

Moments are Precious



Praises:

- The Lord is faithful and trustworthy always!
- We have a wonderful staff that covers us, our family, the kids, the foundation and each other in prayer.
- Celebrating the Savior's birth this year was special and different this year.
- The Christmas party for the families was a fun and sweet time and the gospel was proclaimed to all.
- The staff got to unwind a bit at the party and have a well deserved week off.
- Our family found special moments in the midst of it all.

Prayer Requests:

- I, Gina, am back in the States. My Dad had major surgery and Mom is recovering from covid. Pray for healing.
- Dan is holding the fort down and is tired. Samantha perseveres with school.
- Salvation (for those that don't know Jesus) of the kids, families and Chinese friends and growth for those who do know Him.
- We have several new volunteers starting soon. Pray that they intergrate well and the Lord does what only He can do through them.
- Above all else pray that the Lord is honored and praised and glorified through the foundation, the staff and our lives!

As I look back at the last newsletter, Dan was mentioning how he was thankful I was home. Hopefully next newsletter, he can write that again. I returned to Ecuador for 3 ½ weeks. It was fabulous to be home and be able to participate in Christmas activities, but it was very different this year. This was the first year without the big kids which was a tough one for me. It was the first year where I didn't prep for the Christmas season. I just swept in and let it happen. It was the first year where I didn't get to just sit and meditate on all that the year held and the blessings of it all. But this year might have been the most impactful Christmas ever for me and I will never be the same because of it. Let me walk you through some of it.

We had some family fun and enjoyed our people that the Lord has blessed us with in Ecuador.



The three of us made our Christmas cookies that I have made every year of my life. When I was a kid, my grandparents would come over and make them with us. Lots of memories flooded the mind. But a cool thing, I finally figured out how to get them right at 9300 ft. Baking is different at high altitude.

We squeezed in a quick outing with Samantha's friends and finally rode these little motorized animals around the mall. It was fun to just be silly with teens. I am so thankful she has sweet friends.

Our small group and a few other friends got to go caroling twice. Once in our neighborhood and the other time was in front of the church as people arrived for Christmas Eve service. It is the tradition of one of the other families and they let us jump in. New tradition. Our friends are our family here.

Shortly after I landed in Ecuador, it was time to get Christmas ready for the foundation. The kids at the center and I put the Christmas tree up and sang songs. For 3 of the kids, they had never done a tree because their family could never afford it. (Others had done it the year before with us.) The excitement of the kids was almost overwhelming. It reminded me of all the times I have been blessed to be with a family and all the traditions together. I actually cried thinking how spoiled I have been my whole life.

We put a party together for the kids and families. There were between 80-100 people there for a large North American dinner including turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and the works. We had red velvet cake with white icing for dessert as Jesus' birthday cake and Dan presented the gospel with the cake. It was one of the traditions from Dan's family. It was sweet to think of my in-laws who have passed on to glory. Each child received a toy/gift of some kind and some new socks. Each family received about 50 pounds of food including a whole chicken and 30 eggs. (if I would have had all those eggs in the States, I would have had been able to fund the ministry for the month. lol) We had games to play and everyone participated. I had never seen some of those parents laugh so hard. It was fun for everyone to eat, play and be merry for a few hours. It was like some of the stresses of the world were gone for just a little bit. One mom cried on one of my shoulders and then the other shoulder saying this was the best Christmas she has ever had and her daughter will

have food to eat with her new doll. **Thank you to so many people who gave generously for food, gifts and food baskets for the families.**



The week continued with a staff Christmas party. Our staff are the ones that hug the kids when crying, share the Word of God every day, teach students to read, listen to parents, love, share Jesus and so much more. It was a fun night to just be family and not work. One of their favorite things to do is have a snowball fight with these fake snowballs that Ruth gave me years ago. We also did a secret amigo but when you present the gift to the person you speak kind words about them and people guess who it is. It is so sweet to hear what each admire about the other. We also had a hard goodbye. The De Leons have returned to the States on a full-time basis because of health issues at the altitude and family needs. We understand but will miss them and thankful for their time here.



This is the full-time team. I admire these people!



Christmas morning happened through video chat. I am so thankful for technology considering we were in two different States and 2 different countries but it sure was different. I was having a little pity party that morning missing my babies. But the Lord was about to begin to show me what He really had in store.

As many of you know, Dan teaches the Chinese Bible study once a month and we have made friends with several Chinese here over the last couple of years. Well, this year our church didn't have church service on Christmas morning but a Christmas Eve service. The Chinese Christians just could not understand why that wouldn't happen. They also wanted to worship in public for the first time in their lives on Christmas without fear of being arrested. So, one of the Bible teachers put together a potluck lunch. I asked each of them their stories at Christmas lunch. Some of them are Christians and others aren't, yet. All of them talked about what they had been through. Rebecca, the sweet lady I am hugging in the picture had only been in Ecuador a month when we had Christmas lunch. She loves Jesus more than anything, she said when they spent their first several days in Ecuador she thought, "what did we do?" She said when she entered the church she knew that the Lord had directed them there. She said when we met that she knew she was home and had family here. She hugged me and kissed me and said, "we are eternal sisters because of Christ." None of them will ever be able to return or see their families again on this side of heaven. They are brave and loving and hurting and fighters. They reminded me that it is ALL ABOUT THE SAVIOR not about being with blood family. Not about my comforts or traditions. Not about anything at all except EMANUEL!



Pray for them as they start new lives and that all will know the only one that saves, JESUS!

After lunch, we went to pick up these two cuties and their mom to have at our house for the night and next day. They did not have safe family to return to and so they were ours for the night and day. They look super cute and are, but man what a hand full. The little one spit at my face as I was holding her. The older one was jumping all over the furniture and trying to use markers on the couch. They kept me hopping. But that 20 year old mom needed a few minutes. She needed a family for a day. She needed to check out for a bit. She needed us to show Jesus' love when it is not easy or convenient or on a holiday or our 'day off'. She needed someone to be 'grandma' for a little bit.



A few lessons from Christmas for me:

- 1) The King of heaven came as a baby and sacrificed His life for me. Why do I not think I will not sacrifice in His service?
- 2) What joy there is in serving others! There is no greater love than to lay our lives down for someone else. (John 15)
- 3) Family comes in all sizes, colors, languages, difficulties, space and so on. The young ruler asked who is my neighbor. I ask who is my family. It is those we show Jesus' love to and that should be anyone we come in contact with. (Luke 10)
- 4) When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or when did I see you needing a hug or when did I see you need an ear to listen? We give to Jesus when we give to the least of these. (Matthew 25)
- 5) I really think I enjoyed Emmanuel when I laid my pity party down and enjoyed all the gifts He has given me which the greatest of these is His presence for eternity.
- 6) I have thought a lot about life and death this year as I have been in the hospital with people a lot lately, have had several friends diagnosed with cancer this year, many babies born, a mom at the center contemplating an abortion and many have gone to see Jesus like my sister-in-law. All of our days have been ordained by God so don't live in fear but in freedom and boldness. (Psalm 139)

It is not that I didn't know these things I just experienced them in a new and powerful way that changed me.

December 27th, I got the call that Dad had been rushed to the ER. I pondered and prayed what to do. And the answer was, "honor your mother and father". So, I was on the plane again on the 28th. Dad had surgery because of an intestinal blockage. When I arrived, my mother picked me up from the airport and had just come from the doctor herself. She had covid and was feeling terrible. (my mom who just had pneumonia in November) The next 8 days I jockeyed between the hospital and my parents home taking care of both. Dad will have a couple months of recovery. Both are home and doing as well as expected at this time. I will be with them till January 23rd, Lord willing.

I love how the Lord teaches us something like, He is with us and that is all that matters, then you get a little bit more isolated to see if it really stuck. It has! I have had some of my best worship with the Lord the last two weeks. I have stopped by the Gulf to breathe in His presence as I drive back and forth between the two locations. I have walked with Him and I have talked with Him as He tells me that I am His own. (who sung that??) And the joy we share as we tarry there. None other has ever known. (In the Garden – song – with my adjustments)



Dad and I getting out of the hospital.



Biloxi, Mississippi sunset

I even got to sneak over to Montgomery for 2 hours to hug our son (Zachary moved there 2 weeks ago). I will always cherish these times with my parents. I am thankful for my time with all these people. I might forget some of my lessons but hopefully the Lord in His goodness and grace will remind me. But each sunset reminds me that His mercies are new every morning.

May you be learning from the Lord this year. Lots of blessings to you in this New Year even if they don't feel like blessings at first because they always are.

Many blessings,

Dan, Gina and Samantha