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# Mongolian Memorandum

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HOPE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS | ASIA



Nami works for Campus Crusades.

Dear Friends,

I hope you are all well and enjoying the slowly warming weather. Even here in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, we have seen the telltale signs of spring pushing through the usual cold. The days are longer, the snow has all but melted away, and we are pulling on our light jackets instead of heavy winter ones. The city is livelier now as people take to the streets and markets to enjoy those extra few hours in the day. After a month back in Mongolia, I am happy to say I have adjusted back to the time, weather, and even the pollution! My time in the U.S. was wonderful! I was able to enjoy Christmas with my entire family, visit several schools and churches, and enjoy some down time as well. It was a blessing to be hosted by several families, and I am so thankful for all the care I received.

This visit also presented the opportunity to bring a student with me to the States. Duke graduated from our university this winter and is pursuing his call from God to become a pastor. We originally met through another missionary friend, and since then he has become a close friend. I have even been “adopted” into his family with the use of familial terms when we speak. This might seem like a simple thing to most of us Westerners, but calling someone family here has stronger connotations. It means a mutual relationship of responsibility, and a closer connection than just friends.

Unlike most of the Western culture, here in Mongolia even close friends do not often speak on deep topics or correct and advise about one another’s lives. However, family is a different matter. Family can ask hard questions, say critical things, or even rebuke actions that risk damaging a person or family’s reputation. So, extending the right of family to a person also gives them the right to speak to you more directly than usual.

The more I am around university students the more I realize that Mongolians struggle culturally with the authority structure of the church and of discipleship. This kind of admonition and support is viewed as more of a family affair. In some ways, this is difficult. Some people react negatively to being counseled by non-family—they react by getting angry or pulling away, or they simply ignore what is being taught to them because they do not recognize the teacher as having any authority to speak into their lives. On the other hand, some students draw even closer toward their mentors and find a new family that loves and supports them sometimes more faithfully than their own family.



Duke decided the beach was pretty okay.

## Prayer Requests:

- 1) Many young people are suffering from abuse (verbal, physical, and psychological).
- 2) Preparations for summer camps are underway.
- 3) I am preparing to begin a Bible study in my home. Pray that God will lead and bless.

I have laughed with some of my fellow foreigners over this past year as I realize I now have nearly a dozen new family members! Little brothers and sisters who come to my office or house to say hello. I used to think they came mostly for food or to relax in a quiet environment away from their own chaotic families, but I have begun to suspect that there is a deeper pull. From the insistent hugs and the long silences that wait for questions, from the reluctance to leave and much more, I am realizing they have come to experience love.

They are unused to someone asking them about their day, their classes, friends and activities. It is unfamiliar for someone to check in on them to see if they are doing well at school, or attending church, or being careful in their behavior with others. They do not quite know what to do with positive words and encouragement. "You're smart; you can do this." "I believe in you; keep going." "I love you, and I'm here for you." These little things—that so many of us grew up hearing from loving parents or extended family and even from our church families—these sentences stop young people here in their tracks.

Recently a counselor friend told me children become what you tell them they are. I am working with a country of young people whose families have told them they are worthless, useless, or ugly; that they are not as good as another sibling; or that they wished they had not had them. Young people have reported to me unimaginably harsh or demoralizing words that their parents spoke to them. While this is not the reality for every child here, it is the cultural norm, especially for boys who are expected to grow up strong and capable. They are trained to be such by encouraging promiscuity, expecting them to be involved in fights and other such violent behavior, and refusing to correct wrong behavior so they grow to be independent people. These young people are craving attention and structure, but they cannot seem to find it.

When I talk to young people from the U.S. who are interested in missions, I tell them God will use all their talents, interests, and training on the field. I encourage them to take time to learn as much as possible so they have more abilities and can be more used by Him. But in reflecting on the past year in my ministry I have only just come to realize that our great God, who made plans for us before we were even knit together in our mothers' wombs, does not limit Himself to our interests or our education.

Here I am, the second of five children, living in a place where I suddenly find that being a big sister is one of the greatest things I can do. Who would have thought the craziness of a "big" family would have prepared me for a home full young people? Or those conflicts with my sisters would have taught me how to better resolve conflict? Who would have thought that family game night, baking cookies, or long chats about life could be done in service of our heavenly Father?

This year I have been challenged to love His sons and daughters as though they were my brothers and sisters. He is teaching me that the family of God is a beautiful part of the redemption of this world.

With love from our Father,  
*Nichole Barr*



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