

The Schlelein Family

Missionaries to the Tsongas of southern Africa

JANUARY 2013 | LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA

What is Furlough?

We've been home on furlough since October 1 and return to South Africa in three weeks.

But what exactly is furlough?

By the end of Acts 14, Paul's first missionary journey was complete, so he returned to his home church in Antioch. "And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples" (vss. 27-28).

Get the church together. Speak of God's mighty works. Describe conversions. Hang out with believers *a lot*. That is furlough. But maybe this is a bit simplistic. Paul was single, but most missionaries have families to visit and families to care for. Furlough is a time to share Christmas with those we haven't seen in years. It allows us to re-stock items that are missing, recharge a body that is tired, recount the need for prayer, and rehearse the wonders of the Gospel.

But the rule (with exceptions) is that furloughs should be both infrequent and brief. Plane tickets and travel are very expensive. Our second language suffers in English-only America. The native flock often weakens if the pastor is away too long (like a year). Brief furloughs are a blessing; extended furloughs can be a curse.

What to Ask Missionaries on Furlough

1. "What made you want to be a foreign missionary? Is it what you thought it would be?"
2. "May we watch your kids this evening so you and your spouse can go out?"
3. "What have you been reading?" If the missionary doesn't have access to books, offer to buy him some. If he says he doesn't *like* reading, ask him if he has considered another line of work.
4. Do NOT ask: "How's Africa?" Or, "How's China?" This is like asking: "How's Earth?"
Be specific and creative with questions like: "What are the three greatest challenges you have faced?" Or, "How is the church in Peru different than the US?"

Some Prayer Requests

1. Melinda and baby. We are expecting our fourth child in May.
2. Eric, one of our church leaders. A job nearby so he can join our Bible college.
3. Uber-teammates Seth and Amy Meyers. Strength and success in our absence.

Joyful in Him,

Paul, Melinda and gang