

## Compassion Comes Full Circle

*Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--  
Guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit that lives in us.*

*2 Timothy 1:14*



Mary Nzola has faithfully led a community support group of HIV positive women in the Mukuru slum of Nairobi, Kenya for over four years. I want to share a bit of her story as it so poignantly illustrates God's power to change lives.

Over twenty years ago Mary and her husband moved to Nairobi with the dream of finding work and providing an education for their children. Within six years of moving her husband had died from AIDS and the family found themselves living in a tin shack in the Mukuru slum. The "dream" had not materialized as they faced bigotry being a family from one of Kenya's minority tribes. Instead of schooling, the children learned survival on the streets. To add to the unfulfilled dreams, Mary learned that she was HIV positive, which, in Kenya, led to additional ostracizing and abandonment.

Eventually Mary connected with the SOM slum ministry and in 2006 she made a profession of faith and began to find comfort in the love of Jesus. She was excited to share this love with other HIV positive women and soon the women were fellowshiping over bead making and Bible study. One such Bible study lead to a meaningful discussion of 2 Timothy 1:14—the women took to heart how important it was to protect one's knowledge of the Word of God in the midst of the world's trials and tribulations. These worldly troubles often got in the way of personal spiritual growth; as a growing leader, the ladies took encouragement from Mary and her strength. This was basically the report Mary had shared with me over a year ago, but we didn't realize then how the Lord would call forth these truths.

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Just a few weeks ago I received some heartbreaking news from an SOM staff member. Mary's son had been walking in the crowded streets of the slum and as he stepped around someone, he accidentally moved into the path of an approaching motorcycle. The cyclist swerved to avoid him and fell to the ground, but neither was injured. With danger seemingly past, Mary's son helped the driver to his feet, but then things quickly changed. The crowd that had gathered to see what was going on realized that Mary's son was from a minority tribe. The driver and many others in the crowd were from a different, much larger tribe, and without warning they formed a mob, took gas from the motorcycle, and burned her son to death.

During her time in the slum Mary had endured much, but this was too much. As friends came to comfort Mary they discovered she was plotting revenge against a man who had helped to murder her son. She knew that in the slum the police would not search for the criminals and that justice would not be offered to someone from her tribe. Mary wanted the man to pay for his actions and if the police would not help she would kill the man who took the life of her son. This is when the Bible teaching that Mary had shared with her friends moved from simple words to action. The community group of HIV positive women surrounded Mary with love, reminded her of the lesson from 2 Timothy 1:14, and told her that instead of revenge she must offer forgiveness. This was not easy, but after days of sharing and hours of praying Mary, accompanied by some of her friends, went on a journey.



*Mary gives Rodney a bracelet as her son, stooping behind Rodney, looks on with his hand lovingly placed on Rodney's arm.*



The journey was to a part of the slum where "their kind" is never welcome. Eventually they found the man they sought, surrounded him with the love of Jesus and Mary compassionately forgave the man who took her only son's life. Together, Mary and her friends had "guarded" the Gospel message of love and forgiveness.

Mary continues to be a key community leader in the outreach efforts in the slums of Mukuru. Her faith and love have inspired hope in others, and through brutal, real-life situations, she and her friends are demonstrating the power of discipleship and the beauty and grace of faith in action. Please be in prayer for Mary as she heals and for this man who has been touched by a forgiveness that he does not yet comprehend.





*Blessings, Rodney*

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