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發行：宿務基督教會
電話：032-412-5400
傳真：032-255-2966
通訊：PO. Box 270,
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Website: <http://cebugospel.church/gospellight>

2020 CHURCH THEME



VISION

To be a Bible-believing Filipino-Chinese Church that develops Christ-glorifying Christians

異象

菲華教會 確信聖經
培養門徒 榮耀基督

MISSION

1. To prepare God's People for works of service through equipping, encouraging, and discipling.
2. To promote a Christ-like Church that loves and cares for one another.
3. To proclaim the Gospel to our Community and beyond

使命

裝備鼓勵 培訓門徒
神的子民 盡職事奉
促進推動 效法基督
彼此相愛 互相關懷
宣揚傳講 神的福音
始於市鎮 直到地極



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更新生命 效法基督

谢国智牧师

一、基督裡面，新造的人

聖經說：「若有人在基督裡，他就是新造的人，舊事已過，都變成新的了。」（哥林多前書 5:17）為何使徒保羅說：「若有人在基督裡，他就是新造的人？」我們要怎樣成為在基督耶穌裡面新造的人呢？聖經說：「凡接待他的，就是信他名的人，他就賜他們權柄，作神的兒女。這等人不是從血氣生的，不是從情慾生的，也不是從人意生的，乃是從神生的。」

（約翰福音 1:12-13）既然主的話指明要作祂的兒女，要成為在基督裡新造的人。這等人並「不是從血氣生的，不是從情慾生的，也不是從人意生的。」因此，我們要相信祂要賜給我們基督的生命。



耶穌說：「我來了，是要叫羊（或作：人）得生命，並且得的更豐盛。」（約翰福音 10:10b）耶穌要賜給這新的生命是祂死裡復活的生命，（原文是 *zoe*）我們從母腹生下來只有兩種生命：一是肉體的生命（原文是 *soma*），二是魂的生命（原文是 *psuche*）假如我們不接受基督耶穌為我們的救主，那麼我們靈的生命就是死的，我們不在基督裡面，也不是新造的人了。

聖經說：「然而，神既有豐富的憐憫，因他愛我們的大愛，當我們死在過犯中的時候，便叫我們與基督一同活過來。你們得救是本乎恩。他又叫我們與基督耶穌一同復活，一同坐在天上，要將他極豐富的恩典，就是他在，基督耶穌裡向我們所施的恩慈，顯明給後來的世代看。你們得救是本乎恩，也因著信；這並不是出於自己，乃是神所賜的；也不是出於行為，免得有人自誇。」（以弗所書 2:4-9）神豐富的大愛，使我們死在過犯中的罪人，叫我們與基督一同活過來，一同坐在天上，得著主復活的生命。每當我們禱告與祂談話的時候，猶如我們就坐在祂身旁，是那樣親近，那樣傾心吐意。當我們遇到試探的時候，我們求祂的權柄勝過惡魔的謀害，祂藉著住在我們裡面的聖靈得勝有餘！祂這極大豐富的恩典，使我們成

為在基督裡面新造的人，不是出於自己，也不是出於行為，免得有人自誇，我們是用信心接受祂復活的生命。

弟兄姊妹們，我們要清楚重生得救的真理，否則，我們就不是一位在基督裡面的人，生命也不可能心意更新而變化。

二、奉獻為活祭，生命就更新

羅馬書十二章第一至二節說：「所以弟兄們，我以神的慈悲勸你們，將身體獻上，當作活祭，是聖潔的，是神所喜悅的；你們如此事奉乃是理所當然的。不要效法這個世界，只要心意更新而變化，叫你們察驗何為神的善良、純全、可喜悅的旨意。」

我們憑信心接受耶穌基督為救主以後，我們就屬於神屬靈大家庭－教會的一份子（原文 *ekklesia*）意思是「蒙呼召的一群人」“called out ones”（*ekk-out; lesia called-ones*）。

羅馬書八章第二十節說：「預先所定下的人又召他們來；所召來的人又稱他們為義；所稱為義的人又叫他們得榮耀。」我們救恩的三部曲：1. 因信成義（Justification）－因信心不被定罪。2. 因信成聖（Sanctification）－因信心脫離罪的捆綁。3. 因信得榮（Glorification）－因信心脫離罪的範圍。因此，生命要更新，奉獻為活祭

是必須的。

但是[奉獻為活祭]不一定是清楚蒙恩得救的基督徒能做到的。保羅以[神的慈悲勸我們，將身體獻上，當作活祭。](羅12:1b)[神的慈悲]是甚麼？是做罪人的咱們本來應該得著刑罰下地獄，但祂憐憫恩待我們，反而使我們到天堂。祂差派祂的獨生子耶穌基督死在十字架為我們死，信祂的人必得永生。(約翰福音3:16)這就是[神的慈悲]。

神的愛激勵我們，使我們把自己奉獻給祂為活祭。保羅形容為[是聖潔的，是神所喜悅的，你們如此事奉乃是理所當然的。](羅12:1b)我們奉獻給祂為活祭以後，生命要不斷的更新改變，我們要有積極屬靈的操練：(1)不要效法這個世界。(2)要心意更新而變化。

(1) 不要效法這個世界—[這個世界]是指著不合神旨意的世俗。[不效法]是指著不讓它的模式來塑造我們。(2) 要心意更新而變化—[心意更新]原文字根英文字“*metamorphosis*”是指著一隻受捆綁的蟲(*cocoon*)變成自由飛翔的美麗蝴蝶(*butterfly*)。[更新變化]是指著信徒不斷的追求更像基督的樣式。

三、跟隨耶穌，效法基督

(一) 跟隨耶穌

當我們生命更新了，確定要追求效法基督的樣式，我們屬靈的操練應當在日常生活中表現出來。每天安排固定的時間（不拘早上或晚上），撥出半個小時讀經禱告，積極參加信徒小組查經團契。每主日須參加崇拜會—聽聖經的道理，領受神對教會以及信徒所傳遞的信息。並獻上自己給主，把頌讚之祭、感恩之祭及應納的十分之一金錢奉獻送入主之家的倉庫。同時我們要熱心幫助主裡弟兄姊妹或親朋戚友身心靈的缺乏與需要。星期一至星期六要時刻與主同行，跟隨耶穌的腳步永不偏離。

那麼，要怎樣衡量一位基督徒有真正與主同行跟隨耶穌呢？

第一，我們要跟從耶穌，就當捨己，每天背起我們的十字架跟從祂。我們在跟隨耶穌的人生道路上，應避免流於外表及宗教信仰的儀式；而是要讓聖靈充滿，注重心靈的更新與變化。

[耶穌又對眾人說：若有人要跟從我，就當捨己，天天背起他的十字架來跟從我。](路加福音9:23)，這是耶穌對信徒的挑戰。我們要成為主的門徒，就要付上代價，完全放棄自己的利益，成就主的旨意。[背十字架]代表犧牲的精神與心志。[天天]表示持續不間斷。

第二，我們既要與基督同釘十字架，就不再為自己活，乃是為愛我們的主活。保羅親身經歷過，他說：「我已經與基督同釘十字架，現在活著的不再是我，乃是基督在我裡面活著；並且我如今在肉身活著，是因信神的兒子而活；他是愛我，為我捨己。」（加拉太書2:20）

第三，我們要行善是神預備叫我們行的，因此我們要先讓祂塑造我們有主的性情。聖靈本身啟示保羅寫道：「我們原是他的工作，在基督耶穌裡造成的，為要叫我們行善，就是神所預備叫我們行的。」（以弗所書2:10）

當我們沒有保留地讓祂的聖靈在我們屬靈生命動善工時，我們就效法基督了。正如使徒彼得所說的：「你們若因犯罪受責打，能忍耐，有甚麼可誇的呢？但你們若因行善受苦，能忍耐，這在神看是可喜愛的。你們蒙召原是為此，因基督也為你們受過苦，給你們留下榜樣，叫你們跟隨他的腳蹤行。」（彼得前書1:20-21）

（二）效法基督

我們跟隨他的腳蹤行，我們自然會效法基督了。筆者在此提到祂三方面的特質：

第一，基督是柔和謙卑

祂說：「凡勞苦擔重擔的人可以到我這裡來，我就使你們得安息。我心裡

柔和謙卑，你們當負我的軛，學我的樣式；這樣，你們心裡就必得享安息。因為我的軛是容易的，我的擔子是輕省的。」（馬太福音11:28-30）

我們這些勞苦擔重擔的人要首先到主面前，才有真正的安息。然後當負祂的軛，祂的軛是容易的，祂的擔子是輕省的。有人解釋「主的軛」好像是兩隻牛同負一軛拉著牛車，主與我一起走，主負較大而廣的部份，而我是小而窄的部份。原來我與主同一軛走天路時是容易輕省的。感謝主！

還有我要學祂的樣式 - 柔和謙卑，其結果，我必得享受祂的安息！祂的柔和，以賽亞有描寫：「看哪，我的僕人 - 我所扶持所揀選、心裡所喜悅的！我已將我的靈賜給他；他必將公理傳給外邦。他不喧嚷，不揚聲，也不使街上聽見他的聲音。壓傷的蘆葦，他不折斷；將殘的燈火，他不吹滅。他憑真實將公理傳開。」（以賽亞書42:1-3）

祂的謙卑，保羅在腓立比書有描寫：「你們當以基督耶穌的心為心，他本有神的形像，不以自己與神同等為強奪的，反倒虛己，取了奴僕的形像，成為人的樣式。既有人的樣子，就自己卑微，存心順服，以至於死，且死在十字架上。」（腓立比書2:5-8）

第二，基督是好牧人

祂說：「我是好牧人，我認識我的羊，我的羊也認識我，正如父認識我，我也認識父一樣；並且我為羊捨命。我另外有羊，不是這圈裡的，我必須領他們來，他們也要聽我的聲音，並且要合成一群，歸一個牧人了。」（約翰福音10:14-16）

基督祂也是羊的門，祂說：「我就是門，凡從我進來的，必然得救，並且出入得草吃。盜賊來，無非要偷竊、殺害、毀壞；我來了，是要叫羊（或作：人）得生命，並且得的更豐盛。」（約翰福音10:1-10）

我們得著大牧者的養育，必得豐盛的生命，我們就可以效法祂，做一個好管家。使徒彼得給我們幾樣的原則：「我這作長老，作基督受苦的見證，同享後來所要顯現之榮耀的，勸你們中間與我同作長老的人：務要牧養在你們中間神的群羊，按著神旨意照管他們。不是出於勉強，乃是出於甘心；也不是因為貪財，乃是出於樂意；也不是轄制所託付你們的，乃是作群羊的榜樣。到了牧長顯現的時候，你們必得那永不衰殘的榮耀冠冕。」（彼得前書 5:1-4）當我們小牧人照顧主所託付的羊群的時候，盼望能按照彼得所指示的原則。求主幫助我們！

第三，基督是順服遵主旨意

祂在客西馬尼園禱告掙扎說：「耶穌

同門徒來到一個地方，名叫客西馬尼，就對他們說：你們坐在這裡，等我到那邊去禱告。於是帶著彼得和西庇太的兩個兒子同去，就憂愁起來，極其難過。便對他們說：我心裡甚是憂傷，幾乎要死，你們在這裡等候，和我一同儆醒。他就稍往前走，俯伏在地，禱告說：我父阿，倘若可行，求你叫這杯離開我。然而，不要照我的意思，只要照你的意思。」（馬太福音26:36-39）

腓立比書也指示說：「他本有神的形像，不以自己與神同等為強奪的，反倒虛己，取了奴僕的形像，成為人的樣式。既有人的樣子，就自己卑微，存心順服，以至於死，且死在十字架上。所以，神將他升為至高，又賜給他那超乎萬名之上的名。」（腓立比書2:6-9）

羅馬書第十二章第二節說：「不要效法這個世界，只要心意更新而變化，叫你們察驗何為神的善良、純全、可喜悅的旨意。」我們心意更新而變化以後，我們就會察驗何為神的旨意了。我們還要被聖靈充滿。以弗所書第五章十七至十八節指示：「不要作糊塗人，要明白主的旨意如何。不要醉酒，酒能使人放蕩，乃要被聖靈充滿。」我們要效法順服遵主旨意。願主的聖名得著榮耀！阿們！



DEATH

Catherine Chua

*T*his happened last 2019. It was a 9-year old boy with a tumor inside his brain. He was too thin, I could visibly see his ribs, abdomen curving inwards, with no cheeks in sight. He was gasping for air despite the supplemental oxygen given. His parents were beside him, crying. I was there, the only medical intern. After a few moments, his parents called for me. The boy stopped breathing, and I felt no pulse. As I was pumping on his chest, I could clearly see his face, and I thought that the world is unfair and full of suffering. While I called the nurse for epinephrine, I was also gasping for air. The father told me somewhere in the words, "Doc, if it's too hard for my son, then we will accept." It was heart-breaking, but I kept a straight face, gave my condolences and went on. It was hardly the second hour of my 36-hour duty.

It was a busy shift at the emergency room, especially being assigned in the neurology department. Patients coming in from vehicular accidents with severe injuries to the head, having cancer that spread to the brain and so on. I witnessed four deaths in that shift alone. I remembered crying in my dormitory after that shift.

I reflected on the death of that 9-year old boy, the life that could have been ahead of him, his parents that were left behind, and so on. I also thought of all the other deaths that I could possibly recall. Honestly, it did not make sense to me: suffering, pain, death. It was difficult to grasp because I tried to give my own explanation. And like any great process, it took time. I realized that even in death, God is present. Even in death, there is comfort because God is present. Because of physical death, there is hope for eternal life with God.

Fast forward to today, the world is faced with death: this ever-deafening pandemic. Currently a post graduate intern, it has been about three months since I was no longer required to go to the hospital due to the pandemic. I can only imagine what is going on there, the cycle of suffering, pain and death in many patients. Patients in isolation away from their loved ones, and with a possibility of dying alone. It is scary. But I remember again that even in death, God is present. Even in death, there is comfort because God is present. Because of physical death, there is hope for eternal life with God.

神造就我

許玉英傳道

童

年的我，並不快樂。因家境窮苦，心中總是有自卑感。我又是家中老大，母親對我特別嚴格，因而產生消極的性格。

信主後，接受基督無條件的愛，我對人生開始覺得有價值，有方向。主拯救了我，我把生命的主權交給那位救贖我的主。保羅說：「豈不知你們的身子就是聖靈的殿嗎？這聖靈是從神而來，住在你們裡頭的。並且你們不是自己的人，因為你們是重價買來的，所以要在你們的身子上榮耀神。」（林前6：19，20）

1975年，我接受神的呼召，走上了事奉主的道路。四十多年來，神不斷地教導我，磨煉我，造就我，潔淨我，讓我成為合乎主用的僕人。我想在這裡向大家分享神教我的一些功課：

(一) 神的路是最美善

有時我以為自己的方法最好，神卻教導我要全然信靠祂，順服祂，要相信祂是全能的神。當我經歷了許多事情後，我終於體會到祂的作為真是最奇妙。有一首詩經年不息地鼓勵我要完全信靠。

神的路(靈恩詩歌#167)

神的路最美善，雖我不明瞭，
為何憂愁試煉，常把我環繞；
主用各樣方法，煉我像精金，
故我順服信靠，我慈悲父神。

副歌：

神的路是最美善，神的路最美好，
我願常倚靠祂，惟祂能引導。

(二) 神的恩典夠我用

作為師母不容易。未婚時，神呼召我全時間事主，後來又呼召我一同與外子同心事奉，在多年的事奉中，讓我遇到的是評論勝於鼓勵。但神的恩典夠我用，為主受苦，把評論作為鏡子反省自己，改變自己。不能為自己辯屈時，神為我伸冤。當神的工作繁重時，祂就讓我覺得這是神的重托，有了使命感，心裡便輕鬆了。

(三) 神的同在和安慰

好多時候牧師為了聖工常外出，難免令人覺得孤單，但是當我禱告後，我就不再孤單了，因神的喜樂是我的力量，神的同在安慰了我，神才是確實又寶貝的伴侶。

(四) 憑信心為主做工

林前十五章五十八節說：「所以，我親愛的弟兄們，你們務要堅固，不可搖動，常常竭力多做主工；因為知道，你們的勞苦在主裡面不是徒然的。」

很多時候，我們不能立刻看見工作的果效，但知道為主工作不落空，有永恆的價值，就不覺得白費，憑信心撒種，必有一天要收成。

(五) 正確事奉的動機

神要我以純潔的動機事奉祂：就是為祂的榮耀，成全祂的旨意事奉。我立了志向，要得主的喜悅，因為我工作必在耶穌基督裏顯露出來。工作若存得住，就要得賞賜，因此，事奉時，以永恆價值為目標。

(六) 肯學習以善勝惡

有些時候人得罪了我，我學習原諒他，將重擔交給主，用禱告向神訴苦，神不但安慰我，神還給我機會以善勝惡，得勝有餘。除去怨恨就有機會向他行善，而基督的愛就在此時流露，為主做美好的見證。願我的生命經過神多方面的造就，榮神益人。

TRANSFORMING POWER

Pastor Helen K. Sia

Growing up was not a happy experience for me. Born into a poor family, it created in me an inferiority feeling. My mom was a disciplinarian which caused me to be pessimistic with life.

When I received Jesus as my Savior, I accepted His unconditional love. This caused me to have direction and meaning in life. I gave the control of my life to the Lord who gave His life for me. Paul said: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Serving God since 1975 is a spiritual journey. God uses the experiences in ministry to mold me, purify me for His use. Let me share God's transforming power in my life.

1. God's Way is the Best Way

God made me realize that His way is better than mine. God taught me to trust His wisdom not mine. Going through a lot of struggles made me sing the following song from my heart.

God's Way (Songs of Grace #167)

by Lida Shivers Leech

God's way is the best way,
Tho' I may not see,
Why sorrows and trials
Oft gather 'round me.
He ever is seeking
My gold to refine,
So humbly I trust Him,
my Savior divine.

God's way is the best way,
God's way is the right way.
I'll trust Him alway,
He knoweth the best.

2. Experiencing God's Sufficient Grace

As a pastor's wife, it is natural to receive more criticisms than encouragement. God's grace is sufficient. When I cannot defend myself, God vindicates. Criticisms become a mirror for self-examination, for improvement, for God's glory. When burden becomes heavy, it is lightened by experiencing God's sufficient grace.

3. Enjoying God's Presence and Comfort

Whenever Pastor Sia is not around, God's presence comforts me. Loneliness is replaced with His presence and peace.

4. Doing Ministry by Faith

God taught me to do ministry by faith, by God's Spirit and not by my own might. There are times when I cannot see instant results of my efforts, yet God assures me that my labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)

5. Serving God with Right Motives

God taught me to do ministry with pure motives and they are to glorify Him not for self-glory, to fulfill His will not my own, to put others' interest first before mine.

6. Overcoming Evil with Good

God taught me to forgive those who hurt me. Through prayers, I learned to commit my burdens to God who understands me. He comforts me and causes me to overcome evil with good. By taking my bitterness to Him, I was able to do good to those who hurt me. Thus, God's love is manifested through me.

MONOLOGUES TO MY YOUNGER SELF

Dereik Po

*L*ate 2015 when I was called to take up full-time ministerial work, though everyone is called to become full-time stewards and servants of Christ, I was called to become a shepherd of sorts.

As I started my journey cultivating and equipping myself for the task at hand, I had seen the lack of progress in my church. Quite frankly, I was upset and rightly so. Our church has one of the longest and richest legacies compared to so many other churches. Yet our numbers were dwindling, some even argued that it was because we focused on quality. Well, even our quality was not at par with others. A church is not measured based on quantity but if the quantity was not important to God then why would the Bible have a book about Numbers? Joking aside, being so young, I too clamored for reform. I had often pointed fingers and impulsively blamed those in positions of leadership without understanding the bigger picture. Fast forward several years later, lo and behold, my eyes were quite literally opened to the realities and difficulties of serving God. Here are just some things people working in the ministry often leave out: 1.) God allows failures and He allows them often. 2.) God rebukes swiftly and without hesitation.

In short, I was too dogmatic, was simply too quick to anger, and was often quick to blame others. Just like the youth of my generation, I was opinionated (though perhaps I still am), too zealous of my pursuit for "justice" and quickly forgot that my actions had consequences that I need to ultimately face. I had misunderstood many in the church because I did not take the time to understand their stories or their side of the narrative. I had too much pride and was unwilling to listen to those God had deemed wiser than I. So, what is the point of this article? I want to urge the young people, as early as now, to please learn to look at the bigger picture, to learn from those who are older than you or you will repeat the same mistakes they had made. Do not allow your opinions to cloud the command to love others, and never forget that your words and actions have repercussions that you will be called to answer for.

Our church and many of its members have been used by God to help thousands of lives though these members have often chosen to stay silent and remain anonymous. We, who are young and unaware, have been quick to call them Sunday goers or pew warmers. Have we no shame? I realized the error of my ways upon

going to seminary where I had made several connections with Pastors and ministry workers. One thing I had discovered was how much impact and care our church has and has given to missionaries, families, institutions, church planters, students, and even the less fortunate. People have often criticized our church for not "going" but they forget that "sending" is paramount in God's work. Thinking of it logically, would you force a member who was at their 50's to pursue missionary work without proper experience or training just because some televangelist or pastor called you out? Would you rather have this 50-year old stop doing business, something that he is extremely good at and even manages to support ten missionaries, to just stop supporting and start doing their work?

In conclusion, let me summarize it this way: To the youth, remember that those who are older than us are not our enemies, but rather they are our mentors. To the young at heart, do not berate the young for their youth. They are not kids that need to be tamed but rather they are your legacies that need to be shaped.

To the young, remember to put devotion over emotion. I speak from experience when I say: be aware of loud emotions for they often misinterpret God's soft still voice; and if you do not believe that remember in Jeremiah 17, God Himself says, "...the heart is deceitful above all things." Do not mistake this lesson as a call to be apathetic but rather, see it as a reminder that the head was placed above the heart.

To the young at heart, I urge you to be patient with the youth. They will need more than just a scolding and as Jesus Christ Himself spent four years with His disciples, you will also need to invest time. If there was ever a secret to Jesus' ministry, it was time. Time spent with the youth is a far greater tool than any discipleship material on sale.

Lastly to both the young and the young at heart, heed the words of the apostle Peter when he said, "...all of you, serve each other in humility." Let his profound insight be present in this generation and the next.

For the need to be united in Christ is far more important than the feeling of being right.

ZAKAR: REMEMBER G.O.D.

Pastor Gina L. Pecson

*H*ow often do you hear your parents, teachers, or even close friends say, "Remember to do this or that..."? Do you get irritated or annoyed whenever they remind you to do some important things/errands/duties? Do you obey them right away?

During this quarantine period, I have set a fraction of my time in reading through the Bible. From March to May, I enjoyed reading and reflecting on the first five books of the Bible we usually call, "The Pentateuch," which in Greek means "five books". Reading from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, up until Deuteronomy, the word, "Remember..." kept on popping in my mind and the more I looked into this word, the more interesting it became.

The word, "remember" in Hebrew (Original Word: זָכַר) is "Zakar" which means to remind, to recall, to bring into mind, to take thought, to mind, to mention, to celebrate, to record, and to preserve. This biblical word, "remember" is not merely engaged with the cognitive (head), but it requires the affective (heart), and also the psychomotor domain (body). In other words, it requires your whole being to take part. For instance, when God remembered Noah, his family, and his animals in the floating zoo, He did something to save them by sending water, wind, waves, dove, leaf, etc. to keep them alive. In short, God remembered them through His divine acts of mercy.

Let me use the G.O.D. in acronym to remember "ZAKAR" (זָכַר) in a more profound manner...

1. **G**od is awesome in performing His mighty acts in different situations to different people in order to save His people, to make a covenant with His people, and to show His sovereignty. Stories like Noah's Ark, Abraham's Offering of Isaac, Jacob's Ladder, Joseph's Reunion with His Family, Moses' Staff, Balaam's Talking Donkey and, etc. have become famous and favorites of our Sunday School children. For instance, when Abraham was about to offer Isaac in the region of Mt. Moriah as what God had commanded him, the Lord amazingly

provided a ram instead.

Genesis 22:8-14

8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

Hebrews 11:17-19

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

2. **O**bedience is what God requires from us. There are numerous Bible verses that remind us to walk in His ways, observe His statutes,

and follow His ways. Likewise, there are so many Bible lessons that we can see from these first five books on how the Lord disciplined His people. This should be a stern warning that we ought to take seriously. For instance, Miriam was considered to be a strong woman, a brave sister of Moses and Aaron, and a valiant leader; yet, she was punished and disciplined by the Lord when she spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he married.

Numbers 12:8-13

8 With him I speak face to face clearly and not in riddles, he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" 9 The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them. 10 When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam's skin was leprous, it became as white as snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease, 11 and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. 12 Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away." 13 So Moses cried out to the Lord, "Please, God, heal her!"

Deuteronomy 5:33

Walk in obedience to all that the Lord has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

Deuteronomy 28:1

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and

accompany you if you obey the Lord your God.

3. **Deliverance** from the Lord was experienced by His people in the past and because of this, we can always hold on to the promise of God that we will surely experience His deliverance in every circumstance of our lives. Therefore, whenever we are in distress, always look up to Him and hold on to His promises. For instance, the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt through such a long journey that started from the Ten Plagues, the Passover, and the Crossing of the Red Sea, all these events have shown and proven God's wonderful works of deliverance towards His people.

Exodus 13:14-16

14 "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' 16 And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."


Therefore, since we know that **God** is awesome and that His ways are higher than ours, let us continue to put our trust in Him and walk in **obedience** for He will never fail us. Lastly, let us always recall, relish, and retell His wonderful works of **deliverance** in our lives so that His awesome greatness will be known to others.

A hand is shown from the bottom left, reaching upwards towards a bright lightning bolt that strikes down from a dark, stormy sky. The background is a mix of dark clouds and a lighter blue sky with some green foliage visible at the bottom left.

WHAT HAS COVID-19 TAUGHT ME?


Ryan Justin L. Tiong

*T*he year 2020 was set to be a huge year for me. There was much anticipation for the events that were bound to happen, especially within the first half of the year. However, things didn't play out the way it should've. Few weeks into the new year, we heard about an outbreak of a novel virus in Wuhan. Around the same time, Cebu was hosting a huge influx of tourists, including many Chinese tourists, who were here for Sinulog.



Subsequently, there were several people who expressed alarm over the virus in social media and raised the possibility of the virus lingering around our city. As the news developed further, we had confirmed that there were Chinese tourists who came to Cebu that tested positive for the virus. With this came the massive calls to immediately halt all flights to and from China and to procure the necessary test equipment to start mass testing in the country. As we move into February, we had no new case of the virus. However, the thought of the virus moving around undetected remained as testing capacity continued to be limited. The fear was still there, but tensions were somehow eased. Life went on as usual. Wearing masks when going outside and having a sanitizer on my pocket at all times became a norm. As we geared into our midterm exams on the second week of March, my schedule for the month was packed. I almost didn't have any vacant day by then! Under so much stress, I asked God for a break. I said: "Lord, I need a break. Bisag 1 week lang jud nga di magklase." A few days into March, reports of new coronavirus cases sprung up. The cases were all in Manila, so life still went on. Within the few days we had, we took our College Admission Exams, our Midterm Exams, we carried out our research experiments, we did a lot of things according to plan and on-

schedule. We had even started planning for several events that were set within the remaining weeks of the school year! As the cases rose rapidly, the government suddenly announced that all classes would be suspended for the next two weeks. I was both happy and sad about this. Happy, because I was finally getting a break, and not just one but two weeks! But at the same time, I was a little sad, because our retreat scheduled on the third week of March was postponed too. Nonetheless, I was grateful for the break and just thought we would be able to go back to our normal schooling by April. That, however, never happened. In fact, we never went back to school!! We never saw our plans come to reality, from retreat to entrepreneurship fair to research congress to graduation ball. We weren't even able to get our graduation portraits done and worst of all, we didn't have a graduation ceremony! I was deeply saddened by how things turned out. I missed all the last lessons of senior high school. I wasn't able to spend the last few weeks of senior high with my friends. We weren't even able to bid a proper goodbye and have a proper closure of our time together. It's devastating to think about how we could never turn back time and how we won't see some of these people ever again (that's university life).



One day, I stumbled through this verse while browsing through social media. It's Isaiah 41:10 and it says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." This has led me to realize a few things. First, this pandemic has shown a lot about our human nature. We can be so occupied with so many things in our lives that we tend to forget that we are not the ones who are truly in control of our lives, that we do not hold our own future. God does. He has a perfect plan for each one of us. He has laid out everything from the beginning. Second, God has also shown me that He does answer our prayers but He does not always answer in the way you expect it to be. Sometimes, He answers it in an unconventional way that actually teaches you a life lesson. Truth be told, none of us have foreseen this pandemic, but God has. So we should be reminded to TRUST—trust God, have faith, be strong—because God does not let us go through challenges that we cannot overcome. I realized that there may be a reason why God wanted this to happen now. I thought, maybe He has a greater purpose for us who are supposed to graduate this year, He could be preparing us for something in the future and I think what we have to do now is to learn from what is happening and to reflect on ourselves so

we can serve God better. There are times when we just need something to happen, when we need a circuit breaker to rebuild ourselves, to reflect on what we have done, to realize, to appreciate the simple gifts of life, and to strengthen our relationship with God. In the end, it all leads us back to God. Troubling times like this remind us more of God's sovereignty—that He is everything we will ever need, that He is with us and we are with Him—and this is all the comfort that we truly need. God is our hope and we can always count on Him. He will never leave us alone. We can be confident that God will redeem us from this and the day will come when we can finally move outside the way we used to. Someday, we will all be able to look back at this time and be grateful about everything that has happened. Hopefully, we become much more grateful about the little things and we would become much more appreciative of our lives. This also reminds us that there is indeed a time for everything under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) and that everything works at the perfect timing of God and for the greater glory of God. So, thank God for this and continue to trust God and His grace. He hasn't failed us and He never will.

To Batch 2020, let us make a difference in our world.

幾種常見的心理病症

牧羊者

(——) 自卑感 (INFERIORITY) : 心理毛病中最普通的一種！嚴格說來，一個人若非有點自卑感，就有點優越感！自卑感者自己以為比不上他人，自視不配，換言之即「低估自己」。優越感者是自恃過高，自以為比別人高一級，也就是「高抬自己」！自卑感的強弱，視其個性，氣質，人生遭遇而定！許多人在學識，技能上的確不後人，但因自卑感過強，結果實質與感覺相抵觸，對事情無幹勁，對自己太消沉乏信心，在大眾之間抬不起頭來。許多時候其實定足能勝任的事，但結果不敢嘗試，一無所成。自卑感足能演成嚴重的心理病症，生活不斷在自怨與遺陷之感覺中！

(二) 恐懼感 (INSECURITY) 或稱缺乏安全感：此君凡事畏怕，猜疑，不信任；對人，對事，對己都有同樣感覺，經常充滿悲觀，有時幻想凶惡不測之事即將來臨，杞人憂天，生活在緊張，恐怖下，因為人內心不能放鬆，造成情緒上沮喪，進而足以演成更嚴重病症。在婚姻生活中，夫婦因嫉妒，猜疑而演成彼此口角，控訴，動武，終於步達離婚法庭去。在事業上有此感覺者難得與同事和睦相處，凡事責怪不滿，或恐怕喫虧失業，或害怕成績不如人，工作果效自然差錯，身體也出現消化不良，失眠，胃潰瘍.....等等毛病。

(三) 不配感 (INADEQUACY)：這種感覺又可分為兩類：第一類屬於個人方面，與自卑感類似，他不敢面對人生，無法應付複雜的環境。第二類出現在某種情況下，在其他多方面正常無異。比喻說一位公司經理處事有方，事業日蒸，但回到家裡，對妻子，兒女即出現這不配之感。不但大家談不來，夫妻反目，父子生疏，家庭毫無樂趣和氣。這種人終必沈浸在事業上，埋頭苦幹，辛苦經營，每日花大部份時間在辦公室，工作場所。究其原因，他並非過份喜愛自己的工作，仍因他與家人失調，一踏

進家門便產生不配之際。也有人適足相反在家裡安詳自在，出外即緊張煩惱，這均是不配感在作祟！

(四) 罪孽感 (GUILTY FEELING)：談及罪孽感，我們得了解它有「真」與「假」兩種。真的罪過產生心靈不安，正如聖經的啟示。唯一解除辦法是承認己過，接受基督寶血的潔淨！假的罪孽感是由於幻想或恐懼而產生的。其來源多出自缺乏被愛的感受，不受他人接納所致。正如一個被父母丟棄的孩童自小沒有所屬心靈自然畏懼，挫折一到，承當不起，加上無知，常有自咎之覺，以為自己可能犯了什麼滔天大罪，不得饒恕自己，罪孽感促使人歸向神，向祂獲得接納與慰藉。

(五) 煩惱，懷疑，恐懼 (WORRY, DOUBTS, FEARS)：內心不寧，情緒的緊張，叫人枯腸百轉，疑神疑鬼，戰兢畏怯，煩惱者不論大小事情，遠近事故均包括在內。聖經說：「應當一無掛慮」。這懷疑的對象不但是人，己，事也涉及全能的神。以為對方不關心，不忠實，不愛惜。由於疑惑終於造成恐懼，這一切的根底是信心破產，對不變之主，信實之神失了聯繫！

以上舉五重病徵，造成人類精神的

沮喪，挫折，演成心理上失常，缺陷，潰敗，如不及早加以矯正，足以變成仇視，暴怒，兇狂，敵對現象，上述許多現象不但應明瞭其病因如何治療，更應該提早加以預防！如以屬靈心理治療法的構想，人為的技術方法效能有限，唯有神人基督，是一切心理問題唯一答案！換之這靈性輔導能夠助益精神心理毛病。

自我是心理病主因

箴言書四章廿三節所羅門王智慧之言：「你要保守你心，勝過保守一切，因為一生的果效是由心發出」。

三千年前所羅門王所論的心，並非今日醫學上的肌肉心臟，乃指人的魂－意志，情慾，理智的中樞。防備魂的失調，制止心理情緒上的毛病－例如自卑感，不安全感，不配感，罪孽感，煩惱，疑惑，恐懼，沮喪等等病狀都是今日人間面對的嚴重毛病。心理分析家的辦法是讓病者儘量傾吐內心隱憂，甚至儘發洩積壓在心頭長久的鬱悶，悲愁，仇恨，忿怒，不平，旨在使情感鬆馳，提高低落的情緒，產生自信心去面對現實！在尋找心理治療的過程，當然我們

不能否認一些人獲得助益，最少受鎮定劑所「壓服」，在醫師不斷查詢下道出自己的心聲，稍為認識病徵的因由來。屬靈心理治療認清人生一切難題：包括對自己的估價與感覺，對他人的關係與衝突，對上帝的背叛與遠離，其基本原因乃因人之魂以「自我」為中心，自己既帶有罪性，自然產生罪行。為此要叫心理正常，魂獲得滿足，必須依靠非人力的超然大能，就是基督所賜的新生！

心思情感上的病症

心思病者除了上述一切現象外，心思與情感上也出了岔子的。由於沮喪，憂鬱而演成敵對，反抗現象。當這種敵對 (HOSTILITY) 隱藏心坎，內在的掙扎足以向兩個方向爆發而出。它足能影響其心思與情感，出現狂態與不正常之舉。

在心思上的影響，通常的現象有：

(一) 幻想過份或夢幻：整日胡思亂想，建造空中樓閣。將心中所嚮往，所期待的事，憑空建造得天花亂墜。「白日夢」人人少不了，但過份夢幻足能成為精神分裂；一個人活在兩個世界，一個是幻想的，非實的世界，對於現實世界無法適應。常見街頭逛逛的瘋子，自

稱為警察局長，還穿上軍裝，在街頭亂吹口笛指揮車輛，還便是一個實例。

(二) 癡呆症或神經麻木：這種心思上的現象叫病者終日呆坐，一言不發，與現實環境脫了節，對外來的刺激不能發生反應，終日生活在非現實的情緒下，令人啼笑皆非。

(三) 偏執狂或妄想症：大多數由於罪孽感過深，或自卑感太重叫他認為不配活在現實景況下。病者一面自怨自疚，一面責怪他人，怨天尤人，打雞罵狗。進而相信自己所發撒謊都是千真萬確的，又以為人人均與他作對。或一味苦待己心，認為報應刑罰是自作自受。這種人常是固執個性，無法說服，令人束手無策。

(四) 着迷症或神志不清症：心思上過份刺激足以演成附魔或着迷現象。心頭某一罪過的觀念如除不掉，結果他不斷在演一些動作，令人深覺希奇，例如整日洗手除污，不斷呼喚某君的名字，終日埋頭寫信向人賠罪道歉或致謝等等！

以上所述病況，叫患者時常到診室求診也無多大收效。因病人的因由歸根在乎「自我」佔據了心思，叫他無法解脫！除了心思上的毛病，沮喪，消沉也嚴重影響人的情緒；最普通的是憂鬱不

歡，情緒肅條低壓的神經衰弱症 (DEPRESSION)。內在的不平，反抗不能夠得釋，這是必然現象。這種患者多趨於內向，外來的不幸遭遇始終抑壓心頭！從不敢向他人吐露，只叫自己受罪，甚至有時痛哭悲傷，有時傷害己身，用煩惱的鎖鍊將自己捆綁起來。症況重輕視病人而異，嚴重心理病這僅屬初期。

更進一步情感精神分裂，必叫身體染受傷害，例如：頭昏、眼花、失眠、胃潰瘍、心跳過速、氣喘症、皮膚敏感病、肌肉痙攣、不同的發疹、喉頭炎，甚至昏迷不醒都可以演成！

煩惱不安是情緒上的病徵，現代醫學的估計，百份六十至八十的求診者，他們的身體病症是由心理上造成的。由於魂方面情、理、志之勻與失調，內心衝突而成！一個人如果讓自我來掌握人生的話，必定在心理生理多方面百病叢生，以己為主的人既與上帝為敵，決不可能獲得那心靈真正的安寧，那出人意外的平安只有在基督耶穌裡可以獲得！靈性心理治療的關鍵即在乎將「基督」取代「自我」。靈魂體便圓滿健全！

IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY DOES IT HURT SO BAD?

Glory Grace Lim Chu

*H*ave you ever, at any point in your life, asked yourself this question, "If God is truly so good, then why does it hurt so bad?"



Some people are fond of this common phrase: "God will never give you anything you cannot handle." True? Let's see. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."* Based on the verse, it can be easy to believe that the phrase may have some merit. However, this verse is not saying that God will never put us through something we cannot handle. This current pandemic is proof enough that God does, at times, allow us to suffer. Confusing? Yeah. I thought so, too. There must be a very good reason why we are suffering. Jesus tells us in John 16:33, *"....In this world you will have trouble...."* So, to experience trouble and to feel pain is given, but again, "Why?" If we look at the Bible, we can just see how God can turn pain into something beautiful. The MOST painful story in the Bible is how God sacrificed His only Son for us. To the parents out there, sacrificing your own children for people who have wronged you time and again is just unthinkable. Given the choice, you will not do it. It's a difficult and painful decision to make, to have to outlive your own children. But God did it anyway, and His most painful sacrifice had turned into our most precious blessing, our Salvation.

There are several reasons why God allows us to suffer. Let me share with you a few of these:

1. God has a greater purpose for your pain. I'm sure you are familiar with the phrase "Everything comes with a price." I believe that the price of wisdom is pain, which brings me to my second point.
2. God uses our pain so that one day, we may help others who will go through something similar. In the words of Allen Parr, "God uses pain to strengthen our testimony." Take the life of Hosea for example. God had him marry a promiscuous woman, one who had committed adultery against him time and again. His children were named Jezreel (an


omen to a massacre), Lo-Ruhamah (meaning *not-loved*) and Lo-Ammi (meaning *not my people*). These painful experiences gave Hosea wisdom and empathy. As he preached the Word of God, he himself felt what God felt and shared God's experience of loving the people who were unfaithful to Him.

3. God uses our suffering to call us back to Him (Amos 4:10). Recall a time when you had suffered greatly. What was your thought at that time? Did you blame God? Or did you say, "God, I know it may seem bad now; but I know You have a plan and I will submit." If you are strong in your faith, then your thought process may be like the second one. Those who do not know God may blame God. Atheists will most probably believe that no loving God will use suffering to call us back to Him. But God is not only loving, He is just too. Think of it as similar to how your parents will lovingly punish you when you have done something bad. God allows us to suffer so that we may know that our actions have consequences.
4. God allows suffering to test our faith. Sometimes, in the face of pain, even the strongest Christian can fall. But remember this: Psalm 34:18 says, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* God is in us and in our hearts. Our pain is His too!

In the end, it all boils down to our *faith*. If you are truly committed to God, He will use your pain to paint a picture of beauty. He will use your pain to show you how awesome our God is. He will use your pain and turn it into the most beautiful thing you have ever seen or experienced. With God, *pain* will be a thing of the *past*, *peace* of the *present*, and *courage* of the *future*. As Jesus said in John 16:33, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

PANDEMIC CONVERSATIONS

Chris Tio

A silhouette of a person, likely a man, is shown in profile, leaning forward with their head bowed and hands clasped together. The person is positioned in the center-right of the frame. The background is a vibrant sunset sky with warm orange and yellow hues, transitioning into a darker blue at the top. The overall mood is contemplative and somber.

One of the biggest lessons life has ever taught me is that truth is stranger than fiction. I have encountered this many times in a previous work as a senior Government official and currently as a corporate executive. I have encountered many situations with which I would not be able to tell the story as more often than not, it would be immediately dismissed as impossible or improbable. One anecdotal evidence of this, is when watching movies or TV series based on real life, there is a little footnote that basically tells you that certain scenes have been altered or dramatized for effect. Scriptwriters add these “realistic” scenes to convince the viewers that it could really happened.

Have you ever wondered why we need to be told of fictional realities rather than seeing the hard truth of what really happened? My theory is that our minds have a tendency to see things based on our perspective, and to reject what we have not seen or experienced to be true.

This was probably why the Parables as told by Jesus was well-liked, as it shaped the words of God into a “believable” scenario to the unbelieving masses.

I stumbled upon an article discussing a movie script 10 years ago pitching a global pandemic scenario, almost describing to a T what is going on now. It was rejected outright by all producers as being unrealistic, which is ironic as so many zombie and apocalypse movies ended up being made. Maybe the reason many of these totally unrealistic movies ended up being chosen over a realistic scenario movie is that we have a tendency to reject things that do not reflect our perspective, that a real global pandemic, where the whole world goes into a lockdown, that economies will grind to a halt, and the best thing that citizens can do is to stay home is just too unrealistic even for fiction. Or we just like zombie movies better especially with Brad Pitt in it.

And yet, here we are.

I titled this essay as pandemic conversations as this is exactly what it is. I, like almost all of you have no answers, and to be honest, I cannot even grasp the question. The world has turned upside down, wherein the lowest jobs such as janitors, garbage-men, nurses or even grab riders have become more essential than celebrities, athletes, CEOs, Lawyers etc. Where masks and alcohol are more essential and valuable than Rolexes and Ferraris. The Corona Virus does not care how much wealth you have or where you live. It does not care if one is as powerful as Prince Charles or as popular as Tom Hanks, it does not distinguish a senator from a messenger, a General from a priest or pastor.

I tried to search for one word to describe

what we are all going through, what is happening around the world, the commotion, hysteria, panic, how do you describe it all, in its global scale and lack of answers or solutions.

I ended up with only one word.

Biblical.

To a non-believer, biblical events seems fictional. It distorts or is not grounded in reality. That such cataclysmic events never happened in such scale, or that the writers must have added elements of “fiction” as that is what our minds or perspectives allow us to believe.

I am not a theologian, nor as I will confess, not even a very consistent reader of the Word. But as minutes lead to hours, and hours lead to days, and days lead to weeks; as what I believed to be important slowly fades and what I took for granted increasingly becomes even more important, it becomes even more apparent that God is really in control.

I always liked to repeat an Irish joke whenever I am in strategy sessions at work, I say, “keep in mind, if you want to make God laugh, make a plan!”

God had literally shut down all of our plans, and literally asked all of us to have a conversation with Him. As the road to picking up the pieces, to starting or restarting our lives, to seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, be that a miracle vaccine, or herd immunity, it can only begin to make sense if we sincerely begin that conversation. I have started to see many pictures of beautiful skies and clean seas. Many marvel at how mother nature is healing itself, maybe that was God's plan all along, a big reminder or rebuke to His children that He is in control and that we need to let go of our earthly perspectives and see the Gospel truth.

Proverbs 3: 5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to Him, and He will make all your paths straight.”

Let's all begin having our pandemic conversations with God. It does not require much. It can basically just start with, “Hi Lord, it's been a while...”

THE ABNORMAL NORMAL

Judge Jocelyn Uy-Po





2020... considered to be perfect vision.

Year 2020... I could not even see what lies ahead.

However, there are some things that are certain:

January, 2020. I became a senior citizen.

February, 2020. I have all the love of my life.

March 15, 2020. I still have my job but the venue has changed a lot.

March 16, 2020. The abnormal normal starts.

Famous phrases: wash your hands, wear a mask, social distancing, stay at home

Famous words: Covid 19, quarantine, lockdown, pandemic, infected, recovered, died

News headline all over the world: The Corona Virus aka Covid 19

Status:

Closed: schools, restaurants, malls, churches, resorts, non-essentials

Open: hospitals, hospitals, hospitals, banks, and essentials

Everyday: Holidays for most of the days

Everybody: Stay at home for most of the days glued to the TV or gadgets

And many more....

Both my sons graduated last April and June without any graduation rites. My conferment in May got cancelled. My wedding ministry ended so suddenly. My desire to distribute school supplies to day care centers also ended. The Bibles which I plan to distribute got stalled. Regrets, wishful thinking, what ifs... I guess my teachers were right, "Never put off what you can do today because tomorrow may never come." ... Sigh!

My greatest questions - Will we still be complete as a family come Christmas? Who will we miss?

Alternative:

Non essentials - closed.... Essentials - open.
Restaurants - closed.....Mama's kitchen - open.
Schools - closed..... Our house - open.
Church - closed.....Our hearts - open.

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." - John 16:33



SHINING DESPITE THE DARKNESS



Heir of the King

Like whirling machines slowly coming to a halt, the world in the last few months gradually quieted down and the once silent home hears the lively clattering of sounds and different footsteps. What we once thought was normal, such as going out to buy something or going to work, is something that's becoming a challenge nowadays. We may have rediscovered old hobbies and relished in our new-found ones but presently, our hearts are in turmoil with various unsettling feelings inside of us. The news in both paperbacks and digital articles are spilling with suggestions and recommendations, people are erupting with advices and social media is filling our feeds and redirecting our minds to other economic alternatives. Darkness creeps in and is trying to get a hold of us. Subsequent to the pandemic, it gradually covers and tends to disable our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual capacities.

I once read of a quote attributed to Elizabeth Ross and it says, "People are like stained-glass windows, they sparkle and shine

when the sun is out, but when darkness sets in – their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light within." As Christians living in this contemporary generation, I believe that we are called to be the bright light in this dark world, most especially in the midst of this global crisis. Our worldly culture strives to draw us out and seek to reclassify the value of who we are. Our light often flickers as a result and eventually, it dies down. Therefore, let us be encouraged by Matthew 5:14, 16. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

We are not just followers of the One True King, we are His children – a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's special possession. The best version of ourselves comes when we are defined by the One who loves us most and our willingness to channel this great love around the people surrounding us. Darkness is ever-present but God calls us to shine bright – in this side of eternity.

那鴻書 1:7

蒙恩者

耶和華本為
善，在患難
的日子為人的
保障，並且認得那些
投靠他的人。

聖經人物	災難 / 困境/危機	態度 / 回應	結果
挪亞 (創世記 6-9)	* 洪水氾濫	* 凡神所吩咐 他都照樣行	* 神記念挪亞 * 全家得救 * 神與他立約
羅得 (創世記 19)	* 火災	* 羅得全家 不情願離開 * 羅得全家 被天使催逼離開	* 神降硫磺與火 滅所多馬俄摩拉兩城 * 羅得與兩女兒 逃脫，妻子變鹽柱
約瑟 (創世記 37, 39-50)	* 被兄長嫉妒 被賣作奴僕	* 忍耐	* 有神的同在 * 凡事順利
	* 被主母控告而監禁	* 敬畏神	* 有神的同在
	* 被人忘記	* 等候，不埋怨 * 不以惡報惡	* 神紀念 * 神高舉他 * 神使用他管治埃及人
摩西 (出埃及記、 民數記、申命記)	* 被同胞拒絕	* 從埃及逃往米甸 * 學習牧羊 * 順服遵命 * 忍耐受訓	* 神呼召他 * 帶領以色列人 出埃及
	* 十災	* 順服主	* 神救相信的以色列人 * 神擊打不相信的埃及人
	* 帶領以色列人 在曠野飄流	* 在山上與神深交 * 靠神的引領	* 神賜十誡 * 神啟示會幕樣式 * 得神的照顧
	* 被家人毀謗	* 為人謙和	* 神為他辯護
拿俄米全家 (路得記 1-4)	* 國中遭遇饑荒	* 從伯利恆往 摩押地去寄居 * 兒婦路得立志跟隨 拿俄米從摩押回伯利恆	* 後來以米勒和 兩兒子死了 * 神眷顧祂的百姓 * 親屬贖回拿俄米全家
約伯 (約伯記 1-42)	* 失去產業 * 失去兒女 * 全身長毒瘡	* 敬拜神 * 稱頌神 * 不以神為愚妄 * 不以口犯罪 * 親自經歷主	* 比先前更蒙恩福
以利亞 (王上 17-19); (王下 2)	* 饑荒	* 順服 * 忠心傳道	* 神供養照顧 * 神指引
	* 與假先知鬥爭 * 疲乏灰心喪志	* 靠神得勝 * 坦誠表達心境	* 神大得榮耀 * 神向他顯現; 他被神接升天
大衛 (撒下 17)	* 歌利亞向以色列 罵陣威脅 * 怒罵以色列的神	* 倚靠神打敗歌利亞	* 立他作戰士長 * 眾人都愛他 * 有神同在 * 作事精明
大衛 (撒下 17)	* 掃羅嫉妒謀殺大衛	* 倚靠神為避難所	* 神保守他的生命
大衛 (撒下 18-19) (撒下 22-24)	* 掃羅尋索大衛 生命，追捕大衛	* 倚靠神 * 不以惡報惡 * 不害掃羅	* 神保護他不將 大衛交給掃羅

聖經人物	災難 / 困境/危機	態度 / 回應	結果
大衛 (撒下 25)	* 被拿八輕視	* 生氣時想要殺拿八所有的男丁 * 肯饒恕 * 不報仇	* 亞比該攔阻大衛報仇流人的血 * 神為大衛伸冤
大衛 (撒下 12:15-26)	* 孩子病了 * 孩子死了	* 為孩子求神醫治 * 他順服進殿敬拜	* 神安慰他 * 賜所羅門
大衛 (撒下 15-16)	* 押沙龍謀反 尋索大衛的生命	* 大衛逃難 * 不以惡報惡	* 神對付押沙龍 * 押沙龍被殺
大衛 (撒下 16:5-14)	* 示每控告攻擊大衛	* 大衛忍受神的管教 接受示每的咒罵	* 神使大衛回耶城 復得王位
但以理 (但以理書 6)	* 禱告的禁令： 在王以外或向神 或向人求什麼， 就必扔在獅子坑中	* 但以理仍然祈禱 感謝，與素常一樣	* 神差遣使者封住獅子 口不傷但以理
但以理三友： 沙得拉 米煞 亞伯尼歌 (但以理書 3)	* 凡不俯伏敬拜王的金像 必扔在烈火的窑中	* 決心不侍奉王的神 也不敬拜王所立的金像	* 神與他們在火中遊行， 他們沒有受傷 神得稱頌， 王降旨：在神以外沒有別 的真神這樣施行拯救
司提反 (使徒行傳 7)	* 眾人聽道， 極其惱怒 用石頭打死司提反	* 司提反被聖靈充滿， 呼籲主： 『求主不要將 這罪歸給眾人』	* 司提反定睛望天， 看見耶穌站在 神的右邊 看見神的榮耀
保羅 (林後 11:23-28)	* 多受勞苦，多下監牢， 受鞭打，屢次冒死， 被棍打，被石頭打 * 受困苦，多次不得睡 * 又飢又渴，多次不得食， * 受寒冷，赤身露體 * 為眾教會掛心	* 自誇關乎他的軟弱 以軟弱、凌辱、急難、 逼迫、困苦為可喜樂	* 神大大使用他 * 保羅甚麼時候軟弱 甚麼時候剛強
保羅 (使徒行傳 20:24)	* 遇著船壞，晝夜在深海裡 * 屢次行遠路 * 受勞碌 * 撒但的控擊	* 不以生命為念 也不看為寶貴 要行完他路程	* 打過美好的仗 跑盡當跑的路 守住所信的道
保羅 (提後 4:7-8)	* 遭遇種種的危險： 過江河，盜賊，同族， 外邦人，城裡，曠野， 假弟兄	* 成就所領受的職事 證明神恩惠的福音	* 得著公義冠冕

SAFE IN HIS HANDS

Johnny Go

20 years ago during my regular check-up, I was already diagnosed with mitral valve prolapse and my physician told me that the only medical solution was to change my heart's valve to a pig's or cow's valve. However, since I didn't have any discomfort with my heart during that time, we just decided to leave it alone.

Sometime in the 2nd quarter of 2019, I felt an abnormality with my heartbeat so I went to see my doctor for some consultation and was advised to do the 2D-echo. When the results were in, my doctor didn't see any problem so she just advised me to take the same medication as before even if I insisted that something was not normal with my heart. One Sunday morning while talking to Nixon, I was told that Keng Leng's mother in law had to go to Singapore for angioplasty because St. Luke's Hospital in Manila failed to detect anything wrong with her heart. This sparked my interest and I immediately asked Nixon to request Keng Leng for the calling card of the physician, and his wife Annie was kind enough to help me book an appointment with Dr. Chuang, a cardiologist in Singapore

During my first visit with Dr. Chuang in August, I brought along my 2D-echo result from Cebu which he also found nothing wrong. However Dr. Chuang told me he will do the 2D-echo test by himself as he can't rely on other results. After doing an independent test, he diagnosed that my mitral valve was defective after which he did further tests with the TEE and recommended me

for an open-heart surgery.

He introduced me to a surgeon named Dr. Su and after studying my case, Dr. Su explained to me thoroughly that the ideal procedure is to repair my valve as it can last longer with minor to no complications at all compared to just replacing it with the valve of a pig's heart. However, if in case my valve is beyond repair, he will be forced to replace it with a pig's valve. He then told me that there were only 4 of them who can perform this kind of repair procedure. I told him I definitely want my heart to be repaired rather than replaced and he assured me that based on the findings from Dr. Chuang, the percentage of a successful repair was quite high. After his explanation, I was quite convinced already that he was the right surgeon for me.

I came back to Cebu and was overwhelmed with concerns from family, relatives, and friends who mostly advised me to go for 2nd and 3rd opinions from other doctors as this was a major surgery. After hearing all the suggestions I was very much confused so I prayed to God to give



me signs. At that time my son's mother-in-law Janet introduced me to Dra. Garcia, an esteemed cardiologist in Manila who happens to be their family friend. I flew to Manila with my son to consult with Dra. Garcia and after meticulously checking all my results she gave me genuine advice to have my surgery done either in the U.S. or Singapore as the surgeons in the Philippines are not yet capable of doing the kind of repair procedure that my heart needed. I thanked God for speaking to me through Dra. Garcia to proceed with my operation with Dr. Su in Singapore.

I decided to have my schedule for surgery on October 12, 2019, I was very blessed to have my family, relatives, church members, and friends who prayed for me during my operation. My cousins Kathy and William also flew over to Singapore just to support me. Moments before I was wheeled in for surgery, they prayed with me together with my wife and daughter which gave me an inner peace. I was even so touched when my wife told me that while waiting for me during and after my surgery, William and Kathy took the opportunity to share the gospel to individuals visiting some patients in the hospital whom they happen to come across. They were a big inspiration to me and my family.

After my successful operation, upon waking up in the ICU room, my daughter told me that my mitral valve was indeed repaired which made me very happy. I stayed in the ICU for 2 days and then was transferred to a regular room. However, after 2 days I felt difficulty in breathing and was ordered for an x-ray in which they found fluid in my lungs. I was immediately wheeled back to the operating room to drain

out the liquid. After another 2 days, again I was wheeled back to the ICU because my heartbeat leaped to as high as 132 (regular heartbeat is only 60-80). My doctor gave me medication to lower my heartbeat and told me that if the medicine will not work, he will be forced to electrocute my heart the next morning at 7:00. When I heard what the doctor said, I was quite anxious because I was already feeling so much pain in my chest even with just a small cough. How much more if they will electrocute my heart. I couldn't sleep the whole night, because I had been watching the monitor every 10-15 minutes to see if my heartbeat had lowered and by God's Grace at around 5:00 in the morning, just 2 hours before the scheduled electrocution of my heart, my heartbeat miraculously went down to 58 and I was so relieved.

On the day that I was going to be discharged, I was very excited until a nurse came in and told me that my heartbeat went erratic and asked me to lie and calm down, then someone brought in a machine similar to EKG but bigger version, after the test I saw the printout result from the machine and it was all black, and I asked the nurse regarding the results and as I expected it's not good, so I just stayed in my bed trying to be calm, praying that I could be discharged that day. Later that afternoon after being given a few medications, by the grace of God, I was finally discharged. I just couldn't thank the Lord enough for always keeping me safe in His hands, for giving me this second life, or should I say third life, and of course, for giving me a very supportive family, relatives, church family, and friends who constantly prayed for me and with me. To God be all the glory!



MEMOIRS OF A “LOST” SUMMER

D'Spare

*T*hroughout my life, I always become angry when things don't happen the way I want it to be. I would often get mad at myself for even thinking of its possibility. I have various feelings throughout this quarantine. Oftentimes, I felt lost and didn't know what to do next. Although I have learned a lot about myself and had more time to do reflections, they never seem to be complete.

However, after staying in quarantine for the last three months, I realized a lot of things. With much time in my hands, I thought of the many instances of what I would've done if there wasn't any pandemic: Would I continue to be uselessly wasting my time or would I be able to achieve what I had during this quarantine period?

God truly knows the inmost desires of our hearts. I'm sure none of us would have imagined our summer to be ruined like this, yet it also gave us time of reflections. I believe that in the paths which God has directed us to take, He definitely cares for us and has our best interests in mind.

It was during this lockdown that I've learned to lean more on God, our Almighty Father. I've realized that whenever we feel down, He is always there for us. I've learned that in whatever situation we find ourselves in, God is in control and He has a reason for everything that has happened, is happening and will happen. All is in God's hands.

Life is hard. It takes hard work to be able to

overcome obstacles. All of us may be struggling in what we are doing right now but what I thought to be a lost summer, wasn't truly lost after all. It is good to be constantly reminded that God will always be beside us.

The reason why I entitled my article as my “lost” summer is because every summer is supposed to be a period full of vibrant and fun activities so when June comes around, I would become sad most of the time. This summer however, what my brain thought of as something lost, my heart took it as an opportunity. We never know what will ever happen in our lives. All we should know is that God has graciously allowed us this pandemic to cut through our routinary lives in order to experience and to learn from it.

In the midst of our trials and troubles on Earth, we may feel useless and empty inside without people around to cheer us on. It may feel like there is no meaning to our existence anymore. Our once fun-filled lives have turned into a quiet one. For me, the quiet paved way for numerous self-realizations that led me back to trusting in God.

Sometimes, we just need a little distraction in our so busy social lives to remember what's truly important: that when things don't happen the way we want it to be, maybe we just aren't looking at the bigger picture, and we have forgotten that we have a bigger God, who is bigger than any problems we encounter.

THE CROWN OF THE VIRUS AND THE CROWN OF CHRIST

Arfaith Miranda

Throughout history, infectious diseases always have been constant companions of humans. Here are some of the recorded catastrophic plagues that happened on earth from the second century to the present with its estimated number of deaths.

PLAGUE	YEAR (A.D)	DEATH CASE
Antoine Plague	165-180	5M
Justinian Plague	541-542	30-50M
Japanese Smallpox Epidemic	735-737	1M
Black Death (Bubonic Plague)	1347-1351	200M
Smallpox	1520	56M
Cholera 6 Outbreak	1817-1923	1M
Spanish Flu	1918-1919	40-50M
HIV/AIDS	1981-Present	25-35M
SARS	2002-2003	770
Swine Flu	2009-2010	200K
Ebola	2014-2016	11.3K
MERS	2015-Present	850
Novel Coronavirus (Covid19)	2019-Present	330, 840* (as of May 21, 2020)

**Number of deaths are still rising as of WHO.*

More than millions have lost lives from these different viruses that shattered the world. Pandemics may have had reportedly started in the 2nd century, but bacteria were only discovered in the 17th century. On April 24, 1676, Anton van Leeuwenhoek surprisingly discovered several kinds of micro-organisms in the water, now called bacteria, in his attempt to study the sense of taste. According to the microbiologists at the time, it was considered to be his greatest discovery (Bardell, 1983).

Moreover, viruses as a concept are but a

little younger than bacteria. The first description of viruses appeared in the 1890's – yet most likely they “have co-existed with cellular life through nearly the whole of evolutionary history on this planet” (Rybicki 2015). The word “virus” comes from the Latin word simply meaning “**slimy fluid.**” The first invention that led to the discovery of viruses was the Chamberland-Pasteur filter, developed in 1884 in Paris, France by Charles Chamberland who worked with Louis Pasteur. It was used to remove completely all bacteria or other cells known at the time from a liquid suspension.

In 1892, in St. Petersburg, Russia, Dmitri Ivanovski reported what we know now to be a virus with the first use of porcelain filters by showing a filter candle on an infectious extract of tobacco plants with mosaic disease and revealed that it remained infectious. Then, on 1898, a Dutch scientist, named Martinus Beijerinck, "reported similar experiments with bacteria-free filtered extracts, but made the conceptual leap and described the agent of mosaic disease of tobacco as a 'contagium vivum fluidum', or contagious living fluid, because he was convinced the infectious agent had a liquid nature" (Rybicki, 2015, p.4). Later on, the term virus was used to describe such fluids. The first recorded **virus** causing the mosaic disease was called the Tobacco Mosaic Virus (**TMV**). Ivanovski and Beijerinck, they were the first people responsible for the discovery of the virus. Since then, the science of virology has developed.

It has to be noted that the Scripture writers were no scientists, thus, they only recorded what was observed by their own eyes, yet these references were of great help in the later discovery of the scientific details of these diseases.

The Bible also has references to diseases and plagues. It has to be noted that the Scripture writers were no scientists, thus, they only recorded what was observed by their own eyes, yet these references were of great help in the later discovery of the scientific details of these diseases. The first mention of plagues was recorded in Exodus when God, through Moses punished the Egyptians. One of the plagues was the plague of boils that struck both humans and animals. It was an epidemic. God commanded Moses to take handfuls of soot from the furnace and have it tossed into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. "It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will

break out on men and animals throughout the land. So they took soot from the furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on men and animals" (Ex. 9:9-10).

Another biblical reference to a disease that is still present and dreaded today is leprosy. In modern times, it is also called Hansen's disease because a Norwegian physician, Dr. Hansen first observed this organism in 1873, thus it was referred to as Hansen's bacillus. "Many have thought this to be a disease of the skin. It is better classified, however, as a disease of the nervous system because the leprosy bacterium attacks the nerves. The agent of leprosy is *Mycobacterium leprae*, an acid-fast rod related to the tuberculosis bacterium" (Gillen, 2015. P.2). One example of leprosy in the Bible is the man whom Jesus healed with a withered hand (Matt. 12:13; Mark 3:5; Luke 6:10). "The man with the 'withered hand' most likely suffered from tuberculoid leprosy. The deterioration and shriveling of limbs are indirectly due to leprosy bacillus. Hansen's disease causes poor circulation and the loss of control that provides life-sustaining materials (oxygen and nutrients) from the blood. Without blood there will be deterioration and a lack of harmony, order, symmetry, and design" (Gillen, 2015. P.3).

The term leprosy (including leper, lepers, leprosy, leprous) occurs 68 times in the Bible: 55 times in the Old Testament (Hebrew = tsara'ath) and 13 times in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the instances of leprosy that were mentioned most likely meant a variety of infectious skin diseases (including Hansen's disease) and even mold and mildew when mentioned on clothing and walls (Lev. 13-14; 2 Kings 5). In the New Testament (Greek = lepros, lepra), it is then likely to be discussing Hansen's disease. The exact meaning of Leprosy accounted in both OT and NT is still in dispute. It is a comprehensive term that probably includes

the modern Hansen's disease (especially in the NT) and infectious skin diseases (Gillen, 2015).

There is no written historical record with regard to the origin of infectious diseases. How, when, where, or why they started and evolved remains a puzzle to mankind. The attempt was always to find a cure and ways to prevent such diseases but never its origin, the first infection per se. However, in the biblical perspective, plus the support of the current microbiological research, "one can conclude that the deadly microorganisms can be attributed to the fall of man and its subsequent curse that lead to an overall decay of the originally good creation of man, microbes and mobile genes" (Gillen, 2015).

The Story of Mary Mallon (1869-1938)

An Irish immigrant by the name Mary Mallon, also known as "Typhoid Mary" was the first healthy carrier of typhoid fever in the United States. She was a picture of a human body's interaction with *Salmonella typhi*. At some point, she contracted the bacteria that caused typhoid fever but she was showing no noticeable symptoms. Her body apparently remained safe to handle salmonella typhi and stayed healthy, however, she was still capable of spreading the bacteria to others. In the New York City area, between 1900-1907, Mary used to work as a cook. During this period of her career, she infected more than fifty people with the disease, of which some have died. She was a cook in several homes in New York when the residents showed symptoms of typhoid. She spent months helping to care for the people whom she made sick, unwittingly, it has worsened the situation. She managed to change employment many times but she infected other people where she worked.

George Soper, a sanitary engineer, carefully investigated and found out that Mary was the carrier of the typhoid epidemic. As the

investigation progressed, Mary was put into isolation for three years at a hospital in New York. After a series of isolation and release, the result remained the same, Mary was still healthy and fine, showing no defective symptoms. That was then that the authority decided to confine Mary in quarantine for life. She died in 1938 of pneumonia and was buried in Bronx, NY. Interestingly, the autopsy of her body showed that her gallbladder was still actively shedding typhoid bacilli.

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The new coronavirus (COVID-19) was first detected in late 2019 at the Huanan Seafood Market where different livestock animals were also traded in the province of Hubei, in the state of Wuhan, China. Since then, this has set off a global pandemic.

Coronaviruses (CoV) are pleomorphic RNA viruses characteristically containing crown-shape peplomers with 80-160 nm in size and 27-32 kb positive polarity. With its high mutation rate, Coronaviruses are zoonotic pathogens that are present among humans and various animals with a wide range of clinical features from asymptomatic courses to requirement of hospitalization in the intensive care unit; causing infections in respiratory, gastrointestinal, hepatic and neurological systems (Sahin, et.al. 2020).

It was on December 12, 2019, that an unknown pneumonia case was detected and the Chinese authorities announced later on January 7, 2020 that a new type of Coronavirus was isolated. On January 12, 2020, the virus was named Novel Coronavirus by the World Health Organization; novel means new—a new mutation from other coronaviruses outbreaks like the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). On February 12, 2020, it was officially called COVID-19. The origin of the first case was probably an infection transmitted with zoonotic

agent (from animal to human) but the increase in the number of cases in Wuhan and later in other parts of Asia, then reaching towards the West like Europe and USA, indicated a second transmission from human to human. Since then, it has become a global pandemic.

Curbing COVID-19 is still in the process as scientists and virologists are devoted to finding a vaccine that will eventually stop the pandemic. While it's good news that some patients have recovered from it, sadly, some of the victims affected by the virus have never recovered and eventually died. Since the vaccine is still pending, authorities made sure that the virus is not spread exponentially by implementing strict measures like social distancing, cancellation of big events, promoting good sanitary hygiene, wearing of face masks, and shutting public places down. The constant urge of the governing authorities to "flatten the curve" may reduce the risk of more unwanted deaths.

THE CROWN OF THORNS OF THE CHRIST

"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head, and when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him." (Matthew 27:27-31)

What is new about COVID-19 is its distinct crown-shape feature. Ironically, this is not a crown of honor, but a horrible suffering to its victims, to the rescuing front liners, and to the family members of the victims. Interestingly, suffering is not an experience alien to Christ. A group of cruel barbaric soldiers painted a clear

picture of the suffering that Christ had experienced. The pain is not only physical but also emotional and mental. The soldiers' job is mainly to serve the king, and this time they mocked an accused king. The scarlet robe forcefully worn on him delights them to see a mocked king and the crown of thorns inserted on the head of Christ pleasures their moment upon seeing a bleeding, helpless nobody. However, the task is not simply to cause suffering but to end the suffering through death—a kind of death that only people of shame will experience.

Shame, pain, loss, disgust, mockery, neglect, suffering, even death are but a summary of the crown of thorns. Not all crowns are a symbol of majesty and victory; this one specific crown of thorns impaled on the head of Christ is never a crown admired by anyone; nonetheless, Christ carried it on his head until his last breath on the cross.

The moment the crown of thorns was put on Christ's head, he was bearing a kind of pain no one else can commit to.

Why crown of thorns?

In the biblical account, thorns were first mentioned in Genesis as part of the result of Adam's fall. God pronounced judgment to man saying, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19). Other biblical references to thorns speak about pain and punishment, serving as a reminder of the fall of man.

In Numbers 33:55, God carefully warned

the Israelites that if they don't completely drive out the Canaanites, they would serve as a problem to them, they would be "thorns in your sides."

In Isaiah 34:13, God judged the land of Edom and thorns were part of the consequences, "Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses."

In Matthew 13:3-8, the parable of Jesus has reference to thorns as part of the inner workings of a corrupted heart, "Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them."

Throughout Scripture, thorns are a symbol of pain, drawing from the physical feature of thorns, like any gardener would know. The Roman soldiers were very much aware of how painful it was for a criminal to be impaled with thorns. The moment the crown of thorns was put on Christ's head, he was bearing a kind of pain no one else can commit to.

What the world is going through right now caused by the coronavirus is pure pain, especially to the most affected but Christ understands it all. He sees it right through our hearts. The followers and writers of the account of Christ have understood that he understands our suffering. They never failed to emphasize this point in their writings exhorting and encouraging their readers to realize how Christ has suffered for their sake.

The apostle Peter encouraged the scattered suffering Jews that Jesus' suffering resulted into something better when he writes, "for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). He also added that "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example" (1 Pet. 1:21).

Matthew made sure to record the words of Christ when he was hurting on the cross before his death, when he cried with a loud voice,

saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46)

John, one of the closest disciples of Christ, described the brutality he saw from the Roman soldier who "pierced His side with a spear" (John 19:34).

The writer of Hebrews also understands that Christ's suffering caused him to "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15).

Paul, the one responsible for the suffering of the early church, became a believer when he encountered Jesus in his trip to Damascus. He then went on to the different regions of the known world preaching about Christ, and he wrote to the churches indicating the sufferings of Christ. He writes to the Romans that they "suffer with Him" (Rom. 8:17), and he expressed his desires to the Philippians that he wants to "know Him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10).

Moreover, the Old Testament prophets were also aware of the sufferings that Christ will have to experience. Isaiah penned down what he sees regarding the Christ: "He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...He was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" (Is. 53:3-4). The Psalmist described the suffering of the Christ as well, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within me" (Ps. 22:14).

No suffering is pleasant to bear. Nobody in his right mind would dream and desire to lie on a bed of thorns, yet this is reality. Man is always accustomed to pain. We see pain. We hear pain. We feel pain. A living person on earth cannot be exempted with it. Yet, in all of this, Christ has willingly experienced pain in the most unimaginable way.

THE CROWN OF CHRIST AS KING

"Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in a human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:6-11).

The crown of thorns was not the end of the story. Death did not have its victory, for Christ has overcome it and crashed its sting to nothing. The writer of Hebrews declares that Christ was "crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death" (Heb. 2:9). It turned out that the crown of thorns which was a symbol of his suffering, led to his exaltation as King.

But, what kind of king?

Just a few days before the death of Christ, he entered into the city of Jerusalem—a known city where Israelites' kings resided, including King David. On his entry, this man from Nazareth, riding on a low donkey, was greeted with adoration and acclamation, *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"* (Matt. 21:9) An expression only given to kings is now thrown at this man Jesus. This wishful desire of the Jews didn't last long because just a few days later, the same Jews who shouted "Hosanna!", were possibly the same people who shouted, "Crucify him!" They must have realized that they don't want a dying helpless king. So, they turned him over to the Romans, who didn't regard anyone like a king figure except their own emperor. With brutality, they treated Jesus like a criminal before the very eyes of his own people.

The soldiers made sure that the Jews witnessing the gruesome execution of their rejected king, would see the kind of embarrassment they project as they put an engraved charge on top of his head on the cross: **THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS**" (Matt. 27:37).

He was last seen with this inscription on top of his head. This poor man from Nazareth, rejected by his own people. Gasping. Agonizing. Dying... Dead!

He was let down from the cross. He was wrapped in linen clothes and placed in a tomb—a rich man's tomb. It was quiet and dark. And the world seemed dead for three days. Until the rock that sealed the tomb was rolled away. No soldier can stop it. No power can prevent it. He is gone, leaving the fine clothing wrapped around him. Nobody has seen an event that would change the course of man. Yet, he did not remain unseen, he showed himself to a few women, then to his close disciples, then to a hundred more. He is alive! He has risen from the dead!

They cannot *not* believe.

A man from Tarsus who rejected this message, who even caused harm to those who believed in the message of the witnesses, has seen this man alive. "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:4-5). After this extraordinary encounter, Saul's life was abruptly changed and transformed, believing and proclaiming the message that he once rejected. He wrote a letter to the believers in Philippi, and stating the kind of king Jesus had become. *"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess*

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil.2:9-11). His kingship goes far beyond the tongues of the Jews, it goes beyond the knees of the Jews. Far beyond! His exaltation reaches beyond the heavens, encompasses the whole earth and penetrating even under the earth.

Supremacy at its finest.

The Kingship of Christ means that he is supreme in everything. His sovereignty is all over everything. This sovereignty is capsulized in a brief summary: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15-17).

The disciple John had seen a vision regarding Jesus Christ as king and wrote it in his last book: "His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dripped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has the name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:12-16).

What does his kingship have to do with this pandemic?

Christ is King whether we like it or not. He is King whether we believe it or not. He is King whether we accept it or not. He is King whether we understand it or not. Our belief of Christ does not change who he is. Even if he seems silent, or far, or unreal in times like this, He remains to be King. Therefore, He is in control of everything like

he always had, and always will.

People may blame God for this pandemic. People may point their fingers to other races for the damage done. People may fight against their government for the unlikely response. People may run wild from this threat. People may go hungry from this horror. People may press forward and start something new. People may look for answers and cures. People may pursue new meanings and lifestyles. People may see either the good side, like the ease of pollution or the healing of mother earth, or we may see the bad side, like the deaths and the cries of the helpless. But one thing that bothers me, as one friend of mine said, "The saddest thing is when this pandemic is over, and it will be over - people still don't believe in God."

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A DAY WITH THE SPECIAL ONES

S.A.M.

November 30, 2019, the Young Professionals Fellowship went to Carmen to reach out to thirty PWDs in the Special Education Class of Teacher Meriam of Carmen National High School.



We were all so excited to share the love of God to this group of hearing impaired, visually impaired, learning disabled and the intellectually differentiated people. Though we could not imagine how, but we tried to prepare activities that could cater to all of them.

What really attracted us and challenged us was the fact that they have a livelihood program that makes floral pots out of used towels. Practically all of them have roles to play in each finished product. During our visit, we saw a blind student doing the retouching of the cement – so amazing to see him feel the pot and then rolling the brush with cement.

It starts with scouting for used towels, blankets and carpets. These are then cut into desired sizes. Cement mixture is prepared where these pieces will be dipped into and left to dry on a mold. After a day or two, cement coating and retouching are done to thicken the pot. When it is hard enough, paint is applied to beautify and decorate the pots. Finally, it is ready to be used or for sale so they can earn some income. It seems easy but not really if you

are disabled. That is why we chose them for our Outreach Ministry this year.

So, sixteen of us hopped into the church vans at 8:20 am that beautiful Saturday morning and off we went to Carmen. Weather was perfect. We practiced our song presentation with some sign language. We prayed that the Lord would use us to minister to them.

By 10am, we were warmly welcomed by Teacher Meriam and the students. We gave them some snacks and then we started singing some slow praise songs so they could sing along with us. Those who were partially hearing impaired did the sign language for the others. We dictated the lyrics to the visually impaired as we sang. Then we offered them the song presentation, "A GIFT TO YOU". Siansi Dolores came along and shared the gospel to them. In turn, the group of visually impaired brothers and sisters sang a very beautiful song about God's love.

To mingle more with them, we had games and then of course lunch together with



them. The most interesting part of the visit was the pot-making. We tried dipping the towels into the cement mix. Since some pots were pre-made, we had the chance to do the painting too. We actually purchased the pots so they could have some income and fund for their Christmas party.

It was indeed a very touching experience for us. To think we are all able bodied, yet many times we complain and refuse to serve God. But looking at all of them, with their happy

disposition, we felt so encouraged and so blessed. As Achie Rose said, "We are just stewards of what God has blessed us with – talents, energy, time and money opportunities like this give us joy beyond compare." Thank God!



MY LIFE AT OM

Ann Marie Su

New Year. New chapter in my life. I am now officially part of the OM (Operation Mobilization) family. I was oriented with everything I need to know. Yes, OM is a vibrant community of Jesus followers reaching the least reached. But what exactly do I do? Well, my foremost role is in the Hospitality Department where I am in charge of the maintenance of the Male and Female apartments. I have to see to it that it is a liveable place for our STEPpers (Short Term Exposure Program), staff and visitors.



During my first few weeks, I was into cleaning, scrubbing, brushing and washing. You could just imagine how much work that was, considering no one was really in-charge of this job for the past months. With the help I got, the Ladies Apartment was soon spic and span. Next was the Male Apartment, a big ancestral house which OM was able to rent for some years now. It is used for the ALS (Alternative Learning School) ministry at the ground floor, while the upper floor is for the Male STEPpers.

Now, that was quite a gigantic task. I didn't even know where to start. Finally, at just the right time with the right people with me, we were able to transform the place into a very beautiful place to stay. I was so excited that I suggested we held our February Prayer Meeting/Everybody's Birthday there so everyone could enjoy the place in its transformed state. Thank God all things become beautiful in His time!

By the way, our Prayer Meeting is scheduled every Thursday at 6:00pm. I try to see to it that we are able to have a decent meal before we start. This is actually opened to all who are part of OM – scholars, volunteers, partners, staff, etc. Usually, we are at least twenty in attendance.

Another major responsibility for me is the Children Ministry which covers all the forty some volunteers ministering in the different outreach areas. I have to come up with the curriculum, programs, activities including the VBS (Vacation Bible School) for all areas and the Back to School program. And, at the end of the year, we have the Christmas parties and the Volunteers' Appreciation. Thank God, Cherry, who will soon be a missionary to Nepal, is still with us and has really been helpful to me.

Seeing all these less fortunate children being ministered to by young people coming also from the lower economic status in society really touched my heart. It's good to see the children coming together weekly for Bible lessons, songs, games and snacks. I was then thinking to myself, "What about those who are teaching and helping? What encouragement do they get?"

The Lord gave me an idea.... Since we would be having our quarterly fellowship, I thought it would be nice to start the year by appreciating the volunteers for the time and effort they willingly and faithfully offered to the Lord each week. So, last February 15, 2020, we booked Bintana Coffee House for this very special event. We tried to contact all the volunteers and made sure they all showed up.

Meanwhile, a friend blessed us with some extra funds to make the occasion more elaborate. I also collected scarves from some friends so each one would have something nice and pretty to put on for the group picture.

Finally, the day came. It's so amazing that the Lord really brought all of them together – this was the biggest attendance so far for such activity. I was so excited to meet all of them, especially since I would soon be working closely with them for the Children Ministries in the coming months. The program opened with singing and dancing. After the opening prayer by Kuya Gerry (our Cebu Team Leader), we had some Getting To Know You games and dinner was served. Then, we had a short encouragement talk by Ate Anelfa. I also prepared a Data Sheet and the Child Protection Policy for everyone to fill up and sign. There was a short sharing time before we finally had our group picture and said our goodbyes by 9:30 pm.

We also started the MULTIPLY – a guide to Discipleship. This was scheduled every Tuesday at 9:00am. We had materials to read and discuss then we closed with a video with Francis Chan and David Platt.

On the last Saturday of February, we started the 9-week mission course called KAIROS. Almost all of OM staffs joined, some were facilitators. We also had other people from partner churches joined us. Each of us was given a workbook to read and answer along with the Joysheets that were given to us after watching a video.

WOW! That was a lot of learning! It's another challenge for me since I haven't been to school for a long time and I don't really like studying. On the first assignment we had, it took me three hours to process the 16-page material and answer the questions

The last activity, which was the VBS Training, was held last March 14, 2020. It was a whole day activity where we gathered all the outreach volunteers again but this time, for training. We practiced all the songs and tried to go through the crafts. We all had lunch together at 1pm and had the VBS simulation, a run-through of what the VBS schedule of activities would be like. Many came and we were so glad they were very excited to take home the things to prepare. On that day, I was tasked to take charge of the Missions Station. I showed a video of the least reached people group and shared a





little something about them, then I gave some prayer points. That was also what they were going to do in their VBS.

Then came the lockdown uh oh, what were we gonna do now? I felt so lost and did not know quite what to do, especially since I was not a techy person. Soon, we had to stay home only. At first, I felt so bored since there was nothing to do. My tasks were mainly physical and needed personal interaction and there wasn't anybody to meet or talk to.

After some time of adjusting, we began to explore virtual meetings, from staff meetings to trainings, seminars, bible studies, prayer meetings and online courses. Before I knew it, I was downloading apps like Teams (for all OM related meetings), ZOOM, Google Meet, Messenger Rooms and so on.

We continue with our weekly Staff Meeting. We also have online Bible Studies aside from the others I do with the Bible teachers. There is just so much time to go into the study of God's Word. In addition to all these learnings, I now have the time to listen to the online messages of many renown speakers.

With all these good things at hand, I felt I

had to share them too. So, after my morning devotion, I start sending daily messages to all the people I know in my phonebook – to greet them, encourage them and remind them of how much God loves them. Then, I go about with my OM tasks like connecting with the volunteers and preparing the online meetings. Of course, my daily tasks also include some cleaning and cooking since I am now living in the OM staff house. This actually is a great blessing for it allows me to be more mobile and accessible to the things I have to do outside.

Last May 1, having received some funds for relief goods, I was able to organize a relief operation for the five outreach areas of OM and some individuals. It took me just a week to gather all the stuffs I wanted to include in the packs (rice, veggies, eggs, vitamins, groceries, masks and homemade cookies). I knew deep in my heart that the Lord wanted me to do this and so He made it go so smoothly – from the delivery of each item here in the apartment to the distribution of the relief packs. We did not encounter any hassle as we went from Mandaue for the Umapad and Makro areas to Cabantan, Tac An and Capitol. We gave away a total of 130 relief packs. Not to forget, I included a gospel tract inside each pack, too. I really thank God for providing and allowing me

to serve Him in spite of the community quarantine.

This just shows us that God, our Heavenly Father, is sovereign. He has and He will supply our every need from His riches in glory. His awesome love and faithfulness are manifested every day.

On June 26, we had another Relief Operation among the Badjao community in Mambaling. God even provided a patrol car to escort us during the whole trip. Even though there were areas in strict lockdown, the team was able to travel with ease. The packs were hauled into a banca and sent to the Christian church which took charge of the distribution. It was indeed a beautiful thing to see how we could share the love of God to a group of people who may not know Jesus yet or are even hostile to Him and His followers.

All in all, I praise and thank God for placing me where I am now. Honestly, I feel so at peace and full of joy, being able to serve Him full time – to see more vibrant communities of Jesus' followers among the least reached.

Above all, I thank God for His faithful providence, sustenance, protection and love in all these months – for using me amid this pandemic. Indeed, He has blessed me so much and I know I need to pass on the blessing. Finally, I would also like to thank the Mission Committee of Cebu Gospel Church for the trust and partnership in the expansion of His kingdom. Thank you all for the support and encouragement. God bless us all.



FAITH BEYOND OUR COMFORT ZONE

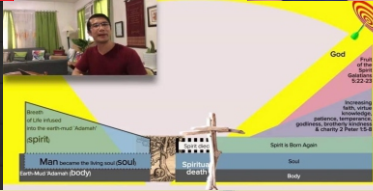
Leeian Yap



In December 2019, an outbreak of a new virus originating from Wuhan, China sparked panic and fear amongst the people as large number of the population died and the spread of the virus to other countries resulted to a worldwide pandemic.

Virtual Christian Youth Fellowship

GETTING BETTER @
COVID



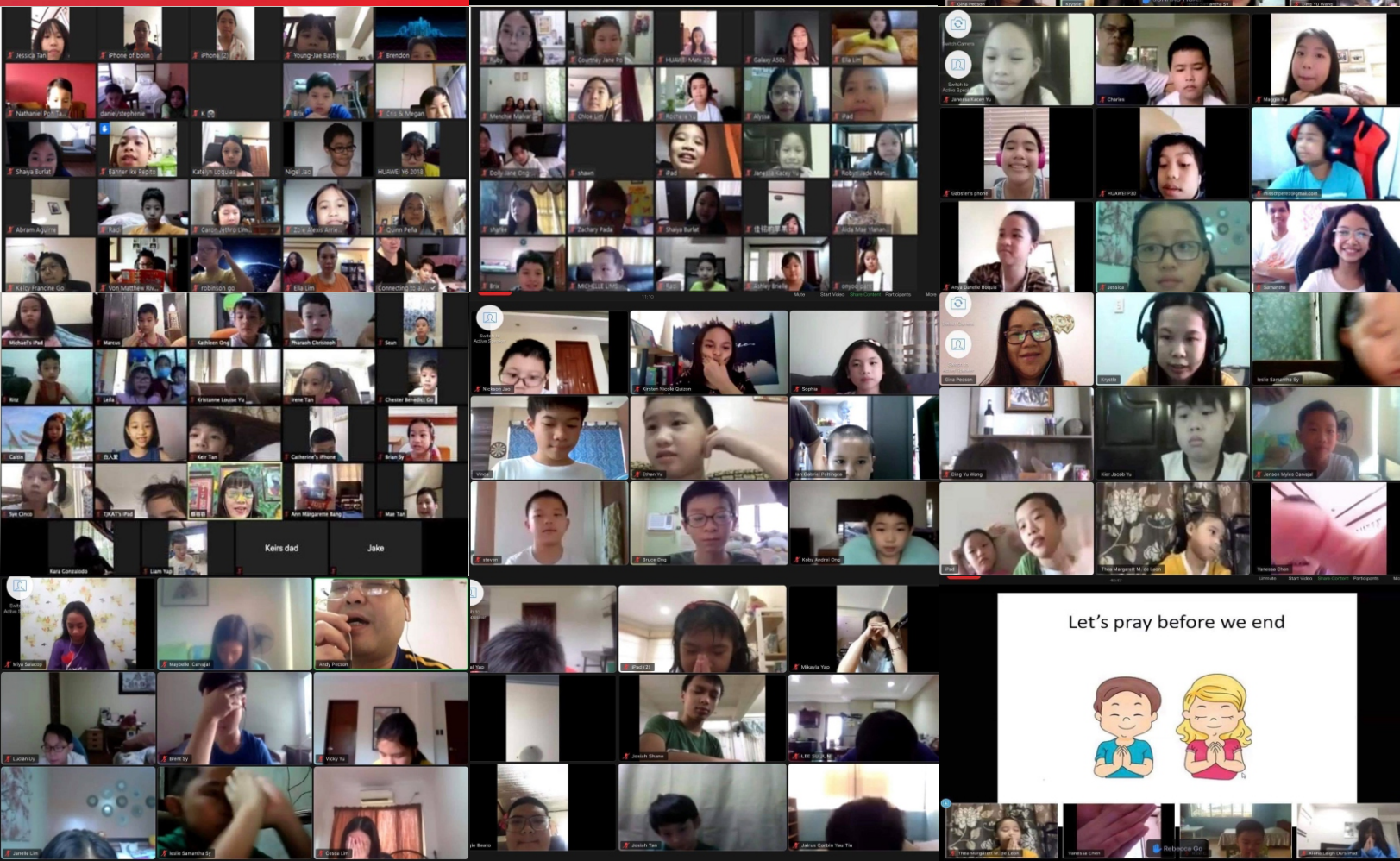
On February 2, 2020, the president banned the entry of tourists and passengers from China except Filipino citizens who had to be subjected to a 14-day quarantine upon arrival. On March 13, 2020, classes in both private and public schools were abruptly suspended. This day also happened to be the last gathering of Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF). Though we all had fun in the group dynamics "I am Accepted in Christ" led by Ahia Dominic Daniel Ong, we never thought that this would be our last fellowship for the meantime. After the worship service on March 15, 2020, the church council met with Dr. Catherine Chua and Dr. Denzel Po, both who used to join CYF, and they gave their insight on the severity of the case. And in compliance with the government's mandate to prevent the spread of CoVid-19 through mass gatherings, the council then decided to temporarily stop all church gatherings and fellowships.

A week after, on March 21, 2020, the counselors and pastors involved in CYF decided to continue fellowship virtually. Every Friday at 6:30pm, a video sharing God's word is posted on CGC CYF Facebook group page by an assigned counselor or pastor. A month after the lockdown, the youth officers planned and started Compass. Videos of young people who have the heart/burden to share their devotion and testimonies were posted on Facebook and Instagram. Our goal is to reach out to the younger kids and encourage them to continue to seek the Lord and do their devotion. Despite the distance and being quarantined, God's word will continue to live.

Sunday School has also started virtual fellowship on June 7, 2020. Praise God, we have around 300 kids from Kinder 1 to Grade 6. We also thank and glorify God for the Sunday school teachers who play an important part in molding the spiritual lives of these young kids. In Matthew



Virtual Sunday School



9:14, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

This community quarantine has opened my eyes and taught me that whatever happens, God's will will always prevail. Things may not make sense as of the moment but God has allowed it in His time, and we are asked to obey and submit. As we go on with life and look back, we will see that God has His finger in every situation, guiding and bringing us to where He wants us to be. The devil will look for ways to hinder our relationship with God by using quarantine to his advantage. We stop going to

church and fellowships, but God's word will never be quarantined. Our faith must go beyond the walls of our church. This lockdown has only pushed us to continue reaching out to others and to share the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. It is written in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

A photograph of a modern church interior. The focal point is a large, illuminated cross on the wall. The church has a high, vaulted ceiling with recessed lighting. The walls are a warm, light brown color. There are two large, arched windows on either side of the cross. In the foreground, there are rows of dark wooden pews. A small wooden altar is visible in the center of the church. The overall atmosphere is clean and contemporary.

CHURCH EVENTS

compiled by Pfr. Rosaline Lim

THANKSGIVING DAY

Y Sister's Fellowship hosted the Thanksgiving Service on November 21, 2019. Brothers and sisters in Christ gave testimonies about how God had been merciful and good in their lives. Among the special numbers that evening were as follow: dance and song interpretation by the Sister's Fellowship; song numbers by the Church Choir, Brother's Fellowship and brethren from Mandaue Gospel Church; a violin rendition by the Sunday School Department; and skit entitled "Thank You, Lord" by Christian Youth Fellowship.





BOOK SALE

The most anticipated annual Book Sale organized by the Literature Committee was held for two consecutive Sundays on November 24 and December 1, 2019. Bibles, Christian books and items were sold at discounted prices



WATER BAPTISM

Two sisters in Christ received water baptism, namely Caithlin Monique Sy and Virgie Dy on December 1, 2019. Praise the Lord!!

SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PARTY

Sunday School Christmas Party was held on December 15, 2019. An assortment of food and goody bags were prepared for both the kids and the adults. The skit played entitled, "Can We Cancel Christmas?" was about the true meaning of Christmas which can never be stolen.



CHRISTMAS CANTATA

*J*oint service was held last December 15, 2019 to celebrate Christmas with the fitting message, "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" by Dr. Gerardo Lisbe. The service was capped with a Christmas Cantata entitled, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" by our very own church choir.



INDUCTION OF 2020 CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBERS

*I*nduction of deacons and deaconesses was held last January 05, 2020. The following new council members were also inducted into office: Dea. Heinrich Lee Yu and Dea. Angelita Dy. Rev. Vicente Sia spoke on "Transformed Life" based on Proverbs 3:1-12.



CONGREGATIONAL SUNDAY

Congregational Sunday was on January 26, 2020 with Rev. John Ong exhorting us to “Be Rich” toward God, be rich in good name and be rich in good deeds. After the service, lunch fellowship was held in P.C.G.S. where members also gathered to sing praise and play games for all age groups.



P.C.G.S. SUNDAY

Last February 23, 2020 was P.C.G.S. Sunday with Rev. Danny Reyes giving an encouraging message, “Don’t Be Afraid” expounded from Deuteronomy 20:1-9. The P.C.G.S. kindergarten students gave a wonderful rendition and psalms recitation in Chinese while the high school students sang “How Can We Keep from Singing” during tithes and offerings. The school also had a video presentation featuring the highlights and activities of the students for the school year.





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