

On The Rock in Athens

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In the Work of the Lord . . .

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. – 1 Corinthians 15:18

There were times late last year, when things just seemed like I might not be able to stand as firm as God calls us to be sometimes. As I stood before my family and spoke final words at the funeral for my earthly father (Charles Kretz), it seems as if 2005 may have dealt just a tad too much to handle for this poor servant. That was the kind of year it was, in many ways. It was such a tumultuous year, filled with many miles on the road, changing jobs, moving from one side of the world to another, saying goodbye to dear ones in your life, leaving behind family and friends, . . . losing a parent. There were so many difficult things that bring a tear to your eye when you think about it. In many ways, it just seemed like too much.

But then we arrive here in Athens on the 14th of January and meet once again the next day with the students of AIBI during worship service. Each and every one of them came up and greeted us with a warm embrace. Each one of them expressed sympathy for the loss of my father. Each one of them, with a broad grin, expressed enthusiastically their gladness that we had returned to teach them the word of God with the school. As we sat there that first Sunday at worship, and heard these students lifting their voices in glad song to the Lord, we knew we made the right decision. We were home. We are where God wants us to be. God has provided us the ability, through the love of these students for Him, the strength to remain steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. We are now to that work. We have arrived. . . and what has been given us is not in vain in the Lord.

As the School begins a New Year . .

We are off to a fast start to this new school year. Classes began this past weekend with 27 students currently enrolled and taking courses. This term the classes are: **Spiritual living** and **Life of Christ**, being taught by visiting instructor **Rick Walker**, who comes to us from Kiev, Ukraine, where he is currently working as a missionary with the church there and teaching at the SIBI branch school in Donetsk; **Church history**, being taught by **Beni Leka**,

a former graduate of AIBI, who is currently working as the associate minister here at the Everou church of Christ; and **Homiletics, Sacrificial System** and **Ezekiel**, taught by yours truly. It is a good set of classes and has been met by much enthusiasm by the students. We'll see how much enthusiasm remains when it comes time for final exams in Sacrificial System.

The Current State of Things . .

We are currently up to active full and part-time 27 students in the school. Each term I have been here so far brings new students who desire to become part of the school. Last term saw the addition of 2 new students, **James Ogbete** and **Israel Oghogho** who heard about the school from one of the other students already in the school. This term has also seen the addition again of two new students, **Timothy Ukegbu** and another student, who's name unfortunately I can't pronounce or spell at this time, as I am still awaiting him to turn in his student application. These students also heard about the school from others already enrolled in the school, and have both expressed the desire to be here because they want to learn more about God's word and better equip themselves to go forth and share His message with others. As one of the students shared in his application, "I want to be a doer and teacher of the word of God." We would actually be at 29 students, but two of our current students, **Christian Ebirim** and **Marie Zuga** are traveling back in their home country, visiting family. Both hopefully will return soon.

Interesting Notes: *We've been kidding Rick Walker that he brought the snow and cold weather with him from Kiev. But, these Athenians are experiencing something here that is very rare for them. It has been downright cold and snowy here these last few days. (see the picture we've attached from our balcony). It's been part of that extreme cold system that has been plaguing the northern part of Europe and Russia these past few weeks. It's all they talk about in the news here. We know they closed the public schools these past two days. Snow in Athens is very, very unusual. I think the last time it snowed here was in January of 2004. Not hard on this boy and girl from Wyoming, but you can imagine what these poor folks, who are used to warmer type weather must be going through. Have you ever seen snow on oranges while they are still on the tree? What a sight.*

Observations from Diana . . .

I may still be in the honeymoon stage, but I am thoroughly enjoying it here in Athens. My first adjustment was figuring out the hot water system. It is solar heated, which will probably be great in the summer. After flipping the switch on (I'm not positive what that switch actually does), and waiting for an hour, I have hot water for 10 minutes. Then it rapidly moves from lukewarm to cold. I think with a little adjustment to this new system I will soon have it figured out. I will never take hot water on command for granted again. The local street market is a delight to go through. Word of caution though, one kilo (the only word of measurement Ron knows in Greek right now) of olives is a LOT of olives. It's probably close to over two pounds of

those things, more than most Americans eat in a year. We'll have to learn the word for "a half a kilo" before we go to the market again.

Any differences or inconvenience is all worth it when I keep the students in mind. They are such a delight. Their hunger for the word makes me ponder my own hunger. Their prayers show their love for God and what He has done for us. Their voices lifted up in song bring down the ceiling. It's a wonderful new experience in worshiping our Loving kind father. Leaving family, friends and familiarities could have been so much worse but for your many prayers and letters. They help tremendously. Thank you for your love, and don't stop those letters and prayers. – Diana.

Focusing on the Students . . .

Let me share with you the story of **Everestus Ogumia**. We were visiting the other day and he told me his story, which I understand is very typical of most of the students in the school. He comes from the Ebu tribe of Eastern Nigeria. He came to Athens five years ago as a refugee to make a better life for himself. He became a roommate with Jonathan, who was then a student in the school. Everestus would come home and see Jonathon studying God's word and he would pick up his study material and look at it. He became fascinated and wanted to learn more. He studied with Jonathon and soon became a Christian. He enrolled in the school last year and is now going gangbusters through the courses. I was surprised at the number of classes he's already taken in the short year he's been here. Jonathan has now graduated from the school and is waiting now for Everestus to graduate. They both want to go back to Nigeria as a team and plant churches. When I asked him if he was going back to the eastern part of Nigeria, where home was, he said no. He said there were too many churches there already. They want to go to the northern part of the country, where there are not so many churches yet, and the population is mostly Muslim. They figure there will be more people there who need to hear about Jesus Christ. How many people do you know who are willing to go to a mostly Muslim population in Africa and preach the good news of Jesus Christ? Please pray for **Everestus** this month.

Looking forward to what's ahead . .

We continue to get settled into our new home and the work here in Athens. Diana is working hard to make our apartment a home. She has already rearranged everything I "had in place" while I was here in November. Of course that was a bachelor's pad, now she's making it a home. She is also busy preparing material to get started with the woman's program again. She hopes to begin classes with the ladies in February or March on Sunday afternoons. She is looking forward to that. Ron is continuing to work and solidify the curriculum for the next year or two. **Darrell Wallace** did a great job of getting the curriculum in great shape, but you know how you need to

stay ahead of those things. Ron is actively working to get up to speed in recruiting good visiting instructors to come and spend a term with these students. The students really enjoy these men who are willing to come spend a month teaching them. The experience is both good for the students, and the visiting instructor. Don't be surprised if Ron drops some of you a line soon asking if you may be interested.

Prayer needs:

- *Pray that our household goods, which are currently on a ship somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean, arrive safely and in a timely manner.*
- *Continue to Pray for **Isaac Osagie** as he draws closer to making arrangements to being able to return home to Nigeria, where he may have found safe Kidney Dialysis.*
- *Pray for our oldest son **David**, as he begins his new job with Norwegian Cruise lines this Friday, 27 January.*
- *Pray for our youngest son **Bryan**, as he has signed up for, and been accepted, to go on a "**Let's Start Talking**" Campaign this upcoming summer. He and his team want to go to Thailand, or somewhere else in the Orient.*
- *Pray to help us learn the students' names, faces and needs. To understand them (their accents make it difficult at times) and to accept the differences that this culture will bring into our lives.*

We have such a mighty God:

*God blesses us with such a family of loving and special people who always seem to be there when we need them the most. The so many cards, e-mails, and notes of support we've received from you all is what kept us afloat during this period in our lives. We have felt your many, many prayers on our behalf. You can't imagine how special each and every one of you are to our lives. **You are indeed a Gift from God.***

With much love . . .

Ron and Diana

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