True Fellowship

Ruan & Christine Pienaar 7 June 2023



Eight months after our wedding, we felt it was time to stretch our faith and we were hungry to see what God is doing in a different nation. So we flew to Malawi to join Lance and Sue McIntosh and their team, bearing bags full of items to deliver to Living Stones Church.

Malawi is a highly evangelised nation, with a heavy NGO presence in many areas, but historically there has been very little discipleship and many churches are in a heartbreakingly unhealthy state. What we saw while we were with Living Stones Church is that God is building a healthy church that makes true disciples through authentic fellowship. There is a real sense of community, vulnerability and openness beginning to be lived out in their church. God is teaching individuals to love each other and He is raising up good leaders.

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During our time there, we were asked to share in 7 home groups and to lead a community leaders training time, which compelled us to step out in faith and actively combat the enemy's lies that we don't have much to offer. It was also such a privilege to lead some people to the

Lord, and we were moved by the power of the simple Gospel! Works-based religion is rife in Malawi, so it was amazing to see a lady move from saying she was 'in the process of salvation' (trying desperately to be good in her own strength) to praying a simple sinner's prayer and truly giving her heart to Jesus.

It was beautiful to see how the people in Living Stones Church are hungry for more of God, open and soft-hearted, and how they listen to His voice and submit to His ways. Over and over, we saw God emphasising love for one another. In a country where many individuals' basic needs aren't being met, it can be easy (and understandable) to fall into patterns of survival and self-preservation. Yet we saw members going the extra mile for one another and applying some of the basic teachings of Acts 2:42-47. One man even cooked his simple meal of 'nsima' and walked 2 km up the road to another lonely man in their group to share a meal together!

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The example that Lance and Sue set in the way that they love and open their home and hearts has also inspired us immensely. You never quite know who will be staying over or who will be at their dinner table – all are welcome. It's a beautiful, challenging example for us to follow! We live in such abundance and have so many resources to share with others.

It is easy to take a healthy church for granted, but things that seem 'normal' to us, such as being part of a community where people are authentic, share meals and pray for one another, are actually radical. We have returned home with a fresh perspective on fellowship, generosity and the power of the Gospel, together with a determination to embrace discomfort and to be stretched by God for the sake of His body.