

**May the peace and grace of God be with you.**

*“Never leave the Lord and the church,”* these were some of Mr. George Kapango’s final words before he passed away on the first week of this year. When George said these words, a few hours before he took his last breath, they sounded familiar to me; little did I know I will be spending this year thinking about what they mean. This year is tough and challenging in many ways to many of us, if not all. Because of what is happening in the world and our individual lives, it is possible to question and even doubt the presence and love of God. I think of George’s words and the context in which he said them. And as I think about them, I get a glimpse of how God was present in the situation and had been preparing us for it.

George was one of the devoted and faithful Christians I have ever met. He was hospitable, kind, generous, humble, and loving. He loved God so much. Because of his faith and love for God and people, we called him “Abraham.” He was 97 years old: very wise and still active. George was also a great teacher and a good storyteller. We all loved and enjoyed his teachings. The Shakawe congregations (northern region) had a gospel meeting during the Christmas holidays at George’s village (Samochima). George was so excited to see everyone. We asked him to bless (pray over) the children.

On January 04 (Saturday), I went with some of the youth to clean at George’s place/yard. After cleaning, George and his wife Setlhodi sang and told us stories. We had a good time and didn’t want to go back to our places. On Sunday morning, I went and picked up George and Setlhodi for church service. It is about 10 miles from their place to the church building in Shakawe. During Bible Study, we asked George and Setlhodi to share their faith and personal life journey. This was an unusual way of doing our Bible Study; however, that day, we felt like we had to do it that way. George told us that he became a Christian when he was about ten years old. He lost his parents and other relatives in a civil war in his home country Angola. Because of the war, he fled to Botswana with some of his siblings, who eventually all passed away. George and Setlhodi didn’t have children of their own. At the end of our worshiping service, George asked us to sing *When the roll is called up yonder*, and he prayed for us.

On Tuesday afternoon, I received a text message that George was critically ill, and he needed to be rushed to the clinic. We took him to the clinic where he became conscious, after some hours. After praying together, he encouraged us in many ways emphasizing that we should “never leave the Lord and the church.” A few hours later, he passed away. When I think about the words he emphasized, I believe George found comfort, peace, joy, and hope in the Lord even when he was in severe pain and facing death—the worst thing

that could happen to a person. And George’s joy, comfort, peace, faith, and hope in God transcended all his painful life experiences and even death. So, I think by saying, “never leave the Lord and the church,” God was speaking through George that my joy, comfort, peace, faith, and hope in him (God), should go beyond my present situation and even beyond death. George is an example. As I look back, I can see how God was present at our gospel meeting when George blessed his children in the faith for the last time. I see how God was present when we cleaned George’s place—God was preparing us for George’s funeral. I see how God was present at our first worship service of the year and last fellowship with George. God taught and blessed us through George that day. I hope and pray that when the roll is called up yonder, I will be there as George will be there. I hope and pray that I will understand by and by, what it means to “never leave the Lord and the church” even in the valleys of pandemics and shadows of death.



*George and Setlhodi*



*George blessing the children during a gospel meeting at Samochima*



*Youth cleaning at George's place*



*Moses cutting some bushes at George's place.*

Despite the challenges that we have had and still going through, God continues to extend his grace and mercy to us. Four of our Sunday school children were baptized immediately after the first lockdown.



*From left to right: Botsalano, Atlang, Franklin, and Kamogelo were baptized in the Lord. Pray for them as they learn to walk and grow in the Lord.*



*Franklin being baptized.*

In the southern region, which includes Gaborone and the surroundings, we have had three lockdowns so far. Reaching out to one another during lockdowns has not been that easy due to limited access to social media and poor internet. However, we try to use whatever is at our disposal. We created a Facebook page *Churches of Christ Botswana*, where we post sermons and devotions. We also use WhatsApp and conference calls to reach out to those who don't have access to social media. Here is a link to one of the short videos I made: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GallRo16EIM>.

We are required by the government to adhere to health protocols during our assemblies. One of the challenges we have is that we don't have enough space to maintain social distancing in our small church building. We have been meeting outside, but now the weather is changing and becoming unfriendly. The rainy season is also approaching.



*Oodi Church*

We have been keeping ourselves busy with gardening during the lockdowns. We have parsley, onions, sweet potatoes, and Chinese cabbage.



In the past four months, I have been blessed to do coaching with Dr. Evertt Huffard. God has used him to challenge me to process and reflect on ministry issues such as emerging leadership, discipleship, and personal growth. I'm grateful to have people like him in the mission of God.

**Prayer needs:** *Thank you for your continual prayers; they strengthen us.*

- Setlhodi (George's wife) is still grieving the loss of her husband. Keep her in your prayers.
- Pray for God's wisdom and guidance as we seek new ways of doing ministry in these moments of anxiety and uncertainty. Similarly, pray for God's wisdom, strength, and guidance in my life.
- Pray for the Oodi congregation to remain faithful to God in these challenging times. Many of our young people are struggling with anxieties, depression, drugs, and alcohol addictions.
- The lockdowns have exposed our brokenness as a nation and individuals. There are so many cases of gender-based violence, defilement, and rape that have been reported during the lockdowns. Pray for the safety and lives of young girls and women in the country.
- COVID-19 is worsening our unemployment situation in the country. Many people, including those in the church, are struggling to make ends meet. Pray for all those affected, in particular, young people.

Thank you for your love, support, and participation in the mission of God in Botswana. I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. May the Lord bless and keep you.