

In the tracks of a missionary – Chapter 12

“Into the Unknown”

A wise friend once told us, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll never get there.” However, as missionaries, we may not know where we are going sometimes, but this we know for sure, *The Lord our God goes ahead of us on our journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for us to camp and show us the way we should go.* (Dt 1:33).

These last couple of months we have been facing the hazy unknown; not with fear and trepidation, but with anticipation. The unknown is where God reveals Himself the clearest! We have been learning how the disciples faced the unknown as they returned to Jerusalem with Jesus Christ in His last days.

Phase II Mission Completed: Cedar College, KwaSizabantu: Tom’s teaching over the last two years has been concluded. *For us, it was a stark reality to realize that we were no longer needed!* Missionaries often work themselves out of a job: In this case, not for negative volition, but because we trained others to teach. Many graduate students are returning to teach, and the need was no longer ‘pressing.’ There is a greater need elsewhere. We did not know where, but we have stepped into the unknown. Where next?

As God closes one door, He opens more! Other teaching opportunities were opening at two different Bible Colleges in two different provinces: Union Bible Institute (where Tom taught previously) and Back to the Bible Training College (BBTC) (in a northern province). We were prepared to commute from our home, spending a month or two between the two colleges. These were “our plans”....seemed to make perfect sense because we were comfortable in this home of three years. However, our plans were not His Plans!! More unknowns.....

Not unsurprisingly, at this precise time in our ‘unassuming’ lives, we received a call from our landlord who informed us that he had a buyer for the house. We had 2 months to relocate. We asked ourselves, “How does this fit in with God’s Plan for our mission?” We had made certain assumptions, but moving was not one of them! Too disruptive to our mission! What now? Where next? Further into the Unknown.... The haze was getting thicker, but we could still see the lines ahead.

God provides sign posts along the journey: Cheryl and her family were actively involved with Back to the Bible in Sri Lanka, 50/60 years ago. Although unaffiliated, we visited the college in South Africa last November. The leader at Back to the Bible Training College is a retired Major General (two-star) Intelligence Officer, SA Defense Force. The General and his wife had volunteered to help out the college for three months. That was 16 years ago!! Being good Afrikaans Christians, they also followed the leading of the Lord. At their invitation, we visited the college a second time for 1 week earlier this month.

Phase III Mission - Back to the Bible Training College: The College recently celebrated 26 years. Located at the end of a long, dusty, rutted road, amidst macadamia and banana trees, it is regularly patrolled by troops of baboons and monkeys. It currently has 106 students from 19 different countries in Africa. Most of the students are pastors, preachers or missionaries from their home country. They are enrolled for a three year training program; all learn English, since there are too many languages involved. Arriving at the College, we were met at the Gate by Peter & Daniel! (Surprised?? Students of the College!) As is custom in African culture, one arrives bearing gifts. We were loaded with breads, bell peppers and avocados. The “Hospitality” committee insisted on *first* giving thanks to the Lord for our safe journey and the food we brought (before they even saw what we brought). First things First! That’s keeping priorities!! During the week we were there, a visiting professor was teaching an introductory course in the Hebrew Language. One late night Cheryl and I were walking through the chapel, library and prayer room grounds and found all the students studying for a Hebrew exam the following morning! Where else but in Africa!!!! Another night was “Homiletics Night” (The art and skill of preaching). Five first-year students were tasked with preparing 20 minute messages, which were subsequently critiqued by their own peers and college staff. It was well organized and some of the critiques (and even messages) were absolutely spot-on, doctrinally. It soon became clear to us and the college that the Lord was leading us in this direction. They asked us both to come on board as lecturers; Tom to teach systematic theology; Cheryl to teach English Grammar and anything non-theological. So the unknown is becoming known as we now eagerly anticipate our relocation by the end of October.

Back to the Bible Training College is located in the old gold mining town of Barberton, which is very picturesque, quaint, and filled with old charm. It “just so happened” that they had experienced a couple of mining disasters which left the town crippled. The mining industry suffered badly. Many homes are left standing but vacant, as workers and executives were forced to leave. After much ado, we found a home on the highest face of the mountain, overlooking the valley, at an extremely modest rental. The only negative reported to us by a neighbor is that there is a marauding gang of thieves that hang around the slopes waiting for

opportunities to plunder and steal anything, especially food! It just so happens that this band of gangsters is a troop of baboons!

Our prayer request is that we will always have the discernment to remain focused on the essential issues of God’s Word, especially with the varying cultures of the students. In addition, we ask for your prayers for our health. We can say with the Psalmist, *I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread!* (Ps.37:25). *Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed every day.* (2Cor.4:16-18).

There is no moral to this story; no lessons to be learned from “experiences”; no ironies; no probabilities; no accidents; no Murphy’s Law: Only understanding from God’s Word! Another wise man who walked into the unknown expressed God’s Plan this way, *Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent? In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider— God has made the one as well as the other So that man may not discover anything that will be after him.* (Eccl 7:13-14)

The tracks of a missionary may be soiled and muddy, but when *grounded* in His Word they will leave a legacy. Thanks for being on this journey with us.



The Barberton “Cartel”!



Evidence: Stolen bread!



Evidence: Stolen carrots!



Riding High!



After a hard days plunder - rest