

# e-SCR@PBOOK

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## Encouraging Etas

We reported on the majority of our Vila visit in last month's edition, but we were still there for a few days in April...

The first Sunday of the month, we assembled with the Christians in Etas Village. While the visit started out a bit difficult (see pic, lower right), we are always greatly encouraged by every visit there, and this time was no different.

For starters, as I've written before, the brethren in Etas are some of the poorest and yet some of the happiest people with whom we work. In the photos on the next page, you will see that they've dragged an old refrigerator from the nearby city dump, and use it to catch rain water as it falls off their rusty roof. They don't have much, but they have joy in Christ and it shows! I always leave them with an attitude of humility and appreciation.

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## Lukim Yu

After six weeks of fun, we said goodbye to Mema and Papa early this month. We had a great time together, and wished they didn't have to go.

Titus and Alexis will miss all the attention they received from some of their biggest fans, and the Brandell-homeschool

sure won't be the same without our visiting teacher!

It was hard to say goodbye, but "lukim yu" actually means see you later, and we're already looking forward to our next opportunity to be together.

Thanks for all the fun times together, Mema and Papa!



**FIRST FLIGHT:** Titus, Alsen and I with our seatbelts securely fastened and ready to fly to Tanna. This was Alsen's first time to ever ride on an airplane.



**FIRST BITE:** During our two-day layover in Vila (between Tanna and Malekula), I had the honor of buying Alsen his first ever hamburger!



**FLAT:** The Vanuatu roads are infamous, and for good reason! A large piece of coral was "hiding" in the grass beside the road, and I hit it trying to miss a pothole.



**[From top-left, clockwise] Water catchment; An old house that is used for the teenage Bible class, with a lean-to attached where the church assembles; Nepina leading the younger children in their Bible class (utilizing recently-received visual aids) ; Sam leading the young men in Bible study.**

We were also encouraged by the way in which the Etas congregation makes such an effort to teach and train young people in God's word. Having recently receiving some new visual aids from the Bakers, Sam takes the older youth each week through a study of the Old Testament, while the women take the younger children through the New Testament. Watching Sam with these teenage boys (many of whom are not children of Christians) literally brought tears to my eyes. He was well-prepared, and he really took the time to teach and make application. He is also using their time together to train the young men in public speaking and leading prayers/songs. Shawnda was equally proud of Nepina and the other women as they led the children in their study. The future is indeed bright for this congregation, and we look forward to experiencing the fruit of their labors with them in the coming years.

They asked me to preach that morning, and I chose to study through Romans 12:1-8 with them, emphasizing the importance of being a living sacrifice for Jesus, focusing on using our talents to His glory.

As is usual in Etas, we stayed around following the assembly to share a meal together. During that meal, I was very encouraged that Sam approached me with some Bible questions that he had been considering. They were very thoughtful questions, and showed that he has really been doing some thinking. I enjoyed spending an hour or so with him and Timothy discussing these things. These two men do not have an easy life, but they have a good life and they are continually devoting themselves to the Lord and His church.

Be praying for these dear brethren as they continue to let their light shine in Etas Village.

# Tanna Island

The Baker family has done a wonderful work in Tanna, and it has been our pleasure to follow up on the islands two congregations in their absence. We were able to spend two weeks with the brethren there this month.

We first visited a group of Christians on the south part of the island, and it was great to having Tom's smiling face meet us at the airport. We hopped on a truck that he had arranged, stopped in town to buy a few supplies (rice, tinned meat, sugar, vegetables, toilet paper, etc.), and headed off on the beautiful (bumpy!) ride to **Iatukun Village**. Our four-wheel-drive truck was able to get us the majority of the way up to the village, but we ended up having to walk the last 30 minutes or so because of the muddy conditions. As you might imagine, uphill in the mud carrying your luggage can be a challenge, but we made it (and Shawnda and I decided we are definitely out of shape!).



**Tom and Margaret's house in Iatukun**

We immediately received a very warm welcome from Tom's family, and got settled in our accommodation. Tom was eager to share some struggles that the congregation has been facing in the early months of this year, as one of the members has really caused some problems. Tom and I had talked on the phone about the issue, but cellular-reception is so poor that these conversations were usually not very productive (you'll remember that Tom is the one who has to climb up in a breadfruit tree near his house just to get a signal). Even after 8 years in the country, I still struggle to understand some cultural things in Vanuatu. This was a major and ongoing issue,



**Sunday morning assembly in Iatukun**

and best I can tell it started with someone giving a pig as a gift, and expecting to promptly receive one in return. When that didn't happen, the problem escalated quickly. I did the best I could to provide some biblical principles, and offered to go and talk to the brother (he lives about a two-hour's walk away), but Tom advised against it since there had been death threats issued. Sometimes I just feel so inadequate! Instead, I wrote the brother a letter and sent it to him via his younger sister, who is also a Christian. I pray that he will come back soon.

The congregation in Iatukun consists of Tom and his brother Antoine, their wives, and few other extended family members. Antoine was not available to study that evening, and asked that we please double up our studies on Saturday so that he wouldn't miss out. After dinner, we sang hymns together, and oh how these folks love to sing. During our last trip, we would sing in the evenings for almost an hour (after I had taught for an hour), and I had to give up and go to bed, but they kept on singing well into the night. They have passed their love of singing praises to God on to their children as well, and hearing their sweet, young voices is wonderful.

The series of lessons that I had prepared to teach during this trip was titled "Recognizing Sin" and focused in on several deeds of the flesh that sometimes become so commonplace within society, that Christians can tend to forget that they are indeed sinful acts. I tried to make the studies as practical as possible, in an effort to encourage us all to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, honoring our heavenly Father. We also emphasized the grace and forgiveness found in



**Tom and Margaret readying a pig for dinner**

Christ, and the importance of walking in the light on a daily basis. I felt like the studies were very well-received, and appreciated some good discussions that resulted as they thought about applications to their own lives.

Shawnda also prepared a series of lessons for the ladies, focusing on Wisdom for Women from the Proverbs. She came back from each study with the ladies practically glowing, because she was so proud of the way that these sisters had committed to being more devoted Christians in their daily lives - what a blessing to be associated with such soft-hearted people!

Alsen, from Malekula, accompanied us on the trip, and proved to be a valuable addition to our group. He quickly formed a close bond with both Tom and Antoine, and “storied” with them for hours at the house, in their gardens, feeding the pigs, fetching firewood, etc. The brethren were excited to have a guest speaker for the Sunday we were there with



**Alsen and Tom studying together**

them, and Alsen did a wonderful job (perhaps the best sermon I have heard in Vanuatu to date!). He and I have spent a lot of time together over the past two years talking about how to study the Bible and how to prepare lessons, and I am very proud of his progress. I know the local Christians were encouraged by him as well.

We had a special opportunity on Monday. Tom had previously had some discussions with a man in another village (while they were both in town), and he liked what he heard from Tom and asked him to come study with him the following Monday. After our morning tea, Tom, Alsen and I walked up the mountain about two hours to **Iennuhup Village** (yen-oo-hoop). Daniel is a natural leader, and recently became disenchanted with denominationalism. He and the rest of the villagers broke from their previous ties and established the “Iennuhup Community Local Church.” He was keen on hearing more from Tom, because he liked the idea of simply being the church that we read about in the New Testament.



**Some of those who studied in Iennuhup**

After a traditional welcome that included a speech from the local chief and the presentation of flower necklaces, I was given the floor to “tell us more about the church that Jesus established.” As you might imagine, no topic could bring more joy to a missionary’s heart. I did my absolute best to present the gospel plan to these 13 adults and their children for about an hour. As is often the case, the longer I talked the more people wandered up in curiosity. I then opened the floor for questions, wanting to allow them to determine what topics we covered. We had questions on tithing, speaking in tongues, modern-day

miracles, and baptism of the Holy Spirit to name a few. I interpreted their non-verbal feedback to be very positive and open to the truth, which was encouraging. When the questions ceased, Daniel thanked us for coming, and assured us that this would not be our last time studying the Bible together. He asked us to pray for their group as they consider these things which they had never heard before. Of course, I in turn ask all of you to pray for the people of Iennuhup Village as well.

Tom, his wife Margaret, and their youngest daughter (Melia) accompanied us back to town on Wednesday. There we met up with Christians from **Loun Village**, who were there to take us to their village. We were very glad to learn that "Will Hill" (as in "if you you're gonna go up this hill you better make sure your will is in order 'cause you never know if you've gonna make it!") had recently been reworked and is now much safer. We stocked up on supplies once more, and were off for the second half of our adventure.

A Christian couple was away visiting family on the other side of the island, so our family slept in their house while in Loun. The Christians there recently completed a visitors house near the church building, and Alsen was privileged to be the first person to get to sleep in it.

The main struggle in Loun Village is water, and villagers have to walk about thirty minutes down a very steep hill to fetch all their water for bathing and cooking (from a natural spring). They are in the process of completing a water supply system to the village, and hopefully that will be in place within the next couple of months.

I spent most of my time with Miswel and Harry, two of the local leaders. I originally met Miswel when he lived in Etas several years ago, and it is amazing how much he has matured and grown in those intervening years. To see the power of the gospel to change people's lives is wonderful. I appreciated the time I got to spend visiting with him. Miswel and Alsen really became close friends, and it was neat to witness their friendship.

Harry began a new job this school-year in town. He is the baker for the secondary school his daughter attends. I followed him to town one morning on the almost two-hour one-way walk, because experience has shown that

Harry really opens up in a one on one setting. I enjoyed spending those hours with him, talking about life, the church, and the Bible. I appreciate his thoughtfulness, and his dedication to his family (physical and spiritual). You can read more about Harry's new job in an upcoming blogpost.

As is often the case in a place as rich in custom and culture as Vanuatu (and especially in Tanna), we had lots of distractions during our time in Loun. A middle-school aged girl died unexpectedly (with the locals claiming it as a case of black-magic) and there were funeral arrangements to attend to (she was a distant family member to Miswel's wife). The village also celebrated a girl's "coming of age" custom ceremony which is a full day affair, culminating in a very odd "beat everyone with banana stalks to show how happy you are" activity. Interesting to say the least (and a little scary!). Lastly, there was a ceremony conducted at the village nakamal (chief's meeting place) where a man who had been convicted in village court of a serious crime against a woman "paid his debt" of a butchered cow, approx. \$700 dollars, and several heads of kava.

In spite of all that activity (in which the locals were expected to take some part), we had a very productive time in fellowship with the Christians, and I believe the Bible studies were productive.

We were sad to leave Tanna, but were very grateful for the time that we had been able to spend with these good brethren. We are already looking forward to our next visit!



**Sunday AM assembly in Loun**

**\* sorry we don't have more pics from Loun, but our camera battery ran out of power :(**