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| **The Last Lap** |
| A rocky mountain with blue sky and clouds  Description automatically generated |
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| April 2024  Recently, with the weather taking a cooler, wetter turn (and participants making their thoughts about cyclists well known on the neighbourhood WhatsApp group!) I’ve been getting back into running. We live in a subdivision which is essentially a big rectangle, and my go-to exercise is simply to do ‘laps’ around it (if you follow me on Strava, all you can see is a very thick orange line). When I can see I’m coming to the end of my allotted 30 minutes, I like to try and turn on the afterburners, like the great track stars I used to watch on the telly when they heard the bell clattering for the last lap. This euphoria lasts about three houses’ worth before usually resulting in my worst lap of the lot! |
| Well, we are very much on the last lap here. Everyday occurrences take on an unexpected poignancy. The other day the gas tank for our oven ran out and I popped across the road to swap it for a replacement. Not one of my favourite household jobs, I must say. But as I loaded it into the back of the car, I realised that might be the last time I ever do that in Bolivia. |
| Of course, other ‘last times’ have been a bit more meaningful from the get-go. Our last Christmas at Trinity. Or our last Easter, just past. On Saturday past, Sam marked his last birthday here with his friends. |
| Like a runner on the last lap of the 10,000 metres, it is all going by with unexpected haste! And it is by God’s grace alone that we continue ‘running’ though the tiredness is palpable. |
| In mid-March, I attended my final (for now!) MICN ReCharge conference, which of course we had the pleasure of hosting here in Santa Cruz. Though I was in charge of the practicalities, Amanda and I were mostly able to engage fully in the proceedings. We were hugely blessed by the ministry of Charles Price, who very kindly agreed to come and teach (and take a couple of cases back to Toronto for us!). Of course, we expected some wise words for international church pastors. We had not anticipated so much that would speak so directly to our current situation of unexpected transition. It all boiled down to two simple, easier-said-than-done, yet absolutely vital words: trust God. |
| As usual, there was also plenty of time built in for fellowship and sharing of experience with the pastors and wives present from all over Latin America; Amanda enjoyed getting to be part of it all for the first time too. It was a pleasure for us to show off this special corner of the continent for us while strengthening these ties of fellowship with others who work in this growing, but niche, area of the worldwide church. As pretty much each one of us said as our four days together ended and we took turns to give thanks, “You guys get me!” And the importance of that cannot be overstated. |
| Naturally, the church saw some immediate benefit, even though the conference took place on weekdays when most of our congregation are hard at work. Charles ministered to us the Sunday before, and MICN’s executive director David Fresch hung around for a few days afterward with his lovely wife Scottie. He was kind enough to meet with the church board on Saturday morning and then preach the next day. |
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| The weekend after Easter, we took (barring any Canadian visa snags!) our final trip to La Paz, for our final gathering with the Latin Link Bolivia team, the annual spiritual retreat. As I reflected with the team on our last evening together, back in 2016 when we joined the on-field team, with a growing sense of isolation in Trinidad, we knew that we needed increased fellowship and support. Yet we had no idea just how vital that would prove to be. It was little over a year later, after all, that Amanda was diagnosed with burnout. Indeed, my most precious memory with our team is the afternoon they set aside to pray with us in a small room up at the 2018 International Assembly in Guatemala, most of them having barely got to know us over the past year. At that point we were in the deepest of valleys, but even then we could see how loved and supported we were. We knew we were in good hands. |
| It has been our joy since then to grow more in the team, taking on some leadership roles and mentoring several of our younger members over the years. In fact, Amanda and I couldn’t help but notice in La Paz that we are now firmly in the ‘older 50%’ of team members now! That has brought a smile to our faces, as has seeing some of those younger members grow more into key team roles themselves. It was good to be together with these people, some of them long-term colleagues, others there for their only team gathering as Striders. That’s the nature of missions. It’s always changing: everything but the Commissioner. It’s not about us, don’t you know! |
| Extending the athletics metaphor, I will now pass the baton on to Amanda, who has a bit to share about a very special gathering *she* was part of just last weekend. |
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| *I had the opportunity to spend four days in Cochabamba attending a women’s spiritual retreat hosted by Azmera, a ministry that hosts retreats around the world to pour into women who live and serve cross-culturally. When I learned that the 2024 retreat for Latin America was going to be in Cochabamba, I promised myself I would go. Two months from moving home, I did feel at times that maybe a retreat was a bit of a luxury, but I tried to internally justify it by saying that it would be helpful to have experienced the retreat if I am going to promote and maybe even fundraise for other LAM Canada missionaries once I start working in Member Care. Once I got there, I realized my self-justification was a bit of a delusion and that I was absolutely there for myself. I needed a break, and I needed some space, and someone had come along and said, “Please let me help you take a break.” It felt wonderful.* |
| *There were loads of North American gifts and swag that we got to enjoy. There was teaching on Mark 6: “Come away with me”. There was a birthday party for everyone (with more gifts). We were put into Connection Circles where we got to share and be vulnerable with each other. There was a hairstylist, a crafts corner and pedicures with covering prayer. The worship times were intense and powerful and all the tired, burdened women in that room cried a lot. And there was free therapy! Counsellors came down and just listened to me.* |
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| *A lot of what I took into that retreat with me was about Sam, and why we’re moving home, and how intense and difficult managing him has been recently. I felt such a sense of awe as I realized how many women attending and volunteering that weekend had also adopted. One of my Connection Circle leaders had adopted, the lady who painted my toes had adopted, the lady who cut my hair had adopted, my counsellor had adopted, not to mention all the other women in attendance whom I just shared and chatted away with because they understood my experience in such a unique way.* |
| *It was such a special experience, and I would love to one day be able to volunteer with them and bless other women still serving cross culturally.* |
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| I’m so glad Amanda had that experience, yet can’t deny it’s great to have her back home with the pace of preparations only increasing! As you can imagine, there is so much to pray for. |
| Give thanks that we have already sold a lot of our ‘bigger’ items (furniture etc) in a pre-sale over the last couple of weeks. Pray that the rest of it gets sold, not least our car! And pray for plenty of energy as we prepare to sell everything else, probably over a couple of garage sales, one at the school and one at our house, in May. |
| Keep praying for the visa application. We have decided to go ahead and apply for my new UK passport (see last email for more on this), accepting some delays in the visa process, which likely won’t be resolved till we get to Canada. Pray that this will not prove too much of a complication as I look for work in particular. |
| And pray for our emotions. Until now, we haven’t really had the time or space to dwell too much on what is happening; indeed, that might remain the case until we finally leave in June. But Sam in particular is getting noticeably more nervous/sad about the move the closer it comes. Pray for him especially, and pray that events like this weekend’s birthday party can provide him with some great ‘closure’. |
| We will do our best to keep you posted as the finish-line looms larger! Till then, thank you again for your prayerful support! |
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