

November 2021

Thank you so much for your faithful support this month. We truly appreciate you, and the Lord will use your giving for the kingdom as we place it in His hands with faith. Here's where we are in....

In circumstances:

This month we were really reminded of all the people the Lord has put in our path that made a difference in our lives and helped shape us more into the image of Jesus Christ. Throughout the month, I could see how God put Rocio in my life to shape me more like Him. I used to be more careless in daily duties. But since Rocio came into my life, her standards are literally becoming mine. Now I always find myself cleaning the house and making sure to be a faithful, dependable worker. This is just an example, but even more, she has helped me be more faithful to God in my character. It has been encouraging to see that when I look back down the road, I can see that God is working on me! God has helped me cross paths with many people and put in my life that have helped me. I want to thank the Lord for all of them- my dad and mom, Jim Gardner, my college professor Fred Smith, a dear friend and psychiatrist who passed away, Martha Little, a dear brother in Christ, Mark Kelly. I thank the Lord for crossing paths with all of you, who in God's will we can make an eternal difference in the lives of others together!!! Praises this month are that my parents came to the U.S. from Peru this November, and the family got together on Thanksgiving break, and we went down to Florida together for three days. Also, Rocio found a night shift job working as a CNA at the Kennestone hospital!!

One verse that helped me this month is Ezekiel 34:1-2, "The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?" You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with wool, and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of your flock. You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost...So they were scattered because there was no shepherd...This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. I will rescue them from all the places they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness...I will pasture them,.. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. Then they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture of the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice."

If you are a leader in one area or another, you have a flock. For me, now I think of my family as the flock God has given me. The verse that struck me the most in this passage is where it says to the shepherds- you only take care of yourselves, what about the flock? This verse tears straight through selfishness and shows us the heart of what love is- laying our lives down for others (Jn 15:13), putting others' interests above our own (Phil 2:4). As I recall, when I became stressed with my kids or my wife or as a teacher this past month, I just asked the Lord to help me love them as He does. And in the back of my mind is 1 Timothy 3:5, "(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) This is God calling us to love others as when he asks Peter: Peter, do you love me?..Take care of my sheep/ feed my sheep. Realistically speaking, sheep can be annoying, sheep can do dumb things, and can be stubborn...even the good shepherd uses a rod to keep us on the path, but He does guide them and protects them and tend to them and looks after them because He loves his sheep. God is calling us to strengthen the weak, bind the injured, and bring back the strays!!! The question would be, how is the Lord helping you shepherd your flock?

In fundraising:

By God's grace and goodness, we have \$51,210.00 in pledges and one-time gifts as of October. In the Partners account is \$23,679.05 (part of the \$51,210.00). Thanks to the Lord that puts us at 51% of the launching goal.

To be honest, I could only say that we are making cracks in a wall rather than saying doors have opened (with enough breaks, the wall will come down). It is a gradual process. The last presentation we had was in

August; this means that both October and November have been tough to get responses back from emails, applications, or phone calls. So I would describe it as a time in the valley or a plateau. Praise the Lord, however, for the cracks in the wall! We have a presentation in a small group at Stonebridge this Thursday, December 23rd! So we are excited to be able to share there. We continue to wait on other responses in prayer. However, I realized that the main person I need to be asking is the Lord himself daily (this is when things start to move more).

Through this time of asking and seeking and not seeing much fruit (there are times like these, it's normal), when the Lord has actually used it for good in a sense. Really what he is doing or wants to do, I sense, is take off the "glam or" of being a missionary or take off the pedestal in my mind through fundraising (which probably happens with most missionaries). Yes, we can share Jesus, and yes, that's awesome, but I notice the one thing that can keep us going is our love and passion for Jesus and nothing else- because sometimes the goals or projects or endeavors just don't come through.

Proverbs 25:4 "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer." For metal to have value, its dross must be removed. We have trails that also remove the dross from our lives. The heat is turned up to remove the impurities from our lives. In our case, fundraising is the fire, and the Lord is emptying us of relying on ourselves, on anything we have, be it- talents, skills, or "qualifications," and helping us rely entirely on Him. As time goes by, both Rocio and I seem like our knowledge/experience in the fields seems to be rusting up, and it's discouraging. It's really been five years since Rocio and I have fully used our career studies (Rocio as a nurse and me as a missionary/teacher). Though we are both using them partially now- Rocio is at least in the medical field, and I am in the education field and always active in ministry. But the lie from the enemy wants to creep in and say all those studies for nothing. Rocio told me something encouraging this month; though I am slow and stubborn, it came through. She told me that the ways the Lord prepares you and the things you go through are never wasted- take Moses, for instance; he grew up as an Egyptian and not a Hebrew. He didn't grow up with the mentality of a submissive, frightened slave, but with the mindset of a prince, and the Lord used this leadership mentality to help Moses lead and free the Israelites from Egypt. Again, somehow in some way, the Lord will put it to use. After two years at chicken poultry and three as a Spanish assistant/substitute teacher, I feel like I don't have much left to give. However, the encouraging fact is this: I have the Holy Spirit- and He sure has plenty, an abundance of love, strength, joy, peace, revelation, truth, etc., that He can give to me and gives to others through me. So I no longer rely on myself but on Him to flow through me. And I needed to get to that point to rely on the Spirit completely.

Spiritually/ prayer requests:

I read Ezekiel 24:15-21, and though it's about Ezekiel's wife's death and Israel's destruction, it is good to meditate on it regarding valuing what is given to us. The context of this passage is that Israel adopted idols and even gods from the nations around them. It shows how God has to deal with a very rebellious nation, and even despite Israel, for the Lord's name sake, He will show His holiness through Israel (even their exile and ruin, then restoration) to the nations. Look at Ezekiel 39:16-32 for a clearer picture of this.

Here is **Ezekiel 24:15-21**(summarized) "The word of the Lord came to me, "Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed tears...and the people asked me why are you acting like this?"

So I said to them, "The word of the Lord came to me: Say to the people of Israel, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary- the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection...And you, son of man, on the day I take away their stronghold, their joy and glory, the delight of their eyes, their heart's desire, and their sons and daughters as well- on that day a fugitive will come to tell you the news. At that time, your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the Lord."

This is an excellent verse to think of where we place our affection, love, and delight. For Ezekiel, it was his wife- as a husband - I had to ask myself- is my wife the delight of my eyes, or is our relationship need more attention? And then I prayed to the Lord that he would fill me of his love. For the Israelites, the temple

represented God's presence among them. The temple Solomon had built described in 1 Kings 8:22-66 regarding spiritual value (a temple that bears His Name) and in 1 Kings 5-6 the description of its material splendor. It was not only a nice place to the Jews, but the promise of God's presence in their midst, and when that was taken from them, it was devastating. However, in Ezekiel 37:26-28, we see a promise to Israel, "I will make a covenant of peace with them; an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever." The application for us here would be, are we placing our love, affection, and delight on God or what He gives us? God wants us to enjoy his gifts, but ultimately, the giver should receive all the affection, love, and delight. And that is part of what a heart of thankfulness/worship truly is. As it says in Psalms 37:4-5, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will do this:"



