



An American's Uganda Experience

Day 1, April 11

My flight to Uganda began with a brief leg to Chicago followed by an eight hour flight to Amsterdam where I had a four-hour layover. I then flew another eight hours to Entebbe, Uganda located about 35 minutes from Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. As I began this journey, I wondered why I was really going to a place like this. If I matched my job qualifications with this assignment, I wouldn't hire me.

This trip came about as a result of getting to know Bishop Julius Oyet, a pastor and leader in Uganda. He is credited with leading a team into spiritual warfare in the northern part of Uganda where they have experienced 20 years of rebel war by an evil man named Joseph Kony who claimed to be God's redemption and led the Lord's Redemption Army (LRA). His evil deeds were notorious--abducting children and turning them into killing machines for his army. The stories are horrendous. Children were forced to kill their own parents or dismember other children for fear of having their own limbs cut off. The heaviest fighting was in the northern part of Uganda in an area known as Gulu. This was my destination.

Bishop Oyet is originally from this northern district and has seen revival come through his ministry, Life Line Ministries, which is based in Kampala and now ministers throughout Uganda. His testimony is one of overcoming hardship during his younger years, when Idi Amin and President Obote were in power. (He was once arrested because soldiers thought he was a rebel.) Julius and I became friends last November when I joined Ed Silvoso's team at a conference in Argentina. Julius heard my teaching and my stories of God's activity among men and women in the workplace and among pastors. He was intrigued and read several of my books. Before that trip was over, he extended an invitation for me to come to Uganda.

The Sentinel Group released a 105-minute documentary film describing the horrors of the 20 year war in Uganda and revealing its tragic effects on the region and its people. In 2003, a major change began to occur when Julius led a team and a group of soldiers into the northern districts to pray over the areas that were revealed to them as the centers of the demonic strongholds. It was not long after that a breakthrough came in the war and Kony was driven into the Sudan. Today, the war is almost over. Only a few remnants of the rebel activity remain. Still, it is not safe in certain areas, and the fear of the rebels is very real. In an effort of safety, tens of thousands of people from the rural areas have abandoned their farms for fear of being abducted or killed and have move to camps. The war has left a devastating mark on the people of Uganda.



Arrival in Kampala

I touched down in Entebbe after the long, 26 hour journey. As our airplane approached the runway to land, I immediately noticed something – there were no runway lights. Just a few faint lights could be seen. I thought this was strange. When we arrived, we were greeted by Julius and about 15 others from his team and the mainstream media. We were taken into a side room. There was no immigration line as is usually the case when entering a country. A woman simply asked for my passport and provided me with a visa. Three others from Canada were on the flight with me, including Pat Francis who pastors a large church in Toronto and is a native of Jamaica. I got to know Pat about 18 months ago when I spoke in Red Deer, Canada. Pat and I were the key foreign guests for the conference.

Bishop Oyet welcomed us to the media and explained the purpose of the National Transformation Celebration conference. It was an event designed to give praise and glory to God for the breakthrough that came in the civil war.

After the interviews, we stayed the night in Kampala. It was an eerie feeling as we traveled through the winding roads of Uganda without lights. There were street lights, but they were not on. “Costs too much” said Julius when I queried him. I would learn later that electricity goes on and off fairly regularly. The streets were unpaved dirt roads, very dusty, and full of potholes. People constantly walked in the roads. The buildings were unkempt. I was definitely in a third-world nation. I have been to a few such nations, but I was not prepared for some of what I was going to experience here.

Day 2, April 12

We stayed the night in the largest hotel in Kampala. I guess I was expecting a little nicer place given that the hotel was the best available. The cold floors and sterile walls were in stark contrast to American hotel chains. The iron bars in the windows and compound cylinder block walls surrounding the complex spoke of the security needs of a nation that has been rocked with violence. I awoke after a decent night’s sleep and found that the trickle of barely-running water provided for an adequate shower for my morning preparation.

After breakfast, which consisted of scrambled eggs, fruit, and instant coffee, we proceeded back to the airport to travel to Gulu. We were told we’d be taking the one-hour flight in a prop plane. When you speak about Gulu to the locals, they cringe. They know of its reputation and fear seems to permeate those who hear you are going to this area.

When I saw the airplane we were about to board, I wouldn’t be honest if I didn’t tell you that I thought of my father’s death from a single engine aircraft when I was 14 years old. Nevertheless, I stepped through my fears and boarded the twin engine, fifteen-seater aircraft. We took off and were able to view the land of Uganda during our flight. However, no one informed us that they were going to make two other stops on our way to Gulu and that we would be landing on dirt runways. Our second stop was in a place called Kitgum, the very northern part of Uganda where there had been much rebel activity during the major conflicts and where there is still activity during some nights. We were in Kitgum several minutes so we all got off the plane and took pictures. A few minutes later, we re-boarded and could see UN vehicles at the airport.



Arrival in Gulu

We arrived in Gulu and were greeted with a kind of welcome that just cannot be described with words. Julius’ team greeted us and a group of young Ugandans dressed in tribal attire began to dance, sing, and beat their African drums. We were told they were singing a Christian song to the beat of their tribal ancestry dance. Julius commented to the media that “We are Africans and need to take back what the devil has stolen from us. This is why we need to bring our roots back.” It was a very moving experience. Julius welcomed the group and introduced Pat Francis and then myself. This entire welcome was recorded and I was told the next day it appeared on national TV. A few days later the national media wanted me to come to Kampala to be interviewed for a live national TV show but this was not possible given our schedule in Gulu.

Before going to the hotel we were taken to a building that would be considered a slum area in America. However, this was the office of a regional political leader in the district of Gulu. His position is similar to a mayor or Lt Governor of the region. He was a believer and talked about the status of the people in Gulu. We prayed for him and his office.

We arrived at the hotel and were escorted to our rooms. The room was small and stark and had bars on the windows with no pictures on the walls. Cement floors and a fan complemented the room. No air conditioning was to be found. I was introduced to a female member of the army and was told she would be ordained that week as a pastor. She is one of the highest ranking females in the Ugandan army. The people of Uganda are gentle, humble, and very warm people. They love to serve and want to carry your bag or even your Bible. It is something they feel has honor, and they want to honor any man or woman who is a Christian leader.



Posters of Event

An American named Joanne Counts from Arkansas became a trusted source for interpreting the cultural nuances. When I asked Joanne why they would want to carry my Bible even though I had nothing else to carry, she said they believe "a portion of your anointing may rub off on them." She has been traveling to this area and working with Julius for several years. We often chuckled at the different cultural differences. One of the biggest differences is related to time. If an African says he will be there at 1pm, that doesn't mean 1pm. It means somewhere between 1:20-4pm. Their concept of time and schedule is nothing like how we operate in the west. We rarely followed the schedule listed in the program and my speaking times were usually given to me the day before or even minutes before. If you like control and order, you will have a problem in Uganda. I have seen this in other African nations as well.



A Really Bad Night

Pat Francis and her team and I had dinner together that night. It was around 10:00 PM when we finally had our meal. We were careful not to drink the water because we were warned of bacteria. I brushed my teeth with bottled water. We drank lots of bottled water or sodas. Coke is alive and well in northern Uganda. About 11:00 PM, the server came over and told us the lights would be going off at 11:30. We assumed she meant on the patio area. However, we later discovered this meant the main power in the entire hotel! That meant the fan in my room would not work, and there was little air circulation. I went to bed, pulled the mosquito net around my bed, and tried to sleep. I had a splitting headache and was hot and miserable. It was one of my worst nights in all my travels. I just waited for morning to arrive and only got an hour or two of sleep all night. But I was reminded many of the

people of Uganda deal every day with horrible conditions. At 6:00 AM, the power came on and provided some relief. I got up and took a cold shower as there was no hot water.

Fortunately, we were moved the next day to another wing of the hotel that was newer and had AC and even a television that received only one channel. The next two nights were comfortable. There was no internet access except for a small room near the registration area with a very slow connection. It wasn't worth it.

Day 3, April 12

We began our day with breakfast. The National Transformation Celebration five-day conference was not to begin until the evening. The conference was designed to give God glory for the breakthroughs in the rebel wars and to pray for a conclusion to it.



Julius wanted me to see one of the “camps.” A camp is where many of the displaced people are who once lived on their own land and were forced to flee their land because of the rebel armies led by Joseph Kony in the Gulu and Kitgum areas of northern Uganda. These camps consist of usually 5,000 - 20,000 people living in little grass huts, no sanitation, and a community well for water. Each day, they walk outside the camp to collect firewood and food to bring back to their huts.



We met in his office, and then he led us through the village and gave us his comments about the plight of the people.



It took several hours to organize our trip to the camp. Finally, we were summoned to leave. A small pick-up truck full of soldiers escorted us via a three-car caravan to the camp. For an American, this is a little disconcerting as I realized that if soldiers are needed to escort me then there must be some level of danger. For the first time, I see the downtown district of Gulu. I am amazed at the dirt and poverty that seems to be everywhere. Yet, at the same time, there is a commercial district where people go to trade. Cows were on the sides of the street grazing; often a young boy was standing nearby with a stick. Once through town, the soldiers rode in the open back of their truck and drove very fast over miles and miles of potholes through the outskirts of Gulu. Along the way, we saw hundreds of people walking. Some carried sticks. Some carried babies. We were told some walk 5-20 miles a day back and forth to their camp.



Once we arrived at the camp, we met the government overseer of the camp. He operates from a very hot, dirty building. He is warm and has faith in Christ. Before the day was over, we prayed for him as the young children of the village watched our every move. They came up to our cars, shook our hands, and looked at us as if thinking “Why is that man’s skin white?” or “Why are these people here?” Joanne and I were the only white people in our group. We were also the only whites among 4,000 or more in attendance at the stadium.

The camps made a big impression on me. I was amazed that the human body can adapt so well to such harsh conditions. Many of these people have been in these camps for 5 to 15 years and have made the best of their plight. We saw several examples of how they made food from beans, peanuts, and other grains. We traveled back to our hotel through the dusty, pothole-filled roads. One of our guides described how hundreds of people died along this route just a few years ago.



Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony was filled with protocol and pageantry. The native dancers danced again along with choirs to the enjoyment of the 3,000 - 4,000 who attended the first night. This was not the kind of stadium you and I would call a stadium. It was more like a public field with a wall around it and a cement building. They set up a special tent for the daytime meetings. One night, I made the mistake of attempting to go to the bathroom. However, because there was no electricity (the meeting was run off of a generator), I was taken to a dark, dingy area that was more like a latrine. My host gave me her cell phone for light. I decided I could hold it until later.



Pat Francis shared an inspiring message of transformation for the people, and we returned to the hotel for a special dinner for workplace leaders and pastors. However, these are not workplace leaders as we would think of them. These are mostly small business operators who are often pastors as well. I was in such shock with the poor living conditions that I struggled as to how to speak to these people in a way that was not totally Americanized. I had to re-think my teaching and became more focused on Bible teaching with examples the people could relate to. That night, I was able to use PowerPoint during my talk. The people seemed to respond well to the teaching.



Day 4, April 13

Each day, we went to the stadium in a caravan of three or four Land Rover-type vehicles. They never brought us to the stadium until it was time to do our portion of the program. People would have already been there for hours worshipping and often dancing Africa-style. I must admit it was a stretch for my conservative roots, but the people love the Lord and it shows in their faces and their lives. Bishop Julius Oyet is doing a good work in Uganda and the people greatly respect his leadership. He is an overseer of several thousand Pentecostal churches throughout Uganda and has access to many of the governmental leaders including the president, who gave him an army to conduct Operation Gideon back in 2003.



Pat Francis and I spoke from a tent that sat in front of a long series of tents that housed about 1,000 people. The sun was hot, and the leaders were sensitive to this by providing shade whenever possible. I did not know I was going to speak in this type of venue until a few minutes beforehand. Originally I was to speak at an enclosed area but plans changed almost instantly so I had to re-think what I was going to say. The Lord gave me the words, and I delivered what I felt I was to share with the people. I shared about Moses' staff and the power of God working through their lives through their work lives. I spoke of the Joseph Calling and the role hardship plays in their lives and how we are to overcome it. I realized I knew nothing about hardship compared to these people. I had general conversations with ministry team leaders who lost family members in the conflict.

Each person had their own story. One woman who was very educated and worked in finance told me how she lost her brother and parents. But, in spite of such pain, I knew God wanted to give them hope for a better future. Just the fact that an outsider cared enough to visit them was of great encouragement to them. I also realized this was a time for me to spy out the land and see why the Lord had me there and what role I and others throughout the world might play in their plight. It is a good place to implement our marketplace strategies to solve major societal issues. There is still corruption in the government and the business sector. This is why marketplace teaching is important. It has to change from the inside. Julius said the government will want me to come back to provide training in the future. If you are reading this letter, you may want to help be part of the solution. Contact me at os@marketplaceleaders.org and let me know.



Prayer for Presidential Representatives

The president of Uganda is President Museveni. He was just re-elected and is supportive of the Church. There was some talk he would be attending the meeting on this night. This was the plan until they had to change at the last minute as is so often the case. Instead, three representatives from the president's office attended in his place and spoke from the platform. Julius invited me to the platform, and after they spoke, he asked me to pray for the three leaders and give each of them a signed copy of one of my books. I laid my hands on the cabinet minister and led a prayer in front of the many thousands in the stadium.

They Ran to Get Saved!

Each day, more and more people came to the meetings. The fields were full of children, young people, and elderly. That night, Joanne Counts and Julius spoke to the people. At the conclusion of the meeting, Julius made a passionate presentation of the gospel message. As he prepared to invite the people to pray with him at the front of the stage, he prefaced it by saying he would call them down on the count of three. I was spellbound by what I was about to witness.

I have never seen anyone present salvation the way he did. I thought to myself, "Does he really think people are going to run to the front?" Then it happened. He said "3!" and the people literally ran to stand in the front of the stage. Hundreds upon hundreds. They were packed body to body as they pressed against one another. Julius went through the commitment very slowly and deliberately so they would know what they were committing to. He called for people to lay down their witchcraft tools and condoms. These things were thrown onto the stage. This was an amazing spectacle. Then he led them in a prayer and they all confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior as he had them repeat their confession together.



When the meeting was over, I was taken by what I had just witnessed. Julius and Joanne told me this happened at all their meetings. They've had meetings of 50,000 and seen great healings take place. Although some might come forward more than once in their lives, most were first-time commitments. They follow-up with them through training at the local church in the community.

A Gift of Books

That night, I saw where books were being sold. It was a meager little table set up at the rear of the stadium. Based on the crowd and the level of income I perceived these people had, I realized the Lord wanted me to change my view of the resources I had brought. The three fifty-pound boxes of books and CDs I had brought with me had a value of more than \$2,500 USD. We planned the sale of these materials as a means to help underwrite this trip, along with gifts from donors. I began to sense I was to give these books as a seed into the nation. Then, when I talked with my wife Angie that night, she made the suggestion without my prompting. So, the next day, I told Julius I was giving the resources to help the nation. He was very grateful. (If you would like to help cover these costs and sow into Uganda, please visit -- <https://www.registrationfactory.com/v3/default.cfm?EventUUID=410C0648> This is just one way we plan to invest in the plight of the Ugandans. We would greatly appreciate your participation in this with us.)

That night, we returned to the hotel, and in the lobby was a man who was a former rebel leader. He was one of Joseph Kony's top rebel commanders. He accepted an amnesty program by the government and has since come to Christ. Julius introduced him to me. He did not speak English.

Day 5, April 14

The power stayed on until about midnight and then went off again until 6:00 AM the next morning. This day was an ordination ceremony for more than 150 men and women who were being ordained as pastors, evangelists, and deacons. One man being ordained was Julius' father whom Julius led to Christ a few years ago. He had been a village witchdoctor. God has used Julius in his own family and as well as the nation of Uganda.



Julius instructed me that I would be sharing at the ordination ceremony during the day. This was a very ceremonial occasion, and the leaders dressed in robes. It was quite a ceremony as each candidate was presented for ordination. A bishop from Kenya gave the key message, and I came up afterwards to give a few closing and farewell remarks as I had to leave in fifteen minutes for a four hour trip to Kampala. Little did I know what was in store...

After much confusion about where my luggage was and who was going to drive us, we proceeded to the hotel to get the luggage of the Bishop from Kenya who was also traveling with me to the airport. We picked up one other man. We began the trip down the highway and my heart began to race as I began to fear for my life! Our driver was a policeman who is also a pastor who was driving about 70-80 miles an hour down pothole-filled roads full of bicyclists and walkers along the road. It was all I could do to watch.



Finally, I stopped looking in front of me (I was in the front seat) and kept my head down. The margin of error from passing the bicyclists and walkers was so close it made me cringe. The brothers in the back seat found it amusing that I was squirming so much. The Bishop exclaimed, "If you were with me in Kenya, you would definitely have to be in the back seat. I would be driving faster than this." On one occasion, it looked like we were getting pinned between two cars and a bicyclist. We literally brushed the bicyclist off the road. I could not look back to see what happened. Our driver simply brushed it off that the bicyclist was not paying attention to the road. Oh, I was so glad to put my feet on the grounds of the airport that night. I thought I needed to fear the rebels. It was the Uganda drivers I needed to fear!

I began my long journey home that night and am grateful for what I saw and learned in Uganda. I am sure this is simply the beginning as I seek to discern my role in the life of this nation. Thanks so much for praying for me and the people of Uganda.

Again, if you'd like to support what we are doing by helping us sow training resources into the nation, visit-- <https://www.registrationfactory.com/v3/default.cfm?EventUUID=410C0648>



Os Hillman

P.S. I'll be giving more thought to tangible ways Marketplace Leaders can be involved. Let me know if you have ways to help. Contact me at os@marketplaceleaders.org