

The Hidden Spiritual Treasure of Mission and Retreat

By Victor Beshir

John and I met a few months after returning from a mission. We started talking about our beautiful memories of the mission. While talking John asked me a question,

“Why my spiritual life experienced a great revival during the mission that I have not experienced anywhere else?”

I thought about his question for a moment, remembering how we usually spend our daily life in the U.S., and said,

“Here, we live in what I call it ‘the daily machine;’ our days are programmed to do certain things at certain times, we go to school or to work to do specific things in a certain order. Then we leave either to continue our daily routine. We think we are free, but in reality, we are not; our souls are chained by a daily routine and even by a weekend routine.”

“Our spirits are not materialistic but spiritual, do not like chains of the daily machine and weekend machine; they like to fly to the endless horizon where they meet God. In a mission, the spirit is free. It feels like a bird was confined in a cage and now the door of the cage is open. The bird becomes so happy and starts to fly. Our imprisoned spirits finally find in a spiritual mission their freedom to soar to God, which results in spiritual revival.



John commented saying, “This is true, I lost this freedom now and my spirit longs to go back to those beautiful days of the mission when we had time to stand before God for a long time. To tell you the truth, first we thought it was too much to have Tasbeha, Raising of Incense, Prayer Meetings, Bible Study, & Agpyea in the mission program. In the beginning of the mission, I asked myself many times, Why this extensive program? But after a couple of days, I started to see its spiritual fruits.”

I asked John, “How to get rid of ice on the hills?”

He answered, “Warm weather or even sometimes hot weather.”

“Great!” I commented and then started to explain:

“Similarly, our hearts have layers of what we could call ‘layers of spiritual ice.’ Our spiritual life becomes so cold, voided of spiritual warmth, and subsequently we become spiritually weak. We do not feel the warmth of

God's love. We attend spiritual meetings but the ice still sitting heavily on our hearts. Then we complain, 'Why are our spiritual life awfully cold?'"

"Then we go to a mission or to a retreat with an extensive spiritual program where we stand before God for hours in ecclesiastical prayers and listen to His words in Bible study and sermons. Briefly, we stay in His presence for a long time. Then wonders happen; His love starts to melt the ice. Our hearts' cold icy layers cannot stand His warm bosom and His sweet burning love. The more the icy layers melt the warmer our hearts become. Little by little, our spirit starts to awake as if from a long sleep."

"Winter rids trees of their green leaves and fruits for long hard months. Then spring comes with its warm weather that clothes trees again with their long-missed leaves and fruits. Green color comes back alive; trees look beautiful again; they have life after what looks like a temporary death; **this also happens to our spirits in a mission.** You feel a spiritual life; you taste sweetness of living with God; you find what you were looking for without knowing what you were missing until you find it in His bosom in a mission or a treat. You find yourself and your life."

"Unfortunately, we do not deal with God as a very close friend; we do not tell Him everything; we like to keep certain beloved things to ourselves away from His attention; we do not want to change certain behaviors though they are sinful. Then we go to a mission and face God who points to those sinful behaviors and shed lights on them. At that time, we see their destructions to our life. We give up those dear things to our hearts, deciding to lose them for Christ's sake saying with St. Paul, '*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him(Philippians 3:8,9)*'. We repent and we cry; we start anew. Then life of Christ starts to shine in our life giving us joy and inner peace. "

I was silent for a few moments thinking about missions and retreat and their great impact on our life, and then I looked at John saying,

"My friend, what happens to us in a mission in a way is similar to what happened to the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). When the son returned, he was washed first and clothed with a new robe. In a mission or retreat, we also get spiritually washed and cleansed."

Then John asked, "Does everyone go to mission or to a retreat experience this wonderful life-changing process?"

"Of course not, as you know God never forces Himself on someone's life. As a result, those who approach God with a feeling of need, asking for His work inside them, they will find their spiritual life. However, those who consider mission or retreat as just a trip and find excuses to miss prayers and spiritual meetings, they will return as they arrive, missing precious opportunity."

John said, "I missed prayer meetings when in the middle of darkness-except for a few candles-I found myself speaking to God as I never did before, not only with just empty words but with words coming out from the deepest part of my soul accompanied by tears and open heart. At those moments, I wished if the prayer meeting will never end."

Both John and I returned home thinking of our missed paradise, the mission. I raised my heart thanking Him for His heavenly fatherhood that is priceless and cannot be obtained even with all wealth of this world repeating the golden words, "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?*" (Luke 9:25)