



Standing with the Vulnerable: A Curriculum for Transforming Lives and Communities

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The world has needs. Children are orphaned, refugees are displaced, and families are devastated by natural disasters. But God is greater than those needs, and he works through his people to accomplish healing and transformation.

This curriculum from World Relief is designed to mobilize the church to engage the great causes of our day, stand with the vulnerable, and meet the needs of our neighbors as Jesus did. These ten sessions show how shaping our fundamental beliefs and values lead to better actions and results.

World Relief Curriculum Mobilizes the Church to Engage Today's Great Causes

Why is it so important for us to dig into and study the topic of the vulnerable?

Gil Odendaal: I wrote this curriculum with the input and help of colleagues and participants on three continents. We wrote it to serve as an instrument that will mobilize the church to rise up like never before to engage the great causes of our day, standing with and for the vulnerable and meeting the needs of our neighbors as Jesus did through a seamless integration of word and deed. The ineffectiveness of many development-related interventions—because of a lack of or a poor undergirding biblical change theory and a neglect of the importance and necessity of changed beliefs for sustainable and lasting change—motivated me to write this curriculum.

What is at the heart of *Standing with the Vulnerable*?

Odendaal: The core of the curriculum is the change theory that emphasizes the interconnectedness of beliefs, values, behaviors, and outcomes/results. Rarely, if ever, will behaviors, which can impact outcomes, change if beliefs do not change first.

How did your own experience inspire this curriculum?

Odendaal: I always had one foot in the academy to test my assumptions and, during this time, I completed another terminal degree. In research under the guidance of Paul Hiebert and Muriel Elmer (at TEDS), I examined how stakeholders in one church in a South African community with a high HIV/AIDS incidence rate perceived the educational efforts of their church to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic and their theological perspectives related to the disease with attention to cultural assumptions. This confirmed my assumption that there is a strong correlation between the beliefs, values, and behaviors of an individual and the accompanying outcomes. I was able to refine my thinking while I served as the global director for the HIV/Initiative with Saddleback Church and as we launched the “Western Rwanda HIV/AIDS Initiative,” the center piece of Kay and Rick Warren’s The PEACE Plan in Rwanda. The original curriculum became a reality when I joined World Relief, who has also been on this journey.

What are the two to five main things you want readers to take away from your book?

Odendaal:

- A good understanding of what poverty and development are
- The interconnectedness of their beliefs, values, and behaviors and a way to evaluate and change their beliefs and thus their behaviors
- That the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel are seamlessly integrated

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and the church has been called to serve the most vulnerable

- God is deeply interested not only in our spiritual well-being, but also in our physical, social, emotional, and mental well-being



Author of *Standing with the Vulnerable*

Gil Odendaal (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; DMin, Westminster Theological Seminary) is a missionary, pastor, educator, leader, and public speaker who serves as vice president of Integral Mission at World Relief. He previously served as the global director for PEACE Implementation with Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, as well as global director for the HIV/AIDS Initiative under Kay Warren.

Odendaal has dedicated more than thirty years to empowering the church around the world to seamlessly integrate word and deed ministries that transform communities, especially through health related initiatives. He has served as regional coordinator for Africa, Russia, and Eastern Europe with Medical Ambassadors International and he is currently serving on the Lausanne Movement Integral Mission Leadership team and on the boards of Accord (Association of Christian Relief and Development Organizations) as well as Micah Network, which represents 584 member organizations currently registered in eighty-four countries committed to Integral Mission. He and his wife Elmarie were born and raised in South Africa and have three adult children and five grandchildren.

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“‘Standing with the vulnerable’ is arguably the best description one could make about Gil. His passion and love for the Lord shine through in so many ways, and his desire to seek and to serve are obviously evident in all he does.”

—**Charles D. Sands, PhD**
provost and vice president for
academic affairs, California
Baptist University, Riverside,
CA

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