



49 ❖ Do what you know you should do

A series of thefts had stirred an undercurrent of uneasiness in the Nyanga church community. Some wondered if the thief was a high school student who had come from a distant place. Others wondered if it was a nearby villager, a former employee, who knew the mission community well enough to find his way around under the cover of darkness. As the thefts continued, conjecture turned to apprehension and finally to anger.

One night, the thief was caught. To the amazement of the church community, he was a son of the senior pastor of the Nyanga church, David Ngongo.¹

A regular meeting of the council was already on the church calendar just a few days later. Because of his position in the church, Pastor David chaired all council meetings.

During the days leading up to the scheduled meeting, council members were quietly seeking each other out, wondering how the matter would be dealt with, given that the thief's father would be chairing their meeting. Would he plead for mercy for his son? Would he try to deflect disciplinary measures? Would his son become a contentious and divisive issue within the council? Perhaps, as chairman, the pastor might try to block any discussion of the matter to avoid the personal hurt and shame that a public airing of the issue would bring to him as the parent.

photo—David Ngongo

1 See "David Ngongo: From houseboy to great leader (chapter 35).

In African society, no loyalty is deeper than that extended to blood relatives. At the same time, the church community was accustomed to taking disciplinary measures in an open way.

The council meeting opened with devotional and prayer and continued to some routine matters that had accumulated since the last session. Finally, the only remaining item was what to do with the captured thief.

The council members were in a difficult spot. Pastor David was highly esteemed by the church community. He had faithfully served the local church for many years. Initially, he and his wife had been placed in a variety of villages to open schools and plant churches. The Lord had blessed his ministry everywhere he had gone. Furthermore, after he'd been called to serve on the station, he had spent many hours on his bike going to visit villages where he had served earlier, seeking out converts to encourage them in their faith while checking up on the teacher-evangelists resident in the villages at the time. His enthusiasm for his work, his love of the Lord, and his devotion to his church were clear to all.

When the council secretary announced the last agenda item about the captured thief, an awkward silence followed. Finally, Pastor David spoke. With an expression that reflected his sadness he said, "What are you waiting for? You know what the book of God says about thieving. You know what our church has done with other matters of this kind. Do what you know you should do!"

A motion was made and carried to excommunicate Pastor David's son and to place him under church discipline. The council also laid plans to call the son to their next meeting for reproof, admonition, and prayer, and to explain their action.

Sensing that their pastor now wanted to be left alone, someone led in a brief word of prayer and the council members filed out of the room, leaving Pastor David, slumped in his chair at the little table in front, to pour out his grief to the Lord in private and to plead for wisdom to deal with his wayward son.

The council action did not remain a secret. It became yet another witness to the surrounding community of Pastor David's uncompromising commitment to God, to his church, and to the teachings of Jesus, even above family.