



April 1, 2020

Dear Ministry Partner,

Joyful greetings in the Lord!

And against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, it's remarkable to write such words. But this is our reality as God's people. Like Paul in prison, we can rejoice in the Lord even in difficult circumstances.

As I write, I'm in Spain. The people here are taking every precaution as they try to stop the expansion of the virus. They're quite scared.

I've never seen Spain so deserted: no people in the streets; restaurants shuttered; and coffee bars, which are the primary hangout for Spaniards, are closed. Last night the army was deployed to enforce a curfew. If you have no good reason to be out in the street, day or night, you pay a fine—anywhere from 500 euros (about \$540) up to 600,000 euros (that's \$647,646)! So people are basically under house arrest.

What would the Lord have us do in these days?

I came over to Spain because I was scheduled to. I'm glad I did! Being here puts me face-to-face with reality and helps me think clearly about what we need to do to keep from being paralyzed.

Our first step was to assemble a videoconference with students, staff, and professors. We've decided to take our classes online until things get back to normal. **But it turns out that this isn't a retreat—it's an expansion!** Let me tell you what I mean and how it happened. . . .

The students were so thrilled to break out of the boredom of house arrest, so grateful for the online opportunity, that they wanted to start work immediately! So as I write, we're just hours from our first online class.

But it's not just the local students. Because the class is online, our students in the Canary Islands can join us for the first time in our history! Praise God! Everyone is excited!

Yet even this isn't the whole story. With the new online dynamic, students and teachers posed this idea:

- Since the entire Spanish population is captive, can we invite the members of our churches to join the courses, at least during the confinement period? The answer was, yes, of course!
- Then another voice of enthusiasm called out: "What if we were to broadcast our courses online and post the video so people in other time zones can tune in whenever it's convenient for them, and they can join us in studies at the seminary?"

Waves and waves of enthusiasm! That's what we're experiencing. God keeps giving us new ideas that can multiply the impact of our training throughout Spain and other nations around the world!

This is what God does with His people when difficult times come our way. It reminds me of Paul in prison writing to his Philippian friends. In the midst of this pandemic, it's easier than ever to understand Paul when he says:

Now I want you to know, brethren, that **my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel**, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

—*Philippians 1:12-14 NASB*

Normally we might read this and perceive Paul as simply trying to be optimistic. But when we experience the reality of the mind of Christ in adverse circumstances—when we're confined, something like he was—we see that it actually works in real life!

Paul didn't have the internet, but he was in communication with the outside world by writing letters. Philippians is one of the most victorious epistles of His entire ministry! As we look at what the apostle was doing in order to achieve victory in his confinement, we can see how much you and I are actually living parallel to his situation!

Down through the centuries, the epistle to the Philippians has made a powerful impact as “the epistle of joy.” Remarkably, Paul was in prison as he wrote his most joyful letter! *Even the first time Paul was with the Philippians, he was thrown into jail!* He was so joyful that he literally sang! He and Silas were beaten with rods and imprisoned—and proceeded to perform a midnight concert!

Paul's joy in prison was not just the “power of positive thinking.” It was the power of the mind of Christ! **This is the greatness of the situation you and I are in today.** The Lord is using this troubling pandemic as yet another opportunity for the advancement of the Gospel.

Look closer. Joy is the *sentiment* of the epistle, but the *theme* is **participation in the proclamation of the Gospel**. Dr. Constable says it best:

“The theme of the epistle is participation in the gospel. Everything in this letter deals with that subject in some way . . . the fellowship that Paul and the Philippians shared in the work of disseminating the gospel. This is the work in which all Christians should participate as well. Paul, the Philippians, and we are all partners in the work of the gospel. The key to working together effectively as partners in the gospel is having the mind of Christ.”

With the mind of Christ for participation in the spreading of the Gospel, Paul's letter reads like a missionary's letter!

1. First, he thanks the Philippians for the gift they sent, as it is essential in their participation.
2. Second, he addresses the walk of the believers in the mind of Christ. He tells them the ways in which the walk is worthy of Christ: walking (a) in unity, (b) in steadfast commitment, and (c) in carrying out our responsibilities.

3. Third, he acknowledges their partnership with previous gifts—and finishes with greetings and blessings to the partners.

Not much has changed in God's way of using believers in the ministry of the Gospel! For me, the joy of it is to realize that you and I are doing things in virtually the same way as the first believers and the great apostle Paul—all of us used by the same Holy Spirit!

We are each carrying out our duties just as the Lord led the legendary churches to do in those first days. I am far from being the gifted apostle that Paul was. But I am grateful that God is using us together to focus on the same task . . . and that we are seeing great and wonderful fruit like they saw in their day!

But it's not just about our responsibilities. It's also about our *rewards*. Paul talks about the reward to be received by those who participate in the spreading of the Gospel.

- There is a reward in the here and now.

God will give us victory over circumstances so that we can see things as He sees them—because we have the mind of Christ. (A professor long ago called this our ability to “turn prisons into prisms of beauty.”)

When we operate in the mind of Christ, God always leads us to triumph. We get frustrated if we're only caught in tough circumstances without the mind of Christ. But victory comes when we know that there is someone greater than the circumstances—someone who “makes all things work together for good for those who love Him.”

- There will also be *eternal* rewards.

The apostle, as he wrote, had the judgment seat of Christ in view. Several times throughout the epistle, it's clear he was fully aware that our works will be tested by fire. He is aware of this reality; he mentions it at least once in each chapter.

This has been a common theme not only of Paul, but of many of the saints of the Old Testament as well. Moses wanted God to establish the work of his hands that he might present a heart of wisdom. David prays along the same lines in Psalm 39.

So today, following the example of Paul, I want to thank you for the help you've given to the work. Going into this month, we knew it would be very tight. But I'm happy to report that thanks to your kind partnership, we made it through the month.

Of course, we arrived at the end of the month to confront the challenge of the health crisis.

What's next? It's unclear. We don't know how the economy will be affected. I do thank God for the efforts being made to stimulate the economy and to put money in people's hands to bridge the gap over the period of the quarantine.

As we've seen many times over the years, a sneeze in the U.S. economy is the flu in other countries where we work around the world. I thank God for the strength of the U.S. economy, and for its potential to improve in unprecedented ways as well.

I believe the spread of the Gospel is poised to do the same—and in fact, it is happening right now as people see that their trust in themselves is not a sure defense, and they turn to God!

Here's my prayer: I'm asking the Lord to help us keep our ministries around the world as strong as ever. The growth of our work, in recent months especially, seems to have a life of its own. Today it's bigger than we ever anticipated. These are the best kinds of problems! Problems of *growth*!

I'm praying a lot these days . . . and I'm trusting the Lord in our pursuit of the four new fields that will help us to pursue the Great Commission on every inhabited continent in the world. I'm inspired by Jonathan's words to his armor bearer when he wanted to attack the Philistine garrison by himself: "The Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 13:23).

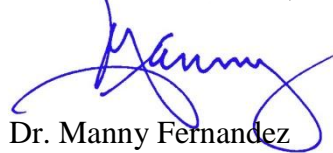
So today, all I can do is thank you for your fruitful partnership, for your rich participation in the spread of the Gospel, and ask you to stand strong with us. **Please give as generously as you can again today.**

It is most affirming to see that we're doing things like the Holy Spirit has been doing throughout the ages of the church! I believe *God will yet again win*. I pray that you and I together will remain eager to be involved and ready to trust Him, so that we'll be on the side of those who trusted, and obeyed, and *won*!

May the Lord bless you indeed. May He enlarge your borders. May He keep you from evil in all its ways so that it may not pain you. May He grant our request!

There is joy in serving Jesus!

Yours for the Harvest,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. I don't know what tomorrow holds—but "I know who holds tomorrow!" As we continue to trust God and give as He enables us to give, and work as He empowers us to work, with the mind of Christ . . . we'll see victory! Thank you in advance for giving whatever you can today. God bless you, my friend! I'm glad we're in this together!