

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Hebrews 13:2

Monthly

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# REACHING GANG MEMBERS WITH THE GOSPEL IN SOUTH SUDAN

## **SOUTH SUDAN**

It was the morning of April 15, when residents of Khartoum, Sudan awoke to the pandemonium that would eventually kill thousands and displace over 2 million.

Fighter jets thundered overhead. Heavy artillery fire rang through the city.

The RSF, or "Rapid Support Forces," is a paramilitary group that once fought on behalf of the Sudanese army. In April 2023, a power struggle between the RSF commander and the army chief of the Sudanese military turned into a full-blown conflict and became violent.

In Khartoum, entire neighborhoods were destroyed and abandoned. The western region of Darfur, which has endured conflict and violence for 20 years as Arab and non-Arab communities compete for land and resources, has seen some of the worst violence.

By July, 2.2 million civilians were displaced internally, and 645,000 more became refugees, fleeing the country for Egypt and South Sudan.



South Sudanese people displaced from their homes take refuge in a camp outside Juba, South Sudan.

South Sudan's already fragile infrastructure, weakened by the socio-economic challenges of tribal or ethnic violence, poverty, and natural disasters, is grossly unprepared to receive refugees. 2.3 million of its own civilians have been displaced. The conflict in Sudan has also disrupted the flow of food commodities through main border crossings, causing food prices in some areas of South Sudan to increase by 20-84 percent.

The poorest and most vulnerable are the first to suffer under these inflated prices. Already, 7.7 million are estimated to be food insecure in South Sudan. The UNHCR reports

4.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in South Sudan, including refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and asylum seekers.

On the ground in the capital city of Juba, our partner, <u>Lazarus Yezinai</u>, has observed a general growing vulnerability around him. "There's a lot of sickness. People are dying every day," he commented.

Lazarus and his family endured serious illness about once a month, starting in September 2022 and continuing through February 2023. In November, Lazarus was treated for yellow fever and typhoid. That treatment was followed by an ulcer,

## **NEWS** bites



Flooding in the informal settlement of Stone Hill, South Africa.



Charl's team thanks supporters for helping them provide warm, dry blankets, shelter and a hot meal for flood victims in Stone Hill, South Africa.



Charl has been visiting the DRC to support the local church's mission for many years.

### **SOUTH AFRICA**

Thank you from our partners and Stone Hill families.

In a mid-June email, ITMI's <u>Charl</u> <u>van Wyk</u> explained to his supporters some dire needs due to flooding in the informal settlement of <u>Stone</u> <u>Hill</u>, where Charl is part of a team that does ongoing outreaches.

In July, ITMI's **Steve Evers** mentioned this need in his *Dear Team* letter

Now, Charl and his co-worker, <u>Dr.</u> <u>Bradley Kuhn</u>, have a message of thanks for those of you who got involved. Charl writes,

Our community of believers truly went the extra mile to help the suffering. This is how our ministry chair, Dr Bradley, thanked our friends:

A massive "Thank you!" to all those who responded so generously, and so quickly, to the call for help in Stone Hill. May God bless you all!

A wonderful and servant-hearted team of women and young people lead by Lwazikazi Sokutu were able to provide shelter for destitute families in our [reclaimed] church building, with warm dry blankets, and a hot meal of vegetables.

The team then sacrificed their public holiday the following day to hand out food and dry clothes to those most affected by the storms, as well as those whose leaking roofs wet all their belongings.

But without those who gave so promptly and freely, this was not possible.

Thank you again. And please keep this community in your prayers.

Meanwhile, the Lord is doing something exciting in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and he's using Charl and his supporters in an exciting way. Charl writes,

Throughout its history, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has endured numerous challenges that undermine its progress and hinder its development.

One of the major obstacles to a healthy society is political instability. The cycle is as dismal as it is predictable: Political instability manifested by corruption, worsened by weak governance, and exacerbated by armed conflicts.

The outcome is a fragile security situation, displacement of millions, and widespread human rights abuses. The country also grapples with destitute circumstances. A large portion of the population lives below the poverty line, lacking access to basic services such as healthcare and education.

Unsurprisingly, the DRC suffers from inadequate infrastructure, limited access to clean water and sanitation, and rampant disease outbreaks, including ebola and cholera.

All these issues create complex challenges that need to be addressed for the country to achieve any semblance of stability—much less future development.

Hope, however, is rising.

Since Felix Tshisekedi became president of the DRC in January 2019, the country has witnessed several notable political changes and developments, including:

The first peaceful transfer of power in DRC's history since independence in 1960—a significant milestone for the country.

Unexpectantly, Tshisekedi formed a coalition government with the ousted Common Front for Congo (FCC) party, of Kabila, which previously held a majority in the parliament.

Tshisekedi initiated a process of national reconciliation, aiming to heal divisions within the country. He called for dialogue and engagement with churches, politicians, civil society, and armed groups to pursue unity and stability.

The administration has expressed commitment to improving human rights – a vital priority as many violations blanket the official records. Efforts have been made to address issues such as arbitrary arrests, press freedom, and freedom of expression.

Fighting corruption and promoting good governance remain key priorities under Tshisekedi's presidency. Efforts to address corruption within the government and state institutions persist, although progress remains a significant challenge.

Tshisekedi has sought to strengthen international relations and improve the DRC's image on the global stage. He has engaged with regional leaders, participated in diplomatic initiatives, and aimed to attract foreign investment to promote economic development, which despite the Covid chaos reached 8.6% in 2022. Unfortunately, China is a big player in Africa, complicating matters greatly.

I've witnessed how Christian leaders have publicly and boldly exposed state officials for evil deeds. However, challenges remain in fully implementing commitments and ensuring comprehensive protection of rights.

It is important to note that political dynamics in the DRC are intricate and multifaceted, and this makes ministry just as complicated. But we know that God's Word has the answers to all the complex socio-political challenges.

I have in the past mentioned how I was invited to meet with the President's closest advisor

Our meeting was called due to a series of Biblical Worldview Seminars conducted in 2006, and 2015. Isn't that amazing?

Our teams have taught in Lubumbashi, Mbuji-Mayi, Kinshasa and Kisangani – training God's people and preparing them to stand for righteousness and truth in the public arena.

The new government officials from around the Congo were aware of these Biblical Worldview Seminars, and therefore connected with Bishop Lamba Lamba to help move the ideas forward. Bishop Lamba Lamba has now invited me back!

The DRC is aiming to hold national elections in December 2023. And I've been invited to bring a team of godly leaders – "men who have understanding of the times, to know what Congo ought to do" – to help train and prepare Christian leaders to serve as God's servants for the good of the Congolese people.

Would you like to support such an outreach prayerfully and financially?

I'm pretty sure Satan will do much to try and derail such teachings, as God willing, it will further disrupt the enemy's now dwindling influence in the DRC.

Our team, Lord willing, aims to train 200 Christian leaders,

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which made it difficult for him to breathe, and forced him to stay close to home.

In June, Lazarus and his wife, Mary, were sick with malaria again, and one of his children was hospitalized and needed oxygen. Lazarus said the air quality in their area was poor, and he knew of many children who were hospitalized and needed oxygen.

In the face of these challenges, Lazarus and his team have still managed to carry on, their resolve to offer Jesus to the hurting only deepened by the constant suffering around them.

If adults in South Sudan are vulnerable, their children and youth are even more so. Many are separated from their parents by violent uprisings, death, or abuse. Alone on the streets, they often form gangs to survive. These gangs are marginalized and disliked by the community because of the threat their needs pose to peace and safety.

Wouldn't it be great if the church could help prevent these young people from growing into powerhungry politicians whose fragile egos drive the displacement of millions as they seek the sense of belonging and importance they should have received from their families and the Lord as youths!

But even more poignant is the dire need for God's people to be a beacon of hope that shines into these desperate situations.

The community *should* see God's people be the first to reach out with hospitality and kindness to the hurting young men and women who have formed gangs because the community wasn't able to or interested in helping them in their desperate time of need.

With the help of ITMI supporters, Lazarus has led the way in organizing God's people to hold out the light of Jesus in this darkness using the game of "football" (soccer). Lazarus' sports outreach to gangs in five Juba communities demonstrates that the Lord sees and cares about these youth.

#### But that's not all!

Lazarus soccer ministry reaches suffering youths who have joined gangs with the Gospel, *and* it creates ongoing relationships so that the Gospel seeds that are planted can be watered and grown.

The youth are organized into teams from five communities in the Juba area. The teams meet twice a week for practice and Bible study.

Lazarus also holds organizationwide events for all the soccer teams to gather in one place. Someone encourages them from God's Word, and the leaders give their testimonies. Lazarus says the attendance rate is high for these events. All the teams show up in full.

The gang leaders have expressed that they are profoundly grateful that someone is paying attention to them. Even those who live with their parents often haven't been "raised" or taught how to be human. They are deeply hungry for someone to truly "parent" them - to discuss their challenges, provide guidance, and invest in them.

Some of the players are showing a change in their mindset. They are beginning to understand who they are as human beings and what the Bible says about their relationship with the Lord and the world. They are learning how to pray, and starting to grasp the concept of right and wrong.

This paradigm shift has fueled hope in some of the players. Some have returned to school because they understand that they have a purpose on earth and that education can help them fulfill that purpose. They start to grasp that to live the way the Bible teaches, they need to provide for themselves honestly so they can stop stealing from others.

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A team manager shares God's Word with the teams and the spectators before a match.



Teams and spectators listen as God's Word is shared.



The Lemon City team emerged victorious, but in an even bigger triumph for the program, they learned, "Our victory comes from Jesus!"

# From the Director

# DEAR TEAM: Choosing to Endure 117 Degree Summertime Highs

The little LED display on the dash of my 2004 Toyota Highlander confirmed the reality I already knew. The display was showing the current temperature inside my vehicle - 146 degrees Fahrenheit.

Natalie Wolchover, in her article "What are the limits of Human Survival?", (August 09, 2012, Lifescience.com) shared this bit of heat-related information, "Most humans will suffer hyperthermia after 10 minutes in extremely humid, 140-degree-Fahrenheit (60-degrees-Celsius) heat." Thankfully, in less than 10 minutes with as many of the air conditioning vents pointed directly at me as possible, I was in a balmy 119-degree driving environment. Summertime in Phoenix is notoriously hot. The Valley of the Sun is now on its record-breaking 19th day of above 110 degrees. The forecast is that we will see the record go to 30 days above 110 degrees. At the dinner table, Darlene and I genuinely give thanks for the air conditioning and its continued operation every day.



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Abid's contract (in Urdu) for goat project recipients.

ITMI's **Gerhard le Roux** in the far northern Cape of South Africa, amongst the dry silty soil and massive heatabsorbing rock formations, regularly see 117-degree temperatures in their summer months. The thing is, they exist, as do most of the community, with little to no "air-con," as they would call it. The le Roux's Daily Bread Bakery ovens combine with the outside heat in a recipe for daily heat challenges. The <u>Daily Bread Bakery</u> is one of the outreaches the le Rouxs have found effective in creating opportunities to interact with people from the community, pray with them, and interject Jesus into conversations about matters of the heart. Although the heat creates significant challenges, the le Roux family models faithfulness over and over as they humbly serve the community with whatever tools or food God provides. Gerhard and his family choose to stay in this "oven" of a community in order to be obedient to where God has called them and where the need is great.

Abid, our emerging partner in Pakistan, was beside himself this last week. His excitement was palpable. He couldn't update me fast enough over the WhatsApp face-to-face video call. His excitement was for the following week when he was planning the official launch of the ITMI Goat Project in his area of Pakistan. The project goals and processes were all laid out on paper. The potential goat recipients had been interviewed, vetted, and selected. The type of goat best for this project had been investigated and identified. The training, both in goat husbandry and in Biblical principles of finance, was sufficiently completed. The only thing left to do was bring all the family leaders who would receive a goat together and have them place their "X" on an agreement, a contract to raise this pair of goats in a way that is honoring to the Lord and to bring glory to God for His provision of this gift. For some, being a Christian in Pakistan can be a sentence of slavery, poverty, life-long abuse, and inability to feed your family adequately. With an "asset" like a pair of goats, a family provider and their dependents can taste what hope feels like. They can experience ownership and the sense of purpose that it brings. They can, maybe for the first time in generations, experience what it means to see a future. They can encounter God's provision and blessing.

Abid, Gerhard, and their families choose to stay in environments that many would prefer to escape so that they can share the love of Jesus and the truth of the Gospel plan. Both these men and all of the ITMI partners wish they could look you in the eye and possibly hug you as a means of sharing the gratitude that comes from being able to continue to share God's truth and redemption story. All of ITMI's partners, including myself, relish opportunities to be welcomed into your homes, groups, Sunday schools, and churches to share behind-the-scenes details and God stories. If you have an opening for one of us to meet and encourage, please contact me or our office, and we'll schedule a time of sharing and rejoicing in what our Father can do and is doing within the faithfulness of His servants. We couldn't do what we do without each of you and your commitment to standing with us in prayer and support. Allow me to say a heartfelt and enthusiastic "Thank You!"

In His Service,

P.S. Your support helped us with the goats and helped Gerhard get a simple window "air-con" unit that allows his family to periodically congregate in the main room for a bit of relief from the heat.

(continued from p.4)

Community leaders are over the moon about this program. They notice positive changes in the youth and a reduction in violence. For those that have parents, the parents also are amazed that their sons are acting more responsibly.

Lazarus shares that the tournaments themselves are becoming outreach events. In July, Lazarus and his church hosted a tournament that included six teams. The final match between Lemon City and Jebel Dinka was held on July 9, commemorating the Republic of South Sudan's Independence Day. Lemon City emerged victorious with three goals to Jebel Dinka's two goals, but there was an even bigger win!

Lazarus reported that this event attracted spectators, including other gang members. His teams of volunteers were able to find gang members who were interested in joining teams and share the Gospel with them. Many were receptive and took a first step to receive the Lord!

This outreach to these extremely vulnerable youth in struggling

communities of a country plagued by corruption, poverty, and violence is possible because of ITMI supporters' involvement in several ways.

Your support of Lazarus and ITMI means that a godly national has the support he needs to meet the needs around him with the Good News and discipleship. In addition to his passion for the Gospel and sharing the Lord with others, Lazarus' familiarity with these communities, their struggles, and their specific needs enables him to sidestep the common landmines of ministry and build an impactful program that makes disciples that make disciples. Your generous response to our Christmas Giving Catalog also helped fund the equipment necessary for this outreach.

Your support of our godly, national partners is making a big impact in the lives of hurting youth in South Sudan!

-Summer Kelley, Steve Evers

(continued from p.3)

preach at multiple church services, conduct citywide radio and television interviews, and wait upon the Lord to see how His Holy Spirit uses the hearers to disciple the people of Congo.

Thank you in advance for your prayers. Spiritual warfare is palpable in the DRC.

But with the Lord, victory is already won!

Charl will be in the States starting mid-September, sharing stories of the impact he and his supporters, by God's grace, have been able to make in South Africa, DRC and Zimbabwe. He'll share personal experiences and reflections or engaging Q & A sessions, encouraging listeners in the Lord. He'd love to be an encouragement to you, your small group, Sunday school class, or church. Please contact our office if you are interested.

Thank you for your support of ITMI godly nationals like Charl, who the Lord is using powerfully for His kingdom.

-Summer Kelley, Steve Evers

#### **FOR PRAISE**

- 1. South Sudan Lazarus Gang members interested in Jesus, coming to faith, and being discipled.
- 2. South Africa van Wyk, Stone Hill Believers stepping in to aid the suffering in Stone Hill.
- 3. Romania Casa Dorca God continues to use ITMI to provide for the needs of orphaned children!
- 4. South Africa van Wyk, Parris God's love and care extended to victims of flooding in Stone Hill.

### **FOR PRAYER**

- 1. DRC van Wyk Safety, provision, and guidance while traveling to and teaching leaders Biblical principles.
- 2. South Sudan Lazarus Comfort and strengthened faith for the hurting in South Sudan.
- 3. Ukraine Evers, Ban Upcoming travel to Ukraine and discipleship training for Ukrainian believers serving in battle-weary territories.
- 4. India Kumar God's direction in dealing with health struggles and opposition in the slum where they serve.
- 5. Poland La Rose Stamina, guidance, and opportunities to minister to hurting kids from Poland and Ukraine during multiple weeks of serving at summer camp in July and August.



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