

In the Shadow
7 February 2022

Very few Rwandans speak English well. My knowledge of Kinyarwanda (the local language) is limited to greetings and a few key words (ie: *ikawa* [coffee]). Because of this, deep conversations are difficult. It's impossible to appreciate the breadth and depth of someone's life without an intimate understanding of one or the other's language.

There are those few, though, that know English well enough to share the stories that have shaped their lives. As a Jesus follower I love to hear their testimonies of how they came to faith in Christ and the new life they are now living.

But these stories are, of course, not all positive. There has been heartache, tragedy, and for many people, incredible terror. The 1994 genocide hangs heavily like the dark rainy season clouds floating over Mt. Niyirigongo. Everyone has a story to tell. Some of the stories I have heard directly from the survivors. Many I've heard indirectly (remember: language barrier). Even those born after 1994 have been influenced immeasurably by those 100 days of butchery.

"My mother was killed in the genocide." "Two of my brothers..." "All of my siblings." "I am the only survivor of my immediate family." "We ran to Congo." "I was a refugee in Uganda."

As horrific as that event was, it is not the only demon to afflict central Africa. There is poverty which brings a hopelessness pushing people to make poor life choices, like early marriage (or at least early sexual activity), alcoholism and drug addiction. I'm having trouble finding any concrete figures on sexual assault among women and girls, but the evidence is that it is very high. Some of the numbers I have heard range in the 75-90% range. On the one hand, 1% is too much, but $\frac{3}{4}$ or more is unfathomable.

I have no intention of suggesting that I have the answers to these issues. Very simply, I need to understand what people have been through and experienced, before I can be of any help to them. As I share in their lives over the next few months, I want to reflect on Paul's words in Philippians 3:10. "*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death.*" Could it be that as we share in the suffering of those around us, we are sharing in Christ's suffering as well? (consider Matthew 25:40)

For the Master, Chris Elliott with the Church of the Brethren Rwanda

