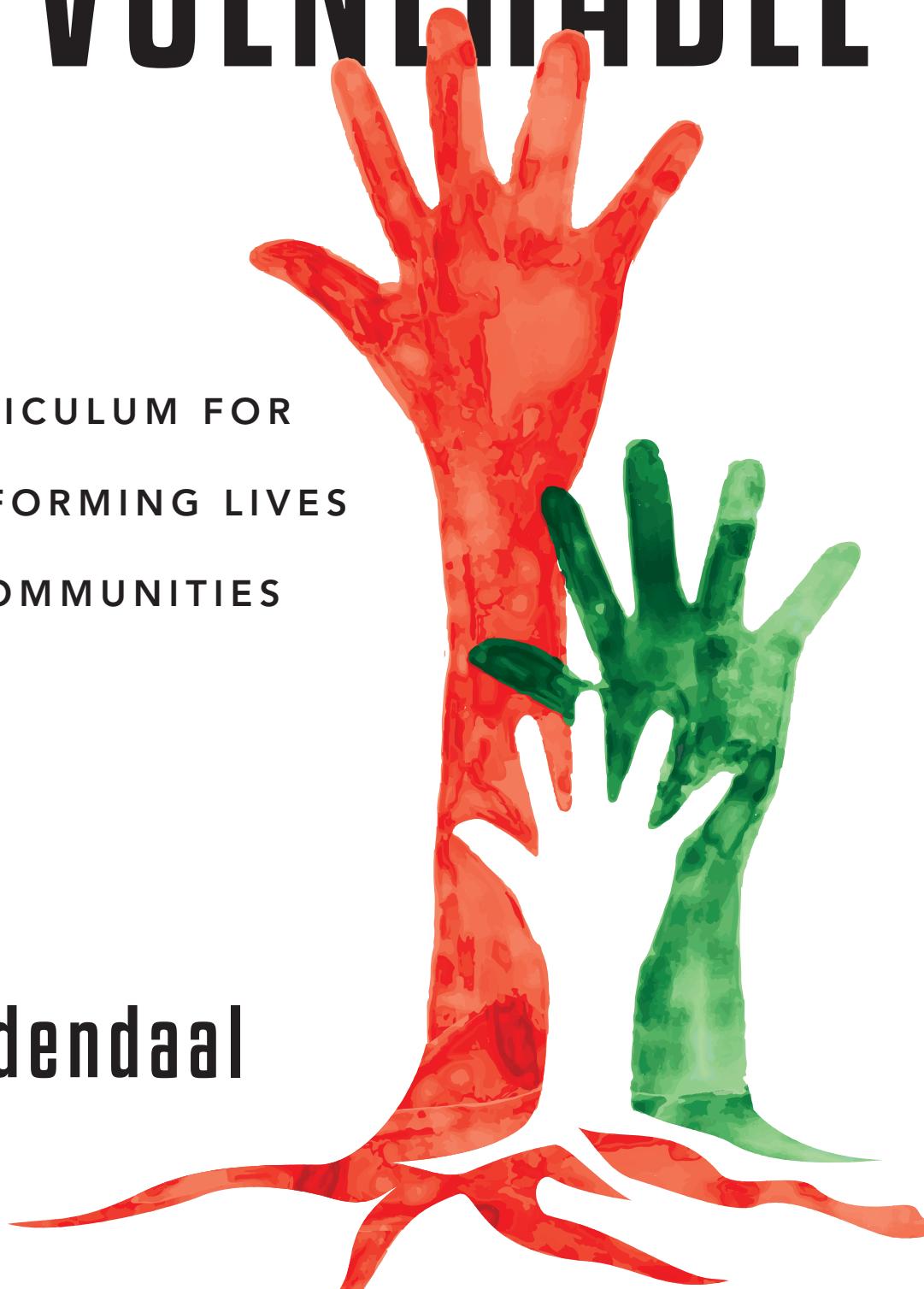


STANDING WITH THE VULNERABLE

A CURRICULUM FOR
TRANSFORMING LIVES
AND COMMUNITIES

10 SESSIONS

Gil Odendaal



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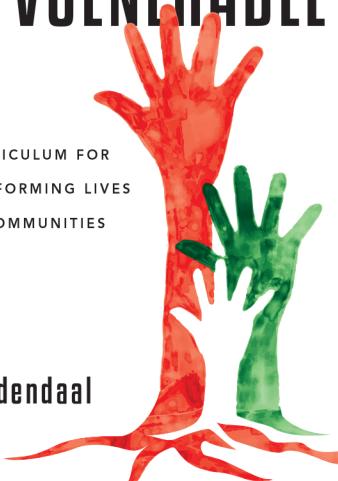
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INTRODUCTION

World Relief is a Christian organization whose mission is to empower the local church to serve the most vulnerable. In community with the local church, World Relief sees orphans, widows, refugees, and families devastated by natural disaster transformed physically, spiritually, and economically.

At World Relief, we believe that obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:37-38) demands that ministry is seamlessly integrated with the spiritual, physical, emotional, and social well-being of those Christ commands us to minister to. This is the call of integral mission for the church: to follow Jesus in all aspects of life by expressing the gospel in who we are, what we say, and all we do. Thus integral mission praxis can only take place when our “being” as Christ-followers forms the foundation for our “saying” and “doing.”

This study will expose you to the “Tree Curriculum” that has been used in Africa and Asia, resulting in vibrant local congregations impacting their communities in word and deed. The stories of Sarah and John and the other characters are composites of situations that World Relief confronts and experiences in the regions where we work. Those planning to go to communities in the Global South for missional purposes will gain a deeper understanding of the human needs there, but the change theory used throughout this study is equally applicable to any of the four continents—including North America—where this material was originally developed. Our hope is that you not only gain insight to the curriculum used in transformational ministry, but that through these sessions you are also transformed.

How to Use These Sessions

Here are some helpful hints as you work your way through *Standing with the Vulnerable*.

Pray. Before you begin reading each session, start with prayer. Ask God to help you as you encounter new concepts and contemplate taking action.

Keep a Bible nearby. Many of the Scripture passages are included, but you'll want to look up others.

Take your time. These lessons are challenging. Read through the entire lesson and answer every question, but don't rush!

Write it down. In addition to writing down your responses to questions, you can underline statements you agree with and write down your questions in the margins. The more you interact with these sessions, the more you'll learn.

Be prepared to meet with your group. Complete the session ahead of time so you are prepared to share what you are learning with your group. Chances are if you're finding some element challenging, you're not alone.

Our hope is that *Standing with the Vulnerable* will challenge you and spur you on to be an agent of transformation in your community.

UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT

✓ Objectives

- Define development.
- Explore development of the whole person and apply it to everyday life.
- Examine God's call to love him and our neighbor.

Developing the Whole Person

Development describes the process of how people and communities grow and change over time. But how does this growth happen?

Think about our many needs.

1. What does a person need to simply stay alive—to *survive*?

2. What is required for a person to have the best possible life—to *flourish*?

We want people to flourish, and in order for that to happen we need to help them meet all of their needs. We can group these needs into different areas.

- **Physical** needs are the needs of our **bodies**. This includes things such as food, proper medicine, shelter, clean water, and safety. Our bodies need all of these things to be physically well.
- **Mental** needs are the needs of our **minds**. This includes our ability to think, learn, and solve problems. Mental needs include education in school. They also include

learning outside of school—learning from our experiences and people in our lives.

- **Emotional needs** are the needs of our **hearts**. Here we talk about the feeling part of us, what the Bible calls the “heart.” We all need to know love, hope, and joy in our lives. When we are sad or angry, we need to be able to deal with these feelings in a helpful way. Emotional needs also include feeling good about who we are as individuals—having a positive view of ourselves.
- **Social needs** are the needs to have **relationships** with other people. We need to give and receive love and kindness. We need others to support us and care for us, and we help others by caring for them, too. This includes relationships with our families, friends, neighbors, and the community.
- We also have the need to **make good choices**. Unlike animals, people have the ability to think carefully before they act, to make choices, to plan ahead, and to determine how they will live their lives in the future. This includes making a choice and taking action to carry out the decision.

Development describes the process of how people and communities grow and change over time.

All people—men and women, infants and the elderly—have within them these areas of need. Take a look at your hand. Your five fingers can help you remember these five areas of development. But notice that your fingers aren’t independent—they are connected to your palm. So as you look at your palm, think of your *spiritual life*. Just as your palm is connected to your fingers, every area of development is touched and controlled by your spiritual life. In other words, *every area of your life is spiritual*.

The apostle Paul talked about spiritual growth and development in his letter to the church in Corinth:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. (1 Corinthians 3:6-8)

Spiritual development includes knowing and loving God and having a relationship with him. This can only happen by believing that he sent his son Jesus to die for your sins and asking him to forgive you and make you his child. But as you think about growth and development, remember that it is *only God* who makes things grow.

Once you have Jesus in your life, you can talk to him through prayer, worship him, and learn about him from reading the Bible and from others who also follow him. World Relief works to empower churches because the church is God's primary means to promote the spiritual growth of a person.

We all need many different things in order to grow into the people God intends us to be. But the spiritual part of us is like a light switch: when the switch is on it lights up the whole room. As you grow spiritually it has a positive influence on the other areas of your growth.

As you think of growth, imagine a small seed.

3. What does that seed need to grow?

4. What kinds of changes occur?

5. What does the seed become over time?

Aside from rain and sun, it takes *time* for a seed to become a tree and to produce fruits. Growth is a process.

We also want to see our families and our communities grow.

Spiritual development includes knowing and loving God and having a relationship with him.

6. What hopes do you have for your family?

7. What changes do you hope will occur?

We have many dreams for the future. It is good to have dreams—they give us hope. By working together, we can help one another overcome difficulties and reach those dreams. We can help one another flourish.

Our *seeds* are our hopes for what will happen in the future. We want those seeds to grow and become real in our lives and in our communities.

Growing as a Whole Person

It is possible to be physically healed and yet still be plagued by emotional hurts when we are governed by false beliefs.

MR. MAFU

Mr. Mafu had a very nice bicycle. As he rode to work one day the bicycle hit a rock, causing Mr. Mafu to fall off and break his leg. His neighbor, a good friend, took him home and called the traditional healer. The healer said the neighbor brought this evil on Mr. Mafu. The healer also advised Mr. Mafu to go to the hospital. At the hospital the doctor put Mr. Mafu's leg into a plaster cast. Mr. Mafu kept saying, "It shows you cannot trust your best friend!" and thought of bad things he could do to his neighbor to pay back the evil his neighbor had done.

When Mr. Mafu returned to the hospital to have the plaster cast removed, he met a pastor there. He told the pastor his story, and the pastor said he should love his neighbor and even if that neighbor did curse him, Mr. Mafu should bless him instead. When the plaster came off, Mr. Mafu was very glad his leg was healed, but he decided to still do something bad to hurt his neighbor.

1. Was Mr. Mafu healed? Why or why not?

2. Why was Mr. Mafu's healing incomplete?

3. What can we learn from Mr. Mafu?

In our story, Mr. Mafu was not healthy even after his leg was healed. He was still angry and resentful, and he treated his neighbor badly. He will not be truly healed until he deals with these problems.

Growing well in all areas of our lives makes us more complete as people. And whole, complete people can contribute to healthy communities. In healthy communities everyone grows individually and together.

Growing and developing as children of God is not just about physical growth. It is about growing as a *whole* person. God created us with the need to develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially and the need to learn how to make good choices.

God's desire is that every human being attains well-being in all those areas. Each of these areas of our development connects to one another.

If one part improves, there will also be a positive benefit to another part.

4. If a child is well-fed, what other areas of that child's life are affected?

5. If a woman has a close relationship with God, what other areas of her life are affected?

6. If a child suffers physically and is hungry, what other areas of that child's life will suffer?

7. If a man suffers physically with HIV, what other areas of his life will suffer?

The Greatest Commandment

One day, an expert in the law asked Jesus a question:

“Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” [Jesus] replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” (Luke 10:25-28)

1. What areas of development are addressed here?

2. What do these verses tell you about how we should love God?

3. What do these verses tell you about how God sees our development?

4. The expert in the law asked what was the single most important commandment. Why do you think Jesus answered with the *two* most important commandments?

These two commands—to love God and love others—are the main things he wants from us. In other words, we cannot separate loving God from loving our neighbors.

The Bible puts it this way:

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. (1 John 4:20)

Look at your hand again and think back to those five areas of your life. Just as all areas of your life can work together to serve God, all of those same areas can work together to help others. But if you use only one area—one finger—to help someone, you will not accomplish as much as when you use your whole self.

**We cannot
separate loving
God from loving
our neighbors.**

The Needs and Strengths of a Family

God's intention for us is to grow. In John 10:10, Jesus tells us, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." A "full" or *abundant* life has its needs met in all areas and continues to improve in each area.

Our lives might not always seem abundant. Sometimes it is easier to see our problems than our strengths. But if we take a close look at our lives, all of us can find strengths. It is important to name our strengths so we can build on them.

As you read the following story about Sarah and John, think about this family's needs and their strengths in all the areas of development—their physical, mental, emotional, and social needs and their need for healthy choices.

1. Discuss this family's situation and their *needs* in the areas of development:

- physical
- emotional
- mental
- good choices
- social
- spiritual

SARAH AND HER FAMILY

Sarah, a woman living in a rural village, is married to John. Sarah and John have five children and own their house. The house is small and often filled with children's laughter. Sarah works hard each day in their small plot of land, growing crops to feed her family. She sells the surplus at the market. With the profit she pays for her children's school fees but she can only afford to send the two boys to school.

Sarah came from a family of many children who were often hungry. After she finished third grade she had to stay home to help in the garden and care for the younger children, so Sarah did not learn to read or write. She believes that she is not smart enough to make good decisions so she often seeks advice from others.

Some years ago John was accused of cursing someone from a neighboring village. The men from that family beat him badly, and now he has a bad limp. Sadly, there is still anger between their families. John works as a day laborer, but because he has a weak leg he is always the last one chosen for a job.

In general, Sarah and John get along well with their neighbors, but Sarah thinks that the neighbors may look down on them because they are poor. Sarah is happy that John is a faithful husband who works hard. They always talk about their problems together.

Sarah and John do not attend any church regularly, but whenever Sarah does attend she feels happy and less worried.

Today, Sarah is working in her garden. The sun is very hot, and the ground is hard. She squints to look at clouds on the horizon. *Will it rain?* she wonders. She is very worried that her family will be hungry if the crop does not do well.

2. Now discuss this family's *strengths* in each of those same areas:

- physical
- emotional
- mental
- good choices
- social
- spiritual

God is not only interested in your spiritual growth but also deeply interested in your physical, emotional, and social well-being. He loves you and desires to bless you in all these areas. He has given us all strengths, but we also have needs that hinder us from experiencing the fullness of life he wants us to have. Our development in every area of our lives will enable us to experience more of what God has in store for us.

❖ Review

- What is development?
- What different areas of our lives need to grow and develop for us to be whole and complete?
- What does God ask us to do with each of these areas of our lives?

◊ Reflect

Look back at your hand and consider your own life. Name one strength you have in each area of development:

- physical
- emotional
- mental
- good choices
- social
- spiritual

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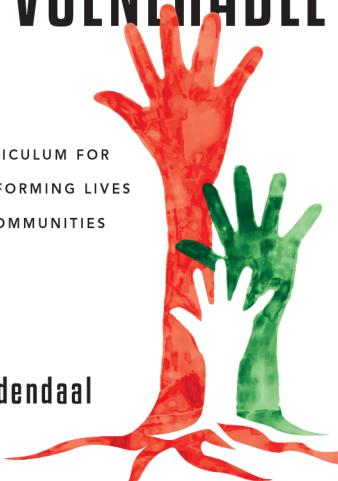
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