

Rebuilding Broken Walls and Lives
By Helen Laib

“We will now be returning to land at Lagos.” Such a shocking announcement woke me from my plane nap. I momentarily aroused from my nap and thought, “Well, this is going to be interesting. I wonder how the Lord will solve this.” There were thunderstorms over Benin and we could not enter them to land. Our plane flew around for about 20 minutes waiting for the storm to pass but it didn’t so we went back to Lagos. Sometimes it is great not to be the team leader. We had gotten up at 5 AM to leave by 7 AM for our 3 PM flight. Lagos rush hour is notoriously heavy and we were on the very far side of town. We did have time to stop at the Chevron compound though to pray for an engineer. He commutes back and forth from Houston where he “moonlights” as an orthopedic surgeon. He got an engineering promotion within a week. We were headed to Warri, a city in Delta state to do a 2 day clinic. We had received word that there were kidnappings there but felt called to go through with our plan. Then we found out that the planes did not fly to Warri and we would have to fly to Benin instead and drive for an hour to Warri. Our partner in Warri had arranged an armed guard for us. We soon found out that the airline offered to rebook or refund. We should have just rebooked but in hopes of getting an early flight out in the morning, we opted to refund. This required a 3.5 hour wait in line. Meanwhile, Pastor Felix went by cab to another airport to try to book us but could not get 8 tickets on the same flight. When we tried to rebook on the same airline, they were now sold out. Pastor Felix found a friend of a friend who could help him get tickets at another airport if he got there before closing. It was now late afternoon, and evening rush hour was upon us. He took a cab but the traffic was gridlocked. Next came a two mile jog in the rain to the 3rd airport. Finally tickets were secured and it was time to find a place to stay overnight and transportation to get there. Just two days before, Felix had met a man who was interested in partnering with our mission. He was a friend of Felix’ sister-in-law and had read the report of our previous trip. We had met him on Sunday and he had blessed us with a contribution to help us rent a van in Abia state. He now came through for us again by booking us into a condo at the Chevron compound where he worked. Meanwhile, the rest of the team was sitting in the “food court” at the local airport. We had no money to buy food though. There were lots of other stranded passengers. Kris got out her guitar and began to sing praise songs. There were children there who sang and danced along to the music. Soon everyone’s spirits were refreshed and the needed arrangements came through. Still it was 11:30 PM by the time we got to our accommodations and we were very hungry. We placed food orders. It was delivered about 2 orders every hour over the next 3 hours. Still it was wonderful to sleep in air conditioning with electricity all night.

Pastor Felix had given each of us “The Making of a Champion”, a book about Nehemiah, when we embarked in Atlanta. We used it for our morning devotions for several mornings. It was very relevant because it seemed that every day there was

something new to overcome. I have encountered such spiritual roadblocks on many trips before but usually after overcoming one or two obstacles, things smooth out and the rest of the trip is smooth. This time though the battles kept coming. We prayed for one of our nurses in Atlanta. She was battling glaucoma and vision changes but had stabilized enough with eye drops to come on the trip. We are believing for total healing and restoration of vision. After the first night, I had a terrible pain in my right shoulder. Pain was radiating down my arm. We prayed for it and I took a steroid burst because I thought it was my rotator cuff. The pain greatly improved and then went away. Another one of our nurses developed a cough, then asthma. We continued to pray for her and nurse her through the trip. We were encouraged to be like Nehemiah and keep up the spiritual warfare on one hand and to move forward with our assignment on the other hand.

We arrived in Warri on the second try. Our host had arranged an armed escort. I thought that would just be a few policemen who would ride alongside us. However, they had a vehicle with a double cab and an open back with benches and a 7 man anti-terrorist squad. Sirens blaring, we set out in a convoy of 4 vehicles at breakneck speed. The police in the back were gesturing to the surrounding cars to clear the way. One driver did not get out of the way fast enough to suit them so they weaved very close to him, and threw water through his open window and then hit him with the empty bottle. At one point, the squad leader got out and stood on the running board gesturing wildly as the truck careened down the highway. We didn't know what he meant though so it did no good. Pastor Felix' sister, Dr Lovette, had conducted clinic all by herself that day since we were not there. People had to come back the next day though to get their medicine since our team was bringing the medicine. The next morning, I thought we would get right over to clinic and make up for lost time. However, our hosts wanted us to go to the palace and meet the king. We went to the palace but the king did not have time for us since we were a day late. Kris once again worshipped with her guitar and we held clinic for some palace workers who were sick. Then we went to clinic and worked hard to see everyone. It was a blessing to be able to pray for each patient and lead a few to the Lord. We also treated our armed guards. We had the opportunity to really minister to several patients on a deeper level with deliverance. A business woman invited us to her house for a delicious dinner after clinic and we later prayed for her and her business. She had a great business breakthrough within a couple of days.

The next day we decided to drive 7 hours to Abiriba in Abia state because if we flew, we would first have to drive an hour to Benin, then fly to Lagos, then fly to Owerri and then drive 2 hours to Abiriba. We felt we needed the armed guard since there had been a kidnapping just 2 blocks from where we were holding clinic the day we were in clinic. We wanted to leave by 8 AM, but had to arrange for the guard first and get permission for the squad to leave the state and return. They said we would also need a rear guard and ask a very high price. After a lot of negotiating by Felix while the rest of us prayed and worshipped, we were ready to go by noon. Now we had a truck of police in front and one behind and we started out at breakneck speed. The guys in front had a goat skin whip as well as their AK47s which they used to direct traffic. If traffic was stalled, no matter, we would cross into the oncoming traffic and they would use the weapons to clear a path. On the

open road which was not in great shape, the speed picked up and our driver was good at tailgating. No amount of pleas to slow down and not be so close helped. We finally gave up, said our prayers and fastened our seatbelts. After several hours, we stopped to buy bananas and peanuts and later to take a bathroom break at the side of the road behind a burned out oil truck. As darkness was falling, we stopped to buy gas. The police then said they would be leaving us since they thought we said we wanted to go to Abia city not Abiriba and they didn't know the way.

If they did go the whole way, they wanted more money and would charge double if they had to stay over night. Felix was able to hire a bystander to ride with the police and show them the way. We finally got safely to our destination. We gave them supper and sent them back with extra gas money. As I settled down for bed after a bucket bath, I realized I did not have my waist pouch containing the team money, my passport, driver's license and credit cards. In a panic, I wondered if it had fallen off behind the burned out oil truck oh so far away. After prayer and a thorough search with my friends using flashlights since the power was out, it was found in the downstairs bathroom. The strap had become unbuckled. Praise God in all things!

Each morning we would start the day singing praises and worshipping God together. We would take turns sharing a devotional. Tim shared one morning that he had been meditating on the Scripture, "He shall give you the desires of your heart." Psalm 37:4 The Lord ask him, "What IS the desire of your heart?" After taking sometime to consider the answer, Tim replied that intimacy with Jesus was the desire of his heart. A few days later, while walking his dog, he had a vision. Jesus was there wearing a miner's headlight. There was a hole in front of him. Jesus said, "Follow me." And went down the hole. Tim said he knew the hole was the entrance to the kingdom of God. It was big enough for his head and shoulder to go through but looking down, he realized that he had stuff hanging off him that was not going to fit down the hole. Things like being performance oriented, wanting to be a successful businessman, wanting to be a certain type of father, duties for his church; all good things but sometimes not God things. I thought about this testimony a lot during this trip because I realized that I too had a lot of things hanging on me that were not fitting down the hole. Things like perceptions of how a medical outreach should be run, how God should use me on a mission trip, how the pharmacy should be stocked, how much the trip should be preplanned and how much should be left to go with the flow. God kept chiseling away at these things on the trip.

The next day we were to visit Abam where the school for orphans was located. Faith Rocks in Him was building a new school there since the old one was made of mud and had dissolved in a heavy rain. On our last visit, in August, 2010, the footings for the foundation had been dug. Work had halted on it since then and we wanted to see how it could be started up again. The van that had been sponsored did not show up on time. Then we found it was not a van but a vehicle that would only hold 5 people. We were 8 plus baggage. He wanted to ferry one group and then come back for the others but the trip was over an hour each way. Then he said he would hire another vehicle but the driver would not start work that early. Then he said just wire him the money and he would come do the job. What! We looked for a local contact. In the end, after more prayer and worship, we were

able to hire the same driver and van that we had in 2010. It was kind of rickety but we knew the driver would do his best for us. We got to the school and the children were all waiting. They recited the 10 commandments and some other things they had learned. Kris sang for them while the rest went to look at the school. It was very heartbreaking to see that nothing had been done beyond the foundation except for a partial row of cement blocks. Tim gave them a kick and the blocks crumbled to sand. The center portion was overgrown with weeds. It was very disheartening. Though the architect and contractor had been a trusted friend, he had taken the full price of the building and only done the foundation. We questioned the man who was helping with the school to see if he would be able to oversee the building project and find a local builder.

We returned to the school the next week to hold clinic on Monday and Tuesday. We were seeing the sick children first. The first several patients who were small children complained of headaches nearly everyday. Further questioning revealed that they were hungry. The school met from 7:30 AM to 12:30 PM and did not serve any food. Students were to bring food from the foster homes where they lived but sometimes did not have any. We were not able to see all the patients who registered on Monday so told some to come back on Tuesday and bring their registration cards. Tuesday morning we shopped in town for food for the children. We bought yams, rice, beans, and hot breakfast cereal. We also left money with the school to continue the feeding for another 4 months. This shopping takes a lot of time in Africa so it was already late when we arrived. A huge crowd had gathered for care. Felix preached to them and led those who wished to accept Christ in a prayer of salvation. He then prayed for their healing. We finished seeing the people who had registered the day before but were not able to accept any new patients. It was sad but true that the need outstripped our ability to treat them. It was not an ideal situation but was the best that could be done. One of the patients was His Royal Highness, a type of tribal king. He had given the land where we were trying to build the school. We asked if he could help oversee the school project and he indicated a willingness to help. It turns out, he was a colleague of Jonas, a good friend of Felix, who had been Chairman in the region, kind of a supermayor. Jonas had done several major building projects in the area while he had been Chairman.

Jonas had met us at the airport when we arrived in Lagos and had arranged the van that we used for our first few days in Lagos. The first Sunday, we attended Revival Assembly which was Felix' home church in Nigeria and the first place that he ever preached. It had enthusiastic praise and worship and a great message on faith. After church, we went to Jonas' church to pray for his Bishop. He was a great man of faith as well. As a young man, he had been a boxer. He had been knocked out in the ring and had stopped breathing. He was taken dead to the morgue and lay on the floor for three days. On the third day, he came back to life and knocked on the morgue door to get out. He scared everybody. He then became a pastor and was gifted in deliverance. People often called him to pull down altars used in witchcraft and to cleanse areas which had been used for evil. He was called to such a task about a year ago. When he arrived at the site, he was greeted by hired assassins who riddled his car with bullets. He was hit several times. They dragged him from the car and tried to put him in the trunk to dispose of the body but suddenly

dropped him and left. His driver was able to put him back in the car and drive him to the hospital. He recovered but had residual nerve damage and chronic pain. He had gone to India for advanced medical care but still had pain and weakness in his legs. He was still using crutches. We prayed over him. About a week later, we got the report, his pain was much better and he had more energy. We also prayed over Jonas and his wife. They are desiring a baby. We also prayed over his business. Later in the week he met John who had helped us with the van and place to stay. They made a great connection. It turns out John had contacts that would be useful to Jonas for an advance he wanted to make in his business.

The next Sunday, we went to church in Arochukwu, Pastor Felix' hometown. Many people there gave testimony to having seen a man raised from the dead the last time he preached there. About 7 people came forward to pray for salvation and we prayed individually for most of the congregations. It was a great time of worship.

We hired policeman to accompany us to Abam on Monday and Tuesday and to the airport on Wednesday since we would be exposed to the public and potential kidnapers could know we were there. Actually someone came to clinic on Monday seemingly with malicious intent. He was run off. These policeman were not flamboyant and rode in the car with us. They were all committed Christians. We had the opportunity to get to know them and to treat them medically and pray over them. One of them wants to become a preacher when he retires in 5 years. He was experienced in dealing with kidnapers. His unit was active in clearing the highway from Abiriba to Owerri from kidnapers who were ambushing vans and church vehicles. They did it by hiring vans and church buses. Plainclothes policemen with concealed weapons rode in the buses. When ambushed, they would play along until the time to go for the "kill" so to speak but often literally. He said he had lost track of how many kidnapers he had neutralized. Our van broke down on the way to the airport. Our guards kept us safe while another van came. We prayed for our driver and gave him some money toward repairs.

We returned to Lagos on Wednesday. The lady who used to run the school in Abam and her husband met us at the airport. They followed us to our condo to talk to us. Last year the lady had been accosted by some men who threatened to kill her and chop her to pieces with their machetes. She said the angel of the Lord stayed their hands and they were not able to bring their machetes down. However, she was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and was afraid to return to Abam. She had started another daycare/school in Lagos and hoped to make enough money to support the school in Abam. So far that had not worked out yet. Kris was able to minister some healing to her as Kris had also been attacked by someone who tried to rob and kill her in Kazakhstan. Kris is a trained counselor. The lady had a breakthrough and said she would now be able to return to Abam if someone would go with her. It would be a good thing because the school in Abam was suffering from lack of her leadership. Meanwhile, Felix ministered to the husband on the necessity for him to be the spiritual leader of the family and to be a covering for his wife's ministry. He also had a breakthrough. We also prayed for the village of Abam because it was reported to have a lot of witchcraft and seemed to be a bit hostile. We sensed a change in the town since we had been there in 2010.

We had the opportunity to pray for several more of Felix' friends that night and the next day at the airport. Just before we left, John ask us to pray for a promotion he would like . It would put him into the position of having a lot more contacts outside his company. I believe it would be good for ministry and we are looking forward to hearing that he has received it. John also said he could put together a fundraising event for Felix. He has done this before and feels confident that it would be successful. He has many contacts who are looking for effective ministries where they can plant their seed. This was very encouraging. We also had the honor of praying for one of the flight attendants on the trip home. She remembered that Felix had prayed for her on her last trip. She had just been voted Flight Attendant of the Year and will be receiving the award in Atlanta this summer. Now she had another special prayer request for her family.

Important lessons I learned from this trip were:

God may close doors to call you to develop new gifts.

God is sovereign. We do not always understand what he is doing at the time.

Be flexible. Plans can change from minute to minute.

Preplanning is good and necessary but everything may not follow the plan.

Give God glory in all the little answers to prayer. They are everywhere.

Praise is the ultimate spiritual warfare weapon.



Kris leading worship in the airport



ATS squad in Warri



Praying at Clinic in Warri



Kris and Tim pulling teeth



Children at the school in Abam



A sick and sleepy child



The foundation of the new school



Preaching and praying in Abam