

Myron Krys Florence  
Summer 2017  
Dr. John Azumah  
Missional/Theological Pilgrimage (Ghana)

## **From Emmanuel to Ebenezer**

*Pride, Patterns, and Partnerships*

*and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. - Matt. 28:20*

Ghana was my first international trip. As such, I did not know what to expect. Thankfully, I had the guidance and encouragement of Amy Speas who continually counseled me along the way. She told me small things that I would not know to do such as, “make sure to take your yellow card.” Having been to Ghana earlier in the year, she was an invaluable resource. We went on our voyage with Germantown Presbyterian Church in Germantown, Tennessee. Amy and I did not know the six members of their church (Jay Howell, Francis Lilly, Erin Bowden, Beth Brock, Lance Warren, and Ty Hardin) nor did we know Juan Sarmiento, The Outreach Foundation Coordinator, but I could not have asked for a better group. Ironically, we were all introverts so we instinctively gave each other space. Throughout our ten days, I did not experience any malice among members of the group. Being in a new space so far from home, this was extremely helpful. Everyone was courteous and respectful to one another.

In Ghana, I witnessed a completely different culture than the rushed, capitalism of America. Compared to America, life seemed less frantic. People did not seem to be in as much of a hurry. We regularly saw people in groups sitting in front of their homes talking to each other. I am so thankful I had the opportunity to go. Being African American, it was nice to have my first international trip be to the motherland: the place where life started. From the Kente' cloth to the

one hundred-percent raw shea butter and black soap that I use, I did not realize how many “African products” actually came from Ghana. Although I am still processing the various experiences, I am certain they will inevitably stay with me for years to come. There are several recurring themes and competing narratives from Ghana, which have shaped and are shaping my theology and view on life.

*You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. - Deut. 10:19*

On my flight to Ghana, I sat beside Emmanuel Akoto, 33, who lives in the United States, but who is originally from Ghana. Our flight from JFK International Airport in Queens, New York to Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana was eight hours and eleven minutes. He sat next to the window while I sat near the aisle, in our two-seat section. From the moment he sat down, we began talking. He was going to spend three weeks with his fiancé’ who lives in Ghana. As we talked, I realized the difference in culture as it relates to personal space. When we talked, he would lean in real close to my face. At times, we were almost cheek-to-cheek. I have previously heard from international travelers that different cultures have varying degrees of what is acceptable for personal space. As one who generally offers a lot of personal space, I felt a little uncomfortable. It was hard to think and maintain interaction when he was so close, but I was grateful for his conversation. Our flight ran through the night but, when we were not sleep, we were talking. He told me to make sure I got some Ghanaian chocolate because it is “the best in the world.” He asked if I ever had Ghanaian jollof rice. I admitted, I had not but I previously had Nigerian jollof. He immediately informed me Ghanaian is better. Even before stepping foot in Ghana, Emmanuel made me feel welcomed.

Upon touching down in Accra the next morning, Emmanuel opened the shade and we looked out the window. Surrounding the airport, I saw lush vegetation. In most airports I have been to in America, the airport has nothing but concrete as far as the eye can see. In Accra, I saw red dirt and green trees. I voiced to Emmanuel, “we are not in the United States anymore.” He responded, “You are home.” It caught me off guard. That simple phrase almost brought tears to my eyes. Throughout my life journey, I have wrestled with identity and the desire for acceptance. I have searched for the feeling of “home” but I have seldom experienced it. I am sure he did not know the magnitude of his words but they translated, “you are loved and accepted here, just the way you are.” As a foreigner, that is what I experienced firsthand throughout my Ghanaian voyage. I found it intriguing that the first Ghanaian I met on the trip was Emmanuel, which means, “God is with us.” It let me know that I was not alone on this journey. God was with me. From the onslaught of my journey to the very end, the word “home” served as a common underlying thread. .

On Ghanaian soil, I experienced radical hospitality. Everywhere we went, from churches to the communities, the people were very welcoming and seemed genuinely excited to see us. Even as we drove down the street, children waved to us with beautiful smiles. Regardless of how much or how little they may have had, you could not tell because their faces shone with joy.

*O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. - Ps. 47:1*

On our first Sunday there, I was able to speak at one of the mud chapels near Tamale. We were late, having come from an earlier service at Unity Presbyterian, so the Kotingli service was already underway when we arrived. As we entered, we heard the cacophony of the drums and the entire church singing and dancing with loud voices in their native tongue. The pastor immediately walked us up to the platform. The doors of the chapel were open throughout the service (if it had doors at all). My seat was closest to the backside entrance, which was approximately two feet away. Little children from the community were playing a few feet outside the door. As we worshipped, they stood at the entrance looking in. They were so close, I could reach out and touch them. I would wave at them and they would smile and wave back. Eventually a couple of the children (approximately age's five to nine) walked up and stood at the step right outside the doorway. After a while, one of the men shooed them away. Ironically, when we were in the middle of service at Unity Presbyterian, a black goat wandered into the gathering. One of the members shooed it out. Although two completely different congregations, the children from the Kotingli service were treated in the same manner as the goat at Unity. It brought the idea to me, "suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not" (Matthew 19:14). I do not know how they view children's ministry or if they have a children's ministry, but the children were very interested to see what was going on. That would be a great ministry opportunity instead of having them run around the church playing in the dirt. I am not sure if the children belonged to members of the church or not but they did not stray far from the church. The choir was all teens but I did not see children in the service.

At every church we attended in Ghana, they asked if we wanted to preach. This was a foreign concept to me. In the American churches I have attended throughout my life, unless the pastor or someone knew you, they would never allow you to get up and preach. There is no telling what the stranger might say to your congregation and what type of theology he or she might preach. Presumably not worried about that, they were quick to hand us the mic. Yet, for me, the Ghanaian concept reinforced the notion of welcoming and honoring the voice of the stranger. Perhaps this was only because of our connection with Dr. Azumah. Nevertheless, I received it as a great honor.

*And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had. - Luke 21:1-4 NKJV*

Before we left the Kotingli Congregation where I ministered, the church gave us African shirts. The pastor informed us that most people in that community were farmers and did not have a lot of money, yet they made sure to give a gift. In my experience, people with less are willing to give more than people with more. Perhaps that is why Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 19:23 NKJV, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

After church, the youth, especially the girls, came up and shook our hands. They would stand off in a cluster and giggle. Then one would run up to shake our hands and the rest would follow. Ty, one of the men from Germantown Presbyterian, suspected the girls were giggling because of how soft his hands are. Working on the computer, your hands do not get hard. As a farming town, many of the men's hands would be harder than ours from physical labor. I proposed they

were also very intrigued to have people from America come. According to the pastor, they do not have many non-Africans come visit them. Our presence honored them and we received honor from their hospitality. The theme of “double honor,” (us being honored by their hospitality and them being honored by our presence), also was a reoccurring theme throughout our time in Ghana.

In another church, where my other cohorts attended, the members of that congregation gave yams and a live guinea fowl. In one church we visited in Accra, they gave us a bag with Malt and crackers. This showed me that love is not only in words but in action. Our example is Jesus. For God so loved the world that God *gave*. It is one thing to say I love you but actions speak louder than words. Radical hospitality not only welcomes but it gives. This trip made me reconsider the depths I should go to make the stranger feel welcomed.

Still another example of radical hospitality and “double honor” came to me at ExTee, the hotel where we stayed in Bolgatanga. I had the opportunity to meet Ebenezer Slim, 25. He was one of the receptionist at the desk. I spoke to him once and it was as if I was his best friend. He wanted to give me a tour of the entire hotel. He offered me some of the watermelon he was eating. In hindsight, he was the answer to a prayer. Being out with the group all day at different sites in and near Bolga, when we got back to the hotel all of my fellow sojourners retreated to their separate rooms. The night before meeting Ebenezer, I was feeling so lonely. I prayed that God would help me. The next day, I met him. I did not realize it at the time but when I got back to America, I looked up the meaning of the name Ebenezer. It is a Hebrew word, which means “stone of help.” I prayed for help and God sent me Ebenezer.

He was even happier to speak to me than I was to speak to him. He thanked me profusely for speaking to him. Rarely do guests take the time to speak with him and try to get to know him. He wanted to take pictures with me. At the beginning, it was nice but after a while, it was a little overwhelming. I knew his heart was in the right place though. He was the epitome of radical hospitality. He genuinely wanted to get to know me. When we were leaving, he came out and waved goodbye multiple times. It made me feel special. That is how I want to make people feel; overwhelm them with kindness.

This radical hospitality I received on the trip, however, juxtaposed or competed with the treatment of landsmen. For example, I wore my hair in cornrows for the duration of the trip. I did not feel like people treated me any different, possibly because I was a foreigner. On the contrary, Dr. Azumah shared that his son originally had cornrows when he moved back to Ghana and he was not accepted. One of the pastors of the presbytery told Amy and I that we should strongly consider coming back to Ghana after graduation next year and partnering with them in the work there. Amy asked if I would need to cut my hair. The pastor quickly said I would not. There is seemingly an expectation for Ghanaians, which foreigners do not have to uphold.

Hair is petty compared to the stark contrast between our treatment as the stranger and the hostility shown to the women banned to the “witches camp” in Gambaga. Within their home tribe, something horrific happened such as a sudden death or a natural phenomenon. Someone in the community accused one of these women of being a witch. It was primarily older or widowed women. Although there are men accused of being witches, they tend to run away leaving their

families, and relocating elsewhere. The women tend to stay unlike the “rolling stone” men. Perhaps it is easier for a man to start over again than a woman within this culture. Yet, in spite of the adversity, these women stayed and faced their accusers. While it is a very different context, the idea of a woman staying and standing against her accusers while the man fled reminds me of the biblical account of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11. She stayed while the man remained nameless.

From my perception of human nature, it seems like there is always a need in every culture to pin the blame on someone. These women were the ones to whom the blame fell. This is not a foreign concept in the Bible. From “The Fall” account of Genesis, Adam did not take the blame for his own actions but pinned it on Eve. Eve then referred it to the serpent. It is intrinsically a part of all of us to cast blame on someone or something else. We try to figure out how and why something like “this” could happen. When something outrageous happens, it makes us feel better when we have someone to whom we can direct our anger, hatred and frustration. The cultures within these Ghanaian tribes seem to exhibit a similar pattern.

In their tradition, it is customary to do the chicken test. They get a live chicken and cut the head off. The chicken would run around and eventually fall, as a chicken with its head cut off will eventually do. If the chicken fell on its back, the woman was not a witch and they exonerated her of the crime. If the chicken fell forward on its stomach, they labeled the woman a witch and she had to leave the community. In extreme cases, people beat her. For years, these women could not return to their community. After there were so many displaced women, the chief of Gambaga



allowed these outcasts to take up residency in his town. At one point, it was two hundred and eighty outcasts within the camp.

Because of the great need, the Gambaga Outcast or GO Home Project eventually formed. Seeing this need as a call to implement the social gospel, they not only provided shelter and clemency for these women, but also came up with ways so the women could become self-sustaining. Those who are able-bodied go out and do field work such as picking shea nuts. Those too weak to do heavy lifting stay in the camp and process the nuts, which the field workers bring back. These elderly women also create necklaces and bracelets to sell. Even though they are safe, as several of the women shared their stories with us, it was obvious that they remain psychologically and spiritually scarred from the ordeal, many years and even decades later. As they spoke, we could not understand their language, but their pain spoke volumes.

The ultimate goal of the GO Home Project is to send the outcasts back home. This is a slow process because it takes challenging tradition while changing a culture and embedded beliefs. I asked how they go about changing cultural beliefs. Our guide said, by educating the community on scientific reasoning for the phenomenon they experienced. They hope to show the community that there are reasonable, scientific explanations for various phenomena traditionally attributed to witchcraft.

Through education, they have been able to send two hundred and ten women back into their communities. According to tradition, in order to welcome one of the “witches” home, they would take a chicken and wave it over the former outcast, which cleared the woman of any negative

energy. It seems, if the chicken helps remove negative energy from the woman, they could do that before banning the woman so that she could stay within her community. Again, it probably boils down to the desire for someone to take the fall. Some of those reinstated women however received another indictment and had to leave again. Others were not welcomed and were beat during the night. There are even Christians who accuse people of being witches, showing that tradition and cultural beliefs outweigh religion. Old habits do not die, as we are experiencing even in the United States. Religion does not destroy embedded beliefs. The women of Gambaga and the stranger have completely different experiences.

*“...live and multiply and enter and take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors. Remember the long road on which the Lord your God led you during these forty years in the desert...” - Deut. 8:1-2 CEB*

I have not seen such great expanses of land as I saw throughout all of Ghana. The people love the land. They live off the land. They depend on the land. Many of the homes and chapels we saw were mud. The land weaves through every facet of their lives. It directly produces the fruit of their labor. Goats and chickens roam freely, reminding them of their food source. In America, I am so disconnected from my food (particularly meat), that when I ordered the fish, it was hard for me to eat because it had the head still on. I typically eat without thinking of the fact that it was once alive. Many Ghanaians do not have (or want?) that option.

The land and the animals are so richly rooted in Ghanaian cultural identity. In America, it seems, the more “civilized” you are, the further you are from the land. Most of our major cities do not have many trees. Concrete and tall stone buildings litter the landscape and many more are going

up all the time. We cut down more trees to build more buildings. In Ghana, the red tint on the dirt roads served as a constant reminder of their connection to the land. Yet, the land does not always serve them well. There are so many commodities that the land houses, such as cocoa, diamonds, and gold. Yet, the water is not safe to drink. One man asked us to pray for another man's daughter who was in the hospital with malaria. Food safety is a real concern. We were encouraged only to eat cooked fruits and vegetables. They live with the competing narrative that the land they love so much could potentially kill them.

In addition, in order to keep the land, they have to fence it in or the government will seize it. That is one reason they fenced in the Presbyterian Lay Training Center. Driving through towns, we frequently saw buildings with “Remove by [this date]” spray painted on them. The dates were often expired but the buildings still stood. People would build on the land illegally because it is easier to get a permit once built than to get a permit and then build. As the adage says, it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission.

*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. - Phil. 3:14*

In one of our nightly trip debriefings, towards the end of our ten days in Ghana, I told my group how I experienced Sankofa while I was in Ghana. The image of Sankofa is an African bird which is looking back (representing the past) yet it has an egg in its mouth acknowledging the future. I have known of this philosophy for a long time. I applied its concepts to a class I taught at a rehabilitation home for CPE, a year ago. I knew it roughly translates to “go back and get it,” and it relates to the proverb “Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi,” which means, “It is not wrong to

go back for that which you have forgotten." All of this was on my mind when I looked it up to show my group, all of which had never heard of the concept previously. Not remembering its country of origin, to my surprise, I found out that it is a word in the Twi language of Ghana. This served as another element, which I did not realize, originated in Ghana.

I experienced Sankofa when we went to different churches. They showed us the location where they began (their past), where they are now (their present), and even the unfinished building where they are trying to move (their future). I witnessed this same pattern when speaking with the Northern and Upper Presbyteries as well as the mosque. They had such pride as they remembered their heritage while pressing toward their future endeavors. They move forward only using volunteer labor, within the competing narrative of building with no money. They did not wait until everything was completely planned and accounted for but started with what they had, realizing that it is God's work. They are doing what they can now and trusting God to take care of the rest. As resources come, they build as they can and when they cannot they wait. Their diligence reminds me of Nehemiah 2:18, "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me, as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' So they strengthened their hands for this good work."

*And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? - Exod. 4:2*

Being a very analytical person who regularly is caught in the state of "do nothing" or the paralysis of analysis, their action encouraged me. It showed me an area of growth for myself. I will never have everything figured out but I can start with what I have. I have sat and waited for

years for the “perfect time” and all the resources to come first. It has never come. I have prayed that God would do something when perhaps God was waiting on me to use what was already in my hand. They inspire me to trust God and move out on faith. I do not see this as a call to be irresponsible and not plan but I do see it as a call to action. Do not wait for all the resources: just start building and eventually they will come. It might take years to finish but when God tells you to do something you cannot let excuses hinder you from moving forward. That is a lesson I learned in Ghana.

Another Sankofa (competing narrative) moment was during our visit of the slave castle. As we exited, our guide showed us the sign on the door. It read:

IN EVERLASTING MEMORY  
Of the anguish of our ancestors.  
May those who died rest in peace  
May those who return find their roots  
May humanity never again perpetuate  
such injustice against humanity  
We, the living vow to uphold this

As the Ghanaian people continue to move forward, it would be very easy to forget the past. In my North American experience, we tend to focus on one (past, present, or future). We try to forget our dark past and focus on a future hope. We even try to remove old monuments and symbols, pretending like it never happened. It is not until events such as the one that took place in Charlottesville that we have to deal with “our truth,” yet the Ghanaian people seem to be able to hold them all in tension. They do not tear down the slave castles, but they let you see them as they sit up on the banks of the ocean, serving as a constant reminder: may we never forget. It is

not one tense, it is the total of them all. The past (however dark) connects with the present and the present leads to the future. It is all inter-connected.

----

Ghana is a land of fabric. It is a huge part of their cultural identity. On the trip, wherever we went, on Sunday as well as during the week, both women and men had on patterned shirts, dresses, and smocks. Even women who walked down the street in the heat of the weekday had on beautiful dresses that one might see only at a church or special occasion in America. Their bright, bold colors painted the streets. No dress or shirt looked exactly alike, as if all custom made for each person. Within the fabric, many times we observed the names of the particular place. For instance, the North Presbytery of Ghana had their name in the fabric. That was the first time I ever observed people having their name or logo within the pattern of the shirt. It showed me the importance of attire in the African culture. It is a visible sign of their unique heritage and identity. It expressed their individuality while also showing their commonality. For instance, the choir at the church in Kotingli where I preached had on the same fabric. You knew that they were coordinated however, each dress showed each person's unique personality and style.

Growing up, I wrestled with low self-worth. Black was my favorite color to wear because it drew less attention to me. Their distinct fabrics told me to dare to be bold. Have pride in yourself and do not downplay or diminish your existence.

While the fabrics serve as a noncombatant to their Christian identity, various elements do compete. Their cultural and Christian identities can be at odds, as indirectly expressed earlier

with Christians not showing compassion and accusing women of being “witches.” People in the Christian sector struggle with their dual identity, as stated by Pastor Jasper, one of the local Presbyterian pastors in Tamale.

From the inception of Christianity to Ghana, the early converts appropriated it into the African context<sup>1</sup>. The question is, how much of their culture can they bring into their Christianity? What elements of their culture compliment Christianity and which ones are in stark contrast to it? This affects non-Christian sects as well. Even within Muslim circles, there was upheaval with Ahl ul-Sunna attacked and publicly condemned “traditional Muslim practices like production of charms and wearing of amulets as un-Islamic”<sup>2</sup>. Of course, the answers to these questions fall within a case-by-case basis, so there is no hard rule. It is something that the local pastors as well as the individuals have to grapple with as they attempt to live out the social gospel. Yet, I see it as a good one.

In my context and religious upbringing, the emphasis was solely on putting off the old person and putting on the new. We promoted the idea, “in our flesh there abideth no good thing,” which is not helpful in establishing a health self-image. The old person and all its characteristics and idiosyncrasies is intrinsically evil and we had to kill it or suppress it every day. In my Pentecostal/holiness faith tradition, you had to look, dress and act a certain way in order to be “holy” or “God-live.” Your former identity, will, and feelings no longer mattered. The church

---

<sup>1</sup> Candy Gunther. Brown, *Global Pentecostal and charismatic healing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 232.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

was the one to tell you how to live out your faith. Although not explicitly recited, we could not think for our self. Cultural identity was not important: only our Christian identity.

Ghanaians testify of another narrative. In Ghana, their cultural identity is just as important as their religious identity. They are inseparable. In America, Presbyterian churches have a reputation for being “frozen.” The churches in Ghana, albeit Presbyterian in name, were as expressive and boisterous as the Pentecostal churches I grew up attending. Movement and dance is a part of the culture. It reminded me of this truth: culture trumps denomination: tradition trumps religion. This could be positive or negative. Ghanaians hold them in tension, seeking to honor both sides of the dichotomy. They are patterns woven into the fabric of Ghanaian society and identity.

*You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. - Exod. 18:18*

In Ghana, they modeled the importance of building relationships. The pastors were very happy to tell us all the great things they were doing, however, they did not present a false hope. They acknowledged openly that they need help. They were not ashamed to tell us how we could help them. They showed us specific areas that they are working on such as clean water projects and building churches. They were not only looking for financial support, as most American’s feel inclined to give. Our Ghanaian brothers and sisters were looking for long-term invested relationships, which serve as a win-win scenario for all parties involved. Rev. Dr. Solomon Sumani Sule-Saa quoted the proverb, “if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.” Going far is their approach to ministry.



The emphasis on partnership and community showed even within the naming service we had the opportunity to witness at 441, the church service in Accra. One of the mothers of the church held the child throughout the service. When the ceremony began, the pastor, John Bosco Dogeneriba asked Josh, our guide, to pray that God will allow them to name the child correctly. The pastor, then asked what the name for the name of the child and gave room for any grievances. He baptized the child and asked for a commitment from the parents as well as from the community in helping to raise baby Ferguson. The congregation repeated Ferguson's name several times at the pastor's request. After the ceremony, people brought up long bars of yellow soap. This ceremony was an invitation of the community into the life of baby Ferguson as well as connecting Ferguson and his parents into the community. Although baby baptism and naming services are not a part of my faith tradition, this was very different compared to the American baby baptisms I witnessed. The community does not seem to have as much say-so in the naming of the child. The call is to the immediate and extended family, not to the entire church family. As a stranger, I even felt connected to baby Ferguson after that ceremony.

As a "loner," I have often struggled with the concept of asking for help. The Ghanaian model encourages me that we all need each other, whether we like it or not. I am encouraged to ask for what I need, as I learned even in raising money to go on the trip. I have never asked for money on that magnitude before. It was different for me, but God showed me favor. The people gave me enough to cover the trip, all the medical expenses, and even spending money while there. We have not because we ask not so do not be afraid to ask. As Matthew 7:7 says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Relationships also span across religious lines, outweighing their differences. In his article, “Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana: ‘Too Much Meat Does Not Spoil the Soup,’” Dr. John Azumah references that in 1993, Christians made up 62% of the population, traditional religious practitioners 20%, and Muslims 16%. Even though Islam predated Christianity in Ghana, Christianity still has a stronger presence there as witnessed by the many Christian scriptures and sayings on the backs of people’s car and van windows.. Yet, this does not serve as grounds for conflict across religions. Most of the tension happens internally within a particular religious group such as between sects of Muslims, namely Ahmadis and mainline Muslims . However, on the grassroots level, Muslims and Christians live in peace. According to Mustapha bdul-Hamid, Ghanaian “Christians and Muslims have lived in absolute peace since the introduction of Christianity and Islam in the fifteenth century”<sup>3</sup>.

When we asked about this, my group learned that it is because “religion has a face.” Muslims and Christians live in close proximity. It is not an “us versus them” paradigm. On the contrary, they are neighbors and family. They talk to each other all the time through the “dialogue of life.” They attend each other's religious ceremonies and celebrations. The Imam we met, told us that Christians get Muslims to pray for them and Muslims ask Christians to pray for them. They do not see it as a problem. Because of this strong, matured bond, if there is a disagreement, they sit down and talk about it. According to Abdul-Hamid, “peace is essential for developments”<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace," *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (IJOURALS)* 1, no. 1, 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

Conflict leaves destruction and stifles growth. Thus, it makes sense why Muslims and Christians seek to work together. It showed me the importance of building relationships, not just with people who look and think like you. We do not all have to believe the same thing but we should have a faith that seeks understanding and aims to partner with our brothers and sisters across the globe.

*Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." - 1 Sam. 7:12*

American television portrays an image of Africans being poor and destitute. That is not the image I witnessed. Yes, they might not be a capitalist society as we are, but I saw God's abundance everywhere I had the opportunity to go. I experience Emmanuel in the warmth, radical hospitality, and "double honor" of their smiles, their gifts, and their welcomes. I witnessed the social gospel first hand as people not only preached the gospel but went out into the communities holding "dialogues of life," seeking to build relationships across religious lines; as they provided "safe spaces" for women and empowered them to be self-sufficient; and as they sought to change culture through education. I saw them faithful hold the competing narratives of their past, present, and future (Sankofa). In Ghana, I experienced the pride of a people who walked around with beautifully patterned garments, seeking to peacefully partner with the stranger. It is here that I raise my Ebenezer, not only as a sign that the LORD helped me while I was in Ghana but also to commemorate what I saw, heard, and experienced in my ten days in Ghana.

*This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. - Ps. 118:23 KJV*

**Thanks be to God.**