

This third quarterly prayer letter is very timely, because on Monday, March 4 Selva will be getting a replacement of her entire right hip at a small hospital in Columbus, North Carolina, which is 76 miles and almost two hours drive from our home here in Anderson, South Carolina. Her surgeon, Dr. Rosenberg, only does hip and knee replacements and he trains other surgeons how to perform his specialized method of doing those kind of surgeries.

The cortisone shot Selva got on her birthday December 17 has completely worn off and two doctors we have known from time together with them in our church, and a third doctor whom we have also known from church and who does hip replacements himself, have "all", in examining X-rays of Selva's hip concluded that because there is no cartilage left in that hip, it is bone rubbing on bone and a complete hip replacement is our "only" option.

We are obviously praying that Dr. Rosenberg will get a good night's rest on Sunday night March 3, and we too will be able to rest well before getting up extremely early on March 4 to make the required arrival of 5:00 a.m. at the hospital. We pray that Monday morning Selva's surgeon will have a steady hand as he enters from the front of Selva's upper thigh, separates some large muscles, extracts that wore out hip, and inserts a new artificial one. We have always shied away from any operation that involves a knife but there is supposed to be very little cutting involved and we are told that you can actually view this operation of another patient on YouTube. We ourselves will be holding off on that viewing opportunity for now.

I will spend the night with Selva in a reclining chair in her room and then if she is released, I will drive her home on March 5. Rehabilitation people will come to our home initially and then on March 18 we will drive back up to Columbus, NC, so Selva's surgeon can take out her stitches and evaluate her progress. Then another two weeks on my birthday April 1 I will get the best present ever when we will once again drive up to Dr. Rosenberg's clinic down the road from the hospital where he performs his operations and hopefully get a release from him for us to go back out on the road. In the meantime, while taking care of Selva I will visit colleges that can be done by going out and back in a day.

SCIATIC NERVE & BURSTITIS

The very real prayer request is that as a result of Selva's getting this new hip her Sciatic Nerve and Bursitis problems that have plagued her for a couple of years will subside and she will be pain free in the days ahead.

BUSY WEEK-END

Our daughter-in-law's birthday is on Saturday, so our son and us are having twenty plus people come to the house that day and some will be spending the night, so please pray that we can get some rest after everyone leaves on Sunday before Selva's operation on Monday morning.

UPDATE ON MY BLADDER CANCER

We recently returned from a four-week road trip up north, during which time we got to experience a lot of that arctic sub-zero weather and snow that reminded us so much of our five winters in the Soviet Union, just in time for my surgeon to go back into my bladder February 27. He feels like the cancer treatments which he has prescribed for me are working and by the time I finish this three-year regiment of treatments my bladder should be fine. When my surgeon goes back into my bladder in May, he is also going to check my kidneys; because if cancer travels from the bladder, the kidneys is where it often goes next

NAGGING COUGH

For months I Tom have struggled with a nagging almost continuous cough that has drained my energy night and day. I have felt fear that because the only other two missionaries who rode motorcycles during the same time period of 13 years that I rode every day in Jakarta, Indonesia, one of the most polluted cities in the world, have both died of lung cancer in their early 60's and they had not ridden nearly as much as I did.

So in recent days I have been fearful that the cancer which has been in my bladder supposedly because of smoking, which I have never done, or other air pollutants, was now in my lungs. All of that extreme air pollution in Jakarta even entered our house, because 365 days of the year it was extremely hot and humid and all of our windows and doors remained open night and day. When volcanoes erupted on our island many miles away we had very fine talcum like volcanic rock powder all over everything in our house.

So with that history and the fact that some years after we entered this old house built in 1939, I could not get anyone to help me, so I myself pulled down all of the cardboard ceilings in our entire upstairs which had resting above them several inches of ancient asbestos insulation. I ate and breathed in that stuff by the pound. So, this past week I have been

consulting with two of the same doctors which Selva has been seeing about her hip and they have taken X-rays and examined my lungs with their stethoscope, only to tell me that everything looks and sounds clear and healthy in my lungs. That that has brought a world of relief.

GOD'S PROMISES

I had been to Hong Kong in September of 1970 and stood at the border of what we knew then as Red China with triple rows of tall razor wire fences behind which Chinese soldier sentries glared at me with forbidding eyes and facial features that seemed to threaten me from stepping another inch closer. So, when Selva and I flew into Beijing twenty-five years later, we admittedly had fear in our hearts. We were two spies entering a territory that has been held by Satan for many centuries, and we had found ourselves behind the border of the Middle Kingdom of China which definitely believes in "walls" and "border control".

During that first trip to Beijing God gave us a promise in Revelation 3:8 "I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hath kept my word, and hath not denied my name." The door surely did not seem open at the time as we fearfully checked into the least expensive cock-roach infested hotel in the city which was just months later scrapped off at ground level. We were afraid to even take off our shoes. But we liked and grabbed a-hold of the part of that promise, about our "having little strength."

Caleb and Joshua were sent by Moses into the Promised land with ten other spies who brought back a very negative report that did not co-inside with the faith believing feelings of Caleb and Joshua. So, because of those ten men's fear and unwillingness to trust our Lord's promise to them, they and that entire generation of Israelites had to spend forty years dying off in the wilderness before any of them ever got to enter the Promised Land.

Four decades later Joshua asked two spies to enter the city of Jericho. I am sure that when the prostitute Rahab hid those two men among the stalks of flax on the roof of Rahab's house located in the wall of Jericho, they too encountered lots of cock roaches and dirt in that forbearing environment where business was conducted much like what we eventually realized was happening in our Beijing hotel.

NEVER ANY CONFIDENCE IN EXPERIENCE OR THE FLESH

Despite our twenty years of experience in the most populous Muslim country in the world and five years behind the Iron Curtain we took no confidence in our experience during those initial days in Beijing and we felt like two little bunny rabbits during hunting season. Now after organizing summer teams into China and helping tens and tens of people to get established over there we are once again faced with temptations of fear which are mainly coming from fellow Christians who like the ten spies see only the giants and high city walls that admittedly have been increasing in their forbearance in recent years and months. We are well aware of all of the reports which are coming out of "our" promised land, and we take each one of those cases seriously. We sometimes feel fearful not only for ourselves, but even more so for those who have stepped out by faith to follow us.

WELL MEANING FRIENDS

One of the things which helps to make me nervous is when well-meaning friends, who like Job's friends are often spiritual people with a lot of experience in life, and who we know have our best interests at heart will tell me about bad experiences different national pastors and even foreigners have had in China. They in complete sincerity and with well-meaning hearts raise questions about the advisability of our taking another 50 young people to China again this coming summer.

Like with Job's friends, most of the issues and points which they raise are well founded and we realize that the apprehensions which they voice to us are based on things which they have heard or read. We appreciate their concern for us and we listen to and consider very seriously the questions which they present. Like Job we do not have explanations or answers to their questions.

Last week we were in a conference with a godly couple who represent Martyrs for Christ. While they have never been to China, they gave us some very concerning reports about things that have happened in recent months to national pastors and Chinese Americans who were visiting relatives in China after the Chinese government had sponsored them to come to America to get higher education and then they stayed on here in the US and became American citizens.

When they were back in China visiting relatives and trying to be a Christian witness the Chinese government still saw them as Chinese citizens and questioned them like they would any of their citizens. While we can understand the Chinese side of things it is still disheartening to hear reports of them being detained. But so far we have never heard of natural born Americans being questioned. Going into China since 1995 we have never had a suitcase opened at

Customs even while taking in numerous Bibles and other Christian materials. We have never been questioned about anything.

SARS VIRUS

In November of 2002 there was much in our American News about a SARS virus in China that was affecting mostly elderly people or people who had previous respiratory problems. But there was so much about it in our news that even supporting pastors expressed concern and some pulled back their young people who were planning on going with us, costing us a great deal of money because of canceled airline tickets.

One pastor dropped our support because he thought we were being reckless. We had no idea of guessing it would happen ahead of time, but as it turned out, by the time we got to China in July that virus, which is only effective up to temperatures more than ten degrees less than what we experience during our days in China had dissipated and the West Nile virus which was sweeping across America that summer effected more people per capita in the US than the SARS virus ever did in China.

DISEASES IN INDONESIA

When we were first given a chance to go to Borneo, Indonesia, our friends and relatives voiced very viable concerns regarding not only the long snakes and many other deadly creatures in that part of the world, but more importantly the threat of Malaria, Dengue Fever, Yellow Fever, and Hepatitis, all of which were definitely there. Through the years I did end up with Hepatitis, Dengue Fever, and Malaria, which most people in those jungle areas got sooner or later, but I was always able to recover like people here in America recover from one thing or another. Fortunately, not even our State Department recommends any kind of shots or inoculations for going to China, and through all these years we have not had anyone get seriously ill.

REPORTS FROM AMERICANS WHO LIVE IN CHINA

We have just last week spent two days with an American missionary couple who have lived in China since 1989 and have since 1992 been living and teaching in the most sensitive area of the entire country for a witnessing Christian to live. They were only back in the US for a few weeks and have been able to give us an extremely complete and comprehensive report regarding the present climate in China. They were pleased to hear about our internship and encouraged us to continue on.

In October we spent a long time at a mission's conference talking to two American men who, as a result of their internship with us back in the late 90's, have been living and working in China with their families ever since we first helped them to get jobs out there. They and many other people we have helped to get established in different parts of China have been giving us very accurate reports about their experience and that of other Americans they know who are living out there.

So while we may not have the warm and fuzzies or any kind of peace about our upcoming trip to China, we are completely assured that the Lord has placed a "Great Wall" of protection around us and has hedged us about with protection from the fiery darts of the enemy, even as we continue to travel by faith on our American roads, with many people talking and texting on their phones. No matter where we go or what we try to do for the Lord, it will come with its challenges and concerns, and all we can do is to move ahead by faith with confidence and assurance that the Lord will get us home safely in His good timing.

Joshua 14:6-12

Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal; and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses, the man of God, concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea. Forty years old was I when Moses, the servant of the LORD, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart. Never the less my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; but I wholly followed the LORD my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's forever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God. And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as He said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spoke this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wondered in the wilderness; and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in. Now, therefore, give me this mountain, of which the LORD spoke in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified; if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said.

HIGH WALLS AND THREATENING ENEMIES

Besides the physical challenges we have been battling in recent months, well-meaning fellow Christians who without a doubt love us and have our best interests in their hearts have without realizing it come across to us like the ten spies who wanted no part in trying to fulfill the promises which the Lord had given to us just as He had to Joshua and Caleb. It is completely understandable why our dear friends have fear in their hearts. We feel that same fear at times ourselves. But at the same time, we realize that we dare not turn back from a promise that the Lord has given us, and until we are stopped in one way or another, like we were stopped initially outside those razor wire multiple fences outside of Hong Kong, we feel like we have no choice but to continue proceeding ahead.

We have multiple spies living inside our promised land who have been giving us reports which indeed have a tendency to put fear into our hearts. But at the same time, we are encouraged that visas are being given to each of our 50 team members, with just three remaining to be issued, we are encouraged by my bladder report this week, the report about my lungs, and Selva's soon becoming a bionic woman that can run faster and jump higher with her new hip.

All of these answers to prayer help us to feel like we may not yet be 85 like Joshua was 45 years after he first spied out the Promised Land, but at 74 and 72, and 24 years after we first went into China and 29 years since the two of us first landed in a January snow storm in what was then Leningrad, and 49 years since I and my fellow spy landed in Jakarta with no contact information whatsoever and were taken off the street into the home of a man who was so drunk that he could hardly walk, but God used him to give us shelter.

PRAY FOR COURAGE

We still feel like little bunny rabbits during hunting season for rabbits. We are well aware that worry is sin, but we still worry that we will not get the 500 Chinese students that our sponsor needs to break even. We still worry about the safety and the peace of mind of all of our team members and all of their parents, who are contacting us about their concerns. We still worry about our partner being able to negotiate for and obtain a campus that will be sufficient for all which we hope to do.

So please join us in prayer that the Lord will help us to translate all of these worries into trust and belief. And please join us in praise for our Lord in His giving us good health and getting us through all of these concerns where we can like Joshua say that despite our old age we feel as strong as we did when we were first sent in to spy out one land after another, and like Joshua we are ready to once again do spiritual warfare. Like Joshua we feel ready to still travel and fight as well as we did then.

Please pray for the success of Selva's hip replacement.

Please pray for her upcoming weeks of her rehabilitation and strengthening.

Please pray that Selva's years of sciatica and bursitis pain will subside.

Please pray for visas for three remaining team members.

Please pray for our daughter Angela's health.

Please pray for the wisdom needed for our national leaders in dealing with government officials.

Please pray for wisdom in both representing our mission and in encouraging recruits.

Please pray for my treatments to continue to control any additional cancerous growth during the remainder of this three-year vigilance, and that my cancer will not spread to any other areas of my body.

(In being as wise as serpents and gentle as doves, we have never done any kind of social media, and we are careful to only send our prayer letters to churches and individuals who support our ministry and understand the sensitive situation in China, where the numbers of these letters are as few as possible and they are not forwarded on to people who do not realize the care that needs to be taken with putting our letters on the internet or in any kind of social media that is so popular these days.)

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