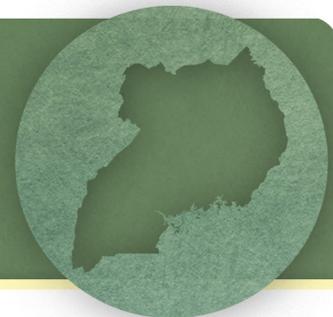




— Thomas & Kristin —  
**IRVIN**  
PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN UGANDA



Romans 8:35-39 KJV

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

February 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you, God's faithful people. We are eternally grateful to have you engaged in this present battle along with us; together, we depend upon Christ, our captain! We are, but useless tools made to appear useful by His grace. Surely by now, it is clear, greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. I suppose, as more than conquerors, we hardly consider the default realities that come with this idea. The embassy set before us may not, indeed, will not come easily. This reality we learned thoroughly over the past year and especially over the past few weeks. As pilgrims and strangers here, it seems we are sheep traveling amid ravenous wolves. Only the Lord prevents them from satisfying their desire to devour God's people. Oh, how they yearn to do away with the presence and work of God's ambassadors. However, the gates of hell still fail to stand against the Church!

The Lord helped Kristin and me to finish deputation in around thirteen-months. We traveled to Uganda in January of 2020 to make preparations for our permanent move. Of course, we had no idea what 2020 would have in store, the year that magnified governmental incompetence and thirst for control. We planned to fly back to Uganda on June 23, 2020. Then it was moved to July 3, 2020; then, the flight was altogether canceled. Kristin and I moved up to the Tennessee area, taking meetings as they came (some churches believed it prudent to obey God rather than man) and helping several churches in that area of Tennessee. Uganda did not indicate as to when they would reopen, an unfortunate reality. During this time, my wife was late into her pregnancy with a projected birth date of September 29, 2020.

As each day passed, we thought surely by next week, surely by next month, these lockdowns and the arbitrary frenzy over this virus would pass. It did not, it has not, and such thoughts are not going to be profitable for some time. It seems we must learn to live and operate now within a world of totalitarian control, control easily handed to governmental powers without hesitation. Then good news came from the Ugandan press on October 1, 2020. Uganda would reopen the Entebbe airport. We immediately coordinated with the Stensaas family (whom we have been exponentially blessed to know and work with thus far) to fly to Uganda on January 26, 2020. This would allow time for the Stensaas family to finish their scheduled furlough meetings and would allow Kristin to deliver our first child (Bethany Lanae Irvin). Bethany was born October 5, 2020 - we immediately applied for her passport; it was issued November 5, 2020. Soon after we booked tickets, Delta instituted their new Covid Free Flights. These flights serve a good purpose for those needing to travel to respective areas of Europe but will not have the time needed to quarantine. For us, these flights impose much risk with no reward. So we rerouted our flights through Detroit to Amsterdam to avoid the COVID Free Flights.

Early January 2021, we drove to Florida to spend a few weeks with our home church before our departure to Uganda. We were there for around three weeks and immensely enjoyed fellowship with people we love! The Lord has blessed us with a great home church; it was such a refreshing time for us! On January 22, 2021, we left Florida and drove back to Tennessee in preparation for final departure. We had much packing to finish and some affairs to get in order. After making the twelve-hour drive from Florida to West Tennessee, we arrived home to a message from Delta. Amsterdam is adding a new COVID test requirement; not only will the 72-hour test be needed, but a rapid test will also be required within four hours before our flight. We were scheduled to leave at 6:30 in the morning; where would we get a rapid test at 2:30? January 24, 2021, and January 25, 2021 - we tested for the Coronavirus as required for international flights. We tested POSITIVE, and then we became ill with mild cold symptoms.

We were not permitted to fly to Uganda on January 26, 2021. The Stensaas family cleared all the ridiculous hurdles and safely made it back to Uganda; Kristin, Bethany, and I stayed home in quarantine.

We moved our tickets out to February 18, 2020. After six days of sickness, Kristin and I began to feel well again. By the seventh day, we felt great. It was soon time to be tested again in order to determine our ability to test negative. Twenty-five percent of people can test positive for up to three months after contracting the Coronavirus. An even larger number can test positive for up to 45 days. At the ten-day mark, we retested - our results were POSITIVE. At the 14-day mark, we tested again, still POSITIVE. On the 19th day, we tested again; the results this time were INDETERMINATE. We were beginning to become nervous. On February 14, 2021, we planned to retest. If this test did not produce a negative result, we would have to move our flights again. February 14 came. We woke that morning to a massive winter storm. All businesses, including test facilities, were closing, most likely for days. We found an urgent care center that had not closed yet, and they informed me that if I reserved a spot before they decided, they would stay open for that appointment. Kristin, Bethany, and I drove through snow, sleet, rain and ice to get to the appointment. They could only administer a rapid test because couriers would not be running for several days. Praise the Lord, the rapid test came back negative, finally.

However, we faced a new host of troubles. This winter storm would last ten days or more. There would be no way for us to get the required testing accomplished before flights, assuming flights would continue amid the storm. After seeking much counsel, Kristin, Bethany, and I arranged a U-Haul to drive to Atlanta and fly direct from there to Uganda. After speaking with the person from U-Haul, she assured

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me the store would be open, or I would be sent a passcode to a lockbox with our U-Haul truck key. After driving three hours (a drive that usually takes an hour and twenty minutes), we arrived at a closed store with no lockbox info. I called U-Haul back; they asked that we drive to another store, usually thirty minutes away. The drive took us more than an hour in the snow and ice. Upon arrival, as I attempted to turn into the driveway, we were immediately stuck in the snow.

Nevertheless, with God's help, the man directly behind us had a large Dodge Ram pickup. He pulled over and without request pulled out the chains needed to tow us out of the snow. Behind this man was a police officer, who, without hesitation, began directing traffic. Within five minutes, we were loosed from the snow.

While sitting in the parking lot next door, I began checking out our U-Haul, but the online process failed continually. I called U-Haul back; this time, we had a bit of a heart-to-heart discussion about their service up to this point. The lady was very understanding and tried her best to help. While we were talking, she suddenly received an indication from that store's physical location that someone was onsite. The notification she received was only possible if a person was physically present at the store. I walked over to find an employee had just arrived on site. He was able to help me get the truck and get us on the road.

We then drove three hours back to Ramer, Tennessee. Upon arrival, we began loading our luggage – 30 boxes and totes, along with six carry-ons. Around 7:30 at night, we began our drive. We had to leave this Tuesday. Early Monday morning the storms would begin again in full force. So we drove through the night, two hours was at 30 miles per hour over what appeared to be an ice bridge. We were relieved when we finally cleared the snow and ice! We arrived at our hotel in Atlanta around 3:30 in the morning. We slept for about two hours, then woke and went for our pre-flight COVID test. This particular testing facility was referred to us by our travel agent, who is situated in Atlanta. The testing facility did an excellent job; we tested at 8:15 in the morning and had our results by 4:30 in the afternoon – NEGATIVE. I had never been so excited to be a negative person! We spent the rest of the afternoon, Wednesday the 17th, resting, repacking, and praying.

Thursday, February 18, 2021 – we were set to make our way to the airport. We had driven the route the day before so that we could be acquainted. We arrived around six hours early, and a missionary friend (Brad Barkowski) had arranged for a brother from a local Atlanta church (Kyle Harrison) to meet us. He drove with us to the terminal, helped us unload, and when he returned our U-Haul for us. I greatly appreciated his help, praise the Lord for servants of Christ.

The International terminal at the Atlanta airport appeared to be a ghost town. Once inside, they quickly identified us as the people with all the luggage. KLM finally opened for passengers, and we processed all 30 bags. All were the correct size and weight, none rejected. Praise the Lord!

Once we were through security, we were directed to a COVID test scheduling table. After registration, we were sent to a room where rapid testing is performed. Like cattle, we herded through, nasal swabbed, then seated in the stable for 15 to 30 minutes for results to come back. If negative, travelers were free to continue their journey. We were then moved to the next stable, the terminal. The terminal was roped off; we were given wristbands. Fortunately, we were not given yellow stars to wear on our chest. One could not enter the roped area without a negative test and a wristband. But, praise our God, the rapid test results were NEGATIVE, our baggage was loaded, and we were on our way to Uganda, Africa. As I write this, we are finishing up the BIMU (BIMU is the BIMU NGO title in Uganda) conference in Uganda, Africa. Thank you all so much for praying for us; God caused many people in many ways to show us much favor as we journeyed to Uganda in unprecedented times.



I do not usually write such long prayer letters, but I wanted to walk you all through the process as concisely as possible but still give you the full effect. If it is heavy for you to read, imagine physically going through the process. God was good to us through it all. We are exponentially excited to be here, getting settled and preparing for (Lord willing) a lifetime of ministry in Uganda. The Lord has blessed us with a home. By the time this letter is available, we should have signed a ten-year lease for a home directly next door to the Stensaas family. (By the way, the Stensaas family has been nothing short of tremendous help and blessing through this process. They make themselves available to us in ways we could not have expected.) Our difficult transition is made so much easier in many ways, thanks to their selfless help.

We continue to covet your prayers. Bethany went through this entire process unbelievably well. She did not cry in flight, and she has adjusted to Uganda quickly. I am not sure I can explain to you after so much time in limbo, then going through such a confused travel process, how it feels to have a home and to be able to plan and direct our future. Pray for us as we get settled; this ten-year lease required that we pay three years of rent upfront. As you can imagine, this was costly but appeared to be a wise and worthwhile investment. The home needs much work; please pray we can get the house in order promptly, then we move on quickly to language learning! As a final prayer request, I was able to have a spirited, though respectful, discussion with a man whose name is Amin. His background is Indian-Iranian; he is a dependable help to respective missionaries in Uganda. He has been a blessing to us in our previous trips here, as well as this past week. In the course of our discussion, the hopelessness and hypocrisy of Islam were made clear to him. And not only so, but multiple presentations of the gospel. Amin is a goodly man on his way to hell; please pray the Lord would intervene.



More than conquerors? Not without the respective battle, respective tribulations, respective troubles. To conquer assumes there is some opposition or resistance that we must subdue. As I meditate on all that we came through to be here, it has become abundantly clear to me: I am just a useless tool made to appear useful by the grace of God. Thank you for praying!

Thomas, Kristin, and Bethany Irvin  
Ambassadors for Christ