

How a Humble African Pastor Rocked My World

In Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world, Christians suffer from a severe lack of resources. But that doesn't stop them from sharing their faith or planting churches. In fact, their wholehearted sacrifice sometimes puts America's well-funded evangelistic efforts to shame.

I witnessed this last week when I met Donald Kuyokwa, a 60-year-old Pentecostal Holiness pastor who has done more on his shoestring budget than some American denominations do in a year.

A retired teacher, Kuyokwa and his wife live on a \$200 monthly pension. THEY raised their eight children in a three-bedroom house with a corrugated iron roof and concrete floors. Their toilet is outside.

Kuyokwa's small congregation in the village of Misuku collects an average of 600 kwacha every week. That comes to about 83 cents. Yet the pastor has planted four branch churches in the past 16 years, relying mostly on the strength of his legs to walk long distances.

A few years ago the lanky pastor decided to target the village of Chikando, which is located in northern Malawi near the border of Tanzania. There are no roads to Chikando, only a rocky path through a dense forest. It takes Kuyokwa six hours to make the hike.

No one in Chikando had heard of Jesus when he visited the first time. The people worship spirits and rely on the superstitious magic of witchdoctors to help them grow rice. Young girls suffer horrible abuse and are forced to marry when they are barely teenagers. Polygamy is common.

But slowly people began to convert to Jesus as a result of the pastor's visits. Today the congregation has built a church with a grass roof. They use kerosene lamps during worship services because Chikando, like most of Malawi, doesn't have electricity.

"At first we were threatened by witches," Kuyokwa told me of his missionary adventure. But today a growing group of first-generation believers worship Christ. They have renounced their animistic and polygamous traditions.

Pastor Kuyokwa walks to Chikando twice a month. In the past he rode a motorcycle, but it fell into disrepair. He can't ride a bicycle because the footpath has too many steep hills. So he buys cheap tennis shoes until they wear out, then he buys another pair.

He really doesn't mind the walk, but he's a bit nervous about the huge pythons that lurk in the forest. "I have heard that pythons have eaten people on that path," the pastor told me. "But God has always protected us."

This man's courage and commitment challenged me to the core after I heard his story. How could someone his age walk so far twice a month to reach a village that few people—even Malawians—know about? Why would a man care about a place that is so remote it has no telephone signal?

Kuyokwa says he gets his inspiration from the apostle Paul in the Bible. "Paul went to places where no one had taken the gospel," he says. "Evangelists don't visit my area. They only go to the big cities."

I was also struck by this man's bright smile. Supernatural joy obviously sustains him. He's one of the poorest people I've ever met, and he has never known suburban comforts such as air conditioning, indoor plumbing, hot showers or television. He doesn't even own a car.

But when I asked him what makes him happy, Kuyokwa didn't even pause to answer. He smiled again and said: "I'm looking beyond this life. I want to meet Jesus. That's what keeps me encouraged."

And what keeps him motivated to keep reaching these forgotten people? "No one had heard of Jesus in these areas before we came, so it is always exciting when the people decide to follow Him," he says, noting that no white person has ever visited Chikando.

I had to do some serious soul-searching after my conversation with this humble hero. Could I smile like Pastor Kuyokwa if I didn't have access to hot water or a wi-fi signal? Would I spend my own money to evangelize a village if I only made \$200 a month?

Most of us have no idea how much the poorest Christians in the world sacrifice to obey the Great Commission. There are many anonymous champions like Pastor Kuyokwa walking miles through jungles and across mountains and deserts to take God's Word to the ends of the Earth. They throw their entire widow's mite into the offering basket for missions while we dig out a few dollars from our bank accounts.

Jesus said: "For to whom much is given, of him much shall be required" (Luke 12:48). Our blessings come with responsibility. We shouldn't feel guilty that we are blessed, but we can't forget that we have been blessed to be a blessing to others. Let's use our abundance not to enrich ourselves but to finish the task Jesus gave us. {eoa}