

Four days after leaving home and seven flights later, the small prop-plane bounced down on the dirt airstrip cut into the landscape of Yabus, Sudan. The door pushed up into the hot, morning air. My friend, Phalice, the director of the newly opened Sudan Interior Church Secondary School, greeted me with a hug and a smile. After returning two fifty gallon drums of aviation fuel to the protection of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, SPLA, we lurched along the rutty, dirt road past the village of Yabus to the SIM (Serving In Mission) compound.

For the next fifteen days I would work at the secondary school as a mentor and trainer for the small cadre of teachers. The first day my body worked through nausea and a headache to adjust to the extreme heat. There was little I could do to really cool off. The lukewarm, filtered water provided barely enough refreshment to energize me for the day's tasks.



My first encounter with the people who made Yabus their home was that first afternoon. On a short tour of the school grounds, Deborah and a group of children surprised Phalice and me. Deborah, a wife of one of the secondary teachers, had arrived in January at the beginning of the first term of school. She was restless to teach so in the afternoon she gathered the local school-aged children into an unused classroom to teach them to read. At the

moment I did not realize that Deborah's demonstration of compassion and mercy would serve as the template for my encounters with all the teachers throughout my visit.

During the next few days I visited classes, attended the teacher prayer time before school and listened to teacher's conversations to get a feel of the school culture. The secondary school enrolled adults, twenty to forty year-olds, who had received an elementary education while living in refugee camps in neighboring countries during the Sudan civil war. I quickly discovered that the system of teaching was primarily read, copy and memorize. I worried about the teacher training I was to do Thursday afternoon. My current thinking about teaching and learning seemed somewhat distant from the practice I observed. I was challenged even further when Canberra, the "Christian Religious Education" teacher and a missionary from northern India, asked me to teach her class. The class was currently studying the Minor Prophets so I was given the task of teaching from Jonah, Micah, Nahum and Habakkuk. This only increased my anxiety as I wondered how I could model a more interactive approach to learning.

By Wednesday afternoon, after several conversations with Phalice, I settled on lesson design as the focus of the next afternoon's training. During classroom observations, I wondered if teachers had a succinct idea of what they wanted students to know or be able to do at the end of the day's lesson. So during Thursday's training, I emphasized developing clear learning targets. I wanted teachers to be able to write clear "I can"



statements for students. So that morning, I began to teach my first Bible class by writing "I can tell others the story about Jonah" across the top of the black board. The opportunity to teach Bible challenged me to put my teacher training ideals into practice.

I learned much about the Sudanese people through my study of the Minor Prophets. Although I had learned about Jonah and the great fish in Sunday school and had memorized Micah 6:8 as one of God's summarizing statements for Christian living, I learned for the first time how the lives of God's chosen people and the lives of Sudanese Christians mirror one another. Corrupt and greedy leaders have oppressed both races. Both were displaced from their homeland by the horror of war. Women and children were raped and slaughtered. In Sudan, between 1956 and 2005, the people have fled for their lives to live in the bush and in neighboring countries. They lived in crowded refugee camps as orphans and widows. Now, only in the last few years are they returning. Here is just one example of a parallel circumstance from Micah 7:

11-13 Oh, that will be a day! A day for rebuilding your city (or the country of Sudan),
a day for stretching your arms, spreading your wings!
All your dispersed and scattered people will come back (just as in southern Sudan),
old friends and family from faraway places,
From Assyria (Ethiopia) in the east to Egypt in the west, (or Kenya in the south)
from across the seas (or the great Nile River) and out of the mountains.
But there'll be a reversal for everyone else—massive depopulation—
because of the way they lived, the things they did.

The additions in parentheses are added to emphasize the Sudanese Christians' reason for the hope and joy they have in the midst of adversity.



The Sudanese people hunger and thirst for peace. During prayer one morning one of teachers, Anter, prayed, "Our ears are tired of hearing gun shots and our feet are tired of running to safety." Yet, just as Micah and Habakkuk proclaimed hope and peace in the Lord, the Dinka, Mabaan and Uduk Christians in Sudan live with that same hope on a daily basis. The country is teetering on the precipice of conflict. Even now leaders are making decrees and hidden decisions

that scatter people from their homes in Darfu, and death and destruction are still the norm there. Pray with me for peace in Africa, and pray that the secondary school in Yabus will provide Christian leadership for the next generation in the Sudan so that the day for rebuilding their country will be realized.