His Vets

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:21)

Several years ago I visited an experienced missionary family in Senegal. They were discouraged. They told me that for the last 40 years any Woloff who decides to follow Christ is either killed or so pressured by their family to give up Jesus, that only God knows if they still have any faith in their hearts. “For a Woloff to come to Christ, God would have to change their whole way of thinking!” Their thinking is futile, their foolish hearts are darkened.

It reminded me of Soo-Il and Soon-Ja Park who worked among the Borana in southern Ethiopia for years—without anyone expressing interest in Jesus. Then suddenly, a whole village believed! I asked Soo-Il what they’d changed, what they’d done differently. “Nothing,” he shrugged with a grin. “I guess it was just God’s time to open their eyes and hearts.” Amazing how the Lord works.

But when will churches be planted among the Woloff in Senegal? When will they be free of fear and the bondage in which they live? Who would step up and replace the discouraged messengers who go home?

Enter Shad and Amy. After just one visit, Shad felt called. He returned home and told his wife, “You really need to go visit!” But when Amy went to visit, she had already decided against it. She fully intended to return and tell her family they were NOT moving to Senegal. Shad and I were praying!

News during her trip definitely didn’t sound promising. Amy was having a horrible visit—and to cap it off, her hosts inexplicably sent her back to the capital city to fly home alone on a taxi driven by a Muslim man nobody knew. A woman alone, she had no idea where he was taking her, and no language ability to ask. She was totally in God’s hands. But God was at work!

It was at that unlikely, least likely moment when she knew, with tears, that this was exactly where God wanted them to come. She returned home speaking with conviction, “We need to go to Senegal.” Shad and I were amazed. That was God’s work. His ways are not our ways...

Before going to Senegal, Shad felt they should go to a country in East Africa (unnamed for security reasons) for language and culture. But that country was blazing hot, and electricity was expensive—they could only afford to air condition one room, and they all slept in it. Getting internet was rare and even involved climbing up in a tree to sort out wires strung in a jumbled mass, to try to get the right one to their house. School for the kids did not work out. Amy’s one disciple was killed for believing in Jesus. Shad said, “The only way to do mission work there was to be totally poured out.”

It took its toll on their health, their kids, their marriage. Everything is super expensive; they burned through their financial supply like confetti in a furnace. Yet God worked. By the time they left, about 20 had come to a saving knowledge of Christ, in a place where no new converts had been known for 4 years. Some of the new believers were beaten. Some had to flee the country due to radical Islam. Shad and Amy themselves returned home, exhausted, drained, and out of funding.
But they still felt called to Senegal. CVM was behind them. Their church was behind them. A Foundation that faithfully supported them was excited. They returned, this time to Senegal. I wondered, would God change the Woloff?

This March, I was able to visit them in Senegal before the pandemic shut down airports. We chuckled when other missionaries would complain about heat or dust or other inconveniences. In God’s providence, having gone to East Africa first—Senegal seems like a paradise in comparison. The weather is not as hot (most of the year), the costs of living are 4x less expensive, the kids’ schooling is going fairly well, they are freer to move about in ministry. Shad is starting Woloff language study, and they’re almost recovered from their very draining time in East Africa. They remain in contact with some of the new believers there, discipling them from afar. They feel blessed!

Shad said, “God is working in the Woloff!!” The Woloff in these villages now ask the believers to pray for them—because they have seen answers to prayer. An elder recently took the spiritism amulets off himself and his children. A Senegalese church planter is working in 6 villages, he teaches Bible stories with the elders—and kids’ clubs on Wednesday nights. It draws a huge crowd! Seeing the joy and peace in followers of Jesus Christ, Muslims say to each other, “It’s those Christians who are really saved.” They even want to give the church planter land to live among them. Their way of thinking is changing!

One Woloff woman and her kids have believed; however, her husband is in France working. She does not know how he will accept her faith. She might be kicked out or worse. Please pray the Lord will be with her and keep her faith strong. Pray the Lord will plant His church among the Woloff!

Pandemics and civil unrest can alarm. But always when we look for the Lord’s hand, we find hope.

For another example, we’ve been praying for a man in another East African country I won’t name, who left Islam to follow Christ. Last year, after a week of beating, starvation, and torture to force him to give up Jesus, his faith never wavered. Finally, his father hired thugs to take him out to the desert and kill him. He was left for dead in an untraveled place. But in answered prayer, he was rescued by people who “happened” to pass by. He is now in Bible school in the capital city for a measure of security. Please pray for him!

Back in his home village, his twin brother considered faith in Christ; so his older brother killed him. Then we heard with joy that both the elder brother and the father have become Christ-followers!! But it was a hoax. They are still hunting for him, to kill him. Today we hear that his father became quite ill, and is in a coma, and the man organizing the hunt for him, just had a serious motorcycle accident. Please pray for our brother’s faith and protection!

Interestingly, in the capital city of that country in recent months, over 300 people have turned to Christ, from multiple tribes. Unheard of! Only God could do that. With God, all things are possible, and prayer is not an empty ritual. It’s a conversation—He answers.

Please pray for these new believers and for those trying to disciple them.

In His service, Fred and Vicki

Fred and Vicki Van Gorkom
19303 Fremont Ave N
Seattle, WA 98133
fvangorkom@cvmusa.org
vvangorkom@cvmusa.org

Contributions are solicited with the understanding that the donee organization has complete discretion and control over the use of all donated funds.