



‘Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”’ Isaiah 30:21

A BIG THANK YOU for your love, encouragement, prayers and support whilst I’ve been back in the UK. I’ve so appreciated people walking with me.

In a previous prayer letter I mentioned that there could be a number of exciting possibilities in Malawi, all of which would involve stepping out into the unknown. I had lots of ideas, but I didn’t know where to start, what the focus should be or how things fitted together. I wanted to keep my hands open and allow the Lord to guide my steps.

The pandemic created an opportunity for me to attend seminars, listen to podcasts, read books, pray, reflect and continue working on my discipleship issues. One of the things the Lord guided me to was a Phd Thesis entitled, ‘*Christian Nominalism within Church Membership*’, written by an African called Enosh Anguandia Adia Edre. Edre had observed many of the things I’ve witnessed in Malawi, had similar questions to me and been prompted to do some research. He hoped his work would help Bible schools improve their curriculum and teaching methods.

I felt encouraged as I read Edre’s thesis because His research and recommendations correlated with ideas I was considering, including holistic discipleship. It wasn’t always comfortable though. Edre stresses that the issues of ‘*nominal Christianity will not be adequately addressed ... unless the Pastoral Leadership realise that they are part of the problem ...*’ As a bible college lecturer that includes me!

One quote in Edre’s thesis that really stuck out for me was,

‘Bible schools ... will never truly solve all the local churches’ problems of godly leadership if they only give lectures and focus on imparting academic knowledge. Effective pastoral care requires that leaders are disciples before, during and after training.’



It highlights the importance of discipleship within both the local church and institutions of Theological Education.

One tool in the Emotionally Healthy Relationships Course (EHR) is the Christian Life Profile. I’d wondered whether this might help provide a better understanding of Christian Nominalism in Malawi. In his thesis Edre says,

‘the kind of research [based on a Christian Life Profile] is urgently needed in Africa if church growth and church health are to move beyond measuring numbers to measuring hearts.’

Ever felt like the Lord has gone before you and is tying things together! Over the last few months I’ve seen the Lord doing that a lot. He has drawn on many different experiences and things I’ve done and I’m starting to get quite excited.



So what is the way ahead? Whilst in Malawi I was really challenged by something a Hasidic rabbi said on his death bed:

'When I was young, I set out to change the world. When I grew a little older, I perceived that this was too ambitious, so I set out to change my state. This too I realised as I grew older, was too ambitious, so I set out to change my town. When I realised I could not even do this, I tried to change my family. Now as an old man, I know that I should have started by changing myself, maybe then I would have succeeded in changing my family, the town, or even the state - and who knows, maybe even the world!'

I can only take people as far as I am willing to go myself. So the best place to begin is probably with prayer, the Lord Jesus and me. I'm all too aware of areas in my life that are more like my earthly family than the Lord Jesus and my powerlessness to change. Thankfully transformation is the Holy Spirit's job, not mine, & He loves me enough to do it. I've found, though, that it does help to co-operate with Him! [Please pray for courage & willingness to do that.](#)

I've agreed a role with SIM Malawi that, for the time being, involves stepping out of formal teaching at EBCoM, research to better understand the context and the barriers to the gospel, working with Malawian leaders within SIM, the local churches and possibly EBCoM, some informal mentoring and discipleship and developing tools to better equip believers and churches. I'm hoping that in time we may be able to redesign Theological Education in Malawi so that it is more appropriate for the context. I'm bringing my ideas and thinking together for consideration and drawing up a strategy. I suspect it will continue to be a work in process! [Please pray for the Lord to lead, inspire, guide my steps and provide creativity & insight.](#)

Whilst I may have ideas and can offer things, I'm not Malawian, I will never fully understand the culture and I don't know what will work. I believe my Malawian brothers and sisters do and that it's important to work as a team, listen to others, critique, assess and trial ideas, explore how they might be contextualised and used and in doing so allow the Lord to transform our lives and hearts.

Recently SIM asked if I would like to explore the Ministry Point Person role for Theological Education and Missiological outreach. This role really excites me and I'd love to say, 'yes'. Yet I also know myself, recognise my limits and suspect I may be best to continue along the way already marked out for me, allow the Lord to continue teaching me and prepare for something like this in the future. [I'd really value prayers for the Lord's ongoing wisdom and discernment.](#)

So what now? My Dad is 80. My family are celebrating his birthday & I'm taking a holiday. I require final medical clearance, confirmation that it will be a suitable environment for me to return to and my Partnership Agreement drawing up. Things seem to be coming together. I am hopeful these can be done at the end of August and that I can return at the end of September. [I would really value prayer for rest, relaxation and restoration whilst I'm away, courage to keep trusting, the Lord to continue healing, line my will up with His and oversee all the practicalities and timing.](#)



[My Parents on my Birthday](#)

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

Your sister in Christ,
Stephanie

Contact Details:

Mobile: +44 (0)7961-801-829

Skype: [darlingstephanie](#)

Email darlingstephanie@yahoo.com (personal)

Email: stephanie.darling@sim.org (SIM)

SIM

Please Note: If you'd like to support Stephanie's work in Malawi you can make donations by cheque, standing order, credit-card, or on-line (see www.sim.co.uk/donate & www.sim.co.uk/sof). Please make cheques payable to Serving In Mission and send them to SIM UK, Newmarket Road, Cambridge, CB5 8RS referencing Stephanie. If you're a taxpayer, the donation is eligible for Gift Aid; a form for this can be downloaded from www.sim.co.uk (Registered charity number 219763)