



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: JUNE 2016

Dear Praying Family and Friends

We'll start this Field Report off on an exciting note. We are rejoicing as several Muslims have openly come to Christ which for them is a costly decision, as you will see later in the report, yet they are willing to pay that price. In an April update we featured three of these and there have been two others since that update; we also have productive visits on going with several others. With Sierra Leone being roughly 80% Muslim, this truly is fabulous news.

PRAYER REQUEST FOLLOW UP: On Saturday, April 16, I was asked to transport the body of nine-year-old Mustapha who had reportedly died at the hospital in Yele. When I got there I realized that the boy had not died yet but was lingering in a comatose condition. Though he never spoke a word to me, Mustapha deeply touched my heart as I sat bed-side holding the little boy's hand and looking into his partially opened eyes. The family had waited too long to get him to hospital for treatment of a severe fever. Many of you received our urgent prayer request for Mustapha's life to be spared and for doors to this Muslim family to be opened for a clear gospel witness. But the answer to that prayer came differently than we had hoped and the next day Mustapha died; I then returned to Yele to transport his body as well as family members who had stayed with him. Follow up visits were made with some family members including Mustapha's mother and an aunt. On Friday, April 22, Mustapha's aunt Asanautu, joy written on her face, excitedly explained to Moses and me that she had considered our words from the previous day, read the tracts we left, and late in the night had trusted Jesus Christ to be her savior! Life had sprung up from Mustapha's death. She also said that she had called her father telling him, "Papa, from this day forward, I am no longer Muslim; I am now a true Christian." Immediate confirmation of her changed heart! Over the phone, her father promptly disowned her and Asanautu is now considered an infidel. She is very faithful in church but will face social persecution from her family as well as the Muslim community in our village. There is also a very productive dialogue continuing with Mustapha's mother, Gbasay (bah-SHAY) Sitta, though she has not yet come to Christ. Both ladies need your prayers.

WITHOUT STRENGTH: This is now the "holy month" of Ramadan which is a very important time for Muslims to observe the month-long sun up to sun down fast. It is our experience here that Muslims may not be faithful to attend mosque five times a day but they will strictly observe the fast month. For them to not do so is a great shame. This worked in our favor on Friday June 3 while on evangelism. On that day there was an important town meeting so the roads, market, verandas, and other regular spots were barren. I then remembered an old man whom Joseph and I had witnessed to a couple of times four years ago. At that time he was very weak and sickly so it was a long-shot that Moses, Dennis, and I would even find him. Going in the general direction of where he used to live, Dennis noticed an old man sitting on a veranda and asked, "Is this not the man you're speaking of?" Sure enough, there was Mr. Combi as old and frail and sickly as I had remembered but amazingly still alive! He was very worried about his spiritual condition stating that he had no Muslim brothers who would carry him to mosque for prayers and that he had no strength to get there himself. He was also lamenting that he could not observe the fast-month because he is far too sick, again stating he had no strength. I quickly told Dennis to turn to Romans 5:6 and read it in Mende for Mr. Combi, who knows no English. "For when were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly." Even in his tired eyes, we could see the lights of understanding coming on which really excited Dennis who was acting as interpreter. "He's getting it! Look at that, he's really getting it!" Dennis exclaimed. Mr. Combi then realized, "That is me. I'm ungodly. I can't go to mosque to pray.

I can't keep the fast. I'm ungodly." I asked him how many prayers he would need to say to make up for all the time he's not been to mosque. He then said, "But I can't. I'm without strength. That is **ME**. Nobody will help me *and I can't get there on my own!*" Of course he initially meant that he couldn't get to the mosque on his own but we showed him that he couldn't get to God on his own either; he needed the sinless mediator. Right there, on that humble little veranda, Mr. Combi bowed his heart and in Mende called on the Lord to save his soul! The following Friday, Moses and I were again out on evangelism and once again we passed by Mr. Combi. He had the joy of the Lord on his face and with eagerness recalled our visit from the previous week; he is trusting solely in the strength of the Lord for the safe keeping of his soul. But now get this - Had there been other people out and about that Friday, I have no doubt that we would have overlooked this dear old fragment who has now been gathered! Glory to God for his faithfulness in bringing Mr. Combi to my remembrance.

YET MORE FRUIT: Zainab Sillah is the elder sister of our institute graduate, Michael Sillah who is himself a converted Muslim. Having great zeal for his family Michael has been witnessing to his sister but after hitting a wall, wisely asked if she would be willing to speak with someone else to which she agreed. Moses and I have made several visits to Zainab, who also lives here in Baomahun, and she has been very receptive. Zainab is educated and, like Michael, is a thinker who listens well and asks great questions. As a female though, she will be under tighter scrutiny and threat from her family if she is perceived to be challenging Islam, the family faith, and it is entirely conceivable that her husband could intervene by blocking us from visiting. She needs your prayers as we continue to take things at her pace.

FRUIT FROM WITHIN: For several months we have been praying for a second person to assist with teaching children's church as Moses Menjor's health is poor and he can't take the class every week. The Lord answered in a great way when he sent Mabinty our way. A "refugee" from the Pentecostal church, Mabinty is growing at a remarkable pace and even attends the Friday afternoon class in Tendabu where we are studying the Sure Foundation book. She is trained as a secondary school teacher and is well suited for children's ministry. Using materials from Child Evangelism Fellowship and Bible Visuals, she and Moses have worked out a rotation so the class doesn't fall entirely on either of them. It's a blessing to see our church members maturing and being useful in service.

UPDATE ON MARY: We've had several ask about Mary, the church member we featured in the July 2015 report where we told her sad story of being forced into an Islamic marriage. When Mary was forced into this ungodly marriage, the town chief told her that if she did not attend mosque she would be driven from town and labeled as a rebel, making it difficult for her to settle somewhere else; she would also lose her business here and not be able to support herself. He pointed all around and said that there would be people watching her to assure that she attended mosque and that she did not attend church. From the start, the church leadership has encouraged her to submit to her husband (who doesn't live here) with the assurance that God would watch over her and bless her obedience to her husband which is ultimately obedience to Him. Last Friday Dennis, Moses, and I paid Mary a visit. She's still cheerful and still loves the Lord. Her only means of encouraging herself is prayer as she's illiterate and cannot read the Bible. When we visit, we read to her, pray with her, and encourage her to continue in the path of submission. She said that when she goes to mosque she doesn't know what they are saying (it's in Arabic) or what she's supposed to do so she just follows the motions of the others. She doesn't know what to do with the prayer beads but she brightened and said she uses that time to pray to the true and living God! She understands that God hears her prayers even though she's inside the mosque. I explained to her the story of Naaman asking forgiveness when he was required to go into the house of Rimmon. She really connected with this Old Testament story and was greatly encouraged by it. She sees that by being here rather than with her new husband, and his other wives, she actually has great liberty and that this way she still gets visited by the church family. We do try to be cautious in our visits so as to not arouse suspicions and make things difficult for her. She is grateful for your prayers and sends her thanks to you. Please see her picture on our photo pages; her smile says it all and is a great testimony.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD: Over the past two years we have gained the respect of the town leadership and now enjoy a good relationship in our village and throughout the chiefdom. Much of the change in attitude toward the Mission began when I made the decision to stay during the uncertain Ebola time. Additionally, we often use our vehicle as an ambulance giving aid mainly to women with birthing complications but also for desperately ill children who need more medical attention than our limited bush clinic is able to provide. On occasion our Toyota Land Cruiser also plays the role of hearse as described in the story of Mustapha at the beginning of the report. We also support six babies who

have lost their mothers in child birth by providing one year of formula to the surrogate mother. This aspect of the Mission work is very critical as it is an open, visible demonstration of our faith in Jesus Christ. Without partiality or preference, we provide assistance to those in need which is in sharp contrast to the Muslim dominated population. Islam teaches the giving of alms and aiding poor Muslims as a means of gaining favor with Allah in the day of judgment. However, Muslims here give little regard to the needs of their own brethren even when it's well within their ability to help. Mr. Combi, who couldn't even find some to assist him in getting to the mosque to pray, is an excellent example. It's well known throughout the area that we don't show respect of persons when it comes to providing urgent care assistance. This service has provided great opportunities to follow up with families and bring them the Gospel where we otherwise might not have a favorable circumstances to speak with them. Some of these medical emergency cases are featured in our photo pages.

In my most recent ambulance run, Moses and I transported a young first-time mother who had been in hard labor for over 24 hours with no success in delivering the baby and her condition was becoming critical. I was sent for and we promptly loaded her in the Toyota but this time, no nurse traveled with us. Yele is only 24 miles away but due to the road, it takes over an hour to drive there. At about the half way point, she began wailing and moaning very loudly and I was sure I was in trouble. I said, "Moses, if she hatches this thing right here, right now, *YOU* are playing doctor not me!" We made it to Yele and I didn't even have to pass out! She was admitted, stabilized and though out of immediate danger, had not delivered the baby by the time we left.

Another way we've aided the community is by donating a clean, safe water well for the Christian elementary school which borders our property. Collaborating with Elmer and Joann Reifel from the organization "Christians In Action", we put in a 45 foot deep well which is primarily to service the school though some families in the immediate vicinity of the school will also benefit from its use. This is also highlighted on our photo pages.

THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE: According to several statistical sources, Sierra Leone is considered the most dangerous place to be pregnant; more women die from complications during pregnancy and childbirth here than anywhere else in the world. Additionally, one in four children dies before reaching their fifth birthday giving Sierra Leone the highest infant and childhood mortality rate in the world. Sierra Leone is truly a sad place. In the three week period from May 25 through June 15, our village of Baomahun experienced an alarming 16 child deaths most of whom were under the age of five. There was no single cause for these deaths and all tested negative for Ebola in a post-mortem swab. Many of these deaths involved fevers caused by various sicknesses. Superstitions regarding fever treatment is something we regularly struggle with as we attempt to teach mothers how to properly care for their sick children but deep-rooted superstition is a difficult area to combat as fear over rides reason. Consequently, many of these deaths were avoidable. Several of these child deaths were from within our church family and we've greatly felt the losses. One in particular is little three-year-old Joseph who was my regular "lap buddy" during church. Being too young for children's church, Joseph would toddle around behind me while I assisted others in finding scripture references or hymn pages, always climbing back up in my lap when I returned to my corner bench. Joseph was quite sick his last Sunday in church; he was burning with fever as his mother left early to take him home. He died the next morning and we laid him to rest on Tuesday; he is missed and my lap is now empty. It appears that our spate of deaths has ended but we remain on guard knowing it could again visit us.

In spite of the sadness here we are very privileged to experience much joy. We remain your grateful voices to the people of Sierra Leone.

Because He is Worthy
Stephen & Laura Holt

We have 6 photo pages - Please be sure to scroll down and view them!

Christ-Honoring Funeral for Joseph



The procession leaving the village for the burial ground

Below: Alfred, as pastor of The Bible Mission Church, giving hope and comfort from the scripture



At only three years of age, Joseph's body is laid in the grave but his eternal soul is safe with Jesus. As with our Lord, this was a poor man's burial with no casket, only a wrapping of linen which for these people is very costly but honoring



Above: A "ceiling" of sticks followed by a thick layer of leaves is put in place before the dirt is mounded on top. Joseph's father is the taller man standing in the center

Left: The church men singing a final hymn. Note in the photos that only men are present. According to custom, women do not attend the burial but visit the grave later



The Bible Mission Church



Our capable and enthusiastic children's teacher, Mabinty, is engaging and animated keeping the kids' attention and making lessons fun

During the singing in adult church, Mabinty takes the children outside to blow off some steam which helps them to settle in for the second part of the class



Michael Sillah giving a moving testimony for two years of life for Little Laura and his wife Beatrice who nearly died in childbirth (see "Life of the Flesh" series on our blog, grainsofgold.org)



One week after preaching Joseph's funeral, Pastor Alfred Menjor had the joy of dedicating the newest little member of the church, Jonathan Williams



Too young for the children's class, Little Laura regularly sacks out on Grammi Laura's lap!

Visitation & Evangelism



Far Left: Mustapha's aunt moved from darkness to light in Christ directly because of his death. Openly renouncing Islam, she has been disowned by her family but is joyful and faithful despite social persecution



Left: Mustapha's mother who is Muslim. Please continue to pray for her salvation

Below Left: Mr. Combi now resting secure in the strength only Jesus can give



Below Right: Michael's sister, Zainab, a Muslim, is gaining light and understanding



Our sweet hearted Mary enjoying a visit and encouragement from church family

I will show thee my faith by my works (James 2:18)



Above: Severely bleeding, Ahmee nearly died in childbirth and no blood donor could be found. After being her ambulance driver, Stephen also donated a pint of blood saving Ahmee's life. In gratitude, her daughter was named Laura and is now a healthy five-month-old. Ahmee is Muslim

Above Right: The niece of a church member, five-year-old Mabinty is also a recipient of Stephen's blood. She was comatose from severe anemia complicated by dehydration from diarrhea and vomiting when our truck became her ambulance. She is pictured here the day of her discharge from Lion Heart Hospital in Yele.



Right: Baby Maria just days after her mother died in childbirth. Her auntie Howah is raising her and we are providing infant formula to assist



Below: Now at 11 months, Maria is healthy and growing well; Howah is now pregnant and will soon deliver. Surely she has some fears when she remembers the death of her sister-in-law, Maria's mother. Sierra Leone is the most dangerous place to give birth



Visiting twins we supported with infant formula. Their mother, a church member, died from an infection when the twins were only three months old. Sadly, these were among our children who died. Though we also provided for their medical care, the twins, shown here at nine months of age, were sickly and struggling to survive. The brother (in Stephen's arms) died on a Tuesday and four days later his sister followed. They are now resting safe in the arms of Jesus with their mother.



School Well Project



Top Left: One of the workers adding some weight to the hand-turned drill

Top Right: Stephen and Elmer discuss logistics while workers unload the truck

Left: Excited school children love to show off for the camera!



Left and Below: Near the end of the project the children were expected to assist in the work benefitting their school by hauling stones for the concrete up from the river.



School Well Project



Left: Finishing the concrete work with only the pump head remaining to be installed.

Below: Project complete, water flowing!



Left: Though the well is primarily for the school, some families in the immediate vicinity of the school will also benefit from its use.



Prayer of dedication for the completed well.

Hannah Kallon, the school head mistress (next to Laura), will have charge of the well.

It was a pleasure to host Elmer Reifel (far right) and his wife Joann (not well visible, standing behind Hannah) for the 11 days it took to complete the project.

Their 6-man team of Sierra Leoneans was lodged at our caretaker house.