

December 16, 2021

Dear Friends and Family,

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul gave this greeting in his divinely inspired letters, and I can think of no better wish or greeting to each of you. As I age I realize more and more the need for God's amazing grace, and how desperately I need peace in all areas of my life. What I need and want in my life, I also want for my loved ones.

This weekend marked the first anniversary of the burial of my father, another of the many victims of covid. Anniversaries and holidays tend to sharpen the pain of loss, at least in the early years. I know we are not alone in our grief. My brother in law lost his dad and my sister in law her mom shortly after our dad died. Our sympathy goes out to all who struggle with the loss of a loved one, especially during this holiday period. A special mention is for the Allison family, who lost their patriarch and husband recently after a long battle with Parkinsons. They were missionaries who served a number of years in Port Harcourt. I was blessed to be able to take them to the airport for their final journey back to the US. I remember them walking hand in hand into the airport, unsure of what lay ahead for. An elderly couple whose life had been spent in service, they joyfully faced an uncertain future with confident love for each other and the Lord. We are blessed to have you walking side by side with us as well, in times of both grief and uncertainty.

We trust and pray many of you enjoyed a memorable Thanksgiving holiday. This is not celebrated here or in most countries. We did not carry on the tradition this year, choosing to conserve resources for Christmas. But we did take time as a family and church to preach the need for gratitude in our daily walk. In spite of the tremendous pressures and struggles of our present time, there remains so much to be thankful for. I need to stop and remind myself of that from time to time, as do we all.

I am thankful for the measure of health that I have. I have recently struggled with vertigo, sometimes severe, but mostly just enough to be unpleasant. Yet I know that many others who suffer from cancer and other ailments far more severe. I need to give thanks for what I do have, various ailments included.

I am thankful that friends and family have been spared for us to continue this journey awhile longer. Recently James, our son who was kidnapped, was on his way home from work when a tractor trailer turned over, crushing the car and occupants just in front of him. A matter of feet and seconds made all the difference, and we have had such grace so many times in our lives. One of our workers and friends was also on his way home when a truck hit his transport, knocking them into a gutter and unconscious. He still has wounds, but not as severe as our friend and co worker Sam. He went to pay the school fees for one of our daughters, when the bus he was riding in blew a tire and lost control. Eight people in the bus lost their lives, and Sam was severely injured. He has been in the hospital now for weeks, and still in pains. Yet

the precious gift of life becomes more treasured when you realize how quickly it can be taken away. We are thankful that we can all still carry on in spite of the many near death experiences we have collectively had over the years.

I am thankful for my marriage of nine years, celebrated recently by my wife Nkiru and I with a one night get away. What a blessing she has been in my life and the life of the children. She has given so much, and been a source of strength and encouragement to myself and so many others. Marriage requires a lot of effort yet it has so many returns on the investment. I thank God for how He has worked to bring and keep us together.

I am thankful for the children God brought into our lives, each in a unique and special way. Joel graduated from university in Ghana on Saturday. Jilinda graduates today with a degree in medical lab science. David graduated from UniPort with a degree in Industrial Chemistry and Jared with a degree in Creative Arts. And we have had a wonderful visit from Innocent who has been away in medical school for 8 years. He is now a fully qualified doctor who has served the past year in a covid hospital. Great investment in his life has born a great fruit. As I look across the canvas of time, and see the large number of children that have shared their lives with us, I can only thank God for His mercy. I cannot understand His reason for putting me in the path of so many children, many at the point of death or in severe need. Why me Lord? Yet He has kept us on task, using you and so many other unique ways to provide for the needs of these children.

It is painful when you give love and it is not returned. Yet it is even more joyful when it is returned. I am thankful I was on the receiving end recently as I celebrated my 67th birthday. I had a quiet day and had told everyone not to do anything. I know how hard it is on everyone right now. So I had a huge shock when I walked into the living room and saw a crowd gathered to help me celebrate. The family had gathered and cooked cakes and hamburgers and snacks and balloons, the whole nine yards. What a joyful celebration, a memory I will cherish always.

And the list could go on and on. I thank God for keeping us secure. Our near neighbor was almost kidnapped from her home recently, but for the grace of God and two good watch dogs. Kidnappings and murders and violence seem all around us, yet we remain. I marvel at the promises of Psalm 91 and know that His grace has kept all of us. Myself and various family members have been robbed at gunpoint and knifepoint, shot at, kidnapped and attempted to be kidnapped. Yet He has kept us through all of this, and will continue to as it suits His purposes.

But most of all I thank God for such friends and supporters as you. Even though many of you are facing financial stresses you continue to invest in our lives here. Many food prices have climbed over 200 percent since the beginning of this crisis. Yet somehow you keep feeding the hungry. You keep children clothed and with medicine. You keep showing us love. For that we are eternally grateful.

Some have inquired of our plans for the future, especially in light of certain recent state government actions. We have done all we could so far to meet up with their expectations. We are not an orphanage, but rather just a family who has taken in orphaned children and others for many years. Authorities seem to not be able to understand this. We have put in a library and office with files on each child. We have set up a designated playground, with room for swings, merry go round, etc. We have established a sick bay, which has been occupied since it opened. We now have a staff room where they can rest and change. We have added new staff to meet their requirements, including round the clock security. All of this is in the former bedrooms of the older kids whom we have had to settle in other accommodations, with those unexpected expenses. The older ones filled their roles in the family that older siblings do. Now this falls back on our shoulders. All of this is at the insistence of one government worker. Yet we strive to do all things honest in the sight of all men, so that the work we have done for 29 years is not viewed as fraudulent or illegal. We know that one day these extra burdens will pass and then we will move on to the next challenge.

What will that challenge be? God only knows. We have plans, but He holds our future. We would like to move to another nearby state, were that to be possible. The black soot that fills every nook and cranny seems to get worse and worse. The traffic, the crime, etc, etc all have us wishing for a better home. Maybe the Lord will grant that prayer. Maybe He will keep us on station and on duty here in Port Harcourt. We have seen His working to fulfill His purposes so many times that we know He is able to do and undo. We just want to be found faithful, serving in whatever way He deems best.

As we close in what is one of the more difficult years, we look forward to bigger and better things. May this period be a time of reflection and rejoicing and renewal. May the greetings of angels, wishing mankind peace and goodwill and the story repeated around the world at this time, that God so loved us that He sent His only Son, fill us with joy and hope and peace. We look forward to working together to continue sharing God's love in a world that is often dark and lost.

We love you sincerely,

Cliff, Nkiru and family