

Friends of Sweetwater,

On Monday morning, April 30, Scott and I were on our knees praying and worshipping in our hotel room. We had discovered minutes earlier that we had misread our itinerary and suddenly had 24 hours more in Tagbilaran, a city on Bohol Island. Our first action was to seek the Lord to direct our steps. The opening of our time was not a surprise to God and we didn't want to waste a moment of the opportunity. Did God intend rest for our tired bodies before our long travels home? Was there someone who needed the Gospel in Tagbilaran? After prayer and singing, I laid on the bed to quietly seek the Lord while Scott journaled and prayed. Thirty minutes later I said, “Scott, when Phillip was called to go to the desert he didn't need to wonder what to do when he met the Ethiopian. Phillip was a preacher, so he preached. When he was translated to Azotus, he didn't need a lightning bolt from heaven to provide direction, he simply preached because that's what God made him: a preacher. I am a water biologist. Let's find some water and see what happens there.”

Around noon, we discovered that our hotel had a boardwalk that led through a mangrove swamp down to a dock where swimming was possible. As soon as we reached the gate to the boardwalk, a retired British expat named Ted arrived. He lived nearby and often swam at this spot for refreshment. He was a warm, friendly sort and immediately struck up conversation with Scott and me. While Scott remained on the shaded dock, I took a swim.



The mudskipper that started it all

Eventually I found myself in chest-deep water under the dock with Ted as we both sought shelter for our white skin from the midday sun. As we wondered at a [mudskipper](#), a curious amphibious animal that looks and behaves like the freak offspring of a tree frog and a fish, Ted expressed his amazement that millions of years of evolution would lead to such a creature. I responded that I saw God's creativity in the mudskipper and that time + matter + chance could not explain its existence. For some people this might start World War III, but Ted and I enjoyed a perfectly friendly discussion. He told me his story and I told him mine. He asked my take on

why natural disasters exist. I gave an answer that

began with Genesis, ended in Revelation, and centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ. I concluded by stating that it was man's sin that subjected the creation to frustration and that creation eagerly awaits the redemption of man through Jesus. One day all will be made new, including the earth, and the relationship of man and creation will be reconciled. He listened attentively and responded with sincerity that I had given him much to think about. Scott informed me that he had spent the entire hour above us on the dock praying and worshipping in earnest, seeing God's hand clearly at work in the encounter.

Later, Ted took us on a tour of a local market and then invited us to an evening of billiards back at our hotel with him and his teenage son. We greatly enjoyed our time with them both. We had engaging conversations about faith, culture, music, science, education, and politics. Before we parted ways, I told Ted the story of my prayer with Scott that morning. I sought water to see who the Lord would bring to us. Ted agreed it seemed something more than coincidence had brought us to the dock. While standing in the water that gave me such joy as a biologist, I shared Living Water with a thirsty soul.



Ted’s story was a fitting bookend to our Philippines trip. Throughout our journey, Scott and I would spontaneously pray, express gratitude to God, seek His direction, burst into song, and generally keep an open, audible conversation with God and one another. Whether on a plane, a boat, walking in the market, or resting in our room, we enjoyed sweet fellowship and

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

the excitement of seeing God move in direct and clear ways in our personal interactions and business dealings. Not a day passed without a significant conversation taking place with a non-believer who needed the Gospel, a believer who needed encouragement, or a person who encouraged us, humbled us, or taught us invaluable lessons about Filipino culture. Our plans shifted on the fly—daily!—but as each door closed another opened. For example, our meeting with NORSU officials fell

through but it gave us the unexpected opportunity to visit with a dozen at-risk youth and orphans. Besides the outrageous joy I felt over washing them in the Word (I preached to them from Mark 5 and Scott also ministered to them), we managed to establish a connection with some officials working on a youth project that could evolve into a Sweetwater collaboration. Sweetwater exists to serve the widow and orphan, and when our pre-existing plans seemed only to indirectly serve them, God made a way for direct connection. Man makes his plans, but God directs his steps (Proverbs 16:9).

Below are details on three outcomes pertinent to Sweetwater’s mission.

- 1) We laid the groundwork with a couple of pastors for water projects that would be of the right size and scope for Sweetwater’s early work. They show promise for getting rolling within months.
- 2) We observed good substrate for the larger, long-term projects working with NORSU and government entities that we originally anticipated would be the focus of our visit. However, due to schedule conflicts, we were not able to meet with the officials who

would play key roles in project development. We saw the physical locations and natural resources but not the people. The potential is there. However, until we interact with those who would be the local leaders, progress will not be possible.

- 3) The third outcome is comprised of the many diverse conversations described earlier wherein God opened doors for the Gospel and salted our words with grace to speak the Word clearly. Although some of these interactions could yield fruit in the form of water projects for Sweetwater, many will not—and that is okay! We shared Living Water with many and that is one of the explicit aims of Sweetwater.

Our next steps include nurturing our relationships with Dr. Fred Hogue, local pastors, and NORSU and advancing discussion of the technical aspects of water production. I am thankful for the many contacts Dr. Hogue made for Sweetwater. He was savvy at getting us connected even when pre-existing plans got upended. I am currently in conversation with two pastors who seem the most prepared for initiating water projects. These projects will likely focus on water *quantity* rather than water *quality* based on their testimonies that illness is not as great a concern as the low volume of water being produced by their existing hand-pump wells. I have been discussing rain-harvesting and water recycling with one of the pastors. These could be relatively inexpensive solutions that would diversify sources of potable water...not all eggs would be in the water well basket. The NORSU relationship will take more time to develop but my tour of their physical facilities gives me optimism that a productive collaboration can be established.



Pastor Ben demonstrating his well output



Meeting with 10 pastors and lay leaders



David on aqueduct exploring NORSU agriculture facilities

Prayer and Partnership

~ Pray that God will give clear and specific vision to the pastors I am speaking with about water projects so that they can articulate the role they see for Sweetwater in their community.

~ Pray that God will grant me wisdom in the timing and content of my communications with NORSU.

~ Praise God with the Sweetwater team that despite my significant health problems for the past 2 years, God kept me strong in the Philippines to be faithful to the work.

Before we left for the Philippines I anticipated future trips and opportunities would abound. My suspicions were confirmed. So I will simply repeat that if God has blessed you with specific skills in water harvesting and recycling or you sense God's calling to see the project first-hand and visit with Filipino churches, contact Sweetwater. We will pray about ways to plug you in.

As always, your financial gifts are necessary to keep Sweetwater growing. If we are to make future trips to the Philippines we will need to supplement what our counterparts there can provide. They understand that they must demonstrate investment but their monetary resources will not cover the full cost of a project. Please consider coming alongside your Christian brothers and sisters on Negros Oriental and support their efforts to be sources of clean and Living Water in their local community.

Soli Deo Gloria!



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David with Pastor Nilo outside his church

P.S. More stories and photos from the trip will be posted to our Facebook page. Please visit regularly to hear of the details that were not included in this newsletter! As always, feel free to contact me directly with questions about the trip or for more information about how you can support Dr. Hogue and the pastors we met.