

My Dear Friends,

Seeing women lifted up out of poverty, despair and oppression in Christ's name gives me greater joy than just about anything we achieve in the AE ministry. And I believe there is no more liberating message than the Christian Gospel for women who have borne the brunt of many of the problems affecting us in Africa.

Indeed, we are seeing the extraordinarily positive impact of the Good News on women's lives firsthand in my home country of Malawi, where our Tailoring School for underprivileged women is daily transforming women who previously had been struggling to find a reason to hope.



Take **Maria Bashoni**, who is 21 years old and has a 19-month-old daughter. Maria is married, but her husband went to South Africa to earn money nearly a year ago and she has not heard from him since, leading her to conclude that he will not return. She was a Jehovah's Witness when she first started our Tailoring School, but she says she felt "a light coming on" as she heard the Gospel and participated in devotions. She recently gave her life to Christ and now feels that her heart is at peace and that she will no longer participate in quarrels with in-laws. Instead she will rather use her father's sewing machine to make clothes to sell to provide for herself and her daughter.

Trine Mbawala is another one of our students, a 40-year-old widow who is responsible for a 20-year-old daughter and 12 orphans left in her care by relatives. She didn't know how to sew, but is now able to make clothes to sell at her local market, enabling her to take care of her growing family.



What we see in the lives of these women, as well as in many more, are the consequences of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, widespread poverty and increasing urbanization, especially in our capital city of Lilongwe.



Sadly, nearly a million Malawians are infected with HIV and almost 60 percent of them are women. It is a further tragedy that 850,000 children have been left orphaned. Thankfully, one of those, **Sheila Mkandiwire**, who was left without her parents at the age of 14, has been a star student in our Tailoring School. Though she had to drop out of school at 16 because of lack of money, four years later she was married and thankfully gave her life to Christ. She is now 29 and has a daughter and son, but had no way to assist her husband, who is a pastor in a Muslim-dominated area of Malawi, in providing for their family. The tailoring skills she has learned have enabled her to earn money and to reach out through her new business to share the Gospel with customers and others eager to learn sewing skills from her.

The need for our Tailoring School is clear: more than a quarter of the Malawian people live in extreme poverty and the population of our city of Lilongwe has nearly doubled in the last eleven years. As is often the case, women have suffered more from this situation than men, with many of them tragically turning to prostitution, and so our aim in this Tailoring School has been to equip vulnerable women and girls to attain

self-reliance and achieve their God-given potential. In addition to sewing skills, we share the Gospel and also educate the women about running a small business and connecting with organizations that can lend them funds that they might need to get their new enterprise up and running. And the investments we're making in the lives of the women in our Project will be multiplied throughout Malawi.



Gloria Bibasi, 30, is one who demonstrates this. She was actually opposed to the Gospel when she came to our Tailoring School, but came to accept Jesus as her Savior, which has given her the peace and assurance she needed to let go of the anger she was struggling with before, anger that was infecting her marriage. Her new skills will give her a way to contribute toward taking care of her 6-year-old and 4-year-old daughters and her newly changed heart has given her an eagerness to share her knowledge and faith with other women in her village who have

no work and spend much of their days idle and discouraged.

The future also looks bright for **Maureen Shadrick**, (with **Rachel Lungu**, right) who is only 14 years old and whose laziness and bad attitude had led her to quit school. Since enrolling in our Tailoring School, however, Maureen has decided she wants to use her new skills to teach other girls how to sew and to reach out to our country's many orphans.



My friends, these changed lives bring such joy to me and to my wife, Rachel. We were burdened several years ago by the plight of so many women and yearned to do something to help them help themselves – not just to give handouts, but to equip them to earn an income through the work of their own hands without being dependent on unfaithful husbands or HIV-infected relatives or, worst of all, a pimp. Along with our colleagues in AE, we did a lot of research to determine the best location for our School. This turned out to be the Likuni area of Lilongwe, a district which sadly has many prostitutes, numerous widows, great poverty, girls who have had to leave school early because of lack of funds and support from parents, and a prevailing culture of ancestor worship.

All this may seem discouraging. However, as the Apostle Paul says, "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20-21). There is much sin and darkness in Likuni and throughout Malawi and across our continent, but we can rejoice that our God is faithful to bring forth His grace in these places when we step out in faith to bring the Good News and a helping hand to those who are hurting.

Won't you join with me in prayer and in a generous gift to join with us in investing in women like Maria, Trine, Sheila, Gloria and Maureen, both in Malawi and around Africa? Together we can lend them a hand, pulling them up out of despair and dependency, so that they can carry the Gospel of Christ out to the continent via their new skills and businesses.



Yours for the hope of Africa,
Stephen Lungu,
International Team Leader