Cliff, Nkiru and Family

Ministry Newsletter • May 2026

Dear Friends and Family,

We greet all of you in the name of Jesus, trusting that all is well with you, regardless of your circumstances. It is commonly said here that “all is well”, as a greeting. Or it is made as a comment on events, usually troubling ones, as if a mere pronouncement would make all well. I can appreciate that statement of faith. It takes a lot to remain positive in the face of almost overwhelming adversity. I usually am the “rain on the parade” by denying that all is well, looking at the realities at hand. But I finish always with a statement of my own, “It is not well, but it soon will be”. To all of you, whether or not you see your circumstances as “well”, we wish you well and affirm that soon all will be well. That’s a lot of “wells”.

Much has happened since last we visited. Many of us enjoyed April showers, though they also brought storms and destruction. We pray May’s flowers will brighten all our lives, even those who are struggling with loss. I hope you had an enjoyable Easter celebration, as many folks in the world rightfully remembered the sacrificial death and miraculous resurrection of Jesus. I’m glad we can, and should, do that often and not just one weekend of the year. It is easy to get caught up in the traditions of the world, especially in religious matters.

One tradition that comes with Easter for many of us is the traditional egg hunt. Almost unconsciously, my late wife and I brought this from our childhood into our family life. The fun of coloring the eggs together, the excitement of the hunt, the satisfaction of eating the shared bounty — all were part and parcel of Easter. I tried to stop all of that this year, citing the high cost of eggs, the disappointment of those who didn’t find as many as others, etc. “But Dad”, the children cried, “it’s tradition”. I relented, so at least for one more year, tradition has prevailed. To me, the star memory of this year’s hunt was when one little boy, who obviously had not eaten many boiled eggs, ate his shell and all.

It is because of the certainty of faith that we have in the historical reliability of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ almost 2000 years ago, and the subsequent hope we can have in our own resurrection, that we can face our own mortality and that of those we love. We mourn, but not as those who have no hope. It is with that hope of a resurrection and reunion that we attended the funeral of our friend Ini Mkpong. Ini and I had a unique bond, as I am sure many others claimed as well. He and I were linked in some unique ways, having both lived in the South, grown up in the Church, and importantly shared that heritage that shaped us. We were two rednecks in Africa. I preached at his wedding, watched his family grow to eight children, and intimately shared our hopes and fears over late night visits. We supported each other right to the very end. I miss his wisdom and advice, his laughter, and the short sermons he blessed us with. Please pray for his lovely family as they now face the impossible task of life without his physical presence.

His funeral was much as he lived — a great and glorious affair carried out over two days. There was a chance for many to publicly give tribute to his life, something I am sure gave a measure of comfort to his family, seeing and hearing of the impact he had on so many. That was followed by a football match in his honor, played with all the intensity that Nigerians attach to the sport he loved so much. The match was not called, even for an intense tropical rain, the storm and the players reflecting how he faced life. In the evening there was repeated, on a grand scale, something Ini enjoyed doing. After a long day of work, he liked to retire with friends to cap off the day with something to chew and drink. In the background would be blaring music of all sorts, something he enjoyed and had an encyclopedic recall of. The family shared skewers of grilled meat and drinks, while we listened to loud music and swapped Ini stories. That was lovely.

The next and dreaded day was carried out with discipline and devotion. It is rare here that any event is started at the scheduled time, but the family made sure they started at sharp 10 am. He was a car fanatic, having a large collection of vintage cars, and these were used to convoy the body to the NCI campus where hundreds were gathered. Each segment was disciplined and timed. Even the preacher was reminded he should remain within 10 minutes, in keeping with Ini's love for short, precise sermons. Then some of the family and guests drove out to the village compound where the body was buried, just before the rains visited again. May his soul rest in perfect peace. Timed to perfection. Good bye, brother — till next time.

The one discordant note was that Bro Paul Samson's wife had her phone stolen while in public transport. Bro Paul, who was a graduate of the school of preaching at NCI, and his wife followed us to Uyo, giving them a chance to reconnect with family and friends. While going, we stopped at Ikot Ekpene, where Paul's parents and brother live. Bro Paul's dad is a police officer, retiring hopefully in August of this year. Early in his career, he was sent out to man a roadblock. It is common here to have roadblocks everywhere, sometimes within sight of each other. The stated purpose is to deter crime, but everyone knows the real purpose is to extort money, which is shared up the chain of command. When returning to the station, money was demanded of him. He replied he was sent to serve the public, not to extort money from them. That principled stand, unheard of in the police, denied him earned promotions for over 12 years. He retires still with clean hands, but at a lower rank and pension than what he is rightfully entitled to. Rare courage in the face of long-term opposition. It was a pleasure to meet them and to receive gifts, including a nice native suit Paul's brother sewed for me. Much respect to Bro Paul Samson and his entire family.

Remember the little boy who ate his Easter egg, shell and all? His sad story mirrors much of our daily life and ministry. His name is Peace. He started attending Nkiru's under-five Bible class, always with a smile and a big hug — undernourished and with one droopy eye. Wish I could tell you the whole story, but there is neither space nor time at the moment. The highlights are that we stepped fully into his family's life, compelled by the love of Christ and a hungry little boy with a droopy eye. Wish I could take you to their one-room tin shack, which barely has enough room for the five children and a mom and dad to lay down on the bare floor. No running water, no electricity, no bathroom. One door. One moveable flap of tin you could prop open and call a window. Wish you could have seen his little brother, born breech birth without any

hospitalization, where a midwife dragged the baby out with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck, breaking both legs and an arm in the process.

And still there were the smiles and hugs, until the time they became less frequent. Noticeably so. And one Sunday morning Peace told my wife that his dad had threatened to kill the family. Which led to Peace and his siblings staying with us for a while, mixing and mingling with the crowd of people that always populate our busy home. Eventually there was no reconciliation to be had at this time. The physical and mental scars, the failure to let go of the past and forge a better future, seemed insurmountable.

So Joshua and Paul took the mother and children back to her mother's village in a neighboring state. You can imagine the shock of the aged grandmother when an unknown car pulls up to her house, and her daughter — whom she has not seen or heard from in 12 years — gets out of the car, not alone but with five grandchildren she never knew she had. There were tears of joy and shouts of "Hallelujah!" The story, which we have seen and been involved in so many times, was that the grandmother had been thrown out upon the death of her husband. She was the second wife, and the first wife drove her and her children away. She, with her own children, went back to her own mother. In desperate need, she allowed someone to take her young daughter to the city of Port Harcourt to be a house maid, with the promise of good care and education. Forced into modern slavery, she kept house, cared for children, and worked long hours on scraps left from the family table. The real aim of the offer came later, when she helped clean the beer parlor the madam owned, and as she matured was expected to serve more than beer. Until the day this became no longer bearable, and she started living on the streets. And there she met the man with whom she would have five children and numerous, all-out physical battles.

In years to come, and even now, I pause and wonder — what about Peace? Will he have another chance to go to Sunday school and learn about Jesus? He joins a large tribe of children who in one way or another have been a part of us. In quiet moments, I hear their voices and wonder what became of them, what if any impact I had on their lives. From the Plains of Texas, to the Navajo reservation in New Mexico, to the tail of the Appalachians, to the slums and villages of West Africa — God has used us to share His love with the damaged and hurting in so many different circumstances. We thank God for His infinite Grace and Wisdom which has made this all possible.

And thank all of you for allowing Him to use you to help serve the needs of Peace, and so many others over the years. Your care and giving remain a source of strength and encouragement to us. Indeed, without you, this story could not have happened. Your love has put food on our table, medicine to help the sick, and clothes to replace dirty and tattered rags. The list goes on and on. Your faithfulness has allowed this chapter of our story to continue to be written. We remain eternally grateful.

We are still scheduled to return for a brief visit to the States on the 6th of May, just around the corner. We will try to attend to every invitation to visit and share more about our work together. We ask for the Lord to lead us there safely and return to pressing problems here. Please pray for this journey, which comes at a troubling time. Please pray for Jonathan, who may have surgery on his liver this coming week if his septic infection can be brought under control. Kingdom will graduate from Lubbock Christian

University on the 9th, a testimony to the unbelievable power and mercy of a loving Father. Other schedules and events will follow as the Lord leads.

May the Lord continue to bless and keep you. May His loving smile continue to shine upon you. And give you peace in the midst of a dark and troubling time. We love you all.

Sincerely,
Cliff, Nkiru and family