

My Testimonies of the Book of Mormon Retreats in Kenya

by Zach Wilson

My Kenya Experience

After a lengthy travel from Kansas City, we arrived in Awasi where we started our first two-day retreat. Our classes were: Stories of the Book of Mormon, Endure to the End, There Is Always a Choice, Jaredites: Turning to our Heavenly Father, Important Book of Mormon Passages and Understandings, Examples of God's Love in the Book of Mormon, and What We Can Learn about Prayer from Enos's Story. While we were there, it was a blessing to see the Mildred Smith Health Clinic, the college that is now recognized by the Kenyan government but sponsored by the Restoration, and lastly the construction of the hospital which is estimated to be completed by this fall. Many saints have played a role in others coming unto Christ in Kenya. It was truly humbling for each of us (Nicole, Josh, Emma and myself) to see the work that has occurred in Kenya. Spending time with the saints, worshipping, and hearing hymns sung with an African tune was such a blessing. Adjustments were made to the trip: one retreat switched to two retreats. Flexibility was important for us as we had intended for two young adult retreats, but they became family retreats. Topical classes eventually restructured to whole group classes, children's classes, and young adult classes. We were very exhausted from the travel and it was a challenge to get used to speaking/teaching with an interpreter—and yet, the Lord gave each of us the energy we needed. We rotated classes and worked to ensure the activities went as well as they could.

Seeing an Old Friend

Having the opportunity to visit with Dean Odida after not seeing him for years was a tremendous blessing. Seeing he is still strong in the gospel and raising a family in the gospel gave me much personal encouragement. Sometimes, remaining steadfast and immovable can feel lonely for many of us who have grown up in the gospel. Yet, I am reminded, the Lord is moving and His work is far greater than the work we often confine ourselves to within our branches. We continued in worship, fellowship, classes and yes, even a little soccer.

After we completed the Awasi retreat, we traveled to Ramisi. Elder Ely Okecha traveled with us and accompanied us throughout the trip. We had the opportunity to visit 8-10 homes of the saints. Each time we were greeted and welcomed, and we were asked to pray for specific needs. Together, we prayed for immediate needs or struggles of different individuals.

A Special Blessing

In one specific home we visited, there was a lady there named Teresa. She had been sick for some time. The pastor (Paul) of the Ramisi Branch explained we would need to administer to her as she had been sick for some time. She was so sick her eyes were swollen and she could only lay on a mattress on the ground, unable to lift her head. Her condition was troubling, to say the least. She had previously been to the hospital, was given medicine and sent home. Yet, the medicine had not been working and, in my mind, this looked like a hopeless situation. The thought did cross my mind, *What if she had something contagious?* Sanitation in Kenya is far different than in the United States. In fact, hand sanitizer and the ability to wash your hands with soap is very limited. Being a father as well, *What if I got sick? Would I be willing to still perform this administration?* Then a scripture came to my mind: **Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord** (James 5:14).

Testimonies of the Saints

Listening and sharing testimonies of the saints is very important. I was reminded of a testimony shared by Bob Dickson at Living Hope, and how as he had administered to a very sick (possibly contagious) individual, the Lord protected him. Brother Ely and myself were able to administer to our sister Teresa. We prayed that she would receive a healing and the medicine she was taking would do as they were intended. After we returned to the States, we did receive word from Brother Ely that she had recovered and was able to return home.

We discovered that the people in Kenya have the same struggles we have here. They have all the same temptations and yet, I was reminded, I do a lot of complaining rather than spending that time in prayer. It is important that we actively seek opportunities to pray for each other and pray that the gospel continues to spread.

The Ramisi Branch is a young congregation and they currently do not have any elders. So, when elders are there, it is important for specific ordinances to be performed. On the second to last day, Eric Odida explained we would have a special service as we wrapped up the week. We would have a baby blessing, two ordinations and four confirmations. As I began to make preparation for one of the ordinations for Brother Isaiah Ogallo to the office of priest, my mind was led to the Old Testament, specifically to Joseph. I have never prayed a prayer like I did in that ordination, but I prayed that he would flee from sin just as Joseph fled the temptation before him in Potiphar's house. (I did not know Isaiah well, and am very unfamiliar with his background.) The next day, Brother Evans Origi (priest at the Ramisi Branch) was in charge of the morning prayer and devotional. He also shared about Joseph, and how the Lord raised him up, brought him out of prison, took a hopeless situation and used Joseph to support His work. Later that evening, it was time for Isaiah to share a testimony. He shared how he had been presented with drugs and how he knew this

was wrong; and when presented, he fled from the situation. The Lord, in His goodness, laid the foundation of referencing Joseph's story as a testimony of the calling and ordination of our brother, Isaiah. I have no doubt as he continues to flee from sin, the Lord will continue to magnify our brother's calling.

It was such a blessing to share the Book of Mormon in Kenya. Each of us felt this, whether we were studying the importance of prayer from the Book of Enos, how the Lord guided the Jaredites, how the testimony of Alma (the younger) allows the chance to turn our lives around, or how agency is a gift we need to grasp tightly so we can actively choose Christ. Each of us were blessed to share the stories and lessons in this book of scripture, and we each feel blessed to have taken part in this first Book of Mormon Retreat in Kenya.