

March 10, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters at Harvest Baptist,

What a difference a month makes. At the beginning of last month, Bella and I were looking forward to our next translation check. We can get on the internet, so we were aware of covid-19. But we didn't realize how quickly the virus, and our collective response to it, would change things. Our translation checker and his wife, Bob and Debbie Clark came here on March 12. When they arrived, they had plans to continue to travel and do checking and attend meetings for the next four months. But over the next week and a half, things really changed for them. In the end, they left here, went right on to Jakarta and then on to the States while they still could. All their plans had been blown to pieces.

While they were here, we did do the check of the books of Luke and 1 and 2 Timothy. The check seemed to go pretty well. When we plan these checks, the rule of thumb for how long they will take is around 100 verses a day. But different factors can influence that total. The language we work with is able to say things relatively succinctly. That means our verses are shorter than they sometimes are in other languages. Also, having done these checks for a while now, we know who the best native language helpers are. We used only four women this time. One said virtually nothing, so really we had 3. I read a passage, and the language helpers say it back as best they can remember it. If it is communicating well, they should be able to give it back to us. One of our helpers has an amazing memory. Because of this we had to read longer passages at one time. If we didn't, she could just repeat verbatim what we said. And that would not really tell us if she understood what she heard. The other two women who helped us were also very good. They gave back what they heard, but very much in their own words. That is good, it tells us that they understood what they were hearing. With such good native language helpers, we were able to do 1,350 verses in 8 days of checking. One day we checked over 200 verses. We had never done that before.

But as the check went on, our translation checkers were watching their itinerary fall apart piece by piece. In the end, as I said, they just went home. After they went home, the virus began to hit the U.S. very hard. You all know what happened. Things here developed a little more slowly and a much less clearly. The virus is in Indonesia. My home church in San Diego asked us to take precautions. So, after prayer and consideration, we decided to shelter in place here in the village. We know the health care here is much poorer than in the States. But we also know that we are less likely to get the virus if we stay here and stay home. So, that is what we are doing. We met with the church last week and explained as much as we could about the virus and ways to try to keep from getting it. We also told them that for the next month, at least, we will not be meeting together with them. I know some of them were scared by all of this. But at the same time there were some very encouraging testimonies from some talking about our lives being in God's hands. If the virus comes here, it will come from down river. We may, or may not, know that it is coming. Our area of the country has very little ability to test people.

Bella and I also believe that our lives are in God's hands. But more than that, we believe that all we hope for is also safe in His hands. He has us here for a reason. We very much agree with what the apostle Paul said to the Philippian believers. *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. 23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."* We would very much like to finish the translation here in Sekadau and see leadership appointed. But if that is not what God has planned for us, we know that what He has planned is the very best for us.

Thank you so much for your prayers for us. And thank you too for the \$100 that you sent to us in March. Please pray for us, not that we will be safe, but that we will honor God in all that we do. We will die exactly when God wants us to. And if the virus makes it to our village, pray that we will know how to respond.

At times like this, it is good to know that we serve Almighty God who loves us as His own dear children.

Yours in Christ,

Paul and Bella

Prayer requests:

1. That we will rely on God's wisdom as we walk with Him
2. That we may continue to translate God's Word here. I am working on drafting the book of Daniel right now, and plan to move on to Hebrews next.
3. That the Lord will use this situation to draw unbelievers to faith in Christ, and believers to a renewed relationship with Him
4. Our daughter Mandy and family are sheltering in place in India. Please pray that they too will have wisdom from God to know what to do. And pray they will have enough food to last through the mandatory home lock down.

The picture is of Bob and Debbie Clark with some of the men who serve in the church here.

