

what do you take for granted?

Samantha Archer writes about learning to pray in a new culture.

What do you take for granted? You may have answered electricity, good health care locally available or even fresh water. These are all things I took for granted before arriving in Tanzania at the beginning of the year, and they are easy to take for granted when you are living in Australia.

But there is a new item that has recently entered my “most taken for granted” list and it is one which has taken me by surprise. It is the ability to pray out loud in public with confidence. I don’t mean we are in a closed country in Tanzania and we can’t legally pray publicly. I mean the very idea of praying out loud in Tanzania terrifies me to the core, as I struggle to utter even one opening sentence in prayer in Swahili.

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I was very happy praying at the NSW Summer School in front of a crowded room; but when we have two or three guests to our new home

who have come to greet us and welcome us to the area, I try to disappear into the chair when the appropriate time to pray comes along. It is not that I don’t want to pray and give thanks to God for the many blessings he has given us, and for fellowship with other believers here in Tanzania. It is that I need to learn a whole new way of praying in this culture.

For example, in Tanzania there are many greetings upon meeting someone, and these all transfer in the way people pray. Tanzanians address God in different ways, and commence with many formal statements about God. It is something we are gradually beginning to understand and get used to. We know we have to learn it like many other things, but you expect to make mistakes when you are having everyday conversations with people and you just continue on. I, however, naturally baulk at the thought of making a mistake in prayer! I know God will understand and the Holy Spirit intercedes, but there is something inside me that doesn’t want to make a mistake in front of Tanzanians. I think it must be pride.

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It is a joy to know our Heavenly Father loves to listen to us as we come before him as two or three or more, and it is good to be reminded to come before him humbly, giving thanks for all the blessings he gives us – including the ability to pray!



Members of a Tanzanian church.



Matthew and Samantha Archer arrived in Tanzania in January 2006. They have spent most of the year studying Swahili and Tanzanian culture and have just moved to Bunda.