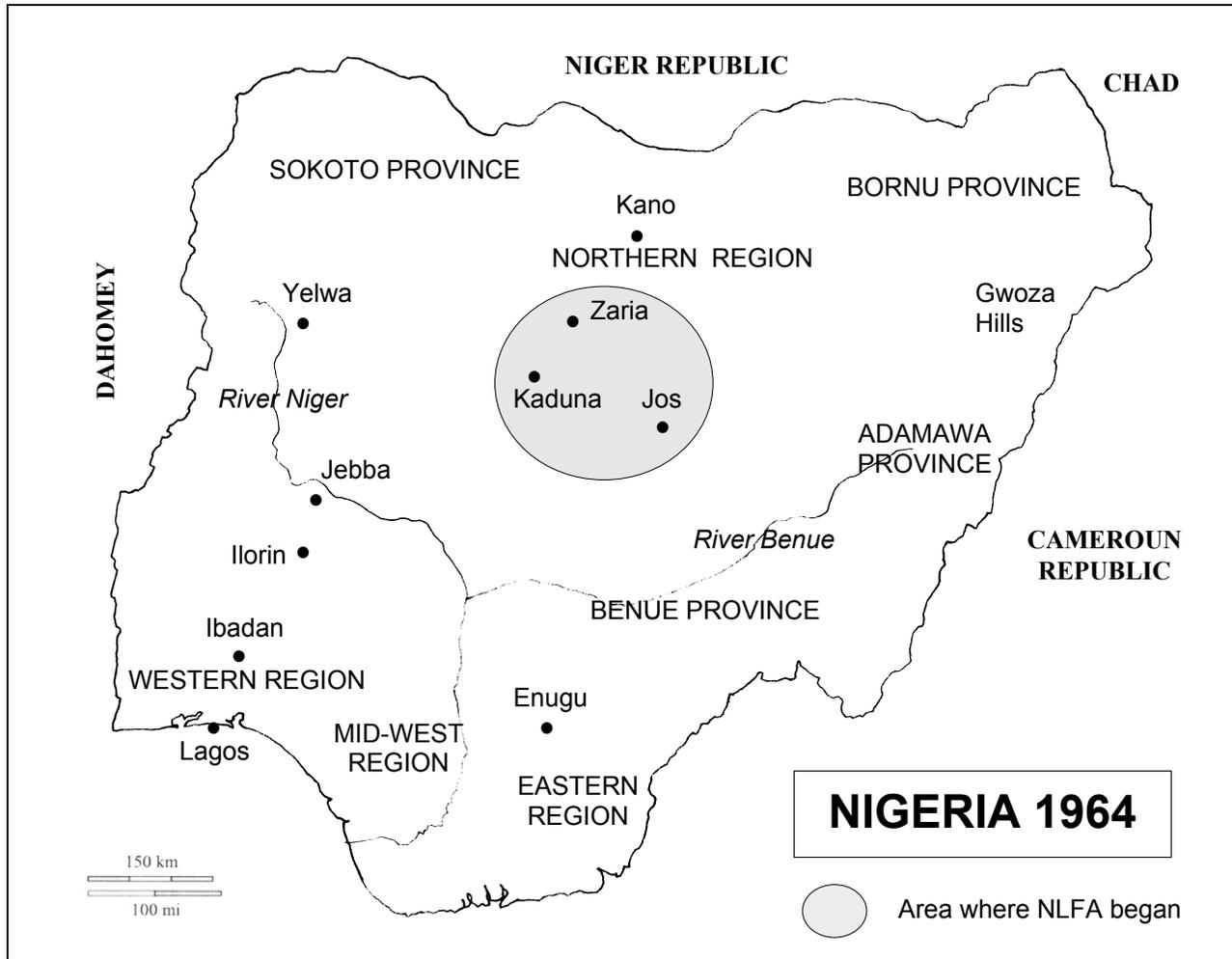


# New Life for All

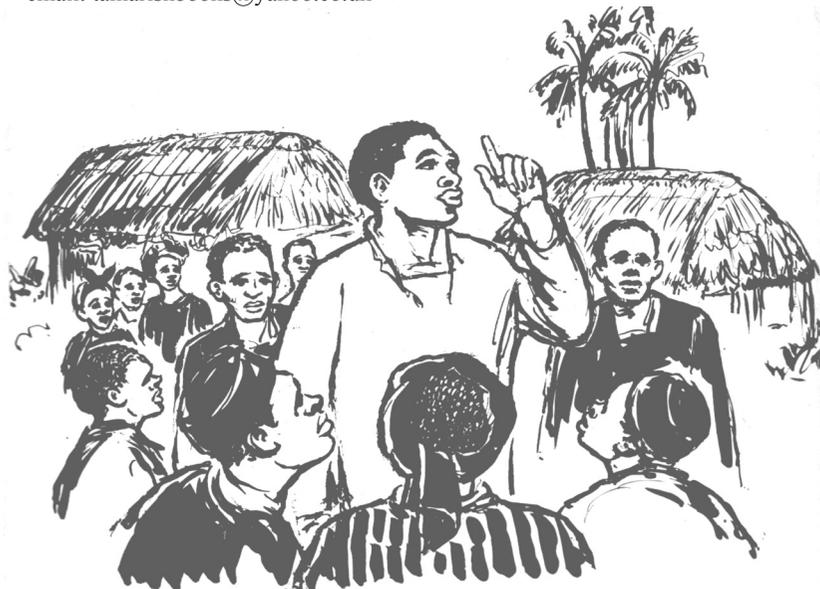
Eileen Lageer



# New Life for All

**Eileen Lageer**

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**from the cover of the 1969 edition:**

Thrilling stories of the New Life For All movement at work in Nigeria are welded into Miss Lageer's narrative as she describes the part played by individual Christians at each stage of the sequence of events surrounding a campaign.

Not only in Nigeria, where the movement took root, but now in other parts of Africa, East and West, the Church is turning with energy and enthusiasm to the task of personal evangelism. Using a simple, well-tried formula – survey teams to assess, retreats to inform, prayer groups to empower, instruction classes to equip – with visitation, gospel teams, and city campaigns to evangelize – Nigerian Christians are making a new

impact on whole communities which have previously been beyond the range of the preacher in his pulpit.

New Life For All brings together believers from different denominations – those who love the Lord and feel that this programme, directed by the Spirit, is a most effective way of evangelizing Nigerians. This unity of purpose is one of the many remarkable features of the New Life which has been injected into several Christian communities.

The book will challenge church groups in many parts of the world to become dedicated, witnessing and lively fellowships, not relying too heavily on visiting evangelists or invited preachers, but with each member ready to give 'to everyone' a reason for the hope that is in him.

Eileen Lageer takes us where the action was and is! Motivation and mobilization ... confession and conversion ... prayer and planning ... offensives and opposition ... successes and setbacks ... hallelujahs and heartaches: you will find it all in this chronicle.

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## Preface

St. Mark records that, when the disciples went out and preached everywhere after Christ's ascension, the Lord worked with them "confirming the word with signs following." This could be recorded once again in 1968, this time referring to Nigerian believers who also went out

witnessing in that same Name and under the same authority. Similar *signs* and *wonders* took place.

It would be impossible, I think, to make a study of what God is doing through New Life For All in Nigeria without becoming excited. This has been my experience during the past three years and I trust it will prove the same with those who read this book.

Although the movement began in two provinces, it soon spread to other areas and it should be pointed out here that illustrations depicting the different phases of the work have been taken from any place involved in the programme from 1964 to 1968. During this time political changes came to the country including the re-partitioning of Nigeria into twelve states, but because many of the incidents recorded happened before this time, terms used in 1964 (such as “Northern Region”) continue throughout the book.

It would be impossible to include the names of all who should be mentioned in an account like this (in fact, the names of some nationals have been changed for various reasons) but all who have given themselves wholeheartedly to the service of God in the NLFA programme will find that their labours of love are recorded in a grander, more enduring Book. And the Father who sees in secret will one day reward them openly.

Even this record, however, would not have been written if it had not been for Mr. Wilfred Bellamy, General Secretary of NLFA, who asked me to write the story and who patiently guided the work over a period of two years. I am grateful also to my mission for the encouragement and support that they gave, sometimes lightening my load of teaching that I might give more time to the work. Especially indispensable was the help of Mrs. Bessie Witt and later Miss Sue Miller who spent many hours of their time typing the manuscript and preparing it for publication.

The story does not end with the last chapter. Many more and perhaps even greater miracles have taken place since then, not only in Nigeria but in many countries of West and East Africa to which the programme has spread. It is the conviction of us all that the New Life For All movement has been born “not of the flesh nor of the will of man” but of God the Holy Spirit, Who is the LORD OF THE HARVEST.

E. L.  
United Missionary Society,  
Ilorin, Nigeria

## A Movement Is Born

Such a thing seemed utterly impossible. Was this really God’s voice speaking to him?

The missionary sat motionless at his desk staring with unseeing eyes at the verse in the open Bible before him. The lamplight nearby sent grotesque shadows of his lean form and sharp features on the wall of his mission house study. The rest of the compound was asleep, but there was no rest this night in the heart of Gerald Swank. For months, a conviction had been growing upon him and with it a deep sense of inadequacy.

When he had first come to this land of Nigeria, he had had high hopes and great expectations like all other young recruits. “Give us the tools and we will finish the job,” had been his lofty aim. But now after twenty years of service, with seemingly the best part of his life behind him, he had to admit that the job was just not being done. Oh yes, the twos and threes were trickling into the Church, but what about the two and three million – even the twenty-two and -three million in the North alone that were still living and dying without Christ? What about the thousands that had never yet heard? ... the villages upon villages that still had no witness ... the people beyond the many little paths that ran crookedly off the main road to no one knew where? What about the hills behind the hills where the many tribes lived that never once set foot in the town – were these to remain forever *the forgotten ones*?

But it wasn’t only the far-off ones that were still in darkness. Right around him here in the town of Kagoro and in hundreds of towns and villages like it there were those who were still sacrificing chickens and goats to gods that could neither hear nor save.

“He was not willing that any should perish,” it was said of the great heart of God. But what about *him*? Was he willing?

“O God, O God,” he groaned. “What shall I do?”

Once more his mind focused on the verse before him. John 4:34: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish his work.”

*To finish the work.*

Finish the evangelization of the whole Northern Region of Nigeria. But was such a thing possible? Was God really challenging him with this task?

The hiss of the tilley lamp in the silence sounded more like the jeers of the evil one as he whispered stinging words of contempt. Who was he to think he could accomplish such a mission? Hadn’t others before him, men greater and more capable than he, attempted the same thing and had failed?

Why should he think he could make an impression on this rock of paganism, this mountain of Islam?

Yes, it was true. Such a hope seemed presumption.

But the One who had faced an infinitely greater mission now drew near and stood by him. His too had seemed an impossible task, but in three short years He had been able to say, "I have finished the work You gave me to do."

"This is for you," the Spirit whispered. "This is the work I want you to do."

In the days that followed, Jerry Swank continued his duties as principal of the SIM Bible College, Kagoro, but a new sense of mission like a mantle from the Lord had fallen upon him – a commission that was to result in almost unbelievable events through which thousands would be drawn into the kingdom before bloodshed and war were to make havoc of the land.

## 1. Together In The Task

Among the nineteen delegates seated around the long conference table there was a feeling of excitement and anticipation as Mr. Swank read excerpts from the story of Evangelism-in-Depth, a tremendous movement of the Spirit in Latin America with which he had come in contact while home on furlough. This, he felt, was the seal of the Spirit on the commission of Kagoro.

After presenting some of the amazing results which had taken place in Guatemala, Mr. Swank outlined to his eager listeners the procedure which had been followed. Could this same thing be done in Nigeria? Would a similar plan bring similar results?

Ideas like a host of flying ants came buzzing into the delegates' minds as they discussed possibilities. The more they talked, the more limitless the opportunities ahead appeared. It was like experiencing the first splashes of rain after a long, trying dry season and realizing that the black clouds rolling up the heavens would be deluge-full.

August 1, 1963, Jos, Nigeria, marked the first official meeting of the new programme; ten different missions and denominations were represented. It was here that basic policies were formed under which the Christians of Nigeria could work together to evangelize their country for Christ. "Our plan for this programme must not be complicated," Mr. Swank told the delegates. "It must be simply the evangelism of Nigeria through the mobilization of the church. Neither is it to be merely an increase in

missionary activity. It is *all of us together*. Using the potential we already have in the Church, we must go out with a simple programme in which in a specific area and in a limited period of time, every man, woman and child shall hear the gospel and understand it."

What could be more effective, both within the church and outside it? This was what they wanted.

The principles under discussion were similar to those worded more formally by the Wheaton Declaration three years later. In it Christians of many denominations pledged themselves to work together "for God's eternal glory and the fulfilment of our responsibility with renewed dedication in our oneness in Christ with the people of God; to seek under the leadership of our Head with the full assurance of His power and presence the organization of the Church, its people, its prayerful interest for the evangelism of the world in this generation."<sup>1</sup>

The men around the table that day were in full agreement with this aim, but what would be the reaction of other church leaders who were not present? Would some be suspicious that the movement would develop into merely another denomination, taking many of their members with it? A clear definition of the plan must be set forth in order to remove all doubt of ulterior motive.

The promoters of the programme clarified its purpose by first stating what the movement was not:

It was not a new missionary society or merely a mission project.

It was not a denomination nor did it seek to start one.

It was not a movement for church unity in the ecumenical sense.

It was not seeking to tell others how they ought to evangelize, implying that they did not know.

It would not depend upon the programme itself for success but upon the Spirit of God who was the Lord of the Harvest.

The positive side of the plan was then pointed out:

The movement was Biblical, based on the Great Commission as recorded in Mark 16: 18.

It was to be thoroughly indigenous. Missionary involvement would be minimal. The real work of evangelism would be done by Nigerians and the control left in the hands of the local church.

<sup>1</sup> 'The Wheaton Declaration was subscribed to by the delegates to The Congress Of The Church's Worldwide Mission convening at Wheaton, Illinois, USA, on April 9, 1966.

It was to be simple and inexpensive. Literature would be used and therefore funds would be needed, but the use of expensive equipment would be discouraged.

It was to be a continuing movement. Long after the initial thrust was past, it was expected that the Church would carry on the work of evangelism on its own. Even if the distinctive name of the movement died out, the leaders would be more than satisfied.

With this explanation accepted, the representatives began to make definite plans for the future in a spirit of great enthusiasm.

“Let’s call it NEW LIFE FOR ALL,” suggested the Baptist representative. “It would be distinctively Nigerian and could easily be translated into Hausa – *Sabon Rai Don Kowa*.”

“For our ‘specific area’ could we not start with Zaria and Plateau districts?” another added. “This would give us a good number of established churches to work with while at the same time we’d have a large community of pagans and Muslims to evangelize.”

After prayerful discussion it was decided to adopt the suggestion. These two districts would be a good representative section of the whole country. If NLFA was successful there, it ought to work in other areas as well.

And so the place was chosen. Now what about the “limited time” item? The committee decided to give themselves twelve months to complete the task, and the year 1964 was chosen as the year for the programme.

Just five more months and that year would be upon them! Expectancy rose with each decision. A calendar for the year was formulated which committees must try to follow if they were to reach their goal. The first three months would be set aside for preparation followed by a month of retreats for church leaders. May to July would be devoted to intensive instruction in the art of witnessing and the rest of the year given over to a full programme of evangelism.

On paper it all looked wonderful, but whether they would accomplish their aim or not depended upon the measure of devotion and effort each individual Christian put into the work.

“No less than TOTAL MOBILIZATION OF GOD’S PEOPLE can be our goal for the next twelve months,” Mr. Swank told the group. “If the body of believers is not stirred into active evangelism of the lost, God has no other plan to bring the unsaved to Himself. It is the Christians that must be awakened and moved out into the work.

“Recently I watched a farmer working in his millet fields. He was transplanting the plants from the seed beds to the farm around. What did I see in those beds? There were thousands of strong healthy plants, some

larger and more developed; others that were crowded were smaller. The bed was well-fertilized and the seedlings grew very healthy.

“But could the farmer ever harvest his crops from those plants in the bed? Why not? They were far too crowded. Soon they would choke each other and begin to die. Just a few of the very strongest would come through and bear fruit.

“Now, isn’t this just the picture of the Christian church? The field around is the world but there are far too few healthy Christians growing there. Many are crowded together in their seed beds or ‘church rows’ of our towns where they are fed spiritually and grow healthy. But they can never mature properly because they have no room to develop.

“At this meeting we have laid down the principle that God uses the Church as His instrument for evangelism, but we must recognize too that it is only as healthy Christians are transplanted into the less favourable soil of an unbelieving community that they can bear fruit for a satisfactory harvest. We must get all of God’s people to work.”

In order to tap all the spiritual potential in the area, it was decided that Christians of all evangelical churches would be invited to a retreat to interest them in this new programme on evangelism. From there they would go home to set up committees which would direct the programme in their own districts. There would be a secretary to handle literature, another to establish prayer cells, one to oversee evangelism, and someone to organize the women and the youth. These would all be under the guidance of mature leaders. No believer was to be left out. Christ’s purpose in the ordination of His twelve apostles (“chosen ... that you might ... bring forth fruit”) was still His plan today. Total mobilization of believers then was one of the first principles that must be put into practice.

Another essential that the committee decided they must aim for was TOTAL EVANGELIZATION OF THE AREA. It was not enough to do a hit and miss job in their witnessing. That was one of the weaknesses that had hindered the work before.

“The church has existed in this area for sixty years,” someone pointed out, “but children are still being born into environments as pagan as they were a thousand years ago so far as spiritual values are concerned. How can we rest content in the light of these things?”

And yet, unless a systematic plan for reaching everyone was followed, they too could not claim that the area had been adequately covered with the gospel. Nothing less than total evangelization could be their aim. Christians must move out of their *seed beds* and begin to witness effectively to all the unsaved around if the harvest in their community was to be abundant.

“Every Christian telling; every creature told.” This must be the goal.

When the meeting broke up that day, the sense of anticipation in the heart of each delegate was keener than anything he had known for years.

## 2. To Meet The Need

Up until the August meeting the NLFA programme had its existence mainly in the minds of its planners. Now something would have to be done to see if these ideas were practicable.

If *every creature was to be told through every Christian telling*, then someone must go out to assess the immensity of the task and the help they would need to complete it.

About this time, Pastor Yakubu Yako joined NLFA as a full time member of the staff. Tall, husky and energetic, Yakubu was the type of man to stand out in any crowd. The long white Hausa gown with matching “Sokoto” style trousers and bowl-upside-down hat that he usually wore were enhanced by the large Bible in his hand and a big, beaming smile on his face. An experienced evangelist and arresting speaker, he had served for a number of years under the indigenous African Missionary Society and knew the hardships of such a life. When he accepted the new position as one of the leaders of the New Life programme, he was well aware that the days ahead would not be easy, but his willingness to work was as great as his smile.

One of his first assignments was to set out with Mr. Swank on a survey of the area to be evangelized. There were two things that they planned to take note of:

- 1) In which sections in the North could the existing churches be mobilized to evangelize their own areas?
- 2) Which territory had little or no Christian witness and therefore needed help from outside?

Down over the winding roads of the Jos escarpment they went, toward the grasslands of the Zaria plains. There seemed to be plenty of “progress” all along the way. Tall, brawny-muscle farmers worked in the field ploughing industriously with their new team of oxen. Enterprising Nigerians had set up Shell petrol pumps at strategic forks in the road. Money-minded companies had agents everywhere selling cigarettes or sweet biscuits to every lorry load of travellers that happened to stop in their town. Much was

being done for the temporal appetites of the people, but what was being done for their souls?

Dozens and dozens of villages, yet so few that had any sign of a church! It is true that in larger centres where Christian work had been established, a strong evangelical outreach was being carried on, but great stretches of land beyond that were still without a satisfactory witness. In an area of 29,000 square miles, the districts of Zaria-Plateau had a population of three million, but less than two in every hundred, they found, attended a Christian place of worship.

“While travelling west from Kaduna,” Pastor Yakubu later reported, “we went for more than forty miles and didn’t see even one church until we came to Udawa. Along the Zaria road toward Jos there again was not one church in a stretch of sixty miles, although we did hear of two Christians in one village; they had come down from the plateau to do farming. Oh the thousands who have never so much as heard the Name of the Lord Jesus!”

Farther east in the Muslim Emirate of Katagum, over 739,000 had been recorded in the 1963 census, but no more than 250 were registered with the church. To the west in Sokoto district the Gungawa tribe numbered 46,000 but only eight were known to love the Lord.

Everywhere the prince of darkness was in control, and heathenism had a firm, fearful grip on the people.

What was it that aroused a pagan’s veneration and fear? A dismal little fetish hut in a grove of trees by a stream ... a painted clay pot on a prominent shelf where three small stones were worshipped as “gods”... a baobab tree tied with a dirty white cloth, the sure sign that it was inhabited by spirits ... a long string of cowrie shells with bits of old calabash strung up across the path to the village ... a bundle of black idols rolled up in a cloth ... the blood of a chicken splattered on doorposts in town, the only sure way to good health and prosperity ... the god “Satan” in a queer cowrie shell skirt, no larger than a man’s hand, yet possessing the power to make its worshipper do terrible things and pay an unthinkable price in order to appease its wrath. These were a few of the extraordinary means by which heathenism was ruling the minds of millions.

But it all sounds so innocent, some say. How could such simplicity do harm to a person?

It might look innocent enough – perhaps even quaint to enlightened minds – but Pastor Yakubu knew that the white ribbon on the trees, the dark blood on the wall, the bits of calabash on the pole were only outward signs of darker meaning underneath. What pagan had not trembled at the cry of a night bird near his house or the hoot of an owl in the dark? These were not birds, he’d been told; they were spirits that travelled at night to eat up the

souls of their victims. What farmer had not felt the terror of the supernatural when he saw a small whirlwind spiralling toward him? He knew it was really the form that spirits could take when they sought a man's life. And who would deny that a strange stone in one's path was the sign of certain death for the traveller unless stronger magic could be found to counteract it in time? Even the sight of a lovely rainbow could bring a chill to many hearts, for they knew it could follow a man and make him insane.

No innocence here; it was terrorism at its worst, for it corroded the mind to such a degree that it was difficult for even Christians to find deliverance from its power. What a tragic fate to be reared in a heathen home! Oh if they only could be born once again! If only they could be freed from this tyranny of fear! Oh to find a remedy through which terror-prone minds could be healed!

It was to prepare the way for men bringing such a remedy that Pastor Yakubu and Mr. Swank had come. They were convinced that men *could* be born again; that the God whom they served could liberate the demon-controlled minds of men and that through Jesus Christ such a miracle could take place.

Proof of this was seen in a strong pagan area where an old man was converted through the work of NLFA. For years he had followed his trade as "Maker of medicine", divining with stones the events of the future. Medicine and counter medicine – this was the only thing that had frustrated his enemies and had kept him alive. But now he was old and the greatest fear was yet ahead. Where could one find medicine to counteract DEATH?

Then a NLFA team arrived in his village. They spoke foolish words – unbelievable words – about someone more powerful than juju. They had talked of man's sin and the anger of God, the dark night of death and the punishment for all who kept on in their way. But this was no news. No news at all. Who did not know that Fear lay ahead? The old man spat on the ground.

But what was this new word they were saying? A way out of death? Provided by God Himself? Incredible! Sheer nonsense! And yet ... they had said that God loved him. What better gift could He give than the promise of life? Eternal life. New life in His Son. That's what they said He would give. Was it possible? Could he, an old man find *life*?

But what about his juju? What terrible things would it bring upon him if he failed to serve it now? It was powerful. Very powerful. He had seen what it could do. But could it give him hope? What promise had *it* made for the future? None at all. Not even one. In fact, the darkness ahead was always linked with his god.

As the days went by and the message became clearer, a turmoil such as he had never known before took place in the old man's mind. Hope struggled with fear. Longing fought against pride, the Spirit of God against the powers of the devil.

The day came when he made his decision. "I have heard and I believe," he said. "You may take my jujus now. I will need them no more."

Immediately the love of old companions turned to wrath.

"What will you do now?" they asked. "We will not give you money anymore nor food to eat."

"That is good," he replied. "Jesus will look after me now."

"What will happen to your spirit when you die? For we will not bury you nor drum for your death."

"That too is good. I will ask the pastor in the next village to bury me as a Christian. My spirit will go to God."

"The evil spirits will destroy you because you have made them angry."

"Jesus will save me from their power. He has given me peace and my heart is happy."

Yes, there is a process by which the heathen can be born anew; there is a cleansing that can heal all their fear.

Besides the many pagans that must be told, the survey team had to consider another group that needed to hear. It was the millions of Muslims who had propagated their faith all over the North. The fact that Islam had been established in the country five centuries before Christianity made the Christian way of life seem immature and unnecessary. It also had great appeal to the minds of the people. Even the appearance of its malams was impressive: flowing white robes, clacking leather sandals and yards and yards of white cloth wound round a red *fez* to form a large turban like a scene from *Arabian Nights*. In his hands the Muslim carries his sacred prayer beads, white, black or even green, which he fingers as he walks, thus able to pray without having to think. Five times a day wherever he may be, whether in the market place or at the train station, beside his parked lorry or on the corner of the street he spreads his mat to pray. His aims, his prayers, his pilgrimage to Mecca, these are the things that will win him reward. The disdain with which most malams look on other religions is enough to quench any interest other Muslims might have in the gospel.

How could one hope to reach this formidable, change-resisting group – a group that held power not only over the political life of the country but also the very thinking and secret longings of its people? One might just as well try to flatten with a feather the volcanic rock mountains that stood at the foot of the Plateau.

Yet God assures us that His Word is like a fire and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Its living, piercing power has been able to transform the hearts of even such people. In days to come Christians were to see the barriers of Islam broken down and many Muslims bowing in adoration at the feet of Christ. One veteran missionary reported that this was the first time Muslims had come asking about the Way. “Since NLFA began in our area, we have averaged one inquirer a day. We have had as many as seventeen in one day.” From the prayer secretary’s office came this item of praise: “Every mail brings news of one or more Muslims who have turned to the Lord.”

A NLFA worker discovered secret Bible classes going on in Muslim homes; some even asked him why Christians had neglected them for so long. One Muslim malam who had spent thirty years in devotion to Islam now witnessed boldly for his Lord. “You know that I have always been faithful to our teachings,” he told his friends. “But today for the first time in my life I know what it means to have peace in my heart.”

From their survey of large Muslim cities like Kano, the men found that much gospel team help would be needed if they were to realize their aim of total evangelization of the area. How many men should they send?

Another people greatly neglected throughout Nigeria were the nomadic tribe of Fulanis. Seldom separated from their cattle, they wander all over the grasslands of the North pasturing their herds on the very thresholds of Christian communities.

Lean and thin-lipped, they are of a different race from other Nigerians, having migrated from perhaps Egypt centuries ago. In temperament they are proud and reserved, independent and stoical. Ease, comfort, nice houses, even money as such mean nothing to the Fulani. They live for their cattle, for which they are willing to sacrifice the things most men enjoy. In order to be with them they will even sleep on the ground or build crude grass shelters that look like miniature haystacks in a barren field.

Men and boys do most of the herding, and a familiar sight throughout the north is a solitary figure standing motionlessly in a field, his one leg propped against the knee of the other, his arms hanging limp on his herdsman’s rod which is slung across his shoulders while he rests. His dark indigo sleeping cloth is knotted around his neck and on his head there sits a large straw hat, elaborate with its red leather trimming and beads.

Although Fulanis are proud and independent, they are also very superstitious and fearful of death. Outwardly they have accepted Islam as their religion, but they also retain their charms, amulets and jujus to protect themselves from spirits that bring harm. When death comes to one of their

number, some have been known to run away in terror leaving the dead body to be buried by whoever came by.

Haughty and non-conforming in youth yet apprehensive in old age, these people constantly wander through the land with few to take them the message. The paths they travel can lead but to the grave, the possessions they value, to an empty eternity. Always wandering, never settled – how could they be evangelized? How could they be instructed and nourished in the truth?

God has a thousand ways to solve a seemingly insurmountable problem, and He was not defeated by this. Later when the time came for NLFA gospel team work to be done, two young men, one of them a converted Fulani, set up camp at the foot of the escarpment and waited on the well-worn cattle route that led to better pasture in the south. There as the Fulanis appeared, these young evangelists would help them pitch camp and look after the needs of the herd. While working and living among them, they found ways to tell them of Jesus and of the life that He offers to those who believe. As herd after herd passed by them that season, no doubt many received the first witness that they had ever had in their lives.

Not all such witness brought immediate results, but the Spirit who sends out the Sower is also the One that sends one to water it until the time for harvest has come.

“A young Fulani man came to our house about six months ago,” wrote a missionary, “when the days were hot and the land was black after the autumn fires. It seemed a dismal scene to us, but to the Fulani it was more attractive than the land on the plateau. He had travelled 200 miles from Bauchi with his tribal group looking for suitable grass where their cattle could pasture.

“In a day or so they had erected temporary huts made of guinea-corn stalks and for a short time would be living near our station.

“This day, the young man appeared at our door, his Fulani rod in his hand. ‘Sallama!’ he said. ‘I have come to see if you have any more papers like this.’

“It seems that someone living on the plateau had given him the first three or four cards in a series of reading lessons and had taught him the elementary steps in learning to read. Did we have the rest of the set he could buy? Fortunately we had, and the glow of pleasure on his face as he received it was reward in itself. When he had mastered the card, he came for his test, and on his successfully reading it through, we gave him the next.

“For a long time he would sit and listen to the strange yet wonderful story of Christ’s love for him and how he could have new life through faith in His Name.

“‘My people have made me an outcast,’ he said simply one day. ‘They do all they can to make me reject this new teaching, but it is sweetness to my heart and I cannot forget.’

“One day he brought a friend with him who peeped in through the windows while the lesson was going on. He was too shy to enter himself. He too looked with fascination at the strange signs he saw on the little yellow cards and gladly accepted the ones his friends had discarded.

“One morning when we arose, the camp site was bare. The group had moved on to fresher grazing land and our Fulani friend was gone. At the beginning of the rains, however, he was back again, joyously saluting us at our door, and eager to be tested in all he had learned. His sole aim, it seemed, was to master the cards so that he could buy himself a Bible.

“‘Why do you want to read the Bible?’ we asked. ‘Do you believe in Jesus?’

“‘Yes, I am now a follower of Jesus and I want to know better how to please Him,’ he said. ‘Will you order a Bible for me to buy?’ We gladly made the promise and he saved up his money till the day it would be his.

“Suddenly he was gone again, for his group had moved on. Many months have passed since he last came to our door but we’re still looking for our friend to return. If their leader decides at the turn of the season to go down the escarpment by another way we may never see this young man again. Where will he get help in his reading? Will anyone give him a Bible?

“Somewhere in this country there wanders a Fulani whose heart has been hungry for God. God grant that his path will be directed to other believers who will strengthen his faith in the Lord.”

As the NLFA programme moved southward, surveys showed a far different picture. Here, instead of the simple life and numerous languages of people on the plateau, there was found the more sophisticated atmosphere of modern city life. Instead of the strong paganism of many tribes in the North, the Christian church had been established by people like Mary Slessor and Bishop Crowther more than a century before. Instead of the spread of Islam, fifty per cent of its twenty million people claimed some connection with the church, though probably not more than five per cent knew what it means to be born of God. In contrast with the rural districts that the programme had first entered, here were ten of the largest cities of Nigeria. Scattered all over the South as well were hundreds of primary and secondary schools, colleges of all kinds and four of the five universities of

the nation. But with all this outward advance went the sin and lustful pleasure that are synonymous with Western culture.

What reception would New Life For All have under such conditions? What place could it have among the ecumenically-minded laity of the great denominations? Rev. Willis Hunking of the United Missionary Society was asked to travel through the South to find out.

Some people predicted a cool welcome on the part of most clergy, but to the delight of the visitors, almost all of the major churches showed a sincere desire to take part. After listening to this “new thing” that God was wanting to do in Nigeria, one eminent church leader replied, “Many of our young people once looked to politics to be the great moving force in our country. How quickly and devastatingly that has all been swept away! They are now looking for a more stable and lasting force to make Nigeria what it should be. Perhaps this New Life For All is what we need.”

When Mr. Hunking and Rev. Moses Ariye (later the Co-ordinating Secretary for NLFA in Lagos) went to interview one of the country’s leading churchmen, they felt the great seriousness of this visit.

“My body was shaking when we entered the building,” Mr. Ariye said, “but once we began talking, we found that God had prepared the way before us. He had been dealing with others even as He had been with us. The Bishop was warm in his interest and offered to help in any way he could. When the programme got under way, it was the Bishop of Lagos that chaired the main committee, and gave much of his time and wise counsel to the work.”

The workers soon realized that evangelizing the cities would be vastly different from working in the villages. For one thing, the hundreds of schools presented a challenge that was almost staggering. There were over eighty secondary schools and colleges in Lagos alone. But all this advance in education had brought the youth of Nigeria no nearer to God. A pastor of a large denomination expressed his concern in this matter to the survey team when he said, “Ninety per cent of all our children are lost to the church once they pass out of our schools. Do you have anything that will save our young people?”

When NLFA got under way in Lagos, the School Committee in the area set out to do just that. First they sent a circular to the headmaster of every post-primary school in the city. It announced the visit of a NLFA team to explain what the programme was attempting to do. For five days this group of Nigerians and expatriates<sup>2</sup> fanned out all over the city to speak to countless students about the new life in Christ.

<sup>2</sup> In Nigeria, workers from other countries are referred to as “expatriates.”

At one school 2,000 young men had gathered in the assembly hall while twenty-two of the staff were seated on the platform. The students, standing pressed one against the other, had hardly room to breathe and the visitor wondered if they would pay attention. But a great hush spread over the group as she spoke of Christ and what He wanted to do in their lives. Many came up afterwards for literature and asked searching questions about God.

Everywhere a keen interest was evident. Almost every headmaster said, "This is the message we need."

The principal of a school of 3,000 thanked the visiting team at the door. "When can you come back?" he asked. "We have been having discipline problems and need to hear more of this teaching."

Most schools in the city were congested. One college felt it necessary to expand but found nowhere to go except up. Large winding staircases led to the classrooms and all day long these seemed to be crowded with feet.

"I don't know when I've been so overwhelmed with students," the visiting worker said. "Even in my sleep I could hear the patter of thousands of feet as they marched up and down stairs to their classes."

When missions and Youth Rallies were organized throughout the city, many more young people were saved. "I came to the Lord during the NLFA rally at St. Jude's," stated a letter from a student. "At first I did not know what was expected of me but when I listened to a sermon by Mr. Wilmot I then handed my life over to the Lord."

The girls of a large school where a NLFA mission was not welcome accepted the responsibility of spreading the message themselves. Four of the Scripture Union leaders met every Sunday at 4.30 in the morning to pray. No wonder one of them could say later, "Girls are being saved in our school just like the flow of water. It is truly amazing."

Throughout other areas in the South as well, schools of all types were open to the message. At a large Native Authority school, the team arrived in the middle of examinations.

"We are a New Life For All team working with young people," they said.

"You are welcome," replied the Muslim headmaster. "But could you come back at noon when the pupils are finished with their exams?"

The team returned at 12.30 and found that all the classroom benches had been moved out into the school grounds. Before them was a sea of little black faces crowned with white Muslim caps, for the 460 children of the entire school were there, quietly waiting for the visitors to come.

One of the team gave the message outlining the steps to New Life. In the middle of his talk one of the malams stopped the proceedings.

"I do not think the younger ones are understanding the English," he said. "Let me interpret it into Nupe."

"That is good," said the leader, "but just remember that some of us on the team understand Nupe."

So for the rest of the meeting, the gospel of Jesus Christ went forth in the vernacular from the lips of a Muslim malam. When it came to the explaining about the shedding of the Blood of Christ, the malam said, "The Christians say that only the Blood of Christ can wash away our sin. We Muslims believe that the blood of animals does this for us each year."

The contrast was eloquent in itself. The team let it stand.

After the meeting was over a teacher approached one of the NLFA workers.

"Is this new life for Christians only," he asked, "or is it also for someone like me?"

All over Nigeria it seemed that people were ready for the message. This hunger was demonstrated by an elderly pastor when he confided in the survey team who had come to call.

"When I look at our denomination," he said brokenly, "all I can think of is Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. Yes, we have had the message, but oh how we need a great revival to stir up our love – a wind that will blow upon the dry bones of our ritualism and bring sinews and flesh to our worship once more."

That wind that he longed for was already blowing. The Spirit of God who had breathed on His servant that night in Kagoro was now fanning the same flame in the hearts of many others. New life would spring up until the Church of Christ was to grow at an incredible rate and new believers be born into the kingdom by the thousands.

### 3. By My Spirit

The night was still except for the shrill chirping of the crickets and the occasional far-away hoot of an owl.

A great number of people lay quietly on their mats in Bible School rooms, classrooms, dormitories – any place that could hold "one more". The New Life For All Retreat was to begin the next day and they needed rest from the long journey that many of them had made to attend.

In their villages they had heard rumours of the blessing some places were receiving in this new type of evangelism. But if the programme was to be successful in a district they were told, the pastors, church leaders and even

ordinary members must first attend a retreat to learn how to carry it on. And so they had gathered in this place for inspiration, instruction and fellowship.

As they had arrived that day they were directed to the Chapel building for a preliminary meeting where they sat for many hours listening breathlessly to the NLFA speaker telling of God's miracles in other places.

"God must have clean lives to work through," he told them. "He cannot use those who hide sin. It is not for nothing that God's Spirit is called the *Holy Spirit*. He is holy and He demands that we be holy too. Not only is God's Spirit the Lord of the Harvest, He is also the Spirit of conviction and before He can convict the heathen and Muslims around us, He must begin with the people of God."

All day long the Christians sat and listened. When someone suggested food, they were almost impatient. Who could think of food for their bodies when they could have a feast for their souls?

The aqua sky turned to a rosy pink, then melted to lavender in the west, finally fading to mother-of-pearl, and darkening shades of grey began to lay hold on the land.

Still the people lingered. The dusk grew closer and the evening still. The brighter stars came out and the southern cross resumed its duty as sentinel of the African night.

When the light had totally faded and the speaker's face could no longer be seen, the people finally became conscious of the need to leave. They dismissed the meeting and went for their food. Then still talking of the things they had heard, they made their way to their assigned places of rest.

Now the chirp of the cricket and the hoot of the owl lay full claim to the outside world. But strangely enough, these are not the only voices that are speaking to the people. Another voice is clearly heard – a Voice that is speaking to their hearts. It is speaking words that discomfit, that disquiet, that disturb. For who can sleep when one is remembering one's sins? What peace can the body know when the mind is at war?

In the silences between the cicada's shrill call another sound is soon heard. It is the creaking of a door and the soft padding of bare feet on the sandy path that leads to the chapel. The door of the meeting hall opens and shuts, and soon the murmur of muffled weeping is heard. It sounds like the voice of a penitent lifted in prayer. More bare feet – then more and more, until the hall is filled again with the same group that was there during the day.

There has been no call, no bell; but something more compelling has pulled them back. It is the Voice of the Spirit that has convinced them that God's eye is upon them, that the hidden life they have lived is well known to Him. With tears of contrition they confess their sins, make their wrongs

right and seek the Spirit's cleansing through the Blood. The blessing of Pentecost once again fills their lives as God prepares His people not only for the week of retreat but for the months of witness ahead.

It was through such retreats as this that interest was stirred up and information disseminated concerning the aims and procedures of NLFA. Often a field man was sent ahead to call on the different church leaders in order to explain the programme, to enlist their co-operation and set the time for a retreat. Handbills also went out by the thousands to urge people to attend.

And attend they did. In some places they came by the lorry load – pastors and missionaries, elders and laymen. Some travelled as far as 150 miles to attend, patiently suffering impossible roads through mountains and thick forest, some having to sleep on the roadside by broken-down lorries. Pastors and people, the educated and illiterate, expatriate and Nigerian, all lived and ate together in a common dormitory and dining-hall.

Many of the retreats registered over 200 in the teaching sessions and in some places as many as 700 crowded into the hall for the inspirational message at night. But whether the number was great or small, the results were the same. Blessing poured down and the spirit of Christian love was everywhere evident. At the end of one retreat one of the delegates could hardly contain his joy. "This is like being in heaven!" he exclaimed. And indeed few had ever experienced such a time of fellowship and spiritual uplift before.

The retreats were not all preaching, however. During the teaching sessions the delegates were armed with instructions as to how they should begin NLFA in their own area. They were taken through the handbook on witnessing which they in turn would teach to the Christians in their own area. Explanation of how committees were to work was also given, and in some places, members of local committees were elected before the retreat was over. Two instructions especially were to be carried out. In their home area they must start as many prayer cells as possible, and begin handbook training classes in every church.

As the retreat progressed, Christians began to see that God's standard for their lives was far higher than what they had been living. *The Holy Spirit* was the main emphasis in each session. He was set forth as a living, vital Person – One who gives victory over sin, who empowers the Lord's people for service and enables the believer to lead others to Christ.

Great conviction took hold of the people, and confession of sin was usual. After one evening's message, 135 Christians were counselled concerning the self-seeking in their lives which prevented the Lord from using them.

“I have seen myself,” one pastor testified with tears. “I have been living for years without the blessing of God, for I have grown cold in my love for Him.”

Others confessed fruitlessness of life because of some sin of the past they had never put right. A church treasurer found courage to stand up and confess that he had been falsifying his reports for years and was now suffering under the burden of his sin.

Some admitted they had been living a double life; outwardly they were church members in good standing but their hidden life was full of adultery and deceit.

“This open confession of sin worried us a bit,” one pastor said later. “Was it true repentance? But we need not have worried. God showed us that this man realized how black his sins were – it was proved by his tears. In fact, all of us began to confess our sins one to another as the Spirit came upon us. Some had lived a long time in hidden sin but now they sought forgiveness from the Lord. How good the Lord is to take anyone back who truly repents!”

Vital in any successful evangelistic programme is the principle that reviving must begin first with God’s own people and especially with the pastors. This was the conviction that came to the heart of an older pastor after he had taken part in the retreat all week. When the last day came, he felt that he too must say something to the Christians.

“The Lord has been speaking to my heart too,” he began, “and what I have to say I want to give in our own language. It speaks more nearly to our hearts.

“You know that for many years I have been a pastor among you. Many have looked up to me as senior, and indeed, I myself felt that I had done well for the church. But this week I have seen how far short my life and work have really come. All that I have done it was surely my duty to do – I am only an unprofitable servant. But now God has given me a new spirit for the ministry to which He has called me.”

The sincerity and humility of this older worker who was loved and honoured by Christians of all denominations brought tears to many eyes and a deeper searching of one’s own heart before God.

When NLFA later moved into Eastern Nigeria, an archdeacon at the Enugu Retreat sat on the edge of his chair. He was listening intently to a message concerning God’s working through the NLFA programme in the North. When the speaker had finished, the archdeacon could contain his emotions no longer. He jumped to his feet, his words tumbling out in suppressed excitement.

“Only last month in our diocese meeting we were asking ourselves once more what we could do for the people of the North,” he began. “For years we have tried to take the message to the people there but it seemed that all our efforts were in vain. Now you come and tell us of these wonderful happenings in the very place we had thought hopeless. Will you give us permission to sing a hymn of praise in our own language?”

Large as he was, he moved with alacrity over to the side of his friend, the secretary of his church who had been discouraged about his assignment in the North. Pulling him to his feet, the archdeacon began to sing. In a moment all the Ibo pastors and elders had jumped up and joined in too.

“To God be the glory! Great things He hath done ...  
Praise the Lord! PRAISE THE LORD! ...”

It rolled out with deep feeling and beautiful harmony. Some sang with tears running down their cheeks, some with hands up in the air. Others waved their arms to the rhythm of the music until the last word was sung and they had given sufficient expression to their joy. It was an exciting few moments.

The week of that retreat was charged with heart searching. The stirring messages left no doubt about the need for the power of the Spirit in the church and in our personal lives. “If the Holy Spirit were suddenly taken out of the world today,” one speaker said, “no doubt ninety per cent of the churches would carry on as before just as though nothing important had happened.”

On the Friday morning a great prayer burden fell upon the meeting and the whole group dropped to their knees to pray. Little did it matter that Presbyterian knelt beside Brethren or that Anglican prayed next to Apostolic. God was there and He was all that mattered.

“Forgive us our many sins – our heart sins, O Lord,” one began to pray. “... the sin of pride, the sin of selfishness, the sin of showing our own personality, the sin of trying to work without the Holy Spirit.”

Hardly had he finished when another took up the confession.

“Take out of our hearts its many wants,” he prayed; “... the want of money, the want of earthly things, the want of honour and position. You can not use dirty vessels, O Lord. Cleanse *my* heart and make me clean.”

After the time of prayer, there followed a testimony meeting, something many of them no doubt had not experienced for years. But spontaneously they arose to their feet.

“From the first day, I started to be clean,” one said. “Secretly I have had great sin in my heart but this morning as we knelt I knew I was being fully cleansed.”

“A new spirit is growing within me,” another witnessed.

“It is one thing to be a preacher of the gospel. It is another thing to take it for oneself. I have begun to see that the gospel is food for me too. We often give food to others without eating it ourselves.”

Then the archdeacon got to his feet.

“I have been down on my knees praying,” he said. “As I prayed I was crying. For sometime I have felt, ‘I am empty. I want to renew myself.’ For many years I have taught others. But many things were missing. This week I have started afresh. My spirit is pure. I am going back as a young boy.”

If NLFA was to have any impact in an area, this heart-cleansing among believers and the infilling of the Spirit was the point on which the foundation had to be laid. During one three-month period where more than 1,300 pastors, evangelists and other Christian workers took part in ten retreats, hundreds confessed to coldness of heart, to lack of evangelistic zeal and to other sins in their lives. Some had hidden for years behind a facade of righteousness. One pastor who had had a most unfruitful ministry in his community had come along quite unsuspectingly with the rest to the retreat. For several days he sat unmoved through the sessions. But as time went on, he grew more and more miserable. Finally he could stand it no longer. The moment came when he too had to make full confession.

“Forgive me, my people,” he said brokenly. “I have not been true to my vows. I have brought reproach upon the ministry. But God is cleansing me now from my sin. Yes, He is cleansing me from my sin. I want nothing to do with it again. If ever you see me slipping back into my old ways, do be faithful and tell me.”

Several days later this same pastor visited his brother, a leading Muslim, and led him into saving faith in Jesus Christ.

What is the pattern that God has laid down for evangelism? It is simply that when the life of an individual is made right with God, God will then use that one to bring others to Himself. It matters little how weak one’s past experience might be. The only thing that matters is one’s present yieldedness to the Lord. There is no limit to what God can do with the life that is fully surrendered to Him.

## 4. When My People Pray

January – February – March. Only three short months yet so much had been accomplished. Area committees had met, literature had been prepared and surveys of the whole district completed. Now came the most important of all – prayer cells must be formed in as many homes as possible. It was necessary to organize carefully here, for whatever was done in the Zaria-Plateau districts would set the pattern for NLFA when it spread into other parts of the country.

Before long, little groups of eight to ten people began meeting daily in homes throughout the whole area.

“What is the meaning of this *takarda*?” a man would ask as he scrutinized a large yellow card tacked on to the door of his neighbour’s home.

“Why, that says that people meet here every night after the evening meal to pray. Would you like to join us?”

And as more and more neighbours trickled in, the group would grow so large that it would have to be divided into two. Then another yellow card with its cornstalk symbol of Life would appear at a different doorway.

There was no set time for these prayer cell gatherings; the group set their own. One company of Christians in the town of Abaji rose for prayer every morning at 4.30. “If others can do this for their religion,” they said, “we ought to be able to do it for Christ.”

The order of service was very simple. A hymn perhaps, a verse of scripture, answers to previous prayers, more requests and then short, earnest petitions by most of those present for friends and relatives who were not yet saved. These people were mentioned by name, for all requests, the prayer secretary had told them, must be definite and to the point. Sentence prayers became common, and people began to take part who never before had lifted their voices in public prayer.

One of the significant things about the prayer cells was that it was not just the people of one church that met together each day. Any Christian from any church who loved the Lord was invited to join the group.

“Before New Life For All came to our town,” reported one pastor, “there were many differences among the Christians. Also we did not see many people coming to the Lord. But now all former differences have been put away. People could not pray together and still be angry with each other. They began to make things right with one another and then their prayers became effective.”

One thing that amazed the Christians themselves was how specifically God answered their prayers when they began to make their requests definite.

“We began prayer meetings in our village in May, ’64,” one evangelist<sup>3</sup> told us, “for although there were only a few Christians in our area, we thought we would be enough to start.

“At first only Musa and his wife and mother came. They had to bring their children too, for there was no one to leave them with. Then Ruda, our midwife, with another medical worker and some patients joined us.

“During the prayers we prayed in at least three languages. One word was heard in them all, though, and that was the name of Stephen. Everyone prayed for Stephen. Stephen had been born into a Christian home and had even become a church member. But when he became a man, he wandered far from the Christian way like a sheep that gets lost in the bush.

“Because of his heavy drinking he lost his job, and his wife and four children grew hungry. Stephen’s father was old and sick and had little food, but Stephen did not think of that. He sent his family to his old father to feed while he himself set off to drink. He could not concern himself with their troubles.

“But we kept on praying for Stephen – Ruda and Musa and the rest of the Christians – we prayed every day and did not let him go. As we prayed Stephen’s heart became more and more afraid. He did not know why he was afraid; he only knew that fear had caught him.

“Then came bad news. His elder sister had died in the hospital! On the way, she had stopped and spoken to him about his evil ways. She begged him to repent but he closed his ears. Now she was dead. Stephen wept much when he heard.

“Later Stephen met two who belonged to the prayer group.

“‘How is your living?’ they asked him.

“‘Oh, my heart is spoiled,’ he replied. ‘God has spoken to me through the death of my sister. I want to go back and be different.’

“We watched to see if his repentance was real or merely sorrow for the moment. But Stephen was different all right. He was truly different indeed.

“‘I want to start building a new home,’ he told his wife. He chose a piece of land near the market and began to make bricks. When he started to build, his wife and children decided to help. Perhaps they all could get it built before his laziness became too great again. I and the other Christians helped too and soon it was time for the grass for the roof.

<sup>3</sup> In Nigeria an “evangelist” is generally a partly trained worker who is in charge of village work while under the supervision of the pastor in that area.

“‘We began to laugh again,’ his wife told me later, ‘for our hunger did not hurt us so much any more. When I and his children were first sent to his father I was much ashamed. But now we can repay the father for all his help. He is very happy and indeed all of us thank God every day for the change we have seen in the father of my children.’

“It was a miracle to us to see what praying every day for Stephen could truly do.”

As the prayer groups progressed, a tremendous number who had dedicated themselves to this ministry began to see the true condition of their heart as they waited upon the Lord. Sin was confessed, prayerlessness and coldness of heart were exposed. Old grudges were brought out into the open and strained relationships between Christians repaired. One husband and wife who had formerly refused to pray with each other confessed their sin and found a new joy and freedom in the Lord.

In the one year’s programme throughout the Zaria-Plateau provinces, 7,000 groups met daily to pray. In one village of 1,000, fourteen prayer cells were established, and in a town of 10,000 no less than 117 groups gathered each day for prayer.

And God used them mightily. Some of the most amazing conversions we have seen in NLFA have come not through the more sensational activities, but merely through the ordinary Christians who met to pray.

In one of the prayer centres, for instance, the people prayed by name for four men each day. They continued to bring them constantly before God as was suggested by the prayer secretary. Then, without any notice, all four of these men came to the pastor to ask how to receive new life in their hearts.

“Who spoke to you about this?” the pastor asked after explaining salvation to them.

“Who spoke to us?” they asked, surprised. “Why, no one has spoken to us. We just heard people talking among themselves and our hearts grew hungry to have this new life too.”

No one had spoken to them? No, not a human voice; but the Voice of God was clearly heard in response to the faithful petitions of their friends in the prayer cell.

In the village of Dangi, twelve men came one by one to see an elderly Christian concerning their spiritual condition. Some of them had walked a considerable distance though no one had called them – prayer alone had drawn them to hear the message of new life.

One of the most far-reaching results of the prayer cells has been that the women of the churches have learned to pray. Formerly they were often

silent when a prayer meeting was in session, and in some areas it was thought a shame for a woman to join in.

But now that this new programme was begun, the challenge came to the women as well. Would they too take time to pray? They no doubt would find it inconvenient to meet in the same group as the men. Grinding their guinea corn, cooking their yam, gathering firewood, going to the stream for water, taking care of their babies – their work left few free moments for anything else, and especially not at the times when the men met to pray.

So in many areas the women set their own time and place of prayer. For some groups it was early in the morning before the first streaks of dawn had pierced the darkness in the east. Those who were on the streets before sunrise in one northern town might have seen shadowy figures from different entrance huts making their way daily to the place of prayer. There on a small table at one end of the prayer room was a shea-nut oil lamp flickering out its uncertain light. A short native hymn, a promise from the Word, prayer victories and requests and then the women knelt on the clean-swept floor in intercession. A murmur of prayer went round the circle. All prayed at once but one led out in more audible petition. The rise and fall of the vernacular tones sounded like the plaintive music of the East:

*Father in heaven who hears our prayers,  
for our neighbours we are praying;  
Those who grind their corn with us,  
Those who go to the stream with us,  
Those who sit in the market with us  
but who never come to church with us.  
Son of God who hears our prayers,  
for our sisters we are praying.*

Another figure entered and knelt, her baby still peacefully asleep on her back, unaware that he was taking part in a transaction that moved the arm of God. It was early for a meeting according to the opinion of many, but most of these women's relatives and friends were still walking in darkness and the thought had taken sleep from their eyes.

*Spirit of God who hears our prayers,  
for our loved-ones we are praying ...*

It was through such intercession that Janebu was converted. She was not the type most church women would want to associate with, for Janebu was a harlot. While the women were praying for their unsaved sisters in the

town, this undesirable one came to mind. Could she too be reached through prayer? Surely there were others He would prefer to save. And yet, hadn't Christ transformed another in Magdala such as she?

As the days went by, Janebu became the deep concern of the group. One Friday afternoon one of the praying women met her on the road.

"Greetings, Janebu," she began. Amazed at such friendliness from a Christian, Janebu could hardly find a proper answer.

"We do not forget you, Janebu," the Christian went on. "In fact, we remember you every morning. We are praying every day that God will help you to repent and live a life that will please Him."

"You are praying for *me*?" the prostitute asked. "Would God have anything to do with me?" This was strange news indeed.

All evening the Christian woman's words stirred in Janebu's heart. These people were praying for her! Could it be true that church women would care that much for her?

Early the next morning Janebu hurried to the meeting too in order to hear for herself the prayers they were offering for her.

What she heard stirred her even more. Could it be true that God loved her? That Christ died to save her? That He had changed another woman like her while on earth? Was there hope then that she too could change?

The next day Janebu came to the church and gave her heart to Christ. She experienced the truth of God's promise, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." And the Christians of the town of Takum began to discover what wonders there were in the place of prayer – even the prayers of women.

In another village the women of the church became burdened for the medicine man in that area. Everyone was afraid of him so the group prayed all the more earnestly.

One day one of them made an announcement. "I am going to witness to the old father myself," she said.

"But it is a shame for a woman to talk to men in public," the others gasped.

"The Holy Spirit has told me to witness to him," she persisted. "Haven't we been praying many days for his salvation? Doesn't God promise to answer our prayers? And if the Holy Spirit tells me to witness to him, He will show me the way."

It wasn't long before He did.

When market day came round again, this courageous woman stationed a fellow believer in a spot near the place where the man always sat behind an array of jujus and charms for sale. At a convenient moment she ambled over to her friend.

“Greetings for the market,” she saluted her. “How is your selling?”

“I thank God. Things are going on well.”

“Have you heard of the wonderful things God is doing?” she went on, raising her voice a little. Her friend had heard, of course, but she asked anyway, “What things?”

Still talking quite loudly, the woman began to relate some amazing incidents they had witnessed.

“Why, in Ibi, many old women have become Christians! No one thought that they could ever change – could old people change their habits? – but here they are, with new life in Jesus Christ! They have even brought their idols and burned them publicly in front of the church.”

At these words, the medicine man sitting nearby turned his head slightly. What was this that these women were saying?

The friends noticed the interest and continued with greater animation.

“Yes, and at Jatu the fetish priest brought all his jujus out and burned them before the whole town! He had decided to be a Jesus’ follower.”

Even a fetish chief? Now this *was* something!

“Isn’t it wonderful how Jesus Christ, God’s Son, can give a person power not to fear to do such a thing!” they went on. “Of course that person must first admit that he is a wicked sinner and deserves God’s anger and the awful punishment that is surely coming upon him.”

“If he doesn’t confess his sins to God,” her friend added, “he will suffer forever in hell with the devil whom he serves.”

“But God doesn’t want us to go to hell. That is why Jesus took our punishment already by dying on the cross.”

“Oh, but He didn’t stay dead – He arose again from the place they buried Him. He is alive today. That is why He can show us the way through death when it comes our turn for the long journey.”

The witchdoctor by this time had forgotten all about the customers he had hoped would buy his charms. Here was a God who could take away the fear which had mastered him all his life! Although he could use the spirits to serve him, they in reality had power over him and used him as their slave.

The two women continued their conversation, going through all the steps of salvation they had learned in their training classes. As they conversed, they prayed. Oh, that God’s Spirit would talk to the inner ear of this man’s heart!

Not long after that heroic attempt at witnessing, the medicine man came to the church to hear more. The women prayed harder than ever. They were now confident that God would answer their prayer.

Before many more days the seeker became a finder, for in confessing his sins he too found power to destroy his witchcraft and enter into the freedom of which he had first heard through that simple witness in the market.

*He does his greatest work when he teaches men to pray*, said E. M. Bounds.

Is there anything that God cannot do in answer to sincere, believing prayer? That the town’s leading medicine man could be won to Christ through the simple prayers and candid witness of a few Christian women seems almost incredible, but the Apostle Paul declared that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the ones that seem wise; and that He often chooses the weak things and the base things and even the things which are despised to bring to nothing the things that are counted unalterable by the standards of the world.

There is no limit to what God can do when His people in faith begin to pray.

But it was not only the women that learned to pray. More surprising yet were the conversions that were brought about by children.

The headmaster of a Senior Primary School in the North was not at all sympathetic to NLFA.

“You cannot hold a prayer meeting in this school,” he told some of the boys in answer to their request. “You’ll have to find some other place.”

This rebuff did not discourage them. Hadn’t the pastor advised them that some might try to hinder?

“I will ask my father,” one boy offered, and so permission was granted to use a hut in that boy’s compound even though the people living there were pagans.

Every evening after school about seven boys around the age of twelve went into the hut to pray. They were not trained in the adult art of flowery phrases and pious platitudes, so when they prayed they just talked very simply to God.

“Lord Jesus,” one would pray, “you know my mother isn’t a Christian. She makes beer in her pots for people to get drunk on. Please show her how You want people to live and help her to repent.”

“My uncle is a medicine man,” another would begin. “He is afraid of the spirits but he doesn’t know You are stronger than they are. Help him to listen to the gospel and be saved from their power.”

The children had been instructed to pray for people by name, and so mothers, fathers, relatives and even friends at school were mentioned to God.

One afternoon the father of the household became interested in these secret activities.

“I wonder what those youngsters are up to in there,” he thought. Sliding off the log where he had been sitting in the shade, he went to the door of the hut and listened.

“O God,” he heard his son pray, “please give my father new life. You know how he still sacrifices to his fetish and he is afraid not to do so. If he had Jesus’ life in him he would not be afraid anymore.”

What was this? His son praying for him? He must look into this.

Later that evening he called his son to him.

“What is this new life you were talking about in your meeting today?” he asked. “What does it do for a person and where does it come from?”

“My father, I know it is in my heart,” his son replied tremblingly, “but I don’t understand it well enough to explain it to you. May I ask the pastor to come?”

The father agreed. After a number of visits both the father and mother gave their hearts to Christ. The efforts of children are not in vain in the Lord. Some have supposed that only talented people could be of much value in the Lord’s service, but in NLFA we are seeing that God often takes a commonplace person and uses him where others fail.

This was evident in the case of Makafo, an old man who was confined to his hut.

“My brothers,” he said one day to the church people who came to visit, “you see that I cannot go to the houses of the village to tell others about Jesus Christ. I am weak and blind and not good for much. But I want to help in the NLFA programme too. Will you bring to me the names of any in the village who refuse to listen to your words, those who harden their hearts against the Saviour – the hardest cases you have. I can pray for them if I can’t do anything else.”

The elders promised to do so and gave him the names of eleven men who were particularly set against the message they heard witnessed in the town.

There in the privacy of his room, sitting alone on his mat, the old father talked earnestly to God. Day after day and all day long he poured out his heart concerning these eleven men who had determined, it seemed, to follow the devil. What effect could an old man living alone in an unnoticed hut have upon the community around? How foolish to even think anything would happen! The men for whom he constantly prayed had nothing in common with him. How could he reach them merely through prayer?

And yet before the year was up, every one of these rebellious, sin-hardened villagers came one by one to his out-of-the-way hut for spiritual

help. There in humility and repentance they confessed their sins to God and became new creatures in Christ.

“I can do very little for Jesus,” he had said. Yet in spite of his age and in spite of his blindness, he could pray; and in faithfully doing what he could, he had the joy of leading eleven men to his Saviour – the very ones whose names had been mentioned so often within the walls of his room.

“My strength is made perfect in weakness,” said the Lord, and here was a man who was not afraid to put this to the test. Sometimes a blind man can reach farther on his knees than a seeing man on tip-toe.

In the few years since NLFA began, a definite principle emerged; where an area failed in its prayer cell ministry, the work of NLFA did not go ahead. But where the prayer groups were successful, the evangelistic outreach was also successful beyond what anyone could ask or even think.

As the programme spread out, “P.O. Box 77, Jos,” overflowed almost constantly at the local post office in town. This was the place where the prayer requests from all areas, besides reams of other NLFA correspondence finally found their way. Mrs. Dorothy Swank, wife of the General Secretary, had launched a prayer chain that was to prove invaluable in days to come. To make it more concrete, a large cardboard chain formed of many links was placed on one wall of the NLFA office. Here were printed the names of those in Nigeria and around the world who had pledged themselves to fifteen minutes of intercession each day, concentrating on the needs of the work and especially on the requests that came in. Definite signs of its effectiveness were soon evident.

The chief of one village, for instance, had not been at all sympathetic to the gospel. In the past he had even sent a missionary away, telling him they did not want his religion in their village.

“This time, however,” reported the Christians, “we of the gospel team were sent out with a chain – the chain of prayer to bind the hands of Satan. People in many different places were praying.

“When we called upon the chief and told him what we had come for, he said, ‘That is good. You may go where you wish.’

“We went first to the chief clerk’s office. There we found Satan bound tight. Everyone present accepted our tracts very willingly. Then we went to the Local Authority office. There too Satan had been chained. The officers gladly accepted the literature and we witnessed to them personally. Throughout the whole town it was the same – everything was peaceful.

“Wherever people gathered to look at us, we preached to them. Before, we could never have done anything like this. There would have been too

much fighting. But we saw that day how Satan can be bound with the chain of prayer.”

In order to make the needs known to the praying groups, a prayer bulletin was duplicated and sent out each month to those intercessors and prayer cells that requested them. When Mrs. Nellie Germaine became Prayer Secretary, the copies requested were few, but as more people came to know of NLFA the number needed grew until over 5,000 were sent off each month to all parts of the world.

It is impossible to overestimate the weight of this intercession, for who can resist the working of God’s Spirit when 5,000 people bring daily the need of one person or district before the throne? In the North there is a tribe which up to this time had constantly resisted the message of salvation. Their people were hard, steeped in witchcraft and pagan practices. None had ever become Christian or had ever seemed interested. Then a great appeal went out to prayer groups all over the world. Fervent prayer was again sent up to the throne for this tribe in their darkness.

Today there are at least four among them who love the Lord Jesus.

## 5. Mightily Grew The Word

For people in small Nigerian towns a gramophone blasting out “high life” music for the benefit of the whole countryside is a special treat.

The little box in Yusufu’s shop was no different. No different, that is, until he found new life in Christ. Now he had a new set of records,<sup>4</sup> some that spoke of *high* life indeed.

One afternoon his friend Lumu dropped in for a chat. After the regular round of greetings (“How’s your household? How’s your tiredness? How are your children?” etc.), Yusufu suggested he play one of his new records. Lumu’s eyes shone. Of course he would like to hear it.

But to his surprise he found that this record was quite different from the rest he had heard. The volume was just the same, of course, but the words were most arresting. He sat and listened. Memories of his past life came flooding back. The man who was preaching seemed to know everything he had ever done; he knew all the sin, the deceit, the corruption of his heart.

At one time Lumu had been interested in the Christian message, but for years he had forgotten God and had gone on in the path where his lusts had led.

<sup>4</sup> In 1963 Miss Ann Sherwood and Miss Kathleen Hoffmeyer of Gospel Recordings Inc., California, USA, toured Nigeria making recordings of a gospel message in over 250 languages and dialects.

Stirred, he turned to his friend.

“Yusufu,” he asked, “what can I do about my condition?”

This was what Yusufu had been waiting for. Going to a shelf at the back of his shop, he got a small green booklet with a familiar cornstalk emblem and a bold title in white: “SABON RAI DON KOWA”(new life for everyone).

It outlined very clearly a simple five-point explanation of the plan of salvation and the methods by which Christians might present it effectively to their friends.

After witnessing to Lumu for some time, Yusufu suggested, “Why not come to our instruction classes if you wish to know more? We are meeting every Wednesday at 6 p.m. to study what the Bible says about new life in Christ. You come and join us.”

“Perhaps they won’t let me come because I haven’t been to church for years,” Lumu objected.

“You ask our evangelist,” replied his friend.

With this encouragement, Lumu went home to hunt out the old Bible that had mouldered in his box for years.

The next Wednesday he set out with his friend when the church gong rang. What he heard in the class made a deep impression upon him and set him thinking thoughts he could not soon forget.

The following week Lumu told another friend that he was attending the instruction classes and that God was speaking to his heart. The friend decided to look in on them too. It wasn’t long before God’s Word began to show them their condition and to convict them of their sins.

Because someone had prepared this course to teach Christians how to witness, Lumu is now a born-again man, seeking to win his wife and others to the Lord.

One of the first things that church leaders did after they arrived home from the retreats was to gather as many Christians as possible and begin to instruct them from the handbook. In schoolrooms, under trees, in police and army barracks, in prison yards, on the compound sitting-log or in large city churches, men and women could be seen poring over the pages of their Bibles as they followed the studies outlined in the instruction book. Again and again during the thirteen weeks’ course, many who had always considered themselves Christians and had come with the thought of helping others became aware of their own spiritual condition and found this new life for themselves.

That was the case with Laraba.

“All my children had died in infancy,” she testified to the group, “and when my sixth child was dying too, I came to the church dispensary hoping that this would save his life. Because the medicine helped and my baby kept on living, I just kept on coming to church too. After a while I naturally began to call myself a Christian – didn’t I go to church like the rest? But I knew nothing of the new birth in my life or of having my sins forgiven through the Blood of Jesus. It was here while studying how to win others that I myself found new life.”

One Sunday the instructor in another town was teaching from the handbook concerning the character and qualifications of the Christian worker. Twice he went over the story of Nicodemus, pointing out that to live a good life is not enough; “ye must be born again”.

After the lesson was finished, he turned to his class. “Is there anyone here who sees himself as Nicodemus,” he asked; “– good living, interested in spiritual things, perhaps even teaching others, but never having experienced this new birth for himself? If so, this is your opportunity to become the kind of witness that God wants you to be.”

There was silence for a moment; then slowly one or two got to their feet. Gradually others followed until twenty-two members of that instruction class stood before the teacher indicating the emptiness of their hearts and their sincere desire to be right with God. Most of them were baptized church members, but by this open confession they were admitting that no spiritual transaction had ever taken place in their heart. That day for the first time they fully understood and accepted the Way and had the assurance that they now had passed “from death to life”.

There were others who, but for the instruction classes, would be in far different circumstances today. In the town of Takum a young policeman heard of the NLFA classes and began to attend. One day after four or five weeks, he asked for permission to speak.

“I want to give my testimony before we dismiss,” he told them. “As a young boy I was baptized but it meant nothing to me. I didn’t even attend church regularly. I have never taken part in Holy Communion.

“But during these classes each week I heard God speaking to me in a way I have never known before and I want to witness to the fact that I have come to know Jesus in a personal way.”

At this the tears began to slip down his cheeks. “My life has been very full of sin,” he said, “but today I confess my sin to God and ask Him to take me as His child. Won’t you all please pray for me. Somehow I felt I just had to give you this word before I left.”

After the meeting he made his way up to the hospital to get some medicine for the headache he had been having for several days. He received

a few aspirins and then started home. But he never reached the town. On his way back he dropped dead on the road. Within an hour of making his decision he was in the presence of his new-found Lord.

Week after week as the Christians discussed each lesson and memorized the suggested verses, their desire to put into practice the things that they had learned grew perceptibly. As a result of this interest, life began to sweep into the participating churches.

The town of Oko, for instance, saw this very thing happen. Although its inhabitants numbered less than 2,000, Pastor Jibowu and other Christian leaders had been able to start daily prayer meetings in sixty-seven homes. The intercessors were faithful to their pledge and their burden for the lost deepened greatly. Especially earnest were their prayers for their pagan neighbours.

When handbook classes in the town began, seventy-five people eagerly joined in the study. About half way through the course their enthusiasm turned to excitement.

“Pastor,” they said, “we should go out and practise what we have been studying. What you have taught us here burns in our hearts. We cannot keep it to ourselves. There are many around us who know nothing of this message.”

From then on things moved with increasing momentum. The teaching they received in the instruction classes was quickly passed on to others. In two months they had witnessed to over 9,000 people, many of whom became Christians. These new converts destroyed their idols and began to attend church. They in turn started witnessing to others and soon the whole area was aware that something new and vital was happening among them. Idol worshippers began to ask their Christian neighbours to come and pray with them, and the names of these seekers were immediately put on the prayer list to start the cycle all over again. More intercessors, more requests, more converts.

Here a whole community was stirred because seventy-five people began a systematic study of God’s plan of salvation; and, backed by the prayers of their friends, went out to take the message to others.

Perhaps the incentive that spurred some on who found the assignments difficult was the examination at the end of the course and the NLFA badge which was promised to all who were successful. This was a large white and green button with its cornstalk emblem, the credentials of a Christian worker in the evangelism programme to come.

But it was not merely the badge that attracted most Christians. Older men and women, illiterates and young teachers, farmers, housewives, clerks and

labourers – people from all walks of life were eager to attend. In the city of Kano, for instance, no less than 1,000 passed the exam while in another area 200 classes met weekly and the blessing that came to their churches was immeasurable. Among the small Igala tribe to the east, another 1,000 wrote the test with a view to taking part in the period of evangelism which was to come with the new year.

It was during this period in many areas that another important project was organized. The central church of the district would choose five or more Christians who went as a team to visit the smaller churches around. Their object was to explain more fully the purpose and procedure of NLFA, to check on their progress and to encourage every believer to become involved.

“The members of our church permitted our pastor to have eight weeks off for this work,” one district reported. “He with four others visited every organized church in the area. The service consisted of lively singing, personal testimonies, explanation, exhortation to the women and young people especially, question and answer periods and then a powerful message by our pastor. He generally spoke on the need to get right with the Lord and of rededication to His service. God was with the team in a mighty way and we saw many marvellous things taking place.

“At one church, people from a nearby village were present. Inspired by the Word, they went back to their homes and began to preach from house to house to all the people of the place. Practically the whole village of eighty people turned to Christ, burned their idols and began to make plans for the building of a church. It was just like the book of Acts!”

In another area the visiting team found that the women of the church were jealous of the one who had been put in as teacher of the handbook. Because they refused to go to classes, the programme had come to a standstill.

Here the message brought by the speaker was on envy and the secret sins of the spirit. Great conviction settled on the congregation. At his invitation eighty-two people came forward including all the women who had been causing the trouble. After the hindrance was removed, there was opportunity to discuss the handbook classes again and the work began to move ahead once more.

Four Christians in another village that a team visited were under discipline for succumbing to the tribal custom of giving their children to relatives to rear even though these homes were pagan. The men were hard and unrepentant over the matter and a gloom had fallen over the work. During the preaching that day all four found grace to humble themselves

and agreed to bring their children back. God was showing His people that they must first be cleansed before their ministry in the surrounding community could become effective.

It was found that this church-team project had a two-way effect. It built up those who took part in it and strengthened beyond measure the churches which they visited. One pastor was able to report, “Every village church around Miango has grown rapidly over the past few months. Prayer centres have continued to make real effort, but more than anything, we are grateful for those who have got right with God and then have ‘left their gift on the altar’ in order to put things right with their brother also.”

As the instruction period progressed, anticipation among Christians grew keener. This of course varied according to the degree to which the pastor himself entered into the plans. Where the leader whole-heartedly endorsed the programme and faithfully followed the suggestions laid down in the Leader’s Guide Book, a spirit of enthusiasm generally prevailed. These suggestions included special posters appearing regularly on the church notice board; one Sunday a month set aside as NLFA Sunday; and in ordinary services, prayer bulletin requests, reports of God’s workings, and sermons on NLFA subjects becoming a familiar part of church worship.

One young Anglican pastor who had had considerable contact with NLFA was assigned by his Bishop to a church where the membership numbered about a thousand. Becoming deeply burdened over the spiritual laxity he saw among his people, he preached one Sunday morning about a life of separation and of trusting in Jesus alone.

“How can you say your faith is in Christ,” he asked them, “when at this very moment many of you are wearing charms, lucky rings, talisman belts and other amulets to protect you from evil around? How can you pray ‘Deliver us from evil’ when all the time you are expecting these things to do so? Can a person trust in God and in his charms at the same time? Can a man sit on two chairs at once?”

Stirred by the power of his preaching, the people bowed their heads at his request and followed him in an audible prayer of confession and of faith in Christ alone.

“Now, if you really mean what you have prayed,” he said, “you will prove it by your action. I want everyone who has been sincere in his prayer to leave in the pews, before he goes, any lucky charm or talisman that he brought to church on his person this morning.”

When the large congregation had filed out of the building, the ushers gathered up 432 amulets and other juju items that had been left behind.

It was on the pastor that the success of the programme largely depended. If he himself showed enthusiasm, then generally his committees also functioned well, his people caught the vision and the unsaved were converted. Whenever the pastor was too preoccupied with his own plans to promote NLFA, however, the work others tried to do was hindered and often came to nothing.

NLFA has no power in itself; it is merely a workable plan whereby God's people through the energy of the Holy Spirit may go out and effectively reach a great number of the lost for Christ. Many pastors have taken advantage of this plan and found that churches newly-built were soon too small for the number that wanted to attend. Half-hearted Christians have suddenly come to life and began to study the Word as never before.

In a two-year period throughout the North, instruction classes conducted in various churches were attended by over 30,000 believers. Together with the teacher (who himself had been taught in a special class) they carefully pored over their Bibles and handbooks, and found that the studies, though simple in themselves, taught profound truths which challenged them to a deeper, richer life in Christ.

"I am deeply grateful to the Lord for all that He has done in my life through NLFA," one young man wrote in. "In the past I have not felt able to speak of Christ to my parents, but since I studied the handbook I have been able to witness to them the story of new life. The Bible is now like food to me. The Lord has used me to win six people to Himself and to restore five others who had fallen away."

Even within the walls of state prisons the study of the instruction course was having an outstanding ministry. A prisoner awaiting trial in the Kano jail surrendered his life to Christ through the witness of a local Christian.

"All former church-goers of many denominations here in the prison have now formed a Youth Club," his letter to the Jos office ran; "and at the present we are studying the NLFA handbook. We also hold daily prayer meetings in the prison yard. Since we started these services, twenty-seven other prisoners have accepted Jesus as their Saviour and they now witness to a new purpose in life."

Many prayed for these new converts in the Kano prison that in their subsequent trial and possible sentence they might glorify the One who had saved them and had given them peace in their hearts.

Perhaps one of the most consistent results of the period of instruction was the deepening desire on the part of many to give themselves more fully to God in the service of evangelism. One young student living near Panzaki

was typical of this group. "As I was studying my handbook one day," he wrote in, "I saw something new in the story of Philip explaining salvation to the Ethiopian eunuch. I realized how important it was to know how to win people to Christ. 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' Paul asked in Romans 10: 14. I knew he was speaking to me.

"After that I began to pray and ask God what He wanted me to do and He showed me that I should go and preach in a village nearby. I went and found only one Christian in the place. The power of prayer, however, was at work. Together we started around the village and everywhere we went we found people who were hungry to hear the message of Christ. God had prepared hearts to receive His word and twenty-eight people repented that day in that place."

Another worker reported that when the programme first came to their area many of the leaders were not wholeheartedly behind it.

"But after the prayer centres started," he said, "great blessing began to come down from the Lord. During the time of instruction, more than 200 were converted, one of them a town official.

"As Christians are taught more deeply in the Word, they also learn to pray with new understanding and earnestness, and they have seen their prayers answered in a way that was totally unknown to them before. All this has brought new strength to our Christians and they are witnessing fearlessly for the Lord."

*That you might increase in the knowledge of God* was Paul's earnest prayer and desire for the Colossians. Fruit is the natural outgrowth of spiritual understanding. The uninformed are also the unenthused; the untaught are also the untroubled concerning sin in their own lives and in those of the lost around. Bible doctrine can be the only basis for faith in Christ, and a body of believers trained in the Scriptures is the only firm foundation for effective evangelism.

## 6. The World Upside Down

Two and a half miles of happy, singing people – amazing! Nothing like it had ever been seen in the district before!

But more amazing still was the fact that this was not the usual crowd of gaily dressed wedding marchers, nor yet the familiar mob of wildly dancing fetish men. This parade was made up of Christians – members of all Bible-believing churches in the area who had come together in one great effort to reach the unsaved for Christ.

Big as it was, it had all been organized by the local committee on evangelism. Toward the end of the instruction period, an interesting phenomenon had appeared throughout the towns and cities of the North. On tree trunks and church bulletin boards, on traders' stalls in the market place, on outside walls of prominent buildings and in rear windows of parked cars large green and white posters appeared announcing a great rally in such and such a church – generally the largest in the district. Similar posters had attracted public attention in the surrounding towns and villages, for all Christians from near and far were invited to join in.

A special feature of the rally was a mammoth parade that would take place, such as the one that astonished the town of Kagoro. Members from all churches and Christian organizations were marching *en masse*.

First came the Boys' Brigade with their smart blue uniforms and highly skilled band. Behind them marched the Girls' Brigade looking delightfully attractive in their white dresses with navy belts and berets. Next came the women of the churches in their brightly-coloured wrappers and even more splendid head scarves. And on their backs came the babies, enjoying the excitement of the occasion just as much as their mothers.

Singing, singing, singing – everyone was singing. Teacher Training and Bible College students, local school children in various shades of paddy green or royal blue, the men and the youths, Nigerians and expatriates, all marching and singing and clapping their hands in praise to the Lord. You could hear them for *miles*.

What an event it was! All the people of the town rushed out of their houses to see what was happening. Who were these people and where did they come from?

Their questions did not go unanswered. In the centre of the parade a special car equipped with a loudspeaker moved slowly along. By means of a microphone one of the leaders spoke to the spectators around telling them that this demonstration was just one phase of the NLFA evangelistic outreach in which all Christians were taking part.

“Soon you will be visited by Christians coming to your homes,” they heard announced. “They will tell you more of what Jesus will do for those who will put their trust in Him. Do not fail to listen and to consider what they say.”

From one section of town to another the human river flowed until they came to the market place. There they formed a huge circle, leaving a prominent place open from which a guest from Headquarters was to speak. In his usual striking manner, Pastor Yakubu Yako brought a stirring message on God's plan of redemption, and many of the great crowd who

had followed along from mere curiosity understood for the first time that Christ is the only way to the Father, the only Giver of eternal life.

The main stop, as with all NLFA parades, was at the chief's palace where Malam Gwamna, Christian Chief of Kagoro, gave a short message to the believers on their responsibility to spread the Good News.

When the marchers had dispersed, no one in the town of Kagoro was left unaware that something had already happened to the Christian community and that even greater things were expected in the days just ahead.

Such parades took place wherever the local NLFA committee had zeal enough to plan one. The rally which followed often threatened to burst out the walls of the church, with people hanging in at the windows and doors, and another hundred or two listening to the proceedings from outside. The beautiful Holy Trinity Church in Kano, for instance, with its seating capacity of 2,000 was well-filled one Sunday afternoon; while in the city of Kaduna, the whole platform of the First Baptist Church could hardly accommodate all the leaders of the denominations that took part.

The order of service in the rallies was simple yet lively. It generally included the NLFA theme song and other congregational hymns sung from a specially prepared song sheet, as well as testimonies from those who had already received new life from the Lord. In one rally the elders had all the new converts of the district sit together at the front of the church – seventy of them that had come to the Lord during the preparation and instruction periods. Other committees had special choir numbers prepared or quartette music from students in nearby colleges.

The main address was usually given by a permanent member of the NLFA staff at Jos. This now included Mr. Wilfred Bellamy, seconded from the Sudan United Mission and who became General Secretary in 1966; Rev. Harold Germaine, loaned by the Sudan Interior Mission and two talented Nigerian speakers, Pastor Philip and Pastor Ezekiel.

It was not unusual for the service to end as it did the day that Pastor Yakubu preached from a text in Matthew 24. When he finished, almost everyone in the church stood to signify his personal surrender to the Lord and rededication to His service in the days of witness ahead.

“It was moving to see that great crowd stirred with such earnest desire to be used of the Lord,” he reported. “And when an invitation to sinners was given, a good number came forward to confess their sins and pledge their loyalty to Christ.”

Many people were converted in other rallies as well. In one place forty-eight repented for their sins, one of them a backslidden woman who had taken to selling beer. Upon receiving the peace of God in her heart, she

promptly sold all her beer pots and drinking vessels, a clear indication that a definite change had taken place in her life.

Some who had refused to appear at the public meetings of the rally were not to escape the convicting voice of the Spirit. In the security of their own homes He found them where they were. As the loudspeakers relayed the message of salvation, it penetrated *zana* mat shelters, leaped over mud-baked walls and took hold of hearts of men hiding within. One young man came privately to the missionary the day the rally was over.

“Oh, I must come back to the Lord!” he confessed. “I could not help but hear the Word that was spoken, and my sins have been crushing me ever since. I have told my two wives that they must go to church with me for I’m coming back to God.”

He had been a backslider for many years, but now was soundly convicted of his wayward life. The Spirit had found him in his hiding place, even though he had tried to escape His voice. The following Sunday he publicly confessed his sins and asked the Christians to pray for his wives. Five months later in another meeting they too were converted and now they are praying together that God will help them sort out their tangled lives.

In another rally an ex-pastor whose sins three years before had made the headlines in a national newspaper fell under powerful conviction even though he would come nowhere near the meetings. An omnipresent God had found other means to show this man his heart.

One night he could not sleep. “Someone” was shaking his pillow and disturbing him.

“I got up and looked around,” he said. “I could see no one, but I was greatly afraid. It seemed absolutely necessary that I should go to the Oganaji church the next morning although I did not know that Mr. Germaine and the NL Team would be present. There I listened to the Word and was mightily convicted. But how could I humble myself and admit that I was the guilty one in the palaver that took place three years before? I could not do it! A great battle began in my heart. For ten days I struggled and rebelled but finally I had to confess my sin.” Later this pastor found the courage to go back to the very churches that he had wronged and make restitution to the people.

Sometimes the parades and rallies were planned in districts where political tension was already gathering, and the NL leaders were somewhat doubtful as to the outcome of a public parade. One night in a Benue town (near the border of Eastern Nigeria) Pastor Yakubu had a premonition from the Lord that something spectacular was going to happen during the parade the next day. He had no idea of what it was – only that it would be unusual.

Would a riot break out among the people? Or did it mean that this “great thing” would be a special blessing from the Lord? He just had to wait and trust.

The next day after his message in the market place, he asked how many of that vast number wanted to give themselves to Christ. He was astounded at the number that responded. He explained again, but still they insisted on raising their hands.

“If you are really sincere, you will follow the Christians to the church and confess your sins to God there,” he told them.

The crowd that set out seemed to swell rather than to grow smaller. The church could hardly hold them all.

“Surely there are Christians among these people who did not understand what I meant,” he said to the pastors.

“No, these are all pagans,” he was told. “They want new life in Christ.”

That day 500 people were counselled in the way of salvation. It seemed that God had been preparing the hearts of many in the Benue district so that whole tribes, such as the Kuteb people, were ready to throw away their idols and put their full trust in Christ. The “great things” that God had promised had come to pass. It did not stop with the parade, however, but continued to grow greater and deeper till the “whole world” of Eastern Benue was awakened to new life. All parades and rallies, it must be confessed, were not the glorious success that others proved to be. With a rattle and a rumble and a roar one village in the north was made conscious that something unusual was taking place in their midst. Louder and louder the noise became until the motley crowd appeared in the distance marching up the road toward the town.

Dogs barked, children shouted, dust flew. A vulture or two flapped heavily out of the way, angrily relinquishing its roadside meal of “departed” goat to the tramping of oncoming feet. Women scrambled out of doorways to look, deftly flinging on a piece of rag for a head scarf as they came. Sheep and hens scurried out of the way so as not to be trampled to death by the thundering throng.

What was this commotion? A welcome party for a celebrity? A football fight? A political riot? They would welcome anything so long as it was exciting.

Above the din and the dust one could barely make out the sound of would-be music and the shape of a cloth banner carried at a precarious angle above the unsuspecting heads of the men in front.

Truly it was marvellous – all the Christians of the area marching together as one. They had come together to show the community that Christians had *something* in common – if only the tune to a familiar hymn. Their

enthusiastic singing of “Onward Christian Soldiers” told you that indeed they were not divided: “all one body we”. The only disunity at the moment seemed to be a slight variation of tempo in the singing so that the group marching behind shouted out their words a few bars behind those in front. The group at the very end had selected their own key as well.

At every village lane the crowd increased noticeably for it was joined at each crossroad by other church groups stationed there. These had been patiently marching on the spot waiting to swing in behind – or in the middle – or any other place where they could be closest to the music. The said music, of course, was the local band borrowed from the community school for the occasion and consisted of one bass drum (beatable on one side only), several bottles struck at intervals to the rhythm of the song and a pair of brass cymbals that had no faith in the value of the pause. How glorious it all was! And how enthusiastic the crowd became! Never in the history of the village had Christians come together in anything like this! How many there were too! Must be a *million* at least! Who would have thought it!

Excitement grows as the marchers swing around and make for the chief’s compound. Little ragamuffins dash up and down beside the marchers yelling and laughing, stopping only to elbow their way into the crowd, merely to get a clout on the head for their pains. “You rascally boy, what are you doing here? Where are your trousers? Off with you or you’ll suffer for it!” The fierce adult-to-child tone is suddenly shut off like an electric power breakdown and the Christian enthusiast returns to his spirited singing:

*Onward then ye people,  
Join our happy throng...*

Everyone is jubilant, elated, inspired. Everyone, that is, except the one church group down the way who finally gives up marching on the spot because some self-appointed organizer in the first section has suddenly got the idea that they should change plans and take a shorter route to the chief’s compound, thus completely forgetting the last contingent of believers still treading where the saints have not yet trod. Which all causes the forgotten brothers to lose a certain degree of their Christian devoutness and go home grieved.

But anyway it has been a parade. And not quite a failure either, for what better way could indifferent villagers be made aware of the great things God is about to do in the visitation period just to begin?

## 7. From Door to Door

“There must be three hundred of these infidel preachers here!” muttered a man on the streets of Kano one day as he bumped into another one giving out tracts.

“Ahap! Three hundred?” cried his friend. “Why, they number at least a *thousand!*”

In reality, it was seventeen volunteers that had moved into Kano City to begin the next step of the NLFA programme; the time for systematic visitation had come. Long before the instruction classes had finished, the committee on evangelism in each area was already hard at work. Maps of the city and surrounding area were either procured or produced; suburb by suburb, section by section, street by street they were studied. Villages, hamlets, Fulani camps and even farm dwellings were to be included. None must be missed; “every creature” was the goal.

Now across the divisions of those maps there appeared new names – names unregistered with a geographical society in Lagos. On one section a large “SOUTHERN BAPTIST” inscription was printed; on another, “ASSEMBLIES OF GOD”; on another, “CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY” etc., as each participating church was made responsible for one portion of the area’s population.

And in individual churches at the same time, groups of eager members were clustered round the desk of a man in his church office, craning their necks over the heads of the ones in front. It was their director of evangelism they were surrounding; while he, looking slightly harassed, was trying to make important decisions as he pored over his section of the map. Which streets would he assign to this deacon and which to that? What district would he give to the women’s group? Which would be best for the youth leader and his company? He was determined that his church’s assignment would be thoroughly carried out. From compound to compound the Christians would go, visiting every house, contacting every family, attempting to reach every individual. Six months seemed hardly enough to finish the work, but with every Christian telling, every creature might be told.

It was not just anyone, however, who was trusted with the responsibility of visitation work. All Christians were expected to witness, but it was only those who had successfully passed the handbook test and were approved by the local committee that could wear the NLFA badge and make use of the programme’s literature.

Courteous, humble, and respectful of other religions, the visitors were not often turned away. This was a surprise and delight to many who at first were rather dubious about their ability to do such a work. Before long they found they enjoyed it greatly.

“We have been busy visiting since the third of October and still no one is tired,” reported Malam Silong. “Some even run from one house to another lest they waste time needlessly along the way. They just do not mind how long the journey might be; all they want is to tell others of Jesus.”

“Men and women, old and young are all very zealous,” wrote another director. “Each one wants to have his own particular work to do and place to visit.”

Perhaps the visitation programme in Kano was typical of many others in the towns and cities of the North. Kano itself is a city of contrasts. Situated on the edge of the desert, its adobe houses with their flat roofs and corner projections are all the same buff-white shade of the Sahara sand. With house flanking house, sometimes with an adjoining wall, any admittance is prohibited except through the low doorway which is generally shut to outsiders. These are the places that must be visited one by one – closed buildings that symbolize the apparent attitude of the people within: the-ways-of-our-forefathers-are-always-the-best. Yet a few blocks away, air-conditioned hotels and modern department stores rise several stories into the air while in the streets below heavily-laden donkeys vie with Mercedes-Benz for right of way. One section of the city is given over to groundnut pyramids and the century-old dye-pit industry, while another edge of the metropolis boasts one of the largest and most modern airports in Africa.

An air of sophistication pervades the atmosphere as white-robed Muslims stride confidently down the streets, their garments billowing in the wind, the clack-clack of their sandals providing music for the way. Occasionally a darkly-veiled Tuareg appears for a short while in the town. Disdainful of city life, counting only the untrammelled expanses of the desert fit habitat for such as he, his business holds him only as long as he feels it necessary.

The same breeze that swirls the robes of the haughty also flutters the rags of the poor. But the tatters belong not necessarily to beggars. Alms-giving, as one of the five pillars of Islam, no doubt began with admirable intent, but because of those who are always ready to take advantage of a situation, it has produced in Nigeria a society of professional supplicants. Some, it is said, are richer than many who work for a living. But these too have souls to save and to them also the message must go.

In preparation for Kano’s visitation programme, a series of inter-church rallies were held. Here the inspiration of the meetings raised great

enthusiasm and dedication for the work ahead. The Visitation Secretary, an able Nigerian optician, had efficiently mapped out the whole city and assigned specific areas of responsibility to all who were taking part.

Everything was in readiness; enthusiasm was high; Christians from other places had come to help and on Monday the programme was to begin. Then came the stupendous news that stunned the world. In a short, sharp army coup, the Northern Premier (also Vice-President of World Islam) and the Prime Minister of the nation were both assassinated on the Saturday. Immediately confusion and uncertainty settled like a cloud on visitation plans. Should they go ahead? Should they avoid all appearance within the walls of this Mecca of West Africa? Should they attempt only the outskirts of Kano in the sections peopled mainly by Christians?

In a few days the situation was back to normal, religious freedom was guaranteed and visitation within the walled city began.

Day after day the NL volunteers walked the streets and the byways, their literature bags over their shoulders, their green and white badges clearly displayed on their shirts.

Although there were those who scorned and belittled the workers, the majority of those contacted gave clear evidence that they wanted to hear. One group of visitors received a hearty welcome in a home and in a few minutes a great crowd of neighbours gathered to hear this new word about life. Attention was excellent until seven men appeared throwing dirt into the air and stones in the speaker’s direction.

“We have our own religion and will listen to no new message,” they shouted. Yet the one hundred or more before them had proved for half an hour that they did want to hear, and *would* listen to a new message.

Others too had open hearts. One of the Christians approached a vendor at a trinket table one day and offered him a tract. The trinket trader looked around him, then whispered eagerly, “This message is what I too believe, but we mustn’t let anyone know. There are others in this section also – we meet secretly to read the Bible and pray.” This was the kind of contact that was listed for later visits and for other types of follow-up.

It is true that a large amount of literature was discarded in Kano, but much of it too was accepted and read. Some people, when offered a leaflet, replied, “I’ve read this one already. May I have a different one please?”

It was heart-warming to go along the streets at night and see NLFA tracts read in the flickering light of kerosene lamps, sometimes aloud to a group gathered round, sometimes in solitude where absence of others allowed the reader to ponder.

At the time that house-to-house visitation was going on, a special effort was being made to reach the factories, offices, shops, hospitals, schools, police barracks and prison yards with the same message. In most places they found that doors were open to them. One factory manager said that preaching wasn't permitted on the grounds, but he would see what he could do.

"At morning break he assembled all his workers in the open place behind the wire fence," said the NL worker. "Each language group went to a separate place and we stood out on the street and preached to them through the fence. It was quite a racket – five speakers all shouting his message at the same time in a different language, but the truth was the same and the results were also the same. Many of those who received the literature came to the meetings later and were converted."

When the Christians began their visitation work in Lagos they found that the task was infinite. One regular Bible Study group of about forty gladly threw in their weight with the programme and took up the study of the handbook. After seven or eight weeks they were eager to begin and divided themselves into pairs to witness. Each group chose one street in the nearby section as their responsibility and pledged themselves to go out two nights a week to visit the people in their homes.

"This will take years!" one of them exclaimed as he reported at Bible Study a few weeks later. "Why, there are 120 homes on our street and in all this time we have got into only five! When someone shows an interest in our message we feel we should go back to encourage him. And so we can't get on with the job. We'll never get through – we'll be doing it all our lives!"

"Exactly," commented the leader of the group. "And isn't that just what the Lord intends us to do?"

The groups discovered that visitation proved so fruitful that when reports were given the following Bible Study nights there was time for only a few.

"Who of you actually led someone to Christ this week?" the leader asked. Of those who responded, one or two were called upon to report. Definite prayer was then offered for all who had been saved.

"How many were asked questions too difficult to answer?" was another consideration. Again from the number who raised their hands a few were given the opportunity to report. The group then discussed passages that could have been used to answer such objections. In this way the visitation programme brought a maturity to Christians who might not otherwise have grown so quickly in the Lord.

Visitation also reached out into outlying districts as Christians became burdened for the pagans around. Some volunteered for this work that many would think unfit for the job. A report from a church of lepers was sent in to the office: "Here in the leprosarium church and Bible Training School, a concentrated drive was planned for the first seven days of this outreach period. The pastor, Bible School teachers, evangelists and elders became the heads of the teams. Eight groups with as many as ten men in each were given specific areas to cover. They were charged with the task of preaching the Word, visiting in homes and giving out Christian literature.

"Of the fifty men who went, only about ten had bicycles. The rest walked carrying gramophones with records in the dialect of the people to whom they were going.

"At the end of the fifth day they planned a rendezvous at a large market place twenty-one miles from here. I went to help them with a loud speaker and thought I might have to bring some of the tired and lame home.

"We found them overjoyed with God's power in their work and only one came home in the car. The rest had unfinished business to do out there among the people.

"On the seventh day they started to return and they came with reports that made the Christians cry with joy. A two-hour service was held Sunday night when all the team leaders gave the reports of their tour. All leaders, that is, except one. He and his group had not yet returned.

"The stories they told of God's power on their preaching sounded just like the Book of Acts. They told of hundreds who had confessed their sins, many of them with tears of repentance.

"They told of Muslim chiefs who received them graciously and fed and lodged them for days at a time. They told of other Muslims that received Christ as their Saviour. They told of prepared hearts among the pagan tribes, especially the Bankalawa where many sincere seekers turned to Christ for salvation. All these had been dealt with as individuals. Any who had not been personally counselled were not allowed to appear on the reports.

"The pastor ended the long meeting with a strong challenge that these new converts be taught.

"'They are just like little plants shooting up,' he said; 'and now they need our tenderest care and watering.'

"On the eighth day the last team returned with the most amazing report of all. In the seven days of their tour they had seen 140 people turn to Christ, bringing the total decisions to 306."

The power in the visitation programme from the very beginning stemmed from the prayer cells. As new contacts were made, their names were taken to the believers who earnestly interceded for them when they met to pray. The Holy Spirit praying through them was also the One going with them. Backed by fervent prayer, the seed of the Word seemed to bear fruit a hundredfold.

“I do not understand it,” reported one Christian. “I simply begin to preach a simple message and men and women burst into tears of sorrow for sin. Before long they begin to confess their faults one to another. This is surely the work of the Spirit of God for it is nothing that I am doing. I am just His tool.”

This power was evident in places where opposition arose because of the work. In one area the Muslim priest became alarmed at the sudden activity of the Christians. He placed an alhaji (a returned Mecca pilgrim) in each district as a counter-action to NLFA. Some were given motorcycles to go around from village to village to follow the preaching pattern of the visiting evangelists. In one place, the alhaji separated all the Christians into one group and wrote down their names. He perhaps thought they would say something in anger so that he might have a charge to bring against them. The Spirit gave them wisdom, however, and not one of them spoke with rudeness or hostility.

A concentrated effort of this sort was made in the town of Muwo in Nupe-land.

“I was called to preach here for a week in connection with NLFA,” the evangelist wrote. “This was the place where thugs had been telling the people that all the Yoruba Christians had already been beheaded and that the Nupes would be next! I had just come from the Yoruba district, so when they saw their lies were exposed, they became very angry and tried to kill me.

“That night many people gathered in the town for the service. The meeting was in progress when two strong men with big sharp stones came slowly forward. All at once one of them threw his stone right at my head with all his might. It missed me but struck the house behind with such force that a piece of the wall came down.

“‘What was that?’ cried the local pastor.

“‘Just a stone,’ I said.

“Immediately he began to shake. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ I said and began to sing a song. Then the other man threw his stone at the pastor but it too missed. By this time the people were ready to run.

“‘Don’t let anyone run away,’ I said. ‘God will protect us.’ Then I stood before them all and prayed for the ones who had thrown the stones, asking the Lord Jesus to save them.

“After my message three people made a decision for Christ. Five others stayed for spiritual help.

“The next day we had another service in town but first we went to the church and prayed. ‘O Lord,’ we prayed, ‘this day we are going forth in Your Name. If we must die for Your sake today, we are willing and ready to do so. We commit ourselves entirely into Your hands.’

“Once again we had the meeting and again they tried to throw stones. Some of the Christians saw them coming, however, and hindered them from doing so.

“Sunday morning most of those who had formerly become Muslims came to the church and the people started to sing. They sang and they sang. When the pastor got up to ask them to stop, they sang even louder. ‘We can’t stop singing,’ they said. ‘God has given us such joy in our hearts!’

“That day many gifts were brought to the church in thanksgiving to God – gifts of grain, yams, chickens, a goat, cloth, a lamp, and other things; also money amounting to £6.0.0.”

Although there was religious opposition such as this in a few places, the government of the country co-operated willingly in every way possible, declaring freedom of religion in all places throughout the land. It stood firm on its adherence to the U.N. Declaration of Religious Freedom, and this was translated into Hausa and given to NLFA volunteers who were going into some areas where it might be thought useful.

Conviction of sin followed the preaching of the Word. Backsliders especially became troubled over their condition and many were brought back into fellowship with the Lord. One team had no sleep during their second night in the town. They had become very conscious of spiritual opposition and therefore gave their supper hours to fasting and prayer.

About midnight they heard someone at their door. “Excuse,” came a voice asking for entrance. The evangelist got up and welcomed the caller.

“I could not sleep,” he told the men. “God has been talking to me about my sin. Twenty years ago I took seven shillings from my friend. He asked me to buy a goat for him. I told him it cost £1 although it really only cost 13/-. It was many years ago but tonight I cannot forget that money.”

“God is able to forgive,” one of the team began.

“Oh, but there is more! I am a laundryman and people give me their clothes to wash. One man brought me a shirt one day which I coveted very much. I washed it but did not give it back. I told the owner it had been lost

but I had really kept it for myself. Now God is reminding me of that shirt and I cannot sleep.”

The next day a woman came to them also greatly troubled in spirit.

“Five years ago I got some medicine from the dispensary,” she said. “I did not pay for it at the time. When the dispenser later questioned me, I strongly declared that I had already paid, even though the money was still lying in my house.

“‘If I have lied about the money, may the medicine not cure me!’ I told him angrily.

“It cured my body all right, but today my heart is sick. What can I do? I want to confess my sin but that dispenser is now the district chief and I am afraid to go to him. Won’t you pray that he will be willing to listen to my story and forgive me?”

Wherever the Word is preached in power, conviction of sin is the natural result; and many sleepless hours were spent by teams as they worked far into the night dealing with troubled hearts whose burden of guilt would not let them rest.

An interesting development of this period was the way that the women suddenly came to life and offered themselves wholeheartedly for the service of Christ. In strong Muslim towns, for instance, it was the women who did the visiting. Men were not allowed to do so because of the religious custom of *pardah* – the seclusion of Muslim women from the eyes of other men. This was the case in the town of Yelwa in Sokoto province. The men, forbidden to enter most of the compounds, had to stay on the streets, so a challenge went out to all the Christian women of other towns to volunteer to spend a week in Yelwa so that people there might hear the message too. A surprising number offered to go; and although few conversions were reported, the courage and zeal of the Christian women made a great impact on the Muslim population of that town. In some places, Muslims and pagans actually brought their wives to the Christian women with a request: “We see how you respect your husbands,” they said, “and we want you to teach our wives to do the same.”

It was not only the married women who were filled with zeal, however; younger girls as well caught the vision of being a personal witness. When NLFA came to Kano, the girls of the Women’s Training College offered themselves as workers. Assigned to a whole section of the city and chaperoned by older women from nearby churches, they worked with a willingness that delighted their elders. Womanhood, emancipated and elevated through the preaching of the gospel, now proved itself to be invaluable to the Church.

From Numan in Adamawa Province came an interesting report. “The work of the women in our area is thrilling,” they said. “We feel that the women, once ignored, are now way ahead of the men. The thing that surprised us most was how they jumped for joy when we said we would preach at a certain village several miles away. No matter how far away the village was, the women would always go with their babies on their backs. Some have reached even into the Cameroon Republic to preach the gospel. Backsliders have been restored and some cold churches have turned back to the right way because of their visits. The joy of witnessing made the miles as nothing.”

And so from house to house, up one street and down another, into crowded compounds, across streams, out to nearby villages they went. No place was too far, no village too small for them to take Jesus to those who were lost. Early Sunday morning before the sun was up, a little group of women would meet at a central home for a time of prayer before starting out on their assignment. On their backs were their babies, or even a two-year old child, and on their heads a calabash with a bottle of boiled water for their child, an extra cloth for the cold, a loaf of bread, a Bible, and a few booklets for distribution. Sitting on top of it all would be a small lantern glowing dimly in the darkness of the pre-dawn.

Off the main road and in through the tall elephant grass still wet with the morning dew they go, one after another in single file, stepping around the red-earth mounds of African termites, splashing through streams, stumbling over furrowed farmland and finally coming upon a cluster of mud huts in the village they are seeking. Just before the refuse pile in front of the town, the women begin to sing, accompanying their words with clapping and the beating of a nail against a bottle half-filled with water.

*Whether you receive Him  
Or whether you don’t receive Him,  
We’re bringing Jesus to your houses-O,  
Whether you receive Him  
Or whether you don’t receive Him.*

From door to door the visitors go, first greeting the people with their many salutations – some for the night’s rest, others for the family’s health and many more for the daily work and household activities.

Then comes the story of new life. In a simple, unpolished message they talk about the wonders of the Lord Jesus, for in Him alone is life – the Life that is the light of men.

“God loves you and has sent us to greet you,” they say.

“He has a gift for you – the gift of Life that can overcome death. It is free to all who will accept it.”

In a dark corner of the room where they are sitting, a wizened old lady suddenly pauses in her cracking of seeds. What is it these people are saying? Medicine against death? Can there really be such a thing? She edges a bit closer. The women go on explaining the way of salvation and urge the people to believe.

“Won’t you confess your need and accept this gift of eternal life ? “they ask.

“My heart is hearing your words,” she whispers, “and they are very sweet. Are you *sure* that I can die without being afraid? Is there truly a cure for death?”

*Good News! little mother, GOOD NEWS! There is medicine against death! There is a way for you to live after your days on earth are past, for you too were included in the love God lavished on the world. He even sent His Son to bring you to glory!*

Little mother cracking seeds in the gloom of the corner, the shells falling from her fingers as the moments from her life. Relentlessly they push her toward the hour that she dreads, when Death the king of terrors will grip her forever. Seed husks and gloom and dark, dark despair!

*Little wizened mother now shining in glory, redeemed and made white in the Blood of the Lamb – heir of all things, beloved Bride of the Son, eternally dwelling in the company of saints! All love and delight and glory! glory! glory!*

Oh beautiful, beautiful are the feet that bring good tidings! And what news can compare with the women’s message this day?

Early as it is, most of the villagers have gone to the farms, and soon all present have been told the story and invited to the big rally that is to take place shortly.

Just beyond the last mud wall of the village, another song is raised:

*O Lord, pick the precious fruit,  
O Lord, pick the precious fruit,  
We have sown in joy;  
O, Lord, pick the precious fruit.*

It is a paraphrase of Psalm 126 which speaks of going forth with weeping, bearing precious seed.

They are half way to the next village before the women stop singing, so great is their joy in their witness for their Lord. Their voices ring out over

the calm morning air and their footsteps keep time to their song. Oh, how beautiful are the feet of them that bring good tidings of peace! Feet that are willing to go forth bearing precious seed; feet that refuse to shun the stubble-filled fields or the hard, rocky paths; feet that tramp mile after mile in the hot morning sun “bringing Jesus to your houses-O”; feet that seek out the obscure tracks where the message of salvation has seldom gone; feet that love Jesus and all whom He loves. Beautiful feet! Beautiful brown, going feet! Doubtless they shall come again with rejoicing bringing their sheaves with them.

And sheaves there will be too from the visits of the women, for since the programme began, hundreds have been won to the Lord because of their witness. In one area alone where fifteen women went out each Sunday for many months, at least twenty-two old women, twenty-three of the men and 104 young people have turned to Christ as Saviour.

And what shall the rest of us say when we give our account before God? Shall we be empty-handed when we “stand before the everlasting throne?”

All of us have a desire to present some trophies to the Saviour, but it isn’t done through ease or avoiding discomfort. There is a condition to be met: the *bringing of many sheaves* must be preceded by *going feet*.

## 8. By Any Means To Save Some

“Here is your salt,” said the market woman to the young man as she handed him a three-penny bit of the commodity wrapped in a piece of torn paper.

When he got it home, the paper proved to be of more value than the salt, for it was a portion of the Gospel of John. At first he read it out of curiosity, but soon he found himself strangely moved by its words and read it again and again. When a born-again Christian contacted him later, he was easily led to the Lord.

A few simple aids to evangelism, of which literature was the most important, were provided for those who were approved as workers. From the very beginning, a committee was set up to prepare tracts, booklets, posters, Scripture portions and literacy cards as well as a monthly newspaper which was highly effective in promoting interest in the programme.

“It has been our desire that all should hear the gospel not by word of mouth only but also through the printed page,” said the literature secretary of NLFA. “More than a million pieces of literature were printed in

preparation for initial retreats. Booklets and tracts have been designed for people of widely differing background. There are booklets for the educated and wordless tracts for the illiterate; we have attractive literature for Muslims and simple pamphlets for the school children. Scripture portions and tracts have been printed in Hausa, Arabic, Yoruba, Ibo, Nupe, Igala and English as well as in other languages of the country. Even the blind have been reached with the printed message of spiritual life in Christ.”

Although at times Scripture portions did a work on their own as in the case of the market salt, NL workers were taught not to give out literature unless they had carefully explained it first.

In one village an old man had heard the message through his brother’s son but had never showed any interest. One day he was given the picture tract with its few words of explanation on each page. Carefully the meaning of each section was taught:

- 1) God gave life to men in Adam
- 2) but man rejected that life.
- 3) God provided new life in Christ Jesus
- 4) but it must be accepted through faith and
- 5) become evident in one’s future behaviour.

That day the Spirit spoke to his heart as he looked at the simple pictures on the paper. Over and over again he repeated its message to himself until the truth began to grip his soul. Two weeks later the old father came to the evangelist. Could he have another book? His own was worn out. Pulling it from the pocket of his gown he presented it for inspection. And a sorry, bedraggled bit of paper it was. He had looked at it so many times and had had the children read it to him so often that it was no longer usable. By this time he had come to understand its message and had asked Jesus to come into his life and save him from the terrors of eternal death.

Success in the literature phase of the work was made possible by the many Christian literature agencies in other countries who took a keen interest in the NLFA programme. Scripture Gift Mission of London sent £1,000 worth of literature for the ’67 programme alone; the World Home Bible League sent 100,000 copies of the Gospel of John while Moody Literature Mission of America donated the money to print 10,000 copies of the tract especially prepared for Muslims. This was “Darkness and Light”, printed in Ajemi, the Arabic script of the Hausa language.

It was this particular tract that brought conviction to the heart of a Muslim malam. Meeting him in the market one day, an ordinary church member courageously decided to tell him too the message he had been sharing with others. To one who had been teaching the Koran for many years such a

story did not sound at all likely. He was willing to accept the little green and white tract, however, no doubt because it was in the Arabic script.

As he pored over its message day after day comparing its statements with those in the Koran, the light of its truth slowly dawned upon him. Written especially for this type of Muslim by an instructor in Islamic studies, the word gripped his thinking in a way he would never have thought possible.

“I slowly came to the awful conclusion that this was the truth, and that I had been teaching error all my life,” he later testified.

But what was he to do? To become a Christian would be like flinging himself into a roaring furnace in order to find life. How could he do such a thing? It demanded of him the thing he was most unable to do. What was it to be – change his beliefs and behaviour and suffer social (and perhaps physical) death, or keep on as he had and endure eternal death?

With the help of the Christians who visited and encouraged him, he put his faith in Christ and faced the blast of religious contempt that rose all around him. Such decisions do not come easily. Jesus said, “I have not come to bring peace but a sword. A man’s foes shall be those of his own household.” Sometimes the agony of making such a decision is soon replaced by the greater anguish of trying to keep true to it. Ostracized by his friends, cut off from the only life he had ever known, forced now to support himself by manual labour after never having worked with his hands, this “new life” was difficult indeed. Struggling, wavering, conquering, stumbling – could he ever have known the great upheaval that “a small piece of paper” could bring into the life of a man? And if he had known, would he have accepted that green and white tract from the hand of the Christian that day?

Not all literature was appreciated, of course. Some who had at first accepted the tracts immediately threw them away in fear or contempt. Others, however, picked them up and were soundly converted “second hand” as was a young Jarawa tribesman now a firm Christian in a church near Jos.

An old witch doctor in another heathen compound could hardly have seemed more disinterested. Did he not have all the religion he needed? Weren’t his secret potions and divining stones enough for him?

“As we witnessed to him,” the worker reported, “he gradually showed more and more interest. We used the tract ‘Miracle of the New Life’. The old man couldn’t read, but I showed him the picture of the butterfly coming out in its new life from what looked like a dead body. Slowly his interest turned to wistfulness and his wistfulness to real hunger. It was a miracle to

me to see God bringing that old man out of the darkness of heathenism into a new life in Christ.”

But was it true conversion in the old man? Would his life show a change?

In the next few days the people of the village began to realize that something had indeed made him different. He refused to do the old rites that he had practised for so many years. Alarmed, they began to ask him, “Who will make our sacrifices for us now? Whatever will we do?”

“You can find someone else to do it if you wish,” he replied. “I am a Christian now and can’t do that sort of work any more.”

One day he set off to visit his son. Painfully he inched his way ahead, stick in hand, struggling along the road. His son was appalled at his change of heart.

“Father, you must come back to the old way,” he said. “If you do not, where shall we meet in the future?”

“We shall go in different directions,” he replied. “I shall go to God and you will be with the devil and we shall never meet again. Why don’t you too repent and come with me?”

After a few weeks he asked the evangelist, “Do you think I could be baptized? I am an old man and can’t learn much but I want God to know that I am His with all my heart.”

Since he could not walk as far as to the church to be examined, the elders came to his house and questioned him there concerning the faith.

“I don’t know much,” he replied, “but what I do know is that all I am and all I have belong to Jesus Christ.”

There was no need for further inquiry. He was received with joy into the fellowship of the church and not long afterward was baptized.

Here was an old father, looked up to all his life as a performer of miracles, but when the message of salvation was vividly presented and understood, the miracle of miracles took place. In a moment he was transformed from a servant of Satan into a son of the Living God, accepted in the Beloved.

Tracts, pamphlets, booklets – all kinds of literature which have been handed out and explained over the years are still preaching their message today. Welcomed where no pastor could go, still waiting after the team member has gone, the printed page patiently and persistently urges the Truth on the minds of men and women. In the open place before the compound with a little group gathered round the reader, or in the secret corner of an unsympathetic home, the words of life are still reaching, discomfiting, convicting the hearts of those who have a mind to listen.

In modern Nigeria the radio is a status symbol esteemed almost as highly as a heavy tome on the sitting room shelf. A familiar sight in even the smallest village is that of a young farmer swinging along the path on his way home in the evening, his hoe balanced on his head and a transistor radio blaring in his hand. The wide, wide world is only a push-button away from the average Nigerian home these days. No training in “book”, no tedious hours in the classroom are needed to understand the news and ideas of the outside world as they come over the wireless. Broadcasts in numerous languages now adequately bridge the gap.

It was because of this fact that NLFA quickly grasped the opportunity to bring Christ to both the educated and illiterate who might go untouched in other ways. Directed by Mrs. Nita Bellamy, programmes are aired weekly from ELWA, Liberia, from Radio Voice of the Gospel in Ethiopia, and on two radio and TV stations in Nigeria.

“NLFA produces the best Christian programmes we have,” stated one NBC official. “Send us all the tapes you can. We are ready to give you even more time if you think you can take it.”

And so the rush for programmes began. After his duties were over for the day, a teacher in a boys’ secondary school in a far-away town gave himself to prayer and the preparation of a NLFA message to be dispatched each week to the NL office in Jos. In another city of the North, a Provincial Forestry Officer spent all his spare time preparing handbook lessons to be broadcast week after week to the many who tuned in. And in the studio, hours more were spent in translating the message, in practising informal dramatizations of actual experiences, in recording Nigerian singing and getting a good tape of the main feature, the message. To see Malam Dalhatu, a converted Muslim, before the microphone reading from a script yet pleading so earnestly with the compassion of Christ, one could not help but think of the Apostle Paul’s confession, “I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” Ostracized by his people yet consumed by a deep longing for their salvation, he would plead with them time after time to accept the gracious gift that God was offering in Christ Jesus.

And out on the distant hills in some far-away spot, a family is just finishing its evening meal of rice and soup. Now is the time for friends to sit around and visit. Neighbours stop by to talk about the events of the day or just to relax in the cool breeze of the evening. This is the time that Christians like Malam Waziri introduce their pagan friends to the love of the Lord Jesus. Inviting them into his low-ceilinged room, Malam Waziri chats with them warmly until the hands of his table clock point to the hour he awaits. Turning up the volume, he invites his friends to listen to an

interesting programme on his radio. The sound of the NLFA theme song, heard in even the remotest house, brings many on the run to join in. They sit on wooden chairs, on benches, on three-inch stools or on mats on the floor – anywhere they can find space. Latecomers squeeze in also and sit on the sharp edge of nothing, presumably the end of a bench. All listen attentively, clicking their tongues over some well-made point or showing their appreciation of the songs by joining in.

And in another town, a white-robed alhaji reclines on a mat in the moonlight, surreptitiously listening to Malam Dalhatu's pleading voice and wondering if there could be any truth to what he says. One of his wives, confined to a life of *purdah*, also hears the sweetness of the message that floats behind her *zana* mat wall and gladly gives her heart to Christ.

A backslidden teacher in another part of the country also listens to his words and writes of his restoration in grace. High government officials and ordinary school boys, business men and interested Muslims, office workers and lorry drivers all write in asking for counselling, or telling of their experience of salvation through listening to the message on the radio. The broadcasts are proving again and again their effectiveness in reaching men of all types and bringing them to Christ.

A more unpretentious tool of evangelism used in NLFA was that of the ordinary gramophone. Hundreds of Gospel Recording phonettes – a simple continuous-wind device that could hardly go wrong – arrived in time for the outreach phase of the work. Thousands of records in scores of different languages also arrived and were soon worn out through much playing. Little boys and even adults were content to sit all day and wind the little handle in order to keep the voice on the record talking.

"It must be true," murmured one old lady. "He says the same thing every time."

A Fulani herdsman listened and was greatly impressed. "It is better than the radio," was his remark. When he offered money to the one who had brought it, the man refused.

"Oh, but it's not for you," the Fulani remonstrated. "It is for the man in the box."

One of the groups of listeners that this type of ministry made the greatest impact upon was the old people. For many years Christians had resigned themselves to the fact that it was impossible for people to repent in old age. "Don't worry yourself about them," some would say. "They are too used to their pagan ways to change."

And the old ones themselves would often tell us, "I have no ears to hear. Here is my grandson – teach him."

Yet it was for the old people too that the Saviour came, and when a visitor with a gramophone arrived, many an old man would pause in his basket weaving or calabash carving and listen intently to the words of the speaker. Here was someone who could speak his language! Here was something that went *into* his ears! So this was what these Christians had been trying to say! He had never understood before.

Day and night the message he had memorized from its many repetitions would speak to his heart and compel him to consider the truths it proclaimed. When the visitor came round again, many of the "impossible ones" were prepared to give up their old life in order to follow Christ. It was one of these little phonettes that was used in a singular way to bring glory to God.

While studying the handbook on personal witnessing, one Christian became deeply burdened for two members of his family. One was his old mother who was steeped in her pagan beliefs and the other his deaf and dumb brother who had always joined the mother in her rituals. "All must hear" the instructor had said. But how could one witness to a deaf-mute? The brother began to pray earnestly for their salvation and brought their names before the prayer group each day.

One day a Christian friend came to visit him whom he hadn't seen for years. In the course of conversation, the Christian mentioned his burden and asked for advice.

"I once learned to communicate with deaf people, having lived with someone like that," his friend replied. "Let me try to talk to him." So it was arranged that he should stay for awhile in the compound to see what could be done. Day after day they witnessed to the deaf man, using sign language and visual aids.

"We raised our hands in the salute given to a great chief," the brother reported, "and pointed to the sky. My brother concluded that we meant that God was the great chief of all. We took him to the prayer centre. When he saw us bow our heads and close our eyes he began to do the same. He had seen that our lips kept on talking, so he knew that we were talking to someone we couldn't see.

"The day came when we felt he understood clearly enough the meaning of sin and righteousness. It was time for him to make a decision. We went to see him after much prayer. When we had gone over the points again, my friend took from his pocket a white piece of cloth and a filthy rag. Using signs, he explained that they represented the condition of a man's heart. Which would my brother choose? "Immediately he chose the white one. There was no question about it – that was the one he wanted. We tried to make him accept the filthy rag, but he utterly refused it. He was going to

follow the clean way, the way of God. That day it seemed that new life came into him and he became very happy.

“Now when he came to prayers with us, he was always the first to arrive. His greatest delight was to ring the bell, for though he couldn’t hear it, he knew that it would bring the people out to pray.

“A great change came into his life. He refused to sacrifice with our old mother any longer. ‘Who will I get to do my *tsafi* with me now?’ she wailed, but my brother was adamant. He had decided to follow Jesus. There was no turning back.

“Now came the time when visitation outreach was to begin. He saw all the other Christians going out with their Bibles and literature bags to witness and his own joy seemed to leave him. Not only had we preached that all should be saved, we had also said that all saved should preach. But here was a problem. He wanted very much to join in, but how could a deaf-mute communicate with others?

“It had pleased the Lord to send to our district the Gospel Recordings team some time before and records had been made in the language of my people.

“Someone suggested that my brother be given a gramophone and be allowed to witness in that way. We thought it a good idea. So a certain section of the town was made his special responsibility and every day he took his phonette and record and sat under a tree to preach to his people.

“At first many of the passers-by laughed. What was this *half man* doing here? But as time went on, some of those who listened began to realize that what the box was saying was undoubtedly the truth. As a result, they too put their trust in the Lord Jesus and became the children of God.”

Strange indeed are the ways of God. But if He can take a deaf-mute and use him to bring the message to others, how much more could He use those whose body is unimpaired if their lips, hands, feet – and pride – were wholly dedicated to Him?

It is not one’s ability but his availability that counts with God.

It was this availability that made a young man named Bitrus an unusual instrument in God’s hand.

Evangelist Yohanna had worked and prayed and preached for years to win the people of Chandeng to God. Yet one part of the village remained unmoved. No one was interested in the message. He continued to pray and visit and had others pray, but there still was no response. When NL came to the area he said, “Now we shall see what God will do for the hard section of Chandeng.”

In this village there lived a young man who had never been able to walk. In spite of his physical handicap, Bitrus was mentally alert and became a happy Christian with a bright testimony for Jesus. One day temptation overcame him and he stole something that belonged to someone else. Everyone was shocked, for he had been such a fine witness for the Lord. Overcome with shame and remorse, he acknowledged his sin and sought forgiveness. The local Christians received him into fellowship again but this was not enough for Bitrus.

“I must go and confess to the pastor and elders as well,” he said.

His friends tried to stop him. It was fourteen miles to where the pastor of the area lived and there was no motor road. No one had time nor energy to carry him so far at the moment.

“Just be patient and the pastor will come here and then you can tell him,” they urged.

But Bitrus could not rest. He must make it right with the church.

One day before dawn, the cripple set off on the long journey to Tofa to see the pastor. Crawling on his hands and knees he inched his way along the rough, rock-strewn path.

Who could believe that a partly paralysed man could travel seven miles in such a way? But by the time he reached the half-way mark, his strength had given out. With hands and knees blistered and burning, he could go no further. He sat under a tree, feeling very miserable and foolish and full of pain. Oh, what could he do now?

But God who sees the heart always sends help to His penitent children. It wasn’t long before a young man came swinging along the path on his way to Tofa. It was Dan Ladi, one of the indifferent ones from the village of Chandeng.

He stopped in amazement when he saw Bitrus by the tree. Noticing his bleeding hands and knees, he asked what had happened. He was even more astonished to hear the reason this cripple had crawled so far and suffered so much.

“You did this just to confess?” he asked.

Who in all the world of wisdom had ever heard of such a thing?

“Please have mercy on me and take me to Tofa,” Bitrus begged.

Dan Ladi stood and considered. He didn’t know Bitrus at all, but he did surmise that he was too poor to pay for his services. That was obvious. And there were seven more miles, mostly up-hill, and the cripple would be no light weight to carry. It would be easy to refuse, but somehow he found that he couldn’t say no.

Bending down, he helped Bitrus to crawl on his back and the two started off.

It was midday before they reached the pastor's house, both of them tired and exhausted. Quickly the pastor's wife brought out a big bowl of *kunu* and a calabash of water.

After this refreshing drink they explained what had happened. The pastor had never met Dan Ladi before, but he expressed his admiration for his kindness.

"You may not be a Christian yet," he said, "but God will surely bless you abundantly for your kind deed to His child this day."

Bitrus stayed for a few days with the Christians and after a full confession of his wrong-doing, he became the bright happy Christian he had formerly been.

But Dan Ladi went off to think. What would make a cripple crawl so far just to confess his sin? Would *he* ever do such a thing? Could his mouth ever be pried open to admit even the slightest fault? Never! Not all the horses of the Emir's retinue could drag it out of him. What power was it then that could give a disabled man like this the strength to do the thing that he himself could never do? This was a puzzle indeed.

When the visitation period of NLFA began, the Christians once again concentrated their witness on that part of Chandeng. Dan Ladi listened carefully and soon began to attend church. After a while he brought others with him, and during the week of evangelism the following January, Dan Ladi repented and gave his life to Christ. He accepted the Saviour as the One who could give him the same power that he saw demonstrated in Bitrus that day on the trail to Tofa.

In our wildest imaginations, could we ever devise a solution that even begins to approach the methods God uses to answer our prayers? Dan Ladi's people seemed hopeless, but does not God prove again and again that He has a *thousand* ways to perform the thing for which we think there is none! Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! No life is too poor, no talent too trivial to be used of Him. He purposely takes the broken things of this world and the things which are despised to prove to our sophisticated age that the weakness of God is stronger than men and His supposed foolishness is infinitely wiser than the combined ingenuity and clever scheming of modern mind. His only limitation is an unwilling heart, an unsubmitive will.

Things like literature, radio, gramophones and records are all vital tools in reaching men for Christ, but more important still is the humble obedient Christian who is sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and usable in the Lord's hand to bring conviction to others.

## 9. Children Of The City

The large bustling cities of tropical Africa are filled with lonely people. Day after day streams of fortune seekers pour into the main centres, fascinated by the lure of city life – the supposed Utopia of all existence. Harsh, friendless months pass by and the vision fades, yet the hypnotic effect of the hustle and noise still holds them enslaved.

To some, the memory of quiet village life of earlier years brings back deep waves of nostalgia – the drawing of water at the village stream or from the communal well nearby; the huge roundness of the guinea-corn granaries that held the season's supply of food; the brilliant array of red-pepper berries spread out on a grass mat by the door; the calabash vine climbing up over the roof and the smell of cassava chunks in the sun; the sound of rain dripping through the grass thatch and the dim cosiness of a mother's fire when all doors were shut on a harmattan day.

But such scenes are only memories now; they have come to the city to get rich. Their children, growing up around them, knowing nothing of the simple delights of the village. *Their* fun consists of dodging taxis on the street or peeping through the windows of neighbouring bars. Instead of the leisurely round of greetings one used to make through the village each morning, one now dashes off to work to the blast of honking horns and the incessant clamour of city life. Neighbours? Oh yes, one has neighbours – thousands of neighbours, in fact, but few of them are really friends. No time, no time! It's hurry, hurry, hurry. If not to work in the morning, it's hurry to the hotel at night. Crowds of people pushing, jostling, rushing. Thousands of people everywhere, yet one is always alone. This is the bleak legacy bestowed on the children of the city.

And because no one cares, young people by the hundreds are lured into sin. The bright lights and loud laughter of the night seem to offer them a friend. Let us drink and forget. There's lots of money and plenty of time. Why think of tomorrow – or of the tomorrows after that? Why think of the anxious mother who sits by her village fire still looking for a letter and any help it might bring?

Yes, city life can be lonely indeed.

For this reason a special programme was planned by NLFA leaders to reach the unconverted in the large centres of our land. Jos, Kaduna, Kano,

Lagos – any provincial capital or city of 5,000 or more came in for the extra programme of city campaigns.

As early as the previous June campaign committees began to work. There was the place of meeting to decide upon and the stadium or racecourse to reserve. There were speakers and singers to engage and counsellors to train. Seating and lighting arrangements as well as those for the loud-speaker equipment must be made. Song sheets, counselling cards, special tracts and follow-up materials would have to be printed. Everything must move smoothly and with a minimum of confusion. Towering over all was the matter of finances – how could the Christians of each centre find the money to pay expenses when they had just been keeping their heads above water in their own denominational commitments? A great deal of faith was certainly needed.

Another hurdle that committees had to face was the opposition that might arise in many towns from unsympathetic groups. In one place in Kabba province, the townspeople gave the committee a serious warning.

“If you try to hold your religious meetings here we will stone you,” they said.

At first the Christians were afraid and plans were dropped for a while; but, strengthened by prayer and the encouragement of staff members from Jos, they overcame their fear and decided to see the chief himself. To their surprise he readily agreed. “You may have the large open space right near my palace,” he told them, “and I and my councillors will attend the main service.”

In the Ibaji area a similar thing happened. A member of the Jehovah’s Witness sect threatened to spoil the gatherings by playing his radio as loudly as he could. Fervent prayer made him change his mind, however, and he turned it off completely. In the same place drummers and dancers who had intended to disturb the meetings felt compelled to pass by without any noise.

In Wukari, some of the unbelievers began to grow jealous of the sudden growth of the church in recent weeks and showed their disapproval by shouting “SABON RAI!” (New Life) whenever the Christians went by. Far from hindering the work, however, this nickname (like the one given some centuries ago in the city of Antioch) actually helped the cause. It provided opportunities to witness to those who became curious as to what this new life meant.

Another surprise came in a large Muslim town in the North. The Emir there had formerly been bitterly opposed to the message of the gospel and had not allowed evangelistic work to be done among his people. But

because of the prayers of God’s people and the change in political conditions, he showed an entirely different attitude when NLFA workers asked to hold a campaign in the town.

“Why yes, there are two places you may have,” he answered. “One is a big playground at one end of the town and the second is another large place at the other. You may have either – or both.”

This “other large place” proved to be the huge open square where the Big Sallah (the main Islamic festival of the year) was always held. It was to take place the following week. This was just the place!

Loud speakers were set up and the string of electric lights was unrolled. But where could they plug in for electricity? A local electrician – also a Muslim – was eager to help.

“I know just the place!” he said. But this ideal place he had in mind turned out to be the local mosque, and the NLFA team could not work up quite so much enthusiasm over the idea. What if an irate priest decided to pull out the plug in the middle of the message? It might be disastrous. No, they must not use the mosque. A shopkeeper then obliged the group by offering the outlet on the side of his building, and for the first time that can be remembered a Christian campaign was held in that town of 50,000.

Although expected opposition did not arise in many centres, the crisis in the country did seriously affect many campaigns in the North. On the eve of the Maiduguri campaign a last minute radio message was sent to the Jos office: “... present circumstances make cancellation inevitable.”

The city of Kano also experienced a similar setback. Having been able to book the large Football Stadium near the gates of the inner city, the Christians were rejoicing in the unparalleled opportunity of preaching the gospel in this formerly forbidden area. Large posters were put up all over town in strategic places: “MASS MEETING NIGHTLY IN FOOTBALL STADIUM”. Just as the campaign was about to begin, word came that this would not be possible. The smaller Township Stadium was made available, however, and the meetings went ahead unhindered.

A town on the boundary of Eastern Nigeria had been the scene of disturbances for three months with nocturnal raids back and forth. When the city campaign began, army and police patrols were still marching up and down making it difficult for many to attend. Nevertheless, by the end of the meetings, 398 people had come forward for counselling, over 350 of them never having made any profession of faith before. Why was this danger area so fruitful? It was because a great seriousness had come upon the people. No one knew what a day would bring forth. Many of their acquaintances that they saw today were dead by nightfall. What was one’s life? It was but

a wisp of smoke that hovered for a moment above the evening fire and then was gone. The question of one's eternal destiny took priority in the thoughts of all at that time.

In multiracial centres like Jos, the general campaign was preceded by a week of evangelistic meetings in special languages. In Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo and English the message was preached – associate evangelists pleading with their own people as they gathered night after night in the church assigned to their group. People in high government positions, including expatriates, were visited in their homes and invited to private showings of Moody Science films on three successive Saturday nights.

During these services a great number of nominal Christians found spiritual life while backsliders and faint-hearted believers were brought back into a vital relationship with Christ.

As the time neared for the meetings in the stadium, interest and anticipation increased accordingly. Posters, handbills, spot ads in newspapers and radio announcements informed the whole city that an unusual event would take place in the near future. The Jos committee had secured the services of Negro Evangelist Howard O. Jones for the week and few in the city were unaware of his coming. On the first night of the meeting two thousand people streamed onto the racecourse and sat on the ground during the service. The number increased as the campaign progressed until on the closing Sunday night 8,000 were present including the Chief of Jos, a fine Christian leader. He sat on the platform with the evangelist and led that large audience in prayer.

Counsellors in different language groups were overwhelmed with the responsibility of guiding into a saving knowledge of Christ the many seekers who crowded round them. In the two weeks of these meetings over 1,900 names had been registered on counsellors' cards and then passed on to the next committee for follow-up. It was not unusual to see a Senior Government official among those who were waiting, while in the same group there might be young Secondary School boys, the mother of several children or an old man who had followed the fetish all his life.

One such old man caused quite a sensation near the gates of the Jos stadium. Many of the people streaming homeward stopped in amazement at seeing a fire blazing right on the street while an old man steadily fed the flames.

“Baba, what are you doing?” someone asked in alarm.

“I have just come from the counsellor who helped me find Jesus as my Saviour, and now I am burning my charms,” he replied. “Why should I keep them any more? Tonight I am free of the fear of evil spirits which

have held me all my life and I don't need these jujus to protect me any more. My whole trust is now in my Saviour.” And so into the fire went all of his charms – one of which alone had cost him £6.0.0.

Not all converts at city campaigns found it easy, however. One young Fulani man eagerly drank in the words of his counsellor and prayed from the depths of his heart the prayer the worker had suggested. Before he was finished, four of his friends came rushing up and forcefully dragged him away.

“You can do with me what you will,” he was heard to say as they left, “but you can never make me deny Christ as my Saviour. From now on I belong to Him.”

The chief clerk of the famous Niger Dam project was converted one night in the Kainji campaign. When his new convictions began to make a difference in his business practices, opposition immediately arose.

“You're fired!” shouted his superior after a disagreement about payments.

What should he do now? Where would he find work? Did this new Lord whom he served help His children in such plights? Or did He forget them when difficulties arose?

No, the Lord Jesus does not forget. A week later the manager sent for his clerk. “You must come back to your old job,” he told him. “We find that we need you. Things are falling apart.”

The time of his testing only served to strengthen his faith.

One of the evidences of the working of the Spirit in these campaigns was the conviction of sin that settled upon many as they listened to the preaching of the Word. In spite of the last-minute change of stadium in the Kano meetings, an average of 2,000 people gathered each night for the service. No speaker can delight an African audience as can a fellow African, and as the Nigerian evangelist drove home deep Bible truths with vivid, daily life illustrations, his people sat fascinated and challenged before him.

After a simple invitation was given, the sight of one to two hundred people coming forward for spiritual help each night was awesome. From every section of the grandstand they came, quietly yet determinedly making their way to the platform where well-trained counsellors waited to talk to them personally after the meeting was dismissed. One woman who came for prayer said she had grown cold in her Christian life as the result of a problem in her home. The following night she sought out her counsellor, threw her arms around her and exclaimed, “Oh, thank you so much for your help! Last night was the first time I've had a good night's sleep for months! Oh, what peace Jesus has given me!”

Another night, just as the speaker began his message, the lights of the stadium suddenly went out and the place was plunged into darkness. Ordinarily this would have been the signal for panic, people jumping up to get away, stumbling over seats, falling down the steps and losing track of their shrieking children. Momentarily the hearts of the leaders froze in dismay.

But instead of panicking, not a soul in the place moved, except five or six car owners who dashed off to the parking lot, jumped into their cars and brought them round to train the lights on strategic spots. Others quickly readjusted the wires of the loud speakers to car batteries and the service went on with hardly the loss of a syllable. The response to the invitation that night was as usual but the scene took on a novel look as counsellors crouched beside headlights recording decisions in every corner of the field.

During that campaign in Kano 1,000 people were counselled, two thirds of their cards indicating that they were first time decisions.

Although the throngs within the stadium or racecourse could be fairly well estimated in any campaign, the number of people who heard the gospel over the loud speakers was no doubt several times greater. In one strong Muslim town a delegation of malams came secretly to Blind Evangelist Sule Garko after the meetings were over.

“We want to hear this again from you,” they said. “Can you come back and explain your words to us personally another time?”

These men had not dared to show themselves in the crowd, of course, but they had been listening behind their *zana* mat walls, attracted first, perhaps, by the novelty of a blind evangelist who could read.

A policewoman who had been sent to keep order in the crowd was sceptical of this fact at first. She came right up beside the evangelist to watch. Seeing that his sensitive fingers were feeling out the small raised dots on the pages before him while his sightless eyes looked out over the audience, she was convinced of his skill and no doubt had spread the word through the town.

In another area in the Igala division, the local Muslim leader went to visit the missionary after the campaign.

“I have heard all the words you people have been saying,” he told him, “and I have never heard a message like this before. I heard it in the Hausa language and again as it was interpreted into our own. But how can I accept this new teaching? My mind tells me it is the truth, and in my heart I greatly desire to accept it, but how can I give up the religion of my fathers?”

The seed of conviction sometimes falls on apparently rocky soil. Nevertheless, when the 50,000 booklets and tracts were given out in this area, many of these Muslim malams gladly accepted those in Arabic script

and the Spirit who does not fail nor become discouraged is still speaking to the hearts of many of them today.

Perhaps the most impressive city campaign that took place in Nigeria was that which was held at Kaduna, the capital of the then Northern Region. For a whole week while the meetings were on there seemed to be just one-way traffic each evening as people from every section streamed toward the old Football Stadium to hear Evangelist Howard O. Jones. Among those hurrying for the best seats on the grounds were pagans, Roman Catholics and Muslims, those who counted themselves “born Christians” as well as atheists and agnostics who would never have attended a regular service in a church.

But whatever their former convictions had been, the Spirit of God was now engraving new ones on the hearts of many as they listened to the message. By the side of the speaker stood Malam Dalhatu, a converted Muslim, who interpreted with eloquent earnestness the burning words of the evangelist.

Again when the invitation was given, hundreds came forward each night to be counselled. Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, English, Ibibio, Tiv – an unknown number of languages were represented, but the Lord who understands them all heard their prayers of confession and gave all sincere seekers peace.

As the last Sunday evening drew nearer, the hearts of the NLFA leaders beat faster. During the weeks of planning, their faith had reached out to ask for Ahmadu Bello Stadium, the largest in the country. Built in Olympic style, its sheer massiveness was enough to cause heart flips of doubt as the day drew nearer. What if only a handful of people came? What if the long trek to the outskirts of the city discouraged even those who had attended the week-night meetings? What if finances did not come in to pay for its rental? It wasn't just the heat of the day that caused the perspiration on the faces of the leaders!

Sunday afternoon arrived, and for the NLFA committee, each breath by now was a prayer. There was to be a parade, but would it *look* like a parade or merely like an extra large crowd of the usual Sunday strollers?

As it turned out, there was nothing to fear. Mammy wagons jammed with people, Volkswagen buses, Mercedes Benz, Fiats, motor bikes, bicycles, pedestrians – even donkeys – all seemed to be travelling in the same direction. Past the Sardauna's great palace and the impressive white mosque, past the long adobe mud walls of the Emirs' residences, out from the direction of Lugard Hall and other parliament buildings the traffic emerged. All seemed to be heading toward the heart of the city and the great stadium in the south.

Into this hustling crowd stepped 10,000 more people. These were the Christians of the city, each group having met at its own church and waiting till the procession arrived. Then they too joined in and marched six abreast, singing lustily as they went. As the crowd swelled, traffic was stopped by the police to let the parade go by.

One car, however, drove up alongside. It was the evangelist and his team. When he saw the endless line of marchers and felt the enthusiasm that possessed them, he couldn't help but jump out and march with the rest too.

Ten thousand Christians marching to the stadium! At least it wouldn't be completely empty. But the leaders had not banked on the ingenuity of Kadunians. Hundreds of town people were shrewd enough to see that if they went with the parade they would have to take any seat that was left, and the pickings might then be rather slim. They therefore dashed ahead and claimed first choice. By the time the perspiring Christians arrived at their destination they discovered that several thousand had out-run them; the grandstand was full already with people even sitting in the aisles! This was not what they had bargained for, but they quickly found seats in the open sections and at 5:15 the service began.

During the singing, all those who had found new life in Christ in the meetings were asked to stand to their feet. It seemed as if whole sections stood up, the number was so great.

That night 600 more responded to the invitation, and workers were busy for two hours counselling and praying with seekers.

After the service the Minister of Information who was there with many other important personalities informed the Team that the 16,000 in attendance that night was the largest crowd the Ahmadu Bello Stadium had ever held and certainly it was the most unusual programme this capital city of the North had ever witnessed.

Other evidences of God's rich resources were seen throughout the campaign. Some at first had thought it highly improbable that the authorities would allow their finest sports building to be used for Christian services. But when in faith the committee went ahead, they discovered that the Lord delights in things thought improbable. Upon receiving the application to use the famous stadium, the men in charge were not only willing to rent it, they also gave it to NLFA for half price because they "proposed to use it for religious purposes."

Others had exclaimed "Impossible!" when the chairman had announced that the churches of the city would have to raise £300 to cover the cost of the campaign. Where could so much money be found in a non-Christian city like Kaduna?

Night after night the offerings came in, but time was running out and they still had a long way to go. When the hour for the last meeting had come, they were still far short and it seemed inevitable that they would have to close with a debt.

The posters and parade had done their work, however, and the stadium was crowded for the service. The singing was encouraging, the Scripture reading and prayers were fervent – and the first part of the service was over. Now it was time for the offering. Pennies clinked into the baskets and here and there came the ring of a shilling or two. Sometimes the sound was softened by the presence of a five or ten shilling note. Row after row and tier upon tier – and then the ushers were finished.

When the offering for that evening was counted, it was discovered that the total giving for the campaign not only reached the £300 goal, but there was £10 left over which wasn't even needed. With a letter full of rejoicing the committee sent the balance to Headquarters as a thank offering to the Lord.

Faith had reached out in confidence to God and Kaduna Christians found that *they who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true*.

During these campaigns in the cities, hundreds came to know Christ as Saviour and entered into a personal relationship with God. Many more, however, have not yet been reached. Thousands still crowd the streets – ever going, pushing, jostling, yet never arriving at the Utopia that they seek. They have not yet learned that

Without the WAY there is no going;  
Without the TRUTH there is no knowing;  
Without the LIFE there is no living.

God help us to evangelize our cities.

## 10. Bedrolls, Bowls And Bibles

Throughout the whole region the rains were over. The sun and the wind were drying out the crops; the millet and the guinea-corn drooped in the fields and the groundnuts had ripened in the soil. Acres and acres of cotton waited to be picked and even the shea-nuts were dropping from the trees. The time of harvest had come.

It was the time for a spiritual harvest as well; an evangelical outreach into remote areas of the country in fact was long overdue. Many of the churches

had had successful ministries among non-Christian people within their own district, but the pattern of evangelism laid down by the Lord Jesus in Acts 1:8 had not been fully carried out. “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Few Nigerian churches had got beyond the second part of the commission.

Probably the most outstanding feature of the NLFA movement was that it gave birth to a deep concern among believers for the unevangelized areas of the country. They were awakened to a sense of mission that the church had never known before. This new awareness produced in the Christians a spirit of obedience and dedication that was new to the churches in general.

While believers on the Plateau were rejoicing in the refreshing from the Spirit, NLFA speakers challenged them with the fact that thousands in remote places had never once heard the message of salvation.

“How can we keep this good news to ourselves?” they asked. “Look at the story of the four lepers in 2 Kings 7. The people of Samaria were starving because the Syrians had surrounded the city. They had no food to eat themselves much less any to give to beggars, so the four lepers decided to go to the enemy camp and throw themselves on the mercy of the soldiers. To their amazement, they found the place deserted and food and clothing scattered about in abundance. Incredible! Amazing! Here was all they needed!

“They ate and they ate till their stomachs were bulging. Suddenly a thought struck them. They remembered their starving brothers back in the city. This very moment many of them were dying. What should they do? ‘We are not doing right,’ one of them said. ‘This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. We must go at once and report this...’

“Those men went back and told the good news that there was plenty of food for the taking, and a city full of people was saved.

“Now if four lepers could hobble back to save their starving brethren, can we do less when our brother Nigerians are dying in sin? Are we going to remain here and keep the message to ourselves? What are we going to do about this?”

The Christians sat there stunned. They had never thought of this before. Was God speaking to *them*? They were just ordinary Christians – carpenters, farmers, blacksmiths, schoolteachers. They had never been to Bible School. It was true that they loved the Lord and had learned much in NLFA instruction classes, but to go out where people had never heard of Christ – this was something weighty. Was it possible that *they* could do this work? Yet how could they refuse? With beating hearts they rose to their feet. “We will go,” they said, “if you think God can use us.”

That first year 202 healthy young men, mature in their Christian faith, accepted the challenge of gospel team work and set out for the training course centre. Each took with him little more than a sleeping cloth, a mat and a lamp, a Bible, a small amount of food money plus a great deal of trust in the Lord. One man arrived at Jos carrying only his sleeping mat and a bowl from which to eat. He was not an outstanding person to look at, but his face was aglow with anticipation as he jumped down from the lorry. “Let us hurry out to the work,” his eager eyes seemed to say. “I want to go and tell them.”

This three-day course was given to all who were accepted as team members. Here they were briefed again on the simple message of salvation and how to approach pagans with the gospel. They were also taught how to live among strange people and how to act courteously to the chief. Special instruction was given on how they should witness to Muslims and what to do in case of opposition. These days were also a time of heart preparation and of waiting upon God until they were filled with the Holy Spirit who alone could make their witness effective.

This practical type of training paid off. In one village two team members received a rather cool welcome.

“Why have you come here?” they said. “Can’t you see that we are busy?”

“This is our building season,” said others. “And we haven’t completed our harvesting.”

Instead of forcing their message upon them, the men decided that the best thing to do was to help with the work. Some days they kneaded building mud to assist in the construction of new houses. Other days they went into the hills to help the villagers harvest their corn. Every place that help was needed they seemed to be there to lend a hand. Gradually the villagers began to ask questions, and hostility turned to interest. On the fourth night the men called for a meeting. Even many Hausa malams came, and for two weeks they taught the people each night after their work was done. Before they left, seven Muslims had witnessed to their decision to follow Christ and within a few weeks, twenty-four Christians in that village were meeting daily for Bible study and prayer.

Earlier in the year surveys had shown that two types of areas would have to be worked. First, teams must be sent into districts of advanced Muslim culture such as in the emirates of Kano and Katsina where hundreds of villages still carried on in the old Hausa traditions. Here the workers had to witness for Christ in difficult surroundings. A group of eight arrived in Kano eager to plunge into the work. They encountered their first set-back

immediately upon arrival. The room that had been rented for them was not ready. An accumulation of goat dirt had to be swept out before their sleeping mats could be unrolled. The wife of the householder had also been engaged to cook for the men, but after she learned the purpose of their mission, she was determined to frustrate their efforts. When a cold reception did not discourage them, she decided to use the woman's ingenuity to "vanquish them proper!" Into the food that she placed before them each day she mixed so much hot pepper that it was totally inedible. A true daughter of Jael, she felt she had conquered her opponents single-handed; and indeed, the men were about ready to capitulate. The food they couldn't eat; the lodgings were small and airless; the dry season sun beat down on their treeless compound and drove them almost to desperation. Surely they would have to seek other rooms. But where else would they find quarters for eight? Word no doubt would soon circulate concerning their mission, and suddenly no one would have lodgings to rent.

Their only recourse was their heavenly Father. He it was who had brought them to this place. He it was whose Name they had come to exalt, and surely He would not let them suffer defeat at this time – especially at the hands of a woman. In their helplessness they threw their whole weight upon God. They told Him their difficulty, their desperate plight, their total inability to come up with a solution. The next day a new recruit arrived to complete their group, and to the amazement and unspeakable delight of the men, they found that he had brought his wife with him! The missionary in charge, however, was disconcerted. These men all lived together in two rooms – where on earth would they put a married couple? But the pepper-plagued men saw in it no difficulty; they were so glad to see a potentially friendly cook that they cheerfully rearranged their quarters to admit the new man and his wife.

And so the work that they thought might come to a sad end immediately revived and even began to flourish.

In another place in Kano Province the chief planned to bring shame upon the men and make them the laughing-stock of the village by assigning them lodgings in the harlots' quarters. Instead of taking offence, the team gathered all the women together and held a gospel meeting that very night. In the light of a small bush lantern the men spoke of the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus, and many of those women heard for the first time that there was forgiveness and peace for sinners such as they.

The experience of another team sounded rather like that of the Apostle Paul as recorded in the Book of Acts. A modern *Luke* wrote down in Hausa

a day by day report of the welcome they received as they travelled from place to place.

"At Garun the people were delighted with the gospel tracts we had with us.

"In P... village the people would not listen to the message and the chief came along and drove us away. We were not even allowed to spend the night in their town.

"The people at Babelé listened well but refused to accept the message of salvation in Christ.

"At Tungan Garu they received our words with great joy. Many were saved. When we were due to leave they pleaded with us to stay and be their helpers.

"Forty men found new life in Christ at Ungwar Giwa.

"The people of Ungwar Shinkafa asked us to send them an evangelist who would stay and teach them the gospel more clearly.

"At M... we were accused of being engaged in politics and were driven from the village.

"The Chief of Wutane received us with great joy. He fed and housed us for a number of days and many of his people came to Christ.

"Several places showed their eagerness to have a full time worker. Many were disappointed when the time came for us to leave."

Just as in Paul's day the bricks and the bouquets came side by side, so it was again in NLFA work as well. Gospel team work was not easy, but the preparation the men received helped them to persevere with patience until many converts had been won.

Gospel Team work in Muslim areas also included large cities like Zaria and Kano where the strength of the local Christians was insufficient to complete the task.

Two by two they went out, into every street and compound until their whole section was covered. Everywhere they went they found at least some who would welcome them, for to most Nigerian households, the unexpected visitor who shows interest in the welfare of the home is a real delight.

Before long, the conversation with the family would move from the highly-esteemed gift of children, of health and prosperity to the greatest gift of all – God's free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. If the householder showed interest, the steps to salvation were carefully explained and a tract or booklet offered.

In the expatriate communities of the cities, some of the visiting teams came across many kinds of religions. As they introduced themselves and told the reason for their visit, they encountered some disinterest at first.

“We have our own religion and do not expect to change,” said some.

“We are Hindus and worship in our own way,” others were told.

“Islam is our way. If you have come to talk about religion, I am not interested,” still others answered.

They were seldom refused a hearing, however, and in most cases were invited in to talk and have a cup of tea. The conversation led to many questions such as “How can you say Jesus is the Son of God? Did God have a wife?” “Why are there so many versions of the Bible?”

“The answers we gave seemed to satisfy them and they listened well,” remarked one of the visitors. “As we left their homes, our hearts were burdened for these people who live such lonely and purposeless lives. Many of them have an abundance of material things but lack the most important of all. Others were well-educated but had never read any part of God’s Word. It was like speaking a new language to them to talk of Jesus. Others had a Christian background but had no idea they had to make a definite decision and commitment to Christ for themselves.”

Although they lived in large modern cities, they were as unacquainted with God’s plan of salvation as people in the remotest hamlets.

The second type of area that needed team assistance was the pagan villages of unevangelized areas like those in the Gwoza Hills. It was here that a team member was given a sudden insight into the vast difference between Christian ideals and the moral philosophy of the hill people when he met one of their citizens on the path one day.

“Hello,” he said. “Who are you?”

“I’m a thief,” was the reply. “Who are *you*?”

“I’m a preacher who has come to give you some good news. You say you are a thief. Do you mean to tell me that you go into people’s houses at night and steal their goods?”

“Oh no, nothing like *that*,” the man replied. “I just hit them over the head when they come down the road and then help myself to anything of value. It’s much easier that way.”

The team member blinked a few times and glanced at the empty path.

“Don’t you realize that someone is watching you as you wait by the side of the road?” he asked.

“Oh, nobody sees me. I always make sure of that.”

“But God can see you.”

“God? Who is God?”

With that the worker gave him the message that he had come to proclaim. Before long the self-declared thief became a good Christian, gave up his profession and moved his lodging to another area where he could be near a believer and so grow in the Lord.

The pagan area in Eastern Benue also presented a great challenge. Here Bible School students from Wukari went out two by two to work among the Jatau and Fulani tribes. In a distance of eighty miles they visited thirty villages and were amazed at how open the area was to the gospel. During a church conference a few months later, five of these young converts rented bicycles and cycled the eighty miles to Wukari to attend. These five Christians are now students at the Bible School themselves.

Not only were the areas of need different; varied also was the type of evangelism to be done. Some teams spread out within the district and went preaching from village to village. Others spent the entire month in one place alone. This gave pagans an opportunity to see what they had never witnessed before – the transformed life of a child of God as he lived it in simplicity day after day. This kind of ministry was especially fruitful in places where opposition to the gospel was strong.

Malam Miri was an effective witness of this type in the northern province of Bornu. In that strong Muslim area his public preaching might have done more harm than good; but, taught by the Spirit, he found an effective way of speaking for his Lord.

Taking two sharpened bicycle spokes and a ball of yarn with him, he would go and sit at the edge of the market place and knit unconcernedly as the people milled past. Before very long one or two would stop to look.

“What are you doing?” they asked.

“Making clothes.”

“Clothes? What kind of clothes?”

“I’m making a sweater.”

“How can that ball of string become a sweater?”

“Just watch and see.” So one person, then two or three, would squat down beside the knitting malam and watch.

“Wish *I* could do that!”

“You can. Just get some old bicycle spokes and I’ll teach you.” Gradually a group gathered round him and as he explained to his students the intricacies of knitting, he also casually brought in the story of Jesus and the way to gain eternal life. Many listened and came again and again for more lessons.

When the sweater was finished he sent it off to a needy Christian, then got more yarn and started another. This settled type of team ministry might not

have produced such sensational reports, but the kind of fruit it developed was far more mature.

Another method that gospel teams followed was that of special reading classes for adults. A thirst for knowledge had swept over Nigeria in the past eight or ten years, and when an opportunity came their way, many pagans were eager to learn. People who had never known A from Z before were now reading their Bibles within a few months. When follow-up workers went into one backward area, they came across a young convert sitting under a tree teaching two others to read. He was only a few weeks old in the faith when the time came for the evangelists to leave, yet he not only had learned to read himself but had also taken on the responsibility of teaching the others as well. By the end of another year, thirty-eight more reading certificates were issued in that formerly primitive district.

This phenomenal progress was the result of the “Reading For All” programme, a course especially prepared by experts in simple reading methods. Used as a definite tool for evangelism, this course was the means of bringing many to know the truth who might not otherwise have been interested. The village of Jibin was reached like this. In order to have fellowship with other believers, the one Christian in the place walked two miles each Sunday to attend the church in the next town. Then “Reading For All” came to the area. This gave the Jibin Christian an idea.

“I’ll start a class in my village too,” he said.

He was so enthusiastic that before long he had a class of twelve men.

“It is not enough for us to learn to read,” his pupils told him one day. “We will go with you to hear God’s Word on Sunday too.”

The Christians at Dileng were delighted the next Sunday to see a dozen men from their neighbouring village arriving in time for the service. Before many Sundays had passed, the evangelist in charge had a plan. “Next Sunday I will leave someone to lead the service here and I will go over to Jibin to worship with you there.”

And so it was arranged. For three Sundays in a row a service was held at Jibin and on the last of each month the reading class all trekked over to worship with the believers in Dileng.

Soon the whole village received the witness of the gospel; it was the class in adult literacy that opened the door.

During that first year of gospel team work, over 2,000 professed faith in Jesus Christ – an average of ten for every team member who went. By 1967 many more had volunteered and hundreds were won to Christ through their Spirit-filled witness.

Discomfort, privation and other forms of suffering were the norm in this type of evangelism. Some men were refused lodging in one place and had to sleep in a tree all night. Others grew so hungry when villagers denied them food that they had to gather what herbs they could find to keep themselves from starving. Others were ridiculed and abused and driven away with curses. One team member was robbed on his way to his place of assignment. Having to change trains at the junction, he alighted at the station and greeted a stranger standing nearby.

“Good afternoon,” he said. “Do you know where the pastor of this town lives?”

“Yes, I can show you,” replied the young man. “Just follow me.”

Instead of taking him to the pastor, however, the stranger led the evangelist to the edge of town where he assaulted him and stripped him of all his belongings including a well-marked Bible and his valuable Bible School notes.

Then he left him to find his way back to town alone.

Grateful to be left with his life, the team member eventually found the pastor’s house where he borrowed more money for his fare and went on to his destination to fill out the time he had pledged. There he worked cheerfully without complaining about his loss or the fact that he had to go about in hand-me-down clothing.

In a remote village in a pagan area, a young man was visiting alone. There were not sufficient men to go round the district two by two, so he had volunteered to go by himself. It was evening when he arrived, and as usual he went to the chief for a place to stay. Local custom forbade that strangers be turned out, but the people did not really want him. To show their aversion to him and his message, they sent him to a dirty cattle shed and told him to lodge there for the night.

“When I saw what they had done, I was not very pleased,” he wrote back to Headquarters, “but then I remembered that the Lord Jesus was born in a stable, and that made me rejoice that I could share the same conditions with Him.”

Christ lays a burden upon us, and we find that that burden is *wings*.

The sending out of gospel teams, however, involved far more than just men, training classes and transport. The biggest question in the minds of many was where funds would come from to pay expenses. Over two hundred had volunteered to go – how were these men to be supported? Where would they get the money to purchase their fares besides even more to pay for their food? Even at the meagre rates of 10/- per week, it still

seemed a staggering amount when many churches were already behind in their local dues. To find *hundreds of pounds* seemed unthinkable.

Suddenly in the midst of some NLFA meetings the miracle of giving took place. Pastor Philip was preaching in the power of the Spirit, and a deep conviction had come upon the people.

“What are we doing to obey Christ’s commission?” he asked. “He told us to go into *all* the world and preach to *every* creature. It was His last request. What have we done to fulfil it?”

He paused, and the church grew very still.

“I am going to ask you to do three things,” he said quietly. “First, how many will promise to give time to prayer – earnest, intercessory prayer that will reach the throne of God on behalf of the thousands without Christ?

“The second is this: How many of you will offer himself for this work – will leave his wife and his family, will not think it too hard to suffer hardship and scorn, will sacrifice all that is called comfort in order to take Christ to the lost?”

“... *I* thank you, and God thanks you, and the Spirit blesses all of you who have stood to dedicate yourselves this day,” he continued, “but I have one more word to say. You who are not able to go, who for good reasons must stay home and work – what are you going to do to help these men who have offered? Are we going to send them out with nothing in their hands? Will we bid them goodbye without a penny for their journey? What will *you* do to send the gospel out?”

Immediately a man near the front of the church came forward and put a £1 note on the platform before the speaker. Then another and another, before the preaching was even finished. One by one they got up to present their gifts to the Lord. With tears streaming down their faces they came. Here a woman unwound her wrapper and brought it to the front. There a man took off his shoes and laid them on the altar. Another gave his pocket watch and another his wage packet. Salt, corn, head-ties, hoes – soon a large pile of gifts of every description was covering the floor by the pulpit. Money amounting to £15 came in, and a woman who was penniless ran out and brought back her goat to give to God. One poor man had nothing at all, so he came and stood among the gifts at the front, presenting himself to the Lord.

All this remained over night in the place where it was laid and by morning the amount was almost doubled. A significant thing about it all was the great rejoicing which accompanied the gifts. Who would have thought that it *really* was more blessed to give than receive!

Similar scenes took place in other churches. While Pastor Ezekiel was speaking in one meeting, the Spirit again stirred the hearts of Christians to give.

“You know,” he had been saying, “when we were pagans, we never went to our fetish with empty hands. We always took an offering, even if it was only a cup of water. And will we come empty-handed to the Lord of Hosts?”

Spontaneously, with great blessing and joy, the congregation gave their gifts to God – £92.5.1 in all besides food and clothing. This was more than sufficient to meet the needs of the volunteers, and the people found to their surprise that giving was not so irksome as they had once believed.

A small village church also felt the stirring of the Spirit and when the offering was taken were amazed to find they could gather together £10.18.4 as well as some clothing and three chickens.

Some churches raised money for the teams through pledges and in one town four teachers banded together to supply the salary for an evangelist who was going out to an unreached district.

At Gusau the believers promised £30 each month for the support of twelve men, while the City Campaign committee at Kwoi devoted the last three days of the meeting to the bringing in of harvest tithes. This proved to be a spiritual benefit to the church itself. Despite the reduced prices of farm produce that year and the extra donations they had made for the armed forces, they discovered that the tithes and offerings that came in exceeded all records of previous giving.

The rain beat down on the pan roof of the Takum church one evening and the 600 people packed inside could hardly hear the preacher. As the message moved to the close, the speaker unexpectedly asked if there was anyone in the congregation who would like to make a gift from his possessions.

Suddenly at the front of the church the big African chairman for the whole district stood up. Solemnly he took off his beautiful white gown and without ostentation, he folded it up and laid it on the table at the front. Immediately others moved forward to give what they could. It was not just the left-over items that were brought – it was things that their owners cherished most. Two men took off their watches and gave them to God while another man pledged his sewing machine at home. One man, in spite of the downpour, laid his raincoat on the pile and several others brought their shoes to be sold. A young mother brought her only son and dedicated him in service to the Lord. She had promised this when he was born but up until now had not fulfilled her vow. As the Christians went forward with

their gifts there was not a dry eye in the place, so moving was the spirit of the meeting.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of giving, and only He can persuade believers to obey cheerfully the Lord's injunction: "Freely you have received; freely give."

Instead of depleting the churches of support for their own work, many discovered that it actually helped. The pastor at Suntai reported, "No more do we have trouble concerning giving in our church. All the people's back dues are paid up and on one Sunday alone we collected £40 for gospel team work."

This is the norm in the Christian life, for "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly," but he who gives bountifully will find it given back to him in the same way – "good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over."

Peter Marshall once said, "Let us give according to our income lest God make our income according to our giving."

## 11. Tending The "New Farms"

In large towns and cities where there is no postal delivery, addresses at best are always rather vague. When the time came for the churches to contact the converts after the special meetings and city campaigns, counsellors found the task far more difficult than they had expected. Coming upon the mere suggestion of a number scrawled crookedly by the door of a compound, the counsellor would check his cards, look again at the number and then call out in the usual manner, "Peace be to you!"

After a few tries each increasing in volume, a faint answer might come from within: "And to you, peace!" A child or two comes warily to the door to look out at the visitor and then scampers back to give a report to the owner of the voice inside.

If it is during the day time, an old woman may appear in the background winding her head cloth in place as she comes. Any stranger is suspect and so she replies with guarded words to the visitor's greeting.

"May I speak to Audu Ali?" the counsellor says.

"Audu Ali? We know of no one here by that name," she replies. Or, if the child holding on to her wrapper has inadvertently indicated that the name is familiar, "Oh, he doesn't live here anymore. We don't know where he has moved to."

Further explaining and questioning often make the search successful, but sometimes the counsellor must leave disappointed. The well-meaning but mistaken relatives are certain that any caller is unquestionably a policeman in disguise or a creditor trying to collect a long-standing debt. The worker then must rely on other means of contacting the new convert and instructing him in the Christian way of life.

The need for following up new believers was particularly stressed by NLFA leaders. Although some of this work was organized by Headquarters, the main responsibility of building up those who were young in the faith was laid primarily upon the local churches into which these new Christians were absorbed. Many accepted the challenge and organized special groups to go out into the city or surrounding villages to strengthen the converts in their faith.

Some raised up full time workers such as those sent to the Liman-Katagun area where 300 converts had come to Christ the previous year. Another church sent six more into an area where they already had seven. In one district where thirty-five new groups of believers had been brought into being, evangelists were asked to go and live for a period of one year in order to establish these new Christians in the Lord.

The Mada Hills church of Kagbu adopted an extraordinary plan. Because of the many prayer cells it had organized in member's homes, sixty-six people in the town had been converted. The church, very much alive to the needs around, then divided up its members so that each was responsible for one of the converts in the town as well as for five pagans in the outlying villages. These Christians were to encourage and teach the new convert at home, and at the same time were to visit and try to win the five pagans that had been allotted to them in the villages. Through this method three new churches were opened and their work of evangelism still continues.

In the cities where many had come to know the Lord, several methods were followed. After the Kano campaign in January, follow-up meetings were held to which all new converts were invited. At least half of those recorded turned up at the sessions and were instructed carefully in the Christian life. In Jos, weekly meetings were organized in the large open air church in the centre of town. Native singing accompanied by native marimbas was featured and crowds grew until 1,000 gathered each Sunday evening for the service. Thus new converts were provided with the warmth of fellowship and the nourishment of Bible teaching which were necessary for growth in their spiritual lives.

In the mining town of Bukuru ten miles away, similar plans were laid. The large Ambassador Cinema was engaged and notices were posted to attract the attention especially of those who had earlier decided for Christ. The leaders were a bit uncertain as to the response of the people. Would they come out again or was the city campaign merely a curiosity piece which by now had lost its attraction?

To their surprise the committee found that the large building they had engaged was filled two hours before opening time and when the service began, a crowd of 2,000 was present to hear Blind Evangelist Sule Garko. Interest was so keen that monthly meetings were organized in Bukuru as well.

Another type of follow-up for new converts was the nights of prayer organized in a number of places. At the first meeting, the leaders hoped for perhaps a dozen people who would not be too comfort-minded to give themselves to prayer for an extended period of time. Instead of the dozen, however, two hundred men and fifty women came to the church in the Jos area and stayed from 10 p.m. till five in the morning. When the meeting finally broke up so the people could go to their work, everyone was so inspired that they immediately decided on another night to hold a similar session.

Not all the time at these meetings was spent in praying, however. Sometimes there was singing and sometimes there were testimonies. Sometimes the people knelt to pray and sometimes they stood. Time was given for short messages and other times for requests. The Christians prayed silently and they prayed audibly. Sometimes they all prayed at once. Through it all one thing was noticeable: here was a prayer meeting where no one went to sleep. Both new converts and long-time followers were finding that prayer could be real and enjoyable, a meeting that their hearts actually longed to attend.

Among the greatest help to new converts in some of the campaigns were the Home Bible Study groups that were first begun in Jos. The dozen or so people who gathered in a home often included unbelievers who would never think of entering a church. The simplest plan of Bible Study imaginable was set up. The group would choose a book to discuss and then they would go through it verse by verse or sentence by sentence, each making some remark on the thought that most struck him as it was read. No great scholars were needed for this study; in fact, it was carried on even if only one or two of the members could read.

Within a short time, sixty-four of these classes were started, some as far away as in Bauchi Province. A pastor from that area had been instrumental in beginning them. "When I was in Jos," he said, "I saw some of these

study classes and went back to start some in my own district. Sometimes forty people attend and spend the whole time discussing even a few verses of Scripture."

Women and children also attended and found that they grew in grace as they increased in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour.

In distant places where gospel teams had been sent, it was often the team members themselves that accepted the responsibility of follow-up. Those who had gone to Mai-Komo were forcefully made aware of the importance of this work.

"The villagers here spoke a parable to us that we will not soon forget," the team members said. "'You are doing a good work,' they told us, 'except for one thing. You come once and then leave us. What would you think of a man who made a farm and did not look after it continually?' They pleaded with us not to do that; not to allow this new farm we had made to become overgrown with grass and come to nothing."

It was in order to cultivate these "new farms" that gospel teams devoted part of their time to instructing the converts. When teams in the Kano-Katsina area went out for four weeks of ministry, they planned that the last week would be given entirely to follow-up methods and the teaching of Christian doctrine. Because three hundred professed acceptance of Christ, however, individual attention soon became impossible, and a period of intensive teaching was planned for a later date. It was not long before fifty volunteers went back for three months to strengthen the Christians in their faith.

In some cases team members helped the believers in putting up a church before they left, even if it was only several crooked poles with a roof of thatch. The "temporary" church building in the Taraba River area was soon bulging on all sides as 185 people came crowding in.

Often it was an individual member of the team that felt burdened for this work and determined before leaving that he would go back to feed the spiritual children that God had given him there. One such worker packed all his belongings when he got home, and leaving his father's compound on the Plateau, took his family to live in the distant village where he had seen pagans turn from their fetishes to Christ. The people had refused to give him his box when he left, insisting that he return and live among them as their pastor and leader. A week later three more offered to return for a year so that the "new farms they had made would not be overgrown with grass and come to nothing".

A Bible School student who had been out for three months also felt compelled to go back. But follow-up for that area had not been recognized by his next school holiday, and there seemed no opportunity to go. The Spirit's urging would not be silenced, however, and with the support of his fellow students he decided to go back on his own.

The houseboy in a missionary home was another who felt the same burden. The travels of his team had taken them to a Fulani compound about forty miles from their base. It was late in the afternoon when they arrived and the visitors didn't have time to sit down, but they found a man there who was hungry for God. Although many of the men standing around walked off when they preached, the hungry one, Ja'e, stayed on. They continued to talk to him for quite some time trying to make the plan of salvation clear. When they asked him if he would like to receive Christ as his Saviour, he eagerly replied that he would. There was great rejoicing among the team that day, but how could they leave him with so little help? They offered him a booklet in the Ajemi script, then committed him to the Lord in prayer.

Two months later one member of the team felt he had to see Ja'e again. It was Ayuba, the houseboy that God was calling to go back. Ja'e's eyes glowed with welcome when he saw Ayuba enter the compound, for now for the first time since his conversion he could have fellowship with a brother in the Lord.

"Have others been persecuting you?" Ayuba asked as they talked alone that day.

"They have been working at it, but now they have stopped for they see they will not win," he replied.

After some discussion of the Word, the two men bowed their heads in prayer. It was rather a short visit but enough to show that faith was still alive in Ja'e's heart.

On the Saturday before Easter, Ayuba visited him again. This day he took time to instruct him more fully in the Christian life. Carefully he went over the story of Christ's death on the cross, explaining the meaning of the resurrection and His triumph over the grave. On Easter morning Ja'e set aside the work of the week and the two of them worshipped the Risen Lord together.

That afternoon they went to visit a friend to whom Ja'e had been witnessing for some time. He showed great interest in the gospel that day but was not ready to commit himself to a new faith.

As Ja'e and Ayuba were sitting outside chatting that evening, the thatched roof of his hut suddenly caught fire. Where had the fire come from? There had been none in the compound. Surely it was the work of one who hated

the Christian way! Quickly they pulled the burning grass from the house, but some of it fell on a little store nearby and burned the family's grain. The water also spoiled a lot of his things – not that he had many to spoil.

Ayuba changed his plans that night and decided to stay a day longer. While they worked together making a new thatch, Ayuba explained to his friend that this kind of trouble could be expected in the life of a Christian. The Lord Jesus Himself had shown us the way to suffer. "Malam!" cried Ja'e, "even if they kill me, I will not leave this new way of life! Don't be worried for me anymore."

That evening as they gathered a few together for a time of Bible reading and prayer, a new member of the compound joined them. It was Ja'e's wife, who had never attended their gatherings before. When the question was later asked, "Would anyone like to receive new life in Christ tonight?" this time there was an answer.

"I would," said Ja'e's wife.

"Which way do you choose?" Ayuba asked.

"I want to follow the way of my husband," she replied. Her decision clearly showed that Ja'e had not been hiding his light under a bushel nor had the efforts of Ayuba been in vain.

Each time this young man visits the new converts, he must travel approximately 230 miles, over half of them to be covered by bicycle. The last time he went he stayed for five days at which time the friend to whom Ja'e had been witnessing finally made his decision for Christ.

This patient, continuous giving of oneself to water the Seed is most necessary if converts are to be built up in Christ.

Although most of the work of follow-up was done by local Christians, there were some areas that needed outside assistance, and an appeal went to NLFA Headquarters for trained workers. A startling account of Christian activity springing up all around the city of Zaria had come. In it was an urgent request for help.

"As a result of gospel team work during January and February," the report stated, "there are now at least sixty-eight scattered groups of believers. Only half a dozen of these have any Christian leadership. Most of them are illiterate. All need teaching in the Word if they are to stand in the face of much opposition."

What could NLFA do to meet this need? The Holy Spirit's answer was unmistakable: "Call upon the mature Christians of Zaria and Plateau provinces. Ask them to spend a month with these people."

Through this appeal God spoke to the hearts of ninety-seven men to give four weeks of their time to teach those young brothers in the Lord.

“After a short course of instruction we sent them out,” said Mr. Swank; “fifty-one to the Zaria area ; thirty-two to NW Bauchi Province; six to Kamuhu near Kakangi and eight along the Panbenguwa-Kaduna Road.

“They took literature and some books with them so that they might gather the converts in daily classes to teach them how to live the Christian life.”

In places where the people were able to read, each new believer was provided with helpful literature and offered two short correspondence courses for home Bible Study. Those that were still illiterate were introduced to the *Reading For All* programme and converts of both groups were put in contact with the church or mission in their area.

To assess the quality of work done by gospel teams in a pagan area, two of the Jos office workers made a special trip to the Gwoza Hills which were situated on the Cameroon border.

Here was a country that hardly seemed like Nigeria at all. The people wore little or no clothing except when they dressed up for market each week. Eighteen months before this, no one was allowed to go into this area without the protection of an armed escort, for the people were always drinking and fighting, a pastime that increased their suspicion of strangers, believing that they had come to interfere.

It was here in February of 1967 that a group of teams totalling sixty evangelists had gone in for three months to bring the gospel to these hill dwellers of Gwoza. Now, some months later, Mr. Bellamy and Pastor Tambaya of the Jos Headquarters were going back to these hills to see what type of work had been done.

“We knew of up to 100 converts,” they said, “and wanted to see how many of them were still standing in the faith. Were the methods of our teams valid or did they give merely a superficial presentation of Christ’s power to transform?”

“Our first stop was at Ngoshe but we found no one at home. The whole village had gathered at a burial ceremony where great dancing and lamentations were going on. Were our converts among these? Yes, they were there, looking rather unlike converts to the Christian way of life but when they saw us, they stopped their celebrations and came over to shake our hands warmly. *Of course* they were still believers, they told us. They still wanted to follow Jesus. Their sincerity was quite evident, but it was also rather evident that they needed more teaching in the Word.

“Our real work began on the second day out. We were still in the foot-hills but going steadily upward. It was possible to go twenty miles into these hills and still find people who as yet had never heard. The young man

who was acting as our guide and interpreter was a convert of the previous team’s witness.

“Our trek that day brought us to a village where we suddenly came upon one of the finest young converts that we met on the trip. He was sitting under a tree teaching two of his friends to read. In the short time that the team had been there, Ali had grown so quickly in the Lord that they made him the teacher of the rest when they left. Now six months later, this radiant young Christian was carrying out his commission as a faithful servant of Christ.”

For hours the Jos visitors sat and questioned the six converts of this place.

“What difference has Christ made to you?” they asked Ali.

“I have learned that God does not like dirt,” he said. “If God forgives sin, He must not want sin or uncleanness in our lives and therefore we must keep ourselves clean. I thought of all the dirt and ulcers on my legs, so I went to the market and bought some soap. And do you know – I haven’t had an ulcer since!”

This young man had learned a practical lesson from his faith. The proof of it was seen in the sparkling white shirt he was wearing at the time the team workers first saw him. But this lesson he had not kept to himself. Before long he had won a friend to the Lord. The first thing he did then was to take his new convert home to his wife.

“Your husband is a clean man now,” Ali informed her. “He has become a follower of Jesus. Now I’ll show you how you must keep your home for a Christian man to live in.

With that he peeled off his shirt, grabbed a broom and swept out the house.

“You see?” he said. “This is now a Jesus’ home and it must stay clean like this.”

The Jos workers turned to another convert. “What difference do you see between the Muslims and the Christians?” they asked.

“Well,” came the thoughtful reply, “when a Muslim prays he gets down on the ground as if to look for God there. But we Christians know where to find Him...” and putting his hand on his heart, “...He is right here within us.”

“What happened when you received Jesus?” another young man was asked.

“He came into my heart, and oh, I have great joy in me now,” he replied. A bright smile spread all over his face.

“What did you have before?”

“Oh, we were so afraid!”

If any man be in Christ, Paul says, old things are passed away.

As the men prepared to go farther up to the top of the mountain, all the Christians of that village were determined to accompany them. They wanted to go to visit their new Christian brethren in the villages above.

A great welcome was given them at Kuseraha and though many of the men had gone off to work for their tax money, all the remaining converts called for a meeting at once.

“How many of you know Christ as your Saviour?” asked Pastor Gambaya during the service. Sixteen hands went up.

“How many heard the gospel for the first time when the visitors came last February?” Again sixteen hands.

“And how many want to continue?” The same sixteen hands.

The thing that amazed the men most was that in spite of the fact that the first team had spent as little as a few weeks in one place, the teaching they had done had resulted in surprisingly clear answers concerning conversion and the main doctrines of the church. It is true that there was still some non-Christian activity such as the centuries-old custom of drinking their beer, but did not even Paul find that his converts needed more enlightenment on God’s standards for the lives of His children? The real test of these people’s faith was their attitude to their pagan gods which they immediately cast aside and were now worshipping the Lord Jesus as the only way to eternal life.

Between this and the next village the team met a wizened old man who was said to be the oldest in the hills. He was naked like the rest and the workers were about to pass him by with just a casual greeting when suddenly the guide stopped and remarked, “He too became a Christian this year.”

“At that we stopped and questioned him,” Mr. Bellamy related, and told him why we had come. He almost flung his arms around me when he found that I was the one who had ‘sent them the men’.”

“That was when I received new life,” cried the old man.

“What do you mean by that?” the workers asked.

“I used to have old life, but now it is new,” he replied.

“You are old now, baba. What will happen when you die?”

The old man became so excited that he waved his arms about dramatically.

“If I fell down right here and the vultures came and ate me up, I wouldn’t care at all, for God has a place for me in heaven!”

“Wouldn’t you like the pagans to give you the proper burial rites?”

The old man looked at him scornfully. “Don’t you ever think that this body is anything!” he replied. “I’ll get a new one when I’m there.”

Years upon years of dark pagan worship, then suddenly one month of Christian teaching and this old man entered into the same hope that believers throughout the world have cherished for centuries!

But this type of survey was just one aspect of their missionary tour. In a village farther on, they talked to a man who said he had heard the evangelists preach but had not yet repented.

“But we are tired of our gods,” he informed them. “The whole town is ready to change if you give us a man to live among us, a man who really *walks one way*.”

“Whom shall we send?”

“Send us Tada, but if you can’t give us him, then let us have this boy who is with you. If he stays with us to tell us the way, then we will follow him.”

*This boy* whom they asked for was a convert of only a few months and certainly not mature enough, some would think, to be an evangelist to pagans. Yet they had seen such a change in his life that they were ready to follow him as one who knew God and could tell them how they too could find the way to be changed. The thrilling thing throughout the whole tour was how all the people – both those who had believed and those who had not – had understood in so short a time the results *and* the requirements of God’s way of salvation.

When the workers arrived back in Jos, immediate plans were laid to send another corps of workers back to the Gwoza Hills to establish the Christians in that place.

Opposition was sure to arise and only the strengthening which comes from the Word could keep them steady under pressure from angry relatives and Satan’s power.

By follow-up teams and individual evangelists, by reading programmes and correspondence courses, through area planning and local church projects, new converts were sought out and nourished in the faith.

And the Word of God’s grace which is able to build them up and to give them an inheritance among all them which are sanctified is still strengthening and instructing the thousands who first heard of new life during the visitation programme or in the messages the teams brought when they came to their villages.

## 12. Lord of The Harvest

*Miracles.* There was no doubt about it; they were definitely miracles. In this age of scientific research, missiles and space ships, such a term might seem outmoded; yet in the lives of thousands of Nigerians things have been happening and still are happening that can be explained only in terms of the miraculous. God has been at work among us and traces of His power are seen on every hand.

Although the unusual took place in the lives of many heathen, it was within the Church itself that the miracle of new life was most apparent. One of the marked evidences of God's blessing upon the programme was that Christians had learned to pray. People who had never before opened their lips to utter a syllable in audible prayer now took part in earnest intercession in the thousands of little groups that met daily to pray. Long, monotonous supplications gave place to a new pattern of prayer – one in which two or three specific requests only were made, and these for definite members of their families or for friends who were still living in sin.

The result of this intercession was astonishing. In one TEKAS church district 2,500 people were converted from paganism – not through the preaching of gospel teams but through the influence of the prayer cells alone. One year later the converts were still standing and the Christians still continue to pray.

This practice of praying for people by name startled Christians into expecting definite answers from God. "I could never have believed it," said a Christian called Haruna. "You know that my brother was deaf and dumb and it never occurred to us that we could ever make him understand. But when we started our NLFA prayer groups, something first happened to *us*. The Holy Spirit opened our minds and we began to think about those around us who needed to know the Saviour. I began to think about my brother and mentioned his name to our group. It wasn't very long before he began coming with us to all of our meetings, and when we bowed our heads to pray, he would bow his head too. He stopped doing his heathen rites and everyone began to say, 'Dikwot has become a Christian! The deaf and dumb man is now a follower of Jesus!'

"Indeed, he did become a Christian, and after a while he was baptized. We all say it was a miracle, but I know that the first miracle that God worked in our midst was to awaken the Christians to the needs of people we had never noticed before."

Such miracles that came out of the Christians' prayer groups were often reported. Heavy drinkers were brought to Christ. Bitter opponents of the

gospel became so transformed that they were soon proclaiming the very Name which they once had reviled. Old people – thirty-five in one place – who formerly were thought hopeless were marvellously changed. Nothing seemed impossible to the Christians now that they had tapped the source of spiritual power.

A transformation had taken place – the Church had *learned to pray*.

A great change became apparent in another sphere of Christian living – the Church now learned to give. The NLFA money that came in from Nigerian Christians as well as from expatriates and overseas supporters exceeded £7,700 that first year of the programme.

"The matter of NLFA finance has always been a miracle to me," said the Nigerian treasurer in 1967. "In the first budget session we talked of spending £4,000 when as yet not a penny was in our hands. But that first year we raised almost twice that amount. Over £1,500 has come into Headquarters from churches in Nigeria."

When the books were balanced at the end of the first official programme it was found that the difference between the totals amounted to only three shillings and ten pence.

Far from suffering from this new zest in giving to evangelism, local churches gained greatly. Many reported that back dues were readily paid up and a new spirit of sacrifice had taken hold of the people. A farmer in one area had saved for a long time to get £20 to buy a new plough. But when the Lord showed him that the church roof needed a new thatch, he willingly relinquished his plans for the plough in order to use the money to pay for the necessary repairs.

Another aspect of church life that was renewed was the love Christians gained for God's Word. The Scriptures became a new and living thing to many. During instruction classes in the handbook, their eyes had been opened to the rich rewards of systematic Bible study, and passages which had long been familiar yet still obscure suddenly became meaningful and relevant to their lives. A sense of awe and wonder came upon believers as they began to realize what a living force, what an unsuspected treasure they had held in their hand as they had carried their Bible to church each Sunday only as a matter of form.

"My Bible has become food and drink to me since I attended the instruction classes," was the testimony of a typical Christian.

The most far-reaching miracle of all, however, was the fact that evangelism was now brought into its rightful place as the most important

feature of all church activity. The reason for such a change can be attributed only to the working of the Holy Spirit who cleanses the hearts of believers and then uses those He has cleansed. “You will receive power, the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you,” was Jesus’ promise to His disciples, and clear evidence of its fulfilment was seen again in our day. A new boldness to speak for Christ came upon the Christians especially in areas where paganism or opposition to the gospel was strong.

For fifty years Mai Tsafi had been the village witch doctor. Now he was over eighty and hadn’t many more years to live. Through him many had been bound by Satan, to say nothing of the slavery he had brought upon himself. Who could believe that such a person might be reached for Christ? Who would have the courage to warn him of the judgement ahead? Yet the Christians now could not pass him by. They went to his home for a visit. There they showed him a leaflet depicting a caterpillar turning into a cocoon and then to a butterfly – the symbol of a life that was entirely different from the old one it had lived.

“Jesus can change you like that caterpillar and give you a new kind of life,” they said.

A strange longing came into the old man’s heart as he thought over the words he had heard. It was not the first time he had listened to the gospel, but it was the first time that it seemed to be real. As he pondered the truth, the cocoon-like grave that encased his soul began to break open and that day the miracle of new life took place once again in the soul of a pagan. Two years later, according to his own testimony, he was still praising the One who had died for his sins and had given him peace.

Along with the new boldness which energized the Christians, there came a depth of dedication to the Great Commission of Christ. During the period of outreach when volunteers were asked to go to different areas, men offered themselves for everywhere but the old city of Zaria. Who would dare to take the Christian message into that difficult place? Its massive walls, some of which are still standing, seemed to symbolize the attitude of its citizens to any form of religion other than its own, and no one apparently had the courage to challenge it.

When the leader at one volunteer meeting saw that no one offered to go, he called for a time of prayer, and a heavy burden settled down upon the people as they interceded for the thousands in that great Muslim city of the North.

After they had finished praying one man rose tremblingly to his feet.

“If you will uphold me with earnest prayer,” he said, “I will volunteer to go.”

Then another arose and another until seven had offered themselves for gospel team work in Zaria. As they did so their hearts seemed to echo the words of Esther, “And if I perish, I perish.”

The first morning they fearfully approached the gates of the city. Although Christian churches had been established in Wusasa and other suburbs of the city, they were aware that there was no established witness to the transforming power of Christ in the old city itself. They knew too that under the old regime no one could speak publicly for Christ within the walls. Could they go through those gates today and begin? Would they be beaten or stoned? With pounding hearts they bowed their heads under the shadow of the gateway towers and committed themselves and their message to the Spirit of God.

Into the streets they went and began to read portions from the Bible – a forbidden Book. Then they began to preach Christ Jesus – a forbidden Personality. Before long they began to distribute literature – a forbidden activity.

Forbidden? Somehow a miracle had taken place. Instead of stoning and beating, even the policemen who formerly would have prevented them from doing such a thing now politely accepted a piece of literature and read its message with interest. One compound after another, visiting in shops and witnessing on the street – still no sticks, no stones. But in one place when they were preaching to a group who had gathered, a Muslim suddenly threw his arms around them and held them fast. Startled, they drew back in apprehension. Visions of jail or something even worse came leaping into their minds. Was this the end? But just as suddenly their apprehension left.

“Thank you! Thank you!” he said eagerly. “Thank you for these words. This is the message we have been waiting so long to hear.”

The old regime was past. A new day for Nigeria had come. Why was it it seemed to coincide with the raising up of NLFA? Why was it that hunger had replaced hostility in this city? In 7,000 prayer groups throughout the nation and in many scores more all over the world, fervent intercessory prayer was going up for Zaria. And the seven courageous young men who had volunteered to give their very lives if need be discovered to their increasing amazement that nothing was impossible with God.

Lest people should think that the effectiveness of the NLFA programme was merely the result of good organizing and contagious enthusiasm, the Holy Spirit allowed incidents to happen that were completely outside the limits of man’s wisdom and planning.

Bulus was a young Christian who offered himself for four weeks in gospel team work. He seemed a very unlikely evangelist – a fine example of what not to take – and so the leaders in charge rejected him.

“There is nowhere that we could send you,” they said.

“Isn’t there *any* place where no one else wants to go?” he pleaded. “No matter how hard it is, send me there. Any place you wish – just let me go out too.”

It was true there was one place where no one else wanted to go. It was back behind the hills where the gospel had not yet gone. Should they let him go there? Surely he could do the people no harm. Eagerly Bulus accepted the assignment and started out on his two days’ trek. For four weeks he remained in that place, continuing to give out the message in spite of unbelievable hardships which he was called upon to suffer.

At first the people refused to give him food. Let him go and feed himself. So he had kept himself alive by living on leaves and grass, just anything he could find; but every day he went among them and told them again and again the story of Christ and His love for them.

Four weeks later he returned to his home thin and weary but with the glow of glory on his face. Two hundred had turned to Christ, the powers of evil had been broken and even the sick had been healed!

“One night while I was preaching,” Bulus reported, “I was saying to the people, ‘I am the servant of the Living God. I have come to tell you the truth from heaven.’ At that moment, some men left the crowd and came back carrying a sort of stretcher. On it lay a seemingly dead body.

“‘If you are the servant of God,’ they said, ‘then you must believe your God can heal. We want you to make this girl well.’

“I was stunned. I had never met anything like this before, but they kept pressing me for an answer. ‘Look at my little daughter,’ the father said. ‘She is dying. Ask your God to heal her.’

“What else could I do? I had been saying that I was the servant of the Living God, and how could I tell them now that He didn’t do such things?

“I knelt down beside the body, put my hands on her head and prayed very earnestly that the Spirit of God would deliver her. In a few moments she opened her eyes and sat up. ‘I’m hungry,’ she said. ‘I want something to eat.’

“Everyone was amazed. Surely our God was powerful! He had healed that little girl before their very eyes. It seemed a marvellous thing to me too and it filled me with great joy.

“A little bit later someone else came to me. ‘Come and heal my baby,’ she said.

“A great fear took hold of me then. The Holy Spirit had come in great power upon me in the first healing. Would He do it again? I left the hut where the child was and went out and sat under a tree. There I put my head on my knees and cried to God to heal the child. I was shaking all over for I had never seen things like this before, much less been used to perform such miracles.

“After a while peace came to my heart and I went back into the hut again. The little body under my hands was so hot that it seemed to burn my own flesh with the fever. Again I prayed earnestly for the little one in order that those who saw might believe that Jesus was the Saviour, the Holy One sent from God.

“As I prayed, a miracle happened. I felt the little body become cool. In a short time the fever had completely left him and the baby was well again.

“Can you not see the amazement and wonder and the dancing for joy that those people felt that day! No wonder they began to listen to the message.

“During those weeks that I was there, 200 repented and turned to Christ. Now they want someone to go back and teach them more about Him.”

“These signs will accompany those who believe,” said Jesus. “In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents... and if they drink any poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.”

*Those who believe.* A man that leaders rejected had become a special instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit. All that He needed was one who believed.

These “signs that accompanied” were not isolated cases. Evangelist Joseph from Piko reported that while he and two others were telling the story of new life in a compound, the father of the home said scornfully, “You say that your Jesus could heal people while He was here on earth. Pray then for this child of mine that he might walk again.” There before them was a boy of ten, crawling on his hands and knees – obviously ill for a long time.

“Suddenly I knew that I must accept the challenge and pray,” said the evangelist. “I looked at my brothers and saw that they too were ready to pray. ‘All right, we will pray,’ I told the father. ‘Christ’s power is still the same today and He is able to make your crippled son well.’

“We prayed one by one and a great sense of God’s power came down upon us. We were able to pray in sure faith that God was working in answer to our prayers. Then we thanked Him and left, full of faith that we would see the child recovered sooner or later.

“That was on Saturday. On the following Tuesday we went to visit that compound again and found the boy standing up and walking. He and all the family were rejoicing and our hearts too were filled with praise to our God. What a wonderful opportunity we had of preaching to them again! The boy himself accepted Christ as his Saviour and his mother and other children of the family are coming to our services showing clearly that they also believe in the Lord.

“The father’s heart is still very hard. Though he has seen the mighty power of God, he hasn’t acknowledged that power and repented. I think it is the fear of others that is keeping him back. We are still praying that God will work another miracle in that home.”

In another village an old woman had been blind for eight years. After hearing the message several times on some gramophone records, her heart opened to the Saviour and she put her faith in Christ. Before long strange rumours began to circulate in the village.

“Old Ulafa is healed! Blind Ulafa can see!” they said.

The Christians checked into this story and found that it was entirely true. She had begun to see faint rays of light and started doing things for herself once more. She could even go a short way into the bush to get firewood to cook her food.

“He has given me new life in my heart and new sight in my eyes,” she said.

The blind made to see, the deaf made to understand, evil spirits cast out, witch doctors transformed, the many burnings of idols – these are some of the miracles God is doing among the heathen in our land. And in the Church similar wonders are taking place. A new love has sprung up among the brethren, dead churches have been revived, church attendance has soared and thousands of believers are going out to witness who had never dreamed of doing so before. “It may well be,” said the head of one mission, “that what the Wesleyan revival was to England, the NLFA movement may prove to be in Nigeria.”

But the awakening is not meant for Nigeria alone. It has spread beyond our borders into other places as well. Inquiries have come from the countries of Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Dahomey, from Upper Volta, Ghana, Mali, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone. Already the handbook and other materials have been translated into twenty languages in these countries in anticipation of the time that the programme will begin.

In July of 1968, the West African Congress on Evangelism met in Ibadan, attended by over 450 delegates who came from every country in West and East Africa with some from South Africa as well. Sponsored partly by

NLFA, the programme included daily sessions on this type of evangelism and it is certain that before long other countries will also reach out to non-Christians using the same pattern of prayer and witness.

Like the great Niger River that has its source in an unpretentious hillside in a far away place yet flows on through many different countries changing and determining the course of people’s lives, so it seems that the New Life For All movement is spreading out from Nigeria into the farthest regions of West and East Africa bringing a tremendous change into the lives of thousands through the transforming power of Christ. The source is the Spirit, the power is the Spirit’s and the final results are in the hands of the Spirit, for He from the beginning has been THE LORD OF THE HARVEST.