

# Lifting Up Liberia

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CCFTL Assistant Pastor Doug Sauder plays with children in River Cess, a coastal village in Liberia, West Africa.



Bobby Bemis and others from CC Fort students from CCFTL's Patmos School

Lauderdale (CCFTL), FL, talk with children in the small town of Cotton Tree, Liberia. This past summer, a team of 16 pastors and of Discipleship visited most of Liberia's 17 Calvary fellowships. The new church plant in Cotton Tree meets in the local school.

## Training Young Pastors on the Mission Field

A frightened congregation watched as 14-year-old Moses approached the altar. This Calvary fellowship in the city of Buchanan, Liberia, knew him as "Killer"—a violent and well-known lieutenant from one faction of the country's devastating civil war. He had dressed to shock—in high boots and a muscle shirt—and some wondered if he might pull out a gun. "The church went dead silent," recalled Chet Lowe, outreach pastor for CC Fort Lauderdale, FL.

But that Sunday in 1996, Moses' life was changed as he heard God's Word and accepted Christ as his Savior. He had come because Pastor Chet had earlier trekked to

the jungle to invite him individually, desiring him to be saved as other young rebels and child soldiers had been. "We saw the change from death to life in his eyes," Pastor Chet said. Over time, Chet has witnessed Moses' growth into a humble man of God.

This past summer, Chet saw Moses again when a group from CC Fort Lauderdale (CCFTL) visited Liberia to encourage believers. Moses' demeanor was gentle as he led the believers down the rubble-lined roads and past bullet-ridden buildings in the capital city of Monrovia. CCFTL Assistant Pastor Billy Venezia remarked, "There's not a glimpse of that former violence in this

man. He's gentle and meek. Yet you know he was militarily powerful. Watching him, I understand the depths of God's grace."

Another young Liberian, 20-year-old Johnny, became a child soldier at age 10 when his father was killed by rebels. He's now a carpenter who whittles biblically-themed figurines out of African mahogany wood. His pockets are filled with used casings from AK-47s, which he has now formed into the shape of a cross. It's his style of evangelism, Johnny said; he tells people, "This is who I am now."



Chet Lowe, CCFTL Outreach Pastor, teaches at a pastors conference in Liberia's capital, Monrovia. Chet planted the nation's first Calvary fellowship here in 1995.



The team's travels took them through Buchanan, south of Monrovia. As a missionary in 1996, Chet had planted a second fellowship here, enabling him to reach more child soldiers with the Gospel. The town was close to the fighting during the war.



Dustin Godwin, a Patmos School of Discipleship student, teaches at the pastors conference. Leaders from all over the nation made the arduous journey to attend.

### Visiting the Brethren

*Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."* Acts 15:36

The team spent their two-week trip visiting most of the country's 17 Calvary fellowships, many of which are in remote areas called "the bush." Travel often took a full day: a three-hour drive to the river, another few by canoe, and three or four more on foot. But the harshness of the journey was soon forgotten when the travelers were greeted with singing, food, and flowers. During their short visits, team members taught Scripture, prayed with villagers, and invited people to the upcoming conference.

The team was joyously greeted by the believers in Gborkakollie Town, a remote village deep in the jungle. "They literally picked us up and carried us," Chet said. The growing fellowship was formed five years ago by a young man who had been displaced by the civil war. He became a Christian while away and brought his new faith with him when he returned home, planting a church in a village controlled by witch doctors. He has since led many villagers to Christ.

### Grace and Unity

The resilient country of Liberia is rebuilding after 11 years of civil war. The fighting ended in 2003—after claiming more than

250,000 lives and displacing nearly a million people. Within the growing Calvary outreaches, former child soldiers and the rebel leaders who exploited them now worship together. "Young men who killed now pray with the family members of those they killed," Chet said.

This past June, nearly 200 Liberian pastors met in Monrovia for a three-day conference. Designed by CCFTL to strengthen the Calvary fellowships, it emphasized teaching the Bible verse by verse. "There was a great hunger for the Word," CCFTL Assistant Pastor Doug Sauder said. The theme was "Answering the Prayer of Christ: Be One,"



In Monrovia, Billy Scruby interacts with curious, local boys outside the conference during a break. Billy shared his passion for Jesus with the youngsters.

and the main sessions focused on servanthood and church unity.

*"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one."* John 17:22

Samuel Bier, who oversees the Liberian churches, said, "The pastors conference revived our unity as Christ's people."

Liberia is home to 16 tribes, each with a different language. The fellowships have been separated by geography and a lack of communication, Chet explained. But, he added, "The consistent teaching of the Word of God has broken through tribalism, and they are showing grace and peace to each other. ... We're rejoicing in the Lord for where He's taking them."

Chet described one fellowship in the bush that labored strenuously for two months—cutting down trees, clearing land, and planting seeds. They created a farm and donated all the funds earned to widows and orphans. "This is unheard of in Liberia, taking months to make something that won't benefit you personally," Chet said. Members of another fellowship purchased a canoe with seed money from Fort Lauderdale. With the profits from fishing, they provide for the widows of the church.

Liberia's first Calvary fellowship was formed in Monrovia in 1995 under the oversight of

CCFTL's Liberia Missions Board. The goal was to rehabilitate child soldiers—children, usually forcibly recruited between ages 10 and 18, who are used as laborers or to commit atrocities. In 1996 Chet moved to Buchanan, which was closer to the war. His aim was to reach more child soldiers and start a second fellowship. In 1997, seven more fellowships were planted in the bush country. By 1998, Chet said, the fellowships began to proliferate. The missions board has since been dissolved, and the Liberian fellowships now operate under the leadership of Pastor Samuel Bier and Elder Othello Scott of Monrovia. However, CCFTL still supports the fellowships financially and spiritually, providing training, running pastors conferences, and giving seed money for special projects. Chet visits the fellowships every two to three years.

He desires for every CC fellowship in Liberia to have a connection with a U.S. church. CC Sonora, CA, sponsored a pastors conference in August, and Chet is planning another for next summer. "Our hope is that Calvary Chapels throughout Liberia will continue to preach the Word of God passionately and deliver the Gospel of Jesus Christ," Chet said. ☞

*I, therefore, ... beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Ephesians 4:1-3

*Editor's note: The names of some Liberians have been changed.*



Liberia is a small nation on the southern tip of West Africa.

### CC Fort Lauderdale, FL

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James Seawall, right, prays with Alfred Sayon before James teaches at Alfred's church. Each team member was paired with a local pastor at the conference.