

Fall 2020

Dear Friends and Family,

During the first week of the lockdown in DC, I called our friend Lena. Lena is in her late 20's and has one daughter, Ellie. We met Lena six years ago when she still lived with her mom. We went to her baby shower and were there to pray with her when she went into labor. When Ellie was a few months old, we all went on a memorable day trip to Gettysburg. We have enjoyed a nice friendship with Lena, seeing her every couple of months and always praying before we leave. When Lena moved into her own apartment, we were not in touch as regularly. But during the lockdown, our friendship took a shift.



Our trip to Gettysburg in 2017

Lena was stressed. She was alone in her apartment with her three-year-old daughter. She was afraid to go outside. When I called her to check in and offer prayer, she was audibly relieved to talk on the phone. After we said a prayer, she asked if we could talk and pray multiple times a week over the phone. We started talking every other day. She would call to tell me what projects she and Ellie were working on and describe the tea parties they had together. She would ask for prayers for her stress, for her cousin who was in trouble, to have success finding her keys, and anything that was on her mind. One day when we were on the phone, she told me she had downloaded the Bible app. "I think that the most important thing for me to do right now, besides be a good mom, is to get to know God better," she told me. This was new territory. Although she had always been open to praying with us, she had never shown interest in talking about God or the Bible before. I offered to do a virtual Bible study, and she was ecstatic.

A week later, Sadie and I squeezed together on a couch so Lena could see both of us on my phone. We spent our first Bible study mainly explaining what the Bible is. Lena had all sorts of insightful questions. When we dropped off a casserole and an Easter basket, we left her a Bible as well. Our second Bible study fell during Holy Week. I asked if she knew why we remember Good Friday and what is special about it. She did not. We read the Passion narrative together, stopping every few verses to explain what was happening. Lena was shocked. When Peter denied Jesus, she gasped, "What?! His



Our socially distanced Easter basket and Bible drop-off!

friend? Isn't Peter one of his friends? You don't do that to your friend." When Jesus was condemned to death, she couldn't believe everyone wanted to kill him. "But he didn't do anything wrong," she said. When Jesus died, she paused. "I had no idea that they tortured and killed him that way. I never knew." Before we got off the phone, we let her know that the story didn't end there. "Spoiler alert," we said. "He comes back." She had a huge smile on

her face as she said, “I cannot wait to read about him coming back from the dead at Bible study next week.”

Maybe it is not shocking that some people have not read the Bible or know the details of Jesus’ death, but I had never been faced with someone who wasn’t aware that Jesus was crucified. Lena demonstrated such childlike faith when we read about Jesus’ passion and death. She accepted what we read together and believed it. She was mad when Judas “snitched on Jesus to the people who wanted to kill him.” It wasn’t just a story. She took everything to heart. Never before had I been so moved in a Bible study.

In July, we finally met for our first in-person Bible study. We were slowly working our way through the Gospel of Luke and were thrilled to be in person. When we met virtually, Lena asked Sadie and me to read. But in person, Lena agreed to alternate reading aloud. When it was her turn, she stumbled through the words. She apologized and admitted that she did not know how to read well. I’ve met many adults in the inner-city who do not write or read well, but somehow I was particularly struck when I realized Lena struggled to read. She’s only a year older than me, has a daughter, and her own apartment. I would never have suspected that she could not read well. When it was my turn again, I noticed that she was reading along with me under her breath. I asked her if she would like to read aloud together. We read the book of Luke together. Slowly, we read about Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons. For the first time in her life, Lena was reading scripture aloud. She clutched her Bible close and sounded out the words, “*What is there about his word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.*” (Luke 4:36) Lena was amazed at the power of the words of Jesus. Her own voice brought life to the living scripture that she read. I was unbelievably humbled to read with her. She humbly accepted her struggle to read and trusted me as a friend. When I got into my car to drive home, I cried.

Recently, we took her to her first Mass. We brought a booklet to help her follow along with the Mass responses and readings. I held the book up so we could follow along together while she held Ellie. I could hear her reading all the parts, even the priest’s parts under her breath. If she missed a response, she repeated it. With simplicity and humility, she followed along sitting, standing, and kneeling. When it was over, she wanted to walk around the church and look at all of the stained-glass windows which depicted events in both Mary and Jesus’ lives. She recognized that the scenes from what we had been reading together and pointed them out to Ellie. “Oh, this is when the angel met her and told her she was going to become the mother of Jesus,” she said as she faced an image of Gabriel greeting Mary. We walked through the images of his life and his death. When we left, she asked if we could get her a booklet of all the responses and prayers we say at Mass that she could keep. “Then I can read it and practice all the words so I won’t have to read along.”



Lena showing us her new Bible and the Bible she found for Ellie.

These past months with Lena have been some of the most profound moments I have had as a missionary. God is moving in Lena's life, and she is responding. There is nothing I have done or could have done to prompt this movement. I am grateful to God that I could be a friend in Lena's life as she begins this journey of faith. When I thanked



Lena and Ellie decorating cookies at our house.

Lena for being so open with us and for wanting to pray with us she said, "You guys are my only friends who I can talk to about God." Lena remembers everything we talk about in our Bible studies and often reminds me what we have already covered. When we read about John baptizing Jesus, Lena asked if she and Ellie could be baptized too. Lena wants to raise Ellie well and wants her to have a church family. She includes Ellie in everything she does. When she bakes or cooks, she includes Ellie so she can learn too. Over the months, she has taught Ellie to pray every night before bed and even picked up a kids' Bible in the check-out lane at the grocery store for her. We are starting to do a regular outdoor story hour and activities with Lena for Ellie since they aren't going anywhere. Please pray for us as we walk with Lena and as she continues to allow God to so beautifully become a part of her life.

In August, we held our annual training and revival at our Kansas City Simple House. It was our biggest recruiting year yet! We welcomed five new missionaries to Kansas City and three to DC. Training is a special time for our missionaries to pray and work through our formation together. It is also a time of fun and getting to know each other. When we weren't in our training sessions, we enjoyed fun evenings of karaoke, games, survivor challenges, and spent a weekend at Pomme de Terre Lake. The Kansas City community sent the DC crew off with a Washington, DC themed dessert spread featuring a rice krispie treat Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial cake. We are all excited to be entering into this new year of ministry together.

You are in our prayers! God bless you!
In Christ,

Chelsea St. Peter with fellow missionaries Tim Casey, Nash Crosby, Sadie Facile, Natalie Finn, Ben Friedman, Ryan Hehman, Tristan Kramer, Clark Massey, Maren Nielsen, Rosie Olszeski, Julia St. John, Bre Sundeen, Margo Wernel, and Gabe Wyllie

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