

THE CHURCH UNDER THE UMBRELLA TREE

By

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Missionary to Nigeria

Christopher enrolled in Bible school in 1999 and graduated as the Valedictorian in 2001. God directed him to start a church. Christopher, young, inexperienced, and penniless relied on God to direct his footsteps. Since there were no finances for a building or even for chairs, he was led by God to start the church under a massive umbrella tree. The tree was remarkably functional for this purpose. Its branches protected the people from the scorching equatorial sun and the above ground root structure provided "chairs" for the attendees.

In one of their first services a message in tongues and interpretation came forth. God promised that people would come from far and wide to worship with them under the tree. (Note: to date visitors have come from three different continents and several different countries, to this village church, essentially in the middle of nowhere!) God also warned them that they would have to endure suffering, hardship, and much opposition, but that God would fight their battles for them.

Christopher ministered to his flock on the weekends and attended Bible school during the week. When he first brought the message of Jesus Name baptism to the people, they resisted. Soon after, about forty-five were baptized in the saving Name of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Mark records the promise of Christ that signs and wonders would follow those that believe. During these early days of the ministry, God operated in the realm of the miraculous. Records indicate that at least sixty were healed or delivered from demons, and three were raised from the dead! God continued to pour out His Spirit and the waters of baptism were constantly being stirred as new converts received a revelation of the Mighty God in Christ.

As prophesied, persecution came in many forms. One evening a gunman set an ambush for Christopher and his wife, Esther. While in prayer the previous day, Esther had been warned about the ambush. When she heard the man take up his position by the umbrella tree, she came out to meet him. Esther rebuked him in Jesus' Name and the man trembled so that he was unable to use the gun and fire a shot. Christopher joined the scene and the man fled in embarrassment. God had given Christopher and Esther another victory.

On another occasion the enemies of the church set a beehive in the umbrella tree. The beehive was brought down during a Sunday worship service and the angry bees swarmed everywhere. But miraculously the bees began to fall to the ground as they dropped dead one by one.

The next plague to befall the newborn church was a plague of snakes. On three different occasions a snake was set loose to attack Christopher or Esther. They managed to kill the first one, the second one slithered off Esther's bed and disappeared when God awoke her to alert her of the danger, and the third one actually bit Christopher, but the poisonous venom was no match for the Holy Ghost. Christopher walked away unharmed.

Nigeria has a semi-tropical climate and a six month rainy season characterized by torrential rains. Considering this, the church under the umbrella tree experienced yet another miracle. From 2000 to 2006 they held services under the umbrella tree and they were never disturbed by rain. Imagine; a statistical impossibility. Christopher can testify that at times it rained up until service time and sometimes after service, but it never rained during the time they gathered for worship, prayer, or the ministering of the Word.

Christopher won more than two hundred people under the umbrella tree! He lives in a small two room mud block hut about fifty feet from the tree. With no financial help from the missionary, district, or national church, he built a concrete block building that will easily seat three hundred.

God can do anything in our lives if we will just avail ourselves to His call. Christopher Rock is a living testimony of God's abundant grace, supply, power, and love. And like the Book of Acts, there is no "amen" to this chapter. Christopher had a well dug outside the church that supplies water to many of the same villagers that opposed him for so long. He is pioneering a church in the capital city of Enugu State. He has brought several students to the Bible School. But that is another story!

This article is an excerpt and slight adaptation of a chapter in a new book being written by Missionary Gerry McLean. It is a fresh testimony of what God can do because people gave to support a missionary because he was willing to go to a mission field. This resulted in a student being taught, and starting a church because the harvest is great and because God is faithful!