

Seminar 2 Missions Conference 2004

By Shari Ardill

Let's just start by praying, shall we? Dear Lord Jesus, I thank you that you are meeting with us here today, and I pray during this next hour, Lord, that you will give us a glimpse of what you are seeing right right now around the world with people who are really hurting and suffering and feeling forgotten. And I pray, Lord, that you will stir something in us that can't let us leave here with those pictures in our minds without doing something about it. So. Thank you, Father Jesus name? Amen.

My name is Shari Ardell, and I was privileged to live in Africa for about a dozen years with my family. The last ten were spent in Ethiopia. AIDS is pretty prevalent in Ethiopia, and yes, we heard about it and sometimes the statistics, but it wasn't something I saw often on the street, because, frankly, by the time people get sick enough to show AIDS, they're not coming out of their houses anymore.

I one time heard in Addis Ababa, we lived in the capital city, that at any given time, at a national hospital in the city, 75% of the hospital beds were AIDS patients, HIV positive. 75%. You can imagine why a lot of Africans don't go to the hospital unless they're practically dying, because they know when you go there, you do die. So it's kind of a scary cycle that continues.

A lot goes on under one roof, under the roof of your house and my house, and even this hut. And it was probably a hut like this where a woman, let's call her Amsala, lived. And she began

noticing that her teenage daughter, her preteen daughter, started looking sick and missing more days of school and losing weight. So they walked for miles and went to a local clinic. At the clinic, and after the blood test, the nurse sat the mother and daughter down and gave them the shocking news that the daughter was HIV positive. The mother was devastated. She grabbed her daughter and they headed for home. And on the way home, she asked her, who has done this to you? Who would do this? And the little girl or teenager hung her head in shame and said, My older brother. Then the mother found the older brother even more upset and said, what have you brought into our house? Look what's happening. We just found out about your sister, who was your partner in this? He hung his head and said, It's our house girl. Now, the mother was irate. Realizing the implications of this, she called in her husband and her children and then called in the house girl and started railing at her and threatening her and said, you have destroyed my family. What have you done? Why did you do this? And the house girl just sat there, shook her head and smiled and said three horrifying words- it's your husband. That meant Amsala, who had an HIV too. This is the reality in some places in Africa, and I hope to just give you a better idea, because we hear about it all the time that AIDS is horrible in Africa.

The United Nations has reported that AIDS has become the most devastating disease ever that the world has faced. Since the epidemic began. 60 million plus people have been infected with HIV. We'll talk a little later. Of that number, approximately 20 million have already died. HIV. AIDS is a stalker. A stalker of the innocent, of innocent children who get it through their mother's breast milk because she's HIV positive, a stalker of innocent women who are treated as objects, as possessions, of faithful wives, of unfaithful and sometimes polygamous husbands. It is a stalker of young girls who have been sexually abused, a stalker of orphans left alone,

mourning and destitute. There's a lot of confusion because we here in the States automatically think we know about the disease. It's a homosexual disease, okay? And some drug addicts get it as well. But the truth is, in Africa, 90% of all HIV cases are caused by heterosexual sex. Imagine if it went into the heterosexual community in America, the land that is so sexually moral. The fact is that every 10 seconds, one person dies from AIDS. But what's worse yet is two more people are infected every 10 seconds. It's spreading, and with no end of insight. Most of you probably know about how HIV is spread through sexual intercourse, through blood transfusions, through contaminated needles, and through the birth process, and through mother's breast milk. But let's look at a few stages of the disease, because unless you're around it, you wouldn't know these probably.

I'd like us to imagine that you are a group of students in an African country, say, Botswana or Zimbabwe, and I'd like you to see how you would be affected by these terrible statistics if you lived in Africa. I'll prompt you when to stand as we go through this. After a person first gets infected by the virus, there's this period where they don't show any signs. And the truth is, it wouldn't even show up on a blood test. Or it's possible for up to six months they could get a false negative. Then when it would show up on a blood test, they can still be without symptoms for up to ten years, depending on the original health of the person.

To help us picture what it's like in Africa, how about if everyone whose birthdays are in January and February, would you please stand now? I'm not going to ask you to do anything scary, okay? These people in a typical group would be in one of these two stages. They aren't showing any symptoms. Thank you.

The next one you do. Charts start showing some symptoms, but they aren't real noticeable. It's the usual flu or cough or casual or sporadic diarrhea. Diarrhea usually isn't real casual anyway. It's a time where other diseases start to enter your body, but you still may not know you have it.

And then in the final stages of AIDS, the most common symptoms are these: weight loss, fever, diarrhea. But then these will develop into even more something like TB or Typhoid. When it enters your system because you're so worn down and so weak, it takes over. And most people think that they're dying of that.

Sorry, I forgot. During the symptomatic period. I would like people who have their birthdays in March and April will you please stand? Okay. About the same number. You are now showing signs of the disease, but you may still not know that it. Have a seat. And now those with birthdays in May and June, will you stand? Okay. And you would be the ones that have full blown AIDS. You're very sick. You probably aren't leaving your houses. Have a seat.

Now, those of you with birthdays from July to December, will you all please stand? Okay. Probably half of this group, look around you. Look at your classmates who are seated. If you were to look at your yearbook, in ten years from now, you would go down the line and say, he's gone. He's gone. She's gone. She's gone. Because the fact is, half of all new infections occur in people in your age group. Have a seat.

Can you imagine if on a campus like this, to think of within ten years, half of the whole student body would be gone? That's what's happening in Africa. An epidemic is when a lot of people die

of the same cause in one place. But a pandemic is when a lot of people are dying in many places around the world. 20 million have already died. I and don't know if you're like me, but I hear that kind of number and think I can't understand what that means. All I can think of is, what about in the Holocaust? 6 million people died. And look what a tragedy that we have seen over and over. Well, this is more than three times as many. But even worse today, 42 million. And in the video you'll see, it will even be mentioned 44 million, because it's a more recent statistic. 44 million are HIV positive.

I started thinking, what can I compare that to? How about what would all the largest cities in California amount to? San Diego, LA, San Francisco, Sacramento. Not 42 million. Do you know, if we took the entire population of California and picture that all of those people were HIV positive and they were going to die, it wouldn't equal 42 million. Instead, it's all of California, all of Nevada, and all of Arizona. That's closer to 42 million. Imagine that in ten years there would not be one person left in those states. That's what it looks like.

Would you believe that of all the 42 to 44 million cases, 70% of them are in Sub-Saharan Africa? That's below the Sahara Desert, southern Africa has been hit the hardest, with Botswana showing the highest number. You wonder why. What's different about Africa? The story that I started out with of incest and all, may not be typical, but it happens.

One of the major reasons is a lot of wrong information going on. One is if people look good, they look healthy, they're acting strong, they're safe. Another is that there's been a push to get condoms out in Africa, and so they are becoming more widely available. The sad story is that

condoms are not 100% effective right, as they aren't in preventing pregnancy either. But it's giving young people a false security that, yeah, if they're faithful to use them, they'll never get AIDS. Instead, it's practically encouraging it because there will be times where they will get it. The most horrible of all is that people think that if you have sex with aversion, it will cure you.

Can you imagine how many young women are being terrible victims because of their us wrong information? There are also a lot of cultural factors that contribute. Prostitution and promiscuity is there in every culture. But coming from Ethiopia, where the annual salary for most people is less than \$250 a year, you can understand why prostitution is just rampant.

Imagine one husband is unfaithful to his wives and brings home HIV. Now he's transferring it possibly to three to four wives and their future children. You can see how that makes the numbers increase. And, you know, even in a monogamous marriage, if the husband dies and the wife sorry, the brother of the husband that dies is expected to take the wife, the widow, as his own wife. So if the husband died of AIDS, the wife has it, and now she's transferring it to the husband's brother and any wives that he might have.

A very sad one. And this is in some places, don't think this is all of Africa, but in some villages, as young girls become adolescents, it's expected that they will sleep with the village initiator the chief or some person to give them an orientation. Well, what if he's HIV positive now? All the teenage girls in the village would be positive as well as their boyfriends.

Another problem is unsterile instruments. You know that tribal markings are pretty common in some tribes. Also, circumcision, even female circumcision happens in the bush with unsterile instruments. And if one person is HIV positive and that blood is transferred to the next person, it goes in that way.

Picture that in most remote villages, there's a dirty hut and a midwife who doesn't use gloves and a messy birth process. And if this midwife has cuts on her hands or anything, and if the mom was HIV positive, it's possible that she would get it that way.

Some other factors are. Would you believe in Nigeria, which is the most populated country in Africa, 14% of their blood transfusions are unsafe? 14%. So, this alone accounts for five to 7% of all HIV positive or of HIV cases.

We think of shared needles as a thing of drug addicts. But in African clinics and hospitals, where the supplies are limited, someone's needle may be shared several times. I know in Ethiopia, where we were at the national Hospital, if you found out that you needed to have surgery, your family would have to go out to a local pharmacy and buy you sutures and IVs and medication because they didn't have it at the hospital. Can you imagine?

We all hear about the terrible tribal wars in Africa. Another instance was in Nigeria when all the soldiers came home from the war in Sierra Leone that they helped out with. One out of nine of the soldiers were HIV positive. And unfortunately, in wartime, rape is quite common. So, imagine how that affects the women in the previous country.

Another issue is because of the very low-income men leave home to go to the big city to get a job to supply for their family. They're gone for two or three months. They're weak, they're tempted. They get HIV from a prostitute or a girlfriend, and then they take it home and spread it to their wife.

So, what are some of the implications of this? Teachers and students are dying or leaving school really reducing the quality of education. Imagine if a quarter of your teachers died in the next couple of years. That would affect things. In Central African Republic, AIDS was the cause of 85% of the 300 teacher deaths in 2000.

As adult or teenage wage earners and families are dying from AIDS, there's much less food, less medical care, and educational funds for the children. But I think the most devastating and daunting implication of all are the number of orphans. There are 13 million orphans in the world today who have lost their parents because of AIDS. They themselves may not be HIV positive, but they are left orphaned. Can you believe 12 million of the 13 are in Sub-Saharan Africa? One author that I read in her book says, I met after she visited Africa, I met one grandmother who looks after 35 grandchildren. She had lost all of her children, including their spouses. 23.

Well, what can be done? The secular approach one is prevention through education, which obviously, after you heard the myths and the cultural factors, is a very important issue. But you heard the other downside of handing out condoms. And a vaccine would be a marvelous answer, wouldn't it? But the truth is, if a vaccine were found tomorrow that would prevent people from

getting AIDS, another 44 million people would still die because it's too late. They've already been infected.

These medications are used here in the States, in other developed countries. They're very expensive. I've read some places where people say, what a tragedy that the Western states would use all of these medications and not offer them to the Third World. Who can't afford them? But again, these helps prolong their lives. Maybe a few years, but it still means there is lots of death.

Think of the 911 tragedy. You want to hear a fact? Over 3,000 died right that day. But consider our response. There was \$100 billion given within weeks, yet only half that amount is given every year by Western countries to combat AIDS. 3,000 plus people versus 42 million.

What are we as Christians have to offer? Yes, we need to get the word out about how AIDS is caused. But more importantly, we need to get God's truth out about his perfect design for sex to be saved until marriage and for marriage partners to be pure and loyal to each other.

You've been hearing a lot with the other speakers about we simply need to show kindness. We have to have compassion. We have to care. But does that compassion lead us to action? Think about Jesus. He socialized with adulteresses. He would walk by a leper or a disfigured person, and he would be prompted to action and he could do something about it. But think of his example. He was the one who taught in Matthew 25 for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in, and I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I

was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick? The King will reply, I tell you the truth. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. How about pure obedience?

James 1:27 talks about looking after orphans and widows in their distress. And I just believe if Jesus was alive today, he would be at the bedside of an AIDS sufferer, holding his or her hand and preparing her food and whispering words of hope. I believe when he would be in a village and would notice a lot of children in their rags because they no longer have a parent to support them, he would stop. He'd go over to them, take them up on his lap, tell them about a father who wouldn't ever die and that he loves them and that there's something much greater to look forward to. The truth is, the most important thing we can do for those who suffer from AIDS. Tell them about our savior. 40 plus million people in the world are going to suffer shame and abandonment and prolonged pain until death in this next decade. They have no hope.

Where can we find a more captive audience than people who know they are going to die and who are alone and nobody cares about them? I just think, wow, if Christians would rise up all over in the Western world and say, okay, I'll go and I'll spend every day at an AIDS victims community, and no, I can't speak the language, but I can find someone there who does speak English. You can translate for me. Can you imagine the difference it would make?

Time is running out. Recently, an article written by a Bible translator to a tribe in Southern Africa, said AIDS is reducing the tribe's population so fast that no one may be still alive when the Bible is finally translated into their heart language.

So, what are you and I going to do? Well, we do believe a recent survey in Christianity Today said that 8% of non-Christians said that they would definitely give money for AIDS education and prevention, compared with 3%. 8% compared with 3% of evangelical Christians. Why? I think because of us being so used to the homosexual reason, it's been easy to say, God's judging them. They deserve it. And maybe even when you hear about the incest and sexual morality in Africa, maybe you're thinking that a bit, too.

But the truth is, what about all those victims that I've mentioned who get the disease not by what they have done on their own, but what someone has forced on them? And the truth of it is, what if God judged each of us and gave us the consequences of our sin? Whatever our sin may be, the truth is they're dying. They need Jesus. It's also easy to think, oh, thank goodness I'm not there. We're safe here. It's easy to keep AIDS out of sight, out of mind. It's not affecting my family and friends.

But imagine if no one would have responded when they found out about Hitler killing all the Jews. I mean, sometimes I think, how did the rest of the world let that happen? What a travesty. That's what's happening today. In a lot of ways, we're allowing it to happen and continue. The problem just seems too big. We can't fathom these numbers.

Do you know it just starts with one person, and one person can make a difference. I know one person. Her name is Allison. She went out to Ethiopia about a year ago. I think it was maybe two. Her husband was a wealthy banker in North Carolina, and she and the rest of her family decided, there's more to life. We need to do something else. And they went to Ethiopia. I haven't talked to her since, but I just met with a friend who came home from Ethiopia and told me about going with Allison one day to her usual visit to an AIDS community where AIDS was rampant. This wealthy American Southern belle walked into this community and started just loving and caring for these people. And people have come to Christ. My friend Kaye told me, Shari, these people are so sick, and they've got smiles on their faces. They are so happy because they know Jesus now. Allison is going in every week and leading Bible studies as well. That could be you or me or any of us.

A lot of African churches have passed through their stages of denial that this really is a bad problem, or that it's all their own fault. And they have started by caring for AIDS patients, by taking in orphans, by leading prevention classes.

I also read from another missionary woman who is really developing programs in many countries about how to respond to the AIDS situation. And she wrote after she got back from touring all these places and seeing these people, she said, regarding to the African Christians who are caring for AIDS victims, she said, Consider me a messenger, first for our brothers and sisters in Africa who are caring for the lepers of our day, those dying of AIDS. They would say, Christians around the world, even though you can't hear the dying, moaning in their beds, it doesn't mean they're not here. They would say, Come feed our orphans, feed our hungry. Remind us of the

stories of liberation and freedom of our new life in Christ. Bring with you the blessing of your rich lives in America and help us feed the hungry. Send money to buy blankets for the thousands upon thousands of orphans who have no blankets and hardly any clothes.

She said in her letter. Those who are suffering in their sod homes would say, we are sick. We are very sick, and we are dirty. It's not because we want to be dirty. It's because we have no one left in our family who has the strength to carry water for 2 miles on their head. Our young children are caring for us. Our crops are failing because we have no close relatives around to care for them. They would say, Tell me again about the new life in Jesus Christ. I need that hope. I need that sweet forgiveness.

While many missions are responding to the AIDS crisis, I have some literature I've brought up here and just to show you an example of what our mission SIM, that stands for Serving in Mission is doing, we have a list of openings in these countries: Asia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Chile, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, South Africa, and Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Can I just mention that I think a lot of times there's this notion going around that missionaries are special people, right? And I just don't have what it takes, because I remember sitting where you were, where you are when I went to Moody Bible Institute many years ago and thinking, it's just not for me. I'm a wuss, I can't handle the differences. I hardly hadn't been out of the country.

Can I just say, missionaries are not different. We've just said, as we've heard and seen, stories like this, okay, Lord, I'm willing, I'll just open the door this far, okay, I'll try it once, and then what happens? A lot of you and others have gone over as short termers, perhaps. And it doesn't mean when you open the door that little ways that you're going to now be a missionary forever. It just means that you have the privilege of seeing what's going on in the rest of the world. And it's a lot different than here in many places.

And I just feel privileged that I have had the chance to see things like this and beggars in the street and lepers and limbs cut off and people with a smile on their face who just need Jesus. And that's the difference. So, I just encourage you, if you have just a little space in your heart to open up, consider going just for some time in the summer. And just people who came out to Ethiopia, even for a short time, said, I will never be the same again. And I think some of you on short term mission trips have felt that as well. That you'll look at your own culture a lot different, a lot more appreciative, and then you'll just remember what you've seen.

What can you do? I hope that when you leave here today, you will start praying, because this is an incredible disease that is wiping out people groups. I pray that you will pray for these people who are HIV positive, who still have time to hear about Christ and to spend their eternity with them, with Christ. I pray that you will ask the Lord to in his mercy, bring an end, bring a vaccine, bring whatever it takes.

I've brought some literature. If you are interested in going at all in a short-term thing, you can fill out one of these papers, give us your name and address and email info and all. My husband and I

are regional directors just starting out here in the Southwest and we would love to get together with you, keep you updated. One thing, if you're thinking at all, if you're open to going even next summer, start soon. People are coming up to us now and saying, yeah, I'd like to go out this summer.

Well, the deadline was March 15, but the truth is it's a large mission with sending countries in like eight other countries, so the positions fill up. So, if you are open to it, keep praying about it over the summer. And when you're back in the fall, keep in touch with us and just try the application process. It doesn't obligate you to anything. Then I've also left some of these HIV brochures and this is if you're interested in giving a gift either one time or regularly, there's a form in there that you can send in your contribution with.

Okay, I'd like to end by showing you a video. [video plays]

Other descriptions of different ministries, maybe you're in the nursing program or premed or something. There are just some different brochures that explain this actually is a notebook talking about a lot of different possibilities in the healthcare. Also, in education. I taught at our International Mission School in Ethiopia. Maybe you'd like to hear more about teaching overseas? Please come up afterwards. Anyone have any questions?

Thanks for coming. And thanks for caring about these people. You can go.