



Insights
FROM THE
GARDEN

FAITH

Doing
cacanando

DO BUSINESS LIKE A FARMER | DO FARMING AS A BUSINESS

WHEN A CURSE IS PART OF GOD'S BLESSING

Have you ever felt that life has been unfair to you? Have you ever asked, "Why do others seem to have it all even though you feel you deserve better? While you do not want to blame God, have you ever asked Him why He is allowing this?"

When we started our vegetable business, I had to compete with wealthy and established farmers from Cagayan de Oro and Bukidnon. Aside from them having better lands, they were also well connected and had access to more funds. They had greenhouses and tractors and were able to hire agriculturists and consultants to run their farms. Pero ako, I had none of those. One day I asked God, "Lord, bakit ganoon? Hindi naman nagprepray yang mga yan at hindi nagbabasa ng Bible, bakit mas marami kang binigay sa kanila?"

Because I could not hire an agriculturist or consultant, I had no choice but to study agriculture myself. Because I did not have money for a greenhouse nor a tractor, I had to come up with creative ways to compensate for what was needed. And since I felt that I would not understand the modern way of farming, I decided to read old farming books and studied how people from the past survived with meager resources.

Today, most of my competitors have closed shop. Because when calamities came, they were not able to pay their loans and their agriculturists and consultants. When these people left, they brought them along with them. On the other hand, sa farm namin, because we did not borrow, we had no loan to worry about. And since I am not going anywhere, the knowledge I've learned and the experience I gained will remain with the farm forever.

Then it dawned on me, the difficulties I had to go through in the beginning were really part of God's blessing. What I then thought were a liabilities, turned out to be valuable assets. Baka naman ganoon din sa inyo. What you feel is a curse today may in fact be God's grace for you.

WHEN GOD'S BLESSING BECOMES A CURSE

A few weeks ago, I explained how something that may seem to be a “curse” in the beginning can actually be part of God’s blessing. God allows us to go through difficult circumstances because He knows that character and strength can only grow through adversities. But can the reverse be true as well? Can God’s blessing become a curse?

According to Genesis 1:28, the first instruction God gave Adam and Eve during creation was to be fruitful! But before this, He made sure they know that He created everything to blessed them. To be fruitful means, God wanted them to use His blessings, by cultivating the garden and keeping His instructions, so that he may continue to live in abundance.

But they turned away from their responsibilities and disrespected the Owner of the garden by disobeying His commandments. So, God banished them from the garden and made him work the ground that He cursed. Sayang no, kasi when they were inside the garden, they were eating from the trees that God planted. Because they disobeyed, they ceased to enjoy the blessings God wanted them to have. So, what was intended to be a blessing became the source of his curse.

In the same way, God blessed the Israelites by delivering them from Egypt and by bringing them to a land flowing with milk and honey. When they reached the Promised Land, God told them that He will make them a great nation. But instead of living out God’s commandments, they copied the ways of their pagan neighbors and worshiped their gods. So, God exiled them to Babylon and gave them over to the desires of their heart. They lived according to

the ways of their neighbors as their slaves and worship their gods by force. So, what was intended to be a blessing became the source of their curse.

God's plan for us has always been to let us live in abundance. So, He gave every person something to start with, just like He gives the farmer seeds to plant. Yet there are many farmers who are poor in spite of owning a land. Why? Because they reject what they have and do not see it as a blessing! Sana they would consider what Proverbs 28:19 says, "He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty."

No farmer should be poor, and no person should be in need. But we need to first accept that whatever we have today is a blessing from the Lord and we need to take care of it according to His ways so that we may someday become fruitful. When we do not, God's blessing may become the source of our curse.

JUDGE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORDS

In 1998, I committed to live out God's word in every part of my life, especially in my business. However, I decided not to impose what I know on others unless they ask for my opinion and request me to teach them. I believe God gave us the Bible so that we may understand His mind and obey His ways, and so that we can make the right decisions and enjoy His blessings.

This issue of same-sex marriage has divided us as a nation, and a question was raised about who gave us the right to judge the LGBT community. On my own, I do not have the right to judge anyone, but God gave us the Bible so that we may decide according to how God sees things. Does the Lord have a stand on this issue? Yes, He does, and one of the references is found in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 which says, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Let me point out na hindi lang effeminate and homosexual ang unrighteous para kay God. They were listed among other things that God considers unrighteous. But does God still love these people? Yes! Kaya nga He sent His Son Jesus to set them free from their bondage to the sins that make them unrighteous. First Corinthians 6:11 says, “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

When people want to live against the ways of the Lord, I will not condemn them because ultimately, they will face their Maker naman. I suggest you do the same as well!!!!

We should look at things from God's perspective—
consider wrong what God says is wrong. But let us not
condemn those who do wrong, because only God has the
right to do so.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR!

Did Jesus come so that He can bring us to His kingdom immediately after we die? This was the gospel I received almost 30 years ago. At that time, I did not find this news completely good because it meant I would only be able to enjoy life after I die. For the meantime, as I wait, I will have to endure and, hopefully, survive the evil of this world.

But this changed when, in Bukidnon, I read something Jesus said in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." This is different from, "Repent, because the end is near," that we normally hear people say. Do you know that you will not find that last statement in the Bible?

If Mark 1:15 is correct, then it means that Jesus came to bring His kingdom near to us. He said it is "at hand" because He continues to give everyone a choice - to be part of it or not.

Since the day I learned about Mark 1:15, I have been studying the laws of His kingdom and finding ways to apply them in my farm, in my business, and in my family. Today, I can testify that the kingdom of God is really "at hand" and we do not have to die before we can enjoy life. However, according to Matthew 6:33, we can only be blessed and protected by God's kingdom if we seek it with righteousness. But what does it mean to be righteous? Deuteronomy 6:25 says, "It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us."

As we remember how Jesus resurrected to overcome death and the devil, can you will decide to have faith in Him and live out the gospel He preached! May you enjoy

the blessings of His kingdom even as you continue to stay here on earth.

DO NOT ASK “WHY,” INSTEAD ASK “HOW”

If you want to get the most out of your TV set, you will read its operating manual in order to understand how it works. When you see an instruction, do you ask “why” you should follow it? No, diba! Instead, you would ask “how” you can follow it so that you can enjoy all the benefits from your TV. Why should you respect what the manual says? Because it comes from the manufacturer and as creator they would know best.

When you read a science manual, say a book on physics, do you ask why you should believe the laws it explains? A wise person will ask “how” he can apply the law so that he can use it for his benefit. But a fool will challenge the law and do something else, but he will soon find out that nature will not bend to man and will always prevail.

If we ask *how* and not *why*, when reading an operating manual and a science book, shouldn't we do the same when reading the Bible?

If you believe that God created the world, you must then see the Bible as an instruction manual which He gave so that we can get the most out of life. The Bible contains the instruction of the Creator and the laws of the world He created. He gave us His laws to guide us so that we may succeed and not get hurt. The wise will read the Bible and ask “how” he can apply God's laws, but the fool will ask “why”, and if the law does not make sense to him, he will do something different. But God will not bend His laws for man, and, like nature, He will always have His ways. This is why God said the following in Joshua 1:8 (NASB)

“This book of the law (instructions) shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written

in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.” (insertion mine)

If you want to get the most out of life, be wise and always ask “how” you can obey. Do not be a fool by asking “why” you should obey and get hurt in the process.

HOW WE SHOULD READ THE BIBLE

Recently, a participant in Jumpstart asked me how I am able to see the Bible differently from the way most people do. He asked where I get my wisdom and also asked me to teach them the way I read the Bible. I will share my answer with you kasi baka may matulungan sa inyo.

My wisdom does not come from mere interpretation but from careful observation, because I do not just read the Bible in order to understand but more importantly, to obey. You see, I am not an intelligent person, just diligent. It takes me a long time to understand what I read. But many years ago, because of all the good things God gave me, I made a promise to obey the commandments I read. When I read, I do not ask “why” I should obey but would instead ask “how” I should obey.

The insights I share with people, came from observing the benefits I gained after obeying the Lord. Let me give you an example. When I rested our soil in the seventh year, I really did not know if it had any practical benefits. In fact, when I first did it, someone warned me that I would lose a year’s income. But after we allowed our land to rest, I noticed that the crops planted in that land had very little pest problems. I realized then that by resting the land you will starve to death the pests that attack your crops. As I read the Bible, I bear two things in mind. First, that God is good, and that God will never contradict Himself. So, if I see any contradictions, I will continue to read until the Bible explains itself. I avoid reading commentaries because each author has his own bias. Instead, I pray that the Holy Spirit would teach me the meaning of His Word because this is what Jesus promised in John 14:26 (NASB95), “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

I told the recent Jumpstart class that I am not a man of wisdom, instead I am just an observant person. I will obey first even if I do not understand the logic behind God's command, and then I will try to figure out the benefits of my obedience. And from my observations, I get the insights that I share with friends like you.

HOW TO BUILD A SECURE FUTURE

Do you want to have a secure future? Do you want to live out the good plan God promised in Jeremiah 29:11? If so, then you should consider His advice in Jeremiah 29:7 (ESV), where he said, ‘Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare, you will have welfare.’

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” Do you know when God gave this promise to Israel? Do you know that He gave this when they were in EXILE in Babylon?

Often, we pray this prayer when we are in the middle of a difficult situation or a great trial. During those times, we would pray for God to deliver us and bring us to someplace better. But in the case of the exiled Jews, He told them to stay put and to “seek the welfare of the city” where He sent them.

Are you in the middle of a very trying situation? Have you been praying for God to deliver you and take you to a better place, but He has not yet answered your request? Is it possible that you are where you are because that is where He wants you to be, because that is where you can bring Him glory? But how can you do this when there is so much oppression around you? I have learned that you can only live out His good plan, when you seek the welfare of the “city” you are in, “for in its welfare you will have welfare.”

Do you know what happened when the Jews obeyed the Lord’s instruction? When Daniel obeyed, he became the governor for the kings of Babylon, Media, and Persia? And in the process, God also raised Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abed-nego to help him. So, while they may have been exiled into the land of their enemies, the Jews ultimately ruled over them inside their own land. And because of their witness, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and Cyrus, king of Persia, confessed that the God of the Jews is the true God over all the earth.

Sana God will use you the way He used Daniel and give you a secure future. Pero before He can do this, you must first seek the welfare of the company you work for, the city you live in, and especially, the country of your birth.

THE WORLD IS A CRUEL MASTER

The world will entice you to embrace its ways but will punish you when you follow it.

Many people who avoid reading their Bibles because they feel that they are not ready to commit themselves to follow the Lord. And because they see the Bible merely as a "book of laws" they shy away from it kasi they feel it will limit them from enjoying life. Besides, they are afraid they can't obey it completely, so they would rather not know God's laws para they do not have to be accountable to them.

These people choose to live according to the ways of the world because they see God as a strict and demanding master. They also feel that His laws are difficult and unreasonable to keep. What they don't realize is that the world is a cruel master. Let me explain what I mean.

Di ba God said you should not steal? When you choose to disregard this command because everyone is doing it anyway, who do you think will send you to jail if and when you get caught? Will it be God? Or will it be the world? When God said, do not bear false witness or plainly said, do not lie, and you choose to lie, especially in business, what will happen when you get caught? Di ba, people will no longer trust you and even avoid you? So, who then punishes you? Is it the Lord, or the world? Sorry to say, it's not the Lord, but the world whom you had chosen to serve. This is why I say the world is a cruel master!

I am now realizing that God does not have to punish us when we choose to reject His laws. All He has to do is to let us bear the consequences of our action, and then lets the world system punish us. Because of this, I am learning that He did not give us His laws to limit our joy, but to

protect us from the painful ways of the world. Like Satan, the world will continue to deceive us by enticing us to enjoy its system and then punishes us for conforming to its ways. Di ba nga I said, the world is a cruel master?

I really wish that more and more people will read their Bibles and see it for what it is: an instruction manual from a loving Father who wants to protect His children from a wicked world. We must always remember that this world is a cruel master, but the Lord will always be a loving Father!

REMEMBER YOUR CALLING

A dear friend recently told me, "When blessings fail to come, remember the calling God gave you." He believes that both good and bad come from the Lord so I should not quit. God has a good reason for allowing things to happen.

On the other hand, I realized that when blessings come, we should not forget our calling also. Otherwise, our blessings may become our curse. This could happen when our blessings become our priority. We must not forget that God blesses us not for our sake but for His sake.

He puts us in a position of influence so that we may represent Him before the people around us and so that He may attract them to Himself. We should enjoy our blessings but never forget that they were given so that we may live out our calling.

THE AUDIENCE OF ONE

One day a dear friend came to me while I was talking with my other friends. He tapped me on the shoulder and announced to them, "This is a person who lives for an audience of one." Then he left.

I did not understand what he meant, so I contemplated on his words. I may have been one of the most arrogant people you would have met in the past. I was hot-tempered and rude; my people in HP will attest to that. Today, I try hard to be nice and kind to people not because I like to, but because I am hoping to please the "One" who has been very kind and gracious to me. He is none other than God Himself!

I have made many enemies and hurt many people in the past because I could not help myself. But since I made it my ambition to please God daily I believe I have become a better husband, father, and friend.

Maybe we should all consider this - to live our lives for the audience of ONE so that even if the world goes against us, we may still respond properly. It has changed my life, and I believe it will make yours better too.

SOMETHING AMAZING JUST HAPPENED

I wish to share something AMAZING with you! As many of you know Semilya has been terribly hit by El Nino (in 2016). We canceled many training sessions because we had no water. So, no training, no income. To compound this, we have not been able to produce pechay, for the same reasons, to fund the farm. As we try to stretch our resources, this morning, after arriving from Manila, I heard what I dreaded to hear. Our bookkeeper said we cannot fund our payables anymore.

Last month, I had asked God if this was the time to close Semilya. So, I met with Dick Ang in Manila to tell him how I felt. Unfortunately, I could not fill up for what Semilya lacked because our farm was devastated as well. After hearing about our financial position earlier today, I went to play golf so I can talk to God (that is where we often talk). Since Semilya decided never to solicit or beg, I told God that He will have to do a miracle otherwise, we should close. I went home very discouraged.

After finishing golf, I received a text from one of Semilya's close friends from Davao. He said he had been wanting to bless Semilya because he had extra funds. But lately, he got so busy to attend to it. That morning, he felt a strong burden to tell me about his plan. Can you imagine my shock and excitement? Then out of nowhere, he told me I should not close Semilya because he had been meeting many people who have been blessed by our training, some of whom were trained 10 years ago. AMAZING diba!

God answered my question and provided encouragement through this close friend. He then said he was depositing some money for Semilya so that he can bless the foundation, as it has blessed him and his business. I did not bother to ask how much he was giving, but what he

said was enough to encourage me to press on. When I finally saw the amount he gave, it was large enough to jumpstart Semilya.

Our God is alive, and He deserves all praise.

WHY GOD ALLOWS DIFFICULT SITUATIONS!

People often say that there is no situation so bad that is beyond God's help. This is why Romans 8:28 is comforting because it promises that God will cause all things to work together for the good of those who love Him.

But as I meditate on the lives of the great men in the past, I have been wondering, "Does God save us from a bad situation by causing it to work for our good? Or does God allow a bad situation to happen because He is trying to produce something good out of it?"

If David did not become a shepherd, he would not have learned how to kill lions and bears with a sling. When he volunteered to fight Goliath, I believe he did not see him as a giant but as a slow-moving bear. That day, no one could have killed Goliath except David because none of the soldiers of Israel knew how to kill a bear from a distance.

If Joseph did not become a slave and a prisoner, he would not have been able to save Egypt from famine. Because the scope of the work was humongous, only a person who knew how to manage slaves and prisoners could have pulled off the job. In Genesis 50:20 (NASB) he told his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. If I look back to our life in Bukidnon, the best learnings we acquired came from terrible and painful situations.

Are you in the middle of a bad situation? Is it possible that this is part of God's doing because He is trying to develop your character? I have learned that before God can work through you, He needs to first work in you. So instead of praying for deliverance maybe you should ask God, "What

character are You develop in me and what weaknesses are You exposing? Help me, Lord, to respond properly".

Maybe God is preparing you for something great, just like the way He had to prepare David and Joseph for their tasks. Maybe He needs to let you go through bad situations so that He can bring out the best in you. May you allow God to mold you into the kind of person He wants you to be.

MURDER VERSUS KILLING

Does the Bible say, "Thou shall not kill"? Or does God command, "Thou shall not murder"?

Friends, allow me to continue to share what I have been learning as I try to understand the issues we face as a nation. In this post, I would like to tackle the moral concern about "killing" which I have been studying so that I may find peace. I am sharing this so I can help some of you find it as well.

In the English language, we often interchange the words kill and murder, but the Hebrew language does not because they are different from each other. In Hebrew the word for "kill" is harag, which means to destroy a life. On the other hand, the Hebrew word for "murder" is ratsach, which means the premeditated killing of another person with malice. Malice is what differentiates *murder* from *killing*.

The original command in Exodus 20:13 is, "You shall not murder." It did not say "you shall not kill" because there are cases of killing that the Bible do not consider as sin.

- (1) Accidental killing is not murder. (Exodus 21:12-13)
- (2) Killing in self-defense is not murder. (Exodus 22:2)
- (3) Killing to save the innocent is not murder. (Genesis 14:14-16)
- (4) To "purge the evil" in order to protect a nation is not murder. (Deuteronomy 17:17, 19:19, 22:22 and 24:7)

I guess this is why the Israeli government does not hesitate to kill as long as it is about protecting themselves and their nation. When I checked the above ideas with a lawyer friend, he said our laws agree with these. However, there is a great debate regarding item no. 4.

Some people have argued that God's standards have changed, insisting that all forms of killing is a sin. But the Bible says, God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow; therefore, His standards do not change. In addition, Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-18 that He did not come to abolish but to fulfill every letter of the law. To balance things, I subscribe to this: If your faith tells you that all forms of killing is a sin then you should live out your faith - never kill anyone, even if they threaten your life. An example would be Desmond Doss who is featured in the movie Hacksaw Ridge, a US army corporal who refused to kill anyone even those who threatens the lives of his friends. But if someone believes that killing in order to preserve his life, to defend the innocent, or to protect a nation is not a sin, then respect that person is convinced that he has not violated God's commandment.

I am not justifying anyone; I am just sharing what I have learned as I continue to search to understand our situation. I hope I have not offended anyone, but if I have, I am sorry. But to those who found this post helpful, may you find peace as I have found mine.

GOD IS OWNER! YOU ARE STEWARD.

There are two important things I learned when I jumped from the corporate world to my own entrepreneurial venture.

The first thing I learned is, contrary to what most people say, entrepreneurship is not about taking risks. Instead, it is about finding prudent ways to maximize the returns of a person's limited resources, thus, creating breakthroughs. Because an entrepreneur does not have the backing and resources of a large corporation, he must use what is in his hands to move from a position of need to a position of relative abundance. He will need creativity, diligence, perseverance, and humility in order to do this. Unfortunately, these are traits that cannot be taught in school nor can be obtained through corporate experience. They are developed over time and are by-products of the many trials his business encounters.

An excellent example is Nehemiah. Though he was just a cupbearer for the king of Persia, he approached the rebuilding of the 2.5-kilometer wall of Jerusalem with an entrepreneurial spirit. When he arrived, he had to work with meager resources and manage people he did not know. He rebuilt the wall by using only the materials available to him and made the people who were discouraged and divided to work together as one. He even took advantage of the threat of his enemies to encourage the Jews to move faster while maintaining the quality of their work. Because of these, he was able to finish the task in 52 short days. Nehemiah is someone all business people should learn from.

The second thing I learned about business is more important than the first because things took a dramatic turn

when I understood it. And it is this: God is Owner, and I am His steward.

When I was in HP, I would make plans and present them to my boss for approval so that I can get the resources I needed. So naturally, I brought this approach to the business. I would make my plans and present them to God for His approval so that I can get His blessings. While I knew that He did not approve of some of these plans because He did not provide for the resources I asked for, I would still proceed with them hoping that He would change His mind. This foolishness led to many failures.

Then one day I realized that God is not just Master, but the Owner of my business too. I learned that as Owner, He has His own plans for the venture. My role as steward is to understand His plans so that I can implement them. I changed my approach by asking Him every day, "What are your plans, Lord? How do you want me to act on them?" I learned this approach from Jesus. In John 5:19 (NLT) He said, "The Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing." I believe this does not mean He has no power to do what He wants, but He just chooses not to make any plans for Himself because He only wants to carry out the plans of His Father. I guess this was why He died for us, because it was part of what His Father wants Him to do. When I adopted this approach, amazing things happened in our business. This idea has also drastically changed my approach to life as a whole.

It is important for Christians to acknowledge God as the Owner of their business. As stewards, our role is to faithfully grow the things He has entrusted us so that, like a plant, we may become fruitful and be a blessing to the people around us. These are some of the principles we teach in the business training of Semilya Sa Kinabuhi. We wish we could share these lessons to as many people as

possible so that we experience breakthroughs upon
breakthroughs, we may make this world a better place to
live in.

THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE WAY!

First Corinthians 8:6 (NLT) says, "There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live."

Many people find it unreasonable that God would provide only one way for man to get into heaven which is His house. Someone once told me that we Christians should not put God in a box. Others would even say, "If God is truly loving, then He should provide multiple ways for people to be reconciled to Him." God is indeed loving for according to John 3:16, He wants everyone to have a relationship with Him. But to enter His house is not an issue of His love but an issue of being proper. Let me explain this.

If I want to go inside your house, can I decide which door to use? I do not think so. If you tell me to use the front door but I insist on going through the rear, wouldn't you feel disrespected? How about if I decide to make my own way to get inside, say, by digging a hole or going through a window, wouldn't you feel insulted, even violated? I think you would. And if you get angry as a result, would it be right for me to say that you are being unreasonable and rude? Of course not! If the world believes that the owner has the right to decide how his guests should enter his house, why then do we force God to do otherwise?

If God says we should pass through His Son Jesus to enter heaven, shouldn't we respect that because we are only being invited to His house? Because of this, I realize that God is not really being narrow-minded about how He wants people to enter His house. As Owner, He has every right to tell people how to enter it! It would be rude for anyone to insist that He accept their ways and not follow

His. Thus, if anyone would insist on his way to heaven, he might as well just look for a god who thinks the same way he does.

Even Mary supported this. Though she was chosen to be the mother of the Son of God, she told the people during the wedding at Cana, "Do whatever Jesus tells you to do" (John 2:5). She said this because she knew that God the Father has chosen Jesus to be the door by which we can enter heaven. As we celebrate the Lenten season, let us honor God by doing what He wants us to do and not insist on what we want Him to be.

AIM TO ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST EVERYDAY!

As the old year ends and a new one begins, may I ask if your life goal has changed? Siguro ang iba sa inyo would say "oo," pero sa karamihang tao it remains to become successfully rich!

As time has made me wiser, I've realized that this goal of becoming successfully rich has, I believe, made many Filipinos remain poor. Did this realization shock you? Let me explain why I say this. I discovered that when people make it their ambition to become successful and rich, they would focus their attention on looking for big opportunities that will make them achieve this goal in the shortest possible time. I believe this explains why many millennials hop from one job to another. While a handful gets lucky to find good opportunities, most people end up growing old still jumping from one business to another looking for that elusive opportunity.

I discovered that the reason why many people fail to achieve this ambition is because it is impractical to make "success" an ambition. Success is just the natural result of being excellent in what you do. In the same way, it is not feasible to make "riches" your goal because it is just the natural reward of success. And recently, I realized that you can never become excellent at anything if you do not stay put and faithfully pursue one particular opportunity.

Whenever people ask me about my ambition, I always tell them that my goal in life is to be faithful to the Lord and to be excellent in taking care of the things He has entrusted to me. While I dream of a bright future for my family, our farm, and the foundation, I focus on doing my best today,

because life has taught me that when I do this, success will come, and riches will follow.

As I wish you a prosperous New Year, I want to suggest an alternative life goal for those who follow me in Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms. Sana, you would make it your ambition to be faithful to the Lord and to be excellent with the way you take care of the resources He gives and the opportunities He sends your way. Because what you do with what you have today will decide the kind of life you will have in the future.

So, my prayer for you is that, more than becoming successful and rich, that you will become a blessing to the world and be fruitful for the Lord.

JESUS NEVER LEFT!

There is a great injustice that is committed every Christmas. It is the fact that while the world celebrates it as one, many refuse to give honor and recognition to the true Celebrant – Jesus Christ. Some people even get offended when His followers talk about Him as the reason for the season.

A friend once told me about a time when he attended a Christmas play in the school his son goes to. In the play, they had fairies, elves, dwarfs, etc., but no Jesus. When he asked why, the teacher said it was because there were non-Christian parents in the audience, and they did not want to offend them. So, my reaction was, "WHAT?!?" Sila nga lang ang nakiki-Christmas, tapos may gana pa silang ma-offend pag binibigyan ng honor ang Celebrant? Ikaw kaya, ano ang gagawin mo pag may nakisali sa birthday party mo tapos ayaw ka man lang i-acknowledge, how would you feel? And what would you do?

So that no one gets offended, the world has made Santa Claus the center of Christmas since he is someone acceptable to everyone. Eh paano naman si Jesus? Hindi kaya Siya naman ang nasasaktan when we disregard Him? And because Santa is the focus, the highlight of Christmas has become the giving of gifts - gifts that have fleeting values - while rejecting the special gift Jesus wants to give us, a gift which has everlasting benefits.

How many of you talk to Jesus during Noche Buena? After you have greeted everyone a Merry Christmas and exchanged gifts, do you spend time to honor Jesus? Many of us do not. Why? I guess it's because we think He is not here with us. Most people believe kasi na babalik pa lang Siya-- siguro sometime pa in the near future. This is why it is important to remember Him by His other name,

Immanuel, meaning "God is with us." Kasi while He may have left us physically, He remains with us in Spirit.

During our last Bible Study for the year in Camp Phillips, I asked my friends, "What will you tell Jesus if you know He is here with us?" It became a very moving exercise because many confessed their shame realizing how they have continuously failed Him. But all of them exalted Jesus when they recalled how He has blessed them with so many good things this past year.

This Christmas, when you celebrate, you will have a choice. You can either recognize that He is here with us so that you can honor Him properly, or you can disregard Him as most people do, preferring to give importance to Santa Claus since he is more fun. But is Santa really more fun? If he is, then why do most of us feel depressed when we realize we have become poorer and stouter because of him?

Celebrate Christmas with Jesus and do not be afraid that you might offend anybody. For all you know, they are just waiting for someone to tell them about His story.

JESUS IS IMMANUEL, GOD IS WITH US

Friends, do you celebrate the birthday of your dead relatives? How about those who have left for distant lands? What about the birth of our heroes? Hindi, diba? Instead, we try to remember and commemorate the day of their death or the day they left us.

You see, I have always wondered why Jesus is not the focus of most Christmas celebrations. In fact, hindi nga Siya ang pinakasikat na personality during this time, kung hindi si Santa Claus. And because si Santa ang bida sa panahong ito, people have made it merely as a season of eating and gift-giving. People eat a lot because they think it is the time and a way to be merry. So, they stuff themselves up but later worry about how to get rid of all the excess weight they have gained. Also, people spend a fortune buying and giving gifts because this is what Santa represents. Then after Christmas, they worry about their finances and with what to do with all the gifts they received which they didn't even like. Because of this, I feel Christmas has become one of the most stressful and burdensome time of the year.

But is this really the way Jesus wants us to remember Him? Diba the Bible says He came to give us rest and abundance? So why do we end up fat and poor after His birthday? Why is it that we don't celebrate Christmas according to His ways? I guess the reason is, many of us believe Jesus is no longer here with us and will only return in the distant future. It is hard to celebrate when the celebrant who is not here, diba? But is this really the case?

Many of us miss out on a very important fact about the birth of Jesus. In Matthew 1:23, the angel said that He will be called Immanuel to always remind us that "God is with

us." If this is so, then why did He leave us? And why is it taking Him so long to return?

Don't you realize that after Jesus told us to make disciples, in Matthew 28:20 He said, "...and lo, I will be with you always, until the end of the age." In this statement, He reaffirmed the promise the angels gave when He was born! So, while Jesus may someday return physically, His presence remains with us today.

So let us not celebrate Christmas with Santa Claus because he will just make us fat and poor. Instead, let us celebrate Christmas with Jesus knowing that He came to give us rest, peace, and abundance.

REBELLION WORSE THAN MURDER?

What is more hideous, the sin of rebellion or the sin of murder? Most people would choose the latter. But do you know that God rejected King Saul for rebellion but still showed favor to David even though he killed Uriah and took Bathsheba? King Saul rebelled against God when he spared the life of the king of the Amalekites, even though he was told to completely destroy them.

Though I said he still found favor, David was not spared from the consequences of his sins. Because of what he did, his family was plagued with many troubles. His eldest son Amnon raped his daughter Tamar, causing her brother Absalom to kill Amnon, which then led to many more complications. Yet God did not reject David like the way He rejected Saul.

In 1 Samuel 15:22–23, the prophet Samuel told Saul, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, ... For rebellion is as the sin of divination, ... Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king."

Saul died a horrible death at the hands of his enemies, while David died in his old age, being comforted and made warm by a virgin named Abishag. What a way to die, diba? Does God play favorites? No! I realized that murder and adultery are sins against our neighbors, but rebellion is a DIRECT sin against the Lord.

The book of Numbers listed many incidents of the Israelites' rebellion against Moses. Whenever they did so, God would deal with them with a heavy hand - some were bitten by serpents, others were consumed by fire, and still others were swallowed by the ground. So be very careful

not to rebel against the authorities God has placed over you because as the apostle Paul said, Romans 13:1 – 5, you will be opposing the Lord directly. He also said that if you submit, God will bless you. But if you rebel against them, you will receive punishment.

If you do not like a leader, do not work for him, run away as David did. But some would say that it is our responsibility to correct irresponsible leaders. Is it? Ako, I will take the stand that David took when he told Abihai regarding Saul, 1 Samuel 26:9–10, "Don't destroy him (Saul)! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish." Saul eventually died, but not in the hands of David but in the hands of his enemies as ordained by the Lord.

So be very careful of the sin of rebellion because it is not a minor sin. And do not make it worse by enticing others to do the same because this can bring a curse in your life!

THERE SHOULD BE NO POOR AMONG US!

Have you read what Deuteronomy 15:4 (NLT) said? There Moses told the Jews, "There should be no poor among you, for the Lord your God will greatly bless you in the land He is giving you as a special possession."

How many times have we heard preachers say, "Blessed are the poor because the Lord is with them"? But this contradicts Deuteronomy 15:4. It implies that if God is with you, you will not become poor because He will greatly bless you. If this should be the case, then why are there many poor people around us? I believe the verse that follows verse 4 explains why.

Deuteronomy 15:5 says, "You will receive this blessing IF you are careful to obey all the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today."

In the past I thought laziness is the reason why many Filipinos are poor. But I have heard foreigners say that Filipinos are dedicated and hard-working. So, why then are we poor? Deuteronomy 15:5 implies that God will only bless those who are careful to obey all the commandments He has given.

Does this mean we need to convert to a specific religion? No! Because a person's religion does not determine his obedience. You see, to obey is a personal decision.

Are the commandments we need to obey related to the church or the temple? No! Because the temple was not constructed yet and only the Levite were assigned to take care of the tabernacle. On the other hand, the rest of the Jews were told to till the land.

The commandments God gave us do not make us spiritually holy, instead, they make us holy by teaching us how to do business, how to take care of our family, how to deal with our neighbors, etc. In fact, Joshua 1:8 tells us that the Book of the Law will allow us to prosper if we carefully follow the instructions (torah) God gave us. The Bible is really an instruction or operating manual. If you do not do what it says you will fail and become poor because you did not follow its instructions.

God gave us the Book of the Law so that He can bless us when we follow them. But when we reject His laws, we will fail and eventually become poor. God loves the poor, but He does not want them to remain poor. He sent Jesus to reconcile them to Himself and gave them His laws so that they can get out of their predicament and later become a blessing to the world.

DO NOT DISQUALIFY YOURSELF, KNOW THE RULES!

Have you ever joined a competition knowing you had the best entries, only to be disqualified because you did not follow the instructions to the letter?

In one of her first art competitions, my daughter Denise submitted 7 entries using different mediums. This was not easy because most artists would specialize only in one or two. When the results were announced, two of her entries won first prize, two placed second, another was fourth, but the remaining two got disqualified. We were shocked because people were saying that they were as good as those that won. Then we were told that they were disqualified because she used ball pens instead of pen and ink, and sepia instead of black charcoal. We wanted to appeal or complain because nobody said these were not acceptable. But apparently, the person she inquired from did not know the rules that well also.

Second Timothy 2:5 (ESV) says, "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." We felt then that the committee should have been more considerate, or they should have explained the rules better. But in hindsight, I now ask, "Was it the responsibility of the authorities to explain the rules better, or was it our responsibility to understand them properly?"

A lot of people get in trouble because they compete without understanding the rules. Recently, there was a road altercation incident that went viral. What was supposed to be a simple P200 no-parking fine led to a possible case of disbarment of the violator who was a lawyer, only because the lady driver insisted on her definition of the 5-minute-no-parking rule of MMDA. It was an awful ending to a simple

traffic violation only because she did not want to work subject herself to the rules.

I have learned that everyone wants to succeed, and nobody wants to fail. However, when people do fail, they often ask God why He allowed this to happen. But these very people refuse to read the Bible so that they may understand the instructions of the One who created and owns this world. Being the Owner, the Lord's ways will always prevail. And when confronted with the commandments of the Lord, they would say, "Ay, hindi pwede yan, Lord! That is very impractical." So, they live by their own rules and then wonder why they continue to fail.

Joshua 1:8 (ESV) says, "This book of the law (instructions) shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (insertion mine). Is it the Lord's responsibility to explain His instructions more clearly, or is it our responsibility to understand them properly? Let us read the Bible everyday so that we may understand God's instructions properly. If we do, we will not disqualify ourselves but instead receive His rewards.

GOD IS NOT STUPID. GOD IS LOVING AND JUST!

The President created a major controversy when he told the Catholic church that their God is stupid, but his God is perfect. Alam kong hindi ako dapat makisawsaw, but I feel obligated to react when he asked, "Why would God create something perfect only to destroy it by tempting them to sin?" The temptation he was referring to were the two trees God placed in the MIDST of the garden.

Jeremiah 9:24 says, "...but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord."

Did God make Adam imperfect by giving him free will, or the ability to decide whether to obey Him or not? The answer is no! The reason God gave him this freedom is because He is loving. How would you feel if you ask your spouse, "Honey, why do you love me?" And he or she says, "Kasi I have no choice, eh!" That would be hurtful, di ba? You see, love can only be called love when you give the other person the ability to choose and not force him or her to do it. According to Genesis 1, after God created man, He looked at His creation and said that it was very good. Notice that He did not say it was perfect. I believe this means that He gave man a choice to live out his purpose, and that is to know God, do good and give Him glory.

On the other hand, did God tempt man when He placed those trees in the garden? Many would say yes, but I disagree! The Bible did not say that those trees were put in an isolated and special place in the garden. It did not also say that they were unique trees with unique fruits. Instead, the Bible said that they were in the MIDDLE of the garden,

God identified two trees to represent the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. Why were those trees there? Genesis 2:16 - 17 explain why. In these verses, God said that they can eat from any tree except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When He said this, God established an important truth in the garden. Through those trees, He made it clear that He remains the Owner of the garden. Only the owner has the right to tell you what you can and cannot do inside his property. So, when Adam and Eve disobeyed this, they disrespected God as the Owner and were thus banished from Eden. Why? Because God is just!

Justice is an important facet of God's character. In Deuteronomy 16:20 (ESV) He said, "Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you." God knows that justice brings order, but its absence will bring chaos and pain. Some people may disagree with me, but I believe this is what the government is trying to do. It is trying to restore justice so that there will be peace in our land. What do you think would have happened if God did not deal with the sin of Adam? Di ba he would have continued to disrespect God and would probably even have taught his children to do the same?

But while God is just, He continues to be loving. This is why He sent His Son to do what man could not do himself-- to atone for his sins and become good. I have learned that it is very difficult to become good on our own because we are naturally rebellious like Adam. That is why God sent His Son Jesus to help us do what is right and good. But for this to happen we need to act on in faith, by trusting and OBEYING Jesus as Lord.

My God is not stupid. He is loving and kind, righteous, and just!

IT IS NOT WRONG TO BE WEALTHY

Jesus taught His disciples to store up for themselves treasures in heaven and not on earth. This is part of the Beatitudes (Matthew 6:19-20) and also part of the answer He gave to the rich young man who asked Him how to inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:21). When the young man heard this, he felt sad and because according to Matthew 19:22, said he owned many properties.

Does this mean that it is wrong to accumulate wealth while we are here on earth? If this is so, then why did God give us the power to make wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18)? And why did Jesus say in John 10:10 that He came to give us abundance? Does God, as Father, delight in seeing His children remain poor, while the rest of the world flourishes and enjoys the earth He created? This idea does not make sense, di ba?

To appreciate the principle Jesus was teaching, I believe we need to understand what the word *treasure* means and know where heaven is.

First, what does treasure mean? I am learning that wealth is something you use and grow, while treasure is something that you store and keep. Treasures are often the source of a person's security and pride, so if that person's treasures are on earth, that person will be less dependent on the Lord. While treasures may come from the wealth you accumulate, if you store and keep them, you are not able to use them. God gave us the ability to make wealth because He does not want us to be in need. Jesus wants us to have an abundance so that we can extend our blessings to others. Just like when God told Abraham, in Genesis 12:3, that He wants to bless all the families of the earth through him, God wants us to be a blessing to the world too.

Second, let us answer the question "Where is heaven?" Is heaven a place we are going to when we die? Yes, it is, but heaven is also where you find the kingdom of God. Do you know what Jesus said about this kingdom? In Mark 1:15, He announced, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." John the Baptist said the same thing in Matthew 3:2 and Jesus confirmed this in Luke 17:21, when He said, "For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

It is not wrong to have wealth on earth, but we have to remember that everything we have is the Lord's. We are just His caretakers. When we store treasures on earth, it means we are claiming ownership of what belongs to Him. Do you know that this was the root of the sin of Adam and the reason why the rich young man turned his back on Jesus? Ako, I do not wish to have any treasure here on earth, nor in heaven, all I want is to be with the Lord, because I know when I am with Him, I will never be in need but will always have abundance instead.

DO NOT CHANGE THE UNCHANGEABLE

What does it mean to fear the Lord? And what good things will we gain from doing so? Psalm 111:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom..." But what is wisdom and how will it benefit us? The Hebrew word for wisdom is "hakmah." It means the ability to understand and to adhere to a set of standards!

Since creation, man has shown a strong tendency to reject the ways of the Lord because he thinks he wiser than the Lord. But man's ways have always led him to destruction. What man needs is the wisdom that comes from the Lord. The first step to being wise is to fear the Lord. This means to acknowledge God as the Owner of this world and that He has established a set of standards for the world He created. It also means to understand that God will never change these standards. Numbers 23:19 (ESV) says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind."

What is the standard God wants us to follow? Proverbs 3:19 (ESV) says, "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens." When God created the world, He established a set of standards, or laws, to guide us in all areas of life. He gave us natural laws, like the law of gravity, and made us understand the science behind all things. This enables us to understand our potentials and our limits. Then, through Israel, He gave the world His moral laws, which when we study and obey will cause us to prosper.

Psalm 1:1 to 3 (NASB95) says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law, he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly

planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”

While the goal of most people is to change the world; another goal is to follow the Lord! But I am not saying this because I want to sound spiritual; instead, I want to be practical. I realized that it will be foolish for me to try to change the unchangeable. If I insist on doing things my way, I will only end up hurting myself. My decision to follow the Lord is based on my fear of Him. But to fear the Lord does not mean to tremble at His presence. It means that I should always remain humble before Him. Do you know that God promises a great reward for those who do this? Proverbs 22:4 says, "The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor, and life."

Do you want riches, honor, and long life? Fear the Lord by being humble and you will gain wisdom. Adhere to the laws He has established, and all good things will be added to you by the Lord.

AN EQUAL CHANCE TO A BETTER LIFE

When the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus if He is the Christ, in Luke 7:22, Jesus answered them and said, "Go and report to John... (1) the blind receive sight, (2) the lame walk, (3) the lepers are cleansed, (4) the deaf hears, (5) the dead are raised up, and (6) the poor have the gospel preached to them." We have seen the first 5 items fulfilled many times in the Bible, but is it that the poor remain poor even if the gospel had been preached to them?" Diba sabi Nya in Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God"? But why are the poor not blessed even when Jesus said that the kingdom of God is theirs? Do we just tell the poor that a better life is waiting for them when they die and go to heaven? But, for the meantime, do we tell them that we have to suffer as we wait for that time?

If I tell you na nanalo ka ng P100M sa the lotto, will that be good news for you? I believe so. But how would you feel if I tell you that you can only spend the money 50 years from now? Will that still be good news for you? I don't think so. Kasi any news is only "good" if it benefits you today. Besides there is no assurance that you will still be alive in 50 years.

As I study the Bible, I learned that the Israelites, particularly in the Old Testament, believed in a direct correlation between obedience to the law and the condition of their lives. Psalm 1 says that a man who delights in the law of the Lord will prosper in whatever he does, but the wicked will perish. But who are the wicked? They are the people with twisted minds because while they know that obedience to the law will cause them to prosper, they disobey it and insist on doing things their way.

Jesus offered the kingdom of God to the poor so that they can have a better life today, even while still here on earth. But they need to accept Jesus as the only way into that kingdom (John 14:6), and once inside the kingdom, they must be ready to do His Father's will (Matthew 7:21). If they become righteous, obeying the Lord, Matthew 6:33 says all things will be added to them today and not just when they get to heaven.

The following are just a few of the instructions the poor should know and obey: Do not love sleep, or you will become poor, says Proverbs 20:13. The hand of the diligent will rule, but the slack hand will be put to forced labor, Proverbs 12:24 says. He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who pursues worthless things lacks sense, according to Proverbs 20:11. The poor who hear the gospel will remain poor if they do not act on the gospel that Jesus preached. The gospel is supposed to give all of us an equal chance to have a better life today, but only those who live according to God's ways will enjoy it. So let us help the poor by teaching them and showing them the better way, which comes when you believe and follow Jesus Christ.

OUR CHILDREN NEED US TO BE THEIR MODEL

As most of you know, Semilya has been conducting REBOOT, a two-week training program for teens and young adults. And as we continue to do this every summer, I had the opportunity to study the behavior of young people. I have observed that it is the fathers who define their character as they grow older. I also noticed that the way they view their fathers affect the way they view their God.

While children look to their mothers for comfort and love, they look to their fathers to provide the example of the person they need to be. When the father fails to be that model, children look for someone else to follow. But often they choose celebrities and sadly, more often than not, someone not righteous. Also, when the mother has a stronger personality than the father, especially when she is the provider, the children get confused and start to struggle with their identities.

I have seen families whose fathers are righteous, but whose mothers aren't. While the children would still have struggles, they often turn out to be okay. But this is often not true when the reverse is the case. While there are exemptions to these observations, this was what I saw in the majority of the children who went through REBOOT.

I am not demeaning the importance of mothers. In fact, I wish to honor my wife, Peachy, because I believe that my children are who they are now because of her. When my children were younger, my example had a very negative effect on them. Recently, Denise confessed to me that when she was a teenager, she did not like to marry because she did not want to end up with a person who was always angry like me. Daniel, for his part, became aloof

when he was in his teens because I was very strict with him and my words were often hurtful. So, when I realized how my ways were hurting them, I decided to change. The question I asked myself then was, "What values do I want my children to have when they grow old?" When I finally figured these out, I worked hard on being the kind of person I wanted them to follow.

Denise also told me recently that because I've changed, she is now open to getting married and is excited to have a family of her own. Ang sabi ko lang, dapat bigyan niya akong apat na apo. As for Daniel, we are getting along much better today. My son, who is now 24 years old would unabashedly say, "Papa, I love you!" And it always makes me feel good to hear those words.

I wrote this post not to insult anyone, but to pose a challenge to all fathers. We need to strive hard to be the heroes that our children would want to follow. And I appeal to the mothers too, because your children will adore their fathers according to the example you show as well. Children really learn by imitating their parents. I realized it is important to help our children become the best that they can be when they grow old, otherwise we will have to endure with them the consequences of their choices.

GOD WILL NOT WITHHOLDS GOOD THING FROM YOU

In a recent post, I said that when God decides to bless you with an overflowing life, Satan cannot stop Him. I learned this truth from the story of Job. If this is true then why do we still go through trials, adversities, and calamities? The answer is simple. Kasi before God can bless us, He needs to first prepare us for the responsibilities that come with His blessings.

Why did it take God 25 years to give Abraham a son? Couldn't He have kept His promise earlier? Why did it take Him 14 years to make David a king? Wala ba Siyang power to remove Saul immediately? I believe the reason for the delay is because Abraham and David were not ready for the blessings God was about to give them. When God called Abraham, his parents were pagans. God had to teach him not to rely on traditions but to trust Him in every way. When God anointed David to become king, he was still a young shepherd. So, He had to teach him how to lead. He did this by sending 400 worthless men, whom David had to take care of, while running away from Saul and roaming around the wilderness.

To the ungodly, adversities and calamities are part of their punishments. But to those whom God loves, trials and afflictions are the tools He uses to prepare them for the responsibilities that His blessings require.

I would be one of the most arrogant people you could have met in the past. I was rude, proud, and very selfish. But God humbled me by letting me go through many trials, He made me wiser by sending me a lot of adversities and made me a better businessman by allowing me to experience one calamity after another. If God gave me my

blessings without letting me go through all these, I would not have been able to handle His blessing properly.

If you love the Lord, then the trials you are going through are not from Satan, but from Him. He is using them to prune you like a branch and to refine you like silver. He is allowing them in your life in order to prepare you for something great.

So, the next time trials and adversities come your way, do not run away from them. Instead, ask, *what is God trying to teach me?* The next time calamities come, do not blame Satan for it; instead ask, *what should I learn from them?* So that the next time this happens, you would be better prepared."

Remember that there is no good thing that God the Father will withhold from you.

WHAT ARE THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD?

When Satan offered the kingdoms of the world to Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4), was he really offering the whole earth to Him? Did he have the right to do so since he claimed these have been handed over to him?

In order to make things clearer, we should know that there are actually three words for *world* in the Greek language. The first is *oikoumene*, which means empires of the inhabited world. Then there is *kosmos*, referring to the universe and the earth. And lastly, there is the word *ge*, which refers to the land, as opposed to a body of water.

What Satan offered to Jesus was *oikoumene*, or the empires of the inhabited world! But these were not handed over to him by God; instead, Satan acquired them by default. You see, God disconnected Himself from these empires when they began making their own gods and started formulating their own laws. One of the most endearing qualities of God that I discovered is that He will never force Himself on anyone. So, because these empires rejected Him and did not want to worship Him, He stayed away from them, and so Satan happily picked them up, like a beggar collecting scrap.

When Satan offered these empires to Jesus, He refused said, "You must worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (Matthew 4:10 NLT). I believe He was saying that He will only desire the things His Father gives Him and will not desire anything beyond that, especially the empires Satan offered. And what did His Father give Him? John 3:35 says, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand." So, why would He want to rule over the *kingdoms of the world* when all the heavens and the earth, the *kosmos*, has already been given to Him? Besides,

Satan has no right to offer the whole earth to Jesus because this belongs to God in the first place. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains; the world, and those who dwell in it."

When Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world, I realized that He was telling him that His kingdom is not part of their empire (oikoumene). He said if He wants to, He can ask His Father to send a legion of angels from His own kingdom. Ultimately, the kingdom of Jesus won over the empire of Rome. When Constantine was emperor of Rome, he became a follower of Jesus and declared Christianity as the official religion of Rome. By the time Rome had fallen into the hands of the Vandals, the ruling family as well as half of Rome were already Christians. Come to think of it, Jesus eventually took control of the kingdom of the world!

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE?

Another question that people ask me concerns spiritual warfare or the ongoing battle between good and evil. I often answer them question with another question. I would ask, "How can the created, Satan, challenge his Creator, God, and expect to win?" I can understand a battle between two co-equals, like between two angels. But how can Satan, also known as Lucifer, even think of going to war against God when in the story of Job, he could not even do anything without His permission?

In the gospels, we read that whenever Jesus meets people who are possessed by the devil, the devil would immediately leave when He rebuked them. I have not read of any account that says that the demons gave Him a fight. Mark 1:27 says, "He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." In another story, Jesus confronted a devil named Legion because they were many. When he saw Jesus coming, Legion was not able to run away. He had to first ask permission from Jesus before he and his cohorts can go to the pigs (Mark 5:1 to 13). Di ba parang ganito din story ni Job? The devil could not do anything unless God allows him.

I am often told that there will be a great battle in Armageddon, to usher in the end of the world. But when I read the account of the supposed battle in Revelation I was surprised because in the vision of John, the writer of the book of Revelation, no bloody battle took place. Instead, Revelation 19:19 says that the Rider of the white horse stationed his army on one side, while the beast and his allies took their position on the opposite side. You would expect both camps to rush forward and fight in the middle of the ground to determine who is the stronger. But no such thing happened! Revelation 19:20 says that the beast and his army were immediately captured. Why was

there no battle? The answer is simple. What weapons can Satan create against God? What force can he muster to challenge Him? None!

I believe the battle between good, and evil had long been settled. When Jesus came, He said He brought His kingdom here (Mark 1:15) and then He overcame the world (John 16:33). Finally, when He resurrected, He conquered sin and death.

The only power Satan has is the power to deceive people. All this time he has been trying to deceive us to believe that he has the power to challenge God. So, do I believe that there is a spiritual battle between good and evil? No! But because Satan has the power to deceive, I believe that there is another battle going on and this battle is real. It is the battle for our allegiance. I will explain this later, but you may want to read Romans 6:16 for the meantime.

THE BATTLE FOR OUR ALLEGIANCE

Why did I say that the real battle is not between God and the devil, but for our allegiance - to God or the devil?

In Romans 7:14-23, Paul described a struggle that we all go through. He said that while he knows that the law is good, he sometimes finds himself disobeying them. This reminds me of a line in a famous song that goes; "Gusto kong bumait, pero di ko magawa." I do not know about you, but I continue to struggle with this concern every day, even when I am alone. Because of this, I realized that my real enemy is my sinful nature.

Romans 6:16 says, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" While the devil is a defeated foe, I realized that we give him the power to hurt God when we choose to sin.

But how do we overcome our sinful desires? In Romans 7:25 Paul said, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." Before Jesus can give us a victorious life, we must first pledge our allegiance to Him. Just like the case of the two thieves who were crucified with Him on the cross. One of them chose to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and went to heaven with Him. But the other one decided to mock and reject Jesus and went to a place that welcomes arrogant people like him. I do not think the second thief willingly gave his soul to Satan, but when he rejected Jesus, Satan accepted him with open arms.

Jun Arro, a dear friend, said that there are three things that tempt us - the flesh, the world, and the devil. But there is only one thing that can make us sin, our sinful nature. But how can we have victory over this nature? In my case, the only thing that helped me was when I decided to pursue God with intimacy. As I spent time knowing Him by studying His Word daily, I found it easier to obey Him as I learn to love Him more each day.

Jun and his wife gave us a wonderful acronym to guide us as we walk with God: IOS - Intimacy, Obedience, and Study. This is the operating system that should drive our lives. Success will naturally follow when we follow this.

So, seek the Lord with intimacy so that you can easily give your allegiance to Him. When you do this, He will give you a life that overflows and Satan will have no power to stop Him.

SATAN HAS NO POWER OVER YOU!!!

When I was in Dumaguete I was invited to join a Businessmen's Fellowship. After I told them my story, they asked me to comment on our warfare against Satan. Kasi raw Satan is making it difficult for us to do what is right in our homes, in the church, and especially in our businesses. My answer shocked them, because I told them I have no fight with Satan and that he has no influence over any part of my life.

I related to them the things I learned from Job 1:6-12. (1) While roaming the earth, Satan was not able to do anything against Job because God placed a hedge around him. (2) So, Satan challenged God to remove the hedge and let him take what Job possessed so that he can show God what is really in Job's heart. (3) So, God gave Satan permission but told him not to touch Job. After that meeting, Satan took everything Job possessed in just one day, but he was not able to touch Job because God did not allow him.

When Job did not curse God in spite of losing everything, Satan complained and said that it was because He did not allow him to touch Job. So, this time God told Satan that he can touch him, but not to kill him. Thus, Satan inflicted Job with painful boils but did not kill him because God did not allow him. Job remained faithful throughout this ordeal. In the end, God not only restored everything Job possessed, but even doubled it. Once God decided to do this, Satan could not do anything to prevent Him.

I told my new friends in Dumaguete that Satan may be involved in many of my trials, but he is never my concern, because when trials come, the question I ask is, *why did God allow him?* So, whenever difficulties come, I would ask God, "What is it in my heart that you are trying to

expose? What is it about me that you are trying to change?"

I feel that people often use Satan as an excuse for not owning up to their responsibilities. When a married couple separates, people would say that Satan succeeded in destroying their home. That is not true! The couple separated because they failed to live out their vows to love each other unconditionally. When a church divides, it is not true that Satan succeeded in destroying the house of the Lord. Instead, it means that the leaders of God's house failed to act in humility and love. Furthermore, when a businessman is forced to bribe in order to get out of his problem, it is not true that Satan succeeded in shaming the Lord. Instead, the businessman failed to do what is right, and instead of correcting his wrong, he decided to hide it.

Satan can definitely come to oppress and tempt me, but he has no power to influence my decisions. If I do sin, it is because I want to. I know God will always send trials to expose what is in my heart so that He can give me the chance to mature by giving me the choice to do what is right or to insist on my crooked ways. Because of this, I have one simple prayer every day, I pray that I will remain faithful to the Lord in whatever challenges He sends my way so that He can bless me, like the way He blessed Job at the end of his ordeal.

IT IS FINISH!!!

When Jesus was born, the angel said He came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). When He became an adult, He announced the good news that the Kingdom of God is here (Mark 1:15) or in our midst (Luke 17:21). Then, just before He died, He said "It is finished!" (John 19:30). This means that He has accomplished all the things His Father asked Him to do (John 19:28).

What did He finish and accomplish? He said He came to save His people from their sins, by paying the penalty of death, and to establish the kingdom of His Father, which His Father eventually gave into His hands (John 3:35).

Every Easter Sunday the Christian world rejoices because it renews their hope that someday Jesus will return to complete His work. I struggle with this idea because if this is so then Jesus did not finish the task His Father gave Him. The idea also contradicts what Jesus said in John 19:28 and 30. One day a pastor asked me, "So you don't believe that Jesus will return?" I said I want Jesus to return so that He can save the world from its sins, but I do not live my life holding on to this promise. Instead, I live it based on a better one which Jesus gave before He ascended, in Matthew 28:20 He said, "... I am with you always, even to the end of the age!"

When Easter Sunday comes, I hope we will rejoice knowing that Jesus has finished His work of redeeming us from sin so that we may enjoy His kingdom while we are still here on earth. But we will only enjoy the blessings of His kingdom when we put our trust in Him and lives according to His laws, which are found in the Bible. My prayer for you is that you will always find comfort in the promise Jesus gave, that He will be with you always, until the end of the age.

GIVE GOD THE HONOR HE DESERVES

I was asking myself, *how can I honor Jesus as we remember His birth?* The Bible tells us that He came to earth for an important reason, and that is to save us from our sins. Isaiah 1:18 (ESV) further explains that He wants to make us clean, "...though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

During the Christmas season, people try to show kindness to others, especially to the poor, to honor and please Jesus. But in Isaiah 1:13 (NASB), God said, "Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me.... I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly." It is basically saying that the services we do and the masses we attend are unacceptable to Him, if we go against His will and disobey Him.

Before Jesus promised to make us white as snow, in Isaiah 1:16 He said, "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, [17] learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." The whole Bible tells us that obedience is more important than sacrifice.

So, as we remember the birth of Jesus, let us give Him the honor that He deserves. Before thinking of any gift to give to Him or any sacrifice to make for Him, let us give Him the thing that He asks from us. In John 14:15 He said, "If you love me, you will obey me!" Pleasing Jesus will not cost you anything financially, but it will require that you give Him your hearts wholeheartedly.

A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENT!

It's been 20 years since we started an experiment of marrying the Bible into our business. I decided to do this then since I had nothing to lose anyway, having given up my job in Hewlett-Packard to move to Bukidnon and live in a 20-foot container van. I wanted to see if the stories in the Bible and the promises of the Lord would apply to me as it did to people like Abraham, David, Joseph, etc. I obeyed whatever the Bible said, even to the extent of resting our soil every seven years.

Since then, we have experienced many miracles in Moriah Farms. But we also went through a lot of trying times to the extent of almost closing down the business. One such miracle was the fact that while a piggery is known to be the dirtiest livestock farm, ours did not have any foul smell nor flies. But one of the best things that happened to us was when we became the preferred lettuce supplier for McDonald's nationwide. However, it was also the most painful experience as it ended abruptly due to changes in their priorities. As we tried to find our way, we lost most of our gains in the process. As if that was not enough, in 2015 and 2016, we went through the worst El Nino ever. But as our resources continued to dwindle, the creativity inside the farm increased more and more.

Now, I would like to share with you how the farm is doing! In spite of us being the oldest hog farm in the Monterey system, we continue to be at par with their best growers. At wala pa rin kaming amoy at langaw! As for our vegetable business, we have become pesticide-free the past year, we have doubled the efficiency of our people and have learned to maximize the use of our meager resources. We have also developed a new approach to managing our finances so that the farm would continue to survive should calamities come our way in the future.

I want you to know today that the experiment we started many years ago succeeded!

As I pondered on everything that has happened, I realized that the miracles we experienced did not easily come like manna falling down from heaven but as by-products of the Biblical principles we applied in our business. While God blessed us with many opportunities, He also sent us many trials to push us to directions we did not want to take and to do some things we did not want to do. He also sent us problems, like the loss of McDonald's and the coming of the El Nino, to give us opportunities to apply His principles and laws so we may see that they really work. I, therefore, conclude, that the stories in the Bible and the promises God have given apply to me as it applied to His people in the past. And they can definitely apply to you as well! If God can prosper a farm business, which I believe is one of the most difficult businesses there is, He can also prosper whatever business you are in, whether you are there as an employee or you are the entrepreneur. But before you can experience His blessings, you must also be willing to completely follow His ways in full as well!

I hope you would dare to test and see that the Lord is good. I hope that you too will know that the God who was alive during the time of Abraham is still alive today! But for you to experience His grace, you must give Him a chance to show you what He can and will do if you obey Him and follow His ways!

A REACTION TO THE "GRACE GOSPEL"

Jeremiah 9:24 tells us that there are three things we should understand and know, "...that I am the Lord who exercises LOVINGKINDNESS, JUSTICE and RIGHTEOUSNESS on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord." Hebrews 13:8, on the other hand, says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." This means that God remains loving and kind but also righteous and just - today and forever!

Because of the idea of "grace" many Christians today believe that God will only be loving and kind, kasi Jesus took care of His requirement for justice and righteousness. Someone who believes in the "grace gospel" one time rebuked me and said that the foundation of what I teach is wrong. Kasi para sa akin my responsibilities before God is to just always be intimate and obedient, and that is enough. He told me that obedience is not necessary anymore because the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross has paid even for the sins we will still do in the future.

I told that friend that though grace is offered to all, grace is not given to all. Because 1 Peter 5:5 says grace is only given to the humble. Who then are the humble? They are those who show their love for God through their obedience, this is according to John 14:15. Matthew 7:21 even says that not everyone who calls Jesus Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, only those who will do His Father's will (which is what you said in your message above). Romans 14:12 supports this by saying that "...each one of us will give an account of himself to God."

I feel many Christians today forfeit God's blessing by believing that accepting Jesus as Savior will assure them of heaven in spite of whatever they do after. And that obedience is optional. Matthew 6:33 says that before God

can add all good things to us, we should seek His kingdom, this means we should acknowledge Him as King, by doing what He wants. Then if He is really our King then we should seek His righteousness as well, which means obeying His commandments and following His ways. And as your disciple said, these are the people God will bless and protect.

BE FAITHFUL AND FRUITFUL!

In my talks, I would always teach that God's desire for us is that we become fruitful like a plant. In order to achieve this, He wants us to use whatever we have in our hands and continually grow them so that we can someday have more than enough for ourselves. When that day comes, God wants us to use our overflows to bless others. I would encourage people to give from their abundance and never out of need. I tell them that when a plant tries to give out fruits before the proper season, it dies prematurely.

One day I received a text from a dear friend who got bothered by what I taught. She asked, "Does this mean, Dong, you do not believe in sacrificial giving?" I was taken aback and felt embarrassed by her question. Kasi while I had given even when it hurts, I did not feel I ever gave sacrificially in the past. So, I spent a whole week contemplating my motives, and after a week I went back to my friend to answer her question.

I told her, "You are right, I do not believe in sacrificial giving because whatever I give away is not mine, it is the Lord's. The resources I use and the strength I have, they all came from the Lord! Therefore, the fruits that I produce and the things that I share are not mine. So, I have no need to give sacrificially."

I believe giving becomes sacrificial when we give from what we own. But if we bear in mind that everything, we have is the Lord's, then giving becomes just a part of our responsibilities as His stewards. This holds true even with the idea of tithing. People struggle to tithe because they feel they are giving to the Lord. When the truth of the matter is, it was God who gave them the resources to become fruitful and the opportunity to be a blessing to others. He asks us to tithe to constantly remind us that He

owns everything we have and that we are His channels of blessings to the world that needs Him.

May you all remain faithful, so that God can continue to make you fruitful.

CHOOSE WISDOM OVER WEALTH

A month ago, Randell concluded his post by saying, "We should choose wisdom over wealth because wealth is the lesser blessing." Dick Ang responded and said, "Don't be impressed with your own (man's) wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil." This made me ask, *Is there such a thing as man's wisdom? Can a man really be wise on his own?*

In order to find an answer to this, I reviewed the definition of wisdom. The Hebrew word is *chokmah*, which means the capacity to understand and the ability to adhere to a set of standards. The Bible says that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. Then this means that wisdom is the ability to understand and adhere to the standards of the Lord. It is therefore not to know what is good and evil, but it is to do what is good, not evil. If a man can be wise on his own, then that means his wisdom is not based on the standards of the Lord, but of the world. However, 1 Corinthians 3:19 says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God."

Farmers in Bukidnon have complained about the failure of GMO seeds to live out its promise to improve the income of our farmers. The idea of GMO seeds is to increase the farmer's yield even if he plants in nutritionally depleted land. With GMO, you can replace the labor for weeding with herbicides and the need to improve the soil with synthetic fertilizers. But farmers have been telling me that they are not getting the desired yield per hectare because GMO seeds produce big corn husks and small-sized kernels unlike traditional seeds. Their savings on labor are spent on buying more chemicals and fertilizers. In farming, I have learned that using more fertilizers will eventually kill the organisms in the soil further. The natural thing to do, according to the ways of the Lord, is to feed the soil that

will eventually feed the plant. This is how to achieve sustainability. In the present agricultural system, the seed companies earn more but the farmers earn less. Indeed, the wisdom of man is foolishness for all.

I agree with Randell, that we should choose wisdom over wealth because wisdom can create wealth, but wealth cannot buy wisdom. But our wisdom must be based on the standards of the Lord for it to benefit us. Tama din si Dick, a man should not be proud of his wisdom because he will eventually look foolish to the world.

WILL GOD REALLY PUNISH WHEN YOU SIN?

Are you afraid that God will punish you when you sin? I am! I grew up having this fear. I was taught that it is good to fear the Lord because this will help me to avoid sin. I believe many of us grew up with the same mindset. But a few months ago, I asked myself, *Will God really punish me when I sin?* I realized that God does not punish me when I sin. Instead, He does something worse. When I decide to go against His instruction, He gives me over to my sinful desires and, in a sense, abandons me to face the consequences on my own. Before you assume that I am now preaching a different gospel, please hear me out.

When Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil, God gave them over to their foolish desires. When they were inside the garden of Eden, they were allowed to eat everything God planted, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But when they decided to go against God's commandments, He kicked them out from the garden and made them plant their own garden to eat from what they can produce from the ground. I believe they regretted their decision, but it was too late.

When the Jews entered the Promised Land, God told them to destroy their enemies and never to go after their gods. But they did otherwise, so God gave them over to their sinful ways by allowing them to be the slaves of their enemies and in the process, were forced to sacrifice to their gods.

Realizing these, I am now more afraid that God will give me over to my sinful ways and desires rather than actually punish me. The Bible tells us that God is compassion and kind, while the world cruel and mean. I now believe that the

reason God gave us commandments is so that He can protect us from the pains that sins bring into our lives.

WHY DID ADAM AND EVE EAT FROM THE FORBIDDEN TREE?

Did the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil look so good that Adam and Eve could not resist it? Did they feel that God was depriving them of something special, so they had to take it? I believe this was not the case because the fruit only became attractive after the devil said, "In the day you eat of it you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

If eating the fruit would allow them to know what is good and evil, why did God forbid them? Diba one of the reasons why we read the Bible regularly is so we can differentiate between good and evil? How can we obey God if we do not know these things? There is nothing wrong with wanting to know what is good and evil, and this was not what made Adam and Eve sin.

If knowing good and evil was their intention, they did not have to take the fruit, they should have just asked God. What really made them sin was that they wanted to be like God! They wanted to decide what is good and evil for themselves, even if this goes against what is good and evil for the Lord. So, when the devil tempted them, they took of the fruit and decided that it was good for them.

I believe that to this day, this is still the root cause of all our sins. Whenever people disobey God and deviate from His instructions it is because they want to decide what is good and evil for themselves. When people react to God's commandment by saying, "Ay, hindi yan pwede, Lord. Argabyado naman ako niyan," we are basically telling Him that we know better than Him. Unfortunately, whenever we do this, we reap the consequences of not trusting Him.

Yes, we should pursue knowing what is good and evil, but we have no right to decide over these things because that right is reserved for God alone. If only Adam and Eve followed what God told them, they would have continually eaten from the garden of Eden. But because they decided what was good for them, they had to plant their own garden and eat from the meager things they could produce. The next time you are tempted to go against what God said is good, don't do it because it is not worth the pain your decision will bring.

POSSESS THIS WORLD FOR THE LORD.

When Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, God told them to fear and obey Him so that they can POSSESS the land He had set before them. I believe God wants us to do the same, which is to possess the land He has entrusted to us today.

While some people believe that Jesus will soon return soon to bring us to heaven, many of them forget what Jesus actually asked His Father in John 17:15 – 18, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one... As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

Why did Jesus pray that we stay in this world? Aside from the need to make disciples, I believe we have the same calling as Israel had - to POSSESS the land for the Lord! Why? In Deuteronomy 4:5–6 (NASB) Moses told Israel, "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do this in the land where you are entering to possess it. "So, keep and do them, for that is your wisdom... in the sight of the peoples who will hear... and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'

God placed us where we are so that we can possess whatever He has set before us – the business we have, the company we work for, the community we live in, the school we go to, etc. But actually, we cannot really own anything because God owns everything in this world; we can only STEWARD things for Him. So, for me, to possess the land means to use whatever He has entrusted to me, to show the world that my God is wise and that only His ways will bring true success and lasting peace. Recently, I realized that if we refuse to live out this calling, people and radical groups like ISIS will strive to possess the world

instead. So let us not live our lives focusing on leaving this world, instead, let us live to possess it for the Lord.

ADOPTION IS NOT AUTOMATIC

If you can open the heart of God, what do you think will you find inside? I believe you will see His strong desire to be a Father to you. I learned this truth in Jeremiah 3:19, "Then I (God) said, 'How I would set you among My sons and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of the nations!' And I said, 'You shall call Me, My Father, and not turn away from following Me.'"

God the Father sent His Son to fulfill this desire. As Jesus paid the penalty of our sins, He invites us to accept our adoption to be His children. But adoption is not automatic. Knowing that love cannot be imposed, God gave us the freedom to either accept or reject Him. To those who agree to be His child, He promises to give them a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of the nations. To those who have not yet done so, He patiently and lovingly waits until they do so. But if they never make a decision in His favor, He lets them be and respects their decision.

I have often wondered why people would want to pursue other gods when all other gods act as cruel masters demanding their followers to serve them. On the other hand, God wants to be a Father, whose heart's desire is to bless His children. But as a good parent, God first discipline His children before He blesses them because He knows that if He does not, His blessing might become a curse to them.

Of all the fathers we should honor today, we should honor God the most. And we can honor Him by fearing and obeying Him because this will lead us to the blessing, He has prepared for each of us. In addition, I believe we should honor Him by imitating His ways so that we, in turn, can raise God-fearing and obedient children.

A MODEL TO THE WORLD, AN AMBASSADOR FOR THE LORD

Towards the end of his life, in Ecclesiastes 12:13, Solomon concluded that life will only have meaning if we live fearing the Lord and keeping His commandments. He further added that, "...this applies to every person."

But do you know that God required this from Israel from the nation's inception? Deuteronomy 10:12 says, "Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him..." He told them that these were the conditions they had to keep in order to POSSESS the Promised Land and be able to live there in peace. If this is so, then this means that Solomon prospered not because he was wise but because he kept the statutes of the Lord since the beginning.

Unfortunately, something happened along the way. Solomon started to use the wisdom God gave him to test the laws He asked him to obey. He tried to see what will happen if he disobeys them. As a result, the kingdom of Israel was later divided into two and his descendants had to pay the penalties for his foolishness.

I realized that we do not need wisdom to fear and obey the Lord. What we need is faith, the ability to trust God and do what He says. It is not important for us to understand why we should do it. What is important is that we obey it.

It is sad to that some people see God's laws as detrimental to them. For example, when the Lord tells us to be nice to others even when they are not nice to us (Matthew 7:12), some would reason out, "Lugi naman tayo nyan. Why does God want us to always be the one to adjust and suffer?"

Why can't He require our enemies to change instead?" While we can challenge the Golden Rule with our human wisdom, we can also, by faith, just choose to believe that this law will benefit us. You see, when we are nice to those who are not nice to us, we show maturity, gain favor from others, and receive blessings from God. However, this does not mean that we should allow people to abuse us, because the Bible also says we should be "shrewd as a serpent but innocent as a dove".

God asks us to fear Him and obey His commandments because He wants us to POSSESS the land He sets before us and to live there in peace. He also wants us to be His model and ambassador so the world will see that our wisdom comes from the Lord and that only His ways can make people fruitful. Isn't God amazing?

THINK INSIDE THE BOX, INSTEAD.

The idea of thinking "outside the box" is nothing new. This was what Solomon, the wisest man in history gave his life to. In Ecclesiastes 1:12-13, he said, "I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven..." Did he find this pursuit fulfilling? Sadly, no. In fact, in verses 13-14 he said, "It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with... and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind."

Let me ask you: Did God give Solomon wisdom so that he can undertake the grievous task to understand everything under the sun? No! God gave him wisdom because Solomon said he wanted to lead Israel in the right way for the Lord. I find Ecclesiastes to be one of the saddest books in the Bible because in spite of his great riches and wisdom, Solomon found his life as one meaningless.

And yet, at the end of Ecclesiastes, in chapter 12:13, Solomon had an important realization. He said, "The conclusion is, when all has been heard, is fear God and keep His commandments because this applies to every person." At that point, Solomon finally made a conclusion which his father David had known all his life. David feared the Lord from the time he challenged Goliath as a young shepherd, up to the time he passed on his throne to Solomon when he was about to die.

I hope none of us will commit the mistake that Solomon made. Let us not use our wisdom to challenge God's ways, but instead, use it to live according to God's ways. Let us choose to always think inside the box called the Bible, so that we may live our lives to the full, as David did.

MAY HIS SPIRIT FILL YOU!

Did Samson lose his strength because Delilah cut his hair? Or did he lose it due to something more serious? After he lost his long hair, Judges 16:20 tells us, "...but he did not know that the Lord had departed from him."

Samson was a Nazarite, a person set apart to accomplish God's purpose. A Nazarite is not supposed to drink wine, touch a dead body, and have his hair cut. Before Delilah even cut Solomon's hair, he had violated the first two conditions already. He would often get drunk with the Philistines. The he took honey from the body of a dead lion, ate it, and even gave some to his parents. The cutting of his hair was the last condition he broke; it was the last straw that made the Spirit of God leave him.

The Bible shows that whenever God chooses a man to do His work, He will put His Spirit in him to give him the power to fulfill His purpose. But if that person persistently disobeyed Him, He would remove His Spirit from him. You see, Samson's strength did not come from his hair but from the Spirit of the Lord who gave Him strength.

What does it mean to be spiritual? To be spiritual does not mean we have to separate ourselves from the world but to do the things God wants us to accomplish in the world. However, we will never be able to do anything significant unless the Holy Spirit is in us and gives us the power to do so.

But now how would we know if the Holy Spirit is in us? Matthew 7:20, tells us that we will know if a person is either good or bad by our fruits! Galatians 5:19-21 describes the works of the flesh, while Galatians 5:22-23 describes the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I am learning that if a man wants to become good, he cannot do it on his own because he is

naturally sinful. We need the Holy Spirit to fill us first. But He will only do this if we acknowledge Jesus as Lord and are willing to obey what He tells us to do. When the Holy Spirit fills us, He will allow us to even do greater things than what Samson did.

OBEDIENCE INVITES GOD'S PRESENCE

If we pray for God's presence instead of just His blessing, as Moses did, is there something we should do so that God would agree to this request? According to Exodus, Moses was special because God would talk to him face to face, as a friend would talk to a friend. God agreed to go with Israel not because they were worthy but because the Bible said, again and again, in Exodus 7:6 and 40:16, "Moses did just as the Lord commanded!"

Most people want God to walk with them, yet they are not willing to obey when He gives them instruction. When they do not like a particular command, they would say, "Ay, hindi yan pwede, Lord. Mahirap yan!" Some wives will not submit to their husbands when they feel their husbands are not worth respecting. Christian businessmen would not completely follow the Bible because they believe they will not survive when they do so. Pero how would they know unless they first obey? Many Filipinos struggle to submit to the government when it does not conform to their idea of good governance. This is in spite of what God said in Romans 13, that He is the One who established all authority and so expects us to subject ourselves to them.

If we want God's presence in our lives, we must be ready to respond as Moses did -- to do things just as the Lord commanded. As such, we should give Him the right to decide where we should go and what we must do. We should not insist on what we want or how we want things to happen. Instead, we should always be willing to adjust to His plans and be sensitive to His leading, because they will always turn out to be what's best for us. That is why spending quiet time with God every day is extremely important because this is when we receive His instructions and His leading.

How did Moses lead 3,000,000 Jews through the desert for 40 years? The Bible says, "And Moses did just as the Lord commanded." We should all follow the example of Moses, so that God can use us to make this nation great.

MAY GOD'S PRESENCE GO WITH YOU!

When the Jews sinned in Exodus by worshiping a golden calf, Moses had to plead for their lives because God wanted to wipe them out from the face of the earth. God then offered to raise a new nation through Moses, but he refused. Instead, Moses reminded God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to make their descendants into a great nation. Because of that, the Lord relented and changed His mind. Then He told Moses to proceed to the Promised Land without Him, but He would send His angels to protect and provide for them. God did not want to go with them because He said His anger might consume them.

Today, when Christians pursue major projects, they would pray for God to bless them and to send His angels to guide and protect them. Others would also call on the saints to intercede for them.

But for Moses, God's blessings and the angels were not enough. In Exodus 33:15, Moses told God that if He would not personally go with him and Israel, he will not move from his place. This prayer struck me! Kasi, instead of proceeding with His blessing, Moses insisted and pleaded for God to personally go with them. It then dawned on me. Why do we pray for God's blessings when we can pray for His presence? Why do we settle for the protection of His angels and saints, when God is willing to do this Himself if only, we obey His ways?

Friends, let me ask you, what great attributes did Moses have and what special skills did he possess that allowed him to lead around 3,000,000 people through the desert for 40 long years? Ang totoo, wala! But he was able to do amazing things because instead of doing things for God, he would insist on doing them WITH God. I hope that we

will be like Moses and pray as he did so that God can accomplish far greater things in our lives and businesses. And then, the world will know that our Lord is good!

TITHING FROM YOUR BUSINESS

To answer Eyley's question on tithing, I turned to Deuteronomy 26:12 for. It says, "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied." According to this verse, the year of tithing for a business is in the third year. Did I get this right? In order to make sense of this information, I asked myself, "Why would God choose the third year as the year of tithing for a business?"

I have always related the profit of a business to the fruit of a tree. As a farmer, I learned that most plants start to bear fruits in the third year. Before this time, the plant only focuses its energy on strengthening its roots and growing its shoots. It needs to do this so that it can build a stable foundation that will allow it to bear a lot of fruits in the future. If I follow the model of the plant, the verse is telling me that God allows us three years to build the infrastructure of our business and correct our weaknesses so that we may first stabilize, then profit. After this, the verse above gives us instruction on how and to whom we should allot our tithes.

Interestingly, I have always been taught that all my tithes should be given to the church I attend and to help those in mission. But Deuteronomy 26:12 tells me that I should also give it "to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow." I do not want to challenge what the churches are teaching, but I am sharing this only because nobody pointed this out to me before.

I believe that if your business is from the Lord, then it should be able to profit in the proper season. And when it profits, we should use the Lord's portion to support our

pastors/priests, widows, orphans and strangers. This idea affirms my belief that God entrusted our business to us so that we can be a blessing to the people around us in the proper season.

Note: Ms Eyley Gaw is a member of Keepers of His Garden Community in Viber. She asked me where we should give our tithes.

WE WERE DESTINED TO RULE OVER

Revelations 5:10 tells us that Jesus has made us a kingdom of priests so that we may reign upon the earth. If this is the reason why Jesus saved us, then why are many of us in a hurry to get out of this world? Why are they wishing for the rapture to happen or for the end of the world will take place soon.

Revelations 5:10 reminds me of what Genesis 1:26 says, that God created us in His image and likeness so that we may rule over His creation. This means that Jesus saved us from our sins so that we can take on our original calling, which is to rule over the earth. Psalm 8:4 and 6 affirms this: "[4] What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?... [6] You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet"

The word "reign" in Greek has a similar meaning to the word "rule over" in Hebrews. To rule over in Hebrew is radah. It does not mean to lord over, but to take care of the things God has entrusted to you.

I believe the reason why many viruses have come to plague us is that we have not taken care of earth properly! We have been managing the world to suit our selfish gains and not according to how God designed things. When we grow thousands of pigs or tens of thousands of chickens in one location, we allow the build-up of disease that is beyond medicine's ability to control. When we let over 14 million people congest a city, like Metro Manila, we give viruses the power to spread like wildfire.

Is this the way God wants us to take care of the earth? Have you heard of what He did in when the people built a tower Babel? God destroyed the tower they were building

because they started to decide what is good and bad, without consulting the Lord. God scattered them, so that they may fill the earth and take care of it properly.

I think the reason why we have not been able to take good care of the earth is that we believe that we are just passing through and that this is not where we should be. While it is true that we are citizens of heaven, but didn't Jesus say in Mark 1:15 that He has brought His kingdom here?

Besides, if the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, as Psalm 24:1 says, then the earth is part of the kingdom of heaven as well. Therefore, we are not passing through, we are here because Jesus wants us to rule over the earth.

We should stop wanting to leave this world so soon and start taking our calling seriously. If rapture comes, then let it come. But in the meantime, let's focus our energy on being good stewards for the Lord by taking good care of the things He entrusted to us. So that, when we finally face the Lord, we may hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

ARE THESE THE SIGNS OF THE END?

Is the COVID 19 part of the plague that the book of Revelations warned us about? Are the African swine flu and the bird flu viruses' part of the fourth seal mentioned in Revelations 6? Is the eruption of Taal and the earthquakes in Mindanao the signs that the end is near?

I have been meditating on Revelations lately and I noticed that the plagues and earthquakes were released when the Lamb broke the seals of the scroll that God was holding. Therefore, these calamities came from the Lord and not from His enemy the devil!

Were these calamities sent to kill all life on earth so that God can usher in the new heaven and the new earth which He promised? The answer is, no! Revelations say that plagues were sent to make people repent from their wicked ways. I believe this is why God sent the plagues one at a time because He was hoping the people would learn from the first few. But when the wicked did not repent, He sent the next one to accomplish the same purpose.

Sino ba ang wicked na tao? For you to appreciate the term better, you need to take note of its root word. The root word is "wick," which is the twisted rope in the middle of the candle. A wicked person has a twisted mind, meaning may sira ang ulo nya.

A wicked person is someone who knows that something is good for him yet chooses to reject it. Di ba may sira ang ulo ng taong ganito? A wicked person is someone who knows that while the Lord is loving yet He is also just. He will bless those who obey Him but will punish those who sin. In spite of this knowledge, a wicked person still chooses to reject God.

But what is sin? I am learning that to sin is not just to violate the 10 commandments, but to disobey the instructions of the Lord. The word law in Hebrew is *Torah*, which means instructions. Therefore, when you do not rest your soil, nor pay your taxes, nor submit to authority, or when you defraud your brother, etc. you have sinned. You are wicked when you do these because you will invite trouble in your life.

A lot of people are waiting for God to establish a new heaven and a new earth. But what is delaying Him? I have been wondering about this for some time now. So I asked myself, "What would happen if the new heaven and the new earth finally come, pero disobedient pa rin tayo?" Will we not destroy that heaven and that earth again?

Are we the ones hindering the Lord's plans? Is it possible that God has been sending these plagues and earthquakes, to make us repent and turn from our wicked ways so that He can finally make all things new?

ARE VIRUSES AND BACTERIA THE ENEMIES OF MAN?

The other day I was explaining to my people in Moriah how bacteria turn milk into yogurt. When one of our youngest staff heard that, she dropped the teaspoon she was using to taste the new product we were producing.

Are bacteria and viruses the enemies of man? Are they plagues that God sent to punish the sins of man? Were they made for the purpose of ending life on earth?

The other term for these microbes is germs. But do you know that what we call germs are part of what God created? And Genesis 1:31 tells us that when God saw all that He created, He saw them as very good!

As I studied the different aspects of farming, I discovered that what we consider germs are an integral part of nature. Most viruses, bacteria, and fungi are decomposing agents. They take dead matter and convert it back to soil. But they are also purging agents, they attack the plants, that are weak, while strong plants have the ability to ward them off. So today, I use them as an indicator of how well I have taken good care of our crops. When our plants have a lot of disease issues, I now know that there is something wrong with the system we have developed.

But while there are bad germs, there are also good ones. The good germs help our bodies grow and make us healthy. An example of this are bacteria found in probiotics like the Yakult drink. When you eat something with a lot of bad bacteria or fungus, you may get diarrhea. Instead of taking an antibiotic to cure yourself, a better way is to take in probiotics, like yogurt. When you do this, you let the good bacteria overpower the bad one.

We saw the same phenomenon in our farm. In 2016, we experienced the worst El Nino, which lasted almost one whole year! Because we were running out of funds, we improved our composting process so that we can maximize the use of our livestock's manure. When the rains came, we were surprised that the fungus problem we had before have disappeared. Previously, when we had one straight week of rain, we would lose our crops for two weeks. But this time, our crops would thrive in spite of the rain. I later realized that by dumping a lot of well-processed compost, I allowed the good bacteria and fungus to overcome the bad ones.

If viruses, bacteria, and fungus were created for our good, then why are they killing many people in the world? It is because we have allowed the bad ones to multiply and overpower the good ones. When farmers use a mono-crop system, they allow the germs that attack their plants and livestock to multiply. When we cut our trees, use a lot of pesticides, and kill our soil through the use of synthetic fertilizer, we kill the good germs that should have balanced the effect of the bad ones. When we overpopulate a city, we encourage the build-up of germs.

Using disinfectants will not solve our problems because you will just force the bad organisms to mutate while killing the good ones. So, what are the solutions?

You go back to nature and learn how God created them. We have experienced that when we restored our ecosystem, by growing trees and planting grasses of every kind, we invited a lot of beneficial organisms. By using the waste of one to feed the other, we removed the build-up of disease. By resting our soil on a regular basis, we were able to let the soil rebuild itself and become healthy.

The conclusion is, never go fight against nature because we will never win. We should respect how God created things and then work around them and not against them.

The coronavirus is living out its purpose. It continues to be an agent of decomposition and purging. It is telling us that there is something wrong with the way we have been managing our lives. We can eliminate it by working with nature and not against it.

MAY YOU RULE OVER IN 2020!

Pagulo na nang pagulo ang mundo, noh? There are wars and rumors of wars, and then there are earthquakes and famines also. The earth's temperature is getting hotter, while the storms are becoming stronger. Tapos, andyan ang problem ng illegal drugs and the alarming increase of HIV infections across the globe. Are these the signs that the end is near? Or are they just the results of our negligence as stewards of the Lord?

Psalm 8:3-6 says, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers...; What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, ... You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,

God created man to rule over the world, and not be ruled by it. Do you know that the Hebrew word for "rule over", which is *radah*, has the same meaning as the Greek word for "to serve", which is *diakoneo*? In Matthew 20:26 Jesus said, "...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant." The Hebrew word *radah* and the Greek word *diakoneo* both means to take care of the things entrusted to you.

I believe the reason why the world is in so much trouble is that we have neglected our responsibility to the Lord. You will find that the issues I mentioned above (wars, famine, hot temperature, strong typhoons, illegal substances, and HIV), are consequences of man's greed and our indifference. The only things we have no control over are earthquakes. The reason why the temperature is hotter, and the storms are stronger is because we do not have enough trees and vegetations to regulate the weather, kasi

pinutol natin sila. I believe this is also one of the reasons why people are experiencing famine around the world.

But many have given up on this world because they believe that it is evil, and that Satan is the one ruling over the earth. But how can the earth be evil when Psalm 24:1 says it belongs to the Lord? And how can the devil be in control when John 3:35 says, “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.”

However, man created a world that rejected the Lord. This is the world that Satan rules over, and it was the kingdom he offered Jesus when Jesus was fasting in the wilderness. We become part of this world when we sin against God, and when we do this, we make Satan king over our lives.

Jesus came to save us from our sins, that He may redeem us from this world and restore us to our position as steward of His creation. So instead of asking God to us out of this world, we should ask God to help us to take care of it for Him. But is it possible to reverse the mistakes of those who have gone before us?

Today, we have an example in Yorme Isko of Manila. He did not allow the evil around him to rule over him. Instead, he took good care of his world and made it a better place for people to live in. He took one of the most dangerous and dirtiest cities in the Philippines and transformed it into a safer haven, by putting God first and by ruling over it with His justice.

I wish we will do the same every year of our lives. I hope we will make a stand for the Lord and show people that if we live according to His ways, we can make this world a better place to live in. May you all take your rightful position

as stewards of the, so that we can create a fruitful world for our children, and their children's children, to live in!

HINDI NA BA USO SI SANTA?

As I was driving on the streets of Cagayan de Oro City, I noticed that there were very little lights along the road and just a few Christmas decorations outside the houses and buildings. Sa loob na lang yata ng malls mayroon, and yet most people do not seem to care. Bakit kaya? Hindi na ba uso si Santa Claus? Or baka naman there is trouble in his factory in the North Pole? Kasi almost everything today is made in China na!

For decades, we have been celebrating Christmas with Santa Claus and his reindeer Rudolf as the focal characters. Because of the persona of Santa, the world celebrates Christmas in a very festive manner with a lot of gift-giving. Kaya siguro during December, we wish people to have a "merry" Christmas. But look at where this perspective has brought us. Many people waste a lot of money during this time of the year, kaya siguro as time goes by, they have less money for lights and decorations.

Because of the attitude we have developed, most people spend up their 13th month pay as soon as they get it and even end up in debt by the start of the following year. The way the world celebrates Christmas has made people poor. Was this the message of Jesus birth? Diba, sabi ng Matthew 1:21, He came to save us from our sins so that, according to John 10:10, we may live in abundance?

But does Jesus want us to experience abundance only after we die and go to heaven? Matthew 6:33 says that if we make Him our king and obey Him, He will add all good things to us even while we are here on earth. When we obey, our Christmas celebration during Christmas will become better and better year after year. Hindi katulad ngayon na we become poorer and poorer as we seek to celebrate Christmas with Santa.

We just had our Christmas party on the farm last December 19. I was both happy and concerned about the many people who filled our hall. I was happy because this means the business has grown and that we were able to provide more jobs for the community. But I was concerned because I know these people have been added to my stewardship for the Lord. Yet, this was not always the case on our farm— when we were just starting, we had very little during Christmas and our hall was only half full. As I watched the people enjoy, I got excited because I know that if we continue to follow Jesus and obey Him, God will allow our celebration to become better and better year after year. Sana all Filipinos will experience Jesus this way, including you.

I would like to encourage you to celebrate Christmas properly by giving honor to the One who came to save us from our sins so that we may live in abundance while still here on earth. Merry Christmas to all of you!

WHY WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?

Why should we celebrate Christmas? Is it because Jesus, the Son of God, was born and promised to save us? If He is Savior, then why are we still here? And why is He taking so long to return?

The Jews expected the Messiah to save them from Rome, while we Christians expect Him to save us from this world! Do you know that this was not the reason why Jesus was born? In Matthew 1:21, the angel said Jesus came to save His people from their sins. And according to John 17, Jesus did not come to save us from the world, but to even send us into the world!

“I do not ask You to take them out of the world but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.... As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” John 17:15 to 18

Why did Jesus come to save us from our sins, and not from the world? It is because when we sin, we make ourselves part of the organized world, not the physical world. The organized world is made up of people who decided to reject the ways of the Lord and has made itself an enemy of God. We become part of this world when we choose to live according to its ways. Kaya James 4:4 said, “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Jesus came to save us from our sins so that He can bring us to His kingdom today. In Matthew 4:17, He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” His kingdom is at hand means if you turn from your sins and follow Jesus, you can enjoy the blessings of His kingdom

while you are here on earth. Because if the earth is the Lord and everything in it, according to Psalm 24:1, then this earth is part of His kingdom as well.

But if you want to live in sin and reject Jesus, then that is your choice. His kingdom will not be able to bless and protect you because you are not part of it. As I have always said, the world is a cruel master. When you decide to obey it, it will punish you in return.

So decide to follow Jesus and make Him your Savior so that you can be part of His kingdom here on earth and so that you can celebrate Christmas every day! Merry Christmas!

IS THIS THE WORK OF THE DEVIL?

Some people have called the coronavirus the tool of the devil and that our situation is evidence of the battle between good and evil. But as I read the Bible, I cannot help but wonder, *Is this really the work of the devil?* I am sure some of you are saying, “Of course! Who else will do this?”

In the first chapter of Job, God asked Satan if he had seen Job as he roamed around the earth. Satan said yes, but in verse 10, he complained about the hedge that God had put around Job and his family. Because of this, Satan was not able to do anything against Job, even if he wanted to. So, he challenged God to remove His protection so that he can show God what kind of man Job truly is! He said that when he is done, Job will curse Him to His face. So, God told Satan that he can take anything Job possess but not to touch him physically.

I do not have time to explain in detail what happened next, but I need to ask you this question, “Who took away Job’s possessions? Was it the devil or the Lord?” While it was Satan who acted on it, you need to realize that Satan was not able to do anything against Job until God allowed him!

Were the plagues that devastated Egypt during the time of Moses, from the devil or from the Lord? When Nebuchadnezzar came into power, where did his power come from? Was it from the devil or from the Lord? Do you know what God said about him in Jeremiah 27:6?

“Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, MY SERVANT...”
(emphasis mine)

Why would a loving God send plagues to kill people around the world? When He sent the plagues in Egypt, He told Moses that He did so that the world may know that He is Lord. When Babylon conquered the world, the Bible tells us that God allowed them so that people may repent and turn from their wicked ways.

Yet, as God allowed the world to suffer in the past, you will also find that He protected the righteous or those who walked in His ways. As He brought devastation to Egypt, He kept Israel safe as they lived in Goshen. When Satan failed to make Job curse God, God restored everything Job had and even doubled it. While the Jews were exiled in Babylon, God placed them in positions of great influence so that they, like Daniel, may rule over the nation that conquered them. And in all of these cases, the devil was not able to do anything to prevent God from doing what He wanted to do.

The calamity we are in has been terrible, especially to those who died without their loved ones by their side. But this crisis has also allowed many people to go back to God and pray, thus acknowledging that He is Lord. While many church buildings have closed, the church has gone back to where it belongs - inside the homes of every believer.

While I wish that God will end this crisis soon, I have also been praying that God will not let it end until we learn that He is Lord and that we need to change our wicked ways. So that this will not happen to our future generation. Some of you may disagree with the things I wrote, but maybe this is a message you would consider as you stay at home.