

5 Things This Businessman Learned From Ministering in War-Ravaged Liberia

Ten years ago, after 14 years of civil war, Liberia was ravaged and poverty-stricken. One casualty of the war was the Ganta Hospital, which was struggling without electricity while trying to rebuild. The dedicated hospital staff worked hard to serve 24,000 patients a year, but surgeons were typically forced to finish operations with flashlights in their mouths, often without anesthesia equipment.

As a businessman with decades of experience working with U.S. electric power systems, when the United Methodist Committee on Relief asked me to help bring electricity to the Ganta Hospital, I said “yes”...beginning a journey that has led me to my God-given purpose in life.

I was forever changed by the social and human experiences of living and working there. Here are five things I learned along the way:

A Large Part of the World Uses Kerosene Lamps or Candles to Light Their Homes

Villagers in developing countries buy kerosene lamps, candles or scraps of wood soaked in wax or kerosene to create light. The recurring expense of kerosene for lamps, candles or scraps of wood consumes \$20 in no time. As an alternative, socially responsible entrepreneurs are leasing or selling LED desk or hanging lamps that can be charged using a small solar panel. These desk lamps provide about seven times more light than the traditional sources and aren't a fire hazard. The weekly cost for a household for these solar lighting systems is about the same as they would pay for kerosene, and in a short few years, the solar system becomes the property of the household. An

added benefit is that people in the village can sell or maintain the lights and earn money.

Why Go to Other Places When There is So Much to be Done Here?

Have you ever read the book of Acts? These guys didn't stay home and just minister to their neighbors. Seeing how it all turned out, we might never have learned about Christ if these guys just stayed in their town.

You may find that the talent, experience and gifts you have can be priceless in other parts of the world. My career was spent working around electric utility systems. Electricity is something we expect to be available to us whenever we want it. But in many parts of the world, it is a luxury or not available. When we took on the project to help provide electricity to Ganta Hospital, the Methodist bishop said, "Thousands of lives will be saved, and hundreds of lives have been saved already."

Wow, Who Knew Electricity Was So Important?

So many people are trying to make the world a better place. We donate money to worthy causes, we go to tell people The Good News, we play with orphans, we give water filters and wells so people can have clean water, we repair homes damaged by natural disasters.

But if you think about it, it is very difficult for a society to continually improve their standard of living without electricity. Electricity provides people the ability to produce crops or goods to sell and make a profit, so they can provide for their families. For example, fishermen are able to use refrigeration to store fish so they can spend more time fishing rather than continually making the journey to market.

Identifying Who Is Good and Who Is Bad

Truthfully, I can't claim to be more righteous than anyone

else. My time in Liberia has made me question would I always do the right thing if I'd lived my life in Liberia for the last 30 years. I've witnessed some people lie, cheat, steal, act indifferently and refuse to help others. But Liberians lived through a horrific civil war. I've never had to forgive a neighbor who killed my child or stole food from me to save his own starving child. That being said, we should do and stand up for what is right. But I've ultimately decided that to judge oneself to be more righteous than another is to aid darkness, not strengthen the light.

Christians are not perfect. That's why we need to accept our failure, ask for forgiveness and focus on what the Teacher is telling us.

Can You Hear That Inner Voice That Keeps Reminding You About Your Grand Dream?

There is a quest within each of us, calling us to action. We are all in a boat navigating an uncharted river. This river is our life. For the most part, all of us stay well inside our boat and rely on it to keep us safe and secure. But there are times when that quiet inner voice becomes so compelling that we step out of our boat, causing us to feel less safe, more insecure and out of our element.

It is counterintuitive, but for me, so many of those times when I left my secure boat were when I also experienced deep feelings of calm, safety, satisfaction and joy. In those blessed moments, I felt I understood and was true to my life's purpose: to make an impact in my community and the world.

Life does not stand still. Decisions you make and actions you take lead you down one fork in the river or another. Some of the forks in your river offer unique adventures and opportunities—adventures that require leaps of faith, and opportunities to trust God to lead you. {eo}

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Quest to Restore Electricity to a War-Ravaged African Hospital. He was a successful businessman whose first career spanned 34 years in the electric utility industry. In his second career, his efforts have been redirected to provide state of the art electric systems to improve the health and education to the neediest people in the world. Steve's extensive experience in logistics while working with U.S. electric power systems has made this unique contribution to mankind possible. Steve has a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering from Texas A&M University.