

Blake Family Prayer Points – April 2020



APRIL 2020 ** pics from this past month at the end.

As we write this message, we are struck by the special opportunity that we now have as cross-cultural missionaries. In just a few short weeks, our global village has been changed forever. For the moment, there is no more coming-and-going between cultures. For the moment, it is only those of us who were already in a foreign culture who remain able to communicate the gospel in person across cultures and daily that ability is waning and we will all be dependent on electronic communication for all things. Lord, give us courage and strength and a willingness to walk through every open door.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

What a difference a month makes. When we wrote at the beginning of March, it was business as usual and we were looking forward to further settling into our life here in Agadez, closing out our house in Niamey, and a medical conference in Greece. Our first inkling that this coronavirus might actually be a ‘thing’ was when Carrie received an email on February 27 stating that the conference committee was considering canceling the conference. At the time, the email seemed crazy and we couldn’t believe they might actually cancel this conference, which trains hundreds of health care professionals working in the mission field, because of a virus. A week later, on March 6, the conference was cancelled. It was the beginning of the waterfall. Initially, we decided to go on to Greece, from where Carrie would continue on to the UK to complete training for Samaritan’s Purse disaster relief team. Then the hotel in Greece canceled. Next, seeing the writing on the wall that the world was quickly closing down, we decided to go ahead and make use of our tickets to Paris and continue on to the USA while we could still make our way back there. We purchased tickets from Paris to Denver for March 29. Two days later, our airport closed. We still planned on going to Niamey on March 22 to close out our house, meet with the Every Man’s Media team down that way, and do some training on Mama Lumiere...but SIM recommended that we stay put in Agadez in order to minimize movement and comply with presidential orders. Beginning March 29, there is no entry into or out of Niamey. So, here we are happily living life in Agadez until further notice.

You should know that we do have our names on the list, for a repatriation flight. And this is our first prayer request for this month: **That we would have wisdom as to whether we should stay here or return to the States if/when the opportunity arises, knowing that we may never be able to return to these precious people if we leave and that if we stay, it may be a very long time before we have another opportunity to return to the States.** In the meantime, we are continuing to Show Up. Drink Tea (from our own personal glasses instead of the communal ones). Talk Jesus.

Amidst disbelief at how easy it was to shut the world down and concern for the livelihood of our friends

and family here and in America, we are thankful for the opportunities that this pandemic is opening in regard to further sharing the gospel and serving our little corner of the world.

The shutdown will have a major negative affect on our people, as the merchants will be unable to travel and sell jewelry, which provides for the livelihood of this whole group. This brings up our second prayer request: **that God would provide an avenue for selling a bit of the jewelry so that the family can know that basic needs will be met this year.** It has affected our blood family personally, as Caitriona's work hours have been severely cut and Garrett immediately lost his restaurant job and ended up moving from Colorado to New Mexico. And this is our third prayer request: **that Garrett would reboot his life well and find work and housing quickly.** He's in quarantine for another 10 days.

As we fell asleep four nights ago, we joked about how we've suddenly added a new 'ministry' to our cadre – refugees. Not the typical Agadez refugees (those attempting to enter Europe via the Mediterranean), but those who are 'stranded' here due to the world shutdown. There are wanderers all over the world and a few of them ended up here in Agadez when everything shut down...and God is leading them to us. Just last night, a young lady from Germany knocked on our door. She's content to stay here in Niger, but also a little scared. We were able to share some wisdom with her, talk a little about faith, and share a meal of potatoes and eggs (for which she was most thankful, as it was the first regular food she's had in a long time). We forgot to offer her the toilet, but she'll be back and we are thankful for the opportunity to speak truth into her life and show her love. There is also a young man from France who is likewise here until further notice and who is searching for truth...well, actually, he 'found' it through our time together. We are truly eternally grateful that God put him in our path. Our fourth prayer request for the month is for **Marine, the young lady, and Antoine as he explores how he will truly follow Christ.**

As we roll with the daily changes in the world, we are continuing our Sunday gatherings for the time being because they only involve a few people. We have been speaking with some of our more 'difficult' Muslim friends about how they might consider joining us on Sunday so that we might pray together, so perhaps the group will grow a bit. Right now, we are walking through portions of Mark, leading up to Easter. We started with Chapter 8, then Chapter 11, and will continue in the next few weeks with the final three chapters. Please **pray for these little gatherings and that we continue to see fruit as a result of them.**

The awareness (and lack of general germ theory understanding) of coronavirus has moved community health and sanitation to the front of Carrie's plate and she is leveraging the moment to get some community health rolling in the villages. **Pray that there will be understanding that the things being taught (handwashing, clean water, basic germ theory, etc.) will be accepted as applicable to ALL illness and not just coronavirus.** Next week, Carrie will meet with the local clinic to discuss how to address maternal newborn needs. This meeting was delayed because we had a surprise visit last Monday by a group of 10 Nigerian (as in, from NigerIA) pastors and students who were on a vision trip to Agadez, resulting in us deciding not to go to the village for 10-14 days in order to model how social distancing

works, especially after contact with travelers. We did break the rule in order to go out to the village and explain why we weren't coming and to give instructions on how they might want to isolate voyagers who are arriving from Niamey in the coming days. And we will break the rule for our Sunday meeting only because it does not take place in the village and because it is a situation that is naturally 'socially distant' with everyone spread out on mats.

It's hard to know how coronavirus will play out here in Niger. Last night, we played a little with statistics by taking the current 'worst' ratios of illness and death -- death was 6,000 per 1,000,000 -- and multiplying them by 10 (to lean toward a worse-case scenario) and applying that to our population. The end numbers were that around 1,200,000 people would die as a result of the virus here in Niger. That's a lot and it would be devastating. Each life lost is devastating. And this, my friends leads us to point out how we, as Christians, can make a difference in this moment in history. We can continue on with joy amidst the sadness and uncertainty. We can rest calm, knowing that through Christ we are forever with God. We can take this moment to walk out our faith and let our lights shine and draw others to Him simply because we have no need to lose hope and because we love and serve others well. We're doing our best to stick to the plan and hope that you are encouraged to do the same: Show up (virtually or in small groups). Drink coffee (from your own cup. No sharing.). Talk Jesus. Don't be rude, but be prepared, be bold and speak truth as you show love. Seek out your friends and acquaintances who aren't Jesus followers. Don't waste the pandemic. **Pray that each and every Christian would make use of the pandemic to make Christ known to those who don't know.**

In other news: Carrie's wallet was stolen and subsequently returned. Praise God. Sean continues to work on the Tamajeq Bible Camp and Bible School as well as coordinate all of SIM's projects in Niger. We are thankful that there has only been one long power outage so far (this is actually the thing we dread most in regard to staying here ... with no solar or generator, it will be soooo hot during those week-long power outages that are to come and they tend to be worse during hot season, which we are now entering). Carrie was accepted to be on the Samaritan's Purse Disaster Assistance Response Team -- she is the first midwife that they have welcomed. **Pray that we are able to sort out the title on the house that God has provided.** There are a few hiccups in the process, but we are confident that it will all sort out. We continue to really enjoy life here in Agadez and are still a little stunned that we're actually here. **Pray, too, for language learning.** We started immediately, but then put on hold these last few weeks in order to get the house together (painting, etc.). We are thankful for missionary colleagues and our Tamajeq friends in Niamey who stepped up to help us sell the last few things in our house and get it closed out.

We are so thankful for you. Thank you for all that you do. As you navigate this unbelievable time, let us know how we can pray for you. It's hard to know what life is really like for you, as our life is largely unchanged at this point aside from the constantly changing target of when we'll head to the States to see our kids, parents, and you.

In Christ,
Sean & Carrie Blake

SIM Missionaries #029349



Pray over this little plot of land, which was given to us. Dreams are happening about what will take place here. A gathering place to learn the Bible - with 'Sunday' school for children; a teaching place for women and girls to learn health and safe birth; a workshop for the craftsmen to work and listen to and discuss the teachings of Jesus.



Sunday gatherings....



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We now have the opportunity to stop in and visit / pray with Aristarchus regularly and for this we are thankful. He was the first person here to tell us, "I follow." The effects of strokes and diabetes continue to ravage his body, but his sweet spirit remains intact. On this day, he had asked me to bring him some meat, which of course I did. He chowed down and then we prayed.



As coronavirus ramped up in the world, affecting all of our lives, we decided that we'd better get serious about getting this year's Christmas ornaments made. There will be 75 Limited Edition AZAMALAN ornaments available this year. 50 of the ehan manger style (first model shown...final is slightly different) and 25 of the bell style (not shown). The sale of these will provide a significant portion of the little bit of income that Adrian will have this year, due to the inability to travel to Europe and sell this year. Let Carrie know if you want to pre-order.



One evening this month, we had a surprise visit by this group, primarily from Nigeria. You may be able to guess who's from around here and who isn't. lol. We adored the opportunity to speak into the lives of these students on a vision trip ... but then self-isolated due to be 'exposed' to voyagers, and that has been difficult.



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Can you get any more iconic than this picture?!?! We journeyed out to visit Mike at his current home -- where he's been being broken/trained for racing. As you can see, he's growing. He's as lively as ever and still seems to know us. This camel.

