

THANKSGIVING MEDITATIONS – From the African bush

November 23-24, 2017

What a blessing to walk with the Lord on this BLESSED THANKSGIVING DAY! Yesterday afternoon I drove about an hour from home to a nature reserve called Mokolodi for a two-day time of spiritual retreat to pray and plan for our ministry goals this next year. My abode is a rustic thatch roofed chalet located in the middle of the “bush.” I woke at 4 am this morning to a troop of growling and hooting baboons having a conference just outside the door and at first light went on a hike up the side of a nearby mountain to pray and enjoy the sunrise. I enjoyed praying for each of you, many of you by name, as we gave thanks to God for your part in this blessed work of the Lord here in Botswana.

This is certainly a first for us – Thanksgiving Day in Africa and in the bush - but it’s a *special* day and a special way to offer our Thanksgiving to God and for sure it will be a memorable occasion. Each day I realize more and more how much we love this land and its people and the unique experiences that it brings to our lives.

Naturally, I find myself missing our family...really missing them, along with Dad’s smoked turkey, Mom’s sweet potatoes and the ceaseless laughter that my younger, big- brother always brings to us with his cutting up and carrying on with my dad and the female side of the family. They both love to tease Cindy but each year find that she’s aptly able to give back more than they can dish out! Did I mention pumpkin pie? Hmmm!! You KNOW there will be pumpkin pie in Heaven!

As I prayed this morning my heart literally overflowed with praise and gratitude to God for so many things. Among other things I expressed my appreciation to God for:

- Our salvation in Jesus Christ, the love, mercy, and faithfulness of our Heavenly Father and the abiding presence and power of the Holy Spirit. How truly blessed we are in that alone.
- The joy and privilege of being counted worthy to be a missionary, especially here in Botswana, to the people we love and the place we now call “home.” I realized again that we don’t deserve to be here and it’s the grace of God that we’ve been called to serve Him and are so wonderfully equipped and supplied to do so.
- The blessed heritage we have from our parents. Both my parents and Cindy’s have so loved and served the Lord that an indelible mark has been left upon our lives prompting us to do the same. From my infancy, I have had a Godly, hard-working and devoted father who has always been genuine and real in his love for the Lord and the people of God. My mother has always been a sacrificial, loving, and praying mother. Both sets of our parents were faithful and sacrificed much in the “early years” when times were really tough yet they stayed true, taught us to love God and to live by faith. Nowadays, though we still have the trials of our faith and the struggles of life, all of us would readily say that we are blessed beyond measure and far more than any of us deserve. There is peace and affection in our extended families as well as Cindy and I both have siblings that love and serve the Lord and stand by us as we do the same. So many people don’t have the joy of that blessing and I grieve for them. God has given Cindy and I a wonderful son and daughter and another one we’ll get to meet in Heaven someday. Brock is strong, handsome, hard- working and tender hearted and Emily is beautiful, gracious with people, and invaluable to the ministry. Both are saved, strong in spirit, full of potential, and growing in grace. We’re none of us perfect (parents or kids) but truly we are blessed to have a loving and Godly family.

- The precious men and women that God has used throughout the years, who have invested their lives, to teach us and to influence us to love, value, and embrace our Biblical convictions, Baptist faith, and Christian heritage. I'm blessed to be a born again, Bible believing Baptist. I love the Lord, his people, and his church. I love and I'm thankful for America, our Christian heritage and our constitution. I still tear up with pride when I see our flag and hear our anthem sung and I hope I always do. My grandfather, father, uncle and brother all fought for America. We're conservative, committed, compassionate, patriotic, flag waving, Bible carrying people and I feel sorry for those that aren't. When I disagree with someone, their beliefs and ideals, I am going to love them as Jesus loves them and show Christian courtesy to them. I'll be gracious, respectful and kind to people I disagree with but I'm not going to compromise my Biblical and blood bought convictions to appease them. I'm thankful for our President and Vice President, that in spite of their imperfections and faults (they are men after all) at least they stand up and speak up for what's right and for what they believe in. I pray for them and I pray that prosperity will not become our God but that our love and faith in God will be the source of our prosperity.
- Our forefathers and pilgrim predecessors, people who dared to dream, to hazard their lives and to get on a boat and cross perilous seas, to come to an unknown land so they could worship God with freedom of conscience and conviction of heart. I think of what they suffered, the perils, losses, sickness, hardships and sorrows many of them endured and we have reaped the fruits of their faith in the true and living God. Living in a foreign country, devoid of the spiritual heritage that we have in America, causes you to readily recognize how much we take our liberties and freedoms, especially in the matter of worship and our Christian heritage for granted. I'm thankful for the faith and example of martyrs and those in the world today who suffer unspeakable atrocities because they love Christ more than life.
- The incredible network of Pastors, churches, and precious people who stand with us as partners in prayer and giving so that we can serve here in Botswana. Not a day goes by (literally, not a day) that we are not mindful of how good God is and how gracious you are to enable us to serve in this place. This is the highest calling and the greatest honor a man could ask for. It's not easy, but it is a blessed privilege and we're thankful for it. We're also thankful for 4 new churches that have added us to their mission family for prayer and financial support in the past two months! Wow! God continues to provide and to prove Ephesians 3: 20-21 to us over and over again. Thank you: Gateway, Lifeline, Suburban, and Buffalo Ridge and Pastors Frye, Lindsey, Glover, and Jenkins for your confidence in us and your commitment to the gospel of Christ.

I could list 100 other things. All of us can. God is so good and we are so blessed. Please take "special" time during this special season to offer to God the sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving and glory He deserves for His abundant grace that has been poured out on all of us. (II Corinthians 4:15). We know that some of you are suffering greatly and enduring a season of sorrow or affliction. We're mindful of you today and though it may be difficult for you to be "festive" during this season know that you are loved and prayed for and thank God for His faithfulness, uniquely felt when we are going through deep valleys of despair or difficulty. We love all of you and are truly thankful for your faith and fellowship in the work of the gospel. I don't ever want to take for granted or lose sight of the blessing that is ours to be chosen of the Lord and entrusted by you to serve here as a missionary. Thank you for loving us the way you do!

Brother Mike Haley
 Botswana AFRICA
 Acts 20:24