

GOD

without
JESUS





OLIA is a non-profit organization (140-272 NPO: OLIA-Our lives in Africa) based in South Africa. It was founded in 2009 and officially registered in 2014.



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Behind the big beautiful eyes and the uplifting smiles of some African children, often lies hunger and poverty. However, addressing their cultural and spiritual struggles is a far more difficult challenge. The purpose of this article is to share with you some of the insights and knowledge that we have gained during our journey of discovery through the hearts and lives of people in South Africa. My family relocated to South Africa at the end of 2009 to pursue our calling to serve underprivileged children in South Africa. Alongside the Montessori teacher training that



my wife, Helen, was leading we started a children's church that grew to 150 children within a year. This gave birth to a 12-member youth group of children from 11 to 14 years old in 2011. Two of the children, a boy and a girl, both were raped at home within the first 6 months of joining our group.

PIVOTAL MOMENT

This was a pivotal moment in our lives in Africa. As we got over the initial shock, a harsh reality awaited. The 10 years of ministry experience I had didn't prepare me for what we had to learn. The locals started to point

out those who were raped. Some as young as 3-year olds were brought to me - adults victims were pointed out too. They couldn't point them all out at once, because there were too many and not one person was aware of all the victims. According to the Optimus study (2016)¹ it was found that in 2015 alone, a total of 351,214 cases of sexual abuse had occurred among 15 to 17-year olds. For scale, 403,874 passed Matric in 2014. We learned that the victims, perpetrators, and sympathetic victims, such as family members and friends of the victims, created a normalized chasm among the family members and between the sexes. On a larger social scale, this state of affairs sabotaged the human values and self-worth that deeply affect many aspects of the society today.

I'M PRECIOUS TO JESUS



In 2011, Helen and I founded the **I'm precious to Jesus Campaign** to raise awareness of rape and abuse, and to promote a sense of self-worth. It was geared towards children as well as adults by marching through the streets and visiting homes wearing the campaign shirts. The campaign was cherished by many locals, which helped in spreading the campaign's message. Often

¹ Sexual victimisation of children in South Africa Final report of the Optimus Foundation Study: South Africa (May 2016) at http://www.cjcp.org.za/uploads/2/7/8/4/27845461/08_cjcp_report_2016_d.pdf

people stopped us on the street with surprise and a keen interest in the shirts we were wearing. Also, many churches and supporters from Canada, USA, Germany, South Korea, Japan, Australia and South Africa pledged for the campaign. Where toyi-toyi protests are considered to be the most effective way to be heard, marching with a message of peace and love, while proclaiming, 'Mna indixabisekile ku Yesu (I'm precious to Jesus)', was a breath of fresh air to many. Many children loved it so much, they washed the shirts each night so they could wear it the next day. The march is meant to give a fair warning to the perpetrators, as well as empower the children and women to attest to their self-worth in a society dominated by a male chauvinistic culture. We have distributed over 4800 shirts, and directly reached 20 different communities across



South Africa as well as one community in Lesotho. We came across many victims who couldn't speak up under their current circumstances, and found many others who were deeply affected. The message and ideas the campaign shared gave them much needed encouragement and hope. Many shared their intimate thoughts and frustrations - often in tears. Many sighed in relief saying,

"Where have you guys been all my life? Finally, we can do something about this."

RIGHTEOUS MEN ASSEMBLY



We have asked 'Why is it the way it is?' for the past 6 years without seizing. We have kept ourselves open and sensitive to the people who were silent and closed up in fear - women and men alike. We dealt with information we found delicately and in confidence, for us to use for our own understanding, and also to prevent any destructive misuse. The critical information was shared only with our close associates. We have questioned many things as a possible cause, from family structure to traditional religion. Out of many contributing factors we found one stood out: the silenced people of good conscience. Then, we started RMA (Righteous Men Assembly), a gathering to mobilize silenced righteous men into action. We focused on the traditional good traits of Xhosa men and emphasized it to encourage actions. Our efforts ignited strong convictions, tear-filled reflections in many men with a good conscience, and gained substantial support. It helped us to understand the reality even further. Disappointingly, it didn't turn out as we hoped. We had educated and signed up

as many as 350 men through 2 to 3 hour lectures, had discussions with follow-ups around the country, and held weekly meetings in some parts. However, we failed to generate the energy RMA needed to grow on its own.

Many men were still afraid to share the message even with their close friends or even with family members for fear of being cast out. Nevertheless, it was clear that we have succeeded in planting hope and directions in both men and women who wanted to see changes in their communities.

QUESTIONING CHRISTIANITY

According to the 2001 census, 79.8% of South Africans identified themselves as members of a Christian denomination. Even though it is not clear which came first, the crime and abuse rate give a clear representation of the emotional and spiritual health of the people. As a missionary, I couldn't help questioning the existence of Christianity. When almost of 80% are Christians, why does such a massive number not relate to how they live their lives? I became depressed when meeting all the silenced victims who are usually hidden from the outsiders or the justice system. There are churches on every corner and overnight prayer services every week. There are many pastors and bible colleges that are supposed to accommodate underprivileged believers. Yet, I see a large number of their congregations are victims of rape and other severe emotional pain. People are afraid to share their distress in the church for fear of becoming a source of gossip and ridicule. Behind the vibrant and energetic worship services, many individual people were fighting

to cope with emotional and spiritual ailments, alone and in secret, while being led to blame it on poverty and health related issues.

SECRETS AND SILENCE

Culture is considered sacred, so it is shared and discussed only among Xhosa men. However, in 2015, we came across a cultural practice among Xhosa people that we believed to be a fundamental cause to the problems we face such as rape, sexual promiscuity and low self-worth. My local colleagues had to go through a lot of soul searching after realizing this truth; all the team members including myself were shocked, to say the least. It felt as if we had lost ground on all of our previous efforts. Building self-worth through raising awareness among women and children, as well as mobilizing men with good conscience to make a difference in their own communities didn't seem plausible anymore. Helen and I prayed and kept that information to ourselves until we could process it. Then, I was kidnapped along with one of my colleagues by three gunmen. Surviving through that gave me the conviction that we couldn't hide our insights any longer. Knowing this truth, we had to find another way to help our brothers and sisters in distress immediately.

ZUKISANI



A team was formed that consisted of people with diverse expertise who could advise us on this issue. Concurrently, we started conversing with some of the local men, who were a part

of Righteous Men Assembly, in an attempt to develop a fitting strategy. We faced strong objections initially due to cultural pride, but soon they agreed to cooperate due to the corrupted nature of the practice. We conducted a few anonymous video interviews on their experiences of the particular cultural event. We found the cultural event is everywhere, but

practiced differently from village to village. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, we didn't want to generalize the perversion of the practice with the limited information we had. So we embarked

on a new journey and conducted a five-month survey from August, 2015 to January 2016. I designed the questionnaire, and Zukisani took on the task of conducting the survey from Queenstown to Mt. Fletcher. The main purpose was to find the general health of the said cultural practice. Even with a Xhosa person going into a strange village and inquiring on the topic, he would face strong objection or would be lied to.



Zukisani visited small villages, spending a few days to a week in each while surveying people. Sometimes he carried heavy groceries for women, and helped fix their houses to gain their trust. Our initial objective of finding the prevalence of the cultural practice was an overwhelming success from the start. Many girls and women shared how discontented and downright furious they were, but also how helpless they are about the practice. Zukisani was threatened and questioned numerous times by the local men, and suffered through an experience of a 14-year-old girl he interviewed being murdered overnight. He had suspected she was getting abused by someone. Many women shared their own experiences in tears and anger. Since we were confident

of the prevalence of the cultural practice, we started to pay close attention to the survey data. Some of the answers allowed us deeper insight that aligned with our ministry experiences, and it

convinced us of the meaningfulness of the data. After surveying 143 people, the questions were revised. After 5 months and traveling Queenstown to Mt. Fletcher, Zukisani successfully surveyed 498 people from the Xhosa heartland.



TRUTH AND THREATS



CRYING INSIDE

When Zukisani completed the trip, he moved into our house. His family didn't want him to come back due to his dedication to the ministry. They believed it was a waste of time

and rendered him useless. I was sitting with him in his new room talking about the trip and things that happened. Obviously, the experience of surveying people was out of his comfort zone and extremely difficult on many occasions. When we got to the point of the girl who was murdered during his trip, he had to take a break. The 14-year-old girl was found naked and dead in the field, and her face was completely mutilated. Little children going out to the field for their daily chores of sheep herding found her body. After a long silence, I asked him, "How do you feel about your people now?" He answered, "I love them. Everyone I have met during the trip put on a strong face, but I could see that they were crying inside."

BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Then, what is causing them to 'cry inside'? It is severely damaged interpersonal relationships. According to our survey, only 4.1% of males (18-35 age group) responded that their father figure was a good role model. That figure dropped to 1.8% in males 35 and over. It is very possible that the core family and cultural values deteriorated or even were lost over the generations. There was a 10-year-old boy who was very violent, and often

got into trouble. He would fight all the time, and exhibit unruly behavior in school. The mother would beat him twice a day. We went to tell her that corporal punishment was not the best way to guide him, but her reasons for beating him was different than we thought. Simply, she didn't want neighbors to complain to her. Often mothers tolerate their children's criminal activities as long as they don't bring trouble home. It is not a well-kept secret that breadwinners get away with rape. We have witnessed a fugitive rapist being protected by the family again and again only when he had a job. Once he lost his job, his step-mother tried to report him to the police to get rid of him. In the meantime, women and little ones around the perpetrator had to live in fear. Our survey has shown that experiencing negligence and disappointment eventually has led people to drinking or violence, which creates even deeper divisions between family members and communities alike. Broken interpersonal relationships, horrendous crime rates, and rape created a deep chasm between practically everyone. It is common for them to live in constant fear of rejection, threats to their personal safety and security due to severe distrust and anger. While they are living in distress of their safety even at home, it is hard for them to be motivated to build loving relationships with their families and community members.

VUKUKHANYE (RISE 'N SHINE)

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs from Motivation and Personality (1954)², the very basic need of a human being is



² Maslow, A (1954). Motivation and personality. New York, NY: Harper. ISBN 0-06-041987-3.

physiological needs, such as food and shelter. Then, comes the safety needs such as personal, financial, health/well-being, and protection against accidents or illness. The Maslow's theory suggests that only when the safety needs are satisfied, an individual will be motivated for the third level needs of interpersonal relationships and sense of belonging. It is proven to be true according to our field test. Since last year, based on the findings and our own experiences, we launched Vukukhanye (VUKU), community gatherings to restore relationships and to build loving communities around them. We planted the groups in three different areas, and each group responded to our teachings and efforts in different ways. I will refer to them as Group A, B and C.

GROUP A

Group A had many participants with physiological needs issues. In this group the family structures were very chaotic. It consisted of many young single mothers, unemployed men, and lots of children. Some of them lived with their families, but could be asked to leave any moment unless they would contribute financially. Some of the young single mothers wouldn't have anything to feed their children while other siblings in the house would have food for theirs. Many people attended the group meetings just to see what was happening without intentions of committing to the group. We had much success in working together to address issues in the community due to high crime rate, but failed to build a loving community. They seemed more interested in pleasing their breadwinners, finding a boyfriend or a man who would support them financially than building a community they could trust.

GROUP B

Group B had fewer issues with physiological needs, but struggled with financial safety such as jobs. The good part of the group was



basically cheering us on until they saw a job opportunity. Only a small group of families opened their hearts to us. While we were successful with some families, many others got frustrated when the job offer didn't come.

GROUP C

Group C consisted of people with job security, and stable family structures. For this group, the first two needs were not critical issues, but struggled with the third need of interpersonal relationships and sense of belonging. They were very interested in being a part of a loving community and working to grow intimate relationships among community members.

The first two Groups (A and B) are getting rebooted with fresh approaches.

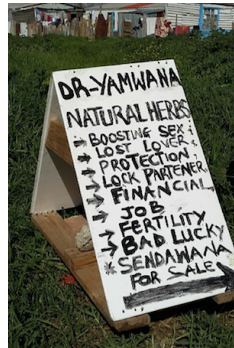
THE PARADOX

Our survey results showed that a large portion of the population was going through a interpersonal relationship crisis. All three VUKU groups had issues with interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging, but as the Maslow's theory suggests, only Group C with job security showed interest in and motivation for building a strong community.

Here comes the paradox. The unique problem, here, is that the safety needs (personal, financial, well-being and protection) are real and persistent in their lives, and it is intrinsically linked to the devastated interpersonal relationships, not only from the poverty or illness. As I stated above the problem is while people are living in distress of their safety needs, even at home, it is harder to be motivated to build loving relationships with families and community members. But when the lack of safety needs is caused by the interpersonal relationship issues, how would they then, overcome the safety issues effectively?

At this point, I'd like to share valuable data from phase 1 of the survey. 19 respondents gave written responses for their negative (Angry/Sad) outlook on their lives, and 12 pointed to the lack of jobs. More than 75% of the people described their childhood experiences as being frustrated, scared and lonely, but none of them blamed it on their interpersonal relationship or neglect from the belonging groups. Only one woman responded "I need a husband," which was the closest response to the third level needs of interrelationship. However, having a man (boyfriend) or a husband is the sole means for survival for many women and girls due to high teenage pregnancy and unemployment.

There are more reasons for people's lack of interest for their need of improved interpersonal relationships than Maslow's theory can provide. In the South African context, Sangomas (witch doctors) make provision for addressing their safety needs in a clear and obvious manner. The picture is a



typical example of what Sangomas promise through the power of the ancestors. There are Muti (traditional medicine) to heal any illness or disease and to provide protection.

If you consider the man as the breadwinner and sole means of survival for many women, what Dr Yamawa offers to his patients are for their safety needs. Of course, people worship ancestors and brew uMqobothi for similar reasons.

GOD WITHOUT JESUS

We failed to translate and plant hope in improving their interpersonal relationships, and build a sense of belonging in Christ. One of the major characteristics that we should have critically understood was the embeddedness of honor and respect in African cultures. The cultures are strongly embedded in the rituals of honoring and respecting spirit/ancestors much more than others. I believe we failed to help African churches in adapting love and compassion, but they have naturally adapted very well in honoring God. It is true that many Africans take comfort and refuge in Christ's sacrificial love, but understanding the depth of love and sharing it with others didn't come to maturity. When the practice of love is not a critical element, worshiping and honoring God is not so much different to their traditional religious rituals and seeking to fulfill their safety needs such as personal, financial, health/well-being, and protection against accidents or illness. Their shamanistic beliefs didn't

transform into Christianity instead it was merely transferred. It is understandable that 64% of the people responded to the survey indicated that the Muti and the Cross holds the same power, 86% of them couldn't deny the power of ancestral rituals and almost 99% of people prefer seeking moral guidance from other sources than the Bible. It felt like we were busy trying to convince them to honor God and not their ancestors instead of showing them the power of Christ's love and compassion.

CHRIST IN A FRESH PERSPECTIVE



Since last year we started a ministry called, Vukukhanye (VUKU). It is a community and family gathering in each community to share and practice Jesus' love. It took us almost a year to figure out a right formula. In an attempt to introduce Jesus Christ in a fresh perspective, we eliminated all the ritualistic prayers and praise to take people out of the



compartmental thinking of honoring God at first. We dealt with more rape cases, drug addicts, and alcoholics than ever before

because of the intimate relationships that we were able to build with members. When we faced those challenges, we approached them as a relationship based issue rather than a problem. We used Biblical teachings to open the hearts of not only the troubled person, but also the entire family. We didn't pursue to



make mere solutions, but promoted understanding and compassion for one another. It

hasn't been smooth sailing as we have had to deal with many obstacles. Many of our members still have to learn to trust our method for restoring relationship, as they simply have never seen love conquer anything. As we become stakeholders in each other's lives, we are building communities where His principles and values are rewarded, rather than being abused. Finally, we are now seeing more and more silenced good people from the communities stepping up, and we are working every day to comfort and empower each other.

SO THEY MAY HOPE IN CHRIST



It is time for us to change. It is not what can be done with our abilities, but what is needed. We need to hear their cries and feel their pain. It is time for us to be brothers, sisters, and

parents while intimately engaging with their hearts and lives without judgment. Jesus has not brought them to us, but has sent us into their broken hearts. We are called to comfort and heal them with the true gift of love that will spring up and spill over in their own lives for eternity. So they may hope in Christ.

