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A Frontline mission team recently returned from a 16 week long, 14 000 km field outreach to Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

During this extensive field trip they conducted 27 Discipleship Training Seminars, 77 evangelistic meetings for women and children, 50 church services and 117 Bible studies! On two occasions team members had their passports and money stolen. On each occasion Robert tracked down the thieves and recovered the stolen items.

Lynne and Donovan came down with malaria and Lynne also contracted an eye infection. After recovering they continued their ministry. There was much demand for Lynne's first aid and they soon ran out of medicines and bandages. In Zimbabwe the team also had to contend with harassment and interrogation from the CIO (secret police).

The team distributed 27 boxes of Gospel literature including 12 000 Gospel booklets, 454 Bibles in Chichewa, Portuguese and Shona, 30 relief boxes and 7 large bags of second-hand clothing. Below are some extracts from their 30 page report:

In Lusaka a thief grabbed Lynne's bag (which contained her passport and money) and disappeared into the crowd. I pursued the thief across the 4 lanes of heavy traffic in Cairo Road. As the culprit was close to being apprehended he threw the bag onto the sidewalk, its contents spilling out. By God's grace all of the contents were recovered!

Our main aim was to conduct Discipleship Training Seminars (each was normally three days) at established rural congregations. Over the years there has been much evangelism in rural Malawi, but very little discipleship, however our Lord commanded: *"make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. . . (Matt 28:19-20).*

We sought to adhere to the apostle Paul's strategy:

"the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men

who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).

We conducted 27 seminars which were specifically directed to church leaders, though everyone was welcome. It was not uncommon for some pastors to walk 20 to 30 kms to attend the meetings. At all of our seminars pastors were instructed, challenged, and encouraged *“to always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15).*

Because these rural churches lacked Bibles and Bible teaching, their knowledge of God’s Word was very limited. It was not surprising to find a Christian who didn’t even know that the Scripture consists of the Old and New Testaments! For that reason we nearly always would begin by teaching: creation, the attributes of God, the fall of man, sin, the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our aim was not only to teach ideas, but also to demonstrate trust in the Lord. The miracles and parables of Jesus Christ were often expounded upon. Church leaders were also taught Biblical principles for the family and for the church.

Polygamy is still a serious problem in the church, and even among pastors! Some “pastors” were attempting to justify their taking of extra wives by claiming that they were only trying to be obedient to God’s command: *“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth. . .” (Gen 1:28).*

These false pastors were then misleading the men in their congregations to take on extra wives, thus making them partakers in the same error. At the seminars, many pastors were strengthened and encouraged by the clear instructions found in Scripture that: *“An overseer must be blameless, the husband of one wife (1 Tim 3:2).*

The **Kalingonda bean** in Malawi provides an object lesson. In the garden of Eden, God commanded Adam *“of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.”* And along with that command came a very grave warning *“for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17).*

The kalingonda bean in southern Malawi is greyish in colour and is quite poisonous. Unaware of the harmful results of eating the kalingonda bean, sometimes a young girl might attempt to prepare these beans for a meal. Malawian parents must warn their children not to eat from this plant. And as the parent warns the child out of love, so the Lord warned Adam out of love.

Two Mozambican pastors walked 20 kms to attend one of our seminars. They reported that they had been blessed with good crops this year; however that they were **starving for the Word of God**. They said that in their area, there were four pastors sharing just one Bible. When it was “their turn” to use the Bible, they would often copy portions of Scripture by hand. Sometimes pages from a Bible would be divided among several pastors. They rejoiced upon receiving 3 Bibles each to take back to Mozambique. In total, 454 Bibles, 110 New Testaments, and 12 000 Gospel booklets were distributed. **Over and over again, it was our joy to put a Bible into the hands of a believer**, and to see his face light up.

For two years, a young man, Enoch, had been praying that the Lord would provide him with a Bible. In awe he praised the Lord upon receiving God’s Word.

“I rejoice in Your Word as one who finds great treasure” Psalm 119:162.

Train up a Child

As most of the rural women and children are illiterate, Lynne taught them the Ten Commandments and Scripture memory verses using pictures. The women and children responded very well to Lynne’s teaching. When she made the verses into a song they learnt even quicker.

At one meeting the pastors were all asked to make a list of their children from eldest to youngest. That having been done, we began the Bible study from 1 Samuel 1 to 4 (concerning Eli and his two wicked sons), Prov 22:6, Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and Ephesians 6:14 which clearly charge Christian parents with the responsibility of raising their children in the love and knowledge of the Lord. The pastors were then asked which of their children have they instructed in the things of the Lord? One pastor let out a deep groan. It had never occurred to him that he should teach his own children! Another pastor enthusiastically remarked that earlier the same day he had just begun to teach his young son from the book of Genesis.

Malaria and Infections

Although we had been taking our malaria prophylactics; Lynne still came down with malaria twice - each lasting three to four days. Donovan also contracted malaria. Typically, malaria makes one very tired, feverish, dizzy, disoriented, and the body is full of aches and pains. One woman described having malaria in this way: *“At first you are afraid that you are going to die. But after a while you hope that you will die!”*

In the bush, we had to make a special effort to keep our hands clean (and to keep our hands away from our eyes). After having just treated a child who was suffering from eye infection, Lynne contracted the same. Yellow pus was caked between her eyelids. Spider bites were also a common source of infection.

We found a basic knowledge of first aid very useful. Medical treatment in the rural areas of Malawi and Mozambique was essentially non-existent. Even where there was a rural clinic we found that their medicines and other stocks were depleted. No antibiotics, no bandages, not even aspirin. Many of the children had health problems related to poor nutrition. Infants were often found to be malnourished. This was largely due to the poor diet of the rural people which basically consists of starch (finely ground mealie meal/corn). If a nursing mother is eating nothing more than *Nsima* (corn meal), there is no way for the infant to get the nutrition required for healthy growth. We saw a number of young children who were going blind due to vitamin A deficiency.

Lynne sometimes spent as much time cleaning and bandaging open infected wounds, or treating malaria, or fever, as she did teaching the women and children. It is very difficult for the children to stay clean so even a minor cut will inevitably become infected. Clouds of flies cluster around any sores or ulcers aggravating the infection. We soon ran out of bandages, gauze, antiseptics, plasters, aspirins, etc. and had to improvise to meet the desperate needs.

Beer or Living Water?

At one seminar we noticed a nearby cluster of grass huts where many people were buying and drinking beer. And of course a cassette player was blaring with some mindless rhythm. Even some of the church members who had come for the seminar smelled of beer. *“Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink”* and

"Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbour..."

(Isa 5:22, Hab 2:15). We asked the proprietor of the local drinking establishment for permission to preach the Gospel to his customers. He reluctantly gave his approval.

About 40 men and women sat around drinking beer from large cups or small pots. Many children were also there. A message on **the broad and the narrow road**, and a warning to those walking in spiritual darkness was preached. The men and women listened to the message. The proprietor's wife became increasingly agitated, and turned the music louder. After preaching against drunkenness we invited those who wished to hear more, to come to the church where we continued preaching.

Many people followed us to the church to hear the Gospel. Later about 15 sought counselling.

In Perils Often

At one village our local host turned out to be a dishonest man who misused the funds entrusted to him for catering. As the food ran out he was exposed. What he stole was almost insignificant, however, when compared to the wholesale theft by governments. By devaluing the currency the Malawi government deflated the Kwacha by 50%. This effectively cut everybody's savings and salaries in half. (Amos 8:5-7)

We also received reports that local Roman Catholic priests were selling indulgences. For 10 Kwacha (less than a dollar) they promised to secure a place in heaven for departed relatives. It was such unscriptural practices that led to the Protestant Reformation nearly 500 years ago. But we *"were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold. . . but with the precious blood of Christ" 1 Pet 1:18-19.*

The Muslims are definitely on the offensive in Malawi. They continue to pour millions of petro-dollars into this poverty stricken country. Mosques have been built all over the country even in places where there are no indigenous Muslims. While I was at a foreign exchange bureau a Muslim was wanting to exchange one million US dollars into Malawi kwacha! In what was previously considered a Christian nation, Islamic transmissions now dominate the air waves (both by loud speakers and over the radio).

At night we were often kept awake by the incessant beating of drums at various witchcraft ceremonies. Occasionally the pounding of the drums would stop and somebody would let out a blood curdling scream. Our host would explain that the “*spirits*” had entered someone. On one occasion we went to investigate. Several drummers surrounded a woman who was childless. The “*spirits*” were being summoned to possess the woman. We witnessed to them, and distributed Gospel literature. The drums did not resume that evening.

On other occasions we were confronted by people tormented by evil spirits. One night we were woken up by the screams of a demented woman nearly a kilometre away. She was the daughter of a witchdoctor. Upon his death the “*spirits*” had come into her. She would periodically go into fits, convulsing up and down. She consistently refused to hear the Gospel and chose to remain under the control of the “*spirits*”

On the day we were to begin our first Mozambique seminar a thief stole all of our funds for ministry and my passport. This led to a two day pursuit over 100 kms and over the border for several policemen and myself to track down the thief and recover most of our funds. The thief was duly “*chastised*” by the police and local villagers and was in a most remorseful state by the time we were able to share the Gospel with him. This initially frustrating episode was powerfully used of the Lord to weld our team and hosts together and provided great opportunities for ministry.

On occasions we had to move our services outside the church building because there were more people outside than inside. Our dramatised Gospel presentations were particularly well received. We had the joy of proclaiming the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ to the Muslim Yao. After one message a Muslim woman professed her faith in Jesus Christ, claiming that the message of the cross broke her heart and yet gave her a peace that she had never known before.

The hunger for Bibles was so great that we began to require those who wanted Bibles to memorise and recite the 10 Commandments and some Scriptures before we would present them with their own Bible. This was enthusiastically carried out.

Marx and Darwin in Zimbabwe

One would not have expected a mission school to have painted pictures of Karl Marx and Charles Darwin on their walls but this Lutheran school did. One of their text books *"The Good News of Liberation"*

included such chapters as

"John the Baptist - a socialist teacher", *"Jesus - a revolutionary teacher"*

and

"Jesus - the universalist."

In another text book the miracles of Jesus in healing and feeding the multitudes was compared to the works of the World Health Organisation and UNESCO of the United Nations today! In these textbooks the UN was doing the work of God and effectively was the kingdom of God!

Another book *"Schools in the Struggle"* clearly states: *"There is no such thing as an ideologically neutral education . . . a socialist society cannot be created via any other education system than that which is socialist . . . education plays such a vital role in society."*

If only more Christians realised how important schools are for fulfilling the Great Commission and discipling the nations.

We proclaimed the Gospel in this school with the wall paintings of Darwin and Marx. The children responded very well although the teachers remained aloof. Later we were interrogated by the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) - the secret police. Our hosts were also harassed but they later wrote to us reporting that most of the pastors greatly appreciated the visit. One student wrote to us *"I was blessed by your preaching . . . your courage was from God. . . I believe in the Lord Jesus and the Gospel."*

Please pray that the door for future ministry in Zimbabwe will remain open.

"Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor 15:58