

Finding God in Rwanda's Killing Fields

It has been 15 years since Rwanda's darkest tragedy. Here's how one pastor suffered in that holocaust—and now offers healing.

Unless you catch sight of the jagged scars on Emmanuel Kadege's* legs, you wouldn't know he is a survivor of Rwanda's genocide. During a conference last week in Pennsylvania he greeted me with a warm hug, a bright smile and a cheerful "Praise the Lord." But after we got to know each other, and I encouraged him to talk honestly, this 31-year-old pastor let down his guard and shared his horrific story.

A member of Rwanda's minority Tutsi population, Emmanuel was only 16 when leaders of the majority Hutu tribe announced on the radio that it was time to kill the "snakes" and "cockroaches"—their ominous code words for Tutsis. For 100 days—from April 6 to July 14, 1994—Hutu militants and thousands of civilians slaughtered an estimated 1 million people.

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About 400 people died every hour during that period—and as many as 500,000 Tutsi women were brutally raped, many in broad daylight while people watched.

Emmanuel, the son of a Pentecostal pastor, had been baptized in the Holy Spirit a few weeks before the slaughter began. His father told his mother and three sisters to prepare to die. But then his mother received a message from God that they would be spared.

Militants armed with sticks and machetes stormed into the Kadeges' neighborhood in the Byumba province and herded all Tutsis into a field near Emmanuel's church. They shot Emmanuel in the arm to wound him, then struck his legs several times with knives.

Says Emmanuel: "My mother cried out to them, 'Please don't kill my son in front of me.' But they told her, 'We want you to die with a broken heart.'" Then two men raped one of Emmanuel's sisters in front of the crowd.

The whole scene was a like a dream to Emmanuel. He had his own wounds to deal with, but seeing so much horror all around him somehow numbed the pain. I asked him what was the worst memory of that day. He answered immediately: "Some men grabbed a pregnant woman and ripped her belly open with a knife. Then they kicked the baby across the field as if it were a ball."

Amazingly, the militants left Emmanuel and his family without killing them. But armed men returned later and bombed their house. So the Kadege family fled into the woods while Hutu warriors hunted them like dogs.

"All our possessions were burned," Emmanuel told me. "So we hid for five months without any real food. Finally some Tutsi rebels rescued us and took us to a hospital on the Ugandan border."

It took nine months for Emmanuel and his family members to recover from starvation. But when they regained their health they went right back into Rwanda—to bring the message of Christ's forgiveness to a fractured nation.

Emmanuel eventually surrendered his life to the ministry. Today, while Rwandan president Paul Kagame is trying to repair his nation's economy and social structures, Emmanuel is teaching people to forgive. He is also trying to feed and house about 800 orphans whose mothers contracted the AIDS virus from the HIV-infected men who raped them. He hopes to

purchase land and build a farm where the children can find work.

Both Hutus and Tutsis now attend Emmanuel's church. "I am preaching reconciliation, and that is really touching the hearts of people," he told me.

"We have forgiven the men who raped my sister," he adds. "Those men are in prison, and she has actually visited them there."

I cannot comprehend the level of demonic hatred that was unleashed in Rwanda 15 years ago, nor can I fathom how much grief still paralyzes people there today. But after meeting Emmanuel I was reminded of how our merciful God always brings His redemption. The sun always comes out, even after the darkest of storms.

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