

RUNNING THE RACE --- BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

**The Odyssey of Sojourner Enocent Silwamba
Prison Fellowship Zambia
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Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)

For the first five years of his life, Enocent Silwamba lived in humble surroundings in the territory of Isoka, Zambia. With few comforts and limited education and professional opportunities, his parents had to reconcile between raising their family in a simple, rural environment, or relocate them to the more developed city of Kitwe. Enocent would miss the purity of the things he had grown to love in Isoka --- exploring nature with his friends and racing across Isoka's rugged terrain; however, he would soon learn that his race was only beginning.

Life in Kitwe would be different; more populated and industrialized with opportunities for the good and bad things of life. Enocent was raised in a Christian family with strong values and throughout his young teen years he thought he too was a Christian; however, by the time he approached his late teens, his behavior was not an example of a God-fearing young man. He began experimenting in alcohol, drugs and careless sexual behavior. Because of the strict parenting at home, he attended church every Sunday, but his immoral behavior the rest of the week was done in secrecy.

At the age of 21, Enocent was invited to attend a Scripture Union meeting where he heard the Gospel preached in a special way. He then understood clearly that he was a sinner and Jesus would forgive his sins and he was worthy of having a personal relationship with the Savior. An invitation was given to those who would like to make a public profession of faith, but Enocent was too ashamed to go forward. Upon returning home, he struggled with the conviction until the early morning when he fell to his knees and cried to God to forgive him, a sinner. A huge burden was instantly removed, leaving Enocent with a joy he had never felt before. He could not wait to begin the race of serving God in his new life.

Before Enocent entered college, his father spent three months in prison. His father was a good man, unduly incarcerated by the hands of scheming authorities. In just three months, Enocent saw his father reduced to nothing. His first trip to the prison to visit his father was also his final one. He was unable to accept the living conditions of little food and see his father wearing prison issued clothes that were more like pieces of thread hanging from his body. Enocent vowed never to enter a prison again, but God had other plans.

Enocent was studying theology at the Theological College of Central Africa in Ndola, Zambia when he was asked to speak at an evangelistic meeting at a prison. It was then that Enocent began to change his thinking about prisons and prisoners. While in college he became friends with a fellow student who was an ex-offender, Lawrence Temfwe, who later became the Executive Director for Prison Fellowship Zambia. Enocent and Lawrence remained friends and stayed in contact after graduation. A few years after graduation, while serving as a pastor for a church in Mufulira, Enocent received a notice from PF Zambia of a position opening. He had already been sensing that God was directing him to embark on a new journey and the confirmation came when he was hired as Prison Fellowship Zambia's national chaplain in 1990. Today he serves as their executive director.

Through Prison Fellowship International, Enocent was invited to participate as a sojourner in the Odyssey passages in Singapore. The first passage left such an impression on him that he could not wait to attend the second. Something new was discovered from each homework assignment and he felt refreshed by each lesson. He says his walk with the Lord has changed quite significantly since the Odyssey experience. His relationship with Christ is more intimate and he is more aware of His presence than ever before. Enocent found all four quadrants (spiritual, personal, relational, organizational) covered in the Odyssey important as they all impacted his life and it would be difficult to isolate one from the other.

Enocent states he has gained more confidence; therefore, his work culture has changed drastically. He realizes now that ministry is about people and he is allowing Jesus Christ to minister to people through him. He is convinced that his staff represents men and women that God has especially chosen and given him to serve with. Although they are gifted differently, there is an appreciation of their differences and he is blessed that they have been called together to serve prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families in unique ways.

There has also been improvement in the area of mentoring. Feelings of superiority have been removed and he is open to learning from those he mentors. Enocent is passionate about mentoring and developing leaders and would like to see that area of the ministry grow. His desire is to see PF Zambia expand to a level where it would be able to have more evangelism and discipleship programmes in all 53 prisons.

For the last five years, PF Zambia has had a Family Support Programme. The plan supports over four hundred prisoners' children with education through paying their school fees, buying them uniforms and other school requirements, as well as providing them with food supplements on a monthly basis. This is the programme that Enocent is the most proud of as it helps to break the cycle of crime through these children who are beginning a race of their own, fighting the odds of becoming potential criminals due to the evil vices in their communities. Enocent looks in the faces of these children and imagines their future secured with some of them becoming responsible leaders and impacting others in significant ways.

Enocent often thought of his Christian life as a race; but the Odyssey sojourner has also learned that it is a journey. He realizes the race he had been running often left him with much guilt, exhaustion, and unreasonable expectations of himself and others. Now he is viewing his days on earth as a life-long journey that is defined more on how he walks it than how fast he runs it. No more competitors, only friends and colleagues walking together toward the same destination. While Enocent learned a lot from running the race, thanks to the Odyssey, he is now enjoying the journey.