

MORE THAN I ASKED!

(Mary Derksen)

September 16, 2021

Ephesians 3:17-21

Every New Year I asked God for a promise. Now I desperately needed one. Slowly I opened my Bible. My blurry eyes tried to focus. “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...” My husband and I had spent many years as missionaries in Japan. We went in 1954 with our 2-year old daughter Evangeline and 1-year old son Richard. We were young and excited about our new life. Four more children were born in Japan. Little could I have imagined how I would long for my mother’s help in raising 6 children in a foreign land. We were in Japan and we would live like the Japanese. But sometimes it just didn’t work. No way could I follow Japanese custom to go home for the birth of each child and stay a month after birth, even though that would have been a great experience.

Now as I scanned the verse again, the floodgates burst. I had hopes and dreams for our children, but God was telling me His plans were far superior to anything I could ever bring to pass with my fretting and worrying.

When the children were little, I felt my priority was at home. My mission work would have to wait. Peter was often gone evenings to meetings in surrounding villages. The church young people loved to drop in after supper, and I felt the right thing to do was to visit with them. Our children’s Bible stories, prayers and songs were neglected. We finally solved the problem by allowing our guests to sit in on our family devotions. The children learned to accept the extended family.

Soon we began hearing remarks like, “I want to marry a Christian so we can have a Christian home,” or “I’m going to read Bible stories to my children, too.” Why, I didn’t have to wait to be a missionary until the kids were grown. We were a missionary family!

During a particularly difficult time in their assignment, a daughter wrote from Nepal, “A few weeks ago at our retreat we sang, ‘O, how I love Jesus.’ Sometimes that is all we can say.” As I read on, my mind travelled back through the years. One of the hardest experiences was sending the children away to school. Our mission had a one room school with a boarding home for missionary children grades one to eight. The highest enrolment year was 19, and not all grades were represented. The children all went home week-ends by train. Fridays when ours came home we focused on family. No meetings. Our kids still talk about how they loved to come home to their favorite food, and all the fun times we had.

When they went to Tokyo for high school to The Christian Academy in Japan, we counted the weeks till they came home again. I prayed much for our children. Once when I was discouraged I prayed, “Lord please don’t let our children struggle like this.” A foolish prayer from a foolish mother’s heart.

After one Christmas vacation, the twins had returned to Tokyo, 1000 miles away. The older 3 who were attending universities in North America, had not come home for

Christmas. Their teen years were slipping by. They were dating seriously, and we hadn't even met their boyfriends or girlfriends. I was feeling sorry for myself.

We still had our youngest at home, but I was depressed. Sometimes I tried to cheer up by listening to records, but ended in tears. Letters did the same.

When our oldest daughter first left for university in Canada, she wrote, "I was so homesick that I went to the cemetery to cry." I felt like packing my suitcase and flying to her the next day. But the same daughter wrote, "Dad, you would never leave Japan, would you? They have so many workers here. God needs you in Japan."

When our oldest son and his wife phoned to share that they felt called to serve God in Zaire, Africa, we rejoiced with them. But inwardly my heart cried, "Why so far away, Lord? Why?" In Zaire they faced struggles quite different from ours. At times they were in great physical danger. But I was learning to pray, "Lord, help them to be faithful to you," knowing He would do more than I asked.

Then our oldest daughter and her husband with their 3 children accepted an MCC assignment in Nepal. Travelling to and from that country brought them on two visits to Japan. We also went to visit them in Nepal, something beyond my wildest dreams! What a contrast. No electricity. No telephone. No running water, unless the person carrying the water was running. No road. Just a mountain path. No health facilities. They struggled often with intestinal illness and a limited supply of food. Yet they were full of joy.

In a recent letter they wrote: "This is the land where you can staple your blouse when a hook comes off, where you can wipe your sticky hands on your clothes, wear the same clothes for a week, pick lice out of your kids' hair, hammer a nail in wherever you want to, get your exercise without trying, live without junk food, see lots of drama without going to the movies, be awakened without an alarm, and see God's grandeur all around." God was going his "immeasurably more."

Another daughter and her husband came even closer when they moved to Taiwan for a short mission trip. Not that we saw each other more but it was a comfort to have them as neighbors!

Now our family was scattered in 5 countries. About once or twice a year we would have a most unusual happening. The mailman brought letters from all 5 children on the same day! Their letters always cheered us up. We still had our youngest with us, attending Japanese school and living at home. Lily was our joy and our sunshine. I prayed that the Lord would send at least one of our children back to Japan. We were thrilled when Bill returned as a missionary. It was almost too good to be true. God's promises never fail.

A family reunion in Japan was in the planning stages for years. Finally it happened, and we were together for the 1st time in seven years. We had grown from eight to 14, including 3 grandchildren. The days rushed by with outings, sharing, laughing, and singing, shopping, laundry, and eating. Our church schedule also kept us busy.

However, one month under the same roof in cramped quarters in our apartment in Beppu, Japan in the sultry heat of July stretched us to the limit. We also had our share of hurts and tears. I felt responsible for the bad times. When they were all gone, I apologized. Our son wrote back, “Don’t worry. Mom. Most families wouldn’t even have tried it.” God had given us a marvelous gift of being together, and I could relax. We were not perfect parents. Confrontations happened, but they made us stronger as we experienced the joy of forgiving and being forgiven. We were stronger to face the loneliness and trials in the various cultures where we worked. Stronger to serve the Lord in his chosen place for us.

All I could say was, “Thank you God, for giving me more than I asked!”