

Sudan Missions

Our most recent mission trip to Sudan and Uganda was a huge success! A team of four individuals from our church spent time overseas serving the poor, caring for orphans, and providing leadership training.

Trip Log

Monday, August 31, 2009

Pastor Mark Pope

JET LAG. It's 2 AM in this part of the world and I'm wide awake and my mind is racing!!! Tomorrow (or actually I guess it's later today) we'll arrive in Sudan. By noon, Clint, Dawn, Kathy and I will show up at "base camp" and our adventure will begin.

Right now, there is no way I can describe the urgency in my soul. It's way beyond a thought and it's burning in my chest. I'm thinking, "Oh Jesus, we only have a few days here! ... only a few days!!!! ... I'm desperate not to waste even a moment!" As I now read what I just wrote it sounds so kinda melodramatic but it really is true!!!

Note to the Vineyard family: Please pray for us (myself, Clint, Kathy, and Dawn). Pray that the fire I feel right now will burn and burn and burn in every waking moment, in every opportunity, with every person we get to talk to, teach, pray for and love during our time here!

A few minutes have passed and guess who is up? My roomy, Clint! In the dimly lit room I see him crawl out of bed, make his way out of the mosquito netting and head to the rest room (I guess he wants to check his hair or something). The good news for me is that it appears that jet lag is contagious.

By now if you were here you would see both of our faces glowing by the light of our laptops (isn't technology great?). Clint is reading out loud some previous correspondence with Pastor Stanley just to remind us of his situation. Hearing the stories makes me fall in love with Stanley and I haven't even met him yet! I gotta love a guy who is growing an orphanage and planting churches!

It's now 3 AM. I want to share a picture that I think Jesus gave me. It happened before the laptops came on and I was just in the dark alone with that "burning in my chest thing". I asked Jesus if there was anything he wanted to show me about our time with these people or anything that might help me do my part and this (as weird as it is) came to mind immediately... "Cinderella and the glass slipper"

Here are a few of the thoughts that have come to mind since...

#1: "Oh great. What the heck does that mean?"

#2: Like the fairytale describes the Prince searching throughout the land with the slipper in his hand... God is desperately searching for his bride in this place, and when the slipper is placed on her foot, supernatural transformation happens. Cinderella becomes the beautifully dressed princess again, and ultimately the bride of the King! I think our team is to be diligently hunting for those people that God is going to touch specifically during our time here. We can only lovingly search and see what the Father does. But there will be significant supernatural moments in individual's lives.

#3: Part of what we are going to do in the midst of all of our activity is trying to connect with the one person who is going to go through a major transformation that will shake this part of the world. The world is not changed as a group. Generally the world is changed when God touches an individual, then the ripples are spread throughout the area. Our job may be to "try on spiritual glass slippers" through love, prayer, and teaching and at some point God is going to ignite a special leader or leaders (someone who will go from obscurity like Cinderella to a place of royalty) and they will be a significant instrument of change. Because of their position, passion, and gifts the crowds will follow and change will happen in this severely challenged part of the world.

Keep us in your prayers. More updates to come!!!

Pastor Mark

Tuesday, September 1, 2009

Pastor Mark Pope

DAY 2. Spent the morning flying into Sudan. At times it seems to be an entirely different planet. Our team spoke of how "surreal" the whole experience seems. In the last 36 hours we've gone from flying out of Chicago on a Boeing 777 with TV monitors on the back every seat and multiple movies and video games to choose from... to our final flight in a small plane that didn't quite look like it

would meet FAA standards! They did have a snack you could pick up at the door of the plane if you wanted. It was a small paper bag, several of which showed signs of grease soaking through. Inside the bag was a muffin. I was too scared to eat it, but Clint ate it and responded... "Hey, it was free food." Actually, it didn't look too bad. And now I wish I would have eaten it since Clint is still alive and kicking!

We arrived at the ministry "base camp" around noon, took an hour to settle in, and then jumped in a jeep to take our first visit to "New Generation Dreamland". We met 71 absolutely lovely kids who have lost their biological parents. The world would call them orphans (which is technically accurate) but what I saw was 71 kids that God had placed under the care of new parents (the staff at this home). One of the staff, Jimmy, shared that he himself had lost his parents when he was 13 but that God had used Pastor Stanley to be (what I would call) his "spiritual father". He used the term... "My eyes were opened" several times. I could hear in his voice the passion he had for Jesus. Besides that we could see his love for the small herd of kids he was now ministering to. Isn't it amazing how God could give an "orphan" such a large "family" at the New Generation Dreamland?!?

Today Clint, Dawn, Kathy and I made sure that every child received a gift to play with... a ball, jump rope, or frisbee (it was like a huge birthday party). Our own kids from the JAM Children's Ministry donated the toys. Thanks kids!!! We also had a few great soccer balls donated from Notre Dame soccer coaches! They were one of the more coveted presents! They should last a long, long time. As a side note: I didn't see one other toy in the entire time we were at the orphanage... not one. What a cool thing to bring gifts that will no doubt bring hours of fun and activity for a long, long time.

While at the orphanage, the 71 kids also sang two impromptu worship songs and, wow, were they good! I remember 3 very vivid things happening during the songs... #1. Clint had the camera rolling so we'll very likely have it to share with you all at some point. #2. I tried to dance and clap along, but for the most part got showed up by the kids, most of whom were under the age of eight. #3. On several occasions during the 10 minutes of singing, a few on our team was choking back the tears. I can't describe the how the Holy Spirit was challenging me as these precious kids (who live in mud huts and may not get another present this year) were singing their hearts out to Jesus with joyful worship songs.

Also today we had a great preparation meeting for tomorrow's leadership conference and we found out that of the 250 leaders from the region who have been invited we have about 300 who have said that they are planning on attending. By the way... the numbers I just used were correct... Pastor Stanley's

team sent out 250 invites and as many as 300 are coming. I guess God can do math however He wants!

If you're praying for us, please lift up Wednesday knowing it is the kick off of this 3 day leadership event as well as the another day of work with the orphans. Kathy and Dawn are going to do some hands on work with the kids on art projects that we will bring back with us.

Finally... (I CAN'T BELIEVE I DIDN'T SHARE THIS EARLIER!!!) I believe we experienced a miracle today! Dawn Morehouse got a sudden stomach bug, and to be honest things were looking really bad. Her face was red, her stomach was cramping. I could tell something was wrong. We prayed... she felt a little better... we prayed a few more times during the morning and long story short... it went away. It's really hard to describe it but I just remember looking at her in the plane one minute and thinking, "Wow, she doesn't look good at all." And no more than 10 minutes later, I turned to check on her, and the whole thing was gone! She had the "Dawn-Morehouse-vibrant-look-of-life" back in her face within a matter of minutes! She had no other symptoms the rest of the day! Praise God!

Oh, Jesus keep watching over us... and helping us to be like you as we strive to serve this region of the world.

Warmly

Pastor Mark

Monday, September 1, 2009

Dawn Morehouse

We've finally arrived in Sudan! We made it to Yei around noon on Tuesday and I have to say that I think I've fallen in love with this continent! It's been wild to see in person things you've only seen in books or videos – there really are women who can carry large bundles of items on their heads, there really are mud-thatched huts with grass roofs, and there really are dirt roads with ruts the size of Texas in them! After arriving and eating some lunch (rice, goat meat, bananas, & bread), we headed out to the New Generation Dreamland Children's Home to take the donated toys to the 71 orphans who live there. Wow, it was amazing! The children all gathered when we arrived and sang beautifully for us. Clint was videotaping, so we hope to share this with all of you when we come back. Each child there was able to receive a beach ball, jump rope or Frisbee – all thanks to the kids in our JAM Children's Ministry program back home! We had also received a donation of soccer balls, so we were able to

distribute them as well. Even though it was raining pretty hard, we were able to play with the kids for a little bit. Another neat thing to see was the security fence that has been installed around the property, made possible by the City on a Hill giving campaign – way to go, Vineyard family!

This evening was filled with a time of exploring the town of Yei on foot, laughing at ridiculous things because we are so tired (and a little disoriented), but most importantly, time was spent talking to Pastor Stanley and hearing his vision and hope for the leadership conference this week. Even as I type this, my eyes fill with tears, for we are partnered with a **TRUE MAN OF GOD**. It was a privilege and pleasure to listen to and pray with Pastor Stanley tonight. His heart longs for the leadership conference to be an opportunity for **REVIVAL** – for there to be a move of God in that place that changes the course of life here. What an honor that we can play a part in what God will do!

Thanks so much for all of your prayer support – we are reaping the benefits!

Here are some of the praises:

- Our travel here went very smoothly, and we felt God with us all along the way.
- I was feeling very sick this morning when we got to the airport for our flight to Yei. My stomach was upset and I felt very depleted when we got on the plane. **PRAISE JESUS** that He brought relief to me and revived me!! I was able to sleep and when I awoke I felt completely better. God is good, and I take not one bit of his goodness for granted!
- When the rain blew in this afternoon it brought with it cool weather! Kathy needed a sweatshirt and I drank hot tea for supper!
- The mosquitos have not been bad at all today!

Here are some of the ways we would love for you to pray for us:

- Please pray for continued health and protection for us all.
- Tomorrow is a big day! It is the first day of the leadership training! Pastor Mark will be speaking, and Clint will be helping him, totaling 3 different sessions. Pastor Stanley's prayer tonight was that the Holy Spirit would confirm himself through signs and wonders. So please pray for the Holy Spirit to be present and leading at the conference! This conference lasts for 3 days, so pray for the possible 250-300 leaders who will walk or ride bikes in order to come. May God meet with each one there!
- Tomorrow is also the day Kathy and I will be at the orphanage working on art projects with the children. Please pray for the logistics of a few workers helping 71 children do a project. Please also pray that it will be fun and that we will be a light to the children there.

I've attached 2 pictures. The first is of some of the kids showing off their new toys, and the second is Pastor Mark greeting the kids when we arrived.

Thanks again for praying! More updates to come!

Blessings

Dawn Morehouse



Wednesday, September 2, 2009

Kathy Smarrella

As I sit here in our little base camp dining area—where in fact, there is a bat flying somewhere overhead that I'm just a little bit afraid of—I think about how I am both exceedingly grateful for this opportunity to be here with these amazing people (the people of Sudan as well as my Vineyard teammates), and I how incredibly humbled I am by so very many things. The awesomeness of the poverty. The happy smile of an orphaned child just because you showed up another day. Our new friend Esther, who cooks our meals and warms our buckets of “shower” water with such pleasantness every day. The red mud that is absolutely everywhere (including the bottom of my socks) and yet somehow, someway, the men who walk down the road still have shirts that are still sparkling white. The list goes on and on. This is a remarkable place to be.

Let me share a bit about our Wednesday.

Dawn and I drove out to the leadership conference site with Clint and Mark this morning. On the four mile drive (which took about 40 minutes), the scenery of Sudan might render you speechless if the rut you just drove through hadn't just knocked you into the shoulder of the person next to you. After dropping them

off (more about their day later), Dawn and I headed out with a couple of the school's teachers to the orphanage. Today it was much easier for both the kids and us to get comfortable, I think. Smiles came more quickly.

Our task for the day was to work on an art project with the kids—if you don't know already, each child here is creating a piece of art and we are bringing those back with pictures of each of them. We plan to sell these at the "Art for the Heart of Africa" benefit auction we're having at Vineyard on October 23rd. It is our hope that you all will purchase these to raise money for the orphanage here and, just as important, I think, pray for that specific child with consistency.

We started with a Bible story that Dawn read from the children's Bible that was donated by some of the Vineyard middle and high schoolers (Thanks!). Then, we set up a little line so that we could get the hand print of each child on their art piece. To do this, we spread paint on the hand of each child and then they put their handprint on their art board.

The opportunity to hold the hand of each and every child, saying their name aloud to them, was a very personal and touching experience for me. God gave me such a love in my heart for each and everyone of them. Really, such a love. As I held their hand and said their name, my prayer was that God would bless them, someday, somehow. After that, they went over to Dawn who took pictures of their extraordinary faces. Wait until you see these pictures. . .

After a lunch break (where the kids ate corn meal and beans cooked in bulk over an open fire) and a little time for Frisbee throwing and jumping rope, we tackled the next project—getting the kids to create their own art to go along with their handprint. We talked about imagination and how they might draw things they see around them. You'll see lots of drawings of soccer balls, trees, pots and cups. They were excited, and also amazingly patient. We took about twelve kids at a time, and at the start, most of them hung outside and watched through the walls (which were wooden sticks) to watch their friends draw. Dawn and I were glad when Clint and Mark arrived to entertain them. Clint jumping rope and Mark leading the drum circle were both highlights. It is such a joy to hear children laugh out loud! They especially liked it when Mark took one of their own songs, made it a little bit sillier and sang it back to them (with their help of course).

All in all, it was a great success and a wonderful day. Thank you so much to all the Vineyard middle and high school students for providing all the art supplies—crayons, paper, oil pastels, and so much more! We couldn't have done it without you. We were able to leave everything with the teachers at the orphanage and they'll be able to continue with art projects for a long time.

Also, the rain stayed away just when we needed it to! Thanks be to God and thanks for your prayers.

Throughout the day, we had some time to spend talking to the teachers at the school. They range from 21 years old to 40 and each has their own story to tell. They were a fantastic help to us, and both Dawn and I said, over and over again, that without them, it never would have happened.

At the same time we were “doing art” with the kids, Mark and Clint went to preach and teach at the leadership conference. 100+ people came to learn lessons about Godly leadership as many were turned away by early morning rain. Mark spoke three times, Clint once, and Pastor Stanley spoke as well. They gave opportunity for questions, which included anything from how to get people to come to church on time, to how to deal with children who are choosing lives of drunkenness. There was an awesome opportunity for prayer. Mark asked those who wanted prayer for courage to stay and they could be prayed with personally. Almost all of them stayed! No one wanted to miss out. Each person lined up and Mark, Clint, Pastor Stanley and Pastor Elli prayed prophetically, asking God for wisdom as to how to pray for each specific man or woman. Pray for them as they continue to lead at the conference that they would share good words of God's wisdom, despite the very different cultural context. Pray for clarity, too, in the language interpretation.

On a final note... Jimmy, the administrator of the orphanage (who Mark mentioned a bit in his last update), gave us a tour of the orphanage. The “campus” includes two dorms, several classroom buildings (one that still needs a roof), a “kitchen” area, a washing area, and a few others. They also have a farm where they grow corn (both for eating and for selling), cabbages, onions and some other vegetables I've never heard of before. As we were walking around the campus, he shows us a village in the not very far distance where just six months ago, Ugandan rebels came and slaughtered some of the people there. They wanted to exert their power and they did that by killing innocent people. The Sudanese ran away, if they could, and Jimmy recounts how many of them ran past the orphanage, screaming and crying. The children in the orphanage were witness to this, and likely, I think, it's not the first time their little eyes have seen such things. That story chilled my soul to the core. This is the reality that these children, these teachers, these good, good people of God live in on a daily basis. But in the midst of that reality, they love God. They trust him. Their faith is true and honest. It's a beautiful and humbling thing to see and to hear.

Again, thanks for your prayers. We see God at work and know much of it is because of those prayers prayed by our Vineyard family. Tomorrow includes, among other things, more teaching for Mark and a shopping trip for dresses for

Dawn and me and 31 little girls in downtown Yei. Oh, and we hope to show a Veggie Tales movie tomorrow night in the open air with the projector we were able to bring for Pastor Stanley.

Blessings to you all,

Kathy Smarrella



Thursday, September 3, 2009

Clint Schwartz

I woke up at 6:45am, about 20 minutes before the electricity came on. There is a praying mantis crawling on the outside of my mosquito net along with a pretty large wasp. I'm not real sure I want to get out of bed and leave the protection of my net... The electricity came on a little after 7:00am and I was able to find Rose online, which was a wonderful thing! We were able to communicate through instant messaging for quite a while and she said good morning to me and I said goodnight to her. She finally went to bed at 12:30am her time, and I got up and had breakfast. This morning's breakfast was one of my favorites, rice that you mix with powdered milk, sugar and hot water. It's sooooo good! The ladies are getting picked up by the dump truck later this morning to take 31 orphaned girls to do a girl thing...SHOPPING! I personally can't imagine taking 31 young girls to a busy, crowded market in a dump truck to buy each one a dress, or a skirt and a top. The young girls trade clothes so that it seems like they have more than one outfit, but in reality, they only have one torn and dirty outfit at this point. I'm so excited about them getting new clothes! And, I think I'm even more glad that the ladies are here doing it so I don't have to! :) Depending on how this goes, we might take the boys later or just give the funds to the orphanage so that they can take the boys... :)

Mark and I left on a motorcycle to go to the conference at 9:00am and Mark's comment while we were riding was "This is the way to see the country, it is so

beautiful!". Several children seeing us driving by would yell out "Awaju! Awaju!" which we later learned means "White man". I jokingly told Mark I thought it means "Funny White Men" as they were always laughing as they said it. White people are rarely seen outside their SUV's in Sudan, so it is fun to break the stereotype!

We arrived at the conference only to find out that the sound system was broke! This is the sound system that we were planning on using tonight to watch a movie with the children at the orphanage. So, after much troubleshooting and a quick conference with Pastor Stanley we decided that I would leave with Anthony to go to the market to find a sound system to buy. We left on the motorcycle and went to the only 2 "stores" in town that carry sound equipment and found an amplifier/tape player that would work as a sound system. After much deliberation, I think I was able to only negotiate \$5 off the entire price! By the time I paid him in a confusing mixture of American currency and Sudanese Pounds, I believe I overpaid and gave him back the \$5 I negotiated off with change! We then boarded the motorcycle, with an amp carefully stacked between us and headed back to the conference. We passed Pastor John Fabiano (from Darfur) and turned around to talk to him. He is going to come back to the base camp at 4pm so that we can talk about how we can help Darfur. We arrived back at the leadership conference and saw everyone doing "traditional worship" with lots of chanting and loud drumming since they didn't have a sound system. Mark learned how to do the "2-handed Sudanese fox trot", you'll have to ask him exactly what that is later... We quickly hooked up the sound system and Mark was back on the microphone teaching, it really helped! Praise God for our Vineyard family to trust our team with the money to take with us to bless these people abundantly!

Mark is right now teaching a lesson on leadership levels by having Pastor Stanley stand on a chair and Pastor Elley standing on the ground and a small boy standing in front of him. This is to show that the one with the most responsibility (Pastor Stanley) can see further and more clearly than the others whose eyes are closer to the ground. It's really connecting with the leaders! Way to go Mark!

We took a 10 minute break, and instead of going anywhere the entire group of leaders broke into worship and began dancing all over the place! Mark joined in and showed his white dancing moves! The jumping and dancing got so energetic that dust rose off the floor and created a cloud in the church! The Sudanese people really know how to praise God!

Mark finished teaching at 1:30pm and it was time to break for lunch. We gave an invitation for prayer for those who needed prayer because they were sick. We thought that maybe 5 or 10 people would respond and that most people

would leave to go get food, but around 75+ men, women and children formed a line to receive prayer. They were so hungry to receive prayer, it was incredible. It was sad to hear what their prayers were for as they were really sick. We prayed for several people with Malaria, several with Typhoid fever, several people with head, stomach and chest pains. Person after person would come forward and described a condition that we would normally go see a physician or even go to a hospital for treatment. So many people came forward that we enlisted some of the young men (10-12 year olds) to help us pray. They prayed so earnestly and intently that it made me feel like such a wimpy prayer warrior! We formed 2 lines and an hour later we were done. Praise God for his call in these people's lives! Please pray that these prayers will be answered in their lives as medication and physicians are not readily available, but the Power of God is available!

We left at 2:30pm and headed back to base camp where we met the ladies and heard about their incredible day of shopping. They were thoroughly exhausted but thrilled by being able to be used to give these gifts to the children. We decided that taking 40 boys later that day would be too much and we will simply pay for the clothes and let the teachers take the boys later.

Pastor John Fabiano (from Nyala, Darfur) arrived at our base camp around 4:30pm and we had a wonderful hour and a half talking to him. We pulled some chairs together under a tree and listened as he told us the wonderful things that God is doing in Darfur! Many, many people are becoming open to the gospel in his area. He described how 10 Muslims were recently converted to Christianity and how the generous work of his church and Christian NGO's (Non-Governmental Agencies) have opened up the eyes and hearts of the Muslims who live there! He said that there hasn't been ANY assistance in that region from the surrounding Muslim countries; only Christians have showed up to give support! Pastor John took our gift from last year and bought food for the people in his churches and then offered it to the community, but also presented the Gospel when they came to pick up the food. It was awesome to hear how God is opening the door for evangelism in his region! Pastor John oversees appx. 14 churches in that area and has been given the soccer stadium by the city of Nyala to conduct a 4 day outreach in November. He has also been given the local Cinema to conduct a 7 day outreach after that. Mark gave him \$4,000 to continue his ministry in Nyala and he plans on buying more food, bibles and do some leadership training. He will give us a report on that later.

Next, we left to ride in the back of the dump truck to travel to the orphanage and setup for movie night! We brought along the projector we bought in the states, the new sound amplifier we bought in Yei and 25 children's movies that were donated by a couple of families from our church. We nailed a large, white canvas to the side of one of the buildings and setup under the stars. We

watched a Veggie Tale movie under a star-lit sky with a full moon behind us, it was so wonderful to see the children laughing and utterly amazed! I'm not sure many of them have ever seen a movie before, and I'm sure none of them have ever seen Veggie Tales movie before! I looked up in the stars and realized that I didn't recognize any of the constellations! I guess I need to brush up on my Southern Hemisphere star map! :)

Dawn is a real hit with the children! She actually had 3 little girls sitting on her lap the entire movie with two more girls pulling a chair close to her to lean on her lap. Mark had a little boy on his lap and I had a little girl sitting with me. Kathy simply sat on the ground in the middle of all the children, it was so much fun!

We left knowing that this was our last visit with the children and it was difficult to say good-bye. We gave them lots of hugs (which they aren't used to getting) and prayed and laughed with them. I am particularly close to a boy named James who stayed pretty close to my side the last couple of days now that he knows that I call him by name. I told him to make sure he did good with his school work and that I would see him again soon. He carried a piece of my heart with him as he walked back to his hut tonight...

Tomorrow is an exciting day; we will all be going to the Leadership Conference in the morning and buying a bicycle for our hostess Esther in the afternoon. Esther's husband died earlier this year from an extended sickness and the tradition in Sudan is for the husband's relatives to take everything from the household. So, she was left brokenhearted and penny-less raising 2 young children. She has never asked for anything before this request, so buying her a bike is the least we can do to help her.

Please pray that our last day of ministry is fruitful! We will doing an outreach in the evening also, so pray that people's hearts are opened!

God is good!

Clint Schwartz

Friday, September 4, 2009

Pastor Mark

What a great day in Yei, Sudan. We are rushing to try to get done all that God seems to have put on our heart. Even as I write, Clint is in the next room having another 9:30pm meeting with Pastor Stanley!

Some of my most vivid memories of this day are as follows.

This was the first day the entire team went to the leadership conference, and the final day of the conference. We all contributed to the teaching, sharing, and especially the praying. Both Kathy and Dawn shared their testimonies as the people listened intently. Clint taught a great teaching on the fruit of the spirit, and I challenged leaders to never forget the most important thing... the presence of God! We walked through the Psalm 91 (my favorite psalm).

There was a break half way through the morning when Clint and I decided to serve all the people their snack... bowls of rice and tea. I jumped to help but I'm not sure the Sudanese women thought I was capable (she may have been right). No matter how much rice I put in each bowl it seemed as if I put either too much or too little. I was thinking that she wanted to fire me, but instead she just kept telling me what to do. It may sound like there was a lot of tension, but really, it got to be kind of funny, and we laughed at how uptight she was and she laughed at how incompetent I was! We were building a relationship even though we couldn't speak a word that each other could understand.

After session two of teaching we offered to pray for the needs of people at the conference. In Sudan, I'm realizing that if you offer to pray, you better be willing to stay for a little while. Our team split into 3 teams and were joined by other pastors and leaders. We had groups of three or four people praying for any need that needed the presence of God. We prayed for men, women, children, many women brought their sick young children to us. Malaria and Typhoid is so common here. It seems that almost everyone I prayed for feels like they have a fever (apparently one of the symptoms of Malaria). The good news is that God is working. We heard a very specific testimony of one pastor whose child's fever broke yesterday and he is now fine!

To describe the prayer time would be impossible for me. But I will tell you that it took our three teams (a dozen people total) an hour and a half of praying before the line was finally gone. It was one of the most exhausting and refreshing times of ministry I've personally every had (if that makes sense).

On a lighter note... we were caught in another rainstorm today. We were riding motorcycles to the market to purchase a bicycle for one of the workers and the clouds rolled in. I think God is packing in as many experiences in one week as we can handle. The rain lasted only a few minutes and we purchased the bicycle and rode it back to the base camp. When the bicycle was presented to Esther. Ester is the orphanage worker who has almost nothing to her name... her husband died this past year and her in-laws came and took every possession of value from her home/hut... some strange Sudanese tradition I'm glad we don't have in the USA. When she got the bike, she forced us to stop before we could take her picture so she could pray a blessing on her new bike and she took some significant time praising Jesus. It made me feel pretty unspiritual

thinking we should take a picture of it, while she was glorifying the giver of good gifts.

After buying the bicycle we raced to help with an evening outreach at a new church being planted. The new church will be held in the building that we've been doing the leadership conference in. There were at least a hundred kids there. There was dancing, singing, dancing, worshiping, jumping and worshiping. The Sudanese people seem to get great joy in dancing and even greater joy in dragging us white folks out to worship and dance with them! I'm not sure how to say this but before long all four missionary white folks were dancing with all their heart and sweating like pigs. I'm not sure that was the best way to put it but it a pretty vivid picture, eh?

Following the worship and preaching, several men raised their hands to receive Christ, which did my heart good. I had really focused the message on trying to reach to adults. Men here are very often disengaged from spiritual things and because of that there are grave consequences felt throughout this country.

When the outreach was over we got the news that the military had confiscated our dump truck for the evening. This was the truck that was supposed to transport most of the leaders 4 1/2 miles back to "base camp". The four on our team were riding motorcycles so we thought we were going to be OK. But instead we quickly realized that one of the motorcycles had blown a tire. Long story short... We eventually all got home safe and sound. It seems in Sudan there is a greater need for flexibility. You never know when the military will just tell a driver of a truck... "this is our truck for a while, we'll get it back to you some time".

Another side note: At no time in this trip has there been a threatening situation to our team. It seems that everyone in Yei is glad to have missionaries here. They are the warmest people I have ever met. As we ride down the road, adults cry out greetings, and children often run to the road waving their arms.

It's great to be greeted with joy and even better knowing we are trying to make a difference in this place where there seems to be so many reasons not to be joyful.

We'll... I'm actually kind of tired (it's 10:15 pm here). Tomorrow we move on for a brief stay in Uganda to meet up with Pastor Solomon and check on the work he is doing and some of the projects we have supported.

Gotta go... My bed and mosquito net are calling my name pretty loudly, tonight.

Final thought... If you were here right now you would have just seen me (a 46 year old man) cringe and put my laptop over my head. A bat just flew in our bed room, made a brief circle around my head (less than 3 feet away) and flew up into the ceiling cracks. For me... That means it is really time to jump under the net and get some shut eye!

Final, final thought... although that may sound scary it really isn't too bad. It's just part of the adventure that I would never want to miss. This has definitely been one of the best spiritual adventures I have ever had in my entire life!!!!

God is so good, and I'm so privileged to be offering what I can to further his kingdom. Thank you Vineyard family for partnering and kind of "joining us" in this adventure!

Warmly,
Pastor Mark

Friday, September 4, 2009

Dawn Morehouse

Well, Vineyard Family, today was my favorite day! All four of us went to the last day of the leadership training, where the people gathered for worship and teaching. Pastor Mark and Clint had been sharing about the amazing prayer times they had there each day, and I was so jealous! So, today I was finally able to be there and I was so, so thrilled! Since we had not been there before today, Kathy and I each shared our testimonies. As I listened to Kathy's testimony I thought of how powerful it is when we share with one another our journey, and what God has done for us. It brings us to a place of deeper connection, and binds us together. Before this we participated in worship. And by participate I mean lots of bouncing while holding hands with a Sudanese person who has approached you. Wow, these people have energy! Pastor Mark did two teachings. He adapted some of his Vineyard teaching for the people here.

Truth is universal - the scriptures apply to us all regardless of our culture. I was impressed with Pastor Mark's ability to bring his personality into that place and truly be himself in spite of teaching with an interpreter. He did an excellent job! Then some guy named Clint spoke...he was white, and looked like our Clint, but this guy was preaching like crazy!! This Clint was on fire!! I told him later that I hope that this new "Clint" preaches at Vineyard from now on, cause it was great! The Holy Spirit was all over the messages and the words. Glory to God!

During one of the teaching breaks something very neat happened! The Sudanese people all ate rice and drink tea during the break. And the women

here do the majority of the work. So they were preparing and serving the food for all these people. Pastor Mark decided he would go help them serve, so he and Clint both went and help dished up the food for all the people. One of the leaders said to Clint later, "ah, so Pastor Mark is teaching us that a good leader will serve..." I think it's so great that the actions of these men Mark and Clint just as powerful as their words. As much as I was impressed with their teaching today, I am impressed with how they are living out their faith here in Sudan. A couple of nights ago my devotion was from the book of James and I read these words, "Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do." It strikes me that this is why we are here – not just to preach well or do nice art projects, but to live out our faith by what we do – the little things like holding hands with an orphaned child, playing jump rope with a group of kids, or helping serve a meal. Today, as I watched Pastor Mark and Clint, I felt grateful to have them as leaders in our church, and privileged to be able to witness God use them here in Sudan.

The morning session ended with a time of prayer. We first prayed with the men who felt like they either needed courage, protection, healing from sickness, or rest. Many men came for prayer and we laid hands on them and prayed for the presence of God to come and met their many needs. We then prayed with the women individually. It was so amazing to hear their stories – so many widowed or divorced, many with conflicts in their homes or unbelieving husbands. Many were also sick - malaria, headaches, chest pain – and many were also being harassed by demons. We prayed for an hour and a half, but it felt like 15 minutes to me! My heart broke for these people and I just kept hearing the Holy Spirit prompt me to pray for the "favor of God". We prayed for many children as well – all sick – lots of problems with headaches and stiffness. A couple of times I literally just sobbed while we prayed, overwhelmed with compassion for these people.

This afternoon we were able to do something very fun – we bought a bicycle for Esther, the woman who has been cooking and cleaning for us this whole week. She even did our laundry, by hand! In the time since Clint was here last year, her husband has died. Here when the husband dies, his family comes and takes everything from the house, so Esther and her 2 children (ages 15 and 8) were left with nothing. She lives a long walk from here where she works, and she often has to walk into town for things, so this bicycle was a big deal! When it got here, we told her we wanted to take a picture of her on it. So she came out, hopped on it, and took it for a spin around the driveway. Then we asked her to pose with her bike and the guys. She said yes, and then stood there, said that she was so very grateful to God. And before any of us knew it she had started praying right then and there because of the bicycle. Amazing...so much gratitude for something so seemingly little. Yes, I was crying. I had to hand Kathy the camera to take the picture. I know!

Tonight we went to the church for an outreach program. All I can say is that I've never jumped up and down so much in my life! These people really get into their worship! It was so much fun to jump up and down, while holding hands with these people while they sang songs about being happy and how we are all the same. Pastor Mark and Clint both spoke again, and then we handed out the balloons that the JAM kids had donated. The balloons were a big hit!

Tomorrow we leave here to go to Kampala, Uganda for a couple of days. I will miss Sudan and its people. One thing I've said the whole time preparing for this trip was that I wanted to come and leave everything of me I could – leave it all on the playing field, so to speak. As I sit here tonight typing this, I feel like I have. I've done everything God led me to do, gave everything of me that there was, and I leave this country tomorrow with no regrets. Thanks so much for all of your prayers that have been keeping us safe and well. We know that God has been orchestrating it all, and we have seen his provision along the way, and we are blessed.

Blessings to you all,
Dawn

Sunday, September 6, 2009

Pastor Mark

Hey Church Family! Here is a quick update because this is a travel day and we are getting ready to check out of our hotel.

Yesterday (Sunday) was our last day of ministry. We attended Pastor Stanley's church in the morning. He offers two Sunday worship services. During the services everyone on our team shared their testimonies and I preached. The people in Uganda welcomed us with so much warmth.

They set aside more time than we do for the preaching. I preached 1 ½ hours at the second service. (Don't be scared, I don't think I'll go quite that long this next Sunday at Vineyard!)

The most wonderful part of the day was an afternoon meal with Pastor Stanley. He shared a lot about the opportunities in Uganda and the ministries he is overseeing... including a school for 400 children, sports outreach programs to reach the unchurched, and leadership development for young men and women. (His church is absolutely full of people 25 and younger! I was so impressed with the quality of the young men and women.)

In the evening, Clint taught during one of their leadership training classes and wrapped up with a few leadership principles we use at Vineyard. I know this update is a little short... but gotta go! Tons of details to come when we get back in town.

It has been a hugely successful trip and we are eager to explore how we can best support and participate in the ministry that God is doing in these extremely challenged countries.

Can't wait to see you all, and it will be nice to have a meal in a restaurant where there isn't a stray cat chewing on an old fish bone by my feet! (I don't think they have a health department in Uganda)

P.S... Yesterday after breakfast, Clint felt some serious stomach pains, but once again through prayer, (and some Roloids) he bounced back. It was amazing, because for a minute, things were looking really bad. Praise Jesus!

Pray for our travel!

Love ya!
Pastor Mark

Monday-Tuesday, September 7-8, 2009

Clint Schwartz

Well, we made it back safely! Praise God! We finished up our stay in Uganda on Monday by doing some souvenir shopping with Pastor Solomon and his wife in a little shopping area in downtown Kampala. We were able to get some really good deals which was a blessing! We had lunch and then decided we should head to the airport since the traffic was so bad. School started in Uganda on Monday and many people were on the roads either taking their children to school or buying clothing and supplies. You would have to see the traffic to really understand!

We arrived at the airport around 4:30pm and found a nice coffee shop area to check internet and drink a "Fanta" (orange pop is a delicacy here!). It was hot and muggy in the airport so I took a "wet wipe bath" in the bathroom and changed my clothes before boarding the plane. Mark somehow found a shower in another part of the airport so he seemed so much more refreshed than I was! We boarded our plane around 8:30pm and flew to Nairobi, Kenya where we had a one hour layover. We then took off and arrived in Brussels, Belgium a little over 8 hours after that. The plane was fairly empty so there was

plenty of room to spread out and get some sleep. In Belgium we had breakfast (at least I did, I love eating foreign food!) and bought some Belgium chocolate so that I'll be "a hit" when I got home. We boarded our Boeing 777 for the final leg of our flight at 11am local time (5am EST) on Tuesday and arrived in Chicago around 1pm CST (2pm EST). We made it through customs quickly and found Rose & Denise waiting to take us home. It was so good to see our families again!

It was a huge blessing to have all of your prayers covering us on this trip as the planes were on time, no luggage was lost, and all sickness was quickly healed! We believe that the seeds we were able to plant in Sudan and Uganda will harvest many times over in the days, weeks and months to come!

Thank-you for your partnership!
Clint