

CONNECT

AIM's journal for prayer, reflection and growth

Explore what God has to say about creation and how it fits into the big picture of mission, redemption and the gospel.



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FOR THE LOVE OF TREES

In 1970 Finnish engineer Tapio Saarenketo created a manual tree planting tool called a Pottiputki. Fundamentally, it is a tube with a pointed scissor-like beak at the bottom. Once the beak is pushed into the soil, a foot pedal on the side opens the beak, allowing you to drop a seedling down the tube straight into the ground. It's brilliantly simple and so easy to use that an experienced tree planter working at walking pace can plant several thousand trees in one day. In Finland, most of the 150 million trees planted each year are done this way.

This journal that you are holding in your hand first started as one of those seedlings (likely a spruce or pine), which has been turned into the sustainable paper that these words are printed on. I'm not sure I've ever really stopped to think about the fact that this was once part of a tree from a forest in Finland. In fact, I think I often have a disconnected and unthankful heart for the created world that God has made and the many ways he sustains and cares for me through it.

GOD'S SUSTAINING GIFT OF TREES

Obviously, trees are just one part of God's good creation, but without them, we would not only be unable to produce this journal, our entire lives on earth would be unsustainable. God's provision of trees gives us food to eat and oxygen to breathe, while also removing carbon from the air. God's gift of trees also means that soil is stabilised, medicinal properties are gained and sustainable material for homes and supplies is provided. As well as helping to sustain life for humans, trees also harbour most of the Earth's terrestrial biodiversity, including 75% of bird species and 68% of the world's mammal species. If we were to unsustainably deforest the world of all trees, we would be dismantling a large part of the sustaining, life-giving work of creation that Jesus has wonderfully shared to care and provide for his people.

"You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it." Psalm 65:9 ➔

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06

Joseph and Bill on the gospel's transforming power.

10

Why is conservation agriculture important for the gospel?

12

Find out about AIM's environmental programmes.

14

Focus on Lesotho.

16

Thabiso discusses using Farming God's way in Mozambique.

18

Pray for Lesotho.

20

Finding fertile soil among the Nyamwezi.

22

Pray for the Nyamwezi.

24

Reports from the frontline in Mozambique.

28

Seeing minds renewed in Uganda.

30

Focus on South Sudan.

32

The Wintermantels on equipping pastors in South Sudan.

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☪ GOD'S REDEEMING GIFT THROUGH TREES

In an increasingly urbanised, screen-based world, it is easy to see that we have forgotten to really give thanks to God for all that he has made. Apparently, almost a third of UK primary pupils now think cheese is made from plants¹, the average time spent on our phones is over three hours a day² and 75% of UK children spend less time outside than prison inmates³. Also, in a recent study, there has been a notable decline since the 1950s of themes of nature featuring in works of popular culture⁴. The Bible however stands in stark contrast. After God and people, trees are the most mentioned living thing in the Bible. They feature in the first chapters of Genesis, the first Psalm and the last page of Revelation. Trees are also used to enrich our understanding of joy (1 Chronicles 16:33), righteousness (Isaiah 61:3), beauty and provision (Genesis 2:9), abundance (Ezekiel 36:30), protection (Job 40:22), hope (Job 14:7) and the healing of nations (Revelation 22:2). It's perhaps no surprise that when

“For on this tree we see the most beautiful, life giving, abundant act of love.”

Luke talks about the work of the cross, he says, “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree’ (Acts 10:39). For on this tree we see the most beautiful, life-giving, abundant act of love. On this tree Jesus gives us death defeating hope, protection and healing for us and all the nations.

“For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.” Job 14:7

CARING FOR CREATION

In this issue of Connect, we will be spending some more time in God's good creation, reflecting on how we exercise the role God originally gave us to care for creation while also living out the gospel in anticipation of the restoration of creation. We will consider



how the transforming power of the gospel through conservation agriculture is literally transforming not just people’s lives but also the landscape itself in Kenya and Lesotho. We will see that the areas worst affected by climate change are often some of the world’s poorest countries such as Mozambique, and how the peoples of South Sudan view and make sense of the world through what they see in creation. I pray it will encourage you to see what God is doing and has done among Africa’s peoples through your support, and also help you pray, reflect and grow on your own journey and involvement in mission.

“...blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.” Jeremiah 17:7-8

JOE MORGAN
Designer

¹⁻⁴ You can find the references for the footnotes by visiting: eu.aimint.org/for-the-love-of-trees.

CREATION IS GOOD

Dave Bookless in *Planetwise* (2008) comments, “Many of us only come to the Bible asking questions like, ‘What does this tell me about my relationship with God?’ We tend to see the Bible as being all about people. Actually, it is all about God. Alongside the familiar material about God’s dealings with humanity, there’s a huge amount about God’s dealings with the earth which we’ve tended to overlook.” Creation’s story starts with God seeing all that he had made and acknowledging that it is good, but creation also reveals much more about the creator.



Read Psalm 19:1-6, Psalm 65:9, Psalm 104:27-30 and Acts 14:17. What are some of the things that we can learn about God’s character from these verses?

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Read Job 38. Creation has intrinsic value to God, regardless of humans’ relationship with creation and independent of God’s relationship with us. How does the reminder that God ‘water[s] a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert...’ impact us? How should we respond?

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Read Psalm 104 and Psalm 145. If we are created *in the image of God* to ‘rule over’ creation, what do you think this delegated kingship should look like?

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Why not explore our free Bible study series: eu.aimint.org/resources.

SUSTAINABLE MISSION

For over 35 years a Christian rural development programme in a remote and impoverished community in Kenya has been literally transforming not just the lives of the people but also the landscape itself. Here, Bill Rettie, who started the Cheptebo project in Kerio Valley, and Joseph Kimeli, the Director of the Cheptebo Centre, share about the transforming power of the gospel in producing effective, sustainable change.

Joseph: The first and impressive thing that has happened is that many people have come to know Jesus Christ and the light of the gospel has really changed my community. There went from being two churches in 1986 to over 24 now. If you go to these churches you will find men, elderly men, women, youth, children, all with the joy of salvation in them. You can see that now the Lord has blessed the people, they are the ones who are building their own churches and supporting their own communities.

The community has seen what we do in our demonstration and training farm, how we take care of creation, how we conserve our soils and produce a wide variety of food crops and healthy animals. The surrounding communities have started to practice what we demonstrate and many come for training at our Agricultural Training Institute. Through this empowerment, slowly by slowly, the community is changing and coming to understand that we must take care of God's creation and help it be more productive.

Finding enough food and water used to be a challenge in the valley, but now there are many different types of food available, ranging from vegetables, cereal crops and sweet potatoes, to many types of fruit. Along the road, where women previously sold alcohol, now you will find women selling fruits and vegetables. With improved food security resulting from what the project has done, health and education has improved in the community. Many children are now going to school, primary and secondary, and even to university. In the past, most people thought Kerio Valley was not the best place to live. Now they have started to appreciate that Kerio Valley is good and many who left are returning to live and farm here. They know that God wanted them to be there. They see that God has a plan for everyone, wherever people live, because he is the creator. ➔





6 HUNGRY EARS CAN'T HEAR

Bill: The focus at Cheptebo in the early days was on the practical problems which the community members themselves had highlighted - water, food, education and health. While the project would develop ways of tackling these practical problems, the church meanwhile would preach the gospel. Initially this seemed like a workable strategy, but there were serious weaknesses in this approach which we did not fully recognise at the time. Practical and spiritual ministries are not separate and largely unrelated activities but are each part of the transforming work of the gospel.

One of AIM's earliest pioneer missionaries asked in a letter home, 'Tell me, what is the use of preaching the gospel to people who are gripped with the awful pain of hunger? How can they grasp it? They want bread, and a fearful account will be laid to the charge of a self-satisfied church unless the pitiful cry... is heard.' In Kerio Valley the people were not only hungry, but had little expectation that

things could ever really change. Even the government had classified the valley as a 'low potential area', reinforcing the notion that nothing of value was expected from it. The prevailing sense of hopelessness discouraged any initiative to improve their situation. The people well understood the challenges of living in the area and had concluded that, 'we are poor, we'll always be poor and nothing is ever really going to change in this place.' An understanding of this attitude led to a radical rethinking of how biblical transformation could impact the situation. We had to abandon the secular development notion that simply identifying the practical needs of the people and responding to them would bring about lasting change.

We realised that effective, sustainable transformation does not start with the practical work itself. It needs to start with what the people think, about themselves and their situation. In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul urges that we, 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed

by the renewing of your mind'. This was to become a key principle for all the work of Cheptebo. We were totally dependent on the Lord to do this work of transformation in the minds of those we sought to help. This led to a new understanding of what poverty, and a biblical response to development issues, was all about.

In his analysis of the nature of poverty, Bryant Myers (Myers, 2011) acknowledges that it is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, but he goes on to identify the root cause of the problem as being fundamentally relational. The basic problems do not lie in a lack of resources and training, vital as these may be, but rather begin with broken relationships. The primary relationship is that between God and man, which has been spoiled by man's rebellion and rejection of God's authority. If that is not addressed, then all other relationships will continue to obstruct positive change and development. Secondly, broken relationships between people can lead to greed, exploitation and conflict at both a local and international level. The third relationship of crucial importance is that of man's relationship to the created order. God's mandate is to care for creation and use its potential responsibly. In this, across our world, we are failing spectacularly. The destruction of productive agricultural land on a massive scale and the effects of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions on the whole global system is already well known. The COP26 Climate Change meetings have recently taken place and the unimaginable consequences of failing to care for creation as the Creator commanded, are starting to be recognised. Cheptebo stands as one small example of how things can be done differently.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN EVANGELISM AND DEVELOPMENT

The urgency of gospel proclamation and the need to respond to vital practical needs has often challenged believers in their response. There can be compelling reasons to concentrate on either one at the expense of the other. In developing Cheptebo's strategy we also struggled to find an approach which

would be consistent with biblical teaching. Chris Wright (Wright, 2016) has written extensively on the mission of the church. He observes that the Great Commission does not begin with a command but rather with an assertion by Jesus: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Matthew 28:28). The authority and responsibility then given to his disciples is correspondingly much wider than the command to make disciples. The church is called to be involved in God's great purpose of redeeming the whole creation into the new creation, through the death and resurrection of Christ and under his Lordship.

The Cheptebo experience has been about much more than providing water and other material assistance to an impoverished community in Africa. The Bible draws a striking parallel between water, with the dramatic change it brings to dry ground, and the pouring out of the Spirit of God which brings change and transformation to the people themselves. Something more than streams of water has been flowing through Kerio Valley, bringing not just temporary relief but life changing transformation. Land that was previously considered unproductive is yielding bountiful harvests, a community is being released from a dependency on aid and a new spirit of optimism and purpose is spreading among its people. People are discovering their true identity and vocation in the liberating truths of the gospel of Christ. Through them, their valley is being transformed.

For more information about the books referenced in this article, see page 35.



JOSEPH KIMELI KIPLALANG

was born in Kerio Valley and has been the Centre Director for Cheptebo Rural Development Centre for the last eighteen years.



BILL RETTIE served with AIM in Kenya for fourteen years from 1986-2000, during which time he established the Cheptebo Rural Development Centre.



CALLED TO CARE

Over the past 15 years conservation agriculture, with its principles of minimum soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotation, has gone from being a fringe farming method, often laughed at by sceptical farmers, to being a viable alternative to conventional agriculture. Barry Mann, serving with his wife Heather at Growing Nations in Lesotho, tells us why.

Conservation agriculture is now deemed to be ‘climate smart agriculture’ with many benefits including counteracting the impact of climate change by retaining soil moisture during dry periods, preventing localised flooding, reducing carbon released into the atmosphere, improving soil quality and reducing reliance on chemicals and fertilisers. All whilst improving food security and nutrition through increased yields.

Climate change and caring for the environment are currently front and centre of people’s minds and government agendas across the world, but what can we do to help care for God’s creation whilst also building his kingdom here on earth?

As Christians the important questions to ask are, ‘Why should Christians care about farming methods and the environment?’ and, ‘What does this have to do with AIM and reaching the unreached with the gospel?’

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS CARE?

Firstly, God created a world in which all he had made was good (Genesis 1:31) and subsequently, in Genesis 2:15, God took Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. That was our purpose from the beginning, to care for the beautiful and good world that God had created. Our responsibility to care for creation is not something new. Using farming methods that protect our environment rather than destroying it is therefore important.

The principals of Farming God’s Way, taught by Growing Nations in Lesotho, include so much more than practical ‘climate smart agriculture’ methods. Training incorporates transformational development, care for creation, leadership development and kingdom business skills. The gospel is central to and weaved into these messages and provides an opportunity for the team to share God’s love with all who come to learn. People can not only change their lives and restore the land around them physically, but grow spiritually too.

REACHING THE UNREACHED

Training farmers across Lesotho is only one part of Growing Nations’ ministry. They also actively equip and mobilise mission workers including the new AIM Southern Region initiative, LEAP Lesotho (Learn, Engage, Apply, Practice) preparing new and potential future missionaries for the mission field. In addition to this, AIM and Growing Nations run Farming Quest, a three week training course to help equip mission workers from AIM and like-minded organisations around the world, giving them tools to help them take the gospel to the unreached.

There are many amazing testimonies to tell of students at Growing Nations whose lives have been transformed spiritually, including three who have gone on to serve God in long term mission work, sharing the gospel through agriculture to the unreached in Mozambique, Malawi and Cambodia.

As Christians we are all called to care for creation and what better way to do it than through demonstrating God’s love to others resulting in both physical and spiritual change? Now is the time, not to sit back and listen to leaders talking. That is a start, but Christians need to take action. Please join us in praying for change; for more workers; and for the resources for them to be equipped and go.



BARRY AND HEATHER MANN work with Growing Nations in Maphutseng, Lesotho. Heather is the CEO and Barry works in Communications.



ADDING VALUE

Chris Power currently works in AIM's Southern Region office, based in Nairobi.

Before joining AIM, I worked in Liverpool for an environmental consultancy. At one point I was even nominated to be the 'green officer'! 12 years later, it has been interesting to see how my role in the Southern Region office has led to involvement in some creative environmental initiatives. There have been opportunities for our members to be trained in Farming God's Way, in transformational development, to launch an eco-tourism business and promote waste collection and removal. I was recently visiting the Indian Ocean Islands and it was with sadness that I witnessed dry riverbeds strewn with litter, especially plastics. There are opportunities for us all to raise awareness, model creation care, and promote small steps of change.

Another way we have done this is through our short term mission teams. We have run three Harvest Teams in Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar, and as well as getting a

taster of cross-cultural mission they have also included an environmental element. These teams were composed of young people from Botswana, Lesotho, and Madagascar, and they introduced sustainable and simple agricultural practices to the communities. This November we are launching a new short term team called LEAP Lesotho. This will be a multi-cultural mission training team at the Growing Nations farm in Maphutseng. Being based in such a location provides an ideal setting for not just classroom learning but application and practice. We want to equip African missionaries to be environmentally aware and give them skills which help them gain access to and add value to the unreached communities they live among.



CHRIS POWER is AIM's Southern Region's Personnel Officer. He and his wife Sarah are now based in Nairobi, Kenya, after working in Mayotte for nine years.

CARROTS IN THE DESERT

Maureen Nyambura is about to join the LEAP team, a three month short term team for people interested in going into long term mission, to be trained and equipped in farming, disciple making, and being on a cross cultural team. She shares about her experience using Farming God's Way.

My first experience with Farming God's Way training in Lesotho in 2019 was providential. I wasn't very excited about it at all. I was told it was conservation agriculture and I was only motivated because my background is in environmental science. I was not particularly interested in the farming bit, because I grew up where farming was a way of life. I didn't think I wanted to be involved in farming. But during our training doing Bible studies with farmers in Lesotho, I came to see that God is the best example of a farmer and the ways that he cares for the land. That opened my eyes to want to know, 'How does he do it?' As we continued learning we saw how land that is cared for with the natural resources that God has provided really produces well.

I got the opportunity after March 2019 to join a team in Korr, northern Kenya. There is a lot of desert soil there. The pastor we were working with there, Pastor David, wanted to have a kitchen garden, so we made one for him. The soil was sandy, so we had to go to the river to look for better soil which we mixed with goat manure to put down. One of our teammates was an architect so he put a structure up that would shade it and prevent direct sun. We planted kale and spinach and carrots, and we watered it, because this is desert soil. Seven days later Pastor David's wife came one morning and said, 'Hey Maureen, what grass is that growing in the garden?' I said, 'Oh, that's carrots!' She had never seen carrots growing before.

Though I had been doing agriculture all my life, to be able to do it in a way that was caring for the land, and seeing the land giving back, to be able to bring and share that knowledge after I had studied for such a short time, it made me so happy. By the time we left there, there were vegetables in the middle of Korr. Pastor David had spinach and kale and carrots. It was such a beautiful experience.



MAUREEN NYAMBURA is a missionary from Kenya. She is planning to serve in Mozambique once she gets her visa.





A WARM SMILE

Lesotho is a small landlocked country surrounded by South Africa. It boasts the highest low point of any country in the world and consists of mainly mountain highlands, giving it the name 'The Kingdom in the Sky'. Barry and Heather Mann, AIM's country leaders, tell us more.

Lesotho is an adventure sport playground with tourists coming to experience the beauty of the mountains, skiing in the winter, pony trekking and mountain biking in the summer. They come to have fun, but few experience the real Lesotho, a land where life is often tough.

Lesotho ranks as one of the world's poorest countries with its economy based on diamond mining, wool, textiles, water and tourism. If you own any well known high street clothing items from Gap, Wrangler or

Levi's, you may be surprised to find you own a pair of jeans made in Lesotho. Despite the employment these industries bring, unemployment is high and many people are forced to leave their homes and travel into South Africa in search of work, men in the mines and on farms, and women as domestic workers in homes. Each month migrant workers send much needed remittances back to family members in Lesotho but, returning workers back in the late 1990s also brought HIV infections with them too, which devastated the population. Life expectancy fell from 60 in 1990 to just 42 in 2006, but is thankfully rising again as a result of education programmes and antiretroviral drugs which are widely available. The same workers also played a significant role in bringing Covid-19 into the country more recently. Officially the Covid-19 death rate has been low, but given the challenges of testing in Lesotho it is difficult to know what the true figures actually are.

In the mountains of Lesotho shepherds stay in remote cattle posts, tending to the animals of the stock owners who hire them. They



spend many months living in small huts on the mountainsides risking their lives in snow, hail, thunderstorms, temperatures that reach -20°C at night and from stock thieves. It is a harsh and challenging life.

Most people rely on subsistence farming for their food, but crop yields are low because of poor soil fertility and soil erosion caused by the effects of conventional farming methods introduced from the West. This has been exacerbated by the effects of climate change which has brought shifting rainfall patterns over recent years, resulting in late spring rains delaying planting, shorter growing seasons for crops to mature and long dry spells at critical times during crop growing cycles. As a result, 31% of the two million population are currently food insecure and reliant on food aid or financial support from NGOs to survive.

Despite the many challenges faced by the Basotho people, they will always welcome you with a warm smile and wonderful hospitality. What little they have they are always willing to share, a lesson for us all.

THE GLORY OF CREATION

‘Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them’ bringing worship ‘to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb’ (Revelation 5:13). We may not understand how creation praises God but the Bible clearly affirms that it does.



Read Psalm 19 and Isaiah 6:1-4.

Though God’s glory transcends creation, he chooses to also display it through the fullness of the earth. In what ways have you been impacted by God’s glory in creation?

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Read Colossians 1:15-23. Often, we think of the gospel as only linked to personal salvation. How do these verses about Jesus’ work on the cross widen that view?

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Read Romans 12:1-2. In this edition we have seen testimonies of how a relationship with Jesus has fundamentally affected people’s relationship with creation. How have you seen this in your own life? How can you honour Jesus’ creation further?

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TRANSFORMED LIVES

Thabiso Matsoso was part of the Growing Nations student programme from 2013-2014. He is now using Farming God's Way as he serves in Mozambique.

Before I joined Growing Nations I didn't know anything about conservation agriculture. My family runs a small farm, and it was degrading. When things are not good, we talk with others. I heard from this guy I was talking to who had seen all this beautiful stuff Growing Nations was doing. He told me to go and see for myself. I applied to and visited Growing Nations and was really inspired.

When I went to Growing Nations I was prepared to learn about agriculture and to be given something that was related to agriculture, like an animal plough. But when I went there, I was given the Bible! I remember someone saying to me, 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the wealth and lose his own soul?' and then I understood that it was not what I expected, that I wasn't going to be learning about these big farming implements, but actually it was about transforming your spiritual life. Farming God's Way teaches us not to rely on ourselves but to consider and to seek God first. It took me a long time to understand that, but I think that is one of the things which actually changed my life. I grew up in a Christian family, but sometimes it's more like a custom to go to church. During that programme at Growing Nations I was totally transformed in a different way.

While I was a resident student we hosted missionaries in our homes, in our villages, and I think it was because of that exchange of ideas and culture and the friends which we made with those people, that made me want to apply for the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) programme. It is a two-year programme which brings youth from different countries together to participate while they are learning to serve and reflect as a team. I was placed here in Mozambique for those two years.

I just came to participate, to learn some skills from my team to apply when I go back to Lesotho. But while I was here I realised that it is not about learning skills but it is about serving. That's when I understood that God calls people in different ways and that I'm called to serve people here through conservation agriculture. I was able to work with pastors who understand the local language. They had learnt theology but didn't know about agriculture. When we started sharing about Farming God's Way, we shared that it wasn't the way we grew up farming, but was a concept which we had learnt from God. God has sent man to take care of the garden, to till it and to work on it. As we shared verses in the Bible with the pastors they were able to understand it better themselves. They then helped me to reach the people.

We are able to sit down with people and discuss things the Bible says, people who I think without conservational agriculture we wouldn't be able to go to or approach. When we talk about farming we will be teaching what the Bible says, and we can ask people what their ideas about it are. Despite the fact that many are Muslims, they have an understanding of what the Bible says because many were born into Christian families. In Mozambique, some communities have turned to Islam because when there are calamities like floods, the mosques will provide rice, food and clothes. That means that we can't just preach to them, we need to teach conservation agriculture so that they are able to feed themselves and their families. Then their livelihoods are sustainable.



THABISO MATSOSO is serving in Mozambique with the Mennonite Central Committee. Initially there for two years, he stayed at the request of the MCC.



GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

GROWING NATIONS

Praise God for the work of Growing Nations and for the lives that have been changed both physically and spiritually through their ministry. Pray for opportunities for them to share more widely in Lesotho and for the provision of resources to do that.

SHEPHERD MINISTRY

Pray for Caleb, Tobias and Khothalo, working to bring the gospel to and disciple the marginalised shepherds in the mountains of Lesotho. Praise God for new short term workers who have been assisting them and pray for more longer term workers to minister alongside them.



EQUIPPING

Give thanks for the LEAP team members who are learning together at Growing Nations. Pray that God will equip them for their future ministries and that they, along with the Farming Quest participants, will be able to use agriculture to reach the unreached in the countries that God has called them to.

CREATION CARE

Pray that Christians everywhere will take their responsibilities to act as stewards of the world we live in seriously. Help each one of us to act and influence others in order to help reduce the effects of climate change, which is having a devastating effect on people in countries like Lesotho.

MOBILISATION

Pray for a new generation of mission workers to be raised up, equipped and sent out from the established churches in Lesotho. Pray for good partnerships with those churches and for creative ways to help them to raise the support they need to go.





FERTILE SOIL

Andrew and Margaret work among the Islamic Nyamwezi people. They discuss how conservation agriculture has helped make inroads into the community.

In 2015, the Lord led us to a farm among one of the poorer and more marginalised Nyamwezi villages on the outskirts of Tabora, Tanzania. The area's open deciduous woodland boasts the only beekeeping college in East Africa. Local skills have passed on from one generation to the next as men spend months out in the forests during the dry season collecting valuable honey. It was our joy and privilege to serve these subsistence farmers who welcomed us among them. The village leaders shared their felt needs at our first meeting: improve farming, year-round water, and better education.

They were enthusiastic about us introducing conservation farming as we explained it increases crop production, conserves water, and trains people how to mulch and make compost from local resources.

STARTING OUT

Our very first training seminar opened the doors to relationships with over twenty households of people of influence in the village. We taught villagers conservation agriculture principles. The results were varied. The Nyamwezi have so many resources and natural medicines right in their fields, including mango, papaya and moringa. At the mention of moringa, one old man piped up, "I use moringa regularly, too...we should pay attention to these ideas you have shared and put them into practice..."

Several tried making homemade compost and practiced no-till farming on a portion of their gardens. One industrious Sukuma farmer was so enamoured that he organised teaching for others. He then started a church



across the road from his farm, to return to God the blessings which he had been given.

GOD'S HEART FOR RESTORATION

The training sessions provided opportunities for important and life-changing spiritual conversations with farmers. Biblical farming principles reveal God's heart to restore not only the land but our relationship with him. We share about sin, but that Jesus opens the way to be saved! In the training sessions, the earth becomes great teaching soil, literally watching it go from being depleted (dead), to being replenished with nutrients and a new nutrient profile. It's the same as we follow Christ. We need good input and fertile soil.

The agricultural seminars led to the village trusting us and the trainees invited us to their homes to show us their fields. Even if they weren't following the principles we taught, they still wanted us to come and meet their neighbours, which gave us more opportunity to share about God's promises. The village chairman gave us permission to show the

Jesus film in several places and times. We also received regular invitations to share with the villagers on harvest days at the local mosque, even an invitation to speak to all at the mosque, sharing the gospel clearly with all.

Last year, the Lord led us to Tabora where we are working with the church to begin the Tabora Bible School. From this central location, students receive theological education and are equipped to spread the gospel throughout the region. Conservation agriculture is a great method for local evangelists to be able to self-support their families as well as to help them to come alongside their neighbours. Farming becomes a natural part of conversations in teaching biblical principles.



MARGARET AND ANDREW

have served for 30 years as disciple makers and church planters in Tanzania. They have worked among the Nyamwezi since 2015.



PRAY FOR THE NYAMWEZI

WHO ARE THE NYAMWEZI?

The Nyamwezi are the second largest people group in Tanzania, living mainly south of Lake Victoria in west-central Tanzania. Before Europeans arrived, the Nyamwezi had an empire consisting of four clans and an ancient king, Mirambo, who was a brilliant military leader. Today the Nyamwezi are known for being melodic, the womenfolk will come to your door as a singing telegram delivering wedding invitations, as well as singing in cadence to the rhythm of their hoes as they till the soil and mound up rows. About 30% of Nyamwezi live and work outside of their 35,000 miles of land, in Tanzania's commercial and agricultural centres.

WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE?

Most claim to be Muslims and follow the five pillars of Islam, but in reality, they live

by their animistic worldview, believing in a creator God, the spirit world, and the importance of using witchdoctors and other diviners to communicate with the spirits. On farming plots, amulets are placed at the corners of gardens to ward off evil.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO REACH THEM WITH THE GOSPEL?

The Africa Inland Church has planted a hundred churches in the area but the majority of attenders are thought to be from neighbouring people groups rather than the Nyamwezi. Some say up to 15% of Nyamwezi could be Christian, but most are nominal believers. In 2020 the Tabora Bible School was established to equip Nyamwezi Christians to share the gospel with their communities as well as those from nearby people groups to be evangelists and church leaders.

WHAT CAN WE PRAY FOR?

Pray that as the Nyamwezi embrace conservation agriculture practices and see renewed vitality in their crops that Christ will also work in their lives. Pray that they would break free from the heavy yoke of oppression under the spirit world and Islam, often mixed together in the religious practices of the Nyamwezi.

After six years of evangelism among the Nyamwezi, one lay leader evangelist related that he has grown weary. He finds that people are eager to agree with the gospel message presented, but their hearts are far from trusting in Christ fully. Pray that God will transform their lives from the inside out, that they would place their trust wholly in the Lord and they would steward well what God has given to them.

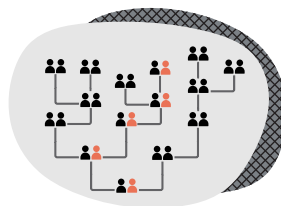
“Pray for these families as they grow in faith and reach out to their community...”

Several local families have gathered to begin a church plant in their village, meeting under a mango tree. They are being taught by a teacher who volunteers his Sundays to lead this congregation. Pray for these families as they grow in faith and reach out to their community. One of the villagers has given land to build a church. On designated church work days the families have gathered together to build the walls of their new church. Pray that as they build the church on a firm foundation, their lives likewise will be unified in Christ, built and lived out upon his firm foundation.



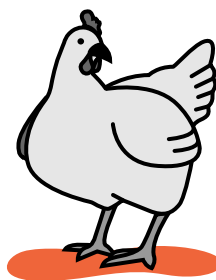
MOON MEN

The name Nyamwezi is of Swahili origin, and translates as either ‘people of the moon’ or ‘people of the west’. In ancient Indian texts they are referred to as ‘moon men’.



FEMALE LINE

Marriage entails both a bride price and bride service; polygyny is permitted but limited in practice. Descent is through the female line.



CHICKEN READINGS

The diviner is a key figure in religious life, interpreting the belief system. Chicken divination, in which a young fowl is killed and readings are taken from its wings and other features is very common.

You can download our prayer PDFs from: eu.aimint.org/resources.



FROM WHERE WILL MY HELP COME?

Many of the areas worst affected by climate change are in the world's poorest countries. A recent report by Christian Aid states, 'People in the, as-yet, more sheltered corners of the global North are now starting to experience the force of the climate crisis, but across the global South it is something they have already been feeling the effects of for years.' Some of our missionaries based in Mozambique discuss the effects of Cyclone Idai and how in every situation Christ's love can be shown.

Karis Koehn shares, "In our home culture, rain is often seen as something that dampens an otherwise happy event. As children we would sing, "Rain, rain, go away, Come again another day..." We obviously weren't farmers. Only after living in a semi-arid region in central Mozambique did I learn to appreciate how invaluable rain is. Each year we wait with much anticipation for those heavy rains that penetrate our clay soil to signal that it is

time for everyone to plant their crops. With the rains comes hope.

Since 2019 though, the arrival of the heavy rains has also brought fear and uncertainty. Will these rains bring life or death? The devastation that hit our area on March 15 and 16, 2019 will not easily be forgotten as Cyclone Idai and the resulting flooding killed 38 from our village and many more in the surrounding areas. The winds flattened homes and trees, but even greater terror came the following day when our river flooded to a never before seen level. The southern half of the village was inundated. The raised highway that splits the village in two held the water at bay from flooding our half until the force of the water broke through the highway to the east and west of us. Our home and surrounding community became an island.

People stranded by the flood waters were in trees and on roofs. Many hoped to reach the highway, but the racing waters were

impassable. God gave Robert the idea and the courage, along with a couple of other young men, to fight the current and create a rope pathway buoyed by plastic jugs across the deepest, swiftest waters. Onlookers stood along the highway, paralysed by their fear of death. When completed, a stream of people pulled themselves to safety over the next 48 hours. Our home sheltered hundreds of people, and as the waters receded, people began slowly returning to their properties to start over.

Weeks later television reporters arrived to interview Robert. He was busy teaching a Bible class and encouraged them to interview Moises, a young man who had helped Robert with the ropes. The reporters, incredulous that one of their own would risk his life to help others, kept asking Moises if he hadn't considered that he could have died. His answer was always the same: he trusted in God.

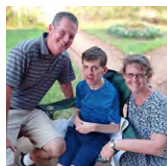
Daily we had opportunities to share the gospel with others as they processed the trauma. Providing shelter, food, clothing, building materials, tools, seed, and new homes in a timely fashion encouraged many and were made possible by gifts from believers in far-away places.

"Daily we had opportunities to share the gospel with others as they processed the trauma. Providing shelter, food, clothing, building materials, tools, seed, and new homes..."

A year after Idai, severe flooding in peoples' fields swept away their harvest. The following year crops were again destroyed by more flooding, and two other cyclones took glancing hits on our village. Currently the population is once again in their fields preparing for the coming rains, but there is trepidation. What will happen this next year?

"From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Psalms 121:1



KARIS KOEHN serves with her husband Robert in Lamego, Mozambique, as team leaders for a team of missionaries.





“THERE’S A CYCLONE COMING!”

Claire works with local churches in Chimoio, Mozambique. She shares her experience of Cyclone Idai.

The radio announced, ‘There’s a cyclone coming! Get ready!’ But few people knew what that meant, or how to prepare...

In March 2019, Cyclone Idai made landfall on the coast of Mozambique, wreaking havoc as it moved inland.

Initially, my main concern was to make sure that everyone was accounted for and safe, but with telephone masts destroyed, communication was a huge challenge. My living room quickly became a co-ordination hub for information from and for many different agencies.

A long list of names on the wall enabled each person’s situation and needs to be recorded, and a parallel list of available

resources made it possible to send help where it was needed most. Food, blankets, medicines, cooking pots - with the aid of a designated WhatsApp group, lists were kept up-to-date and a map of the area was annotated to indicate which roads and bridges were passable, enabling transport routes to be identified.

Although aid agencies handed out food in the towns and along the main roads, many communities in the remote bush areas were largely forgotten or ignored. It was incredibly frustrating, and a logistical nightmare trying to get help to those in need, without tolerating corruption.

Friends in Lamego badly needed food to feed the three hundred people sheltering in their home. But how to get it to them? They were completely cut off by the floodwaters. Mercy Air provided a helicopter but with

the usual landmarks completely submerged, navigation was very difficult. Hours were spent pouring over maps trying to identify the GPS co-ordinates needed to locate them.

A lady in her seventies told how she only survived because her grandson pushed her up a tree and held on to her – for three days. Others told of miraculous escapes, and then another shared his story:

He and his wife had twins aged eight, twins aged four, and triplets aged eight months. Life was difficult and hunger a constant companion.

Then the cyclone struck.

It destroyed their home, all their possessions, and ruined the crops that were to have sustained them through the coming months. The cyclone took everything, including their hope. His wife was trying to breastfeed triplets – while unable to find any food for herself or family. But thanks to the spontaneous, generous donations from my supporting churches, we had been able to buy food and other basics for people in need. As we prayed with this man and handed over a month’s supply of food and baby milk he gazed, incredulous, and declared, “God exists! GOD EXISTS!”

Later his wife shared how she had heard their neighbours saying, “How can she feed three babies? They will die. They cannot survive!” But today, with three strong, healthy toddlers, everyone knows that it was God’s provision that saved these – and many other – precious lives.

As the relief efforts moved from rescue to reconstruction, we began rebuilding homes, beginning with the most vulnerable – widows, orphans and the disabled. God was glorified and many asked questions about God, declaring that he must really care about these widows and orphans, because he provided for them in their need. To him be all the glory!

CLAIRE serves in Mozambique in the areas of discipleship, leadership development and envisioning for missions, to make disciples who will in turn make disciples.

CREATION AND JUSTICE

In September 2007 the Pacific Conference of Churches issued a statement from their General Assembly concerning climate change. They stated they, ‘deplore the actions of industrialised countries that pollute and desecrate our [ocean]’ and called on ‘our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world to act in solidarity with [them] to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change.’ The Pacific Islanders, and many of the poorest nations and people groups face grave threats to their way of life as a result of the action of powerful nations.



Read Matthew 25:31-40. How do these verses make you feel about the plight of nations adversely affected by climate change?

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Read Isaiah 24:4-5, Jeremiah 2:7 and Hosea 4:1-3. What effect does our sin have on the environment around us? How much of the world’s problems do you think can be traced back to forms of idolatry, greed or pride?

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The Lausanne Covenant has described mission as ‘using the whole church to bring the whole gospel to the whole world’. How do you see sharing the gospel impacting creation? How could you get more involved?

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SPARKING HOPE

Bill and his wife Laurie work in Uganda, sharing the gospel and agricultural practices among local communities. He has seen firsthand how the ‘renewal of minds’ (Romans 12:1-2) affects our relationships, not only with our Creator but with creation too.

I loved walking the rolling hills through the homesteads with Pastor Deo and the others. The Biiso community had obviously been expending huge effort in hopeful anticipation of rains. It was hard to find much unprepared soil; a lot of sweat with a hand-powered hoe.

Across much of Africa, the land provides the livelihood for the majority of families, who live as smallholder farmers. Most of these families struggle to survive. And so, although over 70% of people in Uganda are rural farmers, it is rare to find a single person who aspires to be a farmer. Like the families in the surrounding communities, Pastor Deo and his family live from what their farm produces.

And like these families, they had been living through a season of hunger each year. But he was willing to try new things and asked me to come and share about Farming God’s Way with a group meeting at his church. The small trial plot that group planted near the church building became a testimony which people came to see through the following weeks. Its rows of maize and bean plants thrived!

That began regular visits to the Biiso community, where we were able to share this exciting resource. Particularly applied to agriculture, biblical principles are interwoven with responsible management and sustainable technology. We studied what God tells us in his Word. We observed and learned from what he shows in and through his amazing creation. The community came to know the Master Farmer, discovering his design and intentions. Together we learnt what ‘Farming God’s Way’ meant.

That day, on that walk, we visited 12 plots. 12 dusty gems with potential to reveal the fruitfulness of blessing flowing from obedience to God. 12 plots that could become beacons of hope to draw those around to Jesus. 12 little plots. Not a lot to show, but each one profoundly marking



a significant decision to take a step. I was amazed. They had made a beginning!

We went to each person's plot, evaluating and affirming their efforts, correcting and demonstrating so each could be well prepared for planting. And we prayed a dedication and commitment over each plot - before the seen and the unseen audience.

We talked of the spiritual and physical roots of poverty. Of hearts and wills singularly submitted to God, of minds renewed, made possible through God's gift of abundant life in Jesus. We talked of the God-given dignity of being a farmer, a sacred mission as caretaker of his creation and the resources that he's placed in our hands.

There are so many obstacles and things working against the farmers experiencing success and knowing fruitfulness on their farms and in their lives. Jealousy, theft, sabotage, fire, animals (domestic and wild), pests - millipedes particularly in Biiso - and disease. It can feel overwhelming.

LOCAL OWNERSHIP

My visits to Biiso now involve formal teaching and a lot of interaction, debriefing the experience of the past several months,

making observations of what had gone well and what the challenges had been. Group members now address each other's issues and explain Farming God's Way to the new people who join us. On one visit, two members, Maurice and John, carried the bulk of the teaching. They explained some principles and shared their experience with the group which included nine new people - all in the local language.

It's a journey of patience and perseverance, a walk with hearts yearning for an outflowing of God's grace and goodness in that place. There is disappointment when someone falls away. Others exude enthusiasm about their gardens. But what a joy and privilege it is to be part of bringing people into relationship with God and growing in depending on him. How amazing to see his earth respond in abundance to heartfelt stewardship!



BILL AND LAURIE STOUGH

are based in Jinja, Uganda. They work with smallholder farming families, equipping them to implement Farming God's Way principles.



FOCUS ON: SOUTH SUDAN

Andrea and Jordan Scotland have been missionaries in South Sudan since 2005 and are now country leaders there.

One of the realities that we are now facing is that it is hard to receive and keep missionaries from the Global North on the field in places as challenging and remote as the villages in South Sudan. Most villages do not have electricity, running water, permanent homes or anything even close to a market; most of the population lives on subsistence farming and learning a local language is a must for survival.

Parachuting western missionaries into that environment can be hard for both the missionaries and those they live among. Parity is often just not possible. So instead, more and more of our focus is shifting

towards mobilising the local church to send out missionaries. It has been exciting to watch the Africa Inland Church (AIC) grow in its vision to reach the lost and send out missionaries. Many conversations with church leaders are focusing on mission. Training of local missionaries is starting to happen. South Sudanese missionaries are starting to go and live missionally in communities where there is no church. This is exciting! We are praying for the Holy Spirit to pour fuel on this fire.

What will mission look like 15 years from now? I don't know, but I expect it will involve believers from Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and yes, the Global North, working in partnership to reach the farthest corners of this nation and beyond.

WHAT CAN WE PRAY FOR?

Pray for Romano (Regional Missions Director), Owinja (District Missions Coordinator) and Robert (Local Missions Coordinator), that God will give these South Sudanese men vision, unity and creativity as they encourage the AIC to focus on its part in reaching the unreached peoples of South Sudan.

Charles, Knight and Juma are some of the young men who are passionate about taking the gospel to unreached villages and people groups. They are going by foot, bicycle and motorcycle to villages within a day's walk of Torit. Pray they will be trained, equipped and supported, and remain enthusiastic as they face many challenges as they 'go and make disciples of all nations.'

Pray too for young men who have been involved in mission work and are now studying abroad to further equip them for their work among the unreached. Pray that Angelo will complete his medical training and return to the Laarim to continue Bible studies as well as to work in the local clinic. Pray for Michael as he finishes his training at the AIC Missionary Training College, that God will direct his path as he returns to do mission work in South Sudan.

Luka and Umjuma are a South Sudanese family that have moved to a remote village to plant churches among the Lopit. The AIC church is excited about supporting them, but there is still much to learn about what it takes to keep a missionary family on the field. Pray for the six Bible studies Luka and Umjuma are leading each week in Iboni, that much fruit will result, and an indigenous church will be born.

AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH SUDAN



Up to 95 percent of the country's population depends on farming, fishing or herding to meet their food and income needs.



Peanuts are the country's primary cash crop.



Gum arabic, a water-soluble gum obtained from acacia trees and used in the production of adhesives, candy, and pharmaceuticals, is an important agricultural export.



KINGDOM BUILDING

Gina Wintermantel and her husband Steve have been serving in South Sudan since 2018. They moved from Minnesota with their four children to follow the Lord's leading to Torit, South Sudan. Gina tells us about the work they are involved in.

Steve grew up on a farm in Kansas, and has enjoyed planting and harvesting since he was a young boy. I grew up with a love for animals, and graduated with my degree in veterinary medicine. We both wanted to use these passions and gifts from God for his glory. When God called us to our role with AIM of making disciples in South Sudan, it was obvious that we could use these skills and abilities to encourage the community and to equip disciples.

Since arriving in Torit in 2018, Steve and I have done quite a bit of learning about what it means to farm and raise animals in our new environment. Steve has hauled in countless seeds and plants, while I have brought in chicken eggs and duck eggs for hatching. We have had successes and failures as we learned about caring for our plants and animals. ➡



❶ EQUIPPING DISCIPLE MAKERS

We have been working with a group of pastors from different churches in Torit who have a heart to equip and send out disciple makers to the unreached and under-reached peoples of South Sudan. This September, we began training our first class of 10 students for the Kingdom Builder School (KBS). This is not a traditional school setting, but rather a school that meets in small groups (or Cadres), and includes a practical training session weekly in which we go out into the community and lead Discovery Bible Studies in homes of willing people of peace. Our students are those who believe that the Lord is calling them to go out as disciple makers.

As these Kingdom Builders go out, we also want to equip them with possible ways to help support themselves and to give to the community. Many of the people groups

around us in South Sudan keep sheep, goats, and cattle, as well as planting crops to supply their own food. As Kingdom Builders go out to villages, they can build relationships through helping people to improve their agricultural skills, harvest and take better care of their animals.

KBS has secured a piece of land for a demonstration farm. This land will be used to plant and harvest crops that will help the students, and to share knowledge and techniques with the community. The KBS students are able to work at the farm to pay their enrollment fees if they choose to. As they work, they learn, and pay their fees for school at the same time.

In regards to animals, I have been bringing in chicken eggs from Kenya and Uganda, and hatching them via incubator. These chickens have a faster growth rate, increased body

size, and better egg production than the local chickens. Something as simple as distributing roosters of improved genetic stock can make a difference in production and use of animals here in Torit. If our Kingdom Builders are sent out with small flocks of these improved chicken varieties, they could help their communities to improve the health of their poultry as well.



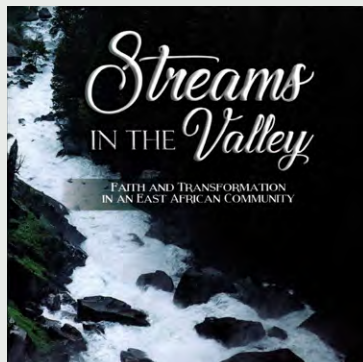
JUMA LOKUNG

Our good friend Juma Lokung helped to build housing and raise up my last batch of chick eggs. Juma is from the Lotuko people group, and has been weekly visiting the village of Imurok where he lived in his early childhood years. He shares Bible stories with many young people, and is currently in school to become a teacher. Juma has a great passion and heart for his people to know Jesus. After he finishes his teacher training, he plans to move out to Imurok to teach in the school, and make disciples. Juma has started his flock from the chickens he helped me to care for. As he goes out to Imurok, he can also share what he has learned about raising chickens, and he may find that helps to open up opportunities to share about God.



GINA AND STEVE WINTERMANTEL focus on partnering with churches in Torit to disciple and equip young adults to go out as disciple makers.

EXPLORE MORE



- Buy Bill Rette and Joseph Kimeli Kiplalang's book *Streams in the Valley*, from AIM for £5 by contacting communications.eu@aimint.org.
- Find out more about Growing Nations and how you can support them at: www.growingnations.co.za. To support Barry and Heather Mann, visit: eu.aimint.org/themanns.
- Watch a video about the LEAP team in Lesotho at eu.aimint.org/leap.

FURTHER READING



Dave Bookless, *Planetwise*, IVP, 2008.

Chris Wright, *The Five Marks of Mission*, Micah Global, 2016.

Bryant L Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, Orbis Books, (second ed. 2011).

For more useful resources to explore why Christians should care for creation, visit: eu.aimint.org/creationcare.



• PRAYER MEETING •

2 February • 7.30pm

Join us for our online
prayer meeting as we
pray for creation.

You're welcome to
attend as an individual
or bring your whole
housegroup, church
prayer meeting or
youth group.




**PRAY FOR
CREATION
CARE**



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