




What
Christians in
America
need to know about
Africa





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It's easy for Western Christians to make assumptions about African countries based on media reports, short-term missions trips, documentaries, or a hodgepodge of all three. But for real impact to be made for the sake of the global Church, Christians outside Africa need to understand what faith is really like for Christians in Africa — what they value, the challenges they face, and the contributions they offer to the global Church.



One

The Powerful Presence of Christianity in Africa

One of the most important things to understand about Africa is that Christianity is widespread across sub-Saharan nations, having grown exponentially over the last century. The population in Africa is still growing quickly, and Church growth has followed this trend. In fact, the enthusiasm and zeal prevalent amongst Christians in Africa — though powerful — has meant Church growth has greatly outpaced discipleship. The percentage of global Christians living in Africa is expected to grow from today's 26 percent to 40 percent by 2060.¹ While for hundreds of millions of Christians' belief is genuine and faith is alive, a significant gap has developed between the staggering number of new believers and the number of mature spiritual leaders.

Part of the reason for this gap is the average age of the population: nearly half (40 percent) of the population is under the age of 19. There are simply not enough mature Christians to invest in the younger generations.

And the population continues to grow. While nuclear family sizes in many countries throughout the world like Italy, Germany, India, and nations in the Middle East have declined, African nations like Uganda, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Congo hold steady at about five children per woman.²

By 2050, the global population is estimated to reach nine billion. Of those, anywhere from two to two-and-a-half billion are expected to reside in African nations, and some projections expect Africa to be home to 40 percent of the world's population by 2100.³ The Church is expected to keep pace or even exceed this growth. With over 630 million Christians today,⁴ by 2060 Africa is expected to be the home of 4 out of every 10 Christians.⁵

The passion for church planting, prayer, and evangelism is evident across African denominations. They have so much to teach the global Church! People in African nations have played a significant role in the development of Christianity for thousands of years, and their contribution to global Christianity continues to be meaningful, as they move out to evangelize their own continent and the world. Zeal and passion for the Lord is evident in all they do.

Two

Common Qualities Among African Worldviews

Ministering to people in Africa requires a firm grasp and thorough understanding of the characteristics common to the worldviews present in many African cultures. As one may expect, there are several distinct differences from a typical Western perspective.

The values most commonly expressed in many African worldviews include:

1. **Spirituality:** the belief in spiritual powers that permeate all of humanity and nature.
2. **Collectivism:** orientation that reinforces cooperation, interdependence, and joint motivation of the group or culture.
3. **Time orientation:** time is flexible and importance is placed on the person you you are with right now, rather than your own schedule.
4. **Orality:** preference for receiving and memorizing information orally.
5. **Verve and rhythm:** penchant for rhythmic dance, prayer, and worship.
6. **Sensitivity to affect:** open acknowledgment and understanding of others' emotional states; balance and harmony with nature; balance and oneness among mental, physical, and spiritual states.⁶

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*I am because we are,
and because we are,
therefore I am,”*

states an African proverb.
This sentiment reflecting
interdependence is evident
across many African cultures.

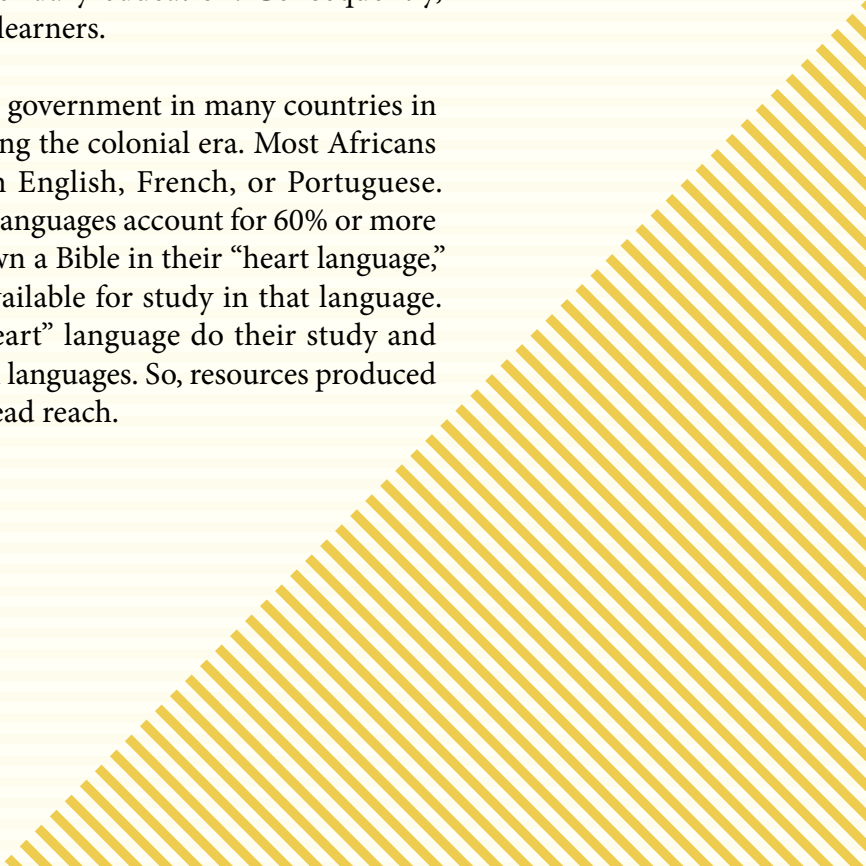


Three

How to Communicate Well

Africans are excellent at communicating in diverse ways with different people groups and languages. The 24 million people in Côte d'Ivoire for example, a mid-size country about the size of New Mexico, are divided into four large language families containing at least 93 languages. But the national language of education and government is French. Consequently, like most other countries in Africa, Ivoirians grow up surrounded by and using multiple languages. They may use one (or two) languages at home, another one in the market place, and yet another one at church or in school. They will usually become fluent in at least one or two more European languages before they finish their secondary education. Consequently, Africans are generally excellent language learners.

However, the language of education and government in many countries in Africa is still the language imposed during the colonial era. Most Africans in sub-Saharan Africa learn to read in English, French, or Portuguese. According to best estimates, those three languages account for 60% or more of literate Africans.² While they may own a Bible in their “heart language,” there are likely little or no resources available for study in that language. Many who preach or teach in their “heart” language do their study and preparation in one of the three education languages. So, resources produced in those languages have a very wide-spread reach.



Four

The Potential Impact

Although Christians in Africa have much to teach us and great zeal, the need for discipleship is more pronounced than ever. The *Africa Study Bible* was built from the start with these realities in mind. It is a study Bible with over 2600 notes and features created by 350 contributors from 50 countries. With the additional translations in the works, we can reach the literate and the leaders of an entire continent. Our committee of African leaders was strategically chosen from each language group, and these same leaders set our goals for writer diversity.

“This fantastic Africa Study Bible is 50 years overdue. The growth of the church in Africa is beyond imagination but teaching and training is urgently needed. Pastors are often unequipped and need this Bible to help them in their vital role.”

– George Verwer, founder
of Operation Mobilisation

While the presence of Christianity in Africa is huge, there is a lack of study Bibles, books, and teaching materials needed for effective discipleship, especially those written with African contexts in mind. The ones that do exist can be expensive, and the method of distribution and infrastructure in most communities are not sufficient to get the books and Bibles to those who need them.

As the global Church supports discipleship in African nations in the coming decades, it's imperative that Western Christians seek an authentic understanding of African cultures. By partnering with Africans to address their unique situations, speak within their contexts, and meet their most critical needs, the Gospel will be proclaimed, and believers will be equipped to carry on the faith.



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