

December 2020

Merry Christmas



Our Itinerary



- Dec 15-18: International Online Training
- Jan 10: Valley Baptist Church, Yuma
- Jan 12: Mandalay, Myanmar Online Training
- Jan 17: Valle Vista Community Church, Kingman
- Jan 19: Myitkyina, Myanmar Online Training
- Feb 19-21: GTN Leadership Gathering

Rwanda: Victory in Adversity

I am thrilled to be writing this newsletter from Rwanda where I am spending much of the Christmas season. I have not seen my students here since October 2019 because of restrictions on travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is wonderful to be here again. The students have been very productive with their application plans for the last 14 months! Here are just a few of the statistics:

- 22 pastors used our Timothy material on Caring for God's People and Christian Stewardship to



train 3839 other believers in their churches.

- 325 souls placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
- 242 leaders were trained to lead small groups and house churches. (In this area the pastors multiplied their own efforts 10 fold.)

There are other statistics dealing with reconciled families, increases in offerings, building projects, etc. However, it is the 242 leaders trained which excites me most. Our pastors lead churches of 175 members on average. Since March the government here has forbidden all worship services. In some areas even small group meetings are forbidden. By God's grace, our pastoral care course helped pastors move forward in spite of this shut-down. 100% of them organized their churches into smaller groups (in more restricted areas, the small groups are individual families). They trained leaders (usually by phone) for those groups. As a result, churches have been strengthened during the pandemic! Church members have been learning to care for, teach, and encourage one another as well as minister to their communities. These church members have been unleashed to carry on the ministry themselves. With the pastors' blessing, offerings of money, food, and clothing have been increasingly used to assist those who have lost employment due to COVID-19. One emphasis which emerged from our teaching on Christian stewardship was the need to use resources productively so that we can meet our own needs and have still more to give away. This year members of the 22 churches represented in our class planted more acreage than ever before. Blessed with bumper crops, they have given away significant amounts of food to the increased number of hungry in their villages.

One of the men present missed the first two courses. However, he took them in classes led by an earlier student of ours. Having an entrepreneurial bent, this man wrote and carried out an interesting six month plan for Christian stewardship. He applied for and received money to use as micro-loans for people starting small businesses. Now he offers small loans along with business coaching to members of his church and community, enabling them to become productive



Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas ... Really



How do you describe 2020? I recently saw an ad for a battery powered Christmas ornament made to look like a dumpster with '2020' writ large on the front and little LED flames shooting out of the top. It's no secret that this has been a rough year. So how can we lift our spirits enough to really celebrate Christmas?

Let's start by remembering that 2020 is not the first difficult year ever. The song "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" was written in 1944 at the height of WWII. It was written for Judy Garland to sing in the Warner Bros. film, "Meet me in St Louis." The author, Hugh Martin, perhaps influenced by the war weary

world around him, wrote original lyrics so abysmally sad that Judy Garland refused to sing them. The song began, "Have yourself a merry little Christmas. It may be your last..." and went downhill from there. Eventually it was rewritten out of fear that children would cry and Judy Garland would be thought a monster. That was a tough year.

In 1918 the world also spent much of the year at war. The world also had to absorb the reality of a newly formed evil empire known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. A flu pandemic killed 675,000 in the United States. That was a pretty tough year too. History is unfortunately replete with tough years, but wait.

Let's also remember that Jesus came into a tough world. Living in Israel in 33 BC was no picnic. According to a recent article in Cambridge University Press, researchers using textual and archeological evidence have been able to paint a 'health' picture of Israel around the time of Christ. Infant mortality was extraordi-

Rwanda: Victory in Adversity (Cont'd)

and provide for their families. The side benefit of this is that giving in his church has grown significantly. He also developed a smart phone app to help church members track their service and Christian disciplines.

These results and others represent the church as God intends it: believer/priests all ministering both to their fellow believers and to the unreached in their communities. The power of the gospel to change lives is on display when churches serve in

this manner! This is the fruit of your investment in our training ministry. When we train majority world pastors in practical biblical principles, they do amazing things and train others to do so. This small group emphasis will continue even after things return to normal. The churches are *healthier, more vibrant and effective* now than before the pandemic began. Thus the mandated church shut-downs, something the devil meant for harm, God has used for good! Here in Rwanda, He has brought victory through adversity. 



Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas ... Really (Cont'd)

narly high as were sub-adult deaths in general. This has been attributed to poor maternal health and poor nutrition. There were also unchecked epidemics of leprosy and tuberculosis. Josephus describes a Hasmonean king suffering from what we know today as Malaria. In addition to these and other health issues threatening everyone's well-being in 33 BC, there was the indignity and injustice of Roman domination over Israel, confiscatory taxation, widespread poverty, and a general sense of hopelessness among God's chosen people. Above all this, for reasons few could fathom, Israel had not heard from one of God's prophets for 400 years. This is the tough world into which Jesus came. And that gets me to my point.

Finally, let's pause to remember WHY Jesus came into this tough world. The angel announcing his birth to shepherds prophesied that Jesus' incarnation would lead to **"Peace on earth and good will to men on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14)**. That promise still holds, and the day is closer now than it was then. Jesus spoke to individual sufferers when He gave them the good news that He had come **"to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)**. **These are the best reasons to celebrate at Christmas—ESPECIALLY at the end of a tough year like 2020.** When the world was darkest, that's when the light of the world appeared. When people were exhausted from their trials, that's when Jesus came to announce, "come to me and I will give you rest." When there was a dearth of revelation from God, that's when the Word incarnate revealed God in the flesh. When one of the few certainties in life was the reality of death, that's when Jesus offered us the water that springs up into everlasting life! Perhaps today we are nearing another such dark moment in history. But, perhaps it may herald the Lord's soon return.

This year Andrew Peterson recorded a song entitled "Is He Worthy?" You can see the video here: <https://youtu.be/Olahc83Kvp4>. It is based on Revelation 5 and speaks for many of us in 2020 by recognizing the deepening shadows around us and pointing to Christ as the only one who is worthy to break the seals and open the scrolls, to judge the world and set things right again. He will never forsake us. I think of this as a kind of anthem for 2020. The good news of Christmas is that because Christ came, even though in this tough world we will have trouble, we can take heart. **He has overcome the world!** One day, perhaps sooner than we think, the murk will be gone, and this truth will be clear! So instead of looking around and being depressed, **look to Jesus and have yourself a merry little Christmas. Really.** 



Our Praises and Prayer Requests



- Praise God for a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday.
- Praise God my injured hamstring is nearly healed.
- Praise God for 325 salvations and 242 trained leaders in our Rwanda ministry.
- Please pray for travel restrictions to be eased, enabling us to train in all of our countries.
- Please pray for my International Zoom class on Christian Stewardship starting December 15.
- Please pray for the health and safety of students in Nepal, Rwanda, Malawi, Philippines, and Myanmar.
- Please pray for good year end giving in preparation for 2021.

Ministry Partnership

Your financial partnership is essential as we carry out our God given ministry. Please follow the instructions below or on the enclosed response card (US mail version).

"Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account... And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:17, 19)

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