

A Whirlwind of Joy

July 2017

Dear Friends and Prayer Supporters,

God is really a God of joy. Of course, the greatest joy is meeting and walking with Jesus. He connects us to the Father, to Life, and to true meaning. Yet, besides that deep spiritual joy of connecting with God, He is not opposed to sprinkling a bit as well into our daily lives – like frosting on a cake to sweeten it up, or a dusting of late-season snow to cool things down. Or, as my experience these past few months, sometimes a whirlwind of the stuff.

It really began with the end of the last semester at Bicol University in Legazpi. It had been a whirlwind semester, with over 20 Bible or discipleship studies going on weekly and activities scheduled nearly every night at our student center. To see such open doors for ministry was itself a joy, but the final burst of thanksgiving to the Lord came from our summer camp, which took place the end of March and beginning of April. Twenty-nine students attended, and I was so encouraged to see how they had grown over the past year. Four of our senior-high students also attended, which brought an extra dose of joy.

But that was not all. The camp was immediately followed by our church young-pros' retreat. A year ago we had no ministry to professionals. But now 17 loaded into the boat to head to our Cagraray Island campsite. What a great time of bonding with this group! The joy was boosted even more by the presence of the Calvary Chapel Chino Hills team, who had just finished assisting us with the student camp.

God wasn't finished, though. Two weeks after these events I was whisked away to the US for my first furlough in six years. Though the trip was only a short six weeks, the Lord found ways to pack every one of the 42 days with reasons to rejoice. A lot came from reconnecting with family and friends. (By His grace I was able to visit over 60 friends, a couple whom I hadn't seen for decades.) The opportunities to meet new people as well as share 11 times in churches and other gatherings in five states added a lot of joy as well to the furlough, and each encouraged me in unique and memorable ways. The chance to celebrate Mother's Day with my mom for the first time in 32 years, go hiking with friends in California, chow down on unlimited Mexican food, take a few bike rides, hang out on a California beach, and experience two Colorado snowfalls: these too all helped further smother the US trip with joyful memories. I also thank God so much for the staff in Bicol who "held down the fort" while I was gone, as well as friends from Manila who covered the six Sunday services in Legazpi that I could not teach while in the US. They were a great blessing to everyone!

Well, now that I'm back in the Philippines, the reasons to rejoice have not stopped. I continue to witness God's joy-producing work, first in how He has reignited the student ministry with good turnout at our initial semester activities. Our church attendance remains strong as well. Doors seem to be opening in a couple new high schools, and perhaps in another nearby community as well (please pray for all these potential opportunities). I'm also encouraged by 5 persons who committed or re-committed to help with campus and church ministry this coming semester. God is faithful.

These last months have truly been a whirlwind – but a joyful whirlwind. And though my body felt a bit exhausted from it all, my heart was refreshed and revitalized by God's clear hand at work in so many ways. Our God is truly a God of joy.

God bless you all who were used by God to sprinkle joy into my life these last months through your love, prayers, and other help. You are a huge blessing! And for those of you in the US I did not get to see as I sailed through (and unfortunately I missed more than I would have liked), may the Lord double the blessing of our fellowship when we do get to meet! Finally, for you all, have a great and joyful summer!

Rejoicing in our God,

Dave
David Matthews



Cooling off in Colorado – one joyful blessing while in the US

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Sprinkling with Prayer

When God works there is true joy, and God works, as we know, when we pray. The Lord has been reinforcing this truth to me since I returned to the Philippines, reminding me that if we ask we will receive (Matt 7:7), but if we do not ask, we may not (James 4:2). So, it's a good habit to ask often and ask boldly – for His glory.

Here are a few of the most pressing needs for which we could use prayer right now here in the Philippines:

1. ***Continued Open Doors and Hearts*** – We continue to press on at Bicol University, as well as to students in three other schools. Please pray more students will come to know Jesus and be strongly connected to ongoing ministries in our church, so that they can grow. Pray for open doors to reach more students in Orosite, Pag-asa, and STI high schools, as well as more opportunities among professionals and families. Student schedules are crazy, and it's hard to work out good meeting times. Thanks!
2. ***Worker and Leader Development*** – July 9 marks the start of our next semester of **DTS** (Discipleship Training School). A once-a-week class for those in the church who want to serve God better, this semester the class will focus on “Foundations of our Faith” and will cover basic doctrines of the Bible. Please pray for good attendance and for wisdom as I lead this. Thanks!
3. ***Boarding House*** – our Legazpi boarding house is filling up, with 13 student boarders. Please pray that God will use this boarding house to build relationships to the boarders and help them grow spiritually. Some of the boarders have not yet met Christ or are very new in their faith.
4. ***Island Ministry*** – I continue to oversee various aspects of the ministry on San Miguel and Cagraray Islands. Please pray that I will know how to balance my time for this. Please pray for the staff manning the campsite and radio ministries, as well as for Pastor Fernando and Pastor Leo, who are handling the three island churches.
5. ***Expansion in Legazpi*** – There is still so much to do among a community of 330,000 people, a country of over 100 million, and a world of some 7.5 billion. We of course are only one of so many doing the work, but please pray that God will allow us to continue to grow to fulfill our role, expanding in work force, facilities if so needed, as well as understanding and spiritual ability to effectively reach this city and beyond. May we never fall short of the potential God has for us here!
6. ***Health*** – An orthopedic surgeon in the US said that my lower back problem was not as bad as I had once been told, yet would still likely require surgery someday. At the moment I have chosen to press on, be careful, and see what God will do. Some days are good; other days now quite so much. Thanks for any prayers for continued healing and that this will not cause a hindrance in ministry. Thanks so much!

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matt 7:7)