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Back in the Saddle Again

After a wonderfully refreshing visit to NZ over the holidays, we were keen to get back to the work in Vanuatu. We spent two weeks in Port Vila, where I had lots of "study hours." I was originally scheduled to go to Ambae Island for a week, but my contact there was unable to set up the teaching opportunity we had planned. Hopefully he will be able to reschedule, and we will have the chance to take the gospel to a new area of that island.

My main focus while in Vila was lesson preparation and purchasing items for our regular Malekula shipment (living essentials that we ship to the village before each stint). We also appreciated the opportunity to assemble with brethren in Epau Village and

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Year Three Begins

It's hard to believe that we're now in our third year of living and working in Malekula. The congregation in Tulwei Village continues to grow in faith and maturity. We have some exciting things planned for 2013, and look forward to all that God has in store. Our current teaching schedule

includes classes on Biblical Parenting (Sun PM) and Wisdom Literature (Wed PM), with the youth group meeting together every Friday at lunch to study through the book of James. On the horizon, I am scheduled to begin conducting some leadership/preaching classes with the men.



NOTICE BOARD: We are up to 9 Bible correspondence course students, and have people stopping by to read information posted on the board on a daily basis.



NEW STUDY: Rovia took a tract on the church from the notice board, and subsequently asked for a Bible study. His desire to learn is encouraging.



DEATH IN THE FAMILY: Flexon and Alsen's mom passed away this month. She is pictured here with Fiona and Flexon back in 2009, during my first Malekula visit.

Vila, having several others over to our place for dinner, and meeting a Christian brother for lunch and a Bible study.

I prepared lessons to continue our congregational study through all 66 books of the Bible, namely the five books of wisdom literature. In conjunction with that preparation, I am preparing a sermon from each of the five books, as I tend to steer clear of that material in my normal preaching routine.

I am starting a new program with the youth group in Tulwei as well, focusing on leadership training. We are using the book of James as our text for the next six weeks. The kids will be working on various projects associated with our study of the book, and I think the format will prove beneficial.

It was requested late last year that I conduct a study on biblical parenting, so I also prepared lessons for that series. The

subject is a much-needed one, but teaching parenting skills in a different culture than your own can be quite difficult, especially as it relates to applying the biblical principles of training and discipline.

During the two weeks, I also reworked our BCC introductory lesson (to fit more into the village setting), and wrote reading questions on Genesis 26-50 for the Sunday AM youth Bible class.



“Olfala i ded”

That’s Bislama for, “the elderly person died.” Unfortunately, that’s the text message I received from Alsen the day before we were to travel on to Malekula. His mother had been diagnosed with kidney cancer late last year, and she had really taken a turn for the worse in the first few weeks of the new year. We were glad to be able to be in the village during the funeral events. Deaths are a communal event in Vanuatu, and we were glad to be able to provide some support to the family.

Of course, there are no funeral homes in Vanuatu, which means that the body has to be prepared by the family. The first order of business to cut down a tree, mill it into planks with a chainsaw, and build a casket (traditionally, they just wrapped the body in woven mats). With no preservative agents, the body has to be buried as soon as possible. The “grave-side” service is the main similarity Vanuatu shares with western

cultures. You may recall that Flexon and Alsen’s dad is buried beside our house (we live on Flexon’s land), and now their mother has also been laid to rest beside him.

Beginning on the first night, friends and family members begin coming to visit the family carrying a kilo of rice. The women begin wailing as soon as they see one of the immediate family members on their initial visit to the house. It’s eerily emotional to be surrounded by 20-30 people wailing.

To express gratitude and facilitate continued togetherness, the family prepares lunch and dinner every day for 10 days (traditionally, 30), culminating in the largest meal on the 10th day. During those 10 (30) days, the male members of the family do not shave their faces to show that they are in mourning. At the 10-day meal, the men all shave, drink a shell of kava, and then

eat a plate of food. The family killed two cows (one on the first day and another on the tenth), and cooked at least 20 bags of rice (50lbs each) during the 10 days. Extended family members donated vegetables from their gardens, as the immediate family is not allowed to work in the garden while in mourning.

I was continually amazed at how everything worked together so flawlessly. No one in particular was given a specific job to do, but everyone knew what needed to be done and when to do it, especially as it pertained to cooking (which was the main activity).

Sadly, “Abu Davit” (grandmother) went to her grave without ever obeying the gospel, but two of her sons have changed the tide in their family - living godly lives and training their young children to do the same. Please keep the family in your prayers as they continue to grieve their loss.



<< The ladies
"scratching"
yams and bananas
for laplap.

Yes, that's a
wheelbarrow full
of rice! >>



<< The men
preparing for the
shaving
ceremony.

Here the men are
cooking rice and
soup over the
open fire. >>



<< Butchering the
fresh carcass,
village-style.

Men sitting
around visiting as
rice and soup cook
in the
background. >>



<< They carved
this spoon to stir
the huge pots of
rice.

10 days of growth
(they graciously
include me as a
son in the
family). >>



NOTE: sorry for the lack of family photos this month - our camera has quit working. I took the funeral photos with my phone.