



The Lord is risen and ascended to heaven. Alleluia!

For many people, they cannot wait for the Circuit Breaker to be over for them to do what they want to do. Is this period a waste of your time? For Christians, this is actually a God-given time for you:

- *to deepen your relationship with God, to grow deeper in your prayer life.*
- *to re-unite with the family of believers – it is precisely because of social distancing that we need to strengthen the unity in the community of brothers and sisters in-Christ.*
- *To be spiritually alert & prayerful – aware of our own weaknesses which the devil is exploiting, in such a time when we are prone to laze around, fall into temptations when we are alone and waste our time because we think we have plenty of it. It is precisely in such a situation when God shows us the areas where we need self-discipline and spiritual growth. God will reveal those areas when we come into His presence in prayer. Today's Scripture readings¹ give us insight of this spiritual practice of Jesus and His disciples.*

1) PRAYER: GOD'S WILL FIRST (JOHN 17:1-11)

¹ Acts 1:6-14; Ps 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Pet 4:12-14, 5:6-11; Jn 17:1-11

We hear in John's gospel Jesus praying before he was arrested, tortured and crucified. In such a critical moment, what was Jesus doing? He was praying. Indeed, it was because it was such a critical moment that Jesus was praying. What do you do in a crisis?

a) To know God's will:

Prayer is the first priority because we need to know that it is God's will before we take the next step. What is troubling you today? How are you going to face it? Coming to God in prayer can help us discern God's will.

Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (Jn 17:1-3)

In His prayer, Jesus was crystal clear that He was doing the Father's will, to carry out the mission to give eternal life to all people. So, Jesus knew that the hour or time had come for His glorification when he would be lifted up and exalted on the cross. Then he would triumph over sin, death & the devil upon his resurrection and ascension.

When our prayers are being led by the Spirit, we will receive a confirmation in our hearts. We will sense a strong conviction to stop or a strong inspiration to take a step of faith. Will you seek God's will? Will you obey the prompting of the Spirit?

b) To do God's will:

To know God's will is one thing. To do God's will is another. And we can see Jesus' desire to do God's will in His prayer.

"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do." (John 17:4)

He prayed for God's glory on earth by finishing the work the Father had given him.

Do you desire God's glory?

Jesus prayed that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven that the Father might be glorified. And since He knew God's will and desired to do God's will, the Father would surely answer in His favour. Jesus did God's will by finishing His work on earth to give eternal life to all people and bring glory to the Father.

How was Jesus able to pray such a God-centred prayer?

If you know that you will soon be arrested, tortured and crucified, how would you be feeling? Jesus did not raise any objection. He was in perfect submission to His Father's will. He possessed such fortitude in His heart by keeping a perfect relationship with His Father.

Listen to Jesus' prayer and we can sense this oneness in the relationship with His Father. What stand out are these phrases in which Jesus attributed to the Father everything that he had.

"those whom you gave me... They were yours; you gave them to me...everything you have given me comes from you. I gave them the word you gave me...I came from you...you sent me...I pray for them...those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine...protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me." (John 17:6-10a, 11b).

Jesus credited His success in His mission to the Father. This gives glory to the Father in their oneness in Jesus' mission.

If we want to be like Christ, to know God's will, and to have the desire to do God's will, then we have to have an intimate relationship with our Father because in Him we fulfill our calling and purpose in life.

This period of deprivation of leisure and social interaction is a God-given time to renew our relationship with our heavenly Father. To deepen our prayer life with the Lord. To enjoy the love of our Father. And you can begin today. God loves to welcome you into his presence.

To deepen your relationship with God you can do the following:

- Set up a Bible reading/listening plan. Have you tried setting a target of reading through the Bible?
- Scripture memory challenge. Do it with a friend.
- Meditating, praying the Scriptures.
- Journaling your prayer. You'll be amazed in seeing how God answers you.
- Sing/worship.

These are basic spiritual practices of discipleship. This year we want to strengthen our discipleship.

Let us look at the disciples after Jesus has ascended into heaven in Acts 1.

2) PRAYER: UNITY FIRST

What was the first thing the disciples did after Jesus' ascension?

- Did they prepare for the persecution that they would face? That was a real danger.
- Did they plan how to improve their financial situation? Wasn't money important?
- Did they discuss how to go about proclaiming the gospel? That was their mission, right?

- Did they debate about the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the charismatic gifts? Like what happened in the Corinthian Church that caused division and quarrel?

All these had the potential to cause disunity in the small early church and destroy it quickly. So, what did they do?

a) They all joined together constantly in prayer. (Acts 1:14)

They prayed. But it is how they prayed that matters.

b) All of them joined together – in unity (cf. Jn 17:11).

The wonderful truth about our unity is that Christ has united us in Him. In John 17:11 Jesus prayed for our unity. *“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.”* Today Jesus continues His priestly ministry of praying for our unity. And we can be inspired that God the Father protects our unity in the power of Jesus’ name.

c) Who do you pray with?

Are you praying together with brothers and sisters perhaps once a week? Or once in 2 weeks? Once a month? If not, why?

What is preventing you from praying with brothers and sisters? And do not say it is the Circuit Breaker. Because that is not going to stop you if you really want to contact someone to pray. Even if we cannot come together in one place, we can join in praying together. When there is a will there is a way to overcome problems. And I do not mean just pray with your family at home, but also pray with and for the family of believers in JCC. How can you be praying together for one another?

I want to encourage everyone to get yourselves into prayer groups of 3s or 4s. I thank God for the prayer group that was

started by Abundance CG that included Dorothy & me. We are encouraged by the prayers. I encourage Cell Groups & ministry groups to form prayer groups to pray for one another and the Church. I am also in a small prayer group of pastors. The greatest joy is to experience the grace of God in answering so many prayers. Do not deprive yourselves of this joy!

Praying with brothers and sisters is a mark of discipleship.

We not only need to pray with one another; we also need to pray for one another. Because the church is under threat from the devil and the world.

3) PRAYER: BE ALERT AND SOBER FIRST (1 PETER 4:7; 5:8)

The Apostle Peter said, *“Be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”* (1 Peter 4:7; 5:8-9)

Be spiritually alert & prayerful.

Be alert to look out for what?

- ❖ The devil will deceive us into not doing God’s will.
- ❖ The devil will distract us so that we miss God’s divine opportunity to serve Him and bring Him glory.
- ❖ The devil will devour us by destroying our prayer life, making us think that we know enough, are capable enough and good enough.
- ❖ The devil will depress us by keeping us down with all our anxiety on our own shoulders.
- ❖ The devil will destroy our unity by buttering up our pride so that we do not submit to one another under the mighty hand of God.

Humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand and cast all our anxiety on him.

Doing so, we can turn our weaknesses into strength by God's grace and power.

Be aware of our own weaknesses which the devil is exploiting.

Heed Jesus' word to *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."* (Mark 14:38)

Ask the Lord to show you the areas of your life that are under spiritual attack.

Ask the Lord to reveal where you are suffering emotionally – hurt, feeling guilty, or dealing with addiction.

Prayerfully open your life to the light of God. Bring your pain, your broken pieces in your life to the Lord, and let the His grace make you whole.

Then resist the devil, standing firm in the faith.

Trusting the Lord Jesus' mighty name that protects you. **And God by His grace *"will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."*** (1 Pet 5:10)

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