

LEADERS FOR...

In 2017, Calvary Baptist Church, Pembroke agreed to a five-year commitment to become involved with 'Leaders' Formation' in Nigeria; an international evangelistic ministry that seeks to train and equip local pastors through the use of a curriculum led by pastors and lay leaders from Canada. This Nigerian group of two-dozen pastors to whom they will be sharing also commit to meeting three times a year for a period of five years, with regular contact and oversight led locally through TETMI (The Evangeliser's Team Ministry International). Shortly after Calvary had made this commitment, I had agreed to personally participate in one of the trips, but the launch of this overseas missions endeavour occurred alongside the launch of our church plant in Petawawa. After three of the five annual trips had been completed with only two remaining, in the summer of 2019, I pledged to join Pastor Paul DeGraaf on the next year's trip to Nigeria, and this journal is a record of that trip. All of the following entries are borne out of my own memories of the experience, I may not have always gotten all of the details and particulars correct, but I hope that these writings will give you a general idea of this unique and blessed missions experience.

His Grace and Peace to you,

*Pastor Tim Roddick
Trailhead Baptist Church*

Thursday, February 6th

- Our trip was to begin with a 3:55 pm flight from Ottawa to Montreal, after which we would leave on a 6:10 pm overnight flight bound for Frankfurt, Germany. We had arranged beforehand for me to park my van at Paul's home, and drive together to the airport, with Paul's wife, Denise.
- Admittance into Nigeria requires a visa, and visas into Nigeria had been increasingly questioned over the past several months. The three previous occasions that Paul had traveled to Nigeria with 'Leaders' Formation', he had done so on a 'tourist visa', but we were recommended this time around to apply for 'Business Visas'; as other participants over the past twelve months have had their tourist visas denied, only to have subsequent business visas approved. This was no guarantee however that our business visas would get automatically approved, but it seemed like the best course of action to take. That said however, late Wednesday afternoon, less than twenty-four hours before we were scheduled to leave Canada, we were informed that Paul's visa was approved, while mine was denied.
- David Umune, Mission Director of TETMI, and our contact person with Leaders' Formation in Nigeria, informed us that twice in the past year, visas applications for Canadians partnering with



Nigeria is home to over 200 million people. In 2015, it was recorded that 50% of the country were practising Muslims, while 48% professed a personal faith in Jesus Christ, with 2/3 considered Christian, 1/3 Roman Catholic.

Leaders' Formation in Nigeria had been initially declined less than a day before departure, but subsequently approved on a second attempt. Sadly, such denials could be the result of 'internal corruption' as each business visa application carries a cost of \$500. And in a lot of cases, with less than 24 hours notice, it can be difficult to cancel or reschedule a 'business trip' with such a short timeframe, so it is more likely that a person would quickly re-apply and pay the extra cash.

“We decided to apply a second time and proceed with faith.”

- Armed with such knowledge, and having already paid for our flights, we decided to apply for a second time, and proceed with faith. Wednesday evening I packed my bags as though I had gotten approval, and the rest of the night I battled a sense of nagging anxiousness.
- On Thursday morning, our travel agent assured us that if I arrived in Frankfurt, Germany, our last stop before entering into Nigeria without my visa completed, and was not permitted to board the plane; an 'interruption insurance' clause on our tickets would allow me to return back to Canada, on the next available flight after paying a \$50 fee, in addition to making up the difference should the return flight have a higher cost or additional taxes than the one we had originally purchased.
- We arrived at the Ottawa Airport close to two hours before our flight to Montreal was to leave, and continued to keep praying that we would receive confirmation of a successful visa application before it became time to board. Paul and I quickly received our boarding passes, and weighed our luggage to ensure we were within our limitations, before joining a lengthy line to check in our baggage.
- 10 minutes turned to 20... 20 turned to thirty... 30 to 40... with our departure time getting frightfully closer and closer, we were hardly moving forward in the line. With less than an hour before our flight was to leave, we finally received an electronic copy of an approved visa - - we were cleared to go... but now there was a troubling question of whether we were even going to make it onto our plane?
- While Paul and myself impatiently waited in line, Denise approached an Air Canada representative and shared with him our dilemma. Upon review our of tickets, he offered that a later flight would not get us in Montreal in time to connect with our cross-Atlantic flight, so he ushered us to the beginning of the line, apologizing that the lengthy wait was due in part because the computer system to 'self check-in' luggage was down; additionally cautioning us that because of the late check-in, our bags might not actually make it on board the plane with us.
- Doing their best to fast-track us through check-in, three separate Air Canada representatives worked on getting our bags tagged, without even properly weighing them. We finally got our visas... had boarding passes in hand... and finally, after much delay, our bags were checked... we were almost there... almost... until we hit the gridlock of airport security.
- With the boarding of our flight already underway, we spoke to one of the nearby airport staff and they apologetically said they were not permitted to advance people in line, but we were welcome to ask the dozens of people before us individually, if they would personally permit us to move ahead of them in line. This wasn't even a consideration in my mind - - at this point, I had personally resolved that we had already placed our faith and trust in God, and although it was tough to do, we would just need to continue to do so when it came to passing through security.
- The line moved fairly quickly, though in our minds, it seemed like forever. When we reached the front, we stripped ourselves of any metal, placed our carry-on items in the provided trays, and passed through the x-ray machine without difficulty (although I think I may now be engaged to whoever it was that patted me down afterwards).



Finally time to sit down and relax in Montreal

- I got through security ahead of Paul, so I rushed to the nearby gate finding the waiting area emptied of passengers. I flagged down the gate attendants from afar, happily showed them my tickets and ID, while informing them that my travelmate Paul was right behind me. We boarded the plane, stowed our bags, sat in our seats, and for perhaps the first time in the past twenty-four hours, we were both finally able to exhale.
- The flight to Montreal was swift, we probably spent more time on the plane getting de-iced and taxiing along the runway at both airports, than time spent actually in the air.
- Arriving in Montreal, we had less than an hour to board our cross-Atlantic flight; but still more than enough time to find our gate, go to the bathroom, and even sit down for a few minutes while we waited to board.
- Crossing the Atlantic, I was able to watch a few in-flight movies on our way to Germany. Paul watched a couple of movies as well, while tackling some additional reading for a seminary course, and grabbing a couple of cat-naps.

- The service on the Air Canada plane was great! The flight attendants kept making sure we had lots of beverages, and I chose chicken for dinner, when the choice was between either that, or pasta (the common two meal options throughout much of our flights).

Friday, February 7th

- We arrived in Frankfurt, Germany at around 7:30 am Friday morning (1:30 am back home - - a six-hour time difference); and we had around a three-hour wait until our next flight, final destination: Port Harcourt, Nigeria, to be interrupted by a brief unloading of passengers in Abuja, Nigeria.
- We located our boarding gate and decided to try to get some rest while we waited. Both Paul and myself were able to take some brief catnaps, and when I awoke, we learned that due to mechanical difficulties, our flight had been relocated to another plane at another gate - - but we still had plenty of time to get there, as the flight had been pushed back thirty minutes on account of the change.
- We made our way to the new gate, which was on the opposite side of the terminal, and soon after arriving there, the Lufthansa crew announced that they were going to spend the extra time checking visas in advance, to place a pre-approved stamp on our boarding passes in an effort to streamline the later boarding process.
- Having my visa ready-and-waiting electronically on my mobile phone, I had absolutely no reservations about going through the line. Paul and myself were being vetted at the same time from two separate Lufthansa, members and while I passed the mustard quite quickly, Paul

appeared to be having more of a struggle with his member of the Lufthansa team. I sat back down near the gate and waited for him to finish, as moments stretched to minutes.

- When Paul returned to where I was sitting, he incredulously declared that they wouldn't stamp his boarding pass, and he was not cleared for entry into Nigeria?!? The paperwork he had been forwarded electronically included the notification of the visa application, and a receipt for the application, but not the actual visa itself.
- We resolved that David Umune (our contact with TETMI in Nigeria) must have mistakenly attached the wrong document in the earlier email - - and we began to both frantically try to get into contact with him using our two individual mobile phones. Neither of us had added the pricey 'roaming' plan to our phones, prepared to rely upon wi-fi while abroad; but the wif-fi at the Frankfurt Airport, wouldn't permit either of us place a call. We both added 'roaming' to our phones; hoping and praying that one of us could get through; but upon repeated attempts, our calls time after time 'failed to connect'.
- I went searching for a payphone in the airport near our gate, while Paul continued to try to make outgoing calls from nearby the gate. Finding absolutely no pay-phones anywhere, I returned to find that the plane had already begun boarding; a now speedy process, since everyone's ID's had already been checked.
- Just then, Paul was able to reach Denise using his phone (5:30 am in Canada); and asked for her to please contact David, and share of our dilemma. Less than a day before, we had feared that I would not be able to board the plane bound for Nigeria with Paul, and now the roles were tragically reversed.
- Paul approached the crew once again, while I passed through the checkpoint and awaited him on the ramp. From a distance, it looked like the identical conversation that took place earlier, seemingly without any grace being offered from Lufthansa.
- A loud beeping began to sound from one of the plane's two ramps, as they started to seal the First Class entranceway; so I took it as my cue to get on board. Once I found my seat, I actively looked down the aisle, hoping (and praying) to see Paul appear - - only to hear the captain announce, minutes after getting on board, *"Boarding has now concluded, three passengers that were scheduled to fly with us have not boarded; so it will be a few minutes as we await their luggage to be offloaded from the plane."* I didn't know who the other two passengers were, but I was certain one of them had to be Paul.
- What followed was somewhat of a restless flight. I had never been to Nigeria before, and Paul had been three times prior; so I was expecting to follow his lead upon arrival, as there was already a system in place to help those serving with Leaders' Formation navigate through Port Harcourt's airport security.
- While on the plane we were given two separate forms to fill out: one was to record both where we came from and where we were going to be in Nigeria; and the other was for the purpose of reporting any recent or potentially harmful medical conditions to the Health Department of Nigeria.
- Paul had warned me beforehand, that he had been given strict instructions on earlier trips, not give anyone any money at the airport - - even if they were airport officials. Paul noted that at different points throughout the airport, people will ask, *'Do you have something for me?'* with their hand out - - an unapologetic gesture appealing for a monetary payment (aka bribe). Paul half-joked before we left, that we could offer them prayer, as they would be less likely to aggressively pursue a bribe with a member of the clergy; and then thought that it might be a good idea to pack along a couple of pocket-sized New Testaments, in the event someone does ask for something.

“I didn't know who the other two passengers were, but i was certain one of them had to be Paul.”

- Once I got off the plane, the first stop was to a counter where we handed in our two forms, and provided proof of Yellow Fever vaccination along with our passport. And once it was shown that all of my documentation was in order; sure enough, the very first airport official I encountered, asked, *'Do you have something for me?'* sliding an open hand next to the counter she was seated behind. Unlike Paul, I didn't pack any New Testaments, so I instead offered prayer, and the woman behind the counter happily accepted. So I prayed God's blessings for her, that she would have a good shift at work and safe travels home once she was finished.

“The very first airport official I encountered asked, ‘Do you have something for me?’”

- After I passed the first checkpoint, I was met by a member of the Port Harcourt Airport Security team with a connection to TETMI. They gave me an update concerning Paul, letting me know he would be arriving on the identical flight from Germany, the following day (Saturday).
- As I was having my passport processed, I was asked my purpose for traveling to Nigeria. I shared that I was a pastor from Canada, coming to the country to teach other local pastors. The woman processing my passport then asked me what I had prayed for that week. And with a big smile, I shared that I had been praying to arrive safely in Nigeria, and God answered my prayers - - and we both had a good laugh.
- My escort then led me through the final checkpoint, helping to record my entry into the country, before escorting me to the baggage carousel.
- A lot of people had exited the plane in Nigeria's capital city of Abuja, leaving probably less than three-dozen people on board; as a result, here wasn't a whole lot of people who had to go through security and pick up their bags in Port Harcourt; so there was only a handful of people left when we arrived at the baggage area - - only to discover that just one of my two checked bags had arrived with me. I started to question whether the ground crew may have mistakenly taken one of my bags off the plane in Frankfurt instead of Paul's, since they were both tagged with the same point of departure; and as I scanned the area to make sure one of bags circulating the carousel wasn't Paul's in place of mine, I didn't see any of his bags either.
- My escort brought me to the baggage claim reporting area, but the person on duty wasn't there. There was already another person waiting, who had arrived with less bags than they had hoped too, so I took my place in line and waited - - with admittedly a little bit of the wind taken from my sails, after thinking I was 'in the clear', now almost twenty-eight hours since I left my home to head to Paul's a day earlier.
- A woman soon arrived at the lost baggage counter, and while I tried to wait patiently, my escort insisted that I not wait any longer, and move forward to share with the woman what had happened, while the other passenger continued fumbling with his ticketing paperwork. It felt rude to do so, but I reluctantly followed my escort's commands.
- In less than five minutes, we filled out a missing baggage claim report; and with one final x-ray scan of my luggage, we were headed towards the exit, where I now met David's brother John. The original plan for me and Paul after we landed, was to make the 2+ hour trek to Owerri, near to the churches where we would be sharing on Sunday, and the Training Center where we'd be teaching the following week. But alternate plans were made for me to stay on my own at a hotel in Port Harcourt, about a 30-minute drive from the airport, and wait until Paul's arrival the following day before driving together to Owerri.
- After we hit the warm Nigerian night air, John insisted that I sit in the back seat, as he drove me to the hotel. We talked for a bit, but fatigue was increasingly starting to sink in.

- The hotel was located in a fairly busy community, within a gated compound accompanied by security. John checked in to the room on my behalf, and I was encouraged to order 'room service' if I was hungry.
- Before he leaves to return home, John informs me that the plan is for me to be picked up from the hotel at around 2pm the following afternoon to reunite with Paul at the airport.
- Once I got into my room, the first order of business was to check my suitcase. I had split things fairly evenly between my two bags in the event that one did go missing, but I couldn't remember what was in each one. The bag that did arrive thankfully included my toiletries, some shirts, socks, underwear and snacks... but no towel, spare shoes, or any other sets of pants. It was OK, I think I could manage if the other bag didn't arrive - - admittedly though, most of the clothes in the other bag were clothes I wear at home on a regular basis, and I tried to put the thought of calculating how much it would cost to replace said clothes out of my mind, by looking at the hotel's menu.
- Some items on the menu were pretty straight-forward and clear, other stuff I really didn't have a clue as to what it was. I resolved that I didn't want to get sick my first night in Nigeria, so I decided to go simple: spaghetti bolognese, a side order of french fries, and a bottled water; and then I changed into shorts and awaited my small repast.
- About twenty-minutes later, the room phone rang to let me know that they did not have any spaghetti bolognese, so I told them that just the fries and water would be ok, and lay down on the bed to wait.
- While lying on the bed, I gave the television a try; a bunch of international soap operas, an 'action channel', a news channel, and a predominantly soccer channel. I was starting to drift to sleep, but kept myself awake as I impatiently awaited a knock on the door from room service - - while another forty-five minutes passed.
- Shortly before 11 pm, one of the hotel staff arrived with my food on a tray: a bottled water, and fries with an accompanying large pool of ketchup laid out on a glass plate, all covered with a blanket of plastic wrap.
- The fries were tasty, but at this point, they were the only thing keeping me from going to bed, so I ate them up and called it an evening.

Saturday, February 8th

- 1 am in Nigeria (7 pm Ontario time) I am wide awake - - I attempt to contact my wife using the hotel's wi-fi, and end up getting in touch with Denise through text, who gives me a fuller update about Paul, sharing that she convinced him to check into a local hotel in Frankfurt, to properly rest up before returning back to the airport the following morning.
- I manage to get back to sleep less than an hour later, and slept through the night until 8 am, when I was awakened to the ringing of the room's telephone, with the front desk announcing that I had a guest. John had brought by a relative named Paul to the hotel, who would be with those picking me up that afternoon to get our own Canadian Paul later at the airport, so he wanted to introduce us to one another.
- He suggested I order in breakfast, and relax in the room until later in the day. I elected to order a meal of: toasted bread; baked beans and oats (hoping that the oats was actually oatmeal); and a large bottled water. About fifteen minutes later, I got another phone call to the room (this phone is busier than my one at home), to ask if wanted fresh bread or toasted bread, so I clarified that I'd like toast bread. I was offered sausage and eggs instead of what I had originally requested, and I replied that if possible, I'd like to keep to my original order.

- Close to forty-five minutes later, my food arrived - - it was oatmeal! On a side dish were four cubes of sugar, and a small can of evaporated milk to add to the oatmeal - - after an initial taste of the bland, unflavoured oatmeal, I decided to crush up two of the cubes of sugar and stir them in, but opted against the milk. Baked beans were as advertised, but the toast looked different than what I was accustomed to, as it appeared to have been toasted in a sandwich maker. We had a similar sandwich maker back home in Canada that we have used on occasion to make grilled cheese sandwiches. By all appearances, the hotel's kitchen staff buttered two pieces of bread, with the buttered sides facing in, and put them in the sandwich maker to become toasted. So the bread wasn't exactly toasted, so much as it was hot-pressed, almost ironed; but it wasn't bad at all, and I may even try it in my own sandwich maker back home.
- By now, the clock was approaching 10am, I didn't have my towel, so I opted to not take a shower until later that evening, to avoid packing anything back in my bag wet - - and I turned on the television to find Steven Seagal is not forgotten in Nigeria. After a few minutes, I decided to get productive and review some of the materials for next week's class; and read a chapter of Jared Wilson's book "The Pastor's Justification".
- Still not fully rested I decided to take a late-morning nap, and at 11:45am I was awakened by ringing once again - - that darn phone! It was the front desk calling to say check out was at noon. So after chatting with them, I contacted David to share the news with him, and asked what I should do, since my ride wasn't to arrive until mid-afternoon.
- A few minutes later I received a text back from David telling me to order lunch, and stay in the room until 2pm. I got out of bed to grab the menu, and found that my floor was completely drenched with water!?! Investigating the source, I resolved that someone must have been mopping the tile hallway outside my door, and a whole lot of the water seeped into my room through the sizeable gap under the door, and obviously didn't get mopped up.
- I removed my wet socks, and reviewed the menu once again and found something from the selection called 'escalope chicken' accompanied by my choice of either roasted potatoes or french fries. I looked the meal up online and all the pictures indicated it was something similar to a chicken schnitzel - - so I decided to go with that. And I lay back down again and turned on the television, expecting lunch to take at least an hour to arrive, only to discover that Sylvester Stallone is still a thing in Nigeria too!
- True to form, about an hour later the room phone rang again, notifying me that they had set a place for me in the dining room with my lunch; so I went downstairs to eat. The chicken did not resemble any of the pictures I had seen earlier, and it was rather a portion of chicken with what seemed to be coleslaw crusted overtop of it. I ate the fries, scraped off as much of the coleslaw as I could, and ate half of the chicken, before retreating to my room to grab some crackers in an effort to cleanse my palette, and await my ride.
- At 2 pm my room phone rang once more - - will that phone never stop?!? It was the front desk notifying me that my ride was running late, and that I should go downstairs at 2:30 pm and wait for them in the dining room.
- At 2:30 pm, I went downstairs, and decided to play backgammon on my phone to pass the time. After a few games, I decided to pull out my laptop and start working on the journal you are now reading, and did so for the next close to two hours; reminded that in Africa, times are just a suggestion.
- At 4:30 pm, my ride finally arrived, and I was introduced to the two armed security guards who would be acting as my 'protection' for the remainder of the day. At this time, John also called to

**“... in Africa,
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a suggestion.”**

let me know that the airline had contacted him, and they had found my bag (Praise God!), and I would be able to retrieve it at the airport, the same we picked up Paul. So we loaded into a small pick-up truck fashioned with a police siren and headed out.

- Something that had escaped my sight from the previous night's drive in the backseat through a sleepy haze, that was now obvious by the light of day, is that there are no traffic lights in Port Harcourt... NONE. Drivers navigate tightly packed roads wedging themselves as tightly into traffic as they can, with some drivers even using their hands to knock and slap nearby vehicles to grab their attention (as if the blaring horns weren't enough). The drive that took about thirty minutes the night before, easily takes three times as long during the day, but we finally arrive at the airport, just after 6 pm.
- During the drive I learned that my newest acquaintance in Nigeria, the one that I met earlier that morning was a professional soccer player, home for just a few weeks before heading to the United Arab Emirates to play professionally. He excitedly showed me a few photos on his mobile phone from his earlier time spent playing in Syria as a left-footed striker. And he showed some kind compassion for me, when I revealed myself to be an Aston Villa fan, before we dropped him off.
- Paul is scheduled to arrived on the same flight I took the day earlier, with a 7:10 pm arrival. After we get parked, I suggest that maybe we should go in and ask about my missing bag rather than wait until Paul's plane arrives.
- Entering the newly built airport in Port Harcourt requires a security check, where everyone entering into the airport has to pass through a metal detector, and have their possessions passed through an x-ray machine.
- Once inside, I talk to the same woman from the night before, who lets me know that my bag will actually be arriving on Paul's flight, which we have now learned has been delayed by an hour.
- I went back out to the truck and grabbed my laptop and returned to the airport waiting area to continue journaling. So if these first few days appear more detailed than the days that follow, it's because I had a lot of idle hours awaiting my reunion with Paul, and the typing helped to pass the time.
- I had been earlier told that once Paul's plane landed, I was to go to the baggage area, show them my ticket and lost baggage form from the day before, and they would permit me to enter the area to retrieve my bag - - but security into the baggage area had other ideas.
- The posted guard insisted that I (and my fellow lost luggage buddy from the night before) wait until the area had been cleared before they would let us enter. A number of people who had been made aware of our missing bags persisted to tell us that our plane had arrived, and to go get our bags - - which only seemed to annoy the security guard more, so I hung back and waited for the 'green light'.
- When I was finally given permission to enter the baggage area, not fifteen yards from the entrance, I was met by Paul pushing a luggage cart, already loaded with my missing suitcase.
- Before exiting the airport, we had to show proof that the bags were ours, and I was asked if I had something for the person checking tags; and when I offered prayer once again, this person wasn't as receptive as before, and just passed me through, with an unimpressed look on her face.
- Paul was looking fatigued, and though he had a good night's physical rest in Germany; it was obvious that he was still a bit frazzled, and emotionally exhausted from all of the events of the day before.
- The five of us loaded into the pick-up and began the 2+ hour drive to Owerri, where we would be staying in a hotel for the evening - - passing through several armed military checkpoints blocking the road with logs and empty oil drums all along the way. These checkpoints don't typically bother with personal vehicles, but will stop and check ID's of those driving in passenger vans that are

used like buses. The presence of our armed escorts however, allow us to pass through all the checkpoints without stopping.

- Entering Owerri, I was taken aback once again at the lack of traffic lights... not a one... the closest thing I could see to a traffic signal, was a solitary flashing yellow light at one point.
- David was waiting for us when we arrived at the hotel, which was situated within another gated compound. It was close to 11 pm at this point, so Paul and I ordered a couple of bottles of water and prepared for bed.
- Before leaving the hotel, David confirms that we will be speaking at two separate churches the following morning: Paul would be at a rural Baptist church, and I would be sharing with an energetic church with a covered tin roof and open walls. David would be back the following morning at 8:30 am to pick us up.
- We were told that a complimentary breakfast was included with our rooms from 6:30 – 7:30 am; and when we ask at the front desk where we were to go to eat breakfast, they replied that it would be brought to our rooms. Asking the follow-up question, if we were to arrange a time with them to receive breakfast, we were incredulously told that it was not necessary, as breakfast would be brought to our rooms sometime between 6:30 and 7:30 am.
- My hotel room was equipped with an enormous family-sized bed, much larger than the king-sized bed I am accustomed to in Canada. The room also featured a slot to insert the room's keycard in, just inside the door. Once the keycard is inserted, the lights in the room turn on, and when the card is removed upon exiting, the lights and room's power automatically turn off.
- There is wi-fi service in the hotel, so I even manage to exchange a few texts with my wife, Stephanie, who informs me that at home, school buses were cancelled on account of a blizzard.

Sunday, February 9th

- I awake the next morning at 6:30 am, and contemplate snoozing for another thirty minutes, but then elect to stay up and await an imminent breakfast. At 6:45 am, a knocking sounds at the door, and I am served a plate featuring two pieces of bread (with the crusts removed), a hard-boiled egg, a tea bag, and a long, thin package of dry creamer. I eat the bread and ask at the front desk if I could get a bottle of water, planning to use the water in the room's kettle to prepare some of the oatmeal I had brought along with me from Canada.
- 5 minutes pass... 10 minutes... 20... still no bottle of water; so I elect to just eat some dry Honeycombs (another Canadian comfort I smuggled into Nigeria). And after eating, and now armed with a towel, I take a shower and prepare for the day.
- After getting dressed, I quickly text Paul to see if he's moving, and he steps across the hall for a visit. When I mention I had ordered water that never arrived, he crosses back to his room to grab my water that had been brought to his room by mistake - - I grant him a packet of oatmeal and the uneaten hardboiled egg as a 'finder's fee'.
- 8:30 am rolls around, and still no David (again, time here is merely a suggestion); but at around 8:45 am, David arrives with the pastors of the two area churches Paul and I will each be visiting with today. I will be sharing at Pastor Christian's church in a nearby village; and Paul will be sharing at Joel's church, a rural Baptist church located outside of the city. Both Chris and Joel will be a part of the class we will be teaching beginning on Monday.
- As we load into our separate vehicles and head to our respective churches, I learn that a young man named 'Promise' will be joining us on the ride. Paul has personally preached in Chris' church the past two occasions he's been here, and while Chris is sad Paul won't be sharing at his church

again today, he is extremely excited to learn that Paul was my pastor when I was a teenager and insists that I share of our connection with the church family.



Church set-up and tear down is a factor in Nigeria as well.

- As we drive through the area, its impossible not to notice the religious billboards and banners that are everywhere in Nigeria, promoting dozens upon dozens of separate faith-based events and concerts, many of them containing the keywords: faith, fire, light and spirit. There is a large push towards the prosperity gospel in Nigeria, and it is easy to see the many ministries that are pressuring people to attend such events in order to become blessed.
- Driving by the light of the day, I again have yet to see a solitary traffic light, and I have also just noticed that there are not even any stop signs either. While many of the roads in Owerri have a concrete median dividing them, apparently this is only a suggestion. Drivers will regularly cross over to the opposite side of the road to avoid large potholes, or any traffic congestion. No one hesitates to use their car horn to announce their approach to any other cars or pedestrians who stray too far into the road. It is not uncommon to see three adults on a motorbike either, and in most cases both passengers may be either texting or playing a game on their mobile phone with their arms extended out from the bike as they ride.

- After a bumpy ride off the beaten path, we arrive at church, just as Sunday School is winding down. 'ThankGod' (yes, that is his actually name) is beginning to wrap up a passionate bible lesson; and quickly changes roles to that of worship leader as the morning service begins.
- The church meets in a humble building covered by a tin roof, featuring a dirt floor in the center, with a raised cement platform along the outer walls that reach a height of about four feet, leaving the rest of the structure open. The building contains several rows of stackable plastic patio chairs to sit upon.
- Worship is energetic and takes on a bit of a freestyle flavour. The band consists of a drum kit, an electric keyboard, a bass guitar and some bongos; all accompanied by a choir of teens situated off to one side. There is much clapping as they worship in a celebratory tone; with many songs of praise featuring a call-and-response format, or a single line of a chorus sung repeatedly in a variety of fashions.
- It is an all-ages church, with probably 30% of those in attendance being children, whom are all seated together in the middle of the back section of the church.
- After a prolonged time of singing, Chris' wife comes forward to lead the church in prayer. I learn quite quickly that if someone from the front of the church proclaims: 'Praise God', the rest of the church emphatically responds with 'Allelujah'; this practice continues in the following week's classes as well.
- Pastor Chris' wife leads the church in several individual prayers back-to-back-to-back, each one covering a separate category; with this congregational prayer time lasting beyond thirty minutes.



The open building allows for a cool breeze to be felt.

- Following prayer is offering time, a raised box is moved to the front of the church, and in procession, with a bit of rhythm as worship continues, everyone comes forward row after row to pass by the box and deposit their offering, beginning with the children. Every child in attendance puts some form of paper money into the box with joy-filled faces.
- As the individuals become older, it appears customary for everyone in the church, to all approach the box with their offering clenched tightly in their fist. Everyone puts their fist into the box, and withdraws it from the box open. From where I am situated, I can't tell if everyone in attendance is actually depositing an offering or not, but by using this practice no one in the church can see who gives or not, or how much a person gives either; because all anyone can see, is a hand going into the box closed, and coming out empty.
- After offering, some songbooks are handed out, from which we sing a short, single hymn, before the books are quickly collected again.
- At this time, a second procession comes forward, as a live chicken is brought into the building, along with several yams larger than footballs, all to be laid out at the front of the church. Then a number of individuals are called forward, for what appears to be a second offering that they deposit into a different container, this time with letter-sized envelopes. The group that came forward are then prayed for by the congregation. I later ask David why the separate offerings, and he explains to me that the first one was an 'offering', while the second one is a 'tithe'?



The view from inside the church.

- As this group leaves the front of the church, a couple of assistants remove the chicken and yams, and three separate people are called forward one after another to share their own personal testimony, one does so in English, the other two in their native language.
- After a couple of more songs, this time featuring some solos from choir members, it has become time for me to be called forward. I am quickly joined at the front by an interpreter, so I am careful not to say too much all at once. We begin to develop a fairly good rhythm with one another, and when I get to the morning's scripture passage, I ask him if he'd like me to read it one verse at a time, or all at once, and he asks that I read all seven verses together, all at once. As I am doing so, he begins looking up something on his mobile phone, which I conclude must be the scripture passage in the church's native tongue.
- Once I conclude my seven-verse passage, he encourages me to continue, and I conclude that he is not going to interpret the passage for everyone - - so I resolve to change things a bit on the spot, as I'm not exactly sure how to reference my message to a biblical passage, that I don't know how many people in attendance understood - - so I resolve to share more relationally.
- The passage I read, was from Romans 15 and involved the Apostle Paul's encouragement of the church of Rome, with Paul urging the stronger believers to encourage and mentor those who are weak. So I share from my own life, how others had encouraged and supported me when I was younger, including Pastor Paul - - and they were thrilled to hear more in depth about our connection.
- Upon the conclusion of the service, Pastor Chris comes forward and shares for another twenty minutes, largely launching off of what I had talked about moments before, applying it more specifically to their own particular community, before closing the service in prayer.
- After the service, Chris takes me aside discreetly, and shares how normally in their culture, they don't notify someone that they are going to receive a gift; but in my case, they wanted to ensure

that the church's gift would be of use to me - - and he follows by asking if I would allow myself to be measured for someone to tailor for me an authentic Nigerian outfit. And who am I to deny such an honour?!?

- Chris also lets me know that I will be travelling to his home with his family, and he will join up with us later after he wraps things up at the church. And not long afterwards, we load up in his car, and I share the backseat with another adult and two children.
- Chris' home is less than a ten-minute drive away, and as we pull up the laneway, several chickens and dogs greet us. The family starts a generator to provide some minimal lighting in the home, and one of the children turns on a television, as those in the house begin watching some kind of soap opera from India upon a small video monitor in the corner.
- I try to amuse Chris' two small children by doodling for them on a small pad of paper I had with me, and after some time passes, Chris arrives home.
- While seated on the couch, his wife serves me a plate of white rice with a saucy meat mixture in a separate bowl. I wait for others to be served, but soon realize that I am expected to eat first. After I take a few bites of rice, two other adults in the room are brought a similar meal and they spoon the meat on top of the rice - - and I try to mirror their actions.
- The white rice itself has a fishy-taste, and the meat is even fishier, covered with a spicy seasoning (I am told later by Paul, who has eaten at Chris's on an earlier trip, that it was probably catfish). Whether it's a mix of the heat, remaining nerves from Sunday morning, or a fear of getting sick, I resolve not to eat too much; which is hard to do, particularly as they gave me the biggest heaping portion of anyone in the room.
- Seeing me begin to 'slow down' and back away from the plate, Chris informs me that we have to go, as he had offered to take someone to a local airport and completely forgot about his commitment, so he drives me to David's home about 15-20 minutes away, earlier than expected.
- Chris drops me off at David's who has some extended family visiting with him after church. He is actively ironing some shirts on a short end-table that appears reserved specifically for this purpose as CNN plays on the television.
- Paul arrives soon after and appears physically beat, having now been in Nigeria for less than a day, with already much accomplished.
- As he continues to iron. I ask David about Nigeria's fascination with CNN, as it seems to be on everywhere I go (not that I've gone to too many places, but at least in the earlier hotel, and through some windows I could see during my area drives); and David shares that it's not so much their fascination with CNN, but the country's fascination with Donald Trump.
- Paul and I both relax for a bit, while David packs his bags in preparation of heading to the Training Centre where we'll be staying the rest of the week. Two of David's older children are presently living at a boarding school, and their youngest (Linda) receives tutoring in the home while we are there.
- Around 4 pm, it's time for us to head out. David drops off a teenage niece on the way, and we pick up 'Chinwe' (chin-way), one of David's co-workers from TETMI, who will be attending the week's classes. About halfway into our drive, we begin to experience some car trouble, and we have to pull over a few times to restart the truck. We have to continue the rest of the way cautiously at a reduced speed - - and in



Our home for the next week.

less than an hour, we arrive safely at the Training Centre named 'Graceland Bible Camp' situated inside another walled-in compound (Elvis is nowhere to be found).



Care for a bag of water?

- Paul and I are shown to our accommodations. We each have our own rooms with an adjoining bathroom; in addition to a bit of a lounge, featuring a mini fridge, coffee table and some semi-comfortable seating located in between our two rooms. We both lie down for a bit after a busy day while different members of the class start to arrive as afternoon turns to evening.
- A dinner is served later in the night once everyone arrives, consisting of rice, once again served with some type of fishy sauce. I feel less guilt about not eating a substantial amount than I had earlier in the day, since it is later in the evening.
- At dinner I also drink from my first 'bag of water'. In Nigeria, you can purchase water in plastic bottles or in bags about the size of beanbags; however there is no nozzle or spout. You are just supposed to bite into a corner, and suck the water out of the hole that is created. I haphazardly bite off a little more than I should have, and end up wearing some of the water much to the amusement of those around me.

- I retire to bed shortly after, and watch a couple of episodes of Columbo from a DVD I had brought with me, before falling asleep.

Monday, February 10th

- Paul and I had planned to eat breakfast with David and Chinwe before the morning session, but David understandably had some last-minute set-up to take care of before the class begins today. David has arranged for our 'lounge' to be stocked with a large coffee urn containing hot water, dry coffee, a loaf of bread, and some peanut butter and jam. Chinwe starts us off by taking four pieces of bread, stacking them one on top of one another, and eating them like a sandwich, with absolutely nothing on them. I choose to instead use the available hot water to make some hot chocolate and oatmeal I had brought with me from Canada.
- At 8 am, we walk down to a large room in a separate building where we would be holding our training sessions. It is quite a reunion, as this is Paul's fourth time in four years sharing with this same group of local Nigerian pastors. There are many biblical names represented in the group, including a handful of Emmanuels; a Joel; Jonathan; David; Peter; along with 'ThankGod' and 'Promise' from the day before.
- Each member of the class has made a five-year commitment, to meet three times annually, with three separate pairs of leaders like us, guiding them through materials offering principles of Christian living and leadership, with those completing the five-years of training becoming 'graduates'. During this week, Paul and I will be leading the class through a preliminary study of the Book of Acts, a lengthy section of the curriculum that will be split into two different gatherings.
- The day begins with a time of lively worship, with much clapping and stamping of feet, followed by prayer, then a devotional led by one of the class participants. As the group is four years into the program, the leadership has begun to enlist different members of the class to lead segments of the day.
- The class members have been given the study materials in advance, and are expected to come to class with the work completed, which should then allow for ample discussion.

- After the devotional time, the class pauses for a tea break/breakfast; hot water is prepared, which each person can use to make coffee or tea, and each member of the class is additionally provided with a half loaf of bread. The bread is effectively the same height and width as store-bought loaves in Canada, and packaged in a similar plastic bag; but it is half the length of our common loaves, and unsliced. Nigerians will commonly rip off chunks of the loaf to eat with nothing on it, until the whole loaf is consumed by one person - - I follow local tradition, albeit saving a portion of my own individual loaf for later.
- The first lesson of the week offers an overview of the connection between the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. There is nothing too controversial in the material, which makes for a fairly easy opening day.
- The Centre provides us with a lunch that consists of some kind of soup served with a doughy ball called 'fou-fou', that can be ripped up and dipped into the mixture. I wasn't too fond of the soup, and the doughy ball kind of reminded me of doughy 'dumplings'. The dough is intended to be rolled in one's hand, and dipped into the sauce, before eating - - most Nigerians will swallow it, without even taking a bite, and think those who chew it, to be odd. The dough makes my hand sticky, and I am informed several days later, that I was supposed to wet my hands with a nearby bowl of water to discourage sticking. After about fifteen minutes of eating, the dough didn't agree with my stomach, and we ended up 'parting ways' shortly after lunch.
- We teach from 8 am until after 7 pm, ending the evening with supper, which is a spicy rice dish, served with a portion of chicken.
- I head off to bed shortly afterwards, and enjoy another two episodes of Columbo before calling it a night.



Loaf of bread for breakfast

Tuesday, February 11th

- I start the morning with a mildly-warm shower. My room is equipped with a shower head attached to the wall in the bathroom, but no actual stall or curtain to be found, and no mirror to speak of; as there is simply just a drain on the floor in the corner of the room for the water to flow into.
- This day's session begins a lively discussion concerning signs and wonders, and we have a healthy debate concerning what should be considered 'descriptive' (offering a description of historical events that occurred during the time of Acts); and what should be understood as 'prescriptive' (prescribing what people of God should do, and how they should act); with an additional discussion outlining the principles of communion, and what it meant for the New Testament church to 'break bread'.
- Lunch today is rice accompanied by a form of fishy paste; and dinner involves a salad similar to coleslaw, with a portion of chicken, and a completely separate edible ball from the one before, this one is coloured brownish-orange, and is the texture of play-doh, that i'm told is fashioned from some mixture of beans.
- I return to my room after supper, and try to get up-to-date with my journaling; and I only manage half an episode of Columbo, before calling it a night.

Wednesday, February 12th



“Fou-fou”, my doughy nemesis.

- This morning, as I disconnect my macbook in my room, I receive a bit of a tingle/shiver from the end of my power cord; I second guess my senses, and grab it again and receive another shock, I’m uncertain if my plug is failing, or if it is something else entirely, but aim to investigate later.
- After the now ritual breakfast routine of hot chocolate and oatmeal, we begin the day’s session that involves a lively debate concerning the ordinance of baptism. As lunch approaches, I peek inside the cooler that the Centre’s staff has brought over to the classroom, and I see it is filled with familiar looking dough-balls; I decide to retreat to my room during lunch and smother some peanut-butter on my personal loaf of bread. I learn later that the dough was served with some type of broth that looked like it contained spinach, but was actually pumpkin leaves.
- I try my macbook power cord in the classroom area, and everything appears fine, I chalk it up to an electrical anomaly.
- The day is bitter sweet, as we will be wrapping up this week’s session early, to allow Paul and myself to lead a series of workshops for a separate ministry conference hosted by TETMI made up of around 15 local, largely bi-vocational pastors connected with their organization, beginning on Thursday.
- The Leaders’ Formation class usually runs Monday morning through Thursday afternoon, but we put in some extra time each of the past couple of days, so we could be all wrapped up by Wednesday evening.
- The afternoon involves many pictures taken of Paul and myself with various members of the class using a variety of mobile phones and tablets.
- Paul and I had learned the night before that depending upon a person’s location, some individuals employ 2-3 different personal mobile phones, as coverage from a particular network may be limited - - so if one has need to travel or work in two different ‘territories’, they may have need of more than one phone too!
- The class has a ‘WhatsApp’ page, that we will use to remain in touch with one another. Some closer to the area opt to begin the trek home before supper, others with a bit of a further drive choose to stay to leave early the next morning before sunrise.



Our February 2020 Leaders' Formation class picture.



A member of the class named Oliver leads the group discussion.

- Before dinner is served, I go to my room and put together some presentation slides to match the handouts I had already prepared for my workshop that I will be leading the next day.
- Dinner this evening is the same spicy rice mix from Monday, served with 'kroka' fish - - I sample some the fish... it definitely tastes like fish... and then devour the rice. After supper, I recount that none of the meals I've had, have been served with any kind of condiments, sauces, or salt and pepper; and make a note to myself to ask someone if that is customary in the area, or just for our stay here at the Centre.
- After supper, we talk with a few of the students who are staying the night, and will be leaving before we rise the next day; before I go back to my room, get completely updated on my journal, and settle down to watch the unfinished episode of Columbo from the night before.

• In my room, after plugging in my macbook, I receive another shock, this time from the computer's outer metal casing; I attempt to disconnect the attached external dvd player, and get

a second shock from the metal case on it as well; I go to remove the power cord from the macbook and get a third shock! I resolve that the morning's event was not an anomaly, and carefully disconnect the cord from the wall, concluding that perhaps the 'ground' on the room's outlet isn't operating right - - so I opt to not plug anything in to my room's outlet any further - - as I get in bed to watch a dimly lit Columbo to conserve the macbook's battery life, as my fingers continue to tingle.

Thursday, February 13th

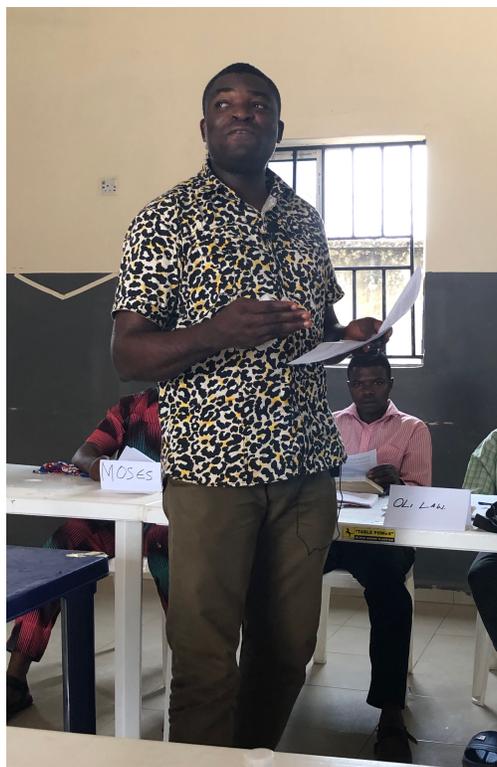
- The TETMI pastors who arrived the evening before are eager to begin the day, and are awake seated on plastic patio chairs outside in the courtyard before 6 am, excitedly talking with one another, prior to our 8 am start. For the next three days, Pastor Paul, myself, David, and David's own pastor, Ebere (eh-bear-eh) will be leading two-hour workshops on a variety of ministry subjects. I had been told earlier, that this coming Sunday, I will be sharing at David's church, so I am looking forward to meeting his pastor.
- Before arriving in Nigeria, choosing from a variety of suggested topics, Paul opted to teach about 'How to Study the Bible' and 'How to Lead a Small Group'; while I will be sharing on the subject of 'Preparing and Delivering Sermons.'
- Nigeria is prone to many unplanned power outages, and the Centre itself will independently turn on different 'grids' of power throughout different times of the day. The grid that runs the a/c in our rooms is generally turned off



Pastor Paul leading the class.

at 7 am, and returns back on in the evening. So having learned my lesson, I turned on the portable water heater in my bathroom the night before, and wrestle with the nozzles as my morning shower fluctuates from scalding hot to room temperature water (which is admittedly still mildly warm).

- After breakfast, five minutes before we begin, David asks if I would share a thirty-minute devotional with the group to start the day. When I make a joke about an appreciation of 'advance notice,' Paul bails me out by offering that he has a devotion with him that he had done recently, already prepared and ready to go. I give Paul my 'thanks' and offer to lead the group's devotional time the following morning.
- The class begins with Paul sharing a devotion about Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, before beginning his lesson on 'Studying the Bible', which is interrupted partway through, to allow the participants to have breakfast (the usual coffee or tea, and an individual loaf of bread). After a short break, Paul then leads the group through a practical study of a passage from Proverbs.
- Just as Paul finishes, Ebere, David's pastor from Owerri arrives, and begins a lecture sharing about the proper way to pursue church growth; highlighting that we not focus our attention upon on physical growth, but growth of a spiritual nature.
- Ebere is dressed in a suit, with no tie - - and I ponder if what I brought with me to wear this week will cause me to be underdressed for this coming Sunday worship service?
- In true Nigerian fashion, Ebere's 2-hour time slot extends to two and a half hours, (further evidence that in Nigeria, time is merely a suggestion); and even with thirty additional minutes, he has only reached the sixth point of the twelve items he had planned to share.
- David interrupts Ebere so the group can break for lunch... once again, the familiar balls of dough, served with a yellow and green fishy paste - - I retreat to my room and enjoy some dry Honeycombs on my own.
- After lunch, it's my turn to share with the group about 'Expository Preaching,' a method of preaching whereby the preacher seeks to 'expose/reveal' what is in the text of the bible, not 'impose' their own thoughts and preferences upon scripture.
- While there is admittedly some rarely used, and perhaps unfamiliar words that are shared with the group, we take the necessary time to assist everyone in understanding the principle benefits of preaching in an expository fashion, adding some guidelines that we can apply in our own preparation towards such a sermon.
- The group acknowledges that most preachers in Nigeria 'impose' their own views upon the text, and the class wrestles with how to respond to preachers who proclaim to be God's prophets, misusing the term to advance their own agenda and fatten their own pockets.
- We wrap up the discussion (in under my two-hour allotted slot); and will commit to applying these principles the next day; as I plan to break the larger group into three smaller groups to use the principles we have learned in today's study, to work on four separate biblical passages together.



Pastor Ebere.



Flip-Flops in February.

- We have a quick 'tea break', and while my eyes are getting heavy, and my bed is calling out to me (it is a very hot day), Paul and I return to class to listen to David share about following up with people who attend one's church. But probably thirty minutes into the workshop, I have to 'tap out', as I am finding it impossible to keep my eyes open. So I return back to my room to lie down, and enjoy a brief nap.
- The group meet until after 7 pm, at which time they finally break for supper, a red-coloured spicy rice dish is served (the spiciest rice yet), with a pair of chicken-nugget sized portions of yummy beef. I conclude that this meal probably tastes the closest to anything North American that we have had, since being in Nigeria.
- Paul, David and I enjoy some casual after-dinner conversation, before Paul and I head to our rooms just past 8 pm. Hard to believe we only have three more 'sleeps' before we head home to Canada.

Friday, February 14th

- Happy Valentine's Day! Another morning... another bowl of oatmeal with a cup of hot chocolate. During this time, David shares with us the challenges of schooling in Nigeria, and how the government will impose extra, excessive taxes on private schools, partly in an effort to have children attend government-run schools. Class sizes in Nigeria hover around 40+ children in one classroom with one teacher leading them in their studies; while some kindergarten classes will have two teachers for the same number of kids. However the children in Nigeria come to school much more disciplined than those in Canada, and are generally respectful of their teachers. And those that don't show respect, or engage in excessive horseplay in class will be 'corrected' with a cane that the teacher keeps ever at hand.
- This morning I also decide its time to shave, a simple task made more difficult without access to a mirror. I depend upon the camera setting on my phone to guide my razor around my beard. And after I'm done, I take a slow, panning video of my face and neck to assess the success of my efforts, judging my efforts passable.
- Returning to the classroom, I lead the group through a devotional reviewing the bold faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I purposefully chose an Old Testament passage, so I can later illustrate to the class how the gospel can be revealed even though passages that don't mention Jesus by name; highlighting that just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego followed the will of God... Jesus too, followed the will of God, descending from heaven to earth, to offer His life for our sin. And after the devotional, the group breaks for their regular breakfast: coffee or tea, and an individual loaf of bread.
- I will be leading the first session of the day, and we begin by reviewing the principles of expository preaching from the day before. Then afterwards, we split the class into three separate groups to develop some insights into how two provided passages should be preached in an expository fashion (one from Galatians, another from Psalms); seeking to identify each passage's context, structure, big idea, gospel movement, and application. The groups come back with great insights and well thought out interpretation.
- After a short tea break, Paul begins his session, continuing to teach on the topic of studying the bible. During the break, I take a bit of a walk around the compound, and find that there is another

“Class sizes in Nigeria hover around 40+ children in one classroom with one teacher.”

group meeting in a separate building. They are much more animated than our group, presently engaged in a long period of time praying loudly together in their native tongue, before praising God in worship; their singing able to be heard in our own classroom a couple of hundred yards away.

- The past couple of days have become increasingly hotter, upwards of 37 degrees. There has been a constant haze in the sky, and I'm unsure



Area Pastors who participated in the TETMI Training Conference.

if it is the result of air pollution or some other natural occurrence. There are no visible clouds above, and the sun, while unblocked, appears blurred in the constant haze.

- When we break for lunch, we are served some seasoned spaghetti with some sliced carrots and beans, served with a pair of chicken nugget-sized pieces of beef that are very tough to chew.
- Each passing day seems to be getting hotter and hotter, and I skip the first session after lunch to lay down in my room, and return later in the day to listen to David share with the local pastors about some key principles in managing finances within the church.
- In the afternoon, Ebere, David's pastor brings his wife and four children to the Centre to introduce them to everyone - - and it adds to my anticipation to share with their church family on Sunday.
- Supper is a mixture similar to refried beans, which is served alongside a boiled yam, combining together to comprise a meal that is very filling.
- David wants to end the day earlier tomorrow, to allow some of the class to begin to make their way home, hoping to break up a long travel time into two separate days. So he elects to lead the session that he had planned to share on Saturday, that evening after supper instead. Paul and I choose to return to our rooms just after 8 pm, to rest and prepare for the next day, and we marvel that even with the lack of 'light pollution' that is common in cities and towns back in Canada; it is difficult to see any stars in the still hazy night sky.

Saturday, February 15th

- Ebere is scheduled to lead the morning's devotion, so he arrives early and enjoys breakfast with Paul and myself (David is completing some last-minute tasks, as it is our last day at the camp).
- Ebere shares from Judges chapter six, and reminds the class of our need to 'not do evil', else we face consequences from the Lord - - speaking particularly of our role as pastors and the need to not tarnish our witness.
- During the devotional, Pastor Chris stops by briefly to discreetly gift Paul and myself with traditional Nigerian outfits: custom-made shirts and matching pants featuring 'African' patterns.
- After Ebere completes his devotional, the group breaks for a thirty-minute breakfast; and Paul and I try on our shirts, much to the pleasure of everyone watching. The question of what I will wear to Ebere's church when I speak tomorrow has been decided - - at least my top anyways... I will have

to wait until later to determine if I will wear the matching pants that are similar to scrubs or pajama bottoms.

- Following breakfast, Paul leads his final lesson featuring the topic of 'Preparing and Leading a Bible Study' - - after two long days of teaching, the group is still eager and engaged.
- We decide to complete our third and final lesson prior to breaking for lunch, and Ebere shares with the group: 'How Pastors Ought to Respond to Criticism'.
- Lunch is waiting for us when we finish at around 2:30pm: 'fou-fou' dough balls and a beef and leafy green broth - - it is a hot day, I do not have much of an appetite, and I am still wary of the dough balls, so I opt out of lunch; David is more than happy to finish my beefy broth for me!
- After lunch, we take a round of pictures with the group before they load up into a pair of local buses, to begin the long trip home. Paul and I return to our rooms and pack up to prepare to leave the Camp and head to a nearby hotel for our last night in Nigeria.
- When we leave the property, David asks our permission to stop at the boarding school where his two oldest children attend, to drop something off for them. When we arrive at the gated compound, there is a school soccer tournament underway, with hundreds of children watching two separate ongoing games. The school is home to over 800 children, who live and study there.



David and his two eldest children.



Hundreds of children watching soccer.

- In every area I've driven through since arriving in Nigeria, I repeatedly see some variation of the words: *'This property/lot/land is not for sale'*, hand-painted on the side of buildings or on compound walls. I ask David the purpose of such notices, and he shares that there are many con artists who will attempt to sell land that is not their own. They will craft forged ownership documents of a property or building, and actively seek buyers. A few years ago, the scam was rampant throughout Nigeria, so owners took to identifying their own buildings and property as 'unavailable', because should the land or building had been vacant and unused, it created a big hassle to get the false 'owners' to vacate from what they had believed they had legitimately purchased.
- We arrive at the hotel that we had stayed in a week earlier, and Paul and I are escorted to our individual rooms, once again across the hall from one another. It is now after 6 pm, so we decide to order room service and plan to eat dinner together. On Paul's recommendation, we both order 'chicken and chips'.

- While waiting for our food I try on the whole Nigerian outfit that I was given earlier in the day, and decide I'll wear the complete, matching set to church tomorrow.
- Our meals arrive at around the same time, and while we ordered the identical meal, the two look completely different. Paul is served a good-sized pan-fried chicken breast and wing with a side of yam fries, and I receive a smaller drumstick and thigh with a side of regular potato fries; each plate also includes less than a tablespoon of barbecue sauce (which reminds me that I still haven't asked anyone about the seeming lack of sauces and salt and pepper yet).

- We relax a bit together, enjoying an early end to the day for the first time in a week, and return to our respective rooms just after 8 pm.
- Several times throughout the evening, the power in the entire building goes out, leaving us in our dark windowless rooms - - sometimes for a few seconds, other times for a minute or two (almost the exact amount of time it would take to find one's phone and turn on its flashlight application).
- I end the evening watching a pair of back-to-back Premier League football (soccer) games; regretful that the team I root for will be playing while I'm at church the following day.
- I use some time in the evening to also start organizing my luggage, as we will be checking out of the hotel before church, and heading to the airport in the afternoon. My bags are a bit lighter now, having off-loaded several paper handouts and materials for the past week's classes, and with much of the snacks I had brought from Canada having been consumed. I set aside some of the remaining food to gift to David and his family tomorrow.
- Before I turn in for the night, I return to the computer to bring my journal up-to-date; and as I look at its present length, I wonder if anyone will even read it - - so if you've gotten this far... you're a trooper! At the very least, I have a thorough record to fill in the details for myself when my memory begins to fail me.
- Before I turn out the lights, I debate whether or not to watch another episode of Columbo, and decide to take advantage of the Premier League sports channel and watch some more football coverage before I fall asleep.

Sunday, February 16th

- I wake up in Nigeria for the *last* time. It's around 6:30 am, and I can expect my free breakfast to be delivered to my room anytime in the next hour. I pass the time shifting stuff around my bags, packing them more properly.
- At around 7:15 am, there is a knock on my door, and for this morning's breakfast, I am delivered my 'Nigerian nemesis', one of those infamous dough balls cut into quarters, a tea bag, some dry creamer, a couple of sugar



Evangelical Church Winning All Good News Church.

- cubes, and a bowl containing some kind of saucy mixture including what appears to be some scrambled eggs - - I elect to make some hot chocolate and enjoy using it to dunk the last of my bread from the day before. Paul arrives shortly afterwards to request a dry oatmeal packet, as his sampling of the 'egg dish' wasn't all that favourable.
- I have a shower in an open bathtub with no curtain, get dressed, and review the sermon I will be sharing later that morning. At 8:30 am, just as Paul and myself are preparing to head down to the lobby, we are met by David. Paul and I part ways, I leave with David, and he, with Pastor Steven; and David and I bring all of our bags to David's home, and pick up his family before heading to

church. It is already a hot day, and moving from the air-conditioned truck to the outdoors causes my glasses to fog up.

- We arrive at church just before 10 am, as Sunday School is beginning. As the class starts, I explore the surroundings a bit, taking a few pictures. The building is in an enclosed space, much like a hall, with several fans powered by a gas-powered generator outside of the building.
- The church family is in the process of building a three-storey 'parsonage' for Pastor Ebere, his wife, and their four children, immediately next door to the church building on the same property. At this time, children's Sunday School meets on the lower level, and will continue to do so, once the work is done. They are also intending the parsonage to include an 'apartment' of sorts, that will act as a 'guest-room' for traveling missionaries and visitors.
- The church's full name is: 'ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All) Good News Church', and was birthed out of 'Serving in Mission' ministries, formerly 'Sudan Interior Mission'. The ECWA organization presently has 85 district church councils, hospitals, dispensaries, theological seminaries and colleges, primary and secondary schools, a micro-finance bank and universities all across Africa, and over six million regular worshippers throughout the globe.



Many gas generator-powered fans thankfully keep the air circulating during Sunday School.

- Following Sunday School, there is a brief time of connecting, and then just prior to the start of the morning worship service, I am ushered out of the building to prepare for a processional marking the beginning of worship, as close to ten 'choir members' lead a parade into the church from a rear entrance as they sing, signalling the beginning of the service. David, myself and Pastor Ebere follow the choir in, and take our seats off to the side, next to the podium at the front of the church.
- Prior to the start of the service, printed bulletins were handed out to everyone, detailing some recent announcements, the lyrics for a couple of hymns that we will be singing this day, along with an order of service. By all plans, the worship service is to begin at 10 am and end at noon.

- The worship service begins with Pastor Ebere leading a call to worship, before Sam (our faithful and humble servant from TETMI who helped out immensely during our time at the Centre), leads the congregation in the singing of a hymn, with a powerful voice that he kept hidden from me all this past week.
- Pastor Ebere follows by reading the scripture passage from which I'll be speaking on today (Romans 15:1-7), before we continue on with further worship led by Sam and an enthusiastic and joy-filled choir. Joining the praise team is a skilled drummer and electric keyboard player; but the outdoor generator regularly kicks out, and we lose power (and sound) on a number of occasions, until the generator is re-started outside in generally less than a minute each time.
- All of the children remain in the Sunday School area of the adjacent future parsonage, and do not join their parents in the morning worship service.
- Following some lively worship, Ebere leads the church family in about 10-15 minutes of intercessory prayer, praying for a number of different categories.
- After prayer, a pair of people are invited forward to share a pair of testimonies; a younger woman praises God for a new job, and an older woman praises God for a full recovery after being hit by

a car and suffering many injuries close to a year ago. Each woman begins their testimony with improvised singing for the church family, and I am struck that while in Canada, we generally use a 'testimony' time to share some pivotal, life-changing event, yet these testimony times are generally used to praise God for anything that a person may have encountered earlier that week; so that God's work can be readily seen week after week after week.

- After the testimonies come announcements, Pastor Ebere shares of their weekly ministries, a member of the board comes forward and gives an update on the building next door, and they welcome visitors to introduce themselves to those in attendance. There is a new family attending for the first time today, with the father having just taken a new job as a plasterer in the area, relocating his family from northern Nigeria where it is becoming increasingly more and more unsafe with the growing menace of Boko Haram, a terrorist group that is expanding its territory. Pastor Ebere also announces that partway through the worship service, he will be leaving to lead communion at a sister church close to twenty minutes away.
- After the announcements, it is offering time, and a box is brought to the front of the church, and the church family come forward one at a time, and with clenched fist, drop their offering into the box and return to their seats. I look at my watch, and determine that the two-hour timeframe for worship is now nowhere near achievable, as the Order of Service has allocated me forty-five minutes to share (11:00 – 11:45); and it is already almost 11:45, and I have not yet taken the stage - - one final reminder that in Nigeria, time is only a suggestion.
- The choir sings a song of special music, with David's daughter Linda comes in from Sunday School to join her mother in singing the song they had practiced earlier in the week (each week, the choir practices once on their own, and on a second occasion accompanied by the band).
- After the special music, it is time for the ministry of the Word, and I am invited to come forward and preach. Considering the heat, it is not all that uncomfortable as the ceiling fans and floor fans are doing a good job of circulating the air.
- After the message the choir leads us in the singing of one more hymn; and as they are singing, the children are brought in the church from Sunday School, and they line-up across the front of the church, and are included in our prayers as David offers a benediction, with Ebere already on his way to another church.
- Once prayer is done, the choir leads us in a recession, as the choir leads David and I out of the church building, signalling the end of the morning service at close to 12:30 pm.
- Shortly afterwards, we head back to David's nearby home and await Paul's arrival. When we get to David's house I inquire about a curious whip-like object laying on the truck's dashboard. David

“Testimony times are used to praise God for anything that a person may have encountered earlier that week”



Erratic motorbike driver deterrent.

lets me know that in some areas, motorbike drivers drive erratically, and on one particular trip an armed guard had used the whip to deter 'crazy' bikers from driving too close to the truck. The whip is craftily fashioned out of the hide of a cow's tail

- David's main room ceiling fan has recently konked out, so we spend some time on his balcony where it is a bit cooler, until we retreat back inside once a neighbour's balcony generator makes it difficult to have a discussion with one another.
- David's wife Hope, makes us an incredible lunch featuring white rice with some mixed vegetables, served with some tasty ginger beef dish made from scratch - - it is the BEST food I've had since being in Nigeria, easily something I would order from a restaurant!!! After starting off with a conservative portion, I refill my plate a couple of times over, and David is pleased, as he hasn't seen me eat much 'local food' since I've been here.



Safely escorted to the Port Harcourt Airport in our Nigerian garb.

- I finally remember to ask about food seasoning, and David offers that while seasoning and hot sauces are used in the preparation of the food, rarely, if ever, are seasoning, sauces or condiments ever put out on the table for a person to apply themselves.
- Around mid afternoon, there's a knock on the door as Paul arrives in a long, black, clerical-looking, long sleeved wardrobe that he had been kindly gifted with from Steven's church.
- Paul was originally planning to change into regular clothes at David's before leaving for the 2+ hour drive to the Port Harcourt airport; but I share with him my intent to change at the airport, so I can board the plane 'fresh'. Both David and Hope enthusiastically encourage us both to wear our Nigerian garb to the airport, jokingly adding that we may get marriage proposals.
- Our plane leaves just before 9 pm, and David suggests that we get to the airport three hours before departure. David remains in Owerri, as our driver and two armed guards, escort us the rest of the way to the airport.
- As predicted, Paul and I turn heads with our Nigerian garb, and we receive many compliments on our clothing. Check-in goes fairly easily, after Paul redistributes some of his luggage to meet weight requirements, and once we pass through security with only one person asking if we have 'anything' for them, we change back into some casual clothing, feeling a bit more refreshed after a lengthy drive to the airport with windows down and no a/c.
- Performing a pre-boarding screening, I am asked to sit off to one side, while Paul is directed elsewhere. After a 10-15 minute wait, I and about a half dozen others are led away from the gate, outside to the tarmac where some further security await us; apparently initial x-rays of our baggage have caused some concern, and airport security wants to check our luggage.
- Confident that I have nothing in my bags that shouldn't be there, I just patiently await my turn, as I conclude whether I was waiting here or at the gate, I'd be waiting in either instance - - I find out the cause for concern was some pill bottles in my suitcase, any previous concerns are quickly dismissed as they have all been prescribed to me.

- Paul is thankful to see me return back to the gate, and we wait together for the boarding announcement. The flight is fairly uneventful, as we stop for an hour in Abuja to pick up further passengers bound for our destination of Frankfurt, Germany.
- Arriving in Germany, we find a comfortable spot in the airport to wait the four and a half hours until we board our next plane bound for Montreal.
- While at the airport, I decide to eat 'local' and have a tasty beef sausage and bun for breakfast.
- By this time, it's been close to twenty-four hours since we got out of bed the day before at our hotel in Owerri, but with a few cat naps here and there, both on the plane and in the airport neither of us are feeling all too worse for the wear.
- In Frankfurt, Air Canada offers to check-in Paul's carry-on bag as the plane is fully loaded with passengers, and he elects to do so. As we near boarding time, we learn there is an adolescent German hockey team that is traveling to Canada, presumably for a tournament - - the team all wears matching hooded sweatshirts, indicating they are from Strasbourg.
- Thankfully, once more, the plane across the Atlantic is uneventful, as we draw ever nearer to home. We land in Montreal just before noon Canadian time (6 pm in Nigeria), with a connecting flight to Ottawa leaving in two hours time.
- After landing in Montreal we perform self check-ins at individual kiosks answering questions about our re-entry into Canada, the process probably takes less than five minutes time. Affirming with a 'live' border agent that we are bringing nothing of worth back into Canada (with the exception of our Nigerian garb), we are given the 'green light' to move on.
- Once on board, the pilot announces that while it's a forty-seven minute scheduled flight, we will only be in the air for twenty-two minutes. This last leg of the trip is nothing more than a quick hop.
- After landing safely in Ottawa, Paul's wife is awaiting us at the baggage claim area - - and thankfully, soon afterwards, we are reunited with all of our bags, drawing our trip to an end.



Ebere, Paul, David, and Tim - - 'brothers from another mother... who serve the same Father'.