

July 2025

Dear Praying Friends,

Allow me to apologize in advance regarding the length of this letter, but God has opened a wonderful door of opportunity for us, and I want to share it with you. First, however, I feel like I need to give a little background.

*"For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises **with understanding.**"* (Psalm 47:7) We live in a time when many churches are slowly diminishing the importance of old-fashioned preaching in favor of a much heavier emphasis on music – specifically, music designed to make people feel good. In many churches, elaborate musical productions have all but replaced the simple preaching of the Word of God in all its life-changing power! That being said, Godly music, when kept in its proper place, is undeniably a major part of the Spirit-filled Christian life. Can you imagine what our church services would be like without the song service? Can you imagine standing up to preach to an audience whose heart had not been prepared through the singing of old-fashioned hymns? Outside of the church, Godly music is equally important in the life of the individual as he seeks to walk with God.

I realize that this is starting to sound like a sermon on music, so allow me to get to the point. I would like you to imagine with me for a moment going to church and singing the following lyrics: *"Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not; Thy compassions they fail not. As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be. Great is Thy faithfulness . . ."* Can you imagine what it would be like to sing these beautiful lyrics with such a majestic melody while really only understanding about half of what you are saying? While certainly someone could explain the lyrics to you, the power of the song to impact your heart would still be greatly diminished. That is the situation of countless Godly Christians here in the Philippines. While English is certainly widely known and used, there is a GREAT amount of singing that takes place *"WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING."* Take, for example, that great old hymn, "Faith Is the Victory." *"Encamped along the hills of light, ye Christian soldiers, rise, And press the battle ere the night shall veil the glowing skies. Against the foe in vales below, let all our strength be hurled; faith is the victory, we know, that overcomes the world. Faith is the victory . . ."* Let's just be honest; there are a lot of Americans who would struggle with some of those lyrics! The point I am making is this: there is, and has been for a long time, a great need in the Philippines for Godly, Christian songs in the native languages of the Filipino people. The Cebuano language, which we often call Visayan, has approximately 20 million native speakers, but as of 2017 when Ruth and I arrived in Dapitan, there still was not even one good Visayan songbook that was doctrinally sound and musically pleasant. There was, and still is, a very old Seventh-Day Adventist songbook, which many Baptists have tried to use over the years, but it is neither doctrinally sound nor musically pleasant. The song translations are wooden and clunky, and strange doctrines are woven throughout the songbook.

Since our arrival in Dapitan, God has slowly pushed me more and more into the linguistic arena, especially in the area of song translation. Over the last 8 years, we have spent literally thousands of hours translating, editing, and reediting our songs. Our current hymnal is in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition and has over 150 songs. I think I've translated somewhere in the arena of 300 songs total, but I've decided to include only public-domain songs in our hymnbook so I can print, sell, or give away anything that we produce without worrying about getting permission from people thousands of miles away. My goal has been to develop a good, doctrinally sound, Baptist songbook with songs that are easily memorized and musically pleasant. After 8 years of hard work, with the help of my Visayan editor and the occasional input from my other staff members, I believe that we are finally almost there. A couple of months ago, I showed my songbook to a faithful pastor, an old soldier of Christ, who's been serving in another city here on Mindanao for over 30 years. I opened my songbook to "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus" and handed it to him. I then began playing a recording of the song on my cellphone. As this old Visayan preacher listened to the song and followed along in the songbook, he began trying to sing along, and I saw tears fill his eyes. After a verse or two, he looked up at me and said in Visayan, "I like your songs better than ours." The most common response I've received from native Visayan speakers regarding our song translations has been, "Your songs touch our hearts." There is a reason that Paul said, "I will sing with the understanding also."

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## Missionaries to the Philippines

*"For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." 1 Corinthians 16:9*



Now, with that as a background, let me share with you what God has been doing. In the last week or so, God has opened up a door of opportunity for us to make our song translations available to hundreds of Visayan-speaking pastors! The way that God worked it all out was extraordinary. About 6 weeks ago, God started pushing me to visit Pastor Doug Sisson's ministry, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, on the other end of our island. I had never met Pastor Sisson, but I had heard many good things about him and his ministry, so I decided to make the trip with a couple of our young men. This was not a small decision, considering the fact that the drive across Mindanao can take anywhere from 12 to 18 hours, depending on which route you choose. General Santos, the city where Mt. Calvary Baptist Church is located, also just happens to be on the other side of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, making the shortest route a rather dangerous one.

About 5 weeks ago, we made our first attempt at crossing the island. We left at 5:00 a.m. and drove straight through the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. We were making good time until my car decided that it "didn't want to play anymore." In the middle of a traffic jam, it died and refused to restart, leaving us stranded smack-dab in the middle of Muslim country. To make things worse, I quickly discovered that the people in that area don't speak Visayan. They usually communicate with outsiders using the national language of Tagalog. Unfortunately, I don't speak Tagalog! Not knowing what to do, I called Pastor Bruce Rice, who's a friend of mine and has been serving as a missionary here in Mindanao since 1986. When I told Pastor Rice our location, he paused and then said quietly, "You're not in a good place, Bro. Mike." Eventually, he arranged for a Filipino pastor and a mechanic from his church to drive three hours one way to try to rescue us. We, in the meantime, were instructed to go wait at an army checkpoint for security reasons. There at the checkpoint, I was able to talk to the ranking officer who happened to speak Visayan, and I asked him if the area was truly dangerous. He shrugged nonchalantly and said, "We do have some ISIS groups hiding way up in the mountains over there." Well, that was good to know! 😊 To make a long story short, with the help of the mechanic, we were eventually able to get the car running well enough to get home, but it wasn't until last week that I finally got it completely fixed.

After our ill-fated first attempt at crossing the island, I made two important decisions: (1) I will never again try to drive my car across Mindanao. It's not trustworthy, and there are just too many areas where a breakdown could be disastrous. (2) I need to learn Tagalog if I am going to travel to different parts of our island. It's very disconcerting when you get out of the car and can't understand what anyone is saying!

However, that's not the end of the story. Last week, we made our second attempt at crossing the blessed island of Mindanao. Considering the less-than-pleasant experience of our first trip, we opted to go around the Muslim area instead of through it. I rented a car, and we began our journey on Monday, July 7. Due to our circuitous route, it took us a full day and a half to get there, but it was worth the trip. I was going because I wanted to see the ministry, and specifically the Bible college. God, however, had much more in mind.

When we arrived in General Santos, I had no idea that for months, or maybe longer, they had been praying for and trying to find good Visayan songs to help the pastors in their area. Last Wednesday morning, I sat down with the man who heads up much of Pastor Sisson's music ministry, and he asked my permission to put some of my song translations in a songbook that they will give out at their Pastors' Conference this coming September. I learned this past Monday that they are expecting around 800 pastors! Only God could have worked everything out so perfectly. For 8 years, we have worked on this project, and we are finally almost ready! Now, at the perfect time, God brought us in contact with a ministry that can make the greatest use of our work.

I would ask you to pray for this project. If we are going to give our songs to 800 pastors, I want them to be the best quality they can be. That necessitates a review of the entire songbook. There is also a lot of work and collaboration needed to deal with the layout aspects of the project.

I would also ask you to pray for our church as a whole. This is a big opportunity, and the Devil knows that. Before I even got home last week, the Devil began pounding my people. Last, but not least, I would ask that you pray for my wife as she draws near the end of her pregnancy. She is due to give birth sometime in mid-August. Please pray that God would be gracious and give her strength and a relatively easy delivery. Thank you for prayers, support, and friendship.

Yours for souls,

*Mike Morrissey*  
Mike Morrissey



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