



lot to learn

We are on the verge of perhaps the most exciting adventure of our lives. In a few months, we will be parents. As I am writing this, there is a little boy that is miraculously being formed in Katheryn's womb. Even though we have yet to meet him face to face, we already feel like we are getting to know him. Perhaps, he is getting to know us as well. I've heard that babies begin to pick up the rhythms and structure of language by listening to their parents' voices while still in the womb. In fact, they are preprogrammed to learn language, and he has a lot to learn. After he is born, his little brain will work overtime absorbing every sound from the people around him. He will begin to understand how those sounds go together to form words. Those words, strung together, will

have meanings. Ultimately, those meanings will weave together to form a worldview. This will be the framework through which our child will understand and interact with the people and environment around him.

Like our little baby, we have a big journey before us. Over the past several years, we have been learning the rhythms and structure of our downtown community. We've discovered that our initial assumptions were shaped by our own worldview and aren't necessarily "reality" for those around us. Despite all that we've learned, we have been but infants in our understanding of the worlds that many of our friends inhabit. In order to better understand these worlds, several friends from our downtown community are helping us as "culture guides." These culture guides are assisting us to see the world through new eyes and hear the world through new ears. They are teaching us their social language. We've spent hours sitting on the

front porch discussing street politics with a good friend who is a "street culture expert." We've had vigorous conversations in coffee houses and around dinner tables, working through cultural and theological differences and misunderstandings. We are learning about important values that people hold and the ways that those values are communicated. We are learning various ways that people grow as a community. We are learning how people view God and their understandings of the Bible. We are gathering more than just fragmented information. Like a toddler, we are tying these meanings together to form a framework of understanding. Through all of this, we are learning how the gospel has been received in distorted ways, finding better ways to communicate the gospel, and learning how to equip the church to be a more meaningful presence in our community. In this newsletter, we would like to share some of the things that our teachers have taught us.



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- ::: Bootcamp Commissioning ::: Heinz 57 Campaign ::: Compassion Weekend :::
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- ::: Downtown Christian Unity Task Force ::: Sermon for Pentecost :::
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the beat

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lan*guage \ 'lan - gwij , - wij \

noun (1): the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community (2): a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings (3): the suggestion by objects, actions, or conditions of associated ideas or feelings [from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary]

re*spect \ri - 'spekt \

We knew that respect was the most important street currency, but only recently did we start wondering if we were defining it differently than some of our neighbors. Talking with our culture guides helps us determine if our hunches are true or not. We are still testing this new understanding with our culture guides, but here are some of the differences we sense. We had defined "respect" as showing honor and esteem and recognizing the dignity of another person. However, we are sensing that it has less to do with esteem and more to do with stability, less to do with two individuals and more to do with how a person relates with their surroundings and relationships. If everything is safe, stable, and under control, you have respect. If someone violates that stability (i.e. an argument, a call to the police, sharing confidential information), he/she disrespects. Disrespect is a verb. It is not an adjective ("to be disrespectful"). It is not an adverb ("treated disrespectfully"). It is a verb, because it is a direct action of violation that threatens the safety of the person's stability. Respect is not deserved, it is demanded out of survival. **WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:** Sometimes an effort to be respectful can actually disrespect. For example, giving furniture to a family because you think they need it can disrespect someone's role as provider within the family. You should try to determine a) if it really is a desired need and not just a perceived need, and b) how to work through the established roles of authority, so no one is disrespected.

Last summer, we concentrated on the first step of being a long term missionary - moving in and bonding with the community to establish trusted relationships and understood roles. Now, we have reached our second summer, and have delved more deeply into that next step, language learning. Language learning? In Lexington? Absolutely. There are many different languages spoken in our downtown. For example, we are learning the language of the street, of the city council, of churches, of non-profits, of coffee houses, and of community elders. I'm not just talking about the words that are used (though that is true, too), but I'm talking about how leadership is perceived, how the gospel is communicated and perceived, how help and benevolence is perceived, how people are perceived, and more. We learn who is respected, how communication takes place, where it takes place, and where the local paths of authority are. This is important not only for our ministry in the city, but also for the church at large, as we teach others how to "language-learn." We want to make sure that efforts of love and care really are perceived as love and care. We want to make sure that the words we say make sense and are understood in the way we intend them. We want to make sure that the gospel really is good news and not a burden or something to be feared. Without learning languages we risk confusion, hurt feelings, dependency, and avoidance. We also risk people never really hearing what we say and only seeing what we do, and we want to make sure that we are bearing a witness of Christ and not of ourselves.

Most people around here have at least heard of Jesus, and most of the older residents are avid church goers. However, the Jesus understood on the streets is not the Jesus we know. We know Jesus as God who walked among people in the midst of their everyday lives. We know Him as One who was "disrespected" and killed. We know Him as One who wasn't afraid of or even stopped by this level of violence and disrespect. We know Him as the One to live again and to live in us, so that the destruction in our own lives will also be overcome. Jesus is relational. We don't just go to Him to get quick fixes or to only get what we think we need of Him. However, this relational Jesus is not known as well on the street. Jesus is in rehab. Jesus provides lunch. Jesus comes to fix things, but He doesn't understand, and for many people He certainly doesn't exist outside the walls of control of the non-profits who talk about Him. He is a toll gate that you must enter in order to get where you need to go. **WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:** When a task-oriented culture does ministry in a relationally oriented culture, the task oriented people bring a "to do list" to fix things, so that is the only kind of relationship people perceive they have with Jesus. But, Jesus came to be the presence of God in relationship with His people. He came as brother. He came as friend. If Jesus is truly God, then He must be felt walking on the streets, and the Jesus we introduce must be One who is more than a toll gate, more than the maintenance man of life. He must be the source of life itself.

Je*sus \ 'je - zas , - zez \

PULSE Point

WE'RE HAVING A BABY!!!

Our mentor Darrell Whiteman has been known to tell students, "If you don't have kids, go out and buy some." Children have a special way of uniting people. Sometimes children make missionaries seem more "normal." In some cultures, people aren't considered adults until they have children. If the children are born into the community, they will never be considered "outsiders." While a lot of great ministry is accomplished without kids, I have to say that being pregnant has opened a whole new world to me.

- It seems that I am a part of a sisterhood that I wasn't before, now that I'm "packin' a baby."
- This child already has "aunties" and "uncles" who claim they will spoil him.
- My elders in the neighborhood have brought me food and given me advice on pregnancy and motherhood.
- People love to pray over the baby as we pray for them. One night, we prayed with three women, each going through a different personal hardship. Spontaneously, they took turns praying for our baby. Afterwards, one of the ladies grabbed my belly and kissed it.



Please contact us if you would like to be added to our monthly email prayer letter.

do you feel me?

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

We hear, "Do you feel me?" more and more often. As people begin to share personal stories, ideas, thoughts, and concerns, they follow up with this question. It sounds somewhat foreign to us. Instead, we might ask, "Does that make sense?" or "Do you see what I'm saying?" This is another example of how language learning is so helpful for us. The questions we are more likely to ask reflect cultures where reason and visualization are primary ways of understanding the world. But the question, "Do you feel me?" speaks of a world that is very emotional and experiential. In order to understand, one must feel what the other is speaking of. As we communicate our faith, it will be out of a sense of feeling, not reason, nor pointing to evidence of God that we can see, nor a Kingdom of God we can imagine.

Fortunately, our God is one who feels us. The writer of Hebrews says that we "do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses," and in fact has gone through the very trials we go through. In the Old Testament, the priests were to remain particularly far from any kind of physical or spiritual tarnish. I think we often think of God as that kind of priest, but that is not the God we meet on the streets of Jerusalem.

The God on the streets of Jerusalem (and on the streets of Lexington) is a God who literally touches the untouchable, feels them, heals them, and brings them back to life. He is the one who lets a prostitute wash His feet with her hair and her tears. And while it is easy to see His example as a call for Christians to authentically welcome "people who are in really bad shape" (and it most certainly is), it also allows me to be honest about my own brokenness.

We don't have to find a way to make Jesus' promises and love "make sense," nor do we have to visualize for people the possibility of His promises and love for them to be real for them. We just need to communicate that He feels us. He was "disrespected" unfairly too many times to mention. He often did not know where His next meal would come from or where He would sleep. He never had money in the bank or a stable retirement portfolio. He literally absorbed the violence of the mistrusting world around Him. And He overcame it all, and lived to tell the story. Every time life comes from death, I know He feels us. There is no sickness that can keep Him away. There is no dirt that He cannot wash clean. Do you feel me?



AROUND THE CORNER

The Mission Bootcamp '09-'10

Network with other churches to share ideas of missions training.

Continue investing in the group of young teenage boys who have befriended us.

Discover ways to disciple people in relational, experiential, and sometimes illiterate populations.



contact us!

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