

January 2009 Prayer Newsletter
—CALL TO PRAYER—Andrea Herman

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Thus far in my experiences in Guinea, January has consistently been the toughest month of the year, and this year was no exception. After hearing encouraging reports from S.K.’s family, about her being able to eat on her own shortly after returning home in December, I received a call on Jan 15 that S.K. had passed away that evening. I rushed to pack so I could leave very early the next morning to get across the border in time to attend the funeral. I arrived just in time.

Funerals in our area are very different than what I experienced in southern Guinea, and I was neither completely familiar with nor prepared for S.K.’s funeral that day. One aspect of funerals here is that any form of crying (silent or loud) is considered inappropriate. My understanding is that Muslims believe that those who cry at funerals are doubting God’s sovereignty. They believe God is the One who brings all sickness and death, and if God has decided it’s time for you to die, that’s God’s business, not ours, and expressing emotion is in effect, questioning the wisdom of God. The deceased’s family’s “lack of trust” in God is believed to hurt their chances of Him being merciful and allowing the deceased into heaven.

I didn’t understand those “rules” until after the funeral, but even if I had, I would not have been able to “keep it all in” until afterwards. As soon as I saw family members, it was all over. To complicate matters, others attending the funeral feel the need to “scold” those who aren’t obeying the “no crying” rules, including scolding the family members of the deceased who are mourning the loss of their mother/grandmother/sister. I’ll just say I didn’t find the scolding particularly helpful. I didn’t know my scolder, nor did she know me, nor what S.K. and I had been through together. It was difficult to know how to deal with that on top of all the other emotions of the day.

One of S.K.’s daughters came to my rescue. She ran up to me crying and threw her arms around me, which is by far the most expressive demonstration of love and friendship I have received here. She then brought me into the house where we could at least cry without being constantly scolded by all the funeral attendees until things got underway. The funeral was a blur of unusual happenings. The women who guided the proceedings said a lot of blessings and chanted a few songs quietly, with others joining in. However, there was also much talking, though not about the deceased, but about her daughter-in-law. They were praising her daughter-in-law over and over for various things, and saying what a great person she was. Though I have attended other funerals in southern Mali, which is culturally similar, I have never witnessed such a thing during a funeral.

They also dragged me up in front of everyone to show who I was, and that I took S.K. up to the hospital, etc. They told everyone to speak a lot of blessings on me so that “God would reimburse me”, and said what “good person” I was. Giving honor to people is an important cultural value here, but I was upset that all the women there were told that I was the one who helped S.K., when in fact it was Jesus who gifted her with an extra month of life. Though I was not given the opportunity to explain that to the women at the funeral as a group, God did open the door for that conversation afterwards as many people came to the family for the “death greeting” while I was with them. Please join me in praying that God

would make it clear to all that Jesus is the one who brought the healing, albeit temporary. I was just the one driving S.K. to where she could get it.

After the funeral I couldn't leave. The thought of being away from the family at that time was overwhelming. J.S., S.K.'s daughter in law, the one with whom I've been hoping to connect, invited me into her bedroom with two of her girlfriends. We were there for several hours, just visiting, eating together, etc. It was by far the greatest time of bonding I've had with J.S., and I pray it continues. After the funeral, the family said that I am a part of their family, because I cared for their mother as if she was my own mother. I have explained to my "big brothers and sisters" that I did what I did not because I'm a "good person", but because Jesus loved us all first, and calls us to love others in the same way. The family understands, and I have asked that they would share that with anyone who tries to honor me in the situation, because the honor does not belong to me, but to God. They have been honoring that request.

To be honest, I really struggled with S.K.'s death. My greatest struggle was not knowing where she was spiritually. I know she had seen the Jesus film several times, and really thought Jesus was great, and an amazing Healer, and that her sons are studying the Bible, but I have no way of knowing where she went when she left us. That has been very difficult for me because I thought I would have more opportunities to share Jesus with her, but we never know when our doors of opportunity will close. What I do know, is that the prophet Isaiah said of Jesus, "a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out...". (Matt 12:20). God has not put me in charge deciding people's eternal destiny, He alone is able to do so. God has enabled me to put S.K. in His Almighty hands, and trust Him that He knows what He's doing.

Please join me in thanking God for:

- the life of SK and how God is using her death to bring me closer to their family
- faith conversations with SK's family
- being able to get back to Guinea in time to attend S.K.'s funeral
- helping me deal with S.K.'s death
- restored health—God has completely healed my hands!
- peace, and the new President, who is holding people accountable for stealing from Guinea
- a good visit with my colleagues, the Heineys, as they passed through town on their way to Mali

Please join me in praying for:

- spiritual hunger all over Guinea, but especially in S.K.'s family & in the S family
- that God would use S.K.'s death to bring many to faith in Him
- MK's family situation—that her husband would reconsider their separation & that both families would be supportive of them being reunited
- MK to be able to return to our area soon—her mother sent her away to visit some relatives
- God's divine provision and demonstration of His love for MK and her children
- God's continued blessing on my language studies
- the 14 seekers in our village in Mali: that God would give them boldness to share what they are learning about Jesus with their families, friends and neighbors
- reconciliation between Christians; that the power of forgiveness would be made known
- good balance in life and work, and restful sleep
- healing for my back, which is often in pain
- the Heineys in their house hunting, that God would make HIS choice very clear
- my furlough schedule to get solidified soon