

Sowing the Seeds for an Indigenous Movement

Presented by Mark Tittley

It is a great and humbling privilege to present a paper at the Global Youth Initiative in Denver Colorado in January 2001. We stand at a critical point in the development of an indigenous movement of disciplinmaking in South Africa and indeed in Africa. It is our prayer that we would keep in step with what God is doing on our continent in the coming years.

1. The History of Sonlife in Africa

It has been my privilege during the past three years to experience the Global Youth Initiative from the receiving end. I made contact with Sonlife from Johannesburg about eight years ago while researching the history of youth ministry for a class I was teaching at a seminary. It was clear that Sonlife International had been a major factor in the development of youth ministry - certainly in North America. The reply to my email was a package in which resources were available for purchase. My disappointment reflected a desire for more than resource - it was to have trainers come to South Africa and impact their life and strategy for ministry to youth leaders throughout South Africa - either directly or by equipping nationals to carry the torch after they had left. By Sonlife's own admission, they were not ready to engage in this sort of venture outside of the States. My how things have changed!

Anyway, it would take another four years before out of the blue an email arrived in my inbox from Dave Childers stating that he had come across the Commitment Level Model of Youth Ministry¹ website that I had developed and marvelled at how similar our approaches to ministry were. I was soon to realise that this contact was a belated yet perfectly-timed answer to my earlier request to Sonlife. That initial contact with Dave Childers resulted in a First Wave team coming to South Africa in February 1999. A team of trainers presented the Foundations and Strategy seminars in four cities in our country. They also went on to present training in Zambia. A second team of First Wavers presented training in February 2000, again in four cities in South Africa. At the same time, Dave Childers presented an Advanced 1 seminar for a group of leaders from South Africa and Gabon. Dave Livermore came to South Africa in July 2000 and presented the Advanced 2 seminar with the same groups of leaders. The demand for training around the country and requests from other countries were starting to mount and we began to realise that it would be difficult to meet the need with periodic training with American trainers. Certification was presented at the same time to enable three South Africans and two Gabonese leaders to present training in their respective countries. (Incidentally, *certification* in South Africa refers to people being placed in a mental institute - so maybe the term *accreditation* would be more appropriate!).

One of the key factors in the early success of the training that was taking place, was the notable difference between the Sonlifers we were hosting and visitors from other American organisations that we had been exposed to. The Sonlifer's sensitivity to our context and willingness to learn as well as teach was evident to all those who attended training seminars or came into contact with them. This helped to break down some of the negative feelings that had developed towards Americans. It also became apparent that Sonlife were not here to make money and in fact, due to exchange rates and the comparative economic situation of leaders in Africa, were fully prepared to subsidise training and material. This too helped to present Sonlife in a positive way.

Surprisingly a vital part of the history of Sonlife in Africa involved a trip in November 1999 to Ireland. Due to sponsorship raised by Dave Childers, I was able to attend the Western Europe

¹ <http://www.youth.co.za/model/index.htm>

Forum in Dublin. I initially wondered why I was travelling half way around the world to meet with leaders who had a burden for their continent, but I soon realised that God was taking me away from my own continent so that I, like an astronaut looking back on the world, could have a vision of the continent of Africa. This was the first time that I had stepped off African soil and I realised that while I had on more than one occasion cried for the beloved country (South Africa), I now was developing a passion for the whole continent. God used the trip to Ireland to start a chain of events that would lead me to consider a more intentional and full-time role with Sonlife. How that would take place is something that we still trust the Lord to reveal. Yet, this we do know, that God would have us launch Sonlife Africa from 2001 - an organisation that will ultimately result in the development of indigenous movements of discipling in each country in Africa - all networked for maximum impact and effectiveness. As we work towards the achievement of our Key Result Areas² we are trusting that God is going to work in powerful ways.

As I reflect on the past two years, the following highlights and frustration come to mind:

A. Highlights

In no particular order, the following highlights come to mind: (a) we have had the privilege of meetings quality disciplers and multipliers and receiving from their lives and ministry wisdom and strategy for discipling youth; (b) we had had the privilege of providing training across South Africa and hearing of trainers who went through Johannesburg International Airport to train in other countries in Africa; and (c) we have been on the receiving end of incredibly generous investment into youth ministry in our country (I recall at an Advance 2 seminar a delegate holding up the resource we had been given and wondering how what we had paid for the conference matched what we had received).

B. Challenges

(1) For me personally, the biggest challenge has been trying to co-ordinate training while involved in full-time training of youth pastors or while serving as a youth pastor in a local church - knowing how valuable it would be to share the training with others on our continent, but not being able to do so.

(2) A second challenge has been the tricky task of trying to unbundle Biblical principles from cultural baggage. While there has been no doubt in our mind that the Sonlife material has principles highly valuable for ministry in Africa, the challenge we face is to take material well-designed for a North American context and adapt it for Africa.

(3) A third challenge has involved dealing with a reaction to American "products" being imported into Africa. The challenge for us is to show people that we have been encouraged to contextualise the material and have released indigenous material.

(4) A fourth challenge involves developing a discipling ministry in a continent ravaged by AIDS, poverty, unemployment and conflict. It appears that Sonlife has a strong emphasis on the spiritual as opposed to the social dimension of the gospel - we cannot overlook the need to focus on issues that are current and real for the leaders that we will be developing. Frank Mills who is working in Kenya reflects this concern in an email included as a footnote³.

² Our Key Result Areas are: Developing Material; Contacting Leaders; Facilitating Training; Developing Multipliers.

³ Dear Mark, there is so much work to do here in Africa. I just got back from speaking at the Africa Inland Church National Youth Convention in Tanzania. As I had several sessions with their youth leaders, two issues continually kept surfacing as deep concerns: (1) Unemployment/poverty and (2) HIV/AIDS. We talked a lot about the church's role in helping to not only meet the spiritual needs of their young people, but also their "physical" needs... job skills. We are building a youth ministry training center here in Kenya. We have taken a "wholistic" approach to the center. We will not only offer training in youth ministry, but also offer skills in carpentry, welding, plumbing, etc. I believe that issue must be addressed and taken seriously as we develop ministry in Africa. The poverty is too great to turn a deaf ear to it.

(5) A fifth challenge has been trying to provide training that is affordable in Africa. The poor currency exchange rate and the lower economic situation of youth leaders have made it difficult to use material produced in the States. Where material has been subsidised, this has been wonderful, but this will not be sustainable, nor will it encourage contextualisation and ownership.

(6) A sixth challenge will be to translate material into various languages - in South Africa alone, we have eleven official languages, and the same challenge faces us in each country that we will eventually work in.

(7) A seventh challenge is the physical distance between partners - including Sonlife staff in the States and multipliers in different countries in Africa. While email will help in this regard, it remains a challenge to strategise and work together while separated by great distance.

These challenges are many and complex, but we believe that the God who has brought us this far will take us through any challenges that lie ahead of us.

2. The Future of Sonlife in Africa

Shaka Zulu created the Zulu Nation and began a movement that would impact the continent of Africa. A book was released in South Africa in 2000 and draws principles for leadership from the life of Shaka Zulu.⁴ Shaka Zulu has been acknowledged for creating and consolidating the amaZulu as one of the most powerful nations on the African continent. He was a child born out of wedlock to Princess Nandi of the Elangeni clan in 1787. His father was a Zulu Chief, Senzangakhona. At his birth the Zulu clan numbered no more than two thousand people. Shaka was conscripted to Dingiswayo's army at the age of 23 where he distinguished himself with acts of bravery. When Shaka's father died, Dingiswayo helped Shaka to become a Chief in the Zulu clan. Dingiswayo helped to redirect Shaka's anger and hatred by guiding him to gain a vision for uniting all the African tribes in the southern half of the continent under a single empire. He went on to hand the British army their first and only humiliating defeat. He experienced depression when his mother died and he became incoherent and unpredictable. His half-brothers assassinated him at the age of 42 and as he lay dying he predicted that their actions would literally hand the land over to White conquerors. His predictions became true within a decade. What were some of the secrets of his success, and can they provide guidelines as we create a disciplinmaking movement in Africa?

A. Have a Sense of Mission

Shaka was born into scandal – born out of wedlock and thrown out of the kraal with his young sister he became an object of scorn throughout his childhood. He was often beaten and humiliated – but his mother never gave up on her dream to see her son become the king of the Zulu clan. Shaka grew up knowing that somehow he would become king and was driven with the desire to overcome his situation and regain his rightful place in society. Shaka would spend hours alone, gazing into the distance with glazed eyes, thinking – which earned him the nickname: “the Zulu with Eyes Stuck in the Heavens”. Shaka knew deep down that unless he fulfilled his mission, his life would have

Secondly, the HIV/AIDS issue can no longer go undiscussed. For too long the issue of sex was not discussed in Kenya. There must be clear teaching on it and a STRONG emphasis placed on changing one's life style that a relationship with Christ can bring about. As I told these Tanzanian leaders, the two are so interrelated and the answer (without being too simplistic) is Christ. Only He can give joy, peace, and contentment in such poverty and only He can give the power to change the moral fabric of these young people. He is their ONLY hope. He too is the answer to the corruption problem that is rampant on our continent, as He changes lives and produces men and women of character and integrity. Frank.

⁴ *The Leadership Lessons from Emperor Shaka Zulu the Great* by Phinda Mzwakhe Madi published by Knowledge Resources in 2000.

been wasted. When Cetshwayo's army defeated the British army at Sandlwana fifty years after Shaka's death, it was Shaka's army – he had built a permanent monument.

If we are to see a discipling movement develop in Africa we must believe it is what God wants to do; we must believe that God wants to use us in creating the movement and we must live each day with our mission in mind. Nothing else must occupy our minds – just like Jesus who knew why he had come⁵, and despite the risks involved and the personal cost that he would have to pay, "Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem"⁶.

B. Be Apprenticed to Others

Dingiswayo sharpened Shaka into a great leader. He was the son of a Chief who was so ambitious to lead that he plotted to accelerate his father's death. When his father heard of his plotting he drove him into exile and Dingiswayo travelled to the Cape where he met up with the swallows (the White settlers were called Settlers because like swallows they were thought to have landed from the sky), befriended them and studied their ways. He mastered their language, learned to ride a horse and use their guns. He liked what he heard about their king, King George IV, but he was concerned that he was setting his sights on the black tribes to conquer them. He believed that the only way they would protect themselves was to be as powerful as they were – and this meant that the black tribes had to be united under one king who would be powerful enough to negotiate coexistence with King George. When his father died he returned from exile and took over as the new chief and immediately stated to extend his kingdom and incorporate other tribes into his own. He became known as a might conqueror – but one who hated bloodshed. When word spread that all people were welcome in his kingdom, Shaka and his mother found refuge in his growing empire. Shaka was conscripted into Dingiswayo's experimental Bushmen regiment. It was here that Shaka distinguished himself with acts of bravery and dedication and caught the eye of Dingiswayo. When Dingiswayo discovered that Shaka was the son of a Zulu chief, he took him under his wing. Shaka was eager to learn all he could from the great Dingiswayo. Under Dingiswayo's tutoring Shaka learnt to channel his anger-driven ambition to greater goals than personal revenge. Dingiswayo made Shaka realise that the most important thing to accomplish, for the growth and development of their people, was to unite them all under one Great Chief who would be strong enough to withstand any invasion. Dingiswayo taught Shaka all about the swallows that he encountered in the Cape and warned him that in time they would find their way to Natal. He warned Shaka that they would come with "sticks that belch fire and kill a man". This was all new for Shaka – all his life he had wanted to restore pride by delivering revenge on those who had driven him and his mother out of Zululand. But now there was something bigger than his narrow ambitions – the delivery of the black tribes from impending slavery. Dingiswayo warned Shaka, "You don't want the children of Zulu to become slaves, swallows herd some of our people to great logs of wood floating deep into the sea, never to be seen again. We must stop that, we must stop that!" While Shaka took on this deeper mission, he also began to have new ambitions, and to challenge some of Dingiswayo's views. He believed that some of Dingiswayo's methods would not be realistic enough – in the end, his vision began to exceed that of Dingiswayo.

We have been incredibly fortunate to be impacted by Sonlife multipliers from the States. Dave Childers and Dave Livermore and members of various First Wave teams have communicated to us a much bigger vision for ministry that we could have discovered on our own. While we may have developed a heart for discipling in South Africa, it was their example and inspiration that helped us look beyond our borders and gain a vision for the whole of the African continent. Being personally invited to attend the Western Europe Sonlife forum gave me a picture of what a continent impacted with discipling ministry could look like. As we have submitted to their leadership we have done so because we have realised that they have vast experience in

⁵ Luke 19:10 - "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

⁶ Luke 9:51 - "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."

disciplemaking in various contexts. We know that as we apprentice ourselves to them⁷ we have gained incredible insights and will continue to be impacted by them. Their impact will continue even as we begin, like Shaka did, to move beyond their limitations and start to contextualise the principles to our situation in Africa (“without chaos, mediocrity or anarchy”, to use the words from the title of another paper being presented at GYI this year). We trust that history will reflect that we spent as much time as possible listening to our mentors, asking questions, gathering knowledge and learning from their experience.

C. Innovate for Effectiveness

The Zulu’s were a conservative people who observed their customs and traditions closely and were reluctant to go against the teachings of the clans founders. But Shaka challenged virtually every convention that was held sacred. He once appointed a woman to be charge of one of his regiments composed of men. Shaka felt that some of Dingiswayo’s methods were too lenient and soft. He believed that many and incessant battles with neighbouring tribes were a waste of precious time and resources. Shaka believed that to achieve their dream they needed to fight few but decisive battles. This would send a message to other tribes that they should not mess with them. When Dingiswayo appointed Shaka as leader of the Bushmen regiment, the first order Shaka gave the regiment was to take off their sandals and never wear them again. He believed speed was critical in defeating the enemy and that sandals slowed them down. He then sprinkled thorns on the group and proceeded to dance barefoot on thorns. The soldiers joined in. Shaka also challenged the wisdom of warriors throwing spears at each other – so he had each soldier carry a single spear – a short spear that was used in close combat. Such a spear had never been seen in the land before. He even used a special kind of wood for the shaft that was not found in the area. He also created a shield that was as tall as a soldier to be used with the short spear. He also came up with a new strategy where groups of soldiers were used to surprise and circle the enemy. Shaka would never be stopped by customs from doing something he thought would help him accomplish Dingiswayo’s Grand Vision. He was not afraid to change old traditions if it served his purpose.

As we seek to create an indigenous movement in Africa, we must move ahead under the oversight of our mentors, but we will inevitable need to fresh and unique ways in which we will strategise to impact our continent. While we can learn much from how things have been done in other contexts, we must remain dependent on God through prayer and discernment and not be afraid to discard methods that do not achieve the best results in our context. We will need to respect principles and test traditions for functionality, yet not change for the sake of changing – all changes should contribute to the effective pursuit of goals.

D. Lead from the Front

Shaka led his people from the front. When he asked his warriors to discard their sandals and stomp on the thorns, he was the first one to do that. In the first battle that the small Zulu clan engaged in, against Zwide who had just captured and killed Shaka’s mentor, Dingiswayo, Shaka led and ordered his troops from the group while Zwide watched the battle from a vantage point at Qokli Hill. Because of this, Shaka was able to defeat an army with far superior numbers. During times of peace, Shaka would wake up before dawn and take the warriors out to train. He ran with them as they were being drilled. No one could say, “Shaka is enjoying his beer and women while were are out here sweating for him.” He was out there sweating with them, eating the same food they were eating and personally teaching them his methods. In this way, he gained their respect and love.

We mustn’t be afraid to stick our necks out. Those who have the privilege of leading the thrust throughout Africa will need to, under God, dictate and set the direction for people to follow. We must not be afraid to face problems and confront people personally. The degree to which we are committed and are dedicated to make sacrifices will impact on the impact we will make in Africa.

⁷ Like Joshua under Moses; Paul under Gamaliel and Timothy under Paul.

We can't only teach with words but must practise what we preach. This means that we must be personally involved in disciplinmaking as well as stay personally involved in training leaders for ministry. Jesus practised what he preached - he personally balanced his life with winning the lost; building the believers and equipping the workers - so when he challenged his disciples to a life of disciplinmaking they had no doubt what he was referring to.

E. Build a Dedicated Team

Shaka knew that if you want to be a great leader, you cannot do it alone. You have to surround yourself with people who believe in your dream. While Shaka was earning the admiration of Dingiswayo, he began to build a core of loyal friends, men like Mgobozi, Mdlaka and Nzobo. In these men, he found a great team that was willing to die with him in battle. Each time Shaka returned from a battle, Dingiswayo would shower him with accolades and give him a dozen heads of cattle – but Shaka would first distribute these to his men – only taking one cow from each dozen for himself. When Shaka took over as leader of the Zulu clan he started a new tradition where warriors sat around a fire after sunset discussing battle. He asked each warrior to recount momentous situations in battle and to give themselves praises for what they had done. Other warriors added their praises – all done in singing and dancing. This was Shaka's way of making the team feel good about themselves; ensuring that they believed that they were part of a great moment in history and even more ready to die in battle.

Jesus spent most of his time on earth developing a team who would accomplish the mission of making disciples of all nations. He never intended to do it all himself. We cannot make this vision for multiplication in Africa come true on our own. We must be surrounded by people who believe in the dream. We will need to make sure that our team knows where they are going; we must make them feel good about themselves; know them personally and get involved in their lives. We will build a dedicated team as we value their worth, appreciate their effort and affirm their input. We will need to engage in regular team-building exercises; challenge them rather than control them; reward their performance, effort and enthusiasm – acting as praise-singers to their achievements.

F. Work According to a Strategy

Successes on the battlefield alone do not make a legend that people will talk about for all ages. Even though Shaka distinguished himself on the battlefield, he built a great nation from a small tribe. You don't build a nation with luck or with skill with a spear. You build it out of your vision, out of your ability to see the whole forest and not just the trees in front of you. Shaka knew that the only way to build the Zulu nation was to end the little skirmishes and to unite the different little clans under one strong rule. Shaka protected and fed all the clans that came to pledge allegiance to him. Even the Whites went to Shaka for protection and hospitality. By the time the White man came to them, the Zulus were ready for them. Shaka did this by always being on the look out for new tools. He appointed people to start making their own guns – which they copied from the White men. He also was powerful enough to enter into a partnership with the White men in which they learnt each other's ways. Shaka had a plan that he was working towards – every battle he fought was for a bigger purpose. He knew what the bigger plan was. When he faced obstacles, he knew why he needed to overcome them – because of his plan.

We must have a strategy that we are working towards. We will falter if we lose sight of the big picture. Everything that we engage in must contribute to the bigger plan. The identification of Key Result Areas⁸ for Sonlife Africa has provided us with the strategy that we need to pursue. This will ensure that we conserve our energy for things that matter and do not get caught up in a business trap where the urgent crowds out the important. Jesus' instructions to his disciples to make disciples

⁸ The KRA's are: Developing Material; Contacting Leaders; Facilitating Training and Developing Multipliers.

of all nations involved specific instructions on a strategy to be used⁹. We must remember that if we have no long-term strategy, our short-term solutions can do more harm than good.

G. Be Strong and Courageous

Shaka was tormented by bullies during his exile. He realised that the only way to fight his lowly and humiliating status was to win extra-ordinary victories. He knew that claiming lineage to the Zulu throne would not get him anywhere. He realised that his only salvation lay in being noticed and liked by Dingiswayo the Great. The first obstacle on his way to greatness was fear. He had to conquer fear. Soon after he arrived back from exile he heard there was a madman who lived in a cave and terrorised villages. The madman had a huge axe, and a neck the size of two bulls. He had defeated many warriors who had tried to attack him. No one had been able to get him out of his cave. Shaka saw this as an opportunity to defeat the giant and make a name for himself. He travelled to the village and plotted how to defeat the madman. With a plan developed, Shaka approached the cave at daybreak and started to insult the giant. The giant became so angry that he charged at Shaka – but because Shaka was not wearing sandals he was able to outrun the giant. When the giant ran out of breath, Shaka took his opportunity and plunged his spear into the giant’s heart. When news of the death of the madman spread Shaka became a national hero.

Our continent has many challenges that wait for us. We will need courage if we are to confront people of other religions, face poverty and disease, and minister in areas ravaged by war. Joshua had every reason to be afraid when he began to lead the people of God into the Promised Land. He knew full well of the giants and other challenges that awaited him – and yet he was willing to trust God for victory¹⁰. As we teach our followers to be courageous and to take risks, we must live by the motto: “nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

H. Know the Terrain

Shaka would win a battle because he understood the battlefield better than the enemy. He was the first leader in the land to use spies. In this way, he knew almost everything about his enemies: how people felt about their leader; the leader’s strengths and weaknesses; the exact number of warriors in each of the enemy’s regiments; and their battle plans. When he discovered that they were seriously outnumbered, he would retreat his regiment and plan his strategy. Before the battle of Qokli Hill where he defeated Zwide, Shaka and his troupe camped at various sites around the uMfolozi river. He studied the shape of the land; listened to reports on Zwide’s preparations; and asked hard questions of his generals about various battle options depending on the response of the enemy. Not only did they defeat Zwide’s army on the hill, but also were able to deal with troops who tried to escape, as they had placed warriors along escape routes. He placed his swimmers on the river to deal with enemy warriors who tried to escape through the river.

We must do everything we can to understand the context in which we are ministering. We must ensure that we stay in touch with ministry in Africa. This means reading books and magazines written in Africa. It will involve consulting with other leaders to gain deeper insights. Just like an effective business venture, we will need to do “market” research, conduct surveys, and get feedback from our “customers” and “clients”. We will set up a network in which leaders in various countries can stay in touch and seek to facilitate a forum in which leaders can get together for encouragement and vision casting.

I. Stay Humble

The downfall of Shaka is a story that must be told. Many leaders after doing great work for their people turn against the very same people. After Shaka had built a great nation, he seemed to be

⁹ Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world."

¹⁰ See Numbers 14:6-9

bent on destroying it. In just twelve years, Shaka had built a nation. Unfortunately, success went to his head. He began to speak about how he was greater than the whole nation; to refer to himself as the re-incarnation of the great father, Zulu. When his mother died, Shaka was devastated – he wept like a child for days and no one could comfort him. As he wept the nation descended into anarchy. He started to act strangely. He had some of his enemies killed for ridiculous excuses. He started to refer to the people as his dogs to be killed at his pleasure. He believed that his mother was so valuable that she needed to be accompanied to her resting place by thousands. When he began to regain his composure, he was interested in ruling by fear. He insisted that he be referred to as a demi-god, not a mortal who could do wrong. He pushed his warriors into battle after battle and suddenly mutiny became a reality. Everyone likes their praises to be sung; but Shaka did not remember that praise-singers are paid to sing praises. He should have remembered the wise proverb: “You must listen to your praise-singers with one ear, and keep the other ear close to the herd-boys.”

Like the Son of God kneeling down to wash the feet of his disciples¹¹, we must never think that we have arrived – but remain humble before God in view of what he is doing through us. We must resolve from the outset to keep a modest perspective on our achievements – and stay motivated to strive for greater performance. When accolades come, we pray that we won't think that we are superhuman. We must remember that those closest to us may not be bold enough to tell us when our leadership is faltering. Like all great leaders, we must know when to step aside and make way for another leader to take over the reins. We will endeavour to see ourselves as instruments of a greater mission and not use the mission as instruments for our personal glory.

¹¹ John 13