

# SERVING THE LORD – January 2006

I have minded to title this mediation, “*Attracting Divine Attention*” or “*Inviting Divine Visitation*”, but just as I was about to pen down this, the phrase, “*Serving the Lord*”, proceeded. And, you know, this is the Word of the Lord. So I did not hesitate looking it up in my Bible. Romans Chapter 12, verse 11 spells it out:

**“not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”**

And truly, the burden of this meditation centres on serving the Lord, diligently and fervently. Turn with me to Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 10. We read verses 1 through 4.

**“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, ...”**

While we are not so much concerned about the credentials of this man, Cornelius, we must admit that he was a reputable man of high social standing. In fact, he was a commander of the army. See verse 22. But of fascinating attention to us is this man’s spiritual/religious esteem and values. These, of course, present vital aspects of acceptable worship and service unto God, which when found in any man bring him before God’s attention. In other words, such acts of worship draw upon a man’s life, divine visitation.

Let us look at verse two again. It reads: “*A devout man, and one that fears God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always*”.

Cornelius as yet did not speak in tongues, but he was accepted before God; he couldn’t expound the scriptures, but he understood love for God and men and he showed it. Cornelius wouldn’t exalt himself above any congregation as the pastor, but he feared God with all his house. And I doubt he knew the popular prayer – “the Lord’s prayer”, but he prayed (and fasted) always!

Beloved friends, who among us, with all our spiritual gifts/graces, can parallel the testimony of this man, Cornelius? “*Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God*”, the angel of the Lord said. Cornelius served God in such acts of worship which the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew Chapter 6, verses 1 through 18. We itemise these as follows:

- i. Giving
- ii. Prayer
- iii. Fasting

Cornelius exercised himself in these acts. And in case you did not know, Cornelius fasted. Acts of the Apostles Chapter 10 verse 30 reads:

**“And Cornelius said, four days ago, I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house ...”**

But let's take note, beloved friends; Cornelius was diligent and fervent in spirit. This is revealed in the manner in which he served the Lord. Consider the underlined phrases in Acts of the Apostles Chapter 10 verse 2.

**“... one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always”**

I just think that these acts are necessary requirements if we desire to have open heavens, if we seek to attract divine attention and visitation. And let me put it in another way: Serving the Lord consists in these, namely,

1. Fearing God with all your house
2. Giving of alms, generously
3. Praying to God always (including fasting).

Let's look at these in little detail.

### **Fearing God with All Your House**

There is something among the Christian fold called “family altar”. No doubt, a lot of us know that. But quite often this is seldom maintained. Family altar is a language/term we have often used to mean our private family worship time. Some people do this in the morning, hence morning devotion. For some other people, it could be in the morning and evening (night, before going to bed). Whichever time we choose seems immaterial so far as we routinely but faithfully observe it.

I will find it difficult to believe that a man who fears God without having a kind of family altar will bring up children that will fear the Lord. Paul, an apostle of our Lord Jesus counsels that parents should bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The popular Proverbs 22:6 instructs:

**“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it”**

Family altar provides an avenue where we not only pray to God and read His Word, but also instruct our children in righteousness, training them in the way of the Lord. This is so beautiful and fruitful too, but a lot of us ignore it.

One of the requirements for a bishop (an overseer, elder) in God’s house is that a man so desiring of the responsibility must be able to have care and control of his children. First Epistle to Timothy, Chapter 3, verses 4, 5 read:

**“One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?)”.**

Fearing God with all your house implies having your spouse and children reverence God and respect also the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Family altar provides a means of achieving this. Fearing God means that we live righteous life especially before our children. It also means that we do not quarrel or use abusive and foul languages. It means that God is honoured in our homes above all else. It also implies that we do not expose our children to certain vices such as obscene, violent, deceitful and corrupting pictures and videos. While parents may excuse themselves of not having time to give adequate attention to their children’s academic activities, none is exempted from the responsibility of inculcating moral and godly values in their children.

Do you expect divine visitation upon your family? Do you seek to serve the Lord faithfully? Fear God with all your house. This is one of the virtues found in Cornelius, and he received divine attention.

Let me go further on this. A lot of folks do not see the need for this family altar. But one that fears God with all his house knows what privileges accrue therefrom. It is almost, to say the least, as blessed as the corporate worship meetings. It shows how much we acknowledge God and His loving-kindness towards us. It provides an avenue where God reveals His will to us, the enemy’s wicked intentions and attack, as well as God’s direction to us concerning each day.

I strongly implore, beloved of God, that we shake ourselves from the weakness and indifference that undermine the place of family altar in our worship of Jehovah. Furthermore, fearing God means that we acknowledge and honour God in our homes. And when we fear God with all our house, we can serve God acceptably in other ways.

Of Abraham, God said, “...*for I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*” Gen. 18:17-19. Cornelius was a righteous man. So was Abraham, and these commanded their household to keep the way of the Lord. This duet received heavenly visitation. They have record that they served God acceptably, fearing God, giving much alms and praying always to God.

I suppose that enough is said here, but I pray and trust that the Lord will enlarge it in our hearts and give impulse unto further personal meditation and corresponding obedience.

### **Giving Much Alms to the People**

We come to a second dimension of serving the Lord, namely, Giving Much Alms. Let us repeat that there are three (3) major acts of worship as mentioned by the Lord Jesus in Matthew Chapter 6. One of which is alms-giving.

I often say this, “Giving is a priestly responsibility, an act of worship”. Let me put this in another way. Giving is a Christian service. Apparently, a lot of people give and tend to give simply to impress some persons. Some others do so with the wrong motive of receiving some kind of favour in return. Perhaps, a few others give because they have just too much. None of these can attract divine attention upon a man’s life. A very important parameter for measuring the genuineness and consequently, the acceptability or otherwise the disapproval of our giving by the Lord, is our heart attitude. A heart attitude of reverential fear for God receives divine approval of his gifts. We have looked at “Fearing God with all your house” above. God does not accept the substance of a soul who fears not God, no matter how much he gives.

This is the second thing that Cornelius did; he gave much alms to the people. Not many persons, even among the rich can do that, except the fear of the Lord is treasured in their hearts. Jesus told a rich young ruler (like Cornelius, if you like) to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor if he wanted to have everlasting life. The rich man would not do it, instead the Bible records in Matthew 19:22,

**“But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions”.**

See Matthew 19:16-24 for the whole account. The young man loved his money more than he loved God and men. And Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, you cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot serve two masters. You cannot love two masters. For this rich man, his money was his master and lord. Those who trust in their riches cannot give acceptably, no matter how much they give. To whom you yield yourself servant, him you will obey.

There are a lot of so called philanthropists out there, a lot of rich people, even in the church world as there were in Jesus’ day. But God looks into their heart and judges whatever they give, whether acceptable or not. In one instance, Jesus observes those that cast into the treasury their alms. Lots of people out of their abundance cast in so much. Yet Jesus told us,

**“...verily I say unto you, that this poor widow has cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” Mk. 12:41-44.**

“Our giving is blessed by God in proportion to the amount of sacrifice we make, not according to the amount we give”. The heart that serves God does make sacrifices!

Jesus tells us in Matthew Chapter 6, that our acts of worship – giving, praying and fasting, should not be done to gain men’s approval. Rather we should, with a right heart of worship, serve the Lord. When we harbour sin and iniquity in our lives, our giving is without the blessing of the Lord, even though men approve it. When we give to please men or be acknowledged of them, we have no reward from God. See Proverbs Chapter 21, verse 27, Matthew Chapter 5, verses 23 through 24, and Chapter 6 verse 1 through verse 4.

If a soul is not right with God, even his substance is unacceptable unto God. Serving the Lord acceptably includes honouring the Lord with our substance. The richest man that ever lived admonishes us in Proverbs 3:9-10 thus:

**“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thine barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine”.**

Though we should not give with the motive of receiving, the promise of the scripture above is steadfast and true for all who walk obediently before God. When we prove to God that He has the right of ownership over us by serving Him with our substance, He is proudly pleased to bless us the more abundantly. And if we believe every word of God, we do well that we obey it.

A lot of other passages in the Holy writ emphasize that we do not lose out on God's blessing when we so acknowledge his lordship over all that we possess. Just one more verse of scripture, Luke 6:38, further shows how that giving brings reward in return. "*Give and it shall be given unto you; ...*"

Can we consider again our elder friend, Cornelius? "*...and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people...*" First, he feared God. In other words, he revered and honoured God. Then, he had to prove this by giving generously, cheerfully and ungrudgingly to the needy. And take note, I said, "to the needy!" Cornelius was not an extravagant spender or some kind of so-called philanthropist or the Pharisees or politicians. He was spiritually minded, giving under the lordship of Jesus Christ in the interest of the Lord Himself. And I take it for granted that we know that we give to God when we do so to people in the interest of God (Matthew 10:42). The angel of the Lord testified to Cornelius, "*Thy prayers and thine alms have come up for a memorial before God.*" Acts. 10:4.

Are you in a church where the "worship service" does not end until a number of "offerings" are collected regularly? Perhaps, you have been intimidated with such inscriptions like this one in one of the Pentecostal denominations here: "If you don't pay your tithe, things will be tight for you". Never mind, that curse cannot be laid upon you! This matter of serving or worship the Lord with your substance is between you and God. It's not between you and "the pastor". If you are a priest of God, and I mean a Christian believer, giving is just one of your responsibilities. You must not be coerced to carry it out; otherwise you have no blessing from God for it. God is not more interested in your substance than he is concerning your soul; you prove a faithful priest/servant when you refuse that your substance will come between you and God.

Besides giving to people – believers and unbelievers – as directed by the Spirit of God, we give preference to giving in the very interest of God, namely, directing our giving to the church to meet the diverse needs of God's people and work. This of course, includes support for missionary work/outreaches. Oh may God make you a blessing, a channel of blessing to his work and people! If we make this prayer, how can we hold back our substances? Even the Lord himself does pluck the strings of our heart concerning certain needs and we give voluntarily and joyfully because He has equally released the grace to do so.

How many of us do know what insurance is? Well I do not know very much about the subject. Have you realised that giving in God's perspective can be called insurance? Anyway,

I call it spiritual insurance, and it seems to me that that is implied in the passage of scripture that say, *“Lay up your treasure in heaven, where thieves do not break in neither doth corrupt”*. See Matthew 6:19-20.

When we serve the Lord with our substance, we are in a way insuring against a “rainy day” in which the need of a brother/sister or even your own need is readily met. May the Lord grant us grace of giving with cheerfulness and gratitude, amen.

### **Praying Always**

We come to a third dimension of serving the Lord. I will invite your attention to another Bible figure that parallels Cornelius in this dimension of service. Turn with me to Luke Chapter 1, reading verse 5 through verse 6.

**“There was in those days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias ...and they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”**

A lot of us think that certain persons pray so much or that they are “prayer warriors”, using a very popular and admirable term. The testimony from men often is inadequate, but let God say a thing about a person, there you find finality. The verses above tell us of Zachariah and his wife. That is a wonderful credential given by Luke, but I am particularly enthused by the testimony of the angel of the Lord, verse 13: *“...fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard...”* May it be that we pray prayers that the Lord will hear and answer!

Now, we understand, in spiritual parlance that incense is a type of prayer. In verse 9 of Luke Chapter 1, we are told that the lot of Zacharias was to burn incense, and that the whole multitudes (verse 10) were praying without at the time of incense.

Psalm 141:2 clarifies this understanding further: *“Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice”*.

Let’s consolidate with this last scripture in Revelation, chapter 8, verse 4:

**“And the smoke of the incense, [which came] *with* the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand”**.

So in spiritual terms, prayers and incense may be taken as the same. Interestingly, the word, incense appears only in Luke and Revelation in the New Testament and not without prayers.

We are considering the third aspect of serving the Lord, namely, *praying always*. The average Christian prays occasionally. By implication, a lot of believers hardly pray. This is a defeating state, as it is very obvious the average believer is comfortable with that. Not so with Cornelius. Cornelius prayed always, and here we see a like figure, Zacharias, a man of prayer, executing the priest's office mostly in this dimension of pouring out prayers unto God continually. Zacharias is a righteous man, a priest like us believers walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Beloved friend, let's take note of this fact. The fact is this, that God speaks to us more often while we are exercising ourselves in service unto him: it was while Zacharias executed the priest's office that the angel of the Lord appeared unto him. At the ninth hour, as Cornelius prayed, having fasted, the angel of the Lord appeared and spoke to him.

If we are serving the Lord as we ought, a lot of prayers become unnecessary repetition. We will clearly hear the Lord say to us, "*Thy prayers are come up before me*". Oh, what peace! Yes, we must get down to praying always, for as the scripture says, "*Men ought always to pray and not to faint*".

Lord, I pray this moment for myself and for all who read these lines. Let there be an awakening of our spirit man to dine with you in prayers. Bestir us to have our head in between our knees and call upon thy name always, even as Elijah did, in Jesus' name, Amen!

Zacharias and his wife had no reason to remain righteous, prayerful and committed to God, because it seemed God had forsaken them. Despite their dedication, even as ministers of God, God did not bless them with a child at least, and now they are well stricken in years. They have ministered to the needs of barren couples, no doubt, who received the fruit of the womb. But here they are, without a child, without evidence of true ministry as it were. Praise God they did not give up praying. They did not giving up serving God. They did not choose children in preference to God. They endured much scorning and mocking, despising the stigma of barrenness, and yet setting forth their prayers as incense unto God.

I know a lot of us have prayed for certain things for quite too long. We have been mocked and ridiculed. Our testimony seems quite contrary to the faith we confess. Perhaps, a few of



you have even given up hope, you have given in to the suggestion of the devil that you are sinful and cursed or that God is afflicting you because of your past life. That is not true! Let me encourage you, pray more and always. Do not give up! It is not over until you believe it is. Let your heart cleave unto the Lord, love the Lord, serve the Lord. The Lord will answer you soon, amen!

May the Lord send us help and strength against our often weakness in prayers. We give up too soon as far as God is concerned. God answers our prayers sooner or later than we expect. We must walk in this third dimension of worship in spite of all odds. We must pray selflessly to be able to pray frequently and fervently. Let us lay aside henceforth whatever reason or excuse that undermines persistent praying.

I want to recommend that you (unmarried persons) get paired with a partner with whom you can pray at least once daily if possible, and also make time for your personal daily prayer. Increase the frequency as the days go by. Take note that accurate knowledge of the Word is vital to effective prayer. Can we make out time to eat at least twice daily? Then let's try to pray at least twice daily. If you pray once only, you are not a praying Christian and thus not a powerful Christian.

May the Lord strengthen us as we arise to this challenge.

I will not bring this meditation to a close without dwelling a little on fasting, which is more or less meaningless without prayer. In Matthew Chapter Six, Jesus recognised fasting as one of the vital acts of worship. And of course, among the Pharisees of his day, fasting was a popular religious activity. Jesus prayed better than all the Pharisees!

In simple and common usage, we say fasting is abstinence from food. Often this light attention to the meaning of fasting has left many Christians in the delusion of starving themselves instead of truly fasting. A lot of us believers today abstain from food, say once, twice or a whole day during a fast, yet without praying. Do we call this fasting? No, this is not fasting! Again, some do fast without considering the Word of God relevant or very necessary. It is so important, if we are going to have result, that while we fast, and before we break the fast we exercise ourselves in the Word of God and prayers.

Even though it seems we have gone beyond the "pharisaical" way of fasting, we have nevertheless watered down and made subservient the whole significance of fasting. Fasting, apart from abstinence from food, also includes abstinence from any unnecessary pleasure, namely, recreation/entertainment, sex, leisure sleeping, unnecessary work, energing-sapping activity or exercise, engaging in long talk or discussion, etc. The essence of such abstinence is to make for the inward, spirit-man a very conducive platform for effective, result-oriented prayer.

Fasting is an instrument for self-denial, a criterion for all that seek to come after the Lord Jesus. So here, as it concerns prayers, fasting becomes a sharpening tool for our prayers. There can't be any true fast without real prayer, though we can pray without fasting. It is remarkable to mention that frequent and periodic fast should be adopted to assist our prayer

life. If you did not know, fasting makes real praying an even much easier business. It builds up our faith too.

I will now conclude with this passage in Luke Chapter Two. I will not make any comment but I trust the Lord to quicken you and me with the import of the passage. Only meditate upon it. Verses 36, 37 read:

**“And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years (84 years), which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers, night and day.”** (*Emphasis mine.*)

May the Lord make us the Annas of today! Certain things will never give way or be realised except by fasting and prayers. (Mark 9:29)

I pray the Lord to keep you and make you and me a peculiar people, zealous of good works. May He strengthen us to be fervent in spirit, *servng the Lord*.

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