

There Is Another Way

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Gathered around for prayer, a neighborhood teenager shared about a project she had been working on at school. The assignment was to create a website and marketing tools to benefit a fictional business. Alisha announced that her fictional business would be a nonprofit to address the issue of teen violence.

“Its name will be ‘8.14.12,’” she said. “Why?” asked an adult volunteer. I knew why: August 14, 2012, was the day that Khalil Cousart was murdered.

Khalil Cousart was a spunky kid with a joyful spirit and a mischievous grin. He frequented our home, so much so that he was granted permission to come on in, anytime, without a knock or introduction. Khalil was everybody’s little brother. His playful attitude and cheerful personality drew everyone in. Everyone knew who he was. If he wasn’t at our house, he was playing basketball or joking around with kids at the neighborhood recreation center. Without knowing it, 13-year-old Khalil was a community leader—always at the center, always drawing people together, always providing comedic relief and hospitality.

“Khalil died, and all they did was put him in jail,” said Alisha. The “him” Alisha is talking about is the boy everyone calls “G-Baby.” G-Baby was only 16 when he was arrested for the murder of Khalil. “It doesn’t make sense,” Alisha went on to explain. “They just put him in jail and didn’t do anything else to keep it from happening. Things like this are not going to stop just because one boy goes to jail. You have to do more than that. You have to do something to make it so it won’t happen again.”

Khalil’s Facebook page is covered with prayers and comments. Even after three years, young people in our neighborhood are carrying grief and pain from his death. It’s no wonder. Alisha’s concern is real. Khalil’s death is happening again. Death keeps creeping its way into our neighborhood and taking ahold of our young people. The experience of struggle and the combat against oppression is hardening the heart and killing the spirit of our young people. Some have died. Some are walking dead, strangled by society’s tightening grasp. Some are only surviving, running on fumes from drug highs and a quick dollar.

A little later during prayer time, Alisha asks us to pray for her faith. She tells us that sometimes it is hard to believe in a God who will allow for tragedies such as Khalil’s murder to happen. “And on top of that,” she went on, “all they did was put him in jail. They didn’t do anything to keep it from happening again.”

I agree with Alisha. It is hard to believe in a God who will allow for such tragedies to happen. It is hard to trust the ones who say they follow God’s ways yet continue to take advantage of the poor, they who consistently choose greed over grace and self over servanthood. Standing in the place of Khalil’s death, in the place of the walking dead, it is near impossible to have hope.

But because of Alisha, there is hope! In her, we hear the voice of a prophet. Through her, we receive challenge, the call of God. People of God, a voice cries out in the wilderness of West Charlotte. A prophet rises up to speak a word of truth.

“There is another way!” Alisha cries out. “The testimony of our lives must be something other than, ‘We didn’t do anything to keep it from happening again.’”

Alisha is calling out to you, O followers of Christ, and her voice is bold, Spirit filled. Together, we can do something to transform this place into a place of life rather than death, rejoicing rather than mourning, creativity rather than violence.

People ask me why I’m here: “You had the luxury of choosing where to live and what to do. At any time, you could choose to leave. You don’t have to stay there if you don’t want to.” You’re right. When I moved here, I did have a choice. But now that I’m here, I don’t want out. I’m here because of Alisha. I’m here because a people of hope and faith—the people of Enderly Park—got a hold of me, and they’ve shown me that there is another way. That way is hopeful and challenging. Most of all, that way is together.



Revs. Helms and Greg Jarrell head up QC Family Tree, a community of kinfolk rooted in discipleship in the Enderly Park neighborhood of West Charlotte, NC. This blog is part of a series of reflections highlighting the ministries of the NBA Incubate Initiative. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate.