

AFRICAN PARADIGM SHIFTS

Bible Engagement and Discipleship in Africa:
Are we on the right track?

Questions and Ideas from 30 Years
of Work in Africa



ARTICLE 1 WHY DISCIPLESHIP IN AFRICA IS A #1 ISSUE FOR THE GLOBAL CHURCH

"CHRISTIANITY'S
FUTURE IS AFRICAN"

– Matthew Elliott, PhD



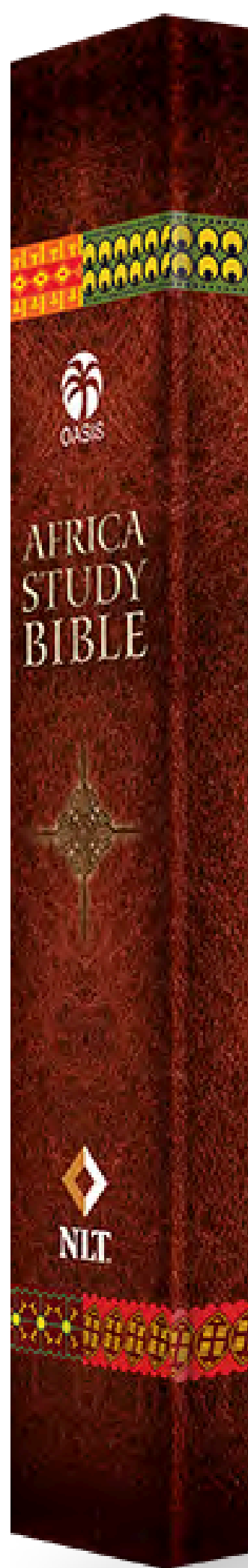
WHY DISCIPLESHIP IN AFRICA IS A #1 ISSUE FOR THE GLOBAL CHURCH

“Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. ...Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress.”

—1 Timothy 4:13,15 (NLT)

Christianity’s future is African. Just take the fact that Nigerian immigrants to the United States now rank among the highest in income for those born outside the United States. Or the fact that one Nigeria-based denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, approaches 3,000 congregations in North America and Europe. The largest churches in London and other European cities are African. No one can ignore the tectonic shift these changes foretell.

Some may think the growth of the church in Africa shows it needs less attention. But for those of African heritage pursuing deep discipleship, it is a growing and prevalent issue for the global church. Here are the reasons.



AFRICANS ARE HAVING KIDS

Africans fulfill God's first command after creation: "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it." All the while many countries today are shrinking rather than growing. Birthrates in China, Japan, and Korea have fallen off precipitously. Birthrates in Europe are well below the replacement level, and North America's birthrate has also fallen. Estimates suggest that by 2100, Asia's population will decline to 4.7 billion people, North and South America hold steady at 1 billion, and Europe will shrink to 600 million. But Africa will grow from 1.5 billion people to 4 billion people.*

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(*[statista.com](https://www.statista.com))

AFRICA IS CHRISTIANITY'S NEW CENTER

In 2020, Africa was the largest Christian continent, with 26% of the world's Christians. In 2060, it looks like that number will increase to 42%. By 2100 out of the top 20 Christian countries, ten will be African. **

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(**[pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org))

IT HAS ONLY BEEN 100 YEARS

In about a century, the church in Africa has grown from 10 million believers to around 700 million. With this mind-blowing acceptance of the gospel leading to the greatest church growth in history, the African Church's number one issue is the training and equipping all first and second-generation Christians. That is just simple mathematics.



FEW TRAINED LEADERS

Many experts estimate that at least 80% of church leaders in Africa have no formal training – but some estimate that number being closer to 90%. The church will not thrive without trained, equipped leaders. New African believers struggle with syncretism, false prosperity teaching, and poorly understood doctrine. The world's largest and fastest-growing church suffers because it lacks access to needed discipleship resources.

EFFORTS TO FOSTER ECONOMIC GROWTH IN AFRICA HAVE PROVED REALLY DIFFICULT

Discouragingly, even African countries with 50, 60, and 80% Christian majorities struggle economically and politically. In 1965, Ghana and South Korea had roughly equivalent population sizes and GDP per capita. Today, the average Ghanaian earns \$2,200 annually, and the average South Korean earns over \$34,000 annually. The majority of African countries rank among the lowest in the Corruption Perception Index, worst in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index, and lowest in GDP per capita. At the same time, Africa has received, by far, the highest aid per capita of any world region over the past decades. We could unpack these statistics for a long time, but can we agree that part of the problem is a disconnect between faith and practice for many professing Christians?



CONCLUSION

In demographics, in youth culture, in influence, and in economics, the future is African. The health of the church in Africa is becoming the leading indicator of the health of the church worldwide. And the church in Africa's future will be decided by discipleship.

I have asked many questions about church needs to African church leaders who represent millions of believers. All of them—Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, Assembly of God, or Apostolic—give me the same answer: “Our pressing need is to teach the Bible in a way that will transform our cultures.”

Will Africa be a Christian continent? It already is, at least below the Sahara Desert! But what kind of Christianity will that be? The churches in Africa have grown deep in faith, unceasing in prayer, and are zealous to share Jesus with others – things so many in the West lack. But prayer, faith, and zeal must combine with truth to transform families, villages, cities, nations, and the world. Will Africans add biblical orthodoxy to their gifts? That question is being answered right now.

We have established some of the reasons why we should all care about deepening the faith of churches in Africa. With urgency, we now will explore what Africa's importance means for Western and global ministry in our next “African Paradigm Shifts” articles.



Want to continue in your discovery of Christianity in Africa? **[Check out our free ministry resources.](#)**

Interested in becoming a partner in the growth that's already happening in Africa? **[Equip a local pastor here.](#)**

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