

John the Baptist is my favourite biblical figure because he always reminds me of the attitude and aspiration of being a minister.

I have a print of the painting *The Crucifixion* by Grünewald hung on the gray partition at my desk in the office. In this painting, right below the Cross, there stands John the Baptist. One of his hands is holding the Bible, the other pointing at Christ nailed on the Cross. His gaze and his gesture are reminiscent to his previous words: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

As the church pastor of Edification, if I have to do some review and envisaging, I will first ask myself: it is often said that the purpose of edification is to *transform life*. Have I been transformed, changed or grown for the past year?

### Humility

The first challenge I found in full-time ministry is the difficulty in ‘focusing’. There are different people and issues come up to keep you busy every day. You may strive to protect your work schedule. You may choose not to pay visits today, not to meet anyone, not this, not that... Nonetheless, things came up, a situation arise. You have to abandon however important tasks you have at hand and take off. All you can do is to pray to God that you may have a little more energy, using much less time to finish what you have to finish even if it is next to impossible.

Because of this, I naturally learned to have more humility and less pride in the course of my ministry.

The John the Baptist hung on the gray partition also reminds me every day that “He must increase, but I must decrease”.

### Prayer

Another challenge is the diversity of things happen every day. In the same day, you have to face people and things of different extremes: while some are enchanted by having a new-born baby, some are saddened by the loss of a family member; in the morning, pastoral staffs have been talking about growth of the congregation, in the afternoon, a member of a fellowship informs you that he/she is planning to leave the church; you spent hours to make a decision on some tiny little things, the next minute came the news that the whole city from afar was leveled in the blink of an eye. Facing things like these, even a pastor could become desensitized and left with no feelings. On the matter of life and death – easy come, easy go.

The only way out I found in conditions of such extremes is prayer. Prayer calms our hearts down. Prayer leads us into other people’s situation to feel the pain, the joy, the fear, the thankfulness. Prayer brings our numbed sentiments out from the coldness of our brains back into the warmth of our hearts. Prayer enables me to weep, feeling the world by tears.

Karl Barth, the theologian, once said, "To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world."

It is true.

### Be There

These days, God made me gradually realize that I am only one who points people to Christ. The success of ministry does not even depend on how biblical or how popular my projects are, or how many lives in Christ were changed and how much applause was gained. The success or failure of ministry is determined by whether or not I am willing to take my part and cooperate with God while He is working on something.

In other words, am I there?

John the Baptist in the painting – he is there. His eyes, his finger tip, even his whole body bring people's focus on Christ on the Cross.

I always ask myself if I am loving the people I serve, or I am loving myself who serve the people. I became more and more convinced that there are many different ways to achieve certain goal in ministry. If I think that my way is the *only* way, there are only two possibilities: 1) I am ignorant; 2) what I love to see is my sense of achievement and not people really being helped.

If I truly love my brothers and sisters, I will first tell what I think. In case other people have better ideas than mine, I will be willing to give up my belief and sincerely work together with them. In case other people have opposite ideas to mine, I have to respect the choice of the faithful, believing in God's presence within. In case my idea is turned down, I will surrender and cooperate in earnest since the same purpose served would not be affected by using different means out of the same intention.

If I truly love my brothers and sisters, I will focus more on our common goal than the nuts and bolts.

Say "Thank you". Give a hug. Write something encouraging. Laugh more, cry more when we gather. I found these as possibilities that we can explore.

Is it not what Paul does in his letters to the Corinthians?

### Old and New

Pastoral Care and ministry implementation enable me to get in touch with people in the church of different backgrounds. In our conversations, I discerned two different voices. One inclines to the belief, "It was like that before. It is like that now. It will be like that in future." No matter it is worship, edification, caring or evangelism; if it was done like that before and it worked, why a change? Is there such a need? When any change is proposed, their habitual warning is: "Go farther and fare worse". "Keep doing" is the motto. So

gradually, other parts of the Body of Christ begin to accept impossibility as the verdict and would spend no more time on the need and possibility of renewal of the self and the church.

The other voice is the complete opposite: What we have been using or doing is outdated and no longer suits the present need. We need to adopt a new approach, something that worked in another church and brought renewal, so that we can have a brand new solution to our present problem. There is only either/or between the old and the new, they hope that a paradigm shift could bring a change to people. In case of otherwise, other approaches could still be tried. The bottom line is: what has not been tried yet is always better.

In other words, some brothers and sisters say, "The old is always better than the new." Others suggest, "New means favourable."

### Patience

My observation tells me that brothers and sisters seem to have lost patience in the seeking of truth. Two extremes came out as a result: one says, "No big deal! We have been so used to that. Let's just continue!"; the other welcomes changes and completely abandoning the old way and start anew.

The problem is: what is new today will become old tomorrow. Are we going to keep altering (or keep conserving)?

Similarly, what is old today used to be new yesterday. Do we understand the reason, the vision and the intention of what brothers and sisters did before?

Is the infeasibility from yesterday the cause of today's indifference?  
Is it really outdated, or is it us who do not have the patience to help it live up its potential?

Since I first joined this church, I have kept convincing myself not to be radical. Rather, keep observing, keep understanding with patience and believe that God has never stopped working and that something happens today is not a simple coincidence.

Whether things follow my way or not is not important, but whether or not they work together with what God has started is.

### What is Jesus Doing?

WWJD (What Will Jesus Do?) was once a very popular motto widely advertised and sold in the Christian community, helping certain Christians regain the courage in maintaining their integrity in faith. A more pressing question I am going to ask today, however, is not "What will Jesus do?" but "What is Jesus doing now?" In our lives, what is our Lord doing now? In our church, what is our Lord doing now? In our community, our country, our world, what is our Lord doing now?

If that is not asked in the first place, nothing is left but our soliloquy.  
If that is not asked in the first place, we will never find the answer to the next question:

“How could we then work with Him?”

Do you know how to work in accord with the ministry that our Lord has already set out among us?

John the Baptist, he knew. What he did in his whole life was nothing but all that.