

“We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5)

“You also joining in helping us through your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:11)

West African Mission Update

July 2005

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Dear Brethren,

We bless the Lord for all of His tender mercies new every morning that sustain us day by day. Prayer is being heard at the throne in our behalf as the work of the Lord is progressing. Our own hearts and those of the children are benefiting from your faithful bearing of our burden in the love of Christ.

May the Lord continue to encourage and refresh each of you from that living Spring that never fails. Amen.

I spent 17 days in Nigeria in May and June, visiting the brethren that we had worked with during our six years in that land. They scheduled 20 Bible teaching programs for me during those days along with frequent individual meetings for counsel and replying to questions.

The condition of the brethren and the ongoing expansion of the kingdom there were most encouraging.

Brother David, who has printed my books, is preaching in villages weekly and has translated and printed *Preach the Word* into Yoruba. Brother Titus [who has now joined us in Sierra Leone for further discipleship] has established gospel works in three locations now where his disciples are carrying on the work. Victor has a group meeting for study of the Word in Abeokuta. Serge leads a similar gathering in Ore. Brother Michael in Ibadan has expanded into two other areas of that great city.

Brother Timothy arranged a three-day seminar/forum on “True Prosperity” in which he did the teaching. Dr. George and the brethren with him have preached the gospel in a nearby village, where there is now a New Testament church meeting. Brothers Moses, Otobo, Tony, and Akogo have been encouraging brethren in the house church in Eke as well, as continuing the weekly Bible studies at the Polytechnic.

Brother Solomon is discipling about six brothers currently as well as continuing his circuit of teaching in several villages each week. Brother Isaac in Lagos is teaching and encouraging five families whom he is drawing together in his home weekly. I was able to meet some new brethren with whom I am communicating by e-mail, some of whom are now beginning *The Discipleship Experience*.

Deborah was in the midst of college entrance exams and we were thus unable to see each other, though we talked by phone. She is doing fine.

Increasingly, there is a dissatisfaction with the religious status quo and a developing hunger and thirsting after righteousness among many. We trust that this trend will continue and that there will be a genuine return to the Word of God.

Following is a summary of the first message I spoke the day I arrived. It addresses Joshua 1:12-18. May the Lord lead us all into His full provision in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Do not take us across the Jordan” [Num.32:5]. This was the determined decree from 2-1/2 tribes among the Israel of God. They had gone far enough. Canaan’s prospects seemed as nothing in their sight. The command of God was spurned for their self-chosen sanctum.

No movement of the pillar of cloud and fire moved them. No alarmed reproof from their brethren alarmed them. They would stay where they were.

Failure or refusal to enter into the Lord’s inheritance is rebellion [Num.32:6-15]. To not dwell in what God has provided in Christ Jesus is wickedness, divisive, and discouragement to the people of God. How many evils have arisen from half-hearted saints who despise God’s portion by their self-chosen ways!

Reader, be warned, self-will is dangerous ground. Walking by sight is blindness to the soul. No cloudy pillar to guide you, no ark of the covenant dispensing mercy, and no presence of God abides in the land of Gilead [Num.32:1]. Cross over and live in Christ’s Canaan.

Things of the world have captured your heart. Cattle are become more precious than Christ [Num.32:4, 26]. Fertile earth is counted as more significant than eternal treasure.

O, if we could glimpse for a moment the excellencies of Christ, pursuits of folly would slip willingly and unnoticed from our grasp. Stupid empty pretenses would be torn down and seen for the idolatrous acts of rebellion that they are [Josh.22:10-29].

“See the copy of the altar of the Lord which our fathers have made, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice” [Josh.22:28]. Yes, we see it. It is empty. No sacrifice ascends from it to heaven. Nothing acceptable is placed upon it. God is not there.

Such an altar has an outward form but no reality. It is good for nothing. It will not convince your children that you have not abandoned the Lord. You have. They will only see you as hypocrites [Josh.22:24-27].

Your altar is for show, not for sacrifice. You claim that it is a witness [Josh.22:27]. Indeed it is. It testifies to an empty unconsecrated life, a cheap imitation without substance.

No one is fooled thereby. The same spirit that animated Ananias and Sapphira was at work in your copy of the real. But you only have crafted a copy because you do not want the real.

The Lord of heaven knows that it is not His altar. The people of God do not mistake your substitute for the actual. Your children know that you are not in fellowship with the tribes of Israel. The emptiness of your folly is exposed before all.

Why not leave your pretensions? Forsake Gilead's deception. Canaan awaits the welcome step of your obedience.

"If, however, the land of your possession is unclean, then cross into the land of the possession of the Lord, where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us. Only, do not rebel against the Lord, or rebel against us by building an altar for yourselves, besides the altar of the Lord our God" [Josh.22:19].

Here in Sierra Leone, I have begun a weekly half-hour radio broadcast of exposition of the gospel of John, chapter by chapter. It reaches a potential audience of about 3 million in this land of 4.9 million inhabitants. We have received some encouraging responses and believe that the listening audience is increasing each week.

Our Sunday evening fellowship meeting here in the home for mutual encouragement and breaking of bread is attended by about 20 adults from a broad spectrum of backgrounds.

Brothers Quintin and Peters are leading weekly Bible teaching times along with open forum question sessions in two universities in Freetown. We are very blessed to have them with us in fellowship.

Both are progressing admirably in the things of God. Both have completed the entire *Discipleship Experience*, being the first ones that I know of to have done so. We have moved on to different aspects of discipleship, focusing now on particular other passages of Scripture along with their own research assignments.

Peters, along with brother Titus, led three young women who are our neighbors to the Lord last week. Various brethren come weekly to see me with questions from the Scriptures and for teaching.

The children are doing fine and we are pleased at their progress in many ways, especially in their attitudes and growing godly behavior. Timothy is diligently working through *The Discipleship Experience*. He and Peters have become "soul-mates," which has been a blessing to both of them.

Patti has been speaking the gospel to different women and children here in our village of Regent. Some have been coming to learn English from her as well.

Our focus remains the same, to raise up faithful disciples who will teach others also.

Here in Sierra Leone, over 50 percent of the districts in the provinces [outside of Freetown] have no Bible church at all. About 70 percent of the population remains Muslim, though of a relatively nominal sort. Immorality is rampant and it is actually unusual to find a girl who has not given birth to a child before marriage.

Do continue to pray for us as we need wisdom daily to respond to each situation, as well as plan for the future of the work. May the Lord bless you one and all.

**Love,
Steve and Patti**

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