



A LIFE OF THANKSGIVING

BY PIN TAI

"...in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thess. 5:18.

How do we celebrate a life that is marked by answered prayers and God's constant guidance when we are unsure about life's next turn? Unmistakably, with thanksgiving! This is God's will, as Paul exhorts us in 1 Thess. 5:18, for nothing that ever happens to us is beyond God's superintendence.

I started my career in the banking industry in Hong Kong, when I got an offer from Bank of America to join their new China office as I was finishing my MBA at Northwestern University in Chicago. It was a clear affirmation

from God as my wife, Teresa and I had desired and prayed to return home to share the Gospel with our families. The opportunity also manifested God's perfect plan for each stage of our lives, as our sojourn in the former British Colony lasted barely four years when the political situation turned very tense. But praise to God, we were able to share the Gospel with our parents, brothers, and sister during this time and all of them accepted Jesus as their Savior. Spiritually, we were led to greater maturity through our active engagement in the local church, lead-

ing fellowships and participating in discipleship training. In particular, God was preparing me for a life of servant leadership.

Unbeknownst to me, God had a perfect plan for my life. I was born in Xiamen, China but it was a difficult childhood as China was experiencing severe famines. My mother took me to Hong Kong to reunite with my father but enduring poverty kept college education a distant dream for me. By the grace of God I was able to enroll in one of the best high schools in Hong Kong and my school counsellor encouraged me to get an education in the States. I did, when the University of Rochester offered me a full scholarship in their Chemical Engineering program.

It was in college when I made my decision for Christ. I had pondered upon the questions of the purpose of life and the existence of God. I inquired into different religions and was convinced that Christianity is a reasonable faith, with concrete evidence spanning over the entire human history. More importantly it preaches a God who is loving and caring for every single human being. My conviction was strengthened by witnesses from some of my friends who were transformed into nicer and caring persons after they had accepted Jesus as their savior. I made my decision for Christ when a well-known Chinese evangelist, Rev. Philip Tang from Indonesia, spoke at a service with the message, "Let God be God." I felt humbled before such an awesome God and raised my hand at the altar call.

Life was never the same after I became a "born again" Christian. I was hungry for God's Word and His plan for humanity. My then girlfriend, Teresa, who had joined me at Rochester to pursue her study, and I were married soon afterwards and we became very involved in the local church. I was working for International Paper as a process engineer after college when the Holy Spirit began to stir a desire in us to return home for the sake of our families. God then providentially prepared me for an education at Northwestern as it was much easier to gain employment with an MBA back home. God's plan, as it was, worked out in divine perfection.

The answer to our angst over Hong Kong's political uncertainty seemed to have been found in Berkeley, where I found myself enrolled as a doctoral student at the University of California. We had no doubt it was God who opened the door, as my study was covered by a full scholarship that helped support my growing family of four. Yet increasingly I questioned whether God's plan was indeed for me to complete the degree, as the program was getting too theoretical for someone who enjoys managerial challenges and people relationships. I was anxious to await God's next move.

The answer came in a phone call from my former superior at Bank of America, who informed me of an opportunity at the Bank of China in New York City. I would never know how he tracked down my contact information, but I prayed immediately about the opportunity, where I could witness for Him in a Chinese government-owned financial institution. That was exactly what God allowed me to do in the next 13 years. But God had planned for a lot more. While actively engaged in our local church in New Jersey, my wife and I were also given the opportunity to plant a new church. The Holy Spirit uses our witnessing to lead a colleague of mine and her entire family to Christ. They were baptized and then started to serve faithfully in our church.

God knows I was ready for greater challenges after so many years with Bank of China, and I sensed the time was ripe when the new General Manager, who came from China, did not seem to trust the locally hired talents. As the situation became difficult, I was approached by Cathay Bank, one of the largest ethnic-Chinese banks in America, to fill a new role to lead the bank's expansion into the New York market. It was at Cathay Bank that I was challenged to learn more about leadership skills. My hunger for leadership knowledge led me to John Maxwell's writings, especially his *360 Degree Leadership*. Maxwell, a former pastor,

is an internationally renowned authority with over 40 books on management and leadership, much of them grounded in Christian principles and biblical teachings. My career at Cathay Bank is a testimony to the power and blessings of

leading as servants, where modern leadership philosophy meets Scriptural insights.

According to the Servant Leadership Institute, unlike traditional leadership which "... involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the 'top of the pyramid' ... the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible." When leaders "...serve first, they unlock purpose and ingenuity in those around them, resulting in higher performance and engaged, fulfilled employees. A servant leader's purpose should be to inspire and equip the people they influence."¹ For a Christian servant leader, I must also add three key elements: Faith, Hope and Love.

Faith. A servant leader believes that his people will always do their best under a good leader. I always suggest to my staff that I believe in their good intention and desire to do their best for themselves and the bank. Most people will try not to disappoint their leader.

Hope. A servant leader is certain that his people will accomplish the goals set for them by the leader. I always set realistic goals for my staff and support them to reach their

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goals. When the people know that their leader is always there to work with them, they will do their best to exceed the leader's expectation.

Love. A servant leader loves and cares for the well-being of his people. When the people feel the love and care from their leader, they will not hesitate to go an extra mile to support the leader. I recently implemented a plan to send a birthday card to all our staff on their birthdays along with a gift card. The gesture was motivational and widely appreciated.

So God was gracious to me during my 17 years with Cathay Bank. I was able to share the Gospel with my colleagues and even customers, leading some of them to Christ. My practice of servant leadership was well received by my colleagues, including members of the senior leadership team and Board of Directors. I owed it to God for His guidance and preparation in my personal journey, which now cumulates in a family of two grown daughters, a son, and four lovely grandchildren, and professionally, in a leadership role that is charged with setting the path of a major, growing financial institution. But this is the role of a servant leader, whose only claim to power is "faith in Jesus Christ," for "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrew 11:6). The outworking of this faith is in the sharing of God's love with others by being a blessing to all (James 2:26). This is the purpose of God's calling for us to be His children, and it is the purpose of my life!

Notes

¹ Accessed at: <https://www.servantleadershipinstitute.com/what-is-servant-leadership-1/>

About the Author



Pin Tai is the President and CEO of Cathay Bank, a publicly traded, California based bank with over \$13 billion in assets and operating in 9 states as well as Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. With over 33 years of commercial banking experience, Pin worked for the Bank of China (U.S.)

and Bank of America (Hong Kong) before joining Cathay Bank in 1999 as head of the New York region. He has been actively involved in the Chinese-American business community and in Christian ministries. Pin holds a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Rochester and an MBA with honors from Northwestern University. He has been married to his wife Teresa for 40 years and resides in Pasadena, CA.