

Stephanie's News No. 41 Aug 2020

'Only in returning to me and waiting for me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength'. Isaiah 30:15

A BIG THANK YOU for your support, prayers and encouragement whilst I have been on Home Assignment. They mean a lot to me. Today I would like to bring you update with where I am and to ask for your prayers.

I returned to the UK last year feeling uncertain about the future. The Evangelical Bible College of Malawi (EBCoM) has been operating with a budget deficit for some time. This has steadily been eating away at the college's reserves. Over the years there have been various income generating projects, cost-cutting measures and new courses. However, the problem has remained. It causes tensions - Should EBCoM accept students that don't really have a call in order to cover costs? And with that, how do we discern calling / vision (E.g. a teacher wanting more bible understanding vs one wanting a higher salary)? Should EBCoM take students

who are unsure of their Christian faith, disciple them and trust that they will come to faith? That's not guaranteed. What would be the effect on the church, if the person remains an unbeliever, graduates and becomes a pastor? Should EBCoM continue to focus on training pastors and other Christian leaders or does the college diversify and train teachers? Does EBCoM part-diversify and teach compatible subjects or does it become a mini-university? They are issues that many colleges in Africa are wrestling with.

Many of EBCoM's students are sponsored by people in the West and the college is dependent on that income. The recent financial crisis in the West has meant fewer students for EBCoM and increasing pressures. Currently the college is designed around a traditional Western educational model, as is primary and secondary school education in Malawi. In the long run this may not be sustainable. So what should a 'Malawian' bible college look like? What format or mode of delivery? What emphasis? What subjects? [Please pray for EBCoM as they wrestle with these issues.](#)

The Church in Malawi struggles with nominalism, syncretism and the prosperity Gospel. Nominalism is when people's beliefs don't really touch or effect the deep areas of their lives. It's prevalent in the West too. Syncretism occurs when people believe in Jesus and in something else. In Malawi it tends to be Jesus and cultural practices or Africa Traditional Religion. In the West it's more Jesus and materialism or secularism. Islam is also increasingly prevalent in Malawi. The latest example of this is the adjacent billboard photo. So are EBCoM's courses appropriate for the current situation in Malawi? [Please pray for people in Malawi and around the world to come to know the Lord Jesus in the deep areas of their lives and for lives to be transformed.](#)



Last year the Trauma Healing Workshop facilitator mentioned that when someone suffers a trauma they tend to revert back to their original cultural belief about God and until the trauma is resolved it will inhibit their view of God. This makes perfect sense to me. I've experienced it. In Malawi there are frequent floods and famines, many people are orphans, abuse and addictions are prevalent. Our students have grown up in this environment. How does it effect their belief of God? To flourish do traumas need addressing? During the Emotionally Healthy



Spirituality and Relationship Courses I noticed that relational skills have to be taught. There are gaps in my discipleship and relational skills. What about our students, many of whom have been brought up by an older sibling? What is God saying and in the midst of this, who is God calling me to be and does my calling fit into this? In my End of Term Review the SIM Malawi Director and I looked at various options.



EBCoM Staff at the Recent Leaving Party

Since then the Lord has used the Covid-19 pandemic to bring the situation at EBCoM to a head. Staff were recently asked whether they would be willing to continue working at the college with significantly reduced pay and restructured programs, or take retrenchment / voluntary redundancy. The majority opted for retrenchment, many feeling called to train rural pastors. I sense the Lord in this and am both sad to see colleagues leave and excited to see what the Lord is going to do. [Please pray for clarity for EBCoM and for the staff that have left, and for the Lord to guide each one step by step.](#)

Meanwhile, back in the UK I've been working on my own discipleship needs. Early on I sensed the Lord encouraging me that this work is important for whatever I do next and that in due time the way ahead will naturally become clear. The Lord's also reminded me of several bible verses. One is Isaiah 30:15, '*Only in returning to me and waiting for me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength*'.

In recent months the SIM Malawi Director, my Mobiliser and the Personnel Director from SIM UK and I have had a few 'zoom' meetings. Whilst I may, at least initially continue with some involvement at EBCoM, depending on what EBCoM might 'look like' going forward, there could also be a number of other exciting possibilities in Malawi. All of them would involve stepping out into the unknown and I feel uncertain. I also don't at the moment know where I would start or what the focus should be. At the same time I'm aware that the Lord is doing something in me and I'm not quite sure what it means. Rather than force anything I'm trying to keep my hands open in case the Lord has something else in mind. I really want to be walking in step with Him, not running ahead and not lagging behind, and open to whatever work He wants to do in me now and through me in the future. [Please pray that I'll have courage to wait for the Lord's timing and for the Lord to bring clarity, confirmation and focus. Pray too that I will be open to any pruning, moulding and shaping that He wants to do in me.](#)

And finally ... **THANK YOU** once again for all you love, support, prayers and encouragement. They are so much appreciated.

Your sister in Christ,

Stephanie

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