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Gaining humility, strength, and freedom through branch church reading

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Yielding humbly to God's guidance, a Reader in a branch Church of Christ, Scientist, is able to serve with assurance and poise. A deep-toned peace comes to the one who knows that reading in a branch church is effective only as it is God-directed.

There can be no weak or feeble moment for man, because there is no lapse in Principle's harmonious government of man.

Consistent humility has the effect of eliminating either personal pride or inadequacy in reading. Whether as a Reader or a member of the congregation, we each need to see that the one reading is not, in spiritual fact, a vulnerable, inexperienced, or limited mortal but the wholly able, immortal expression of God, possessing by divine reflection the authority and truth of His Word.

Acknowledging man's unity with God as His spiritual image enables us to see that all ability is God-given, including every quality and capacity demanded in reading—such as inspired thought, unselfed love, humility, discipline. Reading becomes unlabored, free of egotism or

fear when we're devoted to reflecting Spirit's abilities in our daily lives as well as in our church services.

Along with humility, reading offers us the opportunity to gain strength by demonstrating greater fidelity to God's Word. The days before the reading aloud of the Bible Lesson¹ on Sunday provide us with ample opportunities to put into practice the spiritual message of the lesson. The living and doing of the Word breathe life and a healing spirit into the reading. Consistency in doing this brings spiritual conviction—as well as the courage of our convictions.

David's words to Solomon about building the temple at Jerusalem can have special meaning for a Reader: "Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord."²

Serving God, humbly and courageously, doesn't deplete our strength but renews it. Mrs. Eddy explains in *Science and Health*, "We have strength in proportion to our apprehension of the truth, and our strength is not lessened by giving utterance to truth."³ Strength is gained as we demonstrate the fact that God, universal Principle, is in control and that nothing is beyond the control of this all-inclusive Principle.

The Bible statement about God and His children "He is strong in power; not one faileth"⁴ indicates the permanency of God's strength, continually sustaining man—maintaining the spiritual selfhood of each of us. There can be no weak or feeble moment for man, because there is no lapse in Principle's harmonious government of man.

Readership can also be a means of our gaining a new sense of freedom. Knowing that the only real consciousness present—for each individual at the service, including a Reader—is the divine consciousness, one can read with freedom, with a buoyancy and compassionate love for everyone present. Acting in obedience to Christ Jesus' command "Preach the gospel to every creature,"⁵ the Reader is under no penalty of any kind; he or she is free, God-empowered and God-supported.

I experienced this freedom in the midst of a Sunday service while I was serving as Second Reader in my branch church. Just as I began reading one of the sections in the lesson, I felt as if I would totally black out. At that moment I was reading the Bible verses about how Elijah stood fast against the prophets of Baal in order to give conclusive proof to the people of the one living God.⁶ Following a dramatic display of God's power, the people slew the prophets of Baal. In retaliation, Queen Jezebel, an ardent believer in Baal, sent a death threat to Elijah, who fled into the wilderness and there requested to die.

Immediately after feeling I would black out, it occurred to me that when Elijah requested that he die, such a request didn't represent God's will. It was the malicious hatred directed toward Elijah, coming to him in this instance as his own thought. Likewise, I saw that the feelings of blacking out were not of God and were therefore not really mine as His obedient expression. They depicted an attitude of thought opposed to God and His creation—an opposition that Elijah proved to be powerless.

Elijah was sustained in the wilderness and was led to Mount Horeb, where he learned that God wasn't in the raging elements of wind, earthquake, and fire. This understanding enabled him to obey the "still small voice" of God, which directed him to fulfill his prophetic mission.

I saw that, like Elijah, because I was endeavoring to serve God, I too would be sustained. I couldn't be deceived into believing in a destructive power opposed to God. The error called "blacking out" had no actual control over me, because God, good, did not support it. There was no power to silence the mission of Elijah or to silence the truth that I was voicing in reading aloud the lesson.

The inspiration needed to bring healing was immediate, and the feeling that I would black out faded in a few moments. There was no disruption of the service. Truly, the message had supported the messenger. I completed reading the lesson with a strong conviction of freedom, remembering Mrs. Eddy's words "...rest assured you can never lack God's outstretched arm so long as you are in His service."⁷

Reading in a branch church means serving God, our church, our community. It offers us the joyous opportunity to gain humility by opening our thought and reflecting God's abilities, strength by our fidelity to living the Word, and freedom by an inspired understanding that God

always supports the work of those committed to serving Him.

¹ In the *Christian Science Quarterly* .↑

² I Chron. 28:20.↑

³ *Science and Health*, p. 80.↑

⁴ Isa. 40:26.↑

⁵ Mark 16:15.↑

⁶ See I Kings, chaps. 18 and 19 .↑

⁷ *Message to The Mother Church for 1901*, p. 1.↑

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