

## August 2007 Prayer Newsletter—CALL TO PRAYER—Andrea Herman

*“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” I Corinthians 10:13*

This last month has been an unexpected challenge in an unexpected way. While I was in the States, a Christian family from another city moved to Siguiri and they will be living in my courtyard for 6 months or so. We had talked about this for months, but I had completely forgotten about it - until I pulled into my yard when I returned from vacation. There they were, the father, Abou, mother Eliza, and the kids: Marie, Jaken, Safi & Ami.

On one hand I had really been looking forward to their family staying with me. It would provide Christian fellowship, constant access to Maninka speakers, and other people in the yard which is also good for nighttime security. On the other hand, I knew that this arrangement would require some patience and adapting on my part, but I didn't think it would be much of an issue. Little did I know that God intended to use this family to stretch and challenge me in many ways.

The more time I spend with people here, the more I learn about some of the deep seated values and practices in my own culture. When you are only with other people like yourself, it is difficult to see clearly the details of your own culture, because you are surrounded by it. However, stepping into a completely different culture makes clear the good, the bad and the ugly of your own culture pretty quickly.

I hadn't fully realized the extent to which I had imported many of my own cultural values and preferences, until I was living in community with this family. One of the things that I was made aware of is how anti-social I appeared just in how I typically kept the gate to my yard closed. I rationalized that it was a security issue, given all the craziness of my first few months in Guinea. However, it was mostly because when my gate is open, anyone walking by on the street can look right through my front door and into my house, which to me, feels like a major invasion of privacy. Keeping my gate closed was just something that I was doing to help me cope with the stress of being bombarded by a foreign language and people with whom I couldn't communicate.

God knows that it's not going to do me any good to have people in the community perceive me as anti-social, so He is challenging me on this point through this family's presence in the yard. Now the door is often open and there are all sorts of people who come and go in and out of my yard, and by God's mercy I'm adjusting. I've even made a few new friends in the process.

The issue concerning the gate is so minor, but as many things here that seem minor, they usually represent an underlying value. Keeping the gate closed was a little thing, but it was one little thing I could control more or less, to try to regulate the external stress factor of having strange men coming in my yard unannounced.

There are other things God is challenging me on as well. He is challenging my concept of ownership, which is such significant value back in the States. I used to think that I wasn't very hung up on "things." However, when people borrow my things and bring them back in considerably worse condition than they were loaned, and with no apology, I find myself frustrated.

The “time warp” has also been a source of stress. In the States people say, “Time is money.” Africans are well known for their hospitality, not their efficiency. They are much more concerned about people. Things can wait, because they’re just things. I am learning to appreciate the value of taking time for people. The challenge is balancing the time spent with people and finding time to study, complete reports, newsletters, and thank yous that either have deadlines, or some expectation of promptness.

Though it is hard to articulate all the details, I have REALLY felt God stretching me through the experience of living with this family. It was as if all the little details of life that used to be little tidbits of “security” for me were suddenly taken away. I could’ve insisted on my way, but it would’ve damaged relationships with these new friends and kept me from growing and learning the things that I am learning through this experience.

God is challenging me in the areas of privacy, control of my surroundings, my concept of time, among other things. Though it’s hard to let go of some of these little things in which I find comfort, I know that God is working on me in these areas because they are things that I am hanging onto instead of Him. I am better off learning to trust in Him, and my future ministry will be much better off without these bits of baggage as well. I don’t mention these challenges as if I have it all figured out and God has finished teaching me all these things. It’s a work in progress, as am I.

The Bible verse I chose talks about “temptation.” In this situation, it is not a temptation to do something bad, or hurtful to another person, like being tempted to yell at someone because I’m stressed out. The temptation for me in this situation was to insist on living my life, as I knew it, prior to this family moving in. I have to admit, it is a temptation some days to want to stay and “hide” inside my house or my yard when I’m feeling overwhelmed by people, the language barrier or life. However, falling into that temptation would keep me from having successful relationships with people, learning the language and being part of the community. Though I may feel that way some days, God’s word reminds me that despite the stress of feeling like an idiot because I can’t understand what people are saying to me, or feeling frustrated because I can’t communicate clearly to others, that He is faithful. He won’t ever let the stress and temptation to “hide” take over, because “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13).

There are some days that seem absolutely ridiculous to me here; whether it be stress or crazy things going on around me. It makes me wonder how Jesus did it. He left heaven, paradise, to descend into our miserable world. He chose to enter the world just as we do - as a helpless baby, relying on imperfect parents to take care of Him. He submitted to their authority, instead of reminding them that He is the King of Kings. His humility and submission in that process is remarkable to me. There are days when I struggle with culture shock and wonder, “Why can’t we handle this the way I know how to deal with it?”

Learning all the new cultural rules and different ways to use language takes a lot of time and effort, yet Jesus did it without complaining. His obedience ultimately led Him to surrender His life, so that we would have the opportunity to live with Him forever in heaven. My struggles in Guinea are petty and insignificant compared to what He went through. However, I am also relieved to know that He understands my struggles, no matter how trivial or inconsequential they are. He understands yours, too.

The month of Ramadan is almost here, it should begin September 13 this year. I've experienced Ramadan in Guinea before, but never in a Muslim-dominated city. I've been warned that you need an extra measure of patience with people because everyone is crabby because they're fasting. I can't wait! ☺

My colleagues have also warned me that if I need to drive anywhere I need to be sure to leave or plan my return around the five prayer times each day because, due to the mosque near my house, there will be people praying all the way out into the street. They completely block the main highway through town. It's kind of like what happens in some churches in the U.S. at Christmas and Easter - parking lots are jam packed, people may even need to park out in the street and sit in folding chairs out in the lobby because there isn't enough space in the sanctuary. It's just too bad people's interest in God quickly fades after the religious holiday has passed.

One good thing about the month of Ramadan, is that most people are actually thinking about God and praying, even if they don't for the other 11 months of the year. Often, God will appear in dreams to Muslims during Ramadan, or Muslims will have visions of Jesus coming to them and asking them to follow Him. The vast majority of Muslims who come to faith in Jesus, come as a result of dreams and visions they had, often during the month of Ramadan. Please join me in praying for the following dear friends who are Muslims - Mrs. K, Mrs. C, Mrs. J, Mr. K & Mr. S - that they would hear the call of Jesus, to step out of their lives of fear and uncertainty, and into His arms of love, forgiveness and peace.

Please join me in thanking God for:

- the Christian family who is living with me, and the blessing that they are
- the Maninka words that are coming back to me after being away from Maninka for several weeks
- the quick resolution to a military incident in the market with no casualties
- His gentleness in teaching me what things I need to give up and give to Him
- wise, knowledgeable and patient colleagues who are trying to help me find my way through some challenging cultural situations

Please join me in asking God to provide:

- me with the ability to better understand and "hear" the Maninka language
- the self-discipline to establish a routine of regular prayer specifically for the Maninka, especially during Ramadan
- wisdom in how to proceed with language learning: teacher roles and when to start staying out in the village
- peace and contentment to Guineans, especially the military
- relief from back pain
- a willingness to let go of anything that is in the way of me trusting in God completely

Andrea Herman

"I have but one candle of life to burn, and I would rather burn it out in a land filled with darkness than in a land flooded with light." John Keith Falconer