

We Arrived

To say, “We arrived,” in Bemba, you say, “*Natufika.*” In Chewa, “*Tafika.*” In Dholuo, “*Wasetimo.*” In Swahili, “*Tumefika.*”

Saying such words—that was the plan. Twenty-two pastors would leave home in Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, the United States, and Zambia. They would gather in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Arrived with Difficulty

Some would arrive Monday, October 16 after a full-day cross-border bus ride that began at 3:45 a.m. That was the plan.



Others would start a cross-country bus trip early Saturday. They would get to their capital city at midnight. They would begin flying Sunday morning, and arrive by plane Monday afternoon. That was the plan.

We would all hug and shake hands with joy. That was the plan. In at least six languages we would all thank God and say, “We arrived.”

For eight days we would study God the Spirit since Pentecostalism surrounds us in Africa. We would start Tuesday, October 17, the day after saying, “We arrived.”



But one brother had an old passport. In his land, a law had just changed. Airport officials said, “You cannot fly to Lilongwe without a new passport.” That would take weeks.

Three other brothers had surprise visa delays. They waited near airports. They prayed.

What else to do? The three were trying to fly out on a Sunday. How do you get help from Malawi Immigration when their offices are closed? When you don’t live in Malawi, how do you even reach an immigration official?

Feeling sick, I asked myself, “Why didn’t I apply for visas for the trio sooner?”

On a Sunday how do you get someone in Malawi to approve a visa already applied for and paid for online? Wait for Monday? No. Monday, October 16 was Mother's Day in Malawi. For a third straight day, no government offices were open.



Enter Godwin, my new best friend in Malawi Immigration. I met him at the airport in Lilongwe that Monday. I had just flown in from Lusaka, Zambia.

Godwin scanned the trio's paperwork I had brought along and looked at my clerical collar. He offered, "I will try to help."

Within minutes two pastors got visa approval. Amazing.

For the third pastor, it took two more long days. Not surprisingly: Travel in Africa means "Expect the unexpected."

A better reason not to be shocked: God is so gracious. We offered him so many prayers.

On Wednesday afternoon, October 18, the first two brothers made it to our meeting

place in Lilongwe. Two days late? No problem. They said in Efik, *“Ima isim ufak!”* Big smiles. Hugs. “We arrived!”

Another brother arrived six days after he left home, three days late, on Thursday afternoon. In his native Akoose, he could have said *“Mpidé bwam!”* “I arrived well!” You should have seen the joy. We sang.

That last brother’s bag— had it arrived with him? No. Arrgh.

His luggage came the next day. But the office holding it closed at 3:30 p.m. He could not call. When we learned that his bag had arrived, it was too late to fetch it.

He waited one more day, until Saturday, to say, *“Ntid mpidé meh bwam.”* “It arrived well.”

Still on the Journey

Why tell you an extended “we arrived” story? Three reasons.

1) This is how international travel works in Africa. You don’t know where the bumps in the road will be. You know, “There will be bumps.”

You pray for safe journeys. You thank God for journey mercies.

2) The pastors from six countries who gathered in Lilongwe, Malawi were on a *learning journey*.

We meet face-to-face twice a year. We were in the sixth of nine courses toward a bachelor’s degree in theology.

I direct the program. Usually, guest professors teach. Dr. Kenneth Cherney, Jr., of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, led the learning journey this time. The African brothers, Ken, and I discussed the power, work, and promises of God the Holy Spirit.

Professor Cherney and I prefer “learning journey” to “class.” Ken could have been the sage on the stage, as some say. He aimed more at being the guide on the side.

He is an expert in the Bible. He knows Pentecostalism. He has taught this class before in Africa and India.

Ken would still say, “We were on a journey together. We all learned from each other.”

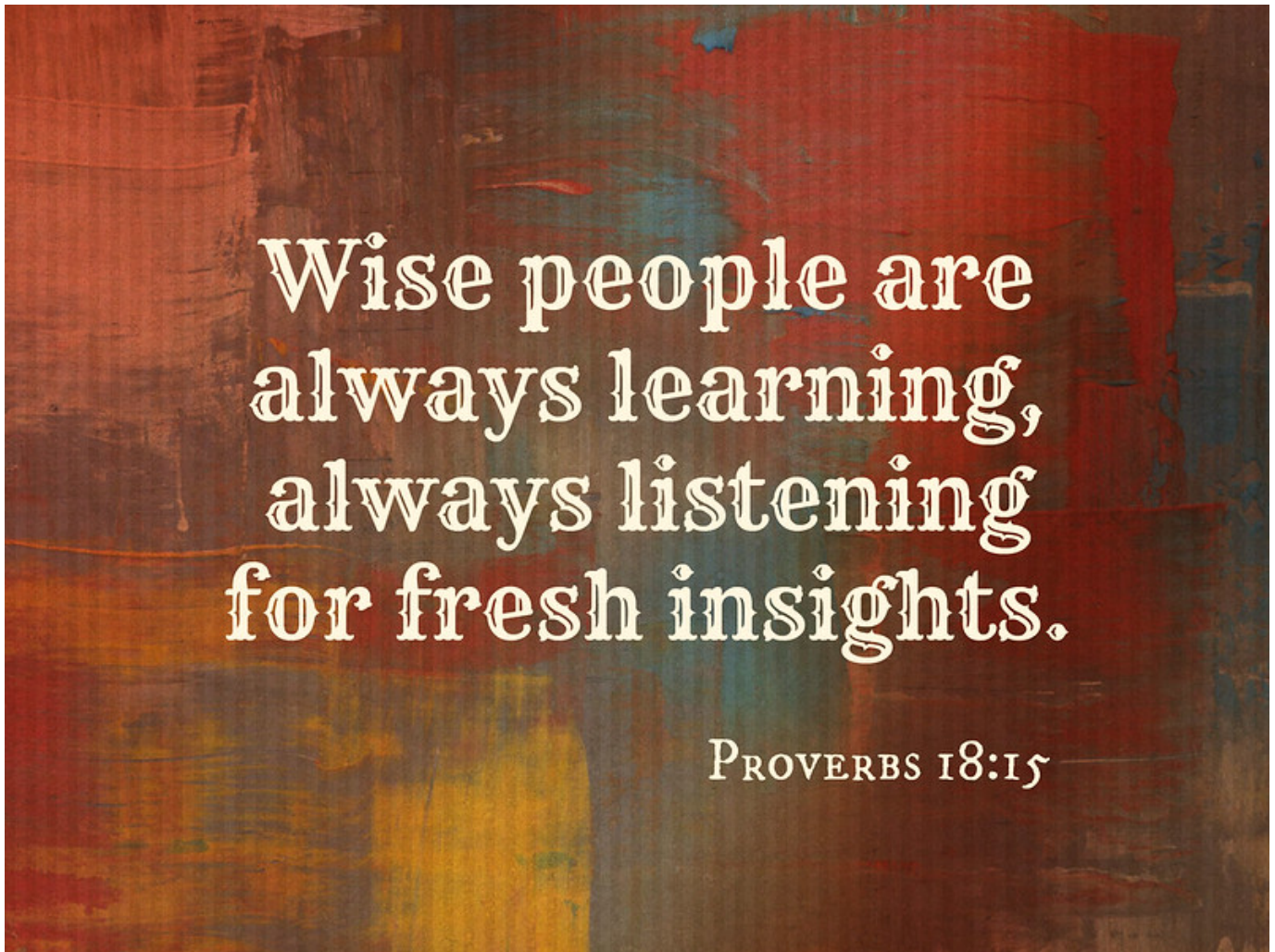


Photo by Denise Krebs <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mrsdkrebs/16407898563>

3) As you read this, the twenty-one pastors from six countries are back in their homes—most plan to meet together again at the end of April.

But when will we say “We have arrived”? When we finish the bachelor’s degree program at the end of 2025, God willing?

Or when Jesus reappears?

“He has arrived,” we will cry. The songs. The tears. The joy.

Even then, will learning about Jesus end?

Jesus told the Eleven the night before he died for us, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor."

Didn't that happen at Pentecost? ("He has arrived!")



And didn't that happen for each of us at our baptisms? Shouldn't each of us have said then, "We have arrived"?

Not exactly. Jesus said, "The Father ... will give you another Counselor to be with you forever" (John 14:16).

Forever? Oh, we have so much to learn from the Spirit.

Our learning of the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God will never end. With God, on the new earth, never will we say, "We have arrived."

That is one reason His Spirit will be with us forever.

Our growing in knowing the beauty of Jesus our Lord and Brother and the glory of God our Father—by the Spirit of God, the learning never will end.



Missionary Dan Witte, based in Lusaka, Zambia, serves as a theological educator on the One Africa Team.

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>