

March Prayer Points

Those who do not have time to read the stories may still get the main points in less than two minutes by scanning the red print and looking at the photos.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.

Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh, but in vain.

It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows, for so He giveth His beloved sleep. Psalm 127:1-2 (KJV)

Dear Friends,

The verse above is a favorite of mine because it reminds us so eloquently of our dependence upon God for fruitfulness in any endeavor. **The way the NASB translates the last phrase is arresting: “for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”**

That seems to be what God has done over the past months in our ministry. I haven't been exactly sleeping, but I have been bound to a desk doing administrative tasks when opportunities for real ministry surround me on every side. I am chronically tormented by my inability to address those opportunities because of needing to supervise the mission's 12 employees, maintain and develop the mission's 8-acre estate, keep the mission's five vehicles operating, defend the mission in court against lawsuits, and interface with the government on many fronts.



Our annual party for the Mission's workers and families

I often think, “I am a trained surgeon in a land of sick people who can't get help – I should be doing operations!” Or “I am a missionary surrounded by spiritual darkness – I should be teaching the Bible and proclaiming Christ full time!”

I then wonder if somehow the adversary has cleverly neutralized me by weaving around me a tenacious web of bureaucracy, all of which has arisen, ironically, from the “much ministering” that characterized our goals and efforts in the past. However, though I often feel immobilized in an administrative straitjacket, it appears God continues to give progress even in my sleep, or perhaps more accurately, even in my state of bureaucracy-induced paralysis.

One physical example of God giving even in my “sleep” that vividly illustrates what I hope is happening as well on spiritual fronts is the mission's property, a mundane matter to which I grudgingly commit a significant amount of time and effort. In 1998 we were given 8 acres of land on the outskirts of town with 130 meters of frontage on the only paved highway passing through the city. Apart from \$6,000 in



The property as it looked at the beginning



The property as it looked three years ago



legal fees, we paid nothing for the property, though over the years we have spent a little over one million dollars building on it. Today, fifteen years later, Nampula has become the second largest city in the nation, and we are now well within the city limits. The land alone is worth over two million dollars based on what neighbors are asking for their properties, and with the buildings we have erected, the total real estate should be worth over four million dollars. **Our initial investment of one million six thousand dollars has grown to over four million! The Lord has given even in our sleep!**

The perceived strategy:

As I look at the spiritual ministry, there too I see encouraging progress, but not much for which I could claim credit. God has given, even during my “sleep”. In this report, I want to sketch out the perceived strategy for each of the major arms of ministry. I say “perceived,” because in seeking to discern and follow the Lord’s direction in these efforts, this seems to be the plan moving His invisible hand. The next report, which I will send in a day or two, describes the current state of the work, which I find encouraging.

Medical Evangelistic Ministry

In the perceived strategy, first, but not most important, is the medical evangelistic ministry which provided great satisfaction during the earliest 8 years of our family’s life in Mozambique. Despite the fact that Mozambique was a communist country back in 1990, at the hospital I was able to pray with every patient, distribute gospels of John in the clinic, sell Bibles from the surgical block, do evangelistic rounds, and preach the gospel every Sunday in the large assembly area to patients, family members, and hospital staff. But along with great opportunities there were great frustrations from working in a government facility. Narcotics were diverted from the post op patients and taken home by the nurses (proven), attractive patients needing blood might first have to sleep with the male night nurse to get the transfusion (alleged), patients sometimes died of





Typical late stage pathology treated in the government hospital

treatable infections because normal saline was habitually given instead of IV antibiotics so that the latter could be sold on the black market (proven), and desperate patients might have to bribe the triage clinicians before being allowed an appointment with the surgeon (alleged).

When Mozambique embraced democracy and a free market economy, Grace Missions received permission to build its own surgical center to be

staffed by missionary physicians and local Christians, something forbidden under the previous communist constitution. Thanks to the skillful labors of Mike and Hilda Stolk and to many generous contributors, that building is completed and in July our family will be returning to the States to recruit the missionary doctors needed to make it function. Once the hospital is equipped and staffed, we will resume the medical evangelistic ministry, but without the confusion of being unequally yoked with unbelieving caregivers.



The inpatient wing of the new facility

Church Planting Ministry

Besides facilitating a consistent, clear-cut gospel message, another advantage of operating our own mission hospital is that those who respond to the evangelistic ministry will have ready access to a church where they can learn more about Christ after leaving the hospital. For 21 years, Grace Missions has been involved in church planting work. Our lone congregation is still small, but our church leaders and members are well equipped to disciple and teach the people we hope God will draw into the church through daily hospital evangelism. In the year 2000, the church began meeting on the mission property, so if the church chooses to remain on the property after the hospital begins functioning, patients will not have far to look to find a place to learn about and worship Christ!



Christian Literature and Conference Ministry

To me, church planting is the ultimate goal in missions, but it is clear so far that God has not made our small church the vehicle for transforming Mozambique. This could be due to inability and faults on my part, but it could also be because God always intended for Grace Missions to minister as well in other spiritual arenas. If our church were growing rapidly, I would devote all my time to helping its leaders, but in 1996, when the church planting effort seemed to be producing more bane than benefit, I began praying that God would let me get involved with a spiritual ministry moving on a faster track.

The response to that prayer was a phone call from out of the blue made by Editora Fiel in Brazil. They asked that I team with them to bring excellent Christian literature

from a doctrines of grace perspective to the churches in Mozambique. This answered another long-time concern of mine connected with our medical evangelistic ministry. Though I was often encouraged by the conviction reflected in the faces of those listening to the gospel, I wondered where troubled souls would find churches that preached salvation by grace through faith in Christ. The message of Evangelical churches in those days was overwhelmingly one of gaining salvation through reforming one's life according to the Ten Commandments or by following the example of Christ and then hoping for leniency on the Day of Judgment. An understanding of salvation by grace through faith, with good works being the result of salvation, not the cause, was almost nonexistent.

Through Fiel's free literature distribution ministry to church leaders across the country, the 14 annual nationwide Fiel conferences I have hosted in Nampula, the Christian bookstore we have operated for ten years, and seminars I have taught for eight years, God has granted Grace Missions an effective means of influencing churches throughout the nation. I find it significant that the greatest concentration of those affected churches is here at the hub of our future evangelistic ministry. I trust that God arranged for Nampula to be the center of both the medical work and the Fiel work because it is important that people coming to the hospital from all over have grace-oriented churches that can follow up on them when they return home. The highest concentration of such grace churches will be, not coincidentally, where we have the highest concentration of patients.



So the perceived strategy appears to be that:

- **Via the hospital ministry Grace Missions will be able to evangelize a large geographical area reaching many people from throughout northern Mozambique who would not normally visit a church;**
- **People from the local area who respond can be incorporated into the church work, something which over time will strengthen both the new believers and the church; and**
- **Patients who come from further away will have increasingly more churches available to them that teach salvation by grace through faith.**

That is the perceived strategy. The next installment deals with the present state of the ministry, showing how God has granted progress despite my limitations.

By His grace,
Charles and Julie Woodrow