

## It's Hard to Be Patient

"The Subula will be eager to visit the Schultes. But right now, their job is to focus on French language classes. I know you will find the right way to help the Subula be patient while they wait for the Schultes."

These words of our supervisor, Rev. David Federwitz, spoken some two weeks earlier, floated up from the murky depths of my memory as I re-read the text from Director Bakari that had just woke me up.

"Good morning, Rev. Schulte. The Subula have sent a delegation to visit you. What would be the best time today to stop by the house?"



*Erin and I (dressed in clothing the Subula had made for us) with the Subula delegation, Director Bakari, and Consultant Touka. For security, all faces but ours have been blurred.*

## But first, the French!

When Erin and I arrived in Cameroon, we spent most of the first two weeks greeting many of the significant partners with whom LBT collaborates on Bible translation. With relationships central to LBT's philosophy and Cameroonian culture, this "greeting" was more than formal politesse. It was the planting of the first shoots of the seedling of "Shared Kinship and Purpose" that countless greetings since and to come will nurture.

One meaningful relationship, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, is headquartered in Ngaoundéré, where we live while learning French. David would shepherd us each morning, greeting and meeting with the church's leadership, including the National Bishop, Dr. Baïguélé, the Director of the Department of Bible

Translation and Literacy, Rev. Bakari, and the Translation Consultant, Rev. Touka. Though our work with the Subula will eventually see us moving on from Ngaoundéré, these men will be responsible for us in Cameroon for all intents and purposes. After all, it's their signature on our visa applications. These roots needed to run deep.

For this reason, David requested a special meeting with Director Bakari to discuss his specific concern for our time in Ngaoundéré: the risk of losing focus. The more French we learned in the next year, the better equipped we would be for both work and life in Cameroon. Yet David worried that the Subula community's desire to "greet" us could become a significant distraction if not managed culturally appropriately by our Cameroonian partners. Director Bakari agreed and promised to "hold off" the Subula for as long as possible.

## The Church is Life Together

It's a testament to the importance of relationships that Director Bakari kept his promise for about two weeks. I don't pretend to be an expert in any form of psychology. Still, I can't help but think that the Subula must have figured that even a professional relationship wouldn't be considered serious if you didn't make an effort to spend time face-to-face, and as is always the case in Africa, shoulder-to-shoulder. Patience is a virtue, and doing things in their proper time is a virtue. But sitting in a stuffy, sweaty room as someone translates each comment into all three heart languages present - at the same time, everyone tries not to stare too longingly at the juice and sugared peanuts sitting on the coffee table - is also a virtue. It's also a joy. Because relationships are joyful. Friendships are a grace.



*National Bishop Dr. Baïguélé, myself, and Erin.*



*In front of the Bible House, Rev. Bakari, myself, Erin, and Rev. Touka.*

Life spent together is staggering and sweet, and in the case of the church, it is also Spirit-filled. It's worth it to take the time to spend it with others. The next episode of that show can wait.

## But Patience is Hard

Honestly, the last few weeks in Cameroon have been hard. Erin and I have found ourselves challenged in various ways, not the least of which has been spiritually and emotionally. A growing sense of ennui is one of my most significant challenges. I've spent the last two years preparing for Cameroon, and now I'm here, and I've still got another year before the "fun" can even start. All the chit-chats, meetings, house visits, and coffee dates begin to feel a bit pointless considering our departure. When I graduated from the Seminary, I swore I'd never seek another degree, and yet here I am, in year three of classes, trying to cram French vocabulary into my head. At some point, my desire to share the gospel turned into conjugating verbs once again.

And that boredom starts to get infectious. Satan gets his fingers in the cracks and starts to ask questions like, "Is this even what you want to be doing right now? Do you actually care about this Bible translation project? Is this really worth putting your wife through some of her life's

most complex and difficult moments?" When I realize I don't always have good answers to those questions, I feel like the Subula had the right of it. Maybe the best thing I can do is pile everybody and everything into the truck and head out.

My pastor, Rev. Dressler of Salem, Blackjack, is fond of saying, "If you don't feel like doing the right thing, do it anyway." At first, it's a heavy law, but after a few weeks of waiting to feel like a good missionary, there's a certain grace to just "doing it anyway." Just keep answering the knocks at the door asking for financial assistance. Keep nodding to stories of the beautiful missionaries who came before you and whose reputation you fail to live up to. Keep getting stopped every other sentence to have your French corrected. We should be doing this because, just like church, these relationships here are worth the effort, even if I thought some of the faces around the room would look different. Being in community is good even when it doesn't feel good.

And maybe, if we keep stumbling down the path of the right choices, God will give us the grace of His joy. Maybe at some point in the tension of ricocheting between mistakes and failures, God will find the right way to help the Schultes be patient while they wait for the Subula.



*During the visit, Director Bakari, members of the Subula delegation, and I gave introduction speeches. At the end, the Subula sang a hymn in their language and danced before closing with the Lord's prayer.*



*Practicing some French conjugations.*



*Erin getting impromptu cooking and French lessons on how to juice the Cassimango fruit.*

## PRAYER REQUESTS

- Pray that God will give us the grace and ability to do the right thing while we wait for the desire. Pray for the wisdom to know the right thing when the choices feel confusing.
- Pray that we will be given the patience to live in the moment and not try escaping to the past or the future.
- Pray for Erin and me as we work on French. Pray that God will give us supernatural abilities for memory and language and that we will achieve a level of French that surpasses our wildest projections.
- Pray for the Lutheran church in Ngaoundéré as they have experienced a spate of deaths amongst the faithful.
- Pray for the Subula as they continue to work on their Bible translation. Pray that God will show us the best time to begin making those connections and developing those relationships and that all will happen in His time and not according to our plan.

## CONTACT

Tim and Erin Schulte  
tim.schulte@lbt.org  
erin.schulte@lbt.org

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