

February, 2006

Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

His grace and peace be unto you. My heart reaches out in thankfulness to you for your help in supporting this ministry that the Lord has given us to be a part of, many times a small part of. I am thankful to God for the many in Congo who also have become a part of this ministry. In two more years, it will be 30 years since my family left for the Congo wondering how we would be sustained, but we found God to be so real, to be so strong. Remembering the very beginning after we landed in Congo, the first Sunday in church, we announced that I would be meeting my mother in Kikwit. The following day I found out she had already been with the Lord a month. Dr. Fountain told me this just a few yards away from where we were staying with our family and with the cockroaches and, undoubtedly, some mice. On Monday or Tuesday after that Sunday, a lady by the name of Jody Voth with the US Embassy pulled her car up. She said, "I want no questions asked. Get your things in my car. The family first, Nancy, Shawn, Nicol, and Todd, you first. I am taking you to my home. That's where you are going to stay. It will become your home for the time that you are here in the city getting ready to go to the bush." She came back and picked me up and many of the trunks that we had. I remember saying to Jody and Lee Voth. "If God lets the ministry that we will be a part amount to anything, you will be one of the main reasons, because just the day before I had discovered that my mother instead of waiting for us had been buried about a month. She had died at our station and was taken to Kikwit and buried there. What a shock, and how Satan wanted to say, "Hey, go back home." But the grace of God was there, the calmness and courage that the Spirit of God gives and the love of people like Lee and Jody.

After staying with them for 7 weeks, our family was on its way to Kikwit for another 6 weeks and then finally on to the mission station of Nkara, by land nearly 500 miles from the capital of Kinshasa, by plane nearly an hour and 35 minutes, but there was no air strip at Nkara at that time. Not only that, there was no radio to communicate with the other missionaries. It was that very special time when we were in the Hands of God without the possibility of human help medically. How difficult it was to find that a man whom my mother had taught English and had ministered to as a young teenage boy was now the pastor and director of the mission station, but he was also a witch doctor, a man who had turned the things of God looking for power. He became the principal of the government school and did dastardly things with the young women if they wanted to pass their exams. What a shock!

Thank the Lord for young men in our Bible school by the name of Kilundu, Mbuku and Gary Kapinga, who came to work on our staff, especially Kilundu, who would always say, "Don't be afraid; don't be afraid, even though this pastor is threatening to kill some of the people who are working with us, and maybe even to harm you! Don't be afraid. God will undertake." Indeed He did! It took quite a few years, but finally that man had to leave. With certain people, it doesn't seem like there is anything that is going to bring them around, and there are such people in the Bible. Paul talks about people that he has given over to God who will give them over to Satan for destruction.

Jody and Lee, God has blessed. I do praise the Lord because people have been ministered to, lifted up, and encouraged, and are faithful servants of the Lord. I hope to the end of their lives that will be the story, and may that be with Nancy and me also. I am so thankful to the Lord for churches and individuals who have stood with us for almost 30 years. I think of another Nancy down in Georgia, and it almost brings tears to my eyes. She fulfilled a promise that she made when my Nancy and I

were in college together. She said that if we ever became missionaries and went to Africa, she would support us. Years went by. We were in America working at a church, and then finally we left and got into music evangelism, recording with the Zondervan Company, and then came the fire to our home, and God called us to the Congo. Nancy in Georgia has never failed, never failed for almost 30 years now; every month she has given. Thank you, Nancy. For the Lord's sake, you have given, and your prayers I am so sure have also followed those checks.

I asked the Lord, "Would you give me 30,000 souls?"—10,000 for Dad and Mom, 10,000 for myself, and 10,000 for my brother, Jack, who was crushed to death when he was 18 and I was 16, as 8 of our high school and college age students at the Baptist Institute of the Ozarks near Bentonville, Arkansas, were out camping two nights. The second night the roof of that cave crashed. My brother, Jack, was asleep. The rest of us were up. Thank God for that young man, who had been beaten by his father when he was a little boy and suffered brain damage, but what a worker, what a guy, even in high school. He kept the rest of us up, but not Jack. Jack was asleep, and all of a sudden the roof of that cave came crashing in, 3 tons first. Billy Spicer, golden glove champion for his weight division that year, ran out seemingly from underneath it, but it had been bridged by a wall that others had put up on earlier camping experiences. And then all of the others got out but Jack, who had wanted to return to Congo and had said in his personally testimony that he was going to take Dad's place, was sleeping soundly. Cutting wood four feet away from his head, I jumped to his side and said, "Jack, get up. The walls are caving in; the ceiling is caving in." He turned over on his side, and I grabbed his right shoulder, but instead of getting up, he was not budging. All of a sudden I heard this crack, and I looked up. Three feet away from my head came this huge piece of sheet rock estimated by the fire department and the police to be 10 tons, which broke in half. Five tons hit him from the chest up and 5 tons from the chest down. Hardly a bone in his body was left unbroken the coroner said. So for Jack I had asked the Lord for another 10,000. Thank God, He doesn't always do what we ask Him to. I think that I can safely say—only God ultimately knows our hearts—but many more thousands than that have accepted the Lord.

One of the great ways that happened was by taking what I had learned in college and at the Warrendale Community Church after more than 13 years of ministry, and giving it to the students who came to Bible school at Nkara, first 7. Then it grew and grew. It is not a huge school, but we have 94 this year, 50 in the larger school, 24 at iwungu, and 20 at Gombe. They are the ones, along with our staff, teachers, and the evangelism team God has given us, who have been used by God to win so many. Now we have more than 500 graduates. They learned to do evangelism person to person, face to face, in cities and in the towns while taking classes. Thank God also for the coming of the Jesus Film. Campus Crusade has made that available even in the Kituba language, which Nancy and I and our children speak.

I would fail miserably if I did not thank God for our children. What a blessing they have been. Now they are all married to wonderful spouses, and we have 8 grandchildren. One of the reasons for that is a mother who taught and lived a godly life. We also had great and wonderful years in the Scriptures in Africa, without distractions like television as young people, maybe in a sorry way, have here in America. Out there breakfast and after breakfast there would be the reading of the Scriptures, hopefully being read in such a way that there was kindness, mercy and grace that flowed through the voice who read the Scriptures which portray Jesus Christ as the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and also as the merciful, loving Savior and also as the God who can be angry, angry at sin. I must praise the Lord that in all the years they were in our home they supported the ministry, and they continue to do so through their prayers, through their own personal walk, and their family walk,

their family life, the testimonies of their families. Jesus Christ is not a stranger in their homes, and their children are also growing up knowing that Name. I am beyond words; so far all of them are people of the Scriptures.

I felt I needed to take this time to acknowledge how grateful we are for all of you, and to give those who are new to Laban Ministries, some background and history. Thank you all for teaming with us to win souls in Africa. As you know, we were scheduled to leave for Congo on February 8, but the Lord has not allowed that. We are waiting on Him for His provision. Two verses come to mind regarding our situation: Psalm 106:13, . . . “they did not earnestly wait for His plans to develop regarding them,” and though we dread telling you we were not able to leave on February 8, Isaiah 8: 13, 14 says, “The Lord of hosts. . . let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread lest you offend Him by your fear of man and your distrust of Him. And He shall be a sanctuary, a sacred and indestructible asylum to those who reverently fear and trust Him.”