

September 2007 Prayer Newsletter—CALL TO PRAYER—Andrea Herman

“He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.” Psalm 25:9

A few weeks ago, I was privileged to attend a missionary women’s retreat in Bamako, Mali. Though the team leading the conference was fun and went out of their way to pamper us, they also shared some challenging concepts from the Bible, specifically lessons from Joshua’s life, on which I really needed to reflect. “Life is about God, not you” was the introduction. It seems like a harsh message to begin the conference, but it is completely true. Though few of us would readily admit to others that our lives are “about us,” the reality of our attitude shows itself through our actions. I’ve never met anyone who is completely selfless and does everything for God 100% of the time, so the message applied to us all.

The speaker gave examples of times in Joshua’s life when he was acting like life was about him, not God - even when he was Moses’ “right hand man.” Our natural self, like Joshua, is sinful, and focused on our own needs and wants. Living our lives for God, and giving Him the credit for who He is and what He has done requires a daily sacrifice of our own desires, meaning we don’t take credit for the good things that God has brought out of our lives, we give that credit to Him. It’s anything but easy, but as God teaches us these lessons of humility and surrender, He shapes us into people that are not only more useful to Him, but also people that are more pleasant for everyone else to be around.

I have MUCH to learn about humility, but one dear, humble, seasoned missionary gave me a great visual on the picture of humility, that I hope to remind myself of for many years. She talked about just wanting to be the “water boy” on this amazing team of women that had gathered for the retreat. The “water boy” image really stuck with me. I’m so quick to want to be in control of things, especially when it involves my life. “I want to be the quarterback!” is usually where my heart is, when it comes to my life. I know in my brain that God is WAY more capable than I am to direct the “game plan” of my life, but since I think it’s “MY” life, it’s hard for me to let Him be in charge.

Everything I have, including my life and breath is a moment by moment gift from God. There is nothing I did to deserve it, and there is nothing I can do to prolong it. God is in complete control of whether or not I’m on this earth even one more day. So, talking about “MY life” gives myself and others the wrong impression. It’s more like the life that God is letting me live for as long as He chooses to. Since He has given me all of that as a free gift, it seems like I should do whatever is possible to follow where I believe He is leading me. That’s how I ended up in Africa.

Even though I’m here, what God is doing in me is far from a “done deal.” I still have struggles, discouragements, and challenges. I have much yet to learn about humility and many other things. But now I have a new goal: My goal is to be the “water boy” on Jesus’ team. Being the “water boy” isn’t a glamorous job or even one for which one receives much thanks, but it is a lot like the life Jesus lived when He lived on this earth. Jesus led by serving and doing lowly things like washing the stinky, dirty feet of those He called to follow Him. He calls us to follow Him into the same humility and servant-hood. Can we set aside our “quarterback dreams” long enough to learn the humility required to just be the “water boy”?

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’.”

2 Corinthians 12:9a

It strikes me as ironic that “humility” seems to be the theme for this newsletter. I feel like God has recently enrolled me in “Humility Boot Camp.” After a brief time of feeling like my language learning was progressing (last month), I soon found myself very discouraged in the midst of a sea of words that are mostly understandable alone, but when put into sentences, they turn back into “noise” that I can’t make any sense out of. I have been struggling with the frustration of feeling like my comprehension should be further along

than it is, but no amount of willpower will force the comprehension to come any sooner. It's pretty aggravating.

One of the issues involved is that both of my language helpers have been basically out of the picture since Ramadan began in mid-September. One of them spends most of her time at the mosque during the month of fasting. The other recently lost her younger sister to diabetes, and was in the capital for the funeral and time with her family. I don't blame them for my lack of comprehension, but it seems harder to work through this process when I can't ask them the many questions I have. The good thing that has come of this "change in schedule" is that I have been free to make a few trips out the village to do more intensive language learning.

The first trip went much better than expected, but I wasn't able to stay very long. I went out again this past Tuesday and I saw the same familiar faces, but it was as if they were speaking a different language than the last time I had been there! I don't know why it was so different the second time, but out in the village there is basically no one who speaks French, so when I don't understand, there is no one to bail me out. Calling my time in the village "intensive" is a bit of an understatement, and when it doesn't go well, it is intensely frustrating.

I know that language learning is a long, drawn out process and that no one learns a language in just a few months. God is using this time of language learning as a "character-building" exercise, among other things. As challenging as it is, I hope to come through this process able to communicate in Maninka. But more importantly, I hope to come out of it being a more Christ-like example to those who have never seen the difference that Jesus can make in a person's life. With your prayers and God's mercy, I believe that will be the result.

Please join me in thanking God for:

- starting my trips out to the village for intensive language learning
- a GREAT women's retreat!
- encouraging postcards I received from youth & adults who attended the LCMS National Youth Gathering this summer - Thank you! J
- fixing my sat modem (it wasn't working for several days). I'll try to catch up on email soon.
- Some relief from my chronic back pain.

Please join me in asking God to provide:

- a strong reliance on God (not myself) and an extra measure of self-discipline to push through this difficult time in language learning
- "discerning" ears that can understand the Maninka language that I am hearing
- some encouragement in the language learning process
- people to pray specifically from now until Oct.13, (from 7pm-10pm Central Time, when Muslims often see visions as they pray from midnight -3am) for Muslims who are fasting during Ramadan, in Guinea & all over the world, that Jesus would call them unto Him - that they would know the Truth and be set free by it.

Thanks for your prayers!

Andrea

"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