

**April 2021**

**Jonathan and Bethany Edwards**

**Using Medicine and Technology to Grow Christ's Church**

***Making Disciples in Muslim Mango, Togo and Beyond***

 It was the morning of December 31st, 2019 and Jonathan woke up feeling exhausted.  He had returned from a business trip for radiology integration training in the US only a few days before and had enjoyed an exciting Christmas celebration with friends from the village bible study. This was not a new feeling.  In fact he had experienced it many times before. In less than 48 hours he had gone from feeling upbeat and energetic to what you might describe as the worst flu you’ve ever had, with every muscle in your body rebelling in pain.  Another bout of malaria, he thought, and so he made the decision to visit the clinic that afternoon before the New Year’s celebrations kicked off and everything closed for a few days.

But at the clinic they found nothing wrong. In fact, they found nothing abnormal at all.  He was in great physical shape.  Thinking it was a virus, they sent him home with a memo to call if it didn’t go away.  It didn’t. Visit after visit went the same way.  Tests, results, healthy.  We tried keeping a rigid schedule thinking maybe it was the first signs of burnout.  No go.  In fact, the longer this went on the worse it became.  Soon not only was there exhaustion but he was showing signs of major depression.

It was at this point around the end of Feb 2020 that the doctors, team, and we decided that returning to the US was the only real option.  So we packed our house up and got on the plane. Many of you will recall this journey and we thank you for your consistent prayers during that time.  Of course, little did we expect that while we were flying, COVID would strike and whole continents go on lockdown.

In the US we visited doctors.  They confirmed what the doctors at Hospital of Hope already had confirmed.  Physically there seemed to be nothing wrong.  The exhaustion remained.  Some depression remained – though this was slowly vanishing in part with the help of medications.  But visit after visit revealed the same nothing... and we slowly began to realize as the year went on that this wasn’t going to be an easy fix.

Today, many of the symptoms remain still.  The depression, so far as we can tell, has passed.  But the medications are still needed and for the most part seem to be what is boosting his energy such that he is at least functional.  But he still becomes easily exhausted even over seemingly simple things and the pain still comes and goes.  On the best days he is able to get 7 or 8 good hours each day with 9-11 hours of sleep each night and a 2 – 3 hour rest required after lunch.

All of this, after a year of searching for answers, brought us and the doctors to one conclusion – that returning for more than a few weeks at a time to Togo – or any mission field with malaria – was out of the question.  Beyond that, the stressors of everyday living in a foreign culture demand that you be at 100% and Jonathan is far from 100%.

We mourned at the news even if it wasn’t unexpected.  We missed our friends. We strove for Togo for years and were ready live out our days there. Then God intervened. He declared loudly and clearly that His plan for us was elsewhere. We questioned why God would do this: send us through the entire preparation process, to get us there for a year and then bring us back to the US.  We had just begun to really get our footing and begin developing our ministries further.  From a resource perspective it made no sense.

We know that God’s plans are not ours and His ways are not ours.  And when you “own the cattle on a thousand hills,” when you can literally speak anything into existence, the material becomes trivial. God has been teaching us many things through this. As He speaks through Paul,

“’My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.’ [2Cor 12:9-10]”

As we stare at the the ripped up pieces of the letter of expectation we sent to God, we rejoice at the new prospects that have been laid before us. It is our desire to continue to reach the nations as missionaries; In this God has so far made it clear that He would like us to remain in His work in that capacity here in north-central North Carolina. Following that lead, we’ve begun looking into and praying about the opportunity to start a ministry for college age young adults both for evangelism and discipleship. Our hope is that they will, upon receiving the Good News, take it to every people and tribe – reaching those peoples despite our inability to go ourselves. Right now we don’t know much about what this would look like and that is one of our biggest prayer requests: that God would make clear His leading, work out the details, create the relationships, and provide the resources.  *Would you please pray with us about this?*

**Bethany, Baby, & Caleb**

Bethany has been praying and seeking God’s will for our future alongside Jonathan, and attending occasional meetings in-person and virtually as we go about this slow and hazy process. As previously mentioned, it has been difficult to see the whole trajectory of our ministry lives change, but God is opening our eyes to the potential here in North Carolina and teaching us again to trust His unchanging character in the midst of what seem like big life changes to us.

Bethany has enjoyed getting involved in a weekly women’s Bible study on Philippians and getting to know some of the ladies from the church here better.

The warmer spring weather has made it a lot easier to get outside – whether it’s to walk, take Caleb to the park, plant flowers and hang bird-feeders, or hang clothes on the line.

We are two weeks away from Baby Edwards #2’s due date, so a big focus of Bethany’s has been preparing our nest for his/her arrival. Bags are packed, labor playlist edited, house-cleaning in process, and baby stuff organized and waiting. We are so thankful to still be staying in a local mission house for the time being and to have a place of our own to bring Baby home to.

Caleb is not so eager for Baby to come. The last few weeks he has sensed a change coming, and has been considerably more fussy and clingy. *Please pray for him as he transitions into his soon-to-be role of big brother.* We are not expecting it to be easy for him (or us!).

His verbal skills have really leveled up the last month as he’s mastered subjects from basic colors to construction vehicles. He is now attempting whole sentences and singing. A couple of his favorites are “His Mercy is More” and ”Country Roads.” He absolutely loves books – especially when they are read to him, but he also occasionally reads them to himself and his (stuffed) friends. He surprises us with how emotionally invested he becomes in what happens to the characters. It is fun to watch his personality and interests grow.

**The immediate future**

We are currently working on the beginnings of furlough and are available to visit nearby NC churches and can visit more distant churches within a month or two (Baby Edwards and Mama need some time). We would love to share with you all what God has done and what He continues to do in and through our lives. If you would like us to visit you or your church, then let’s set up a time.  We’ve also entertained the idea of an e-visit.  If that’s something that interests you then please let us know and we’ll try to work something out.

**Those pesky numbers**

21%; that represents $1391 per month we’re below on our support level.  We are praising God that through this trial for over a year now we have not last a single supporter due to being in the US or because of the pandemic. It is a true blessing that  we have such faithful, giving partners and a faithful God. The deficit represents the increase in costs, mostly insurance premiums and cost-of-living inflation. We aren’t asking you to cough up more funds, although we would never turn them down, but we would ask that you pray for more partners to fill this gap as it is eating at our limited reserves. *Please pray with us that God would fill this need.*

If you have any questions, please ask them.

Serving Him together,

Jonathan, Bethany, Caleb, and baby Edwards