Average Pastors

David Beakley (M.Div.’02) and his family serve in Polokwane, South Africa. In his latest newsletter, David wrote about how although the world sees “average” as a failure, in the ministry, that is exactly where we need to be....

"In America, “average” is considered to be failure. Parents try to enroll children in Advanced Placement courses so they can be accepted at “top” universities. Piano lessons begin at 5 with recitals soon after. No sir—my child will not be “average.”

This mindset can also happen in the ministry. Every pastor sees himself as a “man of God” who speaks with authority, employing the wisdom of Solomon in shepherding. No one sees himself as an “average” pastor.

Enter Joseph Hlongwane, who interviewed with Christ Seminary in Oct 2009. Ultra-charismatic, he wanted to learn the power of the word-faith movement. He came because of a 2008 graduate, Obed. Both men entered the ministry around 2000 as ultra-charismatics. But as Obed began his studies at CS, Joseph saw changes. As Obed experienced the deaths of his first two newborn babies and a debilitating sickness, his preaching increased in power and depth. Joseph wanted what Obed had.
Joseph Hlongwane

Joseph began at CS, full of high expectations —followed quickly by despair and wanting to quit after a couple of weeks. But resilient through the first semester, Joseph’s preaching started to change. By his second semester, his preaching had changed so much that his word-faith church threatened to fire him unless he changed back to the old way, and his wife threatened to put him out unless he started preaching prosperity.

Due to partial blindness during his second semester, Joseph dropped out. I thought he was done. But undeterred, Joseph returned in 2010. As the year was winding down, tragedy struck. Joseph’s newborn baby died (something that happens often in Africa). But the knowledge of God’s sovereignty and goodness were anchors for Joseph, along with remembering Obed and how he stayed faithful during tribulations. Joseph pressed on.

In mid-semester this April, Joseph arrived late to class—four days late! Looking down, Joseph explained. “Pastor Dave, I really wanted to be here on Tuesday, but I couldn’t.” A young man from his church had met him the previous week, confessing that he had taken a young girl out, given her a “date rape” drug, and had taken her back to his place and slept with her. He expected to hear how this was the work of Satan/demons and that he was forgiven. Joseph said the unthinkable (in Africa, the biggest sin is to break community with someone—no Christian is a sinner). Joseph said, “You have one choice. You must confess your sin, repent to the Lord, and go to the police before she does.”

Devastated and after much discussion, the young man left and took an entire bottle of sleeping pills. He went into a coma, on the verge of death. The next day, local pastors called Joseph, rebuking him for giving “very bad counsel.” They said that demons are the cause of sin. Vigorously debating with Scripture, Joseph proclaimed, “The Bible calls this sin and commands us to repent.”

The day before the start of seminary, the young man’s father came to Joseph’s house. The older man said, “You gave my son very bad counsel, and now he is busy dying. If he dies, you die.” At this point, Joseph told me, “Pastor, if I were to leave and come to Seminary, this man and the community would say that I was running away from this problem. They
would say I was running in fear because I sinned. I couldn’t leave until I knew if the young man would live. When he recovered, I felt I could come to Seminary without damaging my testimony for Christ and the ministry.”

As ministers of the gospel, we focus on preparation, study, argumentation, and basic “spirituality.” While these are good things, they are not the main thing. We can actually be excellent in these areas, but fail in the most important area. One can struggle in these areas, but when they succeed in the most important area, I will no longer see them as “average.” In fact, I think I will just strive to be “average” like Joseph.”

_Ephesians 6:13_

*Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm._

David teaches at Christ Seminary in Polokwane. To learn more about this ministry, visit [www.tmai.org](http://www.tmai.org).

Yours for the Master,

Bob White
Vice President for Development and Operations

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