

August 2024, Michael & Rani Grivas-Allison



Michael and Rani Grivas-Allison

with Alexi (2)

Serving the Lord in Belgium



Dear Friends,

Thank you for praying for our summer break!

Over the last few months, God has met us richly with growing relationships, a restful holiday (pictured above and below), and a renewed sense of focus as we prepare to launch into this 'next leg' of life in Belgium. We're so thankful for these clear and generous answers to your prayers. Praise be to God!

As we write, we're about to head into our last 8 months of full-time language learning. Below we've tried to give you a bit of a sense of where we're up to, as well as **some things that are currently motivating us** as we begin this new season of language study. You can thank God for this encouragement (much of which we wouldn't have been able to articulate 6 months ago!) and for the way **He keeps showing us how this season is preparing us to serve Him and His Gospel in Belgium.**

We hope it's an encouragement to you too and fuel for your prayers!

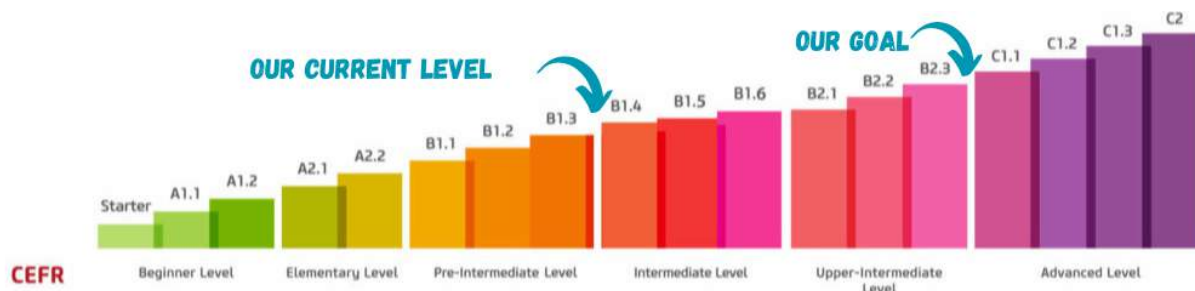
With love in Christ,

Michael & Rani



Above: some snaps from our first 'proper-length' and truly restful holiday here, featuring crazy train station crowds heading to the coast, aquarium statues getting more attention than aquarium animals, Alexi in peak beach mode, and of course, waffles.

Next step, intermediate French...



At the moment we feel like we're 'half-way' to having usable French. We walk away from most conversations with a general sense of what was said, but often without the details. We can follow the gist of a sermon, but are lost when the preacher goes off his notes. Sometimes when we talk, people nod and listen like there's no problem. Other times they look puzzled and say 'what??'. **As you can see from the graphic above, this is what it looks like to be about to start intermediate French.** Our aim in the next 8 months is to finish 'upper-intermediate' (by March/April next year). This will not be fluency, but is the recommended baseline for starting ministry. God has brought us so far, but we still have a way to go!

4 Things Motivating Us As We Begin Intermediate French...

1) In Belgium, French is more than the 'local language'...



When we first arrived in Belgium, we knew that half the country spoke French. **What we're starting to realise is that speaking French is one thing, but being 'francophone' is another.** In a country deeply divided by its two official languages, French marks out a distinctive community and cultural identity (and one which is empathically different to its Flemish counterpart).

For us this means that over time, our goal will be not simply to become 'French users', but to **build a Belgian 'language identity' that is francophone.** This will be a long road! But we're starting to sense more of **the weight that French carries here** and the way that it will situate us to live less 'on the surface' and more authentically for Jesus in Belgium.

Above: with our friend S, the only other 'non fluent' person we know at our (francophone) church. In Brussels, the expectation is that everyone sticks to their own language group, so 'anomalies' like us are rare!

2) Opening the Bible is a 'high bar'...

A while ago we asked our French teacher about some unfamiliar grammar that we'd come across in the Bible. He waved us off and said 'Oh that's archaic! You don't need to worry about that'. It was a reminder that despite being familiar to us in English, **the Bible is an ancient and literary text, and is not yet very accessible to us in our**



second language. We rejoice that the fruitfulness of our future ministry will never come from our perfect mastery of biblical French. However, **we appreciate more and more how high the 'bar' is as we work towards opening the Word through which God does His work.**



Above: we've recently started reading the Bible aloud to each other to improve our fluidity and pronunciation. Stay tuned for a bit more about learning 'Bible French' in a future newsletter.

3) In transient Brussels, slow is good...



As the capital of the EU, Brussels is a highly transient city. Our neighbourhood is constantly full of 'to rent' signs, and it took about a year to work out who was in the 'core community' at our church. The ministry scene is also somewhat transient, with expat ministries coming and going quite frequently. **In this context, taking our time to learn French properly is a sign we're here for the long term.**

And while we don't think that we'll stop being the 'new kids on the block' any time soon, we're beginning to see more clearly **the value of this period of learning, as we wait to understand more, be welcomed in, and eventually join what God is already doing.**

Above: some recent and enjoyable slowness-training, aka snail watching.

4) Language is for God's glory...

When we first began learning French, we had enough grammar to describe God's character. A few months later we could talk about what He's done in the past and what He will do in the future. More recently



we've learned how to express things like regret, possibility, warning, and hope. This term we're learning the tense most often used in prayer. As our language grows, it's been a lovely reminder that **language exists to tell of God's goodness and glory, something which fills and stretches all the grammar and vocabulary we can give to describe it.**



Thank God for this encouragement and pray that He would fill our French with Himself as it grows!

Above: spending time with a new friend from church, as she shared about God's work in her life. It was a joy to experience this moment in French!

Please thank God...

- For graciously giving us **a restful, safe and reorienting summer break.**
- For the **generosity of the GBU and the CMS fellowship** in freeing us up to continue learning French.
- For **His character and work**, which calls forth our praise!

Please ask God...

- For **growing competence and confidence** as we begin intermediate French.
- For deepening bonds with people during and after **church camp** (7 Sept)
- For **opportunities to connect with new and old neighbours and class-mates** during this season of 'La rentrée' (the start of the school year).

From Michael and Rani

"As for me, I will always have hope;

*I will praise you more and more.
My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
your saving acts all day long - though I know not how to relate them all.
I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord;
I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.
Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds." Psalm 71:14-17*

Say 'hello' or let us know you've prayed for us!

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We can't serve in Belgium without the generosity of God's people.

If you'd like to give through financial support, please head to our [CMS giving page](#).

If you would prefer to give using a BSB and account number, please email CMS and they will send you the relevant details.

We're so thankful for your partnership with us to see a world that knows Jesus!

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