

THE FOXES IN FRANCE

May/June 2008

"Oh, you're missionaries to France... That sounds like fun!"

Dear praying friends,

Some American Christians have a fixation on having fun. Everything is measured by how fun it is. "How was camp?" "Oh, it was fun!" And if something isn't fun, it quickly loses its attraction – even church! The opening comment was made to me by a Christian lady at church. While this is not the first time that someone has made this statement (although we generally hear it more from non-Christians than from Christians), her words reminded me that there are perhaps many who do not yet understand why missions in France (or, for that matter, in any other country in the world) is far from being "fun". In fact, the word "fun" does not even enter my mind when I think about our ministry in France. As we are preparing to return to France, perhaps this is an opportune moment to share a few thoughts about this subject.

FAMILY – For us the most difficult part of missionary work has always been leaving our families for years at a time. Perhaps this would not have been so difficult if we did not have such wonderful families, but Lori and I truly love our parents, our brothers and sisters, and even our in-laws! ☺ So, that makes it much harder to leave. Of course, having our own children with us all these years has been a great source of joy. But in a few weeks we will return to France having only our youngest with us, while the four older children will remain in the U.S. And I assure you, that will not be fun!

LOSS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY – One aspect of being a missionary that I had not anticipated was the idea of losing my identity. Here in America, I am someone. My parents, my diplomas, my job experiences, even my athletic abilities have all made me who I am. And in the States, these things mean something to people. However, in France no one knows my parents, no one has ever heard of the companies I have worked for, and the French could care less that I graduated from Penn State or from Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary. To the French I am a nobody. And you know what? It's really no fun to be a nobody!

CLIMATE – For many, climatic conditions are a significant factor in choosing where to live. Lori and I grew up enjoying four distinct seasons, each one quite pleasant in its own way. However, Normandy is known for its cloudy, cool, rainy climate. Summer is far too short, and rain far too frequent. It is not uncommon for days and even weeks to go by without seeing the sun. Not only is Normand weather not much fun, it can be downright depressing!

RAMPANT IMMORALITY – One of the most wearing and perverse characteristics of France is the constant, blatant display of immorality – on the billboards, on TV, on the beach, in their kiosks, etc. As a father who has tried to raise two boys to be pure, this has been a constant challenge and absolutely NO FUN!

REJECTION OF GOD – France takes pride in its secularism. When the French talk about being a secular country, what they mean is that God is not a part of their daily lives. Sadly, many French people have even developed a latent hatred toward God. They blame Him for all of the ills of the world and give Him no credit for any of the good. Since we are in France as ambassadors for Christ, it is very difficult to face constant rejection. The French people are truly without God and without hope in the world. No wonder depression, alcoholism, and suicide are all rampant in France. This is a constant burden that we carry. Several of our neighbors have taken their own lives because they had no hope and would not open their hearts to God. While France may be a fun place to go on vacation, it is NOT a fun place to minister. And I could give still many more reasons, but I'm sure that you get the idea. So, if having fun is not our motivation for serving in France, then what is? Paul provides the answer in his own testimony...

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

However, even as I share these thoughts, I do not mean to convey the idea that our lives are void of fun. Obviously, God gives us many wonderful moments as a family or as a church where we truly enjoy ourselves. But as Christians, living in France is not a fun experience. We are there because we believe that is where God would have us to serve. And in spite of what I have shared in this letter, we do not find it grievous to return to France. In fact, our joy, true joy, comes from being in God's will, wherever that might lead us. For the foreseeable future, that means France, and we are content with that. Do continue to pray for us. We leave for France on June 18. Thank you.

In Calvary's love , the Foxes

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