



The Atkins Family

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West Africa

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It's exciting to see the first wing of the new shop taking shape!

Teen Conference *by Emily*

Every time I am invited to speak at a conference in Guinea-Bissau I am given a theme to center my sermons around. This past month I was invited to speak at a youth conference in a neighboring town and the theme they gave me was Christian dating. At first the topic was a little intimidating, because dating is such a cultural thing. But, after lots of prayer and lots of time in the Scripture, the Spirit led me to several specific passages and the sermons took shape.

I had three days, so the first night I talked about finding your identity in Christ and the importance of using your teen years to figure out who He created you to be and how He created you to serve in the church and the world at large. Once you know those things you are in a much better position to understand the kind of husband or wife who can truly partner with you in life and ministry. (If you're interested, we were in 1st Corinthians 6:12-15a, 7:6-7, 7:17, and Colossians 2:6-10.)

The second night I talked about the blessings of Christian marriage - the ways that the Holy Spirit can help spouses understand, love, and forgive each other, and the needs that God created in us for perfect love and validation that only He can meet. In light of that, we looked at why Paul counsels believers not to marry unbelievers, and the blessings of His guidance and presence that we miss out on when we disregard that counsel. (Amos 3:3, James 4:1-3, and 2nd Corinthians 6:14-7:1)

The third sermon was on Sunday morning and I talked about the difference between making our plans and preparing for God's plan. Specifically with dating and marriage, I talked about what it really looks like practically to prepare so that you are ready for God's purpose for you. (Proverbs 16:1-4, Matthew 25:1-13)

There were just over 100 teens packed into the tiny church, and we had a great time together. Honestly the hardest part was the brutal commute. The church is only 26 miles from our house, but the drive took me 3 bouncing, jouncing hours round trip each day because of the condition of the road. The funniest part of the whole weekend was the question and answer time after the Sunday morning service. They asked me if it is a sin for the woman to be older than the man in a relationship (culturally frowned upon here), and if young adults should or shouldn't date young teens, which was followed up by how old do you need to be as a young teen to secretly promise to date a young adult when you get older (in case you are wondering I said that was actually an even worse plan than the first one!). There were lots of other questions and lots of laughter and it was such a privilege for me to spend the weekend with that great group of teenagers!



Major Milestones *by Jason*

We have passed some major milestones in the shop construction this month! Though we're still making incremental progress on the house, the recent change of hands of the school hosting the current shop space has meant we've had to devote the lion's share of our attention to getting the first wing of the new shop done as quickly as possible, and my crew has risen to the challenge! There were several specific issues waiting for us in the next steps for the shop, and we are now in a good rhythm having solved them.

The shop's footprint is twice the next biggest building at the site. The shop also needed to be oriented so one roof face points south to optimize the solar panels which will power the whole base. This coupled with the fact that we (cont'd)

Major Milestones (cont'd) *by Jason*

(...) wanted to keep the noise-creating and more "public" spaces together in the upper corner of the base meant that the location the shop needed to be built on would require quite a bit of fill. With the foundation finished, I've been working steadily with the loader to bring dirt from our mine to fill and compact to bring us up to the level of being ready to pour the slab. The tractor has been a huge help. Even though it's fairly small as tractors go, its bucket is still a lot bigger than a shovel! Many trips between the mine and the shop have gotten the first wing up to the level and well compacted. After running drain plumbing and some underground electrical conduit, filling with a layer of gravel then compacting, and setting forms, we were ready for the first big slab pour!

The first big challenge was how we could pour a big area and have it end up flat. The many buildings I've seen in Guinea-Bissau have shown that the local way of putting slabs down doesn't often end up flat. This is largely related to the limitations of having to mix cement one sack at a time rather than being able to call for a cement mixer. Even working steadily with a good cement mixer, we can only lay about 250 sq ft a day, and even then have trouble finishing it before it sets up in the west African heat and sun. The wing of the shop that we needed to pour is 1300 sq ft and we were hopeful we could get a slab that was flat across the whole thing and wouldn't crack at the joints from one pour to the next.



My crew has risen to the challenge and learned a new way of finishing concrete slabs. We're now in a good rhythm and making steady progress on this big project!



The new shop is divided into a pair of 20'x60' wings on either side of a central 40'x60' fabrication area. We're working to quickly complete one of the wings, seen here ready for the remaining five sections of slab to complete its floor.

Two breakthroughs made a big difference, and we've now hit a good stride. The first seems so obvious that I'm embarrassed it took this long to figure it out, but not being a concrete guy, I had to puzzle it out for myself. As we're putting the concrete down and leveling it, we now pull plastic sheeting over it to keep the water from evaporating too quickly. This one cheap trick has bought us several hours of finishing time and now means that we can wait to finish the beginning of the pour until after we've already laid the end of it. That extra time means we can do a much better job of finishing edges and such. It has also given us time to use the tool that's made the second big difference - our power trowel! It came over in the container last year, and though I'm still figuring out exactly how to use it, the floor we've finished with it is far smoother and flatter than the previous ones. It looks like it's going to be a great tool!

Though we still have a lot of work to get to a finished shop building, it is encouraging to see the slab growing and the very first blocks being laid to begin the walls around the part of the slab that's poured. We'd like to thank all of you for your encouragement and involvement in helping us get this far, and we look forward to sharing some pictures with walls going up soon! Stay tuned!



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