

BLESSINGS FROM THE PANDEMIC-MY STORY

In the wake of the covid-19 pandemic, I was in China, 4 months into my 2-year study with my family back in Ghana; my husband, two sons, and my mum. I was torn between travelling home to be with my family or staying put. As I prayed and spoke with my family back home, I felt I'll stay back in China with the support and understanding of my family. Through daily calls, my family knew we were safe and they had nothing to worry about because I gave them up to date information of our safety.

Church service stopped with the restrictions that came with the epidemic and for a while, I had to rely on just reading the scriptures and messages from leaders. This actually helped me in a way because I developed the habit of studying church books that I would normally not read except for preparing a talk or lesson. I signed up for volunteer service at school and in one of the hospitals in our province. It was real scary hearing and reading the news circulating about the virus in other places apart from China. I just kept on praying that all will be well and things will get back to normal. In March, the virus was reported in Ghana and that's when I really, like really got worried. I feared for my family and prayed that they would be safe.

We started holding online church service and I am grateful for technology. By this time, somehow, it had become a bit difficult for me to continue my routine of gospel study. It got to a point I would just read the scriptures like I was reading a story book. My prayers were routine and I struggled to stay in touch with members. Some families here made sure I was okay, they constantly sent messages to check on me but I still felt left out.

I threw myself more into my schoolwork and looking out for my classmates. Luckily, we could move within the hostel so I would move from door to door to check on my mates at least once every month. This and my volunteer services kind of got me going. The opportunity to serve others during this period was a blessing. I saw it as my own way of ministering. My faith was actually tried a little as I was moving in and out of active scripture study and prayer.

Volunteering gave me a sense of purpose and I knew I was helping in my own small way. It also helped me reach out to others. It gave me a reason to smile and laugh as I would present my broad smile before checking temperatures. I knew just as those smiles brightened my days, it did same for the recipients. Our volunteer sessions with international patients, trying to encourage them, give them hope to stay strong also helped me stay strong and strengthened my determination to stay safe.

What I have learned from the pandemic?

Hard work, courage, unity and selflessness. I also learned to actually study the scriptures without the pressure of having to study it because it will be discussed at church, I studied it for me, not because I was expected to do so. Checking on my mates regularly was not also an assigned duty but I did it happily and freely. I realised ministering could actually be so easy and enjoyable if we didn't see it as an assignment we had to complete and report on.

How did I handle the stress of the period?

I just created recipes and baked for my friends, some recipes I searched online, others, I just put together ingredients I had and create things. I found fun ideas to do things and kept changing my room decor. I also had friends; not in China, though. But anytime I was spiritually down, I would just call and the right answers were always ready prepared for me. I remember once I made some bad choices and couldn't forgive myself, I was so distraught and I couldn't stop myself from crying and feeling so low. I called and the response was "the Lord wants you to talk to Him, do it" At that time I didn't feel worthy to talk to the Lord but I did. I'm am so grateful to the Lord for the earthly angels He sends to our aid in our times of need.

How did I keep social bonds?

This was the fun part; knocking on all my colleagues' doors at least once a month to check on them, chit chat and back to my room. For those home, occasional messages to them and daily video calls to family at home kept us together during this time. Hearing the "I love you" from my kids, niece and nephew each time we talked was heavenly. I always looked forward to those video calls.

How do I feel about all these?

Blessed. I feel grateful for the joy of service, the joy of sacrifice. I have learned to appreciate little things; I have learned to appreciate the little pleasures of life. I would give anything for time spent with my family. This is my first time of staying away from my family for more than a year and not being able to travel home to visit them has made me appreciate better those times we were together before I got to China.

Well, I actually also got more serious with scripture study, I actually actively prepared for the 2020 general conference following the prompting of the prophet and for the first time, really participated in general conference fully. Then when we were supposed to express gratitude as encouraged by Pres Russel M. Nelson, I knew there were so many things I was grateful for; the peace in the midst of everything that was going on around me. I have learned to embrace hope and not despair and see the positive side to all things. It wasn't all fun, sometimes it was difficult to stay positive, difficult to laugh, difficult to hold on to hope but remembering how others are still fighting, remembering my family, reading messages of hope from Pres. Nelson made it easier for me to hold on and encourage others.

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints