

Stranger than Fiction



True tales of encounters with God in Africa

Some of what you're about to read in 'Tales Out Of Africa' may make you ask, "Is this for real? Could such things happen?" Yes. They're for real. They happened.

Every tale is a true event, faithfully recorded. That's important because we wrote this with you in mind. The intention? To stimulate your expectation, deep inside, that you can encounter God in the same way in your daily life. As far as possible, we've told these tales in a way that anyone can understand, no matter what their background.

We sifted through a vast collection and chose the tales that show a wide range of miraculous encounters with God. There were many more. Some of these experiences we share go far into our past. Most started when we began our personal relationship with God – extraordinary things started happening, frequently. So many and so special that from the mid-1980s we began recording them on 'Special Events' cards and finally into a private 'Special Events' folder. We're glad we kept those meticulous records, because, over the decades, so many things happened, and now, you're able to read about some of the choicest of them. But this book is about more than our adventures.

'Tales out of Africa' is about ordinary people having extraordinary encounters with God. Each story is about a specific person in a moment of time touched by God. We focused on individual stories and not mass miracles to emphasise a personal, loving God uniquely and lovingly involved and present in every life. Many are from our own lives, and many are from the lives of other reliable people who recounted their experiences to us, or we witnessed them.

We also added some historical accounts to show that such things happen regardless of when in time. As with any history of events, there are happy events as well as brutal events. We tell the tales just as they happened, so this is a warning for those who may find a few of the many stories distressing. The tales that contain distressing subject matter are indicated at the start of the tale.

Africa's alive with spiritual expectation, and so, stuff happens. Do such things happen elsewhere? Yes! As proof, we've shared a few of our many experiences in other parts of the world. Miracles happen around the world every day.

Wherever you are, whenever you are, expect the same for your life. We've embedded clues for you on how to experience God in the same way, all through the book. No matter how much you're experiencing God right now, there's always more! Come, share our adventure.

Knives and Fires



Khayelitsha – a promise of peace

(Some content in this tale may upset sensitive readers)

South Africa was experiencing the labour pains of transition. Tensions were high. There were many violent trouble spots. Opposing factions fought. Accounts of people brutally beaten, burnt to death, hacked to pieces in the townships were regularly in the news.

In 1990, the township of Khayelitsha, south-east of Cape Town, had the unenviable reputation of being the most dangerous place in the whole of South Africa.

That same year, Dr Billy Graham, the global evangelist, was organising a Pan-African television broadcast covering the whole continent - Sunday, September 9 1990. It had never been done before. Now, through interconnected satellite technology, it was possible to reach the people of Africa with a message of hope in a single telecast.

In conjunction with this outreach, Billy Graham Ministries was setting up events for people to attend, all over Africa. Each rally would have a dedicated speaker to invite the people into a personal relationship with God. And there were workers to help the people attending.

Billy Graham's South African organisation invited us to give the live message after the televised message. It came through a dear man of God in Cape Town, who'd promoted the nationwide fast of repentance that we'd organised. The National Day of Repentance had taken place just a few weeks previously on Sunday, June 3 1990.

Out of the blue, he phones us with a request related to the broadcast, "Would you be willing to fly down to be the live speakers, on the ground, at a rally in Khayelitsha?"

We were delighted – this was one of the townships we'd been praying and fasting for. We said, "Yes!"

With great excitement and intensity, we started to prepare for this unique outreach. We prayed, fasted, sought the Spirit for the right message, designed invite pamphlets and arranged for 20,000 copies to be distributed to homes throughout Khayelitsha.

Prayers were contributed by many from all over the nation for our safety and for the spiritual empowerment of the people to receive the message and the touch of the Spirit.

A week before the rally in Khayelitsha, fierce inter-tribal and inter-faction conflict was everywhere in the township. And the unrest kept escalating. Houses were being burnt, people were being clubbed, thrashed and hacked with pangas (long-bladed African machetes). People were dying.

And there were reports of necklacing deaths - a cruel and gruesome mob execution in South Africa. It started during the time of unrest and shocked Africa. It was inflicted on hoodlums, Tsotsi's (young, black gangsters), informers, political opponents, and to intimidate.

The victim was surrounded by a crowd, mercilessly beaten and stoned until they were almost senseless, but could still feel pain. Then, a rubber tyre filled with petrol was put around their arms and chest, and they were further doused in petrol and set alight. They were so badly beaten that they couldn't get away. Most of these unfortunates would just sit where they were placed and burn. The crowd surrounding them would shout insults until the person was fully alight, then they'd stand watching until they were incinerated and sure to be dead.

With all this upheaval, sometimes the violence spilt over into other areas. Some township pastors had been beaten, and at least one had been stopped, dragged out of his car, and necklaced for spreading a 'white man's religion'.

As the time grew nearer to the rally, we received numerous calls from anxious people trying to dissuade us from going. Then, just days before the event, the violence had become so severe that the authorities closed off the whole township. Entry was restricted. Roadblocks were set. And political factions controlled traffic in and out.

The organisers phoned, "It's too dangerous to go in. You'll be killed - the event is cancelled."

But we knew it had to take place. We insisted that God wanted this. We spent a long time on the phone trying to convince them to still put the event on. We said that we'd be responsible for our own lives. Finally, we'd persuaded them to go ahead. Having relented, they warned us that we could go in, but at our own risk. Neither they, nor the authorities, nor Billy Graham's organisation could accept responsibility for what would happen to us.

We asked everyone in our prayer support around South Africa to pray for our safety and the move of the Spirit. Most of them were people we'd taught on prayer through our seminars – dedicated prayers.

With all this relentless tumult, it was hard to know if we were doing the right thing and to maintain our resolve, without wavering, and yet, deep down, we knew that we knew that we knew that this was from God.

The night of the event arrived. With the prayers of friends and supporters we boarded the plane. After a long delay, the plane took off. We were now heading for the Cape and whatever lay before us.

We both felt perturbed. It was quite possible that we might not be returning. We'd seen some of these things happening before, we were going into a situation that was potentially deadly. If it weren't for the urgency in our hearts to obey, our courage would have failed.

During the flight, my partner was quietly absorbed in his talk. In his words:

"On the flight to Cape Town, I prayerfully read through the message I'd prepared that God had given me. I then began turning randomly through my bible. As I sat, I read. I was in Psalms. My open bible had one psalm on one page and another on the other page. All of a sudden, God made a verse from each come alive to me."

"The one verse, Psalm 55:23, was a warning to those who sought violence; their lives would be cut short unless they changed their ways:

But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction. Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in You."

The other verse, Psalm 56:9, dealt with those wanting peace calling on God, who would protect them:

When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back.
This I know because God is for me."

"This was for tonight. Although I had prayerfully prepared a message, I knew absolutely that God wanted me to use these two texts in a declaration to the gathered people before the prepared message. A very hard message to give in a place filled with anger."

My partner will continue sharing our experiences on this eventful night in her words:

"In Cape Town, where we landed, this hot, humid, African night seemed a million miles away from the violence. We were met at the airport by the dear man who'd invited us to speak. He led us to a car, and without delay, we began to travel to Khayelitsha."

"It was a black, velvet night, the clear dark dome was the perfect backdrop for the chandelier of stars, a sky filled with huge, sparkling stars. Crickets sang their wild chorus to the night. "The humid heat, lessened by night, caressed, enfolded and gave the feeling of snugness. The smell of woodsmoke filled the air as hundreds of fires were being lit to prepare the evening meal. The smell and sounds of rural Africa."

"As we continued moving further and further away from the city and the lights, we noticed the sickening, dull red on the horizon. Our car reached the outskirts of the township. A genial but tense official met us. We talked briefly about the situation beyond and were then permitted through the barriers."

“Driving deeper and deeper into the township, an odour of smoke got stronger and stronger, and the conversation in the car stopped. We all looked ahead at the dull, burning red that we were heading towards, not knowing what awaited us there.”

“We turned into a rutted lane, and the headlights shone briefly on the remains of a smouldering house as the smell and the fear and the anger in the air fought to choke us. “Still, we drove on in a pall of dread as the smoke in the air turned sickly sweet: the burning of flesh. As we turned a corner on the road, a deep rut jostled us against the side of the car door. In the gloom, our eyes could make out the drawn-up, charred figure lying beside a burning house. Our stomachs heaved at the overpowering smell of burnt, human flesh.”

“You could feel the fear and anger in the air everywhere. Now, in the darkness, fear crept into every cell in my body. The deeper we went in, the more tangible was the tension. Panic seized me. I started praying softly, and slowly, God’s peace came upon me. We travelled without incident, although we passed raiding bands along the way.”

“Finally, we reached a well-lit part of the township, and, with relief, we were welcomed by the bright lights of the auditorium flooding the night. People were milling about, but it seemed the crowd had purpose.”

“Several of the township’s pastors were there to meet us. Here, at the door of the hall, smiling faces and warm embraces awaited us, and the love of God enveloped us as we took our place at the door to greet everyone as they arrived.”

“Our arrival caused a stir. We felt the strong love of the pastors and believers, but also a hatred from some of those around them who stood glaring at us.”

“We were ushered into the well-lit hall and to the front. The pastors expected us to sit on the platform, facing the audience, elevated above them. We declined to take seats on the platform, choosing instead to sit in one of the front rows of the auditorium. We weren’t there to be elevated, and we like praising along with the people. This proved to be a blessing this particular night, and we could see that it met with approval. The rhythm of an African meeting took on momentum, and I reflected on just how God had moved to get us here.”

“Coming out of deep thought, I noticed several groups of men in long overcoats coming in quietly and taking places spread out around the auditorium. It struck me as strange as it was the middle of a hot spell, but I thought no more of it except for the warning tug at my heart.”

My partner is going to be speaking, and so, in his words:

“When the broadcast was ready to commence, the huge screen failed to work, and so, the packed hall watched the Pan Africa broadcast - on a small television set!”

“Now, Billy Graham was a powerful and eloquent speaker, but tonight I was concerned. He was speaking in philosophical, abstract terms, using language unfamiliar to the people and he used very little imagery in his message. I looked about to see the reaction. The expressions of anticipation in the faces of the assembly turned to expressions of confusion. He’d lost them. And I was going to follow the address by Dr Graham.”

“I felt an urgency to regain their attention. After the broadcast, the crowd was restless. I rose and rapidly climbed onto the platform and started my message with the fiercest interpreter you could imagine.”

“I told the gathered people that before I started, God had a message for them. I quoted the two texts, then spoke authoritatively:”

“God has told me to tell you that anyone who seeks peace and safety can call on God, and he will protect you. But those who seek violence will die violently – your lives will be cut short.”

Let me return the narration to my partner. She'd seen things that I was totally unaware of.

“I had no idea that my partner was going to give a word from God - people who wanted to live peacefully, call on me and I will protect you, but you who seek violence will die violently – your lives will be cut short.”

“As he made this declaration, this instruction, my stress level was shooting up. I was praying with great fervency for protection.”

“Unknown to him, earlier, I had seen a group of men wearing long overcoats on this hot night. I was wondering about this when, at that moment, one of those men sat down, right next to me. As he did so, his coat moved open, and I saw the glint of a panga blade. I instantly understood - these men had come in to cause a massacre in the auditorium. I started praying more urgently in tongues.”

“As my partner started, unaware of the deadly intent of the men with the pangas, I held my breath. I said to God, 'I'm going to see you very soon if you don't intervene.' As I prayed, and as my partner gave God's assurance for safety followed by God's warning, suddenly, inexplicably, all the men in overcoats who were stationed around the auditorium rose up and just left.”

“He continued his message. After each phrase, the interpreter fiercely echoed his words. He then invited the people into a relationship with God. There were about 500 people present in the packed auditorium, and 80 to 100 answered the call.”

“There's a tension at Christian meetings and rallies that is unique to Africa. A noisy expectation that is tangible. Some of these people would have walked for many miles to be here tonight, and others, unable to walk due to some sickness will come in wheelbarrows, or piggyback or crawl. Faith would be tangible for those who were carried or crawled there. They'd come for a touch from God in a desperate situation, and they believed they would get it. God honours this.”

“Many people in Africa have a deep faith. The miracles in Africa are a result of that deep expectancy joined to the prayers, efforts and tears of those who laboured and interceded in the past, joined to the prayers of today.”

“My partner then spoke about a God who heals. A line of pastors, the organiser and my partner and I stood in front, praying for those lined up. To us, it was a blur of faces, laying hands and praying for each one individually.”

“At one time, the crowd parted to allow a young woman through. She was wearing a colourful headscarf. Her forehead, face and all her skin that we could see were covered in leprosy. We laid hands on her head and prayed, and continued praying for others. We heard afterwards that she’d been instantly healed. As a result, our line doubled for prayer, and many other miracles happened that night.”

After this meeting, Khayelitsha wasn’t heard of in the news for months. We knew, without doubt, that God had chosen to give a message that saved lives in this place of atrocious violence. Khayelitsha had become, in this time of transition, the most peaceful of all the townships.

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Tales out of Africa: Ordinary People having Extraordinary Encounters with God

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