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Dear Partners in Ministry:

“Be still, and know that I am God” writes the Psalmist. NASB translates it “Cease striving and know that I am God”. The writer of Ecclesiastes proclaims, “What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?”

These things have found abode in my heart and mind this month as I spent a couple of weeks revisiting the bachelor years (Angela and kids spent a couple of weeks in South Dakota with Angela’s family), traveled nearly 4,000 miles (many of them alone), and preached a series of revival meetings in Etna Green, Indiana. All those hours alone left me with time to think and reflect without interruption. (Had I been driving across the Atlantic Ocean rather than around America, I could’ve driven from New York to Madrid, Spain!)

Memories of my father—dead at 66—inhabited the quiet hours. Questions—ever more questions—wandered to and fro in my mind and gave me little rest. Too many questions, too few answers. Anxieties, struggles, pain all striding about within, finding no resting place. I find no purpose in painting sunshine pictures for you, all rose petals and no thorns. Contrary to popular belief, missionaries struggle in life as much as anyone, but perhaps two things make that fact hard to grasp.

First, because they live in faraway and sometimes exotic places, it is concluded that there must be something extraordinarily strong and special about these folks—perhaps that they have sacrificed everything for the gospel. Talk to your average missionary and you might hear something like, “It’s really no sacrifice, just obedience.” Even that sounds remarkable, but in reality, it isn’t.

Second, it’s because many missionaries carry their burdens to God in prayer—not because they are so very pious—but because they had a serious reality check when faced with learning new languages and cultures—when they lost all sense of orientation and had to put on new glasses, new ways of viewing the world. Only God can sort those things out.

Coming back to America does little to answer questions and quiet anxieties. American culture encourages avoidance of pain through massive amounts of busyness. It is so hard to hear God through all the noise—cell phones, voice mail, e-mail, TV, this meeting, that meeting, buy more, sleep less, you deserve a break today, why deny yourself? Sound familiar? We must make wise choices, choices which place us in proximity to Jesus, which seat us in the sanctuary of God’s presence, which stand us in the quiet place of grace where we can hear the voice of our Beloved.

Even so, many missionaries I have talked with (including this one) ask, “Is it all worth it?” You know, “What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?” We often ask this question because so many days we see the futility of dealing with hardened and rebellious people. So often it is because we feel overwhelmed with the enormity of the task at hand and see the repeated attacks of the enemy, waging war against our very souls. We often ask it when we desperately need a change in perspective—when we have allowed ourselves to stare at the shadows of the temporal and have failed to see the reality, the substance of eternity.

The heavenly perspective is spelled out for us by John, who had a great vision and wrote it in a scroll, “. . . I looked and there before me was a multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” (Revelation 7:9).

We must reorient our thoughts to reflect the heavenly perspective—why? Because a perspective anchored in this world

produces nihilism, fatalism, self-worship, self-centered service. It produces a church like the one in Sardis who had the appearance of life but in reality, Jesus declared “DEAD!”. *We must reorient our thinking to the fact the salvation belongs to our God, not to our endless efforts and good deeds.*

What more can be said? This month has had it's share of challenges, but it has also had it's share of joys.

### ***Praise the Lord:***

- We received a note from Ezekiel Panawa, the head of the Somau Garia Translation Committee. He reports that the translators met this month to begin “massaging” the first draft of several chapters of the Gospel of Luke. This is a significant step for them as they were hesitant to work without their advisor (that would be me).
- Angela and kids were able to spend a couple of weeks with her parents in Watertown, South Dakota. It was a good time for them and the boys got to do some fun things like: go pheasant hunting with Grandpa and Uncle Shawn, go fishing with a friend from South Lakes Church of Christ (Jeff Case) and eat the fish they caught, and build a snow fort from an unexpected snow before leaving for the warmer climes of Joplin, MO.
- Todd drove about 4,000 miles without incident.
- Todd was able to preach a revival meeting in Etna Green, Indiana. The theme for the week was “The Seven Churches of the Apocalypse”.
- We are together again and ready to settle in and prepare for the arrival (in late January) of our fifth child, a girl.

### ***Ask the Lord:***

- To continue to guard and encourage the Somau Garia translation team in our absence.
- To continue to work in the hearts and minds of the folks in and around Etna Green and bring revival—especially among the young people.
- To continue bring healing and renewal to our lives during our stay in the United States.
- To be with Angela as she carries this baby. Especially ask that she will not be susceptible to gestational diabetes.
- To provide financially for vehicle replacement when we return to Papua New Guinea.
- To provide financially for our travel expenses as we report to each of you this year.
- To root us deeply in his love, as we serve Him.
- To stand us in grace.

While many avoid candor in matters of the heart, I find it necessary because of how I am “wired up”. My prayer for you is that my openness about things that often go unspoken is a blessing and an encouragement to you and will have a clarifying effect on your intercession for us and for those to whom and with whom we minister.

Thank you for your continued prayer and financial support. Your faithful support is an ongoing realization of John's vision in Revelation 7:9. May God bless you and keep you.

Your servant in Christ,

Todd Owen (for Angela and kids)