



The girl who remembered  
Steve Vinton, July 14, 2007

I had lots of time to daydream as we drove home from our trip to the village of Kimala. The road really was worse than any I've seen here in Tanzania and the whole trip was a battle -- Godfrey had fought with hairpin curves going up and down the mountains, rockslides blocking the road, fallen trees across the road, bridges that gave me the creeps, and really steep hills. It meant the going was slow and most of the time I decided the better part of valor was to just close my eyes and let my mind wander.

I thought a lot about two statements that Godfrey had made earlier in the day.

The first one was when we were at what seemed to be a perfectly flat plateau on the highest peak of this mountain range -- the place in the village of Kimala where everyone had gathered and where we were having this huge town meeting. Thousands of people. It seemed really as if we were at the top of the world. The plateau was just big enough for a soccer field and it was perfectly level. These people high up in the mountains, isolated from everything, were gathered on that mountain top because one girl from the village years ago finished primary school, got the chance to go to secondary school, was now a student at Tumaini University in Iringa, heard Godfrey and I when we came to speak in chapel on a Sunday morning in early June, and bugged us relentlessly over the past few weeks to come with her to her home village so that one day there might be a secondary school in that place. She had lied to us. She told us over and over that it wasn't that far. It was really far. She told us that the roads were bad but that they weren't really all that bad. The roads were

horrible. But after Godfrey gave his speech to the crowd, and after I talked with them, and after we listened to their questions and gave our answers, and after we heard people say all that they wanted to say, then the man who seemed to be the oldest man in the village stood up and said let this day always be remembered as the day that changed our village, then the village chairman stood up and said that for all of these years the rest of the world moved ahead and we remained behind but now is our chance to do what is right for our children, and then the pastor stood up in the crowd and prayed a wonderful prayer. "God bless the daughter of our village who went away but did not forget all of the other children in the village and who has returned now to bring this good thing to us. And God give us the strength to haul the stones and to make the bricks and to not fail our children."

And then Godfrey turned over to me and said -- Mzee, it would be a sin before God to not build a school here.

I thought about that as I day dreamed in the car. Would it really be a sin to not build a school in the village of Kimala? Yup. It sure would. Suddenly I could see the beginnings of a great sermon for chapel at Madisi this next week. How silly we all are to think that sin is a list of things we're supposed to make sure that we don't do. Sin is far more than that! Sin is failing to do good. Sin is failing to do the things in this world that God wants His people to do! I can't wait to make that clear to our students! It's not enough to just go about our lives and to avoid doing bad things. We have to go about our lives seeking out to know the good that God wants each of us to do -- and then to

actually do it. To do his will. And to not do His will is to do sin. I can't wait to preach this next week!

And then there was Godfrey's second statement. It came later as we were walking up yet another steep hill and we had stopped to catch our breath, and I laughingly said -- "Village Schools" -- we don't build schools in cities! Godfrey chuckled, and then paused, looked me in the eye and said -- Mzee, if we don't build a school here, no one else will. And I thought about that for a long time daydreaming in the car as Godfrey drove. Building a school in Kimala will be harder than building a school in any of the other villages where we are trying to build schools. No truck is going to be able to help those people haul stones and haul bricks. They're going to have to carry on their heads every single stone up to the building site. Not only will they have to make all of the bricks and then burn them but they'll have to carry each and every brick up the hill to the building site. I can't imagine how many buckets of sand and water will have to be hauled on people's heads. And I had time to do the mental math while I was day-dreaming. Normally we figure we have to find people willing to help us with \$3500 to buy and transport the metal roofing and the cement and all of that stuff for each classroom -- well building a school in Kimala is going to be more

expensive -- probably more like \$4750 for each classroom. And we've got six classrooms to build there in Kimala so that's a lot of money. But Godfrey's right. If we don't do it, no one else will. And we can't just say that it's too far away, and the roads are too bad. Those kids are like kids anywhere in the world, and they should at least have the chance to go to school. All of them. Every single last one of them.

But what I really thought about as I daydreamed in that car was the wonder of that girl who, years ago, got chosen to go to secondary school, who was so fortunate to get to go to the university, who remembered all those who had not been so fortunate as she was. She could have been a student, studied hard, broken no rules, done nothing bad, and ignored that voice within her that said remember all of those back in Kimala who have no place to go to school and do something, don't take no for an answer, bug them, make sure that they come, get in the car with them, take them to the village, don't let them think of turning back. And no one would have said that she would have sinned by ignoring that voice within her.

No one that is except for God.

And maybe that pastor back in her village who taught her well.