

Greetings all from Senegal.

Jan.29,2017

Last week we made our first village trip (for this dry season - teaching/Storying) to our Yalunka villages. Our trip was cut in half by a kidney stone attack in the middle of the night in the second village. From a geographical point of view, there was nothing that could be done from that side of the big river. Fortunately I had some pain medicine along and got through it by about 10am. So I told the guys with me (our 2 translator partners) that since it had reached the bladder, we may as well stay to finish our planned sharing that night. However about an hour later the attack started back up again with the same kind of intensity and back up at the kidney again. That threw me for a loop and after some time I realized it wasn't quickly going away. I had never yet had two stones the same day. Driving out to get across the river, even while passing a stone, was better than being on the wrong side of the river through the night if I needed medical attention. So the guys loaded up our bed rolls and off we went for a slow and bumpy ride. Fortunately that evening, not long after we arrived home, the second stone passed into the bladder and I was able to sleep well. The next afternoon both stones passed out of the bladder and the whole ordeal was over. Pat says I had twins! (We're still searching for suitable names).

After a week of recuperation and preparation, it's time to head back to Mali. God willing we will leave Tuesday morning for our villages. We plan to pick up where we left off with another night to teach in the second village where our last trip ended. Not only do we want to share the second story we had prepared, but we also want them to see me healed and whole again and to realize we truly care about them and we won't be thwarted by a spiritual attack. The first night with them we heard an incredible testimony from one old man that lives up on the hill across the creek. He became a believer 3 years ago.

In this particular village, lived yet another older man who was the village hunter. He too became a believer just a few years ago and we have watched his life become transformed by the gospel and his testimony was clear. However a couple years ago he became sick with stomach problems which was finally diagnosed as cancer and was beyond medical help. He passed away this past year during rainy season. This was our first time visiting this village since his death. So we had a good time with his family to pay our respects and give our condolences. That evening after our teaching the first Story, we took the opportunity to share our condolences with the whole group who had come, and to share with them our hope and surety of seeing our friend again in heaven one day. It was amazing to watch the countenance change on all the faces around us from grief to hope and joy. Everyone became happy and was agreeing. But the little old man who lives across the creek on the hill spoke out loudly and everyone stopped to listen. He said basically, (my translation), "these words you are speaking is the truth. I am going to see our friend some day in heaven when my time comes. We have seen some of our people accept this road to follow Jesus and then turn back to the traditional religion to appease our ancestors when the way

becomes difficult. But I will never turn back. This new path I am on is the Truth and now that I have finally found the Truth, I will never turn back".

There were twenty some there around the fire that night for the teaching. Some were delighted and in agreement with what the old man said, and some were silent and seemed a bit bewildered. I wish we had time to hear all the small conversations that took place that night after we closed in prayer. One thing is for sure, the gospel was shared in a relevant and meaningful way that night and heard by many. To God be the glory.

I share this story for a few reasons. In the first place, for you as Christ followers to be encouraged and remember you too are an important part of this work. Secondly, we head back to that village in a couple days, (Jan 31 - Feb 5), and we are asking you to pray for the hearts of all those in that village. The believers and the not-yet-believers. Pray for those who are hearing the Truth of God's Word but are fearful to change from their traditional beliefs. Pray for God to open hearts and minds to His Word and understanding. Thirdly, I share all this so you will know how much we depend on and need your prayers as we go.

The next trip after this one, (Feb.17-25), we plan to join with our Southern Baptist friends from Texas and one of our "World Partner" missionary colleagues, all who also partner with us in this initiative to share the gospel with the Yalunka. Our goal to push farther on across the Mali border into northern Guinea where there are villages who speak the same language and who are relatives of the Yalunka . As far as we know they have not yet heard the good news, although they may have heard of us from their relatives on the Mali side of the border. This will be another exploratory trip and we'd especially appreciate your prayers on our behalf and for all the people we will visit on the journey.

Thanks for listening. More to come later. We hope God has encouraged your hearts today.

Steve and Pat Nelson
Fellowship of Evangelical Churches - West Africa Initiative