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A Day in the Life...

September, 2015

"Girl-Child"

Dear Friends,

In this September article, as the school year is starting again for the children in the USA, I want to continue talking to you about the education of children in Ghana. In both the July and August articles this summer I began telling you about the education that the children get both from school, and at home from their parents and family members. This month I want to focus more on the girl child. I chose to talk about the education of boys and girls separately because each is so different.

In the 1980's a national crusade called "send your girl-child to school" brought about major change and independence for female children in Ghana. It also started the development of a government program to protect children's rights. Prior to this independence, in Ghana the girl child was not considered at all when formal education was discussed. The perception was that it was wasteful, both for time and cost to send a girl to school, because she would only "end up in the kitchen" and stay home to keep the house and raise children. Current social development and the apparent benefits of education for girls has changed these ideas dramatically, and for the better.

Although many girls are now able to go to school, they are still trained at the hands of their mothers and the elderly women in society. Often as early as the age of 5, the girls will begin training with their mothers on how to be a woman. In most traditional homes the mother wakes the girls earlier than the boys. The girl child will be made to start sweeping the yard, cleaning the kitchen, doing the dishes from the night before, and often fetching clean water - by herself, or with her brothers when they wake up. If the mother is a market woman (selling wares), or engaged in other commercial activity, as soon as the girl child is old enough to carry a load, she will accompany her mother to sell at the market.

As the girl child grows older, she will assume some of the household responsibilities, like cooking, washing clothes and cleaning the house. The boys rarely wash clothes; they only have to dump dirty clothes anywhere in the house and the little sister would have to gather them and wash them, while the boys go out to play.

If the parents see a reason, the little girl may be sent to live with an Aunt or other Matron to learn a trade: sewing, baking, or some other commercial enterprise by which she may earn income to support and provide for her future home. Often the girl child will live with this benefactor until she completes her apprenticeship, sometimes even staying there until her hand is taken in marriage. Some of these young women would find their own places to make a living with their trade, or return to the village of their parents for employment.

A significant difference in the growing up process of children into men or women is how the young woman is prepared for womanhood and marriage. There is a rite known as "coming of age", precisely prescribed as "puberty rites". I will tell you more about this in the coming months. I will also have some exciting news to share with you from the village of Akrampa very soon! Watch for the October *Lectern* for updates!

Blessings,

Pastor Ben