

My Cup Overflows

I was flying for a second day from Lusaka, Zambia to Douala, Cameroon. Africa is so big that such trips mean an overnight stay. Two flights.

On African routes I fly I rarely hear an American accent. But next to me on the plane from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia was an American. She was born in New York City. Now she teaches at a school of design in Milan, Italy.

I did not get her name. Still, my cup overflowed (Psalm 23:5).

We found out we were both going to Cameroon's biggest city for two-week learning events. She would help students at a major school of design, LABA (*Libre Académie des Beaux-arts*/Free Academy of Fine Arts).

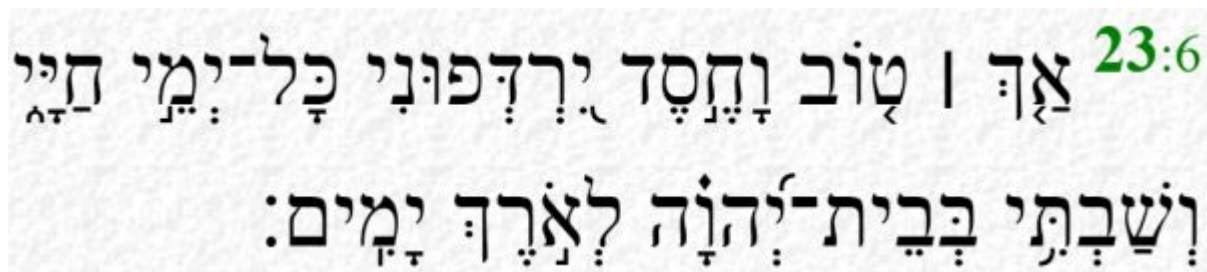


At a more modest site in Douala, I was to meet with eight Cameroonian and Nigerian pastors. They teach at our sister seminaries in West Africa. They too would focus on design—learning design for future pastors.

The woman was inquisitive. Highly educated. Her undergraduate degree was from an Ivy League university.

I wanted to share a bit about myself. I wondered if the conversation might turn toward God and eternity. So I showed her Hebrew on my smartphone: Psalm 23.

I spoke the last verse to her in Hebrew, pointing at each word of 23:6. “Surely goodness and faithful love will chase me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD day after day after day.”

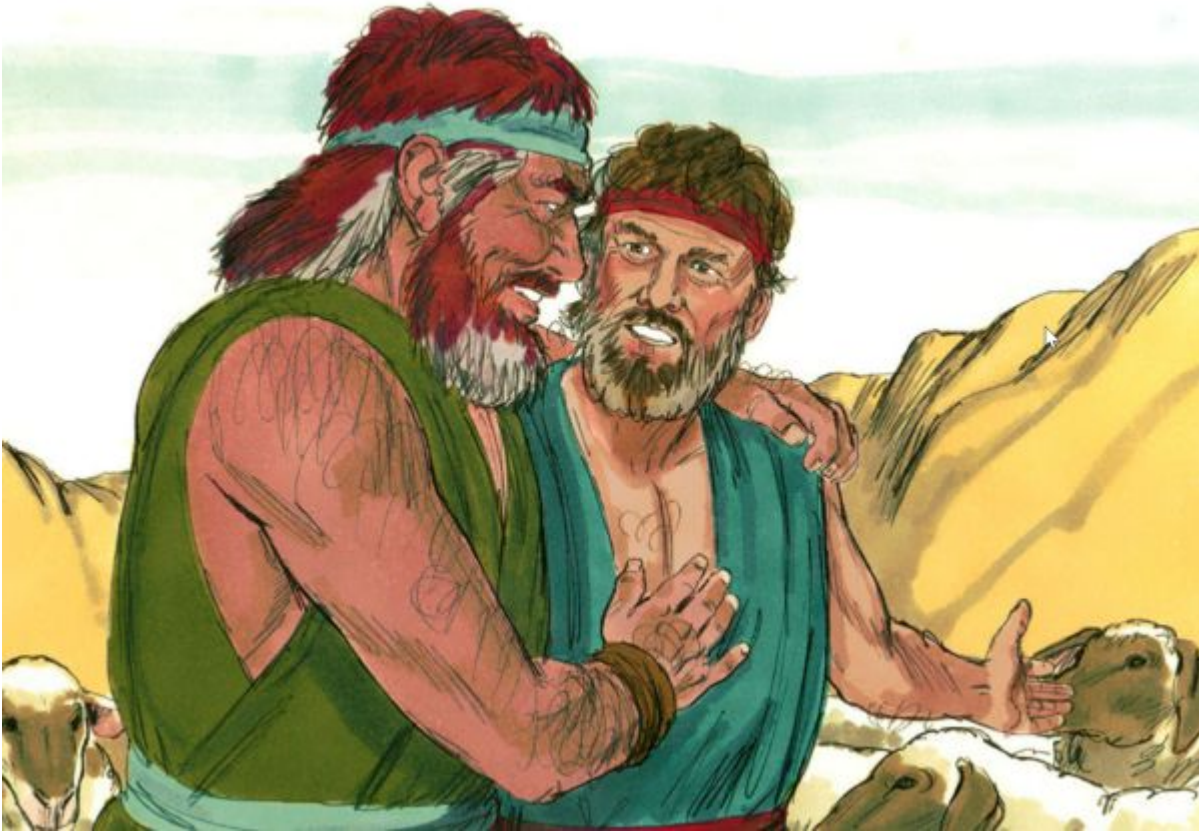


23:6
אֵךְ | טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל-יְמֵי חַיִּי
וְשָׁבְתִי בְּבֵית-יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:

Psalm 23:6 in Hebrew

“You read Hebrew?” she said. “I’m Jewish.” She got excited. “Can I ask you a question about my *bat-mitzvah* verse?”

That turned out to be *B’reyshiya* (Genesis) 33:4. On Jacob’s way home, after all he had done to his older brother Esau decades earlier, Jacob feared meeting Esau. “But Esau ran to meet him, hugged him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. Then they wept.”



Esau and Jacob

In New York City, when the woman next to me had been young, that was the verse she had been chosen to read to her synagogue. She had given a brief speech on it too.

She was still interested in it. She quizzed me about the extraordinary dots in the ancient text over the Hebrew word for “and kissed him.” She remembered asking her rabbi about those.

I asked her if she knew that Jesus had expanded that verse into a story about two brothers.

Another story? Yes.

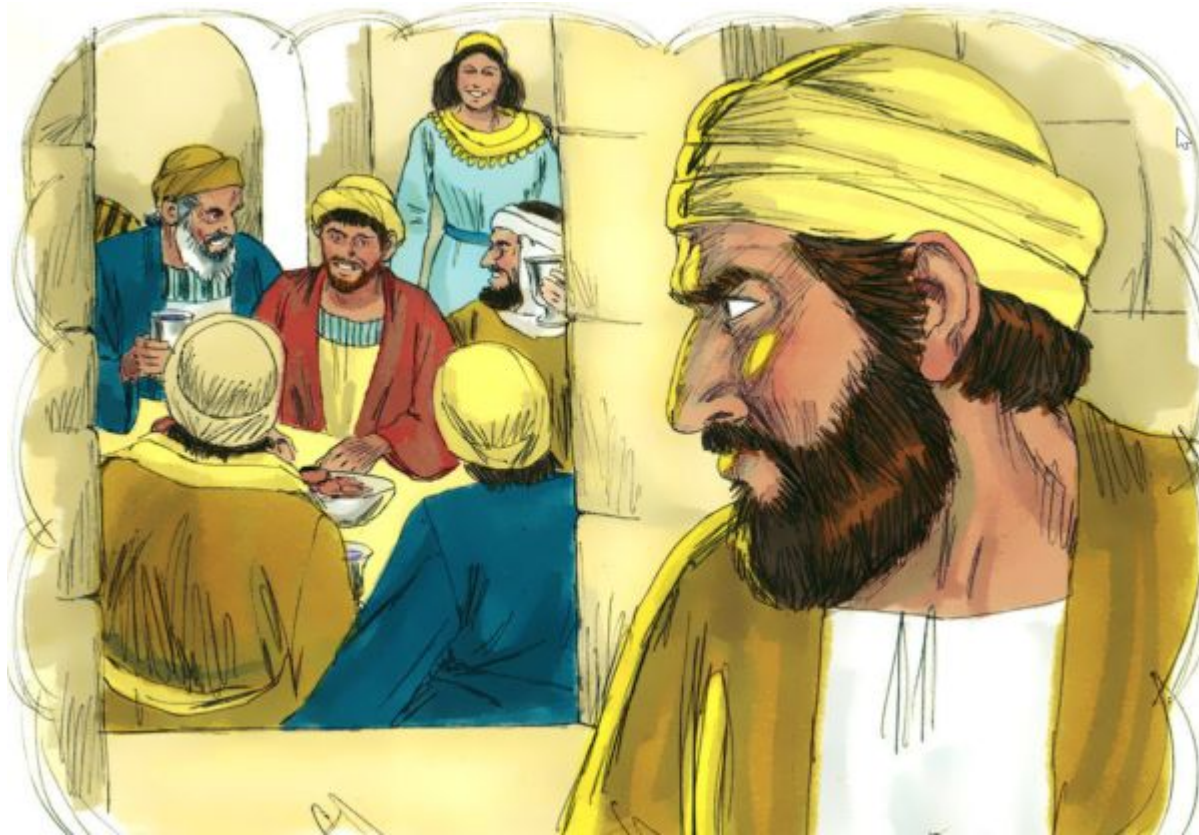
There were two brothers, I told her. Estranged. One had been far from home for a long time. But the Father was waiting for him. When he saw him at a distance, he ran out to him, threw himself on his son’s shoulders, and kissed him.



Did she know that story? “No,” she said. “I’ve never heard it. Tell me more.”

The son in the story had tried to repeat the three-part speech he had prepared. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men.”

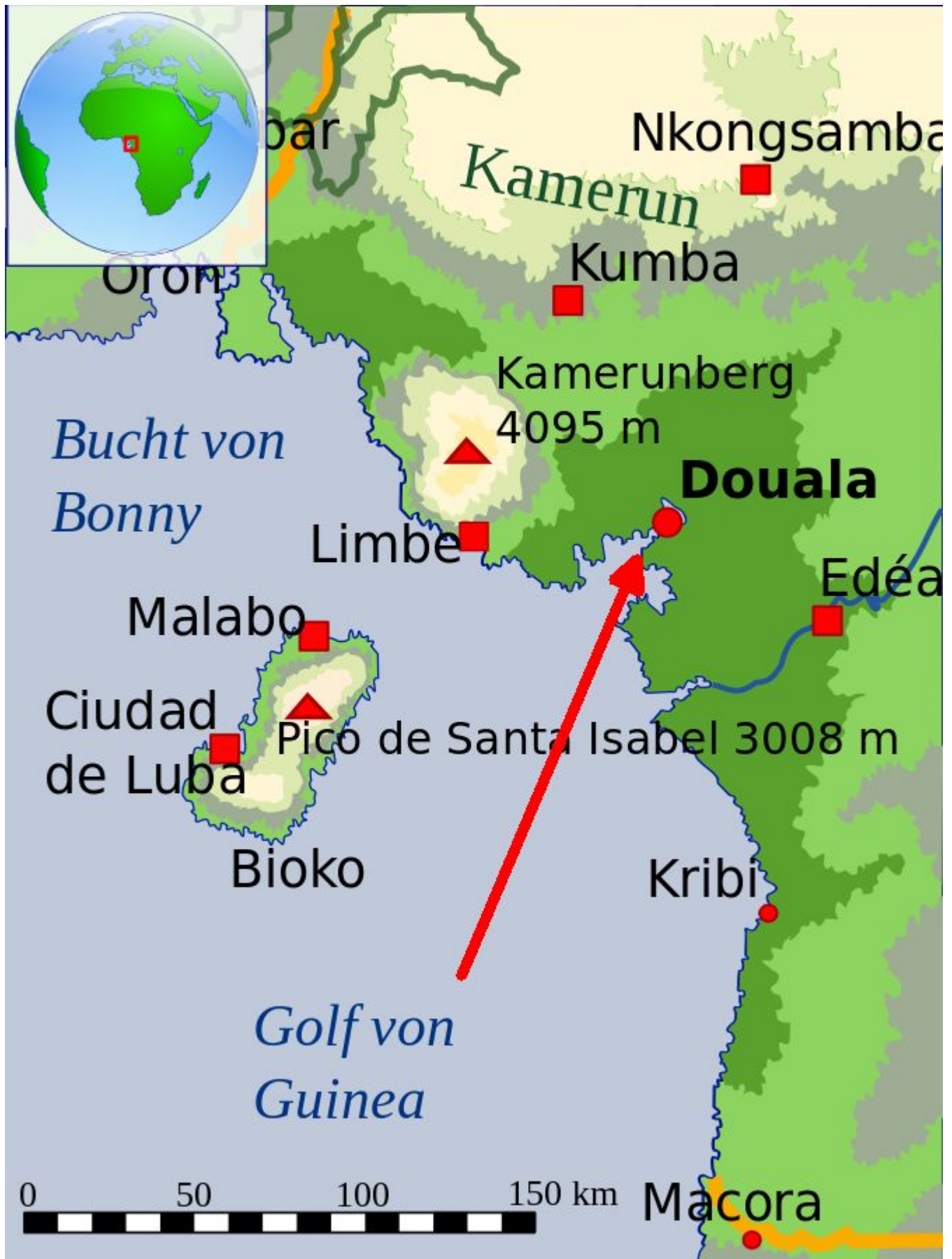
Do you know that story? The one about the Pharisees who disliked Jesus eating with notorious sinners? The one Jesus told about the prodigal son, the waiting Father, and the elder son? The one in which the Father interrupts the younger one before he can offer his bargain?



The woman and I had one of the best conversations I have ever shared with a stranger on an airplane.

Did she become a follower of Christ that day? Not that I know of. I have been praying for her. I still think Psalm 23:5 applies: *"My cup overflows."*

That leads to the next photo.



In Douala, on the last day of our first week together, the West African seminary teachers played this game. Each took turns pouring as little water as possible into the glass dish. Whoever broke the surface tension and made the cup overflow would lose.

I wish you could have heard the laughs and jokes during that game. It wasn't just that the dish overflowed when it ended. Our hearts did too.

Video of singing during devotions

We had sung, prayed, and heard God's word together. We had talked about so many plans that week—plans to help other men in Cameroon and Nigeria shepherd God's flock. Men had practiced teaching the Bible in front of their peers. New teachers had asked questions.

"My cup overflows," David sang. We felt the same.



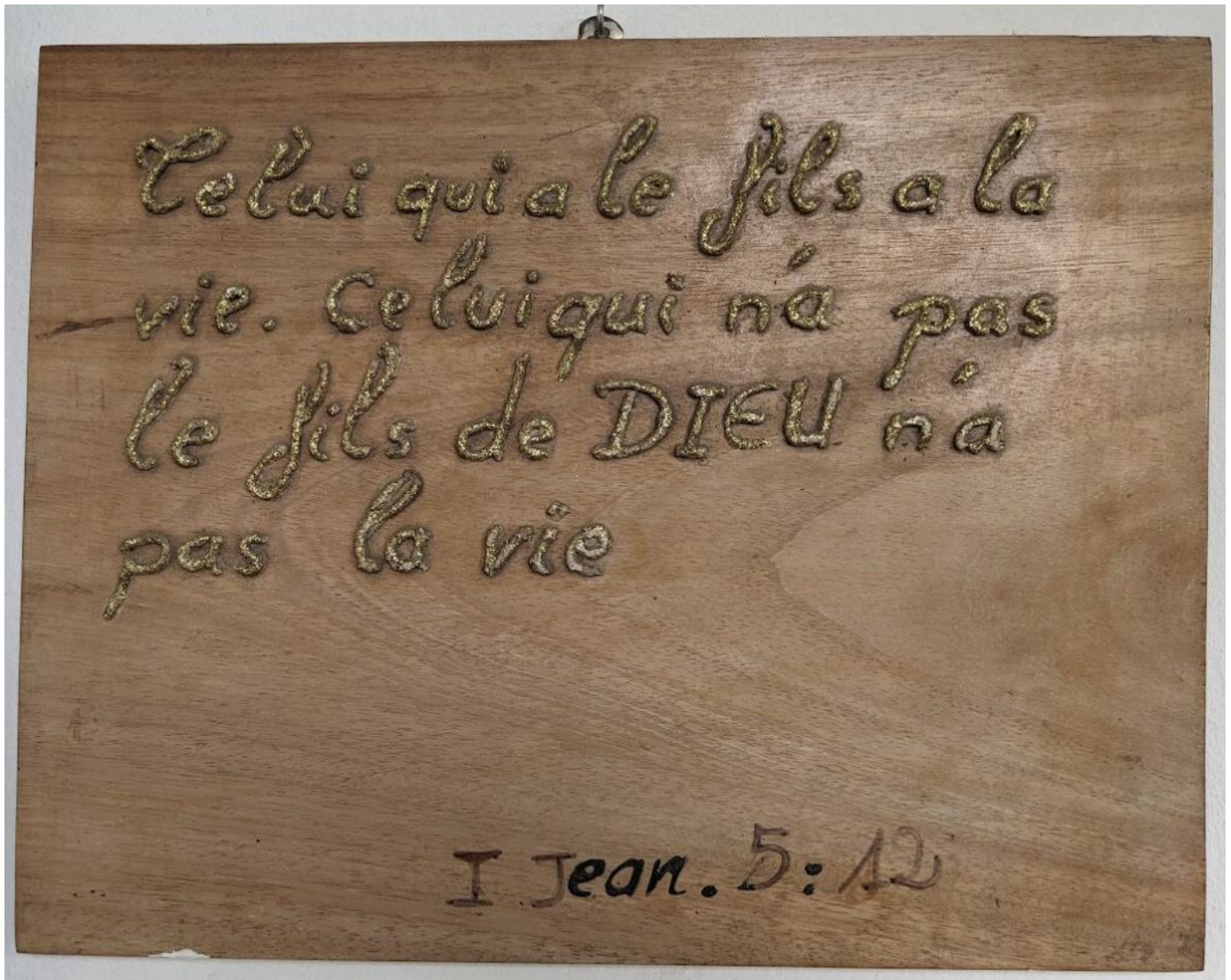
May I share one more way my cup overflowed during my last week in Douala?

It was hot there. We drank so much bottled water.



But on Thursday of the second week, we drank life itself. It was so unique.

Note this sign from the mission house where we stayed. In French: "Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son does not have life."



Four of us saw that in a new way. Others had left. We had stayed a second week. That Thursday the four of us took part in the worldwide theological educators' meeting of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

Our cups overflowed. On a screen before us we saw the results of the Spirit's gift of life around the world.



Pastor Orem and Pastor Johnson from All Saints Lutheran Church in Nigeria loved it. Other theological educators around the globe introduced themselves.

As in the photo above, Pastor Orem beamed. He told me, “My spirit has gone to faraway places and is so blessed.”



Missionary Dan Witte (far right) and his wife Debbie live in Lusaka, Zambia.

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news, and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>