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# The Writer's Inkhorn

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Continuing Reflections on the Word for Your Personal Growth in Christ

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## Remembering “the Affliction of Joseph”



This issue celebrates the variety of mission teams and workers who are involved in summer short term mission projects around the globe year after year. *God* rewards...

This issue of the Writer's Inkhorn is from a message given to the Kaluway Development Association, a year ago, at a fundraising banquet for building a clinic in the nation of Liberia, West Africa, Maryland County. I offer it to you this month in support of an effort by our own Consul Alex Gbayee, to build a **vocational high school** in the same area, which is his homeland as well. The *Liberia Hope Foundation*, the organization that was formed two years ago to undertake this massive project, is in need of support. May this issue stir your hearts and minds.

The cause of building a clinic in the area mentioned above is more than a worthy cause. It is vital. It is necessary. It is of urgency. Poor healthcare in general is a crisis, and not just when an epidemic arises like the Ebola outbreak. I was looking at the World Health Organization website, and learned that:

When countries have very weak health systems, lack human and infrastructural resources, and have only recently emerged from long periods of conflict and instability, they can be severely affected by crises such as the recent Ebola outbreak in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Those kinds of crises of outbreaks are declared to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern under the International Health Regulations (2005).

I applauded the efforts of the Kaluway Development Association and encouraged them to act decisively and with a sense of urgency in completing your project. Council Gbayee told me that there are likely fewer than **40** nurses in all of Maryland County and a mere **three** doctors. But he estimates that there are over **200** villages. People die because there is no clinic within a reasonable distance, there is no transportation and *no* roads or very *poor* roads. I asked him where the nearest hospital is and he said in Harper, about 45 or 50 miles away. Can you imagine having to **walk** that far to get to a hospital and you are gravely ill?

Additionally, a lack of educational facilities at the secondary level is also of crisis proportions. When the only available schools are elementary schools, there is no way for students to complete their secondary education in preparation for going on to college. So I encouraged that group to feel a sense of urgency in that regard as well, and rally to Consul Gbayee's cause in helping him build that vocational high school in Maryland County. One of his goals is to have training for nurses as part of that vocational curriculum, which would then directly provide student nurses that can help service the clinic, even as they continue their own education. These two visions could and should be connected. So think about this as I move into my topic for this issue: **Remembering “the Affliction of Joseph.”**

In the year that I last visited Liberia, 2000, I had quite an unusual summer. I took **five** major trips from one week past the close of school in mid-May to mid-August, and three of those were mission trips of sorts. In mid-June, I was invited to speak in the closing Sunday morning worship service for the annual women's conference for our churches in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Haiti is still considered possibly the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

Then, for two weeks and two days, I was part of a rather large and interesting Youth on a Mission (YOAM) team to Liberia in July. Consul Alex Gbayee was also part of that team. And finally, in early August, I was invited to share in the annual conference of the Church of God in Christ in Paris, France, a church comprised mainly of Haitians that have left Haiti seeking a better way of life in France. With French as Haiti's official language, France is considered kind of a natural place for them to go, and so there is quite a large population of Haitians in France.

Let me tell you a little bit more about my trip to Liberia, then I'd like to try to weave together my experiences with several Scripture references in a way that hopefully makes sense to you. And if you don't remember all of the details, there are five words that I would like for you to hang on to. They are these: "...for the affliction of Joseph..."

The size of our team to Liberia was forty-two people and the ages ranged from ten years to 78 years. There were three 10-yr-olds who helped the teens do puppet shows for the children in vacation Bible school. One of the ten year olds was a violinist who was traveling with her 13-yr-old sister, a college freshman sister, and a college sophomore brother, and their mother, who was an elementary school principal, but also a professional violinist. The family ensemble consisted of four violins and a cello, and one of the most wonderful things about this group was that they had learned the Liberian national anthem and played it in each of the churches and places we visited from Monrovia to Maryland County.

If you remember the state of things at that time, you know that those were very difficult times in Liberia. There were six teachers and school administrators that comprised the education team **within** our mission team. We conducted teacher training workshops for teachers and administrators, most of whom had not received pay for most of the school year, did not have adequate supplies or classroom furniture, and many or most of whom were grossly undereducated themselves. So not only were students seven years behind in their schooling, because of the seven year civil war, but many of the teachers were also. Yet, all of them were

servicing God and just doing the best that they could do for those children.

One of the schools in Maryland County, held up their closing exercises when they heard that we were coming, so that we could witness it. It was both a thrill *and* absolutely heart-wrenching to see older girls and boys of pre-teen years excited about receiving certificates for kindergarten and the primary grades. But they were excited about what they had accomplished and we joined in, and cheered them on with handclaps and small monetary donations collected from among the team members to give encouragement to each of them to persevere.

There was a medical team of nurses on our team that set up a couple of makeshift clinics and saw hundreds and hundreds of patients. There were also some members of the team who painted and did concrete work, laying a floor in the headquarters church that had been bombed in downtown Monrovia. There were two *women* on our team who did all of the *electrical wiring* in the church. Several pastors and women missionaries conducted ministry classes, classes for young mothers, and classes for young men. I cannot even begin to tell you all of what I experienced in that short time, but I wanted to give you at least a snapshot of what occurred on that trip.

Now recall these words to mind: "...for the affliction of Joseph..." Think about these words deeply. They are actual *and* they are symbolic. Allow them to settle into your heart. Hear what the Lord said to His people in the time of the prophet Amos, and what He continues to say to us to this day:

*Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, ...  
Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on  
your couches, eat lambs from the flock  
and calves from the midst of the stall; ...  
But are not grieved for the affliction of  
Joseph. (Amos 6:1a, 4, 6b)*

I was struck by Amos' choice of words, "for the affliction of Joseph." What was Amos talking about? To what was he referring? Do **you** remember the affliction of Joseph? If not, you

would need to refer back to Genesis 37:23-28. There you will find these words:

*And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat...of many colors that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.*

*And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spices and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.*

*And Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. **And his brothers were content.***

*Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and **sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver:** and they brought Joseph into Egypt.*

Now, do you remember “the affliction of Joseph”? This is the passage of text from Amos that I was so moved by when I returned from that trip 17 years ago, and I have *never* forgotten. After we spend the time, and genuinely invest the money and energy into the lives of others we meet abroad, it is so easy for us to settle back into our lives of comfort, and luxury even, for some of us, because of the blessings of God we are experiencing here in this country, when we *do not see*, continually, the sufferings of our brothers and sisters around the globe.

In fact, the northern kingdom of Israel was experiencing unprecedented prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II, and it was *this* period of social corruption, religious apostasy, and luxurious living that the prophet Amos was speaking out against in the verses included here. *Whatever* we do in the name of good/ in the name

of God during the summers and during our other gatherings is simply not enough, if it does not **cause** us to *live* differently, and *think* differently, and *consume* differently, *every* day, when we return home. Are you not *grieved* for the affliction of Joseph? Joseph was their brother. **We** have relatives – sisters and brothers, cousins, nephews, nieces, uncles and aunties, and some of us even have fathers and mothers that are struggling – they are *our* Joseph. Are we not *grieved* for the affliction of Joseph?

I had my memory refreshed, and my conscience and consciousness jarred yet again by what I saw and experienced as I traveled. And I made a solemn promise to myself *that* time to never again forget. I cannot allow complacency or indifference, even though it may never be intentional, to hinder me from acting on behalf of at least some of those whom I have met. **I** have chosen intentionally to remember the affliction of Joseph.

You see, much of the suffering that people experience in our world is caused by other people or forces over which they have no control. As someone said once, "People not only sin, but people are also sinned *against*." Just knowing this truth ought to heighten our sense of responsibility, and move us to even greater action on behalf of those who are in distress.

The nation of Liberia suffered even more years of civil war after we were there in 2000. Liberia is known for its thousands of acres of rubber tree plantations. It was interesting to hear that during the early years of the conflict and civil unrest, it was said that the Firestone factory near the airport in Monrovia never missed a beat. Can you imagine that? How could *that* be? People were being killed and destruction was everywhere, yet they were able to carry on business as usual.

I don't claim to be a prophet, but who knows whether the difficulties and lawsuits that Firestone experienced after that time were not the result of them not acting decisively on behalf of the people who were being sinned against? Justice is so central to God's character that **all** of us have to pay in some way or another when we do not act on behalf of those who are hurting.

Finally, as I have traveled the world, I have seen the joy on the faces of the people of God when they realize that just the presence of even one team is a reminder that God has not forgotten about them. They know that it may be a long and expensive and difficult journey to get to where they are, but people are encouraged when others come alongside them to help them lift themselves up from where they are.

How much longer do we have to get the work done that God has assigned to our hands? Does anyone know? Everything that we undertake to do for the kingdom of God must be attended to with a sense of urgency. Look around you. Can't you see the signs of the time? Christ is soon to return. We do not *know* how much time we have to complete whatever tasks we need to complete. We are trusting God that Consul Gbayee will live to see that vocational high school in Maryland County get built, but at the age of 75+ years, you can hopefully feel the sense of urgency. It needs to be done now.

And besides that, those young people's lives and livelihoods are at stake. People are *dying* not only from rare and serious diseases, but they are dying from things that could be managed or stopped before they become fatal if they just had access to some routine basic health care. Are you not *grieved* for the affliction of Joseph? The clinics *and* the schools need to be completed sooner rather than later.

The summer is always a wonderful time of respite and reflection and thankfulness for all that God has done for us. By all means, enjoy God's bounty upon your lives, and know that you may do so without guilt, for whatever God has blessed you with is yours to enjoy and to do with as you please. *I'm* simply asking *you* to "remember the affliction of Joseph." Always seek to make your **entire** lives and your gifts count *beyond* your own lifetime. Think "legacy." Ask what you can do to leave something behind for those who will follow.

When you and your loved ones are warm, and clothed, and fed, remember. When you enter your houses, remember. When you go to the doctor and have access to adequate and convenient health care, remember. When *your* children have access to adequate education, remember. When you

pray, remember. When you give, remember; and when you return to your places of work and service to God and humankind, remember those who do not have adequate housing or basic necessities like clean water. Keep *remembering* the affliction of Joseph, and not just in your thoughts, but in your deeds as well. When you do this, know that our loving, heavenly Father will, Himself, remember you.

Let me pray for you: Our Father and our God, we recognize that we are a people who are blessed above millions, and that in this nation, even as it is, we are experiencing Your unparalleled blessings. But we also know that it is not because we deserve it more than anyone else. It is only because of your grace and your mercy. Lord, we ask that you help us to remember, that like Abraham, you have blessed us that we may *be* a blessing to others. To consume all that you give us upon our own lusts while others suffer in so many ways is sin, indeed. Help us use our time, our talents, and our treasures that You have given to us, wisely and in service to You, for the upbuilding of Your people and kingdom. In the matchless name of Jesus, the Christ I pray. Amen!



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Are you interested in summer mission travel for yourself or young people that you know? Consider being part of a Youth on a Mission (YOAM) team through the Church of God in Christ. Visit [www.cogicworldmissions.org](http://www.cogicworldmissions.org) to see what COGIC is doing around the world.

The **Liberia Hope Foundation** is an Illinois registered not-for-profit, 501(c)-3, faith-based non-governmental organization based in Chicago, whose primary purpose is to build a vocational high school in Maryland County. Donations for the vocational high school project can be sent to Consul Alex Gbayee at 7342 S. Bennett Avenue, Chicago, IL 60649. Consul Gbayee may be reached by phone at 773.643.8635. **Checks should be made payable to the Liberia Hope Foundation.** No gift is too small.

