

August 2021 — Grieving our losses together

By Nyakuma Peter

with Kristi Rice – Mission co-worker serving in South Sudan

On the second day of our healing and reconciliation workshop, we have a session called the “thief workshop” based on John 10:10, *“The thief comes only to kill, steal, and destroy, but I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full.”*

Participants identify the collective pain they experienced as ethnic groups in the midst of civil war in South Sudan over the past few decades. Each people group identifies what they have lost as a group, either physical things such as land or lives, social assets such as trust in each other or the freedom to live without fear of being attacked, or even spiritual things like our faith in a sovereign God.

As each group shared their list of losses in one recent workshop, it was evident that they felt the weight of each one and “owned” them — each group was convinced that no other group had experienced the same losses that they did. I thought back to when I had fled as a teenager with my family after our village was attacked. We fled hundreds of miles from our home in South Sudan and finally found refuge in a camp for displaced people in Uganda. I was surprised to find people from many different ethnic groups and regions of South Sudan in the camp, and all of them had fled because of violence. I thought my people were the only ones who had been targeted and suffered in the violence until I found that all of us had similar stories.

In the workshop, we compare the list of losses from each group, and participants realize that all of the groups experienced displacement, loss of lives and a loss of trust in each other. In the midst of shared pain, we experience our shared humanity and our shared need of grace at the foot of the cross. Identifying and acknowledging those losses and wounds opens us to healing that God can do in us.



forgiveness workshop. (Photo provided by Kristi Rice)

Nyakuma Peter participates in a

Near the end of the workshop, one Nuer woman shared, “I thought God only loves Dinka people and abandoned the Nuer, but in the thief workshop I learn we all had similar losses. I am healed and will not hate Dinka people again.” A woman from the Shilluk ethnic group said, “I never thought I would drink water with Nuer people, because of the crimes they committed in Malakal during 2013. But I have realized that hate will never bear good fruits for us as South Sudanese people; we need love instead. I am healed of my hate and now want to be a friend to my Nuer people.”

How are you listening to stories that are different from your own? How are you crossing boundaries to sit with the pain of someone with a different experience, and challenging your own prejudice or assumptions? When we find opportunities to hear the pain of others, we join together on the journey to experience the life and healing that Jesus wants to give.