

# FARM ATTACKS

## A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO AN INCREASING INJUSTICE



At least four attacks were reported on Western Cape farms in the past month. In the latest incident earlier this week, a 47-year-old father of two, Joubert Conradie, was shot and killed on a Klapmuts farm near Stellenbosch, Western Cape. Police say Conradie was investigating a noise in his house when he was attacked and shot by gunmen. (*Eyewitness News*)

This incident again highlighted the deep concern over the alleged decline in safety on farms and multiple organisations voiced their dismay following the release of the annual crime statistics in which figures for farm

attacks and murders were omitted. In a video released three days after the attack, farm manager Chris Loubser made an emotional appeal to South Africans - echoed by AfriForum and AgriSA - to observe "Black Monday" in commemoration of people murdered in farm attacks. In response to the appeal, and voicing a concern that not enough attention is being paid to farm murders, a nationwide protest against the killing of farmers and farm labourers were initiated in cities across South Africa.

After the initial plea from Chris Loubser numerous other videos also appeared on social media, mostly with legitimate concerns and calls for government intervention. Sadly, as time passed, and emotions increased, anguish turned to anger and calls for "more than prayer" were made, even producing guns next to Bibles and appealing to God to lead his people to respond.

This article is not an attempt to become another voice in the over-crowded platform of social media. Neither is this article an attempt to explain the legitimacy of the concerns of farmers nor the valid response of those who point to the existence of crimes and murders in other communities as well. These are all well debated and significantly documented. Every farmer that is attacked should be mourned-this is not the discussion. Every woman that is raped, every child that dies of hunger, every person shot in gang-related wars and every injustice, anywhere in the world, should be mourned and should be acknowledged. This is not the discussion.

The point of this article is simply to examine Scripture and determine *a* (not *the only*, but *a*) Biblical response to a very emotional issue. Following Christ's example, together with His uncompromising teachings, will not always be the popular response, or even the easy response. And even though it might be a choice to respond according to the flesh, driven by anger and emotion, for a follower of Christ, it is not an option.

But, for the sake of context, it is important to first look at the numbers in context.

### THE NUMBERS:

It is important to note that it is practically impossible to determine the exact number of farm murders in South Africa. The police's head of corporate communication and liaison, major-general Sally de Beer told *Africa Check* that a breakdown of the status of the victims – whether they are farmers, workers, family members or visitors – was not available, as it is not analysed by the police. Part of the reason is that the South African Police Service has no crime category called "farm attack" or "farm murder", De Beer said.

According to the Transvaal Agricultural Union's Chris van Zyl, the union's database indicates a total of **65 murders** on farms and 347 attacks to date in 2017 (*one every 4,6 days*). Figures provided to *HuffPost SA* by AfriForum Research Institute (ANI), Lorraine Claasen, are about the same, with **67 murders** and 349 attacks on farms, which

Claasen said were "conservative estimates". Independent crime analyst Chris de Kock told *HuffPost SA* that, their figures indicate 71 farm murders in 2016, which implies this year's figures - with two months remaining of the year - are likely to top 2016's.

In the same timeframe as these farm murders, Crime Stats South Africa<sup>1</sup> indicated that there was a total of **18,917 murders (52 per day); 49,445 sexual assaults (135 per day); and 39,633 rapes (109 per day)** reported. These number only reflect reported cases with many countless victims going unnoticed and unreported.

What does the Lord require of His followers in a time such as this?

## 1. AN UNPREJUDICED PURSUIT OF JUSTICE, NOT FAVOURITISM

Righteousness and justice are the foundations of the throne of grace. These are the words in Psalm 89:14<sup>2</sup> as well as Psalm 97:2.<sup>3</sup> When God looks down from Heaven and sees another farmer killed, another woman raped or another child dying of hunger, He sees injustice, regardless of colour, occupation or gender. There is a deep and clear call in Scripture that this core value is non-negotiable in the life of a follower of Christ. Our concern should be 'complete justice' and not 'partial justice'.

The danger exists that we promote a partial justice that looks after the interests of 'our own' only and that we do not respond to injustice in general and as a Biblical principle. There should be an equally compassionate response for those who suffer injustice, regardless of which community they belong to. When 20 people are killed in France the outcry by western leaders and western Christians often overshadows the cries for the 400 that are killed in Aleppo, Baghdad or Mogadishu. The call for justice is commendable, but the call for justice must be universal.

It is indeed a heresy to promote an emotional justice without including a Biblical justice for all who are marginalised and vulnerable. As a Church we have one supreme example: Jesus Christ – who encouraged the rich young man<sup>4</sup> to love his neighbour as himself. Not the neighbour that looks, speaks, thinks and talks like himself, but like the Samaritan, even those who could be regarded as a cultural enemy; the outsider, the one who is different but still suffers injustice. Let's pursue justice, without favouritism.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. AN UNBIASSED PURSUIT OF TRUTH, NOT SENSATION

One of the most critical questions we as Christians need to ask ourselves, especially when we are emotionally confronted with incidents of violence that reaches to the core of our hearts, is why we feel so deeply convicted that we have a right to respond in a certain way and yet find it difficult to look at our own convictions from another perspective? It suddenly becomes impossible to step into someone else's shoes and look from another point of view. And this is not questioning our belief-system according to what Scripture teaches us, but how our world-views and ingrained cultural values often blind and limit us from being able to build and expand a greater capacity to understand different perspectives.



The questions we need to ask ourselves in this regard, says decision-making expert **Julia Galef** at a recent **TED** forum<sup>6</sup> is whether we are **SOLDIERS** or **SCOUTS**? In this regard we can think of the **SOLDIER** and **SCOUT** roles as mindsets — metaphors for how we all process information and ideas in our daily lives, either with an "attack, defend" attitude or a "search and understand" attitude. What mature Christianity needs in a time of emotional insecurity is what Galef calls a

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crimestatssa.com/national.php>

<sup>2</sup> *Psalms 89:14 "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you."*

<sup>3</sup> *Psalms 97:2 "Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne."*

<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:27 "He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

<sup>5</sup> Acts 10:34 "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism'"

Acts 10:35 "but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right."

<sup>6</sup> <https://ideas.ted.com/why-you-think-youre-right-even-when-youre-wrong/amp/>

**“SCOUT MINDSET,”** the drive not to make one idea win or another lose, but to see what’s there as honestly and accurately as we can, even if it’s not pretty, convenient or pleasant. Galef has spent the last few years examining a **SCOUT MINDSET** and figuring out why some people, at least sometimes, seem able to cut through their own prejudices, biases and motivations and attempt to see the facts and the evidence as objectively as they can. The answer, she found, is emotional. **SCOUT MINDSET** means seeing what’s there as accurately as you can, even if it’s not pleasant.

(Read tomorrow’s article on “Soldier or Scout” that elaborates more on this point)

### 3. AN UNCONDITIONAL PURSUIT OF FORGIVENESS, *NOT REVENGE*

This is the difficult one. There is a sense that justice will only be served once the perpetrators are dealt with legally, and if not legally, privately. When someone hurts you, you can hold on to anger, resentment and thoughts of revenge — or you can embrace forgiveness and move forward.

Yolanda Korkie, wife of Pierre Korkie who was abducted by al-Qaeda in Yemen and killed in December 2014, spoke at press a conference after the killing: *“Today we choose to forgive. We choose to love. We choose to rejoice in the memories of Pierre and keep him alive in our hearts. We honour Pierre’s legacy and give glory to God for his life and death.”* She closed with the following statement: **“Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and then hoping the other person dies.”**

Forgiveness is the ‘key’ that ensures goodness on the journey of faith. Forgiveness might be seen as something that will benefit others who least deserve your goodness, but the reality is that the biggest beneficiary of forgiveness is the giver, not the receiver. If we don’t practise forgiveness, we might pay most dearly, not only as individuals but also as a nation. By embracing forgiveness, as difficult as it might be, we embark on a journey of reconciliation, peace, hope, gratitude and joy.

Remember:

**Anguish + Anger = Revenge**

**Anguish + Forgiveness = Reconciliation**

For a true disciple of Christ, forgiveness is not an option. Not letting go makes us the victim and not the victor. The injustice against us will slow us down on our journey and will always remain a part of our life, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on us and help us to move forward. Forgiveness doesn’t mean that we deny the hurt or the fact that we were harmed. It doesn’t minimise or justify the wrong. We can forgive the person without excusing the act. Dwelling on hurts will hinder our movement, and when resentment, vengeance and hostility take root, we might stop completely. If we allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, we might find ourselves swallowed up by our own bitterness or sense of injustice. Forgiveness is the commitment to a process of change: it doesn’t happen overnight, and it doesn’t come naturally. It is an intentional act starting with a decision to be like Christ.

*Matthew 6:9, 12, 14-15* **“This, then, is how you should pray ... And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors ... For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**”**

We should not even attempt prayer if there is not the willingness to forgive. There can be no revival without restoration, no restoration without reconciliation and no reconciliation without forgiveness

The leading pastor of Kasr El-Dobara Church in Cairo shared how the two bomb attacks earlier this year opened an opportunity for Christians to express forgiveness in a way that left the media, the authorities and Muslim leaders speechless. One interview after another of family members of those who were killed expressed forgiveness. **“BUT,”** one of the team members added, **“First the Lord had to teach us two lessons. The first thing the Lord did: He gave us a heart of compassion for our enemy. He melted our hearts. Secondly, He taught us how to serve our enemies, how to love them.”**

When **South Africans** pray for an end to farm murders, corruption, crime and violence, it needs to be accompanied by the opportunity to forgive.

## 4. AN UNPARALLELED PURSUIT FOR TRANSFORMATION, *NOT TRANSACTION*

This is probably one of the most critical components within the Christian faith. If we react like the world we have nothing to offer. If we respond like Christ, we become beacons of hope and agents of change. We cannot be like the world and hope to witness for Christ. It is better to lose our freedom and keep our witness, than it is to keep our freedom and lose our witness.

Here is a challenging thought by Richard Rohr:

For most of us the introduction to Christ was a 'transactional' one. The scripture in 1 Timothy 2:3-6 was received with great joy as we were reminded that God wants all people to be saved and that this happens through one mediator, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

We entered faith with a deep love for a Saviour who "paid the price" for our sins and became the sacrificial Lamb on our behalf. But, if we stay **transactional** Christians for the rest of our lives we will never become **transformed**, changed and mature disciples. Do we continue to only love Christ because he performed a transaction on the cross that paid the price for my sin and saved me from eternal hell, or do we follow Jesus to be transformed into the image of Christ?

This becomes a major obstacle in expanding our spiritual capacity. When we face murders, discrimination and injustice in our communities we call to our transactional God to intervene and restore justice, but we often neglect the transformational power of God that asks that we forgive, reconcile and restore. Confessing Christ will seldom transform societies, living Christ will achieve far more than mere words could ever do.

Too many Christians understand the act of salvation, and prayer for that matter, in a transactional way instead of a transformational way. This perspective allows us to ignore Jesus' lifestyle and preaching, because all we really need Jesus for is the last three days or three hours of his life. What we get, is for many, far more important than what we become. To enlarge our spiritual capacity will require an understanding of the life of Christ and not just an appreciation of the death of Christ. We need to move beyond salvation into transformation.

When Christians are called to be transformed into the image of Christ (Romans 12:2<sup>7</sup> and 2 Corinthians 3:18<sup>8</sup>), Scripture uses exactly the same word as in Matthew 17:2<sup>9</sup> that describes the transfiguration of Christ. The Greek word used in all three of these verses is *met-am-or-of-o* which indicates a metamorphose or a complete change and transformation. The Christian capacity can only expand once we move from a transactional theology to a transformational theology.

This is a difficult concept, but critical in the life of every believer. We need to be transformed into the image of Christ and the world needs to witness Christ by those who follow Him.

## CONCLUSION

**South Africans** now need to become the answers to their own prayers. Justice and righteousness flow from the throne of grace and every believer in the 'rainbow nation' needs to become instruments to look after the hungry, the widow and the orphan. Only then will revival follow.

The following prayer is adapted from a prayer that appeared on ***Faith meets World:***

### **For those deprived of their human needs**

from safety and security,  
that they may be given the comfort  
which God confers on all his people;  
We pray to the Lord

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 12:2 "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18 "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 17:2 "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light."

**For all who are forgotten or thrown away,**  
and especially for the poor, the sick and the aged,  
that God might change our hearts  
and move us to love them as the image of Christ  
We pray to the Lord

**For all who are victimised or afraid,**  
for farmers, the abused and the terrorised,  
and all whom the world has forgotten:  
that Christ might lead us to them;  
We pray to the Lord

**For all who are forgotten or cast off,**  
that we might value each human life,  
as a priceless gift from God;  
We pray to the Lord  
**Amen.**

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## SOURCES

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