

# APRIL 2020



*'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.'* **Psalm 46:1-7**

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for your prayers during our time as a team in The Gambia. We are now all back in the UK. We had to return on a repatriation flight offered by the British High Commission on 7 April.

Our last two weeks in The Gambia were very different from the rest: we went into self-imposed semi-lockdown and had a lot more time together as a team. There was much uncertainty as we were told we may get less than 24 hours' notice of a flight leaving.



God united us as a team (minus Chad who had flown home earlier). All the time together could have led to frustrations and bitterness at our situation. We praise God that he helped us to get along well as a team and have a lot of laughs. Wonderfully, it seems that each of us grew in our trust during this uncertain time. The truth expressed in Psalm 46 became much more real - God really is our refuge and strength, he really is an ever-present help in trouble. And so it makes sense that we can cast anxieties onto him no matter how much uproar and chaos is around us. He really is our fortress.

We had seminars on 'Church' and 'Coming Home', bible studies in John 14 and continued listening to sermons on Zechariah and reading a book together. We also introduced a weekly video course in Philippians (Discipleship Explored), and a daily morning prayer slot, both led by team members. This structure helped the team to make the most of each day and recognise how dependent on God we really are.

In our bible studies we were thinking about Jesus' words in John 13:34-35: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'



It was helpful to think what loving one another to the standard of Christ looks like in lockdown - in particular how we as a team could be more loving to each other and how this looked to our friends we had made in the Gambia. We had to limit contact with them, but praise God that even in this there were still great opportunities to encourage others. We had some wonderful opportunities to share the gospel with individuals like D, S and S.

We set about painting our compound and the GamFES compound opposite. This served multiple purposes - it gave team members something to do (alone or together), it helped the GamFES ministry and it served future gap year teams who can enjoy our fresh coat of paint. We added some decoration to the outside of the compound wall and the inside is now branded with the team's painted handprints (and one footprint - thanks Dan...). Sadly we didn't finish but made a good start!

It was also good to spend time enjoying the beach, with a couple of bonfires and a BBQ with the Algeo family (long-term mission partners at Servants of the Word Bible School). This family gave the team great joy and encouragement at just the right times during the trip, and especially in the last few weeks. We are very thankful for them. We enjoyed celebrating Tom's birthday with them too. We had a full fry up for breakfast, a photo challenge (see photo on the right of 'Finding Nemo') and a delicious Indian takeaway.



The events leading to our flight home were stressful. We saw God answer prayers time and again. And it made me realise how much I take for granted the general smoothness of travel in the UK. See the picture of me counting cash at the travel agent; that is less than a quarter of the amount we needed to hand over! You can perhaps imagine some of the difficulties of getting that much cash out in a hurry on a weekend when the banks are closed! The flight left late and we boarded the plane to find some of our seats were double booked! We're still not sure if Stansted knew we were due to land!

But praise God that he sovereignly oversaw all this, and indeed all our trip. This has been a huge lesson for us all. As a team we looked back on our time, with a selection of reflections recorded here. Please give thanks to God with us for them.

- Many of us noted how we now trust God's sovereignty in working out good in a way that we only knew in our heads before.
- We're so thankful for the opportunity to serve and learn alongside godly brothers and sisters in The Gambia. Specifically Mama and Claris, the GamFES staff, Servants of the Word teachers and members of Omega Church.

- We're grateful for the relationships we made with Christians of a similar age to us (B, D, L, E, S, H, K and L in particular) and the encouragement they were to us and we were to them.
- We are thankful for the time spent in schools serving and learning whilst building relationships with staff and pupils.
- We have a greater perspective on the trials we face in life as we saw the lives of our Gambian friends
- We had a lot of fun and we're really thankful for that!
- We're thankful for lots of time as a team in the Bible - ranging from topical seminars, a bible overview, studies in 1 Corinthians, John and Philippians, and personal times with God. Praise God that his words 'are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.' - Psalm 19
- We're thankful that as a team we remained hopeful despite all the uncertainty of the last few weeks.

As we settle into life in a very different UK than the one we left, please pray:

- For those we left behind in The Gambia. For Christians to know that God is their fortress in the fragility and chaos of life, and to hold out that truth urgently to those they live amongst
- For each of us to continue growing, applying good habits from the trip to a different way of life now in the UK. Several have noted the temptation to go back to unhelpful habits which were broken during the trip. Pray instead for the reinforcement of edifying habits such as regular bible reading and wise use of time.
- For each team member as they head into a different stage of life in the coming academic year - whether at university or in the army. Pray they would stand firmly and boldly for Christ, truly knowing God as their refuge and strength, their ever-present help in trouble.



Thanks again for your prayers and support. It is so appreciated.

Love from  
Ed

On behalf of Sarah, Bobby, Chad, Dan, Ellie, Grace, Lucy, Sophia and Tom

