

Who Next?

R. Stanley, 4 July 2020

“*Who next?*” This is the question that haunts the Indian Christian world following the passing away, in quick succession, of God’s servants like Theodore Williams (Missionary Statesman), Emil Jebasingh (Mission Challenger), Sam Jebathurai (Prolific Writer), Prakash Jesudian (Revival Preacher), John Solomon (Evangelist), Ravi Zacharias (Christian Apologist), Isaac Manoharam (Champion for Abandoned Girls), Patrick Joshua (Prayer Warrior) and the like in the recent years. God of course buries His Servants when their job on earth is over, that they may “rest from their labours” (Rev 14:13). Like David, these men, after they have “served their generation by the will of God, fall asleep” (Acts 13:36). But the vacuum they leave behind remain unfilled for long, or in some cases it never gets filled up. In one sense, every child of God is His servant, but here we think of those who serve(d) Him fulltime. When we start losing these men and women one after the other, “*Who next?*” is a natural question that arises in our minds. Honestly I am worried.

The Bible clearly teaches that our times are in God’s hands (Psa 31:15). This was King David’s confession when there were threats against him on every side through slander and evil schemes (v13,14). As such we cannot postpone our day of death determined by God. However it is the responsibility of every child of God to do his or her best to bless the Servants of God and keep them happy during their lifetime. Our duty to the living is more important than worrying over the deceased or paying them tributes (Josh 1:2). This is the meaning of what Jesus said, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mt 22:32b). The God of Abraham will guide Isaac. The God of Isaac shall guide Jacob. The God of Jacob will guide us all. You will be thrilled to see how many times God is called “God of Jacob” in the Bible!

In this Article I would highlight the headaches and heartaches of God’s Servants so we may do our best to gladden them and their God “who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servants” (Psa 35:27b). Myself being a fulltime Servant of God for 45 years now (2020), it’s easy for me to identify with the other Servants of God who are my fellow-strugglers and fellow-sufferers. Do not just sympathise with us but stand with us and support us to fulfil the ministry God has called us to. Even “a cup of cold water” to refresh us in our tiring job will be richly rewarded (Mt 10:41,42). Note the words of Jesus with this promise: “VERILY I say unto you ...” Whether an Apostle, a Prophet, an Evangelist, a Pastor or a Teacher, basically and primarily he is a “Servant of God.” This is how Peter, Paul, Timothy, James, John, Jude and Epaphras were called (2 Pet 1:1; Rom 1:1; Tit 1:1; Phil 1:1; Js 1:1; Rev 1:1; Jude 1; Col 4:12). Moses and Daniel were also called so (Num 12:7,8; Dan 6:20; 9:11).

1. Health Problems

I do not believe that any Servant of God faces premature or untimely death. When according to God their work on earth is over, He rings the bell to call them Home, as He

did in the case of Moses who was pretty strong and had not even developed cataract (Dt 34:7). But according to our understanding, the lives of many Servants of God are shortened due to ill-health. That's the story of most of those named in the first paragraph. Overwork, irregular meals and inadequate sleep are some of the causes. The confession of many a Pastor is like that of Jacob the shepherd: "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes" (Gen 31:40). The lamentation of the Shepherdess Shulamite is that of many a Servant of God: "I am dark because the sun has tanned me" (SS 1:6a). Pouring themselves for the wellbeing of others, they neglected their own health (v6b). Elisha the miracle-working Prophet died of a deadly disease (2 Ki 13:14a). Imagine what he would have felt when diagnosed! "Is this what a *double portion* of Elijah's spirit means? God took him to heaven on a chariot of fire. Great! Why not at least a painless death for me?"

What a pricking pain Apostle Paul had to bear in his body till death! How much he prayed for healing! (2 Cor 12:7-9). Timothy was already a timid Servant of God though he was the closest associate of lion-like bold Paul (1 Cor 16:10). He had to manage with chronic stomach illness (1 Tim 5:23). He was aware of how even a hanky from Paul healed the sick and drove away demons (Acts 19:11,12). How many times he would have washed the Apostle's clothes! He only carried Paul's overcoat to prison! (2 Tim 4:13). Another Servant of God, a close associate of Paul, narrowly escaped death due to sickness caused by overwork in the ministry (Phil 2:25-30). Standing continuously for long hours while teaching the Bible has caused me varicose veins. Shouting forthright messages for decades has damaged my vocal cords. Wear and tear! Beloved, be an angel to give "fresh bread and water" to the weary Servants of God (1 Ki 19:5,6). Just one time supply won't suffice (v7). Without your help they cannot walk for another "forty days and forty nights" (v8).

As I browsed through Church history, I was shocked and saddened over how several outstanding Servants of God died. David Brainerd died of tuberculosis at 29. His journal propelled hundreds to missionary service world over. Henry Martin, an English missionary to India, who translated the New Testament into Hindustani, died of tuberculosis and a debilitating fever at 31. Oswald Chambers, the author of the world-famous devotional classic, *My Utmost for the Highest*, died of peritonitis at 43. Charlotte Elliott, the author of the most famous hymn, "*Just as I am*," became an invalid at 30 and died at 82. Frances Havergal, the composer of "*Take my life and let it be*," died of peritonitis at 43.

John Sung, China's greatest Evangelist, died of cancer and tuberculosis at 43. George Whitefield, called Prince of Open-air Preachers, who had preached 18,000 sermons in his lifetime, died at 56. Bishop Reginald Heber of Calcutta, the author of "*Holy, Holy, Holy*," died of a stroke at 43. Henry Lyte, the author of "*Abide with me*," died of asthma and tuberculosis at 54. Joseph Scriven, the author of "*What a friend we have in Jesus*," died of drowning at 67. C. H. Spurgeon, called the Prince of Preachers, started preaching at 16 and died at 58. His wife became an invalid at 33. John Hyde, known as Praying Hyde, an American Missionary to India, died of brain tumor (sarcoma) at 47.

Matthew Henry, the famous Bible Commentator, died of a stroke at 52. He could finish his work upto Book of Acts only. (I've completed audiorecording of my daily devotions upto August. Praying that God would give me health and life till I finish this project.) John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, died of fever at 60. Martin Luther died of heart attack at 63. His wife, Katherine, who cared for so many orphans and poor students, died in a tragic accident at 53. Ziegenbalg, who came to Tranquebar in Tamilnadu from Germany, the first to translate the NT into Tamil, died at 35 unable to bear the Indian climate. Arthur Margoschis, called the Father of Nazareth, my native town in Tamilnadu, died of Asthma at 56. We lost two blooming Tamil Evangelists, Thuthi Shankar in a road accident at 32, and Dr. Justin Prabakaran to brain tumor at 41. Let me stop here lest you get depressed!

2. Family Problems

Thank God for the families of the Servants of God who have smooth sailing. But there are many whose ships are tempest-tossed. This does not change the fact of God's calling in their life. Not all Servants of God are blessed with supportive spouses. Conflict-free homes are rare. Eve badly influenced Adam, and they played blame-game (Gen 3:6,12,13). The wife of "righteous Lot" was too salty (2 Pet 2:7; Gen 19:26; Lk 17:32). Mrs. Job was a foolish woman (Job 2:10). The Tamil Bible calls her an "insane woman!" Abraham and Sarah had a major conflict which was eventually sorted out, but not without consequences until this day (Gen 16:1-6; 1 Pet 3:6; Gal 4:22,29). Because of the Ethiopian wife of Moses, there was a rift between him and his brother-sister duo (Num 12). No wonder Jesus commanded His disciples, "Whichever house you enter, first say, 'PEACE to this house!'" (Lk 10:5). There are also non-cooperative husbands of women ministers. Be an Aquila for Priscilla, without male ego, even though her name often comes first (Acts 18:18; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). The Jewish culture was worse than ours in male domination.

The cases of marital unfaithfulness is on the increase among the Servants of God. No reason is justifiable. The wounds caused by it are neither instantly curable nor incurable. Restoration of normalcy is by genuine repentance and generous forgiveness. Professional Christian counselling must be sought where necessary. Believers should regularly pray for oneness between the spouses of the Servants of God to defeat the devil (Eccl 4:11,12). This passage seems to have more specific reference to husband-wife relationship and fellowship than the company of other Christians.

Every other Servant of God has rebellious children. That's the spirit of the age (2 Tim 3:1,2; Mal 4:5,6; Lk 1:17). It is easy to criticize Servants of God quoting 1 Tim 3:4,5. What Paul emphasizes here is the father's responsibility in bringing up children in the fear of the Lord and obedience. This text is usually quoted vehemently by those who have not sacrificed much for the Kingdom of God. If all the Pastors and Preachers of rebellious sons and daughters should step down, over half of our pulpits would become empty! Prophet Samuel did not neglect his family amidst his hectic ministerial tours (1 Sam 7:15-17). But his sons who succeeded him did not walk in his ways and turned corrupt (8:1-5). Remember, it was young Samuel whom God used to carry a message of rebuke to Priest Eli for not restraining his sons (3:11-18). One of Noah's "saved" sons enjoyed pornography (Gen 9:20-25; 1 Pet

3:20). Job's sons were not as blameless as him, and their character was questionable (Job 1:1,4,5). We know how David's three sons — Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah — brought sorrow to his life (2 Sam 3:1-5).

Broken marriages of the children of Servants of God are not uncommon these days. For others it's news, but for the parents it's pain. Do not speak lightly of the situation. A Tamil proverb says, "You will understand headache and stomach pain only if you get it!" One of Billy Graham's daughters got divorced twice. When our only begotten daughter's marriage broke, what a gossip! The Christian community pointed to the unusually fruitful 3-day Family Conference, "*Love-Joy '94*", my wife and I led, under the Blessing Youth Mission, in May 1994, in which we literally made ourselves guineapigs and blessed 350 couples.

Stones will be pelted at fruit trees only. God in His Law has commanded not to fell fruitful trees (Dt 20:19,20). Archers shoot at those who are "a fruitful bough," so they may be grieved bitterly (Gen 49:22-24). Dear Servant of God, do not feel condemned and discouraged by the words of people. Jesus understands your pain. When He was on the Cross, religionists mocked at Him saying, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save!" (Mt 27:42). The robbers also reviled Him with the same words (v44). I know how many people challenge my friend, Mr. Mohan C. Lazarus, a Prayer-Warrior, when he prays for childless couples, because he and his wife go childless. Do you know how many Christians challenged our beloved Brother, D.G.S. Dinakaran, saying, "Healer, heal yourself!"? His family was already agonising over the tragic death of their darling daughter, Angel. Some Preachers are just fruits to people whereas others become fruit-juice by being crushed (Judg 9:8-13).

I asked the elderly Christian gentleman who took me around Revivalist John Wesley's house in England, "What about Wesley's wife?" He politely replied, "The less we talk about it the better!" Several Servants of God have confided in me how they are disrespected by their spouses and family folks. I simply remind them of the words of Jesus: "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house" (Mk 6:4). This text of course does not apply to a Servant of God who behaves irresponsibly. Preachers and Pastors with problem-free families must not look down upon those in difficulties but lift them up in all possible ways (Rom 15:1,2). "Weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). Apostle Paul sympathetically understood husband-wife and parents-children conflicts, and gave helpful counsel (1 Cor 7:7-9,32-35; Eph 5:22-26; 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21). If you cannot help a wounded man, please pass by like the Priest or the Levite. If you cannot pour oil on his wounds, please, please, don't pour acid (Lk 10:30-34). If you cannot be a good Samaritan, don't become a bad Samaritan either! Jesus told this story to a self-righteous legalist (Lk 10:25-29). Keep the Law inside the ark, not above it; let the Mercy-seat be on the top! (Ex 25:21; Js 2:13).

3. Ministerial Problems

My ministerial experience of 50+ years tells me that unless the joy of the Lord becomes the strength of a Servant of God, he would collapse too soon (Neh 8:10c). This joy is the resultant of the blessed exchange of our heavy burden for His easy yoke (Mt 11:28-30).

Those who don't learn this secret early in their ministry buckle under ministerial stress. This has taken a heavy toll among the Servants of God. Whatever be the demands in God's work, His Servants must not sacrifice their time with Him in solitude. Every ministerial activity drains spiritual energy. We will faint if we don't recharge our batteries by waiting on God (Isa 40:29-31). "In quietness and confidence is our strength" (30:15). If we forsake this discipline and run on "swift horses" with this mad world, the Lord would "wait" for us to return to Him in exhaustion (vv16-18). Those who pressurise God's servants and who are not ready to accept "no" for an answer are largely responsible for this malady. You can't keep on burning without pouring oil (Lev 6:13).

Christian work is more than spending money; it is spending oneself. It's literally pouring oneself in sacrificial service for blessing others (Phil 2:17). A time comes when there's nothing in a Servant of God to be poured out. That I believe is the end of his life. Listen to Paul: "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim 4:6). When the people of God don't reciprocate it with love and gratefulness, it's a heartbreaking discouragement which the Servant of God has to overcome. Apostle Paul graduated in this discipline with honours! He wrote to the Corinthian believers, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved" (2 Cor 12:15). This he could do because of his fatherly attitude (v14b). Dear believers, I urge you to love and respect the Servants of God as your fathers (v14). They love you so much that they even set aside their desire to enter the glorious literal presence of God in order to still help you grow through their labour (Phil 1:22-26; 2 Pet 1:12-15).

Frustrations are too common in the lives of God's Servants. We know the history of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was the keyman. He proceeded quite methodically with the God-given vision and wisdom. He had no personal agenda. He denied even his legitimate share in material blessings (Neh 5:15). He boldly withstood attacks from the enemies, refusing to come down from his commitment to complete the work (6:3). There were threats for his life also (vv10,11). But he expresses his frustration to God four times, saying, "Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for these people and for Your house" (5:19; 13:14,22,31). The book ends with this plea! (13:31). I personally can easily understand Nehemiah's feelings. I want to tell him, "Dear Brother Nehemiah, God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His Name!" (Heb 6:10). Apostle Paul had several frustrating experiences in his ministry. Next to Jesus, he was an embodiment of selflessness. He did not seek his own profit, but the profit of many (1 Cor 10:33). It is in this area he specifically challenged the Corinthian Christians to imitate him (11:1). He answered so many of their questions patiently. He gave practical instructions for Church life. To no other Church he explained the gifts of the Spirit in such detail. He was a father to them, more than a teacher (4:15). With all these, in course of time they sidelined him (vv 8,9). This has been the story of many a Servant of God whom I have met. But in their maturity they ignore such hurts and concentrate on getting ready for the day of their coronation (2 Tim 4:7,8).

A Servant of God without enemies is unheard of. We read in Proverbs 16:7, “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” This simply means that it is easy to make peace with a man who is at peace with God. David was a man after God’s own heart. But shall I tell you something? Of the 150 Psalms, 77 are attributed to David’s authorship. In over 50% of his Psalms, he talks about his enemies and prays for protection and deliverance. He calls his enemies as “bulls, dogs and lions” (Psa 22:12,13,16,20,21). Even in the most beloved 23rd Psalm he talks about “enemies.” At Ephesus Paul fought with “wild beasts” (1 Cor 15:32). Once he was delivered “out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim 4:17b). He was under the threat of the hammer and chisel of one Alexander a coppersmith (v14). Men like Diotrefes opposed John the Apostle of Love with malicious words (3 John 9,10). Dear fellow Servant of God, let’s learn to balance between “honour and dishonour,” and “good report and bad report” (2 Cor 6:8). Otherwise we will be killing ourselves. It is usually jealousy that lies at the door of the one who steps out to ruin another’s reputation (Gen 4:6,7).

Financial strain is another ministerial problem. No prophet was rich. No apostle was rich (1 Cor 4:11). Several of those who entered fulltime ministry gave away all their wealth and savings to God’s work. C. T. Studd (1862-1931), the famous Cricketer-turned-Missionary, gave away the huge wealth he inherited from his dad. Mr. M. Patrick Joshua who died on 17 June 2020, gave away all his savings and family jewelry when he entered fulltime ministry in 1977. My friend, Mr. K. Ponraj Isaac, gave away his motorcycle and guitar, which were his only earthly possessions, when he became a Missionary. There are hundreds and thousands of such testimonies down through Church history.

Those who are financially well off are much fewer than those in need among God’s Servants. All that I received as my savings from the Blessing Youth Mission (BYM) when I retired in 2003 was spent to gift my daily devotionals to thousands of the Mission’s supporters. I started my retired life with nil bank balance. But today I have enough and more by way of what I receive from beneficiaries of my five decades of Bible teaching (1 Cor 9:11). I share as much as possible with ministries and ministers in need. I appeal to Christian friends to identify the poor Servants of God and bless them. Be a Stephanas, a Fortunatus, an Achaicus and an Onesiphorus to refresh God’s Servants (1 Cor 16:17,18; 2 Tim 1:16-18). Several retired Missionaries of Indian Missions do not have a house of their own. Contact me if you need guidance (00 91 98437 07600, <stanleyonbible@hotmail.com>)

4. Spiritual Problems

“Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” — This is a time-tested strategy of Satan (Mt 26:31b). The primary area where the enemy lays his hand is the spirituality of the Servant of God. Once he loses personal holiness in his thoughts, words and deeds, the enemy gets a foothold. Backsliding among Pastors and Preachers may not be apparent, at least for sometime. The pulpit success may blind their eyes to see their spiritual bankruptcy (Rev 3:17,18; Judg 16:20,21). As much as you expect God’s Servants pray for

you, you must regularly pray for their spiritual health and fervour. Your Pastor cannot lift your spirituality above his (Jn 17:19; Lk 6:40). In the recent years, the overemphasis on material prosperity has led to spiritual poverty, especially in the life of many a Servant of God (Phil 3:17-19). When the Israelites lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, God granted them their request, but sent “leanness into their soul” (Psa 106:14,15). Mourn in secret like Prophet Samuel if you notice spiritual cooling-off in the life of your leaders (1 Sam 15:35b).

If you become aware of any serious failure in the conduct of your Pastor or Leader, do not backbite or go spreading it. Noah backslided, but God was not pleased with his son who told his two brothers what he saw (Gen 9:20-25). David commanded the people not to publicize even the death of the backslidden Saul, “lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice” (2 Sam 1:17-20). Do not feed the anti-Christian mouths wide open in this country. The Church is a family, and so do what you would do with a problem in your own family (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19). May God give wisdom and grace to the associate Pastors and fellow-leaders to deal with the situation uncompromisingly but redemptively for the restoration of the said Servant of God (Gal 6:1). “God is able to make him stand again” (Rom 14:4). If he is an elderly person, treat him like your “father” (1 Tim 5:1,2). Relieving him of his leadership responsibilities will give him ample time for restoring his “first love” for God and His Word (Rev 2:3-5; Jn 21:15-19). Bless him with a paid vacation for renewal. What God accomplished through him over the years must not be derecognised. Solomon became an idolater but God has kept his three books in the Bible for the benefit of generations (1 Ki 4:32; 11:3,4). We must not read them with bias, because what he wrote was with the wisdom “God” had given him (4:29). The “Book of Acts of Solomon” was a source material for the author of 1 & 2 Kings (1 Ki 11:41).

Freelance preachers, not attached officially to any organisation, should seek the fellowship of a couple of Servants of God of their choice for spiritual warmth and accountability (Eccl 4:9-12). Don't be a loner. We never outgrow the need to learn from one another, because no one knows everything (Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 8:2; 13:9). As you grow old, you may wonder why you should still be studying. With many years of walk with the Lord to your credit, you will understand better certain difficult passages of the Bible. Even in the closing days of his life, Apostle Paul asked Timothy to bring the books alongwith the blanket! (2 Tim 4:6b,13). With a dim vision and frail body C. T. Studd was turning the pages of an old tattered Bible with a lantern in a dark African jungle. When asked by a friend what he was doing at that hour, Studd replied, “My end is near. I am searching the Scriptures again to find out if I have deliberately missed out any commandment of the Lord!”

If we compare our birth to sunrise, our death is sunset. There's a crowning lesson for us as we come to the evening of our lives: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26). **Rest In Peace** (Psa 4:4). We are getting ready to go to the Glory Land. The only ground on which anyone has gone there is that he or she had been “forgiven!” Can we leave anyone on earth without forgiving him of whatever he has spoken or done against us? Like David, ignore Shimei (2 Sam 16:5,6,11,12). Jesus' first saying on the

Cross was on forgiveness (Lk 23:34). The dying words of the first martyr were also on forgiveness (Acts 7:60). Jacob took the initiative in his later years to reconcile with his brother (Gen 32:3,6). Paul softened his attitude towards John Mark in the closing years of his ministry (2 Tim 4:6,11; Col 4:10). Our hearts must become larger and larger as the Temple was growing wider and wider while climbing from the ground floor to the top (Ezek 41:7). “Let your gentleness be made known to all men. The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:5; Js 5:8,9).

Conclusion

There were numerous Prophets among God’s people, but everyone was not as outstanding as Moses or Elijah (Mt 17:3). There were many Priests in Israel but Aaron was special (Heb 5:4). Among the several Psalmists, David was the “sweet Psalmist” of Israel (2 Sam 23:1). Jesus had twelve Apostles and many disciples, but He took only Peter, James and John to the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt 17:1). There were numerous writers of history but God chose Luke to write the story of the early Church (Lk 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3). Among the New Testament Missionaries, Paul was excelling (1 Cor 15:9,10). Similarly we have tens of thousands of God’s Servants all over the world and especially in our vast land of Bharat. Among them there are only a few outstanding Preachers, Pastors, Teachers, Writers and Leaders. It is saddening that the number of these men and women is dwindling as they are leaving us quickly as I have pointed out in the first paragraph of this Article. Even among those left over, many are wounded soldiers. Hardly a handful is active with rich anointing. The question that keeps lingering in our minds: “*Who next?*”