

As the University is always finding means to even strengthen our Christian faith, CPU embraces with an open heart opportunities that spread the Gospel. This fourth volume of the *Seeds of Faith* is another collection of devotional reading prepared by Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalandon that will once again inspire and guide each one of us as we become stewards of God's beautiful kingdom. Just like the three other volumes, may this even strengthen our convictions and may this impact our professional and spiritual lives.

**Dr. Teodoro C. Robles**  
President  
Central Philippine University

It is with joy that I look forward to and recommend Volume 4 of *Seeds of Faith* to long-time followers of Jesus and to those who are just beginning their faith journeys. I anticipate in this fourth volume the same insightful and down-to-earth reflections that shone through Neil's last three volumes. It is my pleasure to commend this treasure-trove of spiritual gems from Neil, whose family and ministry journeys have intersected with mine in so many ways and at different times, I hear not only his voice but the many voices of our spiritual ancestors who first planted seeds of faith in our hearts.

**Rev. Dr. Carla Agus Romarate-Knipel**  
Senior Pastor, Central Baptist Church of Woodbury  
American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, ABCUSA

"Several years ago while researching for a seminary textbook on Baptists, I became aware of Rev. Jalandon's book: *A History of Philippine Baptist Pastors 1898-2002*. This gave me reason to get in touch with him for further understandings. And by these means I gained the opportunity to receive his weekly *Binhi sang Pagtuo* for many years now. They continue to give me new helpful insights toward practical Christian living and thinking. I believe they have aided his University and Alumni population as well. Here you will find new ways to consider thoughtful insights toward effective Christian living through Rev. Jalandon's scriptural-truth-focus."

**Dr. D. Leslie Hill**  
Retired President, Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary  
Author, *Faithful and Free (Baptist Beliefs Through the Years)*, 2013

SEEDS OF FAITH VOL. 4 FRANCIS NEIL GICO JALANDO-ON



# SEEDS *of* FAITH

VOLUME 4

FRANCIS NEIL GICO JALANDO-ON



# **SEEDS OF FAITH**

## **VOLUME 4**

Francis Neil Gico Jalandon

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## Foreword

An academic institution that has survived so many trials is not a matter of accident, but of grace. Ever since Central Philippine University was founded in 1905, the beacon of light in its journey has always been faith in God.

World War II destroyed several university buildings and claimed the lives of several Centralians, but the war never destroyed the Christian faith among Centralians. Through the grace of God, the University slowly recovered from the ruins of war to become one of the few autonomous universities in the country.

Our faith as Christians is always subjected to various tests; hence, we need to regularly reinforce our faith in order to hurdle all the trials in our quest to attain a higher level of spiritual maturity. This process requires a conscious effort from all of us, always accepting the fact that we are all sinners and that our salvation is by grace alone.

This fourth volume of the Seeds of Faith is part of our conscious efforts to continually grow in spirit and in truth. These devotional readings were prepared by Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalandoni, and I hope that all of us find time to read and reflect especially as to our roles within and outside the University. Let us be inspired as we read all the devotional readings and view life with happiness in our hearts.

It is my prayer that we read these texts with open hearts and humility and not merely read them through the lens of science. May our readings of the texts strengthen our faith in God and may we apply these scripture readings in our daily existence.

May the Lord bless us all!



IRVING DOMINGO L. RIO, D.Mgt.  
Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Central Philippine University



## **Commit to change for the better**

The translation of the word “Year” in Hebrew is *Shanah*. It has three meanings in its original root word namely:

1. Division of time;
2. To repeat, do the same;
3. To change, alter.

Ask yourself, will this year just be a passing of time? Will it just be a repetition of the year before? Or will it be a year that you will change yourself and your situation for the better?

We would often hear the word change. Change is so broad that one who seeks to change does not usually know where to begin.

For those who want to live and profess Christ as their Lord and Savior, the answer is straightforward: be like Jesus. Like the apostle Paul we too should say, “imitate me as I imitate Christ.”

If we want to pattern our lives to that of Jesus, then we need to see and understand His pattern of living. Where can we see it? In the Bible. If this is so, then the resolution to change and to pattern our lives to that of Jesus involves our commitment to read the Bible and reflect on what is written there. The ethical question of WWJD - What Would Jesus Do - can be answered if we read and understand the Bible.

If reading the Bible is not yet in your list of New Year’s Resolution, then please place it there as a priority and start reading. Make an everyday reflection, start asking questions about what changes God wants to make in your life through the passages you read. Pray for it and ask for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In doing so, you make a commitment to change for the better.

This year should not just be a passing of time or a repetition of the last year but a commitment to change and follow in the footsteps of Jesus.



## New Year Noise

Every New Year's Eve, we light up firecrackers or in one way or another find means to make noises with the intention of ushering in the beginning of the year. We do this out of tradition however the underlying belief of this practice is that we drive out demons whenever we make noise during New Year's Eve. Although this is a superstitious practice, we can still make it as a visible and audible reminder that we have to engage a conscious effort to resist and oppose any form of evil in our society.

One of my favorite chapters in the Bible is Romans 12 where Paul tells us how to battle evil.

12:9 "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." This tells us to identify any form of evil and hate it. Paul used the word "hate" so that we must abhor, detest and loathe evil things. To "cling" is to embrace, this means that we must seek out good and embrace it – staying on the path of righteousness at all costs.

12:17 "Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone will see that you are honorable." When somebody does evil to us, we oftentimes avenge the wrongdoing by doing another evil. We try to remedy our pain through other people's inconvenience. This is the easiest thing to do; and this is why peace is so elusive and most times unattainable. But the Bible teaches us that we must seek justice through ways that are honorable. No matter what injustice is done to us, at the end, we must believe that good will triumph over evil. 12:9 says "Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God."

12:21 "Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good." I came across a Native American story about a village Chief telling a young man: "there are two wolves fighting inside you – evil and good. The one that you always feed will win." Feed the good wolf with thoughts and meditations of God's words and promises, starve the evil wolf by taking captive every thought and pursuing the justice of God rather than the justice of man.

## **Learn from the storms in your life**

During Typhoon Auring in 2017, a lot of people got stranded. Travelling schedules were changed and classes were canceled in flooded areas. In some places where the flood was overwhelming, people evacuated to a safer place. In times of storms we are always advised to err in the side of safety. God is our peace and safety during the storms of our life. The Bible recounts instances where God is over and above all the storms.

Here are three lessons about storms in the Bible that we can apply in our daily lives:

First, the fierce storm that hit the ship of Jonah teaches us that God has used, is using and will be using “storms” in our life to remind us that what we are doing is not according to His will and that we are drifting apart from His purpose. Jonah eventually realized this and hesitantly volunteered to jump from the ship and sacrificed himself to save others.

Second, the furious storm that came without warning during the boat ride of Jesus with his disciples teaches us that amidst the “storms” in our life, Jesus is our ever-present help in times of need. He will always be there to assure us that He will calm the storm when we ask for His help. In the story, Jesus was sleeping while the storm that put the boat and the disciples in danger was happening. The disciples, most of them fishermen, couldn’t do anything to steady the boat; they went directly to Jesus and asked for His help. This teaches that we need to come to Jesus first and not try our own solutions that will eventually fail us.

Third, the “northeaster” storm that battered the ship of Paul on his way to stand trial in Italy (Acts 27:14) teaches us that the “storms” of our life are opportunities to be a witness of Jesus to other people. Paul, although a prisoner, did not cower but stood tall and told them what they had to do to stay alive and he then courageously preached about God’s plan in their lives. This story teaches us that in spite of our difficult situations, with faith and hope, we can still tell others that God is good. Jesus is always faithful, He will not let us down.

## **Carry each other's burdens**

Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:2 tells us that when we carry each other's burdens we obey the law of Christ. What is the law of Christ that Paul is referring to? What comes to mind is the radical demand of Jesus: "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

The word "cross" is very difficult for us to bear. It is one of the most misused words in the Christian dictionary. People often speak of calamities and tragedies as a cross they must bear. But calamities and tragedies do not define the cross. Sorrow, loss, uncontrolled anger or our shortcomings do not mirror the cost of the cross. They are just heavy burdens – not necessarily a cross.

The cross for Jesus was his deliberate choice of giving His life as a ransom, a sacrifice for all of us. Therefore, taking up a cross for all of us means "the deliberate choice of something that could be evaded, to make a burden which we are under no compulsion to take up except the compulsion of God's love." The cross means the deliberate choice of taking up upon ourselves the burdens of other people.

There is an animated illustration about a man who is carrying a cross. After a short journey, the man decided cut a part of the cross he is carrying because it was heavy. Whenever he found the cross too heavy for him to carry he cut it again, it went on until the cross became so small. Later, much to his dismay, the next part of their journey was to cross a ravine. He saw with sadness that the crosses of others were used as a bridge between the ravines. He was not able to go to the next part of the journey because his cross was now too small to be used as a bridge.

Our cross is our purpose. Let us not be like the man who thinks so little of the cross. We should consider the carrying of our cross as God's way of revealing His glory not only to ourselves but to others as well.



Let it also be said that we carry each other's burdens – bearing one another's cross, helping others whom we meet along our journey, that they may take heart in carrying their own cross. That at the end of our journey we rejoice in the company of our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

It is noteworthy to think, that the cross is not a story of sorrow but a testimony of Jesus' triumph. It is a selfless act of loving one another just as Christ loved us.

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*“The cross for Jesus was his deliberate choice of giving His life as a ransom, a sacrifice for all of us.”*

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## **Unleashing the Minister's Full Potential**

The Theme of the annual Convention Baptist Ministers Association (CBMA) National Assembly last 2017 was “Unleashing the Minister’s Full Potential.” The theme expressed the convention’s commitment in encouraging and supporting Baptist ministers all over the country.

Matthew 9:35 to 39 has something to say to the ministers of today. Let me use CBMA as the outline as we reflect on the question: What attitudes and mindsets should be unleashed by the minister?

C - Compassionate attitude.

Matthew 9:36 says, “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

When our ministers have compassion, they will surely look after and care for the people that they are ministering. If they have no compassion, then it is as if the sheep has no shepherd.

B - Broadminded in ministry perspective.

Matthew 9:37 tells us that the ministry is vast – “Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.'”

This means that there is no shortage of work in all areas of the ministry. Thus, a minister must look in all places and think of what kind of ministry can be started in those places. The shortage is just in our narrow-mindedness. There is no shortage of work only a shortage of workers. This means that a minister must not be idle but a good and faithful worker who empowers other workers to advance the Kingdom of God.

## M - Mission-focused.

Matthew 9:35 reminds us that “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”

Jesus is reminding us that the basic three-pronged pattern of ministry should be present in our ministry, they are: teaching, preaching and healing.

## A - Active prayer life

Matthew 9:38 challenges us to pray – “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Jesus is teaching the ministers to actively look for the next generation of harvesters, to pray for them and to mentor them. We should anchor our lifestyle in faith and in reading the Word of God. Through this, we not only equip ourselves with God’s favor and purpose but we also become testimonies that can encourage others to pursue and follow Jesus.

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## Living for Jesus

What does it mean to live for Jesus? Living for Jesus means living a life that follows the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ as written in the Bible. On our own we cannot do it. We need to accept Jesus first in our lives, and by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit we can live a life according to the will of God.

Let me share to you a song composed by Julie Ann Lagulao, faculty of the CPU College of Nursing, as a way to answer the question “What does it mean to live for Jesus?” This song was the theme song of the Christ Emphasis Week celebration on 2011.

What difference will it make if we live for Christ?  
Do we gain anything Wealth and honor or any prize?

Take a look at the cross and the shameful death He died  
Christ laid Heaven aside Will you remain selfish and blind?  
Heed His call now

Live for Jesus a life that is true  
Think more life Christ His will be our sole desire  
To live for Jesus, His Word transforms our minds  
Lord teach us the way to live like You

Where will you point the meaning of love  
In this world, blinded with fear?  
Yet if you seek Him, You will find Him  
Knock, He'll open the door

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*“Living for Jesus means living a life that follows the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ as written in the Bible.”*

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## The Cross

On most weekends my family and I would travel from our home to the port of Dumangas, from there we would ride a ferry to Negros for our weekend work. During one of my travels, I was captivated by the new electrical posts that were erected. I noticed that the post looked like a cross. My reflection was that the structure that supports the flow of power from the source to our homes and establishments is in a shape of a cross.

Interestingly, the usage of the word cross can either be a noun or verb. Cross, as a noun, means an upright wooden structure with a transverse beam used by the ancient Romans to punish criminals like the cross in which Jesus died. Cross, as a verb, means to go from one side to another side.

Theologically, combining the cross as a noun and as a verb would result to a profound meaning – we can only cross from death to life through the cross of Jesus (1 Cor 15:54). Our old selves were nailed in the cross of Jesus (Rom 6:6) so that we can be free to cross the rivers of life as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

So every time you see anything that resembles a cross, pause and reflect on what Jesus has done for all of us. The cross is the only way for us to cross from this life to a life in eternity with God.

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*“Theologically, combining the cross as a noun and as a verb would result to a profound meaning – we can only cross from death to life through the cross of Jesus.”*

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## Lessons from my grandfather

No matter how prepared we are, the death of a loved one will always bring shock and sadness. Last 2011, my grandfather, Roberto Alvarez Jalando-on Sr., passed away at the ripe age of 88. We mourned yet we continue to reflect on his life and legacies. Our sadness was turned into joy because our grandfather lived a fulfilled life, always full of humor, wit and wisdom.

My grandfather lost his voice because of cancer, and for the last two to three years of his life, he communicated by writing notes. Here are some of “quotable quotes” of our grandfather. Some of them may have been original while others are memorized and copied from books he loved.

*“Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you.”*

*“The best things in life are not things.”*

*“What is so amazing about Grace? Grace is not only something we say before every meal. It is a way life.”*

*“Pain makes one think. Thinking makes one wise. Wisdom makes life endurable.”*

*“Life is not the number of breathes we take but the number of moments that take our breaths away.”*

*“A man who gives in when he is wrong is wise and a man who gives in when he is right is married.”*

*“A man’s face is an autobiography, while a woman’s face is a work of fiction. I do not worry about getting old because I’m too busy enjoying life.”*

*“Flowers are like embroidery in the fabric of life.”*

*“Back to square one, therefore I need a bridge over troubled waters to span the darkness of loneliness into the light of single blessedness.”*

*“Life is short, history is long. Spend your life on pursuits that will outlive you.”*

*“Offering something to the rest of the world, it’s time to turn out the lights. The worth of our lives comes by what we give. What we keep we squander. Look for ways to impart value, be generous with encouragement and handout hope to those you lead.”*

*“Life is like the wealth, when it comes, it comes. Even with a sunny forecast you can get wet.”*

*“Now, it’s only love in silence. No more verbal expression of love even the whisper of sweet nothing remains unanswered. You only hear the sound of silence and sometimes it could be deafening. For silence is the cold wind that chills the heart and the brain in times of loneliness.”*

*“Ain’t this world a funny place. Yet it’s hard to beat. With every rose you get a thorn, but ain’t the rose sweet?”*

*“We should bear in mind that values are not taught but caught. It is the same as mentioning to the children to close their ears to advice but their eyes are open to examples.”*

*“Footsteps a child will follow are most likely the ones the parents thought they had covered up. Moral behavior – it’s not what you say but what you do that counts most.”*

Here's a poem he liked. He memorized this from a poster frame after our grandmother died more than six years ago. It's entitled "The Broken Chain."

*"We little knew that morning that God will call your name. In life we loved you, in death we do the same. It broke our hearts to lose you and you did not go alone, for part of us went with you, the day God called you home. You left us with peaceful memories, your love is still our guide and though we cannot see you, you are always at our side. Our family chain is broken, and nothing seems the same. But as God calls us one by one, the chain will link again."*

Apart from the beautiful memories our loved ones leave us, they also impart to us nuggets of wisdom and testimonies of God's faithfulness, that as we walk forward in the land of the living their counsel and advice will guide and encourage us along our way.

## **The importance of genealogies**

Our two children, Kairos and Francheska, would sometimes demand for a family quiz. It ranges from who their great grandparents are up to their cousins. It is a great way to impart our family history and the legacies of family members who have gone ahead of us.

Matthew 1 and Luke 3 record the genealogy of Jesus. The Jews preserved their history, first by oral tradition and then later transfer it to written form. The book of Numbers in the Old Testament records the genealogy of the tribes of Israel. These records were preserved and handed down from generation to generation until the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the genealogical records.

Interestingly, most people would skip reading the genealogical records in the Bible. But we must remember that it serves a purpose, and all that is written in the Bible is the Word of God. Here are a few things to think about the genealogies in the Bible:

First, God is interested in us.

Genealogies are records of actual people. These are persons just like you and me. If God is interested in their own lives, then it follows that God is interested with what is happening in our lives as well. God interacted with real people in the past and God will surely continue to get in touch with us and the future generations.

Second, God works through people who are imperfect just like you and me.

King David was in the genealogy of Jesus. The Messiah was prophesied to be the son of David. The immoral and criminal acts of King David were recorded for all to see – there were no attempts to delete it in the Bible. Subsequently, David's remorse, acceptance and repentance of his sins were also there for us to read. Rahab, a former prostitute was even in the genealogy of Jesus. This shows that God

will continue to work in and through imperfect people who have surrendered their lives to Him.

Third, God fulfills His promises.

What God has promised He fulfills. God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants. Abraham died and was not able to see the fulfillment of God's promises to him in the next generation, and next one after that.

But we, the readers of the Bible, have seen how God fulfilled His promises to Abraham. This in turn gives us the confidence that in God's own time, He will also fulfill His promises to us, maybe not in our lifetime but surely it would come.

Let us give time and reflect on the genealogies written in the Bible. They are not only historical records of the people who lived but testimonies of how they lived persevering in the promise of God as an encouragement to future generations.

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*“God interacted with real people in the past  
and God will surely continue to get in touch  
with us and the future generations.”*

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## **Global Warming is a global warning**

Extreme flooding in the different parts of the world have prompted a lot of people to ponder on the reality of Global Warming. As we experience abnormal temperatures and unusual weather patterns, the issue of global warming is now a global warning.

One of the major culprits is carbon dioxide emission, the most significant greenhouse pollutant. Greenhouse gases make the Earth hot just like sleeping under a heavy blanket during summer. It is said that our atmospheric “blanket” is over 37% “thicker” than it used to be. The rise of temperature is melting the polar ice caps and glaciers, and warming the oceans. This expands ocean volume and raises the sea level, thus resulting to flooding in some coastal regions.

Warmer climates receive more rainfall than before, but soils dry out faster in-between storms. This soil dehydration damages food crops – disrupting food supplies in some parts of the world.

There are a lot of discussions with regards to solutions on how to mitigate the effects of global warming. Let me share to you some theological insights with regards to this.

Our traditional theological perspective needs to be questioned now in the light of what is happening around us. Traditionally, since, we, humans, consider ourselves as the crowning glory of creation; we have the authority to do anything that we want to our world. We have used the verses like “Subdue the earth” and “You have dominion over all creation” as our theological bases to continue what we are doing.

Our churches have also perpetuated the theology that what matters only is the relationship between God and Human. As such, it gives us the notion that the environment around us does not matter.

There is a need for us to formulate a new theological perspective. Genesis chapter one needs to be read again. This

chapter tells us that the creation of God is inter-connected. There is a symbiotic relationship. We cannot live without the other. There is life in all the creation of God. The relationship that matters is not just “I-Thou” but more importantly, “I-Thou and It” to include the environment around us.

Let us remember that when God saw everything that He had made, He declared that it was very good. If we change our theological mindset, surely our way of life would also be transformed. It is our Christian duty to take care of Earth, our only temporal home.

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*“The relationship that matters is not just “I-Thou” but more importantly, “I-Thou and It” to include the environment around us.”*

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*“It is our Christian duty to take care of Earth, our only temporal home.”*

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## **Love God with all our being**

One instance, a member of the church congregation asked a question “What does it mean to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength?” The church member was referring about the answer of Jesus to a teacher of the Law in Mark 12:30 - “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

To love God with all our heart means that our desire, affection, and yearning in life must be focused on God. Our heart is the control center of our whole being. The passion to do something comes from the heart. Our desire for God’s presence must lead us to worship God in a local church. Our yearning to be intimate with God should lead us to read the Bible. Our affection should also be on things that God wants us to be devoted to.

To love God with all our soul means that our life purpose must be in pursuit of what is heavenly and eternal. The soul is what gives us life. God breathed and we became a living soul. This soul will be separated from our physical body and will go to eternity – either in heaven or hell. If we want to spend eternity in heaven, then we must live a heavenly life here on Earth. We must practice our eternity today. As Psalm 42:1 reminds us, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.”

To love God with all our mind means that what occupies our mind is God. We become what we think. Proverbs 23:7 affirms the importance of the mind “For as he thinks..., so is he...” By observation, the top 6 things that occupy our mind are 1. Career, work or business 2. Family 3. Opposite sex 4. School 5. Past 6. Dreams, future plans.

God wants to be part of our list of priorities, the top things that we constantly think about. In fact, God wants us to think about Him when we think of these things. God wants to be part of our career,

our family, when we're looking for our life partner, our school work, our dealings with the past, and our dreams and the future.

To love God with all our strength means that God wants us to spend our energy on things that will benefit people and expand the ministry of the church. Let us not waste our energy on things that are detrimental to life, and on things that hinder people in achieving a meaningful life.

May we love God with all our being!

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*“To love God with all our heart means that our desire, affection, and yearning in life must be focused on God.”*

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*“To love God with all our soul means that our life purpose must be in pursuit of what is heavenly and eternal.”*

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*“To love God with all our mind means that what occupies our mind is God.”*

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## **How should we love others?**

In John 13:34-35 Jesus said that He is giving us a new command – love each other as He has loved us, and by doing so the world will know that we are His disciples.

Why is this considered as a new command?

Firstly, this command to love is new because it is founded on a new relationship – our relationship with Jesus Christ.

We relate with one another now as people who are united in our faith with Jesus Christ. We are now brothers and sisters in Christ. We now view our relationship with others not just as classmates, party affiliates, officemates or family members but in the light of our relationship with Jesus as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Secondly, this command to love is new because it is presented in a new form – we love each other the way Jesus Christ loves us.

What is a Christ-like love? Let me mention five characteristics of Jesus' love:

First, it is sacrificial. We have to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of our loved ones.

Second, it is prayerful. We need to pray for our loved ones.

Third, it is forgiving. We need to forgive our loved ones 70 times 7.

Fourth, it is helpful. We must love others not just with words but with our actions.

Fifth, it is compassionate. We need to care and emotionally support our loved ones. This kind of love should be demonstrated by us readily, sincerely, humbly, constantly, and creatively.

## **Love yourself**

An expert in the Law once asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment and what will one do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answered “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, strength and soul; and the second is like it: Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

The two things that are always emphasized in these verses are: Loving God and Loving your neighbor. One thing that is sometimes not given due attention is the command to: “love yourself.” We oftentimes think of ways on how to love our neighbor that we have forgotten our own selves. We have sacrificed our time, effort, and resources for others, and have forgotten to spend time, effort, and resources for ourselves.

What are the things that we can do for ourselves?

First, find time to be alone with yourself.

Jesus had a very busy life. But He would often tell his disciples that He would be gone for a while. He would often go to a mountain to be alone and to pray. During these times, he would commune with his Father, and be reminded to continue doing His Father’s will amidst the many obstacles.

Jesus has given us a great example. We must find time for ourselves so that we can question our past actions, reflect on what we are doing, and re-set our priorities.

Second, find time to rest.

The Bible teaches us that as humans we have physical limitations. We need time to rest so that we will be ready for the next set of challenges that will come along our way.

Genesis chapter 1 reminds us that it is necessary to rest. There are laws in the Bible about rest. Jesus would often rest. He even

rested while they were sailing. Amidst the storm, Jesus was sleeping. This teaches us that rest will give us calmness and peace. And more importantly, it will not make us sick and tired.

One time I was diagnosed with low iron and felt so weak, a thought came to my mind, “you are not loving yourself.” This prompted me to re-study the greatest commandment of Jesus.

Third, find friends.

Jesus had many disciples but the inner circle was Peter, James and John. These three became his closest friends. They were with Jesus during the transfiguration and also with him in the Garden of Gethsemane. They were not perfect friends for they were often impulsive, and had the tendency to be violent (asking Jesus to call down fire from heaven to destroy a village, cutting the ear of one soldier, and many more).

We need friends to share our life, our joys and sadness. Our friends will help lighten our burdens – not by carrying all our burdens but by offering a shoulder to help carry the load.

Let us remember that later Jesus called his disciples as his friends. This shows us the real value of having friends.

To love ourselves, we must have a personal experience with the Lord, to commune with our Creator as He reveals to us His special design and purpose. If we know more about God and His faithfulness, we will be more encouraged see ourselves the way He sees us – loved and important.

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*Jesus has given us a great example. We must find time for ourselves so that we can question our past actions, reflect on what we are doing, and re-set our priorities.*

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## **What does it mean to LOVE**

A lot of people celebrate Valentine's Day by wearing something with the color red. The color red signifies blood, thus symbolizing life. This only shows that love is the lifeblood of people. Life without love is meaningless.

Let me share an acrostic message of the word LOVE:

**L** – Laugh more often. If there is love in a relationship, there is less friction. When there are fewer quarrels in a relationship, we can enjoy the company of one another and eventually we can see life as something that needs to be enjoyed. The bible says, “a merry heart does good like a medicine.”

**O** – Overcome fear. Love can make us overcome fear. Every day we face “unknowns” in our lives. We do not know what will happen next. But we go on because we believe that when something goes wrong in our lives, there are people who will be there for us because they love us. Thus, when we are not afraid to make mistakes, we can try many things that will add more meaning to our lives.

**V** – Venture into new heights. Love is an adventure. You discover new things about your partner every day. Boredom and routine are two things that can sap the life of a relationship. Partners should always contribute something that will make life an adventure that you do not want to end.

**E** – Expect great things. When you love someone, you hope for that someone, and it produces anticipation of new things. This expectation is what fuels us to continue in a relationship. Yes, there will be disappointments, but this should not hinder us to expect something greater for each other.

## **Jesus will always be there for us**

There was a time in my life that I asked God a lot of “whys”. Asking God a lot of questions is part of my reflection habit.

One time, my reflection time led me to John 16:33 which says, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Jesus did not promise a life without trouble. In the contrary, He reminded us that in this world we will have troubles. What He promised instead was peace in spite of the troubles that will surely come our way. Jesus assured us by saying, “Take heart!” Meaning, we need to be courageous because He has already conquered the world.

How should we take HEART?

H - Hear the assuring words of Jesus every time a crisis comes. Read the Bible and be assured. Make His word, a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path to lead you in the right direction.

E - Encourage and accompany fellow believers so that you can encourage each other when problems arise. Brothers and sisters in the church are indispensable in times of crises.

A - Allow the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide you. Jesus promised us a comforter who will assure us and accompany us during times of difficulties, the Holy Spirit will also guide us towards decisions that are aligned in the will of God.

R - Retreat but do not surrender. Jesus retreated many times and spent time alone to pray and meditate. A spiritual retreat can energize us and make us ready to face the troubles of this world.

T - Trust in God always. Jesus assured us that He had conquered the world already. This means that when foggy and cloudy days come, we can be confident that God will let the sun shine in our lives.

## **Lessons from the first Filipino President of CPU**

On February 2011, Central Philippine University commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Dr. Rex D. Drilon, its first Filipino President.

Dr. Rex D. Drilon was a nationalist with a very strong libertarian fervor. He fulfilled the dream of past Centralians for the Filipinization of administrative leadership. During his presidency, a momentous event happened. On Christmas day, December 25, 1969, the entire university property – land, buildings and equipment – was turned over by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society to the Filipino Corporation of Central Philippine University.

In the conclusion of President Drilon's inaugural address on April 21, 1967, he said: "If your Filipino president fails, then the Filipino name is marked forever. But if your Filipino president succeeds with your help, with your loyalty, then the Filipino name shall be honored – you honor yourselves."

Lincoln Rex Drilon, his son, shared to us two things during his 40<sup>th</sup> death anniversary celebration:

First, Find a cause greater than yourself. Second, Dream lofty dreams. To dream is for free. Use your God-given talents to realize those dreams.

These are challenging words that can check our mediocrity and passivity. Let us strive for excellence in everything that we do, and get involve on issues that will shape our community for the better, and for the glory of God.

## **Lessons from EDSA**

Every year Filipinos would celebrate the EDSA People Power Revolution that brought down the dictatorship regime of President Marcos.

Amidst the corruption scandals that are in the headlines, the legacy of this revolution seems to remain in history books and have not touched the present crop of government officials.

What can we learn from this experience? Let me coin an acrostic of EDSA.

E – Elevate the status of the marginalized. There are still a lot of people who remain in the margins of our society. Jesus had a preferential option for the poor. This is so because the poor are dying before their time. They have no access to food, medicine, basic necessities, land and other things that will make their life comfortable. As Christians, we have to take on the mission of helping the poor and the broken. It should be our priority to extend the love of God to those in need.

We have to ask ourselves what are we doing for the marginalized?

D – Drive away evil in our society. Most of us have the notion that evil is only present when there is a so-called “demonic possession” that needs to be cast out through “spiritual warfare.” This is an incomplete belief. We need to acknowledge that evil is present everywhere when the will of God is opposed. When we recognize this, then we are always conscious that the battle to combat evil is every day and anywhere.

What are the evil things in your surroundings that you can confront?

S – Show them what is right. Temptations are all around us. A lot of things are inviting us to succumb to its lure. In this secular

age, we need to stand firm with Biblical principles. We need to affirm our Christian beliefs by our actions. As ambassadors of Christ, the world is watching on what kind of lives we are living.

Are you a good example?

A – Allow God to shape your life. One recollection of the 1986 EDSA Revolution is a picture of nuns praying and kneeling in front of tanks. When we submit our lives to God, mysterious things happen. At first we cannot fully comprehend it but later it turns out for our good and for the glory of God. We need to surrender our lives to God. Let us wait for God’s prompting before we do something. God, as affirmed by our experiences, will always find a way to communicate with us.

What are the things in your life that you have not yet surrendered to God?

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*“God, as affirmed by our experiences, will  
always find a way to communicate with us.”*

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## **Life in 3D**

The 2017 Theme of Christ Emphasis Week was “Life in 3D - Discipline Determines Destiny.” The theme highlights that discipline is an essential part of the Christian lifestyle and ultimately in accomplishing our God-given purpose.

There are two pertinent definitions of the word discipline. As a verb, it means “to punish or penalize for the sake of enforcing obedience and perfecting moral character.” As a noun, it is defined as a “training that corrects or molds the mental faculties or moral character.”

Hebrews 12:11 reminds us that God disciplines us to correct us. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Are we willing to accept the discipline of God? Are we accepting the punishment that God has given us for our good? What should our attitude be?

First, we need to accept God's discipline and make corrections now because it will determine our final destiny. Judgment Day is real. Heaven and hell are real. By correcting our ways, we are accepting God's gift of eternal life with Him.

Second, we need to remember that God's discipline is the way that we are being molded as disciples of Jesus Christ. The words discipline and disciple are connected, and the meaning of each word enriches the other. Simply put, we are trained to be disciples of Jesus through the consistent discipline of God.

## **International Women's Day**

March 8 is International Women's Day. In commemoration of this event, let us focus our reflection about women. Throughout history there are many views about women. Let me share to you the Greco-Roman and Jewish views. These perspectives continue to influence a lot people even until now.

The words of Socrates (c.470-399 B.C.) summarize the Greek view of women. He said, "Woman is the weaker sex." According to Xenophon, a disciple of Socrates, the ideal Athenian woman is one who "might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible, and ask as little as possible." Plutarch, a Roman philosopher during New Testament times said that a woman's "two great duties" are "to keep at home and be silent."

The male dominated worldview can be described in one of the writings of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), the most distinguished pupil of Plato (427-347 B.C.). He noted that a single bee will lead a vast swarm of bees to a new location where they will industriously build a new nest and establish their complex society. The one bee whom the swarm of bees followed was described by Aristotle as the "king bee," since he assumed that only a male bee can be the leader.

This observation of Aristotle was later on disputed by scientists. The terminology was changed from "king bee" to "queen bee." Aristotle believed that "the male is by nature fitter to command than the female not only in animals but on all creatures especially humans." He also added that this "inequality is permanent." Socrates also maintained that "the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying."

The patriarchal system in the Old Testament meant: Wives were under the control of their husbands; widows were dependent on sons; women with no heirs were destined to a life of poverty and hopelessness; women could not inherit property; women had to marry within the class so the property would not move out of it;



women were considered property (Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife...house, oxen, donkey, etc. Exodus 20:17).

The woman is “in all things inferior to the man,” said first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Rabbi Judah, a contemporary of Josephus, said “a man must pronounce three blessings each day: 'Blessed be the Lord who did not make me a heathen; blessed be he who did not make me a woman; blessed be he who did not make me an uneducated person.'” Other Jewish writings during this time described woman as “the devil's gateway.” “...Woman, was the ‘weaker vessel,’ ‘slow of understanding,’ ‘unstable in mind,’ ‘liable to deception,’ the one whose disobedience had ruined the man...and required the death of the Son of God.”

In the New Testament, the patriarchal worldview is evident in the counting of the number of people who were fed by Jesus. Jewish society did not count women as individuals of the same worth as men. Matthew 14:21 says, “about five thousand men, besides women and children” and Matthew 15:38 says, “four thousand, besides women and children.” This means that there were about 15,000 men, women and children who were fed by Jesus if you add one woman and child per every man. So, the story should not be referred as the “Feeding of the Five Thousand” but the “Feeding of the Fifteen Thousand.”

What about us? How do we treat women? Hopefully, we can take our example from Jesus Christ.

Jesus boldly broke away with tradition by treating women as persons worthy of respect, love, and fellowship. Many women were followers and companions of Jesus. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and “many others” traveled with Jesus and supported both Jesus and the disciples “out of their own means” (Lk. 8:1-3, Mk. 15:41). Jesus welcomed the women into the group and even accepted their financial support.

Jesus did something even more revolutionary than just including women in his company of followers – he actually taught

women spiritual truths. Mary sat at Jesus' feet, as would any good student of that time, and Jesus wholeheartedly affirmed her desire to learn. (Lk. 10:38-42) He also taught her sister, Martha, about the resurrection and eternal life (Jn. 11:24-27).

Jesus even spoke to women in public – a “no no” during that time. Jesus shared to the Samaritan woman about the Living Water and because of her testimony “many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus.” (Jn. 4:39) Consequently, some Bible scholars have called the Samaritan woman the first evangelist, missionary and preacher of the Good News. Jesus also healed the woman with a blood disease for twelve years (Matt. 9:20-22). Jesus did not just break the rule of not speaking to women – He did much more. He touched a woman with a blood disease. He also did not forbid a woman from pouring expensive perfume on His feet and wiping it with her hair.

When the men deserted Jesus during His trial, suffering and execution, the women were there for Him. After He died, the women prepared his body and visited Him later in the grave. Alas, the good news of resurrection was first shared to the women, and they became the first messengers that Jesus is alive.

May the tradition-breaking worldview of Jesus regarding women be with us all!

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*“Jesus did something even more revolutionary than just including women in his company of followers – he actually taught women spiritual truths.”*

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## **Facing the FUTURE**

March is usually the month of graduation in the Philippines. One of the questions that is often repeated to graduates is “What is your plan for the future?” Whether we admit it or not, we have so many apprehensions when we think about the future.

Let me share some principles in facing the FUTURE:

F - Faith in God has no substitute when preparing for the future.

The story of the Israelites in the Old Testament is a story of faith. They traveled out of Egypt with the faith that they will eventually arrive in the Promised Land. When they doubted, their journey got derailed. But when they trusted God again, they moved closer to their destination.

U - Understand that God has a plan.

Remember the word PLAN when you think of God’s plan: P - Purpose of God is the best. L - Love is the basis of this plan. A - Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in fulfilling this plan. N - Never doubt God’s plan for your life.

T - Thank God that you have today to plan for tomorrow.

Appreciate the present. Thank God that you have another chance to live life. Do not waste your chance rather do what you can do today. Strengthen your optimism about the future by being thankful for today.

U - Utilize the lessons of the past so that you can be better prepared for the next challenge. Reflect on God’s correction and discipline for wisdom and strength.

For athletes there is no substitute for proper preparation and practice. But before that happens, the coach would point out the past

games of the team, and that of the opponent. After knowing that, they practice and prepare based on what happened in the past.

R - Release forgiveness so that you will have no excess baggage in your daily travel.

It is difficult and heavy to live life holding on to anger, bitterness and hang ups. God has already given us the way to unload our burdens but sometimes we still choose to continue in carrying these baggages in our lives. Do remember that bitterness has a way of robbing our happiness. Forgive, just as Christ forgave you – this will give you peace.

E - Enjoy new experiences. Never say never to new things.

A lot of us are afraid to try new things. But if we never dare try a new food or activity we may never know what it is like. Do not be afraid to go out of your comfort zone and live beyond your limits.

This is why Jesus is telling us that our old thinking will not fit with what He has in store for us. New wine needs new wineskins. If we choose to put the “new” in the “old,” then the consequence is that it will “burst.”

Let us leave the past and the future to God; live the present with God.

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*“Appreciate the present. Thank God that you have another chance to live life. Do not waste your chance rather do what you can today.”*

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## **Advice to graduates**

A lot of schools usually have their graduation ceremonies on the month of March. What can we say to our graduates as they face life after school?

Here's what I will say to our college graduates:

First, never stop learning.

Your schooling does not stop when you graduate. When you have a perspective to become a student for life, you develop an inquisitive mind – you question everything and not just accept what you see at face value.

A philosopher once said, “the more you know, the more you don't know.” This statement teaches us to humble ourselves even if we have a lot of degrees, and many initials before and after our names we still must accept the fact that what we know will always be limited compared to the knowledge of God.

Another characteristic of a learner is the courage to unlearn things. Some of us like to hold on to teachings, beliefs and traditions just for the sake of holding on to them for sentimental value or maybe for stubborn reasons. To unlearn is probably the hardest part of the learning process. We need to be open to new ideas that challenge our current perspectives, and accept it if found to be beneficial.

Second, never give up.

The first frustration of new graduates is that they cannot find work immediately. According to the National Statistics Office, the unemployment rate in the Philippines is 5.6 1% (2017), and the underemployment rate is 16.3% (2017) out of the 104.9 million Filipinos (2017).

As this reality sinks in to our new graduates, let those who have passed this way, guide and encourage them so that they will not resort to quick money schemes, shortcuts, and illegal actions just to survive or realize their dreams in the quickest possible way.

Let us remind our graduates that in order for them to realize their aspirations in life, hard work and discipline is really needed. Oftentimes opportunities come to those who are prepared for it. And those who are prepared are the hard workers.

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*“To unlearn is probably the hardest part in the learning process. We need to be open to new ideas that challenge our current perspectives, and accept it if found to be beneficial.”*

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*“Oftentimes opportunities come to those who are prepared for it. And those who are prepared are the hard workers.”*

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## **Be WISE**

In one of the parables of Jesus, there were two builders who heard the Word of God. After the storm, one was declared a wise builder while the other one was called a foolish builder.

What is a WISE person?

W - Willing to listen to the Word of God

Matthew 7:24 says “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

The wise person in the story listened intently. Meaning, he listened with a purpose in mind – and that purpose is to learn lessons and apply it in his life.

The fool also listened but it was not with the intent of learning a lesson. He was probably there just to be counted as someone who attended the gathering, or to refute everything that was said.

I - Inquire more about the Word of God

Matthew 7:25 “And the rain came down and the rivers came and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it did not collapse, because its foundation was laid on the rock.”

This verse reminds us to dig deeper in our study of the Bible. A reading for the sake of reading the Bible is like the fool builder who haphazardly built his house. It resulted into a shallow foundation that consequently destroyed the house. If we are grounded in the Bible, then our faith is rooted in the truth, and it will not waver when the storms of life comes.

S - Shows the Word of God in his/her life

A true proof of being a Christian is in the obedience of the Word of God. We must not be merely hearers of the Word, but more importantly, as doers of the Word. The best version of the Bible is not NIV nor KJV or any other versions, but it is the Applied to Daily Life Version.

E - Enjoy the security of the Word of God

Here is the reality. Our faith has been tested, is being tested, and will continue to be tested. There will be no rest of tests in this life.

Many people have professed their commitment to Christ but some have fallen when the testing comes. They deny their faith when it becomes inconvenient and difficult.

There are many tests in life but the real test is the testing of our faith in Jesus Christ.

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*“The best version of the Bible is not NIV nor KJV or any other versions, but it is the Applied to Daily Life Version.”*

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*“Here is the reality. Our faith has been tested, is being tested, and will continue to be tested. There will be no rest of tests in this life.”*

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## **EARTH Hour**

Every year, during Earth Hour on March, we switch off the lights and other electrical appliances for an hour. This one-hour event gave the world a lot of savings in electrical and fuel costs, and reduced our carbon footprint. But more than that, this commemoration reminded us of the following:

**E** – Earth is our only home. So far, scientists are still unable to find a suitable habitation for humans in other planets. Let us not escape the reality that we were born and we will die on this planet. The sooner we put it in our perspective, the better we will act responsibly.

**A** – Act now. We all heard of campaigns encouraging people to plant a tree, start a vegetable garden, shorten our bath time, not burn plastics, dispose of garbage properly, etc. Have you tried eating vegetables that come from your garden, free from synthetic pesticides? They taste really good.

**R** – Repeat and repeat the campaign to take care of our Earth. We must continue to applaud and support people in the tri-media who advocate the need to take care of our environment. We must also support people who discover and invent products for the betterment of our world. Let us become the prophets like that of the Old Testament who repeatedly warned people to correct their ways so that disaster will not come. This message must be heard from the pulpits of our churches!

**T** – Turn away from bad habits. We all have habits that when compounded have already resulted to some detrimental effects. Let us identify these habits and challenge ourselves to mend our ways. These are also sins that need to be confessed and ask for forgiveness.

**H** – Help one another by being united in effort. When crises come, we are all affected by it. No one is exempted. Let us join groups, and contribute our time, effort and material resources for the cause of taking care of our world. We owe it to our children to be good stewards of the environment.

## **Our children are watching us**

Our two kids would always comment if there are vehicles in the right lane which do not turn right but are waiting for the green light to move forward (they know that right lane vehicles should always turn right, and turning right is always a go). Both of them would also say something if there are drivers who would move forward even though the traffic light is still red. One piercing comment they said was “How will these parents teach their children to do the right thing if they themselves cannot do it?” Indeed, a comment worth remembering.

We are reminded of Deuteronomy 11:18-20 – “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. And you shall teach them to your children by talking about them when you sit in your house and when you travel on the road and when you lie down and when you get up. And you shall write them on the doorframes of your house and on your gates...”

Here are a few lessons that we can learn from these verses:

First, parents should be exemplary models.

Children can see what we are doing, and hear what we are saying. Tying the Scriptures to our hands, and foreheads is a symbol that everything that we say and do should be according to the Word of God.

Second, parents should take time to teach their children about God.

There are many opportunities to teach our children – while sitting, traveling, before bedtime and after waking up, and many more. Anytime can be lesson time.

Third, parents should see to it that their children will read the Scriptures.

Children should start reading the Bible. They should also be able to see Bible verses inside their homes. These printed verses are visual reminders that will surely leave an imprint in the young minds of our children.

Let us be glad when our children point out wrongdoings in our society. This means that we have imparted Christian values to them.

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*“There are many opportunities to teach our children – while sitting, traveling, before bedtime and after waking up, and many more. Anytime can be lesson time.”*

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*“Let us be glad when our children point out wrongdoings in our society. This means that we have imparted Christian values to them.”*

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## **Rest is essential**

Most people are excited about summer time; it means vacation time – a time to rest and relax.

Yes, the Bible is teaching us to rest because rest is essential.

Our modern life is characterized as an “always busy” life. We crave for our phones to ring, for an email to arrive, a notification from Facebook to pop up or a Twitter notification to appear. We have fallen in love with multitasking as if we are Microsoft Windows. Sometimes, the irony is that because of our busyness, no work has been done. We are busy with meetings, and oftentimes we are lazy with the implementations. Nevertheless, management principles tell us that productive, effective and efficient workers are those that are well-rested. This is the reason why we have vacation breaks, paid leaves and so on.

The Bible says in Exodus 34:21 “Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.”

What does rest means?

Rest is not idleness. Rest is best associated with re-creation. This is not entertainment per se but recreation means – to create again, to gain new ideas.

Rest is also about relaxation. Jesus said, “Do not worry...for who can add a single hour to his life by worrying?” None. To worry is subtract hours from our lives.

We also need to lighten up and find humor in life. As the saying says, “Laughter is the best medicine.” This saying is inspired by Proverbs 17:22 that says “A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone-tired” or in another translation “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.”

To rest is also to retreat and commune with God. Jesus Christ would always retreat into the mountain alone to pray. This means that we need “alone time” in order to reflect and evaluate our lives. We also need to be patient when we pray – for prayer is awaiting the command of God.

Let us find time to rest.

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*“Management principles tell us that productive, effective and efficient workers are those that are well-rested.”*

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*“To rest is also to retreat and commune with God. Jesus Christ would always retreat into the mountain alone to pray.”*

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## **Live a Life that Matters**

*My message during the Baccalaureate Service  
of Central Philippine University held at the Rose Memorial  
Auditorium on April 10, 2011.*

There is a story about a young man who applied for work after his graduation. During the interview, the manager asked him. Young man, why do you want to work? He answered, so that I can eat. Then what? So that I can work. Then what? So that I can eat, and buy clothes. The manager told him, “Young man, you are just existing. You are not living. You need to find meaning in your life. You need to find something worthwhile in your life.”

My dear graduates, did you study just to find work so that you can eat? Is this what Central Philippine University taught you for the last 4 to 5 years? I would like to believe that CPU has taught you more than just the ability to find work so that you can feed yourself and your family. I believe that CPU has taught all Centralians how to live meaningful lives in the service of humanity and for the glory of God.

Jesus said, “Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”

Our reflection this morning will focus on how to live meaningful lives – on how to live a life that matters.

I have three things to share to you this morning. There are the three main things CPU has taught me, and still continues to teach Centralians.

First, let us Commit to a kind of life that has an eternal value.

In a parable that Jesus told us, there was a rich man who had an extraordinary crop that the first thought that came to his mind was a question to where will he put the fruits and the harvest. He then proceeded to answer his own question. He planned to tear down his

current barns and build bigger ones, and then he said to himself – “I will take life easy, I will eat, drink and be merry.”

At first glance, we might say to ourselves, there is nothing wrong with this picture. As a student of commerce, I can say that the plan of the rich man is financially sound for he is investing and planning on how to add more to his wealth. He was just acting as a shrewd businessman.

But something is wrong in this picture. God declared this rich man as a fool. God said, “you fool, tonight you will die.” Why did God declare this businessman a fool?

He was a fool because he did not commit his life to a kind of life that has an eternal value. Verse 21 says “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

What is wrong here is that he was only thinking for himself. He was so individualistic that all he thought was “me, myself and I.” He was full of pride on what he has achieved that he has forgotten God.

When he planned to build a bigger barn, he told himself, “where will I put my fruits, my grains, my goods.” He was indeed a fool as God declared because he boastfully declared that what he had were his very own properties – “my fruits, my grains, my goods.”

When God heard his declaration, God responded by saying, “you are a fool.” Let us remember that everything that we have comes only from God. All that we have are God’s blessings and we must be thankful for it by declaring God’s faithfulness, goodness and mercy in our lives.

The rich man did not do this. Instead, he was full of pride. The middle letter in the word pride is I. When you start to think only for yourself, disaster will befall you.

Proverbs 16: 18 “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Another translation says, “First pride, then the crash - the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.” This is what happened to the rich man. And this is what will happen to us also if we will not commit to a kind of life that has an eternal value.

Second, let us be Partners in serving God, and in serving the people.

CPU is a product of a partnership by Filipino and American pastors and missionaries more than 100 years ago.

Let me tell you a short story of our beginnings.

In 1898 a young man named Braulio Manikan met Rev. Eric Lund, a Swedish missionary in Barcelona Spain. Manikan was baptized and became the first Filipino Baptist in history. The partnership of Manikan and Lund started in translating the Bible into Hiligaynon while in Spain. We have to thank these two people every time we read the Hiligaynon version of the Bible.

They eventually arrived in Iloilo on 1900 and organized the first Baptist Church in the Philippines, the Jaro Evangelical Church which was previously situated at the back of the Jaro Cathedral near Jaro Market, and now near Jaro Plaza. They have two worship services – on Thursday because it is market day and on Sunday.

The Baptist mission later built two hospitals in Panay Island: Iloilo Mission Hospital (IMH) in 1901 in cooperation with the Presbyterians, and Capiz Emmanuel Hospital in 1908. They also established schools like the Baptist Missionary Training School in 1904 through the leadership of Anna V. Johnson, and a Baptist Home School in Capiz now known as the Filamer Christian University.

In 1905, Jaro Industrial School started with 17 students. Now, we have more than 11,000 students. When I inquired about the status of Baptist universities around the world that are historically



related to the American Baptist Churches, the officer told me that if CPU will reach 15,000 students, we will become the biggest Baptist university in the whole world. I hope and pray that we can achieve this.

A visible reminder of our partnership is the University Church. The first Filipino president of CPU, Dr. Rex Drilon, defended his plan to construct the University Church away from the school buildings. The Board of Trustees wanted it to be built in the field. He said that we need a big space of land so that the church will stand out. The church should be in her own place so that every time the people walk in the campus, they can automatically see the church.

UC is a symbol of partnership. Why? The design of the church is a Malay *balangay* boat. You can see the *bugsay*, the oar at all sides. It teaches us that if we are united in our *bugsay*, our rowing in one direction, we will move forward. *Indi ta lang pag-usaron ang bugsay nga ilampos sa aton upod.*

Jesus said in verse 35 “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning.” Let us be ready to serve the people of God.

Our society is governed by the economic principle that the bottom line of everything is profit. We tend to always think of how much we will gain, and not on how we can be of service.

The SOP in our society nowadays is to ask: how much is there for me? “*te, pila da ang aton?*” “*Magkano ang pabaon?*” Like the rich man in our story, he was not seeing his extraordinary harvest as an opportunity to serve those who have less in life. Instead, he saw it as an opportunity to gain more profit. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

If the world always says, “what’s in there for me?”, a Christian asks, “how can I be of service? How can I help you?”

Centralians, as you begin your new journey, what would be your question? I hope that your stay here in CPU has given you a lot

of role models from your teachers, administrators, policy makers, and staff. Where is your treasure? I hope that CPU has been true to its mission. I hope that the university has taught you to put your treasure, your heart in the Partnership of serving God, and serving others.

Third, and the last, let us Unload the things that hinder us in focusing our lives to God.

Jesus said in verse 33, “sell your possessions and give it to the poor.” Did Jesus mean that we will give everything that we have, and then there is nothing left for us anymore? I don’t believe that Jesus meant that. Jesus challenged them to give up the things that hindered them in focusing their lives to God. Jesus declared, “No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money.”

What are the things that hinder you from centering your lives to God?

In the Middle Ages, a great reformer by the name of Girolamo Savonarola in Florence, Italy started on what is called the “Bonfire of Vanities.” What he did was to start a bonfire in the plaza and encouraged people to throw away material things that led them to feel arrogant, to burn the things that made them conceited and full of pride.

This movement started a great reform. But later, Savonarola was put to death by rich and powerful people. These people did not want to surrender their vanities. They thought that it is the material things that give meaning to their lives. They hanged and burned Savonarola because they did not want to surrender their pride, they did not want to surrender their arrogance.

My late grandfather once said, “the best things in life are not things.” Savonarola can inspire us to make our own Bonfire of Vanities and then let us throw everything in that bonfire all that hinders us from focusing ourselves to God. Let us throw into the fire those things before the fire of hell will consume us.

Anne Frank, a Jewish girl, who hid with her family in Amsterdam during World War II to escape the Nazi persecution of the Jews wrote in her now very famous diary, “Everyone has inside of her a piece of good news. The good news is that you don’t know how great you can be...How much you can love...what you can accomplish...and what your potential is.”

Anne Frank has reminded us that when we focus ourselves on God, we will find our piece of good news, and we can live a life that matters.

In closing, let me share to you an experience of a good friend of mine who died last year in the ripe age of 96. His name is Dr. Anatalio Viray, fondly called “The Grand Old Man of CPU.” We started our friendship when I was 30 years old and he was 92 years old. I asked him one time about this age gap and he told me, “The friendship of Centralians has no age gaps. The Central Spirit binds us together.”

He shared to me his experience when he was accepted to work in the DBP. He wrote to Gov. Macuja who recommended him. The letter says, “Sir, I can’t thank you enough. I hope someday I can repay you.” The Governor returned the note with his own handwriting on it that says, “Do not think on how to repay me but justify my recommendation.” Upon Viray’s retirement in the DBP, he said to the Governor, “I hope I have justified your recommendation.” The Governor replied, “You even outdid my expectation.”

My dear graduates, your Alma Mater is not expecting you to repay her with donations but CPU is expecting you to justify your being a Centralian. You are now a CPU alumnus. You are now marked with a special symbol written in gold and blue. You are now the embodiment of Scientia et Fides. You are now the prime example of EXCEL. As you go out to the world, CPU is telling you, “Follow excellence. Success will just chase you.”

I hope that our reflection this morning has inspired you to live a life that matters. If you have noticed, my three main points for this morning started with the letters C, P, U. This is what CPU has taught me, and I am passing it to you:

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*Commit to a kind of life that has an eternal value.*

*Partner in serving God, and in serving the people.*

*Unload the things that hinder us in focusing our lives to God.*

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## **The sacrifice of Jesus**

During the Lenten Season we contemplate on how the love of God was manifested in the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ.

The wonderful message of John 3:16 that God loves the world startled Nicodemus when Jesus explained it to him. Nicodemus, like most Jews during those times, thought that God loves only the Jews. They thought that God was exclusive only for them. When Jesus came, He challenged this perspective and put forward the fact that God loves the world – the sinners, the lost, the despised. Somebody said, “This is a wonderful truth when we realize what a world this is – a world of sin and corruption.”

Ephesians 2:4-5 tells us in a beautiful manner how our entire salvation springs forth from the mercy and love of God. The verse says, “But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)”

But the highest expression of God's love is displayed when He gave His only begotten Son to die for the sins of the world. It is only through Christ that we, sinners, have the right to be called sons and daughters of God. From this wonderful love of God in Christ Jesus nothing in heaven or earth or hell, created or uncreated or to be created, shall be able to separate us (Romans 8:37ff).

May we walk each day conscious of the great mercy and love of God in our lives; and may this consciousness spread to other people because they have seen our lives as concrete examples on how God can transform people.

## The process of having peace

The Triumphal Entry of Jesus in Jerusalem can teach us a lot about having peace. Before Jesus entered Jerusalem, He cried while He was coming closer to the city. Luke 19: 41-42 says, “But as they came closer to Jerusalem and Jesus saw the city ahead, he began to weep. “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes.”

His entrance to Jerusalem was a last ditch appeal or attempt to win over the people of Jerusalem and of the whole Israel. Jesus cried on what is happening in Jerusalem. He cried because He had seen enough. His eyes were full of compassion and care. His tears were tears of longing and yearning for Jerusalem to soften their hearts and open their eyes.

Let me share the process of having peace.

First, it starts with Repentance.

Repentance requires two things. First is the admission of sin or guilt done to God and towards people. Secondly, it is the renouncing of that sin or guilt.

Sin in Greek is *hamartia* which means “missing the mark.” This simply means that we are not following God’s will.

Committing sin is caused by our being narrow minded; not open to other people’s views; self-centered; seeing ourselves as always correct; doing things for our own end; selfish; everything that we do is for self-gain; or greed.

Second, it is followed by Reconciliation.

After repentance, forgiveness and healing follow thereafter. If we repent of our sins, we become reconciled with God and with our fellowman.

Third, it is ended by Reform.

Repentance and reconciliation will result to reformation or change in our outlook on life and attitude towards God and people. It is accepting the will of God in our lives, and being conscious that when we follow our own choice it will result to missing the mark once again.

May we have a reflective Holy Week as we celebrate the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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*“Repentance requires two things. First is the admission of sin or guilt done to God and towards people. Secondly, it is the renouncing of that sin or guilt.”*

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*“Repentance and reconciliation will result to reformation or change in our outlook on life and attitude towards God and people.”*

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## **Why must Jesus SUFFER?**

During the Holy Week we see familiar scenes in television, and even re-enactments that are all about the passion of the Christ – His sufferings and crucifixion.

Jesus actually told His disciples that He will certainly suffer: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Luke 9:22)

We can notice in this verse the word “must.” It was a certainty that He must suffer. Let me share 6 things why Jesus must SUFFER?

S - Show God’s love for sinners.

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

U – Unite all people.

Jesus “has broken down, the dividing wall of hostility...making peace...through the cross” (Ephesians 2:14-16).

F – Fulfillment of prophecies.

Here is a prophecy that took a thousand years to fulfill.

Isaiah prophesied Jesus’ suffering: “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3, 5).



F – Final sacrifice.

The Old Testament says that “It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” Hebrews 9:22 affirms that “without the shedding of the blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Jesus had to suffer and die. He is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

E – Eternal security.

Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane – “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). The cup of suffering was drank by Jesus. Jesus did it for our eternal security.

R - Reconcile us back to God.

Jesus removed the barrier between God and people. We are now reconciled back to God through Jesus – “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10).

The next time we are reminded of the sufferings of Jesus on the cross, let us be thankful that He bore the pain and suffering for our sins and let us rejoice because He has overcome the cross and that he rose to life in the fullness of His glory.

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*“Jesus removed the barrier between God and people. We are now reconciled back to God through Jesus.”*

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## **The meaning of Christ's resurrection for us**

If Christ has conquered death, then what does it mean for us?

First, the resurrection of Jesus means that we too can rise above the death-like situations that surround us.

Paul affirms that we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as illustrated in our baptism. If this is so, then we are empowered by God to see life, and make life-affirming decisions in seemingly hopeless situations.

Second, the resurrection of Jesus means that the Gospel we preach is true.

In the book of Acts, the word “resurrection” was repeated many times. The disciples were full of courage in preaching the good news about Jesus because of the resurrection. The disciples who were previously scattered and dejected during the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus were transformed. They became bold enough to stand in front of many people and declare that they are followers of Jesus. This was because of one thing alone – the resurrection of Jesus. This means that we too should not be ashamed in sharing the Gospel because our God is not dead.

Third, the resurrection of Jesus means that we are now bringers of hope.

Hope is very powerful as a psychological motivation. How much more if our hope is based on the resurrected Jesus. Our expectation then is full of confidence because “he who began a good work in us will surely bring it on to completion...” (Phil 1:6). Our hope is not just a mere psych ploy, but more importantly a spirituality that is anchored in a certainty. Let us share that hope with others.

## Christ is ALIVE

What is the message of the resurrection of Jesus for us? Let me share five things using the word ALIVE as an acrostic.

A – Accomplished mission of Jesus Christ. One of the words uttered by Jesus in the cross was “It is finished.” In the Greek text, it is *tetelestai*, and it means, “It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!” Probably the most meaningful meaning of *tetelestia* was used by the merchants during that time, and it means: “The debt is paid in full!” The resurrection validates that indeed Jesus accomplished His mission.

L – Love of God knows no bounds. Jesus defined “great love” as the laying down of oneself for another. This is what Jesus did. The two criminals who hanged in the cross together with Jesus had equal access to Him. Only one repented. The centurion declared upon seeing the suffering and death of Jesus, that indeed Jesus is a righteous man. Some members of the crowd who watched Jesus die went home beating their breasts because they were convicted of their sins. I would like to believe that most of them were there during the preaching of Peter, and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

I – Instill courage to the believers. During the mock trial of Jesus, the disciples deserted him, and even disowned him. They cowered with fear. But after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples were transformed people who had the courage to stand among the crowd of thousands to preach the gospel. Amidst persecution, they persevered because they have the courage anchored on the faith that Jesus has risen from the dead. We, too, can be courageous because Jesus conquered death.

V – Victory over the forces of death. The words and deeds of Jesus were centered on giving people life as against the forces of death peddled by the Romans, Sadducees, and the Pharisees. The agents of death conspired to kill Jesus so that He cannot continue His ministry. But His death did not stop His message, for in His

resurrection, all that He did and said became even more significant. This gives us the impetus to continue fighting the agents of destruction.

E – Expect mysterious things to happen. Nobody took serious notice on the pronouncements of Jesus regarding His death and resurrection. His disciples did not believe it, thus, they were not expecting it. His resurrection gives us the hope that with God anything is indeed possible, and things happen for a purpose, yet at first glance we question why those things happened at the first place with no apparent reason.

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*“The words and deeds of Jesus were centered on giving people life as against the forces of death peddled by the Romans, Sadducees, and the Pharisees.”*

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*“His resurrection gives us the hope that with God anything is indeed possible, and things happen for a purpose...”*

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## **What my grandfather taught me**

Last April 2017 we journeyed from La Carlota City to Sindangan, Zamboanga del Norte via Dumaguete City. It took us more than 14 hours of land and sea travel. Before we departed from my hometown, my grandfather, Rev. Jose T. Gico, Jr., was not feeling well. We made some quick decisions that led us to continue with our travel, and for my parents to stay behind. It was a decision based on the belief that our grandfather wanted us not to miss our appointments as resource speakers of the annual assembly of the Western Mindanao Kasapulan of Baptist Churches. Along the way, we received news that our 92-year old grandfather, fondly called as “Daddy Gico” went home to be our Savior, Jesus Christ. And now, the Holy Week had an added meaning to us.

What can I say about Lolo JOE?

J - Jesus first was his motto, and so should ours be.

The belief of Paul in Philippians 1:21 “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” was seen in the life of Lolo Joe. He ingrained in us the way of life that Jesus should always come first, no matter what, and cost what it may.

O - Obedient to God’s calling as a pastor.

Since graduating in the CPU College of Theology in 1950, he started working in Hinigaran Evangelical Church for more than 50 years – the only Pastor to do so in the history of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches. If Lolo Joe was not obedient to God’s calling, he could not have done it. He could have quit a lot of times when he was maligned, but he persevered. And for that, he was respected by his peers, the congregation, and his students.

E - Empowered others to serve God and people.

According to observation, it is very rare to see three generations of pastors in one family, and in-laws in the pastoral ministry as well.

This is the legacy of my grandparents who were both pastors – Lolo Joe and Lola Pacing Huelar-Gico (a Baptist Missionary Training School graduate of CPU). At one time, almost 75 percent of the personnel of the Convention Baptist Bible College from the president to faculty are from my family – we call it the Aaronic priestly legacy. When Lolo Joe sensed that I can answer his questions on Systematic Theology, and Church History, he gave up teaching these beloved subjects of his, and transferred it to me. It was an honor that I would always treasure.

In my travels to many churches, most of the pastors that I met from ages 40 up are students of my grandparents. They would confide to me that they are inspired by the commitment and consistency of my grandparents.

Deep in my heart, I believe that Lolo Joe has heard from Jesus himself the words, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”

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*“Our Lolo Joe ingrained in us the way of life  
that Jesus should always come first, no matter  
what, and cost what it may.”*

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## **Lessons from the seaside**

Iba, Zambales, where the National PRISAA 2017 was held is a municipality beside the sea. Apart from participating in the sports events, Athletes and coaches from all over the Philippines visited the beaches in this place either to exercise or simply to relax and wait for the games to begin.

In one of the post-resurrection stories, Jesus was at a seaside waiting for the disciples who decided to go fishing. This story can be found in John 21:1-14.

What can we learn from this story?

Let us consider the portion about fishing. The disciples went fishing during night time and they always went fishing in the deep. Jesus on the other hand told them to fish during the early morning, and to fish in shallow waters.

What is Jesus trying to teach us?

First, Jesus is teaching us to think “outside the box” “beyond borders” “apart from traditions”.

When everyone is doing it on nighttime, try doing it in day time. If they are all doing it on the left side of the boat, you try doing it on the right side. If most people are doing it in deep waters, then try it in shallow waters.

For athletes, this means that they need to find strokes that may be considered as unorthodox but effective. This means changing your game style even in the middle of the game so that you can win the game. This means trying out new combinations, new styles, new techniques.

Another portion of the story is about the haul of the disciples. It was full of large fish, 153 in all. They were not able to haul it all at once. What can we learn from this?

Second, Jesus is teaching us about obedience.

The story of the Israelites in the Old Testament is a story of obedience and disobedience. When they obeyed, they prospered. If they disobeyed, something bad happened to them.

When the disciples obeyed Jesus, they were rewarded with a great haul of fish.

In this regard, athletes need to listen to their coaches. The coaches are there to guide them and point out their mistakes – to bring out the best in them. Most players who do not listen are not rewarded.

Another portion of the story is about Jesus having some fish and bread on burning coals. Jesus also told His disciples to add the fresh catch of fish to what He already prepared.

What is Jesus trying to point here?

Third, Jesus is teaching us that we need time to unwind and relax.

Oftentimes we picture out Jesus as someone very serious and boring. This is not so. Children were running to him. Jesus had a great charisma and could relate to all people from all walks of life.

There are many instances in the Bible where Jesus brought his disciples somewhere to unwind and relax. He brought them to an island-hopping journey, to weddings, to the mountains for a retreat, and seaside for eating.

For athletes, they need to be reminded that there should be a time to cool down and relax. If not, then they will be stressed out and will not perform well.

May we find time to be at a seaside and re-read the stories of Jesus, to reflect on His instructions and to immerse ourselves in His peace and goodness.



## Who is the Holy Spirit?

In one of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, He promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit will be with them.

The subject regarding “Holy Spirit” is not often studied. The numerous studies about “Jesus” and “God the Father” have overshadowed the study about the “Holy Spirit.” Thus, the Holy Spirit is seldom a topic in the pulpit.

50 days after Resurrection Sunday is Pentecost Day. Since we are celebrating Pentecost Day in our church calendar every year, it would be best if we become familiar with the Holy Spirit.

First, the Holy Spirit is a Comforter, a Helper. In John 14:18 Jesus promised that He will not leave us comfortless or an orphan.

Let us pray for those who are in grief and facing problems that the Holy Spirit will comfort them.

Second, the Holy Spirit is a Teacher. John 16:12-15 says “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth...the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will make us conscious every day about what God is teaching us – truths on the things that we encounter as we go on with our lives.

Third, the Holy Spirit is a Reminder. John 14:26 says “But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.”

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will refresh us every day with the scriptures so that we can live our lives according to the will of God.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins. John 16:8 says “When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”

In our modern parlance, we can liken the Holy Spirit to our conscience for He really is the one who speaks as our conscience. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will make us feel guilty when we commit sins.

Fifth, the Holy Spirit gives us hope. John 16:13 says “When the Holy Spirit comes, he will tell you what is yet to come.”

During uncertain times, this gives us the courage to go on because the Holy Spirit is there. Let us pray that hope will lead us to actions that will encourage us to be more hopeful and trusting in times of trouble.

Sixth, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be witnesses of Jesus. Acts 1:8 says “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will empower us so that we conquer our fears that oftentimes lead us to inactivity in professing the gospel.

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*“Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will make us conscious every day about what God is teaching us – truths on the things that we encounter as we go on with our lives.”*

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## **The New Testament manner of election**

One of the things that the disciples did after the ascension of Jesus was to choose someone to replace Judas to complete the 12.

What they did was to nominate someone with this criterion: he must be among those who accompanied Jesus beginning from the baptism of John, a witness of the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. They proposed two persons who passed this criterion: Barsabbas and Matthias.

Acts 2:24-26 records what happened in their election: Then they prayed, “You, Lord, know the hearts of all; show which of these two You have chosen to take the place in this apostolic service that Judas left to go to his own place.” Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias. So he was numbered with the 11 apostles.

In recent history, one of the main conflicts in Baptist churches is in the election of our officers. I think some of you have an experience with this kind of problem.

We love to proclaim that we are biblical. We believe in the authority of the Holy Scriptures in in our whole life. Yet, oftentimes, we can hear ourselves saying, “What does our Constitution and By-laws say? Is this action Constitutional?” What should we follow if there is a conflict between the two? The Bible or the Constitution and By-laws of the church?

The members of the Convention Baptist Ministers’ Association (CBMA) also had this dilemma. Bible or Constitution?

Last January 2010 and January 2011 the CBMA finally reclaimed the biblically-guided way of choosing servant-leaders, and that is through the casting of lots like what the Apostles did in replacing Judas. This is historic for the CBMA. We have officially decided to define the manner of election as casting of lots, and have practiced it for two years.

The CBMA has proven that it is possible. Unlike the usual election process which have caused bickering, scandal, and heartache, this new election mode proved to be different; it was a blissful and uniting experience. This experience is so beautiful to be left unshared. We share it now to you.

The pastors shared this manner of election to the national youth assembly of the Convention Baptist Youth Fellowship of The Philippines in Filamer Christian University last May 23-27, 2011. The youth were challenged, and voted to amend their Constitution and By-laws to conform to the biblical mandate. The result was a very moving experience by our young people. They gathered in a worship service and asked a 3-year old child (my daughter Francheska) to pick the names of the next set of officers.

I pray that our organizations, associations, and churches can learn from this experience especially those that are suffering from election-related problems like power struggle, and holding-on like geckos in leadership positions. Let us once again bring back the authority of the Bible in our lives.

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*“What should we follow if there is a conflict between the two? The Bible or the Constitution and By-laws of the church?”*

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## **LABOR Day**

May 1 is Labor Day in honor of all laborers. Let me share five things, using LABOR as the outline that could help you as you go to work every day.

**L - Love your work.**

The secret of how you can love your work is in your perspective, and attitude. Paul in Colossians 3:23 teaches us that in whatever we do, we must work at it with all our heart, as working for the Lord, and not for people.

**A - Accept your job with gratitude, and be a hard worker.**

The latest statistics show that more than 20% of adult Filipinos have no jobs. This means that if you have one, then you must be thankful to God. Our gratitude should also lead us to work hard to be an effective and efficient worker. Ecclesiastes 9:10 reminds us that “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”

**B - Believe that God created you to do something great.**

If we believe that we are a product of God’s design, and that we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, then God has put something in us that should propel us to finding the good in our respective jobs that will give us the inspiration to do it. Paul said it best in Ephesians 2:10 “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

**O - Open your heart and share what you have earned to the needy.**

Paul reminds us that when we work and earn its rewards, we must not forget to help the poor. The blessings of God will return to

us many times over when we are not selfish. In Acts 20:35, Paul shares his real life testimony – “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.’”

R - Reward yourself with the fruits of your work.

We work for our needs and for our family. But we must also find a way to enjoy the fruits of our labor by having a vacation or by buying something you have been dreaming of. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us in 3:13 about the reason why we work -- “That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God.”

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*“If we believe that we are a product of God’s design, and that we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, then God has put something in us that should propel us to finding the good in our respective jobs that will give us the inspiration to do it.”*

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*“The blessings of God will return to us many times over when we are not selfish.”*

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## Commencement

The May 2017 Commencement Exercises of Central Philippine University is a beginning of a new tradition. There were two Commencement Exercises dividing the colleges according to sizes and held it in two consecutive days with two speakers – the Borquist couple, Rev. Dr. Ann and Bruce, long-time friends and former missionaries of the university. This new arrangement gave comfort and convenience to the graduates and their parents since it was held at the air-conditioned Rose Memorial Auditorium instead of the Big Field. The programs were also short and gave ample time for families and friends of graduates to have a celebratory dinner.

What life lessons can we learn from this new arrangement of the Commencement Exercises?

First, do not be afraid to try new things.

Our history books are full of people who did things that were not done before. Do not listen to words like “we cannot do this because it was never done before” or “do not try it because it might be a disaster.” We must be trailblazers in our chosen field of endeavors, and as Bruce Borquist said, “we must be creators instead of being consumers.”

One of the courageous phrases that I encountered is this phrase used by Jesus – “You have heard that it was said... But now I tell you...” This phrase should embolden us to use our God-given gifts to look for paradigms that are new but consistent with Christian values.

Second, continue to find ways and means to make life meaningful and better.

Ann Borquist challenged us to “make it better.” Let us not waste our time but instead decide to do something that can make a difference. Let us not be contented with mediocrity but instead aim for excellence in everything that we do.

As new beings in Christ Jesus, we are called by God to bring about changes that are life-giving and life-affirming. This means that we must combat situations that threatens and degrades life.

The change of venue, and the new arrangement of the Commencement Exercises is teaching us not to be afraid to go into uncharted territories, and to always have a perspective that think and do what is more excellent for the Glory of God.

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*“Our history books are full of people who did things that were not done before. Do not listen to words like “we cannot do this because it was never done before” or “do not try it because it might be a disaster.”*

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*“As new beings in Christ Jesus, we are called by God to bring about changes that are life-giving and life-affirming. This means that we must combat situations that threaten life, and degrades life.”*

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## **The faith of a nameless mother**

The annual Mother's Day celebration leads us to reflect about mothers in the Bible.

There are many nameless women in the Bible. This is mainly because of the patriarchal system during the biblical times. But we are glad that although they were nameless, their stories are in the Bible to tell of a mother's love. There was one nameless mother whom Jesus encountered. The daughter of this woman was suffering from demon possession.

In this encounter, Jesus said to this mother, "Woman, you have great faith." These words were not even used by Jesus to his disciples. Jesus even called them, "O ye of little faith." All of us can learn from the faith of this nameless mother.

This nameless mother had the courage to cross great barriers. She was persistent even in the midst of demoralizing situations. And she was humble in her appeal to Jesus.

We can see the following barriers that this nameless mother faced:

First, she was a woman. Women in the Old Testament were considered as properties, and second class citizens. They often stayed at home. They could not talk directly to a rabbi. But this mother broke all traditions. She had the courage to cross barriers.

Second, she was a Gentile. This means that she was not a Jew. Jews felt that since they are the chosen people of God, they have the right to look down on others. In Matthew 15:24 Jesus answered to her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." This was actually a test of Jesus. Jesus is for everyone and not for Israel alone. But Jesus wanted to test her faith. She passed with flying colors. She had the courage to cross barriers.

Third, she was a Canaanite. Canaanites hated the Israelites. Why? Israel is the new name that the Israelites gave to the Promised Land. The original name of the land was Canaan. Another name of Canaan is Palestine. This is why the hatred is still present up until now. The Israelites call it the land given by God, while the Palestinians insist that it is their land since their ancestors were born there. But this woman did not think about this hatred. She persisted even if Jesus was silent at first about her request. She continued to persist when the disciples told her to go away. She had the courage to cross barriers.

Faith requires us to have the courage to cross whatever barriers that may stand in our way.

What barriers are you facing right now? Let us learn from this nameless mother whose love for her daughter knew no bounds. She crossed the barriers with great courage and faith. Because of this, her daughter was healed.

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*“Faith requires us to have the courage to cross whatever barriers that may stand in our way.”*

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## **Five lessons from five biblical mothers**

Every year we celebrate Mother's Day during the second Sunday of May. Let me share to you five lessons from five biblical mothers.

First, a mother must have the courage of the mother of Moses. Her name is Jochebed.

Jochebed feared for Moses' life. The Pharaoh during that time ordered the midwives to kill all male babies. This is to cut down the population and to weaken the future leadership of the Jews who occupied a portion of Egypt. Jochebed took courage and let go of Moses. Eventually, this act of courage was rewarded by having her son back in her arms because she was chosen by Pharaoh's daughter, who found Moses near the riverbank, to tend the baby.

Moses became the leader of the Jews when they had their exodus from Egypt.

Do we have the courage to let go of our children, and not choke them in the guise of protecting them?

Second, a mother must be prayerful like the mother of Samuel. Her name is Hannah.

Hannah was barren but she prayed hard to have a child – specifically a baby boy. She also promised God that her son's life will be dedicated to the work of God. When Samuel was old enough to stay with the priest Eli, Hannah fulfilled her promise to God. She would frequently visit Samuel and gave him a robe.

Samuel became a judge and a prophet who was tasked to look for a king and later found David.

Do we pray for our children? Are we concerned about their spiritual lives?

Third, a mother must believe in the mysterious ways of God like the mother of Isaac. Her name is Sarah.

The name Sarah means “a mother of nations.” Before her name was changed from Sarai, she was lacking faith that she would have a child. She even laughed at the prospect of being pregnant. But she had faith and gave room for miracles to happen. Her son, Isaac, then became one of the patriarchs of Israel.

Do we give room for God to do his mysterious ways in our lives?

Fourth, a mother must be ready to accept the task that God has given her like the mother of Jesus. Her name is Mary.

God chose Mary and she had accepted the will of God with humility and much courage. She was humble enough to carry the Savior of the world in her womb. She was courageous to face a community that frowns upon and even stones to death unmarried pregnant women. She sacrificed a lot in following the will of God to be the mother of Jesus.

Do we accept the will of God even if entails sacrifices?

Fifth, a mother must be a teacher of scriptures to their children like the mother of Timothy. Her name is Eunice.

Eunice and the Lois, her mother, teamed up to teach Timothy the scriptures when he was young. Timothy later became a pastor, a missionary, a trusted companion and considered as a spiritual son of Paul.

Do we teach our children the scriptures? Do we bring them closer to the Lord by loving God? Are we, like the five mothers in the Bible, faithful in serving God? And lastly, do we submit our children to plans of God?

## **Judgment Day**

Last May 21, 2011 was the much publicized Judgment Day predicted by Harold Camping, the 89-year old network president of Family Radio in the USA. He also said that the end of the world will be on October 21, 2011.

You can read one of the tracts of this group at this site:  
<http://www.ebiblefellowship.com/outreach/tracts/may21/>

You can also read one of the refutations of this so-called “prophecy” at this site:  
<http://www.realtruth.org/articles/110514-001-prophecy.html>

The dates have passed and his predictions are yet to happen. The following verses are very clear that no person will ever know the time when Christ will return: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes” (Matt. 25:13). “But of that day and that hour knows no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). Hopefully, all of us who profess to be Christians will take heed of this truth lest we too will be declared as false prophets. Jesus warned about this on Matt. 24:11 “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.”

What can we learn from this? The lesson is very clear: Jesus Christ will really come again. Thus, we must live our lives according to His purpose because He will come any time (or death will befall us anytime).

I remember a classroom discussion on End Times with Dr. Johnny V. Gumban. He said something like this, “A Christian life is a like a maze. Do not live beginning from the “Start” but begin to see the perspective of our lives from “End.” Why? Because we know that God will triumph in the end over evil, and that Jesus will come again. If you have this in mind, then you will live victorious and righteous lives.”

## **FAMILY time**

Summertime is usually associated with vacations with our family. Let me share a reflection that can remind us about the importance of spending time with our family.

**F – Fellowship, Fun and Food.** Filipino families always gather together in a festive mood, and lots of food are always there. Laughter is always heard when we have fellowship with each other. Let us pray that when we think of family we always think of having fun together and celebrating the gift of family.

**A – Accountability.** Each family member must be accountable of each other. Each of us must be our brother's and sister's keeper. One time during our family vacation, I heard my mother yelling "count your family members" before the bus left from our stop-over place. Let us pray that when we think of family we would always be assured that we can count each other to be there in good and bad times – everybody moves forward together, nobody gets left behind.

**M – Memories.** Old as well as new stories abound when families gather together. Our clan reunion this 2017 was the first time that my grandparents were not around. We surely missed them, and we will surely reminisce the days when they were still with us in the flesh. Let us keep the legacies of our foreparents alive by sharing their lives and stories to the younger generation.

**I – Interest.** Family vacations and reunions are always times to update each other with what is happening in our personal lives. Let it be that we will not only be interested with each other during reunions but on days when we are apart from each other. Let us continually show our family members that we care and value them. Send them a message and ask them how they are, let them know that you are pray for the unceasingly.

**L – Love.** It is love that binds families together. It is not only love due to our blood relations, but it is also love borne out of our common faith and love for the Jesus Christ. Let it be that when we

think of family, we think of how loving each other is a command from God.

Y – Yearn for more. A family that is united always yearns for more time to be together. Let us pray that families all over the world will always yearn for the company of each other with Christ as the center.

May you find time to be with your family.

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*“Let us pray that when we think of family we always think of having fun together and celebrating the gift of family.”*

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*“Let us pray that when we think of family we would always be assured that we can count each other to be there in good and bad times – everybody moves forward together, nobody gets left behind.”*

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## **Be a road SIGN towards Jesus**

Last 2017, our family vacation brought us to some parts of Mindanao. We traveled from La Carlota City to Cagayan de Oro for 26 hours passing by major cities like Dapitan, Oroqueta, Ozamis, and Iligan. We passed by three regions and finally arrived in our final destination. What helped us along the way were the road signs that informed us of the number of kilometers to the next destination, and also pointed us to the right direction. In times when there were no road signs, we either relied on Google Maps, or simply asked people for directions.

As Christians, we need to be road signs for people who are looking for Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be a road SIGN?

**S - Show the way towards Jesus.**

A road sign needs to be visible in order for it be useful. As Christians, our lives should visibly show that we are transformed people. In doing so, we are showing the way towards Jesus Christ. We become the route in which people may meet Jesus.

**I - Inform others about Jesus.**

A road sign needs to be informative. It is only as useful as the information it carries. In the same manner, Christians should be ready to answer questions about Jesus, the Bible and the church.

**G - Go, warning and stop signs are commands of Jesus.**

The three colors in traffic light – red, amber (yellow orange) and green – mean stop, warning and go. As Christians we need to stop doing what is evil, warn people about their wickedness and go to the whole world and share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.



N - Name the signs properly so that it will point clearly to Jesus.

There are instances when road signs are confusing – either the paint has already faded or a heavy storm has bent the sign towards another way. This will surely get you lost. As Christians, we need to examine and reexamine our lives so that we are not sowing confusion nor pointing people to the wrong direction.

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*“As Christians, our lives should visibly show that we are transformed people.”*

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*“As Christians, we need to examine and reexamine our lives so that we are not sowing confusion nor pointing people to the wrong direction.”*

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## **Be REST assured**

There were seven of us who traveled last May 27, 2017 from Banga, Aklan to Iloilo City via Jamindan, Capiz. In a downhill area outside Lambunao, our vehicle suddenly shuddered. I thought it was a flat tire. Upon closer inspection, I saw that out of the five bolts, only two bolts remained attached to the left rear tire. Two were broken, and one was disfigured. It was only by the mercies of God that we did not have an accident. The vehicle also broke down in an area where there is a nearby auto shop, and a motorcycle driver who helped us find the spare parts.

During this ordeal, one statement repeatedly popped in my head – “Be rest assured.” That phrase reminded me that what is promised by God will surely be fulfilled.

In relation to the Ascension Day celebration (40 days after Resurrection Day), what can we learn about the assurance of the Scriptures that Jesus will come again.

What does it mean to be REST assured?

**R** – Ready ourselves for the coming of the Lord. Ready or not, Jesus will come again. We do not know the date and neither should we speculate about it. Our attitude is that we must always be ready.

**E** – Expect the coming of the Lord with joy and not with fear. Although Jesus will be a judge when He comes again, let us not dread it. It should be a joy to give an account of ourselves. You will only be afraid if you are doing evil things.

**S** – Serve the Lord through the church while waiting. We must not be idle while waiting. Jesus told His disciples before He ascended that they must be His witnesses to the whole world. This is our mission too. We must use our God-given gifts in spreading the Gospel.

T – Trust in the promises of God that He is faithful and just to fulfill it. We can rest from our fears and worries because we are rest assured of God’s faithfulness. Our near-accident experience taught us that we can be confident of God's assurances.

Let it be that in whatever circumstance that may come our way we are rest assured that God is with us.

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*“Ready or not, Jesus will come again. We do not know the date and neither should we speculate about it. Our attitude is that we must always be ready.”*

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*“Although Jesus will be a judge when He comes again, let us not dread it. It should be a joy to give an account of ourselves.”*

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## **How to KNOW God deeper?**

News reports indicated that an estimated 22.89 million Filipino students went back to school last June 5, 2017 as the first day of classes in public schools for school year 2017-2018 officially opened. These students will surely do their best to learn more. Hopefully they will become productive members of our society.

As Christians, it is our duty to learn more about God, and become spiritually mature. Let us remember four things as we get to KNOW God deeper.

**K – Knowledge of God comes only from the revelation of God.**

In other words, we cannot know God nor understand God unless God reveals Himself to us. Theologians use arguments like the argument of cause and effect, intelligent design, and every object has a purpose to point the existence of God. But God's highest revelation is in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and this is revealed through the authoritative Word of God, the Bible.

**N – Neglecting the reading the Word of God will lead to spiritual immaturity.**

We have many excuses for not reading the Bible like: we have no time, we are lazy, the Bible is irrelevant, or the sermon on Sundays is already adequate. We need to find time to read the Bible because it will certainly guide us and help us build an intimate relationship with God.

**O – Obedience of the Word of God is applied knowledge.**

We obey the Word of God not just because God rewards obedience or Jesus calls us to follow his commandments, but also because our obedience is a proof of our love and faith in God, and that obedience is better than any religious ritual.

**W – Wait for the Holy Spirit.**

June 4, 2017 is Pentecost Sunday. Christians commemorate the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, and the birth of the church. We are bombarded with a lot of knowledge in this world but all we need to do so that we can test all these knowledge is to be patient and wait for the workings of the Holy Spirit. In that way we can discern what is godly and what is not.

Like students who welcome another school year of academic learning and promotion, let us also be eager to learn about the Word of God and to strengthen our relationship with Him.

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*“As Christians, it is our duty to learn more about God, and become spiritually mature.”*

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*“We need to find time to read the Bible because it will certainly guide us and help us build an intimate relationship with God.”*

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## **The role of teachers and students**

Every June in the Philippines, millions of students troop different campuses to meet new classmates and teachers, to form new acquaintances and friends, and most importantly, to learn to new lessons to make them better persons for the glory of God and in the service of humanity.

Paul in his letter to Timothy wrote, “You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.” (2 Tim 2:2). This passage reminds us of the crucial role of teaching the next generation about Jesus Christ so that they too will become disciples of our Lord and encourage many to follow Christ.

I came across these words that challenged me as a teacher. The teacher needs to learn and unlearn certain attitudes, habits and work ethics. “Their work should become more of facilitation, compassionate counsel and leading rather than supervision and control of learning...The teacher will have to transform the classroom and any learning situations into a crucible for assessing every idea under the fire of analysis and criticism with a view to its continuing refinement in theory and practice.”

Moreover, the role of the student is not just to become a mere depository of knowledge but also to become vessels of truth and enlightenment to others. Students “must be taught to generate ideas more than they accumulate what others may have generated...It is the process of mobilizing the intellect to question the what is in order to get at what ought to be; to break through the cocoon of canned knowledge; and to explore the vastness of the unknown...They will have to be trained to think critically, creatively and innovatively, and to challenge even the most sacrosanct intellectual assumptions and truths.”

May God bless us all as we continue to fulfill the roles of being a teacher, and a student.

## Freedom in Jesus Christ

Last June 12, 2017, the Philippines celebrated its 119<sup>th</sup> Independence Day. It has been 119 years since our country achieved independence from Spain after more than 300 years under their rule. The declaration of independence on June 12, 1898 was sadly not recognized by Spain and the United States of America. Spain even ceded the Philippines to the USA in the Treaty of Paris which prompted the Philippine-American war. Later on July 4, 1946, the USA granted independence to the Filipinos. The two dates continue to be a point of debate among historians even until now – what is the proper date of our Independence Day?

But what about the date when you received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? Can you still remember your freedom day – freedom from the clutches of sin and darkness? Paul wrote about bondage and freedom in Romans 6:20-23. What then are the things that we need to remember?

First, we were slaves to the power of sin. Before Jesus Christ came into our lives, we had no obligation to do what was right and good. We were actually free to do anything we want but that freedom cost us our souls – we are now ashamed of the things that we used to do. If not for Jesus, then we were doomed eternally.

Second, freedom in Jesus Christ means that we become servants of God. This seems to be a contradiction or a paradox but it is not. We are being set free to serve God and the people. We are now more than thankful to do what is right and pursue holiness in everything that we do. We seek the will of God, and follow it as a testimony of our commitment to our Lord and Savior. We embrace life-giving and life-affirming situations, and protest against any form of activity that leads to death and death-like circumstances. This is our kind of life the moment we were marked as “Christians” – we belong to Christ, and must follow Christ.

Let us remember our freedom day, and seek out those who are still in bondage and let them know how it is to be free in Christ Jesus.

## Jesus SAVES

Every time Filipinos see the flag raised up high, we remember the cost of our freedom from Spanish colonizers – the sacrifice and death of the revolutionaries.

Every Christian must also remember our Independence Day – the day Jesus was nailed on the cross and died for our sins.

Let me share 5 things from an acrostic of Jesus SAVES:

S – Sets us free from any bondage.

The mission of God is to give liberation from anything that hinders us in achieving an abundant life. The mission of God is to free us from spiritual and physical sin. Salvation means – from slavery to freedom.

In the Old Testament, God liberated the Jewish people from the exploitative and oppressive system of the Egyptians. The Lord freed them and guided them to the Promise Land. In the New Testament, the mission of Jesus was still to proclaim liberation. Jesus was sent to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

A – Assures us of Eternal Life

Salvation is now and not yet. Salvation is here and there. Meaning, salvation can be experienced on earth as well as in heaven. John 3:16 assures us that whosoever believes in Jesus Christ will have everlasting life. But Matthew 7:21 warns us, “Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”



## V – Victory over sin

The center letter of the word sin is I. Jesus saves us from an attitude of me, myself and I. We must give up looking first and foremost for own our self-interest, self-gratification and self-glorification.

Let us remember Adam and Eve. They committed sin when they chose to follow their own will rather than the will of God. They were given everything in the Garden of Eden yet they disobeyed God by taking what was forbidden.

## E – Elevates the status of the marginalized

Elevating the status of the marginalized was a way of life for Jesus. He talked to women, tax collectors, sick and poor. God is a God of life. Jesus had a preferential option for the poor because the poor were dying before their time. Jesus pronounced a blessing and protection to the marginalized sector.

## S – Showers us with blessings

Lamentations 3:22-23, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness O Lord, great is thy faithfulness.”

God is love. God is faithful. God is merciful. How much does God love us? Jesus answered this question by stretching his hands in the cross and said, “I love you this much!”

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*“The mission of God is to give liberation from anything that hinders us in achieving an abundant life.”*

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## Happy Father's Day

There is a story about an eight year old king named Josiah who was declared by 2 Chronicles 34:2 as a king who “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.”

What is interesting here is that King David was not actually his father but his great great great grandfather. King Josiah's father was King Amon, a wicked king who did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He was later assassinated by his officials. King Amon's father was a wicked king at first but later repented and changed his ways. King Amon did not follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, King Hezekiah.

This account reminds fathers that though you are a good father, your son or your children will still have to make decisions of their own.

What happened with King Josiah was that while he was young, three spiritual fathers took upon themselves the responsibility of mentoring and guiding him. These three spiritual fathers were Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk – three prophets whose books are in the Old Testament.

The story of King Josiah is a great reminder to fathers and to all parents as well. We alone cannot teach our children to become good people. The story tells us that we need the church and other spiritual fathers to mentor our children. Those fathers who are spiritually mature must take the responsibility to seek out children in the church and help them grow in their spiritual lives. All fathers in the church must also allow their children to be mentored.

What were the results of the spiritual training of King Josiah?

First, there was spiritual cleansing in the land (2 Chronicles 34:3-7). He personally led the destruction of idols and the images of Baal and Ashera.

Second, the temple was repaired. (2 Chronicles 34:8-13). He made explicit instructions to repair the temple and open it again to be used by the people. King Josiah led the celebration of the Passover Feast which his father forgot to celebrate.

Third, the Scriptures were discovered again. (2 Chronicles 34:14-28). King Josiah was informed by his assistant, Shaphan that sacred scrolls were found. It was then read to him. He tore his robes upon hearing the Word of God from the Torah. It is very difficult to imagine that there was a time when the people of Israel were not able to read the Scriptures. King Josiah led the way for the Israelites to be able to hear the Word of God again.

Dear fathers, let us not abdicate our responsibility to mentor and guide our children. Let us also seek others who are spiritually mature to help us rear our children. Our children will later make their own decisions but it is our decision now that will eventually lead our children to seek God's will and counsel in the choices they make.

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*"We alone cannot teach our children to become good people."*

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*"Dear fathers, let us not abdicate our responsibility to mentor and guide our children."*

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## **Biblical reminders for fathers**

I had an opportunity to visit an exhibit in Ayala Mall Cebu featuring the Philippine National Hero, Dr. Jose Rizal during its 150<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary last 2011. It features the original clothes and pants of Rizal. Although Rizal was not able to become a biological father, he was considered as one of the Founding Fathers of the Philippine Revolution.

Let me use the acrostic RIZAL for the Biblical reminders for our present day fathers:

R – Revolutionary.

One of the fathers in the Bible that can be called a revolutionary is Joshua. He was a revolutionary because he went against the tides of opinion. Joshua chose to trust God when others would not. Like Joshua, we must declare that we and our families are going to serve the Lord even if the majority of people are not doing it! Joshua 24:15 (ESV) says, “And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

I – Integrity.

Genesis 18:19 (ESV) says, “For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” Our society nowadays is really in need of fathers who are full of integrity. Our children are looking at us as their prime model in their lives. Proverbs 23:24 (NIV) aptly says, “The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him.”

## Z – Zealousness.

A biblical father who is full of zealousness is Noah. He was so passionate in building the ark amidst the criticisms surrounding him. He was also able to rally his children to help him in this endeavor.

## A – Accountable.

One of the accountabilities of being a father is to be a teacher to his children. Ephesians 6:4 (NIV), “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Paul re-echoes these words from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (ESV) “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

## L – Love for God and Country.

Our love for God is bolstered by our experiences on God’s faithfulness, mercy and goodness. Let us share these wonderful stories to our children so that they too can look forward on having their own testimonies of the love and goodness of God. Psalm 44:1 (NKJV) says, “God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old.”

Let us also remember the heritage of our nation so that we can develop our self-worth as Filipinos. God has a special plan for the Philippines and the Filipinos, when we show our love for our country we also express our thankfulness to God, knowing that every detail of our lives is dedicated to His glory.

## **The God of surprises**

One of the best things that children can do to their parents is to surprise them with a gift or a visit. One time, my family decided to take the last trip of Fastcat (a roro vessel). We arrived near midnight at La Carlota City, my hometown. Still groggy from being awakened, my mother answered her phone expecting an emergency. Instead, she was surprised to hear my voice telling her to please open the gate. Of course, my parents were overjoyed to see their children but much more, their grandchildren.

We can see in the Bible that our God is a God of surprises.

God surprised Abraham and Sarah with a command to leave their land and venture to the Promised Land. Later, this couple was surprised by God again with the news that they will have a son.

Gideon was in the threshing floor when God through an angel told him that he will be the leader of the Israelites against their oppressors. He was living a life doing his usual routine and then God surprised him.

Mary was a teenager who was preparing for a wedding. God through angel Gabriel told her that she will become the mother of the Messiah. This is the biggest surprise of all time – a virgin carrying a child.

There are a lot of surprises that God did, and He is still doing it. What then should we do? What can we learn from the Biblical characters?

First, do not be afraid to ask God a lot of questions. Jesus has given us this principle: knock and it shall be opened; ask and it shall be answered. Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, Mary asked a lot of questions. They even asked for signs. In their conversation with God, they were convinced and then they made a commitment.

Second, have faith because with God nothing is impossible. Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, Mary faced impossible situations. But God made it all possible. Because of this, we are being assured that God is trustworthy. The Bible is a record that our God is worthy of our trust.

Let us be ready for the surprises of God. God may call us into a task that we do not expect but be rest assured that God has already prepared you for it. Let us trust our God who makes all things possible.

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*“Do not be afraid to ask God a lot of questions.”*

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*“Let us be ready for the surprises of God.”*

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## To be human

The movie Green Lantern teaches us a valuable lesson about us, being human. We tend to be conceited so as to re-assure ourselves that we can overcome an obstacle. This is because we do not want to accept the reality that we are human – that we are vulnerable. This smug arrogance often leads to our downfall rather than success. When Hal Jordan aka the Green Lantern accepted the reality – that to be human is to have vulnerabilities – he was able to harness his inner resolve, his will power (the power of the Green Lantern comes from the “will”) and overcame his opponent.

Obviously we are not the Green Lantern or any of the superheroes from the comic books, but the lesson still holds true – reliance upon oneself to the point of cockiness will always lead to our fall. To accept that we are weak is not a sign of weakness but rather a sign of true courage. We need to be courageous enough to humble ourselves and ask God to help us.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says, “Each time God said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Let us not be disappointed or frustrated by our vulnerabilities. Instead, let us accept our frailties because the grace of God is sufficient for us. With Paul we can also say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

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*“To accept that we are weak is not a sign of weakness but rather a sign of true courage. We need to be courageous enough to humble ourselves and ask God to help us.”*

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## The Magnificat

There is one story my mother told me when I decided to become a pastor. She told me that when I was still inside her womb, I would do a lot of movement when the song “Doxology” is sang at our church. She said that during those times she would pray that her first born would become a pastor. Her prayers were honored by God, and I would always remember that story when there are challenges in my life.

The account of Luke tells us that when Mary visited Elizabeth, the baby inside Elizabeth's womb (who would later become John the Baptist) leaped. Elizabeth then pronounced in a loud voice: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.” What followed after the greeting and the pronouncement was a revolutionary song sang by Mary. It is popularly called the “Magnificat” a Latin word that means “Magnify” from the first line of the song “My soul magnifies the Lord.”

A Baptist author, Walter Shurden wrote the song in such a way that when you read the lyrics of this song, you “sniff the powder of dynamite.” Indeed this first Christmas song is one of the most revolutionary Christian documents ever written. Mary as we can see in this song is probably not as demure as the religious arts would portray her. The song is powerful and forceful. Luke was able to record it later because most probably Mary would always sing it. Sadly, we know the lyrics but not the tune anymore. Although there are a lot of musical interpretations that you can see in YouTube.

The Magnificat teaches us three things:

First, we should sing songs praising God.

Mary teaches us that God uses lowly people like her. She portrayed herself as a lowly servant yet when she said yes, God used her mightily. In this sense, when we say yes to God, He will use us in ways that we cannot even imagine. Our response to God is to praise Him, and we can beautifully do that through songs.

Second, we should sing songs that tell about the values of the Kingdom of God.

There are a lot of Christian songs but sadly, not most would move you into action. Luke 1:51ff tells us about the values of God: “He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away.”

If we dare want to sing the Magnificat, then we are obligated to show it in our lives and in our actions that we are for freedom and justice, and to protest against any law or policy that does not embrace life, nor give life.

Third, we should sing songs declaring God's faithfulness to His promises.

Mary sang a song proclaiming that God is true to His promises. God fulfilled His promises to Abraham and He would continue to do so. In this way, Mary is teaching us that when we sing or listen to songs, let us remember the faithfulness of God in our lives.

Let us dare sing the Magnificat!

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*“If we dare to sing the Magnificat, then we are obligated to show it in our lives and in our actions that we are for freedom and justice, and to protest against any law or policy that does not embrace life, nor give life.”*

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## **God is with us in the unknown of our lives**

Recently, my post-graduate studies led me to the New Valentine Building of Central Philippine University. This building was my home for 4 years when I was pursuing my undergraduate studies as an accountancy student. Later, it became my mission field when I became the Chaplain of my teachers for 3 years. When I entered it again as a student, I felt hesitant and a little scared. I was already so comfortable with the classrooms, subjects and teachers of the College of Theology that stepping into another classroom, learning non-theological subjects and being designated under new teachers are new yet frightening experiences for me. And then, all of a sudden, I remembered Abraham and Sarah who were called by God to leave the comfort of their home to go to new place – the Promised Land.

What can we learn from the experiences of Abraham and Sarah?

First, God is testing us from time to time to go to the unknown with nothing but faith.

When Abraham and Sarah left Ur, they knew that they were going into a land where they have no families, friends and familiar landmarks. They do not even know the specifics. What they have is the faith that God will fulfill His promises – that their descendants will be many and that they will be a blessing to many nations. God was faithful to Abraham and Sarah, and He will surely be faithful to us when we face the many unknowns that will come our way.

Secondly, God allows detours so that we will realize the futility of our choices.

Abraham and Sarah made some very costly detours. When God called them to go to Canaan, they started their journey and passed by Haran. But instead of just passing it, they stayed for many years. Finally, they realized the futility of their decision. They packed their things and went to Canaan. But they did not stay there. Instead, they

made a choice to leave the Promised Land and went down to Egypt. It was a wrong choice again because it was not God's will. Abraham got into trouble with the Pharaoh. He deceived the Pharaoh by giving him Sarah whom he called to be his sister. It was a futile attempt to ingrain themselves with political power. They left Egypt and went back to Canaan.

It was in Canaan when God changed Abram's name to Abraham. God also made a covenant with Abraham that was sealed with a circumcision. It was only when Abraham and Sarah decided to stay where God wants them to stay that God blessed them with a son, Isaac.

We will continue to face many unknowns, but this is what is known in the Bible – God will always be there with us in the known and unknown circumstances.

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*“God is testing us from time to time to go the unknown with nothing but faith.”*

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*“God allows detours so that we will realize the futility of our choices.”*

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## **The SONG of Jesus**

We sing songs of praise and worship in the church but have you ever imagined Jesus as a singer. Did Jesus sing?

There is only one instance in the Bible that that talks about Jesus singing. It is found in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26. Both of them wrote, “And when they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

What is this hymn that they sang? The Passover meal tradition of the Israelites includes singing the Hallel – Psalm 113 to 118. The Complete Jewish Bible translation affirms that what they sang was the Hallel. The singing of the Hallel can be found in YouTube, and it is sung with joy and dancing.

What kind of song did Jesus sing? Let me use the word SONG as the outline:

First, Jesus sang a song of Salvation from God.

Psalm 116:5-6 says, “The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.”

God hears and answers our prayers. God is our savior. In Psalm 114 the Psalmist narrates the history of the Exodus experience. From Egypt to the Red Sea to wilderness to the Jordan River to the Promised Land.

Second, Jesus sang a song of Obedience to God.

Psalm 116:12-14 says, “How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.”

We can never fully repay God. But what we can do is to fulfill our vows to the Lord.

Third, Jesus sang a song of a New life in God.

Psalm 115 sings about the gods of other people. They have ears but cannot hear, eyes but cannot see, mouths but cannot speak, hands but cannot touch. Those who believe in this kind of gods will be like them. The Hallel is all about a new life in God. It is the kind of life that fully trusts in the Lord no matter what the circumstances are. You do not trust in idols, statues, or any amulets – we trust in the living God who made the heavens and the earth.

Fourth, Jesus sang a song of the Grace of God.

Psalm 113:1-3 says, “Praise the Lord. Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.”

The Hallel reminds us of God’s grace. It is only by the grace of God that we are given the opportunity to live life once again.

May the song of Jesus be in our hearts as we sing to God as our savior, whom we obey, and it is by His grace alone that we have a new life.

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*“It is only by the grace of God that we are  
given the opportunity to live life once again.”*

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## Learn and unlearn

The TV series “Genius” produced by the National Geographic is about the life of Albert Einstein. What struck me the most in his life story was on how the educational system “imprisoned” Einstein. He rebelled against the system of memorization and instead advocated for an educational environment in which the cultivation of imagination is given priority. Einstein was not acknowledged by the “geniuses” during his time because his theories challenged the long standing theories. He also put forward original ideas that were dismissed by people as crazy and impossible because it was not thought of before. He struggled to be recognized until his hard work and commitment paid off. The rest is history.

Long before Einstein was born, Jesus was already challenging the traditions in the Old Testament. In many instances, Jesus said, “It has been said before... but now I tell you.” He also challenged the status quo and the religious and political leadership. He preached about the Kingdom of God or the Reign of God as a way of telling the people that God should be obeyed and worshipped above any leader or government. He was finally accused of blasphemy and was put to death by the Romans because of rebellion.

As Christians, we need to consider the following lessons from the life of Jesus:

First, we need to challenge traditions not for the sake of challenging it but because there could be something better.

Second, our homes, churches, schools and government must be venues that cultivate new ideas, breed imaginations and nurture dreams. We need to protest against any system that curtails ideas and visions.

Third, we should be humble enough to open ourselves to new learning, and unlearn obsolete perspectives, painfully as that may be.

May we continue to learn, unlearn, and to be always curious.

## **SONA of our faith**

When the Philippine President delivered his second SONA - State of the Nation Address, he outlined his achievements, denounced his critics, described the challenges, and announced his future plans. He was interrupted with applause. He sprinkled his speech with some expletives and jokes. He appeared to be a man of action, a no-nonsense tough guy you want to be in your corner of the ring.

What about if we are given a chance to deliver a SONA about our Christian faith? How did we live out our faith in the past year? How would people rate our speech? Will they believe that we “walk our talk”? In what manner should we outline the SONA of our faith?

Let me use what Paul Tillich said as our “ultimate concern” – the answer of Jesus Christ to question “What is the most important of all the commandments?” Jesus’ answer should be our ultimate concern – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:28-31. If this is our ultimate concern, then the SONA of our faith will outline the answer of the question – How did we show our love to God? How did we show our love to our neighbors? How did we show our love to ourselves?

Loving God with all our heart means that we are passionate for God. Loving God with all our soul means that our deepest desire is to have an intimate relationship with God. Loving God with all our mind means that we think and what we focus on glorifies God. Loving God with all our strength means that our energy should be expended in the ministry that God has called us to do.

Loving our neighbor as ourselves means that what we hope and do for ourselves, we also hope and do for others – like we do not wish any ill for ourselves, we also do not wish any ill to happen



to others; our desire for a meaningful life is also our desire for others.

May the SONA of our faith be like of Paul who said – I have completed the task the Lord Jesus Christ has given me.

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*“Loving God with all our heart means that we are passionate for God.”*

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*“Loving God with all our soul means that our deepest desire is to have an intimate relationship with God.”*

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## Be overcomers

August is usually called “*tigkiriwi*” or a lean month that causes you to cringe. This is mainly because rice harvest is not yet around, and the sugarcane milling season has not yet started. Most of our savings were already spent during the June to July months – enrolment and school expenses. All that is usually left are little savings.

In the midst of our troubles, Jesus said in John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Let me share three things that we can see in this assurance of Jesus:

First, we are assured by Jesus that if we are in Him we have peace. If we will follow the ways of the world, we will only have trouble. The ways of Jesus are not easy, it is often called “a road less travelled.” The ways of the world is very easy – just be your natural self – selfish, lustful, retaliatory. We need to make a choice. When we accept Jesus in our lives, He is transforming our very nature and He is now the one living in us.

Second, we are assured by Jesus that we are overcomers because of Him. The world around us wants to overcome us. We can give up and follow the flow of the world which is a very easy thing to do, or we can stand up, take heart and start being overcomers. As Paul said to Timothy, “God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion.”

Third, we are assured by Jesus that He will give us the power of discernment. When Jesus said to his disciples “I have told you these things...” we are assured that through the Holy Spirit, He will continue to talk to us so that we may discern the troubles around us. In this way, we are not caught unaware but we are ready on what will happen next.

## Rooted

The Theme of the Christ Emphasis Week (CEW) last 2017 was “ROOTED.” The word “root” has many meanings. Let us connect these different meanings to our spiritual life, and what it means to be rooted in Jesus Christ.

First, a root is part of a plant or tree that grows underground and functions as an organ of absorption, aeration, food storage, and a means of anchorage and support.

If we are to be rooted in Jesus Christ, then it means that we need to go deeper in our study and reflection of the Word of God which is the source of our spiritual food. Our faith can withstand the storms of life when our roots are holding tight to Jesus. Our roots will also become strong when we draw water from Jesus, the Living Water. Roots also interconnect with other roots. This means that we also need the church and other Christians as a support system to stabilize us.

Second, root also means an origin or a source. If we are to be rooted in Jesus Christ, then we need to acknowledge that the origin of why we have life in the first place is God. And since God is our original source, we must then seek the purpose of our originator. We are designed for a purpose and we can only find meaning in our lives if we live out that purpose. The only way to find purpose and meaning is to accept Jesus Christ in our lives.

Third, another meaning of root is the essential core. The essential core all the prophets, the writings and law was summed up by Jesus Christ – love God with all your being, and love your neighbor as yourself. This means that if we are rooted in Jesus, people will see, hear and feel the love of God in and through us.

Let it be that our lives should be rooted in Jesus Christ. As the text of the CEW says, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” Acts 17:28

## **What Jesus died for**

August 21 is a national holiday in honor of Sen. Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino – a Filipino icon who struggled against Martial Law and the Marcos dictatorship. He fought for what he believed in, and he was assassinated because of that. He probably prophesied his own death when he said, “A Filipino is worth dying for.”

In our lifetime we have encountered and will encounter heroes like Ninoy Aquino, Martin Luther King Jr., and others. They are not like the superheroes of Marvel or DC, but real flesh and blood, men and women like us. They were inspired by someone or something, and they gave their life for a cause. But long before them, there was Jesus who gave his life for our salvation. Jesus was actually executed as a rebel. This means that his death was not just a spiritual matter. It also had a political dimension.

What did Jesus die for aside for the remission of our sins and the salvation of our souls? What are the things that He stood for? Let me mention a few.

First, Jesus was against anyone or anything that hinders people from achieving a meaningful life.

In John 10 Jesus describes Himself as a good shepherd. A shepherd is not someone who just stand by and watch. A shepherd not only leads the sheep to green pastures and still waters but also fights the wolves and robbers that would try to harm or take the sheep.

As Christians we need to lead people towards a meaningful life, and that involves identifying and fighting the “wolves” that hinder us from having it.

Second, Jesus fought for freedom.

The Israelites during Jesus' time were under the Roman Empire. When Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God, He was telling

everyone that the reign of God is better than the emperor of the Roman Empire or the leadership of the Israelites. The Roman Empire and the Israelite leaders were enslaving the people in many ways. Jesus taught that the only way to be free is to accept the reign of God in their lives.

As Christians we need to fight any form of slavery and proclaim that God is in the side of those who fight for freedom because God wants us all to be free.

Third, Jesus empowered the marginalized.

A lot of powerful people were angry with Jesus. When Jesus overturned the tables of the merchants and priests in the Temple who were overcharging and exploiting the people, He was empowering those who were in the margins of society. In turn, He got the ire of powerful people and He was marked for execution.

As Christians we need to stand for what is right and we need to be angry if there is any form of exploitation. And if there is a need for it, we are to sacrifice our lives for the cause of Jesus.

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*“When Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God, he was telling everyone that the reign of God is better than the emperor of the Roman Empire or the leadership of the Israelites.”*

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## Point out the errors

I had an opportunity to give a message to a group of leaders in a seminar conducted by the Haggai Institute. I ended the message with this challenge – “We have intentionally chosen each one of you. We have purposely passed on something to you. Will you passed it on?” Now, can you spot the error? The grammatical error is on the word “passed.” It should have been “pass.”

What lessons can we learn from this?

First, we need to be brave enough to point out mistakes in our society, and make steps to correct it. There are many glaring errors in our community but we oftentimes choose to ignore it. Some are probably afraid of pointing out errors and some are just plain apathetic.

Jesus actively pointed out errors that were perpetuated by the religious leaders. We can remember the answer of Jesus when He was asked by a Samaritan woman regarding the proper place to worship God – in the temple or in the mountain. Jesus said that true worshippers worship God in spirit and in truth. Jesus corrected their wrong notion of worship – that God is not limited to a particular place. Talking to a Samaritan woman was also a form of correction to Jews who believed that God was only exclusively for them. By communicating this truth to a woman, Jesus also corrected the wrong belief that men are superior to women.

Second, we need to be humble enough to accept corrections. Oftentimes, when we hear corrections we react by getting angry and then launch a counter attack. Hebrews 12:11 says, “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening – it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.” Yes, to accept corrections is painful. It will hurt your ego and your pride. As Christians, we need to admit our mistakes and make necessary actions to correct it. The consequence of accepting corrections is to harvest a righteous life.

Saul became Paul when he admitted his wrongdoings and accepted the corrections of God. Paul was successful in his ministry because he was humble enough to be corrected. Later, Paul instructed Timothy to use the Scriptures for reproof, for correction and for training in right living.

May we point out errors, and accept corrections as well.

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*“We need to be brave enough to point out errors in our society, and make steps to correct it.”*

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*“As Christians, we need to admit our mistakes and make necessary actions to correct it.”*

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## **Christian Stewardship**

Hearing and reading news reports about mismanagement, graft and corruption gave me a thought – it is high time for us to think about putting subjects like “Christian Stewardship,” and “Biblical Principles on Management” in the curriculum of our schools, especially Christian educational institutions.

The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:15 to 28 teaches a lot of things about Christian Stewardship. Let me mention a few.

First, Christian stewardship means that we acknowledge God as the owner of everything.

When the master entrusted the talents to His servants, the servants became trustees or stewards. This means that we are not the owners of our potential and talents but God.

Second, Christian stewardship means that each one of us is given by God at least one talent to invest and to cultivate.

According to a Bible dictionary, a talent is equivalent to 20 years of wages during the time of Jesus. This means that the one that received 5 talents had 100 years’ worth of wages, and the one with 2 talents had 40 years’ worth of wages, and the one that got 1 talent had 20 years’ worth of wages. This means that the story of Jesus talks about a very big sum of money entrusted to the 3 servants.

Everyone has a talent – not just the financial resources, but also abilities and skills. Nobody can claim that he or she has no talent. We need to discover those talents and use it. We should not bury our talents because God will eventually ask us to make an accounting of what we have done with the talents He gave us. Doing nothing is inexcusable. But it is not just using it in any way that we want. We need to use it according to God’s will – for the purpose of spreading the Gospel.



We need to remember that God rewards the faithful stewards and trustees. Using the principles in parable, God will reward us by giving a commendation – “well done good and faithful servant.” God will also award us with a promotion – “greater responsibilities.” And finally, God will reward us with joy – “Come and share your master’s happiness.”

To sum, Christian stewardship is the faithful management of resources entrusted by God to us with the accountability that as stewards or trustees we put the resources to work in order to gain more, and share more, hereby giving joy to God and receiving commendation from Him.

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*“We should not bury our talents because God will eventually ask us to make an accounting of what we have done with the talents that He gave us.”*

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*Christian stewardship is the faithful management of resources entrusted by God to us with the accountability that as stewards or trustees we put the resources to work in order to gain more, and share more, hereby giving joy to God and receiving commendation from Him.*

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## **Challenge to Grandparents**

The second Sunday of September is celebrated internationally as Grandparents Day. What is the challenge of the Bible to our grandparents?

First, grandparents must be grand teachers.

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, “Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.”

The Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. In this verse we can see the responsibility of the grandparents. Because of the role of the grandparents, the third generation, those who were not in Egypt, were able to learn what God has done to save them.

Grandparents should be exemplary and worthy to be emulated. They must share their valuable experiences especially testimonies of what God has done for them. They also must be willing to become a parent again in case there will be absentee parents.

Grandparents should be prepared to continue their ministry to their grandchildren.

Secondly, grandparents must be grand prayer warriors.

Psalms 71:17-18 says, “Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

I encourage the grandparents to fervently pray for their grandchildren not just for good health or for them to be studious in their schooling but more importantly that their grandchildren may know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, and for them to

have good friends who will encourage and support them in their endeavors.

Third, grandparents must leave a grand inheritance to their grandchildren.

Proverbs 13:22 reminds us that “A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children...” This verse was specifically written for grandparents.

How will their grandchildren remember their grandparents? I was blessed to have grandparents who imparted a lot of lessons to me. They were even given by God the opportunity to see the 4th generation, our children.

Grandparents have been given by God a second chance to nurture the next generation. May they never waste this opportunity to impact young lives.

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*“Grandparents should be exemplary and worthy to be emulated. They must teach their valuable experiences especially their testimonies of what God has done for them.”*

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## **Why do we share?**

Every last week of September, U-Day fever can be felt all around the campus of Central Philippine University. The Theme for the 2017 celebration was “Centralians Sharing 3Ts (Time, Talent, Treasure) for One CPU @ 112.”

Why do we share?

When we SHARE we:

S - Show to the world that we care. Jesus cares for each one of us. As disciples of Jesus, we need to show it by sharing what we have. Romans 12:13 says, “Share with God's people who are in need.”

When we SHARE we:

H - Help those who are in need. Some are in need of our time, some our talents and some our treasures. We need to find ways to help in any way that we can.

When we SHARE we:

A - Allow God to work in and through us. God can only use those who are willing. When we say yes to God, He will use us mightily to reach out to others through our lives.

When we SHARE we:

R - Release blessings to people and help change their situations. Naturally, whether we admit it or not, we are selfish. When we accept Jesus Christ in our hearts, we become selfless and generous in sharing our blessings to others.

When we SHARE we:

E - Enjoy the privilege of seeing the happy faces of people. There is no substitute in seeing the smile or tears of joy of people when we extend our helping hand to them. We can really experience pure joy when we share our time, talent and treasure to others.

## **Faith, Hope and Love**

I always wondered why Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13 wrote that these three will always remain: faith, hope and love. Paul was probably asked what are the three most important things he could share to people and he answered these three virtues. Indeed, we need these three virtues as we go through life.

First, we need someone to put our faith into. As Christians, we put our faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Without this faith, we do not have any foundation to base our lives. Our faith in Jesus gives us direction in life.

Second, we need to hope because it gives us the reason to continue on living. Without hope, we become discouraged and depressed – we lose the drive to move forward. But if we have hope, we wake up every day with purpose and determination because we want to make our hope a reality. Our dreams and hopes are what fuels us to strive and make a difference. We need to hope for something better than what we have inherited – to work hard to make the plans of God a reality in our lives. If we put our hope in Jesus, we can surely say, “The best is yet to come.”

Third, we desire to love and to be loved. It is love that gives meaning to our lives. It is love that brought us together with our life partners. It is love that propels us to take care of our children. It is love that gives us the passion to do the best that we can to provide for our family. It is the love of Jesus that encourages us to love God and others as the greatest commandment.

As we go through life, let us remember these three things: have faith in God, always hope for the best, and love God and others.

## Seeking out others

“Hide and Seek” is a popular game among children. There are those who will conceal themselves, and there is a designated seeker. After counting aloud up to 10, the seeker would shout “Ready or not, here I come!” and then he or she will try to find those who are hiding.

In the Bible, there was a Samaritan woman who was hiding herself. She went to Jacob’s Well about noon time when most people were already finished getting their supply of water. She probably thought that she was alone in the Well but there was Jesus. He was seeking her out.

What can we learn from this encounter?

First, Jesus is teaching us that the color of our skin is not a barrier in reaching out to others.

Jesus is a Jew and the woman is a Samaritan. There was enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans because they considered them as mixed breed. John 4:9 says, “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” When Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman, He is teaching us that we must reach out to anyone regardless of their nationality.

Second, Jesus is teaching us that our gender is not an obstacle in reaching out to others.

I am proud to be a member of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches (CPBC), a denomination that trains women to become pastors, and also allows them to be ordained. There was a struggle in CPBC at first. But after 80 years of Baptist mission in the Philippines, on March 22, 1980, Rev. Angelina B. Buensuceso became the first ordained woman pastor of CPBC. After serving the CPBC for more than 40 years, she was ordained at the age of 63.

Because of this historical milestone, her picture is now in the front cover of a book entitled, Faithful and Free Baptist beliefs through the years by D. Leslie Hill.

The story of Mommy Buensuceso is a great reminder to all of us. There should be no excuses – women and men, young and old – everyone must share the Gospel.

Third, Jesus is teaching us that our past is not a hindrance in sharing the Gospel.

The Samaritan woman had 5 husbands, and the man she was currently living with was not her legal husband. She went to the Well under the sweltering heat of the sun because she was hiding something. Can you imagine the dangerous combination of these three things – Samaritan, a woman, and an adulterer? But when she accepted Jesus, she became an evangelist. John 4:39 says, “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony...” The past life of the Samaritan woman has actually become her greatest tool in reaching out to others.

All of us have a past that we are ashamed of. If we have Jesus in our lives, then that past is totally forgiven. We cannot totally forget about it but the sting of guilt of our past is already gone. The past has become valuable lessons for us, and an instrument to effectively share the Gospel.

May we become like this Samaritan woman who unashamedly shared the Gospel to others.

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*All of us have a past that we are ashamed of. If we have Jesus in our lives, then that past is totally forgiven.*

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## **ABC of living a life with a purpose**

As we go through life, let us remember the ABCs of living a life with a purpose.

First, A - Allow God to work in and through your life.

God does not force anyone. God can only shape those who are willing. If we want God to mold us, we first need to surrender our will and give way to the will of God. This is very difficult, and would be a lifetime struggle. But the moment we give God a space in our lives, He will surely start something transformational. And when we let God in our lives, He will mightily use us to reach out to others.

Second, B - Build a community of true friends.

For Jesus, one of the highest forms of relationships is friendship. Jesus said to his disciples, I now call you friends.

A friend of mine, Dr. Lee Spitzer, the current General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches, emphasized the friendship factor in growing healthy churches in his book, "Making Friends, Making Disciples: Growing Your Church Through Authentic Relationships."

Yes, our friendships can become transformative forces that can shape society for the better. True friends would always look after the welfare of their friends. When Jesus used friendship as a paradigm for the Church, He is telling us to love, care, and be there for one another.

C - Commit to always do your best to excel.

Be passionate and excel in whatever you will do for the benefit of mankind and for the glory of God. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 14:12 "... try to excel in gifts that build up the church."



## Reunions

To fellowship with one another is part of human nature. We always want to connect with other people. This is why “get-togethers” and “reunions” would always be part of our lives. Last September 30, 2017, hundreds of alumni of Central Philippine University gathered at the campus to celebrate the 112 years of existence of our alma mater. Last October 20-21, 2017 was another reunion of Centralians. This time, it was the Grand Reunion of the College of Agriculture, now known as CARES – College of Agriculture, Resources and Environmental Sciences. There were also CPU Global Reunions held in many places around the world for many years already. Every December we also have a lot of family reunions. It is a reality that we want to commune with one another, and renew our friendships.

But more than seeing one another and talking about our lives, what does the Bible tell us to do?

First, more than “reunions”, we need to be united in making this world a better place.

Psalm 133:1 says, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” Yes, as believers of the Lord Jesus Christ we must show to the world that we are united in carrying out the mission God has given us. Our lives must exemplify what it means to be a Christian.

Second, more than “reunions”, we must help one another.

Galatians 6:2 reminds us to “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” The law of Jesus Christ is to love others as we love ourselves. This is difficult because by nature we are selfish. But by God’s grace, we can do it. We can “walk the extra mile”; we can “love our enemies”; we can “pray for those who persecute us”; we can “turn the other cheek.”

Third, more than “reunions”, we should encourage one another to do the will of God.

Rather than thinking of how to manipulate or exploit others, Hebrews 10:24 says, “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.” This is how we should start our day – think of ways and ideas that can benefit others, and can encourage people to be passionate in doing what is good and loving.

May our reunions be more than just reunions! May it be a time to rekindle our commitment to be united, to help in any way that we can, and to encourage one another to fulfill the purpose of God in our lives.

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*“As believers of the Lord Jesus Christ we must show to the world that we are united in carrying out the mission God has given us.”*

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*“This should be how we should start our day every day – think of ways and ideas that can benefit others, and can encourage people to be passionate in doing what is good and loving.”*

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# MISSION

October 31, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was on October 31, 1517 when Martin Luther sent a letter that included the 95 Theses to the Archbishop of Mainz. Luther also nailed these Theses disputing the practice of Indulgences to churches in Wittenberg, in accordance to their custom. This date now is commemorated every year as Reformation Day. According to this tradition, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches also starts its annual Wider Mission Celebration on October.

What comes to your mind when you hear or encounter the word “mission.” Maybe what comes first is the popular movie series “Mission Impossible” or the “mission” that you need to hurdle in your PC or smartphone games. But what is mission in relation to Christianity?

MISSION is:

M – Making yourself available to the task mandated by Jesus Christ. God can only work in and through willing people.

I – Imparting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to whomever we meet. We should not choose whom we will share the Gospel to. The Great Commission says, “...make disciples of ALL nations...”

S – Sending people to places beyond their borders. The missionaries did not stay in their comfort zone but chose to go to other unfamiliar places. Because of this, Central Philippine University was born.

S – Sowing the seeds of faith even if the harvest seems to be small. When Jesus taught about the Parable of the Sower, only one of the four seeds was able to take root and grow. Economically, it’s a loss. But for Jesus, it always a gain. Jesus said, “the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner that repents.”

I – Inculcating the values of the Kingdom of God to people. The values and principles found in the Bible are counter-nature. By nature we are selfish, but by the grace of God we become selfless. What Jesus taught was very difficult to follow, but as He promised, “nothing is impossible” if we are with God.

O – Obeying the commands of Jesus Christ. The commands of Jesus are imperative. We need to follow it because the one giving the orders is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

N – Navigating this sinful world with the vision that Jesus has given us. The vision in the Great Commission is to “make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded.” Vision must be coupled with mission. The mission keyword here is just two letters – “GO.” Go and do the vision.

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*“We should not choose whom we will share the Gospel to. The Great Commission says, “...make disciples of ALL nations...”*

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*“By nature we are selfish, but by the grace of God we become selfless.”*

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## **Let us Remember**

Traditionally, Filipinos would go back to their hometowns or to places where their loved ones are buried every November 1. This year 2017 the Philippine government added October 31 as a special non-working holiday. The purpose, according to the Presidential Proclamation No. 50, is give more time for the traditional All Saints Day commemorative activities, to promote domestic tourism and to strengthen family ties.

November 1 should always be a time to remember. The Hebrew word for remember is “Zakar.” It means to become a member again. So, when we remember the lives and legacies of our dear departed loved ones, they become a member again of our community.

The writer of Hebrews 11 remembers the stories of many people in the Bible like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. This chapter is teaching us two things:

First, let us remember the story by retelling the story to our community.

We can only retell the stories if we know the stories. Let us read the Bible and learn the stories of people there. Find time to retell the stories in the Bible to the next generation.

This is the same with our family. Those who are older have the responsibility to retell the stories of their family. The younger generation must also learn how to listen to stories, and be interested with the history of their families.

Second, let us remember the story by making their stories a part of our own story now.

We do not only retell the stories but more importantly, we must learn lessons from the Biblical stories.

What does the story of Abraham teach us? What lessons can we learn from Moses? David? Jesus? And so on. The way Jesus taught the Parables is a good paradigm to follow – tell the story, ask questions, elicit discussion and impart the lessons.

May we continue to find time to retell stories and learn from them.

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*“Find time to retell the stories in the Bible to the next generation.”*

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*“We do not only retell the stories but more importantly, we must learn lessons from the Biblical stories.”*

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## **WHY give thanks?**

November is Thanksgiving Month. Some would often ask, Why give thanks? What are the reasons why we give thanks?

Let us go back to the story of Simeon and Anna in Luke Chapter 2. These two persons were present when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple. They can teach us three reasons WHY we need to give thanks.

First, Simeon is teaching us that we give thanks because those who WAIT on the Lord will not be forsaken.

In Luke 2:25 we can see that Simeon was waiting for a long time for the Messiah to come. The Holy Spirit prompted him that Jesus is the Savior that he was waiting for. Simeon even said that he is ready to die because his eyes have seen the Savior.

Second, Anna is teaching us that we give thanks because those who HOLD on to the promises of God will not be dismayed.

Anna was also in Temple. She was a widow and very old. She did not blame God nor become bitter. She overcame it and even became a prophetess. In fact Luke 2:37 tells us that she never left the Temple. She was overjoyed because her prayers were answered. She told everyone that the Savior has finally come. God was faithful to her, and God will continue to be faithful to us.

Third, Simeon and Anna are teaching us that we give thanks because those who YEARN for the presence of God will be fulfilled.

Simeon and Anna sought the presence of God in the Temple. Luke 2:25-27 reveals that the Holy Spirit was moving and convicting people. This means that those who seek the Lord will surely feel the presence of God.

## **Take ROOT in Christ**

In the Commencement Exercises of the 1st Semester of School Year 2017-2018, Mrs. Evangelica Diesto-Padernilla was conferred the degree, Doctor of Pedagogy, honoris causa by CPU. In her message to the graduates, she challenged them to be firmly rooted in Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be ROOTED in Jesus Christ? Let us learn from the characteristics of the root.

**R** - Reach deeper in your study of the Word of God so that your faith can withstand the storms of life.

**O** - Obtain resistance by drinking from the Living Water – the Lord Jesus Christ. The refreshing Living Water will surely sustain you, and in turn you will not to falter from the heat of temptations.

**O** - Open yourself to the constant cultivation of the faith community. The church is there to nurture your Christian life. You must allow the church to teach you.

**T** - Tap the fertile resources around you so that you will become a healthy Christian. There are vast resources available that can help enrich your faith – church, books, blogs, fellowship, reflection.

**E** - Expand to a firmer ground so that you will have a stable foundation. Christians must not be satisfied with the rituals of Christianity but must know and live out the timeless truths in the Bible.

**D** - Develop connections with other roots because an interconnected Christian is stronger.

A firmly-rooted Christian in Jesus Christ will surely bear fruits for the glory of God.



## **Giving thanks to God in spite of the difficult circumstances**

It is easy to thank God if the circumstances we are in are good and ideal. But admittedly we are having difficulties in being grateful to God when we are in dire circumstances. Let us learn from Biblical characters that held on to their faith in God in spite of their circumstances. In the end, they gave thanks to God.

It is hard to give thanks when you are in a situation like that of Joseph – sibling rivalry and conflict, false accusation, and only a few believe in your dreams. Joseph was sold by his brothers as a slave because they felt that he was favored than them. Joseph was also falsely accused of rape, and was subsequently imprisoned. When Joseph was young, only his father would believe in his dreams. In spite of these circumstances, Joseph held on to the promises of God. He was later vindicated and played a crucial role in saving the whole Israel during a time of famine. Joseph thanked God because what others meant for harm, turned out to be good.

It is hard to give thanks when you are in a situation like that of Daniel – persecuted because of your race and faith. Daniel and other Jews were brought as slaves in Babylon. He faced injustice because of his race. He was forced to eat the Babylonian's food, and to worship their god but he stood his ground and did not waver in his faith. He openly defied the Babylonian law and worshipped God. He was thrown into the Lion's Den but was saved by God. Daniel thanked God because their conspiracy against him was unraveled, and King Darius of Mede was convinced that the God of Daniel is truly the living God.

It is hard to give thanks when you are in a situation like that of Elijah – hunted by wicked people because of your conviction, and experiencing poverty. With great courage Elijah told King Ahab and Queen Jezebel that what they are doing were against the will of God. Because of this, he was hunted to be killed. He hid in rivers and caves until there was a great famine. The widow and her son in Zarephath helped him although what they had was their last meal.

But God was merciful and made a miracle in the life of the widow and his son. In spite of these circumstances, Elijah thanked God because he has experienced God's miracles. Later, Elijah won the battle against the priests of Baal in a showdown in Mt. Carmel. The people were convicted of their sins and worshipped the one true God.

What are the difficult situations that you are experiencing right now? Thank God in spite of those circumstances. God will surely reveal to you later why you are experiencing these things. God was faithful to Joseph, Daniel, and Elijah. God will continue to be faithful to those who have faith in Him.

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*“Let us learn from Biblical characters that hold on to their faith in God in spite of their circumstances. In the end, they gave thanks to God.”*

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*“What are the difficult situations that you are experiencing right now? Thank God in spite of those circumstances. God will surely reveal it to you later why you are experiencing these things.”*

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## **Thank God for PAIN**

We have in one time or another experienced pain. Having a stiff-neck or sore muscles is painful. It robs you the ability to function well. The pain of a tooth-ache throbs and affects your whole body. Accidents that physically harm your body are excruciating. Losing someone is heartbreaking. The pain lingers for so long or permanently stays. Should we thank God for the pains that we experienced or are experiencing?

PAIN has a way of reminding us to P – Pray. Sometimes when life is going easy and smooth, we tend to forget to pray. Pain is a great reminder not to forget to pray, and to always find time to talk to God.

PAIN has a way of checking our A – Attitude. Our outlook in life changes when pain is present. Some would become bitter, others are angry and a number of people would even become uncaring. Pain tests our mettle – who we really are. We must be conscious of this and improve our attitude to become better versions of ourselves.

PAIN has a way of I – Illustrating our dependence on God. Without God we are nothing. But we do not sometimes realize this truth when we are pain-free. Pain prompts us to the reality that we need God in our lives.

PAIN has a way of making us take N – Note of what we have. A simple fever prods us to rest, to take it slowly and find time to appreciate the blessings that God has bestowed upon us.

Are you in pain right now? Thank God in spite of the pain. God is sending a message to you. Be rest assured that God will continue to be there in the midst of our pains and struggles.

## **God uses events and people to accomplish His purpose**

There were a lot of fulfilled prophecies surrounding the birth of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me share two lessons that we can learn in relation on how prophecies in the Old Testament came true in the New Testament.

First, God uses events around us to fulfill His will and purpose in our lives.

Luke 2:1 says, “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.” The decree of Caesar Augustus became an instrument that a prophecy by prophet Micah will be fulfilled – “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.” (Micah 5:2).

Secondly, God uses people who are willing to be His instruments.

In Luke 1 we can see the angel telling Mary that she found favor with God and she was chosen to conceive and give birth to Jesus. Mary asked a question “How will this be since I am a virgin?” the angel answered her question and then Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant may your word to me be fulfilled.” This story is another fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah – “All right then, the Lord Himself will choose the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel – ‘God is with us.’” (Isaiah 7:14).

Joseph doubted Mary’s account and planned to divorce her quietly. But when an angel appeared to him in a dream, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Joseph and Mary were also descendants of King David. To be the earthly parents of Jesus was the fulfillment of many prophecies

in the Old Testament that the Messiah will come from the line of David.

God allows His people to ask questions. God wants to have a conversation with us. God will not force you to say yes. But God will find a way to let us know His plan and purpose in our lives. Let it be that when we hear God's promptings, we will be like Mary and Joseph who answered positively.

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*“God uses events around us to fulfill His will and purpose in our lives.”*

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*“God uses people who are willing to be His instruments.”*

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## **The Shepherds and the birth of Jesus**

Have you ever wondered why the shepherds were the first to visit baby Jesus? The usual interpretations are: the shepherds were marginalized and poor, and God wants to uplift them; or that in God's economy the last will be the first; or God wants to teach us about humbleness and obedience. All these are great interpretations. Can we possibly add another interpretation?

When you look at the passage again on Luke 2, you can focus on two words – shepherds and sheep. The two are connected. Shepherds are there for the sheep. And when the sheep gives birth, the first in the scene is most probably the shepherd. Now let us connect the shepherds and the birth of Jesus Christ. What's the connection? Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for our salvation was born, and the first to arrive in the scene are the shepherds.

To make it even more amazing is that during the time of the second Temple, the Bible tells us that the sacrificial lambs offered in the Temple were only bred and taken-cared of in one place, a place near the Temple. And that place is Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem as prophesied by Micah, city of David and the place where the sacrificial lambs are born.

The purpose of the Messiah was already there since the beginning. In the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the prophecy was fulfilled and ultimately, it tells us that Jesus was born to give Himself – to be the Sacrificial Lamb, the Savior of the world.

## **When God is re-routing you**

Last December 2017 we traveled to Roxas City, Capiz to be part of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches H.E.R. (Hopevale. Education. Reformation) program hosted by the Filamer Christian University and Capiz Emmanuel Hospital. Due to reports of heavy traffic in the Iloilo to Capiz route via Pototan/Passi City, we decided to pass by another route – the old route to Capiz (via Calinog/Dumalag). On that weekend, Typhoon Urduja did not let us travel to Bacolod for our weekend ministry.

In the Bible, the Wise Men went to Bethlehem through a route guided by the star. But later, through a warning, they returned to their country via another route. (Matthew 2:12).

How do we know that God is re-routing us? What does it mean when God wants you to be re-routed?

First, You will only know that you are being re-routed when you listen to the promptings of God.

God can use anything around us to communicate to us. In the Bible, God used dreams, visions, signs, wonders, disasters, nature and also through a still small voice. For me, it's usually a remark by somebody, a phrase in the book, a delay, a dialogue in a movie or TV series. This means that it can be anything. We just have to be conscious in listening to God.

Second, When you are re-routed by God, it means that God has a better plan than that of yours.

God loves us and because of this, we have to believe that God has an amazing plan and purpose for our lives. Sometimes, God works in and through our plans, but oftentimes God will do something to stop us on our tracks. This intersection then is the moment of decision – follow your own will or follow God's will. It is very easy to say that we will follow the will of God. The doing part is the most difficult. It is a struggle and will always continue to

be a struggle. The stories in the Bible remind us that when you follow your own will it will lead to disaster, and when you follow God's will it will lead to success.

Like the Wise Men in the first Christmas story, are you ready to be re-routed by God?

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*“God can use anything around us to communicate to us.”*

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*“God loves us and because of this, we have to really believe that God has a plan and purpose for our lives.”*

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## Jesus is “Paskwa”

Have you ever wondered why Filipinos translate “Christmas” as “*Pasko*” or in Hiligaynon/Ilonggo as “*Paskwa*”? The word “*Paskwa*” comes from the Spanish word “*Pascua*” and from the Latin word “*Pascha*”. In Hebrew it is “*Pesakh*” which is translated in English as “Passover”. This means that when we celebrate Christmas we are celebrating the birth of the Paschal (Passover) Lamb.

What does it mean that Jesus is our “*Paskwa*”?

First, Jesus as our “*Paskwa*” means that we must celebrate our passing over from death to life.

In the Old Testament, Moses started the ritual of slaughtering a Passover Lamb every year to commemorate the passing over of the Angel of Death in their houses in Egypt. The angel passed over them because the door posts of their houses were painted with the blood of the lamb. The houses which did not have the blood of the lamb in their door posts experienced the death of their first born sons. The Israelites from then on celebrate the Passover Feast every year to remember the salvation that they received from God.

John the Baptist declared that Jesus is the Passover Lamb. John 1:29 says, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians that since Christ, the Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed we must live our lives as redeemed people.

Peter in 1 Peter 1:18-19 reminds us that we were saved by the “precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

Hebrews 10 affirms that the death of Jesus as the Sacrificial Lamb is once and for all.

Second, Jesus as our “*Paskwa*” means that He reigns now in the Throne of God as the Lamb of God.

Revelation 5 tells us that the Lamb of God sits in the Throne – “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

In movies and in books, who is the king of the jungle? It’s the Lion. We base our leadership and understanding of authority on the Lion. Although Revelation 5:5 also tells us that one of the names of Jesus is the Lion of Judah, we need understand it in its context – it is a reference that Jesus is from the Tribe of Judah, and a fulfillment of a prophecy in Genesis 49 that the Messiah will come from that Tribe.

But in terms of the reign of Jesus, it’s not the Lion that sits in the Throne but the Lamb. This means that Jesus, as King of kings and Lord of lords, reigns as the Lamb of God. We are being reigned by a loving and merciful God – He loves us so much that He gave Himself for all of us.

May we remember the meaning of “*Paskwa*” every time we celebrate Christmas.

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*“Jesus as our “Paskwa” means that we must celebrate our passing over from death to life.”*

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## 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 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 10,000 recipients. Some of these reflections can be found in this volume.

During 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. He currently sits in 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.

He is married to Hermely Agriam, Purchasing Officer of CPU. They have two children: Kairos Rye and Francheska MJ.