



## ***The Humble Beginning of The Berean Bible Institute!***

**“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,

August 25, 2020

It does not seem possible that a couple of months have passed since our last update. The last time I wrote, Debbie was just arriving home from her three-month sojourn with her mother. Now she has been home for about 10 weeks! As we begin preparing for our spring season, most who read this are preparing to transition from summer to fall! It has been a fairly wet and cold winter, so summer can't come soon enough for us. Between lockdown and winter weather, we are suffering from a severe case of cabin fever.

We had hoped to be in the US right now so we could partake in our son's graduation from The Master's University this coming Saturday. But international travel is still forbidden in and out of South Africa at present. And at this time, there is no real indication when the gates to international travel might open. Some are saying not until early next year. There are a few repatriation flights in and out of the country. The problem with doing that is there is a two-week quarantine on either side of our travel itinerary. A total of one month in quarantine makes this untenable. The only consolation here is that the graduation will be live-streamed Saturday evening our time! So, mom and dad will be cheering on our *Summa Cum Laude* graduate via cyberspace!

The secular news from our part of the vineyard remains rather bleak. While the COVID numbers have peaked and started down the other side of the curve, the economy looks like Stalingrad after Hitler's forces were defeated there. Over three million jobs have been lost thus far — I expect more jobs will perish before the end of the year. That puts unemployment somewhere in the staggering vicinity of 45%. It was only a week ago that South Africa went from a level three to a level two lockdown. This might help stimulate the economy some. Meanwhile it has been revealed that the COVID-19 money meant for personal protective equipment (PPE) fell victim to the corrupt kleptocrats who awarded cronies and their patronage network PPE tenders for the small price of some kickbacks and a little *quid pro quo*. All of which ensured inflated prices, delays, and partial service delivery for this much needed equipment. Some government officials were even stealing food parcels meant for the poor to reward friends and family while selling some of the food to line their own pockets. It is sad to say, but if corruption were people, the ruling party here would be China. Much more could be said, but this should suffice to prompt prayer on behalf of this failing nation which seems intent on joining the ranks of other failed African states like Zimbabwe. As Proverbs 29:2 reminds us, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan."

In late June, we were able to go back to church, but with restrictions of course. Even with the restrictions, it was a blessing to worship with other saints in the same place at the same time! It also makes it easier to preach into the live-stream camera. While not all of our people have made their way back to church yet, we are grateful for those who have joined us on Sunday mornings. Out of some two-hundred people, only two had COVID-19 and neither of them had to be hospitalized. For this we are most thankful. The Great Shepherd has truly tended to the needs of our flock during this surreal time.

Since we do not know at this time when things might return to some semblance of normalcy, we have decided to begin our COVID-19 postponed seminary course on September 8<sup>th</sup> using the medium of an online platform. Beginning with an online presence was not how we envisioned our start but given the current circumstances we have no other alternative. We also have managed to get a basic website up and running. Now comes the task of adding much needed material and content. It is certainly a humble start and a work in process, but the bus is beginning to move in the right direction. To date, we have fifteen people signed up for Old Testament Survey, which will be taught by my good friend Bruce Newsham — a fellow alumnus of The Master's Seminary.

The Lord also blessed us with a \$7000.00 dollar gift made to the seminary for some basic renovations on a couple of classrooms at the church. This will temporarily house the seminary until more substantial renovations can take place. One of our primary supporting churches contacted me and asked me if I needed anything. I told them about our short-term plans for the seminary, so they decided to provide half of the needed \$7000.00! The rest of the money came in without me even mentioning it! Renovations begin next week and will include some much-needed bookcases to unpack some wonderful books another supporting church provided a couple of years ago. Then out of the blue, a FaceBook

friend sent me a private message to ask if the seminary needed anything. I told him we need more books. So, he is sending \$1000.00 dollars for books! I look forward to that book shopping spree in the near future!

In addition to all these blessings, God has provided me with some IT help through one of the young men in our congregation — Etienne Neethling. Etienne has some health issues that prevent him from fulltime employment. But he is an absolute whiz kid on the computer and internet. He is also an excellent administrator. As result, I am hiring him part time to help with all matters IT and to help me with administration, as a seminary requires mountains of admin, which is not my forte. I am most grateful for God's provision of this much needed help!

True to our original vision for the seminary, it is for South Africans and by South Africans. At present, I am the only exception to the indigenous rule. And by all accounts, the South Africans keep telling me I am an honorary South African by mere virtue of the fact we are in our 26th year of ministry here. Everyone else involved in the planning and execution of this endeavor is a South African who trained at The Master's Seminary, except for Etienne, who has an online theological degree from South African Theological Seminary.

In short, there is much to praise the Lord for regarding the Berean Bible Institute. We truly covet your prayers for this enterprise as we continue to make slow, but steady progress. In our next update I promise to send a few pictures of our first online class, the renovations we have done, and the books lining the new shelves! As well, we will continue to update the website with much needed content. As I keep telling everyone here, we are a work in progress, so please be patient!

May the Lord truly bless and keep you all safe and healthy during these challenging days. And may you be used to be a shining light to penetrate the dark, murky recesses of this world!

Yours for the Master's use!

*Mark & Debbie Christopher*

Cape Town, South Africa

**Prayer and Praise Prompters:**

- There is much to pray for regarding the seminary: our first class, the renovations, establishing it, promoting it, the right students, financing it, and seeking a link with Christ Seminary Polokwane for accreditation purposes, which is proving difficult — not because of Christ Seminary, but because of government bureaucracy. We need much wisdom and grace as we move forward.
- South Africa needs much prayer as the situation here on the ground continues to metastasize. Of course, with this come unique opportunities to shine the light of Christ and serve as salt to the decomposing situation.
- We are already beginning to think about a furlough next year sometime. This always takes a great deal of prayer, planning, and wisdom well in advance. Please pray that God will help us to think through the unique logistics of taking such a furlough and provide someone to stay in our home this side while providing shelter and transport stateside.
- I am also in the throes of studying for my Ph.D. Hebrew exam. I will probably take the exam middle to late November, but I have a long way to go to get up to that level of language proficiency. I truly enjoy my time in the Hebrew text, but I am all too aware of my deficiencies and weaknesses. Please pray that God will grant me both understanding and recall of all that I am studying and translating.
- We praise God that both our kids are doing well! Janelle has settled in nicely to married life with Nathan and is enjoying life in the Dayton, Ohio area. Micaiah, on the other hand, is working fulltime at The Master's University IT department for the time being and thinking about a master's degree in cyber security! We are most grateful he is living with good friends of ours one block from the university!