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Dear Friends and Family,

We pray and trust that this note finds you all well, enjoying the last days of spring before the hot days of summer. May the Good Lord that has kept all of us during spring storms, continue to hold us in the safety of His loving protective arms.

A good friend suggested that I write more about some of the pressing struggles we face here. He said that he felt my letters were meant to be upbeat and encouraging but that I also needed to write more about the struggles. Well, I am thankful if anyone found our letters encouraging and positive in tone. I pray before I write asking God to use me to be of service to those who were to read them. Never do I want the emphasis to be on us, even though we write about our struggles together. These notes have a deeper purpose, and that is to encourage the readers as they learn of what God is doing in our lives and our common work together. I always struggle for the right words and tone, and sincerely ask for both the Lord's guidance and your understanding and forgiveness of my shortcomings.

The month of April 2021 and now early May has indeed been a struggle both for us as a family and for Nigeria as a country. We are in constant need of your prayers, and never more so than in times of crisis. Here are some of the current issues.

As many of you are going through a changing season of weather, we too face changes from the dryer to the wetter part of the year. As weather changes, so often health issues arise. We have so many people crowded together that it is normal for there to be some illness but the last weeks things have been at a heightened level. One of the big killers in Africa, taking the lives of millions, is malaria. Having almost died of malaria myself, having had two American friends including a veteran missionary, die of the disease and having known of countless Africans who have died of malaria I assure you we do not take it lightly. I so much admire my African brethren who continue to try to carry on despite being burdened by the disease. It is so much a part of our lives, that we normally feel it coming on, know the right meds to take, and after a couple of days of fever, upset stomach, general body pains and aching joints we get back on our feet and keep going. But this year we have seen a different strain of the disease, one that seems very resistant to our normal treatment.

I believe it started with Ugo, my wife's older brother. He is dedicated to a healthy lifestyle and keeps himself trim and fit. We never see him sick, but this time he was hit hard with malaria and typhoid, two endemic diseases of the tropics. Then it hit Obina, the first one in our house. After two complete courses of drugs and still no improvement, we admitted him in the hospital. He left after countless injections and IV drips, only to have the disease continue to ravage his body. He came close to dying, and required further treatment. All the tests came back showing high levels of malaria, though he had more than five courses of medicine. And this again is a strong and healthy young man who is rarely sick. Next came Joy, our married daughter who is very pregnant. She took a series of tablets and injections at the primary health center. She asked for the prayers of the church for herself and the baby. But she continued to

deteriorate and also had to be rushed to the hospital. Her blood pressure was 50/30 when we arrived and the baby was very stressed. It took several days to get her BP up to 100/50 and for the baby to calm down. No sooner had she been discharged till we had to return with Elijah. He too had had complete doses of over the counter malaria meds. By the time we took him in, his kidneys had stopped working. A catheter drained two and a half quarts of fluid before normal kidney function was restored. He is out of the hospital, but somehow it has affected his mental state, enough so that the neighbors are talking. Then TBoy was hospitalized, making 5 by this time who had to go to the hospital. This means we were ferrying meals and other items back and forth, spending time and effort to see them well. Meanwhile back at home, Joshua, Jared, Kingdom, CJ, Carlos, Promise, Naphtali and Jedidiah all had malaria. Some are still struggling and it hurts to see them feel so bad. I know we are not through yet, as Samson just complained of fever and headache. Strangely enough, it has only hit the boys, except of Joy, all boys who are normally strong and fit. And it has up to now hit the older ones, except for Jaden, our toddler grandson.

The struggle the younger ones have had is cough, runny noses and chest colds. It spread so quickly through our younger ones that we kept them from school to keep it from spreading more. An antibiotic, cough syrups and extra vitamins will hopefully do the trick, though we had to take our asthmatic Trish to the hospital for a nebulizer treatment.

We live in a place and a time where health challenges are constant. We feed up to 30 extra kids at evening, and they come from a level of poverty that is reflected in their bodies. Thin discolored hair, bloated stomachs, skin infections that have spread to some of our kids, bare feet that are often cut and torn are all signs of the disease called poverty. Thankfully we are able to be there to minister in the small way that we can. At least one good meal a day, some meds when needed, used clothes and shoes to share all given in the name of Jesus who is as moved today at their condition as He was when He walked on this earth 2000 years ago.

Besides poverty we face the challenge of air pollution. There is a fine black dust that invades everything around us. We mop twice a day, and yet the floor and everything else is coated by this fine dust. You can wake up in the morning and cough up blackened phlegm. The white towels and bed sheets turn dingy gray with time. I know this is not good. I have seen an air quality report showing dangerous pollutants way beyond healthy levels. Yet what can you do besides leaving?

But the major problem of the moment is the deteriorating security situation in the country. I have written before of the Muslim groups that have killed thousands in the North and now Middle Belt. These continue to wreck havoc in so many communities. This is an effort in part, to push back Christians who have been successfully evangelistic, and to forcefully install their brand of religion on everyone else. We have the conflict in regions of the country were Fulani nomadic herdsman walk around with automatic weapons killing any who oppose them. In our region we have had an unprecedented series of attacks on police by unknown gunmen. This past Saturday alone three police stations were burned down in our area and up to 10 policemen killed. This brings the total of burned police stations to more than 36 in our region, plus two major prisons burned releasing almost 4,000 prisoners. Yesterday the president declared this an act of war and vowed to take swift action. Does this mean

we will soon see troops on ground, killing and abusing innocent people as before? Time will only tell. Elsewhere the normal banditry persists and is even heightened as police retreat. Close to our house we hear of murders, kidnappings, theft with increasing severity. God remains our only real security and hope.

But the truly depraved reports involve the trade in human body parts. In Ugo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom state, a 22 year old man was recently arrested after raping and murdering a young lady looking for a job. She responded to an add offering work, as so many do here who are desperate for work. But she was smart enough to leave details with a friend where she was going and why. When she did not return her friend alerted the police. Eventually it led to her grave and more than 50 others. The young man had been killing since he was 17 as part of a family business. Both parents and siblings were involved. They harvest the needed parts and sell them to willing buyers who believe this juju medicine will give them the power and money they seek. The young man is confessing and naming names of clients that allegedly includes senior political figures and even 10 pastors. If this were to be true it would indeed show how low we have fallen.

The economy is in tatters, having been in decline for some time now. Last month NNPC, the national oil company, warned that it would not be able to remit anything into the federal account this month. As the largest single contributor to the national budget, this has huge implications for all levels of government. General inflation is at more than 18 percent this year so far. Yesterday Nkiru and I spent almost 200\$ on meat for the week, and prices were up almost 50% from a short time ago. Everywhere and for everything the cost of living goes up and up while the income of many is withheld or reduced.

Well, I could go on and on but I hope I have communicated a bit more on the challenges we face. What is the answer? I do not know. If war does break out, I have been asked, what do you do? Where do you go? How do you get there? I do not know the answer to these and many other pressing questions. The one thing I know and am very sure of; We serve a Living God who has seen us through years of difficult living. He has rescued us from the hands of wicked men who wanted to injure us. He has healed our broken bodies, though for some of our loved ones, He healed them in another realm. Even in this moment of need and extra bills, He has touched the hearts of good folks like yourself to provide above and beyond your already sacrificial giving to meet those needs. I cannot know how He will Shepard us through, but I know He lives and is faithful. May this be your confidence as well. He will see us all through to His glory and purpose.

Brethren, we love you. We have so little chance to communicate this, and when we do it is late and insufficient. We remain eternally indebted to you. You are the tool God uses to sustain and enable us. Each day you help feed the hungry. When a sick or crying child is comforted, it is you who helps provide that comfort. You help clothe those who would otherwise be in rags. You preach the Gospel to those who respond, such as the young man who was baptized this month. May all these things be to your credit, and may you be encouraged in your accomplishments. The night is fast approaching when no man can work. May we be found faithfully working when the Master calls us home.

Keep climbing,  
Cliff, Nkiru and family