

# The Messer Message

## March 2007

Dear Friends and Prayer Partners,

FAMILY--what does this word bring to your mind? For me, it makes me think of my own Mom and Dad, my brothers and sisters and of course, my husband and children. I know that the first group was and is my first family. I know that the second group (husband and children) is my priority family at this time. Out here in the Ivory Coast, the word "family" has a MUCH broader sense. They do recognize their normal family (normal to me cuz I'm American) as well as their extended family (aunts, uncles, great aunts, great uncles, cousins...) They also consider "family" anyone from their village, tribe or region. When someone says, "This is my sister," it could be their sister, cousin, or close neighbor. If they say "This is my mother," it could be their mom, grandmother, aunt or an older neighbor lady. We have to understand how they look at things when we are dealing with the many situations that arise out here in our church.

Here are a few situations that you can pray about. The first concerns a girl named Nadege. We have known Nadege since she was very little. She does not know how old she really is, but I would guess around 12. Nadege is a very sweet, but quite undisciplined child. She used to come to my house to sell bananas. She always wanted to hold my babies. One time, I allowed her to take a bath, wear some of Leah's clean clothes, and play with the baby. She was in heaven! She began coming to my house as often as she could (and as often as I would allow her) to bathe, put on clean clothes and hold the baby. This is a luxury she does NOT have at home. At home, she wears her dirty clothes all day and all night for a long time. She washes her own clothes by hand and will change once in a while, but most of the time when I saw her, she was filthy. Last term, I began to want to do something more for this little girl who had stolen my heart. I wanted to help her get an operation for a hernia (her belly button sticks way out) AND I wanted to somehow, teach her to read and write. She does not go to school at all. I talked to Andy about all of this and he was in agreement that we would try to help her. Well, the situation is this. Her "mother" (this is really a cousin who did not have any daughters) does not really WANT Nadege to be helped. Nadege's real mother had 10 children in a small village. Nadege has no birth certificate, does not know her birth date and does not even know her parents' real names. She was given to her cousin to be raised because this older cousin wanted a "daughter" to help her around the house. Nadege works at home and sells for her "mother." When Nadege began coming to my house this term, I asked her about going to school. I asked her if she might like to take night classes (she is too big to go in regular school out here) and learn to read. She has learned to write her name, the numbers 1-10 and a few letters of the alphabet. She very much wanted to do this. She also wanted to get her hernia fixed. When I talked with her "mother," she told me not to mess with the hernia as that was a beauty mark (note the lack of understanding) and meant that Nadege would have lots of children. When I asked her about school, she said that Nadege can't go to school without a birth certificate. I was told that we could get her a birth certificate if we know the names of her parents and grandparents. Her "mother" said she does not know their names. Another road block. In the past few months, the situation with Nadege has gone from bad to worse. Her "mother" has been upset when she comes to my house, has beaten her a couple of times and threatened to send her to her village. When Nadege said she actually wanted to go to the village (she would get to meet her real mother and perhaps get permission to come and live with us -- we have offered this), her "mother" quickly changed the plans and said she will stay here with her. Twice now, Nadege has left home and not come back for several days at a time. She stays with friends. Her "mother" thought I was hiding her, but I do not ever encourage her to rebel against her "mother." I always encourage her to be submissive and obedient. I tell her to ask permission before coming to visit me. Lately I have had to refuse to allow her to visit because it seems to anger her "mother" so much. You may wonder WHY her "mother" acts this way (first encouraging Nadege to visit me and then getting angry when she does). Well, the reason has been revealed. I have discovered (from church members talking to Nadege's "mother") that Felicité (this is her name) actually wanted Nadege to work for me and get a salary. Her plan was to make even more money off of this child. We wanted Nadege as a daughter, not as a servant. We can't afford another servant (we have a lady who helps us in our house) AND it is against the law to have child labor. Since she finally realized that we were not going to hire Nadege as a servant, Felicité has stopped coming to church (she was baptized at our church--which makes me wonder if she did the whole thing as a show just to get close to us in the hopes of Nadege getting a job at my house) and does what she can to hinder Nadege from going. I have talked to her several times, but she acts like everything is fine (even says she will come back to church) and Nadege is just a naughty girl... However, when she talks to the Ivorian members of the church, she tells them that Nadege should be paid for coming to my house, and I am not treating her fairly. The fact is, Nadege did not work for me. She ate with us, she did school with us, she loved staying clean all day, we instructed her in God's Word, we bought her modest clothes and we had begun to dream of how her life could be if she could read and write. It really breaks my heart that this "mother" would block the possibility for Nadege to grow and learn and have some positive input into her life --all for the love of money. The Ivorian believers say she would never act like this if Nadege were her own child. Please pray about this situation. We want to help Nadege (it is getting harder and harder) and we don't want to offend or alienate

Felicité either. Felicité's husband has made a profession of faith (I was with him when he prayed, and he seemed very sincere) but he does not come to our church at all. Felicité has 3 sons. The oldest used to come to Sunday School but no longer comes (he is a young teenager and seems headed for a life of sin--roams the streets). The second son is a devoted Catholic and Felicité (remember she made a clear profession of faith, and was baptized in our church) is very proud of this. The third son is saved and baptized and comes faithfully with Nadege. They even won a can of pop for perfect attendance for the past two months. Another thing to keep in mind, Felicité can not read. She can not read God's Word at home. She knows practically nothing about God's Word, and since she has stopped coming to church, I don't see how she can grow at all. Is her heart like the rocky soil that received the Word, but then it was choked out by the cares of this world? Please pray for Nadege and Sylvestre (the youngest boy) that their hearts will be fertile soil, and that God's Word will dwell richly in them. Pray that we will be able to show God's love to Felicité and her whole family. I am able to give up my dreams for Nadege (if it is God's will, He can surely work something out, but if it is not His will I do not wish to go against Him at all!) but please pray that God will hold her close, and maybe someday she will be able to learn to read His Word. For now, she is a child, and under the authority of Felicité. We have respected her wishes (as she makes them known to us--she is the one who used to send Nadege to my house--I just did not know she was thinking she would get money out of it) and we have been loving and patient. Please pray that God will work in Felicité's heart (and mine too).

Once when Felicité went on an extended trip to Abidjan, Nadege was having trouble with boils. I took care of her and she actually slept at our house for about 4 nights. When I told her she had to go home (she was better and her mother came back from Abidjan) she cried and said, "but there is no light at my house." This statement is true in more than just a physical sense. Pray that God will shed His light into Nadege's home!

The second situation is new. It just happened tonight (Wednesday the 14th of March). Andy is out (it is 10 PM) with two members of the church to visit a family in an attempt to help. It involves a 15 year old girl who has been kicked out of her home. According to this girl, her mother said that the fetisher (like a Witch Doctor) said that her (the mother's) health problems are the fault of this daughter. Therefore, the mother (I don't know if this is a real mother or not) has kicked the girl out. She came to church tonight seeking help. We have never met her before. Andy and the church members went to the family's house to see if this is true, and if they can talk to them. One of the church members said she can stay with his family tonight if necessary. Things like this are hard for us to handle. Should we find the girl a home? Should we try to take her in? Should we beg the parents to take her back? This is another reason we wish for a Young Ladies' Home to help girls like this. Maybe one day. In the meantime, we must pray for wisdom and do what we can as things come up. Please pray for us to be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16). Well, Andy has just come home with the outcome of this case. The mother said she did not "kick" the daughter out. The 15 year old daughter has been involved with a sorcery group and they (the group) said they must put a "death spell" on one of the girl's parents. She (the daughter) picked her mother (there is no father in her home). How awful is that? The girl did finally admit that this was all true. The mother said she did not want her daughter to leave home, but she was greatly disturbed by her daughter's actions. They are NOT saved. So many of the people out here practice witchcraft, believe in fetishes, and play with sorcery. I am glad that my Heavenly Father is so much stronger than all that is in the world. I'm glad He is with me, and has promised to never leave me nor forsake me. The people need Him so badly, yet they continually turn to Satan. How sad! The girl has returned home. Andy has invited them to come to our church, as well as receive counsel from God's Word for their situation. They need God's help and forgiveness for sin, and we need His wisdom and power. Please pray for us as we give them the gospel.

We also get many cases of folks at our gate in "need." Some needs are real and many are not real. Again, we need wisdom. We want to help people, but we do not want to waste God's resources on con artists and such. We usually have to check out each story (go to the hospital and see if indeed there is a sick wife/child/parent etc.) It can get annoying and time consuming. Our national believers are a huge help. Please pray for us.

This letter has gotten quite long. We appreciate you all and your open hearts (and ears--ok, eyes since you're reading this). It is such a blessing to just know we can bring some of this burden to you all, and you will share it with us. May God bless you as I know you have burdens too. Please know we will be glad to help pray for anything that you are bearing at the moment as well.

Much Love in the Lord Jesus Christ,

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