

Not Alone

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Eccl 4:12

Francisco Jose is late today, so I have a few moments to reflect and pray. I'm waiting for him at our "new" coffee house. Actually it's a run down bar called Ceiças on the corner across from Terminal Maracaju here in bairro (barrio in Spanish) Santos Dumont. There's a lot of foot traffic here right through the bar after work, so it's a good place to be seen having a study. Even though I do try to dress the part (shorts, flip flops, and a soccer jersey), as an American I'm totally out of place in this neighborhood, so I do get a lot of stares and even an occasional question.

The tiles between my feet are worn down... most of the ceramic glaze is gone on some, they don't all match, and there are some brand new ones. I kick off my sandals and trace them with my toes - at least they are clean. And that causes me to think about some of the losses and disappointments of the last two months.

Wanderson, Dona Cicera's grandson, has gone back to his drug addictions and is out on the streets again; the house we we're going to start meeting in on Dona Cicera's street has been boarded up and Rocky's new wife has said that never ever would should she let "evangelicals" defile a catholic home - sigh. And then of course there is Eduardo.

I remember reading in 2 Timothy 4:10 about Demas and how, because he loved the world, deserted Paul. I always shook my head and thought of poor Demas and his unfaithfulness... used the passage as a reminder to be faithful to God. As I rolled the passage in my mind, I suddenly experienced the anger and loss that I think Paul was trying to communicate there. It suddenly struck me how much he loved and valued Demas, enough to make him express his loss and make it part of the record of the story of Paul's ministry and God's redemption of men.

Our brother Eduardo Rosario, because he loved the world, is gone. Before I baptized him I studied with him that he had to repent of a life of sexual immorality and have his sins washed away. He agreed and we walked down together into the water.

Libia, his girlfriend of 4 years (and incidentally baptized on the same day!), last saw him after an argument standing on the street in front of her house shouting that no one could tell him how to live his life - not her, not Robert, not anyone. You can guess what the argument was about.

I've been by to see him a couple of times to talk to him. It's not a sin, and apparently I don't understand Brazilian culture and the voracious needs of Brazilian men - or so he says.

I feel angry because I've poured so much time and energy into him. Loss because he was such lion at times in the church here; a great help and never afraid to talk to strangers about his convictions about Christ; a booming bass voice in our

assemblies for songs or scripture readings, sometimes preaching and teaching.

Marie says I need to move on and I know that she is right. He's become a ministry black hole. But it's painful. I wonder how much pleading Paul did before Demas took off. Deserted... Paul chose a good word.

But it's not the end of the story. No it's not.

The last light of the setting sun is casting a dusty orange hue over my bible as Joni the bartender cuts on the lights for the evening crowd. Almost on cue workmen start pouring out of the bus terminal crossing the street to grab something to wet their whistle before they head to the house. And in their midst is Francisco Jose with Luciano at his elbow.

He has a quick bouncy step and what reminds me of a Pancho Villa mustache. Senhor Jose is a man in his mid 50's that I've met through the English study at Luciano's school. One of my Brazilian parables caught his ear back in May and we've been studying ever since. Although Luciano is 20 years his junior, he is having a hard time keeping up. Tonight we're studying the Lord's prayer together so I fold my notes and tuck them into Luke 11.

As he comes through the arches he raises his arms and says loudly, "O guerreiro de Deus!" looking straight at me. The bar goes silent. And then he shows me the prize he has brought with him. Luciano grins widely. I'm so humbled in that instant. I sure don't feel like a warrior of God today. But how can I not smile as he gives me a big hug and pats my stomach. Notes that even though Marie is gone these last 6 weeks, I'm not wasting away. Brazilians, they are such a happy people.

The noise picks up again and we get back to my table and start talking. Joni brings us the usual, a couple of boiled eggs, some calabresa sausage and three black cafezinhos with extra sugar. We give the "saude", clink glasses, pray and start our study. It is wonderful. Luciano is far more interactive with us than I thought he would be. Confessing his ignorance of Jesus, he wants to be part of this every week.

Halfway through our study Jean shows up on his way home. Now there's four of us. Pretty soon we are all laughing and talking loud to be heard over the traffic outside. I'm sure that we are quite a scene because there aren't any beers on our table, just bibles, and we're having a pretty good time.

We make plans to all meet at Jean's for Sunday morning worship. That will make 5 men over there. Jean and I both Christians, Francisco Jose who is coming to see that he might not be a Christian after all, Jose P. Neto a mormon looking for true christianity, and Luciano, ignorant of the scriptures but searching for a moral compass in his life. We're going to have to find a new place to meet and soon. We pray for the church and Eduardo specifically and go our different ways.

Broken tiles can be replaced.

No, God's story is far from over and really I have it better than Paul did with Demas. I'm not alone. Far from it. Thank-you for letting me be a part of the chapter being written here.

Watching the Son rise in Aracaju -rob

Moving on...

Okay so I've been on quite an adventure since my last newsletter article. I delivered Morwyn to the USA safe and sound. We opened accounts, got a physical, learned to drive, raised support and visited family. All too quickly it was time to let her head off to Lubbock to start her classroom time in AIM. They will be studying in Lubbock until May and most of them head to the mission field in June, July or August. Right in the middle of our time in the USA, Rob flew in for us to all be together for a week. With Amber and Phil in California, Johnathan and Morwyn in Texas and Rob and I in Brazil, you can imagine how difficult it is for us to all get together. We have been getting to know Phil through e-mail and talking online for almost 2 years now and we finally were able to meet him in person. He fit into our family so perfectly. We had such a fun week together.

I was also able to meet my niece, Pheobe Michelle whom I have never met in person. I was privileged to get to visit with many of my friends, but not all of you. A wise man told me before we left for the mission field that to survive as a missionary you have to just pick up your relationships where you left off even if it's been years in between visits. I've tried to keep that in mind when I'm with family and friends that I haven't seen in a while. It has helped me tremendously.

My flight back was a good one. The only little glitch was about 23hrs into my journey as we landed in a city that is about a 20min. flight from Aracaju, they tell us that they have closed the Aracaju airport because of rain. I'm on the 2nd row so I'm listening to the flight crew discuss what they are going to do with us who are heading to Aracaju. They seem to think we will stay a day in Maceio and try again tomorrow or they will put us on a bus headed to Aracaju. (It is a 4-5 hr. bus trip.) I start praying and eventually they have us gather all our carry-on luggage because we are getting off the plane. Once we're in the airport, no one is talking to us and I can't reach Rob on his phone so I sit there fighting back tears, hating airports, hating Brazil and hating the thought of 4 or 5 plus more hours without a shower. I didn't have a good attitude but I didn't stop praying either. Then, they put another flight onto our aircraft and before long they load us onto another plane and we make the hop to Aracaju. They had told Rob that all flights were canceled so he had gone on home, but I just grabbed a taxi and headed to the house. I want to thank everyone who was praying for me. The long flight from Dallas to Sao Paulo was empty so I was able to stretch out and it was very comfortable. I'm always touched by God's tender mercies toward me.

Please pray for Rob and I as we adjust to our empty nest.

I love you all!! Marie