

Pastor Daryl Diddle

What I Learned Over Summer Vacation

July 30, 2023

### Psalm 96 (NIV)

*Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. <sup>2</sup> Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*

*<sup>4</sup> For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. <sup>6</sup> Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.*

*<sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. <sup>9</sup> Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.*

*<sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.*

*<sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. <sup>12</sup> Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. <sup>13</sup> Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

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If you're new to the church in this last year, you need to know that what I'm doing here is something I do every year. Like what many of us did when we were kids and we returned to school in the fall, every year about this time, I give an account of what I did and something I learned over the summer.

Besides the normal stuff (you know, random house repairs, gardening, mowing the yard, enjoying having at least two of our boys at home more, that sort of thing), this summer involved three trips for me.

I've mentioned before that years ago, Annette and I thought it important to take each of our kids somewhere in the world (to a place of their choosing, as much as possible) that is very different from the United States and especially different from Wilmore, a place that would show them how God works in different nations and cultures.

In 2016, Ben (our oldest) and I went to Russia with a ministry called Orphan's Tree, that works with teens who have aged out of state orphanages.

In 2019, Paul and I went to China with Thane Ury, who gave us a ten-day, three-city tour of China's faith: past, present and future.

And then about two months ago, David and I travelled with Mike Reynen, our denomination's missions director for Africa, on one of his regular trips there, spending a week in Guinea and another in Cameroon.

Both of those nations are "mission districts," which means there is very little organized church structure. There are local pastors in different stages of training who shepherd many local congregations, but there are *no* fully trained, ordained pastors in Guinea, and until this trip

when we ordained five new pastors, there was only one ordained elder in Cameroon.

The day after our 24-hour flight to Conakry, Guinea's capital on the Atlantic coast, we drove 19 hours inland to Gueckedou, averaging about 14 miles an hour, mostly because of poor road conditions, but also due to a couple incidents.

Early in the trip, the front tire of the car traveling just in front of us dramatically blew out and they lost control and hit an oncoming truck.

Since the Guinean Pastor Gabriel, riding with us, is also a doctor, we stopped to help, but two people died there.

Toward the end of our trip that day, we had our own, much less dramatic, flat tire, which took some time to repair because we had to find rocks in the field by the road to help jack up our vehicle.

Honestly though, our flat was comforting in a way, because it reminded us that a flat tire does not always involve fatalities.

The five of us and our driver, so six in all, in a very full little SUV basically drove the southern border of Guinea to what's called the Forest Region, which is, as you might guess, *very* rural. Nearly all FM churches in Guinea are located there. A couple of them not accessible by truck, so we had to hike to those.

In every village, we were greeted and treated like royalty. The oldest to the youngest were all waiting for us and they sang and danced for us, and fed us far more than we needed. One of the villages gave each of the five of us a shirt from their village patterned cloth, and that's what I'm wearing here.

In each place, we conducted a time of worship, examined and baptized several who had come to know Jesus in the preceding six months or so, and then just visited with the people.

In one village baptism service, Pastor Gabriel tied vines around the bottom of his pant legs to keep, what he called the "electric fish" that were in the stream from shocking him.

We were in the forest region, where neither power nor running water could be counted on, for three days, and then we returned to the Conakry area.

As full as our truck was on the way out, on the way back, we also managed to squeeze in a large bag of pineapples, a large bag of avocados and a live chicken, all gifts from the village churches.

We then flew to Douala, Cameroon, and did all our work in that country from the Douala church. Pastors and leaders came from all over the country for meetings, ordination interviews, and a worship and ordination service.

I was able to pray for about a dozen new believers who gave their lives to Christ in the service there, and I

almost preached at a wedding, but at the last minute, even after the church was decorated, the wedding was postponed because the families could not come to a financial agreement.

In Cameroon, David got to hone his negotiation skills at the marketplace, and in both countries, David served as the trip photographer, which was a great help to Mike.

I should mention too that in Guinea, at one of the villages we visited on the way back from the forest region, the village elder invited David to stay and make a life there, and he was offered a wife and a farm if he would agree.

After some deliberation, David decided he liked air conditioning a bit too much to stay.

So that, in a very small nutshell, was our trip to Africa.

My second trip [put on fishing hat] was a week of fishing in Canada with Paul and David and seven of my cousins. That involved a 14-hour drive north, through Ohio and Michigan with an overnight in the Sault Saint Marie Wal-Mart parking lot.

Meeting up with the rest there at the Sault, we crossed into Ontario and drove north along Lake Superior to the town of Wawa, where we turned east for 30 miles and then north for 30 miles and arrived at absolutely nowhere, which is where the fish are supposed to be. And they were, although it took them a couple days to realize we were there to visit.

At Murray Lake there were a host couple, six fishing cabins, nice boats and motors, and no wildfire smoke. You had far more of it here than we did there.

We fished for, and caught, walleye, but we also caught the occasional smallmouth bass, perch and pike—enough to eat every night and also to bring some home.

And we returned safely, obviously, in spite of a strange engine noise in our truck all the way home. Our mechanic here was amazed that we made it back at all, and without any major engine damage besides, so I count that a gracious mercy of God.

And then [hat off, nametag on], I returned just yesterday from Orlando as a conference delegate to our denomination's every-four-years national gathering. Meeting Tuesday through Friday, there were daily times of worship, teaching, training, business and reconnecting with many people who've come through our church here.

You can find all the business results on the [fmcusa.org](http://fmcusa.org) web site, if you're interested.

I know that some people love going to "conferencey" kinds of gatherings, and I'm happy to do my duty, but personally, I'd rather have a tooth pulled.

*In spite* of that, though,  
*and in spite* of Orlando's summer heat and humidity (although one day it was warmer here than it was there),  
*and in spite* of the ridiculous cost of on-site meals, which caused me to live off granola bars, a bag of apples, and a box of bran flakes,  
we began that grand process with Abraham.

God invited Abraham to get to know and trust Him such that Abraham, then, would become the head of the family—the people who would both know and show the world around them its true God, their true God—and in doing so, Israel would become the instrument of redemption and reunification and restoration, to God first and then to each other.

Of course, Israel struggled with this, but ultimately, God accomplished it through them, through Jesus.

Last week we called Jesus the last true Israelite because where Adam and Eve and Israel all said, "no" to God and His ways, Jesus said "yes" to God every time. And this made Him not only the way for one person at a time to be reunited with God, it also made Jesus the head of the family that would deliver the message and opportunity of reconciliation to the world.

How do persons become reconciled to God?

Through Jesus, one decision at a time.

How do persons, then, become reconciled to each other?

The same way—through Jesus, one decision at a time.

Whenever two people are split apart, one person has to begin the process of offering forgiveness and initiating reconciliation.

Same with families.

Same with races.

Same with nations.

Sin segmented our world, but God has initiated its de-segmentation—it's reunification.

It happens when one person at a time sees that they really don't belong to *themselves* after all, but instead, they belong to this God who made them, and who, in Jesus, died to save them.

Reconciliation begins when one person realizes that and then commits himself or herself to a life of doing what God wants, which is working toward that same reconciling of persons, families, races, nations and all creation—to God and to each another.

And we know that's what He wants because everything He's done since Creation has pointed to that.

Reconciliation to Himself, and then the reconciliation of persons, peoples and nations: all leading to the reunification—the de-segmentation—of creation.

That's why Abraham.

That's why Moses.

That's why the judges and the kings and the psalmists and the prophets.

That's why Jesus and the Apostles.

And that's why the Church: to enjoy reconciled relationship with God ourselves, and to help everyone around us understand who He is, so they, too, can be, in Jesus, reconciled to Him and to one another.

God's done all this in order to remove all the boundaries and borders that sin has erected in our world.

You know, I crossed a lot of borders this summer, which took a lot of effort to do!

It took months of paperwork and lots of expense to get visas to enter Guinea and Cameroon. In Guinea, it

took hundreds of dollars and a whole day to take the COVID test Cameroon required in order to enter.

To get into Canada was simpler, but still required a passport and a change of money, and then some places didn't take credit cards or certain credit cards, so that was complicated.

Of course, physically getting into Florida was easier once you get through the airport, but what was funny was that even in the General Conference meetings, there were barriers of language and culture among the worldwide delegates.

We're so used to all the sin-caused barriers and borders, we don't even really notice them anymore. But this summer I noticed them.

Even looking at the map of the different places I was going, with the lines marking their borders and the various places all colored in different colors, you easily see the segmentation of our world.

But you know, God's world map does not look like ours.

When God looks at our world, He does not see the borderlines of nations.

He does not color them differently.

When God looks at our world, He does not see the lines of presumption and caution and prejudice and language and even hatred that we've drawn, at times, between peoples and races.

You know what God sees? God sees people who are either in relationship with Him, or people that He wants to be in relationship with Him.

God sees people who are either working *with* Him in breaking down barriers between people and tribes and nations, or He sees people working *against* Him in this great restoration He is trying to accomplish.

That's really the only segmentation He sees.

So, does this mean he wants border walls torn down and visa processes banished? Ultimately, yes!

But, let me say, not through political activism or protests or governmental irresponsibility; no, not while the world is still suffering so with sin!

To get rid of those sorts of borders while the world is still full of people who don't know God would mean society would self-destruct. That's why God did what He did at Babel in the first place.

Human shortcuts don't work.

You have to address the underlying spiritual reality, and then the practical will come along afterward.

The way to the peaceful, lasting, borderless Kingdom comes through the reconciliation of peoples, families, races and nations with God through Jesus.

That's what God's about. And so, that's what He wants His Church to be about.

And as His people will take Him seriously regarding this, and as more and more find out that God is their Creator and that Jesus, God's Son, is their redeemer: as that happens, then one by one, person by person, all the

things that segment our world today will fall away, because, you see, just as God is one, God's Kingdom is also one – and God's people will be one.

The map will be all one color.

There will be no more border guards, because there will be no more borders.

No more gates.

No more visas.

No more confused languages.

No more presumption and hatred between persons and families and races.

The roads in Guinea will be as good as the roads in Germany.

Those Canadian fish will be able to freely swim to us here.

And we'll be able to talk and laugh and worship with neighbors near and far with full understanding and without any hint of prejudice.

That's what God is working to accomplish.

That's why He sent Jesus, and He fully expects Jesus' followers, the Church, to work with Him in this.

He wants us to declare His glory among the nations and to say to all who will listen, "The Lord reigns!"

So, they can experience reconciliation too.

Are you doing that?

Am I doing that?

Are we doing that?

Are you working with God wherever you can to break down the barriers and segmentations that sin has created?

Are you letting people around you know who God is and what He's done for us in Jesus?

One person at a time. However, whenever, wherever we can, let's do that together.

Closing Prayer: Father, would you show us, in ways we can't miss, the ways you're working in reconciliation around us? And would you capture us for your use in those places? Help us to show people Jesus, so barriers and borders between people and families and races and even nations might be broken down, that Your Kingdom would come and Your will would be done – wherever we are – and in the whole earth, as it is in Heaven.

Closing Song: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*

Benediction:

Our God is one.

That is the *shema*: Deuteronomy 6:4, "**Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.**"

Our God is one.

And so, His Kingdom is one.

He's sent us one Savior, Jesus, who has given His people one call – one task: to make Him known, so that as He's embraced, all creation may, again, be one.

May God's Spirit fill us and help us fulfill His call.