

Liberia and MTS

August 1-17, 2010



Why Liberia?

Last summer, while in Liberia, West Africa, God placed a heavy burden on my heart for the Liberian people. The Liberians endured fourteen years of civil wars that ravaged their country and families, killing 250,000 and displacing 2 million. While there, it was not uncommon to see physical reminders of the war: people blinded from shrapnel, patched up bullet holes in buildings and cars, destroyed roads, blown out buildings, people with scars, and people missing limbs. Yet, even more overwhelming was the emotional damage, as

“What is more disturbing to me is for women and girls to be raped on a daily basis...”

Baccus, Young Life Liberia Leader

we heard many personal stories of devastated lives. It was heartbreaking, as EVERYBODY we met had a story... everybody. I wept at the brutalities they endured: such pain, abuse, and trauma. *“One World Health Organization study found that over 90% of women in some of the areas most afflicted by the war experienced some form of sexual violence, 75% were raped, many of them by gangs, and 49% were forced into sex work, many of them as “bush wives” to militias. Almost 14% of the victims were under the age of 15. However, perhaps even more disturbing is the fact that extreme sexual violence is still very prevalent against very young girls”.* (Susan Mckay, *The Observer*, 2 August 2009). Even though the war is over, rape continues to be an epidemic. Women, teens, children, and even babies are raped on a daily basis. In addition, sexual mutilation of girls is a barbaric, yet common practice. Another tragedy is that both male and female ex-combatants (i.e. former child soldiers) struggle to find their place in society, are often ostracized by their communities, and battle their own shame and emotional wounds.

Yet, despite all of this, there is hope, and many Liberians are turning to the hope and healing found only in Christ. The country is in the process of trying to rebuild and heal. They desperately need materials and curriculum that will assist in this healing process, which brings me to my next point. Last summer, as I was processing everything that I had been hearing and seeing, the Lord gave me a specific vision that was as clear as day: Bring the Mending the Soul materials and healing model to Liberia! Right then and there, I committed this vision into the Lord’s hands and asked Him to pave the way.

Liberians in Phoenix

After returning home, in the months that followed, I began to seek out Liberian refugees right here in Phoenix. One Sunday morning in December, I found myself sitting in a Liberian church in Southwest Phoenix as the only Caucasian. On my second Sunday there, while dressed from head to toe in traditional Liberian attire, the pastor called me up to share. In those few moments on stage that morning, the Lord blessed me with an incredible opportunity to not only share of my experiences in Liberia, but also to let the church know my purpose for being there: to learn from them in the ways of their culture, to be their student, and to build relationships with them. I shared of the heart that God had given me for their people and their

country. It was a powerful and moving experience. Afterwards, I went up to some of the ladies to introduce myself. They ignored my handshakes, but instead, they warmly embraced me and received me immediately into their community. For the last 8 months, I have been actively involved with the Phoenix Liberian refugee women. We have been building a foundation of trust in our relationships, and they are beginning to open up to me about their pain, abuse, and trauma. I have been in the process of researching, assessing spiritual and emotional needs, and learning about the culture and customs. My hope is to be able to minister to the Liberians here as well as in Liberia. However, due to the cultural differences in male/female relationships, there needs to be “PRE-Mending the Soul” foundation first—a baseline of teaching in healthy and biblical relationships—before they will be able and ready to receive the MTS material. In fact, James Davis, the Liberian Young Life National Director, told me, *“Many of our women and female leaders are even abused daily and some don't even know they are being abused. I think there is a need to have someone like you help them understand this, which I believe will help heal their abusive wounds and enable them to function effectively in their communities, homes and areas of work.”*



(Me with a Liberian sister here in Phoenix)

Liberia, Mending the Soul, and Young Life

On August 1st, I will be flying alone to Liberia to do PRE-Mending the Soul work: continued research, education, and assessments, as well as networking and meetings. James Davis recently wrote, *“I want to re-assure you of my partnership (for Mending the Soul) and I will be willing to sit with you and discuss more issues about emotional needs and domestic violence in Liberia and across West Africa. I believe (MTS) will bring about healing to many women and even men who are being abused or enslaved by domestic violence. My hands are opened to help you in anyway I can.”* Then, on August 6th, I will be meeting up with my team of 14 Americans (through Young Life Africa). We will be ministering to the Liberian young people, orphans, and Young Life Liberia leaders.

Prayer Points for the Trip:

- Protection and safety for team: emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Liberia is a very dark place spiritually, and the enemy has a strong presence through violence and witchcraft. Please pray for Jesus’ covering over our minds and hearts, and also that we will have wisdom in directing the Liberians to the hope and healing found only in Christ.
- Courage, strength, wisdom, unity
- For God to guide and direct the meetings, networking, and assessments.
- For God to raise up a future team to take Mending the Soul training to Liberia.

“Now to Him who is able to do IMMEASURABLY MORE THAN ALL WE ASK OR IMAGINE, according to HIS power that is at work within us, to HIM be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” -Ephesians 3:20-21 (emphasis mine)

<http://worldfocus.org/blog/2009/04/16/former-child-soldiers-sex-slaves-recover-from-liberias-war/5006/>
Video of interview with female ex-combatants and sex slaves

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/opinion/21kristof.html>
Article and video of mass rapes of children in Liberia. Includes an interview with a 7 year old victim.

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/07/29/liberia.sex.crimes/index.html>
Arizona girl's attack sheds light on rape in Liberia