



THE BRANCH FAMILY—SOUTH AFRICA

Hello to our dear friends and supporters,

Wow...December is here...Already??? I remember when I was a kid hearing all the adults say, "the older you get, the faster time goes by." Boy, were they right!! It is really hard to believe that we are entering our last month of furlough. The past four months have seemed like a blur at times, and it certainly has gone by quickly. I was telling Vicki just the other day that it feels like we're rolling pretty quickly downhill now toward our departure date of January 7th. With that date approaching, I must say we have mixed emotions. Let me explain...

Make no mistake, we have really enjoyed our time in the States (for the most part). There is just nothing like being with family. Spending time with our two married children and their families (especially our grandbaby) is priceless!! Having everybody together in the same house at Thanksgiving was blissful and I'm sure Christmas will be even better. Being able to see our parents, grandparents, and siblings is just plain fun, too. I'm thankful for the wonderful technology of Skype and Facetime, but there is just nothing like being together in person! I mean, you just can't hug somebody on a computer screen!

Being able to visit churches with pastors and people who care for us and who we view as partners and co-laborers in this work has been great, too. We have felt genuine love and concern for us and for the ministry and a great outpouring of generosity and hospitality. It is a great encouragement to be reminded of the hundreds of people who are truly "engaged" and pray regularly for us. To be able to look them in the eye and say "thank you" has been a blessing too. God has also blessed with safe travel, generous love offerings, and some new churches to partner with.

We've also enjoyed eating some of the good foods we miss in South Africa. We've eat at so many Mexican restaurants over the last four months, we could write a guide book. (That's NOT a complaint by the way) We've also made several trips to our favorite hotdog stand and enjoyed some good ice cream. It'll be diet time for sure when we get back!

But, you have to understand...we miss our home in South Africa, too. We miss the people there and the ministry that we've given our life to. As stressful as it may get sometimes, I'm ready to get back to the hustle and bustle and busyness of day-to-day life in Kimberley. We're looking forward to being back at the schools for assemblies and Bible studies. We're ready to get our Bible Institute and College of the Bible going again. We can't wait to be back in Greenpoint for the monthly children's ministry and see the smiling faces of the children. And we greatly miss the people of Truth Baptist Church. They've been doing very well in our absence, but they are our dear friends and we miss the fellowship and love we share with them.

So, honestly we do have mixed emotions...and there are certainly more to come. On January 7th around 1pm, as we stand in the Raleigh airport, we will be so sad as we hug our families and say our good-byes. When we left the first time, it was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do in my life - and I'm definitely NOT looking forward to doing that again. But, when we touch down in South Africa and are re-united with the people and ministry, and the life that we have waiting there, the smiles on our faces will soon replace the tears.

I realize that what I'm feeling is nothing new for missionaries. I've discussed this same thing with several of my missionary friends. And from what I read, missionary Paul expressed these same kind of emotions himself when writing (under divine inspiration) to some of the churches he ministered to. So, by the grace of God we roll downhill...sometimes too quickly...and look forward to all that God has in store both here and there over this final month.

Merry Christmas!! We love you all so much!

The Branches to South Africa