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Botswana

LOOKING AT IT FROM ALL SIDES

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From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Psalm 61:2

Remember when the Rubiks Cube was the “new” thing? How puzzling it was to turn it this way and that, in an attempt to line up all those colors. In missionary work there are indescribable perplexities and frustrations that cause an emotional drain to your soul and spirit and oft leads to physical exhaustion as well. It’s a day to day reality for most any missionary that can leave you as bewildered as trying to sort out the cube. There is that which is exhilarating one minute as it seems like things are “lining up” and exhausting the next as something takes an unexpected turn towards a seemingly futile end. In the clarity of the Word of God and the sufficiency of the grace of God we are enabled to “look at it from all sides.” And only then do we find the strength, fortitude, and indeed, the joy to carry on.

In the past 3 months we have celebrated some milestones and experienced great victories and at the same time have suffered some disappointing setbacks. God’s grace and goodness continues to abound:

- On Sunday, February 9, Cindy and I commemorated 34 years of marriage and ministry together! Mama Cindy is an amazing lady, the love of my life, and an awesome missionary wife. The church TOTALLY surprised us with a special service filled with singing, testimonials, and precious gifts. We were so blessed!!
- January of this year marked the 8 year anniversary of the start of the Grace Baptist Church - Gaborone! The first week of February was an “ordinary” Sunday, no special promotions, but the Lord blessed us with a record highest all time attendance ever. Our Lord truly is building His church.
- We rejoice to see growing Christians who have completed the CONTINUE discipleship course now taking new believers under their wing to teach them.
- We have found a good meeting place for the Ramotswa church plant – A big answer to prayer!
- The Grace Christian school has successfully started it’s 3rd year with 18 students.
- Ms. Summer is having great success with a village Kids Bible Club and a weekly Bible class at a private school.
- Pastor Catalino and his family are doing an amazing job reaching teens and college aged and have seen several saved in recent weeks. Some of these young people are definitely prime for God’s call to ministry. Please Pray!
- Brother Chris Heynes is nearing the completion of the first cabin for the Grace Oasis camp ministry. He and Molly have been a wonderful help in all aspects of the ministry. Two more cabins are planned for this year.
- The Lord has called Nathan and Akemi Hill from Greenville, NC to start preparations to join the ministry team in Botswana full-time. This family is a great answer to prayer and we’ll tell you more about them and their ministry in a separate letter.

SETBACKS: For some weeks now we’ve felt like a winning team that’s enduring a losing streak. We purposefully try not to say much in our letters about the “other side” of things, that being the struggles we face. But, they’re real and your faithful prayers help us to endure them. Botswana suffers from a very inefficient government. A new President, much like President Trump, is working hard to set some things straight but reforms take time. The immigrations department senselessly and without explanation rejected the residence and work permit applications for the Heynes and Catalino families (our missionary colleagues). Consequently both families have had to bear great expense, multiple trips back and forth and literal hours upon hours waiting in line at immigrations to file appeals. For months we could not get information on Ms. Summers applications until I went personally and spent four hours in the immigration office waiting as they searched for and finally found her “lost” file. We experienced a disappointing blow on an extensive project three years in the making losing an opportunity for a 50 person medical missions team from Operation Renewed Hope to come and conduct medical mission clinics. Ms. Summer became point person for this effort and has experienced first hand the disappointments of dealing with the beauracracy and closemindedness of a government organization that makes it so hard to selflessly serve people in need. She just arrived in May of this year and already her ministry has been a baptism of fire. Summer is a very mature Christian and strong in the faith but for a young missionary it has been a very eye opening experience to see what “real life” missions is. We are thankful for her resilient spirit and unique ability to keep us all laughing in spite of it all.

Some weeks back I experienced a first in my life - an emotional and physical breakdown. A series of spiritual battles, ministry setbacks, and the weight of other peoples needs all came to a head. On a recent Saturday afternoon I made a hospital visit to check on a neighbors wife who has cancer. Words cannot describe the spiritual warfare that went on in that room. The physical

manifestation of it being that for over an hour I helped him hold and restrain his wife by arms and legs as she thrashed around violently and hallucinated in response to side effects of anti-psychotic drugs. The “weekend” nurses offered no assistance. The husband (names withheld) is a skeptical unbeliever of Irish descent but God is much at work. This trial in their lives is resulting in gentle inroads whereby he is becoming tender and open to the Gospel. Sometimes winning a soul to Christ is an intense battle of love and patience. It’s been well said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” I rose early the following Sunday morning totally unable to think, pray, study, or do anything but sob feeling helplessly drained. The deacons and Cindy took care of the church services while I sat at home quietly and alone for most of the day wondering if I was “losing it.” Psalm 23:3: “He restoreth my soul...” and Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God.” I’m studying the ministry of Elijah and am reminded of how common and how shared are our experiences with our predecessors. As God’s grace sustained them God’s grace has sustained us.

As I write this letter Cindy and I are in South Africa getting a respite by the sea and will return on March 1st. It’s been very restorative yet ironically while we’ve been away, back in Botswana, they are dealing with historic rainfall and unprecedented catastrophic flooding in the capital city. It has left many outlying communities, including where the Grace Oasis is located, cut off. I feel we should be there but we’re told that if we were there is nothing we could do. God knows! We’re so thankful for our staff and ministry team and they have told us not to worry and that all is well.

Cindy is nearing completion of the special video we’ve been promising and we hope to publish it soon. A heart felt thank you to all of you who sent greetings and love gifts for Christmas and our anniversaries. Your love, prayers, and support mean so much to us and has an eternal impact as work together to reach the lost with the gospel! We love and appreciate and pray for you!!

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