

Shaardas' Story

It's God's story!

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Working together with local believers to disciple and train village churches.



Blessed Goodbyes – by Mandy

Almost five months ago we said a difficult goodbye in Obule with many tears, but what a blessing! Tears were not fun. Feeling torn from our home, life, and friends was not fun, but we hurt because we loved. We had given ourselves so separating was difficult. Going deep, being real, sharing life's joys and hardships together had created authentic relationships. We were excited about seeing our family in Michigan but it still meant separation. As we cried, I would often remind the girls our tears are worth it. Crying because

we loved is better than never crying because we never loved.

Our last couple weeks in Obule were full of blessings and sadness. Many of our friends invited us to their homes for a meal and expressed how thankful they were for our friendship and help. We were also able to express our love and appreciation for them. Lydia and Grace were busy writing notes to each friend, telling them how they saw God working in them and how much God loves them. In return many notes circled around and our girls were affirmed that their friendship and love for the Lord was mutual. Friends brought us gifts of peanuts, oranges, meals, and more. It was their way of expressing love and thanks. I felt loved and was humbled by their gifts that cost them.

Our goodbyes the last Sunday in church was one of the most meaningful, memorable, and holy moments I have had in Obule. I began to share from Philippians 1 where Paul says it is his joy to partner with the local believers in the gospel. As I spoke I could see Lydia crying on her bench and her friends also began to cry. I then began to cry. Then my interrupter, pastor and good friend



was also crying. Without prompting there was a ripple effect of tears all around the church. Young, old, women, men, my friends, neighbors, teen boys...it seemed everyone was touched and crying. It was so hard but so beautiful! I never felt so loved. Without a doubt our love for the people of Obule is mutual. God did and is doing something special, something few



people ever have the joy of experiencing. God's Spirit was there. He was there in the tears and love. He was present each day that year as people came to Christ, grew in Christ, and were transformed as His truth was shared. I stood there crying with my church family that Sunday trying to take in that holy moment. All I could hear was sniffles all around. Looking at faces of friends that God had touched, friends who have taught me much...I belonged. In Christ we are family and we love each other.

I reminded the church that this goodbye was not forever and that, thankfully, we would be coming back home (to Obule). I encouraged them that they don't need us; God remains in them. My prayer is that they grow in Christ while we were away. After church there were no handshakes; only hugs (not a pat-on-the-back hug, but long, meaningful hugs). I just cried as I was hugged by youth, by David who came to Christ this year, by Patricia who grew so much in Christ, by leaders who are our team, by women who are my best friends, and by old ladies who are dear to me. We had lunch all together but it felt like a funeral as people continued to cry and give me deep hugs. The youth in particular looked so sad. But I was so happy - loving and being loved is a beautiful thing.

The day of our departure finally came. You can only say goodbye so long. Once we were on our way we were ok and excited. We have prayed for our friends in Obule every day since then. We pray they are growing in Christ while we are away.



FULL CIRCLE – TIME FOR MORE GOODBYES

We are now preparing to say goodbyes in Michigan. Five months here has allowed us to reconnect with family, invest in friendships, adjust to life here, attend school, and to be part of church. We enjoyed family, friends, Michigan, seasons, supporters, church, comforts, beauty...and now it is difficult to separate. To say goodbye comes with tears. We love; therefore, it hurts. To not hurt or cry is to not invest, give of yourself, feel, experience, and be present. We have no regrets. Leaving will always be hard, but it is worth it.

Thank you for your prayers as we leave. The transition periods are very hard and we would like to skip over them. We have to choose not to be stressed at these stressful times. Each time we leave it reminds me that this is when my faith takes action. I need to put into action all I say I believe.

We fly out of Detroit Monday January 29 and will arrive in Uganda on January 31. We will rest with some friends a couple days before we drive 6 hours to our home in Obule. Right now Uganda is about 100 degrees hotter than Michigan! Pray for our adjustment.

We want to thank everyone for receiving us, helping us, and loving us! It means a lot to us to be welcomed back to Michigan. Thank you to our family and friends for letting us in and out of your lives with grace. Thank you to Georgetown CRC for providing a home away from home for us. Thank you to Hudsonville Christian and Unity for receiving our kids as part of your schools. We are grateful for all our supporting churches and ministry partners who gave us time to share. Thank you for sharing our excitement for all God is doing in Obule.

Now we pray that you continue to grow in Christ until we meet again.

Testimony of Identity in Christ speaking to a child:

"We met briefly in October, when my son talked with you after the worship service. I just wanted to let you know that he still carries his 'Who I am in Christ' bookmark around with him to school and other outings. It's pretty sweet to hear him thank God for "the bookmark minister." And, with today being Giving Tuesday I thought it might make you smile to know that you received a small donation from our son, out of his own money. He was the first of the kids to know where he wanted to give, because he said 'more people need to hear what is on my bookmark.' Thank you for your faithfulness to God's calling on your life, and for the way you minister so well to people moment by moment. Know that you have a 7 year old prayer partner over here in Michigan."

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