



# Postcards from Portugal

June 2024 | Samuel & Emily Loa-Ferreira  
Serving Jesus in Portugal

## Olá precious prayer partners,

The university academic year is ending and **we are wrapping up our first term of service in Portugal as we prepare to head to Australia** for our first home assignment between mid-July to December. Already! Can you believe it?! Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” **As we have sought to make disciples in the nation of Portugal over the past 2.5 years, we thank God for his faithfulness to his promise of being with us.** Amidst the joys and challenges, God has empowered us by his Spirit, equipped us with his word, and encouraged us through his people (all of you!). More seasoned missionaries have told us that it has been a good first term of missionary service if by the end we 1. Are still Christian 2. Are still married 3. Have had a decent grasp of the language 4. Have made a local friend and 5. Have a desire to go back. By these measures, we would say it has been a good first term of service. **We look forward to seeing many of you soon** whilst we’re in Australia to share in more detail about how God has been at work in us and the hearts of people in Portugal.

With love in Christ,

Em, Sam and Oli



## The end of the beginning of language learning

For the past 2.5 years Em has been in an “intensive language learning” period where she has dedicated most of her available time to the task. **In May she finished an exam which got her to the level of proficiency recommended for missionaries** to reach (not a “rule” but more of a guideline so that you have enough workable language to minister well). Would Em say she is fluent? Not quite! Is functioning in Portuguese super easy now? Nope. But she has made significant progress! The intensive learning phase has finished, but she’ll still be chipping away at learning and improving, it really just takes time to learn a language well. **The initial intensive formal language learning phase gives you the “bones” of language, but from there, you just keep living, making mistakes, and using what you’ve learnt to add more and more “flesh”.** Praise God for sustaining Em through this season!



Then: May 2021 Em in Sydney, starting to learn fruits and vegetables in Portuguese.



Now: May 2024 Em with Oli in Coimbra outside language school, celebrating reaching “advanced” Portuguese.

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## God working through his word

Our work with the University Bible Group ([GBU](#)) in Coimbra is a bible-based ministry. **As students sit under God’s word through bible studies, bible talks and meeting one-to-one, we have the great joy of seeing lives transformed.** Here’s a few ways we’ve seen God work through his word recently.



Duarte is a student whom Sam has been reading the bible with. **During his time in the GBU, Duarte has matured a lot in his faith and has become a committed member of his local church.** He graduates this year. Pray that Duarte would remain faithful to the Lord in this new season and be a blessing to his local church.



Alice is a student whom Em has been reading the bible with. **She is the only Christian that she knows of in her psychology course.** GBU Coimbra has provided her with a community of young Christians that have helped her remain faithful to following Jesus and witnessing him to those around her. Pray that God would keep growing Alice in her faith and witness.



As the academic year comes to an end, we farewelled a handful of GBU Coimbra students who graduate this year. At the farewell event (pictured), Isabela (second to the right), one of the graduating students, shared that through her years of involvement in GBU bible studies and bible talks, **God helped her to see “it is possible to remain firm in the word even through university”**. Praise God for how he is using the ministry of the GBU to help young people remain firm in his word in such a formative stage of their lives.



Recently, Sam gave a talk on the topic of mental health at a youth meeting of a local church in Coimbra, and at the GBU's weekly public bible talk. **30% of university students in Portugal experience moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety. This topic is not understood well within churches in Portugal**, is often treated with little empathy, and



leaves Christian who struggle with mental health issues feeling guilty about “not having enough faith”. Greatly helped by excellent Christian resources from Australia on the topic, Sam presented how the gospel shapes our understanding, experience and treatment of mental health issues. It was encouraging that several people expressed thankfulness for addressing this subject.

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## GBU Coimbra in our absence

**In God's gracious answer to your prayers from our last newsletter, he has provided a substitute staff-worker for the GBU in Coimbra** whilst we're in Australia on home assignment! Shane is an ECM missionary from Ireland who has been serving in Portugal for the past 3 years. He speaks Portuguese and will be moving into our apartment. Shane is a godly guy with a servant heart and great at connecting with students. We feel grateful and relieved! Sam is in the process of recruiting student leaders for the next academic year in Coimbra and handing things over to Shane.



Shane, our substitute GBU Coimbra staff-worker

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## We'd love to see you!

A big focus of our time in Australia is to foster our partnerships with all the churches and individuals that have been behind us, as we look back at how God has been at work in us and through us in Portugal, and look forward to what lies ahead.

We'll be spending time with each of our partner churches. If you're not part of one of our partner churches, **we would love to see you at one of our 'Drop in' days** where you can drop-in at any point during the day between 10am to 4pm for as little or as long as you'd like. Come say hello, meet Oli and hear a bit about life and ministry in Portugal! Contact us for more information.

We hope to see you during our Home Assignment!

- **24 July** | Sydney University Evangelical Union Annual Conference
- **31 Aug** | DROP IN day #1 in Kings Langley [More info and RSVP here](#)
- **8 Sept** | City Central Presbyterian Church Wollongong
- **10 - 12 Sept** | University Bible Group Wollongong
- **22 - 29 Sept** | Village Church Annandale
- **13 - 20 Oct** | Toongabbie Anglican Church
- **27 Oct** | Campsie Chinese Congregational Church
- **2 Nov** | DROP IN day #2 at Village Church [More info and RSVP here](#)
- **10 Nov** | Joshua Tree Presbyterian Church Petersham
- **17 Nov** | Northern Beaches Church
- **10 Dec** | In-person Pray for Portugal evening hosted by ECM in Croydon
- **15 Dec** | Commissioning Service at Village Church Annandale

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## Prayer Points

- Praise God that Em has finished her intensive language learning period, and for helping her to persevere and make significant progress. Praise God that through the challenges of language learning he has grown Em to be more like Jesus, especially in her humility and patience.
- Praise God for how he is using the ministry of the GBU to help young people remain firm in his word in such a formative stage of their lives. Praise God for how he has done this in the lives of Duarte, Alice and Isabela.
- Praise God for his provision of Shane, our replacement staff-worker for GBU Coimbra while we're in Australia. Pray that Shane would be faithful in leading and discipling the GBU Coimbra students in our absence.
- Praise God for sustaining Sam and Em through their first term of missionary service. As they prepare for the big transition of Home Assignment in Australia, pray for mental, emotional, physical and spiritual readiness. Pray for wise debriefing and deep reflection upon return.
- Praise God for the opportunity to spend time with partners in the gospel during our time in Australia. Pray that it might be a time of great mutual encouragement, and God would receive the glory due to his name.

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We are serving with European Christian Mission ([ECM](#)). ECM's vision is to share Christ's love in Europe through evangelism, discipleship and church planting in partnership with local believers.

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