

## Excerpts from My Journal...

### New York Pre-Field Training July 2008

Friday, July 4th

Yesterday the same old thoughts returned. "What am I doing here? I do not deserve to be here. Who do I think I am? I should just run back home." I have battled thoughts and feelings like these off and on for the entire 2 years that we have been preparing for the field. Somehow, I think that I believed that these thoughts would eventually fall away and that I would become confident in having "arrived" at the end of the process. I was wrong. They have returned with even more vigor than ever before. Only now, after all that the Lord has been working in me and after all the work that MTW has been putting into my preparation, I feel like I am more prepared to recognize those thoughts for what they are - they are totally true if this is all about me and my ability, my plan and agenda, my merit... BUT - what I understand now more than ever is that *it is not about me!* Praise God, it is not about me at all. I am in a place where I am learning what it really means to "preach the gospel to yourself daily". I may have understood it to a degree before, but now, being in a place where I am totally *not* in control, where I feel like I am an outsider, where everything seems backwards and I am completely off balance, I am *experiencing* what it is to **need** the gospel daily. Because this is not about me, I am free to make mistakes, even fail - Christ has already done everything necessary for my redemption. So now, *it is all about Him!* I am rejoicing this morning because my response to those old destructive thoughts is now the hope of the gospel. I am free to rest in His ability, His plan and agenda, His merit. What a freedom! I am free to pour everything that I am and have into service for Him and not worry about the outcome. The outcome belongs to him.

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Saturday, July 12

Today, we finally hit the wall. After 10 days of non-stop working, training, traveling, rushing, etc. we came to a grinding halt today. Scott and I were at odds this morning as we were trying to get out the door for a VBS prep time this afternoon. The stress of being on a brutal schedule, in an unfamiliar place, with barely enough time to meet our basic needs of food, sleep, bathing, and having clean clothes finally caved in for us. Instead of stopping right then to deal with it properly, we fought and then hurried out the door with the tension so thick you could feel it. In silence we traveled to our meeting. When we arrived a fellow missionary approached us to apologize about something he had said and done the day before. Scott and I were not even aware of the offense, but he confessed that he and his wife had not been communicating well in the moments before he saw us and that his reaction had come from the unresolved conflict between them. I was convicted by his honesty. Scott and I had been doing the very same thing.

At home, we have been doing well at making an effort to get together alone several times a week to make sure that we are communicating well and that we are on the same page with everything that is going on. Here, we do not have a spare moment

to breathe, much less work out an afternoon or evening to go off together without the kids and reconnect, debrief, and unite for the days ahead. Is this how it will be on the field? We are going to have to think ahead and decide what we can do to prevent the build-up of tension and even hostility by being creative about how to put our marriage first.

The kids are also dealing with the stresses of being here. The older ones seem to be handling it pretty well across the board, although we have had to deal with some issues. The middle ones are doing the best. They are the most flexible and least emotional. All this is one big adventure for them. The two little ones are mostly dealing with extreme fatigue and the lack of any sort of routine or schedule. This is resulting in a lot of whining, crankiness, acting-out and even some physical problems – upset stomach, headaches, lack of appetite. In turn, these things crank up the stress for Scott and I as we have to deal with the fall out. Back home, we would find a sitter for some afternoons, so that they could stay home or we would pull back as a family and cut down on the busy-ness. We are not used to doing things separately. We tend to do everything as a family, and if someone is not able to do it, then we will usually not go at all. But here, we do not feel like we really can cut back on what we are doing. There is no possibility of a sitter for them...so what do we do?

Scott and I have GOT to find (make) time to figure some of these things out – soon! I know that we are only here a month, but we will not make it another 20 days if we do not do something.

I am beginning to think that I am more tired than what I physically feel. The emotional and mental fatigue comes on differently than the physical for me. I am good and pressing on and pushing hard, physically. But I have not always been so good at recognizing when I am starting to loose it mentally and emotionally. Scott and I need to discuss that as well. And for him, we need to ask those questions for him too.

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Thursday, July 17

Our team is on the same page with Scott and I about the unrealistic expectations for our schedule with Ascension. They are all feeling the same stress and burnout that we are. Our first response may be resentment and the tendency to complain, but I think the discussions we are having in MTW training are helping us to be able to step back and try to evaluate this more reasonably. I really think that it is interesting how this has played out for Scott and I and for our team. Yesterday when we completed our CCAI surveys we scored ourselves to see what our weakest areas are. Our teammates were both in the group that struggles with setting boundaries and with being tempted towards man pleasing and trying to make everyone happy. Scott and I were both weakest in the area of Perceptual Acuity – meaning our ability to read others' unspoken cues and understanding others' perspectives on a given situation and making appropriate responses to them. Is it ironic that God has placed us all in this situation that calls for accurate assessment of others intentions and for the lovingly assertive setting of boundaries? God is certainly not wasting these circumstances, but using them to teach us about ourselves and to work in us the experience of real-life situations that require dependence on the grace that we proclaim to the rest of the world.

On another note, the last two days that we have spent talking about cultural adjustment and adaptation it has become more and more apparent to me that cross-cultural ministry is next-to-impossible! With all the intricacies of

understanding the nuances of a foreign culture and realizing that I barely understand my own culture – the opportunity for failure is enormous. Six months ago, this blatant realization might have caused me to abandon the call that God has given to us. But, as He has been working the deep truths of grace into the fiber of my heart and soul, it only makes me more aware of the fact that this is not about me or my abilities. It is all about God and His power to take my weakness and make it into strength for His service.

This week has not given Scott and I much time to reflect together, but we have been able to have a few discussions about our approach to a life of full-time ministry and how it is a challenge to our traditional understanding of the work/family/recreation/“church” balance of time and commitments. This profession of a missionary is full of ambiguity and calls for the ability to change, bend, flex, adapt, re-evaluate, strategize, innovate, take risks, and live boldly. All the while, we are striving to be very self-aware and keep a pulse on how we are doing physically, emotionally, and spiritually so that we take care of our own welfare in order that we might be of some good to others and not so consumed by tasks that we crash and burn.

I have also seen some things about myself this week through some of the exercises that we have been doing at the training sessions. Not so much things that I did not know already, but more confirming things that I would rather have not thought about. I have been confronted with the fact that I am uncomfortable around people that are different from myself. I realize now just how BAD of a listener I am. My flexibility and openness are lacking (even though I do think that I have come a *long* way in this area, mainly through the Lord taking me through some of the most difficult situations where I had no control and no way out). When you are in a place where there are only two basic choices: flex or die, your hand is really forced. But looking back over the past 7 years, I am thankful for these trials because I know myself well enough to know that I would never be as open and flexible as I am today (no matter where some test ranks me) without having walked through these ordeals first.

I came to this training thinking that one of the things I would come away with would be a clearer vision for our specific roles in Belize and even maybe a stronger feeling of security and confidence in our deserving to be here. But, as the time to leave for Belize draws closer and closer (25 days) I think I have even less of a clear-cut understanding of just what we are supposed to do there. I am also still insecure in my qualifications or feelings of being justified in being in full-time ministry. However, instead of that making me more anxious, it has actually begun to bring a sense of peace and rest that I have not had before. I think this goes back to what I said before: I am more and more aware of the fact that this is all about God and His power, His plan, His timing. How freeing is that?

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Wednesday, July 23, 2008

Two nights ago we received an email from Marc, our team leader, about what they have already planned for Scott as soon as we get onto the field. We had already talked with him about the need to really get acclimated, to begin language learning, to find our way around and establish some new normalcy in our family during the first few months and that this would be our primary focus. Well, that has changed. Due to a teacher from the high school going on leave, Scott is slated to teach 24 classes per week for the first semester of school. This

means that in less than 3 weeks after arriving he will be gone all day and very busy with preparing for school when he is at home.

This thing has two sides: in one way it is a blessing because one of the things that has been the most unnerving about going was the ambiguity of Scott's job description and the lack of concrete, measurable goals. I think it is a little comforting to Scott to have something more defined and objective to start out with. On the other hand, for me, I am reeling. I feel like my rock, my support, my one constant has been taken away from me. I am afraid. I will be home alone, with 6 children, all day. I will not know my way around. Everything will be more difficult – shopping, cooking, chores – not to mention figuring out what school is going to look like for us. Our house will barely be functioning – we might even not have gotten our things out of customs until days before. I am a little afraid of being alone and solely responsible for the house and the children right away.

Another thing I find in myself here is some resentment. He now has something to "do". What am I doing? It looks like I will be doing the basics of what I would do if we stayed in the States. Only now, I have no network of friends, none of my own activities and interests. Back home I was involved in a number of different things – each of them were perfectly suited to my strengths and gifts. Teaching 6 seminars a week to middle-schoolers, volunteering at the Crisis Pregnancy Center, small-group at church, doing public speaking across the state of N.C. for CC – all of this kept me busy (sometimes too much so!). But they also gave me a sense of fulfillment, they satisfied my need to be significant, to be needed and wanted, to receive admiration from others, and to do some of the things I love the most: to teach, to speak persuasively and extemporaneously, and to be around a lot of different people. Honestly, I am feeling like I am going back 9 years, when I had a 4 year old, a 2 year old and a newborn. My life was mostly stuck inside four walls. I was lonely. I was often depressed. I did not feel connected to my husband because his outside life was so dominant. I am afraid of going back to that.

This all seems very selfish. In fact, I am sure it is. But it is also honest. Lord, help me. I am finding that I still put my trust in all the wrong places. My sense of value still comes from others. My selfish resentment rears its ugly head. Who am I to be a missionary? This dependency thing just keeps going deeper and deeper. Each time I think I have found the bottom – the essence of being dependent, I find that there are still layers of self-reliance or man-reliance strongly entrenched in my life. What am I to do? Only in you Lord, can I trust. I want to value nothing but you. I want to empty myself and be filled with nothing but your grace. But it is so backwards to my old nature. It is so contrary to the conceit of my heart. Help me, Jesus.