

# 4 CORNERS

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## SHATTERED PLANS – SCATTERED GRACE

**W**hen travelling it is always wise to include one or two good books in case of delayed flights. On my recent trip to Ivory Coast, I was challenged through reading 'Let the nations be glad' by John Piper. In it, he writes, *"The pain of shattered plans is for the purpose of scattered grace"*.

I believe these words aptly describe the situation that the Church is experiencing in Ivory Coast.

The war has inevitably placed great financial pressure on many pastors who often struggle to make ends meet. Pastor Koné has been based at Yamoussoukro since having to flee the rebel held north. In recent years he has had a 'Chicken Project' going by which he has been able to support his family and make regular trips up north to visit believers behind the rebel line.

Starting some years ago with 500 chickens by January this year he had 3500. However, recently he has known 'shattered plans'.



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► In January he attended a Pastors' conference in Abidjan during which time his 'chicken farm' caught fire, losing approximately 2800 chickens. One morning in February he took me to see the devastation of what had previously been his pride and joy. He had experienced a great loss but, as we talked together he said, "William, all that God allows into our lives is for our good!" What a testimony, to those looking on, of God's sustaining grace.

The following week travelling North to Ferkéssédougou and Korhogo we met many who, like Koné, understand the meaning of shattered plans. We stopped off at village churches that were planted several years ago before the war broke out in 2002. The churches have known difficult times. Some believers we knew are now with the Lord; for example, Julien who was a lay preacher at Touro; and Alain who was beaten by the rebels and subsequently died. Yet the churches are still there, bearing witness to God's grace.

Other families have known the pain of separation. I think of one Christian family where the mother and children, frightened by gunfire each evening, fled for safety in the south while the father remained 220 miles away in order to hold his job. They haven't lived together as a family since 2002. As a family their plans have been shattered; however, they testify joyfully to God's sustaining grace.

It was very special being back in Ferké again. Recently an elderly teacher of Islam, Coulibaly Bèh, made his way to the Baptist hospital there with his daughter who needed urgent medical attention. Perhaps he felt his plans had been shattered? While waiting there he

overheard a nurse sharing the gospel with a patient. When he saw the patient wasn't interested he immediately spoke up and said, "If he doesn't want it, I need it and I'll take it" and came to faith in Christ. It was thrilling to meet him and see a new convert radiant because of God's grace!

The story does not end there. Since then around 14 others in his village have found salvation and Pastor Koné is planning a further visit up north to hold a discipleship course. Praise God for scattered grace.

How encouraging it is to see evidence of grace in the lives of new Christians. Night by night the Christians met at Ferké and Korhogo as we shared lessons from Nehemiah. After each meeting there were opportunities for questions. "How can I find the will of God?" was one example. Another lady asked, "When faced with opposition, is God 'closing a door' or is it Satan attacking?" Questions like this cannot be answered in a sentence but they show evidence of grace in lives.

Praise God for people like Josué who came to see me saying he couldn't sleep because of the burden of unreached villages in the north. Another young couple are presently training in the Bible

School at Korhogo with a view to working in the north of Ivory Coast.

When up north one of the things I observed was that many Christians did not possess their own Bible. We had a limited supply for new converts, which quickly ran out. We are now working with *Every Home Crusade* to have another container sent out, this time containing 18,000 French Bibles and 250,000 copies of the Gospel of John, "Pardon and Assurance" booklets and Scripture booklets. Also included in the container will be a quantity of French books published by Evangelical Press provided by 'Pastor Training International'. In addition 'Immanuel Studios' are providing Children's Bible lessons in DVD format. Please pray for this great 'team' effort and for all the logistics involved in this project. Further *Barnabas Ministry* trips are also being planned.

Yes, many people have experienced 'shattered plans', but praise God for evidence of 'scattered grace'. Paul, writing from prison to the Church at Philippi, said: "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel." (Phil. 1:12) This, too, is the testimony of many Christians in Ivory Coast. ■

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