

AFRIGO

“Tragedy in the mission field”

This is a troubling story about how Benita, a missionary, lost her husband and child on the mission field, told in 4 parts:

Part 1

I grew up with a Muslim aunty after my father died, but eventually my Christian mother came to retrieve me and it was after that, that I gave my life to Christ after a Bible class. With salvation came a deep desire to know more about Him and do His will in every area of my life. I was very involved in serving at the church, but not with missions. Eventually, I began to think of marriage and one of my heart’s desires was to marry someone with whom I could serve God. From this came a dream, where God showed me the husband who was coming, and other Christians also confirmed to me that I was to marry him. He was a missionary!

The family supported my decision, but I felt unworthy considering his education level when I was not very educated. My mother, who was illiterate, was especially glad to have such a man as a son-in-law. The marriage went forward and I joined him on the mission field in 2018.

It was a difficult beginning, living in a typical village in a place with harsh weather and backward people. The primary occupation of the area is farming, and the people still trade by barter. My husband and I were sent out by a mission agency; however, we had to raise our own financial support and do farming to provide for ourselves. We served among the Avadin and Dukawa people groups of Niger state, which shares a border with Kebbi State. It takes a person with a deep love for God to stay in such a place, but my passion for the Father made it possible. In that place, there was no church, though some could be found further out. Unfortunately, those churches were not testifying to Christ.

The Avadin and Dukawa people are animists dominated and ruled by the Muslim minority, who are the elite. They oppressed the local people by requiring payment in millet to perform weddings, then giving them loans for the millet at high-interest rates. In this way, the people were kept in debt. The Muslim minority also had a great ability to cook good food, which the local people did not know how to do. Their desire for this good food, which they must pay for, also kept them in debt.

There was not a single school in the community where we worked, and through ignorance, the local people continued to be exploited.

My husband had decided to focus on ministry through education and had started a primary school, so I joined the work. In the beginning, we taught under a tree, but within a short time put up a decent structure. Surprisingly, the older people allowed us to disciple the children, though they themselves were not open to the Gospel.

Before long, we started a church, built a mission house and began to see results as the children were being educated and disciplined.

When my husband came to the community, he started teaching them how to manage their crops, their finances and how to cook good food with what they have. The effect was that people started to learn and there were visible transformations. This did not go down well with the Muslim elites who began to lose their customers. They could see that the education of the children and of the community would eventually lead to the liberation of the local people. This liberation came at a cost; they began to attack my husband spiritually.

That is when things really started heating up. What happened next was horrifying...

Part 2

As was their custom, the Fulani Herdsmen were busy raiding; they often go from village to village, stealing people's cattle. Normally when we saw them approaching, we left our house and went into hiding. On this particular day, the soldiers intercepted the herders first, so the Fulani began looting the community. The old man in the village who gave us land for farming invited us to shelter at his house, but I felt uncomfortable with the arrangement. I told my husband we should run to a neighbouring village, but he disagreed so we hid in the old man's room with our two children. After some time, a number of Fulanis came to this house and asked the old man about us. Initially, he gave them the impression that he did not know our whereabouts; however, when they put pressure on him, he gave in. By this time, I had become so weak, but my husband, who had our son in his arms, was busy praying and singing. When they came to the room, my husband begged them not to kill us, and they started demanding our phones and money. We gave them our phones, but when they asked for money we told them we had none. Right there and then, they shot at my husband but the bullet hit my son, and I saw his intestines come out. On seeing this, my husband shouted, so they aimed the next bullet at his head and took his life. I was carrying our three-month-old baby; one of them came to me still demanding that I give him the money my husband gave me. I told him I didn't have any money; he kept on threatening me that he will kill me if I don't bring the money. I repeated that I did not have any money and that he could do whatever he liked with me. At that point, one of them brought out an axe to butcher me, but another one came to the rescue. He stopped him, reminding him that they do not harm women in their operations. Later, I managed to escape. I started running with my baby but the same man who wanted to kill me caught up with me, still with the mind to take my life. Again the same man who prevented him the first time showed up to stop him. I began to run again, not knowing where I was heading.

Part 3

I had left the wrapper that I used to strap my baby to my back at the scene of the accident, so I removed the shirt I was wearing to put her on my back and ran for miles, topless. Late in the night, I found myself in a village where I begged for a wrapper to strap my baby. There, an old woman offered me room to pass the night; however, I could not sleep. I was like a living dead person because everything that had happened was passing before my eyes continually, like a film. The next day, I put myself together and went to the local government office, and then to the police station, but the police could not have cared less about my story. They said the incident was not in their jurisdiction, but the truth of the matter was that they were Muslims and did not want to get involved in the matter. I later got in touch with some mission family members, who followed me to go get my husband's and son's bodies.

Before I saw them, it was hard for me to believe all these could be true. I told myself that my husband is not dead, that he was just pretending, that he is still alive and I will see him again. However, it was not true. To deepen my pain when I came the next day, I discovered that these Fulani people slept in our house that night: they ate our food, killed our chickens, destroyed our doors and took away whatever they deemed fit.

I also suspected that the old man together with the Muslim leaders connived with the Fulani to kill my husband. The Fulani did not know us as missionaries and they would not have attacked us without inside information. It should be noted that the Fulani did nothing to the old man and his family.

It was as if God took away my heart that day, and afterwards, I had a lot of questions:

"God, did you not promise to protect us?"

"We have done a lot of work in this village, why did you allow this to happen?"

"After all the years of waiting for marriage, why did you allow them to take my husband away from me?"

Part 4

I still have a lot of questions today. I still spend lots of nights in tears, but thankfully the grace of God continues to keep me. I am not angry with God, because I believe nothing happens in the life of a Christian without the knowledge of God. He knew that this would happen to me.

The truth is that three weeks before the incident the Lord spoke to me about it, and that was why I felt uneasy on the day of the incident.

God is not done with me yet, and that is why I am still alive - I could have been killed alongside my husband and son. I believe my husband has finished his assignment and that was why the Lord allowed him to die. Before he died, he told one of his aunties that he knows that one day

the Fulani people will attack him. He also told one of his pupils in the school that if he hears of his death, he should not cry, because he has finished his work.

In the course of time, God spoke to me, -and I felt a deep peace in my heart. He told me that my marriage was not a mistake and that the fact that He allowed what happened to happen does not mean that He does not love me. I don't know what the Lord wants to achieve with my life; I only ask Him for grace to continue in Him.

I know I can't survive without Him; in my weak moments, I say things I am not supposed to say because I still go through emotional pain when I have a flashback of the whole event. Therefore, I ask for His mercy and help, so that I will not disappoint Him, because I know He loves me despite the incident.

After all of this, I went to get 15 of the children we had been discipling from the village. The villagers were abusing them, so I brought them to the city where they go to school and I care for them. The parents allowed them to come, to study, but did not know they were Christians. Unfortunately, the mission agency tried to force me to send the children back, even after the mission was no longer willing to help my daughter and I and cut us off.

However, these children are the fruit of our years of labour in that community, they are the seed of my husband's labour; to let go of them is synonymous with letting go of all the years of labour. I have made a vow to the Lord that I will do all that it takes to get them rooted and grounded in Christ so that they can go back to minister to their people.

I believe the Lord kept me alive for their sake. The Lord has been faithfully providing through Christian friends who believe in what I am doing and are standing with me. Psalm 121: 1-2 is a great encouragement.

One of my visions is to establish an orphanage for the less privileged and disciple them for Christ, but presently I am in the school of ministry while waiting on God for His direction for every step of my life. I will remarry someday if it is God's will but my deceased husband was a very godly man and it would be hard to find someone like that again, who loves my daughter like his own. Meanwhile, I advise women to get ministry training before going out as missionaries, and they must also have passion for the work to avoid any kind of regret because they are bound to face challenges. If they are sure it is the will and purpose of God for them to enter into missions, then no matter how hard it is, the strength and the grace of God will keep them.

Excerpted from an Interview by Rhoda Oluwakemi Appiah. She is married with three children. She is a pioneering missionary of Fullstature Missions International together with her husband, Rev. Daniel Hyde Appiah. She is a lover of God and His word, with an overwhelming desire to see God's kingdom advance in every sphere of society. Rhoda can be reached at kemiappiah@gmail.com.

