

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

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Dear Readers,

“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. . . . Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:1,16-18)

Six times in these three verses Paul refers to himself and his readers as “we.” Clearly he is identifying a time of challenge and difficulty inclusively. Problems do arise. Money does get scarce. People, including other Christians, don’t always behave the way that we think they should. Loved ones die. Friends get sick. The society that we live in is a mess. First, Paul implies that times of difficulty should be expected. We live in a fallen world that is temporarily under the dominion of the evil one. Second, Paul does not encourage his readers to masochistically search out these unpleasant circumstances. They will invariably happen. Third, his encouragement is to keep everything in perspective. For Chris and me, our place of ministry is here in Zimbabwe. For all of you, I sincerely hope that you see your place of ministry wherever God has placed you. To help myself keep perspective, I return on almost a daily basis to Peter’s words in I Peter 2:11: “Friends, this world is not your home, so don’t make yourselves cozy in it” (The Message). We are to see ourselves as aliens and conduct ourselves accordingly. For me that makes all the difference and I can keep going for another day.

Aid workers have formulated an effective way to determine the nutritional status of a village. It does not involve calculating height, weight, and body mass index. It does not record caloric intake. You simply look at the condition of the dogs. If the dogs are walking skeletons then there is a high probability that the family is suffering from malnutrition. If there are no dogs at all then that is an even stronger indication. Another good indication is to observe the manure in the cattle kraal. Every village has a kraal where all livestock, cattle and goats, are penned overnight for safekeeping. If there is no fresh manure then difficulties have been going on for some time. If all of the livestock has been slaughtered then the family is under a high degree of pressure. Finally, walk around the outside of the village and look for any graves. I was visiting a family on Thursday afternoon where there were five graves just outside the fence. Also, what is the ratio of adults to children? If you encounter a situation where one adult is caring for five to ten children then that is not a sustainable scenario in this economy. Are we ever going to be able to alleviate every problem? No, that is not a realistic standard.

The ambassador of a certain country to Zimbabwe was giving a parting address being held at his particular embassy. The ambassador said he wanted to talk about a country (his own) for many years isolated and out of step with the region of which it was a part. An elderly dictator held sway that was backed by a military and party *junta*. The people looked forward to a new era of growth and prosperity. They wanted to catch up with their neighbors who had pursued successful policies in a democratic environment. The audience immediately got his point. Once the dictatorship came to an end, the country progressed to become one of the world’s 10 richest nations. Its people enjoy a high standard of living and the latest technology. The county was Spain. That is the dream of 95% of the people in Zimbabwe.

Here is some entertaining information concerning some of the electoral machinations that take place during elections in Zimbabwe. Everyone knows that Zimbabwe has one of the lowest life expectancies in the world: 34-37 years depending on the estimate. The Registrar-General's office has the responsibility to ensure that voter's rolls are accurate and reflect the pool of registered voters in the country. Zimbabwe has 134,202 over the age of 90 on the voter's rolls. 74,000 of these voters are over 100 years of age. 30,000 have a birth date of January 1, 1901. There are also 182,564 instances of individuals having the same identification number. Some of these geriatric voters must be very vigorous as the total votes in some wards exceeded the number of registered voters. When has any U.S. election exceeded a 110% voter turnout? Is it any wonder that some conclude there have not been "free and fair" elections in Zimbabwe since 1980?

We have just had an addition of ten puppies yesterday. Apparently there is no Ndebele word for piglet so the same word is used as for puppies (imidlwane). All of them look good at this point. EBI has five more females that are now ready to breed as well. Chris's maternal instincts are very strong. Our neighbor has added two real puppies to his household for additional security. One of them is white with a brown mask. The pups come to our back porch every morning for their treat of the day. The white one is named Bandit. Yep, the other one is a brindle color and called Smokey. Honey is another neighborhood dog that has just had a litter of puppies and stops by frequently. We have no idea where Whippet's home is. From what I've heard it must be like having grandchildren. We can do whatever we want and then send them home. The problem is that who knows how many we will end up with?

Last week an old *igogo* (grandmother) stopped me as I was driving and said that the family had not had roller meal for two days. I had assisted her in the past by buying some bags of indigenous seed pods (*umtshatshatsha*) that she and her one granddaughter had gathered in the wild. They are an excellent stock feed that is high in protein. Knowing the family, I was not surprised by the circumstances. I told her I would return later in the day with further food items. When I brought some basic food items for about two weeks, her response was, "*Ngiyesaba kakhulu.*" Literally, that means "I am very afraid." Figuratively: "I am overwhelmed and don't know how to respond." A neighbor, who is a graduate of Wanezi Bible Institute, came to visit and we (Bafana Mlilo and myself) ended up singing a hymn together. I hope that John Newton was not offended by our a cappella rendition of "Amazing Grace." However, the dogs did make a beeline for the nearest rocks. That was a first for me.

Make it count,
Steve and Chris Newcomer

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