

Leader's/User's guide
for the Video Program

Against Great Odds

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VISION  VIDEO

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Against Great Odds

TO THE LEADER

The video provides a fascinating inside look at the Holy spirit at work in the world and through the church today. Through a well-organized network of small groups, the Ethiopian Meserete Kristos Church not only survived, but thrived under severe persecution.

The lessons to be learned from this miraculous contemporary case study provide challenging discussion topics and may motivate other Christian groups to follow similar methods.

SOME KEY DATES

To set the story in its historical context, here are some important dates for reference that you will want to share with your group.

- Mid 60s — Students at the Nazareth Bible Academy begin a prayer ministry, the Heavenly Sunshine Prayer Group, that revitalizes the church.
- 1974 — Marxist government takes over the country. Young people are forced into communist “re-education” classes, but youth resist and flock into the churches.
- 1980 — Some evangelical churches are closed and their people, including youth, flock to the Mennonite churches.
- 1982 — Marxist government outlaws the Meserete Kristos Church, confiscates all buildings and locks up six leaders without trial. The underground house church movement begins.
- 1982-90 — Despite government opposition, the church grows faster than ever before.
- 1991 — The Marxist government is overthrown; the church re-emerges and discovers its amazing widespread growth.

INTRODUCING THE VIDEO

We find this video is used in many different kinds of settings including small groups, Bible studies, missionary societies, Sunday school classes, etc. So there will be different levels of interest for particular themes that are treated in the programs. But regardless of your particular purpose, you will probably agree that we can learn much from our fellow Christians in Africa.

Before showing the video to your group, you may wish to emphasize that this is a true story and the people in the film are not actors but actual participants in the history that is documented.

In the sections that follow, you will find listed 25 principles for evangelism and church growth. These are taken from contents of the programs. You may want to select some of these and ask your group to look for these specifics while viewing. Or you may prefer to bring them up as discussion points after viewing. Then you will find an additional section that gives more topics for discussion and Bible study. Select the subjects that you consider most useful and related to the needs of your group. We think you will find more than enough content to explore that will make for a lively session and challenging interchange among group members.

25 PRINCIPLES FOR EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential
It renewed the believers.
2. Prayer and fasting precedes church growth.
As seen in the Heavenly Sunshine group.
3. A vision for evangelism is needed.
They wanted to evangelize the whole country.
4. Emotional energy must be invested.
They shed tears.
5. Leadership is essential.
Organized for growth through house churches.
6. Persuasion is necessary.
Encouraged others to join the cause.
7. Must teach and nurture.
Convinced members to go along with changes.
8. Must reorder priorities.
Came to see church as people, not buildings.
9. Boldness for Christ has a place.
Confronted the authorities.
10. Prayer and fasting are effective.
Sustained leaders in prison.

11. Christian music sustains believers.
Gave strength to suffer persecution.
12. Expect miracles.
Cross painted over became even more visible.
13. Be creative and adaptive.
Funerals and weddings used for witness; when sewing machines taken, women began to teach.
14. Courage required to witness publicly.
Woman handed out tracts on street.
15. Capitalize on mobility.
As believers moved, they started new churches.
16. Rethink leadership patterns.
After men were imprisoned, women got active.
17. Celebrate God's breakthroughs.
Persecution ends and the church rejoices.
18. churches grow through challenges.
Persecution fanned the flame of faith.
19. Friendship, fellowship and support attract members.
Good times together.
20. Growing churches meet community needs.
The believers sought education.
21. Reach and involve every member in a meaningful way.
Through cell groups.
22. Anticipate opposition, learn from others, and plan ahead.
Visited Russia.
23. Proclaim the Word.
Preached at funerals/weddings; used tracts, literature.
24. Find a way to multiply cell groups.
Formed new groups through cell divisions.
25. Maximize your strength.
Expatriates prepared leaders; nationals evangelized.

FURTHER TOPICS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Ethiopia has a long Christian history which has flourished amid the influences of other religions and, most recently, against political persecution. Acts 8:26-39 records one of the earliest encounters of the Gospel with Ethiopia.
- The roots of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church date back to the fourth century. You may want to research early Christian influences and compare them to more contemporary Christian mission work in Ethiopia.
- Compare the hardships and struggles of the Ethiopian Meserete Kristos Church with the trials of the early Christian Church in Corinth — II Corinthians 1:8-11.
- In what ways are the “cell” groups similar to the first groups of Christians described in Acts?
- Discuss how worshipping in small group settings helps to strengthen the larger body of the church.
- What elements of the “cell” group worship experience could be applied to your group setting?
- Consider ways your church can nurture and teach individual members.
- How does the Meserete Kristos Church envision the fulfillment of Psalm 68:31?
- Suggest ways in which your group can go beyond its boundaries to witness.