Signs for Hope

AUGUST 2013
PRAYER LETTER

# Liberia Trip Update by Joseph Lloyd

As many of you already know, I [Joseph Lloyd], had the opportunity to travel with Signs for Hope, better known to me as my mom's non-profit, to Liberia earlier this month. The decision came spontaneously yet was conceived many, many months ago when I was contemplating a trip in August before I started seminary. I had grandiose ideas of going to Greece with a high school friend, or road tripping through national parks on my way to British Columbia. However, the nonchalant, deciding phone call with my mom ended up putting me in a frenzy, scrambling for immunizations, travel documents, and deciding what malaria medicine I prefer. Only to be found on a plane two weeks later with a college best friend, Bobby Neptune (not making up that name), to join my parents in Liberia.

This would be my third trip to Africa and fourth African country. To say the African pace of life is different than mine would win an award for understatement of the month. I fill my time with a 40-hour a week job, endless hours of coaching soccer, tirelessly riding trails and exploring the Rocky Mountains all the while even managing to weasel in some sleep every day! I pride myself in my ability to stay busy and constantly find things to fill my time. The Liberian life is slow paced and rarely goes to plan. This was consistent with other places I had been in Africa but there still seemed to be something different about Liberia. The first few days I couldn't seem to put my finger on it.

All the vendors were selling the same things, cement blocks, scratch cards for phones, and empty mayonnaise jars that were filled with gasoline which may or may not have contained water to spread their gas supply a bit further. People were moving about, appearing busy, yet it seemed nothing was happening, in decades nothing had changed. A country plagued with civil war for nearly 20 years was left to rebuild with little outside aid, an education system that leaves much to be desired and multiple generations that have been deprived of education and left with scars of war time.

The biggest tangible need I see in Liberia is education. The civil war that started in the 1980's, didn't end until around 2003, and left a wake of many generations lacking education. In a country—the size of Ohio—of just over four million people with the capital city of Monrovia with just over one million, there was not a person unaffected by this war. If a child was 10 when the war started this would put them in their early forties now, so imagine a nation where everyone around that age and under is educationally deprived…enter Liberia. They've mostly known a life of war and don't know much different from that. Which leads me to, what I believe to be a deeper issue but not as measurable. What I believe will change things in Liberia, before or simultaneously with education, is show them *hope*. They have no hope! They understand it as an abstract idea but many have never legitimately experienced it. *Becky note: This article was published earlier this week by the BBC, "Liberian Students All Fail University Admissions Exam."*

Let me show you.

This is Ophelia (photo credit: Bobby Neptune (still a real person).

She attends the deaf school and is 21 years old. She lost her hearing as a child when she became sick and her hearing never returned. We tracked her down one day when Bobby was seeking out a photo story for my mom. We spent some time with her and "talked" with her through my mom. One of the questions Bobby asked her was, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Now this girl is 21 but has the education level of a 9th grader so this is a realistic question. Her response was, "I don't know, what do you think I should be? Tell me what I should be and I'll be that."

Ask any elementary school kid, here in the States, what they want to be when they grow up and they list off multiple answers of doctors, nurses, superman, the president, and many other nonsensical answers that are changing daily but never lacking. They have dreams. They have aspirations. They know how to dream. They know how to aspire. They have hope!

Bobby's follow up question to Ophelia was, "What do you *hope* to do?" to which she responded, "I have no hope." They have no hope!

With education comes hope. With hope comes opportunity to live a life they could never have previously conceived. This is not some shameless plug for Signs for Hope, even though I believe in what they are doing in Liberia (although if you're reading this you clearly believe in SFH). This is a simple observation from my travels, hours of conversations with more knowledgeable authorities on international development, reading plenty, and God's revealing of His heart for the nations.

Now before you peg me as some optimist, something I've never been accused of, know I am very grounded, perhaps at times subterranean. I claim to be a realist, which most optimists would then just say I'm a pessimist, but I like to believe I have an educated view on things in the developing world. So know when I say that *hope* is a fundamental answer it does not come from a bleeding heart for Africa who throws out words like "love" and "hope" in attempts to solve this problem.

Education teaches kids to aspire. It teaches kids they can become more than what Liberians have been living with the past several decades. It provides them with marketable skills to where they can have a job and make money. It provides them with logic and reasoning capabilities. This may sound trivial, but let me show you what I mean. Liberia is a coastal country; in the ocean are thousands of fish, yet I did not see one fishing boat, fisherman, or [ocean] fish being sold for food. In addition, Liberia is a tropical climate, warm, near the equator, and wet. Many things can grow in this climate and there is so much open land for farming, yet this is not happening. I don't claim to know much about fishing, natural resources, or agriculture, but in my short stint there it didn't seem they were adequately using the resources they had available, and because of reason and logic, I understand that.

The second part of education is vocational trade training. This is on the rise in developing countries with orphan empowerment and teaching children a trade they can learn in order to survive. This trade could be any number of things, baking, sewing, textiles, masonry, carpentry, mechanical, and the list goes on and on. How we were able to see this during our trip was visiting a camp that has been set up by Lifeline Children's Services, through their (un)adopted program for orphans. This camp is Liberian run and they open their doors to orphans around the country in order to teach them trades so they can go back and make money by selling their products. This camp has grown crops for the surrounding people that live near by, as well as, provided 50,000 cement blocks for use by the Red Cross. All this is done by orphans. Orphans! The children of society no one else wanted, providing for the people around them. Ironic, isn't it, considering we are supposed to be the ones caring for them. *Becky note: Deaf students from the Deaf Mission are included in these trade camps offered by (un)adopted.*

This is not a guilt trip. My prayer is this is a sobering gut check and a movement to action. Those orphan kiddos are stronger than many of us give them credit for, myself included. Those orphan kiddos are smarter than we know. They just need an opportunity to show it. Those orphan kiddos love more intensely than we know. If I was abandoned or cast out I would be a vault on lock down with my affections and emotions. Yet, every kid I encountered had a smile on their face bigger than one I could produce. They are sponges, ready to soak up any love, affection, education, or attention that comes their way.

Yet again, this is not a guilt trip. Education, vocational trade, empowerment, and development: these are the buzzwords for people in the orphan conversation worldwide, and rightfully so; these are all steps in the right direction, toward Jesus.

Jesus is the answer. Jesus is always the answer. Jesus is enough. But it can't stop there.

This is what I mean. I've had the privilege of working with a man who grew up in Liberia until he was college aged, then came to America on a basketball scholarship. Fast forward years and years and he is a higher-up executive in the Walmart world. He has worked significantly in Africa and knows what it takes for change. Numerous things can be drawn from the wisdom of this man, but this is what I want you to know and what has stuck with me since I first heard it from him.

**"Say you come across a woman with several children and no husband, man, or provider. Therefore, she decides to prostitute herself in order to put food on the table. Then one day you are able to share the gospel with her and she accepts Christ. Praise the Lord, that's great, but what have you done for her? She now is a believer and subscribes to a religion that condemns prostitution. Granted, she has always believed it to be wrong, but she must provide for her kids. Now her way of life is contrary to the calling of Jesus, yet again. What have you done for her?"**

This comes from a man who grew up in Africa, who understands the need is deep. We must engage these people in order to provide a sustainable lifestyle and I believe this starts with education and hope.

All our buzzwords should lead to Jesus. It's our means of showing love, providing hope, sharing the gospel, and opening the door to His Spirit's work.

Just like every kid hated eating their vegetables growing up, I hate when people elaborate on problems without solutions. In three words the solutions are, education, hope, and Jesus (in no such order and ideally hope and Jesus are simultaneous). So what can you do?

Pray. Pray God gives you a heart that breaks for the things that break His.

Go. There are several *healthy ways* to do short term missions and see the need. Pray for the opportunity to go.

Read. Educate yourself. These are my two entry books suggestions. "Half the Sky" by Nicholas Kristof and "When Helping Hurts" by Fikkert and Corbett. Information is highly accessible, engage it. Read your Bible.

Go to your city. There is need everywhere. You don't have to been in Africa to find depravity. I'd even argue we are more depraved here in America than Africa because our true needs are buried under materialism and other suppressors (loaded statement, but for another time).

As for me, this is all for me as well, perhaps more for me than you. I need these reminders. As much as I enjoy gallivanting around the world, I would be content to never leave this country again because I know the need in my own city. When we can't engage people globally we must engage locally. I aspire to live in a foreign country and do ministry, but I can't hide behind that calling when I am here in the States. We must engage the people around us. Otherwise, what makes us think we can cross an ocean and be able to engage people for the gospel there?

## From My Heart to Yours ...

I want to thank Joseph for sharing his heart and experiences with us this month. I cannot tell you how shocked I was when he called to say he wanted to join us in Liberia, just two weeks before we left. And I was so thankful when he texted me last week to ask if he could share his thoughts with you. Joseph took this trip to Liberia by faith, because it was done with such short notice he did not have time to raise his funds before he left. If the Lord leads you to do so, you can mail a check made payable to Joseph Lloyd, to 4040 E. Caley Circle, Centennial, CO 80121. Airfare, alone, was $1,800.

Allow me to add just a few more details about our recent Liberia trip. July and August are typically school break months; therefore there were only 11 students at the Deaf Mission while we were there. That is the fewest number of deaf children we have ever seen there. Since most of them do not have family willing to care for them they are usually at the Deaf Mission year-round. We were told great effort was made to find family, extended family and ACFI church members to care for these children during break, this year, to give their caregivers a break, as well. School is scheduled to resume the first week of September. We had some very special one-on-one time with these few children, but please pray for them all as they start the new school year this coming week.

We delivered the sponsorship packets for those deaf children who are being sponsored through the Heart Adoption program—they will be handed out when the students return—but there are still 20+ deaf children still needing monthly sponsors. Remember these sponsorships are helping provide 2 meals per day for ALL the children, something they are still not guaranteed, even at this point in time. If I could take each of you with me, just one time, for you to see for yourselves how very little these deaf children have...well...you would never be the same!

We are already planning our next trip back to Liberia the first week of March, 2014. I will probably travel back earlier than the rest of our team as there are some events going on in late February I want to be a part of. Our team, in March, will spend much time in the classrooms at the deaf schools across Monrovia to determine how best we can work alongside our Liberian brothers and sisters to improve the education of the deaf children, while teaching them life skills, as well.

One of the brightest moments we had, as far as I was concerned, was when we started to teach the deaf children the 10 Commandments. Mohammad, age 15, stood up and began to tell, in sign, the entire story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Every detail was included. When he finished, I asked him how he knew this story so well. He said he had watched the ASL movie (DVD) we had given them three years ago, many times. So thankful for technology that spreads the gospel time and time again and in ASL.

Thank you, once again, for your prayers! God never wastes them! And when God leads you to support His work through Signs for Hope, thank you, in advance for your obedience. For each of us, He knows our need, before we do.

*"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about it's own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*
*"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."*

To God, alone, be the Glory!
*Becky*

P.S. Signs for Hope has a very busy schedule this fall, so your continued prayers are appreciated. September we will be in Houston at the Empowered to Connect conference and then Becky will take a road-trip across Georgia visiting with families and sharing at the GA Baptist Conference of the Deaf. In October, SFH will be at the Together for Adoption conference in Louisville, KY. Event organizers have graciously given us an exhibit booth FREE (a $750 value). Becky has been asked to present at the NC Baptist Conference of the Deaf in November and will also be sharing the ministry of SFH with a church in Boone, NC as they observe National Orphan Month.

## Stay Connected with Signs For Hope

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**In You, the fatherless find compassion.**
**- Hosea 14:3**

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