

## **Reflections from Africa**

**02.03.07**

Coming to Africa on a long term basis has certainly been a new and challenging experience for me. I haven't even left South Africa for Zambia (my final destination for ministry) yet and I am already reflecting on what I have learnt so far.

Firstly, I have been right out of my comfort zone being in a different country where most things are different. For example, there are no Safeway or Coles supermarkets here and all the prices are different. It has taken me a while to know if a price is good or not by South African standards. This process will start all over again in Zambia. When buying a car, doing official business etc, I was reliant on other people to guide me through a process that would have been familiar to me in Australia. My affairs have often been in the hands of others and I have sometimes felt very vulnerable knowing that people could take advantage of my lack of knowledge of how things work. This is where I have been stretched to trust God more and drawn to seeking him more on daily matters.

Navigating through official processes like registering a car or getting a visa has been challenging because the rules and personnel governing these processes seem to change frequently. It was very helpful talking to other fulltime missionaries here and getting their advice regarding how to approach official business here but everyone had their own experience of how the system worked for them. What I found was that when I began to process my own paper work, my experience was different to anything I had heard previously. One missionary praised the advantages of getting a Zambian visa from the embassy here in South Africa rather than getting one at the border. He got his visa easily this way but it took me five trips to the embassy and lots of running around getting particular documents to get mine. Even then, I almost didn't get it. Again I have had to ultimately look to God to guide me through these situations.

Secondly, I am beginning to appreciate more fully what it means to walk in the favour of God. As an alien here in Africa, people can shun me, be less than helpful or be looking to receive financial gain in exchange for simple help that would be given freely in Australia. I have had numerous experiences here where people have gone out of their way to assist me beyond normal business parameters and I have sensed the favour of God in this. I found a computer workshop at the beginning of my stay here whilst looking for an internet café and the two technicians there helped me tremendously over my stay with my internet/computer needs. They often undercharged me and/or gave me their services for free. Even at the Zambian Embassy here, by the time I received my visa, I was being treated very favourably by the staff compared to my first visit and to how other people were being treated. In the end, my visa was granted even though some of the requirements were apparently not met by myself. One of the staff there was even praying that the immigration official there would grant me the visa.

Well after this preparation time in South Africa, I am now ready to travel to Zambia. Then there will be more to tell.

Mike