

The
Clark

Family



Missionaries to Uruguay

March 2011

Dear Praying Friends,

It is difficult to start a letter such as this without dredging up a lot of emotions. In truth, if my family were not so determined to follow God's will, I would stop writing now, but I hope this will help my dear friends and supporters understand all that God has done in and through us. **Four years ago** my family began what we anticipated would be a swift deputation experience. In reality, it has been very long despite our best efforts which included a dynamic presentation of the ministry in Uruguay. In some respects, the timing is unimportant, since we know that God's timing is perfect, and we are all often guilty of expecting Him to work quickly when, in fact, His plan is frequently something else. So, we look at the slowness of our deputation experience, knowing that God was working in our family the entire time. We count it only as a puzzle piece in the much larger picture of His plan for our lives. This past May we finally surpassed 90% of our support goal. Expecting the remaining few percentage points to come in quickly, we immediately made plans to leave for Uruguay. We scheduled our pre-departure physicals and sent out our consulate paperwork which is required for residency in Uruguay. Our house was on the market and showing well, and we were confident it would sell quickly. We planned to leave whether or not it sold, presuming on God's goodness and His call in our lives. The physical exams were surprising. **Two family members were referred to specialists** for previously unknown conditions. The medical process delayed our departure by several months. Another obstacle was **a paperwork issue with one of the consulates that seemed never-ending**. By the time these two issues were finally resolved, I had received counsel from my pastor that **I should not go to Uruguay while my house remained unsold**. It was wise counsel, though admittedly not what I wanted to hear. Without my church's support on this front, **I was effectively stopped in my tracks**. And so we came to a halt in our ministry efforts. These issues were all individual puzzle pieces, but we began to see a small part of the big picture emerging.

Aside from the issues related to our stateside ministry and pending departure to Uruguay, there were issues within the country of Uruguay that caused us to suspect that God's larger plan was at opposition to ours. Shortly after surrendering to missions, we determined to work with a missionary in Uruguay whose ministry was highly recommended to us. It was only a few months later that we learned **God was leading him away from Uruguay**. So, we chose another missionary with whom to work. We interacted with this man and his family, and our hearts were knit to theirs. We spent over three years of our deputation telling of our plans to work with this man in his thriving work. We have learned in the last month that **God has clearly led this man away from Uruguay after 16 years of faithful service**. The ministry he started is growing under national leadership, and our entrance into that ministry would be disruptive. **We simply cannot go to the location we had chosen as our place of service**. Admittedly this is not a closed door to us, in and of itself, but it offers us another piece of God's eternal plan. At this point, we began to glimpse the reasons we had been hindered in our efforts for so long. We have also learned of **several other missionary families leaving Uruguay**, with whom we would have been pleased to work. Of the remaining missionary families in Uruguay from our board, neither is a viable option for us. It is also an interesting side-note that both of those missionaries are married to Uruguayan nationals.

It has become increasingly suspicious to us as a family to see so many missionaries leave Uruguay, while, with very few exceptions, **only those with familial ties to the country remain**. We also noted in the most recent

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election **Uruguay elected a communist for president.** This man has expressed a desire to remove American influences from Uruguay, as well as a commonality of cause with Hugo Chavez in Venezuela who has already closed the door to American missionaries. By themselves none of these details is significant, but taken together a picture begins to form. Of course, interpreting this picture is central to understanding God's plan in all of this, and there is no other key capable of interpreting the mysteries of life than the Word of God.

This brings me to the point of this letter. As we approached the first several of these obstacles, I was reading in the book of Joshua. As I read of the defeat at Ai, I was struck by Joshua's presumption. Prior to Jericho, he had sought God's guidance on the plan of attack, but prior to Ai, there was no record of any such inquiry. It appears that Joshua was trusting in an old promise, and although that promise was still valid, he was seeking to fulfill it by his own plans. The defeat at Ai was stunning, and in his discouragement, Joshua finally turned to God for an explanation. Had he sought the Lord before the battle, God would surely have revealed Achan's sin, in addition to giving Joshua the battle plan. I believe the Holy Spirit deeply impressed this passage on me, and I began to question whether I was in danger of following Joshua's example by **seeking to fulfill God's plan in my own way.** I asked God to reveal the individual steps in their proper sequence for my family. I could think of nothing more discouraging than to spend all the effort getting to Uruguay only to find that we were not in God's place of service once we got there. Of course, I still expected to find that we were exactly where He wanted, but there seemed no point in taking chances. So, as a family we privately sought God's plan.

As the weeks turned into months, we witnessed **multiple offers on our house fall through.** Even though we had done everything possible to make it attractive to a buyer, God continued to keep it in our hands. The small matters which should not have caused us any delay became mountains in our path, despite the opposite being our experience throughout most of deputation. At this point, I began to consider Paul's Macedonian call in Acts 16. I was struck that Paul had planned to go to Asia and Bithynia. Even though he had the advantage of apostolic authority and direct special revelation, his plans for his travels were apparently not God's plans. It was not that Paul was unspiritual by any means, but instead it was that God's ways are often mysterious to us as humans. So in this passage, **Paul is in mid-journey when the Spirit of God redirected his steps** to Macedonia where a great work was done.

As I considered these examples from Scripture and the circumstances that have coalesced around us, **it has become increasingly clear that God is supernaturally prohibiting us from reaching Uruguay.** Still, we moved very slowly because we understood how some people might view any change so late in our deputation ministry. While we agonized over whether God would call us to one thing and then redirect us to something else at the last moment, one person sought to encourage us to continue to Uruguay by citing the example of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. Contrary to that person's intent, God used this passage to confirm what we already suspected. Just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac at God's command, so we were and are willing to sacrifice all that we have to follow His will; however, as we approached the final steps of deputation, God had deliberately stopped our actions, just as He had done for Abraham. God impressed this passage on us, and we believe that deputation was God's way of building our faith and preparing us for the next step of our ministry. **We also believe that just as He directed Abraham to a different sacrifice, He has directed us in a new direction.** It was exciting to us to receive an offer on our house only days after submitting to God in this case.

Some may question our decisions, and that is to be expected. Our only concern is for God and His will, and we know that this "end" is good. As I considered other fields, I received many suggestions. Each one was offered in love, but each seemed equal in our minds and hearts to all of the others. **I felt no special burden for any new country.** As has become my pattern, **I turned to Scripture.** I was reading in Ecclesiastes and God impressed chapter 7, verse 8 on my heart, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." I knew this was for me. Deputation had seen me grow spiritually out of a proud spirit that I was not even aware of in the beginning. **I believe God has made clear we are at the end**

of our time as deputation missionaries and that He has something even better for us. Like Abraham in the Genesis passage, when God stopped the sacrifice of Isaac, He provided a better sacrifice in Isaac's place.

As I have stated on previous occasions, I truly believe God has called me to ministry. **As I travelled on deputation, I mentioned in a number of churches how God had given me a burden for churches in the United States.** Perhaps it was an odd statement for a missionary to make, but it was true. Many of our churches are in need. The materialistic mindset of some churches has deadened their effectiveness. Many are sliding into compromise and decay. My heart has broken time and again as we travelled. I know that burdens do not equal calls, but Psalm 37 explains that God gives us His desires as our own when we delight ourselves and trust in Him. Nonetheless, we have been very cautious about entertaining these ideas. I deeply desire to expound the Bible, to disciple believers, to evangelize the lost, and to counsel people with biblical solutions to life's problems. None of these things is unique to any specific location, but they are universal to pastoral ministry. In consideration of my burden and these desires, I recently prayed a very difficult prayer for a missionary. I told the Lord we were willing to stay in the United States, if that were His plan. We have no desire to impose our will on God, but over the last few weeks, **God has confirmed this direction to us.** Scripture lists the qualifications of a pastor in I Timothy 3. Not only have I long desired to serve in this capacity, by God's grace I am scripturally qualified and equipped to do so. It now seems clear to my family that God has used to last four years to prepare us for a ministry here in the United States. I have gained experience on deputation that I would never have gotten any other way. Even so, I don't claim to understand the reasons for many things we have experienced, but I must trust God in those things. So, as a result of all these considerations, I will immediately begin pursuing a stateside pastoral ministry focusing on church restoration. Our family wants our supporters to know that this new direction is not a change of purpose. **Our purpose has never changed.** We are still thoroughly committed to following God's will for our lives.

We want each of you to know how very grateful we are for you. We know many of you have sacrificed to support God's work through us. We recognize the magnitude of the changes we have shared, and we have no expectation of continued financial support. We would, however, appreciate your continued prayers, particularly regarding our specific place of ministry, which is yet undetermined. Please feel free to contact me with any questions either by email at "sclark2@baptistworldmission.org" or by phone at (843)767-8239.

In Christ's blessed service still,

Scott H. Clark

Scott, Mary, Esther, Benjamin, and Daniel Clark