

the NICOLSight

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The Price of Honesty

The four welders and the mason sat in a circle looking at the ground. I waited for the mason to start the meeting but he deftly turned it over to me. Taking a deep breath, I wondered how much I should say.

"We have been through this already," I started. "Norm and I told you that the two outside metal doors you made for us are bowed. You have tried to fix them twice but it is only making them worse and they are breaking the wall. We took them out and we want them replaced or we want to be reimbursed. The work is not satisfactory."

"You should never have taken them out without the mason," the head welder interrupted.

"The mason wasn't there, we are running out of time and he saw that the walls were breaking," I responded.

"The cement wasn't good. Doors can't break walls. I have never heard of this before. Our workmanship is good. Whoever heard of bowed doors? That is ridiculous. This whole thing is ridiculous."

I prayed for patience and tried to speak calmly. How many times had I repeated these same words? "The cement was extremely hard. It took Norm three hours to chisel out the doors. I showed your apprentice," I pointed out the young man next to the welder. "when the top and bottom hinge are in place the middle one is 2 cm out of line. If you want to prove your workmanship is good, you will exchange the doors for new ones or reimburse us."

"That's not possible. We don't have the means. We can't buy them back. We don't have the money."

I wasn't getting anywhere so I tried another approach. "On top of that, we paid for first quality doors and you made the second quality. We paid double what the doors are worth."

The welders looked at each other in bewilderment and then at the mason. During the whole discussion he had not said a word or lifted his head from the ground.

"We gave the mason two estimates," the welder said.

"Yes, I saw the two estimates and we chose the most expensive because we wanted the best quality. We didn't get that. Which estimate did you make? How are you going to make up the difference to us? Even if you sell these doors to someone else, you are not going to be able to earn as much as what we spent on them."

The welders squirmed and discussed the case amongst themselves animatedly but no one took responsibility for the problem. No one admitted he had done wrong. The mason sat with his head down. As the intermediary it had been his job to order the doors and control the quality. Yet, not wanting to create conflict 'needlessly', he installed the second quality doors as if they were what we ordered. And we had trusted him.

Had the mason given the second quality estimate to the welders and pocketed the difference? Had the welders received the money for the first estimate but made the second estimate and pocketed the difference? Were both groups working together? Or were Norm and I at fault for our blind trust that the work would be done honestly?

Reflecting afterwards I asked, what incentive is there to be honest if you have never heard God's word? In this culture a man is admired if he gives his family financial stability. The line between earning money fairly or dishonestly is vague. The definition of 'cheating' is flexible if one does not have God's guidelines to follow.

During this interchange I also experienced that one can not receive forgiveness if one doesn't acknowledge guilt and repent. I was ready to forgive but everyone insisted that he had done nothing wrong; no one in the group offered an apology. How many times does God wait patiently for us to humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness while we stubbornly insist on our righteousness, refusing to admit our guilt? Once again, the importance of Bible translation was impressed upon me. "Oh God, may your word become accessible to the Siamou people."

Language Study continued...

We are back in Ouagadougou continuing our language studies. While Norm struggles with passé composé, présent and futur* in French, I try to get my head around the numerous unfamiliar idioms and proverbs which litter the Jula language. (If people would just say what they mean instead of speaking in pictures!)

This time the climate has changed. Much less dust! Instead it rains every other day flooding the roads and making mud. The fresh vegetables have also become scarce as the rain floods the gardens and people head out to the fields to plant grain.

We are attending the Mennonite church started by the university students from the Orodara area and are looking forward to the start of the school year when the benches will be filled again. (Most of the students are home for the vacation.)

*the past, present and future tenses

Praise Items

- We bought doors from another welder and installed them so we could close up our new house before returning to Ouaga. The hired work on the house is finished; we just need to put in the finishing touches (painting, hooking up the electricity, setting up the plumbing...) when we move in at the end of November
- Our move to Ouaga did not hold any surprises. It went smoothly and we have settled into our studies.
- Norm's health improved dramatically after he stopped taking doxycycline as an anti-malarial. He switched to paludrine and chloroquine.
- I have been reading passages from the Bible with my Jula teacher during class. She is Catholic but seems to have little Bible knowledge. She chooses passages which she doesn't understand well and asks me to explain the meaning.

Prayer Concerns

- We told our mason that we would not be paying him the final instalment of his salary to make up for some of the difference we lost on the problem with the doors. After much discussion he asked the elder in our courtyard to talk to us, pleading with us to pay him so he could pay his workers. It was the closest anyone came to admitting he had done wrong. Pray for the welders and the mason. Pray that we will have wisdom in our interactions with the people we work with.
- Once again we are in Ouaga, this time until November. Norm is studying French and I am studying Jula.
- Pray for continued good health.



Addresses

The opportunity to align with God's work in Burkina Faso is made possible through the prayer and financial support you give. Your notes of encouragement and gifts of finances are greatly appreciated. If you would like to express your support of the ministry in Burkina Faso with a donation, you may send it to:

Mennonite Mission Network
1601 W. Beardsley Ave
PO Box 370
Elkhart, IN 46515-0347

Please send personal mail to:

Norm and Lillian Nicolson
PO 40, Orodara
Burkina Faso
West Africa

email: lnicolson@mennonitechurch.ca
Lillian@Haas.net
nicolson@pris.ca