

## The Power of Influence

Refugee: an outsider, a stranger, someone forced to leave their homes, their countries, and many times their loved ones and families, for the purpose of finding safety in another location. Refugee is a well-known term, but to understand the reality of the life, loss and conditions of a reality is grossly unrecognized or properly understood. I had a small window into this existence when I visited Kigeme Refugee camp for the first time in 2014. Walking through the camp, with children greeting, following us with held hands, and witnessing the conditions of living was a humbling, sobering experience. Most had lived there for 2 years, many separated from families and with no knowledge of a definite return. Yet, they sing of hope for return.

We had the privilege of hearing testimonies from many of the 70 trauma healing facilitators, trained by the Bible Society of Rwanda, to provide Scripture-based trauma healing programs within the camp. Testimony after testimony was filled with evidence of healing and change. They described the changes in their own lives, their families and in those they are supporting. They craved more resources and tools. I was deeply impacted by their faith, their resilience, their commitment to help others and their *hope*. I returned home and shared their stories and testimonies with my supporters.

Soon, the missions committee at Calvary approached me about raising funds for a specific project or need at Kigeme for our November, 2014 Dare to Care offering. My mind immediately returned to the testimony of one of the Congolese pastors who shared with us. He told us of their need and desire for full Bibles, as they only had New Testament Bibles. He expressed his gratitude for the Bible Society who had provided these, but had a burden for the entirety of Scripture to be taught to those whom he tried to serve at the camp. An additional idea was to provide sewing machines as a way to generate income. There are individuals who have been trained to use sewing machines, but lacked the resources. There are others with the time and capacity to be trained. Last year, Calvary Church raised over \$5000 for this project.

It was a rare privilege to again be in Rwanda at the time of the presentation ceremony in July, 2015. To again hear updated testimonies of healing and change, to present 70 key individuals with 100 Bibles and 70 sewing machines, and to see their faces lit with joy as they looked at their Bibles and sang with thanksgiving in their language "Jesus is the One who did this." Participating in this occasion profoundly impacted me in many ways. I then realized the tremendous influence these gifts possessed to change lives.

A modest amount of money for our congregation was being used to impact a group of individuals on a physical, spiritual, emotional and society level. I had the opportunity to speak to them and tell them that about the congregation at Calvary who had prayed for them and was inspired to respond to care for them. Since July, employees from the Bible Society of Rwanda have returned and have received updates from those who have received these gifts. Almost all of them are receiving additional training in sewing through a class held at a local church. They gave testimonies of how both gifts have changed their lives.

Thank YOU...what may seem like a small gift to us has been LIFE-changing for these individuals. The Bibles are strengthening their *faith*. The sewing machines provide a greater opportunity to connect with them and then invite them to a trauma healing group. They also contribute to healing of their past trauma. In addition, the sewing machines have equipped them to care for their physical needs. These gifts will affect others in the camp and will have impact on future generations. Finally, I am partnering with an employee of the Bible Society to write a report on this project to serve as a model for impacting refugees around our world. May our gift continue to bear fruit in powerful ways around our world.

Two months after the presentation ceremony, here are some off their testimonies.



**How does the sewing machine help you achieve your duty of helping wounded people in the camp?**

“The machine helps me being stable and having an address, I don’t run all around trying to find money, trying to get a job in and outside the camp because I now have a profession. People can easily find me, I have time because we can talk when I sew, I am now a stable person, I easily give appointments and respect them. Some people come and they don’t have money to pay the service they want. We have been given for free, we learned a great lesson from the lady who gave us these machines that “giving doesn’t require being rich”, she told us

those machines were not given by the richest Christians. Here in the camp we work for money; we sometimes see people who are really poor, very poor who can’t even get a coin. I don’t ask money to those people; the lesson I learned from that loving lady allows me doing so. When people see mercy and love in you they can easily tell about them. This activity can help us to create friends and trust, I got to help people I didn’t know before, those who came and told me about their problems just because of the activity and lesson given by that lady.”

**How do you use that Bible you were also given? (He had it in his hands)**

I am a Christian in 7th Day Adventist Church. This Bible helps me as a Christian and it helps me in my job as a facilitator in Trauma Healing. I like the Gospel of John 3:16. I tell people god loves his people and it is that love God loved me that encourage me to love those traumatized people. There is a man I helped who was drunk and he stopped. When you gave me this full Bible, I gave him the New Testament you gave us before and he is greatly changing because he is reading even after our appointment.

**For someone who saw your children before you got a machine and after, can he see any difference?**

One of the big problems my children had was lack of milk, I had cows in Congo and my children used to drink milk as they want. Before I got machine, I used to pay rent before buying food for them; I could hardly find vegetables but now they can drink milk.

**What can you tell to Heather Evans?**

I would tell her she took us from far to put us somewhere in front. I knew to sew but she did something I could not do for my own since all the time I am in this camp. She did something very important for me by changing my life but she also taught me a great lesson “doing well”. I learned to do well. What she did for me is a reminder telling to do well every time. I would thank her for the gift and the good example. God bless her



**How are the machines and the Bibles being used?**

People are learning to use machines and when they finish, the machines will be very important for them because one machine here can provide for a family more than UNHCR does.

The Bibles have made us feeling loved and we love more our duty of healing the wounds. Most of us have increased the number of people they reach. The Bibles are our badges, people recognize us the facilitators trained by the Bible Society and we are proud of that.

## **Heather Evans told you those machines were given by Christians in her church. What message can you give to those Christians?**

I would first of all thank them because they loved us and they only heard about us, they don't know us. They gave us an important spiritual thing: Bible. This is very important to us especially Pastors and preachers. They gave what is more important in life, they could give food but they chose something very important spiritually.

In the physical side, they gave us sewing machines. This gift will help us to never forget them because they are very helpful and they last long time. In addition, you taught people to use them; this gives more value and ownership.

These machines will help in our everyday life. Here are some examples:

- Basic household needs like soaps, salt, ...
- The food (maize) they give per month is not enough. If you need a variety, you sell two days quantity of maize to have another food item like rice for one day; this creates a gap of one day. These machines will cover this gap and give a possibility to vary food.

Please thank them a lot on our behalf. The first need of a human being is food; refugees don't plan for long time because this is a temporary situation even though it can last long time. We need to be alive tomorrow if we want to plan. Having an activity like that here is very important: your children look different because they can have an adequate diet, they can drink milk, and they can have fruits ...

## **Is there a lesson we as Rwandan/Congolese Christians should learn from what American did?**

The lesson we should learn is "LOVE". The fact someone you never met loves you just because he heard about you. Someone they didn't send to collect information, told them about refugees she saw, they taught us to fish instead of giving us fish. They could have given us food but they preferred to enable get food using our hands. That is like a cow you endlessly milk.

Another lesson is to help: To help every time, to help people in need, to help without conditions. We learned these lessons and will help us even when we go back to our country. In our history, our ancestors gave each other cows, but you gave to someone because you are friends, your parents were friends, they did many together, but Americans gave to us without any of those things our ancestors based on. We are different on skin color, we lost our value we are now refugees. This is what a Good Samaritan did at Jericho.

To tell you the truth, I think about that machine every day since July when they gave it to me. I wish they could come again so that we show them how far we are and how far we will be. That is an important and unforgettable gift. I tell you that even few people who have jobs here could buy a sewing machine! The best job here in the camp pays 18.000Frws/month (24\$).

I decided to send my daughter to learn because my I am old, my eyes don't allow me to do that. That machine is an inheritance for my daughter. I had been thinking about finding something like that for her before but I stopped thinking about it because I could not fulfill the requirements. That machine gives an income generating activity, this put her in another social category, that machine qualifies her for a good husband.

## **What is your message to Heather Evans?**

Hahaha our sister? God bless her, she is the one who did it all. She is great, she packed all our tears in her suitcase and opened it in her church, and she made them love us without knowing us. They gave her a message for us and she

delivered the message. Some Christians these days don't deliver messages they are given. She voluntarily asked help for us, she brought the message for us.

Please tell her we always pray God blesses her, she did well and we pray for strengths to go on.

**What do you think will change in your life?**

"Hahahaha, Praises be to Lord who gave you the good idea like this. God has heard our prayers, no one of us will cry anymore in the future. After we finish class, I will sew, even though I can have 1,000Fwrs per day (1.5 \$ the minimum a tailor can have per day) per day, with the maize UNCHR gives, my life will be sure. I will be able to save for future wellbeing, have a variety in my diet".



**Which message can you give to Christians in America who love you?**

May God bless them, God increases their knowledge, and may God give them long life, and please tell them to come back again. God bless them abundantly.

"You know, that generous lady has eradicated hunger among TH facilitators, we cannot starve with these machines. They are like a cow you milk endlessly."



**HOW ARE YOU USING THE BIBLE YOU WERE GIVEN**

You know the Healing Wounds of Trauma booklet has many verses that go with the stories. Every time I read it, I also read the Bible. The booklet is sometimes like my guide in reading the Bible. I get a lot of lessons related to our life in the camp. The Bible is helping me know more, understanding and accepting our situation because there are many people of God who also suffered. They are my model and I always pray to be stronger and not give up God as they did.

I like the book of Galatians especially where they say what we need to do if we want a place in Heaven.

## **MESSAGE TO CALVARY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH**

I have so many things to say, May God almighty bless them, give them honor, because they did a lot to wounded people by training them in healing their own wounds and the wounds of others, they gave us a way of living, they gave us Bibles to know more and be more closer to God. What else do we need? They healed us, they enable us to heal others.