

The Schlelein Family

Missionaries to the Tsongas of South Africa

APRIL 2015 | LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA

Church Discipline Works

Eric was one of our first converts back in 2006. He was gifted to preach, but got a government grant to the university to do social work, the secularist's version of pastoral counseling. With no good churches and a heavy dose of Freud, Eric fell back, got his girlfriend pregnant, refused to repent, and, in accordance with Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, was excommunicated.

We never stopped loving him, though, and nearly a year and a half after the fact, Eric stood before a packed house this past Easter weekend and read a two page letter of confession. Fear, awe, and surprise filled the room, emotions second only to joy.

In Africa, church discipline is closer to extinction than the rhino. The "big man" mentality makes correcting the pastor almost impossible. Admonishing a church member, especially if he is a tither in a poor church, is rare. But in a society where sexual immorality is rampant--even among our people--our church dug in and did right. Scripture says that church discipline is the tool God uses to bring people back to repentance. This was all theory until Eric's confession. Our leaders later convened with the joint conclusion: "it works!"

Inner Three

We are slowly pulling away from our church plant and leaving the duties to the people, primarily our three male leaders. They preached at the church eight times in March. One man was formally trained for three years at LBI and the others are learning on the run. Elders training lasts for nearly three hours every Saturday as we read through books, memorize Scripture, critique preaching, pray and plan church events.

We have our eyes on three nearby villages to the south where we hope to plant a church. We'd like Trinity to function on its own by the end of the year.

But perhaps this account is a bit sanitized. Ministry is never that simple.

Character is always an issue. One of the leaders still works only part time. Two aren't married. The church is poor. Apathy, adultery, polygamy, and laziness are constant matters of concern. Our philosophy of few US funds has paid off, but dependency is still there. After all these years, we wonder: can the church ever survive on its own?

Paul preached in Lystra for six months, planted the church with elders, left for 18 months and only returned briefly. Paul stayed in Thessalonica for a few months and didn't return until five years later. The church in Corinth was established in 18 months. He didn't get bogged down with much of the heavy machinery we see in missions today. He came in, planted churches, and got out. This letter may lead you to believe that it is our people who need the most prayer. Truthfully, it is we who need it.

Pray...

1. That when we have finished training our people, we would get out of the way as soon as possible.
2. That our people ignore the lie that nothing can be done without us.
3. That our three men would meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3

and lead the church in truth and courage.

To Be Less,
Paul and Melinda