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Dear Partners in Ministry:

I sat on the ground and James Wakira explained to me the use of a particular tree root he was showing me. “When you crush this and boil it and drink the ‘cognac’ that results, you don’t remember anything. You’re stoned for hours.” We noticed one of the old men had stood and was getting ready to urinate, right in the middle of the crowd. He had already spit on someone and had quite obviously imbibed his share of “cognac”.

We were a large crowd sitting around together because the man pictured below, Okura, had died the day before and we were at the funeral wake—his body had already begun to decompose and we were in the direct sun—it would not be long before they would bury him. “What killed Okura?” I asked James. With a shrug, he deferred to a mutual friend (one of the translators), Parakun. Parakun replied that Okura had been sick with tuberculosis for a year and a half but refused to take his medicine. I knew this already and also knew that Okura had been staying at the camp of a sorcerer, seeking healing. “Why wouldn’t he take his medicine?” I asked, to see what kind of explanation I would get. Parakun responded that there was a land dispute that had been going on for some time. Okura had believed that because two clans were in disagreement, the spirits of the place were upset and were punishing him for it. He believed that no mere medicine could cure his tuberculosis because it was a sickness which originated in the spirit world, not the temporal. So he just threw his medicine away. He believed the sorcerer with whom he was staying could sort the problem out with the offended evil spirits: but he couldn’t.

Okura’s misguided belief in demonic power made his wife a widow and his children fatherless. His dependence upon sorcery cost him his life.

About the time of Okura’s death, we were also weighing the unconfirmed possibility that one of our translators, a young man, was considering “buying” a second wife. I was incensed, upset, angry with even the possibility—bigamous marriages are trouble from start to finish—the wives are rivals, the children are torn up by their father’s desires for more than one wife, not to mention the sinful and distasteful nature of it. Violence had broken out because of it. Other men interested in marrying the same woman (a young widow) thought he was trying to elbow in on them, so they gathered together and surrounded the young man’s house and beat him severely. Then they went and beat the woman (also severely). This happened three or four nights in a row.

What is the Western answer to these kinds of situations? “Just tell them it’s not right—show them the *true* way!” Been there, done that. “*Make* them take their medicine!” Been there, done that. “Explain it *better*, hold a course, have a seminar!” Been there, done that. We’ve tried so many things—so many different approaches. The basic problem, as I see it, is that from birth these folks are taught that if God exists at all, he is far away and doesn’t meddle with their daily troubles. The daily troubles are the domain of “spirits of the earth”, what the Scripture calls “elemental spirits”, or what most of us just refer to as demons. (Oddly, this is not so different from Western belief. By and large, Western thought places



God far off somewhere in his own pigeon hole, and looks to doctors, psychiatrists (or Christian counselors), etc. for dealing with our daily troubles.) The Garia believe that they can only approach God after they have dealt with the bush gods first, and have all their ducks in a row. Then, well, the less important things they take to the distant One. Even death, they believe, is dealt with via the bush gods. They don't seem to have a concept of any kind of hereafter separate from haunting the local places. These things are repeatedly drummed into their hearts with every word, action, deed of those around them from birth on. People are complex. What we see on the outside (behavior) is just the manifestation of people's values, beliefs, worldview. What radically changes how a person perceives reality? What will it take to open the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf? What will it take to bring light into the deepest darkness? Life into desperate death? What to do?

These troubling questions and experiences have been tapping at the door of our thoughts and haunting the hidden places in our hearts for some time now. When we cry out to God, we realize that our experience is not so different from so many of those who have gone before. The writer of Hebrews teaches us that many faithful ones who went before did not receive what was promised in their lifetimes. What to do?

In the absence of that remarkable, innovative, transformational idea that will make it all clear to the Garia, we keep on keeping on. We continue to live here; interact with them. We continue to whittle away at translation. We continue to teach our kids. We continue to take each opportunity presented to us and make the best of it. We continue to strive to live in grace and truth and love as we minister Jesus to people. We continue to remind God that these people are here—they are perishing, devoted to a destructive worldview. Sometimes we just curl up in a chair and cry. What to do?

Lately, in our spare moments, we have been outside. The weather has turned for the better. Rainy season is turning to dry and it's good to be outside working. I've been learning afresh to use a machete and have been clearing the bush back away from our house. It's a good stress reliever and it should hopefully keep the snakes away, like the 7-footer that was on our bedroom floor a while back. We've been tending our garden, cutting down trees, planting flowers and tomatoes and herbs. We've been working hard, enjoying the sun on our backs, breathing prayers to heaven. What to do?

As you go to your secret place to talk with your Father, take us there with you. Take Okura's family there with you. Realize as you do, Okura's wife begins the complicated and fearful time of grieving and appeasing her dead husband's ghost (as she sees it). Take the sorcerers there with you. Bring their names—Patri, Andrew, Peter—to God. Ask God to deal with them according to His wisdom. Take the Garia translators there. Ask God to give them courage, strength of character, wisdom, humility, fortitude to stand in the face of opposition. Take our family there, too. Ask God to give us strength to stand when we are weak. Ask God to give us fresh life, fresh love, fresh power, fresh grace, fresh hope daily. Ask God to give us wisdom and discernment.

Thank you, each one, for your continued prayer and financial support. God is using your sacrificial giving, your sacrificial praying, your love and concern to bring his name, his love, his grace before the eyes of many who would not otherwise have opportunity to know Him. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to represent the Lord on your behalf to these folks. While Scripture teaches us that we are Christ's ambassadors to the world, we also, by extension, are your representatives. We often share with these folks that we have friends, families, and congregations back home who are concerned for them and because of that we are able to live and work here.

I'll leave you with a bit of the work we've been doing in the Gospel of Mark. If want to impress your friends by speaking some exotic language, just say "Nu ere kuna ipak kauna, 'Yesus, ne Xourop Xoiteupo Nonon Kutu, ye amakiyepure kakinena? Ye Xoiteupo wenumurei soksoxokuna kanine, kakixanau xoxixoxiyeu.'" (Mark 5:7, tentative Somau Garia Translation (we still have 3 more steps left in the checking process before it can be finalized)). Cheers. May God bless you and keep you.

Serving You for Jesus' Sake,

Todd, Angela, Andrew, Samuel, Abigail, and Hannah