

The Schlehlein Family

Missionaries to the Tsongas of southern Africa



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Every missionary faces obstacles when giving the Gospel. Evangelizing in rural Africa has its own set of challenges. What does evangelism look like in our village? Catch a glimpse below.

Our village of Mbhokota is mountainous, so getting to Mani Joyce's house requires climbing a series of upward, serpentine paths. On the way, I stop at Mani Maggie's home, our strongest woman church member. The goal: I give the gospel first, then she follows. In this way, evangelism is always profitable because even if your host rejects the message, the young Christian you brought along gets to hear the gospel again and again.

Language is an obstacle – Tsonga vocabulary is very limited, which makes theological conversations difficult. We use Romans 3:10 to show them their sin, which literally says - "no one is straight, no even one".

They kind of get it, but getting to the heart of their depravity is a continuous "cycle".

Noise is an obstacle – the house 20 meters next to our study brews and sells beer out of 50-gallon drums. In Mbhokota, alcohol and thunderous music are inseparable. Huge speakers are stacked in the corner and two minutes after our study begins, they start blaring. It's so loud, we have to move our chairs into a huddle formation and shout. The ladies are not deterred a bit.

Education is an obstacle – Joyce can read Tsonga, but Rose cannot. This is not unusual with the older crowd, but even in our church, we have two 19-year old members who

cannot read their own language. If they *can* read, concentrating for a full Bible study is not easy. Halfway through the study, I ask Rose a question, only to be met with silence. I glance up. Rose is asleep.

Poverty is an obstacle – there is a mad man who lives nearby. He sometimes runs around naked, but when he approached our study, he was arrayed in shredded shorts and a t-shirt. He might be mentally handicapped, but the villagers don't have money to care for such people, so he runs wild. He sat behind me with mouth agape and grunted. And while I taught the ladies—over the thumping speakers, and "the cycle", and the snores—the mad man cackled a tune somewhere between a duck call and a snow blower.

How does one minister effectively in such a setting? Rarely do all these distractions converge at the same time, but it is common for at least a couple of them to be present. The answer lies in the sovereignty of God in salvation. Because God in his grace has promised to give repentance to sinners, we have confidence that God can break through both hardened hearts and worldly distractions.



Five Years

Two months ago marked the five-year point of my arrival in Mbhokota, South Africa. In more ways than we would like, progress has been slow. Here are a few things that have taken place.

1. I came here single. Since then, Melinda and I have been married for 3 ½ years and God has blessed us with three children—Audrey, Nathan, and Lawson.
2. After living at the chief's home for over a year, we built a house in the village. For three years we shared our home with the college, but now we have it all to ourselves. We have at least 24 different kinds of trees on our land.
3. We have learned Tsonga well enough to preach comfortably, but we realize that we will always be learning this language.
4. The Limpopo Bible Institute, a three-year Bible college offering over 35 semester courses, was established four years ago. In two weeks will be our second graduating class—all from Zimbabwe.
5. Mbhokota Baptist Church was planted two years ago in our village. We have about 20 converted, baptized members. We catechize and preach through books on Wednesday and Sunday.
6. We've been teammates with the Seth Meyers family for five years. They live 10 minutes down the road in another village and we're always looking for excuses to spend more time with them. Our philosophy, worldview, theology, and goals are virtually identical.

How to Pray for our Ministries

- I'll be traveling a lot over the next couple weeks. Pray for safety and ministerial success.
- Our school is again in a transition time. Pray that God would give us more students.

Thankful for your support,

Paul, Melinda & the kids