

Grace Thumhart

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### Leymah Gbowee: Ending Wars with Peace

Leymah Gbowee is one of the many leaders who have overcome the destruction of war, but she is one of the most inspiring examples in modern times. As the leader of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement, Gbowee was one of the key factors in bringing an end to the brutal civil war in Liberia in 2003, inspiring a fresh generation of peacemakers worldwide. However, her story is not just one of political change and the Nobel Peace Prize; instead, it is one of the daily practice of community and compassion. Her work is important to peace in that she shows the power of collective strength and faith.

Liberia's civil war lasted from 1989 to 2003, due to the former rebel leader becoming the nation's president, causing military campaigns to tear families apart with unimaginable violence. Beginning as a social worker and trauma counselor, Gbowee recognized just how much the war was destroying her country with oppression, division, and corruption. In 2002, she organized a coalition for both Christian and Muslim women, joining together to demand peace. Named the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, they simply used nonviolent protests. By gathering daily, wearing white clothing to symbolize peace, they used prayer and song to publicly demand that the conflict end. As explored in Gbowee's book *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War*, these women were often dismissed by political leaders, but they decided to choose love over fear and persistence over anger.

Gbowee's leadership was effective due to her ability to unite people, no matter religion, ethnicity, or class. By building solidarity among Liberian women who had spent most of their lives undergoing constant violence and trauma, she taught that peace can be found when justice and understanding are present. When the coalition stood together, they were able to pressure the then-President of Liberia to start attending peace talks in Ghana, which led to his resignation and the signing of the Accra Peace Agreement. Following the Peace agreement, Liberia elected Africa's first female president, which reflects how much of an impact Gbowee's movement had, positively changing politics and gender equality.

Following the coalition, Gbowee started the Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa, expanding her mission beyond the country of Liberia. Investing in leadership and education development for young women in West Africa, she preaches that peace can only last if the following generations have both confidence and resources. Addressing the root causes of conflicts, including poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity, Gbowee focuses on mentoring and empowering others. By teaching that real and true peace is found in domestic homes, schools, and communities, she has found that people can see each other as partners to build a better world, rather than just enemies.

Personally, Leymah Gbowee's story inspires me mainly because she is a reminder that a high level of peace doesn't require considerable power or wealth; it can be any courageous person. Her example shows that leadership is not developed through control, but rather through service. Her service and sacrifice of gathering women in protest, risking safety, paid off as she significantly made a historical impact for every citizen in her nation, as well as a major international effect. This story challenges me to ask myself how I can use forms of peace in my life, either focusing on kindness and bringing people together to solve conflicts, or standing up

for others. Gbowee's mission can prove that any act of compassion and solidarity expands, changing communities and even nations.

Gbowee's message "Peace begins with me" is both personal and universal. It calls everyone to review how they treat others, how they respond to injustice, and how they act under distress. In a time period and location especially hit hard by suffering and violence, Gbowee managed to calmly promote unity. If Leymah Gbowee was able to lead thousands of different women to end a war, everyone can find a way to bring peace to our communities. Through her example, it is proven that working for peace is not just political, but moral and spiritual.

## Works Cited

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