

# AFRICAN PARADIGM SHIFTS

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

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**Questions and Ideas from 30 Years  
of Work in Africa**

## ARTICLE 2

**AFRICAN CHRISTIANS REQUIRE  
BOOKS AND BIBLES THAT MINISTER  
DIRECTLY TO THEIR CONTEXTS**



“THE CHURCH NEEDS BOOKS  
ACCESSIBLE TO BELIEVERS FROM  
ALL CULTURES.” – Matthew Elliott, PhD

## AFRICAN CHRISTIANS REQUIRE BOOKS AND BIBLES THAT MINISTER DIRECTLY TO THEIR CONTEXTS

Over a decade ago, we helped a ministry translate and distribute their best-selling book into an African language. An African friend told me, "If a well-known American comes with a free seminar and a free book, everyone will come – it is our culture. But they will go back to their village and never know how to apply any of it." Last I heard, many of these books we printed were still in warehouses.

The international director of a preacher's U.S. ministry called to ask my advice about a mega-project for Africa.

He planned to send out tens of thousands of the preacher's books. I was happy to help. But I sensed something and asked, "Do you want to work on discipleship in Africa with us, or do you want to distribute as many of the preacher's books as possible? They are not necessarily mutually exclusive..." He replied, "If I am honest, probably to distribute as many of the preacher's books as possible." Then he became unresponsive.

A mega-church in the United States announced a multi-million dollar goal to plant churches in mega-cities worldwide . A couple of the cities were in Africa. A mission leader from one of the home churches that was doing the planting told me, "This city already has some of the biggest churches in the world. Some congregations here already have over 50,000 members. Why are they doing this?"

Tragically, Westerners often pour resources into projects that make us feel productive while local concern for transformational contextual discipleship receives little of our attention.



I could write full articles on Africa's need for discipleship books, the lack of books in Africa, and the difficulties of preaching without a library. All of us can point to at least one book that changed our lives. The Reformation followed the printing press. That is not a coincidence!

The church in Europe and North America has done amazing work to adapt and grow to meet current national and cultural needs. From the Great Awakening of the 1730s, to the Jesus Movement of the 1960s, to the Seeker-Sensitive Movement of the last decades, the gospel went out in ways that spoke into new Western contexts. Why then, do we think the gospel will not require new ways to speak into African cultures?

The church needs books accessible to believers from all cultures. But it also needs books that apply the Bible to complex and specific cultural situations. The church requires a local focus to mature and transform people and communities for God.

Africa has reached the point of needing more specialized Christian teaching. Over almost 30 years, I have seen this growth happen with my own eyes. The greatest need is for people rooted deeply in the Bible so they can apply its truth powerfully for the needs of their specific place, time, and culture.



Comparatively to the West, Africa produces almost no resources that teach believers how to apply the Bible to African contexts. My father and Oasis's founder, Edward Elliott, worked to birth and lead the Africa Leadership Study. This groundbreaking work found that African Christians read secular books by African authors and Christian books by Western authors, but not Christian books by African authors.\*

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(\*[africaleadershipstudy.org](http://africaleadershipstudy.org))

Why? Because African-written Christian books sit hidden on the lowest back shelves of the continent's bookstores often badly printed and with a mediocre cover. Would you trust a book like that to contain a life-changing message?

That is why the Oasis value proposition is, “We publish authentically African content that is world-class quality, biblically sound, and value priced.”

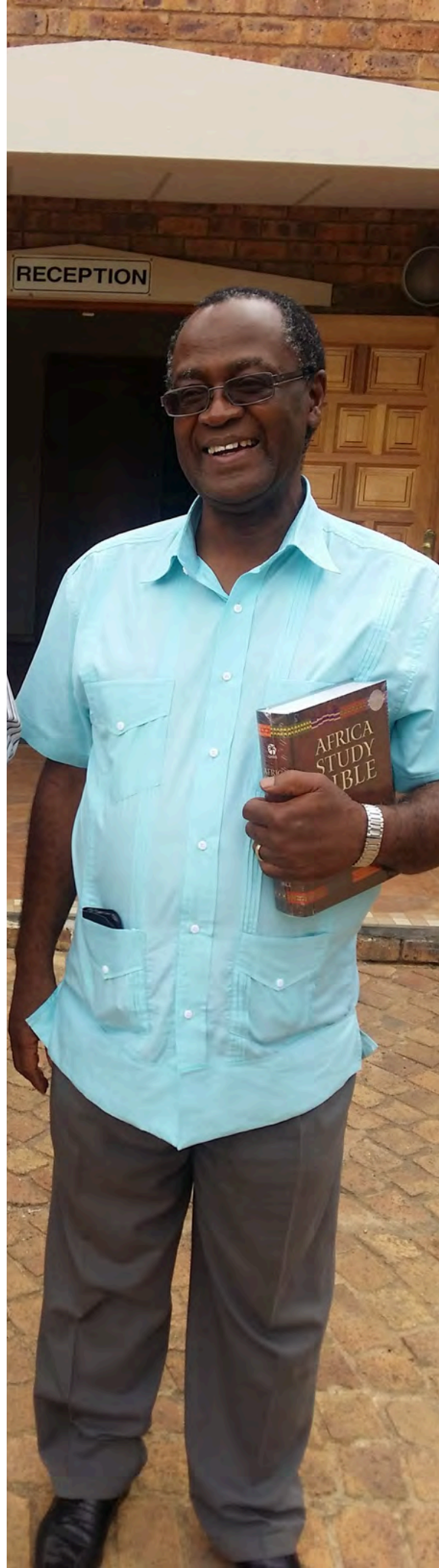
And everyone, from billion-dollar nonprofits like World Vision to 100-student Bible schools in Kampala, Uganda, needs these resources to make their discipleship stronger. We’re excited that World Vision and Compassion International are both using our resources.

## **A CULTURAL COHESION**

When we published the *Africa Study Bible*, we took care to always use the phrase, “African cultures” with an “s,” as Africa holds great cultural diversity. However, many underlying worldview assumptions and realities create cohesion across African cultures. Just like an author from the American Deep South in the USA is understood in Minnesota or California, Africans speak across African cultural divides much more easily than Western experts speak to Africans.

## **REACHING THE UNREACHED IS BEST DONE BY AFRICANS – SO EQUIP THEM!**

Yes, there are many unreached communities in African rural areas and toward North Africa. Africans do a great job of reaching these areas, despite difficult travel, harsh environments, and local hostility toward Christianity. The most important thing we can do is make English and French-speaking African missionaries as effective as possible by providing contextual resources. Africans know the cultures, speak or learn the languages, and can reach the unreached!



## CONCLUSION

I sat in one of the first editorial update meetings with my dear friend Dr. John Jusu and the President of Tyndale House – Mark Taylor. Mark asked a bold and direct question to John. “Why are you the right editor of the *Africa Study Bible*?” Not knowing John well at that point, I kind of flinched and was a bit nervous. “What will John say to the President of one of the largest Christian publishers in the world? Oh my.”

John did not hesitate for even a moment:

“I am Africa.  
I have lived through civil war.  
I am a second-generation Christian.  
My father was a polygamist.  
I have moved from the village to the city.  
I now live with a people that are not my own.  
I am Africa.”

I assure you, he said “I am Africa” twice. John hid under the table as rebels ravaged his village in Sierra Leone during one of the worst civil wars in African history. I could spend a long time telling his incredible story, but it is enough to agree, “he is Africa.” Only such a person could be the editor that the *Africa Study Bible* needed, to understand at a heart level the issues Africans face each and every day, and correctly apply God’s Word to their contexts.

**Oasis has the very best books and Bibles that minister directly to Africa’s needs!**



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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.](#)

This is a free resource courtesy of Oasis International. Oasis is devoted to satisfying Africa’s thirst for God’s Word.