

Coming in and Experiencing Townships for the First Time.

We don't claim to know the right way to come into South Africa or into any country that is new to us. We are certain it is different for everyone. But having struggled with our own "coming in" and having accompanied many Americans experiencing both townships and rural areas for the first time, we offer this advice:

- Listen more than you speak.
- Ask more than you tell.
- Behave like a guest in your boss's home.
- Resist the temptation to fix things; you might not have the tools to do so, and the thing might not be broken in the first place.
- Cast off your lens and look at the world through different eyes.
- Don't look for simple answers for complex problems.
- Don't implement complex solutions for simple problems.
- Live with your experiences.
- If moved to act, ask what is needed. Don't assume you know.
- Be willing to make a leap of faith.
- Be flexible

It all boils down to what the Black Panther told Charlayne Hunter-Gault in the 1960s: "You've got to come in right." From Never Give Up - Vignettes from Sub-Saharan Africa in the age of Aids by Kevin Winge.

Another Great Example to Follow:

"When people approach one another with their hands full of gifts for each other, they cannot even shake hands or embrace in greeting, much less exchange their gifts, so long as their hands are full. First they must set these gifts aside in order to greet each other with empty hands. "

"There can be no sharing of what we have without a sharing of who we are."

From: Empty Hands; Ecumenical Sharing of Resources, 1980, WCC

We, as missionaries here in South Africa, embrace this approach from the World Council of Churches. You may have in mind to bring lots of gifts to Africa, physically, mentally and emotionally, but you must come here empty handed in order to truly meet and greet your brothers and sisters in Christ. You must coming willing to share yourself!