

The Mega-Issue

Carter Chronicle



Upcoming Furlough, Prayer Requests, Highlights from our First Term, and the CBB gets a New Name

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. Habakkuk 3:17-18

Our Upcoming Furlough...By Lisa Carter

Recently I read something in my devotional time written by Henry Clay Trumbull in the devotional *Streams in the Desert*. He said that every person and every nation must endure lessons in God's school of adversity to grow. This was illustrated well by a little example he wrote of a poor man who lost everything he owned including his little home and mill to a flood. He lost everything he owned in one single day and stood at the scene of his loss brokenhearted and discouraged. However, when the waters subsided, he saw something shining that the rivers did not wash away. He screamed, "It looks like gold!" and sure enough that was exactly what it was. Therefore Trumbull writes, "The storm that had impoverished him made him rich. So it is oftentimes in this life." The storm that impoverishes us makes us rich. This is hard to understand. In our culture we are raised that gain, success, and winning are our fulfillment. Of course, hard work and doing our best to achieve goals are good values but I have been learning through God's Word and life experiences that God's principles are far different than ours. As strange as it sounds to us as citizens of this world, in His economy our losses are actually our gains and this is a lesson I have spent the last few years learning in the school of adversity. After all, doesn't Jesus say, whoever will lose His life will gain it and whoever decides to save his life will lose it? It seems in the last few years my path has included all kinds of losses: from the loss of some precious dreams, my independence, to my sense of identity, from my home, culture, family, and friends, and even my health. Physically for months now, I have been suffering from a number of strange symptoms such as extreme fatigue and various aches and pains all over my body despite the fact that I am one you might call a "health nut." Recently two doctors here in Guinea and a couple from home have suspected that I might have rheumatoid arthritis. Guinea does not have the capacity to confirm these medical opinions (or treat me well enough to thwart the possibilities of this disease, if those suspicions prove accurate), so it seems that we have to accept changes in our plans.

Our hope and **our** plan were to go on our first furlough when in my sixth month of pregnancy. According to this plan we would go home healthy: six months pregnant and celebrating, have our baby, spend six months with him/her there and come back here with a six month old baby!! Well, I am not pregnant and we find ourselves having to come home not for festive reasons but due to a medical issue and a need to find rest and restoration. Some days I have so much fatigue and pain that I don't know how I am going to make it another day especially in a place like Africa where life and the people around me demand so much of me and with a high energy 3 year old to raise but the Lord always gives me what I need physically and much more spiritually. I believe I have come to the very end of myself...sometimes I just feel so weak all I can do is rest and trust in the Lord. I have no other choice. Oh, how I have moaned, groaned, and whined along the way worse than the Israelites in the desert. At times I still fall into that but the Lord has shown me that I have so many reasons to rejoice IN my sufferings...IN the storms.... IN all my losses for they are my spiritual gain. When I pull myself up spiritually to praise Him He is always there to richly bless. Even this past Sunday I felt extremely horrible during our worship service yet as the praise and worship time began I got up and sang and danced with everyone (Africans know how to dance and praise the Lord!) and, before I knew it, the Lord lifted me above the circumstances of my pain, tears filled my eyes, and I felt much better for the rest of the service. Isn't this how it is? No matter the temporal loss we face the invisible blessings that God abundantly gives us can never be taken away if we continue to sing His praises and cling to Him in faith IN the storm.

Upcoming Plans/Furlough:

- We will be spending our furlough in Wichita, KS – landing there in the month of August (after debriefing in the WEC Sending Base and visiting Lisa's family in Providence, RI).
- Please pray for strength for Lisa (and the entire family) and for all the arrangements of travel and transition over the next couple of months.

Highlights of our first term:

Since leaving for Costa Rica in January of 2006, here are some of the highlights of our first term:

- Spanish, Spanish, Spanish! Great friends made at the **Instituto Lengua Española** in San Jose, Costa Rica.
- **Kenyon's** birth in a Costa Rican hospital!! (Sill the cutest kid ever!)
- Jason's opportunity to teach a Bible study with **ex-drug addicts** outside of San Jose.
- The **Centro Bíblico Bata**: 4 semesters, 2 graduations (one pending on June 27th!), countless chapels – building the church of Equatorial Guinea one life at a time.
- African pets: Dogs (Sasha, Sima, and now Lala who we are now keeping for missionaries on furlough), **Mario the Monkey**, and a Cameleon (we looked for a patridge in a pear tree, but alas the bird isn't native to EG.)
- Lisa's participation as a speaker at several **children's and women's ministry** conferences/seminars.
- Trips to the **villages** to minister, encourage, and **preach**.
- Helping Elena (the "**abuela negra**" of Kenyon – her name for herself, not our name!) get re-united with her pregnant daughter who was in Benin at the time, to bring her back to EG after 8 years apart in time to witness the birth of her grandson Nehemías.
- Attending **dowry ceremonies** as part of the family.
- **Opening our home** to CBB students, the church, and neighbors for meals, Bible studies, and fiestas.
- Learning how to gracefully thwart bribes!
- Being a witness of the longest day of work that Jason has ever seen: 26 straight hours (working throughout the night) by 15 guys from Mali/Senegal as they poured the **concrete** floor for the second floor of the CBB's Academic Building.

CBB to get a new name:

House of the Word Bible Institute

Centro Bíblico Bata, founded in 1991, has progressed along with the rest of the educational system of Equatorial Guinea to the point where the professors have chosen a new name to better reflect the level of studies at the Bible School. The new name, which will officially be announced at the June 27th graduation ceremony is: **Instituto Bíblico Casa de la Palabra** which translated is: **House of the Word Bible Institute**.

The name itself is actually somewhat of a contextualizaion from the Fang word **abe** (for the Fang Okak of the south) or **aba** (for the Fang Ntumu of the north) which literally means "house of words". The **abe** is a typical little hut where the elders of the village typically make all the important decisions for a Fang village. Since we have students from other countries and from other tribes, the Spanish was used to highlight the importance of the Word of God (Scripture) but contextually for the Fang, the name will bring to mind what is so typical at the village level – folks gathering in the **abe** to discuss the issues of daily life and to make important decisions for the community.



Kenyon, modeling his Nemo swim trunks, turns 3 on June 24th!!

Why Am I Still Surprised by Suffering? (African Title: How do I React when the Lion Roars?)

--Jason Carter

Dear friends, **do not be surprised** at the **painful trial you are suffering**....**But rejoice** that you participate in the sufferings of Christ... (1 Peter 4:12-13)

In the States, when suffering occurs, many times we are surprised by it. My attitude usually is: "There are solutions; this isn't supposed to happen. Everything will turn out okay." In Africa, people would be surprised if suffering *didn't* occur. "Nobody in the hospital?...What's going on here?" I can remember some days when our church of almost 1800 members in Bloomington, Illinois didn't have a single person in the hospital! That would *never* happen in Equatorial Guinea.

But, yet, here I am, still getting *surprised* by suffering – both ours and our friends' suffering – showing me how American I really am. I get surprised that Mateo Ndong (20m years old) can come back from a youth retreat feeling fine and then proceed to spend the next 3 weeks in bed -- sitting in a hospital bed for the last week where 4 people die in 7 days from the same thing he has. And it's purely a tropical illness – nobody knows WHY this happens! (How can this be?!!) His calf and foot are enlarged and the doctors have no answer to why this sort of thing happens – there is no explanation (it's simply called an abscess). And the treatment seems, to my (admittedly) untrained medical mind, like something out of the medieval ages: they will slice open his leg to draw out the puss and hope that takes care of it.

So when 1 Peter says we shouldn't be surprised at the painful trials of suffering, I must confess it's actually hard *not* to be surprised at so much suffering. Peter is actually counter-intuitive for me!! Does the fact that suffering sneaks up on me, surprises me, and catches me off guard tell me how *American* I really am? Tell me how insulated to suffering my life has been? Oh, there are definitely Americans who have seen more than "their share" of suffering – folks with whom I wouldn't want to change places with in the States – but it just seems that the African "share" in the balance of suffering is tipped decidedly and continually in their "favor".

Here in EG, when somebody dies, you can smell it at the funeral. There is no make-up, nobody says "oh, look how beautiful Mrs. Obiang is" at the funeral – No. The deceased person actually looks...well, dead. There is no covering up the fact by make-up or an expensive coffin. The family usually has to dig the grave. It's the family who probably nailed some boards together to make the coffin. At the funeral you see the finality (and sound) of dirt being piled upon the wooden box. Africans aren't surprised by suffering. It doesn't sneak up on them. It's their traveling companion in the journey of life.

This should actually teach me a great deal. If it's a lesson I am willing to learn.

But, it's a lot easier to visit the hospital as a pastor-missionary than live with uncertainty over your own roof and in your own life. As Lisa and I ponder our return to the States and wait to be able to identify what is really going on health-wise with Lisa, it's a difficult time. Not knowing is tough. To live in the information age without adequate information is exasperating. And yet, "**do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering...but rejoice**". That is, for lack of a better term, just plain "weird". The Bible sometimes speaks Fang to me – as in, I can barely make out what is going on and pretty soon I find myself not really trying (or wanting) to understand.

Suffering is never part of the plan. Or rather, never part of *our* plan. And yet: "Moses approached the thick darkness *where God was*" (Ex. 20:21). I don't like the fact that, at times, God resides *there* – in thick darkness. Just as a passenger would rather have a storm-tested sailor leading a voyage on the rough seas, I'm trusting that God is using the difficulties and testings of Africa to deepen my own spiritual anchors. I want to lean into these experiences (easier said than done) to have a life that is more "storm-tested", to be able to navigate from the stern of the ship with more perspective and depth. That's the destination and my prayer....one day, I hope to get there.

Grace and peace,
Jason Carter Obama

A Typical Week? What's that?!?! May with the Carters until Cinco de Mayo

PRAYER REQUESTS

Over the last months, every now and then we get the question: "What does a typical week look like for you guys?" The question is really somewhat of a laugh for us, as there seems to be no typical week in EG. Life is so uncertain, weather can change everything in an instant, things always have a way of "coming up" at the last minute...

But here's an attempt of giving you somewhat of an idea....(until we ran out of space on an already very long Carter Chronicle)

May 1 Friday Morning: Leaving Kenyon with Elena (our dear sister from the church who helps with everything concerning the house!), Jason heads to the church for a **national meeting** of the denomination in preparation for the annual "General Assembly" in the summer (the night before, all the ordained pastors including Roly and Jason, got together as the **Theological Committee** for the denomination). Lisa, in turn, is covering a morning at the Pharmacy of "**The Good Samaritan**", **WEC's ministry to people infected by HIV/AIDS**. However, the key Lisa was left with doesn't end up working -- better luck next week!

Friday Afternoon: Jason hangs with **Mr. Kenyon** as Lisa hangs with the Lord in preparation for tomorrow... for dinner, Jason takes Kenyon for Chinese food. (Yes even in EG as of 2 months ago!!)

May 2: Saturday morning: Lisa puts the finishing touches on her message while Jason hangs with Kenyon (and about 7 neighborhood kids) in the yard.

Saturday afternoon: **Women's Ministry:** Lisa spends most of the day with the women of the church where she gives the **message**.

May 3: Sunday morning: Lisa and Kenyon to "our" **church**; Jason actually visits the main Catholic Church in the center of Bata, something he has wanted to do for a long time since he has no preaching commitment this Sunday.

Sunday afternoon: **Youth discipleship group** hosted in our house.

May 4 Monday Morning: This is our **Market Day** -- both the open air market and the 2 indoor supermarkets. Jason also visits **Mateo Ndong in the hospital** -- Mateo is a youth of the church who has been in the hospital for the last week. Jason brings him lunch (from a Senegalese restaurant) as well as looks for one more medicine that the doctors prescribed. Jason also runs around the city looking for **construction** supplies to facilitate building the concrete "shed" that will store all of our earthly possessions while we are on furlough.

Monday Afternoon: Jason at the **Bata Bible School** -- overseeing chapel and teaching class.

May 5: Tuesday Morning: Mission **WEC meeting**.

Tuesday Afternoon: **Rain!!** Rest and attend a "good-bye" party at "**Gozo de la Salvación**" (Joy of Salvation) church for a WEC short-termer from Canada who is finishing off his 9 month term here in EG

1. **Pray for Lisa's health.** Enough said. (This *isn't* your grandma's arthritis). We've also been cautioned about labeling something unconfirmed at this point, but the consensus medical opinion is that we need to get some tests to get to the bottom of everything.

2. It looks like we will be staying in Wichita, Kansas for the bulk of our furlough, landing there the month of August.

Since we will be coming "home" with all of 2 suitcases, **pray for the transition** into an apartment -- it's a little bit overwhelming to think of starting life over from scratch *again* (from pots and pans to towels and sheets....ah, this is already giving us a headache....)

3. Pray for Kenyon and the transition -- from good travel to entering preschool in a new place. **Pray for his English language**; he seems to be developing a tad slower with his pronunciation. We're hoping being in an "all-English environment" will help his Mother Language because right now he doesn't really have a "base language".

4. We have a TON of things to do before we leave EG, including finishing up the Bible School semester & banquet/graduation for the graduates not to mention a small building project (a shed) to store our stuff while we are away. **Pray that God would give us His strength and endurance for these last final projects.**

YOUR MISSIONARIES TO EQ. GUINEA, JASON, LISA, & KENYON