



Insights
FROM THE
GARDEN

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HOW TO BE SUCCESSFULLY RICH

Most motivational speakers would say that you should know your “*WHY*” if you want to succeed. You should also set goals so that you can measure your progress.

While I generally agree with the concept of goal setting and measuring one’s progress, these ideas may not necessarily be helpful all the time because some people can choose the wrong *WHY* and set the wrong goals.

When asked about their goals, most people would say that they want to become successfully rich as soon as possible, *kasi sayang ang oras*. So, they would hop from one job or business opportunity to another, looking for the quickest way to satisfy their *WHY*.

Recently, I realized that wanting to be “successfully rich” is an unrealistic goal because success is just a natural by-product of being excellent in your job or business. On the other hand, a person can never become excellent unless he stays put and be faithful with the responsibilities he has at hand. Furthermore, a person cannot become faithful unless he is humble enough to recognize that whatever his job is today, it is a blessing from the Lord. One of the most important things I’ve learned recently is that if you do not see something as a blessing, you will never enjoy it as a blessing. You will always be preoccupied with the thought that there might be something better elsewhere.

So, I would like to suggest that instead of dreaming to be successfully rich, we make it our ambition to become faithfully excellent in whatever we do today. When we do this, we will automatically become successful. And when this happens, riches will naturally follow.

GOD HAS BLESSED YOU ALREADY

Someone asked God for blessings, so God gave him a job. But he found his boss hard and his work difficult. So, sabi niya kay God, mabuti pa raw noong wala siyang trabaho, kasi hindi siya napapagod.

Someone asked God to give her a good future, so God gave her strict parents to protect and guide her. But she complained to God and said, "Why can't I exercise my freedom without hindrance?"

Others complain about the color of their skin, the country of their birth, and many other things. They think they deserve something better. Yes, I agree with them. But do you will get that something better by rejecting what you have already? Don't you think producing something good from what God has given you can help you achieve the better things you want?

Complaining about what you have will not change your situation. And even if God gives you something better, you will still find fault in it. I am learning that contentment requires great humility, and that means to recognize that what you have comes from the Lord.

You may be asking why God has given you less than what He has given others. But is it possible that He is just giving you more opportunities to do greater things for Him? Most of the great men in the Bible did not start with an abundance of resources, but with very little. This is what God did for Nick Vujicic. He was born without hands and feet, yet he has become one of the most inspirational speakers in the world. His unique situation has opened more opportunities for him to speak and encourage many people around the world.

As I've said before, one of the most important things I've learned in life is that when you do not see what you have as a blessing, you will not enjoy them as a blessing!

SANA ANG BUHAY PARANG EXAMS LANG

“Sana ang buhay parang exams lang. Mas binibilang sana ‘yung tama kaysa mali.” When I saw this post, I felt sorry for my friend because I knew the quote came from a heart that was hurting. I knew this, because I felt the same way in the past.

Years ago, I would often feel bad because my efforts seem to always fall short of my goals and the expectations of everyone. Some people did not even hesitate to let me know how disappointed they were in me. Ang wish ko noon, sana binibilang din nila ‘yung mga tamang nagawa ko, hindi lang yung mga mali. But life does not work that way.

As I tried to understand how to improve my situation, I realized that I can never change the way people react to me, but through Christ, I have the power to change myself! But how did I know what to change? Instead of forcing people to accept my weaknesses, I studied these weaknesses so that I can improve on them.

And then it dawned on me na ang buhay parang exams nga lang, pero imbes na ‘yung tamang sagot ang bilangin, dapat nating tingnan ‘yung mali.

You see, when my children were young, I would always tell them na hindi kailangang tama ang lahat ng sagot nila sa exams. Mas importante para sa akin na malaman nila kung saan sila nagkamali at kung ano ang tamang sagot doon para pag naulit ang tanong in the future, correct na ang isasagot nila. So, I would tell them to always ask for the corrected test papers at the end of the exams so that they can review them. I told them that it is not essential that they are always correct. What's more important is for them to improve and learn from their mistakes. I learned this approach from the lesson about trials in James 1:2-4.

When our “good” is not good enough, we should not sulk and feel sorry for ourselves. Instead, we should ask why it was not good enough and know how to improve on it. We should not force people to accept our weaknesses but instead, use their criticisms as a tool to understand how we can do better. We should not do this to impress them, but so that we can become the best for the Lord!

Ang totoo, ang buhay ay parang exams lang. Mas inaalang dapat natin kung saan tayo nagkamali para puwede nating itama sa future. When we do this, we can become better and better, from one exam to another, and from one trial to another. Ang tawag namin dito sa Semilya Sa Kinabuhi is to *Excel Still More!*

WHY ARE WE THIS WAY BA?

Many Filipinos get excited when someone comes to bring help in the form of 'aid.' Sosyal na term 'yan for alms. This is because many of us are always in need. Today, a large number of our people have become dependent on 4Ps, and I was told na mag ra-riot ang mga beneficiaries if the government scraps the program. Furthermore, many Filipinos are concerned about how President Duterte is alienating the US and European Union. It is because these countries might stop the aid they are giving to our country.

Alam ba n'yo na ang lokal na tawag sa *aid* ay limos? Bakit ba tayo kontento na pinaglilimusan? Di ba ang mas maganda, tayo ang tumutulong, hindi ang tinutulungan? In Psalm 37:25, David said, "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread." Since we often find ourselves begging for bread, does this mean we are not righteous? Or could it be na hindi lang natin naintindihan ang righteousness that the Bible speaks of?

The most precise definition of righteousness in the Bible is found in Deuteronomy 6:25 (NLT) and it says, "For we will be counted as righteous when we obey all the commands the Lord our God has given us." According to this verse, righteousness merely means being obedient to the commandments of the Lord and living according to His ways. But what is God teaching us so that we do not end up begging?

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 (NLT), Paul said, "Stay away from all believers who live idle lives... For you know that you ought to imitate us. We were not idle when we were with you. We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you... Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: 'Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.'" Here, Paul clearly shows us that part of God's instructions is that we work so that we will never beg. In fact, sabi ng Proverbs 28:19 (ESV), "Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty." Ang problema sa atin, we do not just forsake our land, we even allow foreigners to take control of our resources! Why are we this way ba?

I am learning that it is because ang idea natin ng blessing from God is like the manna the Israelites received when they were roaming the desert. Gusto natin maghintay parati sa "awa" ng Diyos, kaysa magtrabaho para may makain tayo. Do you know that manna stopped falling the day the Israelites entered the Promised Land? This was because they had a fertile land of their own, God expected them to work the land so it would provide for their needs and give them abundance.

Sana all Filipinos will understand that God channels His blessing come through our work. Sana din dumating ang panahon na tayo ang nagbibigay ng

tulong at hindi ang tinutulungan. When we live according to the ways of the Lord, we will never beg for anything anymore!

IS YOUR FREEDOM WORTH DYING FOR?

How important is your freedom? Is it worth dying for?

The Oxford Dictionary defines *freedom* as the ability of a person to act however he wants without hindrance. It is the absence of slavery from any authority and the power to decide one's future. I used to agree with this concept until I read Romans 6:16 which says, "Don't you know...you are *slaves of the one whom you obey*, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" (emphasis mine)

When children disobey their parents for the sake of their friends, they free themselves from their parents' control, but they are enslaved to their friends. Likewise, when subordinates do not submit to their bosses because they don't agree with them, they free themselves from their authority but are slaves to their personal pride. Romans 6:16 is telling us that we are never free, and the only freedom we have is the ability to choose whom to obey.

Ironically, the best example of the proper use of freedom was shown by a boy who became a slave and then later became a prisoner. Joseph was robbed of his freedom in many ways and yet, he always chose to do his best for his master Potiphar. When he was seduced by his master's wife, he chose to do what was right. He resisted and according to Genesis 39:9 he said, "How could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" Joseph's life proved that Romans 6:16 is correct. Though Potiphar was Joseph's earthly master, Joseph considered himself as a slave of God whom he had to obey. When he chose to obey God, he gained a better life. God eventually made a way for him to become the prime minister of Egypt. What do you think would have happened if he chose to be tempted and sin?

Pope John Paul II said, "Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but having the power to do what we ought." So let us exercise our freedom to choose wisely, so that we may give God the chance to fulfill His good plans for us. May He do to you what He did for Joseph.

PROBLEMS MAKE US WISE

I used to confront problems head on. I was a person who would never sweep a problem under the rug. But this approach would leave the people around me hurting and it would create new problems that I had to confront again.

I had since changed my approach because of two important things that I've learned about God. First, I learned that God is in control and that He is aware of what I am going through. If He wants to, He can remove my problems, but if He does not, it means He is using them to teach me something important. Second, I learned that God as a Father will not allow me to go through anything that will not be good for me. So, whenever problems come, I would ask these questions: *What is God trying to teach me? What weakness is He trying to expose? What good will this problem bring?* By doing this, I have learned to embrace my problems!

I would embrace problems the way Jacob embraced the angel who wrestled with him in Genesis 32:24- 32. Even with a dislocated hip bone, Jacob held on to the angel and said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." In the same way I now tell God, "Do not let this problem end until I learn from it." Weird, 'no? I pray this because I know that if I do not learn from my problems, they will come back to haunt me again and again. God has been using problems as His tool to grow me. He allows me to go through them to give me a chance to apply the things I've learned. In the process, I get to convert my knowledge into abilities that will prepare me for the opportunities He will send my way in the future. Problems are friends to those who want to become wise. So, embrace problems as friends and learn from them.

STOP BEING BITTER

If there is something I am sure of it is that people will disappoint us. Some may even betray us. It happened to me several times. I experienced disappointments and betrayal from those I thought I knew very well. Because of this, I ended up being bitter toward them, and even lost sleep because of it.

One day I realized that unknowingly, I had given these people the power to make me miserable. So that same day, I decided to remove their power over me. I chose to treat them the way I want them to treat me as Matthew 7:12 commands, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Then I also chose to forgive them, for God's sake and for my sake; for God's sake, because I want to please Him, and for my sake, so that I will not become bitter anymore. But though I would forgive, meaning I would not count their sins against them anymore, I would not forget. I've decided to use the experience to make me wiser and careful in the future. If ever this happens to you, do not give anyone the power to make you angry and miserable. Instead, use the situation to mature in Christ.

STRENGTH AND GOOD HEALTH BRINGS WEALTH

Whenever we worship with the natives in our farm, they would often stand up to thank God by saying, “Pasalamat ko sa Ginoo sa kusog ug maayong lawas na lyang gihatag sa ako ug sa akong pamilya” (I thank God for the strength and the good health He gave me and my family). I seldom hear them thank God for their good harvest and the good weather. So in my mind I used to ask, *can't they think of something else to say? Is this a habit, or just part of their culture?*

I understood the beauty of their ways when I learned the meaning of wealth in Deuteronomy 8:18. The Hebrew word used for wealth is *chayil*, meaning army, faculty, strength, and property. Strength represents our ability to work and overcome the problems we have by using the resources God entrusted to our care.

I realized that strength and good health are more important than money and riches. When we are strong and healthy, we can work to produce money and riches, but having a lot of money can not buy us strength and good health. In Ecclesiastes 5:12 Solomon said, "The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich does not allow him to sleep." Then in Ecclesiastes 6:2 Solomon talked of a man who lacks nothing in riches but do not have the ability to eat from them. What great irony!

What is the use of our riches if we do not have the strength to enjoy them? What is the value of our properties if we do not have the ability to work on them? Instead of being sources of blessings, they will just become our burdens. What is the value of money if we just spend them on medicine to heal our illness? Therefore, to be strong and healthy are indeed blessings we should thank God for.

The next time you pray, pray like the natives of Bukidnon. Desire strength and good health before material wealth. Continue to ask God to give you the strength to create wealth from the things He has already entrusted to you.

BRIBERY VERSUS EXTORTION

There are two sensitive issues Christians in business struggle with— bribery and extortion. I wish to share what I have learned, baka lang kasi makatulong.

To bribe is *shochad* in Hebrew which means to give a gift with a manipulative intent, given to hide a wrong. To extort is *ashaq* in Hebrew which means to oppress, or to rob a person who wants to do what is right and comply with the requirements of the law, even if the requirements put him in an inconvenient position. It is bribery when we give gifts to avoid these requirements and penalties. But if we have complied and someone oppresses us by imposing an unlawful burden, that is extortion.

When we bribe, the sin is on us and the one who receives it. We sin because our intention is to hide our wrong, but the other person also sins because he will have to twist the law in order to accommodate our gift. Bribery perverts' justice. But extortion is different, because the sin is on the extortionist. Ezekiel 18:18 says “As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed *his* brother and did what was not good among his people, behold, he will die for his iniquity.”

There are two ways to respond to extortion: we can make a stand, or we can give in. I make a stand when my personal faith is on the line and the losses will just be mine to bear. But I give in when the welfare of others is at stake and when they will have to bear the losses with me. Either way, I make sure that I have no wrong to hide and no laws to twist. When I am sure of this, I take comfort in the fact that the extortionist has not sinned against me but against the true Owner of my business— God Himself. God delivered me during the times I made a stand in the past. And I know He will deal with the extortionist, according to Ezekiel 18:18, when I give in in order to protect others. I hope this helps.

THE BENEFITS OF SUBMISSION

Why is it easier for people to rebel against their authorities than to submit to them? Why is it more natural for us to see the flaws of our leaders than to appreciate their strengths? Why are we so concerned about our rights to oppose and be heard, rather than our responsibility to listen and support the decisions of our bosses?

I believe this rebellious nature is what we inherited from Adam, who ate from the forbidden tree not because the fruit was irresistible, but because he thought that by eating it he would become like God (as the serpent suggested). To Adam, it meant he would become co-owner of the garden, and which would in effect, free him from the authority of the Lord.

When I was younger, I was quick to oppose my bosses and eager to point out their flaws. I was very slow to listen but would demand that I speak out and that they should consider my views. I thought then that I was doing other people a favor, fighting for those who had no courage to say the things in their hearts. Although feeling *ko astig ako*, I realize now that my old nature did not benefit me in any way. Instead, it had brought me a lot of grief.

It has only been 10 years since I understood the benefits of submitting to authority. Never *akong sumipsip sa boss ko kasi* I do not like going out of my way just to please anyone. But when I started to humble myself and supported the decisions of those above me, or my authorities, I noticed that they gave me more favor. While I still speak out if I feel something is wrong, I do not do this to show that I am better. Instead, I do it with the intention of protecting my authorities.

Ikaw ba, when you oppose your authorities and keep looking at their flaws, what benefits do you get? *Di ba parati lang sumasama ang loob mo?* And when your boss senses that you dislike him or her, *di ba hindi ka niya binibigyan ng more opportunities kasi baka ikasama mo lang?* And do you like working with people who are rebellious? *Hindi, di ba?* So *huwag mo rin gawin iyon sa boss mo*. *Tingnan mo*, if you learn to become submissive like Jesus was to His Father, you will gain a lot of favor from men and, most importantly, from God.

WORK AND SAVE TOWARD ABUNDANCE

After God created the earth, He told man to become fruitful in Genesis 1:28. But before that, the Bible says that God blessed him first. You may be asking, *Bless him with what?* With a garden that God personally planted (Genesis 2:8). But God did not just give the garden for man to enjoy, He gave him a responsibility to cultivate and keep it!

When I first saw this, I asked myself, *why would God ask man to cultivate and keep the good garden He planted?* I assumed that that garden was close to perfect because the Bible also said that everything God created was good. As I pondered on this question, I realized that if you do not cultivate a garden but continue to take from it, that garden will soon become barren. But if you cultivate and keep it, it will continually provide for your needs and even produce abundance, an abundance that you can use to one day bless others with. For me, this last state is called the state of being fruitful.

As I continue to study the idea of business and entrepreneurship, I realized that the most powerful instruction God gave us to produce abundance is to “cultivate and keep” the gardens we already have. In simple terms, I call it “work and save!”

However, the ideas of working and saving do not really appeal to many people. Instead, most of them are in constant search for a way to get rich without working, and they would also say that they cannot save because they do not even have enough for themselves. So, people are always on the lookout for investments that would create passive income, which they will consume as quickly as they earn from them. I believe this mindset has made many Filipinos poor and has even placed them in massive debt.

While Peachy and I borrowed money from our family to start our hog contract growing business, we did not take any more loans to expand our business. Together, we decided to build the farm by using only what we have. We did this by working hard and continually saving. If we did not work, we would not have the means to provide for our needs, but if we did not save, we would not have the funds to grow the business.

I realized that to “cultivate and keep” is a very powerful tool towards financial freedom. It is the means by which God gives us the power to create wealth and the opportunity to become fruitful. As Keepers, I wish we would teach these ideas to our children, the people who work for us, and even those around us. We should tell all Filipinos that we can all become fruitful when we continue to “work” our gardens and “save” our gains. While debt makes us a slave to the lender, savings will make us the masters over our future.

OUR OBLIGATION BEFORE THE LORD

When a prominent religious leader was asked to react to what President Duterte said about God, he said that it is their MORAL obligation to oppose the evil of our leaders. He even said that they may be forced to organize rallies to make a stand and protect the name of God.

Do we need to protect the name of God? Can't God take care of Himself? Is it really our MORAL obligation to oppose evil leaders to the point of asking people to rally against them? Is this not violating what Paul said in Romans 13, that we should subject ourselves to the authority God had established over us?

When Jesus was on earth, He never enticed people to go against Rome. He would even hide from them when they wanted to make Him king. He even said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's but to God what is God's." Likewise, Paul commanded the followers of Jesus to submit to authority, otherwise, they will be opposing God Himself. Paul said this, in spite of the tyranny of Rome and even though Christians were being sent to die in their arenas. Paul never asked the Christians then to oppose Rome because he never heard Jesus give this command as well. Because he wanted the Christians to live in peace, he asked them to do what is right by respecting the leaders of the land.

Is it really our responsibility to protect the name of the Lord? Can He not protect Himself? When Nebuchadnezzar acted arrogantly, God removed him from being king and made him eat grass like a beast. When his son Belshazzar used the cup from the temple of Israel, God killed him that night. When Pilate was interrogating Jesus, Jesus said if He wants to, He can ask for a legion of angels to fight for Him. But since it was necessary for Him to die to fulfill His Father's will, He did not do so.

God can definitely take care of Himself and protect His name. So, what is our obligation as His representative to the people? It is our MORAL obligation to teach people how to act according to God's righteousness so that the world may see how good and powerful He is. We should follow Paul and submit to authority, and then we should imitate David who did not lay his hands on King Saul even though Saul wanted him killed.

The only time we should not submit to authority is when they ask us to sin against God. When President Duterte called God stupid, that is his sin against Him. But if we entice people to rebel against the President, that will be our sin against the Lord.

Often, I feel that the reason why God cannot implement His plan for change is because we try to do the work of the Holy Spirit. Before God can work around us, we must first allow Him to work in us. So let us seek to obey the Lord in every way, even if it is very difficult, so that we can encourage others to do the same and bring peace into our land. This is the message of 2 Chronicles 7:14.

IS IT OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CHANGE THE WORLD?

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every way, even if it is very difficult hurting us. So that we can encourage others to do the same and bring peace into our land. This is the message of 2 Chronicles 7:14.

THE “ULTRA-POOR”

We define wealth today as an abundance of money and material possessions. It is synonymous to being rich and the opposite of being poor. If you live in a very poor squatter area, you may be referred to as ultra-poor.

Do you know that the definition of “wealth” in Hebrew does not refer to money or possessions? The Hebrew word is *chayil*. It means physical strength and noble character. It also means a mighty army. I learned that strength is an important asset because strength can make money, but money cannot buy strength. Having an army, or a group of workers, is a great advantage because this multiplies your ability to make money.

If wealth is about strength and character, then this means no one should be poor. As long as a person has strength to work then he has the ability to make wealth. An amazing example is Nick Vujicic. Though he has no hands and feet, he has the strength of character to inspire, to teach, to write, and even to build a family.

I have always believed that no one is poor. I believe people become poor only when they do not use their strength and resources to get out of their predicament. When the Bible says we should remember the poor, I believe it means we should tell them that there is a better way to live their lives. But the key to this is to know Jesus and to follow His ways. To follow Jesus does not only mean going to heaven. More importantly, it means to live the good life He intends for us to have. This also means that they have to work for six days and rest only for one day.

I believe the rich should help the poor, not to feed them, but to lend resources and to teach them how to do business. When the poor receive this help, they should use their strength to make wealth so that they can live the life God wants them to have. This is why Jesus said in John 15:8 that His Father is glorified when His people bear fruits because this is the proof that they obey His ways.

LIFE IS NOT ABOUT ME, BUT ABOUT “WE”

I recently learned that life is not about the word “me,” but about “WE”!

I grew up believing that achieving my goals and ambitions should take top priority. I was taught that they will give my life direction and achieving them will ensure a good fortune for me and my family. But as I pursued my goals, I learned that I need other people to help me. While most of the people I worked with cooperated with me, there were those who added to my burden and those who challenged what I wanted to accomplish. So, in the past, I would either confront them or ram through them.

A couple of years ago, I was confronted by Philippians 2:3-4: “...with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” My immediate response then was, *why? Why should I have to look out for the interest of others? And why should I regard them as more important than myself?* These verses seem to suggest that I should sacrifice my goals for the sake of the welfare of others. Naisip ko tuloy, kung ‘yung goals ko nga nahihirapan na akong abutin, proproblemahin ko pa ba ‘yung sa iba? But because I promised to obey everything the Bible says, I acted on what Philippians 2:3-4 say. And some amazing things started to happen.

When I made people feel important, they made me feel important in return. When I put their welfare before mine, they started to protect my interests as well. I learned that God did not want me to suffer when He asked me to serve the needs of others. Instead, He wanted me to see that people are basically good. He showed me that when you help others meet their goals, they will help you meet yours, and by protecting the “WE”, you are actually taking care of the “me”!

This principle is exemplified in the lives of my dear friends, Rico and Menchit Wong. Their passion to protect the welfare of the people around them continually amazes me. But then I also saw that the people they have been blessing have made it their priority to protect the welfare of this couple. Kaya nga today, I have a new ambition. Sana sa paglaki ko magaya ko si Rico!

Rico Wong is EVP of DMCI, while Menchit is the President of Compassion International. They have a small BS group with over 120 adult members. While their members have their own small groups already, everyone are still drawn to the mother group because of how the couple shows great concern for everybody.

WHY CAN'T WE AFFORD TO HAVE GOOD MANNERS?

Last Saturday, when I was in Manila, I had an amazing lesson on humility from an Uber driver named Alfred Iwarat.

As we drove from Alabang to Makati, there was a car that suddenly cut into our lane, but he just gave way without getting angry. Then there were pedestrians who ran across our path, but he just stopped to let them pass. Then though the toll booth operator was a bit rude, he was very polite as he paid our fee. He was very pleasant overall. So, I said, "Bilib naman ako sa iyo, hindi ka nagagalit o nagre-react. Kung ako pa 'yan..." But as he explained his life principles, I was not only floored, but I was also humbled.

He told me, "Alam ho ninyo, many people today can afford to buy good cars, good gadgets, good clothes and good food, but can't seem to afford to have good manners. Eh libre naman ho 'yun, di ba?" Aray ko! Para niya akong binatang, kasi ang sabi ko sa kanya, "Bilib naman ako sa iyo. Kung ako ikaw, nagalit at nainis na ako." I really felt ashamed of myself.

He explained that the reason why he gives way pag may nag-cut sa harap niya is that he does not want to be the cause of traffic should something bad happen. He said he stops for pedestrians, especially those who are running, para hindi sila madapa. Sabi pa niya baka may importanteng pupuntahan kaya tumatakbo. Then he said that whenever he is nice to those who are rude to him, they greet him back with a smile and are more considerate toward him. Everything he told me made sense! I ended up telling myself, Bakit *hindi ko iniisip 'yun?* Nakakahiya di ba?

Tama siya 'no? Most of us can afford to buy good cars, good clothes and good food, but can't afford to have good manners maski libre naman 'yun. Hmm, kung ganyan ang lahat ng Uber drivers, I will suggest that they open an Uber University, and ako mismo mage-enroll!

WHAT IS NATIONALISM?

As we celebrate the independence of the Philippines, I cannot help but wonder why we are so divided as a nation. Everyone claims to love the country, even those who have rebelled against the government. All of them are saying that they do what they do because they are protecting this nation.

What is nationalism? Is it about love for our country and our fellowmen? If this is so, then why are we fighting each other and why is there so much division among us? I have no answer to these questions, but I would like to share with you what I believe nationalism is.

Para sa akin nationalism is to love the country that God gave me. Sabi sa John 3:27, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven." I was born a Filipino because God decided to make me one. He placed me here not because it is the best country in the world but because it is the best place for me.

But why am I here? I am here because God entrusted a portion of this country to me. Here, He gave me a land and a business to steward for Him. Therefore, if I love God, I will love what He gave me and do my best to keep the garden He entrusted to me. As I take care of my portion, I will also try to influence others to take good care of their own portions too, so that together, we can make this the best country for the Lord.

Nationalism to me is to love this country because I love the Lord. I will take care of it and love the Filipinos because this is what He wants me to do. I will support the government and its drive for justice because Deuteronomy 6 says it is justice that will bring peace to the land. I really believe you cannot truly be nationalistic if you do not love God and the things He entrusted to you.

IS IT A BLESSING OR A BURDEN?

"When you do not see something as a blessing, you will never enjoy it as a blessing!" This is one of the most important lessons I learned in my life! I realize that this is true for everything in our lives: in the way we see God, our spouse, our authorities, our children, our jobs, our businesses and, even, our country.

When you do not see God as a blessing, you will see all His laws as a burden. When you do not see your spouse as a blessing, you will question his/her ways and doubt his/her intentions. When you do not see your job as a blessing, you will not do what is necessary to make it work. When you do not see your country as a blessing, you will want to leave it to find a better future elsewhere.

But who decides whether something is a blessing or not? You, and only you!

When you see your spouse as a blessing you will be more accepting of his or her flaws and will be happy to fill up what he or she lacks. But if you do not, you will see his or her flaws as a "thorn in your flesh." When you see your business as a blessing you will look at the problems that come your way as opportunities to improve it. But if you do not, you will see them as a curse from the Lord.

But who decides that something is a blessing or a curse? When I was explaining this to my daughter she said, "Perception lang pala, Papa, 'no?'" I said, "Yes, it is! Perception lang. Pero the problem with perception is that it is the reality to the person who perceives."

I realized that we have the power to make our lives excitingly good by just having a better perspective toward the things we have in our lives. I learned that everything we have was given by God to make us fruitful. Kaso lang when we choose to see them as burdens, we will never enjoy them as blessings.

YOUR COUNTRY: A BLESSING OR BURDEN?

If God gives you the chance to choose kung saan ka ipapanganak, what country would you choose? Would you still choose the Philippines? Or would you choose a country that would give you a better chance of achieving your greatest potential?

Did you look at the mirror this morning? If you did, tinanong mo ba sarili mo kung bakit ka pango? You can deny it, pero maski mas matangos ang ilong mo kumpara sa akin, pango ka pa rin kumpara sa mga Amerikano! So, obviously, God did not give you the chance to choose the country of your birth. But why did He put you in a country where it is very difficult to prosper.

Bakit ka ginawa ni God na pango? Bakit hindi puti ang balat mo? If God wanted to, I believe He could have made you an American or European from birth, pero bakit hindi Niya ito ginawa?

Kasi, He believes that you are the best person to take care of this country— for Him. Kaso lang, as I said in an earlier message, unless you see something as a blessing you will never enjoy it as a blessing. This is why many Filipinos have chosen to seek a better future elsewhere.

Please do not get me wrong. I believe it's not a sin to migrate to another country or work overseas. In the Bible, God told certain people to move to a land that He chose for them, and I am sure God spoke to a few Filipinos to move elsewhere. But I am not sure if He told all the 2.3 million OFWs to sell their land in the Philippines to work abroad or the millions who changed their citizenship.

The Parable of the Talent tells us that God has entrusted us with His possessions according to our abilities. The possession that He entrusted to us is situated in a country of His choosing, just like the way He entrusted the land of Canaan to the Jews. We are Filipinos because God believes that we would be the best stewards of this country.

In farming, I would always say that every seed has the potential to become a fruitful tree, but you need a farmer to bring out that potential. In the same way, I believe every country has the potential to become prosperous, but it needs faithful citizens to bring out the nation's full potential. God made us Filipinos because He wants us to take care of this country so that we can make the Philippines a blessing to the world. Sana we would all start to see this country as a blessing and not as a burden.

BY FATE OR BY FAITH?

Some people believe they are poor because they were born to be poor. Some people believe they are gay because they were destined to be one since birth. Does this mean some people are born to be murderers, to be addicts, or to be evil? Are people destined to be who they are because of fate? Or can they create a better future, because of faith?

In farming, I have learned that every seed has the potential to become a fruitful tree, but it can also become a bad tree if no one takes care of it. However, a seed does not become fruitful on its own, the farmer who owns it must work to bring out its full potential. He must plant it where it is best suited and nurture it based on how it was created.

Genesis 1:28 tells us that God has blessed us with what we need to become fruitful. This means He has given each of us a seed that we should nurture in order to live in abundance.

No one is destined to be poor! People become poor only when they do not use their strength to work and develop their character to become rich. Do you know that most of the richest people today started with very little? Many of them were even born poor!

No one is destined to be gay! People become gay when they reject how God created them. Though the world may have influenced them, they became gay because they chose to.

No one is destined to be evil! According to Psalm 127:3, "...children are a gift of the Lord." Like a seed, each child has the potential to become great, but a person becomes evil when he rejects the ways of the Lord. Do you know that many of the great men and women in history were born into very challenging circumstances, but by faith, they learned to overcome and excel?

You are not the product of your past. Instead, you are the product of your choices!

How can a man who was born with a disadvantaged fate, become great in the eyes of God and the eyes of men, because of faith? The amazing life of Sean Stephenson is a testament that fate does not decide who we will become because it is our faith that determines who we will be. Watch his inspirational videos in YouTube, entitled the prison of your mind | Sean Stephenson <https://youtu.be/VaRO5-V1uK0>

May God give you the power to exceed your potential!

WE FILIPINOS, IN GENERAL, ARE NOT KIND!

The 2019 SEA Games have become a source of disappointment for many, including to many Christians. Sadly, the situation showed that we, as Filipinos, are not kind! We were quick to confront the mistakes of the organizers, believing that this is our obligation as citizens of this country. One Facebook post even said, "If we did not complain, they would not have replaced the kikiam meals with sumptuous buffet!" Really? It was later revealed that the kikiam story was not true.

But this post is not about the SEA Games, but who we are as Filipinos. Most of us are quick to confront the mistakes of others believing that we are following Matthew 18:15, which teaches, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." While we are good at doing what the first part of the verse is saying, we fail to complete what the Lord is telling us to do as we disregard the second part of the verse. It says that when we show our brothers his fault, we should do this so that we can win him over! What does this mean? And win him over from what?

To answer this question, we should consider what Paul said in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness..." To restore means to complete again, and to win over means to set the person free from what enslaves him.

I must confess that I grew up believing that it is my responsibility to confront the mistakes of the people around me. I would force them to admit their sins and tell them to correct their mistakes or else... But most of them would fight back, to show me that they have done nothing wrong. So, these confrontations often ended as painful exercises.

When I understood Matthew 18:15 and Galatians 6:1 better, I changed my ways. I realized that the reason why we should approach our brothers in a spirit of gentleness is that our purpose should be to restore, and not just to show him his faults.

Pero you may say, "If I do that, aabuso siya." Paul did not say that we should exempt him from the consequences of his action, but in kindness, help him get out of the difficult situation he may be in. We should do this to also help those who may be affected by his mistake. I discovered that when we do this, the person in sin will be more cooperative, even if he needs to be penalized for his blunder.

Sana, we can all be kinder to each other by assuming that everybody wants to do a good job, and that nobody wants to fail. Since we all commit mistakes, we should always be willing to help each other. This is the attitude that Paul was telling us to develop in Philippians 2:3- 4: "Do nothing from selfishness or

empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

TO BE RIGHT, TO BE KIND – PART 1

A few weeks ago, Randell Tiongson posted this, “What is more important, to be right or to be kind?” So, I asked myself, *What’s the connection between being right and being kind?*

When someone feels he is right, does that necessarily mean that the other person is in sin? No. Instead, this means he feels the other person is wrong, with regards to a particular issue or concern. But does the other person feel he is wrong? Most probably not. I realized that many conflicts occur when two parties strongly believe they are right while the other is wrong. Conflicts persist when both of them force their point of view on each other, at the same time insisting that the other is wrong. So, what is more important, to be right or to be kind?

I have often wondered what it means to be kind. What is kindness? Modern dictionaries define it as being friendly, considerate, and generous. But the Greek word used for kindness in 1 Corinthians 13:4 means *mercy*, to show kindness based on compassion.

When someone tells you, you are wrong because he is right, how would you feel and what would you do? Di ba, you fight back and show na mali siya and tama ka? So, when will the conflict end? Supposing may nanalo sa inyo, di ba may natalo din? Though masaya ‘yung nanalo, how will the loser feel? He will still be angry and even bitter. There is a quote that says, “A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still!” So eventually, walang nanalo!

I am learning that kindness means to show mercy or compassion toward the person who may be wrong. It means we should protect him from *himself*. We should not forcibly show him we are right, and he is wrong. Instead, we should gently help him realize this. But what if he insists on his ways? When he acts on what you think is wrong, you should allow him to experience the consequences of his decision to let him realize for himself that he is wrong. Huwag mo na siyang sumbatan kasi nasaktan na niya ang sarili niya. When he comes to his senses and asks you for help, show mercy or kindness based on compassion. Do you know that this was what the father of the prodigal son did? And this is the way God treats us?

The Bible says God is loving and kind. What does this mean? I want to explain this subject more in the next post if you do not mind. I was burdened by the post of Randell because I realized I am not a kind person. Often, it is more important for me that I am right.

TO BE RIGHT, TO BE KIND– PART 2

The Bible says that God is loving and kind. While it is easy for me to understand how He is loving, hindi ko naintindihan noon how God is kind. But when I learned that kindness means mercy and that mercy means to show kindness based on compassion, I saw an example of this kindness in the story of the Prodigal Son.

In the story of the Prodigal (wasteful) Son, I had often wondered why the father did not scold his son when he asked for his inheritance while he was still alive and why he did not reject his son when he returned home. I believe he was not a bad father, because the other son did not turn out that way. So most likely he had taught them proper values when they were small, but unfortunately, the younger one chose to live life his way.

For years, I have been asking why the father did not reject his son when he returned, why he did not scold him for what he did and why he did not punish him for squandering his money. It took me a long time to realize that the reason is that the son had been terribly punished already. The world he wanted to enjoy stole his money, robbed him of his dignity, made him eat food for pigs, etc. Because the world rejected his son, the father could not help but feel compassion, so he welcomed him home so that he can show him kindness.

I believe God the Father is the same. He gave us laws, *torah* or instructions, to guide and bless us. If we disobey them, He will send people He calls prophets to warn us so that we may repent. He does this to protect us from the possible consequences of our actions. If we continue to disobey, like the father of the prodigal son, He will step aside so we can experience the cruel ways of the world which we wish to enjoy. Hopefully, someday we may realize that He does what He does because He is loving. When we repent and return to Him, He will welcome us back so that He can show us mercy and kindness. He does not have to punish us anymore because the world whom we chose to obey had already punished us mercilessly.

What is more important? To be right or to be kind? God will always be right, but most of the time He chooses to show kindness instead. He gave us His laws because He wants to bless us, He warns us of our sins because He wants to protect us and when we repent and return to Him, He will accept us. And He wants us to do the same to the people who may rebel or go against us.

In Matthew 9:13, Jesus said, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

TO BE RIGHT, TO BE KIND– PART 3

When Jacob deceitfully took Esau's blessings, he was right to do so because Esau already sold his birthright to him for a bowl of stew. When Esau demanded for his father's blessings, he was right to do so because he was the firstborn. I do not know who you will side with, but Jacob and Esau were both right. But they were both wrong at the same time. I just wonder, what would have happened if one of them decided to show kindness? Would the storyline in the Bible be different?

I heard of two church leaders fighting over a piece of property. What makes it sad is the property was not even theirs; they were just given the privilege to define how it will be used. But their conflicting views caused a division in their church, and it became so bad that they started to attack each other's character. But none of them were in sin, since none of them violated any commandment in the Bible. Both of them insisted that they were right while the other is wrong, so the conflict has dragged on for years. I just wonder, what would have happened if one of them decided to be kind, instead of being right? Would their situation change?

What is more important ba? To be right or to be kind? Mahirap maging kind if you strongly feel you are right and there is no other option but yours. But suppose you can prove you are right and show the other person that he is wrong, what would happen? Eh di panalo ka and talo siya. Will that resolve your conflict? No. It will just make the other person bitter. But what will happen if you decide to show kindness by being considerate, what will happen? You may end the conflict and gain back a friend.

When you show kindness to another person, I believe he will respond in kindness as well because people are basically good. When this happens, both of you will be able to explore options that will satisfy everybody's concerns. I have discovered that when you are nice to others, they will be nice to you as well. When all these happens, you will give God the chance to keep His promise in Romans 8:28 where He said, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."