



Meditation:

The Life of *Hesed*



Rev. Tshililo Liphadzi

This is a brief devotional reflection on the book of Ruth. It will help us to reflect on our own lives as God's agents in building his kingdom in our communities. In the book of Ruth, we see the life of *hesed* exemplified in the selfless lives of Ruth and Boaz. They showed their commitment to the well-being of their family. However, for Israel this lifestyle is applicable to all areas of life, such as politics and economics. People are to show kindness in all areas of life.

From the book of Ruth, we can conclude that a life of *hesed* means giving one's life for the well-being and growth of other people. It is laying down one's life for others to have life. In this kind of lifestyle, one does not start by what one will gain, but with what other people will gain. This is the heart of the gospel; Christ laid down his life for the whole world to have life, and life in abundance. Ruth gave her life to Naomi. She left her family, people and gods and stuck with Naomi, who preferred to be called Mara. Naomi seems to be a futureless lady from whom Ruth will gain nothing. However, Ruth showed kindness to her.

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Transforming our communities through the understanding of God's Word

It is the vision of MMD to see communities holistically transformed by mature local churches that celebrate the power of the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this vision that makes MMD distinct from other NGOs that are working hard for the transformation of communities. For MMD, transformation comes when local churches, through their mature members, live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life.

It is from this understanding of our end goal that I can argue that it is crucial for MMD to find ways of deepening its writers' understanding of God's Word, since our curriculum needs to be founded on the Word of God. We are to guard against building arguments based on mere paraphrasing or quoting verses out of context. If we fail to deepen our understanding of God's Word, we will fail to become instruments of transforming our communities and helping the deprived regain their dignity.

So I appreciated the opportunity that John Boekhout gave me, for two weeks last August, of Inductive Bible Study (IBS) training, in order to do the IBS edit on all MMD courses. Because of it, we will now train all MMD writers in this approach, in order to deepen the hermeneutical understanding of the Bible. If we can cultivate the best biblical interpretation practice in our course writing, we can be assured of better results in our quest for the transformation of our communities. It is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that transforms people and communities, not programmes that we put in place. We should always bear this in mind as we develop this wonderful and much-awaited programme in the continent of Africa.

-Rev. Tshililo Liphadzi

National Coordinator of MMDSA

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Though Boaz will not personally gain from this transaction, he is willing to redeem and to marry Ruth in order to keep Elimelech's name. We therefore learn that a life of *hesed* requires commitment and taking risks. It is this kind of commitment and risk-taking that God used to create a future for his people. It is through Ruth and Boaz's marriage that a son was born, Obed, who became the grandfather of the great King David. It is from this lineage that we received the Saviour of the whole world, Jesus Christ. Indeed, with God, there is nothing impossible. Our community is going through difficult times both politically and economically. It is again characterized by social disintegration. Politically, we are craving to see leaders whose priority is the well-being of their people. However, our ears are deafened by the news of corruption and selfish lifestyles from the corridors of power. Economically, the wealth of the country is in the hands of the few economic oligarchs who are prepared to pay off anyone to tow the line so that they can enrich themselves at the expense of the mass of poor people. We therefore need church leaders who can speak the prophetic words, "Thus says the Lord," to our communities. We encourage you, therefore, to partner/ collaborate with us as MMD in raising up servant leaders whose lives are characterized by love for God and for people, for the transformation of our communities.

-Rev. Tshililo Liphadzi

Thanks to our donors

It is only by God's grace that we keep on operating even in these very hard times, where finances are a challenge for everybody. Our sincere gratitude goes to donors, both national and international, for their commitment of seeing God's work continue and for trusting that MMDSA are capable of being the agents of change in our society. We would like to express our appreciation and special thanks for investing in this organisation. Our mission is impossible without your finances; we thank God for blessing us with you, and we pray that God may keep on showering His blessings upon you.

Prayer requests

1. Thank God for his faithfulness to MMDSA.
2. Thank God for our new endeavour in Zimbabwe.
3. Pray for courage and patience as we continue to share the MMD story with churches, so that they open their doors to the ministry.
4. Pray for finances.
5. Pray for the task force in Zimbabwe.

Listen to what students from the second module are saying:



Mrs. Solter Melazi:

The *Practical Christian Living* course has been a turning point in my Christian life; I can look back and say: "Amazing grace,

how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!" I can now see the connection between Jesus' life on earth and His teachings from the Bible. I now know what I am saved for. I am able to see people's potentials and be there for them to help develop what God has put in them. I shared my course material with my pastor, and he said: "This material is good for pastors". I pray that more pastors would take this course. I am convinced if they did, our churches and communities would be transformed for the good. I asked Dr. Elesinah Chauke (MMD course facilitator) to please make a point to speak to more pastors in our area about the *Practical Christian Living* course!"

Rose Jane Khoza says:

The *Practical Christian Living* course is helping me to be and to do what my heart has longed for all these years. I have been a Christian for a long time and have tried to help other people to live their Christian lives. I thought preaching to them was the way to do it, but now I see that it is not my preaching they need; rather, they need my mentoring. Now I understand why Jesus did not only preach but lived His message among the people. After many years as a Christian, my approach to witnessing has changed. Thanks to MMD for the *Practical Christian Living* course.

Rev. David Mdaka says:

During the first class of the *Practical Christian Living* course, Rev. David Mdaka said: "This course will help us to grow more leaders in our churches. The course is a challenge for us as leaders to live what we want to see happen in our congregations".

Musa says:

Musa, a second-year student in bible college, phoned Dr. Chauke and said: "My pastor told me about your course in *Practical Christian Living*; what should I do to enrol? Do I have to wait and finish college before I take your course, or is there any way I can take it now? What is the nearest learning centre to which I can attach myself? My pastor recommended that I take the module".

Testimony

Our administrator – engaged



What is impossible with men is possible with God. “Working for MMD came with lots of blessings to me”, said Xoliseka Matara, MMDSA office administrator. As a pastor at a Free Methodist Church in Tshwane East (situated in the Eastern part of Pretoria), he finds life very interesting and worth living.

It can only be God who delivers a man from nine years of struggle with unemployment, experiencing social and spiritual abuse emanating from lacking the basics, praying prayers that had no results, giving testimony about God’s goodness to people who were unable to relate to him, falling into despair and seeing life as worthless. It can only be God who turns things around by giving him not only a job but a ministry, and on 4 October 2009, Matara became engaged to Linky Matlala in Pretoria. They are planning to get married soon.

Special thanks to you all for your prayers; please continue to pray as they prepare for the wedding day.

MMD task force formed in Zimbabwe

In our last quarterly newsletter, we shared with you the enthusiasm about MMD we experienced in Zimbabwe in May 2009. The leadership of the Zimbabwe churches invited us again to discuss ways in which we can start with the MMD work in that country. On the 16-17 October 2009, the MMD team composed of Dr Chitlango, Dr Chauke and Rev Liphadzi visited Zimbabwe.

We are therefore happy to share with you that the church leadership in Zimbabwe accepted the challenge to start MMD work. They see MMD as an educational instrument that God can use to transform their communities. Consequently, a task force was formed to start recruiting students to start the programme in early 2010, to come up with a draft constitution of MMD, and to call a meeting of the representatives of all the denominations and theological institutions who will approve the constitution will form the board of MMD. The task force has six months from now to accomplish their mandate.

Dr Chauke will work closely with the task force as a coach until they form a board of governance. We welcome this new development with humility, because it is again a confirmation that MMD is viewed by church leaders in different African countries as a ministry that can deepen the roots of African Christianity. Thus, we will have faith that it will help African Christians in their engagement, in obedience to the gospel, with societal forces that disrupt communities. Please pray for this work in Zimbabwe: that it bears fruit and contributes positively in the rebuilding of that country. Pray for the task force and its coaches: for passion, health and resources.

Taking Responsibility

One of the students in the first module class from Ekurhuleni centre, Silver Ngobeni, travels by train every morning from his house to his work place in Johannesburg’s city centre. “I’ve been challenged by MMD courses to waste no time that I get without witnessing,” said Ngobeni. He has introduced himself to about 250 other people who travel on the same train from his location. He says that the MMD course has challenged him to “take responsibility”, thus he leads devotions for these people on the train every morning, five days a week. Most of these people have no time for morning devotions, since they have to be on the train by 5:30 every morning. “As our course is challenging us to take responsibility for needs in our communities, I felt this is something that I need to do,” he said.

Ngobeni is a pastor of a small congregation. He is now organising a new class for MMD to start in February 2010 and has already listed about nine people from the churches that are related to members of his “train ministry”. He is confident that there will be more people registering. We thank the Lord for students like Ngobeni, who take the lessons seriously. Please pray for Ngobeni and his train ministry, that many will come to know Christ.

-Dr. Elesinah Chauke

Challenges facing MMDSA as we approach 2010

2010 is an important year in South Africa. For the first time, FIFA World Cup will be hosted in the continent, and the host country is South Africa. It will be a busy year indeed. The infrastructure in the country has dramatically changed; we never anticipated this kind of revamp of our infrastructure ten years ago. The impossible has become possible, and this event serves as an inspiration as we look forward to the future of MMDSA. But as we look ahead, there are a couple of "ghosts" that make us think that this future will never come. What kind of "ghosts" are we facing?

1. Selfishness: This "ghost" is imbedded in the thinking and life of many South Africans. We have many corruption trials in the country courts. Many of our government departments are not being accountable on how they are using the state resources; everyone wants to enrich themselves with these resources. We do not have many people who want to sweat in order to have food on the table and to raise children, and the church is negatively affected by this trend. Now we have leaders who are not driven by vision, but by what they can eat, drive and where they can reside. Thus, you have leaders in the communities who are not willing to be involved in ministries in which they have to lay down their lives for the sake of community transformation. For MMDSA to succeed, we have to know and face this challenge head on; otherwise, we will not survive. We need to be vigilant of this "ghost".

2. Hesitation and Fear of Being an African Church: This "ghost" is rooted in our history as a country. In the past, we could comfortably say the church was 80% African in her membership, but 80% European in her leadership. This, I suppose, is still the case with theological training which, in many denominations, is still in the hands of Europeans. Many church leadership-training programmes still originate from outside the continent. Consequently, we find that worship styles and theological articulations in some African churches are more European than those in London and Berlin. Thus, MMDSA is looked at with disdain by those in the theological monopoly, because of its emphasis on empowering African leaders to practice theology within their context for African churches. MMDSA has no future if we cannot stand tall and drive this "ghost" away.

However, we are encouraged to look into the future with hope, not because of anything we have done, but because of who God is. He is the sovereign God who has absolute control over his creation. With this comfort we do not have reason to be desperate because of the "ghosts" we are facing. *If God is for us, who can be against us?*

The MMDSA Board of Governance decided to meet again on the 5 December 2009 to strategize on how we can work with local churches and denominations to increase the number of students and how to work towards financial sustainability. We are therefore asking for your prayers that this meeting will be a success.

- Rev. Tshililo Liphadzi

New learning centres

We are proud to announce new learning centres that have been established in Dwaleni, Mpumalanga, with classes being taught by Dr. Chauke. Students have shown great interest and commitment through their attendance and willingness to pay for the training.

Another class that is due to start in February 2010, is in Fortress of Hope, Durban. This brings the total number of learning centres to seven: Ekurhuleni (Dayeton & Thembisa), Witbank, Pretoria, Venda, Tshidzini, Durban and Mpumalanga.

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Psalm 125:1

'Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and for evermore.'