

GIFT OF LIFE (WEEK 1 OF LENT)

STUDY GUIDE FOR SECTION ONE

- If the books have not already been distributed, pass them out. Take a moment to study the front cover. Ask everyone in the room to share their names and the cover images that stand out in their minds.
- Ask the group to share what they are looking forward to and what questions they might have about the study.
- Pray a centering prayer for guidance for the discussion on the “Gift of Life” section.
- Note devotionals in the sections have a common thread. Section One’s focus on God’s gift of life is multi-dimensional. In Day One Dr. Mackie Norris writes, “The entire experience has taught me to be even more aware of the precious gifts of life that are too often taken for granted.”

DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the gifts we take for granted that stand out as we read of the needs at AU and in Africa? How important is it that we sacrifice so Africa’s people will share these gifts?
 2. What would it be like if there were no nearby clinics or hospitals offering life-sustaining services? Do we take our abundance of health care facilities and professionals for granted? Could being more grateful for what we have lead to commitment to share with others?
 3. Dawn Adams describes how AU students never asked for a handout, but could use a “hand-up.” Recall times in your life when a hand-up made a difference. How can you offer a “hand-up” in addition to monetary gifts?
 4. Share times you might have been apprehensive about going to a new place or when you felt out of place in a new culture. Were there life-giving acts of hospitality that helped you feel at ease?
 5. Discuss this week’s mission challenges. Which ones stand out in your mind? Pray together for all of those undertaking the challenges.
- Close the session with prayer, remembering the students and faculty at AU and all of those sharing in this Lenten challenge. **ASK FOR GOD’S LOVE AND GUIDANCE ALONG THE WAY.**

DAY 1, FEBRUARY 6, 2008

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and He will make your paths straight.

— PROVERBS 3:5-6 (NIV)

THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT ZIMBABWE THAT SPEAKS TO MY SOUL.

I remember my first trip to the continent, the country, and the University. The year was 1992 when we journeyed to this special place for a special occasion. Beautiful hills and mountains, lush green forests, hundreds of enthusiastic people, all create precious memories of the official Opening Ceremonies for Africa University. Since that trip, I have had the good fortune to return several times. One of my greatest professional achievements has been to serve as a part of the study team to develop and implement the Faculty (School) of Health Sciences at the University. That responsibility afforded the opportunity to work with other health professionals from Zimbabwe, China, and the U.S. to dream, research, plan, develop, and see to fruition the newest Faculty at the University. It was during one of the study and planning trips that I had the occasion to visit hospitals and clinics in the area and to speak with care providers as we sought to make the most informed recommendation for the Faculty. The entire experience has taught me to be even more aware of the precious gifts of life that are too often taken for granted: adequate supplies of and access to clean water; protection from mosquitoes and the diseases they carry; nutrition and hydration for infants and babies; adequate food supply; clean and safe places of care when illnesses and diseases invade the body of self or loved one; and so much more.

We can make a difference in the lives of Zimbabweans and in our own lives when we grow enough to share that which has been given to us.

PRAYER: Gracious God. Increase our trust in you so that we may share with our brothers and sisters near and far.

CHALLENGE: Today, for every e-mail message I send and receive, I will donate \$1 to the NTC AU Mission Initiative.

Mackie Norris, Cascade UMC Atlanta, Georgia

DAY 2, FEBRUARY 7, 2008

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia, for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints.

— 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-4

In 1988 my little brother Kelley graduated from SMU and went to Africa for a year as a volunteer in mission at Maua Methodist Hospital in Maua, Kenya. This trip would impact his life in profound ways, solidifying his calling to health care, as well as his commitment to connect the healing of the body to the healing of the spirit. Through his experience with medical care in Africa, he learned that health care professionals were committed, caring, loving, generous and educated but, most glaringly, without the necessary resources to help people in need. It was heartbreaking for him to see children dying of diseases that could be prevented – if only they had the resources.

What if you and I could do something about this? What if our humble offerings could be used to build a health clinic to care for the students at Africa University? What if our offerings could further the education of talented health care workers at Africa University who would spread out across the continent of Africa to help stamp out preventable diseases like malaria and AIDS?

WE CAN MAKE THAT DIFFERENCE THROUGH THIS LENTEN OFFERING! *Can you imagine North Texas United Methodists getting so excited about this that they beg for the privilege of participating?*

PRAYER: Gracious God, you have blessed us with so much. Help us to use these blessings to be a blessing to the children of Africa. We pray that what we offer might be used to bring health to those in need. Amen.

CHALLENGE: I have been blessed to have health insurance. Each day of Lent I will offer a standard office visit co-pay (\$30) to support this North Texas Conference mission initiative to provide a health clinic and scholarships to Africa University.

Clayton Oliphint, First UMC Richardson

**TRANSFORMING LIVES
TRANSFORMING AFRICA**

DAY 3, FEBRUARY 8, 2008

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

— JOHN 9:1-7 (NIV)

When I was visiting Africa University in the summer of 2007, we came across a young woman who was trying to sell some jewelry on campus in front of the dorms. We soon learned that the young woman was suffering from a case of appendicitis and that she was trying to earn enough money to journey back home to have surgery. She could not be treated there on campus, and because she was not Zimbabwean, the country's hospitals would not treat her.

Having suffered through a case of appendicitis myself when I was twelve, I immediately had a great concern for the young woman. I have often wondered if she made it home in time. If your appendix bursts, it can be fatal and treating it promptly is essential.

Africa University needs a health center where the students can get treatment. Many of them come from African countries a great distance away. Unlike you and me, they can't just buy a plane ticket to get home in an emergency.

We know from scripture that Jesus had a great concern for those who have illnesses or diseases and often healed many. Perhaps this young woman, like the blind man, was afflicted so that the work of God could be displayed through her life.

Through our efforts to build this clinic, we can provide the holistic healing needed on campus. Our goal for Africa University is to grow strong student leaders, but they must be healthy as well in order for them to truly make a difference in the continent.

PRAYER: Gracious and Healing Lord, today I pray for all those people in the world who do not have access to adequate health care. Too many people are suffering needlessly. We know this is not your will. We pray for the success of the AU Mission Initiative so that a clinic may be built and that future scholars may do your work in global health, thus promoting your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CHALLENGE: Today I am counting all the boxes and bottles of medication I have in my house and giving a dollar for each one to the NTC AU Mission Initiative.

Marjorie Bishir, Christ UMC Plano

**TRANSFORMING LIVES
TRANSFORMING AFRICA**

DAY 4, FEBRUARY 9, 2008

Joseph said, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed."

— GENESIS 37:6

Soon after we arrived at Africa University, "Pastor G" (Rev. Tyrone Gordon) preached at the chapel services. He told the story of Joseph, and how his brothers put him in a deep pit and sold him into slavery. Years later, because of his dreams and ability to interpret dreams, he became Pharaoh's second-in-command. Pastor G encouraged us to keep our dreams alive.

Just a few days later, I found myself in the bottom of a deep pit...a ten-foot hole I helped dig! Our mission project was to build a latrine for a family who lived by the river at Africa University, and were employees of the university.

As I worked beside team members and students, we shared our hopes and dreams with each other. We shared our joy and faith in God. We shared laughs and jokes as we watched the monkeys play by the riverside! We shared our times of sorrow and disappointment, the times we had been in "the pit" of despair. The work was hard, and my body ached after the long day's work. But when we completed the job, we were proud of our accomplishment and felt good about the work we did together.

**AFRICA UNIVERSITY IS A PLACE WHERE, AS ITS MOTTO PROCLAIMS,
"THE DREAM IS ALIVE!" TODAY I WILL "DREAM BIG" AND "GIVE BIG" TO HELP
GOD'S DREAMS FOR AFRICA UNIVERSITY COME TRUE!**

*Together, as we work side by side, we can dig out of "the pit" into
the future we dream of.*

**PRAYER: Dear God, help us keep the dream of Africa University
alive through our acts of service and giving. Amen.**

**CHALLENGE: Make a monetary contribution to AU for each bathroom
in your home.**

Carter Casad, Christ UMC Farmers Branch