

SIM now

Serving Steadfastly

"But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you." (Philippians 2:17)



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INSIDE

3

Serving Steadfastly – Editorial

Dr Lye Sue Kheong, Director, Information Systems & Communications

4

Steadfast in Service – Bible Study

Rev Dr Lim Kheng Hai, Pastor-at-Large

5

Steadfast in Intimacy with Him

Dr Judy Ho, Nigeria

6

Steadfast in Being Sensitive

Tijin and Merin, Ghana

7

Steadfast Amidst Uncertainty

Luke and Jill, Southern Asia

8

Steadfast Amidst Challenges

Ghie Sibayan, Director, SIM Philippines

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Serving Steadfastly

Dr Lye Sue Kheong, Director, IS and Communications



What does it mean for us to be Serving Steadfastly in mission? Many of us can readily associate with the dictionary definition of “refusal to change or give up”, because it is something that is in our power ‘to do’. It is often something that is reflected in our life – our determination to do well in our studies and career, or even our determination to ‘die as martyrs in the mission field’. We are often like the ones mentioned in James 4:13 – where the emphasis is on “we will ...”, forgetting James 4:14-15 – where the emphasis is on “If it is the Lord’s will ...”. Sometimes, this is also reflected in our fear of the unknown and the safety of our comfort zone.

Merriam-Webster and Collins further highlight “firm in belief” and “convinced that what one is doing is right” as possible motivations for steadfastness.

What then is our motivation for Serving Steadfastly in mission? What do we ‘believe in’ and ‘convinced that what we are doing is

right’? Jesus during His time on earth declared to His parents, “I have to be in my Father’s house” (Luke 2:49), and to his followers, “I have come down from heaven ... to do the will of Him who sent me” (John 6:38). In the Garden of Gethsemane, he reiterated “Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:39), and “May your will be done” (Matt 26:42). Paul in Acts 20:24 followed Jesus’ example and declared “my only aim is to finish the task the Lord Jesus has given me.”

Jesus and Paul, as well as Jesus’ disciples, served steadfastly even to the point of death. They did so not in their own strength and effort but driven by the will of God and sent by Jesus to “testify to the good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).

What is God’s will and calling to us? How convinced and immovable are we to do His will and fulfil His call? Are we ready to be “poured out like a drink offering” (Phil 2:17) in response to doing God’s will steadfastly? Or are we steadfastly doing our own thing? (James 4:13)

We sincerely hope that the current SIMNow issue, which presents real stories of how our missionaries have continued to serve steadfastly amidst many challenges, would be a blessing to you.

“May we learn to surrender our will to Him and to do His will steadfastly.”

Thank you for your faithful partnership with them in their steadfast service for their Master.

Steadfast in Service

*Rev Dr Lim Kheng Hai,
Pastor-at-Large*

Paul - Steadfast in Commitment of Zeal

Apostle Paul is an example of someone who served His Master steadfastly. In Philippians 2:17-30, he reveals what it means to be committed to the Lord's work.

Paul embodies the commitment to be zealous. He compares the faith of the Philippians to the sacrificial victim, and his own blood shed in martyrdom to the libation or drink offering - the wine poured out on the sacrifice (2:7a). In pouring his life out, he is committed to serving the interests of the Lord and ministering to the churches. Paul counts it a joy to sacrifice his life and personal gain so that the church may rejoice (2:17b-18). There is mutual rejoicing in Christian service.

Timothy - Steadfast in Commitment of Care

The second example is the steadfast service of Paul's disciple, Timothy.

Timothy emulates the commitment to care for others. Paul says of Timothy, "For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare" (2:20). The Greek word here for "concern" is the same word that the New Testament uses for anxious. Jesus uses this word 5 times in Matthew 6:25-34. Anxious is excessive concern. Here, the word has the idea of genuine concern. This is how much Timothy cares for the church in Philippines.

Paul draws a connection between those who "seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:21) and Timothy's proven worth, "that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father" (2:22, NASB). He does all he can do to care for Paul like a son caring for his father, so as to lighten his labours and sufferings.



Epaphroditus - Steadfast in Commitment of Risk

The third example that Paul speaks of is Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus is committed to even risk his own life. Paul calls him as a brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, messenger, and helper (2:25). He ends up getting so sick that he is near death (2:26) and Paul takes care of him. His sickness is likely due to his work. Paul says, he "nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me" (2:30). Bible commentator, Lightfoot, says that we can translate it this way, "He gambled with his life." Epaphroditus has so much trust in the Lord that he's willing to risk his life to serve God steadfastly. This prompts Paul to say, "Honour such men" (2:29b).

Paul demonstrates the commitment of zeal by pouring himself out to serve God and others. Timothy shows the commitment of care in his deep concern for the Philippians. Epaphroditus, in his commitment of risk, goes all out to do the work of God. May we follow their examples as we seek to serve steadfastly.

Steadfast in Intimacy with Him

Dr Judy Ho, Nigeria

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (Romans 12:12)



Literacy programme in Kano State village

I left Hong Kong for Nigeria in 2019 amid social upheavals believing that being faithful to God's call was my best course of action in challenging times. After full-time language study, COVID-19 forced me to stay home for months instead of beginning my intended ministry. Due to changes in family circumstances, I left for Hong Kong in August 2020 without any idea when and whether I would return to the field.

I was dismayed that although I could quickly settle some of my affairs, others would require much longer time. Some arrangements were not even my initial preference. Instead of accomplishing everything, I had to trust that if I stepped out in faith, God would look after my loved ones and assets left behind. Therefore, I returned to Nigeria in June 2021.

The rest of the year was spent in resuming my initial ministerial plan after full-time language study. Meanwhile, I attended an online prayer course which rejuvenated my prayer life. I became much closer to God and more sensitive to His guidance. Then I received news of my elder sister's cancer diagnosis, necessitating months of aggressive treatment.

“My intimate fellowship with our Lord sustained me and enabled me to support my sister emotionally and spiritually throughout her treatment.”

Since re-entry, though life till today has been challenging at many levels I have had regular close encounters with my Lord. He has opened my eyes and guided me to ministries which I would never have anticipated. I understand more my current role in the mission field. I enjoy the ministerial opportunities and experience gained. I am more open and flexible in following God's guidance instead of leaning on my own understanding. My life as a missionary has been and will continue to be a fascinating journey.

By stepping out in obedience and by fixing my eyes upon Him, God has showered me with blessings way beyond my imagination. He has graciously let me know Him more intimately. He enables me to understand and accept myself and my limitations more. Certainly, His grace is sufficient for me, for His power is perfected in my weaknesses. I strive to become more like our Master Jesus. I pray that I can glorify God throughout my missionary life.

Steadfast in Being Sensitive

Tijin & Merin, Ghana

As we completed our two and a half years in Ghana, we learned that when we commit ourselves to serve God wholeheartedly, things need not necessarily work as we plan. Yes, when nothing went as we planned, initially we were discouraged. But as we looked back and viewed our journey, we could confidently say that God had done everything for our good (Romans 8:28).

Our plan initially was to train local church members to start kids' clubs in their houses or compounds to reach out to children. We prepared stories explaining the continuous, unbroken thread of the Gospel from Genesis to Jesus, to train believers. That training would have lasted for fourteen classes. Our desire was that at least some would commit themselves to start kids' clubs. But after completing training in three churches, we did not receive a positive response. Churches were not interested in that training because fourteen classes were too long. Based on that feedback and God's prompting, we reduced it to five classes. Even though we did not get anyone to start a kids club, we could see that the believers were coming to a fuller understanding of the Gospel and their lives were being transformed. As we continued with the five classes in other churches one thing God brought to our notice was that even though the church members were professing Christians, they had no understanding of the Gospel. But our five classes helped them to understand the true Gospel and that was the real need of the church.



Evening classes in the village

After completing the classes in the churches in Tumu, we shifted our focus on villages. Our five introductory classes helped the people in the villages too, to understand the Gospel. Many accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour, not because they received healing or witnessed a miracle or were persuaded by cunning speech (Romans 16:17-18), but by knowing from God's Word that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Later when we looked back, we understood why God had changed our plans. It was to prepare us to teach the true Gospel in those villages. The key lesson for us was that we need not get discouraged when things do not go as we plan, but to know that God is in control, and he would turn everything for our good.

“What God requires from us is to remain committed to His work and to be sensitive to His leading in His mission.”

Steadfast Amidst Uncertainty



Luke and Jill, Southern Asia

Mentoring a pastor

The month when an unknown virus was wreaking havoc globally, literally bringing the entire world to a halt, I became the Interim Director of a country in South Asia. I never anticipated what challenges we would face as a team in that season. Those with small children or compromised immune systems left for their home countries, some struggled with lack of resources and others were forced to leave amidst allegations of proselytization. Personally, my family was worried about our son who was in a boarding school in another country. It was in the middle of all this intensity that we then received an email asking us to consider serving as the field director of another country.

God miraculously made a way for us to relocate to the new country even when things in Asia were still very closed and difficult. Confident that God was leading us in His Goodness, we left with whatever we could bring along to the new field of service. But when we arrived, we encountered reverse culture shock, with a vastly different language and our adjustment was greatly affected by pandemic realities.

Before Covid it almost seemed like we could be in control of our lives. But the pandemic caused it to hit home for many of us that we would never know what tomorrow would bring.

So how can we be steadfast when life is so uncertain? We are learning to faithfully do God's work and accept whatever comes our way. We continue to move forward in faith, no matter what happens, even if our new normal looks quite different from what we thought it would. Now more than ever, success cannot be measured by how busy we are or how much we achieve, but only in doing whatever is in line with God's plan for us.

"A gift God is giving us as we learn to live in this new normal is coming back to the simple truth that He as God of Mission is in control."

He invites us to put our trust solely in Him and not take our lives for granted. Now maybe we can see more clearly that it is only by God's mercy that we are sustained. May we say with Habakkuk that even when every system of support fails, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." (Habakkuk 3:18)

Steadfast Amidst Challenges

Ghie Sibayan, Director, SIM Philippines

In my missionary life, I can identify three major circumstances which could have caused me to waver in serving where God has called me. First, when my late husband died of cancer, I thought I was done with cross-cultural missions. Second, when we had a major conflict in our team, I wanted to leave as a few other workers did. Third, when the long Covid-19 pandemic created within me concerns, fear of uncertainties and grief. Three key responses helped me to serve in an unwavering manner despite challenges in life and ministry.

First, **willingness on my part to adjust**. I knew that change was inevitable. However, life events like sickness, death, conflict, uncertainties, and transitions involve lots of changes that it could become difficult to adjust. But I decided not to let myself be stuck in what was before the change. I had to try to adjust and move on. I learned to grieve and forgive as I knew “that too would pass.”

Secondly, **staying in community**. When we are hurting, we normally tend to isolate ourselves. It is during such moments we need to surround ourselves more with a community of trustworthy people. They could be close friends, mentors, accountability partners, or counselors. That was what I did. I had people who journeyed with me in my pain and confusion without judgment and who reminded me of what was true about God, myself, and others.



Thirdly, **recognizing God's presence**. When we are in the dark season of our lives, we may not feel God. But the truth remains that God is ever-present. During my dark moments I found fresh meaning in Psalm 23:4. Even when I was groping in the dark, I realized that I did not have to be afraid because God was with me. His rod of protection against the enemies and His staff of guidance were my comfort.

“As I recognised God's presence, I could also hold on to Him as my hope.”

Remember “... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.” (Isaiah 40:31)

Living through the different challenges of life and ministry has not been easy for me. The Lord has been enabling me to serve steadfastly by being willing to adjust, stay in community, and recognize God's presence. Let us “... be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

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