



# Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

## *Stephen & Laura Holt*

### *Sierra Leone, West Africa*

## **FIELD REPORT: OCTOBER 2016**

*Dear Praying Family and Friends*

It's surely hard for us to believe that in just a few short weeks, November 3, we will have been in Sierra Leone seven years. The time has gone quickly as we've watched the Lord do many and amazing things on our behalf in response to your prayers.

**MEDICAL GROUP:** In an emailed update on July 28 we requested prayer for a group of young people who would be evaluated for charity surgical treatment to repair disfigurements resulting from various injuries. We're pleased to report that each of the four were accepted for surgery and are well on their way to good recoveries.

This project all started two years ago at the height of the Ebola crisis. While traveling to Bo with David Johnny we were stopped as we passed through a small village and a woman frantically asked us to transport a "sick" girl. I looked at David and said, "No way am I transporting someone who's sick." The mother of the girl then said to David speaking in Mende, "No, it's not Ebola, the girl has been bitten by a cobra and needs immediate treatment." Obviously when she said "sick" I wasn't thinking cobra bite! We then collected Kadia Lassie and her mother and took them to a medical facility. To ensure the treatment would be fully carried through, we paid Kadia's medical expenses. However, due to the soft tissue damage, one finger did not heal properly leaving her hand weak and not fully functional. I had her evaluated at Lion Heart hospital in Yele but they did not have a qualified doctor available to make the delicate repairs to the tendons. To make a long story short, the ensuing two years brought encouragement followed by disappointment as time and again promised charity surgical teams fell through due to protracted problems as the country tried to recover from the Ebola crisis. As happens in Africa, word spread around our village that I was helping a girl from another village and soon I was swamped with requests for other children to be included. I had initially selected five with the most pressing need but one of these children, actually the most dire case, was among our children who died in a recent spate of deaths which hit our town (see June 2016 report for details), so we were left with a group of four to be evaluated. These are highlighted on our Photo Pages. As stated these were charity surgeries performed by a highly trained medical team from Ghana. The only expense to us was transportation, feeding, housing, and medication. These expenses are far above the ability of these families to provide and were paid by the Mission.

**DRY SEASON EVANGELISM:** October and November are transition months for our weather as well as for our ministry focus and with the approaching dry season we're beginning to prepare for the circuit of evangelism and training among our network of Partner Churches. Unfortunately the Ebola crisis left us with many holes in our circuit as several contacts died in that terrible scourge. It's been two years since we've been able to conduct the circuit and we're basically starting from scratch to rebuild our contacts. The two weeks spent in the Makeni area with our medical group for surgery and follow up treatment afforded me ample time to visit with pastors in several surrounding towns as well as make a visit to Lunsar while the Sierra Leone Baptist Convention (SLBC) held its annual conference. The blessing of this visit to the SLBC conference is that I was able to touch bases with old friends, make new acquaintances, and get a lot of contact information all in one shot. Very efficient timing to say the least for which we praise God. Now we begin to look at the calendar and make phone calls to schedule visits.

One visit we're particularly eager to make is to Emmanuel Star Baptist Church in Kenema. This group has really been ignited by our previous visits and remains diligent in their evangelism efforts. A sister church has been started and they have sent out one of their own to be the pastor for this new assembly of believers. Because transportation is difficult for people, it's common for a church to establish several smaller "branch" churches, as they're called, thereby making it easier for people to attend church without transportation costs. This new church is direct fruit to your account and we'll be sure to have photos of our visit for you.

As my own focus moves out of the local venue for evangelism, we're careful to not neglect our "Jerusalem." The rainy season home-front evangelism effort is a time of training for our church members who wish to be part of the local on going effort. This season we picked up two new faithful members for the local team, Alfred Jusu and Lauretta Decker. Lauretta is an especially appreciated addition to our church family. As the Officer in Charge of our local police post, we have the law on our side for as long as she's assigned here. And now Baomahun and surrounding villages see her dressed in our trademark shirts and boldly evangelizing along side of us!

**VISIT TO MUSLIM VILLAGE:** Another incredible blessing from my time in Makeni with the medical group was a visit we paid to an all Muslim village. Allow me to set the scene. Magburaka is the neighboring town to Makeni where our group was housed during our two week stay. The facility is a Bible institute operated by a mission group based in Pennsylvania. Though the institute is currently non-operational, there is still a small church and primary school. We were graciously allowed to use their dormitory and hired the pastor's wife to do all our cooking and laundry. (No meals are provided by hospitals here so food for patients must be brought in by patient attendants.)

While visiting with Pastor Samuel one evening, he asked if Moses, David, and I would be willing to visit Mabanko, a nearby all Muslim village, for evangelism. He then went on to explain a few things. Though not raised there, it is his mother's home village. He explained that this is a very militant village and will not allow any church to be established there stating that, "From the ground up, the smallest to the oldest all are Muslim and they won't tolerate a Christian presence." Previously, when the Bible institute was running, Brother Samuel had taken a group of students there for the sole purpose of evangelism. With the fear still in his voice he then told how they had all been chased out of the village by men armed with machetes and stones. He made a couple of subsequent covert visits there alone, just sitting with one or two people, quietly talking with them but with no response or interest. Now he was asking us if we would go. We all just looked at each other and smiled - Would we be interested? Of course! This perfectly fit one of our Mission mottoes: Adventure can be fun but it might not be safe.

The next day, while the mothers were at the hospital attending to our young patients, we four loaded up in the truck and drove to the village. Brother Samuel was clearly agitated and nervous keeping his head down as we entered the village by the single access dirt road. When he and the students had been run out, they were on foot making it easy to scatter into the bush. We were now boldly arriving in a vehicle and he later confessed his fear that they would trap us by blocking the truck. We arrived unchallenged at the center of the village parking close to the "barre," a covered, open-sided community building. Cautiously but decisively, Moses and I got out of the truck sporting our bright red "Jesus Saves Sinners" shirts and Moses began to speak in Temini, the local tribal language. Brother David and Samuel then exited the rear of the truck and joined in a friendly exchange. The town chief himself then announced that all were ordered to the barre to hear the message of the strangers who had come to visit. Not only were we not driven away but everyone was required to be in attendance as the Gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed! David Johnny was the first to address the full-house gathering introducing the Mission and stating the purpose of our visit. He then introduced Moses who took center stage to use the Adam and Eve booklet. Before opening the cover, he was careful to explain that the booklet only contained *pictures*, not *images* and that they were not to think of it as idolatry. This is very crucial when dealing with a Muslim audience who believe Christians are pagan because they view our belief in the Trinity as having multiple gods. "These pictures will only help us all to recall things we already know about God," Moses wisely explained, drawing on the things that are similar between Islam and Christianity rather than focusing on differences. The group was respectful, quiet, and attentive, as you will see on our Photo Pages, and we had a very productive first visit. Yes, this was our *first* visit, as we were invited back and will be adding the village of Mabanko to our circuit. But that's not the end of the story. After he finished, Moses asked if anyone had a question. One dear old man then took the floor stating, "All what these men have just told us is true." Then looking directly at us he went on, "Please pray for me. I am a Christian and have now been encouraged to make that known. Please, I ask you to pray for me." *GLORY!* A fragment of the body of Christ, found, strengthened, and encouraged. All glory to God for making this possible.

**ILLUSTRATED EVANGELISM:** Laura's return was at the beginning of the rainy season which has given us several months to evaluate the needs for new evangelism materials. She's been hard at work in the studio and has already produced one new booklet in which we show Jesus Christ as our Advocate with the Father through pictures. To augment the booklet she also produced a large-scale version for each of the four pages comprising the booklet. This theme hasn't been as effective as I had envisioned but it's only been tested in extremely rural areas where illiteracy is extremely high and the concepts are difficult to grasp. I'm hopeful that these materials will be more effective in urban areas where we see a better literacy rate and the explaining of unfamiliar concepts is easier.

Laura's main project, however, has been a total remake of our very popular Adam and Eve wordless evangelism book. This particular booklet was initially patterned after Jack Chick's "One Way" wordless tract but our version has been done with African characters as well as being rendered in full color to make it more engaging. Over the four years we've used this booklet we've discovered some cultural short comings which needed to be changed plus we wanted to take it out of a cartoon presentation and

use a more realistic style of illustration. We're still using the same basic "story line" but with very different and extremely engaging detailed illustrations. Laura's working very hard to have this large project finished by the end of January when the circuit will be in full swing.

**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CLIMATE:** Curfews have been established in all major cities and large towns due to the serious increase in violent crime, robberies, stabbings, and kidnappings. Adding to the tension is corruption among police who begin harassing ordinary citizens on the street several hours before the curfew time and forcibly extorting phones, money, and personal items. It's not clear who's worse, the criminals or the police. Should tensions mount too much further we suspect that the citizens will take matters into their own hands as reports to police superiors go unheeded. As the criminal element is driven underground, we're seeing an increase in gang and clique members here in Baomahun. Thankfully Lauretta holds a hard line and is rounding them up as well as keeping us well informed. She and Laura regularly have "tea and crumpets" (girl stuff) on our veranda when they exchange all the news and have a good visit. We must be careful to state that the kidnappings are not of foreigners for ransom purposes but of young children for the working of witchcraft. There is a palpable increase in spiritual darkness such as we've not experienced before and the increase of open witchcraft is only one symptom of this darkness.

President Koroma has announced that due to budget shortfalls (an under statement to be sure) he's eliminating government subsidies on fuel which will sharply increase the price of fuel overnight. The grassroots rumblings are already being heard as everyone knows this will, in turn, drive up the price of food which is already higher than we've ever seen. The economy continues its unchecked post Ebola free fall which is what's fueling the crime rate. On the streets of Bo, Kenema, and Freetown is a sight I've never seen before: healthy, strong young men begging. There's no work and no promise for a future. These are young men who've gone to school with the expectation that the education would improve things for them; sadly they are now finding out differently. We've also heard the news, though not officially, that President Koroma will be denied the one year extension on his term which he granted himself late last year. He is at the end of his term limit and the presidential election was slated for 2017. Pulling some political strings, he managed to get the National Election Committee to approve his bid to move the election to 2018. Now, many months later, this is being contested and it appears the extension will be rescinded. This along with other political instabilities in local government are adding to confusion and frustration.

Through all this, GTF remains the same; our focus is still evangelism. We can't change things socially or politically but we can, by God's grace, change the eternal destiny of some, one life at a time. Thank you for enabling us to be your voice in this spiritually dark, physically needy country.

Because He is Worthy

*Stephen & Laura Holt*

**See photo pages below**



# Evangelism Sampler



Above: Using large scale pastel illustrations in Jegwema with Moses translating into Mende.

Left: In Pujehun using Adam and Eve.

Below: As the dry season progresses this river will become passable in the truck but for now, it's on foot. The white boy fell in the water and got soaked!





# Evangelism Sampler

Right: In Jegwema using some role playing to help explain the concept of "The Advocate." Alfred Jusu (standing in center) is the Advocate while Lauretta (seated) is the Judge. Stephen explaining that he, as the sinner needs someone to plead his cause to the Judge.

Below Left: Finding where people are hanging out and hanging out with them.

Below Right: Main Street of our own town, Baomahun. The man in black shirt (Muslim) had very good questions and will be talking with us again.

Bottom: Our faithful evangelism team heading back to town.



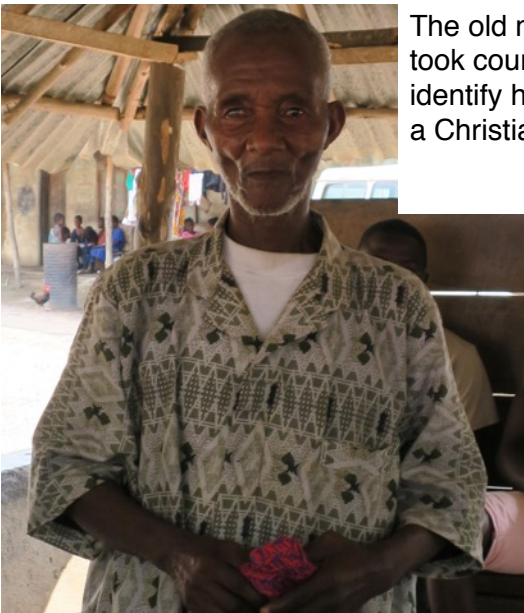


# Visit to Muslim Village



Left: Moses (L) and David (R) with a relaxed Pastor Samuel in the center.

Below: Moses preaching the gospel with the aid of a wordless evangelism book.



The old man who took courage to identify himself as a Christian.



Attentively  
listening to a  
new message:  
Christ died for  
us!





# Medical Group



Next to Stephen is Amadu then Asiatsu's mother. In front of Amadu is Ali then Asiatsu, next is Kadia and her mother, last but not least is Moses who was very much needed for language assistance as these families only speak their tribal language of Mende. David Johnny was picked up en route to also assist with language. This photo was taken on the day of evaluation and at this point it was uncertain if they all would be candidates for the charity treatment.



Both Ali (L) and Asiatsu suffered serious burns to their hands while still too young to walk. The resulting scar tissue left them each with a non-functional hand. Ali is now five, Asiatsu is 8.



For Kadia's hand and Amadu's leg the injury was from a cobra bite. The resulting disfigurement is due to the very extensive tissue damage from the snake's powerful and often lethal venom. Kadia is 9 and Amadu is 17.





# Medical Group



Above: Ali and his mother resting after surgery. With limited staff, each patient needed their own attendant. The mothers accompanying the younger children also helped care for Amadu. Ali's hand 6 weeks post-op when stabilizing pins were removed.

Below: For Amadu, the most painful part of his treatment was when the dressing was changed on his upper thigh where skin was "harvested" for the grafts on his lower leg.



Above: Two cute partners in crime, Asiatsu and Kadia back at the hospital for a 4-week check.

Right: Asiatsu sleeping off the sedative on the day her pins were removed.