

MINISTRY PRINCIPLE **2**

REMAIN HIDDEN

“Stand still and know that I am God. That I am that I am, is the gift that I will confer to you if you’ll only be still. But the nature of the whole religious system militates against that stillness, it calls for running. So my God, do we have the courage to bring that system to an end?” — Art Katz

SUSAN TANG

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

REMAIN HIDDEN

The prophet Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 42:1-4 that the ideal servant of God “shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.” “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth.” In these sentences, God reveals to us His own divine method for spiritual conquest and the way He wants His choice vessels to be trained. His chosen servant, according to this verse, must steer clear of clamour, clutter and push, ostentation, wilful publicity, self-assertion and human force when accomplishing the will of God.

Four Characteristics of Divine Methods

Jesus, as Jehovah’s chosen and ideal servant, **did not rely upon man’s methods** of wilful exposure, self-advertisement, striving and clamour and the use of flamboyance. He did not put His trust in powerful institutions or national establishments even though His work was formidable, arduous and extensive. Instead He adopted **the divine method of quietude, obscurity, hopefulness and persistence**. These are methods which the Father had chosen, methods which had proven to be permanently effective. It may seem slow, unimpressive, ineffective, primitive and ‘flimsy’ in the midst of fierce opposition, but it did triumphantly accomplish its purpose when Jesus shouted victoriously on the cross, “It is finished!”

Yes, Jehovah's chosen and ideal servant must learn to shun self-assertion, public exposure, notoriety, man's applause, worldly methods, selfish manipulation and pomposity. Instead, he must learn the way of the Father, which is the way of 'hiddenness,' of quiet trust, and hopeful persistence in the accomplishing of the Father's will. Since Jesus was willing to follow the Father's method and take the path of obscurity and persistence and not call attention to Himself, **God Himself gave Him public attention when the right time came.** God proclaimed to the world:

"Behold my servant!" (Look at Him, My revelation of a true servant!)

Whom I uphold

My elect

Whom my soul delighteth

I have put my spirit upon him." (Isaiah 42:1)

Jesus, Divine Example for All

What other credentials and security do we need when God Himself endorses our ministry? When God said, "*Behold my servant!*" He was actually alerting the world to a new revelation, the revelation of His divine servant who was to be **the example for all other servants** who desire the Father's favour and approval. Jesus purposely shunned the crowd, bypassed city life, refused to court the rich and educated, left the company of the 'mighty' Pharisees and scribes because **he knew the Father wanted Him to gain spiritual ascendancy and conquest not by noise, tumult, self-assertion, pseudo-spiritual hype, violence, passionate debate or by courting man's favour but by quiet, spiritual and divine strength. He had to persistently die to self.**

Unlike other conquerors, the Lord Jesus chose lowly men from the ranks of the poor to be His disciples. He revealed divine secrets, not to the learned but to ‘babes.’ We see Him expending Himself, not on the rich and influential, but on simple peasants, needy women, children, unattractive characters, ‘bruised reeds’ and ‘smoking flax.’

God’s chosen, anointed and ideal servant had to be raised up according to God’s way – the way of quietude and obscurity.

This seems to be the Biblical concept of divine work. God prefers to work without ‘beating the drums’ as all His wondrous works are self-evident and therefore need no endorsement from any worldly source. Not only had He raised up His own Son in this manner, He had also raised up others like Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Joseph, Nehemiah, Esther, David and the apostle Paul in the same manner in quietude and seclusion.

In chapter 49:2, Isaiah went on to prophesy about how God ‘sharpened’ and ‘polished’ His Son and then had Him **hidden away** – NOT PUT ON DISPLAY. Unfortunately, today most of us fight for the display, the exposure, the noise and the tumult. No wonder so many have had an early collapse. God hid His Son and many of His choice vessels because He knows that lethal weapons are not meant to go on display. Instead, they must be hidden, concealed or submerged, only to be taken out at the right time to fulfil His purpose.

“He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft, in his quiver hath he hid me.”

(Isaiah 49:2)

These words are simply amazing. For 30 years, God prepared His choice vessel in seclusion and hiddenness. While the world frothed in sin and groped in darkness and the devil was probably thinking, “*I have won after all,*” God was quietly and steadily sharpening and polishing an arrow, a lethal weapon, a deadly shaft, one that would hit the devil once and finish him forever! Hallelujah! That was exactly what Jesus did. His task was mammoth but He took only three years to complete it. He hid, however, for 30 years! When He finally surfaced, He, like David, took only one shot to fall His enemy.

Thirty Years of Preparation for Three Years of Ministry

God used 30 years to sharpen and to polish His arrow, and all this time, He kept this precious arrow hidden in His hand and concealed within His quiver. Yes, His choice vessel must be hidden from the desecrating touch of the world, the merciless and hostile grasp of the devil, and most of all, from the defilement of self, from self-consciousness, self-inflation, self-esteem, etc. The long years of sharpening were needed so that the cutting edge of the sword or the axe will be sharp and the axe head not fall off while in use.

Sharpening and Polishing

A sharpened axe head requires little human assertion and strength to use but a blunt axe head is just the opposite. Why did the axe head fall off at the crucial moment while in use (2 Kings 6:5)? If Elisha had not been there to retrieve it, the whole building process would have been delayed because this vital weapon had broken down! I believe the axe head was blunt, thus the user had to exert much physical strength to get it to work. A blunt axe head and much application of human strength is a bad way to work. Either one or the other will fall off in the process! Human vessels, like that axe, very often break down because too much physical and mental strength have been exerted. We ‘pump’ carnal strength and hype into spiritual ministry because we have lost our cutting edge. We do not have the words,

the boldness nor the power to speak and do what God requires of us. So we keep exerting our own strength until the ‘axe head’ falls off or until we break down.

Long years have to be taken in the polishing of an arrow because if there is any lingering roughness on the shaft, it will impede the arrow’s flight. The Great Archer requires polished arrows and smoothed shafts, weapons that will not miss their marks when they are shot. What an arrow Jesus was – perfect in every way! After 30 years of sharpening and polishing, He moved with such passion, accuracy and authority. No one could stop Him in His ‘flight’. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the lawyers, etc. tried to, but they could not.

Words Like Thunderbolts

They could not stop Him when He was only a 12-year-old child, so how could they stop Him when He became an adult? He ‘ruined’ them by the precision and the boldness of His words and He exposed their false values. His words, like thunderbolts, had no comparison. They were so sharp, so searching, so incisive, so original and so disturbing, the spiritual leaders in His days just wanted to silence Him. They could tolerate His deeds, but O, they could not tolerate His words. This arrow was far too sharp and too incisive – it sped to its mark without compromise.

After it has done its work, **the arrow must be willing to return to its place of hiding.** The Archer will draw it back into its quiver where it lies in absolute safety so that nobody will harm it, become familiar with it, misuse it, ‘commonize’ it or ‘buy it over’. The Great Archer, for love of His arrows, will definitely have the arrow concealed again. There it must stay, until its time of use and until the Great Archer pulls it out again. Yes, the sharpened and polished arrow had made its mark and done its job but **the glory must go to the Archer, not the arrow.** The arrow’s contentment must lie in the joy and the fulfillment of the Great Archer’s purpose and in seeing that He alone is glorified.

True Arrows Bring True Fulfillment – To God and Self

Jesus, God’s anointed arrow, brought great joy and delight to the Divine Archer (“*Whom my soul delighteth*”) because He was willing to remain hidden. How many of us are willing to do this? **Our fulfillment should come when God is glorified, not when we are glorified. Our joy should come when God’s purposes are met, not when our purposes are met.** No wonder then that so many do the work of God, accomplish great things but they do not have the joy, or the sense of fulfillment from what they have done. Instead, they possess a lingering sense of ‘dryness’ which makes them prone to moral ills.

I recall with deep lingering sadness the many arrows that have fallen in recent years. I have often asked the Lord why He had not upheld these men and women since they had done great things for Him. The reply came one day, very abruptly, “*I can never uphold arrows whom I do not delight in, arrows who glorify themselves and bring Me no fulfillment.*” No wonder so many have not been upheld. **We cannot deny they have done great works but are the works for self-fulfillment or are they for God’s fulfillment?** When God does not uphold us and delight in us (the way He upheld and delighted in Jesus) then where do we stand? What’s all the noise, the building, the tumult, the clamour and the busyness about?

Inward Stature: Criteria For Ministry

Throughout Bible history, we realize that when God raised up His vessels, He first hid them. Unfortunately, when men do the raising, (or when we raise ourselves) they cannot wait to expose them, display them or publicize them. Thus, they hand these vessels over to an early death. God is never in a hurry or a frenzy, but men are. There are definitely reasons why God wants to hide us. **He knows that there are things that must be worked into our spirit as we spend time in seclusion and solitude with Him – things that cannot be learned elsewhere. Indeed, we need time to build an inward stature.** So many of God's vessels had moved under God's anointing and the gifts of the Holy Spirit without possessing an inward stature or inward maturity. To minister under God's powerful anointing without possessing an inward stature or that inward steadfast maturity is sure foolishness.

What caused Jacob to stand steadfast and un-intimidated in front of the formidable Pharaoh? His inward stature. Jacob was prepared for the experience inwardly. He did not try to impress Pharaoh in any way. He did not abuse his privileges, neither was he ashamed of his own shrivelled image. He did not have to 'hype' something up. Even though Pharaoh was the most powerful man on earth and his benefactor, **Jacob knew he himself was the greater on the inside because of what he carried within.** As a result, he unashamedly extended his wrinkled hand to bless Pharaoh.

And so it was with his son, Joseph. By the time Joseph was brought into the presence of Pharaoh, Joseph knew he had the power and the inward stature to counsel and to instruct Pharaoh. Joseph was not intimidated. He did not ‘bluff,’ flatter, lie, boast or ‘hype’ his way through. He spoke as God had directed him. He revealed as God had shown him. When he finally sat on the right hand of Pharaoh to become the prime minister of Egypt, he had within him that stature that could carry him through in his high position with godly integrity. Inward stature and maturity are important. So many today possess the outward anointing without the inward stature. This is why they cannot keep their position and their ministry.

Forty Years to ‘Kill’ Moses

Could **Moses** have learned from elsewhere the things he learned from the 40 hidden years in the wilderness? Definitely no. God hid him in the desert for that long because God wanted to ‘size’ him down. God wanted less of Moses and more of Himself in Moses. Moses, who had grown up in the courts of Pharaoh, carried that ‘Pharaohic’ stench of pomposity, carnality, sensuality and self-confidence too strongly. The 40 years among sheep took care of that. What smell do you think you will exude if you have spent 40 years among sheep day and night? And if most of what you heard for 40 years was only the bleating of sheep? By the time Moses stood before Pharaoh, he probably smelt like sheep and no wonder he could hardly talk!

He had no confidence to speak to Pharaoh, and Aaron had to do it for him. Was Moses afraid that instead of speaking coherently, he might stammer out a ‘blah...aah’? Remember, he had conversed with sheep for 40 years! God understood. This is why He agreed to give him Aaron. Which school or seminary is able to produce such humility, submission, power and trust in God and make a person adequate to pastor a congregation of three million people without being lifted up with pride and arrogance, or breaking down with stress and anger? The seminary in the desert, the one where a man trains among sheep and is hidden for 40 years under very trying conditions.

Ten Years to Conform to His Master's Vision

Elisha served 10 years as Elijah's personal assistant doing menial and lowly work before he inherited his master's prophetic office. Even though he came into his own office and ministry later on, he was still known as the one 'who poured water on Elijah's hand,' or as Elijah's servant. Elisha observed his great master for 10 years and this proximity with his master produced something in him. He came to love the things his master loved and hated the things his master hated. God hid him with Elijah for those years so that Elisha's spirit could become one with Elijah.

How wonderful. Elisha knew that if he had to carry on the work of his great master, then he must have his spirit. When the right time came for Elijah to die, there was obviously still much work to be done, and Elisha knew that he needed a double portion of his master's spirit to get it done. The years of observation and faithfulness at his master's side had paid off. He asked his master for a double portion of his spirit so that he could continue his master's work with double effectiveness. He got it. God knew that the 10 years that Elisha had had with Elijah would produce in him what he needed to steer the cause of Jehovah and to stand up against an apostate Israel.

Thirty Years to Become God's Standard Bearer

David, as the lesser Jesus, was hidden and trained for 30 years through grave adversities, which included pain, personal losses and deep humiliation, so that he could be, not only the king of Israel, **but also God's standard bearer and champion.** No Bible school, institution or living being on earth could teach David the lessons he learned during his years of seclusion and solitude brought on either directly by the hand of God or by his own sins and inconsistencies. **God taught him by taking him through many, many 'ups and downs,' 'highs and lows,' and the 'ins and the outs' of life.** It is amazing that David survived and triumphed. He wrote about many of his 'high and low' experiences in his writings, and his writings are meaningful because they are comforting, appealing and powerful. They truly meet needs because David wrote them out of genuine personal experiences. This is why the whole spectrum of human emotions such as fear, rejection, dejection, loneliness, hatred, etc. can be found in his psalms. God had taken him through all these.

David still speaks to us today and we are still listening. He is worth listening to because he had heard from the Lord. Yes, David remains a voice today because, unlike others, he was willing to travel **the unfamiliar road of divine dealings in seclusion and solitude.** This made him uncommon and deep. Consider these words by Robert Frost:

*“Two roads diverged in a wood
And I—
I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference.”*

Taking The Unfamiliar is for The Uncommon

Not many of us want to take the unfamiliar road of the hidden life. This is the life of concealment and seclusion where the dealings of God remain strong, and we strive to hear only His voice and maintain His standard. We may also be ridiculed and considered fanatics by others. **Those who have made the choice to travel this road have indeed known the difference. The world will not notice them but God will, just as He noticed the seven thousand who had refused to bow their knees to Baal.**

The Man Who 'Cried in the Wilderness'

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, was a recluse. He was trained in absolute obscurity and seclusion. Only God would and could do something like this – train a man for 30 years and then use him short of three! Like many others, I was trained for three years and used for more than thirty! Thank God He taught me to remain in His school of the Spirit where one has to study a lifetime and never get to graduate! To train someone for three or five years and then use him/her for their entire lifetime is indeed fallacious – no wonder so many of God's workmen break down. The true Bible school is ongoing. We do not graduate from it in this life for there is no 'finality' to learning the things of the Spirit.

John the Baptist was raised up in times of deep spiritual confusion and uncertainty but there was certainly nothing uncertain about this man who had heard from God. In his time, there were seven powerful men (Luke 3:1-2) in the political, civil and ecclesiastical world, but "*the word of God came unto John.*" Isn't this amazing? God bypassed all of these high-ranking, refined, educated, influential, successful (?) and pompous men, including Annas and Caiaphas (the high priests), and spoke to a recluse and a 'nobody.' It is amazing that in spite of their marked recognition, their high positions and their 'vote of the majority,' these men could not and did not hear from God. Instead, John, an uncouth recluse did.

Solitude: Place to Develop Spiritual Sensitivity

John did because he cared to. He did because his spiritual ears were tuned into the realm of the Spirit. That was why he was in the wilderness, living in contact with nature and in contact with God. **His solitude in the wilderness had given him great sensitivity towards God. He had sharp and powerful spiritual senses and a mouth ready to speak words that would burn.** Like Jeremiah, he could not contain the words he heard from above for they were like fire that burned in his bones. He had to release them. His messages were original, fresh and bold. This was why the crowd went out to him. Look at them – the haughty soldiers, the religious people, the whores, the corrupt politicians, the rich and the poor, etc. They were hanging on to his burning words, awe-struck, trembling and ready to obey.

John, who knew that “*valleys had to be raised, mountains had to be laid low, the crooked had to be made straight and the rough ways had to be smoothed*” before God’s glory could appear, made no distinction between men. He spoke as God wanted him to speak because he knew **that his job could only be done by a forceful and uncompromising voice or cry.** His was indeed “*the voice crying in the wilderness*” to prepare the way of the Lord and to make His path straight. His was indeed a sharp, distinct and lonely, lonely voice – but it met the divine standard and did its job.

Cry with Passion, Accuracy and Authority

What is the use of crying when our words do not burn, when our messages have no originality, and they do not meet the divine standard and fall short of its mark? When God trains a man/woman, He wants him/her to **cry in passion, accuracy and authority**. John, the apostolic forerunner was doing exactly this. Such men/women cannot be produced in an environment of compromise, crowd pressure, pseudo-spiritual conditions or under men's manipulative hands. They can only be produced in obscurity and seclusion.

Great Seclusion Follows the Great Experience

The apostle **Paul** took his years of hiding in Arabia after his great experience with the Lord. He did not 'jump' into ministry as many do today. Instead, he went immediately into seclusion before he even met with the rest of the apostles (Galatians 1:17-21). Paul did not go into frenzied ministry. He waited on the Lord. He knew he needed some sharpening, and definitely a lot of polishing, before he could get into public ministry.

There is no need to hurry, to pursue 'self-advertisement,' to strive and clamour for ministry, just because you have had some great experiences with God. When God wants to use a person, He really knows how, when and where to 'dig us out,' like the way David dug up the five stones from the jungle stream. These stones, smoothed by years of friction with the swift currents of rushing waters were hidden in the stream. They were not exposed. Yet, when the right time came, each one was dug up by David and used in the slaying of the giant.

'Readied Hidden Stones' Will One Day be Dug Up

Each stone has that 'giant-slaying' potential, so it does not matter which one David pulled out of his little bag. If the lesser David knew where to pick up his stones, surely our Lord, the greater David, will know where to look for His *'living or lively stones'* (1 Peter 2:5). **In the meanwhile, may all His living stones allow God to hide them and to let His currents work on them, to smoothen them and to place a 'giant-slaying' potential into each one.** God knows the right time to expose you: after, not before you have been sharpened, polished and smoothened.

If He has not moved you on yet, then could it be that you have not allowed Him to do anything in your life? You have not given Him the time to sharpen and to polish you? God cannot work with a blunt, dull and un-smoothened vessel. When the time came for Elijah to move on, God caused his brook to dry up. He was 'flushed' out of his hiding and out of his secret sanctuary. When the time came for Moses and the nation of Israel to move on, God spoke unmistakably to them, "*You have compassed this mountain long enough, now get up and move on!*" When it was Nehemiah's turn, God stirred up his inner being so that he had no peace to stay within the courts of royalty but had to return to Jerusalem. With Isaiah, the divine vision he saw so impacted him that he had to cast off his complacency and volunteer to be God's mouthpiece. God knows how to move people on and to expose them. There is no need for self-exposure.

God knows that over-exposure is bad for His chosen vessels. Familiarity with people, and with fame, crowd pressure, man's favour and city hype is not conducive in the making of a man/woman of God. If it is, then God would not have hidden His many choice vessels while they were in the making. Jesus knew that being over-exposed, being over-familiar and courting the crowds with fame was not desirable. This is why He often retreated from the crowd to seek solitude with the Father.

Jerusalem, the 'City of Cain'

This is why Jesus did not like to resort in Jerusalem. Jesus loved Jerusalem. He prayed and cried over this city but He did not like to resort there. Instead, He turned to Bethany, to the simple and obscure home of three single persons – Lazarus, Martha and Mary (Matthew 21). He turned away from Jerusalem, the 'holy city', the seat of all power and high living. Jesus knew this place had been impacted with the 'Cain spirit' – the spirit of man's religion, self-will, defiance of God, carnal manipulation, crowd pressure, hype, money, pomposity, unreality and dark wisdom. Jerusalem had always remained unmoved by divine chastisement; it was impenetrable to the love and mercies of God and had repulsed all the dealings of God. Cain, the pioneer of cities, had indeed put his indelible mark upon this city. Jerusalem loved darkness and she silenced God's prophets (Matthew 23).

God hid and raised up His Son in Nazareth and Capernaum, not Jerusalem. Jerusalem killed His prophets and finally His Son and it is still doing the same thing today. Crowd pressure, fame, money, men's manipulation and hype have indeed killed off many of God's chosen vessels. It is sad that many of these excellent people do not know how to flee and hide themselves after they have done their job in their 'Jerusalem'. God cannot keep us if we refuse to be kept (1 John 5:18). God's grace will never fail, but men and women, in their own deliberate choices, can come short of the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15a).

You are not the only 'Giant-Killer'

God wants to hide His saints because He does not want lying vanity, flattery and arrogance to control the person. This will make him think that he is the only 'giant-killer' around or that he is the answer to everything. Just because God has used us once or twice in a mighty way, does not mean that we are the only persons He will use 'mightily.' Elijah thought he was the only one until God told him He had seven thousand others whom He had hidden away who were just as devoted. King David too, thought that he was the only 'giant-killer' in the land. He fell Goliath in the days of his youth, became a household name and a national hero. Thousands celebrated his victory and lined the streets of Jerusalem and sang to him.

But David did not kill his second giant although he tried to. He thought he could, but he failed miserably and almost died at the hands of the second giant until Abishai came to rescue him. This second giant, Ishbibenob, was killed by Abishai, one of his mighty men. There were actually five giants in the land but David killed only one. The other four were brought down by his mighty men. These four men killed giants too, but unlike David, they had no one to celebrate their heroic acts, no one to line the streets to sing for them and they did not become national heroes. However, like all true heroes, they were contented to have fulfilled their destiny by doing their part for their king and their country. Read 2 Samuel 21:16-22.

God's Strategies Are Varied

God knows the vanity in the hearts of men and women – that we want to be known as the only ‘giant-killers’ around. Is this the reason why He did not deliver the second or the third giant into the hands of David? When he failed to kill the second giant, David was deeply humbled, as his mighty men refused to let him go out to fight any more battles! **The time had come for David to go into hiding, to hear a fresh word from God and to resurface only when He told him to.** If God did not say, “*Kill another giant,*” then David should not as there was no way he could have done it, although he wanted to.

Unfortunately, many of God’s great warriors today have made the same mistake David did. They think that they are the only ones who can slay giants. Just because they had killed their first giant, (brought revival to a certain place, great healing to certain individuals, turned things around, etc) **they thought they could continue to kill giants without God’s fresh order and directive.** But they failed to fall the second giant. Instead, the second giant killed them. God is a God of variety. He makes His rainbow with seven colors, not one. His strategies are not the same each time. He has many vessels and many arrows and we are one of those many. It is wrong to think that we are the only ones who can slay giants. Many of us will be shocked in these end times to see many unlikely and unqualified characters (in our eyes) rising to be ‘giant-killers!’

Silently Powerful

We often call the 30 hidden years of Jesus the ‘silent’ years. They might have been silent years but they were definitely years that were impacted with power and meaning. Without these years, He would not have had a successful ministry. I would call them the ‘silently loud’ years where He lived His life so powerfully but silently. At the end of those years, Father God responded from heaven with, “*I am pleased with you!*” God kept His Son hidden for those long years so that **the Son could learn submission and righteousness and be a silent witness against wicked principalities and powers. A hidden life lived in deep devotion to God is an affront to wicked spirits** and God takes notice of these lives like He did the lives of 7,000 devoted men He hid in the days of the godless king Ahab.

The prophet Samuel also lived a hidden and quiet life at Ramah but his life was powerful for God took notice of it and used it to cover an entire nation. I want to share the following paragraphs I wrote in, “*ONE SHALL CHASE A THOUSAND.*”

“Samuel’s greatest gift to the nation was the moral grandeur of his character. It was his uncompromising and pure life in an age of compromise and defilement that attracted the eyes of God and arrested the ruin of his people. When men live like this, I am sure their lives will affect even the realm of the spirit – the realm of angels and demons. Isn’t it amazing that when Samuel was alive, the Philistines, Israel’s despicable and most troublesome enemies could not gain an upper hand over Israel. During his days as judge, the Philistines could not return to the borders of Israel.

God must have used his hidden life to govern and to ‘police’ the spirit realm so that no demonic strongholds or spiritual wickedness in those heavenly places could break through. Yes! One life lived in righteousness before God is powerful! That one life did not just ‘chase a thousand,’ in the natural

realm, it also chased thousands upon thousands in the spiritual realm, subjugating and subduing wicked spirits in the heaventies.”

Like Samuel, Jesus lived out those 30 years of His life in quietude and obscurity but His silence spoke very loudly to Father God in heaven. When He was baptized by John at the end of those 30 years, Father God Himself endorsed His devoted life of righteousness by declaring, *“You are my servant-son, I am so pleased with you.”* What was God pleased with? Definitely not with His ministry because Jesus had not started any ministry yet. Father God had been watching the private behaviour of His Son for 30 years and **He was pleased with the way His Son had lived.** This is why His public ministry was so powerful – it was girded by 30 years of righteous living. **Jesus has, in His 30 years of silent but righteous living, taught us that greatness does not lie in what we do; greatness lies in what we are before God, not before man.**

For 30 years, Jesus, the Son of God had allowed Himself to be ‘fitted’ into a human body. He lived out His life in a lowly and humble household where He submitted Himself to learning some of these basic skills.

2

BASIC SKILLS

1. LEARNING HOW TO READ

A. The Scriptures

Jesus hid for 30 years and then ‘surfaced’ and was baptized by John the Baptist. Immediately after His baptism, the Spirit of God drove Him into the wilderness to hide again for another 40 days. When He began His public ministry, nothing could stand in His way. When He spoke, He had the authority not only to preach, but also to exorcise demons, to heal, to raise the dead, to denounce and to command.

His prowess in preaching, teaching, expounding and dividing the word of God was soon noted when He entered the synagogue to read from the prophet Isaiah. Those who heard Him were stricken with awe and wonder because there was such a certainty and a directness about His teaching. His teaching was “*not as the scribes*”. This meant His teaching was uncommon and distinct. It stood in a class of its own. Jesus did not preach to people, He preached **at wicked principalities and evil spirits which controlled people**. When these diabolical beings were hit, the people that they controlled reacted – in very ugly ways.

It was the same with the apostles. When spirits were hit through their strong preaching, the spirits reacted with such anger that they caused the people they controlled to gnash their teeth and become murderous. The reason why Jesus had this distinction in His preaching and teaching is because He did not only preach, teach or quote the scriptures – He lived them. **His public reading and teaching of God’s word was powerful because He had first lived them privately... for 30 years.**

He also knew how to accurately divide the word of God by separating the two prophecies on the different events of His coming. The prophet Isaiah saw His first and His second coming as one event calling it “*the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance*” (Isaiah 61:2). But Jesus knew the difference between the two. He knew that “*the acceptable year of the Lord*” (1st coming) and the “*day of His vengeance*” (2nd coming) were two separate events. The prophet Isaiah could not see as sharply as He did and linked them as one event in his prophecy but Jesus’ sharp and prophetic eye separated the two events as they were to be thousands of years apart from one another. This was why He did not read fully all of Isaiah’s prophecies but stopped at “*the acceptable year of the Lord*”. He closed the scroll at Luke 4:20. He knew that His first coming was to usher in God’s unmerited grace but His second coming would be to bring in God’s judgment.

No one can publicly preach or teach the scriptures powerfully if they have not first read, studied or lived them powerfully in private. King David could kill Goliath in public because he already had some private practice with killing the lion and bear. If you think God has called you into the ministry, then spend time with the scriptures. Read them, study them and practise them so that you can preach them.

If you are passionate about the word of God, then

- (i) Read the scriptures in different translations. This will help to take away boredom or ‘blind spots’ you may have developed towards God’s word because of familiarity.
- (ii) Use a big Bible with plenty of margin space so that you can write down what God reveals to you as you read.
- (iii) Use markers of different colours to mark out different themes/ topics (God’s Dealings, God’s Standard, God’s Commands, God’s Warnings, God’s Promises, God’s Rhema to me, etc).
- (iv) Ask questions as you read. God will give you the answers.
- (v) Respond spontaneously as you read. Let the anger, grief, gratitude, conviction or even unbelief, surface as you read.

Cry when it is necessary to cry, laugh when you think it is funny. Talk to God as you read. Remember the Bible is not only God speaking to you, it is God **speaking into your life**. **We often fail because we do not understand and practise the scriptures (Matthew 22:29) which actually have active-searching, purifying, energetic and efficacious power.** You must know that:

‘The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers.

Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practise it to be holy.

It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword and the Christian’s charter.

Here Paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good the design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet.

Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a Paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and will be remembered forever.

It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labourer, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.’

(Author unknown)

B. Other Materials

It is sad that with the advent of globalization, many have forsaken the wholesome and godly habit of reading, of sitting down with a good book. Instead, people today, young and old, prefer to ‘log into’ and ‘punch into.’ The habit of sitting down with good and wholesome books has been forsaken at a price – a costly one. Just look at the present generation of young people, Christian and non-Christian alike. In spite of receiving the best in academic, material, financial, medical and technological fields, many still do not possess depth in their character. Here are four reasons why apprentices in ministry should never forsake this wholesome habit of reading if they want to grow in the Lord.

- (i) We are truly ‘what we eat,’ and ‘what we eat’ is surely more than physical food. If we have been feeding ourselves with the right mental and spiritual materials, this will be reproduced in our lives and ministry. I do not know whether Jesus read other books and materials (were there any in His times?) but we, in order to be a good minister of Jesus Christ, should cultivate the habit of reading. Reading will produce **a depth within** us. Depth means capacity and as God’s workmen we should have that capacity to contain and contain and contain and also the capacity to release and release and release (like a river that does not run dry,) with a word for every occasion. The present generation is shallow because it does not read. This is why they find it hard to overcome problems and young minds are breaking down everywhere, from Malaysia (one in five youths are developing mental problems and there are 47 new addicts daily), to Beijing with 30 million youths who have mental problems.
- (ii) When we read, we automatically open for ourselves **another avenue of ministry**. Instead of running from counsellors to counsellors and from church to church to

‘spill’ out our problems to people, we should learn to have more self-containment. Sit down with either the Bible or a good book and expect God to speak and minister to us through this avenue. The great news is that He does! I have very often received more than answers when I read. I receive cleansing, fresh revelation and a deep uplifting of my faith.

- (iii) Do you want to fellowship with great minds and godly people? There are so few of these people around today. People who know self-denial, people who would give up everything, including marriage, career, their very lives, to preach the gospel are rare today. Today, we have many who can talk, preach and teach but how many live it out? Great minds, great hearts and great faith are rare today. But you can still find them if you know where to look for them! There they are, on our book shelves, waiting to fellowship with us and to tell us how to run the race well and to travel this narrow and distinct road of the cross with joy. They had walked the road before us.

It is important who we fellowship with. Turkeys and chickens move in droves. They walk around aimlessly, without any dignity or discernment, picking and eating things off the dirt floor. They cackle and cluck, and they are noisy. Noisy, because they ‘talk’ about everything, including things they do not understand. We have plenty of them in Christendom today. Gossipy, aimless, unproductive, covetous, carnal and Christians without vision. Do you truly want to fellowship with them?

Eagles are different. These ‘masters of the skies’ fly alone, soaring over vast areas for prey. They always fly with a sense of great majesty and concentration because they are sure of their direction and once they detect their prey they will not be distracted. They will pounce on the victim with such speed, energy and fearsome force that there is no way its prey can escape. Their attacking technique allows them to actually hunt prey far larger than themselves. Eagles are sure of their direction. They definitely do not eat or cackle as they fly because all of their powers are concentrated on their flight and their prey.

I want to fellowship with eagles, but where do I find these ‘eagle’ men and women? Where are the people who possess great spiritual fortitude and uncompromising values today? Can they make themselves available to me whenever I need them?

Thank God I can still find them – not in downtown cafes or in the common marketplace and hardly in churches. But I can find them in books! They are still living and speaking strongly through their writings and I can fellowship with them anytime I want to. In the middle of the night, in the early hours of the morning, in the afternoon, at night. You too, can do the same. If God is taking you through something and you realize that there is no one who could understand you, then turn to some of the writings of our spiritual forefathers. They may say something that will invigorate you and give you greater clarity about what you are going through. Sit down with their books and fellowship with them! Close proximity ‘bequeaths’ similarity. As you

read their books and fellowship with them, you may soon take on their anointing and be able to do great works like them!

*(iv) Reading from the writings of great men and women will not only provide the fellowship, it will also provide the **mentorship!** How wonderful. Yes, we can **get these great men/women who have long died, to actually mentor us.** Every young 'minister-in-training needs mentoring, but there are not many today who can do it and who wants to do it. I think it is good to have a few mentors, not just one because no one is perfect. God will bring different mentors to us during the different seasons of our lives but the best mentors I have ever had were those great saints who have died! They may not be around physically to do any work, but their lives and their writings still speak because greatness is in the living of a life, not the 'doing' of it.*

I have personally drawn from the teachings and the writings of these great people: Watchman Nee, Thomas A Kempis, Martin Luther, St. Augustine, Madam Guyon, Jesse Penn Lewis, C.S. Lewis, Tozer, Hudson Taylor, Elliot, Wigglesworth, Lloyd Jones, Spurgeon, Wesley, Livingstone and Lindsay. I was then starting out as a young, carnal and starry-eyed pastor. Many of the things that these great people wrote still have an effect on me today.

Martin Luther, the great reformist, read and studied the writings of St. Augustine. He drew strength from this monk who had lived so many years before him. When there was no one to stand alongside Luther, God caused him to draw strength by reading from the memoirs and the writings of a dead monk! I am thankful to God that often, strength has also come to me in this way – as I read the right book at the right time. It may be written either by someone still living or who may have passed away. Part of the right beginning I had as a young minister was that I had read the right books. What a privilege it is to be mentored by these great saints

who had fought a good fight and who are now cheering us on.

Many of today's Christians do not seem to have that spiritual solidarity and fortitude because they have forsaken what they should not have forsaken – the love of reading. When they severed themselves from this wholesome and habit of reading, they did not realize that they had also, indirectly severed themselves from the godly influence of our godly forefathers and/or our godly contemporaries. It is sad that so many Christians today have no inkling about the sacrifices, the pain and the contributions of Christians in the past. Many are not aware that if it were not for their sacrifices, we would not be where we are today. One lady, president of her women's group, asked me whether Martin Luther is the name of a leather product!

In spite of the many modern avenues of ministry made available to us, (counselling, worship symposium, inner healing, deliverance, prayer workshop, etc.) so many of us are still not overcomers. We cannot say 'no' to materialism, sensuality and dark wisdom. Thousands upon thousands of God's people have been assimilated into the new world culture with its ungodly global trends. "Reading is out, and the net and the mobile is in." That is the message of the day. The net and the mobile phone may well be part of the flood that will take them if they are not careful.

We need to 'stay on course' and reading from the writings of godly men/women, past or present, will help us 'stay on course.' Church entertainment, hype, pseudo-spiritual activities and different spiritual 'fads' cannot keep us for

they have no deep spiritual impact. It is time we return to this wholesome habit of sitting down with a good book to fellowship with great minds and great hearts and be mentored by people of great faith.

2. OBSERVING LIFE

Great men know how to observe. They need not be taught all the time. Jesus observed, King David observed. The apostle Paul observed. This is why their teachings and writings are so uncommon and deep. They were men of God as well as ‘men of the world,’ in the sense that they knew what was happening around them. They did not speak ‘above the heads’ of the common people who heard them. This is why they could meet human needs. It is vital for us to remember that not everything in life can be taught. **Often, the most powerful things in life have ‘to be caught’** and observant people know how to catch them. This is what apprenticeship is all about. Let the apprentice follow the master so that he can catch some of his/her ‘unspoken’ skills through observation.

Jesus knew the power of observation. This was why He did not have a classroom for His twelve disciples. He kept them close to Him so that they could observe Him and catch what needed to be caught! Jesus Himself learned through observation. He said that He only did those things which He saw His Father did. His parables and stories reveal to us that He had sharp eyes. First, He observed the farmer at work, sowing seeds which fell onto different types of soil. Some yielded a great harvest of fruits while others had different destinies. Then He came out with the parable of the Sower and his seeds. He observed how a distraught woman looked for her lost piece of silver and an upset shepherd sought for his sheep. Then He used them as examples in His parables.

If you have been observant as you read the scriptures, you will notice that Jesus’ teachings covered a wide variety of subjects. They included precious pearls, yeast in a cake, swine wallowing in the mud, harvest, fig trees, houses built on different foundations, servants and their masters, brides and bridegrooms, etc. Jesus did not only know God’s word, He knew life! He knew every mother called her loving child a ‘little lamb.’ Thus, when he held the hand of the little dead child, He said, “*Tabita, (little lamb) arise.*”

King David, the lesser Messiah, was also a man of deep observation. He wrote about flowers, vegetation, storms, sailors, fountains, rivers, showers, stars, brooks, animals, waves, etc. in his writings.

The language in Psalm 19:1-3 is simply breath-taking. He must have written this psalm after nights of deep observation of the heavens, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.”* David did not waste his hidden years. He spent those years in intimacy with God and God kept him in contact with the wonders of nature and thus, with Himself.

The apostle Paul was truly wonderful in his observation. He observed how a building was constructed, how a competitor should behave in a race, how a plant grew, the patience of a farmer, the different parts in a soldier’s armour, etc. and he compared all these to the life of a Christian. Would he have known if he had not observed? The apostle John too was observant. He talked about hearing, seeing and looking upon the Word of life as He was manifested to them. While others just looked at Jesus, he and the rest of the apostles observed and because they were observant, they could see what others could not see. They developed faith and unfeigned trust in Him and years later, were able to ‘declare’ Him to others so that others too will share the same faith (1 John 1:1-3).

It is important we ask God for keen observation powers as we launch into ministry – this may spell the difference between failure and success. God can be seen and heard not only in churches, seminaries and Bible schools – He is everywhere to the keen and observant eye. Much of what I have learnt in ministry which has remained helpful to me this day did not come from the seminary classroom, it came from observation. Three years of theological study cannot do much for a person who has to minister till Jesus comes! So I have

to learn on my own through observation, reading, communication and interaction with people in ministry. Observant preachers are interesting preachers because they **preach to people**, not **above people or beyond people**. People are able to understand them and relate to what they are speaking because what they preach and teach is real and it meets needs.

3. DEVELOP MANLY/WOMANLY SKILLS

Why did Jesus learn carpentry during those hidden years when his destiny had nothing to do with it? Imagine, the Son of God had to work with wood, nails, hammer etc. daily for almost 30 years. I believe He did this for two reasons. **One, He had to learn submission and obedience to earthly authorities. Two, He had to learn some basic knowledge and acquire manly skills.** Carpentry was one of these skills because men from poor families in those days were either shepherds or carpenters.

This was why He would have stayed in the Temple and He talked about doing His Father's business. But Jesus subjected Himself to submit and obey His parents and returned with them. He hid Himself for another eighteen years, which was not easy. Jesus submitted to His earthly parents with joy and learned his earthly and menial trade, not grudgingly, but joyfully and with all His heart.

This was how He graduated as a 'maestro' in His trade. Jesus was called a 'tekton' of Nazareth, (*Is not this the carpenter (the tekton), the son of Mary?*) A 'maestro' is a master builder or a master craftsman (Mark 6:3). The test of a master builder was the fashioning of the yoke for an animal. When the yoke is laid on the neck of the animal it must be so well fitting that it will not chafe the neck of the animal. What did Jesus say about His yoke? He said, "*My yoke is well fitting (easy)*" (*Matthew 11:30*). Yes, if the yoke, whether spiritual or physical is fashioned or crafted by the Son of God, it will not chafe. It will always be 'well fitting.'

It is sad that today, many 'ministers-in-training' do not see the need for this vital process of submission to an earthly authority and the need to develop some basic manly or womanly skills. God calls us to serve Him but He does not call us out of our humanity. Basic manly and womanly skills are important to every one. Many 'apprentices' in ministry loathe to do menial tasks because they think (i) these lowly work is 'unspiritual' and would lower their dignity,

(ii) that humble assignments would be a waste of their talents and academic degrees and (iii) that these mundane chores have nothing in common with their spiritual destiny. Did Jesus have the same mind set? Did He consider His 30 years as wasted years ? Far from it.

As Jesus learned submission and did His carpentry work joyfully during those 30 years, God was not only pleased with Him, **He was busy building something very powerful into His spirit man. As Jesus submitted, God increased His degree of authority.** Spiritual authority is always released to us in accordance to our spiritual submission. **The more submissive we are, the more authoritative we will be. Anyone who wants to move in spiritual authority must first move in spiritual submission – there is no short cut.** The scriptures mean when it says that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). In the eyes of men, these years may be wasted, but not in the eyes of God.

God wanted His Son to learn carpentry because God wanted His Son, as a man, to learn submission and also to acquire some basic manly skills. One should first be a man before becoming a ‘man of God’ and one should be a woman before becoming a ‘woman of God.’ Men should know some basic manly skills and women should know some basic womanly skills. These basic principles must be established. As a man, Jesus could put together anything with a hammer and nails. Can you? As a woman, we should at least be able to whip up a meal, do some basic baking, know how to clean a fish, sew a button back, make beds and a cup of tea. Can you?

As God’s workmen, we must learn how to pray, preach and teach, read the scriptures, lead worship, encourage others, chair meetings, conduct funerals, weddings, etc. but we also have to eat, drink, live in a house with pipes or electrical items that malfunction at times, sit on furniture that comes loose, wear clothes with buttons and stitches that come off. Don’t we? Skilled human hands are needed to put them together again. These things do not repair by themselves because we

pray, speak in tongues and declare scripture verses.

Jesus was truly a ‘man of God,’ but He was also a man of many skills and a very practical man. I have a feeling He could bake a cake as He talked about yeast in a cake. He knew about sheep-rearing as He constantly referred to Himself as the good shepherd, and He must have known the nature of sheep so well. He knew about farming as He talked about how different types of ground are bad or good for the seeds. He was skillful in handling crowds as we see Him getting His disciples to organize the people to distribute food to the multitudes. He definitely knew how to start a fire and clean fish as He prepared breakfast for His disciples.

4. LEARNING FAMILY LIFE

God raised up His own Son by putting Him into domestic surroundings or a family setting, not by isolating Him on a mountain top. Why? So that He could grow up normal, knowing about family responsibilities and inter-personal relationships. Some Bible scholars believe that Joseph died early and that Jesus had to shoulder the responsibilities in His family. God wanted His Son to grow up to be a responsible, normal and natural person. In fact, Jesus was so normal and natural (like the man next door) that when He claimed to be the supernatural son of God, the Jews wanted to stone Him! If Jesus had appeared ‘weird,’ like so many ‘holy’ men, they might have accepted Him!

The life of Jesus is a living testimony that the supernatural often comes to us in natural and normal ways and only people with sharp spiritual insight can discern its source. The Jews could not accept the fact that the Son of God was so normal, natural and ordinary. He worked with a hammer and nails for about 30 years, ate what they ate, lived in the same type of house they lived in, drank from the same well, wore the same clothes, etc.

Jesus was like any other man on the outside but He certainly was not like them on the inside. When the occasion demanded, He rose to be extraordinary, like when He was out at sea with His disciples. Ordinary men would have succumbed to fear and panic but He was so at peace that He slept soundly. When He was awakened, He stood against the storm, rebuked it and proved that He was master of the sea. What a man! No seminary, synagogue or university on earth could produce such a man – a man who could master even the storms at sea.

He walked the streets like any normal man, putting His feet solidly on the ground. He did not fly neither was He levitated at any time. The most spiritual and godly man on earth behaved normally and naturally, but unfortunately, so many ‘spiritual’ people today behave in a weird and abnormal manner. **It behooves us to remember that most of the time, God comes to people in common and natural**

ways, and when we yield, we break into our spiritual destiny.

This is why **submission to those over you**, i.e. your spiritual elders, your parents, your bosses, etc. is important. Manners, courtesy and hospitality are also vital. King David would never have broken into his spiritual destiny if he had not been submissive to his father who requested that he ran an errand for him. Going to the battlefield to deliver food to his brothers was not like going to Disneyland but David obeyed his father. Who do you think wanted to move David out of the wilderness from watching sheep and into the battlefield to slay Goliath? God!

He came to David at the right time but what if David had been an un-submissive son who refused to go to the battlefield? He would have missed God's appointed time and missed his date with destiny which included becoming the greatest king of Israel. Oh, how I wish young ministers in training are taught these vital things in the Bible schools, – **that the supernatural God usually works in very natural and ordinary ways, so natural and ordinary that we could easily miss Him.** The scriptures warn us to be courteous and hospitable at all times, lest we are visited by supernatural beings (angels) who come to us in natural and ordinary ways as 'country bumpkins' or beggars.

Yes, God will first take a man through the regular before He takes him into the supernatural. That was the way He raised up His own Son – by putting Him into a regular family for 30 years before He raised Him up to take on the supernatural. Jesus knew family responsibilities. He must have been a good brother to James, otherwise how could He lead him into such a faith in Himself? We know He was a responsible son who cared for His mother even in His dying hours. While dying on the cross, He assigned His disciple John to take care of His mother. A man in excruciating pain still thinking of His family obligations – what a man.

Have you ever wondered why God took the great prophet Elijah out of his beloved sanctuary and put him into the household of the widow and her son? It must have been difficult for this fiercely independent prophet to be ‘holed’ up with this family where both the members – a penniless widow and a young boy seemed so in need of his help. Yes, he had drunk from a brook that made no noise and was fed by ravens that did not ask for help, but now he must learn to ‘give and take,’ and the best way to learn it is to live with a family and share some of its responsibilities

If you do not want any family responsibilities, then isolate yourself totally from people. If you have a family, then you cannot run away from these basic family responsibilities where leaking roofs and pipes have to be fixed, daily meals have to be prepared, clothes must be washed and ironed, the pantry must be filled and children must be properly ‘fathered’ and ‘mothered.’ We cannot allow our children to run wild like chickens and ducks and then call them home when night falls! A true man or a true woman of God knows family responsibilities and does not run away from them. Single people also attend to family matters and see to dripping taps as well. God will never be glorified when we become so busy in God’s work that our children and spouses are neglected.

5. LEARNING TO PRAY

Having the right beginning in ministry will spell the difference between success and failure. A seminary or a Bible school that does not teach its students to pray and connect with God is a Bible school that is not worth attending and Bible school students who do not learn to pray while in a seminary or a Bible school need not go through any graduation ceremony – they have already failed. They are already defeated even before they begin. God gives us time to go through spiritual training and preparation and a great part of this training and preparation is in the ‘spirit’ man. We must know how to connect with God and draw strength and wisdom from Him to do His work accurately and to fight principalities and powers.

‘Sharpened’ spirits are needed for accuracy and accuracy are indispensable in the work of God. Why? **Because God’s work is not ‘frivolous activities.’** So many activities in our churches today dissipate our strength, leave our spirits ‘dry,’ and worst of all, **they have no eternal validity.** A great part of God’s workforce is involved only in ‘frivolous activities that bear no eternal validity.’ To toil all night with no catch of fish was indeed a frivolous activity which dissipated the strength of the disciples of Jesus Christ (Luke 5: 5-6). But when they heard from the Lord and they obeyed His word, they cast their nets in the exact spot where the Lord said they should. Their nets almost broke with the huge catch. O, to be able to hear from the Lord in clarity and accuracy!

An unsharpened spirit is like a woodcutter with an unsharpened axe; it is like a soldier who chases a dangerous criminal with an unloaded gun, an artist with missing brushes and a doctor without his stethoscope and his medicines. There is no way we can sharpen our spirit except to spend time in the presence of God. Jesus Christ spent His years preparing for ministry by sharpening His spirit through prayers.

I have been through a Bible College and I know that it is a place where students can backslide easily because it is so full of stress, studies, carnality, competition and complexities. Moving from class to class, writing research papers, music practices, studies, examinations and extra curricular activities can suppress the spirit, causing the student to be unable to connect with God. **Students can ‘say’ prayers but not pray.** We know that saying prayers is different from praying. Jesus noted the difference in the prayers of those spiritual leaders in His days.

Once the clarity, the vibrancy, the accuracy and the intensity have gone out of our prayer life, we will be like the scribes and Pharisees, making many vain repetitions in our prayers without obtaining any results. God hides us so that we can pray, pray and pray and build spiritual bulwarks during these precious times before we go into the ‘battlefield.’ Battlefields are dangerous places where we become either the victor or the victim, the overcomer or the loser.

The most effective way to learn how to pray is to pray and to listen to others as they pray. When Jesus prayed, “ *Father, into Thy hand I commit my spirit,* ” as He was about to expire on the cross, He was actually emulating the prayers of almost every little Jewish boy or girl as they were about to sleep. Jewish parents taught their children to pray this prayer of totally trusting themselves to God at bed time; and Jesus learnt this. Just before He died, He breathed out this prayer, a prayer which no doubt He too, had learned from His own parents. **Prayer has to be learned and God, the Holy Spirit, is our best teacher in this area.** The hidden years of our lives should be years when we learn to pray and to build up spiritual bulwarks against the wicked enemy of our souls.

3

CONCLUSION

During the dark and trying times when Israel was reeling towards apostasy under the reign of the godless king, Ahab, and his wicked wife, Jezebel, God told Elijah that He still had 7,000 devoted men hidden away by Himself. Yes, He had 7,000 but He exposed only one of them in active ministry and it was Elijah. Why? **Because Elijah himself was adequate enough to take on king Ahab and Jezebel.** Seven means perfection or completion and when God revealed to Elijah that He had 7,000 faithful men hidden away, He was saying to Elijah He had the complete number of people needed for His work. No more, no less – it was perfect.

God's Hidden 'Contact Points' are Everywhere

Even now, whenever or wherever He wants to move, these 'contact points' are already there – all over the nations, ready to 'pounce,' ready to 'surface,' ready for duty! God has them sharpened and polished. Now He hides them in the hollow of His hand and His quiver. He will only expose them at the right time. He will not be short-handed in the end times for the 7,000 will be there. This complete and perfect number of polished and sharpened warriors who has not bowed down to the new world culture, who has not assimilated into the present demonic global trends will be like Gideon's intensive army of 300, prepared by God to defeat the Midianites.

O, the wisdom of God! All through the Bible we realize **that God's emphasis has always been on intensity and not on extensiveness.** Elijah was a very, very intense man and having one of him was enough for the entire nation. God did not need to call on the other 7,000 so He just hid them. Like David, using one stone was enough to hit Goliath. He was so precise with his aim, so skillful with his sling and so powerful with his strength. There was no miss. Wham! One shot, that was all it took to fall that taunting uncircumcised block of flesh who had defied God for so long. Permit me to share some paragraphs from my book "*ONE SHALL CHASE A THOUSAND.*"

“God is not interested in working with numbers but with **the minority whose hearts are right before Him.** God did not say that He had too few people to work with, rather He said that He had too many. Remember how He sifted the army of Gideon from 32,000 to just 300? To send 300 unarmed men against the formidable might of the Midianites was military suicide but God did just that! From the way God tested these soldiers, we know that God is not interested in just recruiting men for His work. **He wants men of the right calibre...** and yes, it is also the same for the church. Surely the great need of the church is not for more members but for members of the right calibre.

I wonder how Gideon felt when he saw his army disappearing. To start off with 32,000 and end up with just 300 was not encouraging – not to any man. Why did God dismiss the 31,700 men? Because they failed His test. Like any man, Gideon wanted an extensive army but God wanted an intensive one. The unwanted men were not intense or focused enough to do His great work of tearing down the Midianite stronghold. Extensiveness with no intensity is useless. Remember, **both David and Jesus were men of intensity.**”

The Hidden and Focused Intercessors

Much of God's powerful work has to be done 'underground,' hidden away from the eyes of man. Just think about the powerful hidden prayer ministry of **Simeon and Anna**. This elderly couple literally prayed until the 'new broke upon the old.' They were both living under the old dispensation of the law but they prayed for God's new dispensation of grace to be manifested and to break through at the coming of the Messiah. Both were powerful 'hidden' watchmen who kept their posts faithfully until they were called home.

The Hidden and Powerful 'Disciple-Maker'

Ananias, the devoted disciple whom God used to follow up on the apostle Paul was another powerful 'hidden' vessel who surfaced only when duty called. After his ministry, he went back into hiding again, to pray and to minister to the Lord until there was a need for him to 'resurface'. The apostles in the book of Acts did not expose themselves unnecessarily. Their main duty was to minister to the Lord first and then minister the Word to others. To do this, they had to spend much time in God's presence so that they would have His words to release to others. They tapped into God's presence so that they could carry His presence to others.

The Hidden and Powerful 'Link'

When the devil was after God's public strategic vessel, Elijah, God had a 'hidden' vessel to help him out – a vessel whom He had prepared and hidden for many years. When God spoke of her, he addressed her as a vessel He had 'commanded' to take care of Elijah. This **widow of Zidon** was a great woman for she was willing to show hospitality in the time of famine, willing to share her last meal with others and willing to risk her life to shelter Elijah. Only God could have 'readied' her heart for this great work. Many have applauded Elijah for the great 'open' works he did, but has any one applauded this woman (1 Kings 17:6)? Would God's strategic vessel have lived if it were not for this important 'link' who kept him alive?

What will happen if God has no such 'hidden' vessels and concealed 'links'? King David was God's strategic vessel but what if David did not have a god-fearing father called **Jesse** to father him in the ways of God? David knew God even in the days of his youth and Jesse, his father was the powerful 'hidden' vessel used by God to give David the right beginning. Godly fathers are rare – may God help you to be one. Jesse's godly fathering of his son David reaped great rewards.

Powerful public figures have equally powerful private and 'hidden' figures behind them to influence, to mentor and to guide them into greatness. Glory and applause are given often only to the visible reigning 'kings and queens' but not to the invisible 'king-makers' and the 'queen-makers.' Yes, the Elijahs are applauded, not the widows, the Davids are glorified, not the Jesses. This is the way of man but this is certainly not the way of God. God will never judge the same way as man judges because He is the divine heart-searcher and the divine thought-reader. The Bible says, "*His eyes behold, His eyelids try the children of men*" (*Psalms 11:4b*). God sees into our very hearts and knows that sometimes our outward actions are so high but the inward motives are so low.

The Exposed versus the 'Hidden'

God knows that behind the work of so many public figures, there are many private hands who have worked unnoticed and unappreciated 'behind the scene.' This is why He said, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matthew 19:30) and "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mark 9:41). Whether we are raised up to be strategic public vessels (openly rewarded or applauded) or to be just the 'hidden' links (no earthly acknowledgement or appreciation) is not important. **What is important is: we have broken into our spiritual destiny, filled up the niche that God has carved out for us and has brought Him fulfillment.** Yes, no one may have celebrated you although you too, have killed giants like David did or have raised up the broken walls of Jerusalem like Nehemiah. But rest assured, God knows and to the spiritually mature, this is surely sufficient.

Nehemiah, the Unappreciated Apostolic Builder

Like the great apostolic builder Nehemiah, we must learn to turn to God, not man, for exploits, or for tense and dangerous missions of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's prayer was, "Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people," (Nehemiah 5:19, 13:4, 22, 31). Why did he pray like this? Because he could not find solace, understanding, appreciation, recognition and rewards from those whom he has helped. But because Nehemiah had confidence in God and a clear perspective on issues, he was able to carry on. In spite of what he had done, the people did not set up a monument for him. But a man like Nehemiah needed no monument, no human trumpeting, no beating of the drums, because his own works – the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem, the spiritual reconciliation of Israel to God and the restored city of happy people stood as a monument for him. It is a valid testimony, forever, to the sacrifice of his life.

True Rewards Come Later

Those who are mature in Christ will know that true recognition, recompense and rewards come from the results of the work we have done. They also come later – when we see Jesus face to face. I remember reading the touching story of an aged missionary who returned home to England and realized that there was no one to welcome him back. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he told the Lord, "Is this the treatment I get from home after spending 46 years on the mission field?" Instantly, the Lord told him, "Son, you are not home yet!"

Moses, after the many years of trying service, was seemingly not rewarded. Even his intense desire of setting foot in the Promised Land was not granted by God. God did not even permit him to pray about it! However, we realize that what Moses did not get in his earthly life, he received it in the next life because Moses did enter into the Promised Land! The disciples saw him there on the mountain conversing with Elijah and Jesus at Jesus' transfiguration! So, stop thinking about rewards now, stop thinking about 'making it into the big time', stop thinking about having man's applause and recognition and being a public figure. Just be faithful to God and if He does not choose to expose you, then continue to rest with contentment in the hollow of His precious hand and in the safety of His quiver.

Today's Trend has deviated from God's Ancient Ways

Do not try carnal ways and means to expose yourself by following ungodly and dishonest ways to 'sell or to market your ministry to others.' Today's trend of ministry is *"to do everything you can to expose yourself, pass out name cards that lie even about your qualifications, get the right contacts and push open doors for yourself."* Indeed, the *"crying, the lifting up, and the causing of the voice to be heard in the street"* (something totally forbidden for God's true servants, Isaiah 49:2) today is frightening. There is too much self-advertisement, self-assertion and self-promotion and the clamour and clutter, the strife and push, the hype and lying vanities are equivalent to those of Hollywood. Truly, we have deviated from God's ancient ways and pushed back the ancient stones.

Cheaters are not Crowned

But you, as God's true workman and precious vessel, must know that the scripture says, "*He is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules*" (2 Timothy 2:5). You must be willing **to let Him crown you and expose you in His time**, not yours. Yes, until God feels it is time to take you out of His quiver and to position you in His bow so that you can be shot – right into the heart of the target, you must have joyful patience. When God 'fires' you, you must hit your target with precision, accuracy, thoroughness and power. You can do it because you have been sharpened and polished. All it takes is one shot and the job is done! The object is fallen! The Archer is glorified! And you are fulfilled, just so fulfilled.

Now the Archer comes to the spot where His precious arrow has landed. He stoops to pick it up. He looks at it with delight, kisses it, cleans it and then puts it back into His precious quiver again. He must not lose this precious arrow because He plans to use it again and again and again. This is why He must hide it. Hide it safely within His quiver. Yes, rest there, God's perfect arrow, God's precious arrow, God's uncommon arrow and God's distinct arrow, for you have found the safest place on earth. Rest there until He takes you out again in His time. In the meantime, just stay hidden and minister to Him and continue to let Him sharpen and polish you. **Live this way, and you will always have that freshness and originality. You need not burn out, freak out, be embittered out, or drop out.**

God's Rest is the Most Powerful Attainment

Yes, rest there, for rest is the greatest attainment for God's people. If you have found rest, it means you have found His favour for He gives rest to those He favours. Christ came to bring us rest not only from the guilt of sin, but **also rest from self-righteous striving and rest from the fear of man.** The limitations of our own nature, our own besetting sins and failure to understand the word of God have often disturbed our rest and tranquility in Him. It is self-centeredness that drives us to compete, compare, to fight and to strife. Oh, may

God who has given us new life also empower us to stop the cluttering, the clamouring, the striving and the pushing.

Jesus Christ, our precious Lord has come to call us away from it all. His system has no imposing, pompous and unreal exterior as Judaism or as the ‘Christianity’ of today. Man’s religion, always so full of ‘compulsive or obsessive running’, outward display and pomposity is indeed a heavy and ‘restless’ yoke and burden. This is why Jesus denounced the religion of the Pharisees and their system intensely by associating them with such words as, ‘excesses, extortion, uncleanness, hypocrisy and wickedness’ (Matthew 23). I echo the prayer of Art Katz, *“My God, do we have the courage to bring that system to an end?”*

We should not allow the devil to deceive us by taking us back to the defilement of willful comparison, competition, complexities and complications. Remember Jesus Christ came to call us out of all these so that **we can take His yoke and bear His burden. And His yoke is easy and His burden is light.** Throughout church history, the active effect of true reformation and Holy Spirit revival has always been the end of all personal caprice, selfish efforts and fleshly assertion. We will have the ability to hear the powerful voice of the Lord’s forerunner, John the Baptist still ringing loud and clear, *“Make His paths straight!”* It simply means, God’s means and methods are uncomplicated, uncluttered and free of complexities. Let’s always keep it this way because this is God’s ancient way.

“My God, bless you for a love that:
Will not let us go,
Will not allow us to play games
Will not allow us to make a sham of faith and turn a holy calling into a
career
or profession.

Forgive us my God, to any degree to which that has come into our
being. May we:
Spit it out,
Vomit it out,
May we be as dead men who don't know how to walk and have to
go back to square one.

Begin all over again to learn what it means to be a servant of the
Most High, who can find Your counsel in the holy place and in the
secret place, hear it and speak it without fear.

We don't have to send people home happy. We can send them
home restless, disquieted and trust You in the night hours to
perform that interior work when the word breaks as the hammer
upon the rock and the word is fire in the bones and it will have a
result of a kind that cannot be measured.” — Art Katz