



## CRAIG COOMBE

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“Seek God’s heart for the people He’s placed you around. You never know what mission God will give you to see righteousness, peace, justice, and mercy reign.”

### WHITE PAPER: GOD’S NARRATIVE IN DURBAN

**CRAIG COOMBE** is a founder and the Chief Executive Officer of the Multiply Group, a private Sub-Saharan African Investment firm.

Prior to this position, he co-founded Imbewu Capital Partners, a South African investment firm, and for 11 years performed the roles of Chief Financial Officer and Investment Executive. He was also director, shareholder, and head of Mergers & Acquisitions for Business Connexion, the largest IT Company in Africa. He also served for six years as an investment banker at BoE Bank Limited.

Craig holds a Bachelor of Commerce, completed his articles at Coopers and Lybrand, and is a qualified Chartered Accountant and a member of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants and the Institute of Directors in Southern Africa.

Craig has played an active role in social transformation in South Africa over the past 25 years. His roles included the establishment of three significant Black-owned businesses, numerous public

presentations and panel discussions, and lead roles in strategic business and government engagements.

Craig is married to Lauren and they have two children, Zoe and Troy. Craig committed his life to Christ in 1983 and is passionate to see the Church of Christ transform the world.

#### THE 321

3 Activities that Bring You Peace:

- Prayer
- Surfski paddling in the ocean
- Sitting by a fire in the outdoors

2 Problem Solvers You Admire:

- Jesus
- Solomon

1 Trait You Value Most in a Friend:

- Loyalty

## GOD'S NARRATIVE IN DURBAN

BY CRAIG COOMBE

When God begins to expand your heart to fit His, inevitably you're going to be drawn to loving the people around you. For me, that's been the people in the city of Durban. When I look at this city, I'm drawn to the immense potential it carries; not simply economic or industrial potential, but its potential to be a birthplace of ideas and innovation, exceptional icons of leadership in all spheres of life, and the proponent of powerful spiritual advancement. The human capital that Durban carries is immense, because it's filled with people created by God.

All this potential lies in the midst of, no doubt, a city fractured from a brutal past. The system of apartheid in South Africa did more than just form lines between people of different skin colors; it also sought to create polarizing levels of social status. Superiority and privilege were taken for granted, and poverty in real terms and in the mind were normalized. It was "us" and "them". This thought carried further into the Church. Spiritual lines were being drawn in the sand, each kept to their own and each advanced their own mission. The fracture experienced in society at large seeped into the Church in the most unintentional way, tribes were formed, and the need to work together never crossed anybody's mind.

The current reality signifies the aftermath of this history. It's almost like that silence you experience at the end of a cease-fire where nobody knows exactly what to do next and the loudest voices usually take over and drive the new narrative. The narrative that began to form in Durban was largely negative. Apart from a few wonderful beaches (that again, only a few could enjoy), the city was dubbed a second-rate city compared to the immeasurable natural beauty of Cape Town and the economic powerhouse of Johannesburg – as if you can't get any more superficial measures than that – but the narrative carried on regardless: Dirty Durban with no hope and no potential. What happened during the years post-apartheid was a continued conditioning of the mind that forced people to close up their homes, and disassociate themselves from the very place they lived in.

This need to change the narrative began when a few, ordinary people who simply loved God and His purposes got together and began to sing praises of the city they saw. There were of course those who definitely saw the negative side of a city bruised by apartheid, but there were those who rose above the negativity to also identify the largely positive work that God was still doing in the city. This work we saw was more than merely naturally beautiful, or the rich results of an economic powerhouse. There was an unusual work being done that centered around its most important asset of all: people. We could not stop marveling at the goodness of God's grace being administered through countless people who also shared a genuine love for the city of Durban. Be it through business, the myriad of non-profit organizations, the strength of the family unit, incredible public schools, a rich heritage of leadership development – you name it – Durban seemed to have it.

God began to birth something new. God introduced a desire to begin a grassroots organization that identified and celebrated the good that was being done in the city, and that organized a small number of key events annually to catalyze collaboration and civic involvement. This ultimately led to a city-wide change of narrative. And so, in 2015, God started City Story which began its journey through wobbly infancy. It navigated some tough environments that were held captive to this old narrative, but it no doubt saw a future emerging where people would become excited to exercise their God-given calling to love and serve their neighbors.

We believe that God called City Story to focus on three specific tasks: connect, collaborate, change.

The first task is to **connect** people to the city by communicating through targeted online campaigns the stories of hope that are occurring around the city. By connecting people to these stories, it helps foster a propagation of this new narrative. No doubt what is shared inspires others, who will then hopefully go out and tell their social connections. What begins to form is a connection to the new narrative which in turn changes the tone which people from Durban (or not!) begin to speak differently about the city.

**Collaboration** is the second task. With so much being done in the city, it's easy for people to either not know what or who to support. Or for those who are doing work, it's hard to know if anybody else is doing the same as what you do. A passionate team who loves to feed and clothe the poor in their local community may feel overwhelmed by the need, but not know that somebody else is doing the same thing in a neighborhood next door to them. By fostering collaboration, we go on to help people realize that two or more are better than one; that in isolation we cannot accomplish what God wants to

accomplish, but hand-in-hand with other like-minded individuals, we will help speed the cause of God's righteousness and justice. No matter in which sphere of life that occurs, be it education, business, government, church, or non-profit, collaboration of like-minded groups and individuals will see a greater change of narrative.

And last, but most importantly, the final task is towards **change**. Change of narrative, change of worldview, change in communities, socio-economic patterns and apartheid-drawn borders. Whatever that looks like, we hope to see change when connection to the true narrative of the city happens and when partnership is formed.

We have had the privilege over the last four years of seeing God work in ways we could not imagine. The annual City Serve event we felt needed to be started has grown bigger and with greater vision year on year. In 2019, we saw over 1,000 volunteers from over two dozen citizen-led organizations and churches come together to clean the city's beaches, adopt a very large public hospital, serve the disabled, spread love to street cleaners, and serve a host of informal street traders. This event caused an incredible stirring in those involved to take greater steps of faith in 2020 to practically love, serve, and minister the gospel to many more people in our city. But beyond the stirring, it also showed people that it is possible to put differences aside, link arms, and get the work done, whatever it is!

In addition, one of the other events we felt God lead us to begin by faith was a conference focused around blessing and appreciating the schoolteachers of Durban. A day-long event was put together that involved live entertainment, workshops, leadership training, and encouragement that focused on loving, serving, and giving back to the teachers of Durban who do so much for our children. The feedback from teachers was overwhelming to say the least, with some saying that in all their professional development seminars they've had to attend, nobody has ever encouraged them for the work they've always done. We look forward to hosting a second teachers' conference in 2020 with a greater faith and expectation for what God can do through this conference.

Another initiative which we felt God leading us towards was in the Durban inner city. This initiative focusses on working together with businesses, government officials, and non-profit organizations in the inner city to form a scalable precinct plan that meets objectives to create employment, provide security and cleaning services, and help the urban destitute have access to the social services they desperately need. By God's grace, the program has attracted funding from major corporates in the inner-city that has led to the employment of over 100 youth into positions that fulfill the objectives listed.

With all of this already happening, it would be amiss not to mention the monthly prayer meeting hosted at a local race course. Since 2015, we started meeting once a month to pray for our city. We know that man's plans are certainly not God's plans, and with this posture of heart God has spoken to each and every one of those involved in making a difference through these prayer meetings. These prayer meetings continue to be the place where unity is formed, and our hearts are softened. Churches from across the socio-economic spectrum of Durban are involved, fostering the unity that Christ desires of His Church, and with which He ensures our hearts will be humbled to take on the plans He has put in place.

We're excited for the future because God is authoring this new narrative. Through the faith and humility of His saints, He's begun a work that won't stop, and which will continue to ensure that His name is glorified in the City of Durban. We're humbled that He would use ordinary men and women like us, and it's a privilege to serve in whatever capacity He calls us to. If there's any encouragement we can leave with you, it's to seek God's heart for the people He's placed you around. You never know what mission God will give you to see righteousness, peace, justice, and mercy reign.

**Who is City Story? (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2aH-sb8k9Y>**