

The Link

The Season of Ramadan for Muslims: Religion Verses Relationship



Many people in the world are religious. They scrutinize every word and action of others and blinded to their religious bigotry. I have many Muslim friends **fasting** during the months of June/July which is the Islamic season of Ramadan. In the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar, Muslims throughout the world **fast** and pray for 30 days. The **fast** begins at dawn and ends at dusk with a corporate breaking of the **fast** with a prepared meal. No water or food is taken during the day. Yet, they proudly show each other and the world their ritualistic **fast** but blinded to their spiritual poverty. Many Muslims ask me, "Are you **fasting**?" while I am holding a bottle of soda-water. I retort saying that I am **fasting**, but it is a different kind of **fast**. According to Isaiah 58:6ff: "Is not this the kind of **fasting** I have chosen, to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppress free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard." I also share with inquisitive Muslims that our Bible mandates that when **fasting**, we are to wash our face, comb our hair "so that it will not be obvious to others that you are **fasting**, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Note: In our fast pace society, it is difficult to hide a personal fast from family and friends. In the past when **fasting** for 21 or 40 days, I had to disclose to my family and sometimes to church members why I could not join them for a meal. For 7 or 3 day **fasts**, it is much easier to hide. A few times I've **fasted** 40 days losing 25 or more pounds and people would be concerned with my weight loss. Yet, I would simply say to them that I was **fasting** without giving them a pious discourse. The point I'm trying to drive home is that **fasting** can simply be a **religious**/pious performance rather than a deep hunger to draw near to God ("...and He will draw near to you" - James 4:8 NASB). Also, a person fasting can easily get caught up in **religious** tradition and at the same time be blinded to one's lack of benevolence as sighted in the above passage—Isaiah 58:6ff. The Pharisees, the **religious** bigots of Jesus's day, were more interested in the letter of the law (**religion**) than charity and a hunger/passion for God (**relationship**). When Jesus healed the sick on the Sabbath, the Pharisees would invariably have a spiritual convulsion. The man ill for 38 years was told by Jesus (John 5:2ff) to pick up his bed and walk. The **religious** leaders had seen this poor invalid many times waiting by the waters of Bethesda hoping to be the first one in the pool when stirred by an angel. Rather than being excited & amazed that the man was healed and walking, they scolded and interrogated him saying, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." WOW! This is a prime example of **religious** tradition that trumps **relationship** (compassion, mercy, love). Jesus made it absolutely clear in Matthew 25:36ff, "When you have cared for others, you have cared for me" (Rick's paraphrase). James gives us a sobering verse: "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement" James 2:13. We are to be the hands of God...His expression of love. **Religion Kills!**

Let me share a few examples to shed light on my thesis. I remember inviting my deacon to go on visitation with me. We stopped by a construction site to talk to some workers. I had invited a young carpenter to come to church on Sunday. Before the man could respond, my deacon blurted out, "You are welcome but don't wear that shirt!" (It was a tee shirt with an embossed beer label.) Our churches are filled with **religious** pharisees. A contemporary pharisaical act would be to see your neighbor cutting grass on Sunday and chastising him/her for their laborious work on the Lord's Day RATHER than starting up your mower and giving them a hand. I have vivid recall of a situation in college: Candy was blessed with a much needed job enabling us to pay the rent & eat. However, she had the night shift where she had to go through a very dangerous area of town to get to her employment. Our old car was famous for playing dead at the first sign of moisture. We could not find a mechanic that could resolve the problem. Rather than her driving in the rain at night and not knowing if the car would suddenly stop breathing, we purchased (financed) a Nissan Sentra. The next morning Candy drove home to a waiting neighbor. He ran out of his trailer (we lived in a trailer park while in college) to admire our new family addition. He said, "God has blessed you with funds to purchase a new car!" Candy said that the bank blessed us with a loan to buy the car. Well, he went into a religious tirade about the evils of borrowing from the world rather than waiting upon the Lord for the necessary funds. My bride was crushed (and upset). Folks...**religion KILLS** and relationship brings life. It all begins with our relationship with Christ which bleeds over to others.

I walk the streets everyday praying for opportunities to share Christ. I'll usually strike up a conversation and eventually ask, "Are you born again?" (In Luganda - Walokoka?) Many times they will say, "No! I am protestant." I will explain to them that I am also protestant (**religion**), but when I was a youth, I became born again—A member of God's family (**relationship**). We have so many people today sitting in the pew, perhaps not missing a Sunday service in 20 years, but never embracing the fact that they are lost—oblivious to the fact that their hearts are dirty and that Jesus is the only One that can clean their hearts. It is not unusual for a person to "think" that their **religious** performance and good works will make them acceptable in God's eyes. They have never internalized that salvation is a free gift: "I am saved my GRACE through FAITH in Jesus and not of myself; it is the gift of God not of works so no one can say I DESERVE TO ENTER HEAVEN" (Eph. 2:8-9...Rick's paraphrase). Allow me to say it again: The church is filled with **religious** people, but many are they who do not have an intimate **relationship** with the Savior. To highlight my point, I recently had an email from a former church member. At the time, her husband was an active deacon. For months, he was cheating on his wife. He faithfully wore the Christian mask each Sunday, but empty. There was another situation regarding a deacon, a closet homosexual known only by his mother, who was very active and religious, but void of a true **relationship** with Christ. **My prayer** is that all those reading this newsletter truly have an **intimate relationship** with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. God bless you so much! Happy 4th of July!!!

Rick

NEWS BRIEFING: We have listed four (4) houses that Mission LINK International desires to STAMP as **FINISHED!** Many times we share with our readers that "X" amount of dollars are needed to finish a house, yet our national later announces something "new" or different that he has not thought of in the building process. Just keep in mind that those constructing houses are not builders. Yet, they have done well in constructing beautiful homes for a reasonable cost. Again, once the funds for the houses are raised, MLI will stamp as **FINISHED**. I sat down with each person building a home and ask them, "What will it take for us to finalize your home?"... **TO MARK IT AS FINISHED.** 1) **Mzee John:** Our day time security and grounds person can **MARK AS FINISHED** w/ **\$875**; 2) **James Abalyawo:** Our head teacher still has some outside painting, other budgeted items as well as a 5000 liter tank installed to catch his rain water so he can quench the thirst of his animals and garden. A gift or gifts totaling **\$740**... will enable us to **MARK JAMES AS FINISHED**. On June 25th, we had a dedication service; James invited the community to witness God's blessing. Rick spoke at this special event highlighting the fact that the house built was a result of Pastor James faithfulness in teaching many pastor throughout Uganda and beyond; **Pastor Philip Tenywa:** He is MLI's Director who has worked for over three (3) years to plan for and construct his house. He has a septic system, bathrooms and kitchen to install. The septic, water tank and bathrooms, etc. totals **\$2200** and the kitchen is **\$275** that will enable MLI to **MARK AS PHIL AS FINISHED**. This is critical for Phil to finish as he will be getting married the first week in October to Jackie Mbeya. We really want Phil and his new wife to have indoor plumbing. (Plus, Phil is raising his wedding budget.) Finally, **Pastor Wasawa** (bottom picture right): He is purposely mentioned last. Rick has committed to list his house **only 2 times** in MLI's newsletter. He has a mud house that is an hour walk from the church. It was listed several times in past newsletters to reconstruct. After a recent visit to his church, Rick realized that finishing a partially constructed house next to the church would better serve Pastor James & family. Contributions of **\$2800** will enable us to **MARK JAMES AS FINISHED**. We will then be left with building a house in Eldoret, Kenya for Pastor Bishop Anthony Wambua Ndambuki, MLI's Director for the MLI Christian Study Center.



FLORENCE: Pictured left is MLI's widow who has just undergone surgery. She has suffer tremendously with a broken arm. A metal plate was needed to repair the break. Our donors came to her rescue. She has no family and therefore our director, Esther, traveled with her to an international hospital in Entebbe and will stay with her the entire 7 days. Note: Unless there is a family member, that person will have no-one to assist them in the ward. This is Africa!

PASTOR GEORGE: He is a teacher working in several schools teaching English, mathematics and geography. He has an opportunity through a local college to further his education. George is very capable and passionate about teaching in village schools. He simply needs **\$180 x 6 (for six terms)**. This is an investment not only in George's career, but also for the students that he teachers. Helping a person to obtain a career gives him/her a solid future.



CHICKEN PROJECT (Sponsored by FBC of Ch'ville, Va.) (VERY CRITICAL): We are needing a parameter fence around our chicken project to keep thieves and animals from getting to our chickens. Included is this figure is a metal door & window for the manager's house. The fencing budget is: **\$1175**. (Note: Another \$200 will enable us to add an electric fence.)

PHASE II MLI SCHOOL IN ELDORET, KENYA: Starting budget is \$7200+ to put up a metal frame & roofing (no walls). When completed, students from all over East Africa will come to learn the Bible under the leadership of Pastor Anthony Ndambuki.

DEAF SCHOOL: I met with the founding staff of this newly formed school (started February 2016). The school is small accommodating about 12 students. It is struggling. They have been given a space in a primary school that also is struggling. In fact, the land and buildings are being offered to the leadership of the deaf school for \$16,000 USD. This would place them in a position to have their own facilities as well as managing the rest of the school. This is a dream! However, right now their immediate monthly need is for **food — \$370**. Besides this, they need monthly rent to house the 12 kids at **\$70** and teach's salaries (for 5) is **\$250** per month. Pastor Herbert, who is well respected among the missionaries, is watching over the school. We pray that the deaf school will be successful and grow to help more children who are handicapped. **Food is the first priority.**

GENERAL FUND: The GENERAL FUND gives MLI flexibility to take care of operational expenses & needs/projects—and there are many! Without this fund, it would be very challenging to operate & assist the numerous needs we encounter "literally" day-by-day. **When you give to projects, would you please give a little EXTRA to the general fund. Our balance (though not critical) has been reduced over the last 12 months. God bless you!!!**

LOOK AROUND THE HOUSE, ASK YOUR FRIENDS AND AT CHURCH PHONES, DIGITAL CAMERAS, OLD LAPTOPS, Christian BOOKS

We are in need of your old phones and digital cameras. Please drop them by the MLI office OR mail them to: 1677 Avon St. Ext, C'ville, VA 22902. Christian books/Bibles also needed for next shipment to Africa. Thank you so much! KEEP THEM COMING!!!

IT IS NOT TOO EARLY TO SIGNUP FOR THE UGANDA 2017 TRIP



TRIP DATES ARE FEBRUARY 11 - 24, 2017 TO UGANDA, EAST AFRICA Mission Link International is planning on its 15th medical/evangelistic trip to Uganda, East Africa. The cost is \$2850. Mission LINK has 28 seats which includes KLM Airline ticket, visa, insurance and most of in-country expenses (transportation, hotel, breakfast/dinner, etc.). A \$100 **non-refundable** deposit will secure your place on the team. Anyone submitting their deposit to the

MLI Office by August 31st, will receive a \$100 scholarship. The first 10 deposits will receive an additional \$50 reduction. (**CLOSED - First 10 have captured the \$50 scholarship.**) If you have any questions, please call or write Rick: MLI Office is 434-984-1995 or Cell is 434-981-9101 or EMAIL - thelinkoffice@gmail.com. Regardless of skills or giftedness, we can utilize anyone who desires to be on mission with God. This is an opportunity of a lifetime.

Widow Edisa Still Needs a Sponsor for Monthly Support



For **\$30** a month (just a dollar a day) you can make a difference in the life of a widow. Your support will help pay for school fees, medicine, home-based businesses, food, and much more.

Namukose Edisa was born in 1956 and lives in the village of Itukulu. Seven years ago her husband died of heart failure. Edisa thanks God for the good things provided through Mission Link International (Piggery project, stoves, water filter, medicines received in 2015). Edisa fellowships at Itukulu Baptist Church and her pastor is Pr. Geoffrey Kadoko. Her present challenges are: Renovating her house and her four children's school fees.