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A monthly report on our life in Vanuatu



Happy Birthday, Titus! It's hard to believe that God has already blessed us with four years together. We've had a "monster-good" time and look forward to many, many more years.

We hope this update finds you and yours doing well both spiritually and physically. It is our pleasure to once again share some of our experiences from the past month. We love and appreciate you all!

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MY FIRST FUNERAL

I got a call at 6:30am on Monday morning from Bill in Eton Village. He said that the baby of a member of the church had died the previous night, and asked if I would come and do the funeral as the brother who would normally conduct this type of service was out of town. I asked when it was scheduled and he replied "we'll start as soon as you get here." My mind immediately started racing through potential things to say. As I got ready that morning and throughout the 30 minute drive to the village, I was getting my thoughts together as quickly as possible. Not only would this be my first time to conduct a funeral, it would also be my first funeral to attend in

From the home-front...

The biggest change in my life this month was beginning each day with "school." The kids and I are enjoying our time together. Like any parent, we teach our kids throughout the day while we're living our life. But, it's neat to have a designated time each morning to sit down together and learn memory verses, Bible books, numbers, letters, etc. Having mom here last month really helped me get organized to teach Titus to read too. She gave me lots of helpful hints and signs to look for to know he's ready to start. She definitely "knows her stuff" since she's been teaching kids to read for over 30 years now.

The kids are really growing up and changing each day. They keep us busy with their questions and exuberance for life. They are both a little "high maintenance," but 100 times worth the effort it takes to train them. They really are a joy to this mother's heart.

As we prepare to spend 6-8 months of next year in the village, I have really started trying to prepare myself and the family for the transition. We've been buying things to "outfit" our new place (like huge cook pots to serve as our "dutch oven" and large plastic tubs, silverware, plates, screw top lidded containers to keep the bugs and mice out ...and things like that). It really will be quite a different life than what we're living now...rain water and solar generated electricity. It'll take some adjustments, but I am confident that it'll be a great experience and am secure in the knowledge that there are souls searching for the truth in Malekula. We want to be there to teach them. Please pray for us all as we prepare for this major change.

Hope you have a fantastic holiday season with your loved ones.

Shawnda <<<



Vanuatu. I have visited grieving families several times before or after a funeral, but had not yet actually been present for the service itself. I got to the village and picked up three Christian men and began asking them questions about what was expected of me. They said that I would need to speak twice - once to the family at the house, and once at the graveside. They determined the order of service and who would lead what part, and we got out of the truck and walked up to the house.

I wish I had pictures to give you a better idea of all that I experienced, but of course taking pictures would have been quite inappropriate. There were about 100 people gathered in and around the house. The mother and all the female family members were in the house (a one room structure made of local wood), with everyone else standing outside looking in through the doors and windows. Once inside, it was difficult to control my emotions as I saw that little bitty homemade casket laying in the middle of the room. My first thought was, "they shouldn't have to make caskets that small." I could see a large hole in the ground out the back door, with fresh dirt piled high beside it. While everyone was very somber, there was a surprising absence of wailing that normally accompanies such an occasion. After a prayer and a couple of hymns, the floor was mine. There were, of course, no words that could take away the pain that was being felt - for the baby girl was only a few months old, and had died from respiratory issues (probably something as "simple" as the flu or pneumonia). Her father, who works on a ship, wasn't even able to be present. But due to the lack of modern funeral services, the body had to be buried as soon as possible.

I did my best to provide some comfort to the family from God's word, assuring us all that such a precious soul was now in the presence of her Creator. We were all painfully reminded that the end could come at any time, and that we must always be ready. As David said, this child will not return to us, but we can go to her someday.

In Vanuatu, the burial process is part of the funeral service, and so after a few more words, the body was carefully lowered into the ground by friends and family as a light rain began to fall. Everyone paid their last respects by taking a hand full of dirt and tossing it into the hole. They then filled in the hole and mixed cement to cover the opening.

The entire experience was quite surreal - such a wide range of emotions ran through me. I came home and hugged my kids immediately, and recommitted to taking advantage of every opportunity to enjoy them to the fullest. I am hoping these experiences are few and far between, but am honored to assist in any way that I can.

TRUTOK BAEBOL SKUL

It was once again my turn to teach a Trutok Baebol Skul class in Epau Village this month. I chose the topic "Holy Spirit and Miracles," as there is much confusion in Vanuatu in regard to these things. The Trinity Broadcasting Network (Benny Hinn, et al.) is one of three or so channels that are available for free throughout the two cities in Vanuatu, which has only added to the confusion. I am amazed at how many Pentecostal Churches have popped up since we arrived.

We started the classes with 10 students - four from Eton and six from Epau. Attendance was good for the first four sessions, but the final two had only six students. It was a pleasure to once again be teaching the Bible in a school setting. I appreciate the students' dedication and interest in learning the Bible. Though I felt like the classes weren't going as well as I would have hoped, I was very pleased with the grades on the final exam. Of course, more importantly, I hope that these Christians have been equipped with the truth of God's word, and that they will share that truth with their family and friends.



FAMILY TIME

After being away for over three weeks in October (constructing our house in Malekula), it was a pleasure to be able to spend a significant amount of time together as a family. Shawnda’s mom was still with us for the first week of the month, so we all went and stayed at a small resort just out of town. We had a two bedroom cottage with a small kitchen. The property looks out over the Pacific Ocean, and they had a swimming pool as well. We were basically the only ones there, and the kids loved playing the water two or three times a day. It was a much-needed and much-appreciated time of rest, relaxation, and just being together.



It was also a joy to welcome back a part of our “extended family” this month as the Bakers returned home from their furlough in the States. Since we have lived under the same roof with them for over six years now, they really are like family. The kids were absolutely ecstatic to be back together. And thankfully they have all four matured to the point that they really play well together without much bickering or fighting. Having playmates right next door makes the day that much brighter. We all enjoyed celebrating Thanksgiving together, though we opted for the pork roast instead of turkey (a 6lb frozen turkey is \$150!!). We then had a “garage sale” to start pairing down for our outer island adventures that will soon begin.



We experienced some big changes this month: Titus is 4 years old, Lexi is now exclusively using the “big-girl potty,” Titus moved into his own room (as they were waking up WAY too early every morning, which made for a loooong day), and our home now doubles as a school. Mommy is a great teacher, as the kids learn about God, numbers and letters each morning.

