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Proverbs in Living Color!





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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, SOUTH SUDAN

In March of each year, we celebrate International Women's Day not just to recognize women as we do in the US, but also to advocate for the safety and respect of those who live in a country which the United Nations describes as "the worst place in the world to be a woman".

Proverbs 31, a higher authority than the UN, speaks of the noble character of women. I'd like you to meet one such woman in the Democratic Republic of Congo who humbled me when I sat in her home and listened to her story.

Her name is Christina.

She is 67 years old, but has the stamina of one much younger. She rises in the early hours before dawn and treks across the Rwandan border where she uses money made the day before to purchase sacks of charcoal and corn, bringing them back by motorcycle taxi to her home, built from volcanic rocks, in the crowded market quarter of Goma.

After boiling water and preparing breakfast for her own family, who wait patiently for her return, she starts the daily process of preparing food for those who will visit the market. Sitting in front of her home, she shucks and boils the corn before roasting it. She then breaks the large chunks of charcoal into burnable pieces so other woman can come and buy a cupful for their own cooking needs.

Any unused charcoal will be saved for the next day, but the corn not sold must be dried out for popcorn. Fresh corn for the following day will mean another pre-dawn 3 mile walk across the border.

On weekends, with money saved from the corn and charcoal business, she buys a kilo of precious potatoes and makes samosas to sell locally in the market. She cannot keep those overnight...so only makes what she expects to sell. Sunday is a day of rest and worship. Monday she is up again before the dawn breaks.

Christina has already surpassed the life expectancy for a woman in this part of the world. Her husband is an amazing 70 years old (cared for by a cherished wife). He "repairs radios and small appliances", though looking at his near empty lean-to repair hut, it is clear that Christina is the 'breadwinner' of the family. But she is much more than a financial provider...

Her daughter had 4 children, three boys and a girl. Her son-in-law died and the daughter remarried a man in the military, who was killed in action during one of the many uprisings in this part of the Congo. The youngest boy died, followed by the mother. One can only speculate the cause of death of a mother and young child in this part of the world.

Christina took in the 3 remaining children (her grandchildren) to raise as her own. She is determined to not only provide for them but to ensure all three have the opportunity to go to school, an expensive endeavor. She struggles with the cost of school fees, telling me they "eat small, but schooling is more important."

Not surprisingly, she is a leader in her community. She is the President of a group of women, Solidarité Umoja, who care for orphaned children in her neighborhood. Sadly there are many. She reminds the community of their obligation to care for such children, the majority of whom are homeless and on the street. She works with younger women in the program to help them provide for their own families and ministers to those who are sick and hungry. She is regarded as a 'wise woman' and mediates family conflicts in her neighborhood when asked.

This region of Congo is insecure, far from government control. But that doesn't stop Christina. She reached under her shirt and pulled out a woven cord to which was tied an old sock. She unwound the sock from her waist and reached deep to show me the \$50 she had saved during the year toward the \$150 goal of helping her grandson attend a training program to become a security guard. She keeps it safe knowing the \$150 will be the key for him to earn a job in the city...and to avoid being conscripted into the army or worse, one of the many militias in the area.

She told me, "I had lots of problems in the past but now, Gloire à Dieu, I have money, I have work, I have children, all three of whom are well educated." The oldest grandson is a servant leader at church and her granddaughter is a soloist. The well-being and future of her grandchildren is what gives her determination and stamina each and every day.

Proverbs 31 talks about a woman of noble character. Christina is that woman.

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

She is like a seagoing ship that brings her food from far away.

She rises while it is still night, preparing meals for her family and providing for her women servants.

She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

She reaches out to the poor, opening her hands to those in need.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her.

Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

May we all grow in our faith, to become more like her!

With love and joy!



Christina's family



Christina and Ann Goma, DR Congo March 2017