

My Dearest Agape Family,

Greetings and love in this beautiful season filled with warmth! Thank you for receiving me with such overwhelming love. I've felt so cherished here and have been restored in every way possible. My time in France has also allowed me precious moments to reflect on my last season on the field. Here's my little update:

India:

Last October, I started out my journey in India with my fellow missionary, Stacy.

Upon arrival I was excitedly greeted by a family. A year ago, I had prayed for their daughter, a little 12 year old servant-girl living in the slums. She had problems with her eyesight, but couldn't afford to buy spectacles. So with simple faith, she asked me if Jesus could heal her. After 3 rounds of prayer, she beams up at me with tears in her eyes and stated plainly, 'it is good now!'. God gave her perfect eyesight, and she's never struggled with it since!

This little girl rushes home to tell her mom and siblings, and they came to find me. I told them of a God who values and loves them, and demonstrated with specific words of knowledge. They were alarmed and amazed, they decided to follow our pastor's teachings and soon after accepted Jesus into their hearts. They have been following Him for over a year. Their salvation was a huge joy to me.

In India we also dealt with a few trauma/split personality cases:

Many of the women we work with suffer unthinkable abuse. While I was there, one lady was so badly beaten by her husband that she went deaf in one ear. Another lady had lost 7 babies under her husband's heavy hand. I was horrified as I heard the women relate their pain and suffering, one had even doused herself in kerosene to escape her life. With such unbearable incidences of trauma, these women developed different personalities to cope with life.

It was amazing to see Jesus encounter each part that surfaced and restore them fully.

Sometimes I lack the words to describe the transformation Jesus can bring in a moment to the broken. I found myself weeping while we prayed, knowing that God sees their suffering and was so present to heal them.

Slum/Village schools:

I also got the chance to travel deep into the villages looking at impoverished/lower caste communities without schools. I was quite taken aback by the level of poverty I witnessed in these places.



This is part of the school I've been raising support for over the last 4 years. We have 60-80 children under our program



Many of our children have a deep faith in God Through them, we are now seeing whole families turn to Him.

*This kind family borrowed plastic chairs from their neighbours to host us.
They live in an open-air shack with their 5 children and a cow.*

It was impossible to hold a conversation without flies perching on your face.

Reminded me of Jesus in the manger - not glamorous.



In Northern India, people may not be open to Christianity, but are very keen on missionary schools. We passed by a school named 'Jesus Grace Primary School', and my pastor chuckled saying they borrowed Jesus' name to make their school sound prestigious. Schools are a very strategic way to earn the right to preach the Gospel.

Every village school established is followed by a church plant. We are now supporting 2 schools, serving 60-70 children each. One in a poor Muslim village, another in a slum. (When people say 'slum' in India, they refer to an overcrowded shanty whose inhabitants work as rubbish collectors; they often live off other people's trash too.) We now have a working model that can equip these children up to Primary level and enable them to qualify for public secondary schools.

Rwanda/Burundi:

After India, I flew to Rwanda to visit the Burundian Refugee community Agape has been helping to support. I preached at a prayer gathering where representatives from the 20 families we're aiding came to intercede for their country. They also wanted to personally thank us for the help they've received. The Presence of God was so strong when they worshipped, I could hardly speak because there was so much electricity coursing through me – surely God is close to the broken!

It was deeply moving to see these refugees adore Him. Young men had their knee-joints hammered through so they could not walk or join any resistance; others had escaped prison and execution by the amazing grace of God; some had their businesses torched; pastors had their houses taken over, bank accounts frozen. The government was targeting anyone with an education, influence or physical ability to resist their regime. Many were pastors and church leaders, men and women of great character.

When you care for others, it's sometimes very hard to divorce yourself from their suffering. One morning I found myself unable to sleep, gripped with heartache, and crying out to God repeatedly, 'help me help Your people God, help me help them...' There is so much need everywhere but I've also seen God's astounding ability to provide faithfully. These refugees were filled with reverence saying, 'God has never failed us, He sent your people to help us when we couldn't help ourselves...' I'm just so thankful that God enables us to be a part of His plans.

Congo:

Next, I moved into the Congo. This season was particularly intense. The first week there, we survived a bomb blast that took place 500m from our house. 2 were killed, 39 others injured, but God's protected us. We had passed by that exact area but at a different time in the day...

We were then scheduled to enter into the jungles to service our 4 village schools, but because 180 NGO workers had been kidnapped in the first half of the year, all aid workers were advised to get kidnapping insurance. This took us awhile to obtain and the insurance was pricey. But in the process, we had confirmation after confirmation that God wanted us to go in. We needed those confirmations:

One day out in the jungles, we were driving back to our village chief's house when we saw an exodus of fleeing mamas, farmers and children. They all had terror in their eyes. Someone stopped and yelled in frenzied Swahili, warning us that rebels were just a 100m away looting and hijacking. Our driver quickly reversed and we hid in the school bracing ourselves for a shoot-out. It was surreal, but as we prayed my pastor's wife said, 'God we are Your children and we claim that open heavens right now...' It's amazing how the things you preach is internalised and activated so quickly in these lives. I was very encouraged!

Eventually, we saw government soldiers coming and the rebels soon retreated. It's hard to forget the anxious faces of the people – women carrying heavy loads on their backs, children without shoes, farmers with only a stick to defend their families... All scurrying through the dangerous pass alongside our car.

Even in that moment, I felt so privileged and distant from their suffering. I couldn't imagine how they coped with such fear everyday, it was heart-breaking.

Being with the people was wonderful though. It was so heart-warming to be received with such love, to know that they consider you their own and are protective of you. Their spiritual progress was also evident in the countless testimonies:

One morning we had a man chase down our car on the road. He was one of our missionary school students, and with excitement he told us that his daughter who had been born mute, is now speaking after 4 years! We had delivered her from generational witchcraft earlier this year and prayed for her healing. We didn't see any immediate results then, but the little girl soon started forming coherent words. She now speaks fluent Swahili! God is surely moving, and the miracles are occurring!

Finally, to end this message with a little Christmas cheer...
Here are pictures of some special Christmas parties in poor communities around the world.

I have a firm conviction that everyone should enjoy Jesus' 'birthday'!
These were made possible by all your contributions...

India:



This was a Christmas evangelistic event we had for 2 lower-caste villages in INDIA – where one of our schools is located. Hundreds came to hear the Good News, parents along with their children. Standing on stage is our lady pastor Doreen sharing the Gospel.

Our school kids were able to put up a special item; and everyone got fed. Each family was also given presents like soap, dried food, and other basic necessities to bring home.

Burundian Refugees in Rwanda:



The BURUNDIAN refugees were also able to have a special Christmas Day, where more than 100 refugees came. They ate meat and had sodas – which was a rare opportunity for many since they fled their country. The Gospel was preached and 20 refugees received Christ for the first time!

Our pastor's wife said they weren't sure how they would pass their first Christmas as refugees, but God provided above and beyond what they imagined! For so many families too. She said it reminded them of the scene in Nehemiah, where the joy of the Lord broke through in the midst of grieving.

Kenya:



In Kenya, we had the refugees and poor turn up in their Sunday bests at Pastor Isaac's church to celebrate Christmas. Children were delighted with new shoes and caps for presents. No one went hungry that morning, all were able to eat their fill. As you can see, no celebration in Africa is complete without a soda!



Love you all so much; and here's me wishing you a very Blessed New Year!

Jem