

The Agonizomai Striver

**“And we proclaim Him ... And for this purpose, also I labor,
striving according to His power, which mightily works
within me.”**

Colossians 1:28-29

Dear Friends and Ministry Partners,

June 16, 2020

Debbie and I hope and pray this tardy update finds you all well and weathering all the events unfolding. Debbie and I can certainly relate to Paul in Philippians 4:11 where he declares, “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.” For our part, the whole virus drama found Debbie visiting her mom 900 miles away when the lockdown was imposed. We jointly decided it would be best for her to remain at her mom’s house to help her. Debbie’s mom is 75 and has emphysema, so falls into the high-risk category.

Little did we know then that what was announced as a 3-week lockdown to medically prepare for the worst-case scenario would turn into an 11-week separation, 9 of those in hard lockdown. With the loosening of some of the draconian lockdown measures, Debbie could make arrangements to fly home. So, after 13 weeks away from home, my bride finally arrived at Cape Town International last night!

To describe the ups and the downs of the isolation I endured would take a much longer to write than time allows. Suffice it to say, God’s grace enabled me to endure the loneliness and isolation. At times I felt like the only astronaut aboard the international space station. The loneliness of the long-distance runner in me was given quite the workout! I just knew I had to keep myself busy with all the domestic chores required along with study and riding my indoor cycle trainer to keep fit — our lockdown did not allow for any movement beyond our property except to the store or doctor until a few weeks ago. This all helped to break up the monotony of being by myself. Thankfully, through the wonders of social media, I was able to video chat with Debbie every day!

Like so many other ministries, we are able to keep the church afloat via livestreaming. My South African colleague and I have shared the weekly preaching duties with each of us taking turns preaching from our respective offices on alternate weeks. I have also managed to keep the Leadership

Training and Development course alive with the men I have been working with for almost two years now! We have really enjoyed some wonderful stimulating discussions around the doctrines of bibliology, the doctrine of God, and now the doctrine of Christ. I have been greatly encouraged by the thoughtful and insightful questions these men are asking. They have really been keeping me on my toes.

The Berean Bible Institute was all set to begin its first class on March 31st. It goes without saying we had to cancel our maiden voyage. At this time, we are not sure when we will be able to reschedule — possibly in September. Given the fluid nature of the situation we will have to wait a few more weeks to see what develops.

There is certainly much for which to pray in these trying days. Here are just a few prayer requests from our side of the vineyard:

- South Africa needs much prayer as a country. The ruling party, the African National Congress, is using the crisis to take a very hard left politically and economically. Despite having no money, they are charging ahead with plans for “radical economic transformation” which will offer “inclusive growth for all” a.k.a. radical wealth redistribution. Add to this the estimates of unemployment are predicted to reach 50%. The hospitality and tourist trade have been completely decimated. Daily we hear of more businesses and companies laying people off. Thus, the road ahead will be long and rocky.
- Personally, we were scheduled to make a 6-week trip stateside leaving Cape Town April 30th. We had to postpone that and have no idea when international travel might be allowed again. The rumors are the end of the year, or even possibly early next year. We would dearly love to attend Micaiah’s rescheduled graduation from Master’s University on August 28th. That possibility looks very remote now, but we would appreciate your prayers for that possibility, nonetheless.
- On the praise front, we are delighted that our daughter, Janelle, married Nathan Caldwell the end of March! They contacted me a few days before hand and asked if they could go ahead and get married now and have a celebration ceremony sometime next year.

Considering the circumstances, I gave them my blessing. They now live in Dayton, Ohio where Nathan works as an aeronautical engineer. A few weeks after Janelle and Nathan were married, Micaiah finished his 4-year course in information systems technology and will graduate *summa cum laud!* We are extremely proud of both kids and thank God for the way in which He has undertaken for both during this crisis!

- When lockdown restrictions were eased recently, our neighbor, Marius, asked to go on a bike ride with me. During the ride, he opened up to me about spiritual things and shared how a near death experience prompted him to seek the Lord. He claims to have been saved a couple years ago but has never been to church nor disciplined. I spoke to him and found a copy of Fundamentals of the Faith and gave it to him to begin working through it. I hope to be able to guide him through the material and see where it leads. So, please pray for Marius and for continued opportunities there.
- For wisdom and opportunity to launch the first class of Berean Bible Institute.

May the Lord richly bless and keep you all during these very challenging yet gospel-opportunity laden days.

Yours for the Master's Use

Mark & Debbie Christopher