



The Flame

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The Path Ahead

While in Papua New Guinea's Southern Highlands Province, I trekked along paths that crested mountain ranges of 4000 to 5000 feet, wound along ridges with mountain sides rising on one side and only the bolder-filled Erave River a few hundred feet below in the other. Then there were the ominous vine bridges over rivers and gorges. In all, I covered more than 3500 miles.

Almost always there was the added benefit of punishing sun or stinging high altitude rain and slippery mud paths. In one particular area called the Iapi, there was the unenviable hour and half trek through a canopy of overgrowth that permanently transformed the terrain into a swamp.

Of course, when I stepped off my porch to begin each journey, I was never totally certain what lay ahead. Each time I faced the adventure of a new path or a familiar path with the promise of new experiences. Every excursion into a world more than 500 miles deep in the interior "bush" was filled with the fireside stories of my local brothers. There were even times when I found myself on obscure paths to equally obscure villages where no outsider had ever been.

A few days ago when I looked at my calendar and saw the date "January 1," I was struck with the same sense or anticipation I used to feel as I waved goodbye to my wife and ventured beyond the familiar and the comfortable for eight or ten days at a time. The year ahead is a new path. The path may be familiar in one sense, but the empty pages of the calendar hold new and life-changing experiences.

We have to acknowledge that with the beginning of each year, or for that matter each day, there is the promise of brilliant sunrises and sunsets. With certainty there will be the occasional encounters with the unusual and even the amazing. And, of course, moments of pain, confusion and disappointment are inescapable.

But in the end, the history written on those pages will reflect more than the sum of our experiences. Rather, our days are defined by the imprint of grace and truth that forge the image of the One who is at the center of it all.

"I know what I am planning for you," says the LORD.... "I will give you hope and a good future. Then you will call my name...and I will listen to you. And when you search for me with all your heart, you will find me! (Jeremiah 29:11-13. New Century Version).

Take Your Next Step

Determine that 2016 will be defined by the handiwork of the God of grace and truth. Place a reminder on the mirror of your bathroom, on the front of your fridge, on your dash board, that reads "Defined by Grace and Truth."

Make this the year when your prayer life is shaped by that declaration. Declare in His presence that His grace is the oxygen of your spiritual life including this very day.

Seek each day for the Breath of the Almighty (the *pneuma*, Greek for "breath," used to refer to the Spirit) to fill you afresh with His gift of life (Job 33:4).