

Life in the Pandemic of 2020-2021

My husband and I moved to Antalya, Turkey as missionaries in 2011. Our goal was to meet Turks who might be curious and open to Christianity and eventually start a house church. As the years went by, we had a change of heart about faith, missions, and belief in God, Jesus, and the Bible. We uncovered disturbing differences between American Christians and Middle Eastern/European Christians, specifically in the values, priorities, interpretation of the Bible, and more. I organized our doubts into three categories. The first doubt, who God really is and what are his character traits. Secondly, we began to explore how missions might be perceived by locals and what colonization has done. I began to see the locals as fine just the way they were asking myself, what are we saving them from. Thirdly, during the Trump administration years, I saw Evangelical Christians in a new light and I, personally, no longer wanted to be affiliated with them. During this time, we both went back to school. My husband returned for his masters and I, for a degree with ASU in Family and Human Development. During our time in Turkey we decided to expand our family and welcomed two kids in 2012 and 2015. The doubts of our work and the expansion of knowledge combined, we made the scary decision to move back to the states and change careers. This was in the spring of 2019 and we chose our moving date to be in the summer of 2020.

Spring of 2020 was full of anxiety, indecision, and worries about the future. We didn't know if we would be able to leave Turkey as we planned or if we could get back in country to move home. The response Turkey had to the pandemic compared to the States was very alarming. Even from overseas, we could see families back in the States beginning to be divided on issues of mask wearing, social distancing and more, whereas Turkey took on more of a collective idea of mask wearing and staying at home was their patriotic duty. The summer of 2020 was no different except add to the pile of disagreement; racism and police brutality. The loss of the life worldwide was devastating for some, and others considered it all a routine thing given to humanity by God. I remember feeling very saddened by the loss and confused by the lack of response from my fellow Christians. We were able to leave Turkey during a small window of time when airports were operational and move back to South Carolina in June 2020. We experience severe reverse culture shock and due to the pandemic, didn't feel like we could reach out to anyone for their safety. My husband and I were able to find jobs but those salaries combined, are not enough for our family. We moved in with my parents. It was hard to hear from fellow Christians on social media platforms that people are just lazy and taking away social safety nets would motivate them back to work. They believe plenty of job opportunities are out there. In our experience, minimum wage jobs were available, but they do not even cover the cost of rent, let alone other expenses. Jobs in the desired field and able to support a family were few and far between. There was little compassion from churches to be found as the financial support they gave us for our work as missionaries was cut off after a few months. We were shocked and sadden because there was an expectation on our part

that they would take care of us until we could get on our feet. The lack of compassion from society as a whole was eye opening experience for us, one we do not want see again or be apart of ourselves.

The year of 2020 ended with division between our extended family. Half supporting mask mandates and social distancing and the other half not willing to give up their right to a traditional Christmas celebration. Thankfully, compromise was found and we celebrated. As I write this reflection in the fall of 2021 and the pandemic still in full force, I realize my little family is very adaptable, flexible, compassionate, and strong. The kids who are 9 and 6, adapted to online learning, masks, no masks, seeing friends, not seeing friends, and etc. I learned that I have convictions that run deeper than religion, faith, nationalism, and culture. I see myself in support of people, of humanity. I see myself championing causes for justice like in cases of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless others. I feel my heart growing in compassion for immigrants and refugees. I will do whatever it takes to keep people safe from deadly diseases. I'll distance myself from those who do the opposite. I believe 2020 was a year of loss and shock, an unveiling of how deep some of our roots go, and a glimpse of where we need to go and what we need to do in the future.



Two kids, ages 5 and 8, at home in Antalya, Turkey during a month long lockdown on a Zoom conference call with their friends.