



# Lives transformed in Africa



## What does the good news of Jesus offer to struggling villages in Africa?

Jon Paul Witt writes

The word 'countryside' doesn't exist in rural Africa. Rather it's 'The Bush'. Mile upon mile of African Savannah stretch out from a few urban settlements. Some areas are densely populated, others not. Illiteracy rates are high, poverty is endemic and people die all the time. These areas are either unreached by the Gospel, or are full of several church splits vying for prestige and attention. The people are not uniform either. There is no such thing as the 'simple poor villager'. There are those who have never known anything but the village who live side by side with those who have moved back to 'the bush' upon retirement, and have a much wider life and worldview. Rural Africa is a complicated place.

What hope is there to change the destiny of thousands of people? If all anyone has ever known is poverty and hopelessness, how will they ever become anything else? What

after all does the Gospel of Jesus have to say about this, or is it simply not relevant?

Many years ago we felt God tell us to simply equip his people in the bush to find their calling and to make God's difference happen. We try to do this through many different ways but working with small groups is perhaps the most effective.

Dignity, my organisation, has for a number of years sought to plant what we call Life! Groups into this complicated and, to the European, confusing picture. As part of this, we use the discipleship material *Rooted in Jesus*. When we first looked at how to communicate the good news within Rural Africa, we saw the need for group based study, local language and friendship and camaraderie. Rather than write the material ourselves, we found that *Rooted in Jesus* had invented the wheel before us. Why re-invent the wheel?

One of our core beliefs is that as people come closer to Jesus with His Spirit working within them, they become more open to their community. It is certainly true that our use of *Rooted in Jesus* has helped in providing a foundation for community transformation. We add to this, training in specific skills and another communal based course called Love Your Village. This has led to many fantastic and at first unexpected results. Here are two examples:

1) *Jervas lives in Central Zambia and has run a Life! Group for two to three years. Many people have learned about Christ through the Life! Group and Rooted in Jesus. Recently they have become the focal point for justice in their village. Faced with a chief fomenting tribalism in their area, many excluded people approached the Life Group for help. Armed with a Christ like sense of equality and justice, they opposed the Chief and led to change in their area, preventing factions, infighting and trouble.*

2) *The youth of the villages are often ignored and sidelined. Not old enough to be real men, not young enough to be children, they often don't have a place. All too often they resort to stealing and*



*Rooted in Jesus* is a group course in Christian discipleship written for use in Africa and published by ReSource. It is

the only material of its kind written especially for the use of ordinary African Christians, rather than translated from material developed for the West – where people face different problems and challenges in their Christian lives. Originally piloted in 2002 in Tanzania, it is currently in use in 60 dioceses or denominations in 15 African countries, where it has been translated into 35 languages. See [www.rootedinjesus.net](http://www.rootedinjesus.net)

alcohol. Augustine found two such youths and spent time discipling them using *Rooted In Jesus*. Fast forward a few months and these very same youths are running *Rooted in Jesus* groups for many of their contemporaries in Northern Zambia.

Many groups have taken the line of growing food for their villages. This is food not only to eat, but also to sell to contribute for education fees and schoolbooks. Discipleship combined with farming training has led to an environment where this can happen and those in the villages can more easily provide for themselves and for other families in the village.

If you seek to simply run a project in Africa, you will ultimately fail. The only solution for transformation that will run beyond ourselves, is to set people free in the Power of the Spirit, to be that transformation themselves. This is bigger than a project, it is where the people of God embody and are 'themselves' the change that God wants for Africa. The Good News in Rural Africa is measured by the number of changed lives that are working for the Gospel in their own society. *Rooted in Jesus* has had an important part to play in that story of transformation.

In Zambia, Dignity currently has 117 Life! Groups working in diverse rural locations with three impact teams of Zambian missionaries supporting and pioneering the work with many more teams and groups in development. We also work in a smaller way in northern Namibia and southern Tanzania.

More people knowing Jesus. More people transforming their villages and rural society. That is what makes the Gospel incredibly important in Africa. That is good news for 'The Bush' indeed. 

#### about the writer

**Jon Paul Witt** is the leader of Dignity, a UK and Zambian Mission Organisation. He lives between Central Zambia and North Wales with his wife Judith, and three children Ethan, Joshua and Jacob. His passion is to see the Church in rural Africa blossom and take hold of the calling that God has for it. You can read more at [jonpaulwitt.com](http://jonpaulwitt.com) and at [www.dignityonline.org.uk](http://www.dignityonline.org.uk)

# ReSource publications



#### **Praying with Creation** Alison Morgan, £3

An illustrated booklet packed with scriptures, poetry, image and sayings to help you travel on a meditative journey through the created world.



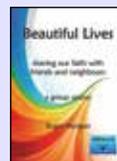
#### **The Grand Surprise: Butterflies and the Kingdom of God**, John Woolmer, £8

This is a beautifully produced book in which John draws on a lifetime's passion for butterflies to illustrate different dimensions of our spiritual lives. Illustrated in full colour with John and Jane's own photographs, it makes an excellent gift.



#### **The Word of God - what does it mean?** Alison Morgan, £3

God speaks to us in many ways, including through the world he both created and sustains. 'The Word of God - what does it mean?' asks whether our human understanding of words limits the way in which we think about the Word and words of God. Offering a mixture of theological reflection, testimony, poetry, and image, the booklet challenges our preconceptions and affirms the word of God as something intriguing, dynamic and life-changing.



#### **Beautiful Lives – sharing our faith with friends and neighbours** Roger Morgan

*Beautiful Lives* is a group course which helps Church members develop the confidence to share the good news of the kingdom naturally and effectively with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours. £30 for pack of leader's manual and 10 course manuals.



#### **Renewal: What Is It and What Is It For?** Alison Morgan, Grove Booklet, £3.95

At its best, renewal can bring fresh life and excitement. And yet it can also be reduced to a mere cultural package and fail to deliver what is promised. Alison's Grove booklet offers a fresh vision of what it means to be made new.



#### **Growing Healthy Churches** Robert Warren and Janet Hodgson, £1

Now in its third edition, this widely used material identifies the common marks of growing healthy churches from different parts of the UK. This popular booklet is useful across all traditions and in all settings for churches seeking to grow in their likeness to Jesus Christ.



#### **New in Christ: resources for personal renewal** Alison Morgan, £2

What does it mean to be made new in Christ? Alison explores the concepts and practice of newness and renewal in our lives and ministries, recognising that we are all so different and each on our own journey.



#### **Praying for Mission**, £1

Since the earliest days, Christians have met together daily for reflection upon the Scriptures, to recite the Psalms and to pray the prayer of the Kingdom, the Lord's Prayer. This is the daily office of the Church and represents the offering of common prayer by the whole priestly people of God. This booklet, extracted from *Celebrating Common Prayer*, is a gathering of those prayers to focus on God's work of mission in His world.



#### **And coming up in 2014**

We plan two new publications for 2014. Roger Morgan has been researching good practice in children's ministry, with help from many experienced practitioners across the country, and is writing up his findings in a short book provisionally entitled *Vision for a Younger Church*. Ministry to children is something we are passionate about, both in this country and through our new *Rooted in Jesus Junior course for Africa*. Roger, drawing on his background not just as a church leader but before that as a management consultant, has identified a number of key principles and steps which will enable any church to grow its ministry to children.



A lot of our work over the last couple of years has centred around questions of discipleship, and Alison is currently working on a new book which will explore some of the principles and issues which lie at the heart of our identity as followers of Jesus. The book will be titled *The Plural of Disciple is Church*, and it will draw on our experience both here in the UK and in Africa.

**For a full range of our publications visit the ReSource website [www.resource-arm.net](http://www.resource-arm.net) or contact the office.**