



Why Are You Where You Are?

Cynthia de Castro

Have you ever asked yourself these questions? Why am I here? Why am I doing what I am doing? Am I supposed to be here or somewhere else? Did God place me here or did I place myself in this situation? Do I see God's hand in the journey to this place?

It has been seven months since we were put on lockdown as a result of COVID 19. Some feel bad about not being able to go out and are merely on survival mode. Some have suffered and have mourned the loss of job, health, friends and family; they're on enduring mode. Still, others have been blessed beyond normal in spite of the pandemic; they're on thriving mode.

Whatever mode you find yourself in, I hope this reflection on Paul's situation will encourage, bless and inspire you, as it did me.

In Ephesians 3:1 Paul wrote - *"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles."*

Notice that Paul identified himself as *"a prisoner of Jesus Christ."* By the time Paul wrote this book, he had been in prison for five years. I believe Paul never thought he would end up in prison. Maybe he saw himself going to Rome preaching to huge crowds and seeing great numbers of Romans converted. But, here he is, in prison because he dared preach Jesus crucified and resurrected.

Life does not always go how we plan it, right? Most things in my life never did go as I thought they would.

Whether it's a special event, a relationship, home, or a job, there are always changes to the plans we have scripted in our minds. But, I am surely grateful that God intervened and changed my plans. Because we really don't know what is best for our lives since we do not even know what is going to take place in the next minute.

Solomon said this in *Proverbs 16:9* *"We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps."*

God used Paul to witness principally to the Gentiles. He went from one country to another, winning both Jews and Gentiles alike and planting churches. Paul may have thought being imprisoned put a stop to his flourishing ministry but actually God had Paul right where He wanted him. God put him in a prison so that Paul might expand his ministry. Huh? Yup, that sounds strange but it is the truth.

If Paul had been free to do as he pleased, he would have traveled around and preached from place to place. Do you know that he was not considered to be a very powerful speaker? In fact, Paul himself wrote the following to the church of Corinth, *"For some say, 'Paul's letters are demanding and forceful, but in person he is weak, and his speeches are worthless!'"* -2 Cor. 10:10.

This tells us that Paul's writings were considered to be more impactful than his physical ministry of the Word. He was not eloquent and his sermons were considered by some to be weak and worthless. In fact, in Acts 20 we read of an incident wherein a young lad named

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Eutychus fell asleep while Paul was preaching and fell down a window. However, Paul was a gifted writer and his letters were powerful.

If Paul's ministry was just planting churches (albeit, that was a great accomplishment in itself), he may not have contributed so much to the history and foundation of the church as he has done for the past 2,000 years. But because God was directing the course of his life, Paul ended up right where God wanted him. He ended up in the place where he could use his gifts to the max and do the most good for the most people.

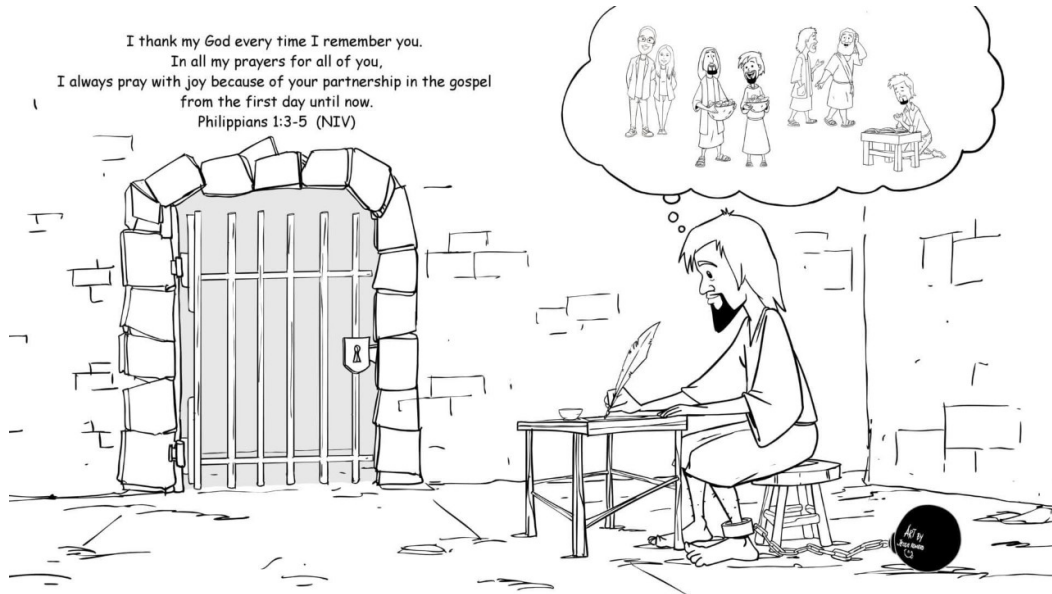
When Paul was arrested, the Jewish leaders probably assumed they had silenced Paul and halted his preaching around the world forever. They never imagined that they unwittingly expanded his ministry by helping place Paul in a situation where the Lord could speak through him to the churches not only at that time but all throughout church history. In fact, Paul continues to speak to billions today, all around the world.

Because he was locked up in prison, Paul had a lot of time on his hands. He used that time to write many of his epistles, almost one half of the New Testament. He also used that time to tell people about Jesus Christ, and even some in Caesar's household, were saved. Phil. 4:22 says, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."

Although the Jews had arrested Paul, he did not see himself as their prisoner. When the Romans imprisoned Paul for years, he did not see himself as their prisoner either. He was waiting to appear before Caesar to defend his case, but he did not consider himself to be Caesar's prisoner either!

Paul saw himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ." That means Paul saw Jesus Christ as the ultimate cause behind his imprisonment. He knew that unless God had ordained it, he would not be where he was. He lived under the sovereign rule of Christ and he was bound to Him forever.

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I can so relate to this lesson! When the pandemic first started and we had to hold our services online, I was inspired to make video devotionals entitled SOULFOOD for the teeny-weeny flock that I shepherd, the WIN-LA Saturday service group. I wrote short scripts, and my husband Nits would film my video devotional. We first uploaded it to the WIN-LA Saturday page made up of around 30 people. Then, Pastor Chito Cordero told me to post Soulfood in the WIN-LA private page and the Word International Ministries - Los Angeles public page as well. I was astounded with the response! So many requested for me to make the post public so they can share the video with their friends as well. As of this writing, Soulfood is now on its 150th episode and has been watched by thousands across the globe - Philippines, Middle East, Japan, Australia, Canada, Asia, Europe, and America. God has truly enlarged my and my husband's ministry and we have been able to share the Word to saved and unsaved family, friends and friends of friends.

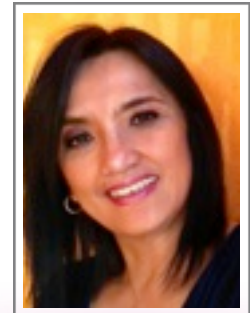
I can truly say that today, God has me where I can bring Him the most glory. All my decades of training and experience as a writer in advertising (disciplined to write short commercials), in TV shows (put interesting stories in the script), in newspapers and magazines (make the article relevant and practical), in broadcast production and editing- all these have prepared me for this Soulfood assignment He now has ordained for me. Indeed, nothing in life is ever wasted.

Why are you where you are today? Do you see yourself as a reluctant prisoner of your circumstances? Do you wish you were somewhere else? If you think you are not where God wants you to be, then pray that the Lord put you in the right track so you can "grow where you are planted" and become all God saved you to be!

Paul saw himself as a *prisoner of Jesus Christ*, being under the sovereign rule of God. If you see yourself as a prisoner of the circumstances of your life, you are going to be a miserable person.

However, if you can comprehend the truth that all of life, including every good and every bad day, every mountain, and every valley, every success and every failure, every blessing and every burden, and every moment of peace and every moment of pain, are all the work of God in your life, you can experience "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

May you always be where God wants you to be, till you see Him face to face!



Cynthia is the wife of Nitoy. She is an Associate Pastor of WIN-Los Angeles, California in charge of Christian Education.

When situations knock you down, get back up and start climbing again, knowing that Jesus is with you. It won't always be easy, but as long as you keep climbing, trusting Jesus all the way, you will reach the top again.

Tracy Eldridge, Mornings with Jesus, July/August 2020



FLOURISH

Julie Atienza

At the time of this writing, we all would have been on locked down for six long months. The world has gone through so much even when our calendars have been cleared out. Some of us grieved the death of a loved one. Some had to battle with sickness, mental issues and Covid-19 itself. Others had to face unemployment and financial distress. It has honestly been exhausting. For us living in the US, the situation is made worse by the political unrest, social injustice issues, riots and more deaths. I caught myself trying to wake myself up from this nightmare but it's real. This is what our world is like right now.

During the early days of the pandemic, fear tried to grip my heart. My mind was filled with anxious thoughts – concerned about the safety of my family. As I turned to His Word, I realized that while the world might change, God does not. He is still the Waymaker who loves us perfectly. And nothing and no one can separate us from His love. Romans 18:37-39 says

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This includes Including the pandemic. In fact, He wants us to continue to flourish in this season. We can be more than conquerors despite the difficulties of this season and truly blossom. How? Indulge me as I share what God has been teaching me these past months.

1. God wants us to grow in faith

The time we have are allotted did not change during lockdown. We still get to spend 24 hours a day. Every minute that we live, we are either investing or wasting our allotted time. God allowed this pandemic to reset our calendars for a reason. This lockdown made me rethink how I'm investing my time. I'm referring to the time not spent on the essentials of life. This is an awesome time to realign our lives to His plans for us. Remember Matt 7:21-23. Jesus said, only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter the Kingdom. Five years ago, God revealed to me (through a dream and a series of events and messages) that He wants me to own and operate a chain of facial salons in North American. That is a God-sized dream! And in pursuit of this vision, I recently enrolled to get my eEsthetician license part-time while working a full-time job.

Despite the lockdown, God still wants us to pursue His vision for our lives. Our lives are never really about us and our plans. It is about Him and His plans. God wants us to live Intentionally according to His purpose.

Regardless of your age, it is never too late to start investing your time. Please don't let the lockdown stop you. Step out in faith now and pursue His plans for you! Your faith will grow exponentially.

2. God wants us to grow in hope

We all need hope. It is hope that will sustain us during this difficult season.

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If we hold fast to hope, we can endure anything. Faith and hope go together because faith is the substance to things hoped for. We grow in hope as we build our faith in our God.

Want to hear some happy news? In the midst of the pandemic, we purchased and moved into our new house in San Fernando Valley in LA. I still get teary eyed when I think of God's overwhelming generosity. I am sure of this - no pandemic can stop God from fulfilling His personal promises to you and me.

Are you waiting on God's promise to you? Don't lose hope. Hang in there. Think of the many times He has pulled you through before. Let God fill your hope tank. Expect good things from Him. This lockdown did not change God and His power. He will fulfill His promises to you.

"And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." Romans 5:5

3. God wants us to grow in love

Matthew 6 is replete with this phrase - The Father is in the secret place and the Father who sees in secret will reward us. While corporate prayer is vital, time spent in the secret place, alone with God, is fundamental. Even Jesus practiced seeking the secret place to spend time alone with the Father.

With the lockdown, God took most of us, off the stage. If your relationship with God is heavily dependent on

performance, this season can unnerve you. Today, majority of our acts of service or worship will be unseen by many. However, they are seen by God. There is something beautiful about a hidden life lived in a way that honors God. Our service should just be an overflow of countless times spent in the secret place – one on one with God and just loving Him. There we worship Him, praise Him, ask Him and listen to Him. We tell Him we love Him. He speaks to us. He changes us. He stills our hearts and reassures us of His love. And gives us a big, tight hug.

I urge you, daily go into the secret place and bathe in His love. You will surely blossom in this season.

You see, this season is not going to waste if we choose to grow. And while the world maybe crazy right now, in the end, three things will remain – Faith, Hope and Love. If we grow in these big 3 in this season of lockdown, then I tell you, my lovely sisters, you would have already flourished.



Julie is the wife of Pastor Hermen Atienza III, Associate Pastor of WIN-Los Angeles, California

When we know that life is not a series of random acts or arbitrary events, we can have confidence in God and His plan for us. We can trust, obey, and cling to our heavenly Father without doubting His rule.

Curtis W. Anderson, Discipleship Journal, Sept / Oct 1995



In Times of Isolation, Trust God

Rachel Briones

We live in unprecedented times and we find ourselves being isolated in our homes. How do we cope with isolation, loneliness and despair?

I love the story of Joseph from the bible found in Genesis 37-50. Here's a quick look at his life.

From beginning to end, his life is both compelling and inspiring. One of twelve sons, Joseph was the favorite of his father, Jacob, and was a dreamer and he shared these dreams with his brothers. His dreams caused great division and jealousy within his family and his brothers were more than jealous of him. In their bitterness and rage, Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. During his time in Egypt, Joseph was arrested for a crime he didn't commit. So not only was he sold into slavery, but he found himself in an Egyptian prison. Nothing was working out according to plan . . . or so he thought. Maybe we are asking "How could God possibly use this circumstance or difficulty in my life?" But the events of Joseph's life were no accident.

I would like to share how we can overcome our loneliness, despair, and isolation.

1. We need to pray

God had Joseph right where he needed to be to fulfill his destiny. Joseph prayed that we would be freed. But God used this seemingly hopeless situation to change the course of history. God will use every aspect of our lives, even the

things that don't seem to fit, to bring about His plan. Jeremiah 29:12 – "Then you will call on me and come to pray to me and I will listen." If we are praying for a breakthrough, we need to PUSH, Praying Until Something Happens! Don't give up, God will see you through!!

2. We need to persevere

Joseph faced different trials and temptations but he showed integrity, honesty, solid work ethics, his actions showed a confidence in God and he was faithful to God even when it didn't feel like God was being faithful to him! Hebrews 10:23 – "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

3. We need to rely on God's promises and presence

Even if you find yourself in "prison," don't lose hope in God's promises. There are thousands of promises found in the word of God to uplift and encourage you. If you can memorize a verse each week, that Word of God will enrich your life!

We read that **God remained with Joseph in that prison.** He gave him favor with the chief jailer and Joseph was put in charge of all the other prisoners!

But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge

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because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper. – Genesis 39:20-23.

God's presence is with you. Psalms 16:11 – "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence there is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."

4. We need to praise Him

We can handle life's difficulties through the power of praise. Turn your heart to find praise for God who loves you and is fighting for you. Psalms 63:3-4 – "Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise you as long as I live, and in Your name, I will lift up my hands."

5. God's purpose will prevail

The life of Joseph demonstrates God's ability to transform sorrow into joy and to breathe life into a dead situation. Because the Lord was with Joseph, he interprets the dream to a future time of abundance that would be followed by a time of great famine. Pharaoh rewarded Joseph with overseeing the lands of Egypt and in these prosperous times he stored up the abundant harvest in preparation for tough times ahead. So, after many years of suffering and struggle, God made Joseph the most influential person second to Pharaoh in the all known world at that time. His wisdom and planning saved the lives of people from not only Egypt but many other nations.

The story ends with Joseph forgiving his brothers and being reconciled with his family. Genesis 50:19-21 "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? **But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good**, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now do not be afraid, I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted and spoke kindly to them. How remarkable and awesome is that!!

When you find yourself in a situation where you feel like God doesn't care, put your faith in what

Scripture tells us about the nature of God. Remember, "He will never leave you or forsake you."

Romans 8:28 – "And we know that those who love God all things will work together for good according to His purpose."

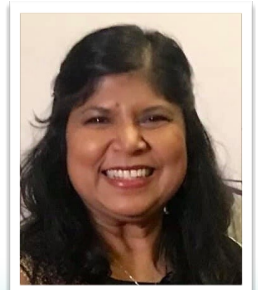
God's purpose will prevail in spite of your pain!!

Here we are in this season of Covid19, some of us we are not able to be with our loved ones and family. We can't have fellowship with our friends and live life normally. We need God's grace that carries us beyond what we can do on our own. God may speak to you through His word or through someone who shows you kindness and provision, and suddenly you have the strength to go on. Joseph had no way of knowing that prison would be the passage to his promotion and in the same way we never know how God is going to lead us to the place He promised. Don't give up, press on God will see you through this season.

I would like to end with this hymn:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of this earth
will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Rachel is the wife of Pastor Mark Briones, US National Youth Coordinator and Associate Pastor of WIN-Los Angeles, California





Seafood Kare-Kare ~ By Elisa Camara

Ingredients

1/2 kilogram Shrimp with head and shell cleaned
2 pieces Crab, steamed
1/2 Kilogram Mussels, boiled, no water, half-shelled
1/2 Kilogram Squid, cleaned, ring slices
8 to 10 stalks String beans, cut into 2 1/2 inch long
1 small (light color) Banana heart, sliced into 1 inch thick
5 pieces eggplant, sliced into slanted
3 stalks pechay
1 bar Butter
250 ml Peanut butter
1/4 c peanuts, ground
2 Tablespoons Rice flour
5 pieces garlic, minced
1 big Onion, minced
1 cup Achuete Oil
1 Beef Bouillon Cubes
2 tablespoons Fish sauce
6 tablespoons Achuete oil
Salt and Pepper to taste
1/4 cup Fish sauce

Ingredients for Sauteed Shrimp Paste (Bagoong Guisado)

1/2 cup Achuete Oil
5 cloves Garlic, minced
1 medium size Onion, minced
2 medium size Tomatoes, chopped
1/2 Kilogram Shrimp Paste
1/4 Kilogram Brown Sugar
Salt and Pepper to taste
Water



Elisa Camara is the wife of Pastor Rainier Camara, Senior Pastor of WIN Ortigas, Philippines



My family loves Kare-Kare, so the best way to try it is by cooking something more special; this is when the idea of having Seafood came into my mind. Although the sauce of Seafood Kare-Kare might look the same with our traditional ox stew, it is prepared differently by cooking the seafood first as buttered shrimp, squid, mussels, and crab. This version makes it richer, flavorful, and it also works well with peanut butter.



Seafood Kare-Kare ~ By Elisa Camara

Instructions

1. Bring a large pot of water to a vigorous boil with 3 tablespoons salt. Blanch the string beans, banana heart, pechay, and eggplant. Cook it for 3 to 4 minutes. Remove the vegetables and put these on a bowl with cold water and ice. Let it stay in the bowl for 3 minutes. Remove from the bowl and set aside.
2. How to make Buttered Seafood: On a frying pan, heat 3 tablespoons of butter in a pan over low-medium heat. Fry the shrimp for 1 minute per side. Remove the shrimp from the pan. Set aside. On the same pan, fry the squid using the butter for 2 minutes per side. Do not overcook the squid as it will get tough. Remove the squid from the pan and set it aside. Fry the steamed crabs on the same pan for 2 1/2 minutes per side. Add more butter if needed. Set aside. Put the mussels on the same pan and stir fry for 4 minutes total. Deglaze the pan with the liquid extracted from the mussels and gently rub your spatula on the surface until bits of seafood are diluted in the liquid. Remove the mussels from the pan and then place the liquid on a separate bowl.
3. How to make the peanut stew: On a medium pan, melt butter in medium heat. Whisk in rice flour. Remove from heat and add a small amount of liquid from the frying pan, stirring to prevent clumping. Set aside. Heat 1/4 cup of achuete oil over medium heat and then sauté the garlic and onion. Once the onion turns soft, pour in the liquid from the frying pan. Stir and let it boil. Add the peanut butter and the butter mixture. Stir and cook until it is completely diluted. Add the fish sauce, bouillon, salt, and pepper to taste. Stir. Cook for 2 to 5 minutes in medium heat while stirring.
4. When ready to serve, combine the seafood with the peanut sauce. Serve on a warmed bowl mixed with the vegetables. Best served with Sautéed Shrimp paste on the side.
5. How to make a Sautéed Shrimp Paste (Bagoong Guisado): You will need 1 slice of Lechon belly (Deep-fried, about 100 grams) to make a very delicious sautéed shrimp paste. Using a fine-mesh sieve, rinse shrimp paste under cold, running water to rid of excess saltiness. Drain well. In a wide pan in medium heat, heat achuete oil. Add sugar and cook, stirring regularly, until sugar is dissolved and lightly brown. Add the shrimp paste and cook, stirring regularly, for about 3 to 5 minutes or until color darkens. Add water to liquefy the shrimp paste. Add the Lechon belly cut into cubes, stir. Then add minced red chili (Labuyo) if you want spicy. Serve it on the side of the Seafood Kare-Kare.

