

Dear Friends and Family,

What a blessing to be able to once again write to you. I stop and pray repeatedly for the Lord to let this message be a blessing to you all, as you certainly have been a blessing to us here. Our being late in writing does not reflect the true depth of gratitude we feel towards you. It is more a reflection of my own problems and weakness.

I believe in my last note I wrote of plans to be a part of the 68th annual lectureship at Nigerian Christian Bible College. I was honored to be asked to speak about the Truths of Christ's Triumph over Death. Honestly, I feel I was the one who benefited the most from my study and preparation. It was good to be reminded of the many eye witness accounts of our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection which is the cornerstone of our faith and hope. I pray we contributed in some small way to the blessings this great gathering brings.

It was an unexpected surprise to meet longtime servants of NCBC Chad Wagner and Henry Huffard and a small group they led to here. Bro Henry, who spent childhood years at NCBC, and much of his adult life devoted to the school, was rightly honored for his years of service. It was a blessing to meet brethren from Tanzania who laughed along side us as they told of how their friends and family questioned their choice of coming here. Even among other African countries, Nigeria has a reputation of being a difficult place to be right now.

Certainly the last mile of the journey would have put visitors off. The paved road we once delighted in has broken completely down, and we had to revert to driving on bush trails that snaked through narrow winding paths that often disappeared in to large pools of water. You only prayed as you entered such pools that your engine would not drown out or you get stuck in the mud. It was easy to imagine, especially at night, the trials the early missionaries faced as they came to serve here. Thank God for their courage and determination, and for the thousands even at this time who endured such hardships to come and fellowship with others.

One unexpected thing happened on our journey. Perhaps because of the number of police that have been killed at checkpoints recently, none but one stopped us to ask for money. This is usually an unpleasant and delaying part of our travels. But this did not happen this trip and for that we are thankful. With security at a all time low, it is good to see them on the road but also nice not to be harassed for "something for the boys".

Before schools reopened in September, our family was able to enjoy a trip to an amusement park. A kind brother sent a gift with the instructions to do something special for the kids. We had to divide into two groups because of our numbers so for Nkiru and I it was a two day affair. It is a simple park, geared more towards small children and families, but it was a special treat for all. Maybe the one and only time we will go, but at least we were able to build special memories, topped off with hotdogs and ice cream. Thanks to all who made this possible.

School has reopened with all its added expenses and attendant struggles. But I am glad that everyone has settled into the school routine without complaint. And we are especially glad that for the first time Jaffa has gone to school, along with her blind sister Jael and Sam's autistic son Daniel. Jaffa has been with us for 21 years now. Having severe cerebral palsy, she is dependent on us for everything. We were able to get her a new wheel chair, which makes it easier to be at school, and she is excited to be going

with others to school. The fees are much higher than our other kids, and it means a lot of extra miles to and from school, but to see them happy is worth everything. All three have such large barriers to overcome, and they will never be able to enjoy the many things you and I enjoy, but God has allowed them too to have a measure of love, safety and inclusiveness.

Another event of this period was when the congregation that meets at our compound hosted the state wide gathering of ministers of the gospel. The ministers regularly meet to discuss matters affecting them and the congregations they serve. It was an honor to serve them a great meal and to let our small body of believers feel a part of the larger body. Several members also went door to door to hand out tracts and invite folks to come and worship with us. It was encouraging to see most people were willing to politely listen and thank us for the invitation. Our attendance hovers around 170, so it is encouraging to see each small step forward.

Brother Fred asked me to talk a bit about challenges we face here, some of the day to day stuff. Well, it is challenging to handle children of any number, and the more the children, the greater the challenges. Keeping everyone fed a balanced diet in face of ever increasing costs is one challenge. Prices of most staples have tripled in the last two years. Just the sheer volume of work required to shop, prepare and clean up from two meals a day still amazes me. We are blessed to have workers who help us in this task. We depend on donated clothing but we do buy second hand shoes especially school shoes. We still are bothered by the black soot that covers everything inside and out, so the house is mopped two times a day. We cough up black gunk in the morning, but we are thankful that with a plain basic diet, a clean environment, and a measure of regularity, our children are healthy for the most part. The absolute biggest challenge is to help each person develop their own relationship with God, to hunger and thirst for His Word and to be obedient to Him. Without this all our physical efforts are in vain.

We have had our share of hospital visits, scrapes and bruises, etc, but nothing to match the size of the family. We have had our share of car issues over the years, demanding time and attention. But thankfully we have a bus, old and worn as it is, that still makes the four school runs a day. Our newer car still has its problems with the air conditioner, having replaced the compressor three times this year, but it is such a blessing to have a car that starts and runs dependably. We try to limit our movement because of security and the state of the roads, but even small in town trips take hours. It would be difficult to describe what it takes to drive here, but it is definitely not for the faint of heart. Whoever is most willing to risk his car has the right of way, were traffic rules are but suggestions until the police catch you. Banking is another challenge, where scarcity of physical cash can make you make endless trips to get money. Electricity has been a challenge since I came, and hardly seems to improve. The lights go off and on constantly, sometimes staying off for days. Recently the electrical workers changed our meters, making the little supply we have cost almost 3 times as much. So we depend on a diesel generator to have some light each day. The problem with that is sourcing the fuel when there is scarcity and paying for fuel that has gone up 400% this year alone. Dare I go on? Do I talk about the constant threat of violent crime, kidnappings, extra judicial killings, jungle justice for petty crimes. I have been shot at twice, robbed at gun point twice, publicly threatened with beheading, seen people burned to death without benefit of judge or jury, folks left on the side of the road for buzzards to eat, the mentally ill left to wander naked up and down the streets eating out of the garbage others throw away. I have seen villages burned over tribal conflicts, twins killed because of superstition, botched medical treatments time and time again. The list could go on and on, but I'm tired just thinking about it all. Br. Fred told me to tell you some of these things so direct any complaints to him.

Personally, I struggle with a 68 year old body that feels much older. I hurt in places I did not know I had places. I sometimes need help to stand up, and an arm to lean on when the room often starts spinning. My hair and my teeth are about gone. I have 11 teeth now and not one of them touches the other, so I gum what I can and leave what I can't. I won't even talk about my plumbing problems. They used to say that a year in the tropics takes a year off your live expectancy. So my 33 years in West Africa puts me somewhere in my 80s which is about what I feel most days. Sit me on the couch and I am likely to fall asleep and stay there till somethings starts paining me enough to wake me up. I wouldn't have known I felt this bad is Br. Fred hadn't got me started talking about it.

And for what? For a \$500 a month social security check to retire on? I have lost family and friends to stay in a place where I am often reminded I am not a son of the soil. I have labored long years for folks that do not understand what I have done for them, nor appreciate it if they did. Where a little phone call or scrap of attention is the afterthought given for years of sacrifice.

Well I tell you I did not do it for any of these reasons. I did not do it because I was afraid of going to hell if I didn't, though my conscience bothers me when I turn a blind eye to other's suffering. I do not do it for recognition, though I have had my fair share of that I suppose. I do not do it to get a reward either here or in the afterlife, though He has promised not even a cup of water given in His name would lose its reward.

I do it in part because others did it for me. God with His sacrifice and sustenance. Godly grandparents who sweated in the sawmills of NE Mississippi and the cotton fields of Arkansas to raise two fine kids who grew up to be my parents. Two parents who loved Jesus, and tried to show me how to live and how to die. A brother and sister who love me and show me that they do, along with their spouses and children. A long list of relatives and friends who still remember me, and help as they can and more than they should.

I do it for my cousin Carrie and her friend Laura, and the large number of folks just like them. They will most likely never get to come to Africa themselves. Yet their eye is not blind to need, around them and elsewhere. My cousin works for days each year to host a huge yard sale for the money she can use to help us here. A dollar here, a dollar there. Sometimes in large amounts, most time in small. The Lord continues to use good folks like yourself to keep my anxious soul fed enough to feel His mercy but not so much that we think it is us who got it done. I do it because He asked me to. Or at least I thought He did when He sent a little hungry child across my path. When He sent a weary widow to beg for a shelter to sleep in or a school fee for her kids. I do it because He allowed me to.

I'll tell you straight that I haven't done enough, nor ever could. I've messed up more than I've achieved. Maybe I've hurt more than I helped. But like my granddaddy Jarrell said in his last words to me, "... Tell them I tried". I tried. But for all that trying, when I stand before the judgement seat not too many years hence, I'll not have any claim or excuse good enough to give me a stay of execution. I'll need the Chief Advocate to deflect the Righteous Judges' stare of anger because of my sins, by covering me with His Precious Sacrificial Blood. If I ever showed someone a glimpse of that Wonderful Savior, or reflected His Light by sharing His love, then all this will have been worth it.

I love you and thank you, though the gap in my letter writing doesn't show it very well. Till the next time.

Cliff, Nkiru and Family