

Strengthening Marriages in Liberia

March, 2011

We are presently in Liberia, West Africa; a world away from the one we know so well. Electricity depends on generators, expensive and not always available. The availability of clean water also presents many problems. The horrible road system leads to snarled traffic and difficulty getting from place to place. Liberia is now almost six years out of a terrible civil war; one that ravaged the land and left the people hurting.

The civil war brought about a massive displacement of family and the damage to relationships was enormous; one writer stating that it dismembered the Liberian family and made it dysfunctional. Yet, others state that the dysfunction has been there all along, that while the civil war certainly hurt families, many problems existed even before the war. The average annual income in Liberia is \$140. Poverty, widespread illiteracy, unemployment, teen pregnancy, high divorce rates and problems with post-war psychological adjustments have serious implications for the family. Two 21 year-old girls working where we are staying have 2 children each and never have been married. Several people here have told us that the out-of-wedlock birthrate is 98%. We cannot even comprehend such a statistic!



Yet, there is hope; hope for this country and hope for the family. God is raising up men and women committed to Biblical marriage and with a passion to see strong marriages in Liberia. We have spent time these past two weeks with several of those people. In fact, today, (April 2) we taught a workshop on lay counseling with 182 in attendance—praise God! Last week's Franklin Graham Crusade received a great response and response to our marriage seminars have been very positive also. God is working!

Our friends and ministry co-workers here have a battle on their hands; the Biblical view of marriage is not prevalent. One man asked us; "Once married, the wife is the husband's property, right?" In another instance, we were told a story regarding a "demanding" girlfriend. A man was married, but his girlfriend demanded a car for Christmas or she would not see the man—the problem was seen that she was demanding, not that the man had a girlfriend on the side. I counseled a young man who was seeking financial help for his wedding to a woman he is living with—the wedding is more important than the fact that they are living together and violating God's will for them. This young man desires to be a pastor, but finds fornication less of a problem than not having a big wedding. In our training today, a woman commented on the fact that many pastors will not let their wives counsel other women; they must stay at home and take care of the children and home.

Yet again, there is hope, we had a great response to our seminars (237 marriage workshop attendees) and to see so many at the lay-counseling training was very heartening. We believe that God is working and that this nation is poised to be a beacon for Christ in Africa.