

Experiencing the Harmattan

Even though this is my second year in Ghana, my previous trip was in the summer so I never got to experience the harmattan until now. I had heard about it, even been warned about it, but until you live with the harmattan day in and day out I don't know that you can fully understand what all the fuss is about. The harmattan is a very dry desert wind that blows from the northeast off the Sahara Desert from December to March, lowering the humidity and creating hot days here in northern Ghana. Every day is pretty much the same with daytime temperatures over 100 and a constant wind of 10 to 15 miles per hour. The real problem is not the temperature though, it is the dust. In addition to blowing dust in from the desert the harmattan results in no rain throughout the northern region. It rained once in November for about 15 minutes, and that has been it as far as moisture goes. With the humidity remaining in the single digits most days there isn't even any early morning dew to help settle the dust. Instead we get the hot, dry wind constantly blowing it into every crack and crevice possible. The dust has gotten so bad that I find it necessary to wash my dishes before I use them as well as after!

A side effect of the harmattan is the lack of water for the utility company to distribute. In our area we have not had city water delivery for the past seven days. Fortunately we have a large water storage tank that has sustained us, but now that is almost dry as well. Earlier this week some of the neighbors who do not have a storage tank came with five gallon jugs looking for water, which of course we gave them. Once we run out we will make arrangements to have the tank refilled by one of the local companies who haul water from the river. While it is expensive (filling the tank one time costs more than our regular monthly water bill) we are blessed to have the means to do it and to help out some of those in the neighborhood who do not.

Added to the harmattan is the smoke being created by the large number of fires that are common at this time of year. Early morning fires are common as people try to warm themselves from the overnight temperatures that fall into the upper 60s, which is very cold to the people who live here. Added to this in the late morning and afternoon is the smoke from people burning off their fields. The smoke added to the constant dust creates a haziness to the air that greatly reduces visibility and leaves everything coated with dirt and ash. Areas that were lush and tropical in September look completely different during the harmattan season!

As you might imagine the living conditions right now are less than optimal. Sinuses and lungs struggle with the dust and the skin dries out from the constant exposure to the elements. While I don't care much for the harmattan it is just another part of living and working here, and it is really a small inconvenience in contrast to the work I am able to do. Whenever I begin feeling sorry for myself I just have to remember what the apostle Paul said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18, NASB). I consider my situation as nothing when compared to what Paul had to suffer through, and he considered his situation as nothing when compared to the promise we have in Jesus. It's all a matter of perspective.

I also know that the harmattan is only temporary, and once May gets here we will be back into rainy season once more. The rain will settle the dust, wash away the dirt and ash from everything, revive the plants once more, and turn northern Ghana back to a lush savanna once again. While I look forward to that time now, I'm sure I'll be complaining about the rain and all the bugs that come with it the next time I get the truck stuck while trying to get to some remote village. But as long as I remember to thank God for the opportunity he has given me to preach His word it will always be worth it.

Please share African Missions Report with your church family. If you know anyone who would be interested in receiving a copy please send their e-mail address to anthonyjohnson2010@gmail.com.

Tamale Institute of Biblical Studies

Classes have begun once again at the Bible Institute, but unfortunately we are still in the old building. The new building is all ready for us to move to except for one little thing, no electricity! We have a power pole and all the wire and connections that were delivered by the power company three weeks ago, but so far we have been unable to get them to come back and hook us up. Our lease for the old building expires on February 15th, so with or without electricity we will be making the final move by then. I am looking at the possibility of using some of the money saved from buying a vehicle to purchase an upgraded generator which will allow us to run at least a portion of the lights until we get the electricity hooked up as well as during the frequent power outages. Right now we have half of our equipment in the new building and half in the old, so it keeps things interesting. It is probably a greater inconvenience for the students as the library has already been moved to the new location, and while it is only one kilometer away it is still difficult for them to get over to use it during daylight hours since they are in classes until 5PM each weekday. I imagine the library will be a very busy place this Saturday!

This term I am teaching Hermeneutics II, focusing on applying the hermeneutical principles of interpretation that the students learned in Hermeneutics I. It is an interesting class for me as I get to see hermeneutical principles applied to issues that affect the church in Ghana, such as polygamy and the church's responsibility to pay preachers.

Other classes this term include Old Testament VII focusing on the teaching of the prophets, Timothy and Titus, Christian Evidences and Congregational Development. Unfortunately our visiting teacher from America who was scheduled to teach Christian Evidences was unable to raise the necessary support for the trip, but thankfully we have been able to find a qualified replacement teacher.

This class has only one more term remaining once they complete their current classes. We are looking forward to seeing the great work they will do in the future for the kingdom!

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Thank you to these special friends who gave contributions toward the Kingdom of Hope School and the Bible Institute last month:

Jima and Martha Bell
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Carla Farr

Please send all contributions to:

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Please be sure to send me a note if you want your gift to be used for a specific purpose.

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If you want more information about what is happening in Ghana check out my blog at <http://thinkingsouls.wordpress.com/>.

Check out other articles I write for the Christian blog site Alive With Christ, along with articles by many others at <http://alivewithchrist.com/givemethebible/>.

Kingdom of Hope Update

I spent a week at the Kingdom of Hope Orphan's School over the recent holiday break to check on the building progress and help with preparations for upcoming classes.

The new classroom building continues to make progress, albeit at a much slower rate than I would like. I have learned that finding decent craftsmen to perform the necessary mason and carpentry work is a challenge in a remote village. It was necessary to find a second mason to complete the work as the first one's work lacked the quality we need. I spent one of the days there working with them to identify and correct a number of issues before we were able to begin building the roof. The good news is that as of last weekend, the roof is now on the building! We will be pouring concrete to complete the floors when I am at the school again in February.

We were able to purchase eight mattresses for the orphan's home this month. When these mattresses are laid out they cover the entire floor of a room where 20 of the children currently sleep. We still need many more mattresses, but we are making progress!

We were also able to purchase 40 additional textbooks for the school for the subjects that will be taught during the remainder of the year. This makes over 100 textbooks now available, meaning that each one is shared by approximately five students. This is a great improvement from the 40 to 1 ratio when I first visited the school.

Probably the best news out of the school this month however has to do with one of the teachers rather than the students. It was necessary to hire one teacher who was not a member of the church because he was the only one we could find to teach math and science. After spending five months surrounded by Christians and hearing the daily lessons from the Bible that are taught to the children, and despite his Muslim family and background, he asked to be baptized! We are rejoicing to have a new brother in Christ, and to see the difference the school is making in the lives of people in Kuka!

Evangelism Update

Over the school's holiday break I got a last minute request to teach at a Christian growth seminar at the Kuka church of Christ, which is the congregation we work with to support the Kingdom of Hope Orphan's School. This was a three day seminar that began the day after Christmas. Each day there were over 40 people in attendance for the seminar which went from 9 AM to 1 PM each day. I had arrived in Kuka to work on the building project when I learned about the seminar, so I stopped by to greet the church and ended up being invited to speak the next day! I was excited to hear last week that a few of those who attended the seminar were using some of the material presented to teach others who are not members of the church.

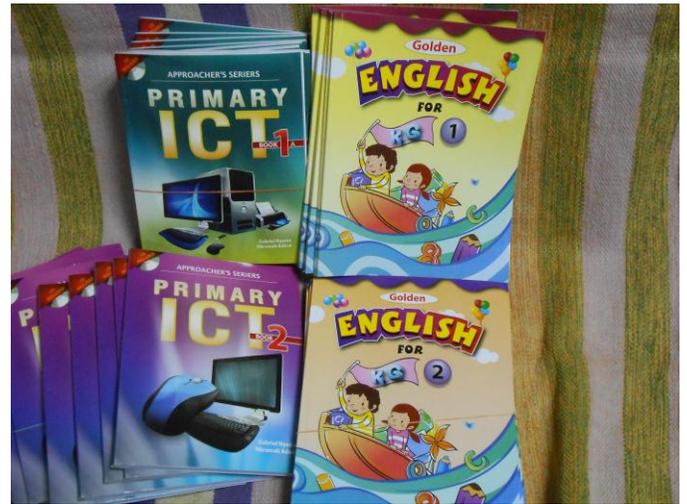
After leaving Kuka I travelled through the southern part of Burkina Faso. The church is virtually non-existent in Burkina and we are looking for ways plant congregations there. Since Burkina is a French speaking country it is more difficult to find qualified teachers and leaders, so we must begin by establishing indigenous language congregations on the border with local preachers who speak the tribal languages. After returning from Burkina I returned to the Upper East Region of Ghana and located two border villages where we will begin this process, Kulugugu and Mogori. We choose these villages because we have local preachers, who speak the native languages, committed to help lead the new congregations once they are planted. The campaign to plant the church in Kulugugu will be held February 16th through the 22nd, and the campaign in Mogori will be when I return from the U.S. in April or May.

We have also scheduled a school campaign during the same week in February in the town on Walewale, which is about 2 hours north of Tamale. The students will be working with the local congregation to tell more people in the community about the church, which is currently made up of mostly students.

Finally we have begun plans for a campaign in May in the town of Garu. It is going to be a busy spring spreading the good news!



Loading up building supplies and mattresses for the children's home.



Some of the new textbooks we were able to purchase.



Inspecting the work on the building and supervising corrections took up a full day.



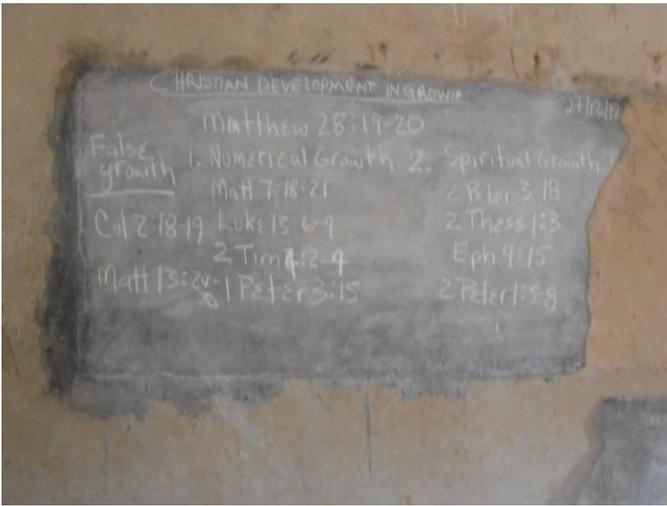
Everything is done by hand, including mixing the cement for blocks and mortar.



I was able to deliver lots of tracts and Bibles for use by the churches in the Upper East Region.



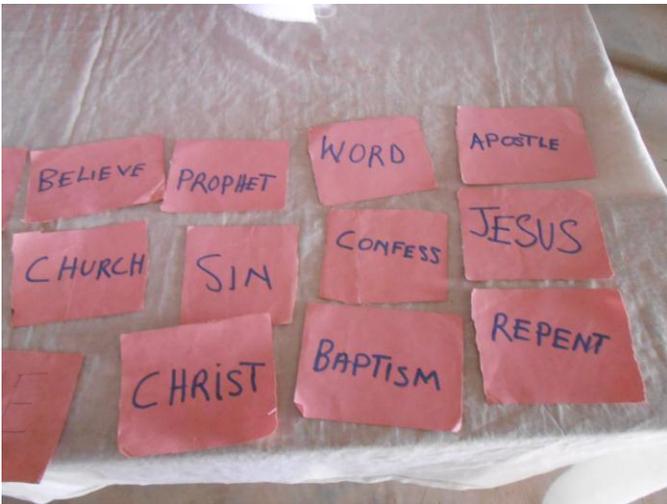
Some of the people who came to the Kuka church of Christ Christian Growth Seminar.



Notes from my class in the Christian Growth seminar.



New mattresses mean 20 children will not be sleeping on the ground tonight.



We use handmade flash cards to teach both English and the Bible at the orphan's school.



Loading up the library to make the move to the new Bible Institute's facility.



Steven Ashcraft showing the new library facility to a group of local preachers who visited the school.



Richard Renfro from Mission Printing in Arlington Texas visited the school to talk about distributing Bible tracts.