

A Visit to Namikango 2009

Passionate About This Ministry

by Mark Thiesen

For the first time in several years, we had Sidney Vaughn visiting Malawi. Sidney is one of the elders at New Beginnings Church of Christ, who has been involved in overseeing the Namikango work since 1974. To say that Sidney is passionate

about this ministry would be an understatement, since he devotes around 30 hours a week to the project year after year.

His tireless promotion of Namikango Mission through the monthly bulletin, letters, phone calls, and other contacts keeps Christians in America informed about this outstanding work and removes a lot of headaches for the missionaries. Whenever something comes up here or we need guidance or have a special need, Sidney is sure to respond to our communication right away.

He is always ready "to go to bat" for the missionaries and the Namikango work, at times going on fund raising campaigns to enable us to obtain critically important tools to keep this ministry going.

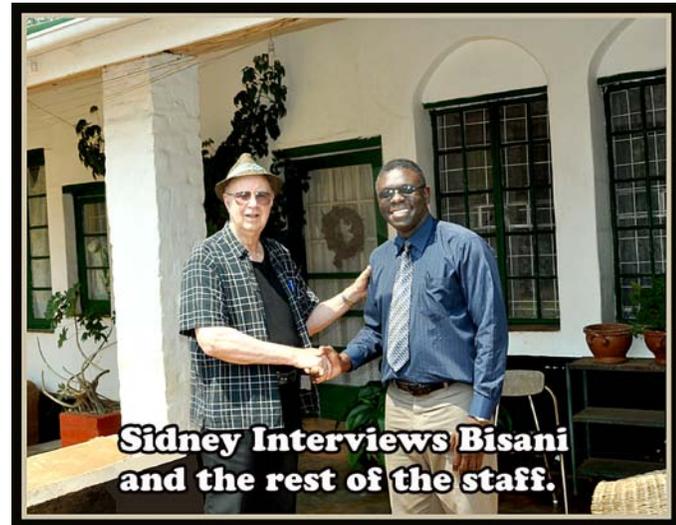
Because of Sidney's close involvement in this work, it's important that he comes when possible to make a personal observation of how things are going. The high cost of travel these days limits his visits to Malawi. His expenses were paid by a private contributor.

He's been making up for lost time since his arrival 10 days ago, though, spending hours with our staff, calling on old friends in the work, and visiting some of our village ministries, including a church meeting and a village Bible school in progress.

He has not wasted chances to take good photos, either, taking hundreds of pictures since he came. I expect future issues of the bulletin will contain some of the best of these.

What I've appreciated most about Sidney's visit is the commitment that we share to building up a godly staff of men to lead this work. Sidney has read about the new men in my reports, but on this visit he has met them in person. He has spent a good amount of time with each one of them personally, getting to know them and learning how we can better encourage them in their work and personal development.

Because of his guidance, we hope to improve our efforts to equip this team, toward building up the church of tomorrow. All of you play a part in the Namikango work already, through your earnest prayers and generous contributions.



Sidney Interviews Bisani and the rest of the staff.

An Amazing Interview !

September 15, 2009

I had an amazing interview with **Isaac Paul**, a young staff member at the Mission. We got to talking and he opened up about his life and even about some physical abuse because of his preaching. Even Mark was surprised to learn of this.

Isaac is 39, married, with six children; the youngest – a son, was born yesterday, September 14, and is doing fine. When he is not on a month-long teaching session or a weekend village visit, he manages the crops grown on the Mission. These crops help feed the many groups that come for the ongoing studies held here at the Mission. His growing of corn, green beans, and peanuts makes it possible for us to host these studies. Incidentally, I discovered that every member of the staff has a variety of responsibilities and this makes for a very efficient organization. . . and allows us to operate on a very small budget. Now back (as Paul Harvey would say) to the rest of the story. It took six years for Isaac to complete the 24 courses of study through the Mission, but long before they were completed, Isaac said, "I have a fire inside of me and I want to teach people about Jesus." He preached nearly every weekend during the six years he was studying the courses.

The "Big Man"

At one small church he visited, he found that there was a "Big Man" in charge. This "Big Man" was a self-appointed preacher who had no Bible knowledge and could not read. He had taken over this church and kept the name, Church of Christ, because that was a popular name in this area. His message was witchcraft, voodoo, black magic, hexes, potions, and curses. His was a religion of fear. For his faithful followers, he allowed drunken beer parties in the church. For any who opposed him, he promised a curse that would take their children's lives in the night. He was big indeed . . . big on intimidation.

Now enters Isaac and a couple more Bible students one Sunday. They had been invited by someone in this area to preach, so they gladly came. When Isaac heard what was going on with witchcraft and beer parties in the church, he began teaching from the Bible on these subjects, showing the people that these things were wrong and the people should be following Jesus, not some self-proclaimed "Big Man."

The "Big Man" was not there this Sunday morning, but he got the word and he got there fast. Outside the church, in front of all the people, on that Sunday morning, he said he did not want this youngster or anyone from the Mission spouting these lies, and he grabbed Isaac's hand, bent his middle finger back, until it broke. The people took Isaac aside, surrounded him and prayed for him. They advised him to call the police and to go to the hospital. The custom here is that if you have an injury, even an accident, you must first report to the police; they will investigate and give you written permission to be treated.

This would also cause the "Big Man" and his helpers, eight of them, to be jailed. The people said he should "Go," but Isaac said, "No!" Then he said, "This is the very thing I have been teaching you about Jesus. Jesus turned the other cheek and so do I. I forgive these men and I pray for them to repent and to follow Jesus."

While people watched, with the bone sticking out of his skin, Isaac took his limp finger, pulled it hard, and heard a snap, as it settled back in place. The very next Sunday Isaac returned, swollen finger and all, and preached. They hung on every word of this young man's sermon . . . this man who not only preached Jesus, but who followed Jesus' example of love and forgiveness.

No, the "Big Man" has not changed his ways, but he does know what a real Christian is, and his threats have subsided. This particular group no longer listens to his hatred.

It is easy to understand why Mark thinks so highly of this young man of uncommon character.



I showed Isaac this report and asked him to read it to make sure I had the facts right. He reviewed it, looked up, and very fervently said, "That's ex-act-a-ly right!"

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Sidney Vaughn



Behind the Scenes

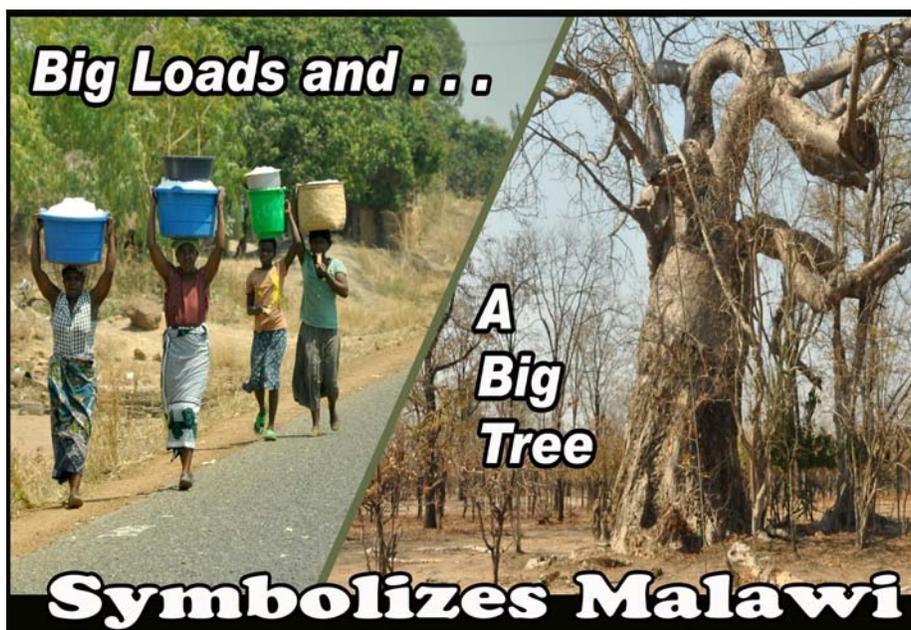
I have often wanted people to know more about the gentle people of Malawi – their customs, their struggles, some of their private moments, and why the people have been so hungry for the Gospel. I would like to try to uncover and share some of these "behind the scenes" moments and how they impact the Mission. This could be a small glimpse of Malawi, the "warm heart of Africa."

For example, I would like to take a look at how people can make a living when there is no natural industry – no forests, no oil, no gold, and no diamonds. I would like to look at the trees, plants, and animals that uniquely identify Africa. What

product in your kitchen cabinets has come from the strange Baobab tree?

These and many more personal thoughts I would like to share with you here in the months to come. Please feel free to also share your own thoughts about any phase of the Mission effort. And, with your permission, I may share some of your comments here, "behind the scenes."

As I think about it, I would really like to enlist your comments. Notes from our supporters are always an encouragement to our Mission family and to me.



Tell us why you are motivated to send your hard-earned money to support a work half-way around the world. Why have you supported this work for so many years? Let us hear from you. S. V.