

The Gospel: The Ultimate in Counter-Terrorism Measures

How one brave Nigerian is risking his life to win militants and terrorists to Christ.

Kelechi Okengwu has taught me to face my fears.

This 32-year-old Nigerian evangelist will probably never star in a movie or be featured on the evening news. But he has been a younger role model for me since I met him seven years ago.

Converted to Christ at 21, Kelechi has spent the past decade reaching dangerous militants who are spreading violence on Nigeria's university campuses. Through his Gospel Mania Project, the young preacher shares his faith with leaders of The Black Axe, Brotherhood of the Black Brigade, The Big Eye, The Pyrates, the Buccaneers and The Mafia—clandestine groups that mix African occultism with drugs and violence to spread fear and political instability throughout the country.

"Dying for Christ is the highest honor we could ever experience. I am not afraid to die. That would be one way to say thank you to God for all He has done for me." – Kelechi Okengwu

"Many people think what I do is madness," Kelechi told me last month when I visited him in the city of Akure. These campus gangs kill 30 to 40 students a year in Nigeria. The murders have forced many parents to send their children abroad to study, creating a brain drain that has siphoned off many of the country's potential leaders.

I am constantly inspired by Kelechi's courage. The students he is reaching are involved in assassinations, bloody occult rituals and bank robberies. They have been known to slit students' throats and bury the bodies in the woods. They often enjoy demonic protection (which they get from witchdoctors)

but they are also armed with rifles and machetes.

Who would dare risk being near these people—much less reaching out to befriend them? Yet Kelechi has led more than 400 of these dangerous young men and women to Jesus.

In a typical campus meeting, held outdoors, Kelechi will preach the gospel and then ask if any of the campus militants will surrender their lives to Christ and leave their gangs. The power of God always shows up. “Sometimes they will fall down on the ground, under conviction,” Kelechi says. “Sometimes, if they are demon possessed, they will fall on the ground and scream.”

Those who respond to Kelechi’s message surrender their witchcraft paraphernalia—which often includes bones, belts, woodcarvings, charms, powders and other objects that supposedly offer spiritual protection. They also lay down their weapons and drugs. Today, many of them serve as part of Kelechi’s unique mission team to reach other militants.

As if this level of danger isn’t enough for him, Kelechi has taken on a new and even riskier assignment in the past six months. He and his disciples are now evangelizing the Muslim terrorists who have been setting up training camps in northern Nigeria. They identify young Nigerian men who are being radicalized by Islamists from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and Afghanistan. Then they attempt to share Christ with them.

It is the ultimate in counter-terrorism—with no bombs or bullets involved. Kelechi’s weapons consist only of (1) the Bible, (2) unconditional love and (3) lots of fasting and prayer.

I asked Kelechi if he ever feels afraid. He admitted some fear, but then explained why he won’t let it paralyze him.

“It is the fear of death that causes people to be afraid of witnessing,” Kelechi told me. “But dying for Christ is the

highest honor we could ever experience. I am not afraid to die. That would be one way to say thank you to God for all He has done for me.”

It’s easy for us in the West to sit on our comfortable couches in our air-conditioned homes and pontificate about how to stop terrorism while we watch the news from Nigeria or the Middle East on our flat-screen TVs. But after spending time with Kelechi and viewing this threat from his vantage point, I am humbled.

I’ve never looked into the eyes of a terrorist. I have certainly never put my life on the line by offering the gospel to a guy holding an AK-47. I pray I could have half the boldness my friend has.

I am grateful to Kelechi and all the other nameless and faceless heroes who are modeling selfless New Testament Christianity in the developing world. They are on the front lines in today’s global struggle. We owe them our prayers, our support and our utmost respect.

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