

In The Gap

A Monthly Prayer Guide

Praying for the Needs of the Somau Garia People of Papua New Guinea
and the Owen Family who Minister Among Them

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Greetings, All, from the Land of Steam and Green:

This month has been rather uneventful, but sometimes the monotony of life is a challenge in itself. Culture stress is beginning to set in *en force* in my own soul and I'm scrambling to stay ahead of it. Various authorities identify stages of culture stress/shock, some giving three stages and some four. They go something like this: First, the honeymoon stage (others call it the euphoria stage) where everything is quaint, perfect, enjoyable, fascinating, etc. Then comes the second stage—rejection. Everything is terrible, horrible, no good, very bad—I think I'll move to Australia. Then, for some, the final stage is acceptance or acquiescence. You learn to take the good with the bad. The final stage for others—my personal favorite—is the ability to laugh at yourself, especially your fumbling attempts to get the language right, to do the “right” thing in the proper circumstance.

Were we simply to go through this cycle once and have it all done, the mission effort would be infinitely easier. That would ruin our ability to write exciting missionary stories, I suppose. This time around I skipped the honeymoon and went right to the seven-year-itch. The rejection. The frustration. The aggravation. The wondering if I couldn't just slip away and become a dog sled racer in the Yukon. The extended cycles of culture shock are rolled into one and called culture stress, one of the reasons that we need to keep our coping skills oiled and in good repair.

Since last writing we've had: A week of all-night-long traditional dances near our house (that means we got little sleep and were none too pleased about it), a sorcery-oriented ritual involving giving thanks to demonic spirits for a good crop in the gardens, long absences of my Garia co-workers as they work out their personal problems before coming back to work full-time on translation, endless requests for this, that, or the other (the Garia people seem to be a little short of demonstrative words like “this” and “that”), almost a solid month of intestinal illness occurring in most of our family members, and a trip or two to Madang for supplies, listening to the roar of the engine (windows down), the rattle of various panels, pieces of sheet metal, parts of the exhaust system bang around as we found all the new pot holes and ruts that weren't in the “highway” last time we drove it: Abigail says, “Papa, why's the car so loud? Can't you make it be quiet?” (Guess I could turn it off on the downgrades of the mountains!)

We've been trying to counter the trends, though. We've been teaching a Bible study on Sunday mornings to the very men who do all the secret demonic stuff on Tuesday, and usually they're the ones who give all the right Bible answers (too bad the information doesn't head south into the region of the heart)! They sing all night, we sing, run our generators and power saws during the daylight hours (we would never think of keeping drunken dancers awake to deal with their hangovers). They get sick, we take them to the doctor, get them medicine, whatever it takes to preserve them a little longer, so that, somehow, some of them will find repentance and reconciliation with the Father. They look around to the demonic spirits for “wisdom” and leverage,

we look to the Father.

I have to tell you, the Yukon has looked pretty good some days this month. I find myself asking God more and more, “Why won’t they just listen?” And He says: “Exactly.”

This is where we start hoeing the row together, you and I. John chapter three verse twenty-one reads in the NIV like this: “But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what *he has done has been done through God.*” Our efforts to win the Garia for Christ through the ministry of Bible translation could be perceived as something that money and education and a little bit of adventure made happen. Certainly those have been some of the instruments used in the process. Were it **easy** we might just as easily praise the givers, the academic institutions, the workers for their cleverness and generosity. But it is not easy. It is difficult, challenging, and I dare say . . . impossible, to think that man can come into this sort of situation with his own wit and way and bring about a fundamental shift in the spiritual posture of a group of people whose culture is based on empowerment by elemental spirits. Our only resource, truthfully, is God and God alone.

We must acknowledge together the fact that **all** that we do is done *through God*. Our response to God in giving reflects our commitment to see him glorified through our giving (and his providence). Our response to God in praying reflects our faith that he cares, that he is ever present, that he works to fulfill his purposes in and through us. Our response to *loving* is to share God’s profound love in a thousand little ways to those God has brought to us, whether that be our child, our neighbor, or the person we’ve never met ten-thousand miles away.

Pray:

- Ask God to sustain us and bring us through the challenges of culture stress.
- Ask God to continually protect our health: physical, spiritual, emotional.
- Ask God to bless us in the inner man, that we might reflect his glory in our attitudes, our interactions, in our relationship with God.
- Ask God to enable to our Garia co-workers to work through their personal problems, the challenges, the opposition, to give full attention to translation again.
- Ask God to protect and heal Angela’s friend, Korenime Lim, who will have surgery November 15 for problems related to having several children.

Praise:

- Thank God that he carried us through the weeks of illness in our household.
- Thank God that he continually redirects our attention to himself in the difficulties.
- Thank God that our road remains passable and our old Nissan is still in working order.
- Thank God that he provided opportunity for us to assist Angela’s friend, Korenime Lim, with some surgery she needs and will be having the week of November 15.
- Thank God that he lets me be a Bible translator instead of a dog-sled racer in the Yukon.

Thank you, each one, for your response of faith, your prayers, your generous giving and hearts. How we need your prayers, your love, your interaction! Thank you for partnering.

Sliding over mud instead of the icy slopes of the Yukon,

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