



What was my strategic plan for the future of schools in Malawi?

Steve Vinton, October 9, 2007

When Godfrey and I crossed the border on the bus coming from the neighboring country of Malawi and made it back into Tanzania, the messages that had piled up in the week we were gone seemed to just gush into our phones!

Emmanueli had succeeded in making three trips with our truck Chapakazi to Idigima to carry metal roofing, door and window frames, boards -- and as long as he was there he tacked on hauling gravel and sand -- and so the work of building the new library and administration building will continue on at breakneck speed.

Our students in Maguu when they heard that the students at Idigima had made all of those bricks themselves for that library and administration building, they decided to do the same thing at their school and were already at work making tens of thousands of bricks!

James had in the first ten days of his school vacation already succeeded in getting all of the foundations in for our new school at Mtambula and was arranging with Emmanueli to get door and window frames and cement delivered ahead of schedule so he could keep the momentum going and get the folks started on getting the walls up. He's got 20 days left and he's got the whole village in a frenzy of activity determined to make every day count!

Enrollment figures from school after school show huge jumps as more and more kids sign up -- hundreds and hundreds of them -- thanks not just to Godfrey and Emmanueli and Janerose making the rounds and holding town meetings and speaking in primary schools -- but it seems from the messages that our teachers, and many, many of our students, have been going far and wide and spreading the

word that we receive everyone in our schools and that no one should miss out!

The inspectors went to our school at Lukima and -- drum roll! -- have formally recommended that we be fully accredited and registered. [I think the whole bus was a big shocked when I cheered over that one and even I was a little embarrassed -- but sometimes it's ok to be overly excited!]

We pulled off "the deal of the century" negotiating really low prices for metal roofing and Emmanueli signed the papers and everything is set for him to begin transporting next week over 3000 sheets of metal roofing down to the new schools we are building at Malindindo, Ulolela and Mpepo! And how fortunate that is because the messages from all of those villages down in the Ruvuma region is that work on building these three new schools is taking off at a tremendously fast pace!

James isn't the only one trying to pull off miracles this year!

A total of 22 more of our former students from Makuzani have sent word that they will be joining us in two weeks, ready to be sent as reinforcements into our schools throughout the country. That is news which is particularly gratifying to my heart, because while we're thankful of course for every teacher who joins us, there's no denying that something really special about having our own students from the very first school that Susan and I started come to work along side us.

And tons of congratulatory messages coming from all over about the results of our students at Madisi and Sawala and how they out-performed all of the other schools in the

district. [How nice to be known not just as the people who help the poor and the orphans, the people who run really Christian schools, the folks with schools that actually have with discipline, the ones who have the schools where students have to work and make bricks and do hard physical labor and learn more than just book knowledge, but hey it's also nice to be known as the folks with the schools with the best quality education around!]

Godfrey and I could only smile with all of this – and tons of other news as well. We had to read and re-read all of those messages and savor them and laugh and joke and feel the joy of being a part of such a wonderful, wonderful team of people. Our thoughts for the past week had all been centered on our visit to Malawi and suddenly it was incredibly wonderful to be home – even if we were still racing through the countryside on that bus – at least we were home and racing through the countryside on that bus in our own country!

What was so clear after being out of the country for a week was the importance of the principles of Ephesians 4. God doesn't give to the church pastors and other leaders so that they can do the work of the ministry. Not at all. He gives to the church these leaders so that they can train others to do the work of the ministry. How easy it would be for us to miss that, but as I told Godfrey, if we missed it, not only would we be running contrary to Biblical principles, we would be stifling God's work, we would be crippling it, we would be forcing it to be very, very small. Godfrey had just three weeks ago finished training Felisia, Sanga, Fanweli and Shukuru -- and he had James and Justin who he had trained two years ago to work in place to work alongside these new folks – and the result was that they were hard at work being used by God to organize literally tens of thousands of people to participate in an incredible effort to build four new schools in the next several months – all while Godfrey, the man who had trained them, was now able

to move on to doing something else -- in this case spending a week with me in Malawi! As I pointed out to Godfrey, the speed with which God is moving things forward in Tanzania would be utterly impossible and even unthinkable if Godfrey saw his job as to do this work -- but since he has understood that it is his job, not to do this work, but rather to train others to do this work -- well quite frankly the sky is the limit! Growth is limited only by the number of workers He Himself sends to us to train – and so we must continue to pray unto the Lord of the Harvest that He send forth workers into His harvest field – and when He sends them, we have to concentrate our efforts on training them and training them well!

It was a good two hours that we babbled away and commented and talked about all of the news and these principles. Two of our 29 hours on the bus from Lilongwe back to Dar we spent in sheer joy. (I won't comment on the other 27.) Our trip to Malawi was crammed full of wonderful moments and now that our bus ride is done and over and behind us, it's good to take a deep breath and to smile and savor those wonderful moments from Malawi!

Certainly one of the moments I savor was when Godfrey, Davies and I met last Wednesday in the office of the Minister of Education with his two advisors and we shared with them what VSI was all about and why we were there and to hear him not only tell us that the door was open, but that his office would back us in everything and help us in any way they could.

No doubt I won't forget for a while the joy it really was to preach in chapel on Friday to the students at the African Bible College and to challenge them to let the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:35-40 do a work in their hearts and to purpose to do good onto the poor and the needy, those Jesus calls "the least of these", as an incredible act of love for Jesus Himself. We don't help the poor because it's good for the development of the country. We don't help

the poor because it's somehow rewarding or fulfilling for us. We don't help the poor because we feel pity. No, we help the poor because if Jesus were here in our midst we would fall all over each other to be the one who would get to feed Him when He was hungry or to give Him something to drink when He was thirsty! The shock really was the number of students at the end of the day when classes were done who gathered with me and Godfrey in the student center and for I think more than an hour asked questions and talked about how they might do in Malawi, maybe just maybe, what Tanzanian Christians were doing in Tanzania – give of themselves in an incredible effort to start schools in village for the poor and the orphans and those without any hope of otherwise going to school – “the least of these”.

And I'm not going to be able to forget the two classes that I was invited to teach in the education department that day after chapel. Studying the philosophy of education and psychology and all of that stuff can be a little dry sometimes (I know – it all brought back memories of studying for my masters a couple of years ago!) But I loved the energy in that room when I challenged them to take the principles that they were learning about interaction and learning on one hand, consider on the other hand, what I had spoken on in chapel, and then put it all together in light of the verse in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 where Paul makes the statement that “we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us”. We were able to look at why in VSI we're not just looking for Christian teachers to teach in our schools, we're looking for Christian teachers who will love their students, who will be delighted to live in the village with them, who will be thrilled to share their lives with them, who will have joy in sharing the gospel with them, who will feel in their hearts what Paul wrote in that verse. If giving our students a Christian education is little more than imparting to them knowledge with some sense of a Christian world view then it honestly is far short of the kind of Christian education that

Biblical principles demand of us. Two wonderful class periods! I really do love to teach!

But the most unforgettable moment was one that could have never been planned for. A student asked me what was my strategic plan for the future of schools in Malawi! I'm afraid I shocked the poor guy when I just about bounced off the stool that I was sitting on in front of them all and almost took a leap across the room and said that I haven't got one. It is after all Malawian Christians who have to come up with their own strategic plan for schools in their own country. My “strategic plan” if you want to call it a “strategic plan” had only three parts to it. First, to meet with the Minister of Education and find out if the government would welcome the opening of Christian schools for the poor in villages through Malawi. (Godfrey and I completed that on Wednesday!) Second, to speak in chapel at his college and to speak from the Word of God and to believe that if God would want those seeds from His Word to grow in the hearts of Malawian Christians so that they would do this for the poor and the needy and the orphans in their country, then He as God would do that. (I had done that that morning!) And third, I would pray and I would ask good people who I know to join me and to really pray for open doors in villages in Malawi, to pray to God to send workers to serve in these villages, to pray for God to raise up a group of leaders in Malawi to organize it all and bring it to fruition, and to pray that God would work in the hearts of His people. In some sense I guess the third part of my “strategic plan” will never be completely finished!

The reality of our world today is that in Malawi, 138,000 students finish primary school every year, but the government only has enough room to take a little more than 7000 into secondary school. The other 131,000 had their hearts sink in disappointment when they saw their names do not come out on the list of those who are chosen. They are the poor, the orphans, those who have had everything in life stacked against them. They are indeed “the least of these”. And this just might be the time

in the history of Malawi that God intends to call His people to give of themselves to do something incredible and astounding for those on the bottom. What an incredibly awesome privilege it could be for us as Christians to be the ones who finally stand up and say we will do everything that we can to help as many as possible. To help the any child get an

education is a wonderful thing. But to help a poor child, an orphan, a girl from the village who had lost all hope of ever going to school -- to help one who Jesus would call "the least of these" -- now that is, well, far more than just wonderful. I suddenly can't think of an adjective to really describe it.