

the NICOLSight

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What Ministry?

Paradox of Language Learning

Norm entered the apartment and stood in the doorway like a wilted lettuce leaf. "My head hurts," he said. I looked up from my computer in sympathy. Language learning is a painful process and I haven't discovered a way to lessen the agony. In learning a foreign language, a person returns to the babbling stages of toddlerhood



Norm with his teacher, Constance.

and fluent speakers often react as one would to a small child. After all, if a person can't express himself he must be slightly stupid, not? Progress is marked slowly by having a first conversation where the other person actually understands what was asked! Then you manage to have a five minute conversation in the target language and information was exchanged! Then you suddenly hear the word you learned in class everywhere you turn, and you understand what it means! These beginning times are exciting advances in deciphering the 'secret' code of the people group you have been immersed in.

Passing from beginner status to intermediate just brings on more headaches and trials. Suddenly it seems as if you have stopped progressing and are even regressing in your speech. You are tired of class, conjugation, articles, vocabulary and weird grammatical structures. You become painfully aware of all of your the mistakes in grammar and vocabulary and pronunciation but don't know how to fix them. People still look at you strangely as you attempt to express yourself and then finally when they understand what you said, they repeat the phrase *exactly* and then try to correct you (where was the error though?) Norm has passed into this stage in language learning and his head doesn't stop hurting.

Not only is language learning painful but it is difficult to measure progress and productivity. The ministry part of the assignment is put on hold and no tangible work gets done. Our society values productivity and quick results to measure success, yet we need to remember that God's measure is not the same as ours. The Bible stresses living by faith far more than works. Language is such an elementary and vital form of communication that, without a solid grasp of it, one's ministry remains ineffective or, at best, inefficient. It is a humbling but necessary step in working amongst people of a different language group.

Being Ministered to...

In order to escape the heat of mini-hot season and take a break from language classes, we spent two weeks of vacation in Europe during September. We didn't get a break from foreign languages as we visited friends in France, Germany and Switzerland (three countries but not many kilometres) but it was a wonderful time of fellowship, rest and exercise. One of my German friends is a Lutheran



View from our room at the retreat center in the Alps.

pastor and she asked us to speak in her church about our work and mission during evening service. She also invited us to a retreat centre in the Swiss Alps. Twenty-two Christians from all over Switzerland gathered for prayer and fellowship and the theme of the retreat was "...and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth." **Acts 1:8.** We were asked to share our work there as well. The response and the interest from the people was overwhelming. This is the privilege of being part of God's family. No matter what country you are in or what language you speak or even what denomination you belong to, you find brothers and sisters to fellowship with in Christ's name.

What happens next

November 14 marks the last day of language classes. Our time in Ouagadougou was a good learning experience but, other than the friends we have made, I don't think I will miss anything except for the fridge (which can make ice in 3 hours). Both Norm and I are looking forward to moving into our new house in Tin and reconnecting with the people in the courtyard and village. Since we are human, we are also looking forward to becoming productive in starting in on the work we came to do: Norm in the recording studio and me in Bible Translation, keeping in mind that this work belongs to the Lord.

Praise Items

- Norm has made remarkable progress in his French abilities and is able to join in conversations. I feel comfortable discussing almost any subject in Jula with patient listeners.
- We are anticipating a small, life-changing addition to our family near the end of March. Since September, I have been enjoying good health and a healthy appetite.
- We thank God for friends and family around the world who take interest in this work and our lives and support us through prayers, letters and finances.
- Air-conditioners are God-sent: when set at 82 F it is cool enough to think!



Prayer Concerns

- Language learning never ends. Pray that Norm will be able to find a tutor in order to continue active French learning. Once in the village I will be struggling to keep Jula and Siamou separate and increasing my fluency in both.
- Pray for continued good health.
- Pray for a good transition back to the village and into the work which we were assigned to do.
- My colleagues, Paul and Lois Thiessen, and their daughter, Sarah, needed to return to Canada because of health reasons. Paul will be traveling to Burkina for a month at a time, three different times in this coming year to guide us in translation work.
- We hope to recruit another Siamou Bible translator. Pray that God will guide us to someone with a heart for God's Word and the Siamou language and who has a good education.

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:

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