



Seeds of Faith, a devotional book now on its fifth volume, has been a source of wisdom and inspiration for the Centralian community since its first release. The narratives, based on the teachings of the Bible strengthened by real-life accounts, continue to touch hearts, inspire many, and proliferate Christian faith. May we make the readings here part of our daily devotional as we deepen our connection to our Almighty Father and as we communicate to Him our worries, joys, plans, and gratitude. I hope that each account reminds us of God's beautiful promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Dr. Teodoro C. Robles
President
Central Philippine University



SEEDS OF FAITH

VOLUME 5

FRANCIS NEIL GICO JALANDO-ON



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SEEDS OF FAITH

Volume 5

Francis Neil G. Jalandon

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Foreword

We often get lost in this fast-paced world. Sometimes, we are led to unknown roads, uncharted waters, unfamiliar places. And humans as we are, we get so overwhelmed with uncertainty or darkness that our hearts are deceived and our faith falters. But as Christians, we recover, and we learn to trust that God has always better plans for putting us where we are at the moment.

Sometimes though, what sheds light to an otherwise obscure path or what calms turbulent seas are not big gestures or grand miracles. At times when we are lost, taken aback, or hurt, what we need are simple acts: warm embrace, listening ear, encouraging words.

Seeds of Faith, a devotional book now on its fifth volume, has been a source of wisdom and inspiration for the Centralian community since its first release. The narratives, based on the teachings of the Bible strengthened by real-life accounts, continue to touch hearts, inspire many, and proliferate Christian faith. May we make the readings here part of our daily devotional as we deepen our connection to our Almighty Father and as we communicate to Him our worries, joys, plans, and gratitude. I hope that each account reminds us of God's beautiful promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

As we flip its pages, may *Seeds of Faith* be a source of strength and courage when we are restless, baffled, and afraid. May we find some comfort from this book, and may this also be a testament of how a person's profound expression of faith may encourage a community of believers to spread His beautiful teachings and live a life with purpose and in accordance to His plan.



Dr. Teodoro C. Robles

President

Central Philippine University

Our God is Trustworthy

A lot of people have superstitious beliefs about New Year celebration. Some buy 12 kinds of round fruits and roll these fruits to their doors. This is for luck to roll into their homes. Some wear shirts and dresses with circle designs. The more circles, the better. The circle symbolizes a coin – money, and wearing clothes with this design would attract money to come. But the most popular is the use of firecrackers to ward off evil.

Christians do these practices with full knowledge of the superstitious beliefs behind it. They just justify it by thinking that there is nothing to lose if you believe in it. Is God happy that we follow these practices to attract blessings? Will God be jealous that we do not fully trust him to bring us blessings?

Proverbs 16:3 reminds us what we should do - “Commit to the Lord whatever we do, and our plans will succeed.” This means that all our plans must be committed to the Lord. Proverbs 19:21 tells the truth: “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.”

Our God is trustworthy. God is true to His promises. In return, let us put our full trust in God and not in superstitious beliefs that can tempt us to veer away from our complete trust in God.

As we start another year, let us claim God’s promises in Jeremiah 29:11-14, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord.

*“Let us put our full trust in God and not in
superstitious beliefs.”*

Have hope in spite of the Storms

Typhoon Agaton entered the Philippines on the first day of the year 2018 (I wrote this while stranded in the pier). In the last weeks of 2017, two Typhoons (Urduja and Vinta) caused destruction, floods, landslides, and deaths. It seems that last year ended with a tragedy, and the new year also started with another one.

In spite of these tragedies, a Christian could still find reasons to hope and sing a Sunday School song, “With Christ in my vessel, I can smile at the storm...” Why?

First, we have hope because the Bible tells us that God sends a rainbow after the storm.

A rainbow was the sign of hope for the family of Noah who survived a great flood. A rainbow is also a beautiful reminder that in spite of the diversities in life, we can unite and make this world a better place for us and the next generation. We do not have to be of the same color. We need to respect other colors (race, gender, and opinions) and stand side by side with them.

Second, we have hope because God has made a promise to never leave us nor forsake us.

In the Gospels, there is a story about the disciples and Jesus who were on board a vessel when they encountered a fierce storm. It can be considered an unusual storm because the disciples who were also fishermen decided to wake Jesus up. Normally, a fisherman would not wake up a carpenter in the middle of the storm, but they knew and believed that Jesus was more than a carpenter -- He is the Messiah. So Jesus stood up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and then all was calm. Jesus also asked his disciples where their faith is, and why they were afraid. This statement implies that when we have Jesus in our lives, we need not fear if we just continue to have faith in Him.

Be a Part of the BODY of Christ

Last January 17-19, 2012, the Convention Baptist Ministers' Association, Inc. held its annual national assembly at La Carlota Evangelical Church, my home church. I was ordained and received the title of Reverend during that assembly. Our theme for the assembly was "Working Together as a Body of Christ" and text was found on Romans 12:4-8 that says, "Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly."

Let me share four lessons from an acrostic of the word **BODY**:

First, we must commit to **B**elong in the body of Christ. We cannot talk about unity, about working together if we do not commit ourselves consciously to be part of the body of Christ. Have you fully committed yourself to belong in the body of Christ?

Second, we must **O**bey Christ for it is His body. This means that we must do our part as God intended it to be. The eyes are for seeing and not for walking. It is the feet's responsibility to do the walking. Thus, the eyes should not covet the work of the feet, instead, the eyes must do their part so that the body can function well. This is also the same with us. We must identify the gift or gifts that God has given us so that we can do our part. Have you identified the gift that God has given you?

Third, we must **D**evote our utmost ability to exercise the gift that God has given us so that the Church can do its mission to the world. To be devoted is to commit 100%. It is not half-hearted but full-sprint ahead. Have you practiced your gift?

Fourth, we must Yield results for the edification of the body of Christ. If we work together, then it is bound to produce fruits of service to God and His people. If we do not plant, then it is logical to say that we will have no yield. How is your yield nowadays?

Let us all be an active part of the body of the Christ.

*“If we work together, then it is bound to produce
fruits of service to God and His people.”*

*“We cannot talk about unity, about working
together if we do not commit ourselves consciously
to be part of the body of Christ.”*

START it Right

One of the new things that came to Iloilo City in recent years are the traffic lights. The installation of traffic lights in key intersections helped motorists developed discipline and patience. Our two children would always observe the behavior of motorists -- if they followed the traffic lights or not. One day, their astute observation of motorists not following the stop light in Jaro, Sambag area led to a question: Can these parents who violated the traffic lights honestly tell their children to obey them? It is a difficult question that we need to answer -- can violators have a moral ascendancy to tell their children to follow the rules and regulations? I was glad that I stopped at the red light at that time, and their question has always been in my mind ever since. It resulted to a reflection on starting right.

How can we START this new year right?

We need to have a:

S - Sense of what is right and wrong. We need to instill this sense in our children if we aspire to have a better future. The Bible should be the source of our ethics.

T - Trustworthy model. Whether good or bad, we mimic the actions of our elders and leaders. This is why we need to have the best model to serve as a pattern for our lives. And that best model is Jesus Christ. Let us be like Paul who said, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ."

We also need to:

A - Allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sins. Starting the new year right also means making a confession. Let us confess to God by naming our sins. The power of a specific sin is weakened when we name it in our confession. Ultimately, by the mercy of God, that sin will have no power over you.

R - Release forgiveness. If we do not forgive, we become bitter. Bitterness has a way of robbing us of happiness. Life is too

short to treasure hatred in our hearts. Your life will even become shorter if you continue hating others. Jesus has taught us about forgiveness. Amidst his suffering at the cross, Jesus said, “Father forgive them...”

T - Tell others about Jesus. When we have good news like birthdays, anniversaries, passing an exam, getting married or being promoted, we see to it that we tell others. How about receiving salvation? This good news trumps all the good news out there. It should be a joy to tell the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

I pray that we will start our new year right.

“The power of a specific sin is weakened when we name it in our confession.”

“Life is too short to treasure hatred in our hearts. Your life will even become shorter if you continue hating others.”

Be Ready

On January 13, 2018, 8:07 am Hawaii time, a text message was received by residents that said, “BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.” There was hysteria. They began to frantically call their family members, uttered prayers, held hands and sought out of shelters. Their worst nightmare was coming true – a nuclear attack by North Korea. They knew the moment that they received a warning that they only have 12 to 15 minutes to seek shelter. After 38 minutes, the alert was revoked. Someone clicked the wrong button. Everyone was relieved, and then there was public outrage.

What if you were there? What if it happened to you? What if you only had 12 to 15 minutes left in your life? This is a bunch of “what ifs” but someday, as we all know, our life will surely come to an end. What can we learn from this event?

First, Life is short so live a life with meaning. We can only have a meaningful life if we have Jesus in our lives. In John 10:10b (NIRV) Jesus said, “I have come so they may have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way.” If you have Jesus in your life, then in the last moments you will not harbor any regrets because you have lived a full life.

This means that you have loved God and people with all your heart, soul and mind. This means that you have let go of your bitterness, have forgiven people and asked for forgiveness also. This means that you have invested the talent that God has entrusted to you. This means that you have fulfilled the Great Commission and shared the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. In short, you have become a follower of Jesus Christ.

Second, Be ready for the afterlife. There is life after this life on Earth. One of the most memorized verses in the Bible, John 3:16, tells us about eternal life and those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will spend eternity with God.

My death, your death, our death will come anytime. We do not know when it will come. We may not have 12 to 15 minutes of warning time. But what we can do is to be ready, and to continue having a life with meaning and purpose.

“If you have Jesus in your life, then in the last moments you will not harbor any regrets because you have lived a full life.”

“Be ready for the afterlife.”

Word of God

The Philippine government declared the month of January as National Bible Month under Proclamation No. 124 signed last January 5, 2017. The proclamation states, “It is fitting and proper that national attention be focused on the important role being played by reading and study of the Bible in molding the moral fiber of our society.” Previously, President Fidel V. Ramos in Presidential Proclamation No. 1067 urged that “national attention be focused in the importance of reading and studying the Bible in molding the spiritual, moral, and social fiber of our citizenry.”

In coordination with the Philippine Bible Society, the Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education held the National Bible Week on January 22 to 28, 2018.

In the Bible, the term Holy Scriptures is used to signify the written Law, Prophets and the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Songs...). Later when the Gospels, Letters of Paul and writings of other Apostles were canonized, the term Holy Scriptures now includes the Old and New Testaments.

But have you noticed the term “Word of God”? John 1 tells us that “In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Word of God is Jesus Christ.

In the book of Acts (4:31, 6:7, 12:24, 13:5) and other verses, it was recorded that they boldly proclaimed the “Word of God,” and that the “Word of God” spread. The “Word of God” that the Apostles proclaimed was Jesus Christ.

Let us continue reading the Bible because the Bible contains the Word of God -- Jesus Christ. More than just reading, we must remember to live out all that Jesus has commanded us to do.

Proclaiming God's Word towards National Transformation

The Philippine Bible Society heads the annual National Bible Week in the Philippines. This celebration is empowered by Presidential Proclamations No. 44 by President Corazon Aquino and Proclamation No. 1607 by President Fidel V. Ramos. Both decrees recognize that “national attention be focused on the importance of reading and studying the Bible in molding the spiritual, moral, and social fiber of our country”.

The theme for the 2012 National Bible Week was “Proclaiming God's Word towards National Transformation.” The theme challenges all of us to work for societal change fueled by our personal conversion as brought about by the conviction of the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 declares, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Let me quote the words of the Head of the Commission for the exposition of the Theme:

“To know what it means to prophesy as Jonah did, i.e., to speak on God's behalf and to bring about moral renewal in our country, perhaps we can follow the words of exhortation contained in the ancient rite of ordination of deacons: “Receive the Word of God whose herald you now are. Believe what you read; teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.” While it is important to make copies of the Bible available to every Filipino home so that we get them to read it, we must insist that it is not enough to just read! We must put faith in what we read—as God's Word for us in the here and now. As recommended by *Verbum Domini*, a prayerful group reading of the Bible (*Lectio divina*) can be the most potent way of building basic ecclesial communities. This can happen only if our reading allows us to grow consciously in faith together like cells and tissues in the body of Christ. And then again, it is not enough to just believe; we must teach what we believe! The task of proclaiming the Gospel is not a monopoly of the ordained and the religious; the laity too must actively do their part in the work of evangelization. Finally, if we truly want to be credible witnesses to the Word, we must

practice what we teach! Otherwise, we become like the proverbial “house built on sand” which fell when “the rains came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house.” (Mat. 7:24-27)

A Christian life is a life of discipleship and mission. We cannot be a church which is preoccupied only with our church affairs. The final message of the Synod that gave birth to Verbum Domini concludes with “the roads of the Word: Mission”. We are a church in mission, consciously reaching out to the modern world and witnessing to Christ, our Lord and Savior. His mandate to us is clear: “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” (Mat. 5:13-16)”

“While it is important to make copies of the Bible available to every Filipino home so that we get them to read it, we must insist that it is not enough to just read!”

Are you Fit for Life?

The question “Are you Fit for Life?” provokes us to answer either yes or no. To be fit is to be ready. The text on which the theme is based tells us that it is God that makes us fit. It is God that sanctifies us and will lead our whole spirit, soul, and body to be blameless.

Sanctification is a process of the transformation of our whole being brought about the power of the Holy Spirit. We are being made holy by God. This process has started in our regeneration. It started at the time that we acknowledged ourselves as sinners, and helpless without the grace of God. Our reformation is an on-going development in our lives.

To sanctify is to make us holy – to separate ourselves from the world and to be consecrated to God. Ultimately, to sanctify anything is to declare it as belonging to God.

To belong to God means to dedicate our lives as God’s servant. We have to dedicate ourselves in the service of God. Dedication is ought to be a way of life for Christians. To dedicate is to bow down. This means that dedication is an offering or sacrifice of oneself before God.

True dedication then is the offering of our bodies to God. Dedication to God is not just today. It would be a living sacrifice. And it is an everyday and ongoing surrender of our life and lifestyle.

To belong to God means to dedicate our lives as God’s servant. We have to dedicate ourselves in the service of God.

The Need to be FIT

“Are you Fit for Life?” This question is often heard in the area of sports and exercise. Let us use a sports metaphor to answer this question.

First, to be fit for life, we need a Fitness regimen. How is your physical exercise nowadays? We are surrounded by a world driven by busyness, pressures, and stress. If we do not take time to exercise, to unwind and let the sweat out of our bodies, then we can be sure that we will be prone to lifestyle related diseases, which of course are very common nowadays.

What about our spiritual life? Do we have a spiritual fitness regimen? If we believe that the Word of God is our guide in this life, then it would be best to consult the Bible daily. If we believe that prayer is our way to communicate with God, then let us constantly pray and talk to God. If we believe that worship and fellowship in the church is a way to glorify God, then let us go to church and get involved in church activities.

Second, to be fit for life, we need to Implement what we trained for in the real game. As a coach, I would often see discrepancies between what happens during practice time, and when the real game begins. There is no integration that is happening. Why? Because a player lacks faith and courage to execute what the coach told him to do. Thus, the player often reverts into his old ways of playing the game. Ultimately, the player loses the game.

What about our life in general? Do we live-out what we read in the Bible? Do we put into action what we heard in sermons? We need faith and courage by the grace of God to change our ways based on the Word of God. It is difficult but not impossible.

Third, to be fit for life, we need to be conscious of Time. A player should always be conscious of time. In a given timeframe, a player needs to do something to win the game. One should not wait for the end part of the game to give his best. Right from the start of the game, the player must do everything in his capability because every point counts.

All of us are terminal cases. We are all in this world with a certain timeframe. We do not even know when we will die. Should you wait for your near death time to surrender your life to Jesus? Not all of us will be given the same chance as that of the two thieves with Jesus at the cross. Let us then be time conscious, thus, do everything that glorifies God.

Are you fit for life? Yes, by the grace of God we are FIT.

F – Fitness regimen to keep ourselves healthy.

I – Implement what we trained for in real life.

T – Time-conscious that anytime our end will come.

If we believe that the Word of God is our guide in this life, then it would be best to consult the Bible daily.

If we believe that worship and fellowship in the church is a way to glorify God, then let us go to church and get involved in church activities.

Let us Worship the Creator rather than the Created Things

There are three very popular festivals in the Philippines that honor Señor Sto. Niño every January – Sinulog Festival in Cebu, Ati-atihan Festival in Aklan and Dinagyang Festival in Iloilo. There are two main thoughts among Christians in the Philippines with regards to these festivities – one celebrates it as part of the cultural heritage of the country, and the other one condemns it as idolatry and paganistic.

Paul wrote in Romans 1:22-23, 25 “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.”

What is the central point of these verses? It is foolishness to worship idols, images, or anything, and ascribe the glory of God in these things.

Going back to the feasts and festivals that we celebrate; if it was a cultural and a historical celebration, then there is nothing wrong with it. It is part of our heritage. What is wrong is when we start ascribing the power and glory of God in the images, relics, and symbols. Those images, relics, and symbols should point to God. The moment that they point only to themselves then there is something wrong with it.

Like the Bible; if we ascribe powers to it by drinking the papers in it, using it as pillows to heal our sickness or expecting miraculous powers by touching it, then there is something wrong with it. Like the cross in our churches; if we have the belief that by touching it we receive some divine power, then there is something wrong with it. The cross is there as a visible reminder for all of us that Jesus died for our sins, and He is our savior. If the cross becomes a talisman, then that is idolatry.

Baal worship has led to the downfall of Israel many times in the Old Testament. The worship of idols violates the first law in the

Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:3-5 says, “You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...”

May we use religious symbols to enhance our worship experience, and to point us back to God. Let us not worship religious symbols because it is idolatry, and God is not delighted with it. Let us worship the Creator rather than the created things.

Let us not worship religious symbols because it is idolatry, and God is not delighted with it.

Let us worship the Creator rather than the created things.

The Super Blue Blood Moon

Since 1866 or 152 years ago, three lunar events had coincided with each other on the eve of January 31: a supermoon, a Blue Moon and blood moon. It was one of the rarest lunar display that happened in our lifetime (although we were disappointed in Pavia, Iloilo because it was cloudy during that night, thus, we just ended watching the phenomenon in the TV). The next time that it will happen will be 19 years from now or 2037. Some of us would still be around to see it, and hopefully no more cloudy skies during that time.

In the Bible, there is a Feast of the New Moon. The Hebrew calendar is lunar-based, and the beginning of the month or Hodesh literally means “new moon.” It was during this time when the Israelites would bring an offering to God. In Numbers 28:11, the New Moon offering is described like this: “On the first of every month, present to the Lord a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect.” The animal sacrifices were accompanied by a grain offering and a drink offering (verses 12–14). Moreover, a goat was to be sacrificed to the Lord as a sin offering (verse 15). In other words, every time there is a new moon, the Israelites remembered to give praises and thanksgiving to God. This should also be a reminder to us – every time we see a new moon, let us thank God for giving us another month, and another opportunity to spread the Gospel.

Later in the Old Testament, the Israelites observed the Feast of the New Moon and other feasts as a way to earn favor with God. This was not the original intention. It became an outward ritual that God despised. God said through the Prophet Isaiah, “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths, and convocations – I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.” This is a lesson for us – if we think that going to church or doing church activities or celebrating religious festivals is a way to earn God’s favor, then think again. The Bible is telling us that it is wrong.

The Prophet Isaiah once again relayed what is more important than the religious festivals – “Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:16-17). The next time that we go to church, let us remember what God really desires. Let us enter the church to worship, but let us not forget that when going out of the church, we serve God by serving others.

“Every time we see a new moon, let us thank God for giving us another month, and another opportunity to spread the Gospel.”

“If we think that going to church or doing church activities or celebrating religious festivals is a way to earn God’s favor, then think again. The Bible is telling us that it is wrong.”

Confront your Mortality

Last February 6, 2012, the Visayas and Mindanao areas experienced a 6.9 magnitude earthquake. The big field of Central Philippine University became a sea of people who promptly evacuated the offices, buildings, and classrooms. The epicenter of the earthquake was in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. Consequently, a tsunami 2 warning was issued. Even up to 8 pm we still experienced a series of aftershocks.

Soon after, text messages circulated about End Times as this earthquake is part of the signs of the times. Indeed, natural calamities such as earthquake make us confront our mortality. When we are confronted with our impermanence in this world, we become closer to the Divine.

A study shows that churches are filled with people whose age bracket is 50 and above. Psychologists point out that this is because people in this age bracket are confronted with their impending death. Those who are in the 20-40 age bracket are inclined to skip church because they feel that they do not yet need God in their lives. Some of them can be heard saying, “I am reserving my retirement years in serving God.”

If the above data is correct, then there is something wrong with us. Maybe calamities are there to remind us that life is short, that we are mortals with a designated timeframe. Hopefully, we should not wait for disasters to happen and take actions to be closer to God. There is something in our homes that can be a constant reminder for all of us to confront our mortality – the mirror. Every time we look at our mirrors, we can see the aging process. We sometimes deny it. Let us face reality – we are getting older every day. If we can face our impermanence, then we can live life to the fullest, and live our today as if it is the last day of our life.

This is what Jesus Christ had done. He knew that he was born with a mission, a purpose. He pursued his mission every day. We cannot see a wasted day in the life of Jesus. It was consciously planned out. His life is a perfect example of knowing the will of God, and doing it. He died at a young age of 33. For some of us, in

this age, we are just starting our career. Yet we cannot say that the life of Jesus was wasted. His last words at the cross, “it is finished” – tells us that he has fulfilled his mission.

How about us? Are we living our lives being confronted by our mortality? Or are we having a life as if tomorrow never ends?

“If we can face our impermanence, then we can live life to the fullest, and live our today as if it is the last day of our life.”

“When we are confronted with our impermanence in this world, we become closer to the Divine.”

Agape Love

As we celebrate the “Love Month” – February (Valentine’s Day is on the 14th), it is good to go back to the Bible and see the different meanings of the word “love.” According to the Greek language used during the New Testament times, there are four major words for love: *agape*, *phileo*, *stergo* or *storge*, and *eros*. Based on the New Testament Greek Lexicon, the word *agape* appeared 259 times as a verb or as a noun while *phileo* appeared 54 times. The other two – *eros* and *stergo* did not appear in the New Testament.

Agape means unconditional love or the complete giving of love to another person. *Phileo* is love expressed to someone whom you like. It is usually used to describe the love between friends. *Eros* is intimate love as expressed sexually. *Stergo* or *storge* is love between parents and children.

The most-often memorized verse – John 3:16 used *agape* to express the love of God to all of us. The famous love chapter 1 Corinthians 13 read during wedding ceremonies used the Greek word *agape* to explain what love is.

In my homily, during weddings, I would often use this illustration – substitute the word “love” by your name in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. To emphasize it, I will leave it blank so that you can read it and personally feel what it means to express *agape* love. I encountered this challenge in the book of Victor Knowles – Together in Christ, More than a Dream.

“____ is patient and kind. ____ is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. ____ does not demand its own way. ____ is not irritable, and ____ keeps no record of being wronged. ____ does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ____ never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”

Let us pray that as followers of Jesus Christ, and by God’s grace, we can commit ourselves to an *agape* kind of love.

Love without Boundaries and Conditions

The central theme of the Bible is God is love. The Greatest Commandment on which the Law and Prophets hang is all about love – Love God with all your being and love your neighbor as you love yourself.

If we loved one another, then the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ. What then is the difference between this kind of love than that of the world? Let us learn some more things about agape love – love without boundaries and conditions:

First, live your life for others also.

Humans, by nature look after their own good first. It is our instinct to have self-preservation. But this natural inclination sometimes leads us to be selfish. We cannot look beyond ourselves and see the big picture. We only satisfy our immediate cravings. If we are disciples of Christ, then this should not be. We need to do something for others.

About the story of the good Samaritan, Martin Luther King, Jr. had this to say: The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?” But the good Samaritan reversed the question: “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?” Then he added, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

Second, look at people the way Jesus does.

If the love of Jesus is in us, then we could see people with eyes that do not discriminate nor belittle them. Each of us was created with different gifts, abilities, and knowledge. But this does not mean that one is superior or inferior than the other. Jesus concentrated His ministry on people who were marginalized – people who were judged as outcasts because of their economic status, race, and gender. The way Jesus looked at them made them believe that they were worth something. Because of this, many people who were once upon looked down by society became great leaders who brought transformation wherever they went.

Paul said it best in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” *Agape love* compels us to look beyond race, economic status, and gender. We should see everyone as God’s creature and God has a purpose for their lives also like all of us.

*“If the of love of Jesus is in us, then we could see
people with eyes that do not discriminate nor
belittle them.”*

*“Agape love compels us to look beyond race,
economic status, and gender. We should see
everyone as God’s creature and God has a purpose
for their lives also like all of us.”*

The Love of God

Have you ever wondered why God created man and woman on the sixth day? According to Genesis, God created the world and everything in it in 6 days. Before God rested on the seventh day, God created man and woman at the last part of the sixth day.

If you study the creation account again in Genesis 1, then you would see that God prepared the world so that it would become habitable for mankind. There is light so that every living thing will have energy and life. There were daytime and nighttime for us to work and to rest. There was the land that produced vegetation for our food. There was also water to sustain all living things. There were winged creatures and also different kind of animals. When all of these were created, God made man and woman in His own image. If humans were created on the first, second, third, fourth, fifth day or even on the first part of the sixth, they would not have survived.

In other words, God created a complete ecosystem in which there is a symbiotic relationship -- we need one another and our survival depends on each other. If you look at it closely, humanity will not survive without the creation of God from the 1st to 6th day. On the other hand, those creation can survive without humans.

If we just look around us and be conscious of it, then we would surely realize that God loves us so much. God shows His great love by taking care of us. God has provided us everything that we need to live.

Here is a question for us to ponder: are we taking care of the ecosystem that God has provided for us? Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors. Let us expand our understanding of neighbors to include the water, trees, animals, fish, birds, sky, plants and all the creation of God. Let us love these neighbors as we love ourselves.

Real Commitment

When you love somebody it involves commitment. Jesus too asks for our commitment. Committing our lives to Jesus is costly. This is what Jesus said to the people who desired to follow him:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... Anyone who does not give up everything cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:25-33

Jesus was brutally frank with his listeners in this passage. He told them the difference between an admirer and a true disciple. Being a follower of Jesus will cost us three things:

First, it will cost us how we view our relationship with others. Did Jesus tell us to “hate” others? No. He just used an idiomatic expression. Matthew puts it this way, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Jesus tells us that He comes first in all our relationships. No one and nothing should become a barrier in our relationship with Him.

Second, it will cost us how we look at ourselves. A true disciple of Jesus cannot say “no” to Jesus. When we make Jesus as Lord of our lives, it really means “all” areas of our life. We cannot say to Jesus that there are some parts of our lives that He cannot rule. We must be willing to deny ourselves and instead follow the way of Jesus in every aspect of our lives.

Thirdly, it will cost us how we consider our possessions. Jesus asks us to give up everything. Jesus tells us to change our perspective on ownership. Jesus challenges us to see that everything around us is not our own. God owns everything. We are the caretakers. If this is our understanding, then it is not difficult to share what we have.

Are we willing to accept the cost of discipleship?

Let me end with the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote a book entitled “The Cost of Discipleship.” In this book, he tells the difference between “cheap grace” that often the church is offering to people, and the “costly grace” that Jesus offers to us.

“Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ... Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow... Jesus Christ. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son, and what has cost God much cannot be cheaper for us.”

*A true disciple of Jesus cannot say “no” to Jesus.
When we make Jesus as Lord of our lives, it really
means “all” areas of our life.*

Love Ourselves Also

Depression is real. According to the World Health Organization in its 2017 statistics, more than 300 million people are battling depression, and 3.29 million of them are Filipinos. Depression is a leading cause of suicide. The records of the National Statistics Office show that the suicide rate in the Philippines is 2.5 for men and 1.7 for women per 100,000 population.

The Bible teaches us to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Other English Bible translations say, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” This means that we ought to love ourselves also. Furthermore, this presupposes that we cannot fully love our neighbors if we do not love ourselves.

Does this mean that I have to be egocentric or narcissistic? No. The Bible warns us against this. Paul wrote to Timothy, “...in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!” (2 Timothy 3:1-5). In another letter to the Philippian church, Paul wrote, “Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

What then does the Bible teach us about loving ourselves? Let me mention a few.

First, believe that you are created in the image of God. As such, our lives matter and we have a purpose to fulfill in this lifetime.

Matthew 10:30-31 reminds us of our worth in the eyes of God. Jesus said, “And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many

sparrows.” Let us not feel worthless and insignificant. We can also claim the promise of God to Jeremiah that God has a wonderful plan for each one of us.

Second, do not hate yourself but feed and take care of it. Let us watch what we eat, and remember to exercise. We can observe that it was only recorded once that Jesus rode a donkey. Throughout his life on earth, he was just walking.

In Ephesians 5:29 Paul wrote that Jesus Christ cares for the church because it is His body. In the same manner, Paul reiterates that “No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it...”

In the creation account, God designed us to eat healthy foods – Genesis 1:29-30 “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food...I give every green plant for food.” In discussing food, Paul argues that “Everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

May we go out every day determined to love God, love others, and love ourselves.

“Let us not feel worthless and insignificant. We can also claim the promise of God to Jeremiah that God has a wonderful plan for each one of us.”

How a Husband Loves a Wife

Aside from our personal relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the next most important relationship for a husband is his relationship with his wife. Ephesians 5:25 reminds us: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.” This passage is the most significant command of God for a husband-wife relationship.

God has given husbands the mandate – love your wives. The Greek word used by Paul in this verse is *agape*. This kind of love goes beyond *eros* – erotic love. It is also more than *phileo* – a liking kind of love. *Agape* is a selfless and sacrificial love – it is God’s love. *Agape* love is not self-centered nor self-seeking. It seeks the highest good of someone you love.

Agape love must be put into practice by husbands. How? The method is found in the same verse mentioned above – “as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.” What did Christ do? He sacrificed himself for the church. This is the meaning of Paul’s love chapter in 1 Cor 13 – “Love does not seek its own.” This is indeed a very tall mandate commanded by God for us to do.

Let me share an illustration about a young man who asked Dr. Harry Ironside of Moody Church regarding his relationship with his wife. Dr. Ironside asked him, “Do you love her as much as Christ loves the church?” “Well, of course not,” he replied. “Well then, you do not love your wife enough.”

At first, I thought that the story above is sacrilegious. But after re-reading Ephesians 5:25, I realized how I should strive more to love my wife as Christ loved the church.

“Agape love is not self-centered nor self-seeking. It seeks the highest good of someone you love.”

Real Transformation

Every February 25, the Filipino nation celebrates the anniversary of the People Power Revolution of February 1986. It was a revolution aimed to topple down the dictatorship and usher a new era of freedom and development. After many years, we cannot deny that there are some gains brought about by the Revolution, yet we still dream for many things to happen.

In the light of this, let us look once again the mission statement of Jesus Christ, and try to reflect on what we can do for real transformation to happen.

Luke 4:18-19 says,
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed
and announce that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people.” (TEV)

What have we done to the poor lately – to the economically poor and the poor in spirit? What good news have we brought to them? What have we done to those who were imprisoned – to those who are physically incarcerated and those who are imprisoned with sin and temptation? Have we proclaimed liberty to them?

What have we done to the blind – to the physically blind and those who are blinded with fear, prejudice, and ignorance? Have we given them a new outlook in life? What have we done to the oppressed – to those who are battered, discriminated and marginalized? Have we lent a hand to them?

What about announcing the salvation in Jesus Christ?

Let us remind the people that the real revolution and complete transformation happens only if we have Jesus Christ in our lives. Let this be our mission.

Jesus and Women

March is Women's Month. As we celebrate this, let us ask the question, "How did Jesus treat women?"

Jesus' affirmation of women was revolutionary given the deeply entrenched patriarchal society of His time. Many women became followers of Jesus. Some even became her financial supporters like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and many others (Lk. 8:1-3, Mk. 15:41). Looking back at the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke, two women recognized Jesus as Messiah and Lord - Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39-45) and the prophetess, Anna, (Lk. 2:36-38). Even before the disciples preached, Anna already "spoke about the child [Jesus] in whom all were anticipating for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk. 2:38).

Jesus spoke to women in the public which was unacceptable in the norms of their society. He broke the traditions repeatedly with regards to treating women. Jesus taught women spiritual truths. Mary sat at Jesus' feet to learn (Lk. 10:38-42). Jesus also taught her sister, Martha, about the resurrection and eternal life (Jn. 11:24-27). What is more shocking was that Jesus spoke to women who were not Jews. Notably, Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:4-30, 39-42). Jesus told her that He is the living water. Moreover, Jesus taught her to "worship God in spirit and in truth" – a phrase that we always use in churches during worship services. Consequently, this Samaritan woman became an evangelist and missionary. Because of her personal story about Jesus as the Christ, "many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him" (Jn. 4:39).

What was even more shocking was a rabbi touching a woman with a blood disease. Jesus did this. He healed the woman with a blood disease for twelve years (Matt. 9:20-22). A rabbi was forbidden to speak to a woman, much more, to touch a woman with a blood disease. Jesus also allowed another woman to pour an expensive perfume on his feet and wiped them with her hair. Just imagine how livid the Pharisees who witnessed it. If you consult a Bible concordance, the name of Mary Magdalene was mentioned 13 times in the Gospels, while Bartholomew and Thaddaeus were only mentioned once. Actually, except Peter, James and John, the name

of women followers of Jesus were mentioned more than those of the other disciples.

Jesus also used an illustration that shows that God is not just a father but also a mother. Matt 23:37-38 says “Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone to death those who are sent to you. Many times I wanted to gather your people as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you did not let me.” Jesus re-echoed the words of Isaiah 66:12-13 that illustrates the love and care of God to them, “...Like babies, you will be nursed and held in my arms and bounced on my knees. I will comfort you as a mother comforts her child.”

The women that followed Jesus were there during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion (Matt. 26:56), and stayed with Jesus even up to the end (Matt. 27:55, 61). During this time, most of Jesus’ disciples were already hiding. Furthermore, Jesus chose women to be the first to deliver the good news of his resurrection (Lk. 24:9-10; Jn. 20:17-18). This was again revolutionary because the testimony of women during those times carried little weight. Jesus entrusted to women the most important message ever delivered in human history: “Jesus has risen from the dead” (Matt. 28:7).

Let it be that we treat women as Jesus Christ treated them!

*“Jesus’ affirmation of women was revolutionary
given the deeply entrenched patriarchal society
of His time.”*

The Empowerment of Women

March is Women's Month and March 8 is the International Women's Day.

The issue of women in the clergy as priests and pastors is still hotly debated until now. In the early church as recorded in Acts 2, the Pentecost experience can also be seen as a significant event for the liberation of women from the patriarchal worldview.

Peter stood and explained to the bewildered crowd the significance of what was taking place. He reminded them that the event fulfilled the prophecy in Joel 2:28-29 that "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and *daughters* will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." The passage speaks about the Spirit of God that is for *all* people and not only for Jews, and that both men and *women* would prophesy.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the birth of the Christian church. Not only were women present, but they were also specifically mentioned as recipients of the gift of prophecy alongside the men. There is no implication of hierarchy here – all are equally gifted to speak God's truth. This reality can be seen in the practice of the early church. Luke records in Acts 21:9 that the four daughters of Philip were well known for exercising their gift of prophecy.

The denomination in which I am part of, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, waited for 80 years since the arrival of the Baptist faith in the Philippines to ordain its first Filipina Pastor. Before, the women pastors were called "Bible Women" or "Missionary." They were doing pastoral work but they were not deemed worthy of the title "Pastor" and "Reverend." This changed in 1978 when the organization of Baptist pastors, the Convention Baptist Ministers Association, approved the resolution to ordain women pastors. This started a controversial debate. The laypeople

during the national assembly did not approve it. One year of biblical studies, deliberation and reflection passed by. On May 4, 1979, the assembly in Bakyas Evangelical Church approved to ordain qualified women pastors. The year after, on March 22, 1980, the first woman pastor, Rev. Angelina B. Buensuceso, was ordained at the same church. In the latest book of Baptist historian D. Leslie Hill entitled *Faithful and Free, Baptist Beliefs Through the Years* one of the pictures in the front cover is that of Rev. Angelina B. Buensuceso alongside prominent Baptist personalities like Martin Luther King, Jr., William Carey, John Bunyan, Ann Judson, and others.

We hope and pray that more people will be enlightened on the role of women in church and society.

“The anointing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the birth of the Christian church. Not only were women present, but they were also specifically mentioned as recipients of the gift of prophecy alongside the men.”

Be Prepared!

Central Philippine University conducts earthquake and fire drills every year. The purpose of the drill is to instill in the minds of Centralians preparedness for whatever emergency that will arise.

In the Bible, we can learn some lessons about preparation from David.

First, David teaches us that we must prepare for the work that God has called you.

The preparation will not be easy. We have to work hard for it and make great sacrifices.

David was anointed by Prophet Samuel to be the next king. This was done even before he fought the giant Goliath. David had to prove himself of the anointing. He worked hard in the pasture and fields tending his flock of sheep and defending them from wild beasts. This was his preparation. And then he felt ready. He stood before King Saul and pleaded to be given the chance to fight Goliath. The king reluctantly agreed, and David defeated the champion of the Philistines. He was able to do this with the help of God, and his preparation.

Second, David reminds us that others will not recognize your calling. We have to prove them wrong.

The prophet Samuel anointed David but after that, it seemed that his brothers did not recognize it. Maybe this was because his brothers were passed on by the prophet. His brothers told him to go back to tending the sheep.

Yes, David continued tending their sheep but he saw it with a new perspective. This pastoral work of David resulted in a lot of reflection, writing, and singing. Psalm 23 (The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want...) was the result of David's willingness to continue tending the sheep. He did not become bitter nor demanded that they respect him because of his anointing. Instead, he turned his shepherding work as an inspiration, and later as a leadership model

– a model that Jesus even used when He declared “I am the good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

Third, David tells us that others will hate us for our calling. We just have to be patient and put our trust in God.

King Saul was envious of David. People were singing songs, and writing poetry about the exploits of David. King Saul was full of hate and anger. He pursued David and attempted many times to kill him to no avail. When Saul and his sons died, David became their next king. It was about 12 years after the anointing of Prophet Samuel that David became the “shepherd of Israel” (1 Chronicles 11:2).

“David reminds us that others will not recognize your calling. We have to prove them wrong.”

“David teaches us that we must prepare for the work that God has called you.”

We must Repent!

The Lenten Season officially starts on Ash Wednesday. Forty days after that is Easter Sunday, and another 40 days brings us to the Day of Pentecost. Using ash in a ritual reminds us that we all came from dust and from dust we will all return. An act of repentance in the Bible is followed by sitting on a dust and sprinkling dust on the head – a symbol expressing deep humiliation and lamentation for the things that were done.

As we approach the Holy Week, let us look back to the sins that we have committed. Have we repented from our sins? What is repentance?

We can learn about repentance from the story of Jonah and his mission to Nineveh.

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*. The literal meaning of this word is a change of mind and heart or a change of consciousness that will result in a change of attitude and will lead to a change of action.

Jonah 3:10 says “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.” This is affirmed by Luke 3:8, “Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.” In a mathematical formula, we can put it this way: Change of thinking + Change of attitude + Change of action = Full Repentance.

When Jonah repented from his sins, God told him, “Jonah, do not just return to me, but go to Nineveh and proclaim the message I give you.” This means that forgiveness is not forgetting our responsibilities. We are still accountable. It is not setting us free from our responsibilities. Rather, forgiveness enables us to go back and fulfill our responsibilities.

Jonah’s act of going to Nineveh and his act of preaching God’s message was a demonstration of his repentance.

Jonah preached to a city which was estimated to have 1 million inhabitants. There is probably no evangelist in recorded history that has done this. His message was: “You have 40 days left in your lives. Repent!” It was not just a message of doom but also of hope.

The people responded positively. Jonah 3:5 says “They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.” They admitted that they sinned and that they had repented. The King also repented. v.6 “When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.” And God showed mercy!

God is a just God. But God is also a merciful God. If you would not turn from your wicked ways, then God would respect your decision and you would suffer the consequences. Meaning, God is fair. You will be given the punishment that you deserve. But if you repent from your wicked ways, turn back to God, and when He sees that your repentance is genuine because of your action, then He will accept you with open arms.

“God is a just God. But God is also a merciful God. If you would not turn from your wicked ways, then God would respect your decision and you would suffer the consequences.”

FINAL Checklist

In March, most students prepare for the Final Exams. Some cram in their studies, some are totally prepared, and some are simply resigned with their fate that they shall fail. What about in our life? How are we prepared to face our final day here on earth?

Here is a FINAL checklist that we can make:

F – Faithful to Jesus until the end.

Are we faithful in our commitment to Jesus? Hebrews 3:14 reminds us that “For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.” (NLT)

I – Impact our community through our life.

Jesus commanded us to influence our community by being the salt of the earth, and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). This means that the people around us can savor our impact, and our influence is like a light that guides them towards what is right.

N – Never give up when trials and temptations come our way.

As Christians, we are not exempted from testing and temptations. In reality, more have come our way the moment we have become a Christian. James 1:12 assures us that “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” (NIV)

A – Always hope that the best is yet to come.

We need to remember the three things that will always remain – faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Hope is what fuels our faith and love. Our hope is anchored on the truth that our God is trustworthy, and in His own time, He will make everything beautiful. Hebrews 10:23 reminds us to keep on hoping -- “Let us

hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.”

L – Love God, and love others as we love ourselves.

The greatest commandment should always be in our checklist every day. At the end of the day, we need to ask ourselves honestly, “Did I love God with all of my being today? Did I show my love to others? Did I love myself?”

Let us continue to examine our FINAL checklist every day!

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by being the salt of the earth,
and light of the world.”*

*“As Christians, we are not exempted from testing
and temptations. In reality, more have come our
way the moment we have become a Christian.”*

Are you Satisfied with your Job?

In the months of March and April, we welcome the new graduates of different schools. Some say that our College graduates will soon join the unemployed or be part of the underemployed out of the 106.5 million Filipinos. But of course, the majority of our graduates will find jobs.

It was observed that recently 70% of the people said: “I hate my job.” It is very sad that job frustration affects other areas of our life. When we do not like our work, it has a domino effect on our home and family. Oftentimes, our spouses and our children take the brunt of our frustrations from work.

What does the Bible say about this? The Bible tells us that God desires for us to have a fulfilling and satisfying experience in our workplace. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 says “Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor.”

Sometimes our job frustration is not in the job itself but from our attitude toward our job. Let us learn three perspectives that the Bible teaches regarding our work:

First, let us work for the Lord. Col. 3:23 says “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”

It is wrong to think that we can only work for the Lord in relation to the church. The truth is we can approach any work with an attitude of worship and service to God. We are not just working for our company but we are working for God at the same time.

Second, let us work like the Lord. Mark 10:45 says “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”

Jesus teaches us to have a servant attitude. Jesus wants us to ask this question, “What can I give to my work rather than what can I get from it?” The Standard Operating Procedure of a corrupt society is always to ask “What’s in this for me?”

Third, let us expect our reward from the Lord. Col. 3:24
“Remember that the Lord will reward you for Christ is the real master you serve.”

Of course, it is disheartening when our bosses do not notice our work. But let us remember that God is noticing our work.

May these biblical principles help us in having a meaningful work experience.

“It is wrong to think that we can only work for the Lord in relation to the church. The truth is we can approach any work with an attitude of worship and service to God.”

Jesus wants us to ask this question, “What can I give to my work rather than what can I get from it?”

Finding the Right Place to Work

Oftentimes, even if we have the right attitude with regards to our work, we are still not satisfied. This is because our job does not fit our personality.

My summer practicum in a bank when I was a Bachelor of Science in Accountancy student then taught me the importance of finding a work environment suited to your temperament. The routine of the job bored me. This was probably one of the signs from God when He called me to become a pastor.

How many of us are still in the career that we have planned while we were still in school? Some of us might want to change. When we want to change career, the trial and error method is not helpful. What we need is to evaluate ourselves.

First, let us evaluate our work history. Galatians 6:4 says, “Let everyone learn to assess properly the value of his own work. Then he can be rightly proud when he has done something worth doing, without depending on the approval of others.”

Let us ask ourselves: What do I enjoy doing? What subjects interest me the most? Certain things really motivate and inspire us. We may be good in many things but clearly, we enjoy some of them only. This basic motivational factor is one of the crucial points in deciding the kind of job we are looking for. God uniquely made us and we need a job to match our uniqueness.

Secondly, let us evaluate our abilities. Romans 12:3 says, “... Try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith God has given to you.” Romans 12:6 reminds us that “God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well.”

We will only be frustrated if we are in a job that does not align with our gifts or ignores the gifts that we have. Surely, our work is enjoyable if we are gifted in doing it. This is why a good administrator of a company or organization should put people in positions in which they can utilize their gifts. In doing so, there will many satisfied people. And satisfied people means productive people.

PALM Sunday

The start of the Holy Week is called Palm Sunday. What can we learn from this event? Let me use the word PALM as the outline:

P – Prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

Matthew 21:5 records the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Zechariah. It says, “Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey – riding on a donkey’s colt” (Zechariah 9:9). This is just one of the many records in the Gospel about the fulfillment of prophecies. This teaches us that we are assured that the prophecies that are still to come will surely be fulfilled – meaning, we must believe that Jesus Christ will come again!

A – Allow Jesus to enter into our lives in His own terms.

The people of Israel during that time did not allow Jesus to enter Jerusalem in His own terms. They were expecting a Messiah that will ride a warhorse. Jesus rode a donkey, a symbol of peace. They were expecting Jesus to lead a revolution against Rome. Instead, Jesus went straight to the Temple and started another kind of revolution. This is the reason why the people who shouted “Hosanna” later shouted, “Crucify Him!” This teaches us to open our lives without reservation and allow Jesus to come inside in His own terms.

L – Learn to live humble lives.

In some tradition, Christians would bring palm leaves during Palm Sunday. After the worship service, these palm leaves will be stored and then will be brought up again during Ash Wednesday the following year. These palm leaves will then be burned, and its ashes will become a reminder that we come from ashes, and to ashes, we will return. The reminder of our mortality will remind us to live humble lives. Jesus was surrounded by people who wanted Him to be their king. Matthew 21:10 describes the situation during that time

– the whole city was stirred and they were asking who this person is that led the people to shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Jesus did not veer away from His main objective and gave in to their demands. Jesus remained humble as He moved forward towards the cross.

M – Make straight the corrupt practices that you will see.

Jesus was angry with the businessmen and religious leaders because they were defrauding the people. They made the Temple a den of robbers. They exchanged the currency of that time to Temple money in a very losing exchange rate. They declared animals like sheep to be unworthy to be sacrificed, and just exchanged it with a dove. They then resold those sheep to other people. It was a very lucrative business but a corrupt one. Jesus expressed what Bible scholars call as “righteous anger” and drove out all who were buying and selling there. We, too, need to express “righteous anger” every time we see injustices around us. Our “righteous anger” should lead to actions that will correct the corrupt practices.

May Jesus have a triumphal entry into our lives!

“Our “righteous anger” should lead to actions that will correct the corrupt practices.”

The Triumphal Entry of Jesus

The Palm Sunday or the Triumphal Entry of Jesus celebration on April 1, 2012, coincided with what society calls as April Fools Day. Was Jesus a fool when He entered Jerusalem knowing that it would lead to His death? On the contrary, Jesus entered it with the full knowledge that His entrance will cause an uproar and will lead to His arrest and execution. Nevertheless, Jesus did it for our own sake.

Will we let Jesus have a triumphal entry in our lives? The entrance of Jesus teaches us two things.

First, His entrance to our lives will lead to our cleansing. The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem led him to the temple which he subsequently cleansed by overturning the tables of the corrupt businessmen who were in connivance with the corrupt priests.

For sure, there will be an upheaval within us when we let Jesus enter. Maybe some of us will not like His entrance and like the Pharisees, Priests, and Sadducees of olden times will plot for His demise in our lives. Or some of us will get angry like the moneychangers whom Jesus called thieves and robbers because of our corrupt ways. But hopefully, most of us will allow Jesus to cleanse the temple of our lives of any unclean practices.

Second, His entrance to our lives will teach us how to live in humility. Amidst the chaos of Roman occupation and the constant clamor of people for salvation from foreign domination, Jesus rode a donkey (a symbol of peace and humility) and not a horse (a symbol of war and success).

In the midst of our horsepower-driven society, we sometimes forget to acknowledge God as the source of everything. When we make ourselves as the center or the starting point of our successes, we are committing the sin of pride. Let us be reminded that the middle letter of the word sin and pride is “I”.

There is an illustration that tells about the story of the donkey that Jesus rode. The donkey was so fascinated by the event

of the triumphal entry that he excitedly told his mother later that the people were praising him and extolling his humble virtues. His mother wanted to teach him a lesson about humility. So she asked him to ride the trail again all by himself. The donkey went home and learned his lesson: We are nothing without Christ.

“In the midst of our horsepower-driven society, we sometimes forget to acknowledge God as the source of everything.”

“When we make ourselves as the center or the starting point of our successes, we are committing the sin of pride.”

The POWER of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ!

In the last 8 years, only four times did the whole Christianity – meaning, the Western Christianity (April 1, 2018) and Eastern Christianity (April 8, 2018) – celebrate Easter or Resurrection Sunday on the same date. The last time was April 16, 2017. The next time that we will celebrate it together will be in 2025 and 2028.

Why is this so? It is because Western Christianity uses the Gregorian calendar, and Eastern Christianity uses the Julian calendar. Some say that Christianity cannot even be united in celebrating Easter or even the name of the celebration – Easter or Resurrection Sunday, like the evangelicals in Iloilo or Bacolod who cannot even be united in celebrating Easter Sunrise Service in one venue. But this is not the point. The point is that we are one in celebrating Easter. We are one in celebrating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ no matter what the date, no matter where the venue.

Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10 “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.” The Greek word for “power” used by Paul is *dunamis*, the origin of the word of dynamite. The power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is more than that of dynamite. The Resurrection POWER can make you:

P – Part ways with our past life. The power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ can transform a life and the whole community.

O – Obey the commands of Jesus. The commands of Jesus Christ are very difficult to obey because it will lead us to deny ourselves, pick up our own cross and follow the leading of God. The power of the resurrection of Jesus will empower us to go on despite the difficulties.

W – Walk in newness of life. When Jesus conquered death, it gives us the hope that with Jesus in our lives we can also conquer death and death-like situations in the present. With Christ, we are living a regenerated life.

E – Enjoy the salvation. The salvation that we have received from God is a joy to behold. Christians ought to bring that joy of salvation wherever we go so that people will see that a life in Jesus Christ is not a life full of rules that enslave us but a life of freedom that gives us joy.

R – Release forgiveness. By our own, we cannot forgive others. Our nature is set to revenge. Our natural desire when somebody wronged us is to find a way to wrong them back. And it will become a never-ending cycle. But with Jesus in our hearts, the power of the resurrection will lead us to a difficult yet not impossible desire -- to forgive and to love others.

May the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ be in us all!

“The power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ can transform a life and the whole community.”

“When Jesus conquered death, it gives us the hope that with Jesus in our lives we can also conquer death and death-like situations in the present.”

It is Finished

We rejoice because our Lord Jesus Christ has conquered death. We are serving a risen Savior!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ affirms one of the seven sayings of Jesus at the cross – “It is finished.”

In Greek, the word “It is finished” is “*tetelestai*.” It means, “It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!”

This word was used by various people during those times. There are three kinds of usage that can give more meaning to our salvation.

First, “*tetelestai*” is used by a servant when he will report to his master. “*Tetelestai*” in that context means “I have completed the work assigned to me.” Yes, the death and resurrection of Jesus mean “mission accomplished.”

Second, “*tetelestai*” is used by a priest after he examined an animal sacrifice and found it faultless. If this is used in relation to Jesus, then this means that Jesus is the perfect Lamb of God, without spot or blemish. The Lamb of God shed his blood, and that blood can take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Third, “*tetelestai*” is used by merchants when payment is made. It means: “The debt is paid in full!” When Jesus died on the cross, He paid our debt in full.

Jesus has finished the work at the cross, but after that, our work as Christians has just started. Are we doing our work?

CHECKpoint

Last April 9, 2018, after 20 hours of travel by land and sea from La Carlota City, Negros Occidental via Dumaguete to Dapitan, we arrived at our destination -- Imelda, Zamboanga Sibugay. The next day we traveled again by land and sea to Olutanga, where the Western Mindanao Kasapulan (Convention) was held. What I noticed along the way was that there were several checkpoints by police and military personnel (Mindanao, being under martial law) to check for suspicious activities and to ensure the safety of travelers.

In our life, we also need checkpoints to examine whether what we are doing is right, or if we are going the right way. A checkpoint will CHECK if:

C - Christ is the focus of our lives. We need to always pause for a while to check if our life is Christ-centered.

H - Holiness is the objective of our morality. Jesus Christ sanctifies us and we are called to live holy lives.

E - Eternity is being lived today. Dr. Domingo J. Diel, Jr., our theology professor, reminded us that our eternity has already started already the moment we accepted Jesus in our lives and that we must live accordingly with that perspective in mind.

C - Compassion is in our hearts. The Gospels tell us that every time Jesus saw people who are sick, poor and marginalized, He had compassion on them, and He did something about their situation. This should be the same with us.

K - Knowing more about the Bible is part of our daily agenda. Studying the Word of God should be part of our day to day activities. Our day should not be complete without meditating upon the Scriptures.

May we continue to welcome spiritual checkpoints in our lives.

Our duty to our children

It is during summer that most churches would hold their VCS - Vacation Church School or DVBS - Daily Vacation Bible School. Psychology affirms that childhood is the most influential in the development of a person's outlook and attitude.

What then is the challenge to the church today?

First, the church must recognize that the formative years are crucial to the spiritual maturity of an individual. As Jesus said in Matthew 19:14 "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them..."

Second, the church must not be like the disciples who rebuked those who brought the children to Jesus and also hindered the children from coming to Jesus. This means that our church must find ways to have a welcoming environment to children. We must give a priority to programs that nurture the spiritual life of kids.

Third, the church must continually pray for the children. We must be like Jesus who placed his hand to the children and prayed for them. We should find the time to pray for our children every day and let them know that we are praying for them.

Fourth, the church must not only teach the children but also learn from them. When Jesus said that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these -- the children", He is telling us to learn from them. Adults should remember that children are more forgiving, more fun-loving, more open to new lessons, more trusting, more loving, and a lot more. We must learn from them.

May our churches give priority to the next generation.

"The church must recognize that the formative years are crucial to the spiritual maturity of an individual."

A Reminder to the GRADuates

March and April are usually the months for graduation in the Philippines. On April 22 and 23, 2018 CPU held its 90th Commencement Exercises for the different colleges of the university.

Here is a reminder to the GRADuates and also to all of us:

G - God should be given first priority in your life. Your life will have no meaning unless God is first in your list. In every decision that you make, think of God first and God will surely guide you.

R - Remember your roots as you reach for your dreams. You are where you are right now because of the people around you -- your parents, family, friends, teachers and significant others. If you forget them, then you will surely have an identity crisis. These people will keep you grounded as you reach for new heights.

A - Allow spaces for mistakes in your life. Learn lessons from your mistake because it is a great teacher. Aiming for excellence does not mean that you will not make a mistake. Someone becomes excellent because he or she turned his or her mistakes into valuable reminders.

D - Do everything with passion and compassion. Be excited and pour out your energy to realize your goals. Do not be a sluggard. Be passionate in doing your work. But while doing so, do not forget to be kind to others. Give space also to the mistakes of others. Be kind, and find ways to always “do the extra mile” as Jesus commanded us.

*“Someone becomes excellent because he or she
turned his or her mistakes into
valuable reminders.”*

Lessons that GRADuates should Remember

Let me share four things for our new graduates. To make it easy to remember let us use the acrostic GRAD.

G – Go with God. We must invite the presence of God to be in our lives so that we can survive the many trials that will come our way. In Genesis 39 we can read the phrase “The Lord was with Joseph...” Indeed the Lord’s presence was with Joseph. This was the reason why Joseph was able to hurdle the many crises that he had: his near-death experience with his brothers because of jealousy, his being sold as a slave in Egypt, the seductive temptations of Potiphar’s wife, and many more.

R – Remember your history. Someone wrote, “If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday.” All of us will be a little wiser if we pay attention to what happened to our lives in the past. History can be a great teacher to us. There are a lot of lessons that the past can teach us.

A – Allow the Holy Spirit to shape your life. The Holy Spirit is real. The Holy Spirit convicts us our sins and reminds us to follow the will of God in our lives. Let us always be conscious of the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

D – Do what is loving to God, and loving to your neighbor. The ethical foundation of Christianity is rooted in the two commandments that Jesus said: “Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Let us always ask ourselves these questions every time we make a decision or an action: “Is this loving to God? Is this loving to my neighbor? Is this loving to myself?”

“All of us will be a little wiser if we pay attention to what happened to our lives in the past.”

The Authorization and the Promise

The Ascension Day – a day that celebrates the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated on the 40th day after Resurrection Sunday.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples a command, which we now call as the Great Commission – “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). What is interesting in this command is the phrase preceding it, and another phrase succeeding it. The command is sandwiched by an authorization and a promise – these phrases make all the difference in the fulfillment of the command.

First, the authorization that comes with the command – “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” – should give us the courage to become a witness of Jesus wherever that may be.

Who can claim that He has all the authority in this universe? Only God can do that. This means that Jesus who gives us this command is God. Because of this, we should be emboldened to go and spread the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. The one who gives us this command is not just a mere general, king or president but the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We have been authorized by the Creator, our God.

Second, the promise when you fulfill the command – “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” – should assure us that no matter what happens Jesus will be there with us.

The fear factor is always the barrier that impedes us in doing something that we have not done before. Fear cripples us and makes us complacent or worst, apathetic. But the promise of Jesus should give us the confidence that we can share the Gospel. We can share Jesus in our homes, neighborhood, schools, workplaces and other places because God is with us, not just sometimes, but always!

The Challenge that Jesus Left us

Most of us have heard of SPA or Special Power of Attorney. It is defined as a written authorization that grants another person the authority to act on your behalf on specific or limited circumstances. Christians should also remember that Jesus gave His disciples an oral authorization which was later written in Matthew 28:18-20.

Jesus specified three things that His disciples should do. And as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are authorized by Jesus to do these things.

The three specific things that Jesus commanded us to do can be found in what we call the Great Commission. As Christians, we need to be reminded that Jesus authorized us to:

First, go and make disciples of Jesus in all nations.

Have we made an effort to engage ourselves in discipling others? Let us remember that we have heard the Gospel because somebody discipled somebody. We must individually continue the cycle of discipleship.

Second, baptize disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Have we led somebody to be baptized? A baptism is an act that we show to the public that we have followed Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. Paul explains in Romans 6:4 what baptism means. Symbolically, when we were immersed in the water, we are buried with Jesus. And when we emerged from the water, we are raised with Jesus. Our baptism reminds us that in Jesus we have a new life.

Third, teach the disciples to obey everything that Jesus commanded us.

Are we teaching others about Jesus? This is not just teaching for knowledge sake, but teaching that should lead to obedience.

Are we ready to act on the authorization that Jesus gave us? If we doubt the command of Jesus, then let us just remember who commanded us to do it. Who can claim that He has all the authority in this universe? Only God can do that. This means that Jesus who gives us this command is God. Because of this, we should be emboldened to go and spread the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

“Have we made an effort to engage ourselves in discipling others?”

“Have we led somebody to be baptized?”

“Are we teaching others about Jesus?”

LABOR Day

May 1 is International Labor Day. This celebration is in honor of all workers for their labor – to appreciate what they have done and to check if companies are giving due compensation and justice to workers.

Let us have a reflection using LABOR as our outline:

L – Learn to love your work. There are many people who have no work. Some have college degrees yet cannot find a job. Some do not have a job because they are not educated, and worst, a few do not have jobs because they are simply lazy. In these times of uncertainty in the economy, what we can do is to love our jobs. Let us see it as a gift from God to support our family, and to survive.

A – Accept the challenges of your work. It is a reality that some people are called 15/30. Meaning, they show up only on the 15th day and 30th day to collect their salary but cannot be found contributing to the attainment of the objectives of the company. This kind of people can be often found in government offices. This is indeed a waste of the taxpayers' money. Let us motivate ourselves to improve ourselves in our workplace.

B – Be a part of the team. Each of us must realize that our individual work is part and parcel of a greater work. The best illustration for this is the manufacturing company of a vehicle. In one section some are working to produce engines. In some, they make the shell of the car. Those who are producing nuts and bolts must not see their work as insignificant because without those small parts a car is not complete. We must see the big picture and in that manner, we can see our small contribution as a significant part of the whole work of the team.

O – Open for new lessons. Life is about learning from mistakes and failures. If you make some failures, it does not mean that you are a failure. It means that you are working towards something and just eliminated some things that are not working. If we ask an inventor, we can probably hear their testimonies how they tried and tried after many failures until they got it right.

R – Relax, take a break. A worker is entitled to have a vacation leave, and other benefits to relax and release work-related stress. Use these benefits. Some continue to work and opted to convert their vacation leave credits to cash. This is a gallant effort to earn more for your family. But we must not overdo ourselves. Let us have time for our family and friends. It is ironical sometimes to think that we are working for our family yet we have no time for our family.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.”

*“We must see the big picture and in that manner,
we can see our small contribution as a significant
part of the whole work of the team.”*

*“. Life is about learning from mistakes and
failures.”*

What a MOM should Be

All of us in this world have biological mothers. We will not be alive if not for our mothers who conceived and gave birth to us.

Let us use the outline MOM for our reflection:

M – a mother should be a Manager. She manages our household. She usually keeps the purse and budgets the monthly expenses.

She also takes care of everything – from grocery supplies to clothing, and food. What will happen to our homes if a mother was not a good manager?

The home would probably be topsy-turvy. We hope and pray that God will grant our mothers the skill of a good manager.

O – a mother should be an Obedient servant of the Lord. The Bible tells us that if we honor our father and mother our days will be long.

This command of the Lord presupposes that our parents are worthy to be honored because they are obedient to the precepts of the Lord. What will happen to the children if their mother was not an obedient follower of God? Probably their lives will have no direction and will end in destruction. We hope and pray that all mothers will be obedient to the Lord.

M – a mother should be a Minister. A minister is someone who preaches and teaches the word of God, cares for the sick, and uplifts those who are discouraged. Someone said that it is not difficult to become a biological mother, but it is very difficult to become a real mother.

Paul lauded the efforts of Timothy's grandmother and mother – Lois and Eunice for teaching Timothy the Holy Scriptures and training them in the ways of the Lord. As a result, Timothy became a great missionary and pastor who partnered with Paul.

What will happen if our mothers would not become ministers? Their children will not have the opportunity to hear the Word of God early in their lives.

We hope and pray that all mothers will become ministers so that they can lead their children to God.

“Someone said that it is not difficult to become a biological mother, but it is very difficult to become a real mother.”

“The Bible tells us that if we honor our father and mother our days will be long.”

Forgiveness is not Impunity

A great example of the subjects of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and discipline is King David. He committed adultery and impregnated Bathsheba. He tried to hide his evil act by summoning Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, to come home to be with his wife and make it appear that Uriah is the father of the baby. But Uriah did not go home but stayed in the palace. When this did not work, David planned to kill Uriah, and eventually succeeded.

David's sin was exposed by the brave Prophet Nathan who confronted the King. The story can be read in 2 Samuel 12.

John T. Willis observes in his commentary that we can learn three things from this incident:

1. Satan never stops pursuing the righteous. Belonging to God does not provide any person immunity from temptation. 2. Doing evil always embarrasses a righteous person who yields to temptation. People often think they can hide an evil act by covering it with other evil acts. 3. God will expose the person who yields to evil in due time.

The good thing that David did when Prophet Nathan confronted him was his sincere acceptance of his sin and repentance. Because of this, David was assured of God's forgiveness but he would suffer the consequence of his sin – his son will die.

The truth is that God disciplines us even though He pardons our sins. This is because forgiveness does not mean impunity. The mercy and grace of God are not to be abused. Here are four things why God corrects us.

First, we are being disciplined so that we will hate the sin and will think deeply before committing it again. Although God forgives the sinner, God tells us that He hates the act of committing the sin.

Second, we are being disciplined as a warning to other people. If you were a parent like God is to us, then allowing your

child to sin without correction is preparing a way for your child to continually commit sins.

Third, we are being disciplined so that we will remember to trust God and not ourselves. Let us remember that the middle letter of the word sin is the letter “I.”

Fourth, we are being disciplined so that God can test the sincerity of our repentance. The consequence of David’s sin was that his child would die. He pleaded for God for the life of his son. Yet God punished him. When his child died, he accepted the will of God.

God is a God of second chances. We have admit our sins, repent and be disciplined.

“The truth is that God disciplines us even though He pardons our sins. This is because forgiveness does not mean impunity.”

“We are being disciplined so that God can test the sincerity of our repentance.”

Launch into the Deep

On May 22-24, 2018 the 6th Biennial Assembly of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches was held at Central Philippine University with the Theme: “Partnership in Mission: Venturing Beyond Familiar Spaces” based on Luke 5:4 to 11 and Matthew 9:35-38; 28:18-20.

What can CPBC learn from these passages?

C - Commit to launch mission work beyond borders.

Historically, the Baptists were assigned to do mission work in Western Visayas including Romblon and Mindoro. Hence, one can see that the Convention Baptist Churches are in these areas. Jesus challenges us as he had challenged the would-be disciples to “launch into the deep.” This is a great challenge to answer the call to establish OFW churches outside the Philippines. As of the moment we have only one Convention Baptist Church in Hongkong which is the New Beginnings Christian Fellowship pastored by Rev. Danilo Borlado and Pastor Malou Borlado. Hopefully, we can venture out to countries that have several Filipino workers.

P - Partner with others in doing mission.

According to the story in Luke 5, the would-be disciples waited for their nets to break before asking others to partner with them. Oftentimes, it is when we feel that we can do it alone that is when a breakdown happens. We should acknowledge that mission work is a difficult task and we need all the help that we can get.

B - Bring the Gospel wherever you go.

Matthew 9 reminds us that Jesus went through every town and village to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. This is a great challenge for each one of us. We must intentionally bring the Gospel to wherever we will go.

C - Claim the promise of God when you do mission.

Jesus promised in Matthew 28 that He will be with those who will fulfill the Great Commission. When we go and share the Gospel let us claim the assurance that Jesus is with us. Let us also remember that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish what Jesus commanded us to do. So let us not be afraid to go to unfamiliar territories.

*“We must intentionally bring the Gospel to
wherever we will go.”*

*“When we go and share the Gospel let us claim the
assurance that Jesus is with us.”*

It's FUN to be Together

One of the most famous slogans of Philippine tourism is “It’s more fun in the Philippines!” We agree with this campaign that’s why we find time to travel once a in a while.

Let me use FUN as the outline for our reflection:

F – Fellowship with family is fun. Let us always look forward to bonding moments with our family. Let us remember that we work for our family – their survival and their happiness. So when our family demands our time, let us give our quality time to them. We spend so much time with our workmates and often we go home tired and ready to sleep. Let us allocate a special time for our family fellowships.

U – Unity in the family is fun. It is sad that some families are broken. Some quarrels started with petty things, some because of money and properties, and some because of inheritance. Yes, there will be conflicts because of our human nature. But this should not lead us to break our ties. Let us remember that we are related by blood. We come from the same ancestors. Let us find common grounds and cultivate it. Let us emphasize the positive things in each other rather than dwell in the negativities.

N – Navigate together is fun. Earlier in our travel, our three vehicles convoyed together. We stopped many times to ask for directions. Some of us are late but we waited for each other. This is the same with our life. We need to journey together. Some may falter along the way, but those who are strong must help the weak and support each other along the way. It’s a great adventure if we go together.

“Let us always look forward to bonding moments with our family. Let us remember that we work for our family – their survival and their happiness.”

Let us Pray

As a pastor, I was asked many times to pray. Sometimes I jokingly try to hide my presence so that I will not be asked to pray. But as we all know, praying is one of the things that every Christian should know and do. When should we pray? Paul wrote: “Pray without ceasing.”

James 5 tells us of 3 specific times when we need to pray.

First, we should pray when we are in trouble, and for those who are in trouble. James 5:13a says, “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray...”

We also remember David who would always cry for help to the Lord. In Psalm 18:6, David wrote, “In my distress, I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From His temple He heard my voice; my cry came before Him, into His ears.”

Second, we should pray when we are sick, and let us pray for those who are sick. James 5:14-15 says, “Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”

In these verses, the meaning of the word “sick” literally means “without strength, fatigued, totally wasted, bedridden, unable to work.” How many times have we felt that way? Then we should start praying.

Third, we should pray when we have sinned. James 5:16a says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

James reminds us that we need to confess our sins. And yes, even those sins that we are hiding. We need to be specific in our confession and ask God for forgiveness. Let us also pray that God will grant us the strength to overcome those sins and to live lives according to His will and purpose. We should pray for one another!

God's Timing

It seems that we are all slaves of time. Since somebody identified that one day is 24 hours, that there is a day called Monday, or a week consists of seven days, and there is a year labeled as 2019, we all schedule our time based on it – sleep, work, eat, play, travel, meeting, etc. The advent of bulletin boards, calendar planners, and the ubiquitous smartphone added to our enslavement. We always look up and check our next appointment or task to do. In other countries, the bus, trains, and planes would depart and arrive at the scheduled time. Hence, you need to be there before the scheduled time. Because as one phrase says, “If you are on time, then you are already late.”

In the New Testament, there were two words for time: Chronos and Kairos. Chronos time is clock time. That is where the word chronological comes from. It is measured by hours, minutes and seconds and is sequential. On the other hand, the Bible also used Kairos time. For example, the Epistle to the Galatians used the word Kairos. It means “the right time” or “the fullness of time” when Jesus was born. Or more clearly, Kairos means “God’s appointed time.”

According to Tezenlo Thong, Pastor of Simpson United Methodist Church, “*Kairos* time is illusive and hard to grasp for a modern person. We are much more familiar with *chronos* time.” I would like to re-echo the challenge of Tezenlo to live our lives according to *Kairos* time, and not to be enslaved by *chronos* time. He further wrote, “*Kairos* time is measured not by a mechanical clock, but in terms of quality. It is quality time. It is experienced and unhurried. It is being and participating in time, not running after time...It is being in the moment and enjoying the time. It is a sacred time when we experience meaning and value in relationships and living life. *Kairos* is when we experience the divine and have “aha” moments.”

May we will live our lives according to *Kairos* time – God’s own timing, and not to be enslaved by *chronos* time.

Be a Good Example

The estimated number of students who went to school in 2012 was 21 million. What was fresh in the minds of everyone as the school year 2012-2013 started was the guilty verdict handed down by the Philippine Senate as an impeachment court on the highest magistrate of the land, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Renato Corona. Against this backdrop, we ask, “Who is a good role model for us? Whom will we follow and pattern our lives? How can we be good examples for the youth today? Who will the 21 million students look up to when even those who have high positions in the government failed to be good examples?”

In Philippians 4:9 Paul wrote, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice.” This is a great example of a person who knows that he does the will of God, and is neither ashamed nor boastful in his request that the Philippian Christians should follow his footsteps. We need people like Paul who can say with a straight face – follow what I say and do.

Oftentimes we can hear parents telling their children, “Obey what I tell you, but do not follow what I do.” This should not be. Words should be backed up by deeds. There is a Filipino saying that reminds us, “A wrong thing repeatedly done by an adult is perceived to be right by a child.” Indeed we must be good examples for the next generation.

After whom did Paul pattern his life? Paul patterned his life after Jesus Christ. In 1 Cor 4:16-17 Paul wrote the Corinthians “Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”

Let us be like Paul who can confidently say, “you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.” (1 Cor 11:1).

Freedom

Last June 12, 2018, our country commemorated the 120th anniversary of the proclamation of the Philippine Independence Day. Our country had been under Spain's rule for 333 years until the day we gained our freedom.

In the Bible in Exodus 12:40, the Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years. Most of those years were spent in slavery. They were praying and groaning to God for their freedom. What can we learn from the experience of the Israelites?

First, God sees every situation and is concerned about our suffering. Exodus 3:7 says, "The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." Our God is a God of freedom. God does not want us to be in an oppressive situation – as a victim or the perpetrator. If you are suffering right now, then be rest assured that God sees you and is concerned about your situation.

Second, God has a wonderful plan for each one of us. For the Israelites, the plan of God, as promised to Abraham, was to bring them to the Promised Land. Exodus 3:8 affirms this plan of God – "So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." God is true to His promises, and we can count on Him. We must claim the promises of God for He will surely bring it into completion.

Third, God surely hears our prayers. Exodus 3:9 says, "And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them." We must never think that our prayers are futile. We should continue praying for God is listening. Prayer is not a one-shot deal. We also need to listen to the responses of God. Let us remember that God can talk to us in many ways, even in mysterious ways. Pray and listen.

Fourth, God sends people to rescue and help other people. In Exodus 3:10, God sent Moses to Egypt with a mission – "So now,

go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” This means that God is calling people to lead other people out of their misery, suffering, and disappointments. May Christians answer the call to be a channel of God’s liberation.

May we all experience freedom in Jesus Christ!

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“We must never think that our prayers are futile. We should continue praying for God is listening. Prayer is not a one-shot deal. We also need to listen to the responses of God.”

Looking Back and Soaring Forward

As we celebrate Philippine Independence Day every year on June 12, it is good to ponder upon our past so that we can move forward as one nation. But it is also equally important that we know how to look forward.

Isaiah 43:15-19 says, “I am the Lord, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator and King. I am the Lord, who opened a way through the waters, making a dry path through the sea. I called forth the mighty army of Egypt with all its chariots and horses. I drew them beneath the waves, and they drowned, their lives snuffed out like a smoldering candlewick. But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.”

Let us learn two lessons on looking back and soaring forward.

First, looking back teaches us the truth that God will always make a way when there seems to be no way.

The prophets would always remind Israel how God had chosen them as His own people; how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt and brought them out to the wilderness through the Red Sea and towards the Promised Land.

This is the reason we need to celebrate important events to remind us that God has been faithful, good and merciful to all of us. We can also be reminded of the ups and downs of our lives. We can look back and declare that history has another meaning – His Story.

Second, looking back teaches us not to dwell in the past but to soar forward with great hope and anticipation.

We cannot live in the past. History has its own place and must be kept in its place. Isaiah told the Israelites to move forward for he prophesied that God was going to do a new thing.

In order for God to do a new thing in our lives, we need to move beyond the failures of our past. Let us not dwell in our past. God can start doing a new thing in our lives if we will admit our faults and failures. God wants us to have a new beginning.

If our perspective is to look forward to a wonderful future, then we can say with confidence that God is not through with us yet. Let us believe that God is doing a new thing. The best is yet to come!

*“We can look back and declare that history has
another meaning – His Story”*

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not dwell in our past. God can start doing a new
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our faults and failures.”*

An Exemplary Father

One of the great examples of what a father should be can be found in the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11ff. Here are some things that fathers can learn from the Father of the Prodigal Son:

First, he treated his sons equally. The passage says that when the father divided his estate, “he divided his property between them.” Fathers should learn from this example. We should not discriminate our children or favor one child over the other or others. Fathers should be fair in dealing with their children.

Second, he was a generous person. The story tells us that when the Prodigal Son came into his senses he said, “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!” This shows that children observe their fathers. They can see if their father was generous, kind or not. Fathers must be good examples to children by being kind-hearted to other people.

Third, he was a prayerful and hopeful father. When the Prodigal Son decided to return, his father was waiting for him. If the father had forgotten his son, then he would not be waiting for him. He most probably prayed for his son’s return and was hoping day and night that his son would come back. Fathers should always pray for their children, and hope for a brighter future for them.

Fourth, he was expressive with his love. The story tells us that when he saw his son, “he ran to him, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” After this, he put on the best robe to his son and ordered a celebration. How many fathers do that to their children nowadays? Are we excited about seeing our children? Do we kiss them and hug them to let them know that we love them? Do we celebrate the milestones of their lives? Let us pray that the fathers of this generation will be expressive with their love for their children.

What a DAD should be

David Blankenhorn in his book *Confronting our Most Urgent Social Problem* stated that “Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend in this generation.” This observation supports the survey that more than 70% of all juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes.

The above statistics challenges us to reflect deeply on the role of fathers in our family and society. We oftentimes see the role of fathers as breadwinners only. Because of this perception, some fathers simply conform to this and just perform their duty as the economic sustainer, then leave everything else to the mothers. This is a wrong perception and should be changed.

Let us use DAD as the outline for our reflection:

D – Dedicate his life to the Lord.

Research has revealed that if a child was the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5% probability that everyone else in the household will become Christians. If the mother was the first to accept Christ, the probability goes up to 17%. But if the father was first to receive Jesus Christ, there is a 93% probability that everyone else in the household will follow.

The influence of a father is indeed deep. This challenges the fathers to lead their families to church and to learn more about God. May our fathers be like Joshua who declared “as for me and my household we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)

A – Allow his children to explore their God-given potential

There are many children who have broken dreams because their fathers would not allow them to explore their God-given gift. If we believe that God has a plan to prosper us and a plan to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11), then we must allow our children to seek the calling of God in their lives.

May our fathers guide the children in the right path, not as a dictator but an inspirer and an encourager. Psychologists say that some parents force their children to live their own dreams that were once dashed also by their own parents. If this was so, then the bad cycle continues. We must break the cycle!

If our children followed our sport or profession, then we should support them. If they chose another sport or profession, then we should still support them. The plan of God is better than our own plans.

D – Devote his time in giving a good legacy to his children

A pastor once said in his necrological sermon, “Live a life that when a pastor preaches a sermon at your funeral service, he will not tell a lie.”

The book of 1 Chronicles is full of verses that names a person as the father of another. It tells the genealogy of many families. Matthew 1 also tells us the family heritage of Jesus Christ.

This Bible recording challenges us to leave a good legacy to the next generation because the next in line to us will surely look back and search their identity through their lineage.

*“If we believe that God has a plan to prosper us
and a plan to give us hope and a future, then we
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Meaning of Baptism

One of the most celebrated religious feasts in the Philippines is the Feast of John the Baptist or San Juan. People would go outside their houses and encourage others to splash them with water. In some places, the Fire Department would send their firetrucks and spray people with water, thereby “baptizing” them.

Can you still remember the time you were baptized? Or for those who are not yet baptized, can you remember a time when you witnessed a baptism?

One of the things that Jesus commanded in the Great Commission is to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the stories found in the New Testament, baptism happened after a certain individual believed that Jesus Christ is the Savior. And the mode of baptism is through immersion in water.

According to Paul in Colossians 2:12 baptism is being buried with Christ, and also being raised with Christ. This means that we put to death our own selves. We bury our sins, our selfish desires, and our past life. Symbolically, the water washes our sins and then we rise from the water as regenerated people. In rising up we share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this means we let Jesus take control of our lives.

We hope that “San Juan Day” is not just about splashing ourselves with water or having fun in water parks or beaches, but more importantly, we remember the real meaning of baptism -- being buried and resurrected with Jesus Christ.

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Lessons from John, the Baptist

The feast of St. John, the Baptist is very popular in the Philippines. In commemoration of this event, people would come out of their houses and threw water to each other. Some even dared throwing water to passing cars and strangers. Some went to the beach. This tradition points back to the practice of baptizing people in the river by John, the Baptist.

John, the Baptist can teach us three things:

First, we must repent from our sins. Matthew 3:2 records John's sermon, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" Those who confessed their sins were baptized by John. This means that baptism without confession and repentance is just a mere ritual with no deep impact on the lives of people.

Romans 6:3ff also reminds us that we who were baptized in Christ Jesus were also baptized in His death and resurrection. We were buried with Him when we were dipped into the water, and in rising up from the water we are also united with Christ's resurrection.

Second, we must be courageous in speaking the truth. John, the Baptist was put in prison by King Herod because he pointed out the sins of the king – having extra-marital affairs with his brother's wife. The head of John, the Baptist was the gift that the daughter of Herodias asked after Herod was pleased with her dance.

John was called a prophet in the likes of Elijah. Both of these prophets confronted the evils of their society. The ruling government hunted both of them because they spoke the truth. The kings of their time wanted to silence them so that the truth would be covered with lies. But in the end, the truth will always prevail. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

Third, we must be a forerunner of Jesus. John, the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ. He preached about repentance, and also about the coming of the Messiah. He also told the people, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose

sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and loosen. I baptized you in water but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.”

We should be like John, the Baptist who humbled himself and focused on the message. May we be courageous witnesses to what is true and righteous. We must bring the message of salvation to the people.

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Let us Sing a New SONG to the Lord

People from all culture and traditions love music. The poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, “Music is the universal language of all mankind.” This means that anyone can understand music, and the Key of C or “Do Re Mi” are the same everywhere. In Psalm 96, King David wrote three times, “Sing to the Lord.” When something is repeated three times, it means it is important.

Psalm 96:1 challenges us to “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.” David did not say that it is not good to sing old songs, but he was referring here to sing about something new and something unexpected that comes from God every day – new mercies, new answered prayers, new compassion that are new every morning.

What kind of SONG is this?

First, it must be a song about the Salvation from God.

Psalm 96:2-3 says, “Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.” We must testify how God redeemed us, and shower us with blessings.

Second, it must be a song about the Obedience to God.

Psalm 96:4-5 says, “For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.” It says here that David acknowledges that other people and nations have idols and gods, but the God of the Bible is greater and powerful than all of these gods combined. Thus, we must obey God.

Third, it must be a song about the Nature of God.

Psalm 96:10, 13 says, “Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.” The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the

world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.” The nature of God according to these verses is that our God is faithful, loving and righteous. Our God is not a “stupid God.”

Fourth, it must be a song about the Glory of God.

Psalm 96:7-8 says, “Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.” We must glorify God who God is worthy to be worshipped. The ultimate goal of the church is to worship God. We do mission so that others may know Jesus Christ, and that they too will worship Him.

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One Lord, One Faith, One Hope

What does it mean to make Jesus our Lord?

Let us use the word LORD as our outline for reflection:

First, we should Let go and Let God be the center of our lives.

The Bible acknowledges that our world has many kings and many lords. But the Bible also declares that Jesus Christ is our Lord of lords and King of kings. This means that there should be nothing or no one which or who will take center stage in our lives. We must check ourselves and get rid of these lords and gods of our lives that hinder us in fully committing to God. We must remember the declaration of God – I am a jealous God. When Israel has forgotten this and installed other gods to be worshipped, God punished them.

Second, we should Offer our lives for the cause of Jesus Christ.

We are committed to a lot of things. Our commitment shapes our thoughts and actions. We are committed to the mission and vision of our organization, our company or institution. But above all of these commitments, can we commit to the cause of Jesus Christ as the driving force of our lives? There is one acrostic of FAITH that says, “F-orsaking A-ll I T-ake H-im.” May our faith in the Lord will result in a commitment that all that we do and think is for the advancement of the Kingdom of God – the cause of Jesus.

Third, we should Remove any barrier that hinders our unity.

We cannot deny that we have different personalities. We clash when we focus on our differences. We also clash when we think of them as barriers to our unity. How about using our differences to enhance our unity – to enrich an idea. A rainbow is a beautiful example of this. One color is, of course, beautiful and unique. But putting all these different colors side by side creates something creatively beautiful that you can only comprehend when you look at it. There is hope for unity when we think of it, not as

uniformity but the coming together of everyone to create something unique without losing one's color.

Fourth, we should Dare to hope that a time will come that all will have One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism and One God.

In this age of relativism, many are laughing at our zealousness in spreading the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Let us not be tempted to lose our evangelistic zeal and wallow on the post-modern view of "come what may, and everything goes." We should declare to the world that we dare to hope that someday "every knee shall bow in the name of our Lord Jesus."

"May our faith in the Lord will result in a commitment that all that we do and think is for the advancement of the Kingdom of God – the cause of Jesus."

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What is HOPE?

Ephesians 4:4-6 speaks about “...one glorious hope for the future.” How can we give HOPE to our world?

H – Help each other.

We give hope to the world when we start helping each other. We need to be reminded of Jesus’ words “walk the extra mile.” The early church was known to help those who are in need. Acts 2:45 (The Message translation) says, “...they pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.”

Let us be sensitive to the needs of others because in doing so we give hope to people. As the song says, “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

O – Organize people and make connections.

We are created by God to establish relationships. No one really wants to be lonely and to be left alone. We want to relate and fellowship with each other. Our ministry then is to make connections. We must become bridges so that people can restore broken relationships, and create new friendships.

By organizing people, we give hope to the people.

P – Preach the Good News of Salvation

In whatever manner, we must get involved in spreading the Word of God. We need to find our God-given gifts and use them to bring the Gospel to the people. In doing so, we give hope to the hopeless and make them look forward to a brighter future. Romans 10:14-15 says, “...And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

E – Elevate the status of the marginalized.

Jesus gave hope to the marginalized sector of society. He broke the taboo and spoke to women, healing the sick even on Sabbath, and included the Samaritans in his ministry. The marginalized people were empowered and because of that their dignity was restored and healing towards wholeness happened.

We must be involved in the empowerment of the marginalized sector of our current society. When we do, we give them hope and we also affirm to them that in Jesus Christ we can be united even if we have different cultures, race, class, gender, and status.

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ROCK-solid Foundation

Nowadays, conversations about God, Jesus Christ, the Christian church and the Christian faith are prevalent in our society. This is a welcome development because religious leaders are given the privilege to talk about God publicly, and people actually listen. Probably, most people were just concerned about religious rituals before. But now, Filipinos are asking intelligent questions about their Christian faith. They want to be assured of the rock-solid foundation of their faith.

Let us remember the word **ROCK** so that we can be confident of what we believe in. A rock-solid foundation means that we:

R – Remember that Jesus is the foundation of the church, our Christian faith, and no one else.

In Matthew 16:15-17 Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Is Peter the foundation of the church? No. It is Jesus Christ. The truth of Peter’s statement is the rock – the foundation of the church. And this truth, this Rock, this foundation is: “Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of the living God.” And those who professed this truth are like Peter, another small rock that will become a member of the church.

O – Offer our full commitment to Jesus Christ.

Just like Peter who was asked by Jesus to make a full commitment, we too should make a decision. Peter who correctly answered about Jesus was asked later on by Jesus if he could commit to an *agape* kind of love. In John 21:15-17, Jesus asked Peter if he loves (*agape*) Him more than all these things. Twice

Peter answered, “Yes Lord, you know that I love (*phileo*) you.” Jesus was asking for an *agape* commitment but Peter can only commit to *phileo*. On the third time, Jesus only asked Peter for a *phileo* commitment, the one that he can offer at the moment. Later on, in church history, Peter made an *agape* commitment when he gave his life for the cause of Jesus Christ. God will surely expect us to make an *agape* commitment.

C – Challenge ourselves to always work for the cause of Christ.

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.” I dare say that Paul that did not only challenge us to “think” about these things but more so to “act” on what we are thinking.

K – Keep on praying and keep the Bible close to our hearts.

When we pray we not only unload our burdens and ask God to answer our requests but more importantly, what we should ask ultimately is the will of God for our lives. We must also remember the authority of the Scriptures in matters of life and faith. We must make it a habit to read the Bible, meditate and ask God to reveal His purpose for us.

“The truth of Peter’s statement is the rock – the foundation of the church. And this truth, this Rock, this foundation is: “Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of the living God.” ”

Bonding with God through the Hurdles of Life

Our bond with the Lord Jesus Christ is unbreakable no matter what hurdles in life we face. Romans 8:38-39 declares that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

What does this BOND tell us?

B – Believe in the promises of God.

Bibleinfo.com says that there are 3,573 promises of God in the Bible. According to bibleq.info, Herbert Lockyer who wrote a book called *All the promises of the Bible* listed 8,000 promises of God. Whatever the exact count this only shows that there are many promises of God in the Bible. One of these many promises is that nothing or no one can separate us from the love of God. Let us claim this promise because our God is trustworthy and is true to His words.

O – Overcome the hurdles of life through God's grace.

One of the exciting sports that is played in the Olympics is the 110-meter hurdles. There are ten 42-inch barriers known as hurdles that you must clear in order to complete the race. Although the fallen hurdles do not carry a fixed time penalty for the runners, they have a significant pull-over weight which slows down the run.

Just imagine our life like a 110-meter hurdles event. We need spiritual discipline to go through it. Sometimes we fall but life does not have to end there. We need to stand up and run again. We cannot do it on our own. We need the grace of God for us to be overcomers of the hurdles of life.

N – New beginnings is there for us to have.

Our God is a God of new beginnings. We can see all over the Bible how God gives a second chance or even many chances to people who want to change. But we cannot move forward with our lives if we wallow in fear. Oftentimes we act on our fears rather than on our faith. Sometimes it is fear that moves us to do something.

That is not a good way to live. God tells us that we should not be afraid of anything or anyone because they cannot separate us from His love. Our faith in a loving God should be the driving force of our actions rather than our fears.

D – Develop your friendship with God.

John 15:15 says “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Jesus called His disciples His friends. We can also be called friends of Jesus. How? The prerequisite to this friendship is that Jesus made known to them everything that He learned from God the Father. Jesus confided to them. Jesus talked to them about His innermost feelings. Are we ready to have a conversation with Jesus? If you are, then open the Bible and read it. Pray. Meditate on it and be sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit. This is how we can bond with God.

“Our faith in a loving God should be the driving force of our actions rather than our fears.”

Bible and Sports Metaphors

According to the FIFA organizers, the FIFA World Cup 2018 had a 98% attendance rate in all the games. They also estimated that half a million fans visited fan zones during match days, and there were 160 million fans who actively followed the tournament on live television or live streaming thereby making it the largest sports event in the world. On this week were also the Wimbledon Open Tennis Finals, and also the return of Manny Pacquiao to boxing relevance.

Did the Bible use sports metaphors? In the Bible, we can see three sports events that were alluded to by the writers: wrestling, running, boxing. Genesis 32:24 used the term “wrestling” when explaining what happened to Jacob and God. Paul used phrases like “run to win” “discipline your body like an athlete” “boxer beating the air” or “shadowboxing” in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 to challenge the Christians to be disciplined and to aim with a purpose in their lives.

What can we learn from the Biblical writers when they used sports metaphors?

First, God can use anything around us to teach us lessons.

Most probably Paul watched the Isthmian Games while he was in Corinth. It was similar to our modern day Olympics dating back to the sixth century B.C. They included several different games like races, boxing, wrestling, and some field events. While watching, Paul saw some valuable lessons that he used to illustrate important points to Christians in Corinth. This means that for us who like sports, we should watch it with a perspective to learn lessons that we can use in our lives.

Second, a Christian is challenged to enjoy life, and that includes watching sports events.

Paul was not just in the games to learn valuable lessons or illustrations that he could use, but he was there, most possibly, to enjoy watching the games and to fellowship with fellow believers.

Some people nowadays would label Christians as “boring” or “killjoy” because they just pray, read their Bible and go to church. This is a stereotype that we must break. Christians are fun-loving, passionate and definitely not boring.

By using sports metaphors, the Bible teaches us about discipline, training, and focus – qualities that athletes use to excel in their chosen events. We should apply these qualities to our spiritual life.

*“God can use anything around us
to teach us lessons.”*

*“A Christian is challenged to enjoy life, and that
includes watching sports events.”*

Lessons from the Olympics

The sights and sounds of the Olympics can lead us to many reflections that we can use in our daily lives. Here are three things that events in the Olympics can teach us:

First, the lighting of the Olympic Torch.

During the parade, a representative carries a gold cauldron for each nation. The cauldron is later lit by young athletes who carry the torches that are turned-over by old and Hall of Famer athletes. The fire spreads through all the cauldrons. It becomes a circle of fire. It is a beautiful sight to behold. Suddenly, the cauldrons, which are connected to poles, begin to rise and form into one big and tall Olympic Torch.

This sight reminds us of Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Second, the hoisting of the Olympic Symbol.

The symbol of the Olympic Games is composed of five interlocking rings, colored blue, yellow, black, green, and red on a white field. The colors of the rings represent the flags of the countries that participate in the Olympics. The five-ringed symbol “represents the union of the five continents -- Africa, the Americas (North and South America are combined), Asia, Europe and Oceania -- and the meeting of athletes from throughout the world at the Olympic Games.”

The two-week long Olympics only happens every four years. But in these fourteen days, there is a semblance of unity in the name of sports. The athletes are united because they have a common ground. What about us? Can we find a common ground?

Ephesians 4:6 says “There is ... one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.” This is our common ground -- that we are all part of the creation of God, and we live on the same ground separated only through distance and time.

Third, the different Olympic Sports.

As we watch athletes perform in their respective sports events, we enjoy the performances that are being done at the utmost peak level. We also marvel how each of them is unique and gifted.

We, too, should discover our talents. Like the athletes, God has also endowed us with unique gifts. Let us use these gifts to make life beautiful -- a world in which God can see once again what He had seen in the Garden of Eden, “Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.” Genesis 1:31

“This is our common ground -- that we are all part of the creation of God, and we live on the same ground separated only through distance and time.”

“We, too, should discover our talents. Like the athletes, God has also endowed us with unique gifts. Let us use these gifts to make life beautiful.”

GAME Time Lessons

I have been an athlete since my elementary days and I have learned a lot of lessons from playing. Paul used sports metaphors to illustrate his point. 1 Corinthians 9:24 says, “Surely you realize that, of all those who are running a race in the stadium, only one of them can receive the prize. In the same way, run your race, so that you may win the prize.”

Here are lessons to ponder from the word GAME.

G – Go for your Goal.

An athlete who has set his eyes on the goal will do everything to win the prize. The athlete will discipline himself to practice well, and prepare himself physically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically. When game time comes, the athlete knows that he is prepared to compete.

This is the same with our life. What is our goal? Are we going for it or are just going through the motions of life?

A – Adjust quickly for there will be changes.

An athlete has a gameplan in his mind. But if the gameplan does not work, he needs to adjust quickly. If the athlete is stubborn, then he will be doomed.

We need to accept the reality that there will be changes in our lives. There is a need for us to adjust.

Are we adjusting well?

M – Make your best shot.

An athlete does not regret if he has done his best shot. If he loses, then it just means that the opponent’s best is better than his shot. He goes to practice again and makes his best shot better.

This is true in our lives. We need to give it our best every time we do something. If our best is still not enough, then make it better next time. Let us be passionate about doing our best!

E – Enjoy the game.

An athlete is seriously concentrating on his game. But being serious does not mean you do not enjoy the game. To play is to have fun.

Are we enjoying our life? God has created us to enjoy life in its fullest.

“We need to accept the reality that there will be changes in our lives. There is a need for us to adjust.”

“We need to give it our best every time we do something. If our best is still not enough, then make it better next time. Let us be passionate about doing our best!”

Lessons from Athletes

Let me share my observations of athletes as they go about their pre-game routine and subsequently their main game. The things that they do can become valuable lessons for life. Paul in 1 Cor 9:24ff also uses the sport of running and boxing to illustrate his point.

Let me use the word PLAY as the outline of these lessons.

P - Pray before the start of the game.

Almost all athletes have a pre-game religious ritual - be it a silent prayer, a group prayer huddle or simply a sign of the cross. All of these prayer rituals affirm the faith in a higher being than us - God. Moreover, it professes the need of an individual for help and guidance. We can learn from the athletes a valuable lesson - let us start our day with a prayer.

L - Love the game.

A true athlete needs a real passion for his or her chosen sport. If you love your game, then you will surely find time to practice and hone your skills. A passionate player never gives up and would fiercely fight for every point because each point counts. If we translate this to a life lesson, this means that we must love life. We must be passionate every day, for every single minute counts. Further, this lesson challenges us to confront anything that hinders life and promotes destruction.

A - Acknowledge the mistakes and correct them.

A great athlete learns from the errors committed during the game - you can never be great if you do not learn from past mistakes. The coach can point out what went wrong but in the end, only the athlete can make the corrections. This is the same with our life - if you do not acknowledge that something went wrong and that it needs correction, then you will be bound to repeat it. Let us start mending our ways.

Y - Yes! Celebrate!

One of the words used most often by athletes is the word “Yes!” They shout “Yes!” for a point or a good play. “Yes!” has become a word of celebration. We can learn something from this shout of exultation. We need to celebrate the many moments of our lives that gave meaning to our existence even though some may deem it to be insignificant. Let us find time to celebrate with our friends and family. Life becomes enjoyable if we celebrate God’s goodness, mercy, and faithfulness.

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Promises...

One of the things that I noticed in the 3rd SONA (State of the Nation Address) of the President of the Republic of the Philippines is the statement with “promises.” He said that the previous administrations declared that Mindanao is the land of promise, and what they did was just to continue in making promises, promises, and promises without fulfilling those promises.

What about God? The Bible tells us that God is true to His promises. Joshua 23:14 declares, “... You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”

If God then is faithful to fulfill all the promises that He has made as recorded in the Bible, we who believe in God can hold on to the following promises:

First, the promise of God’s love.

Paul wrote, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Second, the promise that God has a wonderful plan and purpose for us.

We can claim the promise of God to Jeremiah - “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Third, the promise that God will provide for our needs, and will be there for us.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have,

because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). This verse re-echoes what was written in Deuteronomy 31:6 and Joshua 1:5.

Fourth, the promise that those who believe in Jesus Christ will have salvation and eternal life.

The promise of Jesus to Nicodemus is also true to us - “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

For sure there are many promises that we can see in the Bible. I encourage you to find these promises in the Bible and be assured that God will fulfill His promises in your life.

“The Bible tells us that God is true to His promises. Joshua 23:14 declares, “... You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”

Singing is forever

In the book of Revelation, we have been given by John an opportunity to see eternity. John in a vision was given by God a very rare privilege to see what is happening in heaven. One of the things that we can notice in heaven is about singing.

We can see three things in Revelation 5:6-14:

First, singing is what we will be doing throughout eternity.

Revelation 5:11-12 say, “Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus...”

Imagine a choir with millions of voices singing praises to God. As affirmed by John, singing is part of the worship experience. We cannot detach singing and worship. Let us start singing now because this is what we will do throughout eternity.

Second, our singing here on Earth can be heard in heaven.

Revelation 5:13 implies that when we sing praises to God, our voices reach heaven -- “And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: “Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.”

Let us not stop singing in our churches, homes and wherever we are. We are assured by this verse that our singing can be heard in heaven.

Third, our singing should be centered on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 5:9-10,12 remind us that the content of our song should be focused on Jesus Christ – “And they sang a new song with these words: “You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed

people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth.” And they sang in a mighty chorus: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.”

This means that when we sing, we must remember that it is not for us or the audience; it is for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us continue singing from our innermost being because in the end we are assured that God is listening.

*“Singing is what we will be doing
throughout eternity.”*

*“Let us continue singing from our innermost being
because in the end we are assured that
God is listening.”*

Is Jesus Christ still Important?

Anselm of Canterbury once said, “I believe, therefore I seek to understand.” This was a favorite quote of mine during my seminary days, and it continues to be up to now. This quote reminds us to understand our faith, and go on searching for answers, thus, we need to ask questions. Jesus said “Seek and you shall find.”

One question that found room in my heart during my meditation was: “Is Jesus Christ still important after more than 2000 years?” At first, I thought that this question is somewhat blasphemous and should not be meditated upon, but then it keeps coming back to my mind persistently.

This question is asking us whether Christ is still essential in this day and age when mankind seemingly has all the answers about anything and everything in this universe developed by science, technology and the advanced intelligence of mankind.

My answer to the question is a big yes. Perhaps we should deal more with the how than the why -- “How can we make Jesus Christ relevant today?”

There are many answers to this question. Let me share three points.

Firstly, we should be like Jesus who became friends with the weary. Jesus gave an invitation: “Come unto me you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” In order to make this old invitation of Jesus relevant today, we must seek to identify what are the things that make people’s lives miserable and act upon it so that this invitation may come true.

The Filipino people are confronted daily by poverty, graft, and corruption in all places, the perpetuation of political dynasties, injustice and many more. We are very tired, and every day we are hoping that we can rest from these burdens. Let us become a friend to those who need us, remembering that this is what Jesus did during His time.

Secondly, we should be like Jesus who became a champion of the captives. He announced that “He came to set the captives free.” What Jesus did was He break down the structures that imprisoned people to become what God wanted them to be.

There are still many barriers that beset us today.

Since time immemorial self-centeredness and greed are still at the top of the list. In modern times, we are tempted by materialistic opportunism, relativism, and apathy. The challenge is still the same: we must help people break free from these bondages in order to make Jesus relevant today.

Thirdly, we should become a healer like Jesus. Jesus restored sight to the blind; he made the lame walk; he cleaned the skin with those who have leprosy. We cannot do the miracles that Jesus did, but we can help heal the illnesses of today: moral degradation, ecological imbalance, drug abuse, crime, and many others. Our society needs to be cured, and doctors of this kind of disorders are scarce. To make Jesus relevant today, we must respond to the call to become healers.

“We should be like Jesus who became a champion of the captives. He announced that “He came to set the captives free.” What Jesus did was He break down the structures that imprisoned people to become what God wanted them to be.”

Jesus, the Bread of Life

August in the Philippines, especially in Western Visayas, is called “tigkiriwi” or “cringe time.” Usually, the economic situation during this month is a great challenge because the sugarcane milling season has not yet started; rice harvest is also not yet around. Most savings were already spent during the start of the school year.

In the midst of our financial difficulties, Jesus is telling us, “I am the bread of life.” In John 6, Jesus likened himself to a bread: v.32 “true bread from heaven”; v.33 “bread of God”; v.35 “bread of life”; v.50 “bread that comes down from heaven.”

Let me share three things why Jesus used “bread” as a symbol.

First, Jesus as “The Bread of Life” means that in Jesus there is freedom.

What is the relationship between bread and freedom? Exodus 12:17 says, “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread because it was on this day that the Lord brought you out from Egypt.” For the Jews that heard the words of Jesus, they would associate “bread” with freedom. God saved them from slavery in Egypt. The tenth plague that God sent as the Angel of Death. This angel passed over the houses of the Jews because they painted in their doorposts with the blood of the lamb. Hence, the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is observed for seven days is a celebration of freedom. During those seven days, the Passover is also celebrated.

Secondly, Jesus as “The Bread of Life” means that in Him there is satisfaction.

One of the miracles of Jesus was the “feeding of the five thousand.” This miracle was recorded in the four Gospels. Matthew estimates the attendance as more than 5,000 since the counting excluded women and children. John also highlighted the story with a boy who went to Jesus with five small barley loaves and two small fish. The description of the bread as “small barley” implies that the boy comes from a poor family (since during that time only the rich

can afford a wheat bread). What happened after that was a miracle. Everybody was fed, and there was an excess of 12 baskets.

The point is God wants us to share what little we have. Let us not wait to become rich to start sharing. We may be poor and have only a few resources, but when we offer them to God, God will do wonders with them. The excess of 12 baskets reminds us that the resources of this world are enough for all of us if we just share what we have.

Thirdly, Jesus as “The Bread of Life” means that in Jesus we have a companion.

The lesson of the Parable of the Great Feast is that Jesus invites all of us to the table. On that table, we have Jesus as our companion. This is the same in the “Lord’s Supper” or Communion. We are at one table, and we are all brothers and sisters.

Jesus as the Bread of Life is our freedom, satisfaction, and constant companion.

“God wants us to share what little we have. Let us not wait to become rich to start sharing. We may be poor and have only a few resources, but when we offer them to God, God will do wonders with them.”

A Rainbow after the Rain

There was a time that the Philippines experienced La Niña that brought excessive rains to the country. There was massive flooding in many areas. This experience brings us back to the story of Noah and his family during the Great Flood.

What lessons can we learn from the Great Flood?

First, there is a rainbow after the rain.

Genesis 9:12-13, 16 says, God said, “This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it will be for a sign of a covenant between me and the earth... The rainbow will be in the cloud. I will look at it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

The rainbow covenant is a symbol of hope that no matter what the situation is, God will not forget us. We must believe in this promise of God for He is trustworthy throughout all generations.

Second, always offer thanksgiving to God in all circumstances.

Genesis 9:20 says “Noah built an altar to God...and offered burnt offerings on the altar. God smelled the sweet savor.”

After Noah, his family and the animals went out of the ark, he immediately built an altar and offered thanksgiving to God. Noah gives us a great example. We need to thank and praise God because He listens to our prayers, and grants our requests according to His own time and purposes.

Third, God wants us to be righteous.

Gen 6:11-12 says, “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.”

The Lord grieved and His heart was filled with pain because of what He saw. This was the reason why God decided to bring the Great Flood.

Is God crying about what He is seeing in the world right now?

Although God promised that He will never cause a Great Flood again, God is expecting us to be like Noah, a righteous man who was blameless among the people and who walked with God.

“The rainbow covenant is a symbol of hope that no matter what the situation is, God will not forget us. We must believe in this promise of God for He is trustworthy throughout all generations.”

“We need to thank and praise God because He listens to our prayers, and grants our requests according to His own time and purposes.”

Mizpah

According to POEA - Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, the total number of OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) at the end of 2017 was estimated at 2.3 million. This statistics does not include the Filipinos who migrated abroad and changed their citizenship. All of us have a family member or a friend that is working abroad.

What does the Bible tell us about people working in a strange land? We can learn from the story of Jacob who worked for his father in law, Laban. Let me share three lessons from this story found in Genesis 31.

First, there should be a covenant or a contract to protect the workers.

Genesis 31:44 says, “Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.”

The experience of Jacob with Laban as his employer is similar to that of our OFWs. There are numerous undocumented workers as a result of fly by night agencies. If there is no contract, then a worker becomes unprotected.

This was the situation of Jacob as he narrated it in Genesis 31:40 “The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes.”

Laban was an unjust employer. So what happened when Jacob cried for injustice, God heard him. God rebuked Laban. Because of this Laban was forced to make a covenant or a contract in modern terminology. The Bible teaches us the value of a contract which protects the workers.

Second, in the midst of injustices and abuses, God listens to our prayers.

Genesis 31:42 narrates the conversation between Laban and Jacob. Jacob said, “If the God of my father, the God of Abraham

and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.” In the story, Jacob cried to God in prayer. He prayed for 20 years, and in God’s appointed time, the prayer of Jacob was answered.

This teaches us that we should pray when we are in trouble and those who are in trouble. Let us pray also that trouble will not come to us. We must remember our brothers and sisters who are working abroad. We are assured that God listens to our prayers.

Third, God watches over us when we are away from one another.

The hardest thing in the life of an OFW is to leave behind their families. Before, it would take days to have a telegram or make a call. Now with the birth of the Internet and social media, it is a lot easier to connect with your family and friends. But it is very difficult to leave your loved ones.

God assures us that He is watching us and our families. But we need to completely trust in God. Before we part with our loved ones who will be working abroad, let us remember the word Mizpah. In Genesis 31:49 Jacob called the place where they made a covenant as Mizpah which means “May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other.”

To all of you, Mizpah!

*“In the midst of injustices and abuses, God listens
to our prayers.”*

Do not Steal

One time a thief attempted to rob our house when we were out. The helper in the other house foiled the thief's attempt when she went out due to the loud barkings of our dogs. The robber was just ten meters away, running fast when the helper saw his back. He was empty-handed.

When we arrived home and found out about the incident, what came in my mind was an old illustration of a person who was always thankful. One day he was robbed at knifepoint. He gave up his wallet and pieces of jewelry. Upon arriving at home, he told his wife what happened. They gave thanks for two things: One, that his life was spared and only the material things were taken. Second, that he was not a robber.

My son Kairos told me "Tay, one of the Ten Commandments is 'Do not steal.'" He followed it up by saying, "Make a sermon on this."

We can learn two things from this Biblical command:

First, we must defeat the desire to covet something that is not ours.

Our corrupted human nature makes us selfish. A baby is a classic example of this. A baby wants to have everything. A baby cries when she cannot get what she wants. Adam and Eve had everything they needed. But they coveted something that was not theirs. They eventually got it, but they committed a sin. Some Israelites in the desert also hoarded manna and hid it under their tents. God already warned them about this, but they still did it.

Paul said, "O wretched man that I am, who can rescue me from this body of death? Only Christ Jesus." We, too, can fight the temptation when Jesus is in us. Jesus overcame the temptation of Satan to have all the material things in the world. He did not bow down to Satan.

When was the last time we became victims of the sin of covetousness?

Second, we must learn to be content with what we have, and share what we have.

Paul in Philippians 4:11-14 wrote, “Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.”

In this modern age, Paul tells us that we need to learn again the value of contentment. Paul is also quick to add that we need to help those who are in need. He was a recipient of the generosity of the Philippian church. They helped him many times and Paul praised God for their kindness.

When was the last time that we have shown kindness?

*“In the midst of injustices and abuses, God listens
to our prayers.”*

Relentless

The theme of the Christ Emphasis Week (CEW) celebration for the 1st semester 2018-2019 is “Relentless” based on the texts Isaiah 54:10 and Matthew 28:16-20.

Isaiah 54:10 declares the relentless love of God for each one of us, and Matthew 28:16-20 is a response to the relentless love of God - to be relentless in doing the Great Commission that Jesus Christ has given to all His disciples.

How did the Prophet Isaiah describe the relentless love of God? According to Bible commentaries, Isaiah used a figure of speech called hyperbole to portray the unrelenting love of God. But I believe that the description of Isaiah was not just a hyperbole. Isaiah really believed, as we all should, that though the mountains will literally shake, and the hills be removed, the unfailing love of God for all of us cannot be shaken.

On the same manner of writing, Paul wrote in Romans 8:38-39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What Isaiah and Paul tell us is that regardless of our situation God’s love will relentlessly pursue us. Thus, those who have felt the relentless love of God have a responsibility to share the Good News to others. Matthew 28:16-20 challenges us to do four things.

There are four action verbs in the Great Commission.

The first one is just two letters: *Go!* It starts with our commitment to go wherever God leads us.

The second action word is to *make disciples*. This is a labor intensive task but we have to do it.

The third verb is to *baptize* the disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is a public

testimony that the disciples have made a decision to follow Jesus Christ.

The fourth action is to *teach* the disciples everything that Jesus commanded them. The emphasis here is to find the commands of Jesus. Do not just do it, but also teach it to others.

The amazing thing about sharing the relentless love of God is that the presence of God will always be with us. Jesus promised, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

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have a responsibility to share the Good News
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love of God is that the presence of God will always
be with us. Jesus promised, “And surely I am with
you always, to the very end of the age.””*

Doing Theological Reflection

Long weekends give us time to rest and to reflect. Let me share some of my notes that can help you in doing theological reflection.

My teacher, Rev. Dr. Johnny V. Gumban, in his article, *The Emerging Theology* (1983), wrote, “Theology is man’s way of talking about God. In the Christian perspective, it is our way of talking about God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ as testified faithfully in the Scriptures.

Talking about God should not imply that God is a static object of thought. He is not a concept or an idea. He is an active God who is known by us through His acts in history. His action in Jesus Christ was a unique, special and fulfilling in whom and through whom all God’s acts in history are to be understood.” David J. Wolpe in his book *Teaching your children about God* (1993) teaches us that theological reflection is an avenue “to wrestle with God, with the idea of God, with the traditions taught in God’s name...Faith is about trust, but it is also about struggle...Learners of all ages should be taught to wrestle.”

The book *Theological Reflection in Ministry and Mission* (2004) reminds us that “Theological reflection begins with the lived experience of a person or group, correlates it with the sources of the Christian tradition and wrestles with the practical implications.”

Indeed to engage in theological reflection is to do practical theology – a theology consciously places itself in the middle of practical concerns. Because of this, I am reminded of Pastor Rodolfo Acosta, my Homiletics teacher, who taught us that, “when you start in Iloilo be sure to end in Jerusalem. When you start in Jerusalem, be sure to end in Iloilo.” We should know how to make the context interact with the text and vice versa.

As we do theological reflection, let us be reminded by the words of one my mentors, Rev. Dr. Domingo J. Diel, Jr., “The Gospel of Jesus Christ must be spoken meaningfully to all kinds of people in their respective circumstances and conditions.”

Be a HERO

August 27, 2018, is National Heroes Day in the Philippines in honor of the heroes who fought for the independence of the country.

How can our faith in Jesus Christ make us a hero? What kind of HERO Jesus expects us to be?

First, a Christian hero is someone who H - Helps those who are in need.

In Matthew 25:42ff Jesus reminds us that when we give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, friendship to a stranger, clothes to those who have none, and we look after those who are sick and in prison, we are doing it to Him.

Second, a Christian hero is someone who E - Enlightens those who are in darkness.

Before we can enlighten others, we first must see to it that we are not in darkness. In Luke 11:36 Jesus said, "Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you." Yes, it is Jesus' light that is shining through us.

Third, a Christian hero is someone who R - Remembers others in prayer.

Jesus taught his disciples in Luke 6:28 not just to bless and pray for those you love but also "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

Fourth, a Christian hero is someone who O - Obeys the will of God.

How can we know the will of God? The will of God is revealed in the Bible. As we read the Bible, we should pray, meditate, and discern what God is revealing to us. The Holy Spirit will surely make it known to us. May we all be a Christian hero!

A Hero Patterned after Jesus

Every year on August 27 is National Heroes Day in honor of Filipino heroes who gave their life for their country. As we remember our national heroes, let us reflect what it means to be a hero patterned after our Lord Jesus Christ.

We will use the word HERO as our outline:

First, a hero, who is patterned after Jesus, is someone who Helps the marginalized and oppressed people.

Jesus devoted his time in helping others. He was there for the women who were not given equal status in their society. He was there for the children who were not given importance. He was there for the foreigners who were discriminated. He was there for the poor who were exploited. He was there for the sick who were abandoned.

Do we extend our help?

Second, a hero, who is patterned after Jesus, is someone who Enlightens the people of their real situation.

Jesus challenged the status quo of the society. He went straight to the temple in his entry to Jerusalem and drove out the businessmen and religious leaders who exploited the people. Jesus did not mind that he will upset the status quo. What He did, as the light of the world, was to expose the evil deeds of the people.

Do we enlighten people?

Third, a hero, who is patterned after Jesus, is someone who brings Reformation.

Jesus challenged the traditions and beliefs of the people. He would say, “You have heard that it was said...and now I say to you...” He challenged the interpretation of the Law of the religious leaders. He quoted the Scriptures so that the people will go back to it and not to the interpretations. His reformation gave birth to the New Covenant people – the Church, a community of believers who are

united in Jesus Christ, and the cause of the Kingdom of God regardless of gender, economic class, race or political status.

Fourth, a hero, who is patterned after Jesus, is someone who Offers his life for the cause that truly counts.

Jesus was consistent in his ministry. He did not mince words. He was radical in his approach. He stood his ground. He died for his cause. And Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Death cannot contain him. His cause continues.

Do we offer our life to the cause of Jesus?

We, too, can be a hero patterned after Jesus.

“Jesus devoted his time in helping others. He was there for the women who were not given equal status in their society. He was there for the children who were not given importance. He was there for the foreigners who were discriminated. He was there for the poor who were exploited. He was there for the sick who were abandoned.”

Principles of Christian Giving

Many are asking why we should give an offering in the church. The primary reason is that giving is natural to a Christian as stewards of God's creation. God is the owner of this world, the creator of everything around us. As part of our thanksgiving to God, we give our lives, positions and possessions to spread the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ.

There are three principles that Paul gives us with regards to Christian giving in Acts 20.

First, give what is yours and do not covet what is not yours. In Acts 20:33 Paul wrote, "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing."

This means that we do not need to wait for the millions that may come our way. We can start by giving what we have.

Second, it is a great joy to give what you have worked for.

Paul clarified that what he gave, he had worked for it. Acts 20:34 says, "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions."

Giving is not difficult when you love the recipient of your gift. But if we do not love the receiver, it is very difficult to give. Let us remember that the ultimate recipient of our gift is Jesus Christ. We should give joyfully as "God loves a cheerful giver."

Third, God gives more blessings to those who give than those who only receive.

Paul wrote in Acts 20:35, "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

This saying of Jesus cannot be found in the four gospels but only in the Book of Acts. Paul is telling us that we can probably give without loving but for sure we cannot love without giving.

We must never neglect the opportunity that God has given us to give. You are assured that your offering will find its way to impact a life for the glory of God.

*“Giving is not difficult when you love the recipient of your gift. But if we do not love the receiver, it is very difficult to give. Let us remember that the ultimate recipient of our gift is Jesus Christ. We should give joyfully as
“God loves a cheerful giver.””*

“We must never neglect the opportunity that God has given us to give. You are assured that your offering will find its way to impact a life for the glory of God.”

Happy GRANDparents Day

Every second Sunday of September we celebrate Grandparents Day in honor of our grandparents.

The meaning of the word “grand” is outstanding or impressive. This means that grandparents should be outstanding parents. How can our grandparents be GRAND? Proverbs 13:22 reminds grandparents to leave an inheritance to their children’s children.

May I encourage the grandparents to:

G - Give their invaluable advice to their grandchildren based on their experiences.

Grandparents have a lot of experiences. They need to impart lessons from those experiences to the next generation so that they will continue the noble legacies of their family, and will not repeat the failures of the past.

R - Remember to pray for their grandchildren.

Grandparents may not be there physically with their grandchildren but they can pray for them. Pray that your grandchildren may know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Pray that they will find friends that will make their lives more meaningful. Pray that they will live out their God-given purpose with passion.

A - Act as exemplary models who are worthy to be emulated.

There is no substitute than making your life as an example to be followed. No matter how many lessons you give, it would still be your life that people see and learn from.

N - Narrate the stories of your families and share them to the next generation.

For sure there are numerous stories that grandparents can tell. Grandchildren must lend their ears to these stories so that they will know their ancestors, and how they are connected to other family members.

D - Delight themselves in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The best legacy that grandparents can leave to their grandchildren is the legacy of faith.

Thank God for Grandparents!

“Grandparents have a lot of experiences. They need to impart lessons from those experiences to the next generation so that they will continue the noble legacies of their family, and will not repeat the failures of the past.”

“The best legacy that grandparents can leave to their grandchildren is the legacy of faith.”

Pass it on!

Lois Wyse summed up the feeling of most grandparents. She wrote, “If I had known how wonderful it would be to have grandchildren, I would have had them first.” You can always see the joy in the eyes of grandparents when they play with their grandchildren. Doug Larson is right when he said, “Few things are more delightful than grandchildren fighting over your lap.” If this was true, then we should listen to the advice of Rita Rudner who wrote, “Have children while your parents are still young enough to take care of them.”

There two lessons we can learn from Lois, the grandmother of Timothy, and from Paul, the spiritual father of Timothy.

First, pass on the faith to the next generation.

2 Timothy 1:5-6 says, “I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.”

What are the things that we are passing on to the next generation? Never forget to leave a legacy of faith.

Second, be a source of encouragement.

2 Timothy 1:8-9 says, “So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don’t be ashamed of me, either, even though I’m in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus.”

Paul told Timothy about his sufferings. He was not complaining to Timothy about his situation. Instead, Paul was using his experiences to encourage Timothy.

May the older generation become a source of encouragement to young people. Many young people are shying away from the old generation. The youth are complaining that the old people always put them down, and feel that they are the only ones who are right.

Let me end this reflection with a poem:

“Grandparents bestow upon their grandchildren
The strength and wisdom that time
And experience have given them.

Grandchildren bless their Grandparents
With a youthful vitality and innocence
That help them stay young at heart forever.

Together they create a chain of love
Linking the past with the future.
The chain may lengthen,
But it will never part...”

~Author Unknown~

“Pass on the faith to the next generation.”

Paragon of Excellence

Who is the very best example or the paragon of excellence that we can imitate? The answer of course is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” In this passage, Paul tells us to follow his example. What we should follow in Paul’s life is his commitment to imitate Jesus Christ.

We cannot deny the fact that human beings are imitators. We learn to talk and walk by imitating those around us. We follow people whom we respect and admire. We pattern our lives after our parents and even after sports people and famous celebrities.

But let us also realize that while we imitate others, there are also people who are imitating us. Some of us do not realize how our lives are influencing other people. Some people learn from us because they observe what we do. This is the reason why Paul tells us to be careful who we imitate because we have the power of influence on other people.

Paul patterned his life after the wrong people before. Now, he imitates Jesus Christ, and he gives us the message that we need to be imitators of Jesus.

First, if we want to imitate Jesus, we need to know who Jesus Christ is – his life, teachings, and ministry. We can never imitate Jesus if we do not read the Bible. We can never follow in the footsteps of the Master and declare ourselves disciples if we do not know who our Master is.

This is why it is imperative for all of us to read the Bible. This is why we must thank our Alma Mater – CPU, and those who give us the opportunity to know Jesus Christ. There are many out there in the world who are trying their best to convince us to follow and imitate them. We can only know whether they are false prophets and teachers if we know the Scriptures well.

Second, if we want to imitate Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up the cross daily and follow only Him.

It is not easy to follow Jesus. It is even dangerous. We need to learn the prayer of Jesus – “Thy will be done.” This means that the focus of our lives should be the will of God and not our own. This is very difficult but it can be done by the grace of God.

Paul made his life an example for others to follow. He modeled Jesus Christ. Now, every one of us has the same responsibility. People are observing us. Every one of us can be an influence on someone’s life.

We should become a paragon of excellence. We must imitate Jesus.

“If we want to imitate Jesus, we need to know who Jesus Christ is – his life, teachings, and ministry.”

“It is not easy to follow Jesus. It is even dangerous. We need to learn the prayer of Jesus – “Thy will be done.” This means that the focus of our lives should be the will of God and not our own. This is very difficult but it can be done by the grace of God.”

Lessons from a Typhoon

Typhoon Ompong (Mangkhut) wreaked havoc in the northern Philippines. It was Signal 4 (about 205km/hr) in the eye of the storm, and it was Category 10 in Hongkong (the highest signal that they can give) when it slammed on their shores.

What can we learn from this typhoon?

First, it reminded us that even in this technologically-advanced world, there are so many things that we cannot control.

We are so enamored with the idea that everything can be remote controlled, Googled, clicked by a mouse or can be tapped in an app. The typhoon reminds us that we have to surrender our lives to God who is the Creator of this world.

Second, it reminded us that we sometimes need a life-threatening event to be closer to God.

We sometimes forget God when everything is smooth sailing. Just like the disciples, we need a tempest to “force” us to come to Jesus and declare that we need help. Why not declare that every day we need God in our lives? The reality is that we are always helpless without God.

Third, it reminded us of what is valuable.

We accumulate many things and think that our value is related to the things that we have. We work so hard to the detriment of our health, and we have less time for our family. When a typhoon strikes or when a flood comes, we began to refocus and realize that our life is valuable, and the time spent with our family is priceless. As Jesus said in Matthew 6, “Life is more important than things.” As my late grandfather used to say, “The important things in life are not things.”

Commune with God

In these busy times, we sometimes forget to pause for a while, meditate on the Word of God, and reflect on the message of God for us.

There is a Jewish story about a father who allowed his son to go to a nearby forest. After some time, the wandering of his son seemed longer and he was concerned. He asked his child why he always goes to the forest. The boy said to his father, “I go there to find God.” His father said to him, “that is a very good thing but don’t you know that God is the same everywhere?” The boy answered, “Yes, I know that. But I am not everywhere.”

The child in the story has found a special place to commune with God in the forest. We can also remember that Jesus would often find time to be alone – to pray and to reflect. We should bear in mind that when we search for God it often involves the changing of our setting and our perspective. We need to find a place that allows us to seek and to reflect. We need to stop what we are doing for a little while and ready ourselves to connect with God.

Karl Barth said something like, “We can flee from God but we cannot escape from Him.” Why not face God since there is no escaping His presence?

“We should bear in mind that when we search for God it often involves the changing of our setting and our perspective. We need to find a place that allows us to seek and to reflect. We need to stop what we are doing for a little while and ready ourselves to connect with God.”

Lessons from a Mentor

Bacolod Bethany Church in Negros Occidental is the only church that celebrates the Johnny V. Gumban Sunday in honor of their former pulpit pastor. Dr. Gumban was my Dean in the College of Theology and a dear mentor.

In honor of his memory, we will reflect on a portion of his lecture entitled “Contextual Filipino Theology: Towards a Filipino Theology.” This lecture was delivered a week after Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr., was assassinated in 1983. The death of Sen. Aquino was one of the many consequences of Martial Law declared by President Marcos on September 21, 1972.

“The Christian community lives in hope. They do not live in a vacuum. They live in the midst of distortions yet they believe that what God has done in Jesus Christ, has the consequence of finality. In Him, all the separation has been reconciled and all distortions of human life have been overcome. For them, hope is both present and future. In the present, hope is present in the process of becoming what we ought to be. In the future, it is being freed from all distortions of human life.

The Christian community is an activist community. People with hope are not apathetic. They live a vital life. It is a community with a mission. The Christ in them makes them always search the Christ in others, participating in the work of Christ of actualizing the God-given potentials in others. They participate in the removal of everything that hinders their actualization. They are not stationary. They are always on the move. They find themselves in the government, in schools, in hospitals, in public markets, always responding to the call of Christ who is in others. They do this not according to their convenience but according to their calling. To paraphrase D.T. Niles, they are like beggars telling other beggars where the food is. In their life with others, they serve as a catalyst to unite those who are separated and isolated. They turn the powerlessness

of the separated and isolated into powerful living. This is why Christians who live their hope are always a threat to any oppressive government or system.

The Christian community lives in *proleptic anticipation*, a term used by Dr. Hans Schwarz in his book *On the Way to the Future*. This means living now in anticipation of what is to come. Christians take history seriously. They do not live in one isolated segment of time. They see in the past a promise, in the present, hope, and in the future, a fulfillment. They see the present as important because of its demand for them to make a decision now.

The Christian response to present situations is made on the basis of the reality, which they perceive in the future. They see this reality in Jesus Christ who to them is future made present now.”

May we become Christians who live with the hope that this world can be reconciled back to God, an activist that works toward the actualization of the gift of God in others, and respond to the present realities with an eschatological perspective that God will ultimately triumph.

“May we become Christians who live with the hope that this world can be reconciled back to God.”

Be an Asset

The Theme for the 2018 U-Day celebration of Central Philippine University was “Be a Centralian A.S.S.E.T. - Accountable to Self, Society and Environment Today and Beyond.”

The dictionary defines it: “An asset is a useful or valuable thing, person, or quality.” The logic then is that when you are considered an ASSET, you are not a LIABILITY.

How then can we be an asset?

First, we should dedicate what we have in our hands to God.

Philippians 3:7-9 says, “But whatever were assets to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him...”

Whatever we have, whatever assets we have would be nothing if we do not have Christ in our lives. These will all be a loss.

The challenge for us is to let Jesus enter our lives and to dedicate our assets to Him to be used for his honor and glory. As Centralians we should be reminded that if Christ is in us, then we will surely become an asset to our family, church, institution, organization or workplace.

Second, we should not be indifferent. We must be involved in things that matter. A Christian must do something that will make this world a better place for the next generation. A Christian must make a commitment to make a difference.

There is a growing sector in our society that does not care anymore about what is happening around us. They are called the apathetic group. Mixed with this group is a sector that acts only in their own self-interest. In addition, is the group that does not strive for excellence - that only accepts things as they are. If we let this sector grow, we will soon see a society that does not care nor wants

to get involved. These sectors will surely be liabilities rather than assets.

Paul reminds us in Romans 14:7-8 that “Whether we live or die, it must be for God, rather than for ourselves. Whether we live or die, it must be for the Lord. Alive or dead, we still belong to the Lord.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetuate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”

Let us go out and be an asset rather than a liability!

“We must be involved in things that matter. A Christian must do something that will make this world a better place for the next generation. A Christian must make a commitment to make a difference.”

What the Past can Teach Us

Last October 1, 2018, Central Philippine University turned 113 years old. We give God all the glory and honor for what He has done in and through CPU.

What lessons can we learn from the past?

First, struggles can be seen as opportunities to widen your perspective when you have faith in Jesus.

Rev. Eric Lund was a Swedish Baptist missionary who was sent to do mission in Spain in the late 1890s. He thought all the while that he was there to share the Gospel to the Spaniards. He struggled in that regard until one day he met a Filipino named Braulio Manikan. When Lund shared the Baptist faith to Manikan, he accepted it and was subsequently baptized through immersion in Barcelona, Spain in 1898. These two started translating the Bible into Hiligaynon, and after two years they received some financial help from the American Baptists that paved the way for them to arrive in Iloilo City. The Philippine Baptist mission is a product of a struggle that was turned into an opportunity.

Second, disappointments can be turned into blessings when you trust in God.

Rev. William O. Valentine was an American Baptist missionary that was sent to Burma in the early 1900s. In that country, he suffered a heat stroke that left him disappointed. He thought that he was in Burma as a missionary for life. Because of his illness, he was sent back to America to recuperate. It turned out to be a blessing. It was in the hospital that he met Ina, a nurse, who later became his wife. The two of them decided to go to the Philippines to do mission. A year after they arrived in Iloilo City, Rev. Valentine became the principal of Jaro Industrial School when it opened on October 1, 1905. Jaro Industrial School is now Central Philippine University. Indeed when we just trust in God, our disappointments can be turned into blessings.

Third, we can overcome biases that can become rallying points for new visions when we turn them over to God.

Missionary Anna V. Johnson arrived in the Philippines and started in 1907 the Baptist Missionary Training School (BMTS). This school was training ground exclusively for women. A graduate was used to be called a “Bible Woman.” Johnson at that time dreamed that a “Bible Woman” will be ordained and will be called a pastor. It did not happen in her lifetime but the dream was continued. The BMTS was later merged with the CPU College of Theology. The building that housed the College of Theology was then aptly named Anna V. Johnson in honor of a missionary who dared to challenge the status quo. Now, her dream is a reality. We now call graduates of the CPU College of Theology pastors, and they can also be ordained and receive the title of Reverend. Yes, we can overcome biases when we surrender them to God. Let us dare to dream new dreams.

*“Disappointments can be turned into blessings
when you trust in God.”*

Happy Birthday, CPU!

Every October 1, Centralians would go to the Philippine-American Cemetery to lay a wreath of flowers to the founding parents of Jaro Industrial School, now Central Philippine University. The tomb of the First Principal of CPU, Rev. William O. Valentine is located there, as well as that of Anna V. Johnson, the founder of Baptist Missionary Training School, the forerunner of the CPU College of Theology.

The school also honors its Baptist heritage. The birth of Central Philippine University is connected with the beginning of the Baptist mission in the Philippines. Our foreparents came from the American Baptist Churches. CPU is also a member institution of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches.

If we speak about heritage, we are speaking about legacy. What are these legacies that we need to remember and continued?

Firstly, our foreparents were committed to Jesus Christ and his mission. Let us remember that CPU was born out of the commitment of the American Baptist missionaries to Jesus Christ who gave the “Great Commission.” Rev. Valentine said that this is “a school that would offer industrial education with a firm base in Christian teachings.”

At the back of Rose Memorial Hall is a painted acrostic of CPU that says, “Christ’s lordship is Proclaimed in this University.”

Secondly, our foreparents have left us the culture of “dignity in labor” through the establishment of the program for work students. CPU is the first school in the Philippines to have this kind of program. Rev. Valentine said, “it was decided that in this new school, no boy, no matter how rich, should be admitted who was not willing to work for his food...All must work for their food.”

Thirdly, our foreparents have left us a legacy of love for alma mater and fellow Centralians. This is a unique and precious heritage that they have passed on to us. We call this legacy the “Central Spirit.”

Fourth, our foreparents have left us a legacy of the unity of *Scientia et Fides* – our motto. Dr. Johnny Gumban wrote, “CPU honors its reputation as a Christian educational institution whose philosophy of education is directed towards the search for truth for the wholeness of life through the creative interaction between science and faith.”

*“Our foreparents were committed to Jesus Christ
and his mission. Let us remember that CPU was
born out of the commitment of the American Baptist
missionaries to Jesus Christ
who gave the “Great Commission.””*

A Contemplative Life

A good friend of mine, Rev. Dr. Frank Reeder of New Jersey, sent me a book entitled *Pursuing God's Will Together* by Ruth Haley Barton. I am drawn by the challenge of the book to practice the spiritual discipline of discernment amidst the busyness of our society. The author defines spiritual discernment as “the ability to distinguish or discriminate between good (that which is of God and draws us closer to God) and evil (that which is not of God and draws us away from God.)” Ignatius of Loyola defined the aim of discernment as “finding God in all things in order that we might love and serve God in all.”

1 Kings 19:11-13 teaches us to be still and listen to God. This is the story of Elijah as he listened to God -- “Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (NLT)

There is an ancient method of reading the Scripture. It is called *Lectio Divina*. This was developed by the monks during Medieval times.

The monks had four steps as their guide. These are *lectio* (reading/listening), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation).

Let me summarize the brief description of *Lectio Divina* by Ruth Haley Barton:

Choose a Scripture passage (not more than six to eight verses). Be silent and prepare yourself. Pray the prayer of Samuel, “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.” (1 Sam 3:9). Be prepared

to read the passage four times and allow time for reflection after each reading.

First reading – listen for the “word” that strikes you. What is the word that is louder than the other words?

Second reading – listen for the way in which your life is touched by this word. How is my life touched by this word?

Third reading – listen for God’s invitation to you. What is God inviting me to do in this word?

Fourth reading – trust in God that He will bring about whatever He is inviting you to do in this word.

Finally, decide to live out the word that you have received.

The monks often refused or were hesitant to listen for another word from God until they are fully living the word that they had received.

May we live a contemplative life.

*“Decide to live out the word that
you have received.”*

Leadership of Men

Ephesians 5:21 and the verses after it are often misinterpreted and abused. There are three key words in this passage that if not properly interpreted in its original text can harm us. These words are: 1. Head 2. Be subject to or Submit to 3. Love.

“The husband is the head of the wife...” There are two different words that mean “head” in Greek. First, *arche* which means “beginning, chief, boss, ruler of a group.” Second, *kephale* which means “a leader that is a servant of all, willing to give up life itself for the body.” Paul did not say that the husband is the *arche* (boss or chief) of the wife but the *kephale* of the wife, a servant-leader who will sacrifice himself for the wife. Jesus is also the *kephale* of the church and not the *arche*.

“Wives should be subject to their husbands in everything.” There are four words in Greek that mean “be subject to or submit to.” First, *hupakouo* which means the obedience of a slave to a master. Second, *peitharcheo* which means obedience to someone who is in authority. Third, *hupotasso* which means to subordinate someone such as the plight of the conquered. Paul did not use these three. Paul used the fourth word - *hupotassomai*. The essential meaning of this word is “be responsive to the needs of” or in modern translation, “be supportive of.” This means that a wife is not a slave nor a conquered person nor someone who will blindly obey her husband. A wife is someone who must be supportive of her husband.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” There are four words in Greek for love. First, *eros* which means sexual encounter. Second, *phileo* which means friendship or a deep liking. Third, *stergo* which means love for family. Paul did not use these three. Paul used the fourth word - *agape*. This word means “giving up of one’s self-interest to serve and care for another.”

This means that husbands must love their wives in the same manner that Jesus loves us – a love with no self-interest. How much do you love your wife? The answer must be – I love my wife the same way as Christ loves the Church.

Declaring God's Faithfulness

Near the end of his life, King David, through a prayer, declared God's faithfulness in his life and in the life of Israel. This prayer is recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:10-14.

How do we declare God's faithfulness?

First, we declare that our God is a personal God who is part of our day to day affairs.

1 Chronicles 29:10 says, "Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting." This verse shows that David acknowledges that God is the God of Israel, the God of the people of Israel, and this God is without end beginning and without end.

What does it mean for us? It means that we, too, must declare that the God in the Bible is our own personal God, the God of our family, the God of our church, the God of our city, the God of our country.

David teaches us that God is not a distant God that we cannot reach. Our God is Immanuel --God is with us. God is interested in what is happening in our lives, in our schools, in our workplaces, in everything that we do. That is our God. We must declare it!

Second, we declare that our God is a powerful God who created us, everything around us, and beyond us.

1 Chronicles 29:11a, 12b "Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours." "In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all."

Some people do not believe that there is a Creator. But if we just look around us we can clearly see that everything around us has an intended purpose. In other words, if we can see a design, then there must be a designer. We must declare that there is God!

Third, we declare that our God is our head and our ruler.

1 Chronicles 29:11b, 12a says, “Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things.”

The moment that we have accepted Jesus Christ in our lives, we must remember that we made a promise to make Him as the Lord and Savior of our lives. When we declare that Jesus is our Lord, it means that He is the ruler of our lives. We must follow His commands. The Kingdom of God means that there is a King, a ruler. And if we want to be part of the Kingdom of God, then we must make a commitment that Jesus is our King.

Fourth, we declare God’s faithfulness by giving ourselves and our resources.

1 Chronicles 29:14 says, “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

Do you know how much King David gave? In 1 Chronicles 29:4 he gave three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings. One talent of gold is about 33 kilograms. On today’s value or as of June 2018, the international price of gold was about US\$41,155.69 per kilogram. At this price, a talent (33 kg) would be worth about \$1.4M. This means that 3,000 talents is = $\$1.4\text{M}/\text{talent} \times 3,000 \text{ talents} = \4.2B or P2.3T. This is just the gold that David gave excluding the silver. And because of his example, the people also gave 15,000 talents of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 8,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. In other words, they gave a very large contribution to the ministry of the temple.

We must remember that when we give to the church, our contribution will be used to do mission. Your life and your resources will have an impact on the life of others. As one community of faith, let us continue to declare that God is faithful yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The Missionary Spirit

October is Mission Month. As Christians, we have to realize that we are missionaries. Doing mission is non-negotiable. How do we develop the missionary spirit?

First, always be prepared that there will be persecution against the Christians.

Acts 8:1 tells the story of the persecution of early Christians -- “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem.” Severe persecution was prevalent in the first 300 years of Christianity.

Modern studies about church history show that in periods of government or societal persecution, there is rapid church growth; and in periods of no persecution, the growth is just steady or low. Are we going to wait for persecution in order for us to do mission? We must do mission since it is our way of life as Christians.

Second, be willing to die for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Acts 8 tells us that Saul gave the go signal to kill Stephen. Later on “Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.” Stephen was willing to die for his faith. How about us? If it would come to that point in our lives, would we not deny Jesus Christ?

An early Christian theologian, Tertullian wrote, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” This was true in the life of the Saul who became Paul. The one who persecuted the Christians was transformed to become the greatest missionary of all time.

Close to home, we have the story of the Hopevale Martyrs. On December 19, 1943, American Baptist missionaries were killed by the Japanese forces in Hopevale, Tapaz, Capiz. They willingly died for their faith.

Third, widen your perspective in facing the risks and see it as opportunities in spreading the Gospel.

Acts 8:4 gave us a picture how the early Christians responded to the persecution -- “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”

Last October 3-4, a lecturer discussed risk-based thinking in relation to ISO 9001:2015. Risk-based thinking is an approach in dealing with all issues to minimize negative results. This means that you have to think of all the risks involved in doing a certain activity. In this approach, you also should think about the opportunities that the risks will bring.

In the New Testament church, they have already started “Risk-based thinking.” They acknowledged that there is a persecution, and all Christians will one way or another be persecuted. But they saw it as an opportunity. They saw the persecution as an opportunity to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they would be scattered.

Remember that those who have the missionary spirit are Christians who know what is the mission for, and who sends them to do mission.

“Be willing to die for the cause of Jesus Christ.”

Calm amidst the Storm

The United States East Coast made a lot of preparations before Hurricane Sandy hit them. Weather experts were saying that “the collision of Sandy with a cold front from the north could create a super-charged storm bringing floods, high winds and even heavy snow across a swath of eastern states...Meteorologists have nicknamed the phenomenon a “Frankenstorm.”“ Some called it a “Perfect Storm.”

Let me share to you a reflection from a good friend, Rev. Dr. Frank Reeder, pastor of Seaview Baptist Church of Linwood, New Jersey:

“Here comes Hurricane Sandy! The storm clouds gather. So where is the good news? I have been meditating on Isaiah 43:1-2. “But now says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you O Israel, Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.”

The weather forecasters are telling us to prepare for another time of testing. We can gather in the gallons of water, gas up the generator, make extra ice and lay in some nonperishables. But the first place I want to turn is to the one who speaks words of assurance to me. He’s the one who spoke to the waves, “Peace, be still.” And the tempest subsided. The biggest tempest is often internal. Let us quiet ourselves and hear Jesus’ gentle yet powerful words of calm.”
(<http://seaviewbaptist.com>)

As we face the different tempests of our lives, let us be assured that throughout all generations our God is good, faithful and merciful.

Lead like Jesus

The deadline of the filing of the Certificate of Candidacy (COC) for the May 2019 Philippine elections was on October 17, 2018. There are old and new faces who want to become the next leaders of our country.

What does it mean to be a Christian leader? Jesus showed us how to be a great leader. During the last supper, Jesus exemplified the type of leadership that he has shown right from the start – he took off his outer garment, wrapped a towel on his waist, got a basin of water, and started washing his disciples' feet.

In this imagery of leadership found in John 13:1-17, Jesus teaches us three things:

First, a Christian leader must have humility. Jesus reminds us that as leaders we must be willing to take off our titles, our positions, and the tendency to make ourselves the center of everything. Are you willing to take off your titles?

Dr. Johnny V. Gumban once said, “By nature, man is self-centered, without the love of God we cannot love one another. Relate to people with the Christ within you.” Yes, it is only because of Christ that we can humble ourselves and serve others.

Second, a Christian leader must be service-oriented. Jesus wants to instill in our hearts that there is no scarcity of feet to wash.

What does it mean to be service-oriented? It is always being ready to say “What can I be of service to?” and then truly mean it. Like our outreach work in the church, institution or organization. Do we do that because of tradition or requirement? Serving others should be part of our life.

Third, a Christian leader must love those whom they are serving. Jesus teaches us that we cannot choose whom we will serve. A Christian leader must have a heart to serve a person irrespective of race, culture or religion.

As Jesus Christ taught us, we must go to any situation with no prejudices but only love for our neighbor.

We have to pray and hope that our next leaders will lead like Jesus.

“Jesus reminds us that as leaders we must be willing to take off our titles, our positions, and the tendency to make ourselves the center of everything.”

“Jesus teaches us that we cannot choose whom we will serve. A Christian leader must have a heart to serve a person irrespective of race, culture or religion.”

Lessons from the Sea of Galilee

Last 2018 we had the privilege of going to Israel. We lived near the Sea of Galilee for 3 days. This lowest freshwater lake in the world is also called Kinneret or Kinnereth, Lake of Gennesaret, or Lake Tiberias in the Gospels. It is approximately 53 km in circumference and has been utilized from Biblical times up to now as a major source of tap water, agriculture, and fishing.

In the Gospels, there are many stories that happened in the Sea of Galilee or in its seashore. Let me mention only three.

In the first story, at the seashore of the Sea of Galilee Jesus called his first disciples -- Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. From being fishermen, Jesus now called them fishers of men.

The challenge for us is to remember that when we accepted Jesus in our lives, we have become fishers of people.

In the second story, they were sailing on a boat and in the middle of the Sea of Galilee they encountered a storm. The disciples woke Jesus up. Jesus rebuked the storm and it became calm. Then He asked them, "Where is your faith?"

We must remember that we need to have faith in Jesus in all the storms we may encounter in life.

In one of the post-resurrection stories, Jesus was at the seashore cooking fish and a bread on burning coals. When the disciples came ashore with a miraculous catch of fish, Jesus talked to Peter, one on one. He asked Peter three times "Do you love me more than these?" and Peter also answered three times in the affirmative. Jesus made sure that Peter would really commit to feeding the lambs and the sheep after he denied Jesus three times.

May we all fulfill our commitment to Jesus Christ and the ministry of the church.

The Meaningful Earthquake

Last November 2018 Panay Island was hit with a series of earthquakes and aftershocks with a magnitude of 4.4 and 4.9 and some smaller ones of 3+. According to studies, 90% of the world's earthquakes occur in the Ring of Fire, which the Philippines is part of.

In the Bible, you can also see the occurrence of earthquakes in ancient Israel. The most significant earthquake that happened in Biblical times was during the death of the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross. Matthew 27:51 says, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split." It probably had a high magnitude in the Richter Scale.

What lessons can we learn from the earthquake that shook the earth during the death of Jesus? When the curtain was torn into two, it tells us that:

First, everyone who receives Jesus Christ in his/her life can approach God anytime, and anywhere.

The Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant during the time of the first temple built by King Solomon. In the Ark was the Stone Tablets in which God inscribed the Ten Commandments. The Israelites believed that the presence of God resided there. The High Priest during Biblical times can only enter it once a year during the Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices.

With the veil torn into two, it tells us that in Jesus Christ there is no appointed time or appointed place where we can meet God. We can meet God anytime and anywhere.

Second, Jesus is the sacrificial animal that takes away our sins.

In the Holy of Holies, the High Priest would sprinkle the blood from the sacrifices and also incense in front of the Mercy Seat.

With the veil torn into two, it tells us that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is once and for all. There is no need to offer any sacrifices anymore.

Presently, the only remnant of the First or Second Temple is the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall. This is considered to be the most sacred place in modern Israel. The Israelis mostly pray for the restoration of the Temple and for peace. People from all over the world would also come here to pray and leave their prayer notes in the splits of rocks. After some time, Rabbis would collect the notes and pray that God will answer the requests there.

Last October 31, 2018, together with my wife, we were given the privilege to pray at the Wailing Wall, and also read Psalm 93 in a part of the tunnel at the back of the Western Wall believed to be nearest the ancient Holy of Holies. But you know what? The veil was already torn into two by one meaningful earthquake. God hears our prayers anytime and anywhere.

*“Everyone who receives Jesus Christ in his/her life
can approach God anytime, and anywhere.”*

Live out your Potential

Every November 1 most of us go to the cemetery to visit the graves of our departed loved ones. This is a notable tradition of remembering the past and bringing into the present the legacies that they have left us.

As I was passing by the tombstones and reading the names of the dead, I silently asked: What kind of life have they lived? What was the impact of their life to their family and friends? What were their legacies? I pondered upon these questions and it led me to Psalm 139.

Verses 13-16 says,

“Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother’s womb. I thank you and praise you, O God. It is amazing to think about. Body and soul, I am fearfully and wonderfully made! I worship You in adoration for Your works are marvelous! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you. I thank you and praise you, O God.”

There are three important things that we can learn from Psalm 139:

First, we are wonderfully made by God. As such, each one of us has a purpose in life and was given by God a potential.

Second, we cannot run away from God. Because of this, we cannot fulfill our purpose and reach our potential without God.

Third, we are an open book to God. This tells us that no other person knows the limits of our potential but only God.

Let us live out our potential!

The Fulfillment of Prophecies - a Reason to Thank God

Every November is Thanksgiving month and there are many things that we can be thankful to God. You may have your own list of things to thank God for or if you still do not have a list yet, then you can list it in your mind or better still, write it down.

We have many reasons to be thankful for. When we were in Israel, one of the things that struck us is that the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies in our modern times. Not all prophecies in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the New Testament. Prophecies in the New Testament are still being fulfilled and will be fulfilled. We need to be thankful that prophecies are being fulfilled. That means that the Bible is true.

Let me mention two prophecies that were fulfilled in the last 70 years.

First, the desert will bloom. The prophecy in Isaiah 41:18-20 is being fulfilled in our lifetime.

Our guide recited from memory the words of God written by Isaiah, "I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set junipers in the wasteland, the fir, and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it."

You would have to see it to believe it. There are greenhouses all over the wilderness that were just put up 10 to 20 years ago only. How did the rivers flow into barren heights? They have black hoses all over the greenhouse and this drip irrigation brings water to the plants. Imagine all kinds of trees and fruit trees -- dates, olive trees, bananas, mangoes, vegetables, and other fruits and trees in the desert. How did they do it? They brought fertile soil from other parts of Israel and brought them to the desert. Agriculture is now a top contributor to the economy of Israel. The prophecy has been fulfilled.

Second, the restoration of Israel. Can you imagine that modern Israel is just 70 years old this 2018? At the year 70 AD, the Second Temple was destroyed by the Roman Empire. Jews were scattered all over the world - a great diaspora. Due to that destruction, the only remaining remnant of the Temple is the Western Wall or Wailing Wall.

For thousands of years, the Jewish people wandered the world in exile. But the Word of God is true. God would bring back them back to their land. On May 15, 1948, the State of Israel declared its independence. Just months before that on November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 181. The Philippine President Manuel Roxas instructed Carlos P. Romulo to cast the crucial vote at the UN to separate Israel from Palestine. The Philippines is the only Asian country to support the creation of the state of Israel.

May 15, 1948, happened to be a Sabbath. Do you know what they read in the synagogue throughout the world on the day? It was an ancient prophecy from Amos 9:11-15:

“I will restore David’s fallen tabernacle. I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins. I will rebuild it as it used to be . . . And I will bring my people Israel back from exile. They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine. They will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them.”“

Israel was planted in their own land again. The prophecy has been fulfilled. What does it mean for Christians? The Messiah has been prophesied. We believe that the Messiah is our Lord Jesus Christ. We have to believe that Jesus is coming back again!

Let us be thankful that what is in the Bible is true, and the God of the Bible will be faithful to fulfill what is written there.

Thank God for Archaeological Discoveries

When you walk in the land of Israel, you are literally walking in a land rich in history. When we were there, I received a message that says, “Sing the song ‘I walked today where Jesus walked.’” The song goes this way, “I walked today where Jesus walked, In days of long ago. I wandered down each path He knew, with reverent step and slow. Those little lanes, they have not changed, A sweet peace fills the air. I walked today where Jesus walked And felt His presence there.”

One of the things that we can be thankful is that archaeological discoveries in Israel prove that the Bible is true.

Let me mention a few of the things that we saw there:

First, the wonder of the architecture and engineering of Masada. This place was built by Herod the Great as a fortress. It overlooks the Dead Sea. The aqueduct system is a marvel. Herod built this as a place of refuge in case of a revolt. This is also the site of the last stand of the Jews against the Romans in the year 74 AD after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

What is interesting for Christians is that the Gospel of Matthew recorded that Herod the Great was the king who was approached by the Magi to ask where the king of the Jews was born. He subsequently ordered the massacre of the innocents in order to kill Jesus. This record of Matthew was proven true by the archaeological finding that indeed there was a person named Herod the Great.

Second, the excavation of the “Pilate stone” in Caesarea Maritima. Outside the New Testament, no official record can be found that talks about Pontius Pilate. Some doubted if Pontius Pilate ever existed. But in 1961, a group of Italian archaeologists found a damaged limestone with a Latin inscription reads in English, “To the Divine Augusti [this] Tiberieum...Pontius Pilate...prefect of Judea...has dedicated [this].”

For Christians, this piece of stone is an affirmation that there was a historical person by the name of Pontius Pilate, a Roman prefect or governor of Judaea between 26 to 36 AD under Emperor Tiberius. He was the one who presided at the trial of Jesus and gave the order to crucify Jesus. This means that the story about Jesus' trial, suffering and crucifixion is true.

Third, the discovery of the synagogue in Capernaum. What is interesting in the ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum is that there were two synagogues. One was built in the 4th century AD on top of another ruined synagogue during the time of Jesus. There is now a line at the ruins that indicates where the floor of the older synagogue ends, and the newer synagogue begins. The synagogue from the time of Jesus was built with the local (black) basalt rock.

The ruins of the synagogue in Capernaum only proves true what we can find in Mark 1:21. It says, "They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach." Capernaum was at the center of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. This is also the hometown of Peter, James, Andrew and John, and the tax collector Matthew.

Indeed, archaeological findings that prove the Bible is true are reasons to give thanks to God.

"Archaeological findings that prove the Bible is true are reasons to give thanks to God."

Thank You Lord for Setting us Free

Paul in Romans 6:17-18 wrote, “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

We need to give thanks to God for through Jesus Christ we have been set free from the slavery of sin.

What is it that set us free from the bondage of sin? What set us free from the bondage of sin is the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the basis of Christianity. This is the basis of our faith.

When we were in Israel, we saw archaeological discoveries and places that prove that the events in the Gospels especially the life, death, and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ really happened. Let me mention three:

First, the olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane are more than 2,000 years old. These olive trees are there even before the New Testament times. This is an affirmation of what is written in Matthew 26:36 - “Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’“

Second, the ancient Via Dolorosa - the way of suffering - became the floor of churches in Jerusalem.

The Bible tells us that Jesus carried the cross from the Praetorium to the Golgotha where He was crucified. Matthew 27:26-31 indicates that Jesus was scourged and then brought to the governor’s headquarters (Praetorium), and from there Jesus was led towards the site of the crucifixion. Along the way, Simon from Cyrene was forced to carry the cross of Jesus (Mark 15:21). A portion of a song entitled Via Dolorosa says, “Down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem that day The soldiers tried to clear the narrow

streets but the crowd pressed in to see the Man condemned to die on Calvary.”

Third, the tomb is empty. There are two possible places in Jerusalem where Jesus was buried - in the Holy Sepulchre Church, or in the Garden Tomb. Both of these places have one thing in common - nobody remained buried there. Jesus had risen from the dead.

The life, ministry, and death of Jesus were validated by his resurrection.

These places in Jerusalem prove true what is written in the Gospels. This is one of the reasons to give thanks to God.

What is our response since we have been saved by Jesus from the bondage of sin? How do we say thanks to God? The answer of Paul is this, “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” This means that a life of thanksgiving to God is a life that lives what is right in front of God.

Let us be thankful that through Jesus Christ we are now people who always think and do what is right.

“What set us free from the bondage of sin is the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the basis of Christianity. This is the basis of our faith.”

Thank God for His open Gestures

In Luke 15:11ff we read the story of the Prodigal Son and the Loving Father. In that story, we see some notable gestures of the father. What kind of gestures do we see that will lead us to thank God?

First, the open hand of the father symbolizes the freedom that God has given us. The younger son in the story asked for his inheritance. The father gave his son his allotted property. Along with it, the father gave his son his permission – to do what he wanted to do. This is true with us also. God gave us the freedom to do what we want to do. We thank God for the free will that He gave us. But like the Prodigal Son in the story, we too have abused our freedom. We must use our freedom to glorify God through our actions.

Second, the open arms of the father symbolizes the great love of God for us. The father in the story opened his arms, hugged his son and kissed him. He was waiting for his son to come back. God is like this father. God is waiting for us with open arms, ready to embrace us if we would like to come back to His presence. Thank God for his great love for us.

Third, the open heart of the father symbolizes the mercy of God for us. The father in the story could have turned his heart into stone. He could have cursed his son for the ingratitude and disrespect that he had done. But the father's heart was full of compassion. His heart was open both to the younger son who came back and to the older son who got angry. God's mercy to all of us never comes to an end. Thank God for His grace that continues to sustain us.

“God is waiting for us with open arms, ready to embrace us if we would like to come back to His presence.”

God is amazing

Hongkong is called Asia's Global City. Indeed it is a melting pot of many people. Here are some of my reflections after visiting that city.

First, God is amazing.

The chatter of different nationalities in the streets, tram, train, and the ferry is a sound to behold. Upon hearing so many languages spoken at the same time, I am in complete amazement. This is God's way of reminding us that we are all created differently yet unique. Let us praise God for this mystery.

Second, our differences do not mean we cannot find a common thread.

Just falling in line at the airport can bring us together and strike up a conversation. God is reminding us that we are all humans – with the same basic concerns and goals. This means that we can set aside our differences and focus on our commonalities. We need to let go of our pride.

Third, enjoy the creation of God.

We need to go out and experience the beautiful creation of God. My wife and I had the privilege also of visiting Shenzhen, China especially the Window of the World. All the landmarks of the world can be seen here in a miniature version. God reminds us to visit places and have fun together. It can recharge your soul.

“Our differences do not mean we cannot find a common thread.”

Seek Godly Contentment

Last 2012 Pagadian became famous because of the pyramid scam that happened there. The scam affected many people who lost their millions of pesos in this “investment” that featured a 50 to 60% interest rate for a period of just 15 days.

The company that scammed the people boasted that they were investing the money in the US money market. The people were easily ensnared by this quick and easy money scheme. A friend told me that just three months ago the streets here were lined up with brand new cars. Now, they are gone.

What reflections can we learn from this?

First, we must aim for godly contentment. We must believe that God is sufficient for us. Let us not seek satisfaction from other things in this world.

1 Timothy 6:6-7 reminds us “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.”

Second, covetousness will lead us to evil ways. It is very true that an excessive desire for something will make us fall into temptation.

There is nothing wrong with having money. What is wrong is loving money.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 says “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

Third, we must pursue the things that God desires for us.

1 Timothy 6:11 tells us “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.”

We must live righteous lives with faith and love as our major life’s principles. We must learn to be patient and wait for God. We must practice meekness especially to those who do bad things to us.

“We must believe that God is sufficient for us. Let us not seek satisfaction from other things in this world.”

“There is nothing wrong with having money. What is wrong is loving money.”

Why was Jesus Born in Bethlehem? - Part 1

According to Luke 2:4, 39, Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. They traveled about 128 kilometers from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Bible scholars determined that their route from Nazareth was south along the flatlands of the Jordan River, then west over the hills surrounding Jerusalem, and then into Bethlehem. It was about 8 to 10 days or more of travel, considering that Mary was pregnant.

There are many reasons that can answer the question: why Bethlehem? Let me just cite two Old Testament prophecies.

The first prophecy is the one given by the Prophet Micah 700 years before the birth of Jesus. Micah 5:2 says, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” This prophecy states that the Messiah will be from Bethlehem.

The census conducted by the Roman Empire required the Jews to go back to their hometown. Both Joseph and Mary traced their roots to Bethlehem. One can only marvel with this divine providence: the Roman census became a way to fulfill an ancient prophecy.

The second prophecy is that the Messiah will come from the line of David. Bethlehem is the birthplace of David. Here are two Old Testament passages:

Psalms 132:11 says, The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath he will not revoke: “One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.” It is not a mere man or woman who made this oath. It was God himself who swore an oath.

The Prophet Jeremiah confirmed this oath of God in Jeremiah 23:5-6. Once again, it was God who said this -- “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will

live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior.”

Aside from being the place where David was born, Bethlehem was also the place where Prophet Samuel crowned David king of Israel. Ruth and Boaz, great-grandparents of David were also married in Bethlehem.

Romans 1:2-4 affirms the fulfillment of the oath of God to David -- “God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life, he was born into King David’s family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Indeed Jesus who is from the line of David, born in Bethlehem, is the Messiah, our Lord, and Savior.

“Aside from being the place where David was born, Bethlehem was also the place where Prophet Samuel crowned David king of Israel. Ruth and Boaz, great-grandparents of David were also married in Bethlehem.”

Why was Jesus Born in Bethlehem? – Part 2

Have you ever wondered of the significance of Bethlehem? Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem? In the Part 1 of this reflection, it was cited that one of the reasons why Jesus was born in Bethlehem was because of prophecies found in the Old Testament - Micah 5:2, Psalm 132:11, Jeremiah 23:5-6. These prophecies were affirmed in the life of Jesus Christ, as written by Paul in Romans 1:2-4.

Here are two more additional reasons for the significance of Bethlehem:

First, Jesus is the Bread of Life and Bethlehem in Hebrew means the “House of Bread.”

In John 6:35 Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.” The Exodus experience is celebrated during the Feast of Passover. One emphasis in that celebration is the story about the unleavened bread.

The Israelites were in a hurry to get out of Egypt and they had no time to prepare and to bake bread. The fastest way was to have an unleavened bread, without yeast. Thus, the celebration of the Passover Meal with the unleavened bread. Christians celebrate this during Communion Sunday or the Lord’s Supper. The bread now symbolizes the body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was broken for our redemption.

Paul also wrote symbolically of the yeast in relation to sin. 1 Corinthians 5:7 says, “Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.”

Second, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a little town, the least of all clans, to remind us that God can work from small beginnings.

Let us compare two passages – one from the Old Testament, and the other from the New Testament. Micah 5:2 says, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over

Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” On the other hand, Matthew 2:6 ““But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.””

Is there a difference? Yes! The second line was reversed in meaning by Matthew. Micah stated that Bethlehem was a town of little significance and that great thing would happen there. Matthew, on the other hand, stated that Bethlehem is not a town of little significance because great things would happen there. Matthew had the benefit of writing after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus while Micah prophesied it.

The point here is that God chose something insignificant like Bethlehem to bring about great things. This is to affirm what the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest!” and not glory to any other person or any other popular place. Bethlehem is a reminder that God works in little things, in unexpected ways, and that God fulfills His promises.

“Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a little town, the least of all clans, to remind us that God can work from small beginnings.”

Be prepared

Last December 3, 2012, flash reports were urging Filipinos to prepare as typhoon “Pablo” (international name “Bopha”) will enter the Philippines and will hit several areas in Visayas and Mindanao. It was reported that the typhoon could be the strongest to strike the country at that time, with the U.S. Navy and Air Force Joint Typhoon Warning Center (JTWC) classifies it early Sunday as a “super typhoon” with winds that could peak at 231 kilometers per hour (kph). Pablo has maximum sustained winds of 185 kph near the center and gustiness of up to 220 kph, the state weather bureau, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomic Services Administration (Pag-asa) reported.

We were glad that we had this early warning so that we could prepare for what was coming. Two to three days of warning was sufficient time to plan for any eventualities.

How about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? Was there ample time to prepare for it?

It was in the year 740 BC when the Prophet Isaiah uttered a prophecy about the birth of our Savior. Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

It was 700 years later that Jesus Christ was born in 4-6 BC. The people were given sufficient time to prepare for the birth of Jesus. But they did not take heed. John 1:10-11 says, “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”

Only a few received Him. But those who believed in Him, He gave them the right to become children of God. Are we one of those who believed in Jesus?

Let it be that as we start the Christmas season, we will remember the coming of the Lord more than 2,000 years ago and that He is coming back again. We are given enough warning. Let us be prepared!

Prophecy and Fulfillment

The end of the world did not happen on December 21, 2012 as predicted by the Mayan calendar. Prophecies outside of the Bible with regards to this are all false and cannot be trusted.

What about the prophecies of the birth of Jesus, our Lord and Savior? Where can we find it in the Old Testament? Are there verses in the New Testament about its fulfillment?

Let us look at a few of these prophecies and their fulfillment:

First, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2 says, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Its New Testament fulfillment can be found in Matthew 2:1 that says, “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem...”

When King Herod asked the priests and the teachers of the law, they all answered: Bethlehem.

Second, the Messiah would be born of a virgin.

Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

Luke 1:26-27, “In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.”

Third, the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah.

Genesis 49:10, “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”

In the genealogy of Jesus, Luke 3:33 states that Jesus is from the lineage of Judah: “the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah...”

Fourth, the Messiah would be heir to King David’s throne.

Prophecy: Isaiah 9:7 “Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

Fulfillment: Luke 1:32-3 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Let us be assured that Jesus Christ is indeed the Messiah and that He is coming again.

*“Let us be assured that Jesus Christ is indeed the
Messiah and that He is coming again.”*

Jesus, our Shepherd

Many years ago in the hills of Katipunan, Tapaz, Capiz in a place they called “Hopevale”, 11 American Baptist missionaries and one little boy, together with other Americans who sought refuge with them, were most probably preparing for their Christmas celebration. This could have been their second Christmas since they evacuated on 1942. But it was not meant to happen. On December 20, 1943, the American Baptist missionaries, who were assigned to Central Philippine College, Capiz Emmanuel Hospital, Filamer Christian College, and churches, were executed by the Japanese soldiers who captured them.

On December 17-20, 2018, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, together with Central Philippine University, Filamer Christian University, Iloilo Mission Hospital, Capiz Emmanuel Hospital, spearheaded the celebration of the 75th Hopevale Commemoration. The memorial of their martyrdom was celebrated in the following venues: Central Philippine University, Katipunan Evangelical Church, Hopevale Baptist Church, and Filamer Christian University.

As we celebrate Christmas every year, may we remember the sacrifices of Christian martyrs throughout history. And ultimately, let us not forget that Jesus who was born in Bethlehem, gave His life and died on Calvary. This Jesus, who was visited by the shepherds when he was born, is the same Jesus who is our Good Shepherd.

Here is a poem by Rev. Dr. Francis Howard Rose, one of the “Hopevale Martyrs”, entitled “Jesus, Thou tender Shepherd”:

“Jesus, Thou tender Shepherd of the sheep,
In vain we try this mountain trail to keep,
Keep Thou Thy flock within safeguarded door
And in Thy bosom, O bring us home once more.

Life’s dark enigmas everywhere abound,
Make, without Thee, a ceaseless nightmare round
Where shall we turn, in turmoil, loss, and strife?
Thou are our answer, Thou are Eternal Life.

Thou are the Truth, Incarnate Word of God,
All others fail to point us out the road.
Though seek we rest, our Quest will never cease
Until we find Thee, find Thee our Perfect Peace.

Jesus, Thou Mighty Shepherd of the sheep,
We trust our all, Thy pierced hands to keep
Against that day, in Thy fair Morning land,
When, in Thy Presence, before Thy face we stand.”

*“As we celebrate Christmas every year, may we
remember the sacrifices of Christian martyrs
throughout history.”*

A Humbling Experience

One of the popular talks of the town or most probably the talk of the country last December 2012 was the devastating dynamite punch of Juan Miguel Marquez that sent Filipino ring icon Manny Pacquiao face down on the canvass in the 6th round of their fourth duel. While Manny was twitching, the Filipinos were stunned and silenced. The newspaper headline summed up the feeling of his fans – “Horrors: Pacman falls.”

The post-fight interview showed that Manny humbled himself. He gave credit to his opponent, he thanked God for their safety, and he accepted defeat gracefully. Everyone around him seemed not to humble themselves: his mother blamed his loss to the pastors who are distracting him; an American priest blamed it to the missed attendance of Pacquiao in a Holy Mass; a political adviser blamed Pacquiao for not wearing the rosary, praying to Mama Mary and making a sign of a cross.

This Christmas season is a time to be reminded once again to humble ourselves. This is often repeated: the middle letter of the word pride is “I”. God indeed opposes the proud yet gives grace to the humble.

Paul gives us a vivid reminder in Philippians 2:5-8: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!”

“God indeed opposes the proud yet gives grace to the humble.”

Bow down to Jesus Alone

Whether we like it or not, the Christmas story has been diluted. We have so many traditions and rituals that are based on the Christmas story but sadly, not Biblical. One of these traditions is the worship of Mary and Joseph. Is this tradition Biblical?

To answer that question leads us back to Matthew 2:11. This verse says, “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.”

What lessons can we learn from the verse?

First, the verse clearly states that the Magi bowed down and worshiped Jesus. They did not bow down to Mary, to Joseph, to the animals or to anyone or anything except to Jesus only. The records also show that the Magi did not even bow down to King Herod.

We need to check ourselves. Is our worship solely focused on Jesus Christ? Or are we worshipping other people, other things? Do we go to church and bow down to Jesus only? Or do we bow down to others also? These are difficult questions yet we must answer them.

Second, the verse clearly states also that the Magi brought their treasures, and presented their gifts to Jesus. They did not offer the gifts to Mary, Joseph or to others. They did not also present any gifts to King Herod when they passed by Jerusalem.

All of us have been given by God various gifts, and also treasures. Do we offer our gifts to Jesus? Do we offer our treasures to Jesus? For some, they offer their gifts to the gods of fame and money. For some, they mistakenly offer their gifts and treasures to religious ministers thinking that it is for God’s glory. Let us check ourselves on this.

As we celebrate Christmas, may the story of the Magi lead us to search our souls. Am I worshipping Jesus alone? Am I giving my treasures and gifts to Jesus?

Good News of Great Joy

Every year for many years now, thousands of people would visit and witness the opening of lights at Central Philippine University. The switching on is always followed by a beautiful symphony of fireworks display that lit the sky with arrays of colors and shapes. You could always feel the collective joy of people as they say “oohs” and “aahs”. It is a sight to behold every year.

The shepherds in the first Christmas story were in the field tending their flock one night. Suddenly an angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

What is this great joy?

J – Jesus, our Lord, and Savior, was born.

Let us proclaim the message of the angels to the whole world that we do not need to wait for a Savior.

What did the shepherds do to find this great joy?

O – Obeyed the command for them to go to Bethlehem.

Oftentimes people who heard the Good News of salvation do not act immediately. They tell themselves to wait for the last minute like the thief in the cross with Jesus. We must obey God’s commands for they are not just ideals to be admired but more importantly, they are imperatives.

What is the effect of this great joy to them?

Y – Yield their lives to Jesus and spread the Good News.

Let us be like the shepherds who surrendered their lives to Jesus, and committed themselves to tell others about the great joy that they had found.

How do we Spend our Time?

Every time the year ends, we can hear comments like “I am running out of time”, “Time flies”, “I want more time” and many more related to time.

Mitch Albom in his book, *The Time Keeper*, answers a difficult question, “Why does God limit our days?”

Here is a conversation from Father Time in the book:

“Everything man does today to be efficient, to fill the hour? It does not satisfy. It only makes him hungry to do more. Man wants to own his existence. But no one owns time. When you are measuring life, you are not living it.”

“There is a reason God limits our days.”

“Why?”

“To make each one precious.”

“With endless time (here on Earth), nothing is special. With no loss or sacrifice, we can’t appreciate what we have.”

How then should we spend our time? How did Jesus spend his time?

Dr. Charles Stanley listed 8 things that Jesus did with His time here on Earth.

1. Prayer.

Jesus wakes up early every day to pray. He always found time to pray.

2. Time with family and friends.

He attended weddings with his family. He was always in a dinner with people. He spent time with his close friends like Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. He also called his disciples as friends.

3. Work.

Jesus was doing his four-pronged pattern of ministry: preaching, healing, teaching, and organizing.

Charles Stanley reminds us that:

“Being active does not automatically mean that you are effective.”
“Being busy does not automatically mean that you are productive.”
“Being overbooked and overextended does not automatically mean that you are profitable.”

4. Worship time.

Did Jesus go to church? Yes, he was always in a synagogue or visiting the temple. Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

5. Time to read, study or discuss the Word of God.

Jesus frequently quoted from the Scriptures. This shows that he engaged himself in studying the Scriptures. We should have a conscious effort to read and study the Bible.

6. Relaxation and Rest.

Did Jesus relax and rest? Yes. When things got busy, Jesus in many instances told his disciples: We should go to a deserted place. Sometimes they went to have a boat ride and eat broiled fish by the seaside.

Are you burnt-out? Have an R and R.

7. Sleep.

Our society now is described as a sleep-deprived society. Science tells us that hormones are rebalanced when we sleep. Cells related to immunity also multiply fastest and healing is most effective during sleeping time.

Did Jesus sleep? Yes. Jesus even slept in a boat ride.

8. Fitness and health.

The number 1 New Year's resolution is related to fitness and health. But are we being true to our promise?

Jesus exercised. He was always walking – one of the best exercises available to all of us. Jesus also followed the diet in the Old Testament which made Him healthy.

Let us remember that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We must take care of it.

“We should have a conscious effort to read and study the Bible.”

New life in Jesus Christ

As we face another new year, we must remember that as Christians we are now new creatures, and our old selves are gone.

Let me mention three verses that remind us of the new things that we should do.

First, we must do things that give life. John 10:10 tells us that Jesus came to give us life, and to have it more abundantly. This means that we must affirm actions that give life and shun things that destroy life.

Second, we must think and do what is right. Romans 6:18 reminds us that instead of being slaves of sin, we are now slaves of righteousness. Jesus Christ has set us free so that our choices are according to the will of God.

Third, we must live victorious lives because Jesus has defeated Satan. In Matthew 4:1-11 we can see that Jesus has defeated Satan. This means that all temptations of the Devil to us can be defeated because we have Jesus in our lives.

“We must remember that as Christians we are now new creatures, and our old selves are gone.”

Core Values of Central Philippine University

FAITH

What is faith?

Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”

CPU defines faith as “the act of believing the things God has revealed about Himself and acting on those beliefs. This includes commitment, cooperation, trust, and confidence.”

Note: You may put the word FAITH on the whiteboard and ask your students to supply a meaning for each letter pertaining to how they understand faith.

Here is an acrostic of the word FAITH:

F – Faithful to the commands of God.

To have faith is to be faithful. We must be obedient to the will of God.

Let us take the example of Noah. He was ridiculed, laughed at, made fun of and teased by people. The climate was hot. The rainy season was over. Wise and old people during that time told him and his family that no storm was coming. Nobody believed him. They thought he was crazy. But in spite of this, Noah obeyed God. He built the ark. Then, of course, the Great Flood eventually came.

A – Allow God to work His mysterious ways.

Sarah attempted to work on behalf of God. In order for Abraham to have an heir, she gave him her servant Hagar. Hagar eventually gave birth to Ishmael, but because Sarah “fast forwarded” God’s plan for their lives, conflict ensued—a conflict that resulted to the animosity that continues until today.

We must not play God. Let God be God. Let us remember that if we do not allow God to have His way in our lives, disastrous things will happen.

I – Integrate your belief and your action.

James tells us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:14-26). What James meant is that a faith that is only creedal by nature—belief in God, but not shown in actual life—is not acceptable to God.

Faith should bear fruit and we cannot be called faithful if we are not fruitful. Fruitfulness is the result of our faithfulness.

T – Trust in God

The primary idea of faith is trust. To trust God is to recognize our helplessness and to confess that it is only God whom we put our trust in. There is nothing or no one else upon whom we can rely on. Our trust is in God alone.

H – Hope on the promises of God

Hope is what keeps the people of God going because they know that the best is yet to come.

Joseph dreamed of a time when the Israelites would go back to Canaan, their home. He believed that the exodus would happen. Thus, he left instructions for his bones to be brought with the Israelites when the time came for them to leave Egypt. It was after 430 years before his wish came true. Joseph’s faith was big enough to believe that that would happen.

How about you? How is your faith nowadays?

CHARACTER

CPU defines character as “the aggregate feature and traits that form the individual’s nature of a person, moral quality, and good report. This includes honesty, integrity, humility, and loyalty.”

How can we develop our character?

First, have the Right Attitude.

Acts 8:1b, 3-4: “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”

ISO 9001:2015 talks of Risk-Based Thinking where one identifies the risks, but at the same time sees opportunities in those risks. The Christians in the New Testament saw the risk of being a Christian—they would be persecuted and they would be scattered. However, they had the right attitude. They realized that even though they would be scattered, they would also have the opportunity to spread the Gospel.

Second, have the Right Perspective.

James 1:3: “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

In this verse we can see two things: We need to realize that God has a plan, and that God uses trials. If we accept and understand that God has a plan in our lives, then we can have the right perspective that the tests that come our way are God’s ways of molding our character.

Third, have the Right Approach.

Romans 5:1-3: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

In the verses above, we can see that suffering ultimately produces character and that the purpose of developing that character is for us to have hope. A person with character is someone who has hope in the midst of trials and sufferings. Thus, someone who has a Christian character has the right approach to any situation that may come his/her way.

JUSTICE

CPU defines justice as “righteousness or lawfulness and fairness. It is observing due process in administering the deserved punishment or reward. This includes fairness, equality, morality, and peace.”

What is justice?

J – Justice comes from the heart of God

Psalm 10:17–18: “You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.”

Psalm 11:7: “For the Lord is righteous, He loves justice.”

When we think of justice, the central point is God. If this were so, then we need to make an assumption that God is just and God demands that there should be justice.

U – Understanding justice through learning synonymous expressions

Justice per se seems very abstract, and cannot be grasped easily. One way for us to understand this word is to look at the other terms synonymous with justice. One of these mentioned in the thesaurus is impartiality, which means “not partial or biased: treating or affecting all equally.” Therefore, we do not effect justice when we become partial—biased, one-sided, or prejudiced.

The other words related to justice are fairness, impartiality, reasonableness, rightness, and righteousness.

S – Salvific event in Egypt—liberation from slavery—as a prime example of justice

Slavery is not just. Since God wants justice, it was important then for the Israelites to be redeemed from bondage. The Exodus experience, which is central to the lives of the Israelites, can be understood as God opposing oppression and God serving justice by liberating His people.

Exodus 3:7-8: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...”

Consequently, we must always seek justice because that is the will of God.

T – The Ten Commandments as a divine justice system

When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, God gave them a set of laws to govern them. God wanted justice to be experienced by the community. Call it animal instinct, or law of the jungle—we possess the desire to avenge ourselves from those who harm us or whoever we think has committed wrong against us. As such, the Ten Commandments served as a system that checked and balanced the Israelites’ human propensity towards impartiality which stems from our sin. These laws set by God and given to Moses were, and still

are, meant to set standards on how justice is to be exercised in and by the community.

It is very interesting to note that the most fundamental laws of the world today come from the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments established respect for authority—the authority of God, and the authority of the elders (i.e. parents); respect for human rights, such as the command, “You shall not murder”; and respect for property rights, such as “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house,” and the like. This was especially illustrated when the first thing that Joshua did when they arrived in Canaan was to distribute the land fairly to the 12 tribes. Each tribe possessed their own part of the Promised Land and others had to respect the boundaries. Aside from featuring these rights, the Ten Commandments also modeled some social rules such as being hospitable to aliens/strangers. Adjunct to these laws are penalties—if a law is violated, there is a corresponding consequence. Penalties are there to help enforce the laws.

Note: Group the class into 10 groups and let them discuss the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:1-17. Let them report their impressions of the laws in relation to the laws today.

I – Integrity as a criterion for leaders

One of the primary functions of a leader is to dispense justice. In the wilderness, Moses did not only serve as the leader but also as a judge. To help Moses in performing his tasks as a judge, Jethro, Moses’ father in law, told him to find men of integrity from each tribe. Jethro suggested as such because people will only follow leaders who possess integrity. Aside from Moses, other judges rose up to lead the Israelites in Old Testament times. Some of these charismatic leaders and prophets led the people well by exercising integrity in dispensing judgment. However, there were those whose leadership faltered because their integrity was put into question.

C – Christ Jesus’ hatred towards injustice

Jesus gave primary importance to the poor, the sick, the widowed, the orphaned, and others who were at the periphery of

society. They, the marginalized, were the ones who did not experience justice. Although Jesus did not devise any justice system, he sought out ways to address people's need for justice to be served. The ministry of Jesus goes straight to the origin of injustice—sin. By forgiving us of our sins, Jesus is saying that by the grace of God, we can act justly to one another. Since we have been forgiven, we can do what is right and just.

E – Example of justice—the Church

In the New Testament, we can see that the church sought to address the injustice done to the people—they shared what they had, be it food, shelter, money, property. They redistributed their wealth to the community of believers (Acts 2:42-45). The church gave an example of what it means to invite those who have been sidelined back into the fold. In the same manner, the church today is challenged to be an example of justice by including the “excluded” into the fellowship.

STEWARDSHIP

What is stewardship?

Stewardship is defined as “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to [us].” Theologically, it means that “everything that we have belongs to God. We are to manage it for God's purpose and glory.”

CPU defines stewardship as “the proper and responsible management of life, position, possession, and other resources entrusted by God to man. This includes service, accountability, culture, and outreach.”

Note: Divide the class into groups. Give them the task of finding the *keywords* from the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30); and then make a definition of what is Biblical Stewardship using those *keywords*.

In studying the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), we can see the following Keywords that can help us define what Biblical Stewardship is:

Servants
Entrusted
Property, Talents, Resources
Each according to his ability
Gained more
Faithful over little, In charge of many things
Well done, good and faithful servant
Joy of your master

Based on the keywords, we can arrive at this definition: “Biblical Stewardship is the faithful management of resources entrusted by the Owner (God) to a servant, with the accountability to put the resources to work in order to gain more, and share more, thus giving joy to the Owner.”

EXCELLENCE

CPU defines excellence as “the highly commendable quality or feature of a person’s worth and/or deeds. This includes competence, technology, scholarship, and research.”

Since the inception of this University, the culture of excellence has been nurtured and propagated. In fact, the Vision of the University is summarized in one word: EXCEL.

This drive for excellence is evidenced by CPU being granted an autonomous status by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED Memorandum Order No. 32, s. 2001). This status has been maintained by CPU since 2001. The most recent autonomous status granted to CPU is effective from April 1, 2016 to May 31, 2019. As of 2018, CPU is the only university in Iloilo City granted an autonomous status.

Also, effective 2017-2022, the Level IV re-accredited status is granted to six of CPU's undergraduate programs, namely: Secondary Education, Elementary Education, Business Administration, Accountancy, Liberal Arts, and Biology by the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities-Accrediting Council, Inc. Most academic programs of CPU have also been accredited as Level III by the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP).

Furthermore, CPU was ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 9001:2008 Certified. Currently, it is ISO 9001:2015 Certified. ISO is the International Organization for Standardization, a worldwide federation of national standards bodies.

For SY 2017-2018, www.localpulse.net ranks CPU #18 in the country and #1 in Western Visayas with two CHED Centers of Excellence and four CHED Centers of Development-designated programs. The Centers of Excellence are Agriculture and Business Administration while the Centers of Development are Chemical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Electronics Engineering, and Teacher Education.

Meanwhile, UniRank (<https://www.4icu.org>), as of October 2018, ranks the CPU website (www.cpu.edu.ph) #1 in the whole Western Visayas.

More than the ranking and accreditation that CPU has received, the school has chosen to anchor its perspective on excellence on what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Vision and Mission of Central Philippine University

Vision

Exemplary Christian Education for Life (EXCEL) and responsive to the needs of the total person and the world.

Mission

The mission of Central Philippine University is to carry out a program of spiritual, intellectual, moral, scientific, technological, and cultural training, and allied studies under influences which strengthen Christian faith, build up character and promote scholarship, research and community service.

Activity: Group Discussion
Group the class into four and ask each group to discuss one topic below. They should write down their answers and share to the class.
“Exemplary” Ask the question: “Are we good examples?” “How?” (Give examples)
“Christian” Ask the question: “Are we living a Christian life?” “How?” (Give examples)
“Education” Ask the question: “Are we teaching our students to do what is right?” “How?” (Give examples)
“for Life” Ask the question: “Are we giving lessons that will give life, and for life?” “How?” (Give examples)

About the Author

Rev. Francis Neil Gico Jalando-on comes from a family of pastors.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in Accountancy at Central Philippine University (CPU). He did not become a Certified Public Accountant but instead answered the call of God to become a pastor. He enrolled at the CPU College of Theology where he also finished his Master of Divinity.

His masteral paper entitled “A History of Philippine Baptist Pastors from 1898-2002” was later published into a book by the Institute for Advanced Theological Studies.

During his college days, he was a two-time CPU Republic Senator and was later elected as CPUR Vice President. He supported his studies with a sports scholarship as varsity of the CPU Table Tennis Team. He was also the first webmaster of CPU.

From 2002 to 2008, he had served as Administrative Assistant of the Institute for Advanced Theological Studies. This organization helps in the continuing theological education of pastors and publication of theological journals.

During these years, he was a part-time teacher at the Convention Baptist Bible College in Bacolod City where he taught Church History, Contemporary Issues, Ecumenics and Systematic Theology.

In 2009 he became the Assistant Director of the Office for External Affairs and Public Relations of CPU. He hosted programs in Radio DYVS, DYSI, RMN, and TV programs in the CPU TV Channel. During his tenure he was also in-charge of the publication of the alumni newsletter, *The Centralian Link*, and the weekly online newsletter, “Letter from Central.”

He writes a weekly reflection entitled “Seeds of Faith” which is published online with more than 15,000 recipients. Some of these reflections can be found in this volume.

On weekends, he serves as the Pulpit Pastor of Bacolod Bethany Church, and La Carlota Evangelical Church, Negros Occidental.

He was previously an Associate Chaplain of Central Philippine University, and later an Associate Pastor of the University Church. Presently, he is the Director of the CPU Office of Communications. Under this office is the Information Center, the Educational Media Center, TV Channel, Website and Media Relations. This office manages the official social media accounts of the university, and spearheads the publication of the *Weekly Centralian Link*. He is also a part-time teacher of the College of Theology and College of Business and Accountancy, and the coach of the CPU Golden Lions College Table Tennis Varsity Teams.

He also has involvements in national organizations. He previously served the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches (CPBC), and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) as member of the Faith and Order Committee. This is the body that decides matters on church doctrines, and practices. Since 2018, he has been with the CPBC Ordination Council as its youngest member. This council examines pastors who are recommended by their churches for ordination.

He was the National President of the Convention Baptist Ministers’ Association from 2011-2013. This is the national organization of Baptist pastors serving the churches and institutions of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches. He also serves as the President of the Haggai Institute Alumni Association Iloilo Chapter (2017-2019).

He is married to Hermely Agriam, Purchasing Officer of CPU. They have two children: Kairos Rye and Francheska MJ.

