
Because of our Annual Women Seeking Christ Retreat and after offering the opening sermon to the women who gathered on the mountain this year, I found myself with extra time on my hands with a continued commitment to God’s assignments. My focus for the sermon was the spirit of bitterness leading to broken covenants in the church and in relationships.

Because of my covenant commitment to God’s missive mission, I got a head start and finished my weekly love letter called “The Bishop’s Missive” early. My sermon week ending with my presentation on the mountain with no sermon needed to be preached on Sunday. I found myself alone and thinking about God.

One theologian states that thinking about God or theology is the conscious effort of the Christian to hearken to the actual verbal revelation which God has promulgated in history. It begins with God’s revelation of the word in history and then with us as believers who think about Him and all He is. To wish to communicate and reflect on particular experiences stands at the beginning of the process. Wanting to think about God leads us first to be invited to love God as we align our thoughts with heaven.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said in his book “Strength to Love,” it pains men and women to think. We must value hearing God speak to us as preachers directly in the precious private moments of contemplation, heavenly connection, and conversational devotion with the God. We’re invited to love as He downloads purpose into our uploaded passion in order that we might preach the truth of His Word.

You will never present anything of value until first you value the process and painful exploration of the riches invested in preparation. We must prioritize purposeful preparation in partnership with prayer in order that we might become the priesthood, preacher, prelate and pastors we desire to be and embrace “Tabula rasa” Latin which means “an absence of preconceived ideas or predetermined goals; a clean slate.”

In other words, each week for 21 years now, I have sat down at my computer and had to start with a clean slate, and start over without preconception or presumption and position myself to think and prepare to present another one of these episcopal missives. It could never to be done all these years without first the invitation to love God. Thus, writing missives is a mission of love. Who you love determines how you have to love them. For me, I must write a love letter to God each week.

With that, I cannot be overly preoccupied with those things that form obstacles to my thinking, feelings or even my availability to produce a successful writing of this missive mission for now some 1092 times, encompassing 52 missives a week for 21 years. I write the missives even while on the road, in vehicles or trains along the way. Do you ever think you are the only one facing tests, temptation, or trials as you try to maintain this loving covenant we ought to have
with Christ? Have you ever wanted to ask God why you have those troubles? Here is a verse that adds a good perspective to that question.

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:” (1 Peter 4:12). A look at the meaning of the words in this text helps us apply the verse to our lives.

“Beloved (from “agape”, dear ones), think it not strange (do not be surprised or shocked at something which seems strange to you) concerning the fiery trial (refiner’s fire, trials that test your character) which is (come to pass) to try (the test of a person’s fidelity, integrity, virtue) you, as though some strange thing (thing that you are not aware of) happened unto you:” (1 Peter 4:12).

So, reading between the lines, here is a lesson I learned from this verse.

*Dear One, do not be surprised or shocked because of the trials that come to you to test your character, passion, and love for God. They happen to test your integrity, your commitment, and your moral excellence. You should expect these types of things to happen to you if you truly love the Lord.*

In other words faithfulness is key. I have been faithful to the missive mission project for two decades now. In so doing, I have attracted a whole new generation of readers and those who have found the weekly missive to be a blessing to their lives and ministries.

What is a missive? A missive is a long letter, especially one written in a formal or official capacity. As first the senior, founding pastor of Imani Temple Christian Fellowship, founded in 1998 and now as the Bishop and Presiding Prelate of Imani Christian Cathedral and The Bridge Network Covenant Fellowship of Associated Churches and Independent Ministries (founded in 2011). I have poured my heart out over all these years in an effort to glorify God, and as the late Eugene Peterson said, “Tell it Slant” which means tell it all but tell it slant as T.S. Elliot said, “provide hints followed by guesses.”

Unlike raw facts, truth, especially the personal truth offered many times in these missives, requires the cultivation of deliberate intimacies. I wanted to provide a slant on our ministry missions with a continuity and conversation in faithfulness, fidelity and focus to nurture an awareness on subjects that, in my quiet times, I faithfully offer to God in communication with you.

Why is faithfulness to God an important part of a Christian’s life? Without faithfulness to God there can be no Christian life. Christianity is based first on faith that God is, and then that through Christ Jesus, we can be forgiven and are saved. Our faithfulness is a commitment to adhere to the One God who is true and supreme and to keep His commandments as we align ourselves with heaven.

In fact, the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), deal directly with our being faithful to God. “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous
God...” These are the words in God’s Missive given directly from God to Moses for all people, for all time.

Since God assumes a covenant relationship with His people, He is declaring that He will not tolerate unfaithfulness and competition with anything else. An idol can be in the form of anything that you might place in a higher priority over God. This includes false images of worship or placing anything in our lives that has preeminence over God.

The most significant element in our Christian life is faithfulness to God especially in the days we now live in. In a culture that emphasizes success, it is difficult for the importance of this quality to be fully appreciated. And yet, when we look at the life and teaching of Jesus, we don't hear anything about success. Jesus didn't say, "Well done, you successful servant." He said, "Well done, you FAITHFUL servant."

Even in parables that mention elements of success, the emphasis is on faithfulness and not success - such as the parable of the talents and their investment by all but one wicked servant who never invested the one talent he was given. The focus of the parable was not the doubling of the investments by the others, but their faithfulness to invest. The continued writing of this missive mission is my weekly love investment as I attempt to convey my true feelings about how I feel regarding serving God and His church.

Yet, as Christians, we live in a culture that values things like success and reputations. Faithfulness is hardly ever the focus! I cherish the faithfulness of the privilege of writing these missives. There is a great challenge for us Christians living in a culture that has placed other values much higher than faithfulness. Yet, it is this very quality that characterizes the fullness of the Spirit in our lives! It is not an option in the sincere Christian life, nor is it a value that can be minimized. Faithfulness forms our covenantal lives. Faithfulness is the basis of all healthy things.

Proverbs 28:20 says; “A faithful man will abound with blessings.” Abound is defined as, “To occur or exist in great quantities or numbers; to be rich or well supplied; to be filled.” When we are faithful, we will be rich, well supplied, and filled with God’s blessings in more ways than we can imagine. What an incentive to be faithful!

While Matthew 25:21 says; “His lord said to him, well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

This is an excellent verse about our reward (position) in heaven. Contrary to what many believe, in alignment with heaven, not everyone will have the same position in heaven. We will be rewarded according to our faithfulness here on earth. We are saved by grace and grace alone, apart from anything we do (Ephesians 2:8-9), but position and reward is earned. This all will be determined at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-4:2, 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, Romans 14:10-12). This is a judgment for believers only. The question becomes: Will we be found faithful?
Proverbs 20:6; “Many a man proclaims his own loyalty. But who can find a trustworthy (faithful) man?”

This is similar to Psalms 12:1 except this verse says, “Many a man proclaims his own loyalty.” Lots of people proclaim their own faithfulness, but real faithfulness is hard to find. I’ve experienced this over and over when planting a new church over 21 years ago, leading and presiding over a partnership of churches now over 8 years and writing these missives every week over and over again faithfully. I might even say, the discipline of positioning myself to align with heaven and faithfully writing these missives may have contributed to rewards of distinct grace in my ministerial and personal life.

Luke 16:10: “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”

If we are faithful in the little things (business, ministry, possessions, etc.), we prove to God we can be trusted with greater things. When we are faithful with what has already been given to us, we are given more (time, talent, treasure, responsibility) because we have shown we can be trusted with it. If we are untrustworthy, with that which is least, we show we cannot be trusted with more. In fact, we are in danger of losing what we have. “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (Matthew 25:29).

I have been faithful to the missive mission if I haven’t been faithful in anything else. In every way it has been said, the man or woman is his or her message; the preacher is his or her proclamation, while the speaker is his or her sermon. I am my missive. I believe that God has imbued in each of us talents and gifts that others may not possess. I have a passion for writing down my communication with God faithfully.

Passion has been articulated by none other than Quincy Jones as an uncontrollable enthusiasm. It is the pure love and infatuation with your assignment given from God as you align yourself with heaven and the infatuation with the God that has given the gift. These two elements are inseparable to the missive mission. When you are passionate about something you desire to do it in season and out of season as Paul informed Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2.

Quoting one scholar who said, “Inspiration is easy. It is implementation that is the hard part.” Years ago while working for the State of Iowa, I wrote, “No limitation, Just Imagination!” Growth is forever in need of the fuel of commitment. What are you truly committed to? Michael Jordan says in one of his Nike commercials, “you won’t receive anything if there is no work before glory.” In alignment with heaven, all glory belongs to God.

If what one has done yesterday still looks big to you today then you have not done enough today! This is the missive mission, to grow in grace and in knowledge. (2 Peter 3:18) We must take the time in pain staking critical study and preparation to attempt to master our gifts and complete our assignment of proclaiming God’s word. Preparation and study is the price to be
paid for knowledge. We must be faithful to the process of positioning or aligning ourselves with heaven to produce for God's glory and our good.

The painful part for me is how so many fail to even attempt to open the missive freely sent each week and available to all who desire to read them. I am often discouraged just thinking about this. It is human to want to be appreciated for the things you do for God. But in reality we can't do what we do for God focused on how people receive what we do.

The truth of the matter is looking deeper into this is that your gift and anointing will make certain people uncomfortable. You have to be alright with that and even be empathetic to it. You must understand that what you carry is often too heavy for some, and must be picked up slowly by others. Most people don't hate you, they just aren't sure about what to do with what's on you.

In creating a full, confident, and joyful life for myself, I enjoy a simple formula each and every week of my life. It is amazingly simple. Yet, it can open doors you never dreamed of. In practicing this formula, I must trust and go beyond any doubts and inner resistances. First, I take a pen in hand and a sheet of paper, or I sit faithfully down before my empty computer screen and write a letter addressed to God. It is a letter of grateful appreciation for all He has done in my life. Then, I just hit send and deliver it to you!

Sola Gratia, His Distinct Grace Alone!