

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM MY SICKNESS

Rev. Ronny L. Luces

Copyright 2015

Rev. Ronny L. Luces

## Table of Contents

Preface .....	7
Part 1: The Power of Prayer. ....	8
Part 2: The Indispensability of Pain. ....	9
Part 3: The Virtue of Patience. ....	10
Part 4: The Strength of Perseverance. ....	11
Part 5: The Blessing of a Loving Community.....	12
Part 6: Primacy of Relationships. ....	13
Part 7: God's Wallet – The Sufficiency of God's Provision. ..	14
Part 8: Live One Day at a Time.....	15
Part 9: In Sickness or in Health. ....	16
Part 10: Family that Prays together, Stays together. ....	17
Part 11: Stepping inside Job's Shoes. ....	18
Part 13: Don't ask Why me? Ask, what will I do? .....	20
Part 14: If there's a Will, there's a Way. ....	21
Part 15: Tender, Loving, Care (TLC).....	22
Part 16: "What do you want to eat? I'll cook it for you". ....	23
Part 17: "With this Ring".....	24
Part 18: Challenge Accepted. ....	25
Part 19: Sensitivity. ....	26
Part 20: God Knows Best. ....	27
Part 21: God Knows Best 2. ....	28
Part 22: Unlikely Answers. ....	29
Part 23: A Mother's Love and Wisdom. ....	30
Part 24: Trust and Obey. ....	31
Part 25: Scar. ....	32
Part 26: One Fine Day. ....	33
Part 27: Reverse Isolation. ....	34

Part 28: The Language of Silence. ....	35
Part 29: Women. ....	36
Part 30: Mask. ....	38
Part 31: Hope. ....	39
Part 32: Exercise. ....	40
Part 33: Friendship. ....	42
Part 34: The Gift of Prayer. ....	44
Part 35: Clay. ....	46
Part 36: Window. ....	48
Part 37: Books. ....	50
Part 38: Ills and Pills. ....	52
Part 39: Courage. ....	54
Part 40. The necessity of suffering. ....	55
Part 41: A Tea Bag experience. ....	57
Part 42: Storm. ....	59
Part 43: Easter. ....	61
Part 44: Brokenness. ....	62
Part 45: Faith makes the impossible possible. ....	64
Part 46: Fighting Tiredness. ....	66
Part 47: Don't be afraid. ....	68
Part 48: Serenity. ....	70
Part 49: Optimism. ....	72
Part 50: Miracle. ....	74
Part 51: Limitations. ....	75
Part 52: The Power of Faith. ....	77
Part 53: Gift. ....	79
Part 54: Cup of coffee. ....	81
Part 55: Don't quit. ....	83

Part 56: Sleep. ....	85
Part 57: Stress free life. ....	86
Part 58: Carrying a burden. ....	88
Part 59: Facing temptations. ....	90
Part 60: Fun. ....	92
Part 61: Service. ....	94
Part 62: Teaching. ....	96
Part 63: Volunteerism. ....	99
Part 64: Prayers of the faithful. ....	101
Part 65: Mentoring. ....	102
Part 66: Legacy. ....	104
Part 67: Labor Day. ....	106
Part 68: Victory. ....	108
Part 69: Living to a certain standard. ....	110
Part 70: What impressions are you creating? ....	113
Part 71: Pre–Mother's Day. ....	115
Part 72: Mother's Day. ....	117
Part 73: Birthday. ....	119
Part 74: Aftermath. ....	121
Part 75: Touching lives. ....	123
Part 76: Gifts that sustain life. ....	125
Part 77: Getting used to it. ....	127
Part 78: Stories. ....	129
Part 79: Darkness. ....	131
Part 80: Fruitfulness. ....	133
Part 81: Hooked. ....	135
Part 82: Thank God for memories. ....	137
Part 83: Milestone. ....	139

Part 84: Check-up. ....	141
Part 85: God works mysteriously. ....	143
Part 86: Emptiness. ....	145
Part 87. True meaning of healing ....	147
TEAM Jesus .....	150

## Preface

As I reviewed and edited the reflections of Rev. Luces, I cannot help but have mixed emotions -- feelings of sadness, denial, hope and joy.

In these pages, you will be together with Rev. Luces in the last year of his life here on Earth. He wrote in the medium that is very popular for it instantly published his thoughts -- Facebook. The many comments and likes generated by his reflections are proofs that he is well loved, respected and followed. It also signified that a lot of people wanted to read it.

When *Maninoy* Ronny stopped writing due to the deterioration of his health, I thought that the end was near for him and I have to give him a parting gift. I decided to copy all of his reflections posted in Facebook and put it together as one book. When he received the book and saw the name of author, his face glowed with joy.

In your hands now is a compilation of 87 reflections painstakingly written by a Pastor who deeply reflected with what is happening to him and around him. He aptly called these reflections as *Lessons from my sickness*.

May we learn many lessons from this book.

Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalando-on  
December 15, 2015

## Part 1: The Power of Prayer.

March 2, 2015

Daily, the Lord revealed to me his miraculous ways, his protection, provision and preservation. And all of these – were his answers to the prayers of the faithful. This is the foundation or anchor upon which all my other learning and realization stands.

Prayers of individuals, prayer meeting groups, church congregations, auxiliary organizations, families, were heard by God and his answers unmistakably affirmed our conviction – that he never forget us nor forsake us.

Because of the prayer of the faithful, a big hole was created in heaven's door and the Lord Jesus looked at me with compassion and grace. I can't enumerate the number of times that God listened to our appeals coz' they are too many to mention.

So let me urge you dearly beloved, let us not stop praying. There'll always be something for us to pray and to ask God for his unmerited favors. Did it occur to you that one of the reasons for my sickness is that we can unite ourselves in prayer? The Lord wanted us to be strong in our prayer lives. It pleases him to see our hearts fully attuned to his will and desires. Consequently, he will increase our generosity, give us more blessings, and strengthen our spirit of service so that many people in need will be reached out by our prayer life. God bless you!



## Part 2: The Indispensability of Pain.

March 2, 2015

Too often, we want to avoid pain. We don't like its sensation. We are simply uncomfortable with it. But do you know that when Christ described the experience of great joy – he mentioned the pain of childbirth? According to him in John 16:21, a woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy. There's simply no pain greater than childbirth, and no greater joy aside from it either.

I was subjected to many medical procedures that were painful. A chest tube for thoracostomy (CTT) was inserted to my body to drain fluids from my lungs. For several days I have to carry that tube wherever I go – to the OR, to the x-ray room, to the restroom. I have to bear the discomfort it brings. But I know that my painful experience is part of my treatment and consequently of my healing. I can't be healed unless I experience pain. There's simply no shortcut or easy way out if I want to be healed. For that tube was also used for my pleurodesis treatment.

So I learned to value that painful experience. Instead of complaining, I learned to accept pain as part of my healing. As they say, no pain – no gain.

Are you suffering any pain? Physical, emotional, relational, etc.? It's given to you as an indispensable process of your healing. May God continue to bless you!

### Part 3: The Virtue of Patience.

March 2, 2015

Psalm 30: 5 says, I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. In my long days of hospital confinement, I have plenty of time being still, waiting, praying, and accepting God's will in my life. There the Lord taught me the virtue of patience.

Oftentimes we just want things to be hurried. We have zero tolerance for delays. But as I observed how medicine is being administered – I find out that they do not act instantly or immediately. For medicines to work, they must be taken religiously, after 4 hours, or every after meals, and with the right dosage. You can't just expect medicines to act right away. You must be patient in taking them, and you must be patient in waiting for its effect to come. You must patiently give time for medicines to act in your body.

Is your patience being tried right now? Do you find it hard to keep still, wait, and accept life's circumstances that come unexpectedly? Learn to be patient for it has been said – it's the mother of all virtues.

## Part 4: The Strength of Perseverance.

March 3, 2015

St. Paul encouraged the Roman Christians "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance" (Rom. 5:3). James, also gave this very profound reminder, "Consider it pure joy my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2–3).

I find the true and deep meaning of these verses in my sickness – because I experienced what it is to face suffering up close and personal. I discovered that indeed, perseverance has the strength to change our outlook, make us view our situation in a different perspective, and give us strength to carry on despite hardships.

Perseverance has the strength to change sorrow to rejoicing, negative to positive, and being defeatist to victorious. Without perseverance it is easy to curl into a corner and give up. It is easy to put our hands up and stop struggling. It is easy to lose hope. But thanks be to God for this gift of perseverance. He made me look at my situation and made me view it as a blessing. God has blessed me – because he gave me the opportunity to practice perseverance!

## Part 5: The Blessing of a Loving Community.

March 3, 2015

St. Paul was able to survive the most critical moments of his life and ministry by the empowering communities he established and nurtured in many places he served. He was able to meet and know many people who became true friends, caring brethren, and loyal fellow servants of Christ. And so when he was in prison, when he was sick, when his life was threatened, he was able to come out strong through the supportive presence and generosity of these friends, church people and colleagues in the ministry.

I was greatly blessed by God to have experienced firsthand what Paul had also went through. People I've known from past to present, from near and far, from familiar to intimate, made their loving presence known – when I was at my lowest moment! They came to visit, to pray, to cry, to hug, to comfort, to inspire, to give their resources, to listen, to share their time, and to make me strong in their embrace. They came to assure me – that I am not alone.

Dearly beloved, let me urge you to belong to such a loving and nurturing community. Look for true friends, loyal brothers and sisters in the faith who will not abandon you in your most trying times. I'm blessed by God because he has placed me in the warm embrace of this loving community of faith.

## Part 6: Primacy of Relationships.

March 4, 2015

This is the key to establish empowering and nurturing communities – we must take serious efforts of building strong relationships in our ministry. St. Paul outlined this key principle in 1 Thess. 1: 8, "We cared for you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

Three key words are mentioned here to help guide us in building strong relationships with people. First, we must know how to care. He/she who sow seeds of compassion and caring will surely reap a harvest of the same compassion and caring.

Second, we must know how to share. This means dispensing concrete acts of generosity and not just offering empty rhetorics.

Finally, we must know how to hold people dear to us. This means being inclusive in the way we relate to people. Holding them dear means being honest, intimate and truthful in our dealings with them.

I believe that building this kind of relationship in our ministry will pave the way for establishing empowering and nurturing communities. I'm grateful to God for giving me this firsthand experience in my ministry. The harvest of caring and compassion that I received were evidences of this truth.

## Part 7: God's Wallet – The Sufficiency of God's Provision.

March 4, 2015

Honestly, a few questions kept bouncing in my mind during my long days of hospital confinement.

1. How long will I be made to stay here?
2. What additional procedures, laboratory tests, medications will be prescribed for me?
3. What will they cost?
4. Do we have the means and resources to pay the accumulating bills?
5. What about the next stage of procuring my targeted therapy?

I have asked these questions because one of life's realities confronting people now is the high cost of health and medical services. To get sick is very very expensive.

In presenting these concerns with Mam Martha, she confidently declared that it's not something for us to worry about. She's holding on to God's promise and powerful declaration, "My grace is sufficient for you." To put our mind at ease, and our faith in action, we earnestly prayed about it and designate an empty wallet as God's Wallet. There, the Lord showed us his amazing acts and miraculous power. It was there that love gifts, contributions, envelopes, cheques, remittances from individuals, families, couples, groups, churches, organizations, institutions, alumni batches, friends and acquaintances which keep on coming were put by Mam Martha.

These resources which keep on pouring with words of encouragement, prayers of intercessions, and generous acts of mercy were so overwhelming! Our God's wallet has never been empty ever since. Indeed, God's grace is sufficient for our needs!

## Part 8: Live One Day at a Time.

March 5, 2015

In the past, I used to look at this statement as only a cliché or an often repeated slogan – Live One Day at a Time.

My point of view which I held for so long was to look at life in its strategic or long term perspective. I used to lead many associations, groups, church congregations, community based people's organizations in formulating strategic plans and identifying long term targets and goals. I am not comfortable in looking at life as only a daily experience. For me, the proper way of facing life's challenges and appreciating its myriad and mysterious potentials was to be forward looking, always thinking about tomorrow, and bracing myself for the future.

My sickness brought me down to reality. No wonder, Christ said in Matthew 6:34, Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. I discovered that “living one day at a time” is the essence of a meaningful experience. It is not routinary nor it offers only a meaningless repetition. Each day is NEW! Have you noticed it? There's nothing yesterday that's exactly repeated today. The sun that rises is the same but it shines differently. The chirping of the birds is new, the breeze that gently blows its life giving oxygen is new, the warm company of loved ones is new.

So learn to appreciate each new day with its many potentials. Learn to focus on things around you or you will miss many beautiful encounters. As Lamentation 3:22–23 says, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassion never fail. They are NEW every morning; great is thy faithfulness." Have a blessed day everyone!

## Part 9: In Sickness or in Health.

March 5, 2015

I've solemnized marriage ceremonies of many couples. In fact, I have already lost count how many I had pronounced as husbands and wives to be united in holy matrimony. But there's never an instant in which I forgot to include in their wedding vows this statement – do you promise to remain faithful, to love, comfort and honor your spouse, from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in SICKNESS or in health...? And all of them said, I DO!

I've made the same vows myself with Mam Martha (we will celebrate our 25th anniversary this coming July, 2015). I discovered the true essence, meaning and application of this vow in my sickness! Without Mam Martha's presence by my side, sacrificial service, in depth affirmation of love and earnest prayers, I could have succumbed to hopelessness. I was very vulnerable to negative emotions like fear, uncertainty and confusion. It was easy to issue denials, blames and complaints if only to ease my mind of these negative vibrations. But Mam Martha ensured that in sickness, our vows would be strengthened, our relationship would be closer, our love for each other more meaningful, visible and pure.

I get strong every day because of Mam Martha's consistent affirmation of our marriage covenant. She's there for me, in the moments I certainly need her. I Thank the Lord for giving me Mam Martha!



## Part 10: Family that Prays together, Stays together.

March 5, 2015

If there's an image of childhood which remained as a lasting imprint on what I remembered about our family, it's the family altar. Tatay and Nanay gathering ten of us children in a corner of our house to read the Scriptures, and contribute a statement or two on what we need for God to grant us. This was a nightly affair which we continue to carry in each of our individual families to which we have settled now.

This strong family prayer life sustains each one of us even when we are already separated by distance and geography. For instance, my youngest sister Lucy is working as a nurse in California, but she always made it a point to communicate with me, especially in my sickness, our mother and her other siblings every day. Her generosity knows no bounds, and her sacrificial love knows no obstacles. According to her, she was blessed by God so that she can be a blessing to many of us as well. I'm grateful to God for giving us our family. We stayed together because we are bound by that strong cord of unity – to pray as a family.

Do you want to strengthen your family? You can do that by gathering under the altar of prayer.

## Part 11: Stepping inside Job's Shoes.

March 6, 2015

Gina, one of my younger sisters, greatly comforted me when the doctor revealed to me my sickness. She's a school teacher at Sum-ag, Bacolod City at present. Many years ago, she encountered a very severe trial. Her husband was run-over by an 18 wheeler truck resulting to his sudden death. She became a very young widow with 3 very young children. How did she cope with the tragedy? She stepped inside Job's shoes. This is her testimony of God's goodness, which also comforted and strengthened me.

What does "stepping inside Job's shoes entails"?

1. Being aware that God has chosen you to be tested. Have you seen my servant Job? Test him. God is mighty proud of Job. If you are under severe trial, God is making you his showcase.

2. Being aware that God is highly confident that like Job, we can surpass these tests. God is very sure of Job's faith – that he will not waver while facing trials.

3. Being aware that God is right there at Job's side monitoring the whole thing. God didn't abandon Job.

4. Being aware that God did strengthen Job and greatly blessed and rewarded him after he has passed the test!

These convictions strengthened Gina's resolve to overcome her fiery trials. She declared, "I will not only pass these tests. I will pass these tests with flying colors!"

Our family is very grateful that trials coming our way made us closer to each other and made our faith stronger in the Lord. Good day everyone!

## Part 12: The Mysterious Generosity of the Raven.

March 6, 2015

In part 7 of these lessons, I have shared with you the creation of God's Wallet which served as concrete proof of God's sufficient grace – that in times of our greatest need – God never fails to send us his compassion and support.

A theological insight shared to us by my sister Gina made us more hopeful in committing ourselves to God through this God's wallet, for it's up to his will and power (not on our own capacity) where to get resources for my treatment. She referred our attention to the story in I Kings 17:1–6, the story of Elijah and the ravens. According to her, ravens (they are similar with our crows in appearance and characteristics) are by nature selfish and cruel. Mother ravens were known to abandon their newly hatched chicks and left them to survive by themselves.

In the story of Noah, the raven was the first bird to be released to see if there's any dry land where the ark can settle. But the raven just kept on flying back and forth and didn't enter the ark. This was because the raven was seeking carcass of dead creatures and want to gorge itself without thinking about the welfare of other animals inside the ark. In other words, you can't expect generosity, service and concern from a raven. And yet, in Elijah's case, he was fed by ravens who brought him bread and meat every morning and evening. Here we find the "mysterious generosity of the ravens".

Reflecting on it theologically, my sister confidently declared that God can touch the heart of people and WILL be able to make their heart generous! In other words, God can generate resources that we need through his power – by his touch. Even a selfish raven can be generous – when God touch him and make him a channel of blessing!

## Part 13: Don't ask Why me? Ask, what will I do?

March 7

I appreciate the outburst made by a close friend (a barangay captain) when he heard about my sickness – why does it have to be Pastor? Why not druglords, addicts, hired killers, holduppers, swindlers, who just create problems and sow havoc to society?

I understand his sentiments but I hesitate to agree with him. It would be very presumptuous for me to think that I am exempted to have this sickness because I am a Pastor. It is also wrong for me to ask God why it would be me and not others. I simply have no right to do that. God is God, and he has every right to do his will. I recognized that there are many things in life that we cannot understand, but we must trust God's judgment and be guided by his hands.

So instead of asking, "why me?" I asked, "what will I do now Lord"? And here I received new challenges and revelations daily. Since I cannot do my previous functions because of my physical limitations, the Lord challenged me to explore doing new things – like writing these lessons in social media. Many people favorably send me their feedbacks. I also kept a list of prayer requests that I earnestly make intercessions during my prayer time. I also read a lot of books because I have the time to do that.

Dearly beloved, let the direction of our lives be guided by God's hands because he is our stronghold. He knows what's best for us. Have a blessed day everyone!

## Part 14: If there's a Will, there's a Way.

March 8, 2015

We often heard of the proverb, "Kung gusto, maraming paraan. Kung ayaw, maraming dahilan". This means that the accomplishment of something greatly depends upon the intense desire of someone who wants to achieve the desired result. I have affirmed this truth in my sickness. When my doctor was identifying a medication for my cough he matter-of-factly remarked, "If we only knew somebody who can access this kind of medication in the US (he then mentioned a certain brand), then our problem can be lessened. You see, this brand is no longer available here in our country because it has been banned and regulated. You can only find this medication in the US but with all proper documentation". Mam Martha immediately replied, "Doc, we know somebody who can do it". The doctor then smiled and said, "Well, if that's the case, then here's the prescription. I hope that in the coming 3–5 days it will be here so that we can start dispensing such medication". Indeed, 5 days later, a big bottle of that regulated medication was standing at my hospital table, with my name on it, ready for the doctor's final instruction.

The challenge of finding, purchasing, documenting, and delivering that medicine from the US to the Philippines ASAP was responded by my youngest sister Lucy who's working as a nurse in California. With her deep concern for me, her intense desire and intention to ease my case, she did everything possible to deliver that regulated medicine in my hospital room in record time. I thank God for her motivation, intention and determination, three important elements of showing in concrete terms, her love and care for me.

Indeed, if there's a will, there's a way. Have a blessed Sunday everyone. Let us worship our God with gladness!

## Part 15: Tender, Loving, Care (TLC).

March 8, 2015

When we get sick, there's only one place where we want to go – at the hospital. It is because we are assured of the presence of doctors, nurses, surgeons, and the availability of medications, laboratory facilities, and other equipments needed for our treatment. But not all people are satisfied with their own hospital experience. I want to make an exception.

Fairly recently, I was twice confined at the hospital. The first was 10 days long, the second was 11 days long. Within those days I was subjected to a lot of medical procedures. I underwent ultra-sound guided thoracentesis, CT scan, several x-rays, a CTT tube was inserted to my body, and pleurodesis. I was treated by many physicians who were specialists in their own fields. I lost count of the number of nurses and attendants checking my vital signs and giving me my medications. But I didn't forget their tender, loving, care (TLC) and positive attitudes. I was blessed to be confined in a Christian hospital because that's the way I perceived their treatment towards me. Even in the way utility personnel cleaned my room daily, or my food being delivered by kitchen attendants during mealtime, I can observe their courteous demeanor and respectful attitude. The regular visits and prayers of the chaplains were very encouraging, and inspiring. The comforting presence of the members of the Board of Trustees were likewise commendable. One of them even volunteered to act as guarantor if we lacked financial resources to pay the bill. Lastly, what will be more reassuring than the personal visit of the hospital director himself who came and give me and Mam Martha his comforting words? It was to him that I first shared my favorable impressions and experience. Like me, he was happy to know that his hospital is a dispenser of TLC.

Part 16: "What do you want to eat? I'll cook it for  
you".

March 9, 2015

One good memory I have of childhood in my coastal neighborhood is the picture of people gladly exchanging plates of food. A neighbor knocking on your door and offering you his freshly cooked 'ginat-an nga dagmay' was a daily occurrence. To show him your gratitude, you also put 'apan-apan' in his plate with 3 pieces of 'bukayo' for his children. Alas, this healthy exchange of goodwill and foodstuff gradually faded, and no longer witnessed by the younger generation. I am glad however, that this generous practice of food serving is being revived in the life of people in the church. During potluck dinners, fellowship gatherings, thanksgiving services, family celebrations, people bringing foodstuff to be shared and enjoyed is a sight to behold. I believe that this practice is not only a cultural expression to proclaim to all and sundry our bayanihan identity, but it is to me a manifestation of the nature of our Christian faith and spiritual identity.

In the scriptures, Christ always shared food to the people. He even commanded his disciples who were facing 5000 people, "You give them something to eat" (Luke 9:13). My long hospital confinement was not all filled with difficult or heavy experiences like pain, boredom, anxiety, stress, but also memorable experiences of joy, sharing and fellowship. These joyful experiences were usually ushered in by phone calls I frequently received, "Pastor, what do you want to eat? I'll cook it for you".

## Part 17: "With this Ring".

March 9, 2015

Open your hands. Look at your ring finger. Is your wedding ring still there? In my long hospital confinement, my wedding ring caused me some uncomfortable and embarrassing moments. My ring finger has grown bigger that my wedding ring can no longer be removed. That is why every time I went to the OR, CT–Scan room and even x–rays, I have to explain to the people tasked to prepare me, my predicament – my ring can't be removed. They have to cover my ring finger with adhesive tapes so that my ring (or anything it represents) will not interfere with my medical procedures. And so it came to pass that when I was released from confinement, the first thing that Mam Martha asked me to do was to look for ways for that ring to be removed. It's good that we have a church member who knew some jewelers familiar with the task of cutting and re-sizing a ring to make it just like new. That explains why, after my hospital confinement, I've got a "new" wedding ring – fitted well, with its freshly printed inscription – Martha Mae, July 8, 1990 (the date of our wedding). With this ring I continue to pledge my matrimonial vows with her of a loving marriage.



## Part 18: Challenge Accepted.

March 10, 2015

"Pastor, I challenge you. Live what you preach". These strong words were passionately spoken by my doctor, right after he revealed to me my sickness. To make his statement more emphatic, he was looking at me straight in the eyes with his fingers pointing firmly at me. These strongly worded admonition was used by God to make me courageous in facing my trials, and to make me fully dependent on him. Without this frank and brave reminder from my doctor, I could have adopted a weak and defeatist attitude in facing my situation.

You see, when the doctor told me what I have to go through to confront my sickness, what possible treatments I can explore, what tests I should undergo, what opportunities are open for me if I am just courageous enough to face them, I replied rather unconvincingly, "What if I just wait for what will happen to me Doc"? That earned my doctors ire. For him, to adopt a passive or negative attitude in the light of what I'm facing is an expression of faithlessness and it's not the kind of response he expected from a pastor like me. That's why he stood up, and with his fingers firmly pointed at me said, "Pastor, I challenge you. Live what you preach". His words hit me very strongly. It was like God was using him to directly speak to me. I realized that indeed, he was right. I used to preach about courage in the face of perplexities, strong faith in the midst of adversities, and being open to God's revelation in the midst of confusion and doubt.

Why then should I adopt a lethargic and pathetic attitude? I was greatly humbled and brought to reality by that experience. That's why I assured my doctor, "Yes, Doc. With God by my side, I accept the challenge". I thanked the Lord that he has spoken his words of encouragement through my doctor.

## Part 19: Sensitivity.

March 11, 2015

This word, according to the dictionary means – the awareness and understanding of needs or feelings of others; the ability to respond to perceived inadequacies; the strength of physical and emotional reaction. The opposite of sensitivity is apathy, numbness, unresponsive, unfeeling and hard-heartedness. To be called "sensitive" is to be able to have a positive description.

Many favorable things happened in the lives of people because actions made by sensitive persons had helped solve their problems or eased the burdens they were carrying. I owe a great debt of gratitude to many people whose sensitivity eased my pain, answered my needs and brought me joy. The day after my release from hospital confinement was the Jaro fiesta. For those familiar with the event, it means that traffic is closed, streets are filled with all kinds of vendors, noise and dirt pollution proliferates. For us living in the central part of the district (near the Jaro plaza), it means being vulnerable to 24 hour noise, smoke and dirt pollution, and difficulty of transportation. Being newly released from the hospital I still suffer from shortness of breath and have difficulty in my physical movements. The question which occupied my mind in anticipation of the fiesta was, "How can my body rest in the middle of such discomfort"? Without my knowing it, sensitive members of Jaro Evangelical Church had already prepared for such an eventuality. They had already made a reservation in a nearby beach resort to have a cottage to accommodate me and my family for 2 days so that we can avoid the inconveniences of the fiesta celebration! The sensitivity of these concerned church members enabled them to plan in advance what to do during my time of need. How wonderful to have Christian brothers and sisters like that! I praise God for giving us sensitive members of the family of faith!

## Part 20: God Knows Best.

March 12, 2015

All of us have our favorite poems, sayings or mottos that bring comfort to our beleaguered souls when times get hard. I remembered watching a movie about Nelson Mandela and how the poem "Invictus" figured prominently in his life. When the doctor revealed to me the devastating news about my sickness, the words of a certain poem also rang true in my heart. It brought me peace of mind and a calm understanding of what I'm going through from the perspective of someone who has fully surrendered herself to God's power and will. The title of the poem is "God knows best" and it was written by Helen Steiner Rice. I would like to share the first three (3) stanzas of the poem to you, my dear readers:

Our Father knows what's best for us  
So why should we complain –  
We always want the sunshine,  
But He knows there must be rain.

We love the sound of laughter  
And the merriment of cheer,  
But our hearts would lose their tenderness  
If we never shed a tear.

Our Father tests us often  
With suffering and with sorrow,  
He tests us, not to punish us  
But to help us meet tomorrow.

If you are undergoing some very terrible experiences right now, just commit yourselves to God and his ultimate power. Certainly, God knows what's best for you! I will share the next lines of the poem on my next lessons. Good day everyone.

## Part 21: God Knows Best 2.

March 12, 2015

As promised, here are the remaining stanzas of the poem which greatly inspired me, and gave me a positive outlook as I face the challenge of my sickness:

For growing trees are strengthened  
When they withstand the storm,  
And the sharp cut of a chisel  
Gives the marble grace and form.

God never hurts us needlessly,  
And he never wastes our pain  
For every loss he send to us  
Is followed by rich gain.

And when we count our blessings  
That God so freely sent  
We will find no cause for murmuring  
And no time to lament.

For our Father loves his children  
And to him all things are plain,  
So he never sends us pleasures  
When the soul's deep need is pain.

So whenever we are troubled  
And when everything goes wrong,  
It is just God working in us  
To make our spirits strong!

## Part 22: Unlikely Answers.

March 13, 2015

Isn't it true that we all wanted our prayers to be answered? And isn't it true that the answers we expected are the answers that we already framed in our minds? In other words, when we pray for a ganta of rice, we also expect to receive a ganta of rice – not just 2 cupfulls. Most often, we wanted God to follow what we already formulated in our thoughts.

But God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts, not our thoughts. I affirmed this truth in my sickness. I discovered that God was in the business of giving me something which I haven't asked, but something which was for my own good. An article I've read articulated this truth. It says,

I asked for health that I might do greater things;  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.  
I asked God for strength that I might achieve;  
I was made weak that I might learn to obey.  
I asked for riches that I might be happy;  
I was given poverty that I might be wise.  
I asked for power and the praise of men;  
I was given weakness to sense my need of God.  
I asked for all things that i might enjoy life;  
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing I asked for, but everything I hoped for;  
In spite of myself, my prayers were answered –  
I am among all men most richly blessed!

## Part 23: A Mother's Love and Wisdom.

March 14, 2015

My 81 years old mother came to visit me today (Saturday, March 14, 2015). I would like to dedicate this lesson to her, by recalling her text message the day she knew about my sickness. She said, "Noy, we should be glad that this trial has visited our family and you were chosen to be its bearer. For it means that we were made partakers of this suffering. This trial will enable us to be stronger in our faith and we will be more closer to each other and with the Lord". She then sang a battle hymn to inspire and to encourage me to face my sickness.

I am really thankful to God for giving me a very prayerful, full of godly wisdom, and faithful mother. You see, she was also in great pain while relaying those words to me. She suffered a leg fracture rendering her immobile since the month of November last year. In fact, when she came to visit me today, she was physically carried by my brother in a wheelchair. But that inconvenience didn't prevent her from coming over just to show me her love and to express her affection. I am more inspired to face the challenges posed by my sickness because I am being supported by the prayers of my mother.

## Part 24: Trust and Obey.

March 16, 2015

This is the title of one of the most popular and timeless hymns sang by Christians the world over. How many people were brought to the saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because of this hymn? How many lives were changed for the better because of the enlightening and inspiring message of the song? We really can't tell. But I'm sure many people were able to gain favorable results in their lives by adhering to the challenges posed by the song.

During my long hospital confinement, I was greatly helped by the encouragement I received from this hymn. When I faced uncertainties and lingering doubts, I just told myself, "Just trust and obey". Instead of spending time in worrying, instead of asking too many questions, instead of formulating my own theories and explanations, I just told myself, "Just trust and obey". Just trust that God knows what's best for us. Just trust that he is sovereign, his power knows no bounds, and he will work miraculously through people that he touched. That he can work through the doctors, surgeons, nurses, laboratory personnel, etc. That his power can be manifested through medications and treatments administered to our physical body. But more importantly, I trust that God listened to the sincere prayers of the faithful who continue to humbly ask for his intercession and compassion.

As a result, I discovered that when I fully trust God in all these things, I can obey everything that the doctors prescribed for my own good. I obeyed the dietary requirements, I obeyed the prescribed rest and exercise schedule. I obeyed the sanitary procedures like wearing masks even though it's inconvenient at times. Indeed, to trust and obey are 2 very powerful virtues that can strengthen our relationship with the Lord, and can also help us in facing our practical problems. Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

## Part 25: Scar.

March 17, 2015

I came across this fascinating theological riddle many years back, "What man made thing is now in heaven"? And the answer is – the SCARS in Jesus' hands, feet and side. Those bodily scars were created by nails and the centurion's spear during Christ's crucifixion. Those marks were sought by Thomas as proof of Christ 's resurrection (John 20:25 – "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."). Thereupon, when Christ saw him a week later, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." And Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:26–28)

I remembered this riddle fairly recently when I took a bath and saw the scar at my side. It was the scar that resulted from a CTT tube insertion administered to drain fluids from my lungs. When I looked at that scar, I was reminded of its significance. Without such wound, the doctor couldn't have performed the pleurodesis procedure and I couldn't have returned to my normal breathing pattern. That wound has been a step towards my healing. That wound is necessary for me to be treated. The scar resulting from that wound serves as proof that we have exhausted all means to treat my bodily problem.

Reflecting on this theologically, I am reminded of my own sinfulness, and of my deep gratitude to God for giving us his son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. In Isaiah 53: 5 it says, "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. Without the scars in Jesus body, we are still on our way to perdition. But thanks be to God, we were forgiven!



## Part 26: One Fine Day.

March 18, 2015

How do you define a fine day? Perhaps to many of us, a fine day is a day that is devoid of any problems, burdens or cares. Everything you encountered all provide you with joy, blessings, entertainment, and give you a sense of fulfillment or accomplishment. That's why people who encountered such a kind of day blurts with excitement, "You have made my day!"

One of the most common greetings I heard from people who came to visit me was, "How's your day?" I'm grateful that they are so concerned about my situation and that they would like to know whether I still find joy, meaning, hope and peace in that particular day. My ready answer to that is of course, "I have a fine day! Or, "My day is fine!" This is because I do not look at the negative circumstances surrounding me on a particular day in order to make my judgment, but I focus on God's goodness and grace which enables me to appreciate the new day that God gave me. The fact that I still woke up to a new day is already a great reason for me to say that my day is fine!

Proverbs 11: 27 says, "He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it." In other words, we will be able to define our day as a fine day, by looking at all the positive things that God gave us and learn to celebrate that day by affirming God's goodness and faithfulness. But if we focus our attention to all the negative, hard, evil aspects of the day – then that's how we will also perceive our day – negative, hard and evil. Ever since I discovered this verse, I learned to focus on searching the good things that God prepared for me on that particular day. For what you seek, you will find! Have a fine day everyone!

## Part 27: Reverse Isolation.

March 19, 2015

I confess that there were a lot of things that I didn't like during my hospitalization. Foremost is the cost. I find out that it's really very expensive to get sick. It's no wonder why many people who need immediate medical attention, just preferred to stay at home and learn to maximize the use of alternative or herbal medicines. I even read of a joke about a patient who was already healed of his heart ailment and was given the go-signal to be released after his long confinement. But he died of cardiac arrest when he saw his hospital bills! I certainly hope that it's really a joke and not a true story.

Next that I dislike is the pain and discomfort related to or resulting from my treatment. But I have come to accept them, since I knew that they were a significant part of my healing.

But there's still another thing that I didn't like – no matter how this doctrine was explained to me. They called this Reverse Isolation. According to this phenomenon, I can't accept visitors in my hospital room because they might have colds, cough or flu, and their virus may affect me. While I understand that this was a valid way of safeguarding my already feeble health, I find it difficult to just accept it. That is why there were some instances that I struggled against the insistence of people looking after me, to allow people especially those who came from faraway places to enter my room and pray for me. I really sympathized with those people who came from churches that I previously served as pastor. I knew that they came from remote communities. They travelled long distances, and spent their hard earned money for transportation just to show their love and affection to their former pastor. In a way I'm grateful that my requests for exemptions such as these were also granted by my guardians. Isolation is never a good thing for me because I just don't want to be alone.

## Part 28: The Language of Silence.

March 20, 2015

It is customary for people to make or create a noise when emphasizing something. New business or products are introduced by loud public announcements, accompanied with drum beats, full volume music, street parades, caravans, fireworks, etc. It seems that people are convinced of the products' efficacy by the loudness of its propaganda or advertisement. The louder the noise, the popular the business. Silence is perceived as a weakness or a show of insignificance. But is it?

My sickness has introduced me to the world of silence – by force. In other words, I was forced to be silent, otherwise I will suffer a state of incessant coughing if I continue talking. It took me quite a while to adjust to this condition. You see, as a Pastor, my job was to speak, and not just speak, but to speak loudly. I was not used to just sit in a corner and be silent. But my sickness made me discover the virtue of silence. I discovered that it's also a means with which I can still communicate with others. I discovered that I can listen more while others are talking, and I can fully internalize what they felt. I discovered that I'm more sensitive to the feelings of others. Not only that. I also discovered that I have plenty of time to think more deeply, analyze things more broadly, and in so doing, learn quite a lot of things more frequently. I have more time for personal devotions and to read the scriptures. I have plenty of opportunities to pray for many people in my prayers of intercessions. I have more time to reflect and write my reflections.

What I missed doing when my faculty of speech was still intact, I learned to value and maximize in my world of silence.

## Part 29: Women.

March 22, 2015

I have a few women in my life, but that does not mean I'm a womanizer. First, there's my mother who gave me life. Next, there's my wife, who gave meaning to my life. And then there's my daughter who gave purpose to my meaningful life. My life is being strengthened and sustained by the love of these women.

Aside from them however, God gave me the strong support of JEC women in my ministry since I was called as pastor in 2003. They always accompanied and supported me during outreach services, vigil services, shut-in visits, and when there were invitations extended to me outside the city. Their active presence and support through prayers, choir songs, generous contributions, add blessings to the many engagements we have participated in many areas of ministries of the church. Reading Luke 8:1-3, I'm glad to know that Jesus had the same circle of support from faithful, generous and prayerful women. Aside from disciples like Peter, James, John, Matthew, etc. there were also women like Mary, Joanna and Susanna who supported Christ's ministry out of their own means.

I thought that all these would come to an abrupt end when I was diagnosed with my sickness. I have to resign my post as pastor of the church since I am already weak to carry my responsibilities. I can no longer preach, lead bible studies, conduct home visitations, led vigil services, make lectures and seminars, do counseling sessions and other pastoral duties. During my long hospital confinement, I have to explain these facts to these JEC women – that I can no longer spent time with them since I'll be confined to my living quarters for my treatment and convalescence. But these women have a totally different plan and would not be limited by that. When I was released from confinement, they became my regular visitors to bring me foodstuff and pray for me. They also accompanied

me and my family in our walking exercise at Fort San Pedro, in my doctor's consultation and even to perform some errands. They also bring me and my family out for special lunch or dinners so that our fellowship will continue and I will not be deprived of these kinds of celebration! Yesterday, eight of them treated Mam Martha and I to a sumptuous lunch at Tatoy's. I'm thankful to God for these faithful, generous and prayerful JEC women!

## Part 30: Mask.

March 23, 2015

One of the funniest movies that I saw was entitled, "The Mask" starring Jim Carrey. I'm sure many people have seen that movie, and perhaps remember the scenes that made them laugh and momentarily forget their cares and problems.

One of the most frequently offered advice given to me by people who are concerned about my health is to view funny movies so that I can laugh and be stressed free. Perhaps I will ask my daughter to look for a downloadable version of that movie so that I can see it again.

But it's not the reason why I mention the word "mask" in this lesson. I'm referring to a different kind of mask – one that is not worn for disguise, performance or entertainment, but for protection. I'm referring to the sanitary face mask that has been a part of my outfit since I was diagnosed with sickness. I was made to wear a mask, wherever I go at all times. The only times that I remove my face mask was when I was eating, or taking a bath. I must admit that it caused me some discomfort at times. Sometimes I have difficulty in breathing normally because I was made to wear double when visiting public places (church, restaurants, etc.). But I understand the underlying concern behind this instruction.

Reflecting on this theologically, I discovered that God also uses our discomforts for our protection. In other words, not everything that caused us inconvenience is bad for us. Swedish composer Lina Sandell Berg wrote, "Day by day and with each passing moment, strength I find to meet my trials here; Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment. I've no cause for worry or for fear". What discomforts are you experiencing right now? Perhaps they are given to you for your own protection.

## Part 31: Hope.

March 24, 2015

Before being elected to office, Pres. Barak Obama wrote a book entitled, "The Audacity of Hope" which became a bestseller. The title was taken from a sermon by Pres. Obama's pastor Rev. Wright, who based his expounded homily on G.F. Watts painting "Hope".

Excerpts from the sermon says, "With her clothes in rags, her body scarred and bruised and bleeding, the harp all but destroyed and with one string left, she had the audacity to make music and to praise God. To take the one string you have left and have the audacity to hope – that's the real word God will have us hear, from this painting".

With hope, anyone can aspire for something great, even for something that borders on the impossible. St. Paul named three greatest virtues that will remain forever when all else have already failed and died – these are faith, hope and love. I certainly believe in the power of hope to strengthen and sustain us especially as we are facing seemingly insurmountable odds. I affirmed this truth in my sickness.

Without this hopeful attitude of being healed, that God is there listening to prayers of the faithful who are united in their voices, appeals and supplications, and to overcome difficult stages of treatment, it is easy to give up and stop trying. But even though my body is already scarred, bruised and weak, I will still hope that God will give me another chance to be renewed, that he has the power to extend my life, that he has the grace for me to continue serving him as his servant. And even though I can no longer perform what I have been doing in the past, when my physical strength was still normal, I will still look for ways to serve him, to inspire people, and to declare his goodness and faithfulness to anyone I encounter. This is the hope that I'm holding on to. I will still play my harp even when I have just one string left!

## Part 32: Exercise.

March 25, 2015

St. Paul was a strong promoter and advocate of physical exercises in his epistles. He wrote about different sports like running a race, boxing and wrestling. He even challenged young Timothy about the value of physical training (1 Timothy 4: 8) and about the discipline, determination and adherence to existing rules by an athlete (2 Timothy 2:5). From his detailed descriptions of various sports and their benefits, we can conclude that St. Paul possess intimate knowledge and personal experience about the world of athletics. It is also possible that Paul himself was a very physically fit person. He was able to survive shipwrecks, bodily flogging, hunger, snake bites and other life threatening attacks. But because of God's intervention (and his gift of good health) he was able to overcome these physical dangers.

Upon my release from the hospital, I was really physically weak. Little movements will make me feel exhausted. I suffered from shortness of breath. I lost many pounds. My appetite was not good and my sleeping pattern was very erratic. There's always the temptation to just lie down on my bed and minimize my physical movements. But thanks to Mam Martha who became my life coach. She encouraged me to do some exercises. Together with Manang Tessie Lozanes, they would bring me to Fort San Pedro to do walking and breathing exercises and to avail the natural healing impact of early sunlight. After that, we ate breakfast of rice, grilled fish, vegetables, chicken soup and plenty of fruits. This became our regular schedule and I discovered the positive changes happening in my body as well as in my mental perspective. Now, I am able to do deep breathing, my appetite has significantly improved, my pallor has also improved (many noticed my cheeks were not so pale anymore), and I slept well at night. I am also recovering the pounds that I lost. Truly, doing physical exercise is very important to maintaining our good health.



To everyone out there, don't wait for sickness to destroy your body before you appreciate the advantages and benefits of physical exercise. I am speaking through experience.

## Part 33: Friendship.

March 26, 2015

It has been said that if you have two persons that you consider friends, you are lucky. But if you have one GOOD person to consider a friend, you are extremely lucky. Perhaps it goes without saying that if you have more than one good person as your friends, you are not only lucky – you are blessed!

The Bible has a lot to say about friendship. According to Proverbs 17:17, "A friend loveth at all times". Is it not interesting? Why does it not say, "brothers, or sisters loveth at all times"? Because in real life, even brothers and sisters may hate each other to death because of greed, and quarrel over inheritance. But we know of friendships that overcome the tests of loyalty, and the passage of time.

I've known J when I was having my fieldwork/internship at the Institute of Religion and Culture which was holding office at CPBC Hq., Jaro, Iloilo City during that time. We were staying at their house as boarders. He was still a student then. I will only come in contact with him when we were queuing with our pails at the water pump near the house and have our conversation. He seldom talks, but whenever he was in the mood, he will just blurt out his plans for his family, how to help his parents, and how to send his siblings to school. For that brief period, we became friends.

I was hospitalized and brought to the operating room where a CTT tube was attached to my body. This procedure rendered me almost immobile. Upon my release from the operating room and still feeling lightheaded, I sensed someone looking closely at me. He was also wearing a mask and a uniform of a hospital orderly. "Manoy, ikaw diya?" He asked. Even with a mask I recognized him and so I replied, "Yes, J. I was operated just now and I have a tube attached to my body."

He then replied, "Don't worry Manoy, ako bahala kanimo." After that, he made everything to make my return to my room as comfortable as possible. Every gadget that he thought I might need because of my limited mobility, he would procure. He was doing to me what Jesus taught, "Go the second mile." When the nurse assigned to bring me back to my room observed the way he was doing things, he just told her, "Friend ko diya si Manoy."

## Part 34: The Gift of Prayer.

March 27, 2015

When my sickness was revealed to me by my doctor, I immediately sent this SOS to family members, friends, church people, colleagues, everyone I can reach – "PLEASE PRAY FOR ME. Please create a hole in heaven's door so that the Lord will look at your faith, and will look at me with compassion and will answer our pleadings."

Since then, I was sustained day by day by the Lord. Miracles continue to happen moment by moment and His mysterious ways are revealed minute by minute. To express my thanks to your prayers, let me also post my prayer for you:

Our heavenly Father and merciful God, we turn to you in prayer as we have done since you have called us to be your children. Thank you dear Lord for giving us this gift of prayer and making us partakers of this blessed moment of communicating with you. Our spirits are dependent only on your divine anointing. Please let your presence fill our hearts and hear our prayers once again. We are so grateful for your grace and mercy that brightens our lives even in the midst of sickness, sorrows and grief that we are experiencing. For despite those difficulties, you have endowed us with so many blessings. You have made us a community, a family, a sanctuary of faith. You have given us so much goodness and we are much grateful for it. Thank you for the fellowship that we share, the songs that we sing, the prayers that we utter. Please sustain us in our promise to one another to share these goodness, to offer our companionship, material relief and watchful presence to everyone in need, wherever and whenever we can.

And yet as we look out, we have this awareness that for most people, the days and nights offers neither serenity nor wonder, but punishing indifference, hunger, conflicts, sickness, wars and other forms of destructive experiences. O

loving God, forgive us that sometimes we forget our brothers and sisters, and in doing so fail at the one great task you have set before us. Guide us, then, O God and rekindle our lights with your own. When we look to the heavens, teach us to take our bearings from them, to be guided by them, to walk each day with integrity — knowing that in this way, together, we may cause the indifferent nights to be overcome. When we feel the despair that comes from broken promises in our lives, we remember O God that your promises do not fail. When we feel the loneliness that comes from a sense of failure and rejection we remember O God that your love is sure and unchanging. When people and events in our lives seem frighteningly out of control, we remember O God that all things are under your control. When we do not understand the reasons for the difficulties that we face we feel confident in your divine wisdom.

We praise You Lord and thank you that your promises, your love and your power sustains us in the most pain-filled times. We pray all these in the name of your son Jesus Christ, our Savior, our Lord and our friend. Amen.

## Part 35: Clay.

March 28, 2015

One of the most powerful stories in the Bible is the story of the potter and the clay. I'm sure when we were in school, we experienced how it was to work with clay. There is a lot involved in the process of making something out of clay. Once we learned the basic ways to work the clay, it took on whatever shape we gave it.

Barangay Pahanocoy in Bacolod City is widely known as a pottery producing community. During one of our outdoor trips while still a student in Bacolod, we happened to drop by in that barangay and observe the actual pot making process. It was a very enlightening episode that revealed this one particular truth – the clay was totally subject to the potter's design.

As I was reflecting this story in connection with my situation, I realized that God allowed this sickness to happen to me because he was molding me to a certain shape which could be good for me, and because he has better plans for me. In Jeremiah 29:11 it says, "For I know the plans I have for you; plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future." In order for his plans to be realized in my life, I need to fully depend on him like a clay to a potter. I will not resist, I will not complain, I will not protest. I just need to be pliant, soft and easy to mold. A poem I read confirmed this:

I am but clay in the potter's hands,  
does clay say to the potter, what is it you make?

Worry and fear are not from which I stand,  
therefore I must trust the potter's will is at stake.

As he finishes sculpting, I know I am changed,

I can feel my new ridges and sturdy base.

But just as I find ease in what was once strange,

I see there is more ahead I must face.

Life is not easy, not even for clay,  
for heat is what makes us strong.  
The kiln has been burning, awaiting my day  
and the licks of the flames are long.  
I am but clay in the potter's hands,  
my fate is not mine to choose.  
I must trust that he knows his perfect plan,  
and that I have nothing to lose.  
As I'm led to the fire, the potter is gentle,  
he knows I can only handle so much.  
He assures me the end results will be plentiful  
if I trust in him and remain tough.  
So I face the adversity, the heat and the pain,  
knowing the flame cannot bring my end.  
Though I ache and I hurt and I want to place blame,  
I cling to the hope that the potter sends.  
God bless everyone!

## Part 36: Window.

March 29, 2015

I was admitted at Iloilo Mission Hospital twice but I only stayed in one room, Room CB 301, during my hospitalization. The reason why I chose to go back in that room was because of its window. During my first admittance (that was the time when my doctor revealed to me the true nature of my sickness), that window served as our direct pathway to heaven. Every morning, Mam Martha and I would open the sliding glass pane of that window and lift our eyes to the skies, and talk to God. That open window has been very meaningful to us as it served as our altar of prayer. Of course we can still pray in a windowless room, but an open window has something to offer in terms of physical access. When you are facing an open window, you can see the things outside. You can see the blue skies, the green trees, the verdant plains, the people around, and you feel connected to them and to God, our Creator. We can't do that in a windowless room. So there, every morning, as the sun rises extending its life-giving rays, we expressed our cares, anxieties, hopes and aspirations to the Lord, and we usually leave the place with a calmness provided by His comforting presence, and we have peace of mind.

We interpret an open window to offer us a positive opportunity. That is why we say window of hope, window of growth, window of improvement, window of progress. We never say – window of failure, window of problem, window of sickness, window of fear. Negative experiences are never described as windows. Instead, they are described as closed doors. That's why on my second admittance, I asked if that room was available, and the admitting section said that it was. Mam Martha and I were happy that we were given that same room. We felt that it was not incidental, but providential – so that we can continue to commune with God from that open window.



Despite the magnitude of problems we were facing, we have an open window of God's assurance and blessed promises – that He will never leave us, nor forsake us. Have a blessed Sunday everyone. Let us worship Him today with gladness!

## Part 37: Books.

March 20, 2015

My mother taught me to read before I started going to school. Perhaps that's what prompted her to enroll me in Grade 1 even if I was not yet at a proper age. That wasn't much of a problem though because she was also my Grade 1 teacher. From that experience, I developed an early passion for reading which continued until now. Whenever her journals of education arrived, I was the one who first open and read it.

My father was also a wide reader. I remembered that he brought issues of Free Press, newspapers of different titles, Reader's Digest and magazines at our home whenever he arrived from work. He was also the first to introduce me to pocketbooks.

That kind of environment and early training had imbued in me an intense desire to purchase books written by my favorite authors, whenever I had extra resources. I'm also grateful to have befriended many bookworms who shared my love for books. They introduced me to new authors, and encouraged me to explore new genre, aside from what I already gotten used to.

When I got sick, my priorities (and our whole family's priorities for that matter) changed. Every resources that our family raise was appropriated for my medicines. That is why, when my daughter and her cousins decided to help so that they can contribute in this fund raising campaign, I give them the go-signal to sell my pocketbooks. Anyway, they (my books) have already given me the unspeakable joy of adventure when I was reading them. They have brought me to different places, introduced me to many characters, regaled me with different plots, surprised me with different mysteries, and above all, taught me valuable lessons of life which I was also able to integrate in my sermons, bible studies, and counseling sessions in the church.

If you are interested to be a bookworm, please contact my daughter. She will introduce you to my world – of books!

## Part 38: Ills and Pills.

March 31, 2015

It has been said that life is composed of the following stages:

1. Infancy – spills (an infant can't control his/her reflexes, so he/she is susceptible to falls, slides, spills)
2. Childhood – drills (there are many to do's and don't's at home, in school, anywhere, for a child to observe)
3. Youth – thrills (youths and teens have an overdriven sense of adventure, thrill seeking attitude)
4. Adulthood – bills (payments abound for mortgages, loans, electricity, water, subscriptions, etc.)
5. Late adulthood – ills (at this stage, sickness of different nature became abundant – high bp, high cholesterol, high sugar, etc.)
6. Early Seniors – pills (there's a pill, tablet, capsule for every hour, everyday, 24/7)
7. Late Seniors – wills (last will and testament to allocate what to whom, so that heirs will not fight over properties and other inheritance)

I now belong to the number 5 and 6 stages. With my illness, I need to consume many pills every day. There's my main oral targeted therapy tablet taken once a day, 2 pills to stabilize my BP, 2 for vitamins, 1 for my lungs and 2 kinds of cough syrup, all these were to be taken daily.

I'm thankful to God for providing my needs and for strengthening my body so that I will be able to take all these

medications. When my doctor saw my latest SGPT laboratory exams, he was happy to inform me that my result was normal. I am happy that even though ill, and pills are now part of my existence, yet I'm grateful to God for his continued providence and care, every day of my life.

## Part 39: Courage.

April 1, 2015

I always remember this word whenever I reflect on the meaning of Lent. It was because of Christ's courage to face arrest, torture, crucifixion and death that Lent happened.

What is courage? Karl Barth said, "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." C. Rickenbakker said, "Courage is doing what you are afraid to do." Christ was courageous to face death through his faith, prayer and his love for mankind.

I had been wondering about the many faces and features of courage. Most of the popular images of courage presented to us have to do with men fighting in a battlefield. They have something to do with warfare, bloodshed and violence. But I don't think courage can be capsulized in that gory description. Courage is more than that. From my experience, courage is pictured in a family facing or dealing with a difficult trial like terminal cancer. They are facing this trial strongly and squarely. Courage is also likened to a single parent struggling to raise a family, or a single person who chooses purity over promiscuity, an engaged couple who wait until the right time although the world says go ahead, and an employee who sees something wrong, and decided to blow the whistle, etc. Courage from these descriptions mean, don't be afraid, don't give up, don't be intimidated, and don't lose heart. These paradigms of courage continue to inspire me to face my own test of faith head-on.

In the bible, it is interesting to note that there were lots of instances when God said, "Fear not." According to some commentaries, there were 365 "fear nots" in the bible. That means one "fear not" for every day of the year. Have a blessed season of Lent!

## Part 40. The necessity of suffering.

April 2, 2015

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. Inside he felt he saw a struggling wormlike creature wanting to come out and join the world as a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours, as it struggled to force its body through the little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no further. The man was filled with kindness and compassion. He decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that at any moment, the wings would expand and be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its time crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly. It soon died miserably.

The man unwittingly prevented one of the processes designed by God to introduce the meaning of growth and qualitative development which is metamorphosis. It is growth not just manifested in increase of height or weight, but in transformation. What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into the wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon. Because it was deprived from experiencing such a very important growth process, that unfortunate butterfly became a cripple for life. It cannot taste the wonderful experience of flying and it can't visit flowers from which it can gather nectar and pollen.

Perhaps many of us are saying to ourselves right now, that that man made a very ignorant and irresponsible action or

mistake. He should have let nature take its course. He should not have intervened with the process that he was not familiar with in the first place. But how many of the people we know are doing it for their children, or for the persons they love? And how many of us are praying to God not to let us experience struggles and sufferings in life?

Look around you. Many parents are making everything easy for their children. They are facilitating everything so that their loved ones will not experience any struggle, suffering or sacrifices. That is why there are many children who don't know how to manage themselves or their affairs. They are always looking or asking for their mothers and fathers to take over. Their cocoons were cut off in their early years, and they have never experienced struggles and sufferings. Everything seems so easy for them – but they grow rootless and with shriveled wings. They were deprived of character building struggles, sufferings and training for discipline. It will be very hard for them to fly.



## Part 41: A Tea Bag experience.

April 3, 2015

Have you experienced how it was to accidentally dip your finger in a boiling water? How did it feel? We don't like the burning sensation as well as the resulting blisters that we get from that unfortunate incident. But do you know that not all hot water situations are bad? There are times when we need to experience burns and blisters to learn some lessons – like a tea bag.

I'm sure every one of us has seen teabags (my sister sent us a special package of tea while I was at my hospital bed). You put the teabag into a cup, glass or mug and you add boiling water. As the teabag sits there, hot water permeates the tea bag and the flavor of the tea seeps into the water. The longer the bag sits in the water, the more of the flavor that will be drawn out and mixed into the water. Without boiling water, a tea bag cannot produce flavor. The hot water is merely the catalyst for drawing out the flavor of the teabag.

Our Christian lives are like that in some respects. God allows hot water experiences to surround us and draw out the flavor of our heart. As we find ourselves in difficult or strange situations, God reveals the true desires of our heart. He turns our hearts from that of a dry, and unattractive tea leaves into a savory drink. This experience will teach us that God wants us to be transformed from being un-Christ-like, into a Christ-like humble servant.

The goal of this biblical concept of change is for us to become Christ-like humble servants to be used by God to accomplish His will, and our part is surrender of our body, mind and will while God's part is justification and sanctification. We are placed in hot water situations to draw out the flavors in our lives. This is not the action of a cruel God, rather this is the action of a just God who loves us and wants to give us a more abundant life.

In this Good Friday celebration, may we be more appreciative of God's love and faithfulness in our lives. He puts us in hot water situations so that we will be transformed and purified.

## Part 42: Storm.

April 4, 2015

We have experienced many storms in our lives. Not only storms that contain torrential rains and strong winds, but storms of life like sickness, death, accidents and other unfortunate incidents, as well. We can't forget Yolanda, the strongest typhoon to unleash its furious damage in our country in November, 2013. While writing this lesson, my ears are glued to the radio for news about the landfall of Chedeng which is expected to hit several provinces in Northern Luzon anytime soon.

When I think of storms, I immediately remember one of the favorite illustrations of Sir Acosta about a storm. Ironically, the virtue that pastor wanted to emphasize by using the picture of a storm is PEACE. For those who have not yet heard about that illustration, here is the gist of the story.

It seems that a painting contest was held with the over-all theme "Peace". Most of the entries contain images of a tranquil sea, a very calm beach, stationary objects, a mountain view, picture of the skies with birds flying contentedly. But the single entry that got the judges nod is a picture of a storm in full swing. How can that be? How can a storm represent peace? So many people protested the decision of the judges. To placate the protesters, the judges invited them to look at the picture in close-up. There, in the midst of swirling rain and strong winds, is a tree branch with a nest in it. Inside the nest, a mother bird sat contentedly, oblivious to what is happening around her. The judges ruled that peace in this context is not the absence of chaos, but contentment and joy in the midst of trying situations. Perhaps that's what Christ emphasized in his words found 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 be of good courage, I have overcome the world".

Are you under attack by many storms of life right now? Take heart. With Christ in your vessel, you can smile at the storm. Peace be with you!

## Part 43: Easter.

April 5, 2015

I would like to share a special prayer about Christ's resurrection that we are celebrating today.

Our loving God, today is very meaningful because we celebrate Easter, that Christ is risen. Be with us today as we gather in different places of worship this day, and the wonderful community of people to share it all with. We celebrate gratefully, all that has brought us together on this Easter Sunday.

We pray, O God, that you will help us to know well the story of this day. Help us to know the inside of it, help us to feel how everything changed this day, when a great story had ended and then somehow another began. Help us to live victoriously, that because Christ rose from the dead, we too have that assurance to live also. Create in our lives that living hope that will enable us to overcome all the troubles that may come our way. O eternal God, who is the keeper of this day, make us to be keepers of Jesus' vision also. May we cherish that part of his story which tells us how people who were transformed by Jesus resurrection became powerful instruments of your message and goodwill. Please make us to be like them, that as your children, born unto your love, we will be forever committed to you. Help us to know this deeply. Help us to act with tender mercy toward one another, toward our brothers and sisters as well as the vanquished and the forsaken around the world. This is the story you wrote for us, O loving God: the story of the beloved community that Jesus saw in the distance. May it rise in us. May we feel the power of faith in each and every one of our lives. This is our prayer in the mighty name of the resurrected Christ, your Son and our Savior. AMEN

## Part 44: Brokenness.

April 6, 2015

We don't like something broken. Even a plate or glass accidentally broke by a child while washing dishes will increase the mother's blood pressure by several notches. We like something that is intact, whole, compact. But there are certain situations when brokenness is not only tolerated but is welcomed and needed. When the doctor told me my sickness, I requested everyone I knew – to bore a hole in heaven's door, just like what the friends of the paralytic did in Mark 2: 1-12 – they bore a hole in the roof and brought their friend to Jesus. After going through the broken roof, the paralytic was brought to Christ's feet and he experienced healing and forgiveness. Without that broken roof, Christ didn't see the friends' faith and their deep concern for the paralytic. Without that broken roof, Christ didn't see that the paralytic was also a broken man in need of his healing power.

That's what we can experience also if we pass by experiences of brokenness in our lives. Brokenness signifies difficulties, sufferings, limitations, impenetrable problems, dead ends, frustrations, and other sources of grief and despair. But you know, after going through the process, the result is different. Look at the experiences of biblical characters. Each of them experienced going through broken roofs before they became empowered by God. There is a clear pattern in the Bible that teaches us that brokenness precedes greatness:

- Before Abraham became the father of many nations, he and Sarah were childless.
- Before Jacob could be blessed, he was wounded by an angel in a wrestling match.
- Before Joseph ruled Egypt, he was sold into slavery by his brothers.

- Before Job's estate was doubled, he lost everything he had, including his family.
- Before Moses led Israel out of Egypt, he was a fugitive running for his life.
- Before Joshua conquered the Promised Land, he went through the wilderness.
- Before David was anointed king, he was rejected by his family.
- Before Jeremiah became a great prophet, he was just a kid preacher that nobody listened to.
- Before Hosea became a powerful spokesman for God, his wife betrayed him and returned to prostitution.
- Before Peter preached 3,000 souls into the kingdom, he denied his Savior three times.
- Before Paul brought the gospel to the Gentiles, he was blinded on the Damascus road.

These biblical characters have experienced brokenness before they have achieved wholeness. Oswald Chambers said, "If we are ever going to be made into wine, we will have to be crushed – you cannot drink grapes. Grapes become wine only when they have been squeezed."

Brokenness can teach us valuable lessons of life and truth if we only focus on Jesus. When God gets us alone through suffering, heartbreak, temptation, disappointment, sickness, or by thwarted desires – when He gets us absolutely alone, and we are totally speechless, unable to ask even one question, then He begins to teach us.

## Part 45: Faith makes the impossible possible.

April 7, 2015

There is always a depressing connotation every time you hear the word “impossible”. If you have a patient in the hospital, and the doctor tells you that his or her case is impossible to be treated, you would really feel depressed. If you are applying for a job, and the hiring personnel told you that it is impossible to consider your application, then you will certainly feel upset. Why? This is because impossible denotes a dead-end, a hopeless scenario, a point of no return. What more can you do for something that was already declared impossible? You can’t do anything, you can’t grow, you can’t improve, you can’t introduce anything if something is impossible.

And yet on the other hand, there’s also something very attractive and challenging in the word impossible. Paul Fritz, a management Guro, wrote that “There’s nothing more satisfying than doing what everybody else think as impossible.”

Look at all the technological gadgets and scientific inventions around you. Fifty to one hundred years ago, people say that it’s impossible to travel to the moon, or to send a picture through space, or to talk to one another while one is in the US and another is here in the Philippines. Who would have thought that instead of waiting for the newspaper to arrive, you see the actual news where it happen and in real time? The advent of Satellite TV, Internet, Cellular phones eliminated many impossible myths and beliefs. A lot of things which were impossible yesterday are just normal or ordinary occurrences today: Flying in an airplane, taking a submarine ride, going to the moon, traveling to other planets.

Robert Kennedy said, "Some men see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say Why not?". So, to declare something as impossible is not realistic



anymore. Because faith, time, determination and action will make something impossible to be possible. Instead of being depressed, we should be challenged to face things that were declared as impossible. This is what's giving me strength and hope as I confront my sickness. I believe in the power of Jesus to make the impossible becomes possible.

## Part 46: Fighting Tiredness.

April 8, 2015

I just returned from a short trip to Sunrise Beach Resort, Guimbal, Iloilo. Mam Martha wanted to see for herself how our young people from JEC and Libertad Baptist Church, Tapaz, Capiz were faring with the 2015 Youth Camp. This was the first time that she's not able to stay with the campers because her priority was taking care of me. Since the place is not so far away, I decided to accompany her with Nang Tessie Lozanes driving her van as our service vehicle. I also used the time to breathe fresh air from the sea and to savor the heat of early morning sunlight in the beach.

As soon as we arrived at JEC, I felt very tired that I said to myself, "Just rest, forget everything, don't do anything, just lie down and sleep." Isn't that the way tiredness can affect you? Even if you have something important to do, exhaustion seems to drain all your strength and energy and make your body, mind and spirit helpless. To fight the temptation to be motionless and useless, I decided to work on this lesson so that I can face my tiredness in a positive way.

I discovered that if I do what's important and urgent, my tiredness will just be forgotten. I have learned this lesson from many persons who don't let their tiredness render them useless. Take a look at an Olympic athlete. The most important for him/her is a gold medal – and for his or her name to be enshrined among the most outstanding sports personalities in history. That is why he/she never stops training and disciplining him/herself so that his/her body, mind and spirit will be prepared for competition. Because of the importance of his/her goal, he/she fights exhaustion instead of being paralyzed by it.

Let's turn the spotlight on us. What's most important to us as Christians and what can help us fight spiritual tiredness? Jesus provided an answer in Matthew 16:24. He

said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." This is a direct instruction from Jesus, and which he himself did by actual example. He carried the cross for us and fought his exhaustion, to teach us that there must be suffering before glory, sacrifice before reward, cross before a crown.

The heart of Christian discipleship is the cross because it signifies giving before gaining, losing before winning. Take away the cross of our Lord and every Christian becomes nothing but an unregenerate sinner. Without the cross, the world is hopeless. Without the cross repentance and faith become nothing more than empty words. Only at the cross of Calvary that the tired has find rest; that the hurting find comfort; that the lonely find a friend; the blind received sight; the lost find salvation and the dying find life.

## Part 47: Don't be afraid.

April 9, 2015

What are your greatest fears? Sickness? Failure? Loneliness? Rejection? Death? When my doctor told me the true nature of my sickness, one of my struggles was to eliminate the feeling of uncertainty that hovers in my consciousness like the proverbial "Sword of Damocles ". I tried very hard to overcome such feeling hanging in my consciousness.

What's the problem with fear? Fear will keep you from making a difference. Why? Because even if you know what the true state of things are, or know what the right choice is, when you are afraid of what others think or are fearful of something, it grips you, paralyzes you, and keeps you from taking action. Most of us want to make a difference, but we will fail to do so if we are too scared to make the right turns in life. There is only One who can deliver us from our fears, and until we focus on Him, we will not be able to make a difference in our lives. The ONE is Jesus Christ. He must be in your life to have victory over all your fears and live a life that has eternal impact. With Him, With Him by my side, I can face my fears, uncertainties, confusions and doubts.

Too often we experience fear because we focus on ourselves or on what people think instead of focusing on Christ. This hinders us from doing God's will. When we live to please Jesus, God rips us free from the bondage of fear to do what He wants us to do.

1 John 4:4 says, "Greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world." We can overcome any fear through Christ because HE is greater than any problem or fear that we face.

St. Paul said in Philippians 4:13 also says, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." It doesn't just

say some things, but all things. So why should we fear when God gives us the power to do what is necessary now to give our best?

Proverbs 3:5-6 says “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.” When we completely trust in the Lord, that’s when we can overcome our fear.

## Part 48: Serenity.

April 10, 2015

There's a prayer popularly attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr that says:

God, Grant me the serenity;  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
The courage to change the things I can;  
And the wisdom to know the difference.  
Someone also added another paragraph that says;  
For every ailment under the sun  
There is a remedy, or there is none;  
If there be one, try to find it;  
If there be none, never mind it.

It may be hard to admit, but it is a difficult task to remain serene and cheerful especially if we are facing some insurmountable problems, and we want something to happen pronto – like healing from sickness. There are really many things that we cannot achieve immediately no matter how much we tried. That is why Niebuhr's prayer encouraged us to observe this seldom mentioned virtue – serenity.

As I deal with my sickness, I find comfort in the truth that only God can give us true serenity. If we fully surrender and commit ourselves to his will, everything that happens to us will be accepted and valued. I always remember that my primary responsibility is to obey God's will. Jeremiah wrote, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11) So I continually ask the Lord for the wisdom, grace and calm to learn, accept and obey His primary will for my life.

To those who shared similar experiences with what I have now, do not try to run ahead of the Lord's plans for your life. There are many things we can do, but ask the Lord for

wisdom so that we will be able to do his will and not our own. When you are seeking first His interests, other problems seem to take care of themselves. The Lord is eager to fight your battles for you. Remember God's training program for your life. The Lord allows many things to come into your life for purposes that are greater than our minds can comprehend. Isaiah wrote, "His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts." (Isa. 55:8,9) Remain open, teachable and flexible to allow the Lord to mold your character in the image of Christ.

## Part 49: Optimism.

April 11, 2015

One of my favorite verses in the Scriptures is found in Isaiah 40:31, "But those who wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint". I always think about this verse when I feel that physical weariness is about to gradually creep to my body. I also think of lively people surrounding me and giving me hope, so that I can overcome my own weariness.

Yesterday, Mam Martha and I went to see my oncologist at Qualimed Hospital. We were surprised to observe that the patients waiting for the doctor seem to be composed of enthusiastic persons and not terminally ill persons. You can hear laughter, lively sharing of experiences and exciting testimonies. Later, I heard Mam Martha also sharing her experiences about God's answers to our prayers with them. If I was not bothered with my incessant cough, perhaps I have also shared a word or two about my own situation.

Some of the causes of our weariness are negative or pessimistic attitude and bad influence. Have you ever known someone who could walk into a room full of people and in a few short moments completely change the atmosphere? The situation becomes moody, low energy, and increased tension. This is the experience of Job among his friends. Instead of lifting him up, he was pressed deeper and deeper into the quagmire of confusion, guilt, self-pity and blame because his friends hinder him from achieving a positive outlook instead of helping him. They were pessimistic in their perspectives. Instead of offering hope by their optimistic attitude, they introduced bitterness and blame to Job.

Are you surrounded by optimistic or pessimistic people? Do they lift you up or they let you down? In this life



we need friends who are supportive and energy giving. People who don't grow weary attract many people because of their positive modeling:

- They face each day with joy and optimism
- Their radiant lives draw others around them like a magnet
- They're always doing while others are doubting
- They never wait for favorable conditions to accomplish something worthwhile
- They always lift the spirits of those around them
- They work while others worry
- They're always discovering more potentials within their own lives
- They make things happen while others are waiting for things to happen
- They initiate good thinking and positive action in an atmosphere of doubt and discouragement
- Hope is their friend because they are always ready and prepared.

## Part 50: Miracle.

April 12, 2015

When we mention the word miracle, the popular image conjured in our minds is that of something supernatural or “out of this world” phenomenon. In other words, it has to be sensational and beyond ordinary or common. But this was not I remembered in our systematic theology subject in the seminary with Dr. Gumban. He defined miracle as "an act of God", or a "certain event or occurrence where God's power is revealed." In this definition, even ordinary happenings can be considered miracle because they revealed God's power and glory. Sir Gumban's favorite example of miracle is childbirth.

I decided to write about miracles because I experienced it every day in my life. The miracle of answered prayer, the miracle of strength, the miracle of positive developments, the miracle of love expressed by brothers and sisters in the Lord, the miracle of provisions, are just some of the daily miracles that God let me witnessed so that I can proclaim His glorious power to all and sundry. Let me share with you a very recent example.

Yesterday, after cooking our supper, Mam Martha found out that we have no more rice in our plastic container. So she planned to call Edgar, our caretaker to purchase several kilos of rice because she is sure that many young people will be with us during the next day which is a Sunday. But before she can call the attention of our caretaker, Edgar himself informed her that a sack of rice was just delivered by a church member from Calvario Evangelical Church for our family!

Thank God for that act of generosity by one of His faithful children. Surely that act revealed His power working in the hearts of people who loved and worshiped Him. Indeed, that was a miracle!

## Part 51: Limitations.

April 13, 2015

We grew up being instructed by our parents, teachers and elders "Don't do this, or don't do that." It is then followed by a long list of limitations, and a long litany of explanations why those limitations were imposed. All the while, we thought that those limitations were inherently part of childhood that we secretly whisper to ourselves, "Wait till I become an adult and I'll do whatever I want."

Alas, limitations are not only for children. Ever since I was diagnosed with my sickness, many limitations were imposed on me and I really struggled with these imposed limitations. For instance, I was not allowed to eat certain food and fruits because they weren't good for me. Perhaps it's not so difficult at all if these food and fruits were not my favorites – but in my case, what were not allowed for me to eat are those I like most! Having grown in a coastal village, part of our staple food were crustaceans (crabs, shrimps, prawns). Now, these are declared not allowed for me! Also I was not allowed to eat mango. But mango is the only fruit I like most! I have to think deep and hard how to resolve and explain to myself the justification and acceptability of these limitations!

I gained enlightenment when I looked back at the story of Adam and Eve. They were allowed to eat all kinds of fruits in the garden EXCEPT the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And because they did not heed God's limitations and disobeyed him, sin entered into the world. I remembered the joke told by the evangelist Dr. Greg Tingson that if Adam and Eve were created as Filipinos, they could have eaten the serpent and not the fruit!

Setting humor aside, I now looked at my limitations in a positive light. I perceived them as good instructions delivered for my own good. Observing and obeying these limitations will shape my character and will put me in a

position to benefit in ways that I haven't seen yet. Instead of doing what I wanted to do, I listened to those giving the instructions and give them my respect and obedience.

## Part 52: The Power of Faith.

April 14, 2015

A little boy was given the daily responsibility to light the pot-bellied stove in the county schoolhouse. He had the job of coming to school early each day to start the fire and warm the room before his teacher and his classmates arrived. It was his responsibility and his opportunity to prove his trustworthiness. But a tragic circumstance occurred.

One morning the teacher and other students arrived to find the schoolhouse engulfed in flames. They dragged the unconscious little boy out of the flaming building more dead than alive. He had major burns over the lower half of his body and was taken to the nearby county hospital. From his bed the dreadfully burned, semi-conscious little boy faintly heard the doctor talking to his mother. The doctor said the boy would surely die since the fire had devastated the lower half of his body. But the brave boy didn't want to die. He made up his mind that he would survive. Somehow, to the amazement of the physician, he did survive. When the mortal danger was past, he again heard the doctor and his mother speaking quietly. The mother was told that he was doomed to a lifetime with no use at all of his lower limbs. What a pessimistic prognosis!

Well, even though things looked pretty negative, the little boy had faith. He had a positive attitude. He made up his mind. He would walk in spite of the doctor's prognosis. But unfortunately from the waist down, he had no motor ability. His thin legs just dangled there, all but lifeless. Ultimately he was released from the hospital. Every day his mother would massage his little legs, but there was no feeling, no control, nothing. Yet his determination that he would walk was as strong as ever.

One day his mother wheeled him out into the yard to get some fresh air. This day, instead of sitting there, he threw

himself from the chair. He pulled himself across the grass, dragging his legs behind him. He worked his way to the picket fence. With great effort, he raised himself up on the fence. Then, stake by stake, he began dragging himself along, resolved that he would walk. He started to do this every day until he wore a smooth path all around the yard beside the fence. There was nothing he wanted more than to develop life in those legs. He was determined, hopeful, optimistic.

The little boy was an inveterate optimist. Ultimately through his daily massages, his persistence and determination, he did develop the ability to stand up, then to walk haltingly, then to walk by himself and then to run. He began to walk to school, then to run to school, to run for the sheer joy of running. Later in college he made the track team. Still later in Madison Square Garden in 1934, this young man who was not expected to survive, who would surely never walk, who could never hope to run – this determined young man, Glenn Cunningham, ran the world's fastest mile! That, my friends, is the power of faith!

## Part 53: Gift.

April 15, 2015

The word “Gift” has many meanings. I think the most popular is – something given voluntarily without payment in return, as to show favor toward someone, honor an occasion, or make a gesture of assistance. In other words, a present. I'm sure many of us were either givers or recipients of these gifts in times past. In my case now, I was blessed by God to be a receiver of many gifts and blessings from many generous friends, family members, and the family of faith who cares so much about me, and wanted to help me overcome my sickness.

Another meaning of this word is also familiar with all of us – notable capacities, talents, or endowments that a person possesses. If a person is known to have certain skills and adept at performing such skills, they are described as gifted, for example, "He is a gifted singer."

Someone mentioned to me yesterday that she appreciates what I'm doing, and that I have a gift of writing. I would like to say that I was greatly inspired by her comments, and I thanked the Lord for giving me this venue to bring encouragement to people even though I can no longer speak in a church' pulpit because of my sickness.

Friends, God has equipped each one of us with specific gifts and talents. Have you identified what are your gifts? And have you disciplined yourself to develop those gifts so that many people will be benefited by your talents? I believe that we were given our natural talents not only for our own good, but mainly to serve others and bring glory to God. You will know your gifts if you know your strengths. What are you naturally good at? What do you enjoy doing? What's meaningful for you and gives you sense of fulfillment? Take the time to identify your strengths and as the scripture says, give yourself to your gifts. Don't waste valuable days pursuing

things that are outside your strength zones. Focus on something you can do that comes easy to you and find ways to develop and fine-tune those gifts. Are you good with people? Are you good with your hands? Are you good in music?

Know that your gifts and talents are given to you by God. Thank Him for your talents and for creating you who you are. If you'll be comfortable with who God made you to be, you will not only enjoy your life more, but you'll be ready to serve Him and others, and you will receive the abundant blessing God has in store for you!



## Part 54: Cup of coffee.

April 16, 2015

One of the things I missed ever since I got sick was going to my favorite coffee-shop in the nearby mall. I missed my favorite brew and the friends which shared the same passion of drinking coffee after every lunch hour. Most of all, I missed the conversations, and the learning I gained from our exchange of experiences. This reminded me of a story I read about coffee and cups. The story goes like this:

A group of alumni, highly established in their careers, got together to visit their old university professor. Conversation soon turned into complaints about stress, conflicts and competition in work and life.

Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups – porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite – telling them to help themselves to the coffee.

When all the students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said:

"If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. Be assured that the cup itself adds no quality to the coffee. In most cases it is just more expensive and in some cases even hides what we drink. What all of you really wanted was coffee, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups... And then you began eyeing each other's cups.

Now consider this: Life is the coffee; the jobs, money and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold

and contain Life, and the type of cup we have does not define, nor change the quality of Life we live.

Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee God has provided us."

God brews the coffee, not the cups. So enjoy your coffee! Enjoy your life! "The happiest people don't have the best of everything. They just make the best of everything."

This story taught me these truths – Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.

## Part 55: Don't quit.

April 17, 2015

I'm sure there was a time in your life when you said to yourself, "I'll quit!". You'll want to quit your job, your relationship, your career, your aspirations, even your life. When things go haywire, when the future seem too dark, when everything is so depressing, we can't help but be hopeless, and the only way seem to be – enough is enough, I'll quit!

When the doctor told me the devastating news about my sickness, there was that sense of uncertainty hanging in my consciousness like the proverbial Sword of Damocles whispering threats in my ears and tempting me to doubt God and His power in my life. But God is faithful to strengthen me and give me hope. I know that he will not quit on me, so why will I quit on Him?

A story I read inspired me to always lean on Him and His faithfulness to us. The story goes like this:

One day a man said to himself, "I decided to quit...I quit my job, my relationship, my spirituality. ... I wanted to quit my life." He then went to the woods to have one last talk with God. "God", he said. "Can you give me one good reason not to quit?"

His answer surprised the man. "Look around", He said. "Do you see the fern and the bamboo?" "Yes", He replied." When I planted the fern and the bamboo seeds, I took very good care of them. I gave them light. I gave them water. The fern quickly grew from the earth. Its brilliant green covered the floor. Yet nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo. In the second year the fern grew more vibrant and plentiful. And again, nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo.

"In year three there was still nothing from the bamboo seed. But I would not quit. The same in year four. "Then in the fifth year, a tiny sprout emerged from the earth. Compared to the fern, it was seemingly small and insignificant.

But just six months later, the bamboo rose to over 100 feet tall!

It had spent the five years growing roots. Those roots made it strong and gave it what it needed to survive. I would not give any of my creations a challenge it could not handle.

"Did you know, my child, that all this time you have been struggling, you have actually been growing roots? I would not quit on the bamboo.. I will never quit on you.

"Don't compare yourself to others." He said. "The bamboo had a different purpose than the fern. Yet they both make the forest beautiful.

"Your time will come", God said to him. "You will rise high." "How high should I rise?" The man asked. "How high will the bamboo rise?" He asked in return. "As high as it can?" He questioned. "Yes," He said, "Give me glory by rising as high as you can."

The man left the forest, realizing that God will never give up on him. And He will never give up on you. Never regret a day in your life. Good days give you happiness; bad days give you experiences; both are essential to life.

— Author Unknown

## Part 56: Sleep.

April 18, 2015

There's a saying that goes, "You can buy a bed, but not sleep." You can lie down in a comfortable, air-conditioned room, with the softest cushion and pillows, but that does not guarantee you can have a good blissful sleep. One of the reasons why I'm sure God loves me is found in Psalm 127: 2b, "for he grants sleep to those he loves." I thank God for giving me rest through a good night's rest every evening.

You see, when I was hospitalized for quite a long time, I have developed an erratic sleeping schedule due to many unavoidable reasons. First, I can't sleep continuously because I have to regularly take my medicines, and nursing aides get my vital signs (temperature and blood pressure) even during unholy hours of the evening. Add to that the fact that my bladder seem to be always full because I was made to drink a lot of liquid. So I have to visit the toilet for a number of times daily. Furthermore, I have developed this penchant of sleeping only when lights were out and no sounds were there to disturb me. You can't have it in the hospital because lights were always on and the PA system is always operational. This means that I have to sleep intermittently during the day.

But when I was released from the hospital, I thanked the Lord for providing me with a good night's rest every evening. My schedule of taking medicines was designed by Ma'am Martha that the last dosage will be administered by 8' o clock in the evening. The church also provided me with a comfortable room and bed where I can rest my ailing body. Above all, I thanked the Lord for giving me peace of mind that frees me of all worries and anxieties. I commit everything to him – my life, my health, my needs, my aspirations, my dreams. I prayed for all these to be under his will and control. And every day, I see how he answers the prayers of the faithful. That is why I can sleep well at night!

## Part 57: Stress free life.

April 19, 2015

This was what my doctor advised me at the hospital, "Pastor, free yourself from any stress. Discipline your mind and body to relax so that your strength will return. If your mind is occupied with anxieties, worries and tensions, your body will be exhausted and you can't fight the damaging effect of your sickness." By saying that, my doctor doesn't want me to be lazy and be a parasite. He just wanted me to adopt a kind of mindset and perspective that doesn't succumb to negativism, instead I will only entertain positive and encouraging thoughts – hence this term stress free.

For many, this is difficult to achieve. Finding the time to relax can be challenging. This is because we are used to live demanding lives. Stress is a common part of our existence. It seems everyone demands your time, energy and attention, not only in your home, but on the job and in your community. But I soon learned that indeed, what he said was true. If I entertain unfavorable thoughts, I find out that I can't relax. As a result, my appetite and sleeping habit are affected, and soon, I can feel un-explainable pain passing through my body. I need to rid myself of stress creating thoughts and adopt positive ones so that I can find the necessary balance to guide my life. And I discover that when I commit everything to our Lord, by letting him control everything to his will and power, then I need not worry about the outcomes. As I spend each day with Him, I find out that my spiritual balance is maintained because I let Him into my space.

Let me share with you what I'm doing now to get rid of negative thoughts and keep my mind stress free. May these will also help you in your quest for a worry free life:

1. I always start each day with prayer and keep an attitude of prayer throughout the day. The Bible tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 4:17). Praying is communing

with God, talking to Him and letting Him talk to you. You can talk to Him like a friend, and talk about anything, at any time.

2. I devote some time each day to the study of God's word. Reading the Bible is one way that God speaks to you. Pick a time of day that's best for you when you can be alone with God, for example early in the morning before you start your day.

3. I am determined to work within God's will for my life. I discover that when I am so intent in pushing my own agenda, I realize that worries soon entered my mind. So I just surrender my heart to Him, trust in Him and let Him do the leading.

4. I continue to share my faith (I'm doing this through writing my reflections and lessons learned since I can no longer preach in the pulpit). You too, no matter where you are, never be too busy to share your faith with others. Extend a helping hand when you see the need. Give a smile, speak a kind word, do a good deed. May God bless all of you!

## Part 58: Carrying a burden.

April 20, 2015

Ever since I got sick, Ma'am Martha prevented me from lifting heavy weights. This has caused me an adjustment problem because as the only male in our household, I was used to be the one in-charge of putting the big water container in our dispenser. She would always stop me every time I attempt to lift something heavy. According to her, this was one of the doctors' instructions so that my body will not experience additional harm. And although I find it difficult to just watch, I have to let my robust niece do the task of lifting heavy things in our household.

As a Pastor, I was used to do the task of carrying burdens. According to St. Paul in Galatians 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ." Many of our brothers and sisters were laden with heavy loads. Those burdens may be spiritual, emotional and even material or physical. They need someone to help them carry their burdens, and as their Pastor, I must be obedient to fulfill the law of Christ. What is the Law of Christ? It is the Law of Love. That is the only Law Jesus gave us. Remember his words, "a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." We carry one another's burdens because Jesus carried ours in the first place. He carried the Cross that should have been ours. He carried our sin onto that very cross. He carried the wrath of God that was due to us. He carried the death that we should have died. And even now he encourages us to cast our burdens on him so that he might carry those, too. Jesus has carried our burdens so that we might carry one another's.

Is there a burden that you can help carry because these burdens are too heavy for our brothers and sisters to handle? We may think of helping someone through a rough financial situation, coming alongside them in a time of grief or sorrow, or providing them with a gift of our presence and comfort during their time of loss. Don't prevent yourself from



extending a helping hand, a prayerful heart and a willing mind to people around you carrying their heavy loads. People will see Jesus in us when we help carry their burdens.

## Part 59: Facing temptations.

April 22, 2015

I was not able to write anything yesterday because I was physically indisposed. I suffered arthritic pains in my shoulders, joints, and waist. I have to lie down on my bed and try get some sleep because I was not able to have a good night's rest the previous evening. You know why? Because I did succumb to temptation by eating something which was not good for me. After eating that "enemy food", my uric acid increased and launched arthritic attacks on my body. I have to keep repeating my prayer of repentance so that the Lord will forgive me from my mistake.

Temptations come in a variety of forms. Even Jesus faced temptation. What lessons can we learn from this?

1. Recognize your pattern of temptation and be prepared for it. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Know where your weakness is, and prepare that area. Figure out the patterns and times in which you are most tempted and brace yourself for those times. Jesus was tempted to turn the stones into bread because he was hungry.

2. Always request God's help. Psalm 50:15 says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." This is the most important thing in overcoming temptation. We cannot merely use our willpower or courage. The temptation is stronger than we are, but God is stronger than the temptation. Jesus used the Word of God to refute his temptation. "Temptations keep us dependent upon God."

3. Refocus your attention on something else. When we try to think about not thinking about it, we drive it deeper into our mind. It's like trying to think you're not hungry. Diverting your attention is a much more effective way of dealing with

temptation than fighting it. We should occupy ourselves with godly things. Jesus refocused his attention on God by going to scripture. In my case, I stopped craving for food that I liked and accept food that the doctors advised me to eat.

4. Realize your vulnerability. No one is exempt from temptation. We all have vulnerabilities. We have to watch out what we do and where we go. Recovering alcoholics are often counseled to stay away from places that promote and serve alcoholic beverages. Jesus' temptations were to use his God-given power for selfish motives: food, power, and protection. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Are you battling temptation today? Turn it over to God. You can't do it on your own. You must ask for God's help. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was "tempted as we are, yet without sin."

## Part 60: Fun.

April 23, 2015

I decided to write about this because I heard the loud laughter of VCS children downstairs. Clearly you can see that they're having fun with what they've been doing since Monday. Yesterday, a little boy and his mother even took a peep to see me in my bedroom and to perhaps see whether I was having fun like the rest of them.

What is your idea of fun? For us born in the 60's and 70's, fun was easily achieved by group games which were simple, varied and easy to participate. We don't have technologies to play with. But fun was clearly established by the excitement, laughter and anticipation by playmates from all over.

Today, it is different. Kids we're taught how to be selfish. Look at their play tools and instruments. They are encouraged to play just by their lonesome. There are critical items that must be brought back to influence the culture of our children so that they will not grow into selfish and destructive individuals.

First, let us try to bring back the value of friendship in our children so that they will welcome people in their lives and they will not grow into self-focused individuals. When they appreciate the value of people, they will learn to behave very differently in the adult world. They will learn about teamwork, that there is room for many people to be successful, and how they're more likely to be successful if they help others to be successful, and how they'll be helped in return.

Another thing that can be taught to our children is the value of compassion which is not taught in the schools at all. In fact, instead of teaching children how to empathize with others and try to ease their suffering, our schools often teach children to increase the suffering of others. Have you heard of

bullying? Many children were victims of bullying in their schools. So let us teach our children how to put themselves in the shoes of others, to try to understand them, and to help them end their suffering.

There are still a lot to be learned and taught so that our children will grow into loving, respectful and socially well-adjusted individuals. Most of these lessons are found in the Scriptures. So let us discover these precious lessons by delving deeper into the Word of God. Let us have fun studying the Bible.

## Part 61: Service.

April 24, 2015

Yesterday, I mentioned that my attention was caught by the laughter of VCS children who were enjoying their lessons, games and creative works. Today, I heard the same contagious laughter, but I discovered that they weren't created by children but by a different group. They came from first time youth volunteers who were assigned by Ma'am Martha to be teachers' assistants. As such, their assignment is not in the classrooms but in the church kitchen, and their task is not teaching, but serving snacks to children. They will prepare the snacks, they will serve the snacks and they will wash the dishes. Perhaps many will be surprised by this set-up. Well, Ma'am Martha's principle is that the first virtue and responsibility that first time volunteers should internalize, value and perform is service. Only when they are used to serving can they be promoted to teaching. From the kitchen, they will be assigned in the classrooms. The fact that these first time volunteers are having their hearty laughter and excitement is for me an indication that they enjoyed their task of serving, and I was inspired by their positive attitude.

Service is the virtue that Jesus himself declared to be his purpose for coming over. "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28). He also left this virtue to be performed by all who profess to follow him. I'm sure God is happy to see his children gladly serving their fellowmen. In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats ( Matthew 25:31–46) Jesus taught us one important truth about how God expects us to live out our lives as His children. He calls us to loving service and He will judge us based on our loving service; and He will bless our loving service ("I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me"). To live the way that God calls us to is not an easy task. But when we live with the attitude that every act of kindness is a direct service to Christ and that we will be

rewarded by Him, we will find sufficient energy and drive to meet the needs that come our way.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, wrote a challenging poem that I would like to share with you:

Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.

May this be the way in which we live and are recognized by those we meet each day. May God bless you today as you continue to serve him!

## Part 62: Teaching.

April 25, 2015

From my sickbed, I can hear the VCS festive celebration inside the church sanctuary. The week-long vacation church school has finally reached its apex. Children were glad to have learned important lessons and are now ready to graduate from their classes. They are also excited to receive recognition and awards for their exemplary participation and learning. Parents and guardians were also glad that the task of bringing and fetching their children to church has now been completed. The church on the other hand was glad that like before, many youth volunteered to be VCS teachers for this school year. Without them, VCS at JEC and outreach areas couldn't have happened. But with them, many children (and other family members as well) were able to learn and accomplish something to develop not only their individual personalities, but more importantly, to establish and strengthen their relationship to God. Teaching is very important.

Teaching was introduced by Christ as one of his major ministries, alongside preaching and healing. The synoptic gospels told us that he taught by parables, simple down to earth language, and uncomplicated topics or subjects. Everywhere he went, crowds of people gathered to listen to his magnificent lessons and life-changing words. We need such passion for teaching today. Not only teaching literacy, numeracy and other skills to make our existence well adjusted – but more importantly teaching about Christian life. That is why we are glad to have many youth volunteers who wanted to be Christian educators in the church and communities.

I would like to share a poem entitled "View from a Pew" that emphasized the need for more volunteers. The poem goes like this:

Once upon a pew I sat and heard the  
preacher ask,



"We need someone to teach a class, now  
who will take this task?"

Then God sat down beside me there and  
said, "Son, that's for you."

"But, Lord, (said I) to stand before a class is  
one thing I can't do.

Now Bill would be the man to call, there's  
nothing he won't do.

I'd rather hear the lesson taught from here  
upon my pew."

Once upon a pew I sat and heard the  
preacher ask,

"We need someone to lead the songs, Now  
who will take this task?"

Then God sat down beside me there and  
said, "Son, that's for you."

"But Lord, (said I) to sing before a crowd is  
one thing I can't do.

Now Brother King will do the job, there's  
nothing he won't do.

I'd rather hear the music played from here  
upon my pew."

Once upon a pew I sat and heard the  
preacher ask,

"I need someone to keep the door, now who  
will take this task?"

Then God sat down beside me there and  
said, "Son, that's for you."

But I replied: "saying things to strangers,  
Lord, is one thing I can't do.

Now Tom can talk to people, Lord, there's  
nothing he won't do.

I'd rather someone come to me and greet me  
on the pew."

As years just seemed to pass me by, I heard  
that voice no more.

Until one night I closed my eyes and woke  
on heaven's shore.

'Twas four of us together there to face  
eternity.  
And God said, "I need just three of you to do  
a job for me."  
"O Lord," I cried, "I'll do the job, there's  
nothing I won't do."  
But Jesus said, "I'm sorry, Friend, in  
Heaven there's no pew."

## Part 63: Volunteerism.

April 26, 2015

A lot had happened that greatly affected the life of the church fairly recently. Many people got sick (members and pastors alike, including me). Numerous families were visited with sorrow due to the departure of their loved ones, and there's almost no vacant day to rest during summer because of multiple church' schedules and ministry updates. There was the Junior's camp, Youth camp, Vacation Church Schools, vigil services, necrological services and regular church worship schedules that must be organized, managed and handled.

The reason why no displacements happened to endanger the normal flow of things, (despite the demands presented by what were happening), is the strong spirit of volunteerism that permeate the life of church members, and other people who were concerned of the Lord's work at JEC. Some volunteered to help in conduct of the camps to be team leaders and counselors. Many volunteered to be VCS teachers, assistants, kitchen crew, and earlier today during the mid-morning worship service, Pastor Sharon mentioned that many pastors from nearby congregations volunteered to be assigned as JEC speaker anytime at the church' convenience. Without this strong spirit of volunteerism, many activities could have been postponed or cancelled, and many needs could have been left out.

Jesus experienced this in the story found in John 5: 1–15 at the Pool of Bethesda. A paralytic man who was invalid for 38 years was there for a very long time already. When asked why he was in that condition for such a long period, he replied, "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." He remained invalid for 38 years because no one VOLUNTEERED to help him even in just one instant!

That is why Jesus took the cudgels right then and there, and commanded him to get up, roll his mat, and go.

Volunteerism is very important and significant to our lives today. To face challenges and demands, we need volunteers who are committed to do the work and to provide us with hope. According to Pres. Obama, "The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope."

## Part 64: Prayers of the faithful.

April 27, 2015

Every Sunday at JEC, during three regular worship services (early morning, mid-morning and vesper), a focus prayer for the pastor is included in the liturgy. Members of different boards and auxiliary organizations were assigned to lead this prayer. This focus prayer was incorporated in the worship service upon my release from the hospital last February 15, 2015 and continued until now. I can say that this is one of the uniqueness of JEC to show their love and care for their sick pastor. That is why every Sunday, I do my best to attend the worship service to draw strength from the prayers of the faithful who never tired of asking the Lord for His healing touch so that I can recover from my sickness.

I would like to share with you, my beloved readers, one focus prayer led by Mary Ann Dionela from the Koinonia auxiliary group. This was offered during last Vesper Service held on April 26, 2015. Her prayer says,

Dear Lord, We commit to you the complete healing of Pastor Ronny. You are our great healer and physician of all time. Bless Ma'am Martha and Ronamae with good health, patience and perseverance as they took turns in caring for Pastor Ronny. Lord, thank you for the people you touch and use to help supply the medicinal needs of Pastor Ronny. We, the congregation and friends of Pastor Ronny also draw strength and inspiration from the positive outlook of Pastor Ronny. Pastor Ronny have difficulty in talking, and instead, he use his fingers to write beautiful insights and messages, and post them on Facebook. We are all touched and inspired.

Lord, bless Pastor Ronny as he made us realize that every day is a gift from you. Thank you Lord for your healing touch, and into your name we commend our petition for Pastor Ronny. in Jesus name we pray, AMEN.

## Part 65: Mentoring.

April 28, 2015

Mentoring is a process involving people. God may bring an individual, a couple, or a group of persons into your life at various stages and for various purposes to help you grow. In every case, these people are sent by God to usher in nurture and perpetuate the learning process. Do you have a mentor? Or do you mentor somebody right now? If not, you should seriously consider these questions.

When I got sick, I had to relinquish or give up my tasks and responsibilities as church pastor. But it's not only me who had to let go of his tasks. Ma'am Martha had to also delegate her functions as she took a leave of absence to take good care of me during the first months of 2015. But according to her, she was blessed to have someone who willingly took over the implementation of her tasks because he was already prepared for such an eventuality. That preparation was done through the process of mentoring. Ma'am Martha was the mentor, and he was the protégé.

Mentoring is not a new concept. In the Bible we knew the stories of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy. These pairs of mentors/protégés showed us the important lessons and over-lying impact of mentoring. The skills, principles and faith experiences of these older men were passed on and multiplied in the lives of the younger men. Without the process of mentoring, skills, principles and faith experiences will end as soon as the person holding them passes away. But because of mentoring, these important legacies will remain, multiply and continue to spread.

For those who are in their mature years, don't wait for your bodies to be weakened by sickness and old age before you decide to mentor somebody. You have to pass the skills that the Lord has given you to a protégé who will nurture it and make it grow. There are many young people who have

vast potentials today. What they need are Christian mentors who will show them a life lived for the Lord and not compromising their faith in the face of modern pressure. They need mentors who will stand strong in the face of adversities and not be weakened by them.

There's a quotation that says: "Young people live in the 'hinge' years of life. During adolescence, they formulate their world views, wrestle with their sense of purpose, form their core values, explore their sexuality, choose a career and a spouse, and make choices regarding their faith – all of this at time of life when many are ill-equipped for such pivotal decisions." (Paul Borthwick, in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*). They need Christian mentors to help guide them. Will you be one of them?

## Part 66: Legacy.

April 30, 2015

I greatly rejoiced at the news of Mary Jane Veloso's reprieve by Indonesian President Widodo, presumably upon the personal appeal of our President Aquino. She was due to be shot by firing squad but her life was spared indefinitely. Eight other convicts were not as fortunate.

That reprieve was a miracle of answered prayer and will be written in the annals of our history as proof of our unity as a nation, where everyone prayed for Mary Jane's salvation from execution (from the highest official of the land to the lowest person in the streets). It will also speak of President Widodo's legacy of understanding and compassion, President Aquino's legacy of sympathy to the victim's family, and appropriate maximization of diplomatic protocol to gain reprieve, and Mary Jane's legacy of claimed innocence despite being convicted as a criminal in a foreign court. Her grandchildren will honor her as someone who was granted pardon from imminent punishment because she's a victim of human trafficking and not a perpetrator of drug related crime.

Legacies are very important because they continue even after our lives cease to exist. Our children, and our children's children will either enjoy or suffer with their lives with whatever legacies we leave them. If we leave legacies of faith, righteousness, respect, sacrifice and other positive values, they will deeply value the contributions we have made in their lives, and to our society and the world. They will recognize that we have sacrificed much and worked hard so that the younger generations may enjoy a quality of life that is pleasing to the Lord. But if the legacies we left are questionable and dastardly, they will suffer lives of distrust, confusion and meaninglessness.



We continue to pray that the Lord will always renew our hearts, that he will help us to spiritually grow in faith and truth and to help us to take real joy in our lives no matter what the circumstances are.

## Part 67: Labor Day.

May 1, 2015

Today is May 1, 2015, popularly celebrated the world over as labor day. I observe that it is a strange holiday. While we call it "Labor Day," we try to do as little labor as possible and most working people have the day off! The church even identified this day as the annual church family picnic because all members have their rest day. I could have joined the celebration held at the beach, but I am not yet physically strong to withstand long travel, and the hot temperature may adversely affect my health. So I decided to just stay at JEC and reflect about the meaning of labor or work, as one of God's gifts to us.

Work is a very important part of God's revelation and will for people. Without work or labor, we will have no means to actualize our God-given potentials and gain income at the same time. God has always honored and provided work. In Genesis 2: 15, the Lord God took Adam and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. He created man in His image, and gave him work to do. In Ephesians 2:10, St. Paul said, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." When Jesus came to earth, God continue to show how he honored work through his birth. Angels announced His birth to working shepherds, Jesus Himself learned a trade and worked with His hands, Jesus chose working men as His apostles, and called them from their labors to His side.

But in all these experiences, Jesus didn't forget the value of the right work or labor. In John 6:27. "Do not work for food that spoils". Jesus means get your priorities straight. Spend time working for the eternal, not the temporal. Don't spend your whole life working in your profession and lose your soul in the process. He asked, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul? (Matthew 16:26). In other words, there's a different kind of work or

labor that God approves – and that is working for his kingdom. This is work of service, and work to promote the growth of his body – the church.

When we are faithful in this kind of work, and even when we falter in the doing of our utmost, God remembers us, and recognizes our frailty. It is then that He takes us up into His arms to complete the job with and through us, not in our strength, but in His. Today, whoever you are, whatever you've done, however you may have failed in the past, Jesus calls you to service. He calls to service within His church as it assembles and in the world when the church is scattered. He wants you to put your hand to a task that lasts; to invest your time in eternity; to do a work that endures. He calls you to follow Him to service, and all who hear, and who believe, will humbly, faithfully, diligently put Him first and follow Him.

Would you be one who would put your hand to the task? Would you be one who, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, would follow Him? Then continue in laboring for the Lord. May God bless you!

## Part 68: Victory.

May 4, 2015

Yesterday, the world stopped for the "Fight of the Century." Two best boxers face each other to engage in the battle for greatness. After 12 rounds of fierce boxing, the ring judges pronounced one as the winner, another one as loser. The winner has won more points, the defeated one less points. If you only look at their fight as a boxing match, the winner has a reason to be proud and the wherewithal to lash out at his opponents, the loser to bow his head in shameful defeat. That's not what I saw. I looked at their contest as a battle of testimonies, and the one declared as loser is in fact the most victorious.

The People's Champ was introduced to our collective consciousness as a man of deep religiosity. He wore a rosary and crucifix as a regular fixture of his attire. He made the sign of the cross as often as possible. His bouts were preceded by well attended masses. He was seen praying at his corner before and after fights. But he himself declared that his actual lifestyle was not righteous. He engaged in womanizing, gambling, heavy drinking – putting to danger his married and family life. His religiosity was only form and not substance, focused on the ritualistic and not personal relationship to God. All these were changed when he encountered Jesus and accepted Him as his Savior. The champ was transformed and so was his immediate family. He got rid of meaningless rituals and adopted the scriptures as his guide to right living. He also got rid of gambling, womanizing and other vices. He tried to eliminate speaking of profane language that was gotten used to by his growing entourage. He lived a life of a Christian and in every given opportunity; he wanted to introduce Christ to people around him. He can be described as no longer religious but righteous. He was not concerned with ritual but relational. He was more focused on substance rather than form.

All these were again revealed on the night he was made to face his opponent before their boxing match. In that press conference he declared, "The most important thing is that after the fight, I can introduce God and my faith to my opponent, and God will be glorified after the fight." In other words, he will measure his victory not by a belt, trophy or medal, but by sharing his faith to his opponent, and change his views about God.

Well, after all's said and done that's what really happened. His opponent who was used to carry an image of a trash-talking, materialistic, disrespectful and mammon worshiper individual seem to change into a tame, meek and respectful person. The people's champ was the only opponent he showed respect and admiration. His first words of acknowledging God for his triumph was for me the highlight of our champ's victory. God was indeed glorified in that battle for greatness, and our people's champ was the clear winner!

## Part 69: Living to a certain standard.

May 6, 2015

I have to go back to the hospital again. Not to be admitted but to undergo a new batch of laboratory tests. My oncologist advised me to see my complete blood count (CBC) and serum creatinine. According to her, there are certain indicators to be verified whether my blood chemistry is normal or not. If they are not normal, it means that they have not reached the standard number. She will then prescribe additional medications to bring my indicators to the normal standards.

Reflecting on this, I find that our spiritual life has also certain standards. If we lower our standards with what Christ showed us and told us to do, then we live abnormal Christian lives. Lowering our standards means weakening our character, hurting our personal testimony, and hindering our prayer life. It means compromising our faith and corrupting our thinking. For example, if we lower our standard on honesty by letting it to be breached in some form, it becomes easy to stop upholding the truth elsewhere. It will affect how we think in terms of right and wrong because we have compromised on a principle that should have been non-negotiable. As a result, we can easily grow defensive about concessions we've made in our faith and behavior; and we start to expect everyone to be tolerant of our errors. This will distance us from the Lord, and out of touch with his words, and his prescribed principles that define a victorious life.

What are the indicators that we lower our faith standards and that we live a half-hearted Christian life? Let me mention a few I have read in a certain article:

1. When we do not love Him as we once did.
2. When earthly interests and occupations are more important to us than eternal ones.
3. When we would rather watch TV and read secular books

- and magazines than read the Bible and pray.
4. When dinners are better attended than prayer meetings.
  5. When we have little or no desire to pray.
  6. When our Christianity is joyless and passionless.
  7. When we know truth in our heads that we are not practicing in our lives.
  8. When we make little effort to witness to the lost.
  9. When we have time for sports, recreation, and entertainment, but not for Bible study and prayer.
  10. When we do not tremble at the Word of God.
  11. When we seldom think thoughts of eternity.
  12. When God's people are more concerned about their jobs and their careers, than about the Kingdom of God.
  13. When believers can be at odds with each other and not feel compelled to pursue reconciliation.
  14. When our children are growing up to adopt worldly values, secular philosophies and ungodly lifestyles.
  15. When we are more concerned about our children's education, and their athletic activities than about the condition of their souls.
  16. When we tolerate "little" sins of gossip, a critical spirit and lack of love.
  17. When our singing is half-hearted and our worship lifeless.
  18. When our prayers lack fervency.
  19. When our hearts are cold and our eyes are dry.
  20. When we are bored with worship.
  21. When we have to be entertained to be drawn to church.
  22. When we don't long for the company and fellowship of God's people.
  23. When our giving is measured and calculated, rather than extravagant and sacrificial.
  24. When we are not seeing lost people drawn to Jesus on a regular basis.
  25. When we aren't exercising faith and believing God for the impossible.
  26. When we are more concerned about what others think about us than what God thinks about us.
  27. When we are unmoved by the thought of neighbors, business associates and acquaintances who are lost and

without Christ.

28. When the lost world around us doesn't know or care that we exist.

29. When we are making little or no difference in the secular world around us.

30. When the fire has gone out in our hearts, our marriages and the church.

Dearly beloved, let us continue to live within the standards that Christ inspired us to do. May God bless you always!



## Part 70: What impressions are you creating?

May 8, 2015

As I go around the Jaro Plaza to do my morning exercise with Ma'am Martha, I met my thoracic surgeon. He was the one who inserted a CTT tube in my body to drain fluids from my lungs last February. He was doing his jogging exercise too. I thought that he'd already forgotten about me. I'm sure he has a lot of patients and he could not have memorized all of us by our appearance. But I was wrong. When we came face to face he stopped, smiled, shook my hands and asked me how I was. I answered that I'm alright, that I'm doing my daily exercise and enjoying the early morning sunlight. He then said, "You still look the same", and off he went.

I decided to take his comment in a positive way. I chose to interpret his impression of my countenance to be favorable to me. I took his comment "You still look the same" to mean that I have not deteriorated in his eyesight, that I have not gone more thinner than before, or more weaker than before. You see, the last time I saw him in his clinic was on February 23, 2015. That was the time when he examined my wound to see if it has fully healed. I have to be sure that I have his clearance so that I can start taking my oral therapy medicine. I remembered that his comment to me during that time was, "Your wound is healed. In fact, it seems that you don't appear sick to me at all." I thanked God for my doctor's impressions.

Reflecting on this, I realize that indeed, we are creating impressions to people around us not only by our appearance, but by our attitudes and actions. How do our lives appear to them? What kind of image are we projecting in our Christian walk? Are we living a life that is overflowing with the spiritual blessings of the redeemed like peace, joy, compassion, love, and power to witness? Or are we creating an impression of a life that is miserable, a life that is like a

dwindling, trickling little stream that barely gives evidence of its existence. When Jesus was here on this earth, He said that He came to give us “abundant life”, John 10:10. This is a life that is overflowing with all the blessings of the Spirit of God. He tells us that when we trust Him, our life will literally gush with the overflow of His work within us, John 4:14. Jesus did not save us to be listless, dry, dull and barely clinging to spiritual life. He saved us to be filled with His glory, His peace and His joy. He saved us to overflow with spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3. According to that verse He has already given all we need to enjoy the abundant Christian life. What we need to do is learn how to appropriate what the Lord has already given to us.

Some examples of this kind of living are the disciples of our Lord. Before they were filled with the Spirit, they were prone to failures, petty jealousy, pride, and other weaknesses of the flesh. However, after anointed by the Holy Spirit, they were changed men! They were filled with power and joy. Even in the darkest hours, they were able to rest in their faith in the Lord. These were men who had joy in spite of persecution. They lived a life of overflowing spiritual blessings.

What impressions are you creating with how you live? Do you give the impression of an abundant life that is blessed by the Lord? Or are you giving an impression of a life that is listless, weak and meaningless? May God bless you today and always!

## Part 71: Pre–Mother's Day.

May 9, 2015

Tomorrow, the world will celebrate Mother's Day. I'm sure many are already planning what to do to express their love to their mothers. I would like to write this reflection to encourage you, dear readers, to spend quality time with your mothers to honor them. I'm just a little bit sad that I can't be physically present with my mother because she's staying at our home in Negros. I remembered that when I got sick, she's the one who greatly inspired and strengthened me to accept my sickness. She also visited me here at JEC despite her physical difficulty. Indeed, with her words of wisdom and encouragement I find strength to face my sickness and fully trust our God to take good care of me, and provide for my healing. I am blessed because I have a very faithful and prayerful mother who never stopped interceding for my recovery.

Abraham Lincoln declared, "no man is poor who has had a godly mother." A Spanish proverb reads, "An ounce of mother is worth a ton of priests." Someone else has said, "The instruction received at Mother's knee, together with the pious and sweet souvenirs of the fireside, are never effaced entirely from the soul." Howard Johnson wrote an acrostic M–O–T–H–E–R with the following rhymes:

"M" is for the million things she gave me,  
"O" means only that she's growing old,  
"T" is for the tears she shed to save me,  
"H" is for her heart of purest gold;  
"E" is for her eyes, with love–light shining,  
"R" means right, and right she'll always be,  
Put them all together, they spell "MOTHER,"  
A word that means the world to me.

Our mothers deserve to receive honor. That is the biblical commandment – HONOR YOUR MOTHER. The

words are very simple: "Honor your father and your mother." The Hebrew word for HONOR literally meant to "be heavy." The basic sense is "to treat someone with respect because they carry a heavy weight of authority. Sometimes we speak of certain dignitaries as being "heavyweights." The commandment calls for treating our parents as VIPs because they deserve it. To "honor" means to treat with dignity, respect and deference.

Sometimes mothers don't get the honor and respect they deserve. Their role and responsibilities go under appreciated. In a world that tends to measure everything in terms of finances and position we can miss the vital contributions a mother makes. For the many that work outside the home and care for a family, too often we act like the real job is the one that brings home a paycheck. A world that thinks that way has messed up priorities.

Please prepare now to treat your mothers and have a meaningful and memorable celebration tomorrow.

## Part 72: Mother's Day.

May 10, 2015

To all Mothers, Nanay, Mama, Mommy, Inay, Inang, Mamang, especially my Nanay, we honor you today. We honor your hard work, your unconditional love, your sacrifice, and your undying devotion to your young. Moms of all ages we salute you. Moms with little ones, we know how hard you work. Moms with school age kids we know your devotion and unending concern for your young. You want so much for them to get off to a good start. Moms of teenagers, we know your worries and hopes. Moms and grandmas with grown kids, we know your love, concern, and devotion never ends. We salute you. We honor you because you deserve it.

There's another reason we honor our parents on this day, especially our mothers. We need to do it. They deserve it. But such honor and respect is also part of God's plan for human survival. Colossians 3:20 says, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." It is no accident that this commandment is in the Ten Commandments. It is not an add-on. It is not an afterthought. It is the heart of the commandments. This is God's plan for teaching and preserving the other nine. Family matters – to our young, to our society, and to our God.

Deuteronomy 5:16 slants the promise in a slightly different direction. "Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you." The command promises not only long life, but a successful life as well.

We also honor women who have never had children of their own. May they will not feel left out. There are lots of reasons that couples don't have children. Sometimes by choice; sometimes not. If you have never had a child of your own, we still want to honor and thank you on behalf of all the

other people's children you have loved and helped through the years. The church has been blessed with countless men and women who have poured their lives into the lives of other's young. If you are one of those, we honor you today.

For some, days like this bring a flood of unhappy memories. Not all children grow up with good recollections of their childhood. Not all moms (and dads) always did the right thing. Some of you probably experience some pretty dark emotions on days like this. If this is your lot, I encourage you too to reach out to the Lord who heals memories and makes forgiveness possible. You don't have to live alone with those bad memories. The Lord who loves you wants to help carry the burden.

Finally, a word of grace – Mother's Day is not always a pleasant experience for everyone. For those who have only recently lost a mother, this can be one of those tough days. The grief can feel fresh all over again. To you I say, "Our God is a God of comfort. Draw near to him and he will draw near to you."

## Part 73: Birthday.

May 11, 2015

Today, May 11, 2015 is my birthday. I thank God for letting me reach the ripe age of 57. Today is an answered prayer. You know why? Because on January 24, 2015, the day my doctor told me the true nature of my sickness I asked him, "Doctor, how long then will I remain alive?" The doctor replied, "It's very difficult to determine that and we have no answer to that question. Only God has the power over our lives – to take it, or to extend it." That is why I immediately prayed, "Lord God, please extend my life until my birthday on May 11, 2015." And indeed, he answered my prayers. The fact that I'm still alive today is a testament to God's power, his mercy and compassion, his glory and his grace.

Yet it's not only me who prayed. You, my FB friends, colleagues, family members, church congregations, all of you prayed for me, and I thanked God that He answered our prayers. Every time I go to church to attend the mid-morning worship service, I can see people stretching their necks to see me in my designated seat at the liturgist's side. They wanted to be sure that I am there. During focus prayers, which has become a permanent part of the worship liturgy, I can feel the whole congregation following the prayer of the assigned person leading the prayer. And because of that, God extended my life because of your prayers, your love, your deep concern for me, and your intercessions reached heaven's door and bore a hole through which God can look with compassion to all of us. Thank you for making this day memorable for me.

I would like to post the focus prayer of Engr. Glenn Fernandez shared yesterday during the early morning worship. This represents the many prayers of the faithful, uttered in deep supplication and humility in my behalf:

Our merciful God and loving heavenly Father, constant and consistent, faithful and unchanging. From darkness you

have called and brought us into your marvelous light, a people for your own possession. You rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your beloved Son. We stand in your holy presence with bowed heads and humble hearts, gratefully remembering and declaring your goodness and mercy towards us, undeserving yet deeply and unconditionally loved.

Loving Father we thank you for Pastor Ronny and how you use him to touch lives and bless your people. We are inspired by how you have widened his reach, his territory beyond Jaro Evangelical Church through the internet. And we praise you for your work in the lives of our children and the youth through Ma'am Martha, Ron-ron and Kassele. We lift up your name on how you comfort, sustain and empower them that they not only continue but in fact become more effective in your work. We marvel at the growth which resulted in the lives of people here in JEC and beyond as we respond to the needs and challenges brought about by Pastor Ronny's illness and rally behind him and his family. We exalt you for indeed you cause everything to work together for the good of those who love you and are called according to your purpose for them.

Sovereign God we don't question your will but it is not lost in us how Pastor Ronny's illness affects him and the whole family. Merciful God we continue to pray for his continued healing, for his illness to continue to respond to treatment until his health is fully restored. Continue to make way dear Lord to sustain him, Pastor Martha, Ron-ron, Kassele and Nanay Fanny. Ensure faithful Father that all their needs are met as we continue to be a true and caring family to them. We pray this in the name of Him who invites us "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know". AMEN

May God be praised, all honor and glory belong to Him!



## Part 74: Aftermath.

May 12, 2015

I've heard many testimonies from people who actually experienced the phenomenon, that the saddest part of a funeral event, is the post-burial stage. That's the time when the departed loved one was already buried, the well-wishers have already gone to their respective homes, and the bereaved family returned to the empty nest. According to them, this is the stage where grief descends upon them like a curtain of gloom. They will have to settle everything, handle the debts that were incurred, and face other complications and problems which might have resulted from the departure of a loved one. That is why many counselors gave advice for family members and relatives helping the bereaved – don't leave all at once. Let a few members remain to assist and support the host family. Leave only when everything has been fully settled.

If this was the case during funerals, what was it during birthdays? I must say that it's quite the opposite. Birthday aftermath is for me the most joyous stage. Why did I say that? Because that's what I experienced after my birthday yesterday. Birthday aftermath is the time when all the guests have already gone leaving behind their gifts, tokens, cards, envelopes, cakes, fresh fruits, beverages, a sack of rice and other abundant bounties. That's also the time to read all the cards and greeting notes and the time to make an accounting of all the monetary gifts. And you know what? It's so overwhelming! It's so amazing to receive all those gifts from people who would like to express their love! Ma'am Martha and I could not believe that we were recipients of those abundant gifts!

Reviewing greeting posts in social media was also very surprising and inspiring. My timeline was filled with 133 personal messages. Birthday pictures were liked by 130 friends. Posting by my daughter was liked by 210 friends. An article I've written about birthday was liked by 107 friends.

And my cellphone was filled with greetings from well-wishers, family and friends. That overwhelming expression of love and care is so amazing that we were filled with joy! It's a great and humbling feeling to know that you are loved by so many, and that they are continually praying for you. I've endeavored to respond to each greeting in return but it seemed that I have not completed this task yet.

Dearly beloved, thank you for your love. Thank you for your gifts of presence, gifts of songs, prayers, material resources. I pray that you will be greatly blessed by the Lord because of your generous hearts. My birthday becomes memorable because of you. And now, perhaps the Lord will understand that I have a new prayer for him after he granted my prayer of extending my life up to the date of my birthday. My new prayer is for him to extend my life until July 8, 2015 – that's the time when Ma'am Martha and I will celebrate our 25th Wedding or Silver Anniversary of married life. Please include that also in your prayers. May God continue to bless you!

## Part 75: Touching lives.

May 13, 2015

I learned this lesson through the life of a 6 year old little boy. Last May 9, 2015 (a Saturday), I was visited by my younger siblings (2 sisters and a brother), with a few nephews and nieces from Negros. I was surprised that one of my younger sisters brought with her, a cute little boy I saw for the first time. She said that he's her pupil in Kindergarten 2 at their school in Cosmopolitan, Bacolod City. She said that his name is Fir Rezzer (Baby Boy) C. Hulleza and that he was glad to be brought here in JEC to visit me. It happened that my sister, after being made aware of the true nature of my sickness, had shared to her class about my case and she had requested her pupils and their family to pray for me. Without my sister's knowing it, Fir Rezzer took this prayer concern very seriously. The boy told his parents and siblings about me (elder brother of his class teacher) and he asked for their permission to let him visit me! He said that he don't just want to pray there in Bacolod. Instead, he wants to pray for me in person, and he wants to sing a song for me! What a noble intention for a little boy! And so when my sister informed her class that she will visit me, she was surprised that Fir Rezzer approached her and told her his plan to join her to see me personally.

And so it come to pass that on May 9, 2015, a little boy sang a song for me and personally prayed for my healing. You know, dearly beloved, that was one of the most unforgettable experiences I have in my life. I was so touched by his caring concern and affection. As he prayed, he was putting his hands on my shoulders. His words are so touching, so honest, so pure. He prayed earnestly, that the Lord will heal me so that I can do my work as a Pastor again! I can't help but cry. My body seem to tremble with deep emotion because of the little boy's pleading to God. I was deeply blessed during that time. Ma'am Martha was likewise touched and after the boy prayed,

we hugged him, with tears in our eyes, thanking him for his gift of song, prayer and presence.

Have you touched lives of people around you? That little boy taught me that age is not a hindrance to do that. At a very young age of 6, he already spread his influence, Christian love and concern to people who need his prayer, gift of song and gift of presence. Oftentimes, we seem to listen to our many lingering inhibitions and excuses that prevent us from reaching out to people who need our attention. We say, we don't have the time, we don't have the expertise, we don't have the means, we don't have this, we don't have that. That boy showed me that touching people's lives don't require complicated strategies and techniques. An honest motivation, a God-given encouragement to help, and a deep seated commitment to reach out can inspire you to touch people's lives.

Lord God, thank you for the life of Fir Rezzar C. Hulleza. Please bless him and his family always!

## Part 76: Gifts that sustain life.

May 16, 2015

Ever since I got sick, I have been a recipient of many different kinds of valuable gifts. At the hospital where I was admitted for more than 20 days, it seems that gifts were delivered to my room in a daily basis. There was even a time when Ma'am Martha cried, and wouldn't accept the amount given to her because she knew that the person who gave it was so poor, she only walked from her house to the hospital so that she can give something for me. But Ma'am Martha had to accept the gift because the person insisted that she had already set the amount aside to contribute for my healing.

Stories of similar nature were repeated many times over to show how people who have hearts of gold were willing to sacrifice just to express their generosity. This was continued when I was released and brought back to JEC to recover. Gifts were brought there also. I have an abundant supply of foodstuff like fresh fruits, rice, cookies, health beverages, etc. for our daily consumption. Financial support to help me purchase my oral chemotherapy medicine was also given by many generous individuals. Steady personal visits and prayers from individuals and groups were likewise giving me inspiration and were very commendable. My post about birthday aftermath was just an evidence of this truth.

Why am I mentioning these? Because I find that my life is sustained by God through these loving and generous persons who gave of their valuable gifts. If not for the concern of these loving persons who wanted me to stay alive, I could have already succumbed to the destructive effects of my sickness. But because many people wanted my life to be extended, they give their resources so that I can have food to eat, money to purchase my medicines and pay other medical bills, and sustenance to provide strength for my body to face the challenges of the day. Prayers of the faithful give me

spiritual power to be positive in my outlook and not be discouraged by the pains disturbing me intermittently.

I am writing this to emphasize the importance of love and care to sustain a terminally ill person wherever we are. I'm sure, many of our relatives, friends and colleagues are also experiencing my kind of sickness, although in a different degree or magnitude. Their lives could be extended and still be meaningful, if they feel they are loved and supported, and many of their loved ones are praying for their recovery. Do you have a family member or a friend who is terminally sick? Never grow tired of taking good care of him/her. His/her will to live will be strengthened if he/she knows that people around him/her are supportive of him/her. He/she will be inspired and strengthened to face the insurmountable odds of his/her sickness, because his/her loved ones and friends are with him/her wholeheartedly.

Many lives could be extended if we show concrete love and care by our generosity, sacrifice and prayer. May God daily sustain you!

## Part 77: Getting used to it.

May 19, 2015

I was not able to write anything for two consecutive days (Sunday and Monday) because I experience extreme pains in my body especially my back and hips area. I have difficulty moving, and my face grimaces in pain every time my incessant cough attack me. I cannot think straight that's why I was not able to write my reflections. I'm grateful to Ma'am Martha for applying salonpas strips and anti-pain ointment in the affected areas. Before I go to sleep at night, she would massage my affected body, so that I can recover from the pains. She also challenged me to make adjustments to deal with these pains. According to her, I must accept this development as a new reality that I must face. She can help me by massaging my affected body parts but it's up to me to make necessary adjustments and pain management endeavors so that I can overcome this new phenomenon.

Reflecting on this, I discovered that I was not able to immediately face this difficulty because I was not getting used to it. Had I experienced it before, I could have already made adjustments to minimize its debilitating effects.

I remembered the first time I joined a mountaineering expedition. Before our scheduled climb, we were made to train in some areas that were not so high and steep. We were also exposed to climbing gears and equipment that were needed to preserve our lives. During our climb, we were accompanied by local people to guide us and to carry our provisions. They have no climbing gears. They were just wearing ordinary clothes. But they climbed the heights with no apparent difficulty. When I asked them why it was so, they replied, "We are getting used to this. We are living in these areas. We are not strangers here. What's difficult for you is an ordinary part of our lives." That's why they were never exhausted, nor grow tired. And so I have to tell myself, "This will be a natural part of your existence. Get used to it". I'm thinking, that when

I get used to these intermittent pains, my body will make its own adjustments so that the pains will be manageable.

Please continue to pray for me, that God will strengthen me and my resolve to face my difficulties head-on. Thank you everyone. May God continue to bless you!



## Part 78: Stories.

May 21, 2015

Will I sound strange to you if I say that I can still remember my elementary lessons but not my high school or college lessons? But it's what I felt and experienced. I can still remember that when we were in elementary, our lessons were about the boy Lino, the girl Nita, their carabao named Puti, their dog named Bantay and their abundant garden plant kamatis and ligbos (tomato and mushroom). I can also remember lessons about President Magsaysay who was named Monching and other Philippine heroes. Perhaps, I can explain this by pointing out that elementary lessons were told in stories form while high school and college lessons were just written in the boards and copied in our notes. Stories are easily followed and remembered because they speak about characters, times and places, sequence of events, dialogues and encounters of characters involved. Perhaps this is the reason why Christ's favorite way of teaching and delivering his lessons is to tell stories and parables. We can also remember his ministry in the New Testament because his disciples told about his miracles through stories of healing and transformation.

Why am I mentioning this? Because for the past few days, in which I missed writing my lessons because of bodily pains, I entertained myself by reading stories about people who have been touched by God in miraculous ways. In addition, I was visited by a friend who told me many stories about people she encountered during her travels. Many of the people she knew were also affected by my kind of sickness that is why I was interested to listen to her stories. I've already forgotten the names of her characters, but what remained in the deep recesses of my mind was their strong faith, their unflinching resolve to face their sickness despite the negative perception of their colleagues, and the importance of a strong support group who prayed for them and unselfishly gave of their material resources for their medication. One of her

stories was about a pastor who was elected in the high echelon of their denomination's hierarchy. He suffered from a grave disease of the bones. He resigned from his position but asked his colleagues to pray for him as he underwent treatment. To the surprise of his friends, colleagues and acquaintances, he survived the most critical part of his medication. He was declared healed! Now, instead of going back to his lofty position in their denomination, he accepted the call to be a pastor of a very poor community in Tondo. He felt that he was healed by the Lord to serve the people there. I was greatly inspired by the stories told me by my friend.

Another blessing that I received was a birthday gift given by one of our young professionals here at JEC, Cherish Ann Dionela. It was a book entitled "When God and Cancer Meet". It was written by a cancer survivor who knows from experience how it was to be touched by God. It contained powerful stories of cancer patients and their families as they trudge along the difficult way of surgery, chemotherapy, radiations and various tests. I was blessed by their stories. They have provided me with a harbor of hope and bounty of blessings. Instead of being devastated by shock and panic because of dreadful diagnosis, their experiences offers encouraging evidence and passionate testimony of the power of prayer and faith to overcome despair and disease.

If you have inspiring stories to tell, tell them passionately to people who need to be encouraged by your testimony and faith journey!

## Part 79: Darkness.

May 23, 2015

Most of my times these days are spent indoors. I only go outside when it's my schedule to have walking and breathing exercise in Port San Pedro or the Jaro Plaza. In my room, I watch news on TV, read books and magazines, and listen to broadcasts in the radio. Perhaps I can say that I am one of the most updated people when it comes to recent happenings, because I have the time to listen, to watch, and to read about news that happened during the day. But it's not always heartening to know about the most recent events. I find that most news are grievous – bringing deep pain, suffering and sorrow. Most of what I heard in radio and saw on TV are terrible accounts of calamities, massacres, pestilence, wars in many parts of the world. Here in our country we have the Mamasapano massacre, followed by arrival of typhoons and drought, the Veloso story, and the political turmoil. Outside of our country, we heard of the earthquakes in Nepal, ISIS killings, massacre in Nigeria and the most recent, the Rohingyas migrants who spend days in the sea because no country will welcome and allow them to settle and live. How hopeless and dark are these situations.

This only confirms and strengthens the observation, that for a long time already, we live in a dark world. A world where people kill one another, and wars and terrorism abound. A world where people are enslaved by drugs, abuse, materialism and greed. A world destroyed at its very core by its inhabitants. Even its climate caused confusion. Who may have thought that we have a typhoon during the Holy Week, when it was supposed to be the peak of the summer season? But that's what happened.

Yet I'm still not losing hope. God's word tells us that a light will break through the darkness because God is a God who restores (Joel 2:25–26 and Jeremiah 30:17). Every

darkness is followed by sunlight. Every night is followed by a new day.

Restoration. What a powerful word. What do you think of when you read or hear that word? Perhaps you yourself is in a situation of darkness right now just like me because of my sickness. But I pray and imagine for my health to be restored. I believe that God is in the restoration business. Job experienced this. The book written about him records his struggles with himself and with God during that time of devastation. Then at the end of the book, he has everything restored: his health, more land than he had before, more money, another wife, more kids.

What kind of darkness do you face today (aside from grave and heinous news items)? Is it a boring life, a dead end job, or looming illness? Do you face the darkness of violence, a failing marriage, a family falling apart? Are you facing the darkness of financial problems, debts piling up? Do you face the darkness of a self-centered life, or the turmoil of no inner peace? No matter what it is, you can rejoice for the light is coming. Morning is on the way. God has sent his son to bring light into our life. God has sent his Holy Spirit to invade and possess our soul and give peace and joy. God has promised a day when all oppression and evil will cease. And God has promised to be a God who restores... physical or spiritual, in this life or the next.

## Part 80: Fruitfulness.

May 25, 2015

I did my morning exercise and enjoyment of early sunlight just inside the JEC compound. I discovered that there was an area near the church' generator that is well covered by sunlight so I brought a plastic chair there. After my stretching and breathing exercises I sat down to absorb the heat of the sun. While sitting down, I was called by the fruit vendor selling his produce just outside the church' gates. He gave me fresh mangoes. He said "Pastor, I'll give you these mangoes, these are good for you." I thanked him for his generosity and I then went back to the parsonage to rest. The fruits that he gave me lead me to reflect upon our lesson today.

The monthly theme of the church says, "Fruit-ful" Servings for Significant Living. In the Bible, a fruitful life is described as one that is producing good things. God's Words teaches a lot on this topic so it must be very important to God. God wants to bless your life. He wants you to be so blessed that He produces fruit in your life that will go on blessing you and the others around you like what that fruit vendor did by sharing his mangoes with me

Some people bear spiritual fruit. Some don't. Those who do bear fruit have more meaning in their lives and service. Their lives are more fulfilling. Those who don't bear fruit are missing out on some great blessings in life! This is one of those spiritual truths that a lot of people have trouble believing. To learn the truth on this matter, consider this interesting passage of Scripture.

Matthew 21:18-22 In the morning, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, he was hungry, and he noticed a fig tree beside the road. He went over to see if there were any figs on it, but there were only leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" And immediately the fig tree withered up. The disciples were amazed when they saw this and asked,

"How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" Then Jesus told them, "I assure you, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can say to this mountain, 'May God lift you up and throw you into the sea,' and it will happen. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

It grabs our attention that Jesus cursed something. We're used to reading about the many times He blessed people and things in the New Testament and this is the only miracle of judgment performed by Jesus during his earthly ministry. So, at first, it seems this miracle doesn't fit the nature of One so loving and compassionate. He could have just as easily used his miracle-working power to cause the fig tree to produce fruit immediately. Instead, he cursed it then and there. So we ask ourselves, "Why?"

Dearly beloved, Christ cursed the fruitless tree as a warning – a warning about the emptiness of a fruitless lifestyle – the emptiness of a life without a real relationship with God. He wanted us to bear fruit and satisfy the spiritual hunger of people around us. If we are fruitless, then we are like that fig tree that is useless. Each one of us has a decision to make. Are we going to follow Jesus by the leadership of the Holy Spirit and bear fruit, or are we going to follow the desires of our sinful nature and be fruitless? When you decide to follow Jesus and be led by the Spirit you will be set free from the kind of life that produces the rotten fruit of the sinful nature – and you will be able to see God produce His wonderful fruit in your life!

## Part 81: Hooked.

May 28, 2015

For the past few days, I was not able to write my reflections because I was hooked with watching my favorite TV show – the NBA Conference Finals. For those who are not familiar with these events, there were 4 basketball teams in the US vying for conference championships. In the east are Cleveland Cavaliers and Atlanta Hawks. In the West, Golden State Warriors and Houston Rockets. Yesterday, Cleveland Cavaliers swept Atlanta 4 games to 0 to win the Eastern conference crown. Today, Golden State Warriors captured the Western Conference Championship by defeating Houston Rockets 4-1.

The NBA games on TV have really caught my attention. That's what I enjoyed doing for the past few days. Watching the games made me momentarily forget my bodily pains and other physical discomforts. It has also buoyed my spirits and enhanced my outlook and perspective to be cheerful. I remembered that one of the advises given to me by my doctor was to look for ways to be happy, to find shows that will make me laugh and enjoy, and so I guess, watching the spectacle of NBA on TV fits the doctor's prescription.

Another positive effect of this pastime to me was to bring back happy memories. It seems that I have become a teenager once again happily playing my favorite sports of basketball. Not many people knew that I was a member of CPU College of Theology Basketball Team. We would visit communities around Panay to distribute tracts in the morning, play basketball in the afternoon and hold evangelistic rallies during evenings. Playing basketball has been a ministry outlet and it has strengthened the relationship of the seminary and our churches all over the convention area. We came to know many people and establish friendship in many different localities because of such sporting event. During gospel teams, we organized short term tournaments that were participated by

young people of churches in our areas of assignments. Such events made these young people spend their time in wholesome and memorable competition.

These good memories have awakened in me that passion of healthy sportsmanship. Although physically I acknowledge that I can no longer perform its routines, mentally, I tried to inspire myself, so that my attitude and outlook will be lively and positive. In a way, I have no regrets being hooked to basketball spectacles once again.



## Part 82: Thank God for memories.

May 30, 2015

It could have been a wave of nostalgia, or a sudden feeling of solitude that visited and prompted me. Whatever it was, I was surprised to find myself looking at old photo albums in our files and reviewing past postings in my Facebook page. Suddenly, memories of the past descended on me like a comfortable blanket and surrounded me with warm reminders and happy thoughts. Every picture has its own story to tell and these stories were embedded in my mind to be awakened if I see something that will remind and make me remember what happened. That is why I find myself smiling and laughing at some pictures and posts, while teary eyed at others.

I certainly find memories as God's blessings to us. Without memories, past events could just be considered as meaningless parts of our existence – they were gone, to be forgotten. But because of the gift of memory, the past became an important part of our lives. They have left in us important lessons and legacies to be treasured and valued as long as we live.

I enjoyed looking at past pictures of family reunions, weddings, birthdays, church gatherings, celebrations and anniversaries. They reminded me of God's goodness, grace and merciful blessings. I got sad when looking at vigil services and funerals, but at the same time glad that God was there to comfort us and relieve our griefs and sorrows. These pictures reminded me of important persons who were part of my life although some of them were already gone. But their absence was only in the physical aspect of my existence, for in my mind, they still live to influence me and teach me valuable lessons of life.

Because of the gift of memory, we can always thank our Creator God for giving us a world that is beautiful beyond

all words, fertile fields, work that fulfills, time that renews,  
people who care, freedom to pray and worship together, the  
sense of community we find in our churches and sanctuaries,  
and the ideals we profess in our words, deeds, and songs.

We join our voices in giving thanks for all of these  
things and ask that we may never take any of them for granted.

## Part 83: Milestone.

June 3, 2015

The past days have been agonizing for me that's why I was not able to write my reflections. I again experienced bodily pains which make my movement quite difficult. But Ma'am Martha encouraged me to fight it out, to never give up and don't give a chance for pain to immobilize me. That's why even if it's hard I still do my walking exercises in the church compound each day. Ma'am Martha said that if I give up, then more of my muscles will also give way and not perform their function as expected.

This is true not only in a person's life but also in the life of an institution, society, or nation. That's why, even if besieged by problems, these institutions, societies and nations still make necessary adjustments and move forward towards achieving their goals. I saw this in the life of Jaro Evangelical Church and the way it concretely faced difficulties and challenges – by creating necessary milestones. A milestone is a significant event or stage in the life, progress, development, or the like of a person, institution, nation, etc.

For five (5) months, JEC lacked the services of two full-time ministers. Pastor Sharon has been declared Pastor Emeritus, and I resigned from my post due to my sickness. Only Pastor Martha remained to take care of her ministry for the formation of children and youth. That's why the church invited preachers to complement Pastor Sharon who volunteered to remain as preacher together with the JEC Lay Pastors. Last Sunday, the church celebrated a milestone in its life as the First Baptist Church in the Philippines by installing Pastor Ronald Parpa as Church Minister to spearhead the shepherding ministry of the church. Pastor Ronald is a product of our CPU College of Theology, has served many churches under our convention, and as staff of Filamer Christian University (FCU). This milestone of calling Pastor Parpa is a significant event in the life of JEC which decided to move on

despite the difficulties and challenges it faced. Let us support Pastor Parpa as he serves as JEC Minister.

Personally, I too have my own milestone. Nang Tessie Lozanes facilitated my application for Disability Identification Card. This card gives the bearer the privilege of being given 20% discount in his/her purchases just like what the Senior Citizens have. As you know, aside from my oral chemotherapy, I'm still purchasing other medicines for my blood pressure, incessant cough, vitamins, lung care, etc. I'm taking up 2 syrup and 8 capsules every day. This means I'm purchasing a lot of medicines for my health care. To be given a Disability Identification Card means a lot for my situation. That's why I considered this a milestone in my life as it serves a very significant purpose of easing my burdens and difficulties. I'm thankful to Nang Tessie for her deep concern for me so that this milestone will be fully realized.

What difficulties and challenges are you facing? Perhaps all you have to do is ask for God's wisdom to guide you in identifying a necessary milestone to be installed in your life so that you can face your situation more squarely and patiently. God bless all of you!

## Part 84: Check-up.

June 6, 2015

The Iloilo SSS Doctor personally examined me yesterday. He thoroughly asked me about my medical history, my hospitalization, my oral chemo treatment and how my body adjusts or reacts to my medications. He made me to stand up, walk around, and sit down. He also put his stethoscope on different parts of my body while alternately instructing me to breathe-in, breathe-out, inhale and exhale. According to him, this thorough check-up was a necessary requirement or step in his consideration of my application for SSS Disability Assistance Program. While doing his physical examinations, he was also checking documents from my folder where he write his notes in some pages, and putting his signature in some. Finally, he gives me a signed form with instruction for me to open an ATM Account in a bank at my convenience and to continue my follow-up at their office in the next 2–3 months. I saw that he was acting favorably to my application. Why made me open an ATM Account if the result is disapproval? So I profusely thanked him, recognized his professional demeanor and appreciated his caring attitude towards me. That physical check-up was a very memorable experience for me given by a government functionary. He truly gained my respect and warm regards.

This check-up has the following historical background. When I was hospitalized, JEC members who were knowledgeable about SSS operations to sick employees visited me and encouraged me to explore ways to avail some SSS Assistance. I thought that SSS can only help me 3 ways – when I ask for a loan, when I retire, or when I die. I was not aware that SSS offered many programs for their members who are in various needs and situations. The JEC members who visited me have vast knowledge and experiences about these programs because they were operating a big company and many of their employees have availed these services with SSS. They also assured me of their help by sending me their

company personnel who is most knowledgeable of processing documents in my behalf. And so it came to pass, that because I resigned from my pastoral post due to my sickness, and I have no fixed income, I applied for sick leave to SSS asking for their monetary help. You know, I was amazed at how my application was favorably considered by SSS and they sent a check for me, proof of their positive action! A new world was opened for me! I didn't know that there are opportunities like that from our government service providers. But there it was! Thank you Lord.

I also recognized the company personnel sent by concerned JEC members to facilitate my documents because without her actual guidance and processing, I might not be able to present my case intelligently. This Disability Assistance Program was the next step that I would like to avail since I need additional resources to help me procure my medication. With the favorable action of the SSS Doctor during my check-up, I am hopeful for a positive result regarding my application.

## Part 85: God works mysteriously.

June 15, 2015

I received many positive feedbacks from many people regarding my SSS transaction. They could not easily believe that the agency's response to such application will be fast, and smooth. I could not believe it myself at first! Imagine receiving a check from SSS a few days after I get out of the hospital without so much difficulty and delays. It was only after I talked to some people involved in that process that I came to realize the true story behind the transaction – God worked mysteriously behind the scene! Let me explain.

When the woman from a business company who made my documents submitted my application, she found out that the person receiving the documents was a JEC member, very known to Mam Martha and me, and a close friend of our church' secretary. Let's call her, Miss KR. Miss KR was surprised to receive an application with my name on it, and she promised to make everything possible, within the bounds of their procedures, to facilitate the processing of my documents. What's more interesting about this is that Miss KR was just transferred in that department! It was her first time to receive and process applications. I believe that her transfer in that part of the agency was not accidental or circumstantial, but providential. God worked mysteriously for the transfer, so that Miss KR will help me with my needs.

But there's another surprising development that occurred to strengthen my realization. When my second application was being processed, this time concerning my disability request, we find out that applications of this nature will be submitted to the medical department, a totally different part of the agency. But do you know who received and facilitated my documents? It's still Miss KR! She was transferred to be the new personal assistant of the SSS Doctor! Can you believe it? Miss KR was likewise surprised with her sudden promotion and transfer in that department. She only

smiled when an application for disability support with my name on it was handed to her. Our church secretary told her that her transfer was a result of God's mysterious ways so that she can continue to help me. That's the same message I left to her when I subjected myself to the SSS Doctor' personal evaluation and examination. I thanked her profusely, and requested for her continued support through prayers about my health. She promised to do her best to help facilitate my documents being aware of God's mysterious work and ways.

Indeed, God works mysteriously!



## Part 86: Emptiness.

June 19, 2015

This is such a sad word. Have you experienced how it was to feel empty? I'm not comfortable of saying this, but this was my feeling during the past days. I feel empty physically. It seems that I was drained of my physical strength. I have no energy because I suffer from shortness of breath and I was easily exhausted. I can't do my usual routine just like I did before. My mobility has been drastically reduced.

I also feel empty mentally. It seemed that my mind has also weakened. I was not able to write my reflections because I can't think of something to write about. I felt that my mind was drained also. I also feel empty emotionally. Whereas before I have the courage to face anything that came to me, or being strong in confronting my difficulties, I felt that my resolve has also been gradually weakened. At least, I am glad to be aware of all these developments so that I can make necessary adjustments of not totally giving up or lose my hope and my faith.

In the midst of this situation, I thank the Lord for giving me a revelation about emptiness. Not all emptiness is bad, sad or negative. In fact, in our Christian life, we must experience emptiness so that we will be filled with Christ's strength, love and wisdom. For unless we empty ourselves of our human abilities and capacities we can't be able to fully appreciate God's strength and will for our lives. It is in emptiness, that the Holy Spirit can work directly and wholeheartedly in our own lives because we surrender and commit all to him.

Now, I'm looking at my situation in a new perspective. All the emptiness I suffered is necessary to happen to me so that I can surrender myself to God in the most comprehensive way. I leave all of myself to his will and strength. I rely on

him fully. I pray to him just as Christ prayed – not my will,  
but yours will be done in my life.

## Part 87. True meaning of healing

June 25, 2015

Ever since i got sick, JEC placed a special part in the worship's liturgy which has become a permanent part of 3 worship services every Sunday. This was the Focus Prayer of my healing assigned to different Boards and Auxiliary organizations of the church. Persons assigned to lead this prayer understood that the healing mentioned in this focus prayer is for my physical and personal healing from my cancer, which is understandable. As time passed on, that specific kind of healing did not transpire much. I observed that i am deteriorating more and I suffered more pains and discomforts. Does this mean that God did not answer our prayers of healing? No! Through this reflection, I would want to share what mam Martha shared to us in our hospital's bed gathering and reunion of loved ones, colleagues and family of faith. My sickness has been the key to God's healing provided to my family, the church, and the pastoral ministry. These are her words. Words which carry my convictions.

"Many times I felt that God is not anymore interested with my prayers. He is not listening to my pleadings for Pastor Ronny to have the 2nd chance of life. God snobs my grief and my tears, this I thought.

Last June 23, our oncologist doctor told me in front of my face and of my family members God gave Pastor Ronny a miracle! Pastor Martha, you are God's miracle to Pastor Ronny's healing."

This remark disturbed me so much. How can this be? In spite of my effort in care-giving, in loving, in doing everything to save the frail body of Pastor Ronny, he is deteriorating. I began to re-trace the events since Ronny got sick if I could connect it to the miracle of healing. I am amazed how the Holy Spirit enlightened me with God's perspective of healing in Ronny's sickness.

First: Healing has penetrated our family. Because of Ronny' s sickness, our families met as often as we can. Communications, words of care, comfort, adjustment in schedules, in resources, happened easily among siblings. On the process of doing this, our children became aware of their role to their parents, brothers and sisters became closer and communicated more often with each other, and there is only one priority: family. It is very difficult to unite the family of 10 but this was possible because of Pastor Ronny's sickness. Prayers, resources, decision making became one. The miracle of healing in our family to act as one.

Second: Healing in our church, Jaro Evangelical Church. Since Pastor Ronny was not able to perform his pastoral duties, (same with me), church's activities should have been affected. But No! This did not happen. Church major activities went on smoothly as planned because JEC congregation became a YES congregation. Each member acted with joy to serve. NO is not anymore a problem. Pastor Ronny's sickness challenged them to stand in the frontline and take part in continuing the Lord's work. They took courage to stand behind the pulpit to preach, they make church their place to gather to standby for any needs, accompany the new pastor for familiarization of his work and assist Pastor Ronny and Pastor Sharon in their medical consultations. Taking note that they see to it that Pastor Ronny's needs will be provided and taken care of from finances, to ease his discomfort. The miracle of healing from being passive, into active partakers of building the Body of Christ.

Third: Healing within our Pastoral circle as a whole. Praise God for giving us amazing and loving colleagues, co-workers, co pastors who prayed, gave their resources, visited and comforted us. Also people following Pastor Ronny's FB postings on lessons learned during sickness. I was amazed how they took serious reflections on Pastor Ronny's situation. CBMA circles started to discuss about the medical support of sick and aging pastors, local churches were given the opportunity to assess their ministerial duties to their local

pastors, young pastors sit in circle and reflect their calling and commitment based from their encounter with Pastor Ronny. Pastor Ronny's FB postings have challenged them to become pastors amidst circumstances, even they are in the valley of the shadow of death. This is healing from individualism and mediocrity into a profound understanding of one's calling as minister of the Lord.

Ever since Pastor Ronny got cancer, I asked the Lord to answer my prayer to heal him. Never did i realize that He has answered me in other way. RONNY WAS HEALED! He healed his family, JEC pastoral work, and to the wider circle of pastors.

I would like to believe that God's healing for Ronny is not for his body alone but healing beyond my expectations. I know it will happen. FOR WHAT HAS BEEN, PRAISE GOD, FOR WHAT WILL BE, Amen.

## TEAM Jesus

A tribute during the Necrological Service in honor of  
Rev. Ronny L. Luces

When I visited Rev. Ronny Luces in the hospital, he challenged me to meditate on what it means to be part of a TEAM ministry.

You are part of a TEAM when you:

T - Think of the same goals. If you have a different goal than that of the team, then you probably belong to another team. Make sure that everyone in the team subscribe to the same goals.

He had a big influence on my thinking. He was always the lecturer of National Situationer during the assembly of the Convention Baptist Youth Fellowship of the Philippines.

When I was in the College of Theology, Nestor Bunda required me to read the writings of Rev. Ronny L. Luces in the 1980s. Later, I quoted it in my book extensively.

In 1985, Ronny Luces<sup>1</sup> made a theological reflection on theology and action. He said that a *pastor* must look deep into the context of the Philippines because a *pastor* does not operate in an empty space. “He operates in the society that is historically situated and conditioned by the structure or system encompassing it. He has a community with population, lifestyle and culture.”<sup>2</sup>

The society is plagued with problems and manifestations of evil in the socio-economic and political sphere not to mention moral degradation; the *pastor* must do something. The reflection of Ronny Luces deserves a longer quotation.

---

<sup>1</sup> A graduate of CBBC batch 1977.

<sup>2</sup> R. Luces, in, *Centralite*, 1985, 44-A. Italics mine.

“The *pastor* being part and parcel of this society cannot alienate himself and just stay in his ivory tower. He must act and do something because of the mandate of Christ for him as a salt and light of the earth. He cannot afford to just stay idle and remain passive over what is going on. In the church where he is based and on the society where he is operating are opportunities where he can manifest the divine calling of God for him. Foremost of this is the opportunity to educate his people regarding the realities that are transpiring. Coupled with this, is his prophetic role to denounce the evils that cause injustices, to expose and oppose all forces of oppression and support the people’s struggle for change. He must also organize with other *pastors* and religious bodies to build a strong ecumenical network and join forces with other sectors of the society. This way he is actually taking the role of a salt. In his action in society, he must ‘plunge in’ to the actual situation. This process is called integration and Christ has done it when he incarnated with his people ‘being one of them.’ Through these he can have first hand experience about what it’s like to be struggling for a just cause of righteousness, truth and freedom not merely theologizing it but putting it in practice.”<sup>3</sup>

We also share another hobby. We love reading books, novels. We share books. We love authors like Baldacci, Silva, Vince Flynn, Ludlum. Later, I sent him lots of ebooks. We would prefer reading than watching movies or TVs.

We also share the same passion in writing. I saw to it that before he will pass away he will be able to see that his reflections are made into book form. He was able to see it and he was very happy and excited that it will be printed and distributed.

E - Expect that your back is covered by all the team members. We cannot always watch our backs. When you are in a team, you are assured that someone is looking out for you.

We worked together in the CBMA. I was the staff and he was the treasurer. Later, he was still the treasurer and I became the auditor.

---

<sup>3</sup> R. Lucas, 1985, 44-A. *Italics mine.*

He had my back and I had his back. We had Rev. Edwin Lariza's back when he was the President. It was in this time when we decided to construct the Katipan Hall. It was a great challenge for all of us to raise funds for the construction.

When I became the CBMA President he had my back still. He protected me. When he heard the unfair criticisms hurled against me, he was the first to put into record in the minutes of the CBMA that the officers must support the president.

It is good to work with somebody who has your back.

A - Allow the uniqueness of each team member. A great team is a team in which everyone contributes their own special way. Each team member is indispensable.

Rev. Luces knew how to manage people. He was able to tap the gifts of persons and harness their potentials.

M - Move to serve God and the people. This is the ministry that God has entrusted to us. Let us check the impetus of our team -- is our team serving God and the people?

Let us all be part of TEAM Jesus!

Rev. Francis Neil G. Jalandon  
July 20, 2015  
Jaro Evangelical Church





