

Stop Whining

Anyone who thinks ministry travel is glamorous is welcome to accompany me the next time I go to Nigeria. I spent nine days there in January, and during the trip I came face to face with my spoiled American self. It was not a pretty picture, especially after I learned that my luggage did not arrive with me.

When I complained in a privileged American tone to the uniformed woman at the customs desk, she offered no sympathy. "Come back in five days," she said.

So there I was in a hot, sweaty country with no deodorant or cologne, one pair of underwear, no contact-lens solution and none of my trendy American clothes. When I arrived at the conference I was attending, my hosts gave me some African outfits ("colorful pajamas" is a better way to describe them), along with a pair of sandals. I became an African for a week, eating their food (goat, rice and fried plantains), enduring daily power outages and sitting in meeting halls that had no air conditioning.

Before the week was over, I had forgotten how badly I was "suffering." In fact, I didn't care if I ever saw my suitcase again. I had crucified my whiny selfishness and left it to rot in Africa.

It really wasn't the missing luggage or the rust-colored bath water that made such an impact on me. It was the brave people I met—the true heroes of the faith who showed me that the selflessness of New Testament Christianity is still alive in the 21st century.

One man named Abu told me that he was beaten by Islamic radicals and left for dead near a campus in northern Nigeria, where an angry mob once burned as many as 300 churches in one weekend. He was revived after some Christians prayed for him, so he went back to the same spot where he had been preaching and began another sermon—only to be chased out of town by a gang of Muslims wielding machetes. Today he sneaks into Nigeria because he is on a Muslim hit list.

Shaba, another hero of the faith, told me that members of his family tried to kill him last year because he was winning Muslims to Christ. He knew a pastor in the city of Kano who was beheaded a few years ago, but he says he must stay in the north and continue to share his faith in spite of the risks. “We need to go back to the book of Acts and stop thinking of ourselves,” he told me.

A courageous leader named Laide shared that she is covertly sending Nigerian women into Islamic countries in North Africa to intercede and pave the way for evangelism teams. Her prayer group once blocked Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi from coming to Nigeria to fund Islamic terrorists. One morning, Laide and eight of her team leaders laid hands on me and prayed that Charisma would carry Nigeria’s revival fire to the United States.

That flame will not be kindled in your life or mine until selfishness has been dethroned. Obedience has nothing to do with comfort or convenience. The crucified life is not a popular concept in today’s prosperity-oriented church, but we’ll never make lasting spiritual impact if we don’t embrace suffering and sacrifice.

Maybe we Americans would develop genuine New Testament faith if we lost our luggage more often—and learned to see the world through the eyes of our persecuted brethren.