



BIG

CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

A Model of a Possible Future
of African Christian College



Chikondi

Chikondi was preparing for a visit to ESwatini to stay with his uncle who was working temporarily there. He jumped at the chance to travel outside of Zambia. Plus, he had heard about a school there — Big Christian University — that sounded like a great place. The visit to his uncle would give him an opportunity to see the university for himself.

When he arrived at his uncle's place, there was a flyer on the table for an Open Day at Big Christian University. The uncle picked it up at church. The Open Day was in a few days, so Chikondi messaged the university to make his reservation.

Chikondi rode a kombi to campus on Friday morning . . . just before the events of the day began. Big certainly described the university. He recognised some of the tall and modern (yet distinctively African) buildings around the campus from the university website and flyer.

Students were heading in all directions to their classes around the campus. Chikondi was able to find his way into a lecture hall where prospective students were being warmly welcomed.

A Warm Campus Welcome

After welcomes from the staff and Student Representative Council, Dr Vilakati, the university president, gave a welcome address to the visiting, potential students. He spoke about how the university started as a preaching school in 1967, became a Bible college, then a university college, and now is a fully-fledged, accredited university with multiple faculties and disciplines.

Dr Vilakati noted both male and female students have long been part of the student body and that for many years students have come from throughout Southern Africa and East Africa.

And, the president emphasised the Christian commitment of Big Christian University. He told the visitors that the university exists to glorify God which means no matter what discipline one studies — whether the cutting edge, future-thinking faculties or the traditional faculties — there is a focus and commitment to God's Kingdom and discipleship to Jesus.

Chikondi was hooked and began day-dreaming about what faculty he would join. He wondered what it would be like to study it and theology together. Suddenly, he realised everyone was standing up. They had been dismissed.





Visiting a Class

The visitors were split into small groups and were going to attend a class. Out into the busy hallway, Chikondi and some others were escorted into another lecture hall where they found seats away from the front. Students filled the room. As a bell rang, a lecturer walked in and greeted several of the students by name.

The lecturer welcomed the visitors to the class — a course on the Life & Teachings of Jesus — and invited them to participate with the students. But clearly Chikondi was not prepared for the class. Though he grew up in church, he was challenged by the lecturer and student insights into the Word of God . . . especially how they spoke about the message of Jesus in African ways instead of it being interpreted through Western ways. Before he was ready, the bell rang to end class.

A student from the class offered to show Chikondi the way to Chapel – where everyone was now heading. Chikondi asked the student about the class and if he was going to be a preacher. The student laughed and said, ‘No. I don’t plan to be a preacher. I’m studying engineering. No matter what you’re studying at Big Christian University, you still take Bible and theology classes. To be honest, I thought it would be boring, but it turns out they are some of my favourite and best courses. I don’t plan to be a preacher, but I’m definitely learning a lot that will help me serve my church when I get back home.’

Chapel & Lunch

Chikondi couldn't tell if it was hundreds or thousands of students moving into the building for Chapel. It didn't matter, because the worship service was uplifting and led by students and staff members. They sang songs in multiple languages and heard an inspiring message from the Bible. You could feel the Spirit in that place.

When Chapel dismissed, Chikondi felt a little lost. Yet, from looking around the room, he felt like this place was a big family. He could see students greeting and talking together. And, he saw lecturers and staff also greeting each other and students.

Chikondi found out they were heading to the cafeteria for lunch. That's when he realised he was hungry. The cafeteria was full of students, staff, and faculty eating hearty portions of good food. Chikondi tried some things he'd never had before, but he was also happy to find some food that tasted like home.

Some students invited Chikondi to sit at their table. The conversation drifted between classes, football, girls, the Bible, and being tired. He could not believe that he was sitting at a table with people from five different countries across Africa. He had never met anyone from Kenya, Botswana, or Uganda before – but here he was eating with them in ESwatini!

The students talked about their lecturers and their programmes. Mostly it was positive, but they also complained about the assignments and about some of the lecturers who were boring or difficult . . . or both.

It was here at the lunch table that Chikondi learned even more about the various faculties the university had to offer. He even heard that some of the programmes were online and there were many students studying online — maybe even more online students than those who were studying at the campus in ESwatini.



Work & Fun

One of the students looked at his watch and said, ‘Eish! I’ve got to go. I’m almost late for work!’

Chikondi asked the others about work. They told him some students could land jobs on campus — like the guy who just left. A few others at the table also worked on campus — some in offices, some in maintenance, others in the macadamia orchard.

But they told him that not everyone got an on-campus job. Those who are not from ESwatini get preference for jobs because foreign students cannot work off-campus. So, getting a job was a blessing if you’re able to get it — especially if you don’t have the financial support to pay your fees.

That night, Big Christian University held one of its biggest events of the year: the Cultural Dance Competition. Chikondi was among the attendees. The place was filled with energy as different groups of students from different countries performed various dances, sang songs, and entertained the audience – all competing for the coveted Grand Prize.

Everyone clearly loved the show. Chikondi cheered loudly when the Zambian groups performed because he wanted to see students from his country win the prize.



In the Dorm

That night, Chikondi was supposed to stay in the male dormitory. The student whose room he was staying in was very welcoming.

Chikondi learned even more about the university from him. He learned that less than a third of the students lived on campus. Most of the students travelled in from Manzini or Matsapha where they rented places or stayed with family. Once he realised that most of the campus buildings were for classes and offices, he recognised there was limited space for accommodation.

He also learned that many nights in the dormitory there was a Bible study and discussion with the boys on the hall. The devotionals were great fun and very encouraging.

Some guys in the dorm came in the room and invited Chikondi to watch the university football club play against the national university club the following morning on the campus football pitch.

A little later, when Chikondi laid his head on the pillow to go to sleep, he did so with great excitement and peace. He knew for sure that Big Christian University was where he wanted to study. This would not be his last visit to ESwatini.

