namely that money may obstruct service. Some volunteers do not serve because they wish to work overtime to increase their income. So they spend their spare time and effort at work, resulting in a negative effect on their service. One may wonder, “Is raising the standard of living a sin, where the burdens of life are abundant?” We understand this way of thinking. But we have to understand the message of the servant and his personality. The servant is a person who finds his joy in the Lord and in transmitting his holy message to others. Other people may find their joy elsewhere, even if they are alright. The Lord said, “My delights was with the sons of men” (Proverbs 8:31). This holds true of the feeling of the servant. His delight is with God’s creation.

We discussed this point earlier when we spoke about self-deprivation as a factor of strength in the life of God’s servant. We must add that the servant believes that anyone who faithfully serves God will receive His blessings, spiritual and material blessings, as well as blessings in health and in all his endeavors. Do we forget this? Do we forget the Lord’s saying, “Give and it shall be given to you” (Luke 6:38). The servant is rewarded in other aspects other than the materialistic ones, including God’s care and protection, the gift of health, the blessings of happiness and inner peace. All these cannot be valued with money.

Concerning the needs of the service itself, money must be seen as a means and not as a goal. We have never heard that the Church ever asked for money to satisfy its needs. We hear, for example, that the believers in the early church used to sell their possessions and bring the money and put it at the feet of the apostles. This occurred simply as a spiritual incentive when “the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32,35). This beautiful expression, written by the author of the Book of Acts, shows the early church’s view towards money. The prices of their possessions were laid down “at the apostles’ feet.” This should be the value of money in the eyes of a faithful servant, always under his feet. He uses money without being used by money.

Many servants forget the life of self-deprivation and do not want to be self-sufficient. Many servants run after money and are enslaved by it, and at the end perish because of it. Many servants take off the clothes of grace and put on the robes of the Pharisees. They devour widow’s houses and for pretence make long prayers. How many servants lose the spirit of self-sufficiency and become greedy for money, which makes those whom they serve despise them.

We repeat that money should be placed under the feet of faithful servants. It should remain there all the time. They do not seek it, but it seeks them when those served feel that it will be wisely used for the glory of God and to satisfy the needy.

When the church was poor in its resources, it was rich in its faith and its men. When its material resources increased, it lost its spirituality as a church of Christ. I cannot forget what has been recorded in history about a conversation that took place between a Pope of Rome and a monk from the West. The Pope was showing the poor monk all the treasures of the Vatican and said, “The time has passed when the church can say I have no gold nor silver” The monk replied, “the church can also no longer say to the paralyzed man, ‘In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’”

There are many useful projects in the mind of the servant. But he has to seek God first before anybody or anything else. He has to go to the Householder to arrange what is good in His eyes. No doubt, He is going to

do what is best for His church and people at the right time and in the right way. We do not need money as much as we need faith.

### **5.5.2 The Attacks of People**

Sometimes, people inside the field of service may attack the service. This is not strange “Because the Lord has sworn, the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:16). Amalek is a symbol for the devil who has followers in every age to fight God’s work.

We read in the New Testament about many who fought the truth. Elymas the sorcerer attacked Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus and wanted to turn away the deputy from the faith (Acts 13). Alexander the coppersmith did Paul much evil and greatly withstood his words (2 Timothy 4:14,15). Furthermore, when St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the legality of his apostle ship, he numbered his perils in service; some of these were perils among false brethren (2 Corinthians 11:26). When he wrote to the Galatians, he also spoke of false brethren who came in secretly to spy out their liberty, which they had in Christ to bring them into bondage (Galatians 2:4). He wrote to the Corinthians saying, “For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9). When he spoke about the last days, he mentioned many adversaries: “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was” (2 Timothy 3:8,9).

The adversaries, who attack God’s work, are a proof that the service is successful. The devil does not attack except when he feels he is in danger. The faithful servant should be determined. Joshua, the son of Sirach, said, “My son, when you start serving the Lord, you should prepare yourself for difficulties” (Sirach 2:1).

It is not necessary that those adversaries be from outside the field of service, for sometimes they are from within. These adversaries may be more dangerous to the service than are the external adversaries. When our Lord Jesus Himself was attacked, He was attacked not by outsiders, but by men of His religion, from the Scribes and the Pharisees!

The apostle Paul mentioned in more than one place in his epistles about “false brothers” and the dangers he had encountered from them. This name, “false brothers,” fits them perfectly for they have all the external features of being brothers, but unfortunately, they are not genuine. Paul said, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

We should not forget these facts so that we may not easily fail. We have to remember the apostle’s words about the adversaries that “they will progress no further” (2 Timothy 3:9). If they create divisions and even think that they have succeeded, the apostle still encourages us saying that they will progress no further. Sometimes the passage of the river may be narrow for it passes through some rocks. When it overcomes that section, it flows more strongly. We may meet obstacles in our service and the scope of work may narrow. But let us be patient for these difficulties have an end, and when they end, the service will flow powerfully.

The faithful servants should not forsake the service because of many difficulties. If the apostles had done so at the beginning of Christianity, we would not have received the message of Christ. St. Paul said, “to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Galatians 2:5). All the forces of evil have attacked Christianity, but the voice of truth has never been put out. The church struggled for three centuries, like a baby crawling on thorns, and many carried the light of

truth, until it was victorious. All faithful servants should be determined, feeling their responsibility to fulfill their message, never forsaking the field of service to the devil and his helpers. Remember God's commandment to His disciple Timothy, "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). The promise of our Lord Jesus encourages us as He said to Joshua, "Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

### **5.5.3 Those Being Served**

Sometimes those being served may cause the servants to abstain from service. There are fields in which it is very difficult to serve. The servant may not feel any response from his students. He may not feel any spiritual growth after a period of service but rather complete negligence. The Lord Jesus Himself, when teaching in Nazareth, was offended by the people. "He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matthew 13:58).

There is no doubt that students vary in their readiness to accept God's Word. These souls resemble the soil that the Lord Jesus referred to in the parable of the sower. As there is good soil that gives fruit thirty fold or sixty fold or a hundred fold, there is stony soil and soil full of thorns which choke the seeds. Even the good soil needs time. The Lord Jesus said, "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). Let us pause and meditate on these last words: "bear forth fruit with patience," in spite of the soil being good and the heart being good, according to the testimony of the Lord.

When agricultural fields are neglected for a long time, the land needs much effort to make it fruitful. Likewise, when souls are neglected for a long time, they need a lot of time, effort, patience and care to become fruitful.

We do not doubt that if we take care of souls, that they will be corrected, even if they vary in the time when they bring forth fruit and in the amount of the fruit. All souls are created according to God's image and in His likeness. As St. Paul wrote, "Every creature of God is good" (1 Timothy 4:4). When the Jews in the city of Corinth attacked St. Paul, he shook his raiment and said unto them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). However, the Lord appeared to him in a vision saying, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:9-11).

All this applies to the nature of the students and their varied readiness to accept the Word of God. There is another characteristic of students in general, which is that they are very moody. The multitude cheered Jesus on his entry to Jerusalem with cheers of victory, and they welcomed Him like a king. After five days, these same people changed and shouted, "Crucify Him, crucify Him. His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). In the city of Lystra, St. Paul healed the lame man. It was such a great miracle that the people said, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men" (Acts 14:11). And they called Barnabas, Jupiter and Paul, Mercury. They even brought oxen and garlands unto the gates and would have done sacrifices with the people, but the two apostles prevented it. Soon these feelings changed and they stoned Paul and drew him out of the city, supposing him to be dead (Acts 14). This is how people behave. St. Paul wrote to the believers in Galatia rebuking them, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6).

Therefore, let the faithful servant continue in his way putting all these considerations in front of him, feeling that he is not better than His Master, who faced the same difficulties, not seeking early fruits. After the seeds are sown, they need water, continuous care and time, amounts of which differ from plant to plant.

In all these stages, God alone is the One who makes them grow.

Let me whisper in your ear, O faithful servant, if you have strong faith in God's power, the service will change people and the fruits will multiply. In the miracle of the healing of the paralytic, when Jesus saw the faith of the four friends who carried him, He healed him (Mark 2:5). When God sees our faith and our love to serve others, He will surely answer and work.

## **6. Everyone Is Invited To Serve**

Service in its general meaning is not limited to teaching. Its meaning must be expanded in our minds. Service is associated with love. These two cannot be separated. Whenever love prevails, service also prevails. Whenever there is true successful service, there is great love and inflamed zeal.

The first and greatest commandment in Christianity is love; love to God and to our neighbor. Our Lord of glory said, "On these two commandments, hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). If you are a living member in the Body of Christ, you have to sympathize with every suffering member in that Body. If you share the feelings of the suffering members, your love will lead you to ease their sufferings. This is service. However, if you do not feel the suffering of members, you should know that you are not a living member in Christ.

Service is not only limited to preaching and teaching, but it goes far beyond. When you talk to others about God from the church pulpit, you are serving. If you do not have this gift, but you talk to others about God privately, you are serving. When you visit a sick person, encouraging him, and strengthening his faith and his hope in God, you are serving. When you comfort a sad or troubled person, you are serving. When you lead a person to church or to a spiritual meeting, you are serving. When you help a needy person or convert a sinner from his erroneous ways, you are serving. There are many opportunities through which we can serve the Lord and show our feelings of love toward Him.

The miracle of the paralytic, who was carried by four friends, has many points worth meditating upon. We have before us a rescue team, the first of its kind. We know for sure that they were not hired, but were friends. It is not possible that they had carried him from his home in the same way as they lowered him from the roof. But most probably, when they failed to reach Jesus through the multitude, their love led them to "uncover the roof and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of palsy was lying." We notice that they did not talk with our Lord nor mentioned anything to Him. All they did was bring their sick friend in front of the Giver of Life and the Healer. Their characters included strong faith and persistence in reaching their goal.

Can we mimic these four friends? Can't we carry a soul, which is sick with sin, and bring him in front of the Lord? Misery accompanies sin and seldom do we find a person who wants to remain miserable. Many need to be carried to Jesus, as the impotent man at Bethesda said, "I have no man," when the Lord Jesus asked him, "Do you want to be made whole?" (John 5:6).

Many of the spiritually sick may know something about Jesus and His power, His mercy, and His grace, but they are dead with their sins. The dead person cannot move and has no will. Many are miserable because they are away from the Lord, and they are in desperate need of someone to wake them up. "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5:14). Can a sleepy person do anything? Such is the sinner. These people need somebody to bring them in front of the Lord. Mary and Martha sent a strange message to the Lord. "Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick" (John 11:3). They did not make any specific request. They did not tell Him about their love for their brother and their anxiety for his well-being because they knew that God's love to Lazarus is more than their love to him.



Now, my dear brethren, how many spiritually sick do you know? Can we send a message to the Lord, as did the two sisters? Can we pray and tell Him, “This person whom you love and for whom You died, is sick; this person whom You love, is in bondage of sin and under the control of the devil”? Can’t we do that? How can a loving heart see a person in need and not do anything for him? The apostle wonders about him, saying, “How does the love of God abide in him” (1 John 3:17).

## **7. To the Uttermost Part of the Earth**

The Lord Jesus’ commandment to His disciples before his ascension was not to leave Jerusalem and begin serving until they had received power from above. This is the power of the Holy Spirit. After receiving it they could then witness to His Name in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:4-8).

These words were the last of Jesus’ commandments to His disciples, before He was taken up in the cloud ascending to heaven. Let us pause at Jesus’ last words for they point out very important principles in service. The words of our Lord Jesus were not said haphazardly when He defined the steps toward the road of service. These are summarized as first staying in Jerusalem and waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit, and then going to serve. It should be noted that there is a special sequence: first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then in Samaria, then to the uttermost part of the earth.

### **7.1 In Jerusalem**

The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to witness there. What is Jerusalem, in which the Lord asks me to witness first? Jerusalem is the city of the Great King and has the temple. It refers to the heart, and the holy private spiritual life of the person. To witness to Christ in Jerusalem means to witness with my private life and my holy deeds.

Many do not follow the sequence, which the Lord set. They try to witness in Samaria or unto the uttermost part of the earth, for example, before they witness in Jerusalem and hence mistakes and failures result. Our Lord Jesus reminds me that I should witness to Him in Jerusalem first. From Jerusalem came the Good News of salvation, and from your holy private life come the blessings that benefit others.

Jerusalem was the center of Judea where the temple was and where the sacrifices were offered. It was a major attraction for the Jews, where they visited and found their comfort. Likewise, the inner Jerusalem, or your private life as a servant of God, is looked at by all people; and through you, they glorify the Heavenly Father. Therefore, O you servant of God, from your inner Jerusalem, present sacrifices of thanksgiving, the fruits of lips confessing His Name.

Why do we start serving from Jerusalem? It is the closest circle in which we can witness to the Lord. If we do a good job in it, then we prove that we deserve to serve outside it, wherein we receive power from God. The Lord’s commandment to His disciples was not to depart from Jerusalem until they had received the Promise of the Father, the power of the Holy Spirit, which would work in them and through them. God always wants service to be accomplished through the power of His Spirit so that the credit goes to Him. How often do we sin when we proceed to serve, depending on our own power and wisdom? This power, which was granted to the disciples, was granted to them in the upper room while they were waiting for the Promise of the Father, praying fervently in front of the Lord with one soul, with the doors and windows closed. Likewise, we shall not receive this power except in the “upper room,” that is, when we are above earthly matters and while praying waiting for God’s work and His grace in us after we have locked the doors and windows of the soul. In this spiritual upper room, the Lord will reveal Himself to us as He did to His disciples granting us joy and peace. With this power, Peter witnessed to Christ in front of thousands of Jews

after he had denied Him in front of a slave. We, too, can serve God with this power, even to the uttermost part of the earth, for then we will be led by the Spirit.

## **7.2 In All Judea**

The Jews are God's own people to whom He came, but they did not accept Him. Witnessing in Judea is serving the Lord at home, among the family and the small community in which we live. We often neglect serving in this field, which may create problems in the service. Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). St. Paul said, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). The servant may be successful in his service, but he may have problems at home. Therefore, the apostle emphasizes this point, "For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5). The apostle considers taking care of one's home a measure by which to evaluate the servant. If one does not take care of his family, how can he take care of the whole church?

## **7.3 In Samaria**

The Samaritans were a mixture of Jews and atheists. Witnessing in Samaria represents our service among believers and unbelievers. After the servant has witnessed to Christ by his own private life in Jerusalem and in all Judea, he starts serving in a field that requires more preparation and greater struggle. Serving in Samaria requires love, mercy, and consideration for the feelings of others. When the city of Samaria refused Jesus, John and James wanted to destroy the city by fire. "Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' And they went to another village" (Luke 9:51-56).

Moreover, the servant needs special studies to fit the needs of those he serves. It is a difficult field, but one's faith may be a blessing to many as the faith of the Samaritan woman was a blessing to the whole city.

## **7.4 To The Uttermost Part of the Earth**

It is so joyful when God's Word grows and spreads. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things" (Romans 10:15). How happy is the servant when he goes to unknown places carrying the Good News and the message of salvation to people whom he does not know and with whom there are no national or cultural ties, nor even the same language, race, or dogma. He goes with the mere incentive of deep love, resembling the One who loved him and died for him.

However, all this needs special qualifications. As it needs faith, it needs balance. It also needs determination to walk in God's path, commitment to follow His commandments and strength to serve His great name and preach His love to everyone.

## **8. A Final Word**

To conclude, we would like all servants to pay attention to this simple word: Let us not take matters superficially, or look at them from only one angle. Let us consider all the needs of the church from all angles so that we may not be enthusiastic for just one side. Let us not be zealous for service (though good and holy), and forget to wait for the Promise of the Father and His power. Let us not forget ourselves in the midst of the great sea of service and its enormous field. No matter how we struggle and labor, "The harvest is plentiful

and the laborers are few.” Let us believe that God can work through us. Let us sit with ourselves quietly and evaluate our principles in service. Let us start from the beginning with strong faith and steadfast determination.

## **9. Spiritual Assets: Readings**

There are various kinds of religious readings, but we are writing here about spiritual readings, which inflame the spirit with God’s love, straighten our personalities and purify our souls and bodies from all evil. We will divide this topic into the following areas:

- ❖ The Material of Spiritual Readings
- ❖ The Purpose of Spiritual Readings
- ❖ The Benefits of Spiritual Readings
- ❖ How to Read?
- ❖ The Time of Reading and its Quantity

### **9.1 The Material Of Spiritual Readings**

There are three basic sources for Spiritual Readings including:

1. The Holy Bible: The Old and New Testaments, with commentaries, meditations and biographies of the writers of the Book.
2. The Sayings of the Fathers: Ascetic books which deal with virtues. These are better read gradually and offered to each person according to his needs.
3. The Lives of Saints: Whether they lived in the world or the desert, whether martyrs or monks or ministers or heroes of faith or leaders of Christian thought, etc. Reading their biographies offers us living examples of Christian virtues. St. Mar Isaac said; “The news of the saints is very desirable in the ears of the meek like watering new plants”.

### **9.2 The Purpose Of Spiritual Readings**

One has to know the purpose of his reading and always remember it so he may not deviate from it. For example, reading the Bible has many forms, which may vary from one person to the other. The purpose of one form of reading the Bible is learning, i.e. knowing its contents, stories, characters, and commandments. However, the purpose of another form of reading could be meditation, i.e. to stop at a certain verse, meditate on it, apply it to one’s self and benefit spiritually.

These two kinds of readings (learning and meditations) are included in our discussion and they are different from the third kind of reading, which is mainly studying, i.e. deeply understanding the Bible. This kind of reading involves accuracy in information and does not stop at mere general knowledge, but researches very deeply and accurately to know the meaning of certain words with the help of various dictionaries, references to old translations, making comparisons, and coming out with conclusions. This study includes the introduction of each book, its geography, symbols, prophecies and proofs. Moreover, it involves explaining difficult verses, which may seem contradictory and solving problems, which may contradict with science, philosophy, physics, astronomy, history, geology, and anthropology.

All this is very useful and important, but it does not fall under our subject, for we are concerned with the meditation of the spirit, not the activity of the mind.

### **9.3 The Benefits Of Spiritual Readings**

Reading, in general, gathers the mind from its wandering and leads it to concentrate on the subject of the

reading. When the topic of reading changes, the kind of thoughts will change also. St. Mar Isaac said, "Remembering virtuous people renews in us the desire of virtue. Likewise, the thoughts of philosophy renews in us evil desires. Therefore, spiritual reading does not gather the mind from wandering in material and carnal things, but it lifts it up to the world of the spirit and opens before it the door of divinities to taste how good the Lord is. Therefore, spiritual reading has two benefits: one is negative and the other is positive.

1. The Negative Aspect: is to avoid evil or vain thoughts, hence spiritual reading is used as a sword for chastity to attack evil thoughts, and thoughts of anger and to calm the soul.
2. The Positive Aspect: is to lift the thoughts to the divine matters. This aspect has many gradual steps, which may allow the person to have his thoughts with continuous unity with God.

Spiritual reading is a door through which the person may enter to be fervent in the soul. The soul, which became very cold spiritually due to its concern with materialism, or its influence with bad company, may remember God and the saints and its pure nature and may desire to return to that state. Spiritual reading may inflame God's love in the hearts and may instill the desire to imitate the saints and to apply the virtues mentioned in the Bible or the lives of the saints.

Moreover, spiritual reading kills monotony and laziness and facilitates the virtues in the eyes of the reader and puts in his heart readiness to start working. Hence, the person feels as if fire is pushing him to obtain all the virtues, and all carnal desires become as trifles in his eyes. He despises them and does not remember them any more.

Spiritual reading, which creates the desire to imitate the righteous people, becomes the material for spiritual readings. Whenever a person reads about a certain virtue in the lives of the saints and he wants to imitate it, he starts training himself in it. Hence, virtue is transferred, through reading, from the book to the notebook of spiritual exercises and becomes part of his life. It is said that the door of virtues is opened to whoever starts spiritual reading.

Whoever reads about God's commandments and the virtues finds in them a true mirror where he can see himself, or finds a scale where he can evaluate his actions and personality. Therefore, reading becomes a means of examining one's self and afterwards repenting.

Whenever a person reads the biographies of the saints and apostles and looks at the high standards which they have attained after hard labor, patience and struggle, whenever he puts all these virtues on one side of the scale and puts himself on the other side, he feels how trifle he is and that he is still a beginner. Hence, reading leads him to true humility, which is built on true knowledge of one's self. The more he reads, the more he becomes humble, for he remembers God's saying, "He who knows more, more is required of him".

Spiritual reading is also a subject matter for prayer. The kind of prayer varies according to the kind of reading. One kind of reading may let the person feel the burden of his sins and weaknesses. Then he bows down in sorrow and with contrite heart, confessing his sins to God, asking His mercy and forgiveness. Another kind of reading may stir in a person the love of virtues so he prays with persistence asking God for grace and help so that he may follow the road of our Fathers. Another kind of reading may stir in the reader the love of others so he lifts up his hands praying for them. Another kind of reading may reveal God's beautiful qualities and unlimited greatness so he kneels down glorifying God for these qualities, feeling his unworthiness to talk with such a Great God, then one starts praising God with expressions of gratitude. Reading is an incentive to prayer. Moreover, it is a subject for prayer. St. Mar Isaac said, "One's soul is enlightened in prayer from reading." He explained this by saying, "When one approaches prayer, the memory of what he has read will guide him to what to say."

As a reading is a subject for prayer, it is also a subject for meditation. You may read a verse from a

chapter from the Bible and meditate on it, or you may read a story of one of the Church Fathers and meditate on the greatness of the grace, which God has granted this father, or you may meditate on how much that father has loved the Lord. Also, you may reflect on the ladder of virtues, which that father has climbed step by step toward God. You may read a chapter from the Bible and store it in your mind for future contemplation. As the evil proceeds from the evil heart of an evil person, remembering all what he has read from dirty topics or magazines or stories, also the righteous person reads spiritual topics and stores them in his mind. The memory of these readings will nourish his spirit. He finds a subject for meditation in his prayers and quiet time. As a result of these readings, his thoughts will overflow like a good spring of spiritualities.

Spiritual reading is the road guide to God. It reveals to the person the will of God and enlightens His way. The Psalmist said, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). When one reads the Word of God and the biographies of the Fathers, he acquires knowledge and discovers the ways of a pure life. Moreover, reading gives him a kind of spiritual discrimination and wisdom, although these are attained fully by experience and application.

There are other advantages for reading that vary according to the occasion and the reasons that lead to them. There may be a sad soul, wearied from temptations and tribulations that need to choose certain chapters to comfort and strengthen him. These chapters will show him God’s help in similar circumstances, or the behavior of the Fathers in more difficult situations, or they may explain to him God’s wisdom in allowing these temptations. Hence, his soul rejoices and his sadness is lost. There may be a person who committed a terrible sin, and afterwards the devil tried to make him fall in despair. Reading about repentance, the lives of those who repented and God’s acceptance of them brings hope to his heart. Then, he proceeds to God with hope. A third person may have prayed to God for a specific subject and did not find any answer to his prayer so he may think that God has refused his request or rejected him personally and that God does not listen to him any more. Upon reading a spiritual book or a chapter from the Bible pertaining to his subject, his heart will understand that the right solution will come in the appropriate time and in God’s own better way.

Spiritual reading strengthens the mind and activates the thoughts. One thought begets another thought or thoughts. Whoever reads much with meditation, exercises his spiritual senses for spiritual thinking to the extent that he finds an atmosphere for spiritual meditation in all subjects of his reading. He may come out with a benefit from any good book he reads, if he reads it in a spiritual manner. He may also find an atmosphere for meditation in any thing he may see because he has practiced spiritual reading.

Spiritual reading is a useful way to pass time, occupy the mind with what is beneficial. It is a helper in solitude, killing monotony and expelling bad thoughts. It also helps and encourages one to be alert.

#### **9.4 How To Read?**

1. Start reading by prayer: so you do not depend on your human mind, which may err but rather ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Before your spiritual reading, pray telling God how weak you are and how your understanding and human mind are limited and incapable of reaching the Divine words which the prophet David said, “Open my eyes so I may behold wondrous things out of Your law” (Psalm 119:18). Ask God to open your mind to understand and open your heart to accept what you understood and to strengthen your will to implement what you have accepted. St. Mar Isaac said warning everyone, “Do not approach the sayings of the mysteries of books without praying, asking God’s help and telling God to let you feel the power behind the words. Prayer is the key to real understanding in the Divine books”.
2. Put yourself in the subject of the reading and consider it a special message for you personally. Do what you can do with spiritual discrimination. Be sorry for what you cannot do and pity your

weaknesses in humility. Tell God your desires and ask the intercession of the saints who excelled in the spiritual road. Keep what you have read in your memory. Probably you will need it later in appropriate circumstances.

3. During meditation, avoid reading about problems and complicated thoughts. This is not the time for that. Therefore, try to skim through them.
4. Not all the books of the Bible can be subjects for meditation for beginners. Therefore, start meditating in the historical books. Read in them about the beautiful qualities of God, how God chooses His saints and treats them, and how the saints treat God and people. Following these books, come the educational books.
5. Remember that reading is a means toward a goal, and is not the goal itself. Therefore, if you have reached your goal from reading, then put aside the reading and occupy yourself with the purpose for which you have read. Reading is only a match that inflames the soul with God's love. Therefore, if the soul is inflamed, do not keep busy with the match, but light your lamp with this holy fire and go out with the wise virgins to meet the Bridegroom. Put aside reading, for a while, and do the work of the Spirit which He did in you, whether by meditation, prayer, examination of one's self, weeping for your sins or spiritual exercises. Never neglect this heat and continue in reading, lest it cools down, and then you seek it but do not find it.

### **9.5 The Time Of Reading And Its Quantity**

No doubt, one needs to read with meditation, for this reading is the main factor, which activates the heart and mind and makes one grow in grace. However, one cannot be satisfied with this kind of reading, which may concentrate on only a few verses from the Bible, or else, tens of years may pass without one finishing reading the whole Bible. But one needs to know the whole Bible for many spiritual reasons, for this knowledge strengthens his meditation. When one compares the verses of today's meditation with other verses from previous readings, he may benefit greatly, and the talent of meditation grows in him.

But what should one do, then? Which kind of readings should he choose? There is a third kind of reading whose goal is study and research, and there is not enough time for all that. What is the solution?

The solution is simple and it is one of the following ways:

1. Either to combine both readings so he reads few consecutive chapters, but does not make these his subject for meditation, because his time as a busy person is not enough to meditate on all that. Instead, he can meditate on only a few verses or a main idea. That kind of person can devote half an hour or more each day with twenty minutes for reading and ten minutes for meditation. Then he may increase this time gradually according to his needs and capacities.
2. The other alternative is to distribute the kinds of readings over different days and to evaluate himself weekly, not daily, recording every day what he has read. This weekly schedule is more beneficial for it allows the reader more freedom. The end result, though, should be inclusive to all elements, not neglecting any.
3. The third alternative is to specify a special time every day for the meditation reading. The reading for knowledge should be added on certain days of the week when one has more time, but the weekly quantity should be sufficient.
4. One should take advantage of opportunities. When one has more time any day or if one has a vacation, he can read without limiting the quantity of what he reads and studies from the Bible. He considers these as periods of storage and contemplation that benefit him when he is extremely busy in other times.

In any case, one must choose the appropriate time. One should not give God the leftovers of his time when he is extremely exhausted, busy, or annoyed, lest he does not benefit from reading as he should, or else he may feel that his spiritual reading is a burden upon him.

## 10. Spiritual Assets: Exercises

“This being so, I myself always strive to have conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24: 16).

- ❖ The Benefits of Spiritual Exercises
- ❖ The Sources of Spiritual Exercises
- ❖ The Characteristics of Spiritual Exercises
- ❖ The Duration of Spiritual Exercises
- ❖ Exceptions to Spiritual Exercises
- ❖ The Purposes and Incentives of Spiritual Exercises
- ❖ A Notebook for Spiritual Exercises
- ❖ Examples of Spiritual Exercises

### 10.1 The Benefits Of Spiritual Exercises

Spiritual readings, from all their sources, will remain mere sayings for mental knowledge until they are changed through exercises to become part of your life. Anything you train yourself to do will eventually become a habit and easy for you to perform. And the more you practice, the more it will become part of your qualities. This is the advantage of spiritual exercises.

The person who practices these spiritual exercises will climb the ladder of virtues step by step. Day by day his heart will be purified and he shall experience the spiritual life, so that if he were to tell others about it, he will be speaking out of actual experience and not just theory. Not only does he learn of the path to good deeds, but finds out the difficulties encountered along the way and how to overcome them.

He also knows his nature, his points of strength and weakness. He distinguishes the desire to do good from the ability to do it. He knows of all the factors that may influence him, and what temptations he can go through and win by the grace of God, and what situations he has to escape because of his inability to face the temptations. Through exercises, a person knows the level of his spiritual status and the extent of his God granted capabilities. He knows his limits, and hence does not think of himself more than he should. Unveiling oneself makes it easier for a person to confess, and the task of seeking help through the father of confession becomes more effective.

Not only do the exercises make an individual aware of God’s ways, and not only does he find out more about himself (his strengths and weaknesses), but also he can sympathize with others who are similarly struggling in God’s way because he has experienced some of the enemy’s devious ways and knows the strength of evil. He also knows of the times where one is unable to struggle and the times when God’s grace forsakes him and he reasons for that! Hence, those who have mastered the spiritual exercises are God’s children who are most likely to sympathize with fellow strugglers, who can endure people’s faults and who are more capable of aiding those who succumb to temptations since they themselves have experienced how easy it is to be enticed and how difficult it is to overcome.

The individual who exercises knows the kinds of sins that tempt, from within, and from without, and the conditions under which one yields to temptation. He also knows the sins that tempt a person gradually and the type that comes in the form of virtues. He also knows the diseases of the soul, whether hidden or apparent.

## 10.2 Sources Of Spiritual Exercises

Spiritual exercises are either negative or positive. The negative ones train you to resist specific sins or to overcome personal weaknesses. But the positive ones enhance your spiritual virtues and qualities. Therefore, the most important sources of spiritual exercises are the following:

1. **Previous Sins:** sit and examine yourself and know your sins. You will find that you have occasional sins and repetitive sins. Exercise yourself to overcome the repetitive sins. Know the causes of these sins, what leads you to transgress, and then train to rid yourself of their roots.
2. **The Holy Bible:** God's Word is a light to your path; it guides and teaches you how to conduct yourself. You can find His commandments and Biblical verses are good sources for your spiritual exercises.
3. **General Church Practices:** This is a very important matter. To begin with, practicing in all church services is a must because they were designed, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to help build the spiritual life of all believers. Therefore, a person cannot exercise one particular kind of worship while neglecting general worship services where all believers join in one spirit as members of one body. For example, a person cannot practice a specific private fast and neglect the rest of the church fasts. The same applies to prayers and meetings. Examples of general church practices are: attending church regularly and on time, learning church hymns and rites as well as participating in them, general church prayers such as the Agpeya and Tasbeha, attending church in all special occasions, observing all church fasts, attending liturgy and receiving communion regularly, attending all services with humility and an alert mind.
4. **General Social Virtues:** Many people train themselves to master the virtues of worship but neglect general social virtues. That is, an individual should practice being a helpful and loved member of his immediate family and his close social circle. He should train himself to treat everyone with courtesy and to be a productive member of the society.
5. **The Lives of the Saints:** The virtues of the saints are many and they can be a source of spiritual exercises. A person has to know the extent of his spiritual growth. That is, he cannot while yet a beginner; exercise on a virtue that a saint had attained under different circumstances and after a long struggle lasting several years. Therefore, we have to be wise in choosing the saints' virtues that suit our personal circumstances and our spiritual level, being gradual in practicing them.
6. **The Causes of a Failure of Previous Exercise:** If you have trained yourself for a virtue successfully and recorded how well you have done, you will find that at times you'll fail to maintain that virtue. Take the cause of failure and make that the target of a new exercise. For example, suppose you have exercised the virtue of "Not to condemn others," then one day you failed doing that while engaging in a discussion concerning general church policy. Take that reason for failure and practice not to meddle in a discussion until you have learned how to discuss without transgressing, or at least to be careful when you face similar situations.

## 10.3 Characteristics Of Spiritual Exercises

Many have failed in their spiritual exercises because of the nature of the exercise itself. Therefore, we shall discuss some characteristics, which may lead to the success of spiritual exercises:

1. **The Clarity of the Exercise:** For example, concepts such as "Meekness" or "Poor in spirit", or "God's love" or "Estrangement" may be very vague to you. Do not attempt, therefore, to train yourself on such virtues, without knowing precisely how to go about it, which brings us to the next point.
2. **Being Specific:** Do not take the broad more encompassing virtues (Mother virtues), as the subject for your exercises, but divide them instead into their various categories, and make each category a subject for an exercise. For example, you cannot exercise "love", because love has a very broad meaning, which covers the whole meaning of Christianity. St. Paul has mentioned some of the



classifications of love in his first epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). He divided love into fourteen classifications, and you cannot train yourself in all fourteen at one time. Similarly, you cannot exercise other “Mother virtues” like meekness, humility, service, perfect prayer, silence, because they are all inclusive, but rather divide them and exercise yourself on one classification at a time. It is much easier to implement a specific exercise. Also, you cannot carry out different exercises at the same time. Some people try to train themselves on five or six exercises all at one time. The result is that they forget some of them completely because of the inability to concentrate. Some may oppose that opinion claiming that this procedure is too slow, for they want to reach the end of the road fast. Our advice is that spiritual life needs patience and long endurance. When you achieve a specific virtue fast, you might lose it just as fast. A lasting virtue is very important, and to be steadfast in it is very essential. Do not get impatient; one cannot rush into a virtue for the path to spiritual life is slow and stable. At times when God grants you His grace and you feel invigorated, you might then think that perfection is at hand and easy to attain. Keep in mind, however, that this is just a temporary visitation from God, and that you may return to your usual self because one’s life is constantly changing.

3. **The Time for Exercising:** You cannot practice being silent, for instance, on a day when you are going to attend a special party or if you are planning on visiting many people or going to a picnic. This kind of exercise is liable to fail on such a day, and even if you do succeed, it will be at the expense of other unnecessary losses. Therefore, if you are afraid of making mistakes on such occasions, do not practice an exercise of complete silence but rather one that would help you “to avoid evil talk.” Also, some exercises may fail if they are inappropriate to the person’s health, the availability of time, family circumstances, social environment, level of education, and the spiritual strength of the individual.
4. **The Element of Gradualism:** Big thrusts into the spiritual life are unsafe, threatened by sudden failure and depression. If you carry out a detailed exercise in one big step, you may succeed a little due to your enthusiasm. But, because of your lack of training, you will not last, and you may even experience opposite results. Therefore, go step by step, and make sure you are well settled in one step before you go onto another. Hence, when tribulations arise and you are forced to regress, you will just go backwards to the previous step, and then be able to proceed forward again. Those who do not train themselves gradually, however, will go all the way backwards because originally they did not pass through the various steps along all the way. Here is an example: two persons are training for the exercise of “silence.” The first person takes the one big step of not talking. The second one tries gradually, like avoiding passing judgment, avoiding topics of no concern to him, giving brief answers, not interrupting discussions, talking in a low voice, starting only necessary discussions, circumventing unfamiliar topics of discussion, and finally practicing complete silence. Then, when circumstances arise and both persons are obliged to talk, the second person will be more cautious as he has trained himself, whereas the first one might fall back to his original state of condemning others, interrupting, talking loudly and uselessly, and so on. This is only because he did not practice going through the phases of silence. He then contemplates and realizes the importance of progression. He becomes aware of the fact that he kept his tongue silent without correcting the mistakes he could make when he does talk.

This then leads us to the following important factor.

#### **10.4 The Duration Of The Exercise**

How long does one keep practicing the same exercise? One saint practiced a single exercise for a whole year. St. Agathon practiced “silence” for three whole years before he could perfect the virtue of silence. One might wonder then, how can we train ourselves for so many virtues if each virtue takes that long to be attained. The answer is clear: all virtues are interrelated. For example, the one who practices “Continuous praying” will no doubt achieve the virtue of “silence” because talking with people will impede his talking

with God. Therefore, he will not talk unless it is absolutely necessary. This will then lead to seclusion; for fear that mingling with people would lead to talking instead of praying. And seclusion, in turn, will lead him to exercise the virtue of “fasting.” The more seclusion, the less use of his energy, hence the lesser the need for food, and therefore he is able to fast. Prayer, therefore, leads to fasting, and fasting, in turn, leads to silence. The nature of silence helps in meditation, the reading of the Holy Bible, and self-examination. All of this will help an individual to be pure at heart and thought. Prayers in themselves help us to be pure because a mind that is occupied with God has no place to Satan. Fasting, in turn, also helps us to be pure by restraining the desires of the flesh.

Hence, we find the individual who theoretically trained at one virtue, has actually practiced several other virtues; all linked together like a chain. A brief period of training is not enough if you are to benefit fully from the exercise, neither it is sufficient for you to sincerely test your steadfastness and durability. You might be able to endure well during the short period of training but fall apart in the long run. Moreover, the short period might not be enough to determine whether there is any conflict between a certain exercise and other virtues, nor whether there are any exceptions. Short periods of exercising, therefore, are not useful, and as St. Mar Isaac puts it: “Any exercise practiced briefly is fruitless.” The longer the period, the more useful the exercise will be.

We see that saints have found it necessary to train themselves over several years, what then of the average layman? Persistent, long-term training is essential. Give yourself ample time and resist the boredom that you might experience during that seemingly tedious period. A solution could be to maintain a major exercise (one which requires an extended training period), alongside a relatively minor exercise that could be fully accomplished in a short period such as in two weeks.

### **10.5 Exceptions To Certain Exercises**

There are some exercises that cannot be compromised, such as those pertaining to sin. We train ourselves to resist sin at all times, with no exceptions. There are some virtues, however, that can be practiced with flexibility. The virtues of silence, fasting, prayer, retreat or period of solitude, modesty, all fall within the category of flexibility or exceptions. Train yourself but do not become a slave to an exercise. For example, a person knows that he commits tongue sins when he talks, and then he decides to practice “silence,” as a goal to overcome such sins. Being a member of society, this person should not adhere strictly to the exercise of “silence” because of his social obligations. At times, the benefits of talking outweigh the benefits of keeping silent, and a person might be committing a sin against God if he does not talk out. This is considered an “exception”.

St. Bersenofios said, “Talking for God is good.” And as Solomon puts it, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven... a time to keep silence and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:1,7). As a result of the exceptions, a person learns when to talk and when not to talk, whom to talk to, and whom to avoid, when to be concise and when to elaborate, when to be strict in talking and when to be kind and courteous. Once a person learns all that, he surely has gained the benefit of the exercise of “silence.” Such a person is allowed to talk as he pleases, because he has learned the limits of talking. But he who offends or angers others, or causes problems by his silence, and if other people’s rights are forfeited due to his silence, that person is considered a “Pharisee”, one who follows the exercise literally not spiritually, and is a slave to that exercise without understanding the wisdom behind it.

### **10.6 The Purposes And Incentives Of The Exercises**

Any person practicing an exercise has to be convinced of its benefits and the wisdom behind it, and the exercise has to be rooted in, or based upon Bible verses, or the sayings of the church fathers, or the lives of the saints or all of these combined.

A person might fail in an experience if he does not know its general advantages or its benefit to him personally. If he encounters an obstacle in accomplishing the exercise, he will ask himself: What do I benefit from that exercise? If he does not know the answer, he will then stop exercising. Therefore, before you start any exercise, understand it and be convinced of its benefits to you personally, and seek guidance. It might be beneficial to others but not to you, because you have different circumstances. After you are convinced of its benefits to you, study Biblical verses, which encourage that exercise, and repeat the verses in your heart often especially when you encounter an obstacle, and remember then the sayings of the Church Fathers. This will support you, and you will not fall. Remind yourself constantly of the exercise so as not to forget it, and to renew your energy as well. Pray for long periods that the exercise be successful, and do not ever think that you may succeed without stumbling because of your strong will or your desire to accomplish that exercise. You do not know Satan's temptations, and you may not know your own weaknesses. Ask for God's help because you cannot accomplish anything without Him. Hence, when you do succeed in that exercise, thank God for helping you, and do not think that you have accomplished it on your own.

### **10.7 A Notebook For Exercises**

This is an essential tool to remind you of the exercise, and to help you in self-examination. Keep a detailed record in your notebook. Do not just put check marks, but write the name of the exercise, the date, and how long it will take to accomplish. Write the Biblical verses, and the sayings of the Church Fathers that encourage that exercise. Write each day's date in the margin and have a blank space to record your self-examination at the end of each day.

If you succeed completely in an exercise, write down: "Thanks be to God," and you could indicate the factors that helped make the exercise a success. Or you can write down, "There was no evidence that the exercise was successful." And in case you quit the exercise, record the number of times you have abandoned it, why you have failed and with whom. Was the failure partial or complete, and was it intentional or unintentional? Try to avoid the causes of failure in the future, or take the causes themselves and exercise to overcome them. Some people put grades to evaluate themselves.

It is best to sum up this information at the end of each week and to arrive at conclusions, which will help you in knowing yourself better. Some people write additional information in their notebook with this prayer: "Lord, without You, I can do nothing. I cannot control myself. These exercises are only a kind of prayer to express my desire to live with You, and not to show that I am depending on my own strength. Please Lord, help me with Your grace."

### **10.8 Examples of Exercises**

#### **A. Exercises of meekness**

1. Not making anybody angry: to avoid bothering or hurting anyone's feelings.
2. Not losing one's temper.
3. To be calm at all times: when talking, walking, or working and to be peaceful within yourself.
4. Talking in a soft voice.
5. Avoid talking in a haughty manner.
6. Being courteous to others, big or small, to avoid hurting anyone's feelings.
7. Not interfering on other people's business.
8. No to be argumentative, which could irritate others.
9. Not interrupting a conversation even if you have heard the topic before.
10. Not to complain: if need be, a complaint ought to be about a situation and not about other people.
11. Bearing other people's faults with patience.
12. A pleasant face to all.
13. Being kind to everyone.

14. Obedience in general: but not in matters pertaining to the guidance of one's life, which is the concern of the father of confession.

### **B. Exercises of not condemning others**

1. Not to talk about people behind their backs.
2. Refraining from insults.
3. Avoiding complaints about people.
4. Not to display disgust with others in any manner.
5. Not to condemn a group as a whole, whether large or small.
6. To refrain from indirect condemnation, that is when your listener condemns others from what you have said.
7. Avoiding the discussion of certain topics that are known to lead to the condemnation of others (This category can be divided into several parts).
8. To avoid talking about certain individuals with whom you are not quite friendly.
9. Not defending oneself in a way that would consequently shed the blame on someone else.
10. Resisting condemnation by thought.

### **C. Exercises of silence**

These are discussed in the main chapter and some are interrelated with the exercise of meekness and the exercise of not condemning others.

### **D. Exercises of prayer**

1. Physical deference: the raising of hands towards heaven, standing straight, avoiding a sluggish posture, kneeling at the appropriate times and guarding the senses (sight, sound, touch). This exercise can be done gradually, and not all at one time.
2. Veneration from within: the feeling of the presence of God and His greatness deep within the heart.
3. Training to pray with the aid of Agpeya or prayer book.
4. Memorizing psalms and other prayers from the Agpeya, so that eventually one can do without it and be able to pray without anyone else noticing.
5. Special prayers (not memorized) in addition to those found in the "Agpeya."
6. Praying, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me, a sinner," to be said at all times and in every place.
7. Continuous prayers: while walking or at work, or driving, or being with people.
8. Prayers before every deed: for example, before meals, before reading or studying, or before any act, whether physical or mental.
9. Blending work with prayers whenever possible.
10. Extending the periods for prayer: (especially when time permits, like before going to sleep to guard against dreams, and before meals to curb the feeling of hunger.) This exercise can be carried out gradually and may include adding memorized prayers and resisting the temptation of getting the prayers over with.
11. Not limiting prayer to times of need. The main factor in praying is the love of God and not merely the fulfillment of needs. This exercise includes prayers of thanksgiving, prayer of confession and admitting one's shortcomings.
12. Prayers for enemies and foes.

### **E. Exercises for fasting**

This needs special wisdom and spiritual guidance and it includes:

1. The church fasting days; especially Wednesdays and Fridays, Lent, Holy Week, Advent, Apostles Fast, St. Mary's fast.
2. Special fasting days for specific events, whether personal or on behalf of others.
3. A period of abstinence from food: this differs from one person to another and it grows gradually. It starts by skipping breakfast.

4. The kind of food: not just eating special fasting food, but abstaining from fasting food that may be good enough to stimulate one's appetite.
5. The amount of food: fasting does not mean eating only special fasting food but reducing the amount to be eaten as well.
6. The amount of liquid intake is also cut down, but wisely. (Note the difference between winter and summer and the times of exhaustion versus resting periods).
7. Not eating between meals (which is good for your health): requires the planning of visiting hours and meetings.
8. Not eating unnecessary types of food that you can do without, like sweets and some drinks.
9. Not showing that one is fasting.
10. Abstaining from some meals or certain kinds of food and giving the money instead to the poor, over and above what you ordinarily give.

Note: There are certain church fasts that are particularly strict, for example, during the holy week the church requires complete abstinence all day and then breaking the fast by eating only bread and salt. If you are unable to do so, then at least don't eat any dessert or appetizing food in addition to your abstaining from food for a period of time according to your ability.

## **11. Spiritual Assets: Retreat**

“It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent” (Lamentations 3:27,28).

- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ The Blessings of Retreat
- ❖ What is Retreat?
- ❖ The Servant's Need for Retreat
- ❖ How to Spend the Retreat?
- ❖ Where to Spend the Retreat?

### **11.1 Introduction**

What is the cause of our mistakes and our getting astray from God? What is the cause of our spiritual and intellectual deviations? What is the reason for the many problems we face and our inability to solve them? What is the reason for all that?

The reason is that we do not know ourselves well. But where do I know myself? Where do I know myself naked of all the fake clothes, which are covering its mistakes? Where do I know the truth, which the Lord spoke of, “And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). But where do I see God?

Do I know myself amid the noises of this world? Can I see God amid people and tumult and clamor? No, I will never know myself unless I go away from people and see it in the light of God. There I will examine it. I can never see God in His glory unless I go up on the mountain of transfiguration, after I leave the world, at my back, even temporarily and rise up on the mountain of meditation.

The human being, since his creation, has not suffered from the whirlpool of life as he has in this present time. There are strong trends trying to pull him downward, toward the materialistic and carnal. This age is the age of speed, in which life is going very fast and everyone is trying to catch up with the trend, and woe is to him who is left behind!

Many wrong principles and incorrect theories, from the spiritual point of view, have penetrated our society and even our private life. We are not aware of them because we are accommodating with the speed of life. Do not think that the strong harmful trends are limited to the world, but rather you can find them also in the field of service. How many blessed personalities have been active at one time, but have perished during their service because they have forgotten themselves!

Poor is God's servant whom the devil of service deceives and keeps him running like a windmill and makes him think that he is acceptable unto God. Do not say that you have served and cast out devils in the name of Christ, lest you hear the fearful voice saying, "Go away, I do not know you."

Many of God's servants are void of grace. They use service and its different activities as a cover to cover their mistakes. They put on the beautiful clothes of Christ but what is most important is to put on Christ Himself, not His clothes "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:14).

## 11.2 The Blessings Of Retreat

We need retreat to examine ourselves and find out how much we have deviated from the truth and to correct what the spirit of this age has spoiled because of our persistence to conform to this world.

If you want to know yourself in its reality, and the amount of fruits you bear being a branch in the true vine our Lord Jesus Christ, enter your room, close your doors and sit quietly. Examine your deep self then you will realize how poor you are, "That you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). You will see the branch of your life fruitless. You will see the axe put on the root of the tree and you will hear these divine words, "Every tree that does not bear fruit is cast in the fire." You will see your sins made clear as you go to be judged. You will discover your hypocrisy and deceit in service, even if unintentionally. You will be frightened by St. James' words, "Be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1). You will see everything in its reality; you will see yourself naked. It is the same self whose mistakes you were careful to avoid. It is good that we see ourselves, in our realities. You will see yourself in God's image and you will discover how awful you are and that you do not resemble God at all, you, who are created on His image and are called to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).

Discovering one's mistakes is a great blessing for it is the only means to get cured. One of the saintly fathers said, "Knowing one's self is the assured means to know God".

But what is the significance of knowing myself? And what do I know about myself when I am alone? I know that it is full of sins and weaknesses "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18). What is the significance of knowing my weaknesses? Once I know my weaknesses, hence I know God "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). Once I realize how awful my sins are, then I am worthy of God's grace.

Peter said, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Peter felt how bad his condition was. The lord Jesus answered him, "Fear not, from henceforth, you shall catch men" (Luke 5:10). When did Peter deserve this great role of discipleship and apostleship and the great honor of service? This was at the moment he knew himself and said, "I am a sinner." God's answer to his feeling was, "Fear not, from henceforth, you shall catch men." Yes, from now, that is, from that moment. Therefore, knowing ourselves is the means to know God and we cannot reach this knowledge unless we get away from noise, in a quiet retreat.

In retreat, you will have a chance to be sorry, supplicate God and weep. How can you have this chance in the midst of the world?

The practice of retreat with the spirit of meditation is the most successful method to discipline one's self and to rebuild its personality according to high ideals. Retreat is a school for virtue, a lighted ladder that leads fast to God. It is the landing place of holy inspiration. The voices of the trumpets and drums hinder the soft voice of the violin. Therefore, we cannot hear God's voice in the midst of the noises of the world and the wandering of the mind and the deceit of the senses.

If you put some unfiltered water in a container and leave it alone, it will become clean. Likewise, the soul, when it is alone, it gets purified and reaches holiness.

The woman with the issue of blood had spent all that she had on doctors and became worse. But when she went secretly and touched the hem of Jesus' garment, she was healed at once (Matthew 9:20-22). Likewise, a soul suffering from the misery of sin and trying to get cured by any means cannot be cured. It needs to touch the Savior secretly, in a holy retreat, in order to be healed.

You cannot get figs from thorns. Also, you cannot get true comfort for your soul as long as you are attached to people and concerned with the cares of life. Our Lord Jesus said, "When you pray, enter your room and close your door" (Matthew 6:6).

Do you want comfort for your troubled soul and quietness for your heart? Do you want tears to cry for your sins? Do you want a pious soul saying: "My heart is smitten, and withered like grass so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning, my bones cleave to my skin" (Psalm 102:4,5). Do you want a pure heart which God witnesses that it is like God's heart? (Acts 13:22). Do you want all that? Therefore, you have to follow David's advice when he said: "Indeed I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness" (Psalm 55:7). Apply this in your life by practicing retreat.

John the Baptist, who was very holy and deserved the Lord's witness that he is the greatest among them that are born of women, fled to the wilderness since his early childhood and remained there till he appeared to Israel. There, the wickedness of this world did not defile him, although the Holy Spirit had sanctified him while he was in his mother's womb! John the beloved did not get to see the revelation except when he was alone in the island of Patmos. There he was in the spirit (Revelation 1:10).

St. Paul, the great missionary of the church, after the Lord appeared to him on the way to Damascus, went to Arabia (the desert east of Damascus). He said, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia" (Galatians 1:16,17). There in the wilderness, he lived in a holy retreat with the Lord for a period of time, about three years, where he received from Him everything necessary for his life and for building the holy church. He told the believers, later: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you" (1 Corinthians 11:23). Where did Paul receive these matters although he was not one of the disciples who followed the Savior and he did not see Him physically? When did he receive all the principles of faith, which he preached, except in the holy retreat with the Lord in Arabia? When Elijah, the prophet, was alone he used to eat the heavenly food. But when he lived with people, he was hardly able to get what to feed on. In the same manner, the soul, when all alone, will receive many gifts, which will be lost among people. The children of Israel did not eat the manna, the food of the angels, except in the wilderness! What did Abraham do to become a great nation? He obeyed God's command to get out of his land and his father's house. Do the same, my friend, get out of your land and your father's house to a holy retreat so God may bless you and make you a great nation "Get out of your country, from your kindred, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you and I will make you a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great" (Genesis 12:1,2).

All the saints have followed the path of retreat and loved it. St. Arsanius, the teacher of the kings' sons, is one of the greatest who loved that path. It was said that after he had fled from Constantinople and lived in

Eskeet, he used to pray and ask God to guide him as what to do. After three years, he heard a voice saying: “Arsanius, be quiet, get away from people; be silent and you will be saved, for these are the veins for not sinning.” He heard the voice for the second time so he went to a quiet place. Pope Abba Theophilus the twenty-third desired to see Abba Arsanius. He sent to ask his permission if he could open the door to him and meet him. He answered him, “If I come, I’ll open to you; and if I open to you, I can’t close the door to anyone else. If I open the door to everyone, I cannot live here.” Because of his great love to retreat, he used to stand behind a pillar in the church during the Divine Liturgy so nobody can see him and he wouldn’t see anyone. This pillar is up to this day still in the monastery of Baramous.

St. Anthony the Great said, “If the mind is away from people and gets in a quiet solitude, the Lord will strengthen it, then it may deserve to see the greatness of God and His power in His creatures.”

Is there a better proof of the importance of retreat and its great blessings to the soul than the proof of the Lord Jesus Himself who loved it and honored it and used to retreat in the wilderness and on the mountains! “And when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from leaving them” (Luke 4:42). Therefore, you, also go into the wilderness and seek Him and tell Him not to depart from you then sit at His feet in a holy retreat as Mary, Martha’s sister, did “Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

How great are the blessings when we are in retreat with the Lord. At the beginning of the retreat, you hear a soft voice calling, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you” (John 11:28). At the end of the retreat, you will say in persistence, “It is good for us to be there.” These are the feelings of love all dissolved in these words, and then the soul will look up and see no man except Jesus only (Matthew 17:1-8).

### **11.3 What Is Retreat?**

Getting away from people is not a retreat. A person may be living in the midst of the wilderness, yet still the world is living inside him. This person is not in a retreat! Retreat is emptying the heart and mind from all worldly cares.

Therefore, the correct meaning of retreat is that it is a retreat with God; the mind is void of all cares, the heart is void of every desire and movement except for the desire of the holy love to the Beloved Jesus. The place is empty without people where you can hear the voice of solitude. When the soul is quiet and has all these conditions, then it cries from inside, “Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). Then it hears the answer, “The Teacher has come and is calling for you” (John 11:28).

Jesus did that when He retreated with the Father “Everyone went to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives” (John 7:53) where He used to spend the whole night in prayer. He used to be in retreat with the Father. When His disciples had scattered, every man to his own, He told them, “I am not alone because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32). Henceforth, the Lord Jesus has set for us the correct principle for the holy retreat. It is a unity with the Father. Let us learn how to get away from the hustle and bustle of the world, its noises and problems and be alone in a retreat, singing the beautiful song, “My Beloved is mine and I am His” (Song of Solomon 2:16).

Probably some will object to the idea of retreat saying that the apostle Paul said, “Love does not seek its own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). We answer saying, “But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works” (Psalm 73:28). It is a retreat for the heart with its Creator, and a retreat for the soul with its Lover. This matter does not need a place but it needs quietness in the heart and looking inside yourself. People may surround your body not your heart; therefore, your heart can be in unity with God. David, the prophet, has experienced this beautiful exercise, in spite of all his busy



schedule as a king. He said in the Psalms, “I have set the Lord always before me, because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8).

#### **11.4 The Servant’s Need For Retreat**

Today’s servants are poor. The word poor is not enough to express their condition. They lose their lives and peace in the middle of service. The secret of their being tired is that they are not quiet with themselves and they do not devote time to be alone with God. One of the fathers said, “Whoever devotes his life a living sacrifice to God, has to devote his time to the top of meditation in retreat.” The servant needs to struggle spiritually more than others and needs Divine help. If we knew the value of retreat in our lives, we would surely realize its importance in the life of God’s servant.

God’s servant, who leads others, is in dire need to be filled and to correct his principles in the light of God. Mar Isaac said, “If you do not sit down everyday for one hour with yourself and think what wrong you have done and when you fell, and straighten yourself, then do not count this as one of the days of your life. Love solitude, for therein is life for your soul. Through quietness, you see yourself. Outside quietness, you do not see except what is outside. As long as you see others, you do not see yourself.”

#### **11.5 How To Spend The Retreat?**

The only work you do during the retreat is not to do anything. The only thing you do is to think of your sins with sorrow and broken heart, your sins that separated you from God. These humble feelings may be the preliminary steps to the retreat. Do not spend the retreat in preparing topics for service or do not think of the problems of service. The devil of service wants you not to think of yourself. Spend the time of the retreat in quietness with yourself, contemplating with God in prayers of love and eagerness to God, and in re-evaluating your principles in life.

Put aside all your worldly cares. It is better to be fasting and abstaining from food, under the guidance of your spiritual father.

You may be annoyed at the beginning of the retreat; however, you should force yourself with patience and endurance. Moreover, you should know that retreat is not a period to spend then go back to your previous condition. But it is an opportunity for repentance and renewing your promises with God and training yourself with some spiritual exercises.

#### **11.6 Where To Spend The Retreat?**

For individuals, you may arrange for yourself certain times in a special place, suitable for you. It is better that this place be fixed so nothing would distract your attention.

However, for servants of the church as a group, centers for retreat should be built. These centers should be located in a quiet place, not away from transportation. Spiritual leaders should be appointed to manage these centers and special rules should be set to govern them.