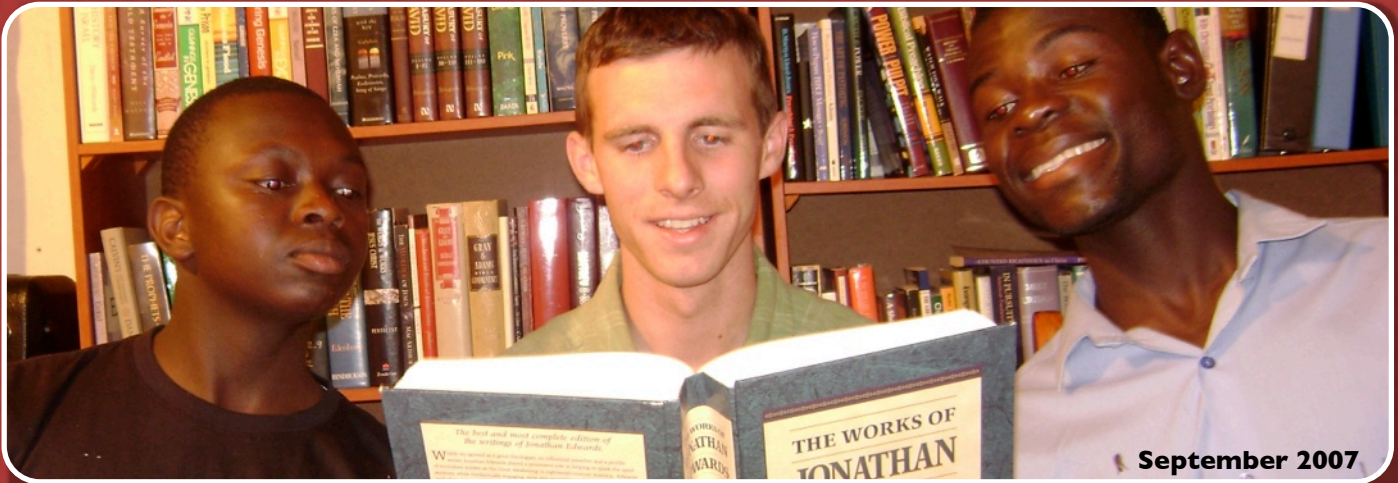


THE SCHLEHLEINS

Missionaries to the Tsongas of South Africa



September 2007

UNTIMELY DEATH

The Wages of Suicide Linger Long For Church and Family

At 7:15 Sunday morning, we received a frantic and garbled call from a lady church member. I rushed to their home to find everyone outside--their faces glassed with tears--staring at a little hut as their way of telling me to enter.

Maggie and her son Mahlatsee have been faithful members of our church for years. When I first arrived in South Africa back in 2006, Given was the first person I led to Christ.

He became a part of the Inner Three, never missed church, and attended every function. It was not uncommon to spend 30 hours a week laying brick together at church. We prayed for his mother's conversion, and years later she left the Jehovah's Witnesses to follow Christ.

I crouched slowly to enter the circular thatched room, kicked open the make-shift door, and saw Mahlatsee hanging by his neck from a rope.

Then the wailing began, then came the neighbors, then the police. Our church services down the road had just begun when our congregation was told the news. Now with looks of shock they filed into Mahlatsee's homestead where many of us had seen him just the day before. I wanted to join the mothers in their sorrow but preached from John 11 instead.

As they carried out his body, we sang "*Loko hi wela hi khombo, hi yena la miyetaka*". "When we face trials, it is He who calms us." His mother howled on the ground. Unusual for Africa; Mahlatsee was her only child.

Death is painful, suicide worse, but the suicide of one's child is almost unbearable. As is common with such deaths, we are

struggling with guilt. No note, a few clues, lots of questions. Introspection can be good or bad.

Three Challenges

The first challenge is that Tsongas mourn differently. There is no hugging, with not even a word for "hug" in the Tsonga language. Men rarely show emotion. Women come in droves to cry, sit with the family and cook. Funerals are a way of life. Africans can endure the hardest of times, for death is common. Young deaths too.

The second difficulty is that many Tsongas believe suicide is the result of witchcraft. Immediately the word in the village was that he was struck by witches. How this will affect our church's testimony is unknown.

Finally, we are concerned for his young cousin with whom he shared a room. While Vincent slept below, Mahlatsee took his own life. It was to this scarring image that Vincent awoke.

Pray...

1. That our fragile church would sustain this heavy blow. Sin and suffering has struck us heavily as of late.
2. That the daily Bible and prayer meetings at his home and the Saturday funeral will exalt Christ and his gospel.



Mahlatsee Given Moyaba
1988-2015

Hurting and Hopeful,
Paul and Melinda