

## Chapter 1

### A Matter of Money

There are people in this world for whom \$25,000 one way or the other would probably not even be noticed, or for whom, at best, it would mean very little. But I'm not one of them. And, judging from the voice on the other end of the line, my bank manager wasn't either. That's why he was calling me long distance. He wanted his money back.

I suspect it was the timing of the thing that had him worried the most. Diane and I were getting ready to head back to Africa, to our home at Lukanga in the Kivu province of Zaire. Our furlough was not quite over, but we had decided to go back early - two weeks early. When he called us, we had only one day left. So he was understandably nervous.

We had moved up the date of our return because of the school year in Zaire. Of course, our bank manager didn't know that. He didn't know that for missionaries on furlough the school year is always a problem, that the summer break is for two months while furlough is for three. All he knew was that we were leaving in a rush and we had his money - a lot of it.

The last month of a furlough is a lot like the first three weeks of December. You spend your days shopping, your evenings wrapping, and your nights planning - but Christmas doesn't come. Oh, I suppose it does, in a way, for there's great excitement at being so close to getting back, but there's great regret as well. A thousand days of separation from family and friends loom very large from this perspective, especially when your only contact is by mail and the mail takes at least a month to get through.

We didn't know, as the last few hours slipped away, that there was a banker for whom the thought of separation was almost as painful as it was for us. We didn't know that he was desperately phoning different members of our family, trying to locate us before we left. And we certainly didn't know why he wanted to talk to us, but we were soon to find out. It wasn't to say Bon voyage, I can assure you.

Earlier in the day, one of his tellers had made an error in our favor! On my way out of Oshawa for the last time, I had stopped at the bank to withdraw \$2,500 for a money order to pay for shipping our baggage,

our motorcycle, and several other items. The teller made out the money order as I requested, but then she made a slight error, a little nothing, really. Instead of \$2,500, she typed in \$25,000. I didn't notice it.

I left for Michigan when I finished my transaction at the bank, and it was late that night before the manager's phone call reached me. He was doing his best to sound casual.

"There's been a small error with that money order you got from us," he said, the worry in his voice almost palpable. "Did you cash it yet?"

"No," I answered, "I wasn't planning to cash it until tomorrow."

"Oh, good," he said, answering just a little too hastily to sound natural. "The teller made a mistake, and you might have had trouble getting it cashed. We wouldn't want that, would we?"

"No," I agreed, "we certainly wouldn't."

He went on expansively. "Tell you what. Just to make sure you have no problems, I'll send my assistant down there with a new money order tonight."

"But it's a 300-mile drive down here," I protested. "It would take him the whole night."

"I know, I know," he acknowledged. "But it's the least we can do. After all, the error was ours, not yours. And we certainly don't want to have you running into problems at the last minute." A bank manager was there to serve the bank's customers, and if it meant driving all night, well, that was just the way it would have to be.

Call me a realist if you will, or a cynic if you must, but to my suspicious ears, something didn't sound quite right. I made a motion to Diane, who was standing nearby trying to figure out the whole conversation from the half she could hear. "Bring me the money order," I whispered.

The banker was still talking when she came back, and I looked at the money order with great curiosity. It wasn't until three or four apologies later that I finally noticed the mistake. It was surprising how inconspicuous it was, really - until you had seen it, that is. After that, it was hard to take your eyes off it again. I pointed it out to my wife as the man talked on, assuring me for the fifth or maybe the sixth time of his bank's earnest desire to be of service.

Diane says I let him off the hook too easily. I don't know. Maybe I did. But I let it pass. I didn't bother to point out to him that I could have cashed the thing anywhere in the world and there would have been no questions asked. But he should have known a missionary

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wouldn't do such a thing. In the end I simply had him send the corrected amount to a nearby bank just over the border in Canada, and he paid me mileage to drop off the old money order and pick up the new one.

We left for Zaire the next day. The bill for the shipment came to \$2,462, and I counted the change carefully before putting it into my wallet. It would come in handy during the trip, and after what had just happened, I didn't want any more mistakes. You see, there are people in this world for whom \$38 one way or the other would probably not even be noticed, or for whom, at best, it would mean very little. But I'm not one of them.