

MINISTRY PRINCIPLE 1

MINISTER
out of a
STRONG
INNER LIFE

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DEDICATION

*“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power”
(Psalm 110:3a).*

To this great army who is willing to turn its back on the world and
on selfish pursuits to serve God,
I lovingly dedicate this book.
I pray that you will have the right beginning and that you will not
take the path that many before you had taken
– and they fell.

This is the right beginning: Build a strong river on the inside
and minister out of that river. Never separate ministry from your
relationship with God.

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1

NO SECRET CHAMBER, NO FRESH WORD

The indictment given by God to the prophets of Israel in the days of Jeremiah was that they had separated their ministry from their relationship with Him. God charged that they had not stood in His counsel to see, to hear and to listen to Him before they went out to minister (Jeremiah 23:18). As a result, these priests and prophets had no fresh word or messages from the Lord although they continued to speak in His name. Like Ahimaaz, the un-commissioned but gifted and enthusiastic messenger, they insisted on ‘running’ for their king even though He had not commissioned them nor given them any messages.

The ‘Message-less’ Runner

Ahimaaz, (motivated by a desire for self-glory) wanted to serve the king by running as his messenger. He was naturally endowed with the power of speed and even though he was not commissioned with any messages to bring before the king, he insisted on doing the job. When he reached his destination, all he could say was, “*All is well.*” (Actually, all was not well!) When he was questioned further, he responded, “*I did not know what it was all about!*” (2 Samuel 18: 29). This man stirred up a lot of dust as he ran; he generated a lot of attention when he arrived; he did his best but unfortunately, he ended up as a real disappointment because he had nothing to deliver.

True Runners versus Talented Runners

This is a poignant picture of so many prophets and priests today and of those who stand behind the pulpit. They are gifted, cultivated, talented, enthusiastic and able to stir up a lot of ‘dust’ and attention but unfortunately they cannot deliver because they have no fresh word from the Lord. Yet these men, like Ahimaaz, may actually outrun and overtake those who are genuinely commissioned with God’s authentic word! Church history bears witness that often those with talents, human dynamism, carnal pretensions, dark wisdom and great ‘exteriors’ had ‘outdone’ those who were genuinely commissioned by the Lord. In the days of King David, the lowly Cushie who was commissioned to run with the authentic message was easily overtaken by the speedy and popular Ahimaaz! (2 Samuel 18: 23) This simple and loyal servant simply could not run as the gifted Ahimaaz ran!

The “Ahimaazes” and the “Cushies” are still with us today. Yes, those who are commissioned with the message and those who are not commissioned with the message are still running along side each other. Like Zadok and Abiathar, the faithful and the unfaithful priesthood, they are still serving side by side (2 Samuel 15:35). It is frightening to know that those who had not been commissioned with the message had oftentimes ‘overtaken’ those who had. We are reminded of Jeremiah, who was temporarily ‘undone’ by the false prophetic voices of his days. Those self-acclaimed and covetous prophets truly ‘outran’ him with their dreams, visions and false prophecies when they succeeded in getting the nation to listen to them.

The Wheat and the Chaff

When Jeremiah became discouraged, God's solution was so simple. He told Jeremiah to remain faithful and focused and to continue to preach His word because His word has the power to do the crushing ("*Is my word not like the hammer?*") and the burning ("*Is my word not like fire?*") (Jeremiah 23:29). Jeremiah was to preach the fresh word he had received from heaven because God said that His word is the wheat that will bring 'substance' to the nation while the words, the dreams, the visions and the revelations of the self-appointed prophets were only chaff.

If we do not tarry in the presence of God and draw from Him, then where will we get the wheat of His word to feed His people? How strong and substantial can we be when we do not live on the wheat of His word but only on the chaff of false hopes, fleshly dreams, carnal visions, self-centred revelations and interpretations of God's words? We become what we feed on. No wonder Israel turned out the way she did. She was carnal, flaky, covetous, unholy, impious, sensual, ungodly and deceived – so much so that God had to call her *a strange degenerate vine and pure dross*. Israel had lived on chaff that was fed to her by her degenerate spiritual leaders. God's pain was evident when He voiced His heart to the prophet Jeremiah and Ezekiel,

*"I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the **degenerate plant of a strange vine** unto me?"*
(Jeremiah 2:2)

*“The whole house of Israel is **become dross**: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver” (Ezekiel 22:8).*

God Himself pointed out that the cause of this sad dilemma lay in the covetous and unfaithful prophets who were ‘running’ in the nation with no genuine word from Him. God charged these unfaithful men with the offences of *“healing the daughter of my people slightly” (Jeremiah 6:4)* and of *“walking after things that do not profit” (Jeremiah 2:8).*

Works with No Eternal Validity

Truly, what is the use of running when we have no substantial message to give to God’s people? What is the use of crossing hill and dale like Ahimaaz did, when we hold nothing, but only chaff in our hands? Is it worth exerting all our strength, straining every muscle and stretching every joint to be ‘in the run’ when in the end, like Ahimaaz, we will be told by the King, to **‘step aside’** (*“You’re not wanted”*) because we do not bear God’s genuine message? Ahimaaz’s ‘running’ or ministry was only a frivolous dissipation of his strength – it accomplished nothing. It benefited no one, it had no spiritual value or eternal validity. The king was disappointed, so were the people because he bore no message.

So many are ‘running’ in the ministry today, but do they really understand what ministry really is? One cannot be frivolous when one is serving the King of kings and when dealing with things of eternal value. Oftentimes, Bible schools have been too eager to impact the minds of the students and to nurture their gifts but they have failed

to impact their spirit by teaching them to build a deeper relationship with God. Deception and idolatry set in when God is displaced as the object of our devotion. It is always a tragedy when seminary students know how to devote their time to studies, activities and programmes, but not to the Lord.

No Secret Chamber, No Fresh Word

There are far too many people ‘running’ in the ministry today who do not have a fresh word from God. There are far too many in leadership today who have forsaken the secret chamber and the closed closet. Instead of ministering out of a strong inner life, they are ministering out of their own strength. To do God’s spiritual work with human physical strength is sure folly. This is the major reason why ministers and ministries do not last. They are not durable because there is no spiritual substance both in their own lives and in their ministries. Substance can only come when we are feeding on the wheat of God’s word and drawing from His strength. Only the wheat of God’s word will bring deep conviction because God’s word has active searching power. The lack of spiritual substance in so many lives today is evidence of two things: (i) many of us have not been preaching or consuming ‘wheat’ but chaff and (ii) the secret chamber and the closed closet of communion with God have been forsaken.

Danger of Restlessness

Most Christians, like Martha, are only capable of running around ‘for God’ but are incapable of waiting in His presence like Mary did. If we are not careful, the ‘running around’ can lead us into a condition

of restlessness. Restlessness is dangerous because restlessness (like lust) seeks fulfillment. If the devil cannot defeat us through sexual lust and other moral failures, he can defeat us by making us restless and totally incapable of spending unhurried time in the presence of God for contemplative prayers and meditation of the Word.

Keeping oneself in God's presence, drawing from Him and hearing from Him are powerful. This conscientious practice to pursue Him ("*thou wentest after me*" *Jeremiah 2:2*) in an unhurried way will not only bring delight to Him, it will also (i) work a depth into our character, (ii) help us subdue our personal desires and lusts, (iii) let God reveal His secret counsel and strategies to us and (vi) cause us to 'rise to the occasion' whatever the occasion may be (temptation, suffering, persecutions, etc). This is why the devil fights hard to keep us away from God's presence. He knows that whenever we are saturated with the Dew of heaven or whenever we get connected with God, God will build into us, irrespective of how we feel. The devil does not want God to build into man – that's his greatest fear!

Dew from Heaven

The apostle Paul became the man he was by the "building or the working of God" into his life. In Colossians 1:29 Paul gave us the great secret of his ministry: "*I strive according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.*" God could work mightily into Paul because Paul gave Him the time and the right to do so. Yes, even the devil knows that anything is possible when the Divine penetrates into the human. This is why the devil fights hard to distract us by constantly bringing before us the good so that the best can be forsaken. The devil will bring a million distractions into our lives to keep us away from

the Dew of heaven or from connecting with God in an unhurried way. Jesus has promised, “I will build my church” but there is no way He can do it if we do not allow Him to.

Dew from Heaven is powerful because dew invigorates, saturates and stimulates. Dew is the power that gives life, originality, creativeness and freshness but dew can only do its work when there is stillness and when there is a ‘settling.’ It can only saturate us when we are willing to be still. Dew has no loud presence, it does its work without any fuss, noise or fanfare, but silently, thoroughly and effectively. After a night of its saturation, the sickly plant raises its drooping head to pronounce, “*I live again!*” No wonder God told backslidden and sickly Israel, “*Let me be your dew!*” (*Hosea 14:5*).

Only the ‘Marys’ Have Strength for Self-Denial

This was what happened to Mary. God worked into her and saturated her so thoroughly with the ‘dew’ of His love that she gave up everything for Him. Whoever would have thought that this quiet and unassuming woman would be capable of such selfless devotion? It was a devotion that involved her breaking her alabaster box and sacrificing her precious perfume. Mary’s strong inner life (developed by her much ‘sitting at the feet’ of Jesus) finally caused her to ‘rise to the occasion.’ It led her into true self-denial and into abandoning her dreams of marriage and family for Jesus. When she broke that alabaster box over the head of Jesus, she was actually giving up everything because that box of perfume was meant to be broken and poured onto the head of one’s bridegroom on the wedding night.

When Mary sacrificed that perfume for Jesus she knew in her heart that there would never be a wedding, a bridegroom or any children for her. What power and strength this simple docile woman

possessed! This young and unassuming woman was capable of such forceful self-denial because she had been saturated with the Dew from above. She had allowed Him to work and to build into her life as she spent those hours of unhurried time in His presence. Such an indomitable spirit of self-denial cannot be produced by seminaries, theological degrees or years of experience in the ministry. It can only be produced as one allows God to work into one's life – daily, consistently and in an unhurried way.

Like Leaders, Like Congregations

When spiritual leaders do not draw close to God and have no capacity for Him, where would this leave the congregation? How can we take them further and deeper? God's priests and prophets must know that when they sever relationship with God (i) they will never be able to hold up against any demonic invasion, (ii) they will not have God's counsel to release to the people. Worst of all, (iii) their end may be most fearsome for they may hear the Master say, "*I never knew you, depart from Me, ye that work iniquity*" (Matthew 7:23).

How can Light Turn into Darkness?

It is no wonder so many prophets and priests have failed morally in the past two decades. Not too long ago, the newspaper carried a photo of a 73-year-old handcuffed priest as he made his way into prison. He had a history of molesting young boys. When ministers forsake the secret chamber and do not draw strength from God, when they do not minister out of a strong inner life, they will have a high price to pay. The papers reported that this priest used to go into the

ghettos to visit juveniles and abused children. What happened to him? Instead of prevailing as the light in the darkness, he became part of the darkness himself. He must have picked up those demons of abuse and uncleanness as he walked through those unclean places. He had no strength to fight them off because he had no connection or relationship with God.

The Lord Jesus Christ took time off to pray and to wait unhurriedly in the presence of Father God. Luke 5:15-16 tells us that as His popularity grew and the crowd swelled, He “*withdrew Himself into the wilderness and prayed.*” Jesus made a deliberate choice not to court fame and multitudes but to court the presence of God.

When spiritual leaders minister out of ‘emptiness,’ and ‘dryness,’ the consequences are horrific. Not only will they themselves suffer, their congregations and the nation will also suffer. So many today are so eager to serve, to get behind the pulpit, but do they really know what spiritual ministry is? My years of ministry have taught me the meaning of spiritual ministry.

2

SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

Spiritual ministry is:

- A. *Working out what God has worked into me*
(Colossians 2:29)
- B. *An overflow of my own love relationship with God*
(John 21:15-17, 2 Corinthians 8:5)
- C. *Taking the Lord's yoke and bearing His burden*
(Matthew 11:28-30)
- D. *Preparation of my own spirit*

A. WORKING OUT WHAT GOD HAS WORKED INTO ME (Colossians 2:29)

This was what the apostle Paul understood about ministry. Ministry was the 'working out' of what God had worked into him. God can never work into me if I do not give Him the right and the time to do so. I have to take time to be with Him in the way that Mary, Moses, David, Abraham, Elijah, etc. gave Him unhurried time to work into their lives.

Inflow First, Outflow Second

If God does not work into us, (if there is no inflow from God), then we have nothing to 'work out' and give to people (no outflow). If ever we do give, it is just a working of self and the flesh. The 'outflow' of

Paul's ministry was great because he had allowed God to work into him greatly. The greater the inflow (God's working into our lives) the greater will be the outflow (our working out). This is why Paul said, *"I strive according to His working, which worketh in me mightily."* Paul's working out (ministry or outflow) could only be according to what God had worked into his life.

God is always original, innovative and fresh. If we have allowed God to work into us, then there will always be originality and freshness in our ministry. There is no need to copy from one another, to steal someone else's dreams and prophetic word, visions etc. Ministers and ministries that bear the mark of God's workmanship will last. There is the abiding power because God promises that *"He that doeth my will abideth forever."*

"I Will Build My Church"

Many do not realize that when God takes us through the 'ups' and the 'downs' of life it is because He wants to work or to build into us. When Jesus declared, *"I will build my church,"* and *"I will never leave you or forsake you,"* He was actually declaring that He will work into our lives at all cost! The true mark of a child of God is that he/she will submit to that working, however painful it may be. The child of God knows that God has promised He will save us from the flames of fire but not from the fiery furnace. He will save us from the mouths of the lions but not from the lions' den.

The three Hebrew men who were devoted worshippers of Jehovah were not saved from the fiery furnace but they were saved from the flames of fire. When they were thrown in, they were bound from head to toe but when they were in the fire, they were loosed!

The fire had burnt off the ropes that bound them. Why did the fire burn off only the ropes, and nothing else on them? Because these ropes were not God's ropes, they were king Nebuchadnezzar's ropes. These men were not bound by God but by men. When God exposes us through the fire, it is because He wants to burn off those things that He has not put into our lives. Things like pride, arrogance, fear, jealousy, selfishness, a superiority complex, greed, lusts, meanness, insensitivity etc. These invisible ropes that bind us will be burnt when we go through the fire of testing.

B. AN OVERFLOW OF MY OWN LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (John 21:15)

Ministry is not about one's 'rice bowl,' (there are better ways of making money) one's glory and honour. After His resurrection, Jesus asked the backslidden Peter three times, "*Do you love Me?*" It was after He had elicited from Peter the answer, "*Yes, Lord, I love you*" that Jesus gave him the apostolic commission to feed His lambs and sheep (the commission to minister). It was after the confession of Peter's love that Jesus predicted his future service and martyrdom. God wants us to know that the true basis or motive for ministry should come from the overflow of our love relationship with Him. Without this love relationship with God, there is no true ministry. Neither will there be longevity in our service.

God Desires Human Love

Jesus did not lay claim upon Peter's abilities, talents or money but He did solicit his love. This should tell us distinctively that our Lord desires our love. Only those who truly love Him are eligible to serve Him. Yes, as far as Jesus is concerned, every candidate for ministry must pass this test when Jesus asks us, "*Do you love Me?*" Peter was one of the disciples in the inner circle. He was closer to the Lord than the other disciples and he had great spiritual experiences and revelations. He had unashamedly longed for higher service. Peter had, in a sense, wanted to be "one cut above the rest."

Now, is such a man also capable of giving deep and unadulterated love to the Lord Jesus? Jesus knew that when a man has high spiritual ambition, is rich in spiritual privileges and imbued

with spiritual power but is destitute in genuine love for God, he will be corrupted and dangerous – to himself and to others. This is why He had to question Peter thoroughly about his love for Him before He commissioned him to serve Him.

God First, People Second

The Macedonian Christians did great exploits for God by giving beyond their means. They did not allow their personal trials and deep poverty to be an obstruction in helping others. Their selflessness made such an impression upon the apostle Paul that he used them as a ‘catalyst’ to move others in giving. What they did was far beyond Paul’s expectation. What was the secret of their selflessness? Paul said it was their love relationship with God. These believers gave themselves to God first, and then only to men.

*“They **first gave themselves to God**”* (2 Corinthians 8:5). This was the foundation and the basis for the ministry and the giving of these saints. These simple Macedonian folks knew how to “put the horse before the cart” and not vice versa. Their love for God had caused them to do the extraordinary, their passion for Him had caused them to overflow with such love for the unfortunate (humanity) that they were able to do things “beyond themselves.” What then separates the ordinary from the extraordinary? Surely it is not talents, human dynamism, academic abilities, intellectual refinement, etc. It is the love and passion for God. For only this will make a man go the second mile.

No Relationship, No Ministry

When we sever ministry from a love relationship with God it is truly impossible to serve with focus, freshness, meaning and longevity. All we will manage to churn out will only vex and tire us. Yet most of us have to move on and do what we do because the ministry is our 'rice bowl.' Spiritual ministry is different from other professions – when the 'heart relationship' with God is gone, we really cannot carry on. It is equivalent to the shaking of Samson. Even though his hair was gone and his covenant relationship with God had been broken, Samson continued to shake and shake, but alas, no power, no reality, no voice came from heaven. Read Judges 16:19, 20.

C. TAKING THE LORD’S YOKE AND BEARING HIS BURDEN (Matthew 11:28-30)

How wonderful to know that the ministry is actually taking the Lord’s yoke and bearing His burden, not my own! What did Jesus say about His yoke and His burden? He announced that it is both easy (“*My yoke is easy*”) and light (“*My burden is light*”). Oh, this is so wonderful. It is wonderful to know that I am called to take *an easy yoke* and to bear *a light burden*. But why is it that so many of God’s servants are finding the ministry such an unbearable yoke and an intolerable burden, one that causes them to stress out, burn out, freak out, be embittered and then drop out? To them, the yoke of ministry is certainly not easy and the burden is certainly not light. This is so because they are taking the wrong yoke (their own?) and bearing the wrong burden (man’s?) – not the Lord’s.

Manifestation of Meekness and Lowliness

To those who labour, to those who are heavy-laden and have become weary, Jesus announced, “*Come to Me, take from Me and learn of Me*” (Matthew 11:28-29). The reason why we are not taking His yoke and bearing His burden is because we have not learned of Jesus. (It is not learning from Him. The literal translation reads “Learn Me.”) And what is He? He is meek and lowly. Meekness means Jesus is restrained in His power (He does not like ‘showing off’ and exhibitionism). This is truly not easy because the world and the devil were constantly goading Him on to “prove Himself and to show Himself.” One has to be totally void of selfish ambition, of unreality, of pride, of complications and complexities in order to be

able to be meek. There was such a contrast between Him and the religious leaders of His days. While they were driven by the ferocity of self and flesh, and fought “*to be seen of men,*” Jesus was driven only by the will of His Father. He refused to exhibit His power for selfish gain but only within the Father’s will.

Lowliness means spiritual humility. The humility of Jesus was seen in the unfeigned regulation of His spirit towards (i) doing the Father’s will and towards (ii) His interaction with mankind. In ministry, Jesus operated and ministered only within the bounds of the Father’s commission. (Unlike us, He was not ‘all over the place’ doing everything.) This takes true humility because Jesus had unlimited power and authority and yet He looked to God for direction. He was never moved by His own ambition and compassion. His spirit was regulated by God and He did only what the Father told Him to do. Now, can we be meek and lowly like Him?

Christ Government versus Self Government

Unless we too have become meek and lowly like Jesus, we definitely cannot make His yoke and His burden our own. Taking His yoke and bearing His burden means:

- (i) the termination of selfish ambitions (self will always goad us on, refusing us rest)
- (ii) the humility to minister within the bounds of His commission (self cannot do this because self wants to be the ‘messiah’)
- (iii) the willingness to be restrained (this hurts and upsets)
- (iv) the willingness to be inconspicuous and self denying (this is self-denying)

Yes, the yoke and the burden of Jesus are alien to corrupted flesh and the expectation of the world. Flesh and self want to be conspicuous, to be recognized, to be flamboyant, to be seen, to be loud and to be attention grabbing. They want to erect edifices of grandeur and be heavy-laden with speculative pursuits, not the pursuit of godliness. Quietude and restraint do not come easy for the proud and the egotistical. These people do not want to remain ‘incognito,’ to be concealed, restrained or hidden.

God Was Not in the Dramatic

Self and the flesh love the shrieking wind, the reeling earthquake and the roaring fire but unfortunately God is not in any of these three. The prophet Elijah, whose ministry had often been associated with outward signs and miraculous deeds, was disappointed when he could not find God in any of these three dramatic and attention-grabbing events. God chose to speak to His prophet through the ‘*still small voice*,’ which actually means a ‘*deep lingering inward consciousness*’ (I Kings 19:12). If we are not quiet, calm and ‘tuned in’ we will not be able to hear this voice. Why does God want to speak in this way? Because He knows that this inward work proves to be more powerful than many outward dramatic and flamboyant events which hardly produce radical and abiding changes.

The Scriptural Way to Build and Serve

When God’s great temple was being built at Jerusalem, no hammer, axe or sound was heard. God will not permit it because He does not want to call the attention of the passers-by to His great, noble and sacred work while it was being built. This massive construction had first existed in the mind of the Master Builder before it had

any earthly expression. When God does something, He is always more concerned about depth, thoroughness and accuracy rather than ‘loudness,’ noise, flamboyance and drama. Unlike insecure human nature, He does not like frivolous exhibition and ‘showiness.’

To take His yoke means we must be meek and to bear His burden means we are to be lowly. Yes, we have to have His nature, *to learn (of) Jesus*, or to be able to refrain from all fleshly loudness, showiness and flamboyance before we can enter in. His yoke and burden simply means an end to selfish ambition, to fleshly manipulation, human complications and complexities which are so prevalent in the present day churches. When such things abound, how can we have rest? Jesus came to call us away from all these so that we can have rest but unfortunately today we have substituted the ‘rest’ for the ‘show’. This is why our yoke has become overwhelming and our burden intolerable. And the price: we burn out, stress out, freak out, we are embittered out and drop out!

The authentic way of ministry is to first *learn Jesus* and then let God tell you what to do. (Even the Lord Jesus did only what the Father told Him.) Jesus did not move with mere human compassion; neither did He commit Himself to everyone and everything (John 2: 24). Ministry is not about building projects, buildings or reputation. Ministry is building human lives for eternity and things that have eternal validity are often spurned by carnal earthy man. If you are involved in authentic ministry then you have to forget about your own accomplishments, achievements, reputation, man’s acceptance and applause. Be willing to *learn Jesus*, be meek and lowly. Only then can you take His yoke and bear His burden, not man’s yoke and burden, and you will find rest!

The Power of God's Rest

“I will give you rest.” God’s rest should be man’s highest attainment. We enter in by simply becoming like Him – we have His nature. When we do, we will receive a release not from labour, but a release from weariness. We continue to labour, but we are not vexed or weary, rather our soul is quickened as we see so much being accomplished in quietude and simplicity. We continue to labour but it is all within the bounds of God’s commission and because it is within His bounds, we see spiritual accuracy being established.

Restlessness or Rest?

It is sad when shepherds have no spiritual rest and are only sustained by the ‘exterior’. If this is the sad state of shepherds, then what do you think will happen to the flock? I am reminded of Jeremiah 50:6 where God issued a scathing rebuke to the leadership of Israel for not leading the people to their true resting place:

*“My people have become lost sheep: their shepherds have led them astray; They have made them turn aside (to projects, activities, hype?) on the mountains; they have gone along from mountain to hill and **have forgotten their resting-place.**”*

Like leaders, like congregations. It is no wonder that so many Christians today are restless and have to be sustained and driven along by projects, activities, music, atmosphere and programmes, instead of by a personal and intimate relationship with God. If leaders do not know how to enter into the rest of God, then how will the flock know? This is why so many have no force to stand against the demons of materialism, sensuality and infidelity.

Demons recognize spiritual identity. My attempt to paraphrase what they said to the seven sons of Sceva would read something like this: “Jesus I know, Paul, I know, but you? Who are you? You have no identity or intimacy with Jesus and you expect us to acknowledge and to obey you? Since you have disturbed us, this is what we will do. We will jump on you” (Acts 19:14-16). It was indeed a sad ending for these seven men who did not know what authentic ministry was. Authentic ministry certainly is not an outward show. It is not loudness and exhibition.

The True Builders

Let us all come back to authenticity in ministry and know that true ministry is indeed an easy yoke and a light burden. What makes ministry complicated, complex, difficult and heavy is self and the flesh. Self and the flesh are always going for competition, comparison, the acceptance and applause of man. As long as we are goaded by self and the flesh, we will know no rest. All true builders of God’s work, like the men building the great temple at Jerusalem, are contented to build quietly, deeply and accurately – always looking to God for direction and precision, not to man for approval and applause. Man’s approval and applause are indeed very heavy burdens and not easy yokes at all.

D. PREPARATION OF MY OWN SPIRIT

If Bible school teachers understand that spiritual ministry is basically a readiness of one's spirit or the preparation of the 'inner man,' then they will teach the students to spend more time in prayer and in the contemplative and reflective study of God's word. Prayer is the only thing that will keep the students 'supplied' with God's spirit (Philippians 1:19) and connected to the grace of God. When we are connected to the grace of God, we can run the second and third mile in ministry. The grace of God will bring to us the constancy (of purpose) and the capacity to serve tirelessly. What has kept me going for the past 35 years has been the grace of God. It is His grace that has given me the constancy and the capacity to do what I have done for the past years.

Grace, Constancy and Capacity

The apostle Paul testified often about the grace of God that made him what he was – extraordinary in life and ministry. That is why he charged Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1, Ephesians 3:2, 7, Colossians 1:25). The author of Hebrews warned his readers never to “*fail of the grace of God*” (Hebrews 12:15). Yes, we are saved by grace, called by grace and therefore we must be sustained by grace.

*“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in **the grace** that is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 2:1*

*“If you have heard of the dispensation of **the grace of God** which is given me to you-ward.” Ephesians 3:2*

*“Wherefore I was made a minister according to the gift of **the grace of God**, given unto me by the effectual working of His power.” Ephesians 3:7*

“Whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of (the grace) God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.” Colossians 1:25

*“Looking diligently lest any man fail of **the grace of God**” Hebrews 12:15a*

Grace is Always for the Humble

The apostle James wrote that God gives grace to the humble but He resists the proud (James 4:6). Is this the reason for the downfall of so many ‘mega’ pastors? Had they become so proud and arrogant because of their achievements that they had not only cut themselves off from the ‘common’ people but also from the grace of God? I remember someone asked me about a pastor, “Why didn’t God keep him from falling, from bringing such reproach within the body and from tearing down the work he had built?”

Do you know that there are some people who could ‘not be kept’? The proud and the arrogant could not be kept by God’s grace. This is what James meant when he said, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” The word ‘resist’ means ‘to oppose.’ Who can stand it when God becomes our ‘enemy’ and opposes us? When He opposed Esau, He declared that He would tear down

everything that Esau had built.

“And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever” Malachi 1:3, 4b

Many big-time’ ministers fell because they had cut themselves off from the grace of God by their pride. Instead of having God on their side, to build together with them, they had God opposing them because of their arrogance. God allows their fall so that through their humiliation and their humility, they will return and they will once again connect themselves with God. God is not concerned about our reputation. He is concerned only with our character and with the things that have eternal validity.

What is Greatness?

Constancy is the characteristic of greatness and Paul was great because he was constant all through. Nothing could deter him from serving the Lord (Acts 20:24). Rain or shine, good or bad, in hunger or fullness, pain or pleasure, beatings or jail, Paul served God. Yes, when we have constancy, it means we will not change. When we know that God has called us to be His servants, then we must not stoop to become kings. (Why do we get involved in direct sales or meddle in business? Were not the Levites set apart to serve God? They were not permitted to till the ground as others because God was to be their inheritance.)

What is Capacity?

When we have the capacity, it means we can “*run and not be weary, walk and not faint.*” With capacity, we can do many things for God without looking for worldly rewards and man’s appreciation or applause. Prayer will also cause the word of God to be “*effectively worked into us*” (1 Thessalonians 2:13) and cause us “*to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*” (Colossians 4:12). This is why Epaphras gave himself intensely to prayers for the Colossian Christians. He knew that the only thing that could keep these people in the will of God was prayers. Each year the statistics for drop-outs and ‘casualties’ among ministers is shocking. There is already a shortage of labourers in the harvest field. We truly do not want to see anyone dropping out but unfortunately this is happening. Why?

Because too many were not given ***the right beginning*** in their ministry. They were not taught to build a strong spirit or a strong inner man to withstand what lay ahead of them. They have not been taught to build “*a strong river running on the inside,*” and to minister out of that river. Dry man-tailored theological studies cannot supply God’s strength to man’s spirit; neither can they connect men to God’s grace or cause them to stand firm in God’s will. Many lectures by clever-minded, humanistic, unspiritual, prayer-less and religious teachers in present day Bible colleges cannot renew or change the hearts of the students because the hearts of men and women can only be changed by God’s power.

Let the ‘Strong River’ Sustain You

A strong inner life out of a strong spirit is the only thing that can lift us up and support us through the hard times in ministry. Hard

times and hurts will come in the ministry – they are there to test our constancy. Will you still serve Him through the hard times? When we pass the test, our spiritual capacity will increase. Hard times and hurts are caused by misunderstandings, accusations, lies, humiliation and worst of all, merciless gossip. Even king David and our Lord Himself were not spared from slander and the “*strife of tongues*” (Psalm 31:13). Jesus was called a madman and a drunkard. Have you been called one yet? When you have a strong spirit or a strong inner life, you will not break during the hard times because the strength in your spirit man will sustain you. God knows how much you can take and He will be faithful to “*hide you in His pavilion*” as He hid David (Psalm 31:20, Job 5:21). The advice given by the Holy Spirit through Solomon in Proverbs 18:14 is indispensable to all those in ministry but I wonder how many Bible school professors teach this to their students?

“The (strong) spirit of a man will sustain (support or carry him through) his infirmities (weaknesses), but a wounded spirit (weak spirit) who can bear?” Proverbs 18:14

Fighting Unseen Enemies

We must remember that the dark dynamics, the secret sins or the offensive, twisted and warped moral misbehaviour in human lives are fuelled by demonic powers and nothing less than the resurrection energy of Jesus Christ can set us free. This energy can only be set into motion when we pray and get connected with His word. This is why the apostle Paul told the Christians at Thessalonica and at Ephesus that God’s word has the power to work effectively into them and to build them up (1 Thessalonians 3:13, Acts 20:32). Bible schools

should never graduate a student if he/she has not learnt to spend at least an hour in daily prayer, another hour in the reading/studying of God's word and in weekly fasts. These exercises will supply strength to their inner man and thrust them into effective ministry. Most importantly, these will enable them to be 'durable.'

Unlike other professions, the ministry is about dealing with spiritual beings, with wicked spirits and evil forces. We cannot enter into combat with them if our spirit man is weak and unprepared or when we do not have a "strong river running on the inside." Demons love dry places. This is why there are so many casualties in the ministry today among priests, pastors, prophets, and bishops, and men who are supposedly the highest representatives of God. Many of these fallen men do not even know what hit them because their fall had come so gradually, seductively and stealthily. One day of missed prayers easily becomes another. Two days of not reading the Bible easily slide into another and it goes on and on until he/she can no longer pray or sit down to read God's word. The condition of 'restlessness' has set in and daily 'restlessness' seeks fulfillment, causing the man or the woman of God to run and run and do one million other things rather than spend time in the presence of God.

Only the Abiding Can Cause Fruitfulness

The apostle Paul told us again and again to be strong in the 'inner man' because he knew that ministry into human lives is more than 'skin-deep,' and that in ministry, one can easily 'pick up demons,' and come under strong oppression and attack. This is why so many who started out so well, like the priest in the ghettos, ended up so badly. Jesus told us that without Him, we can do nothing and that we must abide in Him in order to bear fruit. The church today has become

very, very bold – to the extent that it dares to disconnect itself from the Vine and goes on to bear fruit by itself. The sad result? Those who wanted to bring light to others ended up as darkness themselves.

“They Picked Up Spirits”

I have friends in the ministry who, like that 76-year-old priest, became darkness themselves because they did not abide in the Vine. These pastors wanted to ‘light up the dark world’ of the prostitutes, juveniles, drug addicts, abused children etc. But because they did not have a strong spirit they succumbed to the darkness around them. Some slept with the prostitutes and the juveniles, while others abused the children they were meant to protect etc. Let me share the following paragraph I wrote in *“THE MANIFESTATION OF ANGELIC BEINGS.”*

“Moral misbehaviour is, unfortunately, also rampant in many Charismatic circles. What about physical abuse? Is physical abuse and violence inflicted only by marines in war zones and Iraqi prisons or are they also rampant in many Christian rehabilitation centres too? Did it shock you when the Sisters of Mercy (noted for their merciful kind deeds) finally confessed their private misbehaviour and made a world-wide apology through the media for their abuse of children under their care?

These things have happened in Christendom because most Christians only have an outward form of Christianity but have no power on the inside. An outward profession without an inward reality is painful. They could not ‘stay the course’ because they had not allowed **the cross to level them on the inside by dealing with those deeply buried dormant lusts, greed, anger. Holy living or moral excellence is never possible if Jesus is not allowed to invade and pervade us. Christianity is not going to church; it is allowing Jesus to be**

the invading and pervading Reality in our lives.” (page 52, 1st Printing 2004)

Paul’s Readiness Was In His Spirit

Demons know our identity and our strength and how far they can push us. Paul himself told us that his own readiness to preach the gospel or to do God’s work was according to how prepared or how much he had in his spirit. Have you meditated on what he meant when he said, “*God is my witness, whom I serve **with my spirit***” and also “*As much as **in me** (in my spirit) **is**, I am ready...*” Romans 1: 9, 15. (*Paul was ready to take Rome for Jesus!*) Paul considered himself ready and prepared to do God’s work not according to how much he had in his mind, his academic accomplishments, his social standing, his financial account but according to how much he had in his spirit man. His outward readiness was in accordance to the inward preparation or the fullness of his spirit man.

Have you ever wondered what he meant when he said in Acts 20:24 that he was going to Jerusalem “bound in the spirit,” and that nothing could move him? He was warned not to go as intense suffering awaited him there but he went. He was indifferent to all those outward threats of violence because he was prepared in his spirit to face them. He could anticipate all personal suffering cheerfully because he was prepared in his inner life to take them. Yes, once we are prepared in the spirit or in our inner man, then nothing on the outside can shake us, make us wince or intimidate us.

How Weighty is Your Spirit?

We are not ready because we have graduated from Bible school with excellence or because we are intellectually refined. We are

ready according to how much we carry in our spirit. How weighty is your spirit man? There are missionaries who have to be recalled from their fields of ministry because of sexual scandals, swindling of funds, burnout and nervous breakdowns. I know of some who were impregnated on their mission trips. I heard a very sad tale about seven ‘trained’ missionaries (five were married) who fell into fornication and adultery with Orang Asli (native) women when they went into the interior to do missions work.

These were fine men who had spent about 4-5 years in theological and missions training and they (and others too) thought they were ready. Unfortunately, they discovered too late that they were not. They learned too late that readiness in ministry meant MORE than academic, theological and cross-cultural training. Readiness in ministry means possessing a strong inner life or a strong spirit – that which is able to withstand wicked and seductive spirits. These things are so basic. How could we have missed them?

Demons cannot be fought with academic and theological excellence. They can only be overcome with the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, the energy that lodges within our spirit man. It is an energy that must be built up daily through unhurried time with Him. We must have muscles in our spirit, not just muscles in the intellect and the body! *Any Bible school that fails to teach its students to build a strong inner life or to make God his/her focus is a Bible school that has failed in its mission and is not worth going to.*

3

CONCLUSION

The Real Reason as to why We Cannot Relate with God or Prevail
in Serving as His
'Royal Priesthood'

God's word in 1 Peter 2:9 reminds us that we are called to be God's unique people and *royal priesthood*. Yes, priesthood is our first responsibility. Priesthood means we are to stand in His presence to minister to Him before we minister to people. Priesthood means speaking to God first and speaking to people second. Priesthood means relating with God first and relating to people or work second. This is God's order and it will never be changed. *Royal priesthood* is indeed a distinguished name with a distinct destiny. What religion on earth has such a distinct destiny – that we can actually spread out our hands towards heaven and minister and relate with God?

Why Restored Truth is Seldom Practised

Although this great truth was recovered through the Reformation, it is unfortunate that it is seldom (whether individually or corporately) implemented or practised. We preach it, teach it, talk it, write it, discuss it, encourage it, hold seminars on it but unfortunately we hardly live it. Why? Because the obstructions that prevent us from getting into the presence of God are real and because we, as finite beings, actually have very little capacity for an infinite God. Only God Himself can increase the capacity within us for Himself. He

does this by dealing with us and by bringing us through the ‘ups and downs’ (crises, adversities, pain, losses) in life. Someone has said that “*man seldom cries out or thirsts for God unless God kills him!*” Yes, put the man on the cross and he will surely cry out, “*O God, I thirst for You!*” No wonder king David cried so often, “*God, I thirst for You.*” Study his life and you will realize that most of the time he was going through a crisis. I need to share the following paragraphs I wrote in “*DEMANDS OF LOVE.*”

“The early Christians did not pick up spirits as easily as we do now because they were serious Christians who had a strong river of Spirit-life running inside them. They believed in spiritual communion and intimacy with God and spent time in serious prayer daily. They were people who knew how to drink long and deep at the Living Fountain. That was why they had no problems with demons.

Unfortunately, most Christians today do not know how to “drink”, and any man who has a “drinking” problem will soon find himself fighting demons. Ministry today is dangerous because the emphasis is all on the outward _ the size of the church, the numbers, the performance, the buildings. Satan will be happy to give us these (and he can) provided he can keep us away from “The Drink”.

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13).

Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of this water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:53-54).”

The Cross Will Restore the Thirst

“Intimacy and communion with God are so powerful and vital that when God was cut off from Jesus at the cross, Jesus ejaculated this heart-piercing cry, “I thirst!” I cannot believe that He cried out because of physical thirst. If He could endure the excruciating pain of the cross, He could endure the physical thirst. When someone is dying in excruciating pain, he has no time to think of a drink. Jesus screamed, “I thirst” not because He was physically thirsty but because He felt a spiritual thirst when the flow of communication and intimacy with His Father was broken.

The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink (Matthew 27:44-48).

Only one other man in the Bible has cried about being thirsty: the lesser David.

My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:2).

O GOD, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is (Psalm 63:1).

I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land (Psalm 143:6).

David's cry of thirst was prophetic. It later found its fulfilment in the cry of our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater David. Friends, pastors and especially those who are in the forefront of ministry, knowing when to drink and how to drink of Him is important.

It is mandatory to come into His presence to drink long and deep and to release. I have worked with people who are so critical and full of accusations that they are really thorns in the flesh. If I had not known how to release in the presence of God, I would be a ruined person today and my ministry would have been ransacked _ which is just what the devil wants. There are good ministers of the Lord who are ruined today because they do not know how to release in the presence of God. They allow the accuser of the brethren to use people to sow wrong and hurting words into their spirits and they do not know how to come free. What we do not release will hurt us. Ministries are aborted and lives are ruined.

Friends, solve this "drinking" issue in your life and you will have no problems. Do what the Lord tells us to do: come into His presence and drink of Him _ drink long and drink deep. It is vital for our daily living and our daily serving.

God Himself can teach us how to drink, how to pray and how to commune with Him. The bride says in Song of Solomon 1: 16, *Our bed is green*. The bed is always for intimacy and green has always stood for life and growth. What I understand from here is that intimacy with God can be developed and it must grow. As the years go by, we should be praying more, not less. However busy we may be in ministry, intimacy with God must never be neglected or substituted. The more we minister,

the more we should pray. Our private life of intimacy with God must always exceed our public world of ministry. When we reverse the order, we get into trouble.” (pages 53-56, 2nd Printing May 2005)

What about the obstructions? They are real and we must be humble to deal with them as God reveals them to us.

OBSTRUCTION ONE: The Lack of Sacrificial Living and Dying to Self.

In the Old Testament, priests were always associated with sacrifice and with death. The entire life of the priests was engaged in the sacrificial system ordered by God. When you look at what the priests did, you may lose all your appetite for the priesthood. Their lives (they had no worldly possession, not even a piece of land) their daily duties (they dealt with blood, animal organs and dung?) and their sacrifice (they watched the altar fire throughout the night and had to change garments endlessly) would definitely kill everything that appealed to self and the flesh. These were the things that the priests had to contend with every day. Their ministry as priests was associated with the endless slaughtering of animals, with the unpleasant shedding of blood and with watching the painful death of animals. In other words, their ministry as priests was grounded upon sacrifice and death. If they refused to deal with sacrifices, blood and death, then there was no priesthood.

Basis for Priesthood: Self-Denial

The message is clear. It tells me that I cannot prevail as a priest, I cannot prevail in God's presence unless I, too, am willing to contend with sacrifices, with bleeding and death daily. I must know that my ability to prevail as a priest is founded upon my willingness to live a lifestyle of sacrifice and death (to self.) This means my effectiveness (to prevail in God's presence) will always be determined by the intensity or the degree of my sacrifice and my death to 'self-government.' There is no short cut. To minister as a priest you pay a costly price.

Unlike God, the human nature loves 'short cuts.' This is why we want to run from meeting to meeting, from seminar to seminar, from Bible school to Bible school, hoping to catch something from those meetings. Or we hope that the speaker will lay his/her hands upon us so that the anointing can be transferred to us because we do not want "*to put in the works ourselves*". Unfortunately, this can never work in the ministry of the priesthood because the ministry of priesthood must be grounded upon the reality of sacrifice and death.

The Normal is Strange to the Carnal

Do we know now why so many believers cannot prevail in prayer and enter into their high and holy calling? Because they refuse to 'bleed,' to live a lifestyle of sacrificial service and to deal with the government of self. We have to put self to death if we want to spend unhurried time to pursue God. Spending unhurried time to pursue God and to pray one hour a day sounds so strange to so many believers. A woman I spoke to did not only drop her jaw, she dropped the cup she was holding when I told her to do so! "*This is so abnormal!*" she

protested. Oh no, it is not. How could you have missed this teaching when Jesus told us to do this so clearly in Matthew 26:40? In fact, Jesus was shocked when His disciples could not do it.

“What? Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.”

He has been disappointed with so many of His disciples for over two thousand years! Many of us can worship, sing, talk, argue theology, preach, teach, go from one mission field to another but we cannot and we do not pray an hour daily, and yet we expect principalities and wicked spirits to bow in obedience to us! We expect to change the hearts of men and women. To subdue drug addicts and set the captives free. But when we do change our selfish ways and let ‘the government of Christ’ increase in our lives and learn to be more sacrificial, then to our surprise, we find a change in our relationship with God. We find God becoming more personal to us and as a result, we can better prevail in His presence.

This was what happened to Jacob. As long as he remained Jacob, the calculative, selfish, lying, scheming, carnal and manipulative personality, he could not address God as his own God. Every time he cried out to God, he had to appeal through his ancestors, Isaac and Abraham (*“God of my father Abraham, Isaac”*). God will not be personal to carnal, selfish and manipulative people. Jacob knew in his heart he could not prevail before Him – he had to use the names of his godly predecessors.

God is Personal Only to the ‘Israels’ not the ‘Jacobs’

But when Jacob finally changed and became Israel, (a God-controlled person) he was able to call God his own God! He was able to address God as “*El-el-o-he-Israel*” meaning, the God of Israel” (Genesis 33:20). God suddenly became real, personal and close to him. Yes, exchange your ‘self-governed’ ways to God-controlled ways and you will experience God being personal and real. You will find that relating to Him is not that difficult and that entering into the ministry of priests is not as complex as you think.

OBSTRUCTION TWO: The Lack of Purification

As I read Ezekiel 44, I find it heart-wrenching and soul-ripping. Some portions of scriptures are very painful to read and the forty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel is such a chapter. It is painful to know that God will not root out fleshly and unfaithful priests. Neither will He terminate their ‘gainsaying’ ministries but He will continue to allow them a place of ministry in His sanctuary. He does this so that they can continue to minister to those who are of their own kind – the fleshly and the unfaithful whom God addresses as the “*uncircumcised in heart and flesh.*”

Carnal Priests to Serve Carnal Congregations

Paul talked about the perilous times that will come in the last days. These end times are so ‘horrifying’ because Christians will be ‘lovers of their own selves.’ As a result, they will not tolerate sound doctrine. Instead, they will, after their own lustful hearts and corrupted inward

condition, get their own teachers to preach to them what they want to hear. Will they find such preachers and teachers? Plenty. For this reason, God will not remove these corrupted and defiled ministers. In the end times they will minister to those of their own kind (2 Timothy 3:1, 4:3-4).

*“For the time will come when they **will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables”** (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

Inward Condition Controls Outward Choices

Many of us are not aware that the messages we listen to, the preachers we run after, the books we read, the friends we fellowship with, the church we go to or the things we give ourselves over to daily, tell on us. It reveals to us, deep down, the type of persons we are.

The Judgment: Not Allowed into the Presence

These unfaithful and unholy priests had somehow ‘incorporated’ themselves into the priesthood and were participating in the holy activities in God’s temple. Though no one could discern the difference, God knew, and they themselves knew. They knew because they bore a judgment within themselves and that judgment was that they could not relate to God or get near to Him. O, they could work, they could talk, they could even move in spiritual gifts. Does all this sound disturbing to you?

Jesus often said things that are very, very disturbing. Listen to

Him again in Matthew 7: 21-23. When they asked Him, “*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*” He replied, “*I never knew you, depart from me!*” What He meant was, “*I never had a relationship with you. We were never intimate.*”

The Lord seems to be saying, “*Your outward works are all right but your inward motives and condition have missed My mark. I saw that inward declension and corruption; you too knew it but you did nothing about it. You never came to Me for cleansing, you just carried on in 'self government', covering that inward rot and those low motives with high outward actions. I was never a part of what you did.*”

This sounded so much like what King David told Ahimaaz at the end of his run, “*Step aside!*” The inward spiritual declension of these priests rendered them powerless to prevail in God’s presence. Although God did not terminate their ministry, He did not allow them the sacred privilege, the strength nor the capacity to enter into the holy place to offer incense or sacrifice before Him.

Blessing of the Ever-Faithful

God has spoken so clearly in this chapter that priesthood can only settle exclusively on the faithful and the holy whom He addresses as those who are “***circumcised in heart and flesh***”. The fidelity and the holy lives of the priests in the Zadok lineage established them as priests forever. This is how important fidelity and holiness are. However, the infidel and carnal priests did not have their ministry terminated. God merely reduced their unfaithful ministry to lower

subordinate duties and He judged them by refusing to let them get near Him. His words are cutting and precise:

*“They shall bear their iniquity; Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and **ministering to the house**: (not to God) they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they **shall stand before them to minister unto them** (not to God). **They shall not come near unto me**, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place” (Ezekiel 44:10-3).*

So many people think they can enter the ranks of priests to prevail in the presence of God just because they have received an ‘impartation’ and a strong prophecy. No. No. Spiritual things are not that easily obtainable. Although ‘impartations’ and prophecies have their place, we need to remember that we have to live the life – *the life of purity or holiness and loyalty* in order to prevail in this high priestly function.

A ‘pseudo spiritual’ condition or spiritual declension within us will undo us and render us powerless in His presence. Many pray, but still get tired and vexed and manifest no victory over fleshly desires and appetites. It is important to deal with the condition within. If we do not, sooner or later, we may be disqualified from carrying out this high function.

“I’m Your God Only if You Live It”

The Lord Jesus told us that God is the God of the “living.” Are you living the life of the ‘circumcised in heart and flesh’? If you

are, then He is your God. If not, then He is not your God. If He is not our God, then we cannot claim His presence for ourselves. We need God's grace to sustain us in spending unhurried time with Him. In other words, God Himself must allow me to be near Him. If He does not, then there is no way I can get near Him. Yes, if He does not delight in my presence, if He does not say to me, "*Seek My face*" then how can I enter in and stay there?

The Call and the Echo

Does God indeed come to us and say, "*Seek My face*"? I believe He says this to every one of His children but unfortunately not many, in their busy-ness and hectic lifestyle can hear that voice or want to hear that voice. When King David, head of state (his life was busy and hectic) heard that voice, he echoed back immediately, "*Thy face, O Lord, I will seek!*" (Psalm 27:8). God's wooing of the human soul to pray is real but it is also seasonal. In other words, God does have His timing when He comes to woo us to pray. When God comes after us to woo us to pray, it is easy to connect with Him and we must not bypass these precious times when the inward call is so real. To me, this call can come anytime and anywhere. I may be watching TV, writing, reading, or having tea with someone. I have learnt, not perfectly, but most of the time, to echo back by putting everything on hold and just pray.

Coffee, Water and Tongues

The rest of the time I discipline myself to 'walk by faith and not by sight' (by feelings). I get down to seek Him even when I cannot feel Him and even when I do not feel like doing it. Like David,

I learn to pursue Him and to “follow hard after God”. I cry after Him even if I feel He has hidden His face from me. When my flesh becomes very violent and tries to frustrate and oppose my efforts to spend time in God’s presence, I have come to realize (for myself, not necessarily for you!) that a cup of good coffee, splashing cold water on to my face and a few minutes of loud praying (in strong tongues) will usually bring the flesh under submission. These years of walking with the Lord have taught me that when I am faithful in seeking Him, even when I do not feel Him or feel like doing it, He will come to woo me to seek Him even when I am not seeking Him (i.e. when I am busy with other things). This has increased my capacity and time for prayers as I find myself praying at my set times for prayer and also praying at the times not set for prayers, the latter being the times of His calling.

May God Himself teach us to pray. “Yes, Lord, ‘our bed is green!’”