

SUDAN

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When my bewildered friends and family ask me the standard question, “Well how was ‘The Sudan?’” the only word I can muster is “Humbling.” In order to be able to focus on the mission of my trip as a part of the WithOpenEyes team, I was forced to completely detach myself from my “normal” social expectations.

Beginning with the moment that I set foot on the dirt air strip in the Nuba Mountains, the two weeks in Sudan were defined by a salvo of forceful stimuli such that was simply not comparable to my previous experiences. 18 strangers were greeted with the beaming smiles and glowing spirits of the Nuba people. The town of Korrarak welcomed us with dancing, music, and a ceremony at church. Not to mention the AK-47 that burst into fire 10 yards away from me during the dancing-in celebration, to our relief. As I said, I was compelled to abandon my own ideas and experiences in order to experience the culture and lifestyle of the Nuba people for what it is.

Being a short term mission trip, our goals were to learn as much as possible about the people of Sudan, both their past sufferings, in the war that intermittently raged in Sudan from 1983-2005, their present status under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that is in place until 2011, a cease-fire between the North and South, and their needs. WithOpenEyes took a professional film crew along on the trip, which filmed everything our group did. We met with local Elders, Pastors, and saw with our own eyes things which are a part of daily life for people in Sudan: an unexploded bomb twenty yards from the road, a troop transport truck that had only 8 months earlier been destroyed by an anti-tank mine, and women who walked 4 hours to fetch water every single day. We learned that the reasons for fighting in Sudan are incredibly complicated; religious conflict, racism, inter-tribal fighting, and foreign militant groups such as Joseph Kony’s LRA and nomadic Baggara tribes have all been at the center of the persecution, strife, and injustice that has perpetuated in Sudan over the last 30 years.

However, despite the heartbreak of what Sudan has been through, and and that I met no child with more than one set of clothes, and that families live in huts the size of my car, the dominating theme of the Nuban people was strangely a spirit of the purest, most unadulterated joy I have ever witnessed. I was greeted as a brother and as a son by people who were total strangers to me. I have never been to a place with such little food, yet I have never been to a place where I was offered so much food.

We saw some of the 300+ churches destroyed by the North during the war that Samritan’s Purse has rebuilt. Some of our group met a man named Kamal, who was tortured by Northern soldiers during the war by being placed on scalding rock with his hands and feet tied behind his back, resulting in the severing of his hands and an inability to walk, rendering him completely dependent on his family to care for him. He spoke to us about how his faith in

God has enabled him to enjoy a blessed life, despite what was so unjustly taken from him. When someone from our group asked him, “What would you say to the men who did this to you?” Kamal casually replied, “Oh, they live just down there (pointing toward a couple of huts in the distance) and I speak to them regularly, and they come to church now.” Kamal’s forgiveness is a small representation of the spirit of the Sudanese people as a whole: a spirit which “runneth over” the evil that they have borne.

About WithOpenEyes:

With water being so scarce in the dry season, a severe lack of school teachers, one out of every 5 children dying before the age of 5, and the oppression of Christianity, women, and racism constant concerns, the people of Sudan have many needs. Samaritan’s Purse has done an astounding job in Sudan building churches, water bore holes, and training Sudanese in trades such as agriculture, carpentry, and mechanics. WithOpenEyes aims to partner with Samaritan’s Purse in Sudan. Through the development and proliferation of its documentary about Sudan, WithOpenEyes hopes to raise funds and awareness in the United States for the cause of the Sudanese people, partnering with Samaritan’s Purse to sustainably aid the people of Sudan in the areas of education and basic health care in particular.

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