



Icon of St. Paul from the  
Coptic Church of St  
Mercurius, Old Cairo

H.H. Pope Shenouda III said that the major difference between the saints and us is **SERIOUSNESS**. The strength of our service is directly related to our seriousness regarding the service and our spiritual condition.

### + ARE WE SERIOUS ABOUT SERVING?

We should always be serious about the words in the Holy Bible: if we are, we will not be tempted to lie, cheat, or curse our neighbors.

- The people of Nineveh took the prophet Jonah's words seriously. They believed that what he was saying was true.

*In the Holy Book of II Timothy 2:3-7 it states, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things."*

- The first example St. Paul used when writing to St Timothy was that of a soldier (i.e. a life of discipline)

You must take your suffering as a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ

The metaphor of a soldier is frequently used. (See: Philemon 1:2 and Philippians 2:25)

The first thing that the term "soldier" brings to mind is a serious person (who must have 2 important characteristics: commitment and dedication).

We are soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore we should not entangle ourselves with things of this world, but we should work hard to please Him who entrusted us-the Lord Jesus Christ. We are soldiers in the army of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore we should not be distracted by anything else.

- The second example that St. Paul used was that of an athlete

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules

Athletes must go through hardships and be extremely serious and dedicated to the game.

- The third example that St. Paul used was that of a farmer

A hard-working farmer ought to have the first share of the fruits, not the lazy farmer

In order for us to reap from our ministry, we must be hard-workers

+ WHAT ARE THE RULES OF SERVICE/  
FEATURES OF A SERIOUS SERVANT?

1. Faithfulness: a serious servant is a faithful one

In the Holy Gospel of St Matthew 24:45 we are told,  
*"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?"*

Faithfulness means that someone is doing their service correctly & giving the glory to God, instead of to themselves

You must have wisdom: if you are faithful, committed, and devout, but not wise, you will lose many souls. If we are wise (and know how to serve God) but are not faithful, we will lose souls.

*"to give them food in due season"*

We, as servants, are responsible for providing nourishment:

We must provide our children with spiritual food

We must make sure that what we are giving these kids is proper-is it the proper spiritual food?

We must make sure that this spiritual food is given at the proper time (the proper time can include visitations to the children's houses, phone calls, etc.). The effect that you can have on a Sunday school student by simply calling them to see how they are is immense-you cannot fathom the type of impact you will have on them if you do something as simply as to call them.

We cannot give our children spiritual food that is too heavy for them (because they will not understand it). Nor can we give them spiritual food that is too light for them (because they will not gain anything from it-they will not learn).

The Holy Book of Revelations 2:10 teaches us, "*Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.*"

Commitment and Dedication: The Holy Book of Proverbs 22:13 informs us, "*The slothful man saith, there is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.*" In the Holy Book of Proverbs 26:13 it states, "*The slothful man saith, there is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.*"

Why is it that we insist on being on time, even early, to work and to school, and yet we don't do the same thing for church?

The Holy Book of Jeremiah 48:10 tells us, "*Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness.*"

In the Holy Book of Proverbs 10:4 we read, "*A slack hand causes poverty but the hand of the diligent makes rich.*" (The harvest-many people-will be lost because of the slack hand).

In the Holy Book of Proverbs 18:9 we find written, "*He who is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys [souls].*"

Remember that the Lord cursed the man who buried his talents.

The Holy Book of Proverbs 6:6-8 says, "*Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.*"

This is a verse that shows us that we should not make excuses. The ant, which has no overseer or captain, automatically knows what it must do in order to survive.

2. Caring: A servant should care about every person and every soul. We should not give rest to our eyes until we have satisfied our spirits that our students are safe (physically, mentally, emotionally, etc.).

Do we have zeal about every person in our class? Do we notice when someone doesn't come to class? Do we bother to ask why they didn't come?

The prophet and shepherd David is an example to all of us: he would not compromise even one of his sheep to the bear and the lion when they attacked-he was even willing to risk his own life in order to save his sheep. We must seek after the LOST and bring them back to the church-it is our responsibility. We will be judged if we do not make EVERY EFFORT to bring back the lost:

*The Holy Book of Ezekiel 3:18 states, "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul."*

3. Responsible: a serious servant must watch every aspect of service. Being a Sunday school servant is

not just about teaching a lesson in Sunday school-it's about bringing souls back to the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, do we pray for our class? Samuel the prophet said, "*moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you*" (1 Samuel 12:23). If we are not praying for these people, we are sinning against God.

We should pray for our class not as a whole, but individually-each one by his or her name.

4. Prioritizes: A good servant knows what is important in his or her life. We should know where service comes in. Is it first in our lives, or does it come after work, school, family, friends, etc.?

Common to all believers is being regular in prayer, fasting, confession, and communion. What touches the life of God's servants and makes them strong in service and spiritual condition is their love for the service. To take the service seriously, love of service should be the strongest factor governing your life. The Lord rejects virtue we accomplish without the spirit of love or service that we perform. Love raised the Lord Jesus Christ upon the Holy Cross. Love attracted Saul of Tarsus at the doors of Damascus and made him a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "The love of Christ surrounds me." It

converted the great persecutor into a great apostle, missionary, and servant.

Love overcomes all obstacles of the service. Love endures all difficulties of the service. When the servants' heart is filled with love he becomes serious, strong, and zealous. Nehemiah's love was strong and zealous. He said, "*let us build the gates of Jerusalem and not be a reproach*" (Nehemiah 2:17). Jerusalem was the church and society of the faithful. It needed zealous servants like Nehemiah.

May we all pray to serve with seriousness, strength and with unsurpassing love.

H.G. Bishop Youssef  
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern  
United States