

September 2, 2023

Dear friends and family,

What a privilege it is to be able to once again share this time with you. We pray our note finds you well and that you continue to see the Lord working for and with and through you. It is well with us here in rainy Nigeria.

When last we wrote, at the beginning of summer, we were waiting to see what the Lord had in mind for us. We had been kept from boarding our flight to the US, which nullified our own plans and timetable. There was nothing we could do but pray and wait for God's Will to be done. As my wife simply said, she took her problem to the King of kings and He solved it. Global restrictions on covid vaccines were lifted and the way was cleared for us to go. Over and over again we see God at work to make things much more beautiful than our own limited views and imagination.

One of His first expressions of love for us on this trip was how we were able to reach Mississippi from Atlanta. Ini, our friend and brother here in Nigeria, was in America at the time to attend his daughter's graduation. When he planned his trip, he had no way of knowing that his niece was to die soon after his arrival. Having successfully battled sickle cell anemia all her life, her sudden passing was a shock, as she was to have started her college career in August. I am glad he was able to be there to help his sister and family through this crisis. I am also glad he volunteered to pick us from the airport. He drove from Memphis to Knoxville to drop off his nephew at his university, then down to Atlanta, picked us up and then drove to my sister's in Mississippi. All in one day. Almost 20 hours. What a gift.

One of the first orders of business was to go to the dentist. We pulled nine of my remaining teeth and then started the path of getting a set of dentures. I viewed that decision later with regret, but yet it was a blessing that delayed our return, causing us to see many more of God's "unexpected" blessings.

By the end of our first week, my brother and his wife came from Kansas City along with our son Kingdom. They had been kind to host Kingdom since the end of his first semester and even outfitted him with a pair of overalls and work boots. What a joy it was to see them all. We met them in Memphis, taking part in an elaborate scheme by my brother to surprise his wife with an anniversary celebration. This also gave us a chance to visit my cousin Susan, who lives in the suburbs of Memphis, and renew that family bond.

We did more of that family bonding when my brother and most of his family came to celebrate my sister Donna and her husband Brian's birthdays. What a treat. We have not had such a gathering since my brother Philip's children were small. It was remarkable the effort it takes to gather together now. Molly and Wynn drove up from Jackson, which is over four hours, only to drive back after the celebration. Will drove down from north of Saint Louis. Walker and his wife Audrey along with Madeline and

her husband Levi drove up from Starkville to Saltillo. Philip and his wife Myra along with last born Wyatt brought all the food for the “surprise” party. Magen even flew in from Maine. Will and Megan’s spouses were not able to come, but what a blessing it was to have family together.

This was just a prelude to being able to attend the reunion of my mother’s family which takes place every two years on Memorial Day weekend. I had not attended in many years and what a blessing it was to introduce my wife Nkiru and son Kingdom to a part of my family they never knew existed. I saw kin I had not seen in ages. One of my cousins I had not seen since 1977, at the first of the Sisco family reunions held at my mom’s house. My cousins Bill Sisco and his wife host the event, along with my cousin Kaylon and his wife. Ninety three of the clan gathered this year, a record that may never be broken. I met a younger generation that I have completely missed out on, including a niece and her family that were missionaries in China for 12 years.

I do regret that I have not been able to be more a part of the family fabric. I have missed the weddings, the births, the funerals, the milestones that record a family history. I miss not having been able to see the younger ones coming up. Yet God has given me another family. A physical family as well as a spiritual family. I have children and grandchildren who call me their earthly father who would not be here had I not made myself available for God to use. I include you in my much larger spiritual family, and I look forward to a greater reunion in God’s own time and place, where we will have time to work, worship and be together as family.

Reunions help you notice how quickly time is passing. How precious time and family are. This was made abundantly clear by this brief time we had together. Even more so when we got news that the daughter of my cousin Russel died unexpectedly only two days after we were together. As Granddaddy’s Sisco favorite song says, “Time is filled with swift transition. Naught of earth unmoved can stand. Build your hopes on things eternal. Hold to God’s unchanging Hand”.

We left along with Kingdom after the reunion headed west to Texas. We stopped in Lake Charles to have a lunch of alligator, boudin, jambalaya and other assorted. For those of you curious, alligator tastes just like chicken. We had a wonderful time with friends Don and Debbie Locke in Tomball, Texas. The congregation at Spring Creek were kind enough to allow me to share our story to their Wednesday night gathering, and responded with an unexpected financial gift to help support the work here. A big and public thank you to the Lockes and the congregation there.

Then it was on to San Antonio to our family at NorthWest. Br. Fred and his wife Peggy hosted us, and we were glad that a long spell of undiagnosed illness had left Sister Peggy. What a blessing they have been to us and so many others. We were glad to be able to speak three times on Sunday to the congregation there, who have been our largest supporting congregation for many years now. Though their numbers have declined over the years, their enthusiasm has not. It gave me a needed boost in spirit to see their smiles and excitement in what God is doing through our work together. May

the Lord continue to bless and keep them, and increase the fruits of their labor. We were able to attend a men's Saturday breakfast. What a treat that was. While in San Antonio, we carried Kingdom to see the Riverwalk and the Alamo, and show him that freedom is not free and often comes at great cost.

Next stop was Lubbock, a day's drive from San Antonio. We wanted to spend a little time with our son Jonathan, and see about Kingdom's further studies at Lubbock Christian University. First let me tell you about Jonathan, and then about the great thing God did for Kingdom.

Jonathan is my second oldest son. He worked so hard for his younger brothers and sisters from the very first child we took into our home. He never defied his mother and I. He left home when he was twenty one, going back to America. He attended nursing school in Mississippi, staying with my dad. When his mother died he stopped school, intending to go back to Nigeria with me to help with the younger ones. However, I left him back in Lubbock not feeling well. I thought it was just a bad stomach bug. But it was much worse I found out later, and he has battled ill health ever since. He continues to try to stay positive and do all possible to guard his health. I appreciate his gentleness and tenacity. Spending a few hours on a short visit every year or so seems too little for a father to give. Like my dad who was in such poor health in his last years, he encourages me to stay and serve here. But I feel like a failure each time I leave him in Lubbock. Please keep him in your prayers.

When in Lubbock, we visited Mark Griffin along with our son Kingdom. Mark and his family have been great servants in so many ways to so many, and us in particular. He was happy to meet Kingdom and has stepped up to mentor and support him in his studies at LCU. What a relief it is to a father, to know that someone else is willing to also be a father and a brother in my stead. May the Lord continue to bless the Griffin family. God also used the Paulger family to bless Kingdom. He met them at the Greenlawn congregation his first Sunday in Lubbock. Their whole family took him in as a son and after meeting them I felt so relieved leaving him in Lubbock. God continues to show mercy to Kingdom. We have told him that to much has been given, much is expected. We pray his stay in Lubbock will continue to bring God glory.

From Lubbock we drove through Dallas to visit with our daughter Jodie on our way back to Mississippi. As I mentioned in my last letter, because of a life threatening condition with her pregnancy, she and her one year old son have moved to Dallas to be with her mother in law. It was a joy to be with them, if only for a few brief hours. Our grandson Henry has more energy than I do, and took me for a long walk while Nkiru and Jodie enjoyed a rare treat at an African restaurant. Unfortunately, something I ate there made me very sick, so we did not get to visit as long as we would have liked.

By this time my gums had healed enough to have an impression made for my dentures. I was told to come back in two weeks for my dentures. This allowed us time to visit the congregations in the area that have been faithfully supporting us through the years. Saucer Creek, the congregation were I grew up and the congregation that has

supported us for 30 years, had a luncheon where so many Southern comfort foods were provided. What a time of refreshing it was to be with friends and co laborers. It was a fore taste of the fellowship we look forward to in heaven.

In all the places I spoke, I tried to leave this message; we thank you for allowing God to use you for His purposes, your sacrifices are bearing fruit as evidenced in generational and eternal changes in people's lives, and He is faithful to His Word to reward those who believe and obey. It is a message I hope all of us can take to heart. For all our friends and family that have sacrificed on our behalf, and on behalf of the many in need here, we ask for God to continue to bless and use you.

One supporting congregation we visited was at Christian Chapel south of Vernon, Alabama. They too hosted us to a Sunday lunch and an unexpected gift of support. Their kindness and warm smiles gave us a needed boost in spirits, especially the gift from a 91 year old sister who sat in front of us. So many who have given over the years are elderly retirees, who I know are finding it increasingly difficult with the inflation as it is. Yet out of love for the lost and widows and orphans, so many of you give even as you have your own needs. This sacrificial love can never be unnoticed and has its promised reward.

From Vernon we traveled north to Hamilton and stopped by Maywood Christian Camp, allowing Nkiru to see what a children's summer camp looks like. Maywood holds special memories for me, and has been a blessing to so many families over the years. My dad was a part of the early development of the camp, and I will always treasure the family time we had working there. Myself, my sister and brother all attended and my sister was baptized there. It was a treat to see Maywood grow since my last visit in 1977. May it continue to serve to bring young people closer to the Lord.

We continued traveling north to reach my cousin Carrie in Russellville to spend the night with her and her husband Tony. Carrie spends so much of her time helping others. She gathers items and has a giant garage sale on our behalf, and has a special friend who is an artist from China who donates a percentage of her sales to helping children here. She filled us with fresh vegetables from her garden, and love from her Heart. It was the anniversary of the death of her daughter, so we were able to follow her for a brief visit to the cemetery where daughter, mother and father and various aunts and uncles lie buried.

From Russellville we continued north to Huntsville, where my oldest son Jeb lives. We had an afternoon visit with him, and we treasure each moment. He has bought his first house. He has lost 70 plus pounds after being diagnosed with diabetes and has gotten his sugar levels to almost normal. He drives a new truck. So we were glad to see all these things. But my sadness is he has no spiritual connection to the church, for a variety of reasons. I don't give up hope, knowing the Lord can still gently bring him home. I hate that while trying to save other people's children I have lost my own. Please pray for God's mercy for me and my son.

Back to Tupelo to the dentist where we found that the dentures could not work. They

made large sores on my gums and they had to start over with a new mold. Again, this was not my intention to stay away so long. But it allowed us to visit more folks than we would have been able to. And that is a good thing.

And it was also I believe a part of God's plan and purpose.

That extra time allowed us to travel north to Illinois to visit Mark and Chika and their daughter Sharron. You may remember how God had used us to help get them married here in Nigeria in 2017. A lonely bachelor from a small town in Illinois and a widow in Nigeria met on the internet after my wife prayed with Chika for a good husband. It has not been an easy road, with immigration issues, cultural issues, etc but we were so happy to see their progress. May their marriage continue to show the glory of God's love. A special treat for us was to visit a county fair, see a tractor pull, and eat Nkiru's first banana split.

From there we traveled north of Saint Louis to enjoy an evening with my nephew Will and his wife Jenny. They are expecting their first child at Christmas. What a treat it was to share the hospitality of their beautiful country home, and to bask in the warmth of their love for each other. What a treasure to be young and in love. Will works at an engineering firm during the week, wrestles professionally on Saturday and preaches on Sunday. Will never did fit the mold.

From there we traveled to the boot heel of Missouri, where we were hosted by Br Ish Smith, Myra's father. Brother Ish's wife passed away within a week of my dad. She was a supporter of our work, and also encouraged the brethren in the little country congregation where her husband preaches to support us. This was a congregation I had never visited, but had supported us on the recommendation of Sister Smith. What a blessing this weekend turned out to be. The church there has dwindled to 10 members, reflecting a shrinking rural population. Philip and Myra came from Kansas City, Will and Jenny came from north of Saint Louis and we had a great weekend together. The fellowship at Sunday morning was special, and Br. Smith invited everyone over for lunch so the fellowship could continue. He announced to the church that he was sure his daughter had cooked enough for them all, and indeed she had. Fresh vegetables from the garden and all the love the table could hold. I enjoyed the fore taste of heaven on that day, and other meals we shared with brethren during our stay. Br. Ish is now a lonely widower busy on the farm he grew up on and has spent his life on. God bless him and so many others we met who serve God faithfully while struggling with the challenges of their twilight years.

From Missouri we traveled through Arkansas on our way back to my sister's place. We spent ten minutes with Br. Chad Wagner and his family in Paragould, Arkansas. Br. Chad is the president of the African Christian Schools Foundation, and does a great work here in Nigeria. We passed through sleepy Marmaduke, Arkansas, the hometown of the Gardner brothers. These three men, from a little town of a few hundred people, grew up to have global impact. E Claude was the long time president of Freed Hardeman University, where he influenced thousands of young men and women for the Lord, including Ini and his father and sisters who attended there. His brother John was

also the president of two of our brotherhood universities. Brother Albert was the preacher who invited my dad to go to Ghana, which eventually led me to where I am today. What a wonderful tapestry God has woven, all from threads included from a little village of 500 people in rural farmland of Arkansas. His work and ways are beyond our understanding, and we marvel at the little we can witness and comprehend.

We passed through Jonesboro, Arkansas where I was born. I have a few memories of my early childhood there, we left when I was three, and none of them matched the big city I saw. We were to meet Br. Lowell Hardcastle there. Dr. Hardcastle and his wife came twice to Nigerian Christian Hospital when we served there, and they remember our children from their early childhood. Unfortunately our GPS falsely routed us twice and so we missed our appointment with Dr. Lowell. From there we traveled to Searcy, Arkansas, home of Harding University. It is also where Harding Place is located, just off the campus. It was there we met our dear sister Mary Ann Turner and her daughter Christy. Sister Mary Ann and her husband Delbert and their extended family have been long time partners with us in our work here. Br Delbert had just passed away, at the age of 92, leaving a long legacy of faithful service in the Kingdom, having been led to the Lord by a faithful grandmother. It is always bittersweet to witness the death of a loved one. As a Christian, we have an assured hope that our loved one has passed to a better place and so we rejoice for them. Yet we desperately miss their presence, and we know the struggle the Turners are passing through. It was good to spend a few moments with them, and the promise of attending his funeral latter in the week.

A last stop that long Monday was at Parkin, Arkansas, where my father spent his teenage years. As a 12 year old son of a sharecropper, he had determined to drop out of school and be a farm hand, since he was earning a man's wage of \$2.50 cents a day driving a team of mules. A chance visit by a school coach saw him playing basketball, and he was persuaded to come back to school and play ball. This was the first of three ways God used basketball to shape our family. God used basket ball to keep my dad in school. Then my parents met at a basketball tournament, otherwise they had no reason to meet each other being from distant towns and social circles. The third way God used basketball was when He brought a coach into my dad's life that led him to Christ and the Lord's church. God uses strange things at time His wonders to perform.

Parkin is now a tragic, almost ghost town. What was once a thriving farming community is now a shell of itself with only four businesses left on what was once a thriving Main Street. I saw a lot of rural decay in my journey, but this was the most wide spread and closest to home. It was a reminder that there is a time and season for everything. No one and no thing is so high and mighty that it cannot be brought down.

We made it back into Brian and Donna's, got my last teeth fitting, and attended the funeral of Br. Delbert. It was the largest funeral I have attended in the US in my lifetime. It was a fitting tribute and show of love and support to a beautiful family. Even in death Br. Delbert's life spoke, as evidenced by the large attendance. May the Lord strengthen them all, especially Sister Turner.

With less than a week before our return flight, my sister suggested we take a last minute trip to see the replica of Noah's ark up in Kentucky. So we made a spur of the moment decision and took the only road trip the four of us have ever made together. I am glad we did, as the ark, based on man's best imagination and on the dimensions found in the Bible, was an inspiring sight. Only God could have commissioned such an undertaking, and enabled such a crew to build such a giant vessel. If you have the time and money, I think it a trip worthwhile. It encouraged me to think of how Noah patiently labored to serve God, and the important outcome of his obedience. It was an object lesson for me to continue to serve with patience and perseverance.

After an almost 1000 mile weekend trip, and only two days to go, we got a call from Jodie's husband. He told us Jodie had to be rushed to the hospital with bleeding at 3 am, the very thing that they had been worried about in Wyoming. He was starting an almost 20 hour drive down to Dallas. I talked to Jodie and she was scared and alone. So we once again delayed our return and headed back to Texas. We rented a car and arranged to return from Dallas instead of Atlanta. We were thankful that we were able to go and support them. Thankfully, the treatment given stabilized her and they scheduled a C section one month before her due date. It was so good to see her life spared and that of the baby, and that we had a little longer to strengthen that family bond.

Since we were, by Texas standards, close by, Dr Massey asked that we come one last time to visit them. We appreciate them so much that we could not say no. So we made the 250 mile trip down on Saturday, had a good overnight visit, spoke to friends in the Sunday school class which has most supported us one more time, and drove back on Sunday afternoon. On the way back we stopped in Austin to visit with Bob and Jan Towel. They have done so much to evangelize over the internet, even in their golden years. They have been house bound for some time now due to their age and health, but still find ways to share God's love. It was a great encouragement to see them share good even in the midst of great adversity.

And so went our summer. I will save what we found at home for our next letter. I cannot thank God and you all enough for caring for us during this long journey. We were blessed beyond measure. A special thanks to my earthly family. My brother made three long trips to be able to have just a little time with his big brother. And a special, special thanks to my sister Donna and her patient husband Brian for hosting us, sharing their car so we could make journeys, going out of their way to make us feel welcome. God will repay you all, as I am unable. Your love is too much.

Till we meet again,  
Remain blessed,  
Cliff, Nkiru and family

P.S. Jodie called this morning to let us know that her last MRI showed the placenta reattached in a safer place and that she is no longer considered a high risk pregnancy.

No C section considered at this time. Normal due date and delivery expected. No medical explanation given. Just a loud thank you to that KÍNG of Kings my wife keeps praying to.