



# **The Torch**

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**From Torch Trust**

**The Christian organisation with a worldwide vision for  
people with sight loss**

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Torch Trust  
Torch House,  
Torch Way,  
Market Harborough,  
Leicestershire,  
LE16 9HL.**

**Tel: +44 (0)1858 438260  
Email: [info@torchtrust.org](mailto:info@torchtrust.org)  
Website: [torchtrust.org](http://torchtrust.org)**

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# Welcome!

Welcome to this issue of The Torch magazine! As before, I have gathered material from several countries which I believe will challenge, inform and inspire you.

In *My grace is sufficient for you* Samuel Kabue from Kenya shares honestly about his struggles to understand God's healing after becoming blind, and describes how God uses the experience of the Apostle Paul to help him. In *You are the only Bible some people will ever read* young Ugandan Rose Sandy describes an encounter which reminds her of the Christian imperative to be Jesus to others. In the next article, *Prayer, placement, power, praise, progress and peace*, Andrew Gani-Ikilama of Nigeria shares lessons he learned following his father's death, through which God led him into ministry to blind people. Rose of Malawi offers some confidence-inspiring thoughts in *An African perspective on Christianity and Western influence*. Finally, retired Torch staff member Michael Stafford, who has lived and travelled widely in Africa, ends as I begin – on the theme of thanksgiving to God.

So, let me begin with thanksgiving. As we compile this, we are preparing for September's annual Torch Thanksgiving Celebration at Torch House. This year we celebrate 58 years of God's blessing on Torch Trust, the work having begun in 1959. Co-founders Ron and Stella Heath have passed away, Ron in 1999 and Stella ten years later.

A few weeks ago I spent time with someone who was there with the Heaths at the very beginning. I went to the 80th birthday party of Lilian Taylor. It was Lilian who

introduced the Heaths to their first blind contact – a young woman called Wendy. I asked Lilian about the “Friday Nighters” – the youth group that the Heaths ran in their home in Reigate, Surrey in the South of England before Torch Trust existed.

“I had a friend who, after a tremendous amount of badgering, persuaded me to go along to the Friday Nighters, together with my twin sister,” remembered Lilian.

“My sister became a Christian through Mrs Heath one Friday night and then I became a Christian on the Sunday of the same weekend when Mr Heath was preaching at the little chapel in Carshalton.”

I asked Lilian to describe how the connection between Ron and Stella Heath and blind people came about.

“I started work at Hethersett, the local college for visually impaired and blind students aged 16 to 18 years,” explained Lilian.

“I used to go to the Heaths’ for Sunday tea and I would take some of the students with me,” she said.

This was in the late 1950s. The teas were always a real highlight for many young people and the numbers attending grew.

“One blind student in particular, Wendy, became really interested in Christian things and she became a Christian one afternoon as we were walking home,” said Lilian.

“Through Wendy, Mr and Mrs Heath realised how little there was for blind and visually impaired people in terms of Christian literature.”

**And that's how the braille and large print work began in the Heaths' home. Torch Trust was born, taking its name from the magazine called *The Torch* which they took over.**

**Lilian continued to be involved in Torch after she left Hethersett and got married. As her children grew up, they also helped. In fact, the Torch group there continued right until last year when the college was demolished.**

**We thank God for the faithfulness demonstrated by Lilian's many years of service to Torch. And, just as the Heaths did over half a century ago, Torch Trust continues to look to God for guidance and provision as we respond to the needs of blind and partially sighted people.**

**Dr Gordon Temple, Torch Chief Executive**

## **'My grace is sufficient for you'**

**[Samuel Kabue's illustrious career has included university teaching, correspondence tutoring for blind students, managing Kenya's first national printing house for blind people, leadership within the disability movement, and working with the National Council of Churches in Kenya, the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches. Until recently he served as Executive Director of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN). He has received awards for his service to his country and for his contributions to church life. Here, on the occasion of his retirement from church eldership this year, he shares some of his thoughts.]**

**I lost my sight at the age of sixteen, just after committing my life to Christ and joining high school. The events that**

unfolded reflect a serious paradox between this seeming tragedy and my religious life. The impression I had was that the world had come to an end for me. No consolation could be given by the encouragement to start life anew by learning braille and continuing with education offered by the School for the Blind. My understanding was that I was sick and what I needed in order to continue with life was a cure.

The doctors, having surrendered in their efforts and wisdom to cure me, recommended that my place henceforth was the blind school, a place I had heard very little about. I could not imagine how blind people lived let alone learned there. The doctors having failed, my yearning for a cure was strongly driven by religious influence. There were many in religious circles around me who considered miracle healing an option and, long after my becoming blind and a lot of adjustment, their reminder that God owed me a cure kept on following me. I did with all earnestness seek faith healing over a long time before I came to understand and accept that blindness had become a part of me. It took me a long time to accept that although God can heal, he can do so only within his own will and timing.

With time I recognised that an emphasis on physical healing can at times work out very negatively for the faith of many people with disabilities. This is still very much the case today for many people living with conditions like mine. Many have felt it embarrassing either to attend worship or crusades because when they do so it is assumed that they are going to such an event not for spiritual blessing and nourishment but for physical healing. Often they are coerced to going to the front for

**divine healing prayers. If no healing takes place, they are presumed to have no faith and, more often than not, they are told exactly that.**

**I went through these experiences and can witness to the feelings that result. Finally I was able to overcome my anger over it, but it was very difficult in the early days of my blindness. God has his own ways of dealing with us that are very different from human understanding. Paul the apostle, despite his mighty work of preaching, teaching, healing and even raising people from the dead, could have been discouraged by his own problem which he describes in as ‘a thorn in the flesh’**

**(2 Corinthians 12:7–9). He testified that he pleaded with God over this three times but God’s answer to him was ‘My grace is sufficient for you.’ He would have wanted to be fit, perfect and healthy to serve God better. By revelation he realised that this very problem was his constant reminder about God’s strength and its manifestations. Living with it reminded him that God was not limited.**

**God will heal us if he considers it necessary, but our physical conditions should never be grounds to make us fail to carry out the mission he appoints us to fulfil. He will accompany us and give us the necessary grace to handle our situations. “This realisation has made me soldier on in life and aspire to do my best. As a child, youth, student, professional, husband and father, I can say with confidence that I have lived a fulfilling life in which my blindness has been merely a fact of human diversity in my life experiences.**

**There have been moments of frustration, disappointment and outright anger but quite often these have**

strengthened my resolve. I have learned that there is happiness in recognising that at all times the Lord is in control. Where I am weak, I have taken it to be a reminder that I belong to a stronger God who will uplift me and make the stumbling blocks put before me by the enemy into stepping stones to higher heights of glory and success. I have also learned that what the world considers as tragedy, God can turn into blessings.

[Here is the full text of the Scripture passage (2 Corinthians 12:7–10) that Samuel Kabue has written about:

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.]

**‘You are the only Bible some people will ever read’**

[Rose Sandy is a young black Ugandan. A diplomat’s daughter, she has travelled widely. She speaks four

languages and has worked in multinational corporations. She's also a thriller writer, and has worked in book publishing and the entertainment industry. Here is an excerpt from an article she wrote from Lugazzi, Uganda, about the responsibility of being a believer engaging with others.]

I will never forget the look on her face when she greeted me. Her outstretched hand and farm-worn fingers gripped mine with a strength drawn from the love of life. She was a champion against poverty and a woman I'd waited almost ten years to see.

Her eyes glistened with the will to survive, untarnished by hardships life had tossed her way . . . She reached to me like a long-lost sister and I was instantly drawn into her embrace.

She ushered my two children, my husband and myself into the tiny space of what she called her living room . . . perhaps no bigger than the store room in my London flat, but I must admit I felt like I was on the red carpet strolling up the steps of Buckingham Palace, as a state-dinner guest . . . My family each found a relaxing seat while she took a humble position on the cement floor.

In all of this, my new friend and sister in faith reminded me of the person I wanted to be.

Not long ago, I heard a wonderful phrase at my local London church . . . 'You are the only Bible some people will ever read.' They will only ever see the message of the Cross through you and through the life you present before them.

**That sunny, tropical morning while I sat conversing with this remarkable daughter of the King, a champion of life and the mother of the child we've sponsored in Uganda through a Christian mission for over ten years, I believe I was the one learning a lesson in compassion . . . The mother's gratitude to her God was evident as she began unfolding her 10-year journey from the mudslide that had threatened her house with ruin, and how a practical token of compassion from a continent away had enabled her to cement her house with protection. The child we were sponsoring, a vibrant 10-year-old girl, looked on with pride as . . . her mother demonstrated strength and wisdom that only God could give.**

**This woman brought her best to us, presented the choicest fruits of her labour from a tiny farm she'd secured to support her family – all gifts that could have fed her family for three months . . . She lived the Bible before me.**

**You are the only Bible some people will ever read.**

**What a responsibility! Many of us will never get a platform from which to preach the Bible treasures, but every living moment of our lives is like open scripture for the world to read . . . What is written on the pages of your life, an open book for the world to read? What story do you want it to tell?**

# **Prayer, placement, power, praise, progress and peace**

**Andrew Gani-Ikilama is the son of Dr Bitrus Gani-Ikilama of Nigeria, who was blind from the age of five.**

**Overcoming many obstacles, Dr Bitrus Gani-Ikilama became a respected physiotherapist, university lecturer, writer, and founder of an internationally-known centre for blind people.**

**When his father died, Andrew says he was shattered and couldn't sleep for days at a stretch: "What he had said would one day happen, did happen; one day my father died. I was numb from shock. My peace disappeared. Is bereavement a form of blindness? It was for me."**

**Andrew describes the process which happened in his life then as GPS. Many readers will know of GPS as the Global Positioning System of modern technology. This is the worldwide navigation facility based on radio signals from orbiting satellites which cars and other transport can use in direction-finding. Andrew explains:**

**"Let me tell you about what I call the 'real' GPS, the God Positioning System. As GPS unfolded in my life, just like the rehabilitation process helps a person who has gone blind, I came to discover some things in a new way. I came to discover prayer, placement, power, praise, and progress.**

# **Prayer**

**“Jesus started his ministry with fasting and prayer – forty days and nights long. When Jesus was happy, he prayed. When he needed supplies, he prayed. When he was faced with temptation, he prayed. So who am I not to pray? No wonder the apostle Paul advised that we ‘pray without ceasing’. When we pray we make ourselves available for the next big thing to happen.**

# **Placement**

**“The will of the Father will come to reality. This to me is the ultimate reality show in which I am the star. God doesn’t make mistakes about his placement for each of us. How do I know? Because he knows the number of hairs on my balding head! To ensure his planned geographical placement, God moved me from one location to the one he wanted for the next phase of reality on earth.**

# **Power**

**“God is the power. God has the power. He gave me free will to choose. He also gave us the Holy Spirit who is available and desires to lead us into the real power. He gives access to all he has and so we call him Father. I have come to realise that the creative force he released at creation is fully available to me even though I thought I had gone blind.**

# **Praise**

**“Like everyone who becomes blind, I have become familiar with certain tools. One of them is praise. God inhabits our praises. He revels in them. King David understood the power of praise. Just read all the Psalms and you will understand. Many nights my state of blindness would keep me from sleep; I would pace up and down and read out the Psalms until my body slumped in tiredness. Even though sleep was far away, my spiritual man was gaining muscle. Father God was building me for his glory.**

# **Progress**

**“Father God loves progress. He is the loving parent who wants to see how we are making progress. He wants us to multiply. How has the muscle-building of my spiritual man helped my physical body and travels? After I got some semblance of clarity in my thoughts, I started a business school. I didn’t pray before venturing into that. Big mistake! All I wanted was to pay my bills. I put some food on the table but I was far from happy, far from fulfilled. I slept a little better but I wasn’t satisfied in my spiritual man. One day a friend visited my office and suggested we both attended a Bible School. I accepted.**

**During the course, the Lord told me to give knowledge to blind people. I needed fulfilment, I needed filling and I was being told to go and do something for others. When the Holy Spirit reminded me that about five years earlier I had promised my late father that I would continue to help blind people, I broke down and screamed ‘Use me**

**Lord for your glory!’ Day by day I literally received instructions as though by direct line from Heaven. The name of a new organisation, Knowledge For The Blind Initiative (kfbi.org), was delivered to me and the registration process was hitch-free. The logo was shown to me and I guided a designer to bring out exactly what I was seeing in my mind. The brethren (ed. Christians) I was led to all agreed to be involved. Now people are being ministered to, and Muslim communities have opened their doors to us.**

## **Peace**

**“Finally, being in the centre of the will of Father God always gives peace like a river; peace in the storm; peace through the storm; peace that passes all understanding.”**

**Follow the work of the Knowledge For The Blind Initiative on Facebook (simply put the name of the organisation into the search bar on Facebook) and please pray for fruitfulness for this ministry.**

## **An African perspective on Christianity and Western influence**

**[This is an extract from a thought-provoking article written by a young African woman, Diana, who describes herself as “a Christian first, Malawian blogger, photographer, entrepreneur, music listener, art lover, and student of life, passionate about Jesus Christ, God’s truth**

and the arts.” She writes on faith, art, culture and theology ([iamnotagoddess.com](http://iamnotagoddess.com)). These are her words:]

I remember the very few history classes I’ve taken between Grade 7 primary school and Form 2. I remember being taught briefly about Rev Chilembwe, Dr Banda, Dr Bakili and Dr David Livingstone.

When it came time to talk about the history of Christianity in Africa/Malawi we were told how missionaries brought Christianity to us right alongside colonisation and slavery.

After I became a Christian not much changed. I read a lot on western Christianity and Church history. Even here, nothing changed much; Africa was hardly ever mentioned and African theologians were never quoted. And the more I read the more I started to ask myself why everything I read on African Christianity starts with the western missionaries. The result is people believing that Christianity, slavery and colonialism came together on one ‘boat’. And that white people used the Bible and Christianity to colonise us.

All this has led some to ask, ‘Is Christianity a western religion?’ Did Christianity come to Africans/Africa only after the first missionary came? Was there Christianity in Malawi before Livingstone? What about African theologians? Where are the African theologians?’ . . . All these are questions I’ve been asking myself lately and, to be quite honest, I haven’t found answers for all of them. But I’m looking and I’m reading.

I believe that culture is God’s idea; ethnicity is part of Genesis 1. God created all human beings in his image, but he also designed us to be uniquely different. It is God’s creation, and it’s beautiful the way he made it. My culture

**is beautiful, my African-ness and my Malawian-ness is a beautiful thing, handwoven by God. When he redeemed me, I believe even the things that make me unique are also redeemed; the same thing with my tribe and culture – redeemed in the sense of how I look at them, through a biblical lens.**

**My journey to appreciating being African goes hand in hand with appreciating God’s work on the continent. They are inseparable: the fact that God loves African people makes me love being African. He has included us in his plan for salvation. We have been in the Bible from the time of Moses (his wife was African). Jesus came to Africa (Egypt) to escape from Pharaoh. We also see, in Acts 13:1–3, listed among the teachers and prophets was a man from Cyrene which is now a place in Libya. The first missionary to Africa was probably an African if you recall the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–40.**

**In his commentary on Acts 13:3 Malamulo Chindonga writes, ‘God has been engaging Africans with the gospel centuries before Livingstone.’ (Malamulo Chindongo pastors Antioch Baptist Church in Blantyre, Malawi.)**

**We’ve always been taught about African Christianity as if it was the ‘white man’s idea’ but really Christianity has always been and will be God’s idea. Christianity was in Africa way before any white/western missionary was. Africa has so many great theologians, hymn writers, pastors, evangelists who preached the gospel to the rest of their kinsmen.**

**Christianity is not a western religion, nor a religion that is alien to Africans. If there is anything that African traditional religion can teach us it’s that . . . ‘what can be**

known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made' (Romans 1:19). Also, 'God has placed eternity in our hearts' (Ecclesiastes 3:11); and he has placed us here that perhaps 'we may seek him and find him' (Acts 17:27).

God has used various ways to bring Africans to himself. He has used western missionaries and continues to do so. But we must not overlook the incredible work of sharing Christ that African natives who have heard the gospel have done from the beginning and continue to do.

So to go back to that question: no, Christianity is not a western religion, neither is it African – although I do think that in some cases it takes a western form.

I hope that more people will learn to appreciate who they are as African Christians, that they would not be ashamed of being both African and Christian, nor feel like they are a mistake, or that everything that has to do with 'African Christianity' is bad. I am personally on that journey and, to be honest, I don't think African Christians look one particular way anyway, because we don't all fit in one box.

Christianity in North Africa will be different from West Africa and same goes for the other different parts of Africa. We are beautifully diverse because God made us so for his glory.

I hope we will learn to appreciate who we are in Christ and learn to appreciate what God is doing on our continent. Better yet, let's be part of serving our countries, let's join the list of locals who are working to build the Church in

**Africa. There are so many ways to be involved, from evangelism to translation. Now more than ever there is a need for relevant Christian materials and even the Bible in our own languages. We are the labourers he is sending to the field; let's work!"**

## **Thanksgiving**

**[We began this issue with the annual Thanksgiving Celebration at Torch House, and we close on the same theme. Michael Stafford, a missionary in Africa before spending many years serving with Torch Trust, including making many visits to Malawi, encourages us to be thankful, following the example of the apostle Paul. Michael writes:]**

**Every year at our Thanksgiving Celebration, we remember how the Lord has blessed, guided and provided for the work we do in seeking to help people with sight loss over the past year. Giving thanks is an essential part of Christian living – and even dying!**

**Recently I attended a thanksgiving service for the life of a brother in Christ who had lived an exemplary life, demonstrating the love of Christ in his life and service for the Lord.**

**It has become a custom in the UK to have such thanksgiving services instead of, or as well as, a traditional funeral service. This emphasises the fact that the death of a believer is not a mournful and hopeless time but rather a time for giving thanks, not only for a life lived for God's glory, but also for the eternal life with Christ that he or she is now enjoying.**

**The apostle Paul frequently wrote of thanksgiving in his epistles, often thanking God for the believers in the churches to which he was writing. This is what he said in Ephesians 5:19–20: ‘Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our lord Jesus Christ’. Then, in 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 he wrote: ‘Be joyful always; pray continually; giving thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus’.**

**Giving thanks for everything . . . in all circumstances! Really? Can Paul really have meant that? How can we thank God when things go wrong: when we are disabled, ill, in financial difficulties, or facing family problems?**

**We can – if we remember that God has our greater good always in mind, even when we are suffering, and will give us grace to cope with our circumstances, just as Paul did when he suffered what he described as ‘a thorn in the flesh’, as brother Samuel Kabue testifies so well earlier in this magazine. God apparently didn’t answer Paul’s prayer for the thorn’s removal but instead said ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’.**

**Anifani is a blind lady in Malawi who struggles not only because of her blindness but also this year with hunger, as the maize crop has again failed. She is a shadow of her former self, yet one thing has not changed: her thankfulness to God. She is able to smile with a joy and peace which comes not from her circumstances but from God himself.**

**Eckhart (1260–1328), a famous Reformation theologian, said: ‘If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, “thank you”, that would be enough.’**

**We may at times have suffered the hurt of giving a gift to someone who never bothered to thank us for it. How do we think God feels when we fail to thank him for his many good gifts? Thanksgiving is a vital part of our praise and worship.**

**George Herbert, the poet, orator and minister (1593–1633), said: ‘You have given me so much . . . Give me one more thing, a grateful heart’.**