

In the Shadow

Grace and I have been here in Rwanda for over two weeks now and are enjoying it immensely. We've been learning a lot, even if it is a slow process. The expression here for something tedious is "buhoro buhoro," meaning "slow by slow." It takes time! Our American/Western mentality pushes us to be dissatisfied if things don't happen quickly and on time. Not an easy lesson, but one that Grace and I are studying every day.

One example is husking and shelling corn (referred to here as maize). When it is harvested, there is still moisture in the kernel. In the US it is shelled in the field by a combine, then hauled to the farm or the elevator to be dried before long-term storage. Here in Rwanda, as in most of sub-saharan Africa, it is harvested with the husks still on. Last week we husked three heaping pickup loads. A few strips of husk are left on to tie a few ears together, then hung over the rafters or a drying rack to let dry. Once dry, it is shelled by hand for final drying in the sun on a tarp, then sacked for storage.

For me, as an American, and a farmer at that, this takes entirely too long. There are machines that can do this. What is taking days can be done in minutes (or hours, at least). Truth be told, I have enjoyed this process immensely. In the US, I do my job with my machine; you do your job with your machine and there is little interaction. We go to the drive-in window to pick up our lunch; we do our banking through the app on our smartphones; we order things on-line to have them placed in our mailbox or dropped on the porch. The human interface is minimal, if at all. Here, there are 6, 8, 10 people sitting together husking and shelling. The conversational chatter would never happen if machines were noisily clanging.

All of our gadgets and time-saving devices have not made our relationships stronger or better. Time cannot be saved. You can't put an hour in a safe place and keep it until tomorrow. Time can only be spent. Slowing my pace to that of Rwandans might never fully happen for me (I won't speak for Grace). After all, I only plan stay for four months. But if I gain a greater appreciation for the simpler life of my African sisters and brothers, I'll get a little bit closer to seeing how most other people in the world live. North Americans are very much in the minority on this one.

For the Master, Chris Elliott with the Church of the Brethren Rwanda

