

# Nigerian Christian Children's Home



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**September 2020**

Dear Friends and Family,

I wish to repeat Paul's oft used, inspired greeting, found in almost all of his letters, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". I especially wish to repeat his opening remarks to the brethren in Philippi, with whom he shared an especially close bond. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." I stand ever humbled and grateful for your faithful support of our work together. I know it is never easy, especially during this trying period, but you continue to faithfully show God's love to us and our circle of ministry. May the Lord who began this good work in you, strengthen you until its completion.

Our peaceful morning routine was interrupted this morning by a cry from one of our co-workers named Treasure. She had gotten a call from home stating that her father had been brutally attacked and was in critical condition. While going about the task of sharing and accounting for village funds he was stabbed in the eye, with the knife going deep into the brain. Then he was stabbed in the chest before the drunken attacker was overpowered. This faithful brother, Joel by name, was one of the most gentle and humble persons I have known. He was the farm manager when we were at Nigerian Christian Hospital, and one of the hardest and faithful workers to work closely with me. To see his life dramatically changed, without a moment's notice, was such a shock and discouragement. I know this mirrors the senseless violence we are seeing in the US and other regions in the world, but it touches us more deeply when the devil reaches out to harm someone we know so personally. We ask you to join us in prayer for Joel and his family. He and his daughter Treasure are the two persons in the family whose salary takes care of family needs. If he dies, or is unable to continue to work, how will the family survive?

This is a question I repeat to myself from time to time. As a brother who has been such a major support to us in many ways asked during our visit last year to the US, "

How are you going to survive when we are gone?" I do not shy away from asking my kids this same question, or the seemingly endless line of persons coming to us for help. There has to be diligent effort to plan and work towards stability in finances and other areas. Yet I have learned and am often in need of reminding, that it is the Lord who sustains and gives the victory. It is such a weighty load, living here and having so many look to us for help and assistance. After years of effort, the burden seems crushing at times. Yet in times of darkness, the Lord reminds me, very often through the encouragement of a believing wife, that He is ever faithful to His promise to never leave or forsake us. It is His work, one that I never actively sought or dreamed of. If anyone could have told me 28 years ago that I would be where I am today, I might have tried to escape like Jonah. I know each of you, even though you live in different circumstances, also have your trials and discouragements. If anything, this year has taught us that life can suddenly be turned upside down, and everything we depended upon can vanish as a vapor. I encourage you, and I hope you will encourage us as well, to hold on in faith to the One who holds us all in the palm of His hands.

A friend told me that I should not shy away from sharing more of the struggles of our life here, to tell more of the "war stories". I hesitate most times to do that, not wanting to come across as a complainer in light of the Lord's blessings. He takes a dim view to grumbling, as the Israelites learned during their journey in the wilderness. I also know that it is an easy trap for old missionaries to fall into, where stories of hardships and deprivations tend to color conversations to the point of questioning if any good at all has been experienced. I do not want to sensationalize our walk here. Yet I do see need to have some balance in reporting, while meanwhile emphasizing the hope and glory God manifests in our lives. So at the repeated request of a friend, please allow me the folly of mentioning some of the negative aspects of our journey here, with hopes it will enlighten and encourage, something we all need.

I just shared the news of Joel, and the horrific and unprovoked attack on his life. It is a reminder that I get very, very often that we live in a dark and dangerous place. That is not unique to us, as news feeds from US cities have certainly shown, but we are a far cry from the times I grew up in, where doors were left unlocked and keys left in the car. I have been shot at twice, with the bullets coming so close once that I heard the unique whistle they make when they fly close by. I have been robbed at gunpoint twice, with the added humiliation of having my family forced to lie on the

ground during the robbery. How impotent and humiliated that makes you feel, as you realize you made decisions that led to your family being placed in mortal danger. My experience again is not unique, as other missionary friends I have known and admired here have suffered worse, even to the point of gunshot wounds and in the case of one missionary, death. One by one I have seen missionaries and friends leave, until there are only two other missionary families that I know in this entire region. I am sure there may be others I do not know of, but this is a large area that once had many foreign missionaries. Satan has used violence to destroy the lives of many faithful servants, those whose aim was to shine God's light into a dark corner of the world. We live behind 10 foot high walls, topped with barbed wire which was once electrified. There are six doors and gates between my front gate and my bedroom. Yet I understand that this provides only a deterrent. I limit our movement and try to take prudent steps, but I know that my life is in danger any time I go to the bank or any other normal activity. If I have learned one thing during this long exposure to stress of insecurity, of waking up to hear gunshots nearby in the night, of knowing I have a target on my back because of my skin color, of having so many friends experience violence at the hands of kidnapers and thieves, it is that our only true security lies in the will of God. "Except the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain". It is a point of prayer, one that we ask you to join us in. We try to do our best, but we know that real security lies in our walk with Jesus. Even when the violence of sinful men touches us, we understand that God's Will is supreme, and He has promised to work all things to our good.

Another stressor we face is the burden we feel of so many who come to us for help. We can understand more why Jesus often went to a private place to commune with His Father after periods of intense serving others physical and spiritual needs. Textbooks talk of "missionary fatigue", similar to "donors fatigue", were people are asked to give when faced with disaster after disaster. The heart strings get pulled so many times that the heart starts to get callused and not as tender as before. May God help us to never become numb to what we are doing, mechanical in our response to the suffering of others. Let me give you a couple of examples of things we often face.

During this period things have become much worse for so many. Jobs have disappeared. The economy has shrunk. Prices of everything have skyrocketed, even basic foodstuffs. We have often up to 30 extra mouths to feed, as children from the

neighborhood know our door is open. The slums at the back of our house are full of substandard everything, and folks somehow find their way here to our door. Single moms leave in early morning hours and drop their kids off with us until they come home in the evening hours. These are kids with scabies which has spread to our kids, runny noses and worm filled bellies, but still creatures of God's that need to know that He still cares for them. One lady drops her three young ones off as she goes to work at a hotel at the end of our block. She works seven days a week, more than 10 hours per day, all for the princely wage of about 34 dollars a month. Even at that, her employer has not paid her in almost two months. So what hope does she have? A single mom with three small children, little education or marketable skills? What future will these kids have, with not enough money for them even to feed well, much less go to school? Where is the money for school fees or uniforms or school shoes? We are glad that she has started to come to our evening devotionals at 8:30 each evening, and joins us in singing, praying and reading God's Word. I feel so powerless in the face of such challenges as she has. All I know is that for the moment she has a safe place to leave her kids, they get some decent food, and hopefully they will have a chance to learn about Jesus, as the neighborhood children flock to our house for Sunday worship.

Similarly is the story of one of the men who worships in our second house at Uzouba. He came to tell me after service recently that his mother in law had made known her intention to come and collect her daughter. She rightfully said that she could not stand by as a mother and see her daughter suffer. The young man has no job, not much hope of a job and a heavy heart with all the pressures facing him. He asked for help to put up a little shed where he could cook beans and rice and sell to the public. I applaud his drive and determination to make things better. But we are flooded with similar requests to help start some lively hood. What are we to do? Each request is time consuming and heart consuming and encouraging and depressing at the same time. So what do you do? We try to give as we can, counsel and encourage, train and advise, knowing that we can never be or do enough.

And on and on the stories could go. I could complain about the traffic, but I have to be reminded that friends sacrificed so that we could have a car that we can be stuck in traffic in. I could complain about the electrical supply, which is never steady and often damages appliances, etc. But then I have to be reminded that we have a generator as the last charitable gift given by a stranger who died three days later.

Each challenge provides ample opportunity to thank God for His deliverance, and the grace to repent from grumbling and complaining.

Well, ok, one more story and challenge. For months now we have had issues with banking. First was the lockdown when banks were closed entirely. Then the opened banks had massive lines as banks required limited spacing in their halls. It did not seem so important that folks were often jammed against each other hoping to get in. The struggle to get in was daunting. One day we drove all over town, standing in line under the hot African sun, going from bank to bank trying to get in. We spent more than 6 hours doing this, and finally went home without having succeeded. At the bank where we have banked for the last 13 years, the guards know us and often assisted in us getting in. But this always led to some in the crowd shouting at us or in one case even shoving me in the back. It is understandable. If I had stood in the line for two hours and someone cut in front of me, I would initially want to be annoyed as well. Finally the lines disappeared, to be replaced with the mantra of “no money available today”. This too changed to “you can no longer have your dollars in physical cash”. We were allowed to transfer electronically, but yesterday we were told that we can only have access to the dollars donated to us by selling our dollars to the bank at an almost 25% discount. We spent most of the day driving around to other banks trying to figure a way around this newest challenge. I do not know what we will do for now. I just know somehow God will make a way that will reflect His Divine Power and Providence.

In fact, He has already done so. I called an American friend here for advice. He said he had just gotten off the phone shouting at the banker about the same matter. But my friend said something that spoke as the oracle of God. He said, “Don’t worry. As long as I am on the watch, those kids will not go hungry”. And he quickly sent local currency with the promise that he would turn the world upside down if necessary and shake it until something came out. It is almost unbelievable, and you would be tempted to call me a liar, that in the moment of need and crisis, God used a friend to assure me that the kids would not go hungry. I do not know what we will do. We have another roadblock and frustration. But we also have the testimony that God sees all and still has the power to fulfill His promises.

Let us end this pity party and move on to positive news. I mentioned in my last letter that we had been without a car for some months. We spent money and frustrating days at various mechanics trying to revive our old cars. This has been replaced by the kindness of others with a 7 year old Toyota Highlander. Directly

imported from Alabama, with only 38,000 miles, it has been an answer to prayers. Stuck in traffic under the hot sun, we now have an air conditioner. We can roll up the windows against the smog and smells and enjoy the comfort of a reliable car. It makes us a target as does any display of wealth, and I have already collected 3 tiny scratches, but we are thankful that God touched the hearts of His children to come to our aid.

Secondly, we are happy to announce the marriage of Ani and Aiyo. Ani came to us as an older child after the death of his father. His mother had passed some years before. He was the schoolmate of some of our older boys and just slipped in amongst the crowd and quietly became a part of us. He worked three jobs at almost 19 hours per day to try to save up money for marriage. We are thankful that they were able to have a court wedding and a great reception attended by many family and friends. They made their own cake, having met in a cooking school we sent him to. The cake got held up by the police as Joseph, our other married son, came to bring it to the reception. It made for a funny story later, as every wedding must have some hitch to laugh about later. I was very proud that the kids from the house taxed themselves and bought the couple a small fridge and generator.

Well, this note has rambled long enough. As always, it is sent with the hope that it will in some small way communicate about our life here, the work which your money is doing, and encourage us all by the testimony of God's love and provision. We truly appreciate the kindness you continue to show us. We try to be good stewards of your gifts, to make it do the task for which you have sent it. May the Good Lord continue to shine His face upon you. May He bless every aspect of your life as you use those blessings in His service. In the words of the memorable Mr. Spock, "Live long and prosper".

Love you all,

Cliff, Nkiru and family