



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: APRIL 2020

Greetings to our Family and Friends!

We've delayed our report in hopes of having a more complete picture of how the current global pandemic will affect our ministries for the remainder of the dry season. On Friday, March 27, the parliament of Sierra Leone unanimously approved President Bio's motion of declaration for a year-long State of Emergency. Following the lead of the international community, the government of Sierra Leone then began implementing many restrictions such as closure of the international airport and land borders, ban of public gatherings, the practice of "social distancing", and the closure of schools, churches and mosques. We also have a country-wide curfew from 9 pm to 6 am. Prior to these new restrictions, we had reported in a March 15 Update that we anticipated being able to continue with our circuit of training and evangelism. This will now not be possible. At the time of implementing of the State of Emergency, Sierra Leone had *NO* official cases of the Coronavirus. Within three weeks, we are now reporting 50 cases throughout the country, with no deaths yet reported.

Unfortunately, the impact on our dry season circuit is unavoidable. This year's circuit was our biggest ever, reaching into new areas, adding many new and eager partner churches. It truly is a heartbreak to have the plug pulled right as we were getting into a high hum with travel, training, and evangelism.

To keep the focus on our blessings of this dry season, this Field Report will be a packed 6-page photo retrospective of the churches we visited, and the incredible amount that has been accomplished in an abbreviated time. One of our most exciting developments for this season is the number of schools in which we were able to present the gospel and distribute New Testaments. Most of these were senior secondary schools, the equivalent of our high school, so these students are reading fairly well by that level. Praise the Lord for being able to invest in their future with a copy of the scripture and gospel tracts to conclude the banner presentations. Additionally, these are schools in which the pastors of our partner churches are already giving Bible lessons so we feel confident that the necessary follow up work will be forthcoming.

Due to the ban on any gatherings, I will not even be allowed to teach Bible Institute classes in Baomahun. A prolonged down time will be difficult to recover from. I am also concerned about the circuit congregations losing ground as they did with the very tight restrictions during Ebola. We were actually only now getting past the damage done during that time. Please also pray that our village of Baomahun would stay as clear and clean of the COVID-19 pestilence as we did during the Ebola crisis. Amazingly, we had only one Ebola death in our village, with one other case evacuated, during that stressful time. That was only the result of your prayers! *Thou shalt not be afraid ... of the pestilence that walketh in darkness ... it shall not come nigh thee (Psalm 91:5-7)* Praise the LORD!

The Bible Mission Church is praying for you, our brethren, as you face this uncertain time. We pray that the church will come through stronger and more committed to her mission once restraints are lifted, and we can all, once again, be about our Father's business. Thank you for your continued care for us through your faithful prayer and giving. These photos are your fruit.

Because He is Worthy
Stephen & Laura Holt

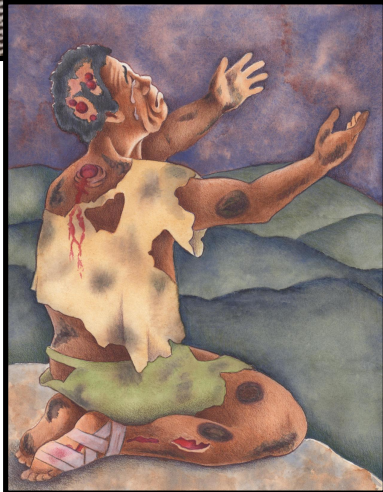
Kambia District



In Kambia District, Moses, Michael, and I served with three churches, one in Kambia proper, the other two in outlying towns.



A New Name! The young man standing next to me was a devout Muslim. When shown the wordless book, he was captivated by the illustration of the dirty sinner (below). The pictures drew him conclusively into his own guilt. It became clear that the Islamic ritual washings cannot clean the inside, and he could not answer the question, "How do I get clean before a holy God?" He was not trying to impress. Even in the busy market, it was like it was just the two of us. He was unaware of his family and friends (pictured) as they waited for him. We sat and talked for a long time, not rushing. And it was excellent training for my young evangelism partner! This is why we partner with existing churches, this man will receive followup visits, and has a solid church where he can attend and grow.



Mornings are when women and young men visit the wells. Michael is using the evangelism booklet, which is perfect for engaging those waiting their turn. Tracts are also distributed to those who can read. Michael takes some time with a young man to answer his questions.

Rutile



In Rutile, Moses and I served with 2 churches, one a new branch church! Rutile is another of our new areas added this circuit season.

Our training always begins with acclimating church workers to the wordless evangelism booklet. We set up the banners in church (center) while the workers follow along in the booklet. We also leave a few copies of the evangelism booklet for them to continue in the outreach effort. We are also working on making banners available to our more dedicated groups. We were very encouraged with this first time visit to Rutile and hope to be back for abbreviated institute training classes.

Being in a new chiefdom, we needed to secure the permission from Madam Howah Gbangbama, the Paramount Chief (PC) of Imperi Chiefdom. Having been in office 30 years, she is the longest presiding PC. She is in her mid 80s. I explained what we wanted to do in her Chiefdom and Moses gave her a brief presentation of the evangelism booklet. I asked her, "You have lived so long and seen many changes in your country, what are your expectations for the future." With a distant look in her aged eyes, she answered, "I hope to hear a trumpet from heaven, or one morning I'll just open my eyes and see my Jesus!" There was a collective Amen! She was overwhelmingly enthusiastic, giving her approval. She has much concern for young people. She hoped that teaching like this would bring some back to the Lord. I hope to spend more time with Madam Gbangbama on our next trip to Rutile. I know I could learn a lot from her long life and experience.

Madam Gbangbama invited us to do the banner presentation in the secondary school she built and funds. It was the nicest, best disciplined school we've been in. The students were attentive, polite, and well engaged, asking many good questions. Christian ethics are an emphasis in this school.

Lunsar

We have had the pleasure of serving with Pastor Gbory and this dedicated group at Ebenezer Baptist Church for several years. One great thing about this church is the number of literate women who are game to go on evangelism any time, any place! With just a few phone calls, I can have a truck load of people ready to beat the bushes. And if I can't fit everyone, the others stay behind and have visitation in the neighborhoods around the church. That's commitment! This church is actively working to reach the large number of children in the area. 50 % of Sierra Leone's population is under 20 years of age who are largely left to raise themselves. Pastor Gbory has a burden to reach these children with the gospel. GTF is privileged to partner with them as they labor in the city of Lunsar and surrounding villages.



There is a very interesting cultural story in these photos. When we first approached this woman and her daughter, they were beating rice in the mortar and pestle. Pastor Gbory could see that they could not give their full attention to the booklet presentation so he stepped in and took over beating the rice. Typically this is strictly women's work and a less humble man would not have done this, especially out in the open with others around. This is the type of man Pastor Gbory is — a servant.



Above: Women reaching women is a GTF priority. Women are often better served by another women so we actively encourage churches to get their ladies involved.

Left: The portability of the booklet is what makes it so effective. We can spend an entire day reaching small groups in obscure places.



This dear woman is Christian and was just so happy to meet our evangelism team, encouraging us in our work.

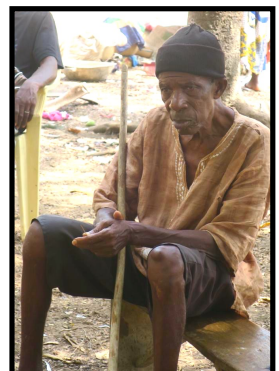
Kenema



We were scheduled to be with three churches in Kenema when word of the impending travel restrictions was passed to us by our contact with the police department. We were able to serve with two of our scheduled partners before we made a hasty retreat home. One was this new church plant (Right), () Baptist Church. Pastor Flomo has been sent by a Bible Institute in Liberia for the purpose of starting this church in a growing residential area just outside of Kenema.



Following a late afternoon banner presentation, we were able to distribute tracts, John/Romans booklets as well as Essence of Christianity booklets. All were well received with many reading the materials right away. One of our eager workers was Timothy, red shirt. He has committed to attending our classes in Bo. Due to his job, he has been issued a travel pass and will be able to drive from Kenema to Bo without harassment at the district border checkpoints. As school let out this afternoon, we attracted a lively and colorful audience of primary school students! Young and old alike heard the gospel.



Schools



In Tonkalimba (Kambia District) Michael preached to a full house of secondary school students. Each student received a New Testament.



This primary school, also in Tonkalimba, moved outside to watch Moses give the banner presentation. We ended up with quite a crowd, some bringing their own chairs and benches to sit in the shade, hearing and seeing the gospel!



We were blessed to be in a record number of schools this circuit season with many more on the schedule before the travel restrictions caused cancellations



Illustrated Evangelism



Laura keeps the Art Department busy and well employed. She's currently working on upgrading the art for a series we call The Two Crowns which contrasts the Crown of Mercy (thorns) and Crown of Judgment (King) with a crucifixion scene between to illustrate the payment for sin which appeases God's judgment, making possible His mercy. Her health continues to be up and down necessitating a lot of rest. Thankfully the doctor visits are fewer now so that strain has eased up.



The woman pictured above with me is a glorious treasure for Laura's efforts. While hearing and *SEEING* the gospel presented in her own front yard (left), this dear woman listened attentively and on occasion smiled at what she was seeing, nodding in agreement. During our question and answer time, she stood up. She said she thought she had a question but realized that it had already been answered. She explained very clearly that because of the pictures she had gained the understanding she needed, that she now knows what Christianity means. She was standing to show respect to God. I told Laura that this dear soul was hers!



Whether its the banners or the booklet, Laura's art keeps her well connected to the ongoing work in Sierra Leone.

