

News from Sarah Casson July 2017

"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." Hebrews 12: 1-2.

Nearing the finishing line ... Saturday 1st July, 11.11 pm: the moment I mustered the courage to click "Send", and dispatch my PhD thesis to the Kings examinations office. I had dreamed of this for so long, but submitting something electronically is a strange anti-climax: Did it really go? Could I not retrieve it, cast one more glance over it, correct that glaring typo, and re-send it? The lateness of the hour and the last train home helped me to resist this temptation. As I stumbled numbly over Waterloo Bridge, streams of theatre goers and revellers reminded me that in other worlds, Saturday nights are for celebrating! I tried to mark the moment by taking in the beauty of the illuminated Thames, framed by its iconic landmarks: the Eye, the Houses of Parliament, St. Paul's, the Shard. I've become so accustomed to this star-studded walk to the Kings library. In a few weeks' time, it will return to being a tourist destination for me. Two days later, I delivered two alarmingly large copies of the thesis to the examinations office, soft bound in the stipulated royal blue, for dispatch to my examiners. The ritual of relinquishing these heavy blue burdens helped the reality to sink in.



Slowing down ... Two and a half weeks on, I am coming to rest and savouring the novelty of mental space. Over the past six months I've felt that I was passing through a long, dark tunnel. Emerging into the daylight, I'm dazed and a little disorientated by the freedom, and still trying to find my bearings. I'm aware of a deep-seated fatigue, but unwinding and re-establishing normal sleep patterns takes time. It's difficult to focus and concentrate, especially on screens, and to make decisions. I also find myself feeling anxious that I'm not using every micro second profitably. But my internal resources have been depleted by several years of relentless

doctoral discipline and solitary study. The water table needs replenishing if I am to be fruitful again. My favourite activities right now include staring into space with a cuppa, spotting birds, following butterflies, walking in hills and along rivers, listening to silence, playing with my niece Anna, and lounging around with friends.



The final hurdle ... I haven't quite made it across the finishing line yet: I still need to go through my viva. This is an oral examination with two external examiners during which I have to defend my thesis. It will take place on September 6th, and will require some preparation (including reading all that my examiners have published!). At the end of the viva, the examiners will give me my result. This could be anything from minor corrections (up to 3 months of work) through major corrections (up to 6 months) to re-presentation of the thesis (up to an extra year and a half!). In the meantime, I'm looking forward to a week's holiday in the matchless wilderness of the

Cairngorm mountains in the Scottish Highlands with my brother John.



The technical bit ... What's it for? My thesis is about the small but significant Greek connecting word yap. It crops up 144 times in Romans! It is sometimes translated "for" in English, as in Romans 8:37-39: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **For** I am convinced that neither death nor life. will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In many cases, though, "for" isn't a good translation, and yap often gets omitted and overlooked in interpretation. But ignoring yap is a bit like ignoring a road sign: you may end up at the wrong destination! Some interpretations of Romans do seem to end up in the wrong place, hampering our understanding of the letter. Is it all about individual sin and salvation, or about how Jews and Gentiles are all included in God's people, and interdependent in God's purposes? I use a modern communication theory, relevance theory, to try to understand yap in a fresh way. I argue that it guides readers to distinguish between main points in the argument and supporting or strengthening information. This helps to highlight the most important parts of what Paul is saying, and to see how different parts of the argument fit closely together.

Staying the course ... I have found my PhD a long and often lonely road. I've learnt a lot through it about perseverance and pacing myself, and about digging deep to discover resources I didn't know I had. God has sustained me with his grace for the long haul. Jesus' constant companionship has given me strength and stamina each day. The Holy Spirit has brought creativity out of the chaos of my thoughts. There's been solidarity in sharing and comparing the grind with fellow students such as Japanese friend Rieko. Rieko participated in an Alpha course at our church in Richmond while she was in the UK. We've continued to keep in skype contact since she went back to Japan. At the beginning of April, Rieko made a decision to follow Jesus. This was a big source of joy during the uphill push of the last few months of my thesis.



I'm particularly thankful for the incisive input of my supervisor, Dr. Eddie Adams. He has been a patient coach who's helped me to chart out the course, focus on what's essential and keep on putting one foot in front of the other. I wouldn't have stayed the course, either, without the support of my aunt and uncle, who have very kindly let me live with them for the past five years. And it's only been possible for me to pursue these studies because of the ongoing financial support many of you have given me. Thank you for your faithfulness and generosity.

Looking ahead ... Once the viva is out of the way and the corrections are made, there are a number of possible roles for me back in Bunia, DRC, including returning to teach at Shalom University, and translation consulting. As always, there is far more work to be done than there are workers to do it. It is tempting to dive in and attempt to respond to all the immediate needs that clamour for attention. But one of the lessons of my PhD has been learning to accept my God-given limitations. I want to try to honour God by searching for rest and balance amid the many demands of work, recognising my dependence on him for lasting fruitfulness. This is a lifelong lesson and I'm a slow learner. I need to take time to listen to God to discern how to find a more holistic rhythm of work and rest, community and stillness, in DRC as well as the UK. This is all part of living and sharing God's shalom, I believe. I'm trusting God that he will bring fruit from all the labour invested in the PhD, though I don't yet know what shape this fruit will be.

Thank God...

S that my thesis is submitted!

S for his strength and faithfulness, and enabling me to persevere in this race.

S for my supervisor and supporters who made it possible for me to complete this marathon.

S for the summer to rest.

Please pray.

S for God's help in relaxing and coming to rest.

S for the energy to prepare properly for my viva, and that I will defend my thesis with confidence.

S that my research will be useful to others in the future.

S for God's direction for the coming months, and for discernment about what my future role should be.

S for stability in DRC as the country moves towards elections, and for just leaders with integrity and vision.

I hope you find time to rest and replenish your resources over the summer too.

With/love, Sarah/

