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July 2002

Dear Partners in Ministry:

One morning one of our village friends, Kisama (for whom some of you have been praying) asked me to radio Madang and ask for an ambulance to be sent. A little girl had “died” three times in the night (she was unconscious and they could not wake her) and she needed to be evacuated. I did as they asked but before the ambulance was dispatched they told me to cancel it. The parents had decided that they would rather the child die in the village. They were afraid that if she died at the hospital that she would haunt the hospital area rather than her home area.

Three days later they changed their mind asked me to take her to the hospital. She was unconscious and they could not wake her. My conclusion is that the sorcerer/diviner could not cause the sickness to go away and they wanted to try Western medicine. I loaded the girl and her family in our four-wheel-drive and headed for the hospital about an hour and fifteen minutes from our house, over some very rough roads. About halfway we stopped and prayed for the child. As I was praying for her, she stirred and began to moan as if she was trying to wake up. We went on to the hospital and I wish I could tell you that she was healed, but she was not—she died in the hospital of cerebral malaria at six years old. I was hoping that God would show his power to these people by healing the girl before arriving at the hospital, but that was not his choice. I cannot help but think that if they had allowed the ambulance to take their child earlier she would still be alive. This kind of malaria is deadly—but only if it is not treated in time. Fear, ignorance, and animism are responsible for this girl’s death.

I was talking with friends the day this girl was buried about the elections that are going on right now. It is a crazy time in PNG. The guy who ended up winning the local electorate did so by intimidation, extortion, and death threats. Our friends here have closed up their markets and have been hiding from fear of this man. When he won, they immediately got excited about his victory and began to talk on and on about what good he would do for people. Huh? This man once said that God was “number one” in his life. People heard that and it canceled out the death threats he had made to them, his evil violent personality, his extortion. I was angry and disturbed by the deep level of deception which Satan uses to hold these people in bondage. One of the first things he takes from them is any sense of reason. The darkness is thick and the oppression heavy upon our spirits right now.

We have been trying something different in church the last few weeks. We have been praying that God would open our eyes to ways in which to reach people with the gospel and the way I felt lead to begin is by walking the people through the Scriptures which show Jesus as being our Savior and by taking them through Scriptures which teach them how to walk with God. This is nothing new, but how we are doing it is. We address a couple of passages, then I have the congregation paraphrase it in Somau Garia, then we summarize it in one brief statement and memorize the principle together—in Somau Garia. In a congregation where only a few can read or write, the oral means of memorizing God’s principles for life is a powerful tool. Last week we memorized “Yesu nupo xoukem sikeya xati sini xokupa oma purinuku,” that is to say, literally, “Jesus gave us his stomach so that we might live new”, or “Jesus gave himself for us so that we might have life.” This week was “Sini sinipo xosikem Yesu tuwop xati sini xokupa oma purinuku,” or “We give our stomachs to Jesus so that we will live new”, that is, “We give ourselves to Jesus so that we can live.” People seem to be responding and one sure sign that it is connecting with the community is that village leaders have attended both Sundays, when typically they skip church or come intermittently—they want to make sure we say it right. I also have switched to preaching as much of the sermon as I can in Somau Garia, rather than the trade language, Melanesian Pidgin.

Please pray for several things. Please pray that people’s eyes and ears will be open to the gospel and their hearts will be tender toward God. Ask that God will use the leaders to influence people for the gospel. Ask God to be powerfully present over the next few months as we make preparations to begin translation of Mark in September. We need his covering, his direction, his wisdom to be poured out over the many, not just our family. Thank the Lord for his providence and kindness to us.

Your servants in Christ,
Todd, Angela, Andrew, Samuel, Abigail, and Hannah Owen