

Introduction

The Somau Garia people number 4,000. They take their name from the mountain in the center of their land, Mount Somau. The seminal village is named Garia. They eat by the sweat of their brow, gardening steep mountainsides that are prone to give way during the tropical downpours of wet season. They are a proud people, clinging to the land and heritage handed down to them by their forefathers.

Lutheran missionaries came to their area in the 1930's, bringing the good news, asking the locals to abandon bush gods and ritual magic in lieu of the good news.

Bai-yo, a local Lutheran missionary, came to them from the Amele area in those days; about two days' walk along the river valleys of southern Madang Province. He was greatly distressed by the sorcery and murder he witnessed from day to day. He watched as Somau Garia men dressed for battle, slinging their *kupira* shields over shoulders, taking up their man-killing spears, their flint knives, and their bows and arrows. He watched as they called on their gods for strength and craftiness. He watched as they consumed their enemies. They fiercely defended their ancestors. He fiercely defended the gospel.

When holy distress defeated fear, Bai-yo confronted the men, challenging them to throw their weapons and wicked implements into the fire and to trust Creator-God to protect them. Yet no one would dare make a decision like this *alone*. Community is security. Community is place. Community is the past, the present, and the future.

The men gathered in secret. Could they turn their backs on the traditions from time immemorial? Could they discard the secret knowledge passed from generation to generation? Could they oppose their fathers' gods? **No**. Neither could they oppose Bai-yo. They agreed to burn their fetishes before Bai-yo's eyes, but to keep the secret knowledge and practices of their fathers behind his back.

It is said that there are five strategic strongholds in present-day Papua New Guinea where Satan lives. The area inhabited by the Somau Garia people is one of them. Travelers through the area often express feelings of fear or dread. Some become physically ill while there, only to revive when they exit. Spiritual

oppression lies heavy on the those mountains like a blanket soaked by a summer rain.

Nonetheless, God is bringing his people from the furthest reaches of the globe to establish his Name and word among this people. Beginning in the 1990's he brought Bible translators and literacy workers into the area. The first were in a neighboring language group, then in the mid-1990's translators moved to Uria Village and began learning the language and culture. Just a few years ago He brought a Papua New Guinean missionary family from another province to plant a church—a church whose emphasis is on following Christ in every area of life.

Consider this prayer guide your invitation to be written into their story, i.e., to move behind the veil, into the Holy of Holies, to partner with God in bringing light in the darkness . . .

Day 1

*“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
The way to the sea, along the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
The people living in darkness of seen a great light;
on those living in the shadow of death
A light has dawned.”*

Matthew 4:15-16

Quoting Isaiah 9:1-2

Israel had an advantage that no other people in history had. As Paul says in Romans 9, “Theirs is the adoptions as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!” Yet because of their pervasive and persistent disobedience, they were scattered among the nations, a great diaspora.

Though they were made to be a kingdom of priests to our God, to be a light, they were living in darkness, in the very shadow of death.

Yet there were candles in the dark. In Herod’s temple in Jerusalem sacrifices were still offered. Passover was observed. Prophets moved in the sanctuary. Israelites were reminded month-to-month that their people had known slavery and oppression over and over and that God had delivered them. He had promised to “raise one like Moses” to deliver his people.

Powerful anticipation infused the daily life of the first century Jew. Into their darkness a light dawned, a great light moved from village to village, synagogue to synagogue, preaching the Kingdom of God. His words and actions held the promise of deliverance, the dawn of a new day for God’s people.

Gentiles were different. They **were** the darkness, were they not? They were the idolaters, the sexually immoral, the violent, the godless. Their secret societies and mystery religions were bloodied and boldly amoral. Their temple ministry was ritual prostitution, their sacrifices offered to demonic idols. They, too, lived in the shadow of death. They, too, needed the light to dawn.

The history of the Somau Garia is not so very different than what we know of those first-century Gentiles. Their past is filled with stories of carnage and

cannibalism and fear. Their history is filled with sacrifices made to evil spirits; vain attempts to control both evil spirits and fear.

Today they are known to outsiders for being ground zero for cargo-cult in Papua New Guinea, for car-jacking, sorcery, and fierce violence against any who would cross them.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to light a fire in the hearts of those Somau Garia who have surrendered to Jesus Christ. Ask God to strengthen and empower the believers, to raise them up to be evangelists, pastors, teachers—bright lights in the darkness. Ask God to protect them from the onslaught of the enemy who would destroy them. Ask God to imbue them with a powerful love and an unbreakable unity. Ask God to choose from these people men and women to help translate the Word of God into the Somau Garia language, a powerful weapon in the war for the souls of men and women.

Day 2

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

2 Corinthians 4:4

Images were at the center of first century life. Athens was known for its plethora of idols. Ephesus, the gateway to all Asia, was renowned for its magnificent temple to Artemis, also known as Diana. Artemis’ temple was enormous—360 feet long and 180 feet wide, adorned with tableaus, carvings, paintings, and, of course, the image that had supposedly fallen from heaven, establishing Artemis’ domination of Ephesian society. The Ephesian people considered Artemis the giver of their livelihood, the heartbeat of their culture. Yet Paul indicates elsewhere that this and all other idols are merely demonic spirits. The idols themselves are nothing, Paul says, but are animated by evil spirits.

Images don’t need to be carved of wood or stone to be blinding. In tribal cultures, like that of the Somau Garia, people may fear and appease totems, in Papua New Guinea called bush gods. For example, in Uria Village, where we live, the bush god believed to be master over the area is called Uriarainaku, represented as a hawk (I can attest that there are many raptors, hornbills, and other large birds that inhabit the area surrounding Uria). At Igurue Village, the totem spirit is called Mupu, which is a kind of python. The Somau Garia have numerous “gods” that have different responsibilities: war, gardens, male initiation, sorcery, fertility.

The demons behind these images, the so-called gods, are bloodthirsty and unjust. Appeasement of these spirits guarantees nothing. Those who fear these spirits will try all sorts of ritual: from killing animals and offering their blood to food sacrifices suspended on long, bamboo poles. People never know whether or not a ritual will “work” and don’t expect anything in particular. They hope against all hope that their offerings will move the spirit to do their bidding.

The spirits appear to people in visions masquerading as recently dead or powerful sorcerers or as, not surprisingly, the totem spirit of the area. For

example, many years ago a toddler went missing for several days. A local shaman known to us said that he had a dream in which a large hawk and snatched the child away and dropped the child in a creek at the edge of its domain. The child was found (alive) three days later in a creek in a border area.

The spirit of the age, whether it calls itself Artemis or Mupu or Uriarainaku has but one purpose: to blind the eyes of unbelievers so that when it is thrown into the lake of fire, it will not go alone. It's purpose is to spit in God's face by dragging as many as possible into Hell.

AS YOU PRAY: Pray that the image that people see and receive and love is the image of the invisible God, Jesus Christ. Pray that God will draw the Somau Garia people to his light in and life, that He will draw their eyes away from Uriarainaku, Mupu, and all the rest, to His Son, victorious over Hell and death, alive forevermore.

Day 3

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God, not from us.”

2 Corinthians 4:7

I was talking with a friend a few years ago about writing. In a former life he was an award-winning journalist. I, on the other hand, was an aspiring writer. I was tossing out the idea to him of writing a missionary memoir, not to excite people about me or my story, but to excite people about what God is doing in remote corners of the world like Papua New Guinea. He rightly pointed out that it is difficult to write a memoir that places Christ at the center of the story rather than the person who is writing the memoir. Touché.

Why is it so difficult to point people to the Savior rather than the saved? I suppose it is the fallen nature. People are given to venerating what they can see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and touch with their hands. What is seen is somehow more . . . *approachable*.

For example, you might read any number of the prayer updates or newsletters that I have sent or will send out. Jungle life sounds so very exotic, doesn't it? Heavy rains that bring massive landslides during rainy season or extensive drought during rainy season or murders along the highway or demonic sacrifices or decrepit, undeveloped infrastructure sounds so . . . *heroic*?

On this side of the saltwater, as often as not, missionaries face failure. Those landslides induce fear and stress. Those bumpy roads cause backaches and headaches and grumpy dispositions. Those sacrifices bring anger and frustration. Prayer vacillates between the gracious and the imprecatory. Some days are sunshine and joy, others shadowy and oppressive.

Nonetheless, God has chosen to use broken, fragile, brittle vessels to carry the light of the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations. It is genius, really. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus came in the flesh so that he could be a perfect High Priest for us. He could understand our weakness and He could intercede more effectively.

It is through our frailty that our neighbors catch a glimpse of the powerful Spirit at work in us. It is through our failure that they see that God can love

them in their failure, too. It is through our limits that they see the limitless God.

When people turn from the demonic, when lives are brought back from the brink, Jesus is seen for who he really is: Deliverer, Healer, Savior.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to give us the grace and mercy from day to day not to shade the light that he has placed in us when he gave us his Spirit. Ask God to shine through the brokenness, through the frailty and frustration to bring about his dream for the Somau Garia people. Ask God to continually provide wisdom and discernment, that we might step out of view so that Jesus may be held in the sight of the people, in high esteem, worshiped and glorified.

Day 4

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14

Israel had left Egypt solely by God’s mighty right arm. He had delivered them from four-hundred years’ oppression. Early in the journey, when they would stop, Moses would pitch a tent a good ways outside the camp to meet with the Lord. When he would leave the camp, all the people would stand in the doorways of their tents and watch him solemnly march out to the tent of meeting where he would talk face-to-face with God.

After the law was given, though, and the Tabernacle (with all its furniture) was constructed and placed in the **center** of the people with three tribes arrayed on each side of the tent. As the people camped in the wilderness, God was tabernacled in their midst.

The Greek text of John 1:14 literally reads that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. Beginning to end, He has desired to be the center of our being, the focal point of our comings and goings, our considerations, our attention.

The Somau Garia people’s worldview, however, places them in the midst of an unfriendly, dangerous world. They consider the jungle filled with spirits that are to be appeased. They fear stones and trees and pools of water for the spirit that they believe animates them. This world is very real to them and Satan encourages their fear by appearing to them in the guise of recently dead ancestors or “*ol tewel*” (devils) sent by sorcerers to cause chaos and bring retribution.

As long as they dwell in this scary spiritual environment, they will forever be subject to fear and the rituals used to attempt to control that world.

God wants to be tabernacled in their midst, though. Not only did He send the One and Only to pitch his tent in the midst of Israel, he sends each of us, today, to pitch our tents in the midst of the communities, the peoples, the families that desperately need to **glimpse his glory, the glory of the One and Only**, who

came full of grace and truth.

He has sent our family to pitch our tent in this central village, Uria, to reflect the glory of Him who is, who was, and who is to come.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to raise up many believers among the Somau Garia who will be so utterly different—so holy and so comely—that those who now reject God will give themselves fully to him. Ask God to shine through the Papua New Guinean pastors who have come to work here so powerfully as to dispel the shadows, the darkness, and the fear of their neighbors. Ask God to use us, as well, to reflect his character and glory clearly.

Day 5

“For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12

What would your life be like if your Bible was either not available at all or was available only in Latin, Greek, or Hebrew? Try reading the following: ουτως γαρ ηγαπησεν ο Θεός τον κοσμον, ωστε τον υιον τον μονογενη εδωκεν, ινα πας ο πιστευων εις αυτον μη αποληται αλλ' εχη ζωην αιωνιον. Some of you (forgive the abominable lack of proper diacritics) will be able to read this. Most not. It is John 3:16 in the Greek of the New Testament. If this were the only Bible you had, what would your confidence in God be like? What would your prayer life be like? How would you fight the good fight when assailed by the evil one? How would you worship? How would you grow? How could you understand Him?

Not long ago there was a crowd gathered in front of our house for an event. While we were setting up we put a digital audio recording of Mark's Gospel in the Somau Garia language on a loudspeaker. What had been children's chatter and chasing and horseplay quickly became silence. Old people shushed the children. Children listened intently. People at the edges drew near. It was as if God was speaking directly to them in their language. No one really wanted to move or leave. We played chapter after chapter. It was a holy moment.

The Word of God *in the language of the heart* has infinitely more penetrative power than one available only in a foreign language. The Word in Somau Garia held the attention and imagination of the people gathered.

There are three domains of spiritual warfare mentioned in Scripture that all who are in Christ must grapple with: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Because the Word of God deals effectively with all of these domains, it is a powerful weapon in the arsenal of the believer. It provides direction in prayer, it judges the thoughts intents of the hearts (making tenderness toward God possible), it dismantles the lies shot at us as flaming arrows. It replaces strength for fleshly weakness, it establishes the Way amidst the broken and fallen ways of the world. Without the Word in the heart language, believers are vulnerable to the

attacks of the devil, unable to confront the world system that pushes from without and the enemy within.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to make level paths for all of us who are engaged in this vital ministry among the Somau Garia people. Ask God to bring down all the obstacles, to fill in the valleys, to surround all involved in this work with angelic hosts to protect and encircle. Ask God to bring sharpness and clarity to the minds of all involved, keen insight, and supernatural discernment in choosing idioms and turns of phrase that will speak most clearly to the hearts of the hearer. Ask God, above all, to go before us in all things.

Day 6

*“And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”*

Revelation 5:9-10

Two-hundred-thirty-eight clay pots. Four pigs. Twelve heaps of garden vegetables. An undisclosed amount of cash tucked neatly into the spines of a sago palm frond. Singing and speeches and a flowing, frazzling traditional dance in full traditional regalia. These were the elements of a Somau Garia bride price ceremony, the gifts to make payment for a daughter given in marriage and the children born to it.

The Somau Garia operate on a sort of installment plan. The early payment is given when the young woman is untested—will she be able to bear children? What kind of worker is she? Is she worth sharing life with? The bigger payments, like the one noted above, come later when she has proved her worth as a child-bearer and hard worker. The sort of open generosity and unconditional love that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit is largely absent from this system. Yet, for millennia it has been this way in many cultures and eras across this big blue marble of ours.

When the fulness of time had come and the Father sent his One and Only to pitch his tent in our midst, Jesus came with a singular purpose: to purchase men, women, and children for God, to make them a kingdom and priests to serve our God.

He came not with clay pots or fat pigs or even a wad of cash. No. He came with something of infinite, indestructible value: his own blood. He knelt in Gethsemane and made his final surrender to the task given him. The garden was soaked in a gory, bloody sweat. Blood flowed when He was scourged. It flowed into his eyes and ran down his face as the crown of thorns was thrust onto his brow. More flowed when his arms and legs were nailed to a rough-hewn cross. Then there was the bowl of blood that he carried into the heavenly Holy of

Holies to make atonement for us. With his blood he purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. His obedience, his sacrifice made him worthy.

There is a great wedding feast to come, but it will not be to purchase a bride. That payment has already been made. It will be to celebrate the coming together of bride and groom.

AS YOU PRAY: Pray that the Somau Garia people will see the majesty and glory of the One who spilled his own blood for their atonement. Pray that when they spill an animal's blood to appease an evil spirit, God will somehow make them powerfully aware of the blood shed to make them a kingdom and priests for our God—and in so doing, surrender to Him with heart, soul, and mind.

Day 7

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried in a loud voice:

*“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”*

Revelation 7:9-10

The most famous speech in modern American history is perhaps the one given by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “I have a dream . . .” it begins. Revelation is filled with the dreams and visions given to an exiled, lonely apostle named John. With trembling hand he wrote down the indescribable on a skin scroll.

One such dream is found about a third of the way into the Apocalypse. He sees a uncountable crowd of people. Not white people. Not black. Not yellow or red or pink-polka dotted. He saw a sea of faces from every nation, tribe, people, and language, gathered with one purpose, one heart, one mind: to worship God and the Lamb that was slain for their reconciliation to God.

The Bible is filled with this dream. God made Israel to be a kingdom of priests to stand between God and the world. When the temple was constructed it was meant to be a house of prayer **for all nations**. His Son’s blood was shed for all mankind. The veil was torn in two to give access to **all**. Our mandate as followers of Jesus is to take this good news and with it make disciples of all nations. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5 that we are all ambassadors of God, as though God were making his appeal (for the world to be reconciled to himself) through us.

God’s dream is that men from every generation, from every tongue and tribe and nation will be gathered around the throne in heaven in worship, honoring the Lamb that was slain and the One who sent Him.

In those moments of prayer, sometimes uttered in the in-between world of wakefulness and slumber, I search the crowd there before the throne for faces, Garia faces. Will they be there? If so, where? Are they close in to Him? Are they far away? Are they there at all?

This dream haunts my waking hours. This dream animates my working hours. This dream penetrates my frustration when drunks wander the village in the night, threatening violence and hatred to all around them. This dream grips me when I want nothing more than to buy a plane ticket to an easier life.

Does God's dream enter yours?

AS YOU PRAY: Pray that God will penetrate the haze of deception that holds so many Somau Garia people hostage. Pray that He will give them dreams of a Great White Throne, of the Creator enthroned there, of a Lamb that was slain for their salvation standing beside. Pray that God's dream will so grip them that they will no longer cower in fear of the spirits that they believe inhabit their land. Pray that, by some means, God himself will give them visions of Heaven rather than nightmares of Hell.

Day 8

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

1 Peter 5:8

Dry season is a time for preparing new blocks of land for gardens. The land must be cleared of undergrowth, trees cut out, dried foliage burned, and fences built from the trees that have been felled. Why fences? The fences are not made to keep people out or even to mark a border. The fences are built in order to keep pigs out. The swine of New Guinea will eat just about anything, but usually they just root up the ground, digging for grubs, bugs and roots. **But** they never pass up the opportunity to have something a little more substantial: local villagers, for example. Most pigs are domesticated, but there are wild ones around. A person must be careful around the wild ones.

Wild boars have great, sharp tusks. Instinctually they try to take the two-legged prey off of their legs to gain access to the mid-section. With the mid-section exposed, the pigs use those sharp tusks to open the midriff and feast on the contents. It is essential to be vigilant in areas where a wild pig might show up.

Gardens are the primary source of food for these subsistence farmers. The fence is the first line of defense to preserve the food supply from the invading pigs. The fence is also a barrier to keep wild pigs off of the people working in the gardens.

The closest lion to most Papua New Guineans would be in a zoo in Australia, I suppose. But wild pigs could be just behind the next tree or just behind you or just where you want to be. Both are intelligent, dangerous, and on the hunt for the next weak, careless victim.

AS YOU PRAY: Pray that the Somau Garia people may be able to see the devil for what he is: a dangerous, hungry, wily pig waiting to knock them off of their feet and gut them. Pray that the Somau Garia people will understand that God alone can weave a strong enough garden fence to keep the evil one from raiding their source of sustenance and life; can keep the enemy from knocking them off of their feet. Ask God to open their eyes to

the profound reality that while the enemy prowls around to devour them, their heavenly Father has done all that is needed to provide them with abundant life, with joy in the midst of harsh realities, and with everything needed to overcome the enemy.

Also pray that Angela and I will be wise, discerning, and vigilant as we serve among these people. Pray that we will not give in to fear when being charged by an angry, hungry adversary. Pray that we will be skilled with our weapons to not only defend against this enemy, but to slay him as he charges.

Day 9

“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Ephesians 4:26-27

I was walking down the four-wheel drive track the other day with my daughter and our dog, Meggie. As we rounded a switchback in the road and began descending toward Saiva Creek, I pulled out my phone and snapped a photo of something quite common around Garialand. Alongside the track is deep ditch, cut by the runoff of heavy rains. Laid over the top of it were four spindly saplings meant to be a footbridge. Just beyond this bridge were several steps carved into the clay-ridden soil of the mountainside, intended to provide a little traction to get up into the garden beyond.

As we walked, I kept thinking about those steps, those saplings. Something that I'd read recently kept tickling my thoughts. I had read that strongholds begin not as great, impenetrable walls, but as small toeholds carved into the side of a cliff or wall: carved little notches for fingers and toes to get a grip, to climb, to invade, to establish something quite menacing.

Toeholds. Footholds. Notches carved to give fingers grip in a rock face.

In the Greek New Testament this word NIV translates “foothold” is actually *topos*, that is, the word from which we get words like “topography”. It typically means “place”, that is, a smaller place as part of a larger area. Sometimes this place is marked off, not always. It often also means “chance” or “opportunity”.

The idea is that by carving a notch in a wall, the soldier is creating opportunity to scale the wall of the stronghold, one handhold or foothold at a time.

One of Satan's footholds into Somau Garia culture is . . . anger. In a culture where unity is of highest value, anger often goes unresolved, creating a tenacious bitterness, causing chaotic disunity. Division, violence, and animosity characterize so many relationships. Though this is not unique to the Somau Garia (it is common to all societies), it strikes hardest in the church here. Though the Somau Garia number only about 4,000, there are at least six Christian denominations, some adherents to Bahai (a pseudo-Islamist cult), and many more who are devoted only to the animistic religion handed down by their

ancestors.

The foothold given to anger clearly allowed Satan to scale the wall and invade the stronghold, establishing his own stronghold.

AS YOU PRAY: Call on God to bring about a sea change in how Somau Garia Christians relate to one another. Ask God to Bring them to a place, a *topos*, reserved for God alone. Ask God to open Somau Garia eyes to the peace and joy found in walking according to the Spirit; walking as Jesus did. Pray that God will open hearts to the Prince of Peace.

Day 10

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

Isaiah 55:1

When Angela and I first moved to Uria Village in 1997, we lived in a twelve-by-twenty foot house with walls made of bamboo and a roof of corrugated zinc-alum. Andrew was three, Samuel eighteen months. Angela was pregnant with number three.

I had malaria when Amos’s wife died in childbirth. Though it was rainy season and her home village was several hours’ hike from Uria, I needed to go to her funeral. Malaria is actually not as bad as the medicine taken to eradicate it is. The meds have all sorts of side effects: ringing in the ears, migraines, dizziness, general malaise. I, of course, was experiencing all of these even as I packed my backpack to start hiking.

That day the skies were slate. Mists hung in the air like bedsheets forgotten on the clothesline. Squish. Squash. Squish. Squash. A friend and I hiked over the mountains to bury a woman who had been a second mother to the Owen children.

You’d be surprised at how thirsty you can get in the middle of a downpour and how desperate you can feel when your water runs out. The desperation is driven by the absence of a water purifier. “Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink!”

I drank the first liter on the way to the funeral and had finished the second before leaving for home. The medicine meant to break my fever had run out and my head was once again burning. The water was finished. Part of the way home I stood under the eave of a bush house, moving my drinking bottle this way and that trying to capture some of the runoff from the roof. Who cares about getting dysentery if I’m dead from thirst? My attempts at collecting water in my bottle were not very successful. After a while I stood under the drips and slung my head back like a tom turkey trying to drown in a rain storm. Drip, drip, drip. Ugh.

I’ve often thought of that day when considering the spiritual condition of my

Somau Garia neighbors. They live in a country where Christian missionaries are sought after by the government. Churches spring up like dandelions in the front yard. Yet, without the Bible in their heart language, the influence of those churches blows away like dandelion seeds in a spring wind.

Surrounded by the rains sent from heaven, people are thirsty, desperate, and trying anything and everything to quench their thirst: animism (the belief that spirits inhabit areas, trees, pools of water, etc.), appeasement of bush “gods”, cargo cult (a belief that secret incantations can produce manufactured goods), burglary, or car jacking.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to empower those translating the New Testament into the Somau Garia language (Todd and a lot of local friends) to work efficiently, with insight and discernment and, above all, godly unity. Pray that these people will thirst for the Living Water.

Day 11

“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”

Acts 17:26-27

Is there a passage in all the Scriptures that expresses more clearly than the one above the heart of God to reconcile the nations to himself?

I read these words with new fascination when I think of the Somau Garia people. Somewhere in the history of the world we have a common ancestor and I reckon that that ancestor was more recent than Adam. The message of the good news of Jesus Christ made it to my ancestors in Ireland and Wales as early as the seventh century. It was not until the 19th century that missionaries began risking going ashore along the south coast of New Guinea. It wasn't until the 1930's that the good news came to the Somau Garia area. And it wasn't until the 1990's that Bible translators began working there.

Despite the centuries that passed before missionaries showed up on the scene in the foothills of the Finisterre Mountains, the passage plainly teaches that God laid out the boundaries, the exact places and times so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him.

What is it about those verdant, jungle-covered mountains that might cause a people to reach for God? What is it about the way the community does life together? What is it about their social/physical/spiritual environment that produces in them a longing for God?

Satan skillfully manipulates people to turn from God. Just as he turned Eve from uninterrupted fellowship with God in Eden, he whispers and woos Somau Garia speakers in their little slice of paradise. He drives fear like a stake into their hearts. He masquerades as ancestors or deities or other images to draw them away from the One their hearts were made to seek. He perverts the revelation of God's character as shown in nature into something grotesque and fearful. He veils the eyes of those who would see the glory of Christ and parades before them spirits to be feared and worshiped.

Yet, the Truth still stands. The reality is that no matter how much deception

tugs at hearts and fears, God is never very far from any of us and he continually works so that we will reach out for him. The Truth is also the bearer of grace for those who would have it.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to strip away the veil of deception and confusion, that those of the Somau Garia people who do not know him will seek him, will reach out for him. Ask God to show himself to them unmistakably, that they might follow him.

Day 12

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all the mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

This passage seems especially fitting for Bible translators. Most of us work in the kinds of places you don't want to vacation in if you are a person of means. Our lifestyles are more likely to be written up in *National Geographic* than *Southern Living* or *Travel & Leisure*. We are well educated in disciplines like linguistics and anthropology. We have degrees in New Testament or Biblical languages or Theology. Most of us work in countries that most Westerners would consider poor—at least materially so.

Somewhere in the development of the missionary soul is a modicum of *love*—a love for Christ that compels us to leave the familiar, the comfortable. That love remains constant. It's the other love that is so very tested, that is, the love for the ones to whom we go . . .

Pick up a copy of the *Geographic* at the doctor's office and you can lay it down again when your name is called. The photos are interesting in a detached sort of way. Perhaps you are moved by the drama depicted there. As you walk into the examination room, perhaps the pictures fade in lieu of more pressing concerns.

The window of my study in Uria, though, is like a moving photo in a life-sized, 3D *National Geographic*.

The colorful characters on this page lose their quaintness after a few weeks and they become neighbors. These neighbors are at once generous and helpful. Not all, though. There are darker characters and times. The darker characters remind me of something Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:12: “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.” Jesus here is not speaking of my neighbors' love—**no**—he is speaking directly to *me*.

He is warning me: “You're smart, educated, experienced, faithful. Don't, under any circumstances, let your love grow cold. Don't become less-than-zero

by losing the one quality that speaks my character mostly clearly. Don't let your love grow cold.”

This *cooling* love can be given not only to the Somau Garia people, it can be cooled by the challenge of working alongside fellow missionaries. Life in community is hard.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to fan our love into flame—for the people to whom we have been sent *and* for our fellow missionaries. Ask God to give us creativity in giving love and being resilient when our love is disregarded. Ask the the God who is love to fill us with his Spirit to overflowing, that our lives might bear the fruit of love in all relationships and circumstances.

Day 13

“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

2 Timothy 2:1-2

I remember sitting on a log in front of Lim’s house one morning early in Angela’s and my sojourn in Uria Village. I was leaning toward my partially-toothed neighbor, listening to and closely watching him as he tried to teach me the simplest phrases. As I furiously scribbled script in my notebook, one of Lim’s pigs kept coming over to me, nipping at my toes. (Pigs are very tasty pests.) Lim swatted at the pig a few times, then picked up a stone. He showed me the stone and uttered one word: /Xe/. Or was it /E/? Say again? /Xe/ (pronounced like “egg” without the ‘g’ sound) . . . or . . . maybe /E/ (pronounced with what my grade school teacher would call a short ‘e’, but no hard sound on the front). Lim showed me the stone again, tossed the stone at the pig and said, “*Xe pu oune.*” Or was it, “*E pu xoune*”? Or “*Xe pu xoune*?” I was obviously confused. He repeated it several times. It seemed like he was saying, “The stone is going to the pig.” I got philosophical. Maybe he’s trying to give some sort of will to the stone. Maybe the stone is some sort of deity that runs off pigs . . . After a few minutes of verbal ring-around-the-rosy I had a eureka moment. After months of missing that certain hard sound at the front of the word (glottal stop for all you linguists) I finally heard the distinction. He was saying, “The rock hits the pig.” Lim gazed at me through his rheumy eyes, grinned his piano keyboard, and chuckled. He had given this over-educated toddler a lesson in grace, overlooking my supreme ignorance and valuing me as a neighbor despite it.

Paul exhorts Timothy in the verse above to “be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.” I’m reminded by Paul’s words that grace *shown* is grace *taught*. Grace is foundational to a *non-cooling* love, necessary for God’s abounding love and forgiveness to be experienced by all. He reminds me that it is in the context of grace (and truth) that character is imparted, that truth is caught, and followers of Jesus formed in the crucible that *requires* grace. No grace, no love. No offense to be forgiven, no grace to be shown. I’m reminded that grace is a

precious commodity and in short supply in this world.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to allow Somau Garia Christians to show as much grace to one another as they show to Angela and me. Ask God to raise up, in this grace crucible, reliable men, who can pass grace and truth on to their neighbors, their children, their churches, their enemies. Ask God to pour out his own grace on the Somau Garia people.

Day 14

“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

2 Timothy 2:3

There were once two leathered, rough-hewn friends who lived at Nugu Village. They came of age at a time when eating your enemy was prudent, to gain his strength and to control his newly dead spirit. In old age, though, they were real gentlemen and friends of mine.

The older of the two went by the name of Ike. He might have weighed 85 pounds in a rain storm wearing a wool trench coat. Ike had a son in his late teens or early twenties named Benjamin. Benjamin was a boarding school student, home on school break and needing money to pay for school. In his need he did something very foolish.

Though Benjamin’s father, Ike, was a gentle soul and a good neighbor, Benjamin’s crazy uncle was not. Benjamin’s crazy uncle hobbled together a home made pipe gun: pipe, nail, cartridge—a one shot wonder. He and several others talked Benjamin into hiding in the tall grass along the main road to lie in wait for a public motor vehicle to pass by. The uncle and his best mates would stop the vehicle and Benjamin was to threaten them with the “gun”. He had never done such a thing before. They got the bus stopped and Benjamin, much like a criminal Barney Fife, stepped out and in his shaking hands accidentally fired the gun. The bullet blew the side window out of the van. Chaos ensued. The bus disgorged its occupants, most of whom where carrying machetes. Benjamin’s uncle and mates abandoned him. He froze. The violence the passengers visited upon Benjamin was unspeakable. Having killed him, they threw his body in the brush guard of the van and drove up and down the road threatening anyone else who would dare try to rob them.

Angela and I were grieved by Benjamin’s foolishness, but more grieved by the violent death that he died. We hurt for Ike, who was not to be consoled in his loss.

In the midst of many, many similar situations, our spirits began to dry up and harden around the edges. Relentless hardship can have a hardening effect on the heart if God is not invited into the middle of the loss and pain to soften and restore the resilience needed to show grace, love, and hope to a people seeking

it; reaching out for it. We've learned over the years to allow the Spirit to do his work in the inner man, to soften the creeping hardness that would turn our hearts to stone. We are still learning—everyday. This is not a one-off lesson, unfortunately. It is an ongoing transformation.

AS YOU PRAY: Pray that the Father will continually soften our hearts, that we might show the very core of his character, love, in the midst of great pain and chaos. Pray that the Spirit will give us grace for the hour and day and week and month, not only for ourselves only, but to extend to others. Pray that the Somau Garia will be transformed by God's love and grace.

Day 15

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”

Psalms 56:3-4

Her husband was long dead. And now, so was she.

Her husband had been considered a powerful sorcerer in life, one who controlled the spirits like few others had. The strength of his ritual practice kept the most evil of spirits in check, or so it was thought. But he was gone and she was in need.

Great fear blanketed the village.

The traditional Somau Garia worldview is populated by all sorts of evil spirits, some of which are considered *demon monsters* whose sole intent is to waylay the souls of the dead on their journey to the “other side”, the place of the dead.

As the sun set on this freshly dead widow, a palpable sense of evil flowed through the village like a slow moving mudflow. Dogs were whining and barking everywhere. Sorcerers slipped into the bush surrounding the village and began sounding ritual panpipes to draw the demon monster’s attention from the spirit of the widow. Bamboo poles were erected near her house and garden food was suspended from them to appease the anger of the demon monster. Clan members began milling about in the pitch dark wailing in terror, begging her late husband to come and escort her to the place of the dead. Animals were sacrificially killed. On and on it went until the light dawned in the east.

The Somau Garia people had no access to the Scriptures in their heart language on this evil, fearful night. They had only the teaching of outsiders about what God is like, a Bible in a second language indecipherable to most because they could not read. They had only the teaching of their fathers whose belief had emerged from sorcery and seance and desperate searching for solutions to quell their fears.

What would this night have been like had the Scriptures been available in the heart language of the Somau Garia?

When we am afraid, Angela and I take up our English Bible and read from the Scriptures. When we are in the need of prayer, prayer partners frequently

send Scripture references to bolster our courage and to remind us of God's character, his faithfulness, his ability and desire to deliver us from evil; from the enemy.

What of our Somau Garia friends? There will come a day when evil rolls in to crush the Somau Garia and believers will take up the sword of the Spirit, in their heart language, and they will take it into their hearts. That word will remind them of their Protector and they will put their trust in him to dispel their fears. In that day, they will praise His word and will not be afraid.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to draw Somau Garia believers to the Scripture portions that they have already in their heart language, to strengthen them with it, to grant them bold courage in the face of fear.

Day 16

*“You have taken account of my wanderings;
Put my tears in Your bottle.
Are they not in Your book?”*

Psalm 56:8, NASB

Our boys were toddlers. We had spent the holidays in Australia giving birth to our third child, a daughter, Abigail. We were still in the early stages of learning how to live in Papua New Guinea, to speak the language(s) necessary to communicate with people with something more than basic pleasantries. It was the spring of 1998 when we returned with Abigail to Uria Village.

One day someone came to the house, asking us to come with them to one Uria’s many hamlets. Something tragic had happened and they wanted our help. We felt helpless to know what to say or do in the face of tragedy, but we walked over.

On the open verandah sat a young mother, cradling a very still baby in her arms. Opposite were a group of guys playing cards, gambling, swearing at one another, and laughing at the silent mother. The baby was not sick. It was dead. It had died in the night and its mother had sat gently rocking the baby, alone in her grief, being ridiculed by her husband and his friends.

Angela sat down beside her. The tears came easily. She held this woman in her arms and cried with her. I stood scowling at the jerks playing cards. “Would you say a few words from the Bible when we bury him?” asked another woman sitting nearby.

A few hours later (there is no embalming) we walked together into the jungle to the clan’s graveyard. Teen boys had dug a grave. Angela had brought some of our baby clothes to bury the child in. As I opened the trade language Bible (we did not yet speak Garia) the mother wailed and tried to throw herself into the grave with her baby.

Those Somau Garia speakers, like this woman, who adhere to traditional religion, don’t necessarily see God as one who cares, who has any concern for people other than to be appeased ritually. The traditional view is that spirits of the place are demanding, petulant, unpredictable, and uncaring. The God of the white man is merely another one of a pantheon of gods who is to be appeased—

this one on Sunday. They don't want to be vulnerable to just another demanding spirit who has power over them.

How can they know anything different when all their knowledge of God is second-hand, second-language and usually coming from a foreigner? When they are able to absorb the impact of the word of God in their heart language, many will understand that He is not just another spirit making his demands, he is a tenderhearted Father who keeps track of their comings and goings, who understands their pain and suffering, and cares.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to draw the Somau Garia people to himself. Ask God to enable them to see his true character—as a tender Father who loves and cares for them, who collects their tears in a bottle, who does not forget their pain and suffering. Pray that they will see that when he disciplines, he does so to help them, not hurt them.

Day 17

“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky; and all the nations will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

Matthew 24:30-31

When I was a kid growing up in Southeast Kansas, toward the end of winter we’d keep our eyes peeled for the red-breasted robins to make their appearance. We knew that when the robins returned from wherever they spent the winter months, spring was not far away.

It’s been a challenge to learn the signs that signal change in Garialand. But I’ve learned a few. For example, there is a certain tree that turns a burnished bronze color when dry season is coming on. Or how about those signs in the sky? The most interesting one to date goes like this: when clouds are covering the summit of Mount Somau, it will not rain.

Some signs bring hope. Others are ominous omens of something terrible about to happen. Like so many things in this life, though, perspective largely determines whether or not a person anticipates an event or dreads it. Jesus was teaching about that time when he’ll wrap it all up. He says something that piques my interest: “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, *and all the nations of the earth will mourn.*”

When we came to live with the Somau Garia people, we came because of a biblical mandate given by Jesus in his final moments upon the earth, the Great Commission. We came because we love Him and want his name to be known in the uttermost parts. Over the years, though, our love for Jesus has grown into a love for many, many Somau Garia people. We have laughed with them. At times we’ve fought with them. We’ve cried with them. We’ve shared much.

What if Jesus were to come tomorrow? What if the sign of the Son of Man appeared in the sky tomorrow morning? There would be those who have lived in open rebellion who would mourn his coming. They would wish to be covered with stones, to hide in caves, to shut him out. There are others who walk more in ignorance than willful rebellion. They would mourn as, at his appearing, all

that they are or are not would be exposed by his majesty—we all will be laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. And then, I think that some of us who are of those elect He is gathering, will alternately rejoice in gazing upon our Redeemer and mourn for those whom we love who will not be gathered to Him.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to pour out a spirit of repentance and surrender on the Somau Garia people, that an awakening will sweep through the hamlets and villages, through the clans and families and children, that on that Day there will be much rejoicing and little mourning—that they will be found to be in Him—and gathered.

Day 18

“What is truth?” Pilate asked.

John 18:38

One Sunday morning in the late 1990's I was asked, on the spur of the moment to preach in the local church in Uria. This was not unusual. I had done so many times and I thought nothing of it. I stood and preached for the next hour or so. What was memorable about this particular Sunday was the conversation that I had with the so-called church leader afterward.

In the context of a broader discussion, the church leader uttered these words, “Look. *Xoiteu* (the Somau Garia word for Creator God) is the god for Sunday. He is the god that the white man brought us. We have to keep him happy on Sunday, so we do the liturgy to appease him. His day is Sunday. Monday is for *Urianainaku*. Tuesday is for *Korinaku*. Wednesday is for *Iwaiwanaku*. Every day has its own god. We must keep them all happy or else our gardens won't produce, our women won't have children, we'll be weak. *Xoiteu* is for Sunday.”

I was slack-jawed. This *church* leader had reduced God to just another created spirit that needed to be appeased. We argued the matter for *four hours*. I could not convince him to stop teaching this. I could not convince him to stop sacrificing and honoring the local bush gods. I could not convince him that God is above all.

The Somau Garia people do not have a literate tradition. Their tradition is oral, passed from father to son, grandfather to grandson. The traditions change ever so slightly with each generation. They have not inherited a tradition in which the Scriptures are understood to be absolute truth. While many Westerners do not believe this either, until very recently our governments, our foundational documents, and most of our churches did indeed present the Bible as God's authoritative word.

This man's whole existence is like the house that was built upon the sand, blown here and there by emotions, shifting societal values, or the enslavement of those evil spirits who masquerade as bush gods, changing their demands from day to day, willing his destruction and desecration. As he has no Bible in his heart language, he has a hard time making heads or tails of its meaning. He's used to speaking words that he does not understand in a ritual manner, because

the words are for the god to be appeased, not for him anyway.

This is a very tribal version of what we used to call “fire insurance” when I was growing up.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to imbue Truth into the hearts and minds of those who lead the church. Ask God to *convert* many church leaders. Ask God to protect, empower, enliven, and energize those whom He has chosen to translate the New Testament into the Somau Garia language. Ask God to open the minds and hearts of those who desire above all to know and follow him, that they may indeed know the difference between Truth and tradition.

Day 19

“A voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

Matthew 3:3

John the Baptist was chosen before birth to bring the nation of Israel to a condition in which they could both recognize and receive the promised Messiah. His ministry fulfilled prophecy, garnering the attention of both the marginalized and the powerful. Nazarite bug-eater that he was, he could not be ignored.

Paul writes to the Galatians: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son . . .” Note here that if the time was full for Jesus’ coming, so too was the time full for John, because John paved the way.

Every generation has a responsibility to follow in John’s footsteps, to live in such a way as to prepare the way for the Lord to be recognized and received by both the marginalized and powerful of their generation. We have not only a commission to prepare the way, but we also have a commission to go the next step and make followers for Jesus in every generation, every tribe, every people, every nation, every language.

Angela and I have been desperate for almost two decades to see Jesus’ name revered among the Somau Garia people. When we were younger we poured ourselves into any and every aspect of ministry we could find strength to do—and all too often we went beyond our strength, paying a very serious price for doing so—resulting in eight years off the field.

Those years, though, were useful for making a way in the desert, for making straight paths. God used those years to hone and refine, to fill in the bogs and mires of our lives, to deepen our dependency upon him. Though He has allowed us to return to the field and once again engage the Somau Garia, He is still doing his deep work in us.

Did you notice in the prophecy where the voice is calling from? Quite literally for John it was the wilderness. For us there is a spiritual principle at work here. It may be that in our times of desperation, of wandering in the wilderness when we have no strength for the journey, no knowledge of the way through, that God is most able to use us to prepare the hearts of the desperate, the deceived, the walking dead for the coming of Life and Truth. It may be that

those are the seasons that show most clearly the heart of God to sustain and rescue us—and to give us voice.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to show himself clearly through our weakness and frailty. Just as John called Israel to repentance, pray that God will call those Somau Garia who do not know him to repentance. Ask God to open their eyes to the majesty and beauty of the resurrected Lord, who is over all and in all. Ask God to show them his power to overcome the wicked spirits who desire only to imprison and destroy them.

Day 20

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”

Matthew 7:15-16

There was a crowd gathered in the soccer field opposite our house in Uria Village. One of my neighbors was standing before them, holding a photocopied newspaper article up, proclaiming in a creaky, unnatural voice, “This is the Eurodollar. This is the mark of the beast. The end of the world is here. The Europeans are coming to take our land and our people away from us.” I walked over, squinting at the paper. On the paper was a photocopy of a U.S. Dollar: George Washington’s picture, serial numbers, the whole shebang. The article was about exchange rates or the strength of the U.S. Dollar—pretty average stuff to anyone reading the newspaper in the 1990’s. It might have even been copied from the *Wall Street Journal*. I walked over. “Brother, that is the U.S. Dollar. It says, “The United States of America” on top and “one dollar” down below. It is a photo of our first president. That is not a Eurodollar.”

It became surreal after that. “Do not listen to the white man. This is not a U.S. Dollar. This is the Eurodollar. The end is come. The beast is here.” “But brother, *read* it. It says, ‘U.S. Dollar’.” “Do not listen to the white man, he does not know what he’s talking about.”

Another time I was driving some of the translators to another village to visit the family of someone who had just died. The name of a local politician came up in conversation. This politician, only a few weeks before, had come to our area with several LandCruiser loads of gun-toting thugs promising, “If you don’t vote for me, I’ll know it by my magic and I will come and kill you all.” He is known for owning brothels and stealing from the government—sort of a Papua New Guinean Al Capone. Yet, the conversation in the SUV went something like this, “I was at the government station and this politician said that he is a Christian. If he says he is a Christian, he must be. Why would he say that if it weren’t true?” I reminded them that he had held them at gunpoint and threatened to kill them all just a few weeks before. “So? He says he’s a Christian. We need a Christian politician.”

False prophets make false promises under false pretenses. My friends, in

both cases, were inclined to take a person at his word with no effort made to *examine the fruit*. They were deceived and unable to distinguish truth from error. *It is vital to make the word of God available in their heart language, so that they might have some measure of truth and error*. Availability doesn't guarantee discernment, but it makes it possible.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to grant Somau Garia Christians the ability to recognize “prophets” by their fruit, to discern legitimately, to know good from evil. Ask God to make his word accessible and meaningful to the Somau Garia mind.

Day 21

“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations . . .”

Mark 11:17, NIV1984

“Yeu atapa xokupa sanawapu xuiapue kouneri yeure kunukunuwopineri . . .”
[This house of mine is for people of all countries that they might come and
pray to me . . .]

Mark 11:17, Somau Garia Translation

In June 1997 Angela, the boys and I moved into our little twelve-by-twenty house in Uria. Each day brought new discovery. We were learning the language and culture, seeing new places, soaking up all those differences that made life and work so interesting. We were in the “honeymoon stage”.

The longer we lived in Uria the harder I found it to wake in the morning. My strength dissipated. I began to sleep up to sixteen hours a day. My ability to think evaporated like an over-boiled pot of water. I became a zombie.

Our Somau Garia neighbors were concerned, obviously. One afternoon a friend came to the house. “Tomorrow morning there will be noise outside your house. Don’t worry. It’s nothing to worry about. Stay in your house and stay quiet.” He had our attention.

Just before dawn the next morning Angela and I heard the shuffling of many feet outside our house and the murmur of many voices. The murmurs became a steady drone of the combined prayers of a score of people. Round and round our house the feet moved, the voices swirled. They had come to encircle our family in prayer, literally. “O God, heal brother Todd . . . “Send the evil spirits away . . .” “Help us, O Lord . . .”

Their impulse was to intervene in prayer. Some of these folks might pray to other gods on other days, but they were asking this day that Xoiteu would deliver the white man from his sickness. They were doing what they could do to help. Somehow our little house, because of who lived there, became a place to meet the white man’s God, to pray. The local church built their meeting house near our house, just a few feet away.

God’s purpose in instructing Solomon to build the temple was to give people

a holy place to meet God. High places were used for sacrificing to the gods of the nations. The temple was built to sacrifice and pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But it was not for the Jews only. God intended the Jews to bring the nations to Jerusalem, to the Temple, to meet with God.

Anyone who follows Jesus is considered to be a temple of the living God. It is intended that we, too, are to draw the nations to God the Father through Jesus the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit that they too might meet with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to draw Somau Garia people to himself through the church, such as it is, in the Somau Garia area. Pray that believers will walk in holiness, drawing men, women, and children to pray to *Xoiteu*, the Garia name for God the Creator, the God of Israel. Pray that the church will be strengthened and built into a spiritual house, a place of refuge for those tattered and torn by the evil in the world.

Day 22

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Luke 10:18-20

The translation team had been gathered in Uria for more than a week, working. During the day a dozen or more of us worked together on the text of *the Gospel According to Mark* and in the evening, after dinner, I would retire to the house to spend time with my family and rest my brain, but the guys would gather in the meeting house nearby and spend time worshipping together.

Angela and I were putting the kids to bed when someone braved our 110-pound Rottweiler-German Shepherd to bang on the door. “Stanley’s been bit by a poisonous snake—come quickly!”

Surrounding the public spaces in the village are small gardens, jungle, and tall grass called *kunai*. Late in the evening one of the guys, Stanley, walked into the *kunai* to take care of some personal business. As he was walking back to the meeting house, he was bit on the foot by a lethal little snake called a death adder.

The name, unfortunately, fits this snake. Its venom is a powerful neurotoxin that first paralyzes the victim, then interferes with the respiratory system. Death usually occurs within six hours as the victim loses his/her ability to breathe.

Angela and I grabbed two things. We grabbed our “zapper”, one of those powerful stun guns used sometimes to stop an attack. Supposedly they can sometimes be used on snake bites to electro-chemically break down the toxin—that’s the idea anyhow, though one that’s unproven. We also grabbed a small flask of oil.

Angela stayed in the house with the kids and I went down to Stanley. He was in pain and scared. I asked the guys to gather around him, to lay hands on him. I zapped him a couple of times on the wound and then applied the anointing oil to the area around the wound. As I anointed him, each of us began praying, calling on God to intervene, to save his life, to show the people that our God is able to save, even from death adders.

When the chorus of prayer began to wane, we sat quietly and watched for a while. Nothing happened. No swelling. No labored breathing. No paralysis. No signs of imminent death. Stanley walked away with no ill effects at all.

The church was filled for the next few months. People wanted to know more about this God, *Xoiteu*. But, like Israel, people have short memories.

Jesus has given us authority to come against Satan, to overcome his attack. More importantly, he has written our names in the Lamb's book of life.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God remind the Somau Garia people of the myriad times that he has intervened in the lives of their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, families and villages. Ask God to open the minds of the followers of Jesus to understand and exercise the authority given them in Jesus Christ to overcome the enemy. Pray that the Somau Garia believers will rejoice that their names have been written in heaven.

Day 23

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Ezekiel 36:26-27

Lightning split the sky and thunder rocked our SUV as we sat near Kawawar Market. We had been to Madang in the morning and were hoping to make it back to the village before the afternoon/evening rains. Just as we crossed Ono Bridge and started climbing the last mountain before home, the skies opened.

We parked at the market and sat there, waiting. The drone of torrential rain on the roof was deafening. I turned and looked at the heap of supplies sitting in the back of the SUV, looked out the window at the driving rain, and sighed a prayer for mercy.

The answer wasn't long in coming. A few minutes later the rain let up a little and down the hill (from Uria) came my friend, Kisama, and his family. One carried an umbrella, another covered their head with a banana leaf, others just soaked in the “cold” rain. They had been thinking of us and were on their way to help us carry our supplies when the rain started.

Though we still had a few kilometers to hike in the rain (the rain had not stopped), we had a lot of help carrying our supplies.

“Thank you, friends, for helping.”

“No worries. It is God's work. We are happy to help.”

When I hear those words from Kisama and his family, I almost always tear-up and thank God for the work he has done in them. He has been faithful to prune and clean and discipline this man who wants to please the Father.

When he was younger, Kisama would not have been willing to help. When he took part in community work in his younger days, he wanted to be paid, whether it was for telling a story so that I could learn the language and culture or doing physical labor like repairing the four-wheel drive trek we used to come and go to and from our house.

In Somau Garia culture, we depend upon one another to thrive. For example, we might ask for help fixing the road, but that help ensures that when a woman is in labor or someone is acutely ill, we can “easily” get the patient to the

hospital about sixty kilometers away. We might ask for help in learning the language, but the people know that it will result (eventually) in vernacular elementary schools, adult literacy, or per our purpose, the New Testament in their heart language. Give and take. Reciprocity. Mutual support.

Kisama's faith has grown to maturity and he no longer seeks to take advantage. He seeks to serve *because God has removed his heart of stone and given him a heart of flesh.*

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to work mightily through Somau Garia Christians to not only model, but to make available the God who removes stones and supplies living hearts to their neighbors, their clans, their people.

Day 24

“I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

Isaiah 43:6-7

The Somau Garia people are a proud people who have clung tightly to their heritage and their language. They are known for being **strong**, and this has been both a blessing and a curse.

God gave these people their amazing tenacity and strength *for his glory*. He created them not to wither away in some forgotten corner of the world, walking out their days in the foothills of the Finisterre Range, moving from dad to day merely to garden taro and *kru sako* or to raise pigs or keep the old stories alive.

He placed this people in the heart of the Bagasin area, an area known all over Papua New Guinea for their sorcery and powerful “black magic”. He placed this people in the heart of darkness not to deepen the shadows, but to be a light, a fire, a living, breathing army for God, to make his name known to all, to make him as famous in New Guinea as their sorcery has made them famous.

Young Somau Garia men and women are gradually migrating to the coastal cities to find some outlet for their education or to find employment. They live in settlements, Garia ghettos in cities like Lae and Madang, carrying their language and culture—and sorcery—with them.

These migrations, though, haven’t provided these youth with what they are looking for. They think that they will find fulfillment, joy, or hope in money or manufactured goods. What they too often find instead is violence and grief in these ramshackle settlements, hobbled together with the refuse of industrial society.

God has not forgotten them. Right in the middle of their homeland He is beginning to bring his sons from afar. In the 1990’s Bible translators began the slow, tedious work of translating God’s word into their heart language. Though various churches have come and gone from the area, in 2014 God brought Papua New Guinean missionaries to Uria Village to plant a church. The church that they started a few years ago is gaining traction and planting many seeds

(and doing a bit of harvesting, too).

We were away from the field for many years and God called us back to finish what we started so many years ago. God is raising up local believers to model the gospel, to teach the children, and to **pray**.

God is beginning to call his sons from afar, to remind them that they were made for *his glory*, reminding them that he formed them for *his purposes*.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to open hearts and minds to the reality that God created them for *his glory*. Ask God to smash through the barriers that keep Somau Garia men, specifically, from surrendering to him. Ask God to bring men and women *changed by the gospel* back to the area to be witnesses and change agents.

Day 25

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”

1 John 3:2-3

Samuel used to waddle down the hill opposite our house when he was a toddler. Every morning he'd twaddle off to our neighbors' fire and sidle up beside the mama who would cook him a banana in the fire, or piece of taro, or some breadfruit seeds. She'd wrap her arms around him and talk to him in the trade language while he ate her food.

She was a good friend to our family, a second mama to our boys.

It was a blow to our family when she died in childbirth—and her son with her. Village life following her death was somewhat like living in the Twilight Zone. Our boys would go outside and mothers from around the village would stop them, keeping them from going near *her* house. “You cannot let your sons go near the empty houses over there,” they'd say. “Her spirit wants to have them with her in the afterlife. She'll call them into an empty house and feed them poison food so that they will be with her in the afterlife.” Fear of this dead woman was pervasive.

This tragedy provided a window through which we gazed deeper into the heart of Somau Garia society, gaining some understanding of what drives so many Somau Garia people: fear. Fear of evil or disgruntled spirits has shaped their culture in so many ways.

For example, gardens must be prepared *ritually* to appease the bush gods of those areas. Doing so will help insure a good crop and, in turn, food security. The recently dead, like this young mother, must be appeased through magic rituals to keep them from bringing wrath and destruction on the village. Those seen as spiritually powerful must be appeased to insure their “blessing” on society rather than driving them to perform “poison”, that is, evil sorcery. In so doing, their society has taken on the look and personality of these spirits.

Imagine the time when God begins gathering his sons from afar, when he raises up Somau Garia believers to bring awareness of his glory, when the hearts

of stone, like Kisama, are turned to living, working hearts filled with the Holy Spirit. Imagine when love for God and acceptance of his grace and his Spirit becomes their hallmark, when their hope is in God rather than the efficacy of their ritual. Oh friends, just imagine! In that day, they will know a hope that purifies. Imagine when they see Jesus as he is!

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to hasten this time. Ask God to draw all Somau Garia people to himself, to bring a hope to them that transforms their hearts, that changes the landscape of their culture, that powerfully portrays God's glory before the eyes of a watching world.

Day 26

“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

1 Corinthians 2:12

The doors were open on the back of our decrepit, old Nissan Patrol. A couple of guys were lifting an emaciated, weak young father sick with tuberculosis into our vehicle so that we could take him to the hospital to get treated with medicine that would hopefully save his life. The local shaman had been lingering nearby in the shadows and just before we could close the doors, he leapt into the back of the SUV, opening his hand. He drew a deep breath and blew a fine powder into the face of the sick man. The powder was a mixture of ash and bone dust that he had ground in a makeshift mortar and pestle. He didn't believe in the reality of tuberculosis. He believed in the ill intentions of evil spirits. He was trying to use magic to rid this man of his sickness.

Like many shamans in tribal cultures, this man was an admixture of crazy and kind. He wanted to help people in ways that are traditional to his people, but abhorrent to God. The adversary used this man's desire for good to bring destruction and pain—to steal hearts away from God. The spirits used him to draw people away from God.

Another time this same man convinced another young father to repent of his trust in “white man's medicine”. He took the young father to a stream nearby the village and forced him to throw all of his TB medicines in the water. “Your problem is that you've offended the bush gods and you need to make that right. Don't make them more angry by taking “white medicine”.

Both young fathers died premature deaths because they listened to a man who trusted in evil spirits and listened to the voices echoing around his head. He operated under the influence of the spirit of the world or of the prince of the power of the air, rather than under the Holy Spirit's influence.

As the church becomes more influential in Garialand and as the word of God becomes more and more available in the local language, things are beginning to change. As people receive “the Spirit who is from God”, they are slowly but surely becoming acquainted with the freedom given us in Christ. They are beginning to discern what, short of being directed by the Holy Spirit, they could

not have discerned.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to continue to empower the Somau Garia believers to grow in freedom from fear. Pray that their boldness, their peace of mind, and their witness might powerfully impact Somau Garia culture *across the whole group*. Ask God to raise up evangelists from among the people, to not only preach the gospel that brings freedom, but to walk its truth out day by day before the eyes of a watching people.

Day 27

“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

Romans 4:7-8

There was a young man who hadn't been married very long. He had a wandering eye and followed the comings-and-goings of his brother's wife, lustfully looking for an opportunity to act. He waited until his brother was to be away for a few days and then made his move, violating his sister-in-law, an act that in Old Testament Israel would have brought about quick and severe judgement. When the offended brother discovered what had happened he burned the offender's house to the ground and chased him into exile in the jungle.

Not long after, another young man was chained to a mango tree. His left earlobe hung oddly from the side of his head, nearly severed. His eyes were swollen almost shut. He had no shirt or shoes. People were gathered around him, staring, tisking their tongues and spitting curses at him. He had done the unspeakable—he had violated his adoptive mother, considered the same as incest and therefore, abominable.

The night before, the offended husband, his adoptive father, brought a few close relatives to rain justice down on the head of this young man who had brought shame to his name, who had violated his wife. Just before receiving the final act of justice, the offender smashed through the wall of the house and ran, naked and bleeding, into the jungle. He found refuge in the camp of the adulterous brother who had been exiled.

Both men had offended their close relatives, their clans, their societies, even their gods by their contemptible behavior. Both were exiled.

Is there hope for these men? Are they eternally damned by these inconceivably heinous acts?

I'm reminded of a slightly different story, one which is in some ways much worse—a story about a guy named Saul of Tarsus. Saul was haunted his entire life by the murders that he both sanctioned and participated in—murders of those people who followed the Way, holy people. He was there as Stephen begged for forgiveness for those who were killing him. He was personally

responsible for the imprisonment or death of countless Christ followers. Despite his vehement violence against the church, he was redeemed, turned from wickedness, given the Holy Spirit, and sent to the Gentiles to call them to the cross. When he copied the above section of Psalm 32 into a letter he was writing to the church in Rome, it was personal. He was one of those who were blessed.

There is hope for these Somau Garia offenders and all those like them who are searching for release from the shame and guilt of their sin.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to make examples of all those who have a reputation in Somau Garia society, however bad. Ask God to so transform them that the reality of God's forgiveness and powerful Spirit who raises the dead, makes new creations, and transforms worldliness to holiness cannot be denied. Ask God to draw Somau Garia men, women, and children to himself by these exemplars.

Day 28

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

What moves you to act? These last few days you’ve read stories of violence—people acting to bring justice to those who committed unthinkable acts. Others act to provide security for their families or clans or society in general. Some act selfishly, like the two men who violated the women in their families, looking for a cheap thrill or some sense of power over another person. The shaman described earlier **alternately** acted from a sense of misled compassion and a selfish hunger for power. Others, like my friend Ezekiel, are moved to the action of drafting and translating the New Testament because they want their people to know God through the Bible in their heart language.

What moves you to act? Oddly enough, I’m not moved to act by the need for the Bible to be translated into the heart language of the Somau Garia people. I care about them and I care that they have access, but it isn’t my basic motivation. I’m not moved to act by the prospect of living in perpetual summer or the adventurous jungle life that is Papua New Guinea. I’m not moved to act by some Messiah complex, driven by some need to be a hero. I’m not one. I’m not moved to act by some innate need to prove something. While I think I’ve been guilty of all of these at one time or another—in the state of maturity I now know—such as it is—none of these get me out of bed in the morning.

What moves me to action these days is one simple word with a whole host of explanations sitting behind it: **obedience**. I’m compelled to be obedient because, when I was a walking dead man, absorbed in myself and my sin patterns, Jesus died for me. He didn’t have to. He chose to. He chose to because he loved his Father. He chose to because he loved me. The love that moved Jesus to leave his Father, to pitch his tent among us, to walk in complete, perfect, obedience and to surrender himself to the most gruesome torture and execution in history moves me to do what he asks of me. In the face of such incomparable love, how could I say “no”?

It is my hope and prayer that each of us is moved to action by even the

tinest mote of gratitude and love for Jesus, who loved us first.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to produce a deep, Spirit-empowered love in the Somau Garia church, at once sacrificial, at once bold and willing to obey at any cost. Ask God to transform lives through the witness of their testimony and the blood of Jesus.

Day 29

“As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.

For he says,

‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’

I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

There is an immediacy in the gospel that compels us to act urgently. God’s word produces in us a holy desperation to move out, to the very ends of the earth, to bring the message of the good news of Jesus to all nations.

We simply do not know the day or the hour when Jesus will come on the clouds with his angels, with a trumpet blast, to roll this old world up like a scroll and to bring all the nations around the Great White Throne to give account.

Two visions dance before my eyes. The first is dreadful. The nations, mourning, dreading the coming of the Holy One, because they know that time is finished, opportunity is over, sins, rebellions, and evil brought to justice. This vision is lit by the lake of fire. The mourning ones are a sea of faces: red and yellow, black and white, tears of terror flowing as they are laid bare before the eyes of the One to whom they must give account.

The second vision is different from the first. In this vision there is a throne. This throne is occupied by something I cannot fully describe. It looks like the Lion of Judah, but also like a lamb that has been slain. This throne is surrounded by odd creatures, by twenty-four elders, by a throng of souls wearing white robes and holding palm branches. They are crying out at the top of their lungs, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” Angelic hosts cry with them. The elders cry with them. In this vision the worship goes on and on, people from every tribe and nation and people and language. This vision fades as God leans into the crowd and begins wiping tears from every eye.

The nations must know! Now is the day of salvation! They must not wait, they must not delay. Now is the day of God’s favor. Now is the time to cast our crowns at his feet, to surrender our lives to him. To delay is to risk being a

mourner when Jesus appears. To delay is to risk spending eternity in a place not created for man, but for the devil and his angels.

Now is the day to receive God's grace and to respond accordingly.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to place these two visions before the eyes of Somau Garia men, women, and children. Dreams carry powerful influence in Somau Garia culture. Pray that these visions will motivate Somau Garia people to receive God's grace, to celebrate the day of salvation, to be the object of God's favor.

Day 30

“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

Romans 13:11-12

Over the last thirty days, if you’ve prayed through this guide, you’ve been praying for God to miraculously intervene in the affairs of the Somau Garia people.

These people have known generations of darkness. Less than a century ago cannibalism was relatively common among them, as were revenge killings, polygamy (which still is present today), demonic worship, and an inescapable fatalism.

Since the 1930’s, God has been making inroads into the lives of most Somau Garia people through the comings and goings of missionaries, the establishment of various churches, colonial intervention (which allowed for increased missionary activity and suppressed the more violent behavior). God has been reaching out to these people since the 1990’s by means of Bible translation, by the introduction of the Bible in the heart language of these people. God has been bringing the Somau Garia closer and closer to the dawn of righteousness, the dawn of holiness.

Today he is calling on Somau Garia believers to put on the armor of light. The Somau Garia people understand the concept in a way that is more present than most of us can connect with. Not so long ago, Somau Garia men would fashion shields out of tropical hard woods. They call these shields, *kupira*. They are hewn in such a way that they are suspended from the shoulder and ride under the armpit. When under attack Somau Garia warriors would turn side-on to their enemies, thus making themselves a smaller target. The *kupiramasa* would deflect the spears, arrows, and knife thrusts of the enemy.

As dawn approaches, the adversary is heightening his attack on Somau Garia Christians, on the missionaries who serve the Lord in the Somau Garia area, and upon any who would even *think* of laying aside deeds of darkness and putting on the armor of light.

These people have a special place in God's plans for Papua New Guinea. When the day comes that the demonic strongholds that hold so many Somau Garia in bondage are broken, the light of the gospel will explode from the Bagasin area with the light and force of a spiritual Hydrogen Bomb. The effects will both be seen and felt far and wide. We *must* pray that these people will have the courage, the love, and the boldness to lay aside deeds of darkness. We must pray that they will have the mind of Christ, empowered by the translated word, and discernment to put on the armor of light—before it is too late.

AS YOU PRAY: Ask God to fill the Somau Garia area with his angelic hosts to war against the adversary. Ask God to strengthen the faith and resolve of Somau Garia believers by the power of the Holy Spirit in the strength of Christ and his resurrection. Pray that they will boldly proclaim the gospel to all whom God brings their way.

After Word

Thank you for spending time over the last 30 days interceding for the Somau Garia people. It is impossible to know what ripples we will make in eternity through partnership with God in this priestly work of prayer.

I invite you to come back to this prayer guide month after month, to add to it prayers that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind and heart, to stand in the gap for these people.

I invite you to be broken by the love of Christ for these people, to be compelled to action to bring the transforming power of the gospel to these folks.

Thank you for praying also for our family as we minister more directly to and with the Somau Garia.

We send out a weekly prayer update that I also invite you to subscribe to for up to the moment updates. If you'd like to be added to the update, please drop us a line at:

prayer@shakethegates.org

and we'll get you added.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face shine upon you and give you peace.

All scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are NIV1984.