

LIU LA NAMIKANGO

Namikango Mission

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Where Should We Fix Our Eyes?

As we near the halfway mark of 2020, we may pause and reflect on the how the year has gone so far. This year has been very different than other years. While it started off with a good harvest for many people in Malawi, a global pandemic has quickly changed the way we do everything, from church worship to visiting friends and family. We are currently living in a very different world than we were at the beginning of the year.

When so many things happen that alter our lives, it is very easy to fix our eyes on those circumstances and to focus our attention on what is happening to us and around us. It is very easy to get caught up in the news and in the gossip and rumors surrounding the news. Here in Malawi, the pandemic is occurring while the country is also dealing with political issues. These major events can consume our minds, our conversations, and make us live in fear about how both will turn out. If we allow them to, pandemic thoughts and political thoughts can drown our minds in thoughts of fear and anger, as we can't understand how either will turn out.

The Bible has much to say about this. The Old Testament is one big story of God's people in crisis. They started as slaves in the beginning, and by the end of the Old Testament had lost their nation, their identity, and their freedom again. When Israel was overthrown and taken into exile, they lost their political voice as well as their health safety. The people of God are well acquainted with political turmoil and health crises!

And yet through all these issues and situations, men and women of God kept their faith in God very strong, and rather than fix their eyes on the problems, instead fixed their eyes on God and his promises for his people. The author of Hebrews reflects on the many people whose faith was strengthened not by dwelling on the problems, but by fixing their eyes on Jesus.

It seems fitting that in this year of unprecedented fear and concerns, that we reflect on these great women and men of faith, learning from their example how to fix our eyes on Jesus, who has promised his steadfast love and care for all his children, even through the darkest storm. Please enjoy the articles in this bulletin as Namikango staff reflect more on this theme of fixing our eyes on Jesus.

- Eric Gephart

Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

We are living in difficult times in which our Christian and physical lives are facing different trials and challenges. Because we are human, we can be think that answers to these problems can be found by ourselves. To say the truth, in ourselves we cannot manage all the problems we might be facing if we cannot fix our eyes on Jesus Christ. We need to realize that we are not the first ones to face challenges. There were many people who faced problems, but they still looked to God and they triumphed.

Many times when we are in seasons of peace, we do not often think about God; but when a problem strikes it is when we look to God. But we need to realize that God does not leave us alone, he is with us all the time and he does not change. We need to have faith in Jesus Christ because he does not change his love towards us. In the Old Testament, we read about Abraham. He lived for many years without a child. Despite this, Abraham still obeyed God in all his life until in his old age when God blessed him with a gift of a male child, Isaac, according to the promise. Obviously, the family of Abraham was joyous upon the birth of this child. God does not lie; what he says he fulfills. But when this child grew a bit older, Abraham was told by God to do a very difficult thing to accept. God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about” (Genesis 22:2).

It was a very difficult time for Abraham considering that the pagans were also sacrificing their children, a thing forbidden by God. But because he looked to God all the time he knew that it was the voice of God. Abraham did not think of running away or disputing with God, because he was in a good relationship with him. This was because he had nowhere else to look but to God, so it was not difficult for him to obey.

Today, as Christians we are passing through terrible times, so we need to fix our eyes to Jesus Christ where our answers for all our problems are. Many people, when faced with challenging

Genesis 22:2

He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the lad of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”

moments in their lives, go to a witch doctor for help but they get disappointment instead.

If we depend on an individual we will get disappointed, because people will fail and do not keep their promises all the time. Look at Abraham, when he was passing through a difficult time for him to make a decision to follow, he chose to obey God. As a human being he waited for a child for a very long time, and as any parent he would have loved to be with Isaac. But God commanded him to sacrifice the child as a sacrifice, it was not easy, but he knew that the giver of that child was the same God and he had faith that God had power over that child.

God works differently than we do, we often see time as delaying or people are disturbing us not knowing that God wants us to be victorious. Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son who was to fulfill the promise between him and God. He showed unshaken faith in God when he told his servants saying, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5). These are the words of faith from Abraham, though God had commanded him to sacrifice his child, when he was leaving his servants he did not show any sign of worrying or doubting, he knew he would return back with him. Sometimes when we are in painful situations we do lose hope and get worried because we look to ourselves and not to God. When poverty strikes we worry and start thinking that things were not supposed to be like that. Let’s rely on God in all situations we may find ourselves in, in challenges and even in times of peace. Abraham in his whole life depended on God and he knew he had the authority upon his child and that’s why he obeyed and travelled for a three day journey in obedience to God.

God gave Abraham a lamb for him to offer the sacrifice instead of Isaac because he saw Abraham's heart that he was genuine and that he was in a good friendship with God. When we are giving our offerings, or when wanting to serve God, we need to be serving with all our heart. This shows that we are relying on him in all aspects of our lives.

What God did by asking Abraham to sacrifice his child was a picture of what God was to do by saving his people from the slavery of sin. He predestined to reconcile his people to himself and make us his children not slaves to sin anymore. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians said, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, and Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:4 -7). Today, we are saved not through our own efforts but it is God who prepared in advance for us to receive salvation through the death of his Son. Our lives are supposed to be led by the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is not far from us but within us; moreover we are children of God through the death of Jesus Christ. So, let us fix our eyes on Jesus whenever we meet with challenges or any temptation.

The whole world is crying because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before this pandemic people were busy going to watch football matches, going to other entertaining places and to do every entertaining thing. But today the whole world is silent; everyone wants to save his life. This is the time for all of us to stick to Jesus. People are dying, health workers are trying to work hard in order to save lives from this pandemic. There is a need for us as Christians to look up to Jesus asking him to remove this problem on top of following precautionary measures from health authorities. Our God is Almighty and we just need to stay closer to him and our lives will be encouraged though we are passing through this trying moment.

If we are not going to look up to Jesus we will lose our faith because this problem is big.

One day, while the disciples of Jesus were in a boat, their faith was tested and Jesus appeared to them but they did not realize it was him. Peter and his friends were arguing when they saw someone like Jesus, "But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.' 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' (Matthew 14:27 – 30).

Our life cannot function without Jesus. We can try but we cannot prevail. The problem in which the disciples were passing through seemed big before them because they did not look up to Jesus. When Peter started walking while fixing his eyes on Jesus, his courage came and started walking on the water. But when he removed his eyes on Jesus he started sinking. Things are now of a global concern if we are not going to fix our eyes on Jesus our problems will escalate. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus with all our faith for him to help us because he does not fail. But if we focus on our problems we will be filled with fear and our faith will be shaken.

Paul, encouraging the Philippian church said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). He meant that everyone who is a Christian and passing through trials receives his strength from Jesus Christ not somewhere else. When other people are weak, for them to have strength they believe in taking drugs or smoking weed/Marijuana for them to have strength. But this does not help, it just continues to destroy one's life. Paul has shown us the ability of God through Christ Jesus. He was saying these words while he was in prison, and these were the words of someone who was established in Jesus. Although there were problems, those problems did not move him from Christ but they drew him closer to God. We need to be like Paul by being courageous even when we are facing challenges. But this is not so with many Christians. When challenges come we stop trusting in Jesus and turn to other things. We must realize that by doing so we underrate the power of God. As Christians the problems that the world is facing should cause us

to draw closer to God, so that those who do not believe in him should realize the love of God upon each individual. “For God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have an eternal life” (John 3:16). God’s love has already been offered by giving his Son what remains is for all the people to believe in him. “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you” (1Thessalonians 5:28).

-Stanley Mkwanda

The Livelihood Change Through CHE

“We are growing maize without applying chemical fertilizer.”

Namikango Mission is continuing the spiritual and livelihood program of CHE, which has been an eye-opener to many Malawian communities. The “Farming God’s Way” program has continuously brought a tremendous change to the people that have adopted it well in all aspects of their lives. Financially, farmers have reduced the amount of chemical fertilizer that they used to buy in previous years by almost half. Some have even stopped using chemical fertilizer altogether; they are using manure only to grow maize and still have a bumper harvest. This has reduced the debt dependency rate of which a huge amount of loans or debts acquired were directed to farming, especially on fertilizer.

This also brought a great relief to farmers who understand and have adopted “Farming God’s Way.” Rodrick Sinoya and Rosert Mtambo are lead farmers from Mangochi under CHE’s “Farming God’s Way” program. They testify that it is very possible to grow maize without fertilizer while still being able to harvest a bumper yield. According to Rodrick, “I did Farming God’s Way in a piece of land which is 50x60 meters. I grew maize in the 2019-2020 growing season and applied only compost manure and follow the weeding timing taught by our Namikango trainer. I never thought I would see the fruits of such maize, but I have maize even more than those who applied chemical

fertilizer to the extent that some thieves started harvesting my maize in jealousy. How great the maize was growing! I thank God, and Namikango for the spiritual and livelihood intervention. I am advising my fellow farmers to please adopt this methodology of “Farming God’s Way” and testify afterwards.”

Rodrick has been a blessing to the Church of Christ; he was baptized in October when he came for the second phase training after hearing a preaching about abundance of life in Christ from fellow lead farmers and the CHE trainer. This shows that CHE is yielding both physical and spiritual harvests of peoples’ lives in Malawi. Rosert also concurred with Rodrick as we visited them both in Mangochi on a monitoring and follow up visit. She said she is a great testimony to the communities; more people are willing to adopt Farming God’s Way after seeing how possible it is to harvest more without investing more money. “I now grow maize twice in a year, winter and in summer, for the past two years I and my family have never went to bed on an empty stomach. We appreciate the trainings in agriculture and in the word of God.”

At Namikango, we believe that through CHE’s agriculture and health program that is being implemented, along with the word of God, great change in the lives of the people that we serve and all communities can come. On top of the Farming God’s Way methodology, 65 lead farmers were also recently trained in seasonal budgeting, life skills, record keeping and agro-forestry. This has impacted positively in their homes as most of them have started small-scale businesses like making cassava or sweet potato fritters, lemongrass juice, wweet potato juice, kholowa juice, baobab juice, hibiscus juice, just to mention a few. This is a positive economic growth on top of the reduced fertilizer usage cost. It is our plea to the church and community to adopt both spiritual and livelihood programs that Namikango offers, in order to uplift their lives and fulfil an abundant life that was said by Jesus in John 10:10. You can be the champion of change by mobilizing your congregation or community for such trainings to create a better life for Christians and your community.

-Faith L. Somanje

Benefits of Village Savings and Loans

In previous Liu's, we explained about Village Savings and Loans (VSL). These are savings and loan groups. We also showed many benefits of what Village Savings and Loans under Namikango Mission has. In this Liu, we will explain the main purposes as to why Namikango Mission started the work of teaching Christians in churches to save and loan out money in groups and we will also explain how VSL operates.

The work of teaching Christians to save and loan out money was established with these main purposes; first, to encourage Christians in churches to know that they have a responsibility of taking care what God has given them (things like, wealth, time, strength and the skills of doing business). The second purpose is to encourage the culture of saving money, using wealth wisely and for people to be self-reliant economically.

VSL is a program which starts operating itself without any outside financial help (This means that Namikango Mission, does not provide financial help if people start a savings and loan group). When a group starts, it operates by itself by its own rules and guidelines set by the group itself. There are four things done by the group when it is set and these include: saving money, borrowing each other's money, repaying back with a small interest which the group agrees, and after sometime the group shares all the money.

In VSL individuals of between 15 and 25 form a group in which a VSL trainer teaches. This group writes down rules and chooses leaders who lead it. Members are owners of this group and leaders are just chosen to serve the group by being given the position and duties to be performed. This group meets once a week whereby members save money in form of shares. Members borrow money and are supposed to repay within 4 weeks. This work is carried out from 9 to 12 months. Finally, members share all the money in accordance with one's shares. When members start saving and borrowing the money, the counselor visits the group guiding it on how things are supposed to be. When the group shares the money, the counselor is

supposed to see the group if it can stand on its own or if it is still having some issues. If it is still struggling, the counselor continues to make visitations in a second phase. In this phase, the group has a special fund for helping out members during sicknesses or funerals.

This special fund works in two main ways. The first way is that this fund works as a relief or a gift. For example, if one member has a sick child, friends from the group can agree and take some money from the group to cheer that member. This fund works as a loan as well. If a member is sick or he or she has met with some uncertainties he or she can borrow from the fund and repay later without any interest. The amount to contribute is the same because it is supposed to help equally.

How does the special fund work? This fund is not supposed to be mixed with money for the shares which people borrow for business. The group needs to put some rules on how the emergency fund is supposed to be used and on who to receive help (on how it is available, on how it is to be withdrawn, on how it can be repaid). Members are supposed to agree an amount to contribute at every meeting for this fund. Members are supposed to agree on the amount to be given as an emergency fund to someone whom they have accepted to receive as a help from this fund so that there cannot be any favoritism. They also need to agree on repayments terms if there will be such a need. In addition, they also need to agree on how they will handle the remaining money during the time of sharing.

Some may ask, why bother oneself by being in a group while I can be doing business and keep money on my own? In Chichewa we have many sayings which show us the benefits of working as a group. A well-known saying is that one which says, 'one head does not carry a roof,' and another one says, 'being two is not fear.' Our fellow Indians saw the goodness of doing business together. For example, they do put money together towards a big business and this helps in bringing a lot of profits. While here in Malawi we are used to do business as individuals. Many Christians have been complaining that they cannot start business because they do not have enough capital. But if there can be a couple of people and contribute

some money, they can do something amazing which can definitely change their lives plus those around them.

Doing things in a group helps in sharing different ideas on how to do certain things like business, on how to manage our families, church, area or even a country. Being in a group also helps people to get loans for small scale businesses. You can testify that money lending institutions prefer giving loans to groups than an individual.

Groups established by Namikango started to benefit greatly with this arrangement though other people had bad feelings towards VSL. The number of brothers and sisters doing Village Savings and Loans is increasing greatly and many here in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia desire for Namikango to reach them with this program as well. Members are now able to stand on their own financially and are also able to serve God without problems because through these groups people learn how to lead spiritual songs, learn how to read God's word, interpreting scriptures and many more which helps in advancing their lives holistically. This is making the life of people in the village strong. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

-Styford Blazio

Announcements

Southern Africa International Lectureship

- The 2020 Bulawayo SAIL (Southern Africa International Lectureship) was postponed due to Coronavirus.
- The meeting will be held in 2021 in Bulawayo and all logistical arrangements will be communicated through the local transport organizing committee.

Radio Ministry

- We wish to inform everyone who follows Kodi Muli Pati program on TWR that the program is still being aired every Sunday from 6:30 to 6:45. However, the frequencies were changed in different geographical areas. Therefore, you are advised to search for new frequencies.
- Here are few frequencies for selected areas: Blantyre 90.6, Thyolo 101.8, Mangochi 105.7, Dedza 98.5, Lilongwe 106.3, Mchinji 96.7, Mvera 93.9, Karonga 106.3 and Ntchisi 90.7.

Bible School Programme

- Namikango will be introducing its Discipleship Training Institute in 2021 as announced earlier. Details of the whole programme will be communicated soon for interested applicants to apply.

Namikango Outreach Programmes

- Because of the Coronavirus, all church visits and development meetings were suspended from the month of April until the time when things normalise.
- We wish to encourage churches and development groups to follow all preventive measures that have been put in place by the ministry of health to avoid further spreading of the Coronavirus.

The Sick

- We should continue praying for the following people:
 - Bro. J.C. Katete in Chingale, Zomba
 - Bro. B.S. Mbewe in Liwonde, Machinga
 - Bro. Lendal Wilkes in USA

The Deceased

- Bro. Kachingwe a former preacher from Dzanjo, Phalombe died on 8 March and was buried on 9 Marchs 2020.