

# Digging deep

## for water

## and hearts

## in Western Africa



Billy Rutledge, senior pastor of Hatteras Island Christian Fellowship, holds local pastor Samuel's youngest son.

# Living Water

## for a thirsty people

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**In the drought-impacted isolated area of Burkina Faso, Western Africa, drinking water often comes from filthy, shallow pools polluted by animals. Christians bring in drilling rigs—not only to find clean water but for an opportunity to share the living water of Christ.**

Mary Sawadogo could only marvel as she watched the team of Americans in her yard. They completed construction on her family's home, built a wall around their property to keep stray cattle from destroying their crops, and provided both food and livestock that would serve as a source of income for her family. It was the unfolding of a prophetic dream she felt that God had given her a year earlier—white people mixing concrete in her yard, finishing her family's block and tin roof shelter—unimaginable to the people in this poor and remote northern region of Burkina Faso, a nation in Western Africa.

A year later, Mary would marvel again as she witnessed something just as unbelievable and unexpected. Her husband, Samuel, who is a local pastor, was openly weeping and embracing American Pastor Billy Rutledge as the men said “good-bye” for a second time. In doing so, he was breaking his culture's long-established “poolaku” system which forbids men and women from publicly displaying emotion. “It was an embrace of commitment and thanksgiving, a joining of hearts, sealed by the Holy Spirit,” recalled Billy, senior pastor of Hatteras Island Christian Fellowship (HICF), located on the outer banks of North Carolina. He had led the team that God used to fulfill Mary's “impossible” dream the previous year. Billy returned to continue the work of quenching physical and spiritual thirst, not only in Samuel and Mary's lives, but also beyond their village borders.



The Sawadogo family moved to the edge of the Sahara Desert to share the Gospel.

In Burkina Faso, water from shallow pools is used by humans as well as animals. Stagnant water is a breeding ground for disease-carrying mosquitoes and bacteria. A team from Hatteras Island Christian Fellowship, NC, visited to share living water that nourishes both physically and spiritually.



Billy shares his testimony with a group of Muslim men who came to visit one morning before the team left to drill for water in remote areas. The man in back, right, accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

*“You could see it in his face. He had really come to Jesus, and he was really excited about it.”*

T.B. Reedy

In this harsh, parched land at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert, hopes rose and fell on the success or failure of the American missionaries’ 2008 well-drilling operation.

“The area is dying for water,” said Patrick Taft, Billy’s partner on the second trip. It had been the area’s spiritual drought, however, that first attracted Samuel and his family. Samuel, Mary, and their five children have lived in Deou for more than seven years, leaving behind a prosperous region of

the country to bring the Gospel to desolate, remote, northern Burkina Faso. Due to their Christian beliefs, they were forced to live outside the town on the worst land in the area. They had experienced drought, severe hunger, a scarce water supply, and periodic harassment and rejection from some local Muslims. Stampedes from cattle roaming outside the Muslim village often destroyed Samuel’s crops. Although Burkina Faso is predominantly Muslim, it is a secular country that allows freedom of religion. When

asked why he stayed on during the hard times, Samuel would respond, “Then who will tell these people about Jesus?”

**The First Trip: Laying the Groundwork**

Groundwork for the well-drilling trip had been laid a year earlier. In November of 2007, a four-member HICF team arrived in Deou, working with Keith Smith, a resident missionary from Wales. Keith, who has lived and worked among the natives for 20



Nuuhu

years, served as translator. “The white people in the pastor’s yard” building Samuel’s home attracted the attention of many curious locals, including the chief of the nearby village of Lila. The chief invited Billy and the entire team to spend the night at his village, to share a meal, and to sleep under the stars with him and his brother Nuuhu. Billy and Keith shared more than fellowship that night; they presented the Gospel.

The next morning the chief announced that he would not oppose anyone who wanted to become a Christian. Nuuhu accepted the offer. “He wanted this Jesus who would bring peace to him and his family,” Billy said. A young boy named Amadou, the son of a strict Muslim, had spent several days with the team. He also accepted Christ on that trip. “You could see it in his face. He had really come to Jesus, and he was really excited about it,” said T.B. Reedy, one of two HICF women



Amadou



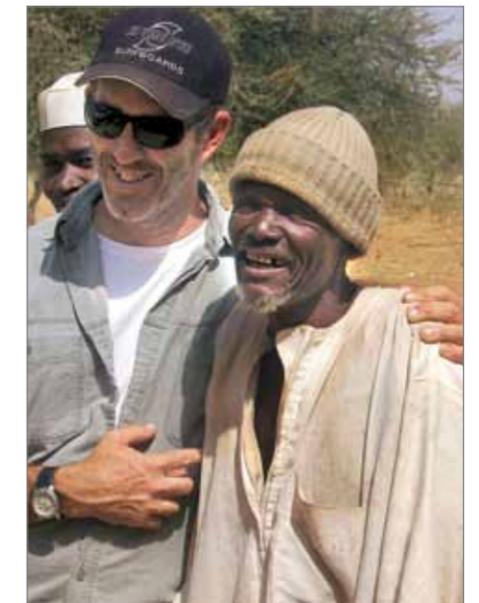
Billy Rutledge and Keith Smith, a Welsh missionary living in Africa, explain the Gospel to Nuuhu, who later accepted Christ. Nuuhu is the chief’s brother.

on the mission. Although Billy didn’t know it at the time, an elderly man who had been contracted to make bricks for the wall around Samuel’s home became a Christian during that visit. Billy had befriended and witnessed to this Muslim brickmaker, whom he affectionately nicknamed “Papa.”

Men and women are segregated in this African culture. The American women, T.B. and Alma Fountain, didn’t interact with the men of the villages or physically work on the house. They spent their time “just being there” with Mary and the other women, building relationships with them and sharing in their work. Although communication



Each day of drilling, the crowds started small early in the morning and swelled as the noise traveled through the Sahel, an arid region south of the Sahara Desert.



Billy is warmly greeted by a bricklayer they called “Papa” who accepted Christ during a previous visit.



A crowd at the local market in Deou listens as the team proclaims the Gospel. Keith Smith uses a portable sound system to translate. He is dressed in the traditional garb of the Fulani, a west African nomadic Muslim tribe he desires to reach for Christ.

with the women was difficult, it wasn't impossible. They used facial expressions, hand motions, and even pictures to communicate. "It's amazing how you can converse," Alma said. When it came time to leave Lila, Alma didn't realize how she had bonded with the women after simply churning butter with them. "I just broke down," she said.

Mary, who had the original vision of whites coming to serve, didn't let the language barrier hinder her testimony. Her attitude toward her "extremely difficult life" presented a strong message to the women, T.B. recalled. "Whatever she was doing, she always seemed to have a peaceful smile on her face, a very strong spirit. We knew it was

from the Lord." Mary's example of true biblical submission to her husband was unforgettable. "She served him because she loved him and loved the Lord."

The women experienced a brief breakthrough in tradition when one of the village leaders served them. T.B. shared, "He came

by, smiled and gave us bowls with something to eat." Billy added that on several occasions, this particular leader purposely spent time with the women as they worked, something they didn't expect.

The team also reached out to children informally and through special, planned activities on that first trip. "Children came in droves," walking for miles to meet the Americans, Billy said. They came in groups of 5 to 10 during the day, growing to 20 to 25 after school. T.B. and Alma had brought bubbles, jump ropes, balloons, and dolls to share with the children. They played simple games and made easy crafts. Often they would sing together, including songs about Jesus in English and later in their native language.

"The children loved having their pictures taken with the digital camera and immediately seeing the image," Alma said. T.B. remembered one afternoon when she was forced to remember some long-forgotten high school French as she and some of the children read their schoolbooks together. After the team spread the word in the market that there would be a party for the children, nearly 50 youngsters showed up. In addition to the fun and food, T.B. said, "They seemed to be really hungry for the Gospel."

### Drilling wells, reaching hearts

In November 2008, Billy and Patrick returned to Deou for another purpose: to participate in a desperately needed well-drilling operation with missionary Keith Smith, a drilling team they partnered with, and another group of believers from Great Britain. It was a sweet reunion for Billy and Samuel's family. Nuuhu and "Papa" had traveled a long distance by foot to excitedly share that they were still following "in the way of Jesus." They arrived to greet Billy within an hour of his arrival.

The work, however, was arduous and frustrating. Five drilling attempts resulted in only three successful efforts. A new well was placed in Samuel's yard; two wells were repaired inside the town of Deou. The local mayor, thankful for the pumps, met with the teams and allowed them to pray for him and his leadership ability "in the name of Jesus." The entire operation then moved to Lila. Unfortunately, Lila was dry, which was "crushing" to the hopeful villagers, Billy said.

"Why aren't we getting the water we want?" Patrick wondered at the time, after having



On market day, a woman rides her donkey in Deou.



Billy's message of hope through Jesus Christ is translated into the local language of Fulfulde as well as French. Some Muslims were eager to hear the Good News.

*"It's all because of Jesus! It's not Jesus as prophet or teacher, as recorded in the Qur'an. It's Jesus as God, living in men's hearts."*

Pastor Billy Rutledge

drilled 350 feet down. Some of the villagers were upset when the team started to pull out the equipment, Patrick said. But the chief settled matters by reminding them that it wasn't people from the mosque who had come out to drill and that the Christians had come "for free." In the end, the Christian teams were warmly invited back.

The building of good relations between the Muslim communities and the Christians continued to another village. Outside of town, the two drilling trucks sank into the sand in the Christian churchyard where the drilling was to take place. For more than six hours, local Muslims turned out in large numbers to free the vehicles, unaware that the team would later attempt to drill wells inside the town. The Muslims offered to raise funds to help the pastor feed the teams regardless of the outcome and prayed for their work. The teams were able to place one well in the churchyard. They were also able to put a second well, the most powerful one drilled, in the Muslim community.

In the villages, after helping to load and unload the drilling equipment and after the hard work of the day was done, the HICF team had time to relax with the locals. "It's like the circus comes to town" when the big rigs come, Patrick said. He and Billy mingled with the gathering crowds, including the children, who had been drawn to watch the equipment trucks in action. This gave opportunity for them to share the Gospel. Several children asked how they might know Jesus as their God because "they had never watched religious leaders playing with, laughing with, and hugging and loving children," Billy said.



Burkina Faso is located in Western Africa, south of the Sahara Desert.



The HICF drilling team prepares to drill in Pastor Samuel's yard.

Locals, who had seen secular organizations venture into the region in the past, repeatedly told them how astonished they were that this Christian well-drilling team worked and interacted so well with them. Billy said that the presence of the whites "showing real respect and concern, getting dirty with them and loving on them," impacted the villagers. "Locals were surprised to have white foreigners laboring side by side with Africans."

"What you're doing is a good thing. Your God will be glorified," one older Muslim man told Keith. Digging wells, Patrick added, proved to be an effective scriptural illustration of the value of the living water of Christ. "This is a free gift we're giving."

At the end of the last day in the Muslim town of Tasmaket, Billy shared the Gospel with the crowd as Keith translated. "Why would men pay to travel and labor for a people they don't know, to a land they don't know, with a language they can't understand? It's all because of Jesus! It's not Jesus as prophet or teacher, as recorded in the Qur'an. It's Jesus as God, living in men's hearts. It's Jesus giving us absolute assurance that we can be saved, right now, in this life!"

Church leaders at HICF are praying about returning to Burkina Faso this coming fall with an evangelism team. They hope to rent



A local boy watches the drilling operation from a high vantage point. Drilling wells provided many opportunities to share with Muslims that following Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is what motivated the missionaries to assist others in need.

*a booth on a market day celebration, give out watermelon, and share the Gospel message through drama.*

**"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."**

John 7:38

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Keith Smith translates as HICF missions team member T.B. Reedy shares the Gospel with local children.