



THE LORD'S FLOCK GROWTH DIGEST

PASTORAL GROWTH SERIES

The Prison Experiences

Sis. Techie Rodriguez, Elder-Founder
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Reflection: What are your experiences while you are in the middle of home quarantine?

On March 16, 2020, the President declared the Enhanced Community Quarantine in response to the Covid19 epidemic, which compelled people to stay at home except for those in essential services. This lockdown has been extended to April 30. This seems like we are "imprisoned", but this time we are not being punished, but being protected. The President's ultimate goal is to save us from ourselves. We should consider this time at home, in this temporary "prison" to learn some lessons. When God allowed some special people to be prisoners, He meant to teach them lessons they would not learn anywhere else.

Joseph the Dreamer (Gen 39:20-24)

- One of the greatest characters in the Bible is Joseph, the Dreamer. He was put in prison, and he was sold to Potiphar. All the time, the Lord was with him. Today, the Lord is also with us while we are 'imprisoned' at home.
- Potiphar put him in-charge or steward of everything. When he was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he resisted committing a sin. Are we committing sins while we are in this situation: do we worry, grumble, or lose hope, especially those who lost their jobs?

THE PRISON of PROMOTION

- Why was Joseph put in prison? Potiphar wanted to punish him for a crime that he did not commit. But God let him be imprisoned because He wanted to promote him.
- Why are we in 'prison' today? While we are quarantined at home, *the Lord is using this time of confinement as a time for our refinement. He will use this time to promote us to a greater level of service.* We have our respective assignments for the Lord but we have not able to accomplish them because of our busy-ness

or because of many other priorities and concerns. This time we are confined inside our homes, and we are shut off, shut down. The Lord is making this a prison of promotion.

There are a few tools in this passage that we need to understand today.

A. The PROBLEMS of this PRISON

- Prison is not a pleasant place. Early in my ministry, I was giving teachings to prisoners in the city jail, to the sick people at the Muntinlupa Hospital and at the Tala Leprosarium. These places were very scary and dirty, and I was in this 'prison' from 1982-1985. But, during those times, I was touched by God and God spoke to me "When I was in prison, did you visit me?" It was there where I saw Christ. I was humbled to mingle and to teach to people who were like the living dead, who were being shunned by society. But, I "adopted" some of them, and we welcomed them to our home and our community when they came out. Without God's grace, you will find these people repulsive.
- Joseph's prison was no different. It is never easy when the Lord sends you to a prison. God never promised His children that serving Him will be a painless affair. Some of His choice servants have been shaped by the harsh angle of pain.
- We have been surprised by the pandemic. But in 1Pet 4: 12-14, "Beloved, do not be surprised that the trial by fire is occurring among you, as if something strange were happening to you. But, rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when His glory is revealed, you may also rejoice exultantly. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you". So, if you are being blamed or bullied or are victims of gossip or scandals, if they are not true, let these go.

- The people that God would use greatly, He first hurts deeply. We should not be surprised that we find ourselves locked away in one of the prisons of life right now. We are not the first to suffer afflictions. Joseph must have wondered why his brothers hated him.
- In Phil 2:14 “Do everything without grumbling or questioning”. Do we question God why we are in this situation? Do we whine and complain? Do we wonder why the Lord allowed covid19 pandemic to happen? We might not understand why we are suffering the loss of our loved ones. But let us all be sure that the Lord is in control. This is part of a plan that we know nothing about. God is using the hard, harsh realities in our life to shape us.
- He has a plan, the best plan. In Rom 8:28 “We know that ALL things work for good for those who love God, who have been called according to His purpose”
- Our duty is to serve the Lord, even when we do not understand. Submit to the will of God. Trust Him to do right. And that is what Joseph did.

B. It is a PROLONGED PRISON (Gen 41:46)

- As long as 13 years, Joseph stayed in prison. Today we have been locked down for 30days, but we are impatient already. God may spend many years shaping you or your life, or at other times, for a relatively short period. He’s preparing you for greater service.
- Right now, we are continuing with training leaders while they are in their homes; your Leaders have not stopped feeding you the words of God

C. The PROVISIONS of this Prison and the PROVISION of God’s presence

- This prison is a place of problems. But it is also filled with God’s provisions. He will never send us there alone, or without the resources. Let us not be afraid. Regardless of the nature of the prison experiences in your life, God is with you. He will provide the resources that you need to survive and thrive. “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5).
- “When you pass through the water, I will be with you; when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (Isa 43:2).

- When you are shut off, He does this to grow you and to strengthen your faith, so that His image can be more clearly seen in your life.
- All of us are children of God, let us make sure that we are not showing fear; let us make sure our lives as Christians are seen by others, especially those who do not know God.

Look at the opportunities that this prison experience or lockdown will teach us. .

1. How should we as Christians respond?
 - Finish reading the Bible.
 - When the opportunity presents itself, do not hesitate to help.
 - Do not panic or despair! Be of good cheer. “Peace, it is I your Lord”.
 - Do not be afraid. There are many false prophets. Listen only to God’s words. Turn your eyes only on Him.
2. Show respect to government officials (Rom 13).
 - Corona virus is presenting new challenges to leaders. Stop complaining that they are not doing their jobs.
 - When we decided to cancel our group meetings, this was not an easy decision. Our community praise & worship is integral to us; even churches have been closed.
3. Stay in touch with your family, friends & community. One the challenges is being isolated; we miss one another. Take advantage of modern technology: text, chat, email. Take this time for bonding, eat together with your family.
4. Attend virtual church services or Bible studies.
5. Stay home. Clean up. The children should help organize the home, de-clutter your home. Pray and praise together.

CONCLUSION

Regardless how long this will last, let us submit to God’s will. Live above our circumstances, and walk above the waters. Let us continue to pray together. And whatever our situation, God blesses us. “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with first fruit of all your produce; then will your barns be filled with grain, with new wine your vats will overflow (Prov 3:9-10).

Transcriber/Writer: Sis. Jo Advincula

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