



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

How Must We Prepare the Soil for a Harvest of Freedom?

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“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people...” (Galatians 6: 6-10)

Ethiopia has become a place where harvest is inadequate to meet the needs of our people in terms of food, but our biggest crisis is the harvest of destruction, oppression and tyranny that happens when crops of hope are planted in rocky and infertile soil. The question is: how can we prepare the soil for a “harvest of freedom” when most Ethiopians are sitting back expecting someone else to do the work or are actively sabotaging the work of others in order to advance their own interests?”

Between a Rock and a Hard Place ^[1]

Between a rock and a hard place is an expression that means: stuck between two opposing forces that are both powerful, making it difficult to find a way out of a predicament. In our case, we quickly recognize Meles and his supporters as being one of these forces—perhaps the “the hard place,” but what is the other?

I say, the rock of resistance we face is our own misguided beliefs! We have become so comfortable with years of self-destructive thinking and the actions that result from it, that we don’t see ourselves as part of the problem. However, because of it, we are neglecting the soil that only produces misery and suffering, while illogically thinking that the harvest will be different next time. This kind of thinking has not worked in the past and will not work now. We must face up to it if we are to create a harvest that will sustain life in Ethiopia.

Facts: We are between a rock and a hard place. If we Ethiopians are our own rock, what shall we do?

1. Recognize: we have created a mess and that now we must deal with it.
2. Realize: We have to accept some of the blame for it.
3. Understand: We are suffering because of the consequences of the choices others have made.
4. Equally understand: because of our own bad choices, others will suffer
5. Know: Pretending that we don’t have a major responsibility for our predicament is part of the obstruction of the “rock.”
6. Be encouraged: We can learn to be better people and a better nation through the pain of this crisis.

How Can We Respond?

1. Fear God: God is what we need, but yet we will not acknowledge it and accept it—perhaps because we have swallowed a lie we have accepted from Communist times or because “we want what we want” even though it ends up bringing destruction and nothingness.

Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy. (Amos 5:14-15)

2. Do not run from truth and responsibility as only as we face these two things will we learn and change. Our present crisis is an opportunity for us to listen and to turn away from what has led to our crop failures of life in Ethiopia.
3. Humble ourselves and receive what God has in store for those who do, for God opposes the proud. Oftentimes when we refuse to humble ourselves, we end up blaming other people or God when it was our own actions that created the messes we are in.
4. Don't lose sight of the purpose of our difficulties because God can use them to perfect and transform us into better people. We oftentimes want the benefits of freedom without being freed of those things that keep us from succeeding.
5. Don't be afraid to cut off that which stops transformation and healing—what is toxic, poisonous and destructive.

“...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” (Hebrews 12:1a)

We have broken minds, damaged emotions and hardened hearts and what comes out of that is rocky, dry and infertile soil where nothing grows.

Our history has become who we are and will determine our future unless we face it and replace it with God's plan which is filled with truth, grace and healing.

No matter what we say, what we think is who we are and dictates how we behave. In other words, our actions show our real beliefs regardless of our words. Democracy, rule of law and justice are only shallow words in Ethiopia with no meaning. Instead, this government has shown their true beliefs through what they have done and it is not about freedom, except for the few, privileged loyalists.

What we think and the resulting actions is the soil prepared for the next generation. We can pass on soil good for:

- destruction, misery and death, or for:
- freedom and life

It is up to us! We must understand the right kind of leadership and to see warning signs of the right or wrong approaches. However, the public has to be invested in contributing or the best of leadership will go nowhere because they have not support. Just like a top-notch general in the battlefield will not win the war by himself. It is the common soldiers who win the war.

Two Kinds of Leadership

What kind of leadership do we need in light of this? Here is some insight into what Jesus says is the wrong kind of leadership and then he gives an example of the right kind of leadership.

(Matthew 20: 20-22, 24-28)

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.

[Later] when the ten [other disciples] heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

1. Gatekeepers:

The first kind of leadership demonstrated by the personal ambition of the mother of Zebedee's sons, I will call "**gate-keepers.**" This is not what will bring us a new crop in Ethiopia for it is based on flawed and destructive beliefs.

Characteristics of Gatekeepers

- "Me-first thinking", personally ambitious, competitive against challengers, especially those most able and capable. Gatekeepers seek to destroy competition.
- Reserve the best for me and keep everyone else outside the gate! Prejudices based on ethnicity, skin color, religion, gender, region, education, etc.
- Tribalistic or ethnic dominance, "It's our turn to eat—not yours and we will fight you for it!"
- Gatekeeping can mean the use of violence, but it does not necessarily only mean that. It could mean spreading rumors, sabotaging the efforts of others, preventing others from getting an education, clean water, economic opportunity, land or roads, but it can also mean passive resistance—lack of acknowledgement, denying credit for accomplishments, exclusion, etc.).
- "There is only enough for us—not you!" Instead of cultivating more soil, the gatekeeper destroys the soil of others. Instead of planting more trees, the gatekeeper will steal or grab on to someone else's, stepping on the hands and heads of others to get ahead.
- Trust issues emerge for the gatekeeper is an opportunist (changes positions and loyalties based on what is best for him/her) so others don't trust him/her and conversely, he/she does not trust others because he/she believes others are like him/her
- Secretive because the public face does not match the private face. The gatekeeper knows that public knowledge of his/her private motives and tactics would bring public disapproval so they are carefully hidden.
- Blames others and accepts little responsibility or accountability for mistakes
- Unfree and self-destructive
- Unchecked power will lead to abuse of others and downward cycle for individual

2. Jesus' way: Servant or Slave of the People

The second kind of leadership is what Jesus demonstrates in his life and calls his followers to imitate. He promises that it is the way to being "great" or "first" in the kingdom of God. It is freely choosing to become a servant or slave to others.

Characteristics of Slaves/ Servants

- Free to choose to humble self and to serve others
- Puts the well-being of others first
- Gives justice more than demands justice ^[ii]
- Not threatened by others who are talented, committed and able to help
- Actively empowers others and seeks ways for them to use their gifts
- Respects the personal boundaries of others—independence, property, etc.
- Overlooks faults of others unless respectful confrontation necessary for the betterment of the person, others or for a just cause
- Courageous enough to speak out against misguided, wrong and destructive ways regardless of personal consequences
- Actively works against hate, lies and injustice—not against people.
- Transparent: Admits faults and mistakes and forgives others for theirs
- Lives under the moral authority of universal principles given by our Creator rather than by the winds of culture, peer pressure, opportunity, revenge, escapes, etc

Characteristics of good leaders:

1. Humble and self-effacing
2. Respects and listens to ideas and opinions of others; questions them to gain better understanding of details that form and impact the “big picture”
3. Ambitious for the right, for a cause, for a country—not personally ambitious or needy for recognition nor competitive towards others who are helping
4. Happy if others are successful in contributing, empowers them and then gives credit to them for their accomplishments
5. Goal is to pass on success to successors so they can achieve even greater success
6. Desire is not to lead, but the reason for involvement is due to personal convictions and any God-given leading and passion
7. Jesus is an example who embraced downward mobility^[iii]—washing the feet of his disciples and then dying on cross for others to be freed from destruction to life

Application:

We must know what we want in order to fight for it. Then, we must be examples of what we are fighting for. Are we fighting for dominance—gatekeeping—leaving others out or for becoming a nation depicting humble servanthood to each other?

- In the first, we plant seeds of destruction.
- In the second, we plant seeds of freedom, justice, peace and truth

Meles is our hard place, but we are the rock. Without changing, we will put ourselves in another hard place. We cannot be successful by just changing our government if we remain the same. We must not resent the message of those who put pressure on us to think differently about our part in this. It is not all Meles’ fault and we must be prepared should this government change. Right now, we are not ready.

Even God disciplines those he loves and we know he loves Ethiopians---all Ethiopians. We should attempt to not resist his teaching but to be quick learners.

Who will free Ethiopia?

A changed Ethiopia will come from changed minds and hearts. It will not be a politician or political party members, but it has to come from the average Ethiopian throughout Ethiopia and in the Diaspora. However, a few can destroy Ethiopia if the rest of us are silent and do nothing.

Perhaps our suffering will force us to wake up. God sometimes allows suffering and hardship in our lives to force us to produce a better crop—one that he can only use after we are refined by persecution, difficulty or hardship. For instance, I am certain that God is the one who allowed the painful experiences I have gone through in the past in order to shape me now. Someone once said that such experiences leave us with one of two choices—to become better, more compassionate and God-fearing people or to become bitter and consumed with anger and hate.

Those experiences were difficult, but they taught me something I would not have learned from ease of living. Through my own pain I started to see the pain of others. I see now that God has used these lessons to teach me to trust Him and to live differently because of it. He gives each of us the responsibility of picking up the broken glass in our pathways so others, such as a child who might not be carefully looking out for it, would not be injured in the future. This is what we must do now.

The genocide of the Anuak was horrific, but God is using this, as only He can, to bring about something good. The lives of precious Anuak relatives, friends and colleagues were stolen from my life and I will grieve that loss forever. However, I have been pushed through this tragedy to expand my world and as a result, I have met over a thousand Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians throughout the world who have become not only friends, but like relatives to me. I am amazed how God has used this horrible tragedy to bring new people together. What Satan wanted for destruction, God can use for His purposes.

How Can We Respond?

I want to invite you to follow the example of Jesus in becoming a slave or servant to others. Let me be the first to publicly declare my choice.

I am a slave to Ethiopia by choice, because I am free and because God has filled me up with love towards you.

I encourage you to give up being a gatekeeper if you recognize this in yourself and most all of us will recognize it in ourselves because we are flawed humans. But yet, we must fight against it because it is a trap and it is the right thing to do. It leads to nowhere. It is only by denying ourselves, and our personal ambitions, that we become free.

I encourage you to cut off the load of competition, gatekeeping, sabotaging others or waiting for someone else to free you.

Let us be a nation of humble people who fear God and are filled up and willing to serve others.

Those two disciples of Jesus, the sons of Zebedee who were seeking honor, were transformed. You can read about them—James and John—in the Gospels, especially in the Gospel of John, written by John himself.

In the last chapter (John 21: 15 -19) of that gospel, John records a discussion between Jesus and the disciple, Peter where Jesus again turns upside down the world's view of leadership. This time, he understands.

In this passage, Jesus is asking Peter if he really loved him. Peter says, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus responds by saying, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus asks Peter if he truly loves him. Peter again says, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus repeats the same instruction, “Take care of my sheep.” A third time, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” Peter, hurt because Jesus had asked him the same question three times responds again, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Then Jesus gives him the call for the third time, “Feed my sheep.” He then told him that it would cost him, but that it would glorify God. He then told Peter to “follow him.” Peter followed him and God used him as the rock to build his church by humbly “caring for the lambs.”

Gatekeepers don’t care about the sheep, but make sure they eat first. Are we willing to become people concerned about the sheep—who “feed the sheep” of Ethiopia, of the Horn, of Africa and of humanity? Our future will be dramatically altered if we do. Are we willing to take such a step? Until we do, we will be in self-perpetuating bondage to our past failures. We will eat and never be filled, drink, but will remain thirsty. We will desire freedom, but our souls will be in bondage to destruction. The reality is, we are not really ready to be free of Meles until we are free in our souls. May the God who loves Meles as much as He does us, free his soul as well.

Are We Rightly Preparing for a “Harvest of Freedom?”

Do we reap what we sow? Yes, but the “best injustice” in the world is that God is full of forgiveness, love, mercy and grace and if we humbly repent of our ways and seek guidance from our Creator, He not treat us as we deserve. If we are willing to listen, He can lead us to new solutions to our predicament. He is interested in healing the wounded and raising up the sick from their beds of torment. He wants to produce freedom in our souls that will spill over in its abundance to others. He is not interested in punishing us, but in redeeming us. The only way Ethiopia can be freed is if all Ethiopians come together and agree to put their differences aside, with one common goal in achieving a national reconciliation like South Africa did, like Mahatma Ghandi did, or like Martin Luther King, Jr did in the civil rights movement. This is why we are calling for a Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia.

Again, as I have it many times, this is not about politics, but about how human rights is founded on God-given principles of how to act towards others to bring about healthy, well-functioning societies. We in Ethiopia have been entrapped in self-defeating patterns that have skewed our views on leadership and caused us to follow those who have led us to more destruction. We have “grown” exactly the crop of leaders, and the crop of followers, we have planted. We must open our eyes and change our ways.

As long as we have Ethiopians who will eat the crops of failure without calling for a re-nourishing of the soil and the planting of new kinds of seeds, we will see crop failures and the malnourishment of the soul of Ethiopia. It is time to cultivate a new kind of crop that will bring the “harvest of freedom” for which our hearts crave. Are we ready? The answer is yours. You do not have to be a leader to influence our leaders and our society.

May God expose the lies that have perpetuated our misery so that we may choose a different path. May God’s name be praised and may He redeem the hearts, minds and souls of Ethiopia!

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^[i] Some of the ideas presented in this article were inspired by talks given by Beth Moore at her 2008 Living Proof Live Conference in Minneapolis (July 18-19) and by Wayne Pederson at Calvary Church, Roseville, MN on July 20, 2008. In the latter talk, Pederson also talks about some of Jim Collins' (author of "Good to Great") research on

qualities of top leaders which includes: humility, working for the company's goals for the present and for the future and being motivated by inner passion instead of selfish ambition.

^[iii] Oswald Chambers writes in his book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, p.179 to "Never look for justice in this world, but never cease to give it."

It should be noted that this article, as others, was co-written by AJC members, Obang Metho and Jill Anderson.