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Shank Update - Summer 2026

1 message

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Summer 2026

I love crowds...and I hate crowds.

Let me explain. I'm an introvert at heart. In the hustle and bustle of a busy city, I love the anonymity. I love feeling like I blend into my surroundings. I love the people watching. I love the kind of crowds I can disappear in.

As an introvert, I dislike a different kind of crowd, the crowd of people that all "know me;" the crowd that demands my attention and splits it 8 different ways in a span of 10 minutes. The crowd that "knows me" pulls me out of my introverted default and makes me engage with multiple people at the same time. You know those kinds of crowds right? The church function crowd, the house party crowd, or my personal least favorite, the wedding day crowd (I can tell you later about how this crowd overstimulated me so much that Mike and I escaped our reception way earlier than we had planned.) Hate is really too strong of a word, though. Of course, I used to feel this way, but

sanctification and maturity have made it so I can handle these crowds despite the discomfort they bring. Missionary life has also forced me to reckon with crowds because for starters we are, as Mike likes to call us, "Polar Bears." that is, big white beings who are clearly not from around here. Polar bears sometimes just draw in the crowds. Moreover, we have purposely drawn in crowds in order to share the gospel and create belonging. We've orchestrated big events and we've even hosted a small crowd in our home for a wedding (no, I didn't feel the need to run away from that one, thankfully).

Life in the city of Santa Cruz sometimes lets me indulge my guilty pleasure of camouflaging myself into the crowds as we walk through the main plaza or window shop in the air conditioned mall. If I'm honest, anonymous crowds are where I'd prefer to be, especially as I tote around my crew of small people that consume most of my social energy. However, I have recently discovered a new reason to appreciate the other kinds of crowds, those where I can't be anonymous. See, despite not enjoying the juggling act of 3 different conversions + a nursing baby + loud background music, I do long for human connection. I'm an introvert at heart... but I'm also a people person! Or should I say, a person person, because all I can really attend to is one person at a time. I have recently found that, if I am sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance in the middle of a crowd of people, I *can* find that one-on-one *meaningful* conversation.

It first happened to me at a baby shower several months ago, when I had finished bouncing from one small talk conversation to another I noticed a woman sitting alone. I had talked to this woman once or twice during church gatherings, but I didn't know her well. Something **(or actually – someone –** aka the Holy Spirit) told me I should sit next to her chat. After pleasantries, I asked her how she really was doing. In the midst of the laughter and goofiness of the baby shower crowd, she confided in me that her marriage was suffering greatly. I told her I would pray for her. We exchanged numbers and soon thereafter we started meeting regularly to read and pray together. Mike has been meeting with her husband too.

Recently, It happened to me again in the middle of an event at the Amparo Foundation home with a team from Texas that came to invest in the Foundation. I attended the event hoping to be helpful with translation, expecting to be bouncing from conversation to conversation. I was pleasantly surprised when instead I got to have one of the most intentional conversations with a girl from the home. The hustle and bustle of the crowd provided the perfect cover for her to

feel free enough to share some of her biggest fears and questions with me. With the loud music and laughter in the background, I was able to share the hope that the gospel provides for her specific fears..

It happened to me again during a World Cup party where, as the host was showing me a good diaper changing spot, she quickly and unashamedly bore her heart with me. Amidst the noisy cheering in the other room, I listened to the Holy Spirit prompt me to assure her she was not alone.

This season of life is drawing me into new crowds of people. The homeschooling crowd, the birthday party crowds, the basketball crowd, the kid-friendly cafe crowds. These recent conversations have challenged me to look for deep connections within the crowds, to reject the desire to sink into the ease and safety of invisibility. I have been challenged to lean into intentional and even hard conversations even when it seems like it's not the most private or ideal moment. I've been challenged to trust that the Holy Spirit has been working long before I ask a question.

Mike's crowds:

Unlike me, Mike fuels his tank being around people. He's a natural connector and he's gifted at bringing all kinds of people together.

One of his crowds has been the Simeon Trust crowd. Here we see the beauty in the diversity of the Body of Christ here in SCZ as Pastors and leaders from various denominations come together to grow in expository preaching.

Mike has been continuing to bring some of these same leaders together (plus others) around a time of prayer for the city. July marked the first of these monthly prayer breakfasts. Our hope is that these times of prayer will also knit hearts together and bring creative ideas for how to reach our city together!

Announcement!

We will be going on a short Home Ministry Assignment. We plan to be in the United States at the end of this year. We are excited to get to see many of you and we'll be in touch soon about what our schedule will look like.



Above (1st Picture): Group Picture from our SAM Conference in June.
Yes...it is hard to keep shoes on Marilyn these days....



Above (2nd Picture): Games with friends from our church and
missional community after a Sunday lunch!



Above (3rd Picture): Moses wanted to come with Mike to visit a church where he preached, but...there ended up being no children's church. To his credit, he made it through most of the sermon sitting patiently in the first row, but this is how Mike ended up finishing the sermon. You can also pray for our Bolivian Missionary friends Juan & Asunta, whose picture is in the background on Mike's right! This was at their main sending church!



Above (4th Picture): A church in Santa Cruz has organized Biblical Counseling trainings, with the hope of creating a local body to accredit Biblical Counselors. It was awesome to see people coming together across churches and ministries to be trained. Please pray for God to prepare and use godly counselors to point people to Christ in Santa Cruz!



Above (5th Picture): We loved having Joel Woodard and his daughter Hannah visit us in July! Joel is a former missionary, pastor, and SAM's new Director of Mobilization. He is passionate about equipping local churches to engage in God's mission. Let us know if you want to connect with him about how you and/or your church can get involved in God's work in South America!



Above (6th Picture): We had an incredible time having Mike's parents and nephew (Teddy) come to visit us for a few days, too!!

Praises and Prayer Requests:

1. Please pray for Mike's health. Back in April, Mike, Marilyn, and I (Marina) contracted the mosquito borne illness, Chikungunya. This virus is known for having lasting effects on joints. Marilyn healed quickly, and while I still have some stiffness, I am mostly better. Mike, on the other hand, has been struggling with foot and ankle pain for a few months. Please pray that he finds relief soon.
2. Praise God that aside from Mike's joint pain, we have been mostly healthy and been able to jump back into ministry more!
3. Our church is officially starting the first year of *La Travesia* (Journey Groups). Mike and I will both be leading groups. Please pray that this kind of life-on-life discipleship begins to permeate the whole culture of our church (and other churches, too!)
4. Mike and three other leaders from Santa Cruz will be traveling to Lima in September to see what the Lord has been doing through the Lima Initiative (Gospel Movement in which other SAM missionaries serve). We hope to be able to learn from our brothers and sisters there in order to consider how to continue to participate in what God is doing in Santa Cruz together, and how we can learn from others! More on this to come! Meanwhile please pray for their time together.

5. Please pray for two pastors (R* and A*) from Santa Cruz with whom Mike is walking. They are going through the City-to-City Incubator (church planters' training), and are looking to the future, desiring to church plant, but not sure what that looks like. Please that God would guide their paths and use them for his glory!
6. Please pray for us amidst upcoming transitions, as we seek to serve well in these next couple of months, and then come to the U.S. to visit churches, colleges, and as many of you all as we can!



Our growing family, plus economic inflation and other factors, means we also need to raise more support! *Would you consider partnering with us on a regular basis?*

Give to support us as a Family

Give to support the Gospel Ecosystem Movement

You may also **make a check payable to South America Mission** and write our account number **"Account #10548"** (for support for us as a

family) or "**Account #77474 Gospel Ecosystem Bolivia**" in the memo
line and mail it to SAM's US office:

1021 Maxwell Mill Rd, Suite B, Fort Mill, SC 29708.

**Thank you so much for your prayer, encouragement, and partnership
with us in the Gospel! To God alone be the glory!**

South America Mission

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