



# Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

## *Stephen & Laura Holt*

### *Sierra Leone, West Africa*

## **FIELD REPORT: MARCH 2015**

*Dear Praying Family and Friends*

**STATE-SIDE UPDATE:** The first months of 2015 have been full and busy. I am half way through teaching a 15 week “Holy Women” class at our home church. Despite the nervous knot I get in my stomach, the teaching has been fun and I thoroughly enjoy the time with the ladies. I’ve completed several ministry projects including our new DVD which will soon be mailed out to our supporters and friends. Along with those tasks I have been working on some writing and am preparing a fairly full schedule of travel to visit some supporting churches. In June I’ll be attending a week-long seminar on gardening in the tropics. This is a follow-up course to the Tropical Agricultural Development seminar I participated in when home in 2013 and promises to be very useful training.

**GTF WEB SITE:** As announced in December, our newly overhauled web site is up and running. We would like to invite you to subscribe to the ministry blog, Grains of Gold, which is a chronicle of life and lessons learned in Sierra Leone. There are no controversial subjects discussed and there are no comments for the entries; the purpose of the blog is strictly for giving you all a taste of the richness of life in a foreign culture. It does require a separate subscription so please stop by at [grainsofgold.org](http://grainsofgold.org) and sign up to receive post notifications. And please feel free to use these posts in ladies’ groups or prayer meetings.

**THE NEWS FROM SIERRA LEONE:** In our last Field Report we asked for prayer as Stephen would need to have his Ebola Response Pass renewed. He did indeed get the renewed pass but only to find out two days later that all travel restrictions had been lifted country-wide due to the reducing numbers of new cases. Many, including Stephen, felt that it was too soon for restrictions to be lifted and this sentiment has been bolstered as new cases are on the increase with some minimal restrictions again being imposed in an effort to curtail wide spread resurgence of the deadly virus.

In December we also asked for prayer regarding the undertones of political and social discord. Some of this has been quieted as the British Parliament sharply rebuked President Koroma for his overtures to suspend the constitution thereby allowing himself to stay in office past constitutional term limits. Citing the international response to the crisis in Sierra Leone, British

Members of Parliament warned the president that he had many eyes on him and he needed to rethink his actions and keep the good of the country in the forefront.

And now, as I write this report, the news has come in that on March 14 Sierra Leone's vice president sought political asylum at the US Embassy located in Freetown. Having been expelled from the ruling All People's Congress political party on March 6 and facing removal from office for, among other charges, "orchestrating political violence", the vice president has gone into hiding claiming to fear for his life. Much of this is just political posturing and will likely come to nothing but people are already discouraged due to the on going Ebola situation and this only adds to the tension. There has been a general call for people to remain calm amid the confusion and we ask for prayers in this regard.

**BAOMAHUN STAYS CLEAN:** The members of The Bible Mission Church have had their faith greatly strengthened throughout the Ebola crisis. Continuous prayer meetings have been held and it seems that God has placed His hands around our village and immediate surrounding area as if to say, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (Job 38:11). They have had Ebola creep ever so close to the village but it remains ranked among the cleanest, safest areas in the country. The only two Ebola cases were those of outsiders who were quickly removed to Bo before they died and before infecting anyone else. Our church members are amazed and continue to fervently pray; they are seeing the hand of God mightily move in response to their earnest prayers. They also send their heartfelt thanks to all of you who are equally fervent in your prayers for them.

**EVANGELISM BLITZ!** On March 5, 6 and 7 Stephen and three eager institute graduates along with one new student held the first urban evangelism blitz since the Ebola outbreak began over a year ago. Collaborating with First Baptist Church of Bo (affiliate of Sierra Leone Baptist Convention), strategically located in a densely populated residential area, several teams fanned out for door-to-door visitation. Thursday evening was for training followed by Friday and Saturday evangelism. There were 15 from the church who participated both days - *all day*. They didn't come close to visiting every home and much work remains to be done in the growing residential areas of Bo, Sierra Leone's second largest city. All of the Jehovah Witness and Mormon missionaries have left the country and Stephen's goal is to saturate this area with the Gospel truth before they begin returning. With the mixed multitude of false doctrines propagated in this area there is a lot of confusion and Stephen compared it to a religious "Tower of Babel". His own words will say it best:

"We really had a good crew. After some prayer time and a quick review from the previous day's evangelism training, we were off with our teams and tracts with a long day ahead of us. The area is predominantly Mormon and Muslim but there's also the jumbled influence of other doctrines. These people know only the name Jesus but have no idea of who He is. There's lot's of children and when we opened the One Way booklet to them they were absolutely fixed on it; the illustrations are so effective for keeping attention even among the adults. Festus, the brother with me, learned quickly and he started taking the lead in initiating the conversations. The Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mohammedans have so corrupted this area these poor kids had zero understanding of even the most basic Bible stories. There are three churches, the 'Born Again' church, the 'Salvation' church, and the New Apostolic church that have done as much damage

here with their false doctrine as any of the major cults. These kids and their parents have a blended form of Catholic-Islam mixed with no-hell Jehovah's Witness doctrine and all mingled with talking in tongues and waiting for a miracle of healing and prosperity to come fix all the misery of their lives. What a mess; so, so, sad. And so much more work to do.

"This church has a lot of potential and we're working out a schedule for follow up visits to several homes where there were serious, constructive conversations. Joseph will be helping with regular Saturday visitation as well as teaching Sunday school for this church as often as he is able. I've also left them with tracts and John/Romans booklets. There is much more to tell - this was a very successful campaign."

By way of explanation, the "Born Again" and "Salvation" churches are West African cults which have a bizarre Satanic blend of voo-doo and New Testament theology. They practice sacrifices, casting of spells, and spirit channeling as part of their church services and are strong proponents of the secret societies which are part of traditional tribalism in West Africa. Many people are visibly afraid of these cults because of their demonic practices; people fear the powers possessed by the leaders of these churches. It causes much confusion because they blend false Bible teaching with these familiar traditional animistic practices. We have to be very careful when using scriptural terms such as born again and salvation because people think we are connected with these groups.

**NEW NAME WRITTEN IN GLORY!** At the end of January we sent an update asking you to pray for a Muslim man that Stephen had been dealing with. I erroneously gave his name as Chaw but it's actually Cham. Thankfully God knows his name and Stephen sent a wonderful report regarding this precious gathered fragment. The following is from his letter:

"Thursday [February 19], Cham came for some more Bible talk. He has started reading the book of John and he's got questions, really good ones; he's clearly thinking. It was a thrill to help him grow in understanding. I gave him a New Testament Survey book so he could also read the overview of John. He wants to come back on Saturday! We talked for a while after we finished studying and I just had to pin him down regarding his salvation. His testimony is very solid; he may not have all the words but he's sure got the understanding. He said, 'If you could see into my heart right now you would see Jesus. I love him and I love reading him. Please, I want you to believe me, I trust him no matter what those others come around me and say to me. I tell them I'm not a small one and I can make up my own mind. I won't have to answer to them but to God. I'm following Jesus and this Bible.' I wish you could hear him saying all that in his broken English; it was inspiring. He wants to go back to his family in Gambia. He went on to say, 'I have something to tell them they need to hear.' How's that for confirmation! He said to me that when he came here he told his family he'd be gone for about two weeks; he's been here for three years and now he wants to go home to talk to them about the Gospel before it's too late."

Please continue to pray for Cham as he faces mounting social persecution from the Muslim community in our village. Also please pray for the Lord to pave the way for Cham's return to Gambia, a small country to the north of Sierra Leone, to witness to his Muslim family.

**A GREAT STORY:** The main mode of transportation in and out of our village is the large transport trucks which daily make the 37 mile run from Baomahun to Bo and return late in the evening. That short distance is typically a 2 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hour ride or longer due to road conditions (see photo page). Stopping at every village along the route the trucks are always jam-packed with passengers and their rows of wooden bench seats are hardly comfortable. People are packed inside; stuff, goats, chickens, baskets of fruit and vegetables, and even more people go on top! Stephen's students much prefer to ride with him when he's going to Bo but as one student recently learned, there's an advantage to riding on the over-crowded transport trucks. This again is from one of Stephen's recent letters:

"Moses Gbla relayed an exciting story to me. He and Joseph were on one of the large transport trucks heading to Bo and Moses said he kept having this unsettledness in him. He told Joseph, 'I don't feel right inside; I feel like I need to tell everyone the message here on the truck.' So he started witnessing to the captive audience. He witnessed to the passengers for over an hour! After arriving in Bo he was getting out and went to pay the driver but the driver said, 'No, you don't pay. You ride free with me anytime you want as long as you preach like that.' Moses then told me, 'Brother, I'm not going to be riding with you much anymore.' PRAISE the LORD!"

And you can be assured that these truck drivers don't miss getting their payments! This is quite a testimony to the effect of the preaching and teaching around town.

**AND FINALLY:** Stephen has shared with me so many amazing stories over the last several months; regrettably there is no way to include them all. The Lord is greatly moving and so much is happening especially in the spiritual growth of our beloved little flock. This final quote from one of his letters is a good conclusion to this report:

"In church last Sunday, tears filled my eyes and I had to thank God for letting us be here. I sat there just watching, marveling, and listening to them sing their traditional songs. Looking around the room I know all their faces; each and every one of them was smiling and singing and just looked so full of joy. In recent weeks I keep hearing myself say, 'What if we'd never come?' They'd still be Pentecostal or worse, still lost and deeply entrenched in traditional animism or Islam. Zainab was shaking her shaker, Patricia was sitting behind her singing away, Moses Gbla was doing bass drum, Michael was knocking the keylay, Timothy and Augustine whacking away on the drums. It was joy unspeakable; not because it sounded all that good to me but it was the spirit of peace, with joy and just plain happiness; it was truly worship, with no guile, and no strife. Glory! What if we had never come?"

Thanks to all of you we are enabled to go as your voice to the people of Sierra Leone. It is our great privilege to represent you to these spiritually needy people. Your prayers and financial giving have made an eternal difference. Thank You!

Because He is Worthy

*Stephen & Laura Holt*

**See photo pages below**

# March Photos



Left: Holy Women Class is well attended.

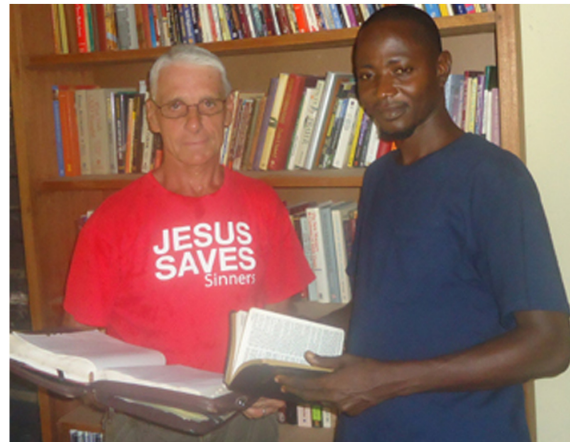
Below: The large green transport truck is from our village. There was a pile up this day as many vehicles became stuck in the mud during rainy season. This is Moses Gbla's new preaching venue!



Above: The two-month old daughter of Patricia, a church member. Stephen took mother and daughter to a Dutch run medical facility where she was diagnosed with "failure to thrive" due to her mother's inability to produce sufficient milk.



Right: We have been providing formula for little Dorothy; now at 3 months she is gaining strength and growing. Sierra Leone has one of the highest infant and childhood mortality rates in the world.



Bible study with Cham, newly converted Muslim man

"If you could see into my heart right now you would see Jesus. I love him and I love reading him."



# OPERATION: BO EVANGELISM BLITZ



Left: The Team ready for door-to-door work

Right: Brother Festus quickly caught the vision and used the wordless evangelism book to good effect among the children.



Left: With schools still closed due to the Ebola virus the man in the white shirt was tutoring several children. He brought them all over to hear the Gospel presentation and to view the evangelism book. The children were very polite and attentive.



Being good Baptists there was, of course, food and fellowship following the evangelism each day. This also makes for a good debriefing time to extend the training. The excited buzz among the ranks was truly a blessing!

