

Malawi 2013

It is hard to believe we have been away from home nearly a month now. Marty and I left Cincinnati on June 4 to visit the brethren in Malawi, Africa for the summer. We were uncertain of what all to expect, but decided that we were able and that the opportunity was before us. I like to preach and conduct Bible studies, and Marty is a well qualified registered nurse. There is a need for both in Malawi. We knew that the hardest part would be being separated from our friends and family in the US. However in this modern electronic age it is nothing compared to the sacrifices made by those who have traveled here fifty and sixty years ago.

We took a couple of days to get rested and acclimated to the time difference when we arrived in Malawi, and then we began our work with great fury. On the first Sunday we drove for about two and a half hours to a small church where I preached, and we then ate a meal prepared for us by the sisters. We arrived back to our house in Blantyre about five o'clock that evening.

The next day Marty began her volunteer work at a nearby hospital. I got material together for studies that were planned for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. My studies each day were in different locations, but each place was about a three hour drive one way. The sessions would last about four to five hours and then we would leave to return to Blantyre. One place only had about twenty men who showed up for the study; at another there were more than sixty.

On Friday and Saturday I did not have studies but I did have preaching engagements. Getting to our destinations is a big part of the day. One day we drove four and a half hours, I

conducted a four hour study, and then we drove home four and a half hours. Another day we drove nearly five hours, I preached, we ate, and then we drove home.

Although much time is spent in driving we have never gone very far—less than a hundred miles. The roads are unpaved and very rough. It is impossible to make very good time. Sometimes an African will pass us on his bicycle because he is able to make better time on the road. We are exhausted of an evening from the ride.

Each week has been similar to the first. I continue to visit five to six congregations a week. We have day long studies usually at about three or four of these places, and then I just preach the other days.



Preachers and church leaders pose for a picture at the close of a study at a church in Zomba.

WHERE DRIVING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE ROAD IS LEFT

One of the hardest things I have had to learn here in Malawi is to drive a car. Just getting into the vehicle has been challenging enough. More than once I have opened the door, got in, and then realized that I am in the passenger seat. The steering wheel is on the opposite side of the car. Everybody drives on the left side of the road. So much for reflexes and instinct when you see an oncoming vehicle. The gear shift is to my left, and the rear view mirror is to the left. I am constantly turning the windshield wipers on when I am wanting to make a turn because the turn signal lever is on the right side of the steering wheel.



Although the vehicle I am driving has a five speed manual transmission, I seldom get out of third gear when I am in town. Marty told me the first evening we were out that she thought I was to close the edge of the road. My judgment of where I was driving on the road was not very good. This was a critical problem because at any given time of the day there are lots of pedestrians walking on both sides of the road. During the morning and evening rush hours there are hundreds of pedestrians and bicyclists along the edge of the road. In a market place there may be thousands—its like a sea of people. Drivers are expected to watch out for bicycles and people afoot. They have the right to be where they are.

The second day I was driving I came to a police road check which are pretty typical here in Malawi. The officer, who was standing on the left edge of the road, was waving me through until I nearly ran over his feet. He jumped back from the highway, I stopped, and then he came over to talk to me. I explained that I was new to the country and that I was just learning to get around. We talked for a few minutes and then he waved me on. Needless to say, I was very nervous the rest of the day as I was driving. That should have been enough of a lesson for me, but . . . a couple of days later I was out in the bush. We had driven for about three hours on an unpaved road to visit a church. I preached, and then we visited for a while before we left. I had barely driven out of sight of the church when I met a bicyclist coming toward me. The road was narrow and I moved over to give him plenty of room. Something crunched under my tires. I stopped and got out. A woman was picking produce from her garden and had set a bucket between the road and her garden. I had run over the bucket. I apologized and told her I was greatly embarrassed. We determined what a new bucket would cost, and I paid her and went on my way.

I am getting better, But I am still very tense when I get behind the wheel to go someplace. Probably about the time I get this all down we will be returning to the States.



The church parking lot is never paved at the congregations I visit. There usually are quite a few vehicles—all of them two-wheeled, and none of them motorized. These brethren ride their bicycles for miles. It is not unusual for a man to come to services with his wife and a child on one bicycle.