

March 2014

Isaiah grew in Christ and learned from our teammates. He found a job working on a farm, and stayed sober. We were delighted to find that he was not physically harmed for confessing faith in Christ. In fact, we began to meet others who had come to Christ out of Islam, including a woman named "Light" who worked at the clinic. Because it was almost Easter, we invited her to come meet with our team to help us record the Easter story in her language. She did a marvelous job of retelling the story with vivacious imaginary dialogue thrown in. After two tries she finally understood she should just stick to the text. The third version was one we could memorize, and we then had numerous opportunities to tell it throughout the village.

The team was really adapting. At our one-year anniversary party we played games like "grate the coconut" and "carry water in a bucket on your head," everyday skills for villagers. We attended local weddings and funerals, helped our neighbors weed and hoe their crops. The students wrote and presented ethnography papers, their study of some aspect of the culture. We all taught whenever possible, usually in homes: math, English, literacy, Bible. Deborah's preschool class had swollen to 25; some of them were children whose parents had actually pulled them out of the local school to attend her front porch classes. One Friday, a team "committee" presented over a dozen options of projects we could bring to the local government officials, and by voting we finally narrowed them down to four. Which of the four would the local leaders choose as the most valuable for us to do?

Conversations with our immediate neighbors about spiritual things continued. One day when I passed their house I saw the grandmother, Kellie, sitting in the sunshine with a swollen knee. "What are you thinking about as you sit here?" "I am thinking about God," was her surprising answer, "and the judgment when I face Him." That gave me an opportunity to share that by putting her faith in Jesus she could have confidence and peace. "Shall I pray for God to heal your knee?" She nodded, and I prayed. A few days later she called to me from where she was hoeing weeds. "Look! I am well again!"

Nancy continued to be both interested and reluctant to talk about spiritual things. One day, after Ruth and I had been to visit another lady and had read John 4 with her, Nancy asked me what we had done and read, and wanted me to read it to her, too. When we finished the story I asked, "Do you think Jesus knows all about us, like He knew all about the Samaritan woman?" She had been sitting on the porch step beside me, listening intently, and now she looked uncomfortable. Finally she answered, almost accusingly, "You think Jesus knows everything about you, don't you? And that He has forgiven it all!" Was she envious? I hoped so.

That month Nancy's preteen niece, Adi, arrived to stay with her for a year. She was a sombre girl. "You mean God made all the animals? Even unclean ones? Where did people come from? How did people begin to die?" I brought out the Bible. "You see," Adi remarked to her friend, "This is why I want to learn to read. Because by

reading, I can find out the answers to these things I want to know about.” Aha! Capitalizing on that discovery, I offered reading lessons. Her glum manner dropped away day by day, and became brilliant smiles as she made progress.

Then old Kellie’s youngest daughter, Belle, five months pregnant, came to visit her mother for a few weeks with her three youngest children. Her interest in learning to read and in the Bible was also intense. “Let’s read every day. I want to know God,” she insisted. We met anywhere she happened to be at the moment, even sitting in the middle of the cornfield. “What?! Abraham was willing to offer his son as a sacrifice?” Yes. I dearly hoped we could get to the part of the history showing that God Himself gave His only begotten Son for us all. Before we did, however, her husband called her home because his older wife got sick. “Yes,” she sighed. “I’ll be back to have the baby in a few months, and then we can read some more.”

A church in Lindi invited us to come lead their Easter service. Colin prepared a sermon in Swahili. The rest of us got ready to be the choir, Tanzania style: uniforms and front-porch rehearsals. Anticipation lifted our mood. Colin and I recalled the humble home of the pastor, the simple church. It would be an eye-opening field trip.

