



The tie that binds both happiness and spiritual service is a fundamentally simple one, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35).

The Lord Jesus Christ not only taught giving; but His very life demonstrated emphatically that serving others is an essential component of spiritual

happiness. A person may have unprecedented gifts and talents; but if they choose not to share them with others, those gifts and talents will not bring about the expected fulfillment.

*"There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities but it is the same God Who works in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (I Corinthians 12:4-7).*

***The first step*** towards an enriched, fulfilling service to God is to recognize that gifts and talents are ultimately God's and His alone. They should not be considered yours neither by you nor by others.

No two servants possess exactly the same identical gifts. It was only the perfect Lord Jesus Christ Who had possessed all the gifts and talents during His life on earth. God's plan is to assimilate all the infinite

number of gifts and talents He has distributed to us all, and make them function together as one. It is a biblically documented mandate that everyone combine their talents and gifts laboring together in love towards one unified goal without any underlying human dissension. We should embrace this as an expected behavior from us springing from an internal conviction rather than a waited-for effort; if we truly believe our gifts and talents are from God to be utilized for the advancement of His kingdom.

***The second step*** towards a happy blessed service is resolved in making a commitment to share our gifts and talents with others. Having the desire to serve is certainly essential; but without determination desire is like a candle without a flame. Wishful thinking alone does not make service burn brightly with productivity and success. Rather, commitment extends desire into unconditional, faithful, seven day a week service. Hard working, progressively moving, validated service turns into a labor of love with committed dedicated servants.

Origen (c.248) spoke of the commitment of the church teachers at its inception:

"At the present day, indeed there is a multitude of Christian believers. Not only rich men receive the

teachers of Christianity, but also persons of rank, as well as refined and high-born ladies. Some will perhaps dare to say that it is for the sake of a little glory that certain individuals assume the office of Christian instructors. However it is impossible to reasonably entertain such a notion about Christianity in its beginnings. For back then, the danger incurred was greatest especially by its teachers."

Servants cannot serve two masters. They have to choose either the earthly or the heavenly; but they cannot be attached to both and claim they can serve. *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matthew 6:18). Trying to maintain an attachment to both leads to procrastination in completing service works to the best of one's ability; some readily volunteering their talents and gifts, in addition to sporadic time spent in prayer and preparation for vital services such as deacons' hymns and Sunday School lessons.

***The third step*** following full commitment to His service is having the right attitude in reflecting our gifts and talents. We "choose and wear" our attitude exactly as we do our clothes each and every day. The essential question concerning attitude is, "Does my attitude, supported by my actions, spiritually

encourage others to desire to share their gifts and talents, furthering and ensuring the growth of the Church?"

The Lord Jesus Christ prolifically gave a heartfelt example of how the right attitude, the true inner faith we reflect to others should be, "*I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me*" (Matthew 25:35,36). Here, the Lord not only gave an example but also identified Himself with the poor, the homeless, the suffering, and the needy.

With a spiritual attitude one comes to realize that spiritual rather than physical nourishment leads a person to never hunger or thirst again. Offering the garment of righteousness through teaching, exhorting, encouraging, seeking out the sick, visiting the debilitated, immobile elderly, is doing that unto the Lord Himself. There is physical as well as spiritual Imprisonment; and among us there are people walking seemingly free; but who are spiritually imprisoned to sin and compliance to a worldly sinful life. Such are the ones our Lord asked us to visit and liberate.

Our commitment and non-condescending attitude towards living a righteous life will eventually lead others to follow our example in desiring the Lord Jesus Christ as Master of their life away from sin and its bitterness. Further, it will demonstrate to those who are ever mindful and watching our example as servants how we are called upon to use our talents and gifts. We must be ever watchful and introspective as servants "*...for who is greater, he who sits at the table or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves*" (Luke 22:27).

The spiritual attitude of a servant should also not be overtaken by often seeking the easy, most familiar, less difficult path. St. Paul said, "*...serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me...*" (Acts 20:19). A servant should also be faithfully seeking positive ways by which to expand and share gifts and talents, persevering for the betterment of the service. The number of years in service, a servant's age or relations should not place them in higher esteem than other servants.

St. James and St. John, the sons of Zebedee unthinkingly, unsettled the other ten listening disciples by saying, "*Teacher we want You to do for us whatever we ask. And He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' They said to Him,*

*'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your Glory" (Mark 10:35-37). The Lord called them privately aside and quietly taught them the self-denial in discipleship, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise it over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:42-44).*

***The fourth step*** is finding spiritual satisfaction in service. Servants should have service as the utmost important source of their happiness. Giving unto others what God has given unto you, becomes to your soul its breath, purpose, and joy. Salty lakes are self contained, with water pouring only internally. Fresh lakes, on the other hand, receive and give fresh water, causing their waters to be really fresh and refreshing. So is the case with service. If it is not contained; but reaching out to others then it becomes refreshing; bringing forth happiness to the giver as well as the receiver.

It is humbling to constantly keep before our eyes the fact that perfection is a quality possessed by only One earthly person, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord

Jesus Christ earthly life and His death reflect the Perfect Servant in the Perfect Man. The perfect Man did not ask to be paid for His services. There was no royal fanfare for His miracles; nor was His service motivated by fear. No pretensions or vices overshadowed His service; a donkey was his choice to ride as a king. There were even very few who had said "thank-you". He served until he went on the cross.

The Lord Jesus Christ reached out to others with His heart not only with His all knowing, all powerful encompassing knowledge. He motivated others not only by **who** He was; but also by **how** He was; humble, ready, patient and loving. His service was truly a labor of love, bringing spiritual happiness to all those who chose to faithfully follow His teachings and His Holy Example. His epitome of service would fill voluminous Holy Gospels known by those whose watchful observant eyes could not help but commit His examples to memory.

Let us all be thankful to God for bestowing upon us precious gifts and talents and may He make us worthy to commit them to His Service. May we increase in service and righteous endeavors, fulfilling spiritual happiness and become more upright in good deeds.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Bishop Youssef

Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern  
USA