Dear Family and Friends,

From Steve:

Thank you so much for your prayers and words of encouragement in response to Hannah's update last month. We truly needed your loving support and words of encouragement. We have read many uplifting emails and felt once again the embrace of our family who is so far away but is so obviously with us in spirit.

One of Hannah's specific requests was concerning the conference I was at when she wrote. The conference was great and I want to tell about one specific thing I learned there. One of the worst things for a man to feel is aimlessness, and I was feeling very aimless when I went to that seminar. I was trying to effectively juggle my time between Bible study and general reading, guitar practice, housework, community and relationship building, time with Hannah, and time alone with God. I was feeling lost and overwhelmed. While the conference didn't take any of these tasks off my plate, I have a better sense of how I need to prioritize my responsibilities. Thank you to everyone who prayed for God to give us guidance and sense of direction; your prayers have been heard.

"R" is for Relationships

The clearest, most practical thing I took away from three days, jam-packed with Bible study and lectures was "stay focused on building relationships." God is definitely helping us in the process of reaching this community and one of the ways He's helping us is by showing us ways of building relationships. Here are some examples...

Going to visit people at their homes is one of the ways people get to know people in a town like this. If the person is home, you shout out a greeting to get their attention and then chat until the cows come home, literally sometimes. It's been a process to just get out and start doing this, but it's happening on a much more regular basis.

A second method God has blessed me in recently is a form of "community service." I've been helping my next-door neighbors every Saturday load up their big truck with the town's groceries that they sell the next morning. Then I go down with them and help unload. Since that involves going all over town and seeing people again and again, it's been a big help in getting to know names and faces. It also saves me the cost of going to the gym. Try lifting 20-30 200-pound bags of potatoes! Hannah says I'm getting buff.

Soccer games are also a way I'm getting to know the youth of the town. Every game is time spent with the people I want to get to know and reach out to. I missed a game three weeks ago because I went to Lima to pick up my Missionary Visa; the next weekend it poured rain; and then I had to go visit a guy who had his whole flock of sheep stolen. 70 were found in the end and he only lost 10, but he was still shaken and needed encouragement. Yesterday, a guy jokingly teased me that I was going to be fined for excessive absences at the soccer games. He was consoled to hear my reasons for not being there.

March 1st was another breakthrough day for us. Most of Ushpabamba went on an all-day hike way up the mountain and I got to go along. Hannah and I are no longer strangers in this small town. My presence was celebrated openly as we toiled along through the countryside. I had just learned a Quechua phrase that means "long live" when one of the leaders of the town yelled to me from up the mountain, "Hey, Steve, yell something!" So I called out in Quechua, "Kaw sachu, Ushpabamba!" To which the whole company replied, "Kaw sachu!" It was great fun! But more than that, I sense that from now on I am part of the town to a much larger extent than before. This is not meant to sound like a boast unless I am boasting in
what the Lord is doing on our behalf in order to give us a voice to the people we are trying to reach.

"R" is for Rejoice

Life, of course, continues to have its ups and downs. There are days when, as my uncle put it to me, victory is NOT getting on a plane that day. We feel empty and lonely at times. But, at the same time, we rejoice to see how God is working in us, around us, and through us. The band "Downhere" put it well when they said, "Well, this is not what I imagined. But this is real, life in the trenches and we are livin' the dream."

From Hannah:
Your emails have been a great blessing to us. Thank you for responding so immediately and warmly when we cried out. While I (Hannah) wrote that email, Steve was away at a retreat for church planting. He came back with fresh excitement, as once again the focus on relationships, prayer and Bible study were brought to the forefront. Years ago, Steve will say, he learned "don't expect the glory of today to carry you through the trials of tomorrow." We must always cling to our Savior newly every day.

Praise God for His interest in our lives and yours! Life has not been a constant high since we last wrote, but I did sense God immediately responding to prayer, spiritually and in practical areas:
1. I found a bounce in my step I had been missing for some time.
2. I found myself singing spontaneously.
3. I felt like I surged forward in my Spanish conversation skills.
4. My conversations with a neighbor-friend felt naturally deeper, more relaxed.
5. Reclaiming privacy in our kitchen and bedroom areas also made a difference.
6. Some fellow missionaries have welcomed us several times into their home and that has proved restful and edifying.

The Lord multiplied a few loaves and fishes ...
Yesterday afternoon, I prepared a stew. A small stew meant for two. I couldn't wait to eat it! As it simmered down, we could see there was going to be more than we could eat. So Steve decided to invite a neighboring family. There wasn't that much extra, so I put on about 15 potatoes to boil.

Not convinced that the Yeses had been sincere, Steve went to the highways and byways and invited every neighbor at our end of Ushpabamba.

And then He multiplied a few people...
They all came, popping in the door one after the other. We ended up with 12 guests. Apart from two who showed up too late, everyone got a little share in the stew. But I was beside-myself-mortified, and even more deeply for those last two. I know what a Peruvian-sized serving should look like. I even know what a Hannah-sized serving should look like! Only in hindsight did I think of watering the stew down to soup, and frying up a dozen eggs to bulk it up. Otherwise there was just nothing available to add to the meal. No rolls, no Doritos, no minute rice. Live and learn.
After hiding in our bedroom for a few minutes with my hands on my face, I made myself come back into the room and realized that miraculously everyone, from the boldest to the shyest, was having a great time. There was laughter, there were stories, and at the end, a young lady approached me and asked if we can cook together again sometime, preparing enough food to invite even more people! I was furious with Steve for the uncontrolled inviting antics, but I shared his joy that this event brought a lot of neighbors to our table and "community happened."

God didn't need to multiply the food--He multiplied grace instead. And I, more than anyone, seemed to be in need of grace that night. We thank God for filling our table. Next time we'll fill their plates, too!

Life doesn't stop being an adventure. It can put us at our wits' end sometimes, and we can fail to respond correctly. But in the end, God is the faithful one. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths."

**A Prayer Request**

I (Steve) had a good conversation last night with Marco, the president of Ushpabamba. He was one of the people I invited to our humble meal from the highways and byways. I asked Marco about some different customs and superstitions that I've been seeing in practice. One of those, in particular, is very interesting. Two springs from up the mountain has dried up. It's a major concern for the town since these springs are irrigation water during the dry season. Another town near Ushpa had the same thing happen recently and fixed the problem by burying some food and killing a duck for the mountain spirits. It worked! So now Ushpabamba is going to do the same thing for their two dry springs. And I've been invited to go along on this animal sacrifice to the local water demons. Elijah took the prophets of Baal and all Israel up on a mountain and said, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If Baal is god, serve him. If the LORD is God, serve Him." God then proved who was God by pouring out fire that burnt up the offering, dried up the water, and licked up the dust. Now, in the 21st century, I'm being invited to an animal sacrifice where the people believe that spirits are in charge of their water supply. I don't want to put God through some foolish test, but I also believe that God has given us the Bible to show us who He is and how He works. I covet prayers right now!

Please also pray for Hannah as she flies to Lima early tomorrow to pick up her Missionary Visa. I was able to pave the way for her since I went through the same process a month ago. But please pray that all the people she deals with be helpful and that things go smoothly. We paid the extra money for her to take a two-way flight (an hour and 20 minutes each way) instead of being on a bus for over 20 hours each way. I'm grateful that we could do that. So it's not the time we'll be apart; it's just her solo trip to the immigration office that makes me want all the prayers we can get.