



from Glenn and Beth Calderwood

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PNG Newsletter

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Dear Friends,

It's good to remember, and to recognise, that missionary work, particularly evangelism and church-planting, is just plain hard work. It's easy to think that things are not going anywhere, but often this is just a reflection of how the missionary scene of the past 50 years or so has influenced our thinking and expectations. We are fed a constant stream of triumphant success stories accompanied with miraculous doings that would even make the Apostles blush at how paltry their efforts were by comparison.

I once read of a missionary who claimed to have planted something like 600 churches over a 2 year period of service (in Africa, if I remember rightly). When you do the sums that works out at about one new church every 1.2 days. Okay, that's probably an extreme example, but the fact that the story even made it to press let alone get extolled as a wonderful model of what can be accomplished does serve to make the point that too often such stories are accepted uncritically. The sheer volume of these stories impresses many wrong expectations upon us.

The plain fact of the matter is evangelism and church-planting, not least of all in places like tribal Papua New Guinea, take a great deal of effort and much patience to see even the smallest gains that are in accordance with the purposes of God in the world. When we read the New Testament with our eyes open we know that it was never plain sailing for the first church-planters; and that was in the era of the inauguration of the church, by the apostles, accompanied with genuine signs and wonders!

When we come to "measure" things in Papua New Guinea we need to make sure we are measuring the right things, otherwise we will get a distorted picture. For example, if we measure the standard of behaviour of those believers at Tatagufa or Avili against our own standard of behaviour then we might tend to think that they really need to lift their game – a lot! However, if we were to measure how well each of us is doing in resisting his own cultural norms and values, if we were to look at how differently we live to those around us in our own culture, then we might suddenly discover that we are not so very different after all from our Papua New Guinean friends.

The believers at Tatagufa and Avili find it very hard to move away from the beliefs and practices of their ancestors and of their culture, including sorcery and violence. This looks bad to those who look on from Australia and other countries long influenced and conditioned by a Christian heritage. However, on closer inspection we discover that many of us find it very difficult to move away from the beliefs and values and practices of our own culture. Materialism and

attitudes to wealth would be one example of a belief system and practice in which it would be hard to tell Australian Christians and pagans apart. Do you see what I'm getting at? It's possible that the believers at Tatagufa and Avili have actually moved further along in their Christian walk than many in Australia. The Tatagufa and Avili believers may still look mediocre by comparison, but yet have done more and have moved further than many Australian believers. I'm not saying one way or the other, but just that this is possible.

I'm sure you want some news so let me give you a brief run-down. Some personal things first.

⌘ Beth's eye continues to give her problems (auto-immune uveitis). After four lots of treatment since May, and advice from an optometrist friend in Australia, it was decided she needed to see an ophthalmologist. Thankfully there was a visiting ophthalmologist in Goroka last week and we were able to secure an appointment. He prescribed some extra treatment which he felt confident would manage the problem. Beth continues the treatment and won't know it's success until completed. The aviation (helicopter) department of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) were very kind in accommodating our need to travel at very short notice.

⌘ We're having some difficulties in securing a vehicle to bring in much needed fuel supplies. It will be necessary for me to travel out with them to make the purchases. Safety on the roads and success in getting all we need (supplies are not always guaranteed when we go to town) would be our main concern.

And regarding ministry:

⌘ Things at Avili remain constant and quite good, although we have wondered if there's a little bit of apathy creeping in. They have decided not to have a mid-week Bible teaching meeting as we do at Tatagufa. They feel they are too pressed for time during the week. Notwithstanding that, there is no noticeable drop in attention to what is being preached on Sundays, and numbers remain constant.

⌘ Sundays at Tatagufa also remain constant. The good attendances remain, and people's interest is high. Wednesday meetings are good also. The ladies are very keen for their meetings and are very eager for their memory verse work and put a lot of effort into learning them. Literacy is slow, but again the ladies are enthusiastic which encourages Beth to persevere.

⌘ We're getting less than half of the men along to the men's meeting. While that's disappointing it's kind of what we expected. Those who do come, though, are responding in good ways to what is being taught and to how it's being



taught. They are made to work out for themselves what is and isn't being said in the passage, what is being taught, and then they are helped to see how that is relevant to them today. It's tedious to work this way with semi-literate people, and I think it does scare some away, but it is very helpful nevertheless. It's also been a good time for being more personal with the men which is especially valuable.

⌘ Over the last couple of weeks the attendance has been low as a nephew of Tili'o and Jeni, a cousin to Koino (husband is Juan), was found hanged on a tree in the bush - many have been over at his village for the funeral activities. It would seem like suicide, but that's not been confirmed. Juan tells me that when some of the relatives began their sorcery practices to find out who "killed" the boy, he moved his wife and children out of that house to another away from them. He said this was in response to the Bible's command to have nothing to do with such practices.

⌘ We've had some frank discussions with Jeve (at Yafanagomo). It appears he would like all the benefits of Jesus' work but without the repentance Jesus calls for. This is such a common thing in Papua New Guinea (and the rest of world, I suppose). People want all the trimmings and trappings and blessings without giving up their independence. We expect it's crunch time for Jeve and it's not certain which way things will go. We would really like him to join with the men on Wednesday (as we study Romans 1-8), but so far he has resisted that.

⌘ Preparation for our long service leave next year is well on its way. I hope to complete a study book on 1 & 2 Timothy which deliberately follows the pattern being set in the Wednesday men's meeting. The book will contain some commentary on the text to help people arrive at the right content and meaning, together with some questions which will help them work out how what is being taught might apply to their present situation. The idea is that while we are away one person will lead, but all will hopefully participate as in a Bible study. Since we don't have anyone who is really capable of preaching, this is the next best thing. (Iko did well earlier this year, but he would not be able to sustain this for the 6 months we plan to be away next year. We anticipate he will be the one to lead the studies with some of the other men in support.)

Most of you will know that in 2009 Beth and I will be taking 4 months' long service leave (probably mid-May to mid-September) on top of some furlough and annual leave. This is to free us from the stresses of work here, and also from the busyness of furloughs. The goal of this break is respite, with a view to being better able to continue the work in Papua New Guinea in the years to come. We're really looking forward to this time.

With love,
Glenn and Beth.

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