

June 7, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while he is near. . . .

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:6, 8-9

It has been nearly two months since my return to Togo - sometimes I wonder "only two months? it seems much longer!" So many experiences in such a short period of time.

In my last newsletter (January) I wrote of my Togolese experience at the Dapaong Hospital. When I returned to Togo in April, I remained in Lomé to purchase a new car. Another Togolese experience! The greatest selection of used cars here in Togo is found at the international port of Lomé, where cars coming from Europe and the USA are sold on HUGE car lots. Thankfully my mechanic from Dapaong was able to be in Lomé soon after I arrived and he helped with the process. The selection is basically by sight, as there is no opportunity to test drive. We dealt with the seller, a Lebanese fellow sitting in a little structure on stilts, high above the lot; a transitaire, who does all of the dealings with the customs officials, getting the vehicle out of the port, paying for registration, license plates and insurance; and 'cherchers' - young guys trying to get us to visit other lots. When we had finally found a car that seemed promising, we climbed up into the seller's little office to discuss price. This included the price of the vehicle, the customs duties, registration, plates and insurance, fees for the transitaire, repairs. Such bargaining in three different languages! The car needed a number of things. . .including a battery!! Who is to pay for what? Then the problem of getting funds transferred from GSLC and the Togo Mission Fund to Togo. None of the transfer agents (Western Union, Ria, Money Gram) would accept such a large sum. . .and in Togo the only way to make such a purchase is with cash in hand. I am so thankful for Tammy's untiring help in getting the funds to me through three different transfers over several days. One of the bank branches I visited didn't have even several thousand dollars to complete one transfer, so I had to wait for money to come from the main bank. Another bank refused to complete the transfer as my middle name was not listed. Finally, with a huge wad of money in a backpack, riding on motorcycle taxis, we returned to the sales yard to complete the purchase. Alas, the seller had NOT completed the repairs he had agreed to do. A few more words exchanged. When the deal was finally completed, it was too late in the day for the car to be driven from the car lot. I had been nearly two weeks in Lomé since my return from Turlock and was anxious to be home in Dapaong. My mechanic was staying for other business, so it was agreed he would return to the sales yard the following day to get the car and take it to his garage in Lomé. There, final repairs could be made while waiting for all of the official papers. Two weeks later, the car was released and my mechanic returned to Lomé to drive it back to Dapaong. Azouma, my 'son' and co-worker, was going to ride with him. They started out early on a Sunday morning, hoping to be in Dapaong early in the afternoon. When I went out to go to church in my old car, alas - a flat tire! I sent a text message to Azouma, who told the mechanic. The mechanic called me immediately; the new car had broken down about 1/3 of the way to Dapaong! He'd sent his assistant here in Dapaong to get my car, repair the tire, and set off to rescue them! They could not make the repair easily, so the old car towed the new car back to Dapaong! I had begun to

wonder about 'my thoughts.' Were my thoughts about the purchase of this car so different from God's thoughts? I had prayed for His guidance, and listened to those willing to help, but oh? When the mechanic, Azouma, and the assistant finally reached Dapaong Sunday evening, they were all very tired and I was very discouraged. Being hopeful and positive is sometimes very difficult when obstacles keep appearing. My old car was still running well enough, so I used it until the needed parts arrived to repair the new car. Finally, one month after I actually purchased my car, the mechanic brought it to me. He actually sold my old car at the same time! I used some of the money from this sale to pay for the costs and repairs that I experienced, and to give help to others. As I had been gone for several months, there were many needs. Though we cannot understand God's ways or His thoughts, we must rest in His care and strength in all things. I don't know why life keeps throwing challenges in our paths, but 'with God, all things are possible.'

At the same time my new car was ready, Dr. Glenn Fluegge, director of the Cross-cultural Ministry Center at Concordia University Irvine, arrived in Dapaong with ten students for a two week visit. Glenn is a former Togo Missionary who served as director of the CLET, professor, and head missionary. He had brought the students as a part of a university course, to experience life and culture in Togo. The group spent a week living together (all eleven of them) in the guest house at the CLET. They attended chapel with the CLET students, visited the Dapaong market and visited the building site of the Lutheran Day School. Then they moved out to the village of Mire, where they slept on the packed floor of the courtyard of the house built adjacent to the church. We had made repairs to the house and constructed latrines for the group, but they lived the village life! No running water, no electricity, and living together in a small space. Several of the church women prepared village food for the group, twice a day. Each day we went out into the village to visit and see. We were able to make a visit to our CCCS/LeadaChild schools in Lokpano and Mire. I returned home to Dapaong every night, to return in the morning with needed supplies (pure water, bread) and to care for one of the students who fell ill, and remained in the guest house most of the final week. I was thankful for my new car, making the trip every day to Mire! I appreciated the students and Glenn also so much. It was exciting to see them learn about life here. I was very thankful also that Azouma and Kombiagou, two of my first English students, served as translators for the group during their entire visit. They spoke Moba, French and English as well as gave insight into culture and tradition. We hope and pray that one or two of these young people will be encouraged to become a missionary, here in Togo, or somewhere else in the world. They all are seeking the Lord, and seeking His thoughts!

Our Lutheran Day School project here in Dapaong is moving along. Most of the masonry work is finished, leaving the tole roof to be installed by the carpenters. Funds are lacking, and money to have table benches constructed, purchase some teaching documents, complete legal documents with the government, and hire teachers must be raised. Again, we seek the Lord! His thoughts and ways are much higher than ours, and we pray that He guide us in the next steps. Our hope is to educate our children in the way they should go, giving them the tools to become good Christian men and women and leaders in the Lutheran Church of Togo.

with a grateful heart for your prayers and encouragement!

Valerie Stonebreaker

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