



BRANDON VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

March 2023

Editor Janelle Daum

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“And Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines,’ Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it, So the dead that he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.”

Judges 16:30

In the movie *The Sound of Music* there is a song that asks the question, “How do you solve a problem like Maria?” Maria had joined the convent, but she was definitely not nun material. She was too much of a free spirit and she was constantly pushing the boundaries of the rules. We can ask the same question about Samson.

Samson was a judge in Israel for twenty years. Roughly 99% of that time he was focused on himself and his own desires. The judges were placed in their position by God in order to deliver the people of Israel from other nations that were oppressing them. In Samson's situation he fulfilled that service to the Lord but only when it coincided with his personal desires for revenge.

That doesn't fit very well with our conceptions of what a person should look like who is serving God to His glory. The story of Samson challenges us to change our conceptions. God used Samson to His glory, in spite of his selfish and sinful life. David is another example of a sinful and selfish person that God used to glorify Himself. God chooses to use people at His discretion. Samson is the most extreme example of that truth. We should be grateful that God uses broken and sinful people. It means that we all have hope.

That doesn't mean that we can choose sinful lifestyles and expect to be blessed by God. Samson's life was not characterized by God's blessing. If anything, it was marked by intense trouble and struggles. Nothing Samson did seemed to work out the way he planned. His desire to marry the Philistine woman at Timnah was fraught with acts of deception and betrayal. It started with his riddle to the Philistine men at the seven-day wedding feast. They couldn't solve the riddle so they turned to Samson's wife and induced her to betray him by threatening to kill her family. That deception allowed the Philistines to solve the riddle and win the wager. After Samson paid off the wager he returned to his father's house to cool down. When he returned to Timnah to claim his wife he found that she had been given to another man. Once again his sinful desires led to trouble.

We are all familiar with the story of Samson and Delilah. Judges 16:4 tells us that Samson had fallen in love with her. By this time the lords

of the Philistines wanted to kill Samson in the worst way. They came to Delilah and offered to pay her 1,100 pieces of silver if she could find out the source of his great strength. The answer lay in the only part of the Nazirite vow that he had not broken to this point. A Nazirite could never cut their hair. It took four tries but she found out that source of strength and had his hair cut off while he slept. Samson was captured, his eyes were gouged out, and he was bound in shackles.

After a period of time the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a sacrifice to their god Dagon, celebrating the great victory over their mortal enemy. In the midst of the celebration Samson was brought to the temple to entertain them. No one thought about the fact that his hair had grown back. He asked the young man who had brought him from the prison to help him rest his arms against the pillars on which the house rested. The temple was filled with the lords of the Philistines and various other men and women. Another 3,000 people were on the roof looking on as Samson entertained them.

This is the last and greatest act of Samson and even then it was an act of personal revenge. Judges 16:28 tells us that Samson called out to the Lord, *“O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my eyes.”* He then pushed on the two massive pillars and the entire building imploded, killing everyone. The number of Philistines killed in that one event was greater than those he had killed during his life. Samson didn’t find blessing, but he did turn to God and he served God in that final act of his life. It marked the beginning of the end of the Philistine influence in the land.

A seminary professor and his wife were vacationing in Tennessee. One morning they were eating breakfast in a little café when they noticed a distinguished, white-haired gentleman who was greeting people at all the tables. When he came to their table and found out

that the man on vacation was a seminary professor he sat down and said, "So you teach preachers to teach? Well, I've got a story for you."

Pointing out the window at a mountain the man said: "See that mountain there? Not far from the base of that mountain, there was a boy born to an unwed mother. He had a hard time growing up because every place he went he heard the same question, 'Hey, boy, who's your daddy?' It didn't matter where he went, he always heard that question, 'Who's your daddy?' He would hide at recess and lunchtime from the other students because of that cruel question.

"When he was about twelve years old a new preacher came to his church. He would always go to church late and slip out early to avoid being taunted by the other kids. But one day the new preacher said the benediction so fast that the boy got caught and he had to walk out with the crowd.

"Just about the time he got to the back door the new preacher, who knew nothing about him, put his hand on the boy's shoulder and asked him, 'Son, who's your daddy?' The whole line of people got quiet. The boy could feel everyone look at him as his face turned a bright red.

"The new preacher sensed the situation, and the Holy Spirit prompted him to say to the young boy, 'Wait a minute! I know who you are. I see the family resemblance now. You are a child of God.'

"With that he patted the boy on the shoulder and said, 'Boy, you have a great inheritance. Go and claim it.' With that the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. From that time on, whenever anyone asked him, 'Who's your daddy,' he would tell them, 'I'm a child of God.'

The white-haired man got up from the table, and as he turned to

leave he said, “You know, if that new preacher hadn’t told me that I was one of God’s children, I probably never would have amounted to anything!” Then he walked away.

The seminary professor and his wife were amazed at the story. When the waitress came over he asked her, “Do you know who that man was who was just sitting at our table?”

The waitress smiled and said, “Sure, everyone here knows him. That’s Ben Hooper. He’s the former governor of Tennessee.”

One simple statement set a boy who was headed for a life of shame and anonymity on a new path. His understanding of his position as a child of God changed him. He developed a godly character, a strong character, and God was able to use him to His glory as the leader of the state of Tennessee.

God, in His sovereignty, uses broken and sinful people to achieve His will. As He refines our character He transforms us into people of visionary faith that He can use to His glory.

Blessings,

Pastor Randy

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR MARCH AND BEYOND

EVENTS CALENDAR 2023:

Sunday's

9:30 a.m. Worship Service

10:30 a.m. Fellowship

10:45 a.m. Sunday School for the Whole Family

Wednesday's

6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m., Awana

7:45 p.m. Middle & High School Youth Group

Thursday's

3 p.m. Prayer & Women's Bible Study meeting in homes

6:30 p.m. Women's Evening Bible Study meeting in homes

Saturday's

March 4, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

March 18, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

Upcoming Events

Sunday, March 12, Royal Family Kids Presentation

Daylight Saving Time Starts

Sunday, March 19, Newsletter Articles are Due

Saturday, March 25, All Church Birthday Party

Friday, April 7, Good Friday Service

Sunday, April 9, Easter Sunday Services

Sunday, April 16, Crystal Springs Presentation

Thursday, May 11 - Saturday, May 13, Youth Group Rummage Sale

- Items can be brought and stored at the church anytime. Please have items priced if possible.

MISSIONARY UPDATES

AMANDA BENSON - PHILIPPINES



February 1, 2023

TURBULENT WATERS

“Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;

but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:28-31

This has been a January like none I can remember experiencing in the past. It feels like wave after wave is moving towards me, threatening to drown me. And yet, in the midst of each wave, I have seen the Lord be the firm foundation under my feet. Through trials, busyness, and relational stress, He has carried me through. He has been my anchor.

The first week of January, my friends and I took a trip to Davao (a different city in the Philippines) with my roommate's parents. It was great! But just before that, I found out that a friend and mentor had passed away. Because of so much going on, I didn't really have a lot of time to process that. The day we got back from Davao, I quickly realized how much I had to do for school and for planning our week of Outdoor Education (OE), which will happen from February 6-10.

During the weeks of January, I spent all my spare time planning for OE. Because I have never done this before, there were many things I didn't know I needed to think about that came up. It was stressful and overwhelming at times. It also took a long time to get the contract for the bus company figured out (we just signed that one last week!). I had multiple meetings with various people who are also helping with OE. But the details have been steadily falling into place!

It has been fun to plan, but it also has been hard to find the time to also work on teaching. So, since I was planning OE during the week, I spent the weekends prepping for school. I praise God that He provided me with a trustworthy and competent high school TA (teacher's aide). She has been able to do a lot of my grading. I also have a parent volunteer coming in once a week to sub my English classes and do a bit more of my grading for me so I have a bit more time to work on OE planning.

These two things (planning OE and teaching) have had me at max

capacity. But then, on top of that, there have been a lot of social and emotional things I have been dealing with. I have been processing more of my life, and the Lord reminded me through a podcast I listened to that there is hope – that I can have hope that things will change and that the Lord will change me more and more into His image because He is the Creator. The next day was a series of constant attacks from the enemy, filling my head with lies as he wore me out. It was so hard to keep fighting that mental battle all day. It's one that I fight on a fairly regular basis and sometimes get tired of fighting. I'm grateful for the Lord providing me with people to help me through those struggles at just the right times.

Then, about a week and a half ago, my 11-year old nephew was diagnosed with brain cancer. This has been really hard for me. I've cried a lot. I've wished I could be there to just be with them and support them in this journey. This made it hard for me to have a clear mind for making decisions for OE planning. It made it harder to be present with my students, fellow staff members, and friends. Due to being at max capacity with work, I have had very little time to sit and just process this.

And yet I can see the Lord at work, even in the midst of these trials. I have sensed His strength keeping me from being overwhelmed by these waves. When I was struggling, I asked for prayer from others, and God gave me peace and a clear mind to work. The struggle and grief and sadness come and go, but God has been so good. He reminds me that His Word is true. The words at the beginning of this newsletter are true. Even when I am weak, He never is. He never grows tired. He can increase my strength. I just need to run to Him. I need to constantly, moment-by-moment turn to Him in the midst of these storms. I want to fix my eyes on Him, knowing He is good, in control, and all-powerful.

The advanced crew leave Saturday (the 4th) for Outdoor Ed, and our students leave Monday (the 6th). Pray that all of the last-minute details will be finalized. But more than that, pray that God will work in a mighty way in the hearts of the students. Pray for the speakers to speak truth and that the students would have soft hearts. Pray that the squad leaders will foster meaningful conversation. Pray for the children we are ministering to for our ministry, that we will plant seeds and that they will come to know the Lord.

I am looking forward to seeing what God will do – in OE, in my nephew’s journey, and in my heart. He is so good.

Thank you for journeying with me in whatever way you are. Your support and prayers mean so much to me.

Amanda

Praises

- Almost all of the details are finalized for Outdoor Ed!!
- I’ve seen God’s hand at work in my life a lot this month. I have seen Him answer prayers I’ve been praying for a long time. I’ve experienced His peace in trials. I’ve watched Him fight for me, even when I don’t want to fight for myself. He is so good.
- I’m so thankful for the relationships I’ve built with my students. I’ve had girls that are willing to share with me what is going on in their lives. And our Bible study has been so fruitful, with the girls sharing and thinking deeply about Scripture.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for my nephew, Ethan, and his family as they’re processing this diagnosis. They’re currently working on figuring out what the treatment plan will be. Pray for me as I process from a distance and

find ways to support them. I'm praying about possibly going to visit for my upcoming March break.

- Pray for Outdoor Ed. Pray that God would do a mighty work in the hearts of the kids, and that He would protect us and our students. Pray that no one would get sick so that everyone can go (we have had hand-foot-and-mouth passing around this week and last).
- Pray that God would continue to work in my heart to mold me more into His image. Pray that I would have a willing heart to obey and change as He is working.
- Pray that I would have wisdom as I disciple my students. Pray that God would work in their hearts and that I would speak truth into their lives.

RON & JEANNIE SECK & MARIJANA CIZMANSKI



February 2023

THE “ JUST-A-SECK” TIMES

Prayers:

- For thriving partnerships in North Macedonia and in Kosovo with the two NAB churches that visited CHE teams in November.
- For continued watch-care over Leoanard Hanykovics, his team, and MEK’s Ukraine relief ministry to refugees and displaced persons needing food, clothing, supplies, and Jesus.
- For Marijana Čizmanski’s requests in the letter below.

Praises:

- A partnership ministry is starting up to reach an unreached people

group in south Kosovo.

- God is providing church support and a man to help with ZZ Serbia's work in Donji Petrovci.
- We have a new partner, Medical Ambassadors International, in MEK's Ukraine Refugee Relief Project.

He says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." ISAIAH 49:6 (NIV)

Dear Partners with us in the Lord's service in Central Europe and the Balkans,

We're exploding with news! November through January has been a productive time for us. In November, Jeannie and I had the privilege of leading vision teams from two NAB churches, one to explore a partnership with a thriving Community Health Evangelism (CHE) ministry in North Macedonia and the other to negotiate a cooperative agreement with a CHE-trained church in Prizren, Kosovo, to do outreach among an unreached people group nearby. The NAB is coming back to the Balkans!

Thanks to financial support from NAB churches, our MEK Hungary worker, Leonard Hanykovics, and his team delivered 18,000 pounds of food and medicine aid into Ukraine in December. In January, translation of CHE lessons began in Bulgaria for our fledgling network of pastors and churches there. We continued to explore future ministry possibilities in western Ukraine and made new connections in eastern Slovakia as well. Meanwhile, Jeannie and I returned to Phoenix in late November and have been engaged mainly in administrative work.

I would like to give the rest of the time in this newsletter to share a

recent prayer letter from Marijana Čizmanski, our own NAB Serbian national missionary. Marijana directs our NABsponsored team called ZZ Serbia in Novi Sad in the north of the country.

Marijana Cizmanski – “Dear family, friends, churches, prayer warriors, Thank you so much for your prayers and support through this 2022. God did many amazing things, and we were blessed to be part of that as a ZZ team and as the Čizmanski family.

Something new that happened in November was a CHE conference that started as my idea, but soon others supported it, and at the end we had a team of probably 20 helpers. We were around 40 people altogether for the conference and were able to spread a vision about Christian community development. **Please pray for the next step – holding a training in early 2024 for those who are interested in community development.**

We were able to hold the fourth Christmas camp in the Roma community of Donji Petrovci (DP). Children spent four days in a peaceful and joyful environment among people that love them. We were able to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, sing songs, play, hear stories, prepare cookies together, and so much more! At the end of the camp for some children this was a very sad moment. They said: “Can we stay here (instead of going home)?” or “I am really enjoying being here with you.” Some were crying as they had to go home. **Please pray for their families to accept different/new/healthy ways of living life and taking care of their families.**

On December 18, Tamara, my sister and coworker, and I picked up some of the youth from DP and visited a Roma church in central Serbia where I went with a group of youth for camp this summer. The kids wanted to visit them and their church. While there, we were also able to visit their Roma kindergarten and talk about that idea. They are

very eager to help and support our work in DP with kids and starting kindergarten. On our way back home, we were listening to worship songs, and the youth asked me: “When will we go again?” **Please pray for youth from DP to grow in Christ and to see changes in their lives.**

Soon I will have a first meeting with a team I am forming to do youth ministry in DP. Please pray that everybody comes, for the organization of this team, for their preparation (giving them basic knowledge about CHE), and finally for starting the youth meetings. It is quite amazing how God is working, and the devil is trying to do everything to stop it!

In January, Pastor Peter (who had been holding house meetings before Covid) decided to start church meetings in DP again. I have offered him the Community House so more people can attend. **Please pray that people will respond to his coming and to the Word he is sharing.**

Recently, I had a profound meeting with Pastor Bera (of Christian Fellowship Church, Novi Sad) about the help and support that is going to come to ZZ from my own church!!! This is so amazing! Basically, they asked me how Christian Fellowship can help and support ZZ. Pastor Bera wants to come and see DP! **Pray for this. Women will come and help by doing workshops together with the ZZ team for women’s meetings in DP.**

Ratko (male member of my church) has realized that ZZ ministry is something God laid on his heart and wants to support it by visiting DP every Thursday with Tamara. **Pray that he stays faithful to the calling God gave him.**

Vukica (our DP champion) is very supportive of the idea to have regular/kindergarten work in DP. I am starting leadership training with her. I am also going to see with the law how I can start counseling

meetings in the DP community: what is needed and how I can do it. I'm already talking with Steve Liberti and Mercy Street about the summer camp and them coming to Serbia.

Family news: This is it! We are moving in! As most of you know, we are building a home 20 km from Novi Sad. We have decided that in April 2023 we will move in no matter what conditions are going to be in our new home (i.e., no water or electricity). **Please pray for the provision of funds, people that will come and help, and that everything goes well.**

I wish you Happy Holidays, and may God use you in 2023 like never before. Much love from ZZ team and Čizmanski family.” - Marijana

Ron & Jeannie Seck

SHAN REED - JAPAN



Shan Reed

MISSIONARY IN JAPAN



February 2023

THE WORK OF GOD

Praises:

- Praise God for his work in our hearts and ministry.
- Praise the Lord for his work in and through the youth of the Japan Baptist Conference and at Komyo Christian Church.
- Praise God for his work in the hearts of the women who have attended the ladies' seminars.
- Praise God for opportunities to share God's love throughout the Christmas season.

Prayer:

- Pray for God's work in and through Komyo Christian Church, that we will shine the light of Jesus on those around us.
- Pray for me to pay attention to God's work in my heart and life as I continue walking with Jesus daily.
- Pray for the youth of Komyo and Kongo churches, as well as the whole JBC, to learn to trust Jesus with their whole lives.

- Pray for the women who attend the seminars and the Kansai Christian Women's Conference to grow in grace and that God will be glorified.

**Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
PHILIPPIANS 1:6 (NIV)**

God's work in me personally and in the world around us can often be slow, much slower than we would like it to be. The more days I spend walking this earth with Jesus, the more I have learned that I often walk too fast to notice God at work. Taking a few moments each quarter to share with you what God is doing and how you can pray for me as well as Japan helps me to slow down and take notice.

First up, an update of youth activities. We had a youth Christmas party with three churches, planned and led by the students, in early December. Fun, food, and worship! In early January, we had our winter youth gathering with students from churches of the Japan Baptist Conference. More student-led fun, food, and worship! God is at work in the students' lives as they are learning to walk with Jesus and how to trust him. They are also learning to build friendships with others who love Jesus. Three of the students in our group from the Komyo and Kongo churches are taking entrance/graduation exams in February. These tests are very important for their schooling and future. Please pray for them.

Yuri and I have enjoyed God at work in the lives of women who attend the ladies' seminars and other events. We love listening to the ladies share what they learned from each other at the seminars. Also, in December we had a ladies' craft time at Komyo Church to make gifts for the residents at the nursing home across the street. The ladies worked diligently and enjoyed fellowship as they used their creativity

to share God's love.

In February, Yuri and I will facilitate a ladies' seminar at Komyo Christian Church. Then in March, I have been invited to be the speaker for our annual Kansai Christian Women's Conference, a day of worship, study, and fellowship with English-speaking missionaries and Christian women in our region. I am looking forward to seeing God's work through these gatherings and in my own heart as I prepare.

Our international planning team for the conference chose the theme of "Spiritual Elegance: Clothed by Christ," with Colossians 3:12–17 as the main passage. I have been enjoying my preparation for our day together, reading books and articles, watching videos and movies. I think I probably have enough material to talk for days, but the committee has reminded me we are only gathering for one day! God is at work in my heart, and I am praying for his work in the hearts of the ladies who attend the conference, too.

English teaching has been part of ministry in some capacity for me since I first arrived in Japan. I am especially noticing God at work in my students' lives in more informal settings. The students graciously received bilingual New Testaments at our Christmas party. Recently, at lunch with one of my classes, one student shared her thoughts and feelings about her mother's death last fall. The English Bible class continues asking questions, not only about the Bible passages we are studying but also about how to walk with Jesus in everyday life.

Komyo Christian Church had fun celebrating the birth of Jesus together as a church family. After our morning service, we had sandwiches and snacks while enjoying a program in which everyone participated, from the youngest to the oldest attendees. We sang songs, heard the Christmas story, and had a visit from two of Yuri's puppets. It was the first time to really meet all together, in our church, for a celebration since before the pandemic started. It was wonderful to see God at

work as we fellowshiped and celebrated as one family in Christ.

Thank you for participating in God's work in Japan through your faithful prayers and support. I am grateful to have such an amazing team walking with me, even from afar, while I minister in Japan. The members of Komyo Christian Church and all my Christian friends here are thankful for the way you show the love of Jesus through your prayers for each of them.

May each of you also experience and notice God's work in your hearts and ministries where he has placed you.

Soli Deo Gloria, Shan Reed

DARWIN & KAREN STOESZ



February 1, 2023

Ministry Update

We wanted to give you an update as our travel schedule has changed. We are thankful that we have been able to add several churches to our schedule where we can share what God has been doing in Japan and in our future ministry. Pray for our travelling schedule as Darwin will be out of town almost every weekend in the month of February. For details of our travels see the schedule below.

We made the following announcement and to be honest we were unsure what the response would be. We have been so encouraged by the response from supporters and friends that it has been an answer to prayer. We are now 50% to our goal of reaching \$500 more in monthly support. Pray that we would get the remaining \$250 a month needed to get us up to 100%. This can come in current supporters just increasing a little or if you have never supported our ministry maybe now is a good time to join our ministry.

Darwin has started watching training videos and has now learned how to connect his computer to SEND's server to start understanding

some of the processes and programs that he will need to use in the new position.

If you didn't read our announcement in our last email update the summary in two sentences is:

The International Treasurer of SEND, Ruth Kirtland, invited Darwin to help her with the growing demands of mission finances by stepping into the role of Assistant Treasurer. This position is virtual, and so we plan to stay in Kansas after 18+ years in Japan this was a difficult decision but a decision that we feel is best for our family and situation at this point.

Transition trip back to Japan this summer

We have reached out to a travel agent to purchase airline tickets. Pray for us to determine how much time is necessary in Japan to say "Good Bye" and to settle our affairs in Japan.

Contact Information

Our contact information for the year is:

Our physical address is 219 W 1st St Elbing KS 67041

Our mailing address is PO Box 33 Elbing KS 67041

Our main phone number for text and calling is: 316-708-0127 (Feel free to send us a text)

Prayer / Schedule Update

Our tentative schedule so far is as follows. Of course, all dates are subject to change. Please pray for us especially for these events:

Wednesday's Darwin will be helping with AWANA as much as he is able despite his travels

Feb 1 Whitewater Community Church AWANA – Whitewater, Kansas

Feb 4-7 Darwin with his parents in Mountain Lake, Minnesota

Feb. 7-8 Darwin visiting his brother in Lino Lakes, Minnesota

Feb 8 Whitewater Community Church AWANA – Whitewater, Kansas

Feb 9 Mountain Lake Christian School Chapel – Mountain Lake, Minnesota

Feb 12 Brandon Valley Baptist Church – Brandon, South Dakota

Feb 15 Whitewater Community Church AWANA – Whitewater, Kansas

Feb 18 Clara go to Berean Winter Banquet

Feb 22 Whitewater Community Church AWANA – Whitewater, Kansas

Feb 22 Newton Christian Bible School Chapel – Newton, Kansas

Feb 24-26 Faith Evangelical Bible Church – Henderson, Nebraska

Mar 4-5 Heartland Bible Church – Lincoln, Nebraska

Mar 13-17 Berean Academy Spring Break

Mar 20-24 John Brown University Spring Break

Apr 15-16 Hebron Bible Church – Hebron, Nebraska

Apr 16 Jansen Bible Church – Jansen, Nebraska

May 5 John Brown University last day

May 8-12 SEND International Headquarters for Darwin training – Farmington Michigan

May 18 Berean Academy last day

June 6-July 11 Potential trip to Japan

Aug 1 Darwin to begin role as International Office Assistant Treasurer

Please pray:

1. Pray that Darwin's teacher Mr. Tsuneizumi and Karen's friend Yuko-san would put their faith in Christ.
2. Pray for Anna and Clara that they would have continued growing relationships with Jesus.
3. Pray for Anna at John Brown University and studies kinesiology.
4. Pray for Clara at Berean Academy that she would seek God and make good friends.
5. Pray for wisdom as we setup our schedule of activities for home service.
6. Pray for safety as we drive during these winter months
7. Pray for our new ministry assignment as we work out the details of the change in ministry.
8. Pray for our continued support needs. Many partners have been with us for a long time, and some are reaching the end of their giving ability.
9. That Anna and Clara will be able to adjust well to this significant change.
10. Our goodbye trip to Japan this summer would be able to accomplish the goals of saying goodbye and at the same time go through in a few short weeks all our items in storage.
11. Wisdom for Darwin as he begins training for this new position.
12. Wisdom and patience for Karen as she gets near the end of her education that she is doing online with Moody Bible Institute.
13. Pray for our housing for us as we would like to live in the

Whitewater community, once we get housing pray that we would find the furnishings required to make our house a home.

14. Pray that we would find suitable transportation for our long-term in Kansas.

15. That our supporters will continue to support our ministry as we still rely 100% on support

Thank you so much for your prayers, financial support, and encouragement.

Sincerely,

Darwin & Karen & Anna (19) & Clara (15) Stoesz

RICK & DEBBI BARDIN - CAMEROON



FEBRUARY 2023

Dear Friends and Family,

HAPPY HARMATTAN!

We hope you enjoy hearing about what God has been doing these last three months! As we closed out 2022 and began 2023 we want to thank all of you for your faithful support in prayer and giving. We are so blessed to have each of you in our lives!

Praises:

- The administrator from our sister hospital was finally released. He had several opportunities to witness while in prison.
- For such special times with our kids and grandkids.
- For health and strength throughout the year.
- For celebrations among our friends here in Mbingo.

Prayers:

- That Rick can get the backlog of cases reported as quickly as

possible.

- That Dr. Mbanga, the doctor in pathology training, does well in presenting his final year project (this week) and then taking his final exams (date not yet announced).
- That the two new microscopes that SWMCF has provided arrive safely in Mbingo (we just heard today that they are finally ready to be shipped).
- For an end to the conflict here.

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9 (NIV)

This February finds us here in Cameroon. I don’t think we’ve been here for the whole month of February for probably 9–10 years. We discovered early on that the hot dry season wasn’t our favorite, and we loved cold and snow more, so we usually planned our month vacation or our furlough to cover February. The Harmattan is very heavy, and the dust around causes most of us to have colds and coughs. We got a small rain a couple of weeks ago, but besides that, it hasn’t rained since mid-November. The rain usually starts in mid-March, so we pray for that!! On the bright side, we had a wonderful whirlwind month vacation in the US since we last wrote. We got to spend the holidays with our kids and grandkids. We spent a couple weeks with each family. The wonder of Christmas morning was fun to be a part of at the Flashners’ in Florida. It was unusually cool while we were there, so no beach trips, but we had fun attending an activity at Sea World, neighborhood Santa party, playground fun, and just hanging out at their house playing store, house, dolls, chase, to name a few! With the Bardin family, we brought in the New Year with

games, a movie, and fireworks! We also went to ICE at the Gaylord Hotel in Nashville, did an escape room event together, attended some of the boys' basketball games and karate practice, and also just hung out at their house playing basketball, board games, video games (mostly watched them, they are past our level), and made gummy bears; they also love a good game of hide and seek, and Your IT! You can imagine we never had trouble sleeping at night on this trip! When we got back to Mbingo, we both met a mountain of work and are still trying to climb out of that hole. We thank God for the telepathology system. Rick would really be totally overwhelmed if not for the cases that were done by volunteers using that system while we were in the States. Debbie has been involved in helping enter client claims for the Care & Treatment Centre in order for the department to be reimbursed by the HIV Free Program in place. After being gone for a month, there was a lot to catch up on. Our mission station is really changing. Two missionary couples, our dear friends and colleagues, are retiring. The Browns left in November, and the Palmers are leaving in March. We will miss them so much. We are also hopeful they will return from time to time for a visit! We are thankful for the Snells, Streatfeilds, and Julie Stone, who are still here with us full time, and others coming often! As mentioned in the prayer request above, Dr. Mbanga, the doctor you have been praying with us about for the last five years, is about to finish his training in pathology in Kenya by God's grace! We are hoping that by our next newsletter we can report to you that he is with us here at Mbingo working with Rick!

We pray this finds you well and that 2023 will be a year of growing closer to the Lord,

Rick and Debbie

BRANDON & MARCI JONES - BRAZIL



February 2023

PAUSE AND REFRESH

Prayers:

- For the next semester of the seminary, that our students will be granted time and energy to focus well.
- For our ongoing learning of Portuguese.
- For God to continue raising up the next generations of church planters and leaders for our state who can proclaim the good news of his kingdom.

Praises:

- That God provided a big financial need for our family through our generous partners.
- That God granted good health for our family in 2022.
- That the seminary continues to see new students and increasing enrollment each semester.

Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea-the Lord on high is mighty. PSALM 93:4 (NIV)

February marks the end of our summer break here in Brazil, so the past several weeks have offered a bit of a pause. But before any of the breaks, we had a busy November and early December. Of course, this is also a busy time in North America, but in Brazil it includes all the regular lead-up to Christmas combined with the lead-up to the summer break, which for professors like Brandon includes making sure final semester grades get posted in a timely manner for our graduating seniors. Our seminary had a fantastic graduating class this year, with eleven students receiving their diplomas on December 9. Our graduates come from all over the state and are already serving God in various capacities in their churches and communities. We will continue praying for each of them as they commence on their next stages in life!

The week after graduation we had our first retreat as NAB Team Brazil at the system of waterfalls called Foz do Iguaçu. Special guest, Carol Potratz, taught a two-week class for our seminary and graciously stayed an extra week to lead our field retreat. Her theme was “A Pause That Refreshes,” as each day she prepared a time for us to reflect on Scripture together. With water abundantly flowing all around during our days, we looked at passages that focused on refreshing water each night, such as Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in John’s Gospel.

We worshiped with our church on Christmas morning and then enjoyed a time for exchanging gifts and eating a traditional-well American traditional-Christmas dinner as a family. This was bittersweet because it was our first Christmas in 18 years without Daniel joining us, and we certainly missed each other throughout the holiday season.

Since summer is often a time of traveling, our pastor asked Brandon if he could preach in January, so Brandon was able to write up a manuscript in Portuguese and preach for only the second time in

Portuguese. When we returned in June of 2022, all four of us lamented that we felt our Portuguese had regressed a bit during a year-long home assignment, but we praise God that only half a year later we all feel that we are moving forward, even past where we were when we began our home assignment 18 months ago. Monica and Olivia even attended summer church camp, where for five days they were immersed in a Portuguese-only environment. They both returned excited, making new friends and admitting that their language skills really are pretty good.

And so, we return to the fall as February comes. Brandon will be teaching a class each week for the seminary in the fall and continues to mentor masters and doctoral students for Kairos Brasil. Marci is continuing her studies for her MDiv with Kairos University. Monica and Olivia are continuing ninth and seventh grades respectively at the Pan American School here in Porto Alegre. Daniel has already begun his spring semester at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. It looks like school is a big focus for all five of us! But a bigger focus is the privilege of joining with so many partners to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom in southern Brazil.

Thanks again for your continued love, prayer, and support!

In Christ, Brandon & Marci Jones

HARLAN MOSS - PRISON LIGHTHOUSE MINISTRY



February 2023

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Ephesians 3:20a

God is amazing, He knows everything about us! He knows if we are serious with Him or if we are using Him for our purposes. Isaiah 55 says, “So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” I enjoy hearing the testimonies of men who are serious with the Lord!

One of the men, Les, who I have counseled for the last couple of years has been in and out of segregation for a while. For the last year it has been a joy to see him grow in his faith. He told me that he read a book about authority and how it affected him. Les said, “Most of my past was fighting against the authority of the officers. Now I realize that all this time I was fighting against God! It reminds me that the Apostle Paul thought he was doing right, but God had to show him he was going in the wrong direction. Now I get along with the officers and understand their authority.” Only God can open our eyes to things we need to see!

James who just came back into the prison told me in the hallway that he wanted to talk with me about the goodness of God. When I visited with him, he had some great testimonies of how God was at work in his life. James said, "I deserved so much more time than what the judge gave me. He gave me two years when I deserved many more. God dealt with me while in the jail. I asked the Lord to forgive me and change me. The joy of the Lord came into my life. I started a Bible study with some of the men there. I sang a few hymns in my cell one evening. The next day a 57 year old man, who was in the cell next to me, told me he was ready to commit suicide the night before, but when he heard me singing hymns it made him change his mind." James went on to tell me that he wanted to use the two years in prison to grow in his faith and tell others about the love of God!

Fred is a middle aged man who has some physical problems because of living a hard life. At this time he has to get around in a wheelchair. He told me that he was an alcoholic. He drank alcohol trying to cover of the pain and shame of his life. A few years ago he let his brother use his car, knowing that he was going to buy alcohol. His brother was killed that day in an accident with Fred's vehicle. He was filled with guilt and shame for allowing this to happen to his brother. Fred told me, "I can't go out in society again with this guilt and shame." We talked about the plan of salvation and how Jesus wants to take our shame from us. As we talked Fred said, "That is what I need, I want Jesus in my life. I have heard about Jesus and believe in Him, but I have never committed my life to Him." As we prayed, Fred put his hand on his heart and started to weep. After taking a few deep breathes through his tears, a smile of relief came over him. His whole countenance changed from a depressed look to joy! I look forward visiting Fred in the weeks ahead!

I would welcome the opportunity to speak at your church or Sunday

School class to share what the Lord is doing in the prison. I appreciate your prayer support and financial support for this prison ministry!
You're a blessing!

I hope you have a great February!

In Christ, Harlan

PAUL & JANET HARKNESS - AWANA



January 20, 2023 – The Memo

Greetings!

We were unable to make a planned Club visit this past Wednesday due to the snowstorm in Nebraska. Thankfully though we will be able to get out to do ministry this weekend! Sunday we will lead our Understanding Kids training at the Arthur Baptist Church in Arthur, Nebraska. Wednesday is a Club visit in Pawnee City, Nebraska. Along with the above, we will be making connections with Pastors.

Thank you for your prayers!

Paul and Janet Harkness

JOSHUA FUND

February 2023

I had the privilege of interviewing Pastor Hayford on the topic of Israel and want to share that with you now. As you listen to his insightful answers rooted in Biblical truth, you'll get a glimpse of his love for Israel, devotion to Jesus, and passion for strengthening the global church through the Word, Holy Spirit, and intercessory prayer.

Hamal* was troubled when authorities arrested two of his fellow ministry leaders. As a Joshua Fund ministry partner who has proclaimed the Good News to his Arab brothers and sisters in the Epicenter for decades, he understood what could happen to them. Concerned for his peers in prison, Hamal also feared how the Believers in his community would react to the persecution. "We thought that would have a negative effect on the others," Hamal shared with Joshua Fund staff. "But praise the Lord," he continued, "when that happened, many people were encouraged to be more involved in the ministry." By the grace of God, Hamal's congregation has been able to help many former Muslims who have suffered for their newfound faith in Christ.

They've also conducted four Bible conferences for training and discipleship, prepared future ministry leaders, and assisted Hamal's friends in prison—thanks partly to the generosity of Joshua Fund supporters. "We received this funding from you at a very essential time as a heavenly support from the Lord to help people suffering for their faith," Hamal told our team. Despite the risks, Hamal still dares to preach God's Word. "We are in a continuous battle, and without your prayers, we can't continue," Hamal said. "We trust the Lord for all the difficulties and challenges in this very hard place, but we don't give up. We continue to invest in people knowing that any small act

of love never fails.” Thankfully, Hamal’s fellow ministry leaders were eventually released-an enormous blessing and encouragement to the region’s body of Believers. “God is bringing new people to Him every day. There are so many people coming to Him but not enough people to receive them and disciple them and be the body of Christ for them.”

Hamal’s heart is to see more Arabs come to know their Savior. Thanks to the generosity of people like You, he has the resources to continue strengthening others in their faith and sharing the Gospel. Pray for the safety of our ministry partners living in volatile regions of the Epicenter. Intercede for persecuted believers who are suffering for their faith. Ask for Lord to raise more believers who will boldly teach the Word and reach their communities for Christ.

Joshua Fund

THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS



Persecution & Prayer Alert (February 16, 2023)

PAKISTAN: Teenager Forcibly Married to 60-Year-Old Man

Sitara Arif, a 15-year-old Christian girl, was kidnapped on December 15th in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Abducted by the husband of her employer, she was forcibly converted to Islam and then married to her captor. It took almost two months for police to finally register a case against Rana Tayyab, despite repeated pleas from the girl's family. According to Sitara's father, Arif Masih Gill, the teenage girl provided domestic services for Naila Ambreen, who is employed by the government as a school principal. Because of her government position, Naila and her husband have considerable influence over the police. Therefore, when Arif tried to file a police report, it was outrightly rejected. Additionally, Sitara's family members faced repeated acts of intimidation in an attempt to force them to drop the case. The police only responded to the kidnapping after an advocacy group, Minorities Alliance Pakistan, was made aware of the situation on February 3rd and demanded immediate action. When the authorities raided the home of the accused Muslim man, his wife handed police a certificate

indicating Sitara's marriage to Rana. The couple claims that Sitara had converted to Islam and married the 60-year-old man of her own free will.

Akmal Bhatti, who serves as the chairman of Minorities Alliance Pakistan, stated that young teen girls from minority groups are targets of forcible marriage because their families are generally poor and do not have the resources to fight in court. "We are continuing to build pressure on the officials nonetheless, so that [the authorities] don't slack in their responsibility," he promised. According to a 2021 report from Forbes magazine, at least 1,000 women from religious minorities are forcibly converted and married annually in Pakistan. The numbers are likely much higher, since many cases go unreported. For more reports on the difficulties being encountered by Christians in Pakistan, go to our country report.

Pray that Sitara will soon be set free from her kidnappers and safely reunited with her family. In the meanwhile, may the Lord grant this teenage girl greatly needed comfort, hope and strength as she awaits the intervention of local authorities. Please also uphold before God's throne of grace Sitara's parents and other concerned family members who are anxiously longing for her hopeful return, asking that they be reassured of His unfailing presence and promises of help throughout this difficult time. Further, pray that those responsible will be held accountable for their wrongful actions, and that such prevailing societal attitudes will shift away from the acceptance of abuse against Pakistan's vulnerable young women and girls.

PAKISTAN: Christian Farmers Killed in Two Separate Attacks

Muhammad Waseem, a Muslim landowner in Punjab's Khanewal district, assaulted and killed a Christian farm labourer on February

6th after accusing the believer of stealing oranges from his property. The victim, Emmanuel Masih, was irrigating the orchard at around 3 a.m. when he was approached by Muhammad and four other men. Though Emmanuel pled his innocence, the five men brutally beat the married father of six to death. According to police reports, no evidence was found to support the allegations of theft, and charges have been laid against the landowner and two of his accomplices. However, Emmanuel's family members wonder if justice in this case will actually be upheld. Speaking of the challenges experienced by Christians in the village, Emmanuel's nephew Zahid Sahotra lamented: "We are very poor and too weak to even think of offending the Muslim villagers. They know that we are helpless and that they can get away with anything, even murder." Without the funds required to obtain the help of a good representing lawyer, the family is concerned that those responsible will soon be released on bail.

This is not the first time a murderous crime was perpetrated this year against a member of Pakistan's vulnerable Christian community. On January 11th, a Christian guava farmer named Allah Ditta was gunned down after confronting three Muslim men who were stealing and destroying fruit from his orchard. An altercation ensued in which the Christian man was called a "chuhra" – a derogatory term used for Christians. The victim's son, Shahbaz Masih, who happened to be with his father during the incident, reported that the men derisively stated there would be "no chance at justice," even if they killed the Christian farmer. One of the three assailants, identified only as Usama, then pulled out a gun and shot Allah in the chest. As the perpetrators fled the crime scene, they warned Shahbaz that they would kill him and his family if he contacted the police. Shahbaz called for an ambulance as soon as the men left, but by then his father was already dead. All three of the men have been arrested and charged for the Christian man's murder. However, the attackers come from wealthy families

with strong political ties. The gunman's father, a retired army officer, has offered Allah's family 500,000 rupees (approximately \$2,500 CAD) if they dropped the charges. Although the family refused to accept his bribe, there are concerns of potential retaliation, and the resulting danger it could pose, because of the powerful position held by the former officer. Thankfully, support is being provided to the family, both from neighbours and advocacy groups. A caring Muslim neighbour stated, "The murderers have killed him without reason and we are standing with the family of Allah Ditta. We are hoping they get justice."

Pakistani Christians often face significant disadvantages when dealing with legal matters because of their poverty and low societal standing. In such cases, the authorities frequently discriminate against religious minorities, demonstrating partiality towards Muslim citizens. To learn more about the persecution of Christians in Pakistan, go to our country report.

Please pray for the grieving families of the two Christian men who were needlessly killed over trivialities relating to the produce of farmed crop, indicating an underlying animosity towards those who follow Christianity. May the victims' loved ones abide in the comfort of God's healing presence during their times of mourning, drawing needed strength, courage and hope from Him. Ask the Lord to prompt fellow believers and others in the community to come alongside them with further encouragement and loving support. Finally, pray for His intervention in Pakistan's judicial system, ensuring that the perpetrators' position in society or other societal advantages will in no way deter authorities from rightfully pursuing justice.

CRISIS IN UKRAINE



From one of our partner churches in Ukraine:

“I am Kiril*. The story of my journey started on April 6th when 4 rockets hit my house. Although the damages weren’t too bad, some of the utilities stopped working and that made me leave my hometown. I went to the Military Commissariat even before the missile attacks, but they didn’t have a need in me, since I haven’t had any military experience.

So I came for the medical check-up to get a military ticket, but stayed here for much longer than I was expecting. Living in a different city, where you don’t have any acquaintances, requires some resources to get by. At the beginning of my stay, I lived in the school and slept there on gym mats at the gym. There was only 1 toilet for 60 people. But I’m grateful for that as well! Food costs money. We only took a couple of bags with t-shirts and underwear with us. That was the first time for me to be so limited, so I had to look for help...

My relatives, who went abroad, helped me, too. It was my mother, who is the closest person to me and she’s proved it again. We found the church. It’s weird that I, as an unbeliever, got help in a place, where I never expected to get it. I am an atheist. But I never found church as something bad. On the contrary. People talk about the right things

there, and most importantly people are kind there! I haven't imposed my beliefs on anybody, but still, the attitude of these people toward me has become a revelation.

They haven't forced on me love to the Bible and haven't judged me for my beliefs but just tried to draw my attention to the fact that there is also another way to live. In addition to that they were helping materially: with food kits, personal hygiene items, and clothes.

In conclusion, I want to say that I haven't believed in God, but I've seen so much kindness in these people that I have never seen before. If their beliefs make them act this way then let churches be everywhere. I will not forget their help.”

*Name changed for security purposes.

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BRANDON VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

PRESENTING A CHANGELESS CHRIST FOR A CHANGING WORLD