



Being Thankful For What We Don't Have

Cynthia de Castro

Recently, a friend of mine posted in her FB page that she and her two sisters are now "pandemic orphans," having lost their parents to COVID 19. "No matter how much we hid our parents since the pandemic started - making sure they never went out of the house - somehow, COVID still "found" them and took them away from us," she said.

Sadly, millions have been made "pandemic orphans, pandemic widows/widowers, pandemic-bereaved." Too many people have died - and not just because of Covid. It seems like there have been more deaths the past two years than in previous years. I myself have lost a mother, brother, cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends. But through Jesus Christ, the hope of seeing them again someday in heaven have comforted me and given me peace, amidst the grief.

I like how death is described in our native tongue, Tagalog. "Sila ay sumakabilang buhay na." They have gone on to the next life, affirming that there is life after death. And the expression, "binawian ng buhay" conveys the truth that our lives are not ours. We are merely stewards and someday the real Owner of our lives get to take it back, in His own time, in His own way.

Meanwhile, we all must learn to trust God and move on in faith. "But how?" my friend asked. "I don't want to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas. The holidays seem to be meaningless now. I don't feel grateful. The grief overwhelms me."

Her feelings got me into thinking. People do tend to forget to be grateful when they focus on what they lost, rather than on what they still have. That is why you often hear of the advice to "Count your blessings." Look around you and be thankful for family and friends, home and things that you have.

Yesterday, as I thanked God for everything I have, my heart found countless reasons to rejoice and be at peace. Then it's like the Lord impressed this thought in my mind- Gratitude includes not only what you have, but also those that you don't have - the things or people you wanted and asked God for, but you never got.

And so, I made a "not-your-usual" list of things to thank God for. I have been blessed as I did this and I'm eager to share it with you so that you too may make your own list. I started my list by thanking the Lord for the things that I don't have; the prayers that were never answered, for the things that never happened. Here are some in my list:

- Thank you God that we don't have COVID or other major diseases that threaten life and steal peace and happiness.
- Thank you God that we don't have persecutions, torture, imprisonment and even death for practicing our faith where we live.
- Thank you God that we don't have poverty, famine, and homelessness in our families.
- Thank you God that we don't have despair and hopelessness as we deal with all

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kinds of trials because we have the Lord Jesus interceding for us.

Then there are those "Thank-you-God-You-did-not-give-what-I-asked-for" prayers because His plan was far better than anything I could have wish for. God's love and mercy often withholds the very things that we think we so badly need so these are some of my prayers:

- Thank You God for that door that never opened.
- Thank You God for that promotion that did not materialize.
- Thank You God for the job I lost which led me to a better one.
- Thank You God for blocking the path I was on that would have taken me far from you.
- Thank You God for that relationship that never took place.

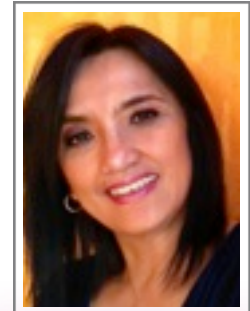
And the last things on my "thank-you-God" list are things I have not received yet. We honor and please God when we thank Him for His declared promises even before they arrive, and we flood our souls with joy at the same time. Our list of future blessings may include the following:

- Thank You God for the source of income or job that is on its way.
- Thank You God that the prodigals in our church/family will someday return to You.
- Thank You God that You will restore that broken relationship.
- Thank You God for the coming deliverance of ___ from his/her addiction.
- Thank You God that You will provide for me in my retirement, so I need not worry.

It's right to ask God to provide us what we need but it's even better to thank God that He will take good care of us, even if we can't see His provisions yet. What we think we need to have may not be God's will - so we should trust the Lord to sort all that out. His job is to answer according to His will; my job is to be thankful for that.

And so, at the end of my "not-your-usual" prayer list, I thanked God for even the pandemic - for how He has used COVID 19 to draw people closer to Him. I am grateful that the pandemic orphans and pandemic-bereaved people did not lose their loved ones permanently because we can trust Jesus' promise that "he who believes in Me will never die". We can thank God for heaven because that is where those we love have gone and that is where we too will be going.

If you have been praying for something you want to have for yourself or for someone you love, remember to end your prayers with a "Thank You God." For whether you get to have it or not, this one thing is sure - God's love for you is trustworthy so that whatever His answer will be - you will certainly be blessed with the best!



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

You can expect to meet Jesus in the most unlikely place - at the intersection of Expectation and Disappointment. The Jesus you meet there is not the Jesus of your dreams. Nor is He the airbrushed Christ of popular Christianity. He is the enigmatic and unpredictable Jesus of the Bible. You will not forget Him.

John Koessler, The Surprising Grace of Disappointment



Bigger Than I Thought!

Julie Atienza

Bigger than I Thought is one of my favorite songs these days. The chorus goes:

So I throw all my cares before You
My doubts and fears don't scare You
You're bigger than I thought You were
You're bigger than I thought
I stop all negotiations
With the God of all creation
You're bigger than I thought You were
You're bigger than I thought You were

Last spring, I was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA). RA is an auto-immune disease that causes chronic joint inflammation and pain. I've had many doctor visits, laboratory tests, different medications, steroid shots, more tests, etc., between doing life, work, homeschooling, and attending esthetics school. I was in pain every day. The everyday chores are difficult. If I'm stressed or push myself physically, I will get flare-ups. One night, I broke down because I couldn't lift the pan to transfer our dinner to the serving dish. I was sick and sad. And then my sister and her family moved out of state, and I had to grapple with that too. I was struggling, and I tried to be okay, but I'm not.

In His goodness, God intervened and orchestrated a visit to my sister, who recently moved. In my mind, the goal was to check on my sister. However, God had another plan. During those five beautiful days, He said to me many "I love you" s. The Father quieted me down, answered my

questions, settled my doubts. No, not all of them, and I don't think He ever will. I had to surrender control and learn to rest in Him. Instead, He drew me close enough to feel His heart beating for me, and I came back home with clarity of His hand on my life. I did not know that another battle was brewing just around the corner.

A few weeks later, I got a Facetime notification while having my prayer time in the morning. It was my younger sister. She calmly informed our other sister and me that my Dad and Mom both tested positive with Covid-19. They were in the Emergency Room of the hospital in Alabang, Muntinlupa, waiting to be admitted. They were number 15 on the list. They needed admission for pneumonia. In addition, they both have co-morbidities.

I could not process the news at first. My younger sister said that my brother, my only sibling living in Manila, advised my Dad to settle their affairs while preparing for the hospital. Mentally, I rejected those words. I can't give in to fear. I believed that my parents would be healed and fully recovered and refused to entertain those contrary thoughts. After the call, I informed Hermen about the situation, and we prayed together. We then requested our church, WIN-Los Angeles, to intercede. My sisters called back and asked me to lead them in prayer. I spent that day and night continually lifting my parents to God, many times in tears. I was hounding Him with every small request. That was Wednesday. By Thursday

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morning, my parents were admitted to separate rooms. That was an answered prayer.

Hospital protocol requires one room and one caregiver per patient. The caregiver will stay with the patient until they are discharged. Who will my brother choose? Should he go with them or stay outside to coordinate their care? Providentially, my brother hired trained caregivers who would take care of my parents during their hospital stay. Another answered prayer. My brother tearfully narrated that he cried when he said goodbye to my parents, not knowing he would see them alive again. That was heartbreaking. There were moments when I felt powerless and guilt-ridden to be so far away. But God reminded me that, more than me, my parents needed His help. True to form, God already moved ahead of us and assigned brilliant doctors. They ordered an excellent treatment protocol, and my parents responded well to it. The caregivers were regularly updating us on their vitals and condition. By Friday, their fever was gone. That was our first glimpse of God's healing touch. They amazingly responded so well that the elated Pulmonologist informed Dad that he could be discharged by Sunday. However, Mom still had to stay at the hospital as she had an allergic reaction to antibiotics and switched to a new one. We knew then that the worse was over. God was healing them both, and they just got progressively better. Both of them never required oxygen. How great is our God! Indeed, our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:8) There is nothing that can stop our God.

Dad called me that night. He joyfully said, "Looks like we could beat this. It would be a memorable Christmas for the family." Tears, many joyful tears, fell that night from all of us. My parents and my siblings. Only then did I realize that I was holding my breath since I got that first Facetime notification. While I declared my faith in God, my body was betraying me. Again, I had to surrender

control and rest in Him. Then, finally, I was able to breathe freely.

Later, my brother went to the same hospital as he was experiencing mild symptoms. Again, we waged spiritual warfare and requested prayers from WIN LA. My brother tested positive with Covid, and after additional tests, the doctor prescribed medication. However, the doctor advised him to continue treatment at home. It was perfect timing as my parents were discharged that same afternoon. Dad, Mom, and my brother finally went to my parent's house that night.

As I write this article tonight, they are happily quarantining together, enjoying each other's company. My Mom's appetite is back. She face-timed me as they were having breakfast, and I heard Dad declare in the background, "God healed us!". I responded with a loud, "Amen!". They are walking miracles—testimonies of His power and faithfulness. On the other hand, I learned that I could stop holding my breath in times of difficulty and rest in His loving hands. And RA is nothing to my omnipotent God. As the bridge of that song goes -

I will rest in the Father's hands
Leave the rest in the Father's hands.



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



In Everything Give Thanks!

Ellien Hernal

As the scripture say “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you “ ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:18

I have so many reasons to thank the Lord because He has done countless miracles in my life. The very highlight of it was when I was still on dialysis. I kept on praying, believing, and trusting God that He will make a way for me to have a new kidney. My patience was tested for more than 13 years of suffering by going to Dialysis Center 3 times a week.

Sometimes we really don't understand the will of God in our lives, but He has the reason for everything, and He knows what is best for us. But as long as my hope is in the Lord, I know I will be fine in His perfect time. So, 3 years ago, God gave me a new kidney, a new hope, and a new life to serve Him. I am forever grateful for His goodness.

When COVID19 struck, I was unfortunately tested positive. I was so scared, realizing how dangerous the virus is, that even though I had the vaccine I

still got it. My immune system is very low due to the medication I'm taking, it suppresses my immune system, so my body won't reject my new kidney.

My only hope is in the Lord, He is my strength and I trust Him. I know that He will carry me through in all my down times and will never leave me. After a month of struggling with Covid, God helped and healed me from it. Praise God I'm back to normal health, back to church and will continue to serve Him till He takes me home. God is so good. I experienced His miracle healing. “I will give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever. “ ~ 1Chronicles 16:34



Ellien is the wife of Pastor Robert Hernal, Pastor of WIN-Eagle Rock, California

The same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow, and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering, or He will give you unending strength to bear it.

~ Saint Francis de Sales

Pathways to Wellness

Jal Raval, wife of Associate Pastor Michael Raval of WIN NY



At the peak of the pandemic, the once busy streets of Times Square became a ghost town. There were no more musical shows to watch, no more games to play or gatherings to come together. Casualties were so devastating that it prompted many industries to close their doors while working from a remote location became a new norm. Everyone tuned in to see deaths and hospitalizations increase with each passing day. A global crisis brought the world to its knees. With all the challenges that COVID19 brought every facet of our daily living it opened opportunities that we would not have considered otherwise. Churches managed to pull through during this difficult time, became creative in delivering uninterrupted scriptural study, and executed a spirit-filled remote Sunday service with continuity. The body of Christ thrived even in the face of a serious health threat.

Are we now living in the end times? Is the worst yet to come or are we nearing the end of the tunnel? These were a few of countless questions no one had imagined a few years back but is now a reality. But the Bible dared to predict the future. In Matthew 24:8, Jesus described what we experienced now as the beginning of birth pains, there is more to come and will surely come to pass according to His plans and purposes.

In my work as an educator, I have seen the adverse effects of learning remotely for a long period of time to impressionable minds. They have been quarantined and somehow still reluctant to socialize with their peers. Many studies have postulated that the negative effects of the series of extended lockdowns could have a long-lasting impact of students' mental health. We continuously provide trainings and workshops on how teachers can identify some red flags in students' behavior that may lead for them to become aggressive or in contrast, isolate themselves and practice self-harm. Clinical psychologists suggest a number of ways to combat childhood trauma some of which include continuous purposeful communication with your

children allowing them to air out their concerns without fear of being judged. Whether they are frustrated or elated young adolescents need to know it is ok to feel, say their thoughts. It is only by drawing out their true feeling can we provide them with the tools to unpack and understand how to respond appropriately to them. Another way is establishing routines where they can depend on expectations such as a set mealtime, reading and homework time, games and recreation, shower schedule and sleeping and waking up. Structures provide guidance that they need to balance their time between recreation and engaging in academic activities. In addition, interacting with loved ones and a community is essential in developing trust in social settings. Being physically separated for so long this might be the best time to reconnect with family and friends that we have not been able to see in a while. Plan to attend church or family gatherings is a good idea to encourage each other as well as our children. Lastly, set aside some prayer and meditation time. Prioritizing your own time to reflect and process what transpired in a day is helpful and redirects the focus from ourselves to surrendering control to our Creator.

Our realities merged with divine providence regardless of individual perceptions or collective experiences. God's words will eternally be the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. While issues on mental wellness are exponentially increasing daily but the Lord Jesus Christ had long comforted us. He has overcome the world! And those who are united with Him in the Spirit are one with Him in victory. It may be hard to believe but it's the ultimate truth. Everything is in God's hand. It was Him who designed the course of individual lives because He is the Supreme being. The one true, living God. We are therefore called to be joyful and be prayerfully vigilant at all times because He who is in us is greater than anyone from eternity to eternity. And in all circumstances, be thankful because this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Let us therefore activate our faith mode so that we can discern what God's will really is in our lives.



From the Kitchen of Ladies from WIN Seattle

Truffle Cream Pasta ~ By Lei O'Loughlin

Ingredients

4 pcs large portobello mushrooms
1 tbsp white truffle oil
1 tbsp butter 4 cups heavy cream
1 box thin spaghetti
2-3 tbsp white truffle oil
1-2 tbsp butter
1 or more cups of grated parmesan cheese
Salt to taste
Freshly ground pepper to taste

Procedure

1. Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil. Season with salt and olive oil. Put in the pasta and cook for 8-10 mins. Wash and drain. Set aside.
2. Clean the mushrooms, remove the stem and scrape the gills off. Slice it into julienne with your desired thickness and length.
3. In medium heat, saute mushroom in truffle oil and butter, add salt to taste until a bit soggy.
4. Add the heavy cream and let it boil. Add parmesan cheese. Mix well.
5. Pour cooked spaghetti in low the heat. For 2-3 mins. Mix well. Make sure the noodles are coated with cream.

Transfer to a serving dish immediately and sprinkle with finely chopped fresh parsley and parmesan cheese.

Ready to serve.... enjoy!

Notes: (substitution) Instead of 4 heavy creams you can use 4 cans of Campbell's mushroom soup or 2 cups mushroom soup and 2 cups heavy cream.
Instead of white truffle oil you can use black truffle oil.
Instead of plain salt, use truffle salt.

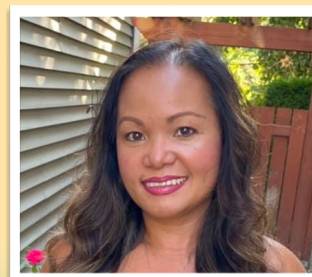




My Grandma's Puto~

By Ida Lockhart

WIN Seattle Ladies Ministry Head



Ingredients

- 4 cups uncooked rice
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 2 tbsp baking powder
- 1 cup sugar

Procedure

1. Soak uncooked rice for 24 hours.
2. After soaking, rinse 3 times.
3. Add water up to same level with rice.
4. Add cooked rice. Blend 1 cup at a time.
5. Add baking powder and sugar.
6. Spray pan and pour up to ½ full of mixture in pan.
7. Steam for 15 minutes.



When we fill our minds with Scripture and live according to its principles, Satan's schemes lose their power over us.
~ Charles Stanley
