



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt

Sierra Leone, West Africa

FIELD REPORT: MAY 2024

Greetings to our Family and Friends!

It is with great joy that Laura and I can announce my return to Sierra Leone! I have an early morning departure from Orlando airport on May 27, with layovers in Dulles, and Brussels, arriving at Lungi airport, Sierra Leone, the evening of May 28. I will have to overnight in Freetown and make the eight hour ride home to Baomahun the next day. Driving at night is never a good idea in Sierra Leone.

LAURA'S HEALTH: My bride continues to improve but is still not what we would call well. Thankfully the management of her symptoms is much better now, and her doctors agree that the great degree of improvement can only be explained by answered prayers. We will never be able to adequately express our gratitude for all the prayers for Laura's recovery.

Laura has been able to return to Sunday night church (mornings are still very difficult for her). She is again writing for her blog, something which brings her great joy as she shares stories and lessons from her years on the mission field. And most excitingly, she has been able to draw a little bit again and is working on a new project for Illustrated Evangelism.

Laura has a great team of doctors working with her to better control the debilitating and excruciating muscle cramps and spasms. As her condition is neurodegenerative in nature, it is not going to be cured, and may even continue to increase in severity. Thankfully her new regimen of medications is working wonders to better manage things! We also have a protocol in place through her neuromuscular specialist for when she heads into a flare up: an increase of her maintenance meds plus the addition of one other medication. This step-up protocol has just been implemented as she is currently in a flare up and we can confidently say that it is helping — Praise God! In addition to this medical intervention, we have also set in place a plan for me to be recalled from the field sooner should Laura's symptoms dangerously escalate again. Having never before experienced such a terrible flare up, the family kept delaying to bring me home fully expecting the cycle to abate, which, in retrospect, we all now see as the wrong decision.

I have asked Laura to write a brief note in her own words.

My dear friends, I would like to express and affirm that I am 100% supportive of Stephen's leaving. I am able to be unattended in our little home now, and am quite comfortable with that prospect. Our house adjoins our daughter and son-in-law's, and with four grands, there's always someone around; I am never truly alone. We purposely built our house this way so that Stephen could safely be away as I would have caregivers right next door. This is a decision Stephen and I made together by much prayer, and we have the full support of our family, our pastor, and my doctors. I am very pleased with the new medication regimen and readily see my improvements. I am also comfortable with the flare up protocol and am seeing it work well, as I am currently in an escalating flare up. And I am also comfortable with the plan we have in place to recall Stephen if needed. This is the ministry we started together, and even though I cannot be physically on the field, I am still actively involved through Illustrated Evangelism as well as Stateside administrative duties. It is a great privilege to serve the Lord in Sierra Leone in the way that I am able at this time. Thank you for your prayers, love, and friendship.

THE NEED TO RETURN: Because my departure from Sierra Leone needed to be immediate, there were things left pending which are in need of my attention. One of these is the of registration of The Bible Mission Church. This process had been started before I abruptly left, but has since lapsed in my absence. Now I will have to start all over again. This is a lengthy, time consuming process and nothing is computerized. Much of this will need to be done in person in Freetown, a taxing eight hour drive. To add to the complications of this administrative project, I have been receiving word that there is currently a severe fuel shortage. With the price already at \$5.94/gallon prior to the shortage, fuel is going to be very costly by the time I arrive, and be greatly restricted in the amount which I can purchase.

ONGOING LAND DISPUTE: In our March Field Report I mentioned that there was a dispute among the land holding families in our village of Baomahun. This is the main reason for my need to quickly return to Sierra Leone. GTF Bible Mission has been drawn into this conflict because the property where our mission station is located, as well as a separate piece where the new church building is situated, was formerly part of the challenged property. The court where these proceedings are taking place is a provincial court, not a civil court of the central government, and therefore is tribal in nature. My presence is needed on two levels.

Firstly, to help our church family grow through this severe testing. Either way the ruling comes down, whichever side wins, whichever families lose, there are going to be hurt feelings and the potential for division and fighting among families in town. Though no one of the opposing side attends the Bible Mission Church, some of the people on the “other” side are indeed Christians. Our church family needs to set the example by handling the matter with grace and charity. A difficult thing in a tribal culture. Additionally, we need to keep a good report of them which are without Christ (I Tim. 3:7). I need to be there to help keep the peace and help heal the inevitable hurts. It also must be stated that the pastor of The Bible Mission Church, Alfred Menjor, is the recognized head of the family against whom this challenge has been brought. Certainly a difficult and touchy situation.

Secondly, to safeguard the mission property. Our two pieces of property were purchased, surveyed, and legally conveyed through national government’s Ministry of Lands and Planning. We have been advised by our lawyer in Freetown that the land legally belongs to the ministry and we should be in no jeopardy of losing the land and buildings. As the legally stated director of GTF Bible Mission, I am the only one who can bring an appeal if the ruling is unfavorable to the mission. It does become complicated due to the two-layer system of governance in Sierra Leone. We may be perfectly legal and legitimate in the eyes of the central government, but the predominantly Muslim local and provincial tribal government could make it very difficult to live and minister there, as they have done in the past. This further underscores the need to help both sides stay civil.

IN CLOSING: I just received word today, May 17, that the hearings at the provincial court in Bo are concluded and we should expect a ruling on June 27th. My arrival will be well timed to begin preparing our church family to receive this ruling in a Christian manner, regardless of whether we win or lose.

We are very grateful for your patient understanding during this difficult time for our family. I am actually quite amazed that I only needed to be here a little over three months. Only God could have so quickly brought Laura back from the terribly low point at which I found her. We have been more than blessed and give all the glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, along with our profuse thanks for your faithful prayers and continued support. Thank you for allowing us to be your voice in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

Because He is Worthy

Stephen & Laura Holt

Be sure to scroll to our photo page below!

Fight the Good Fight of Faith (I Tim. 6:12)

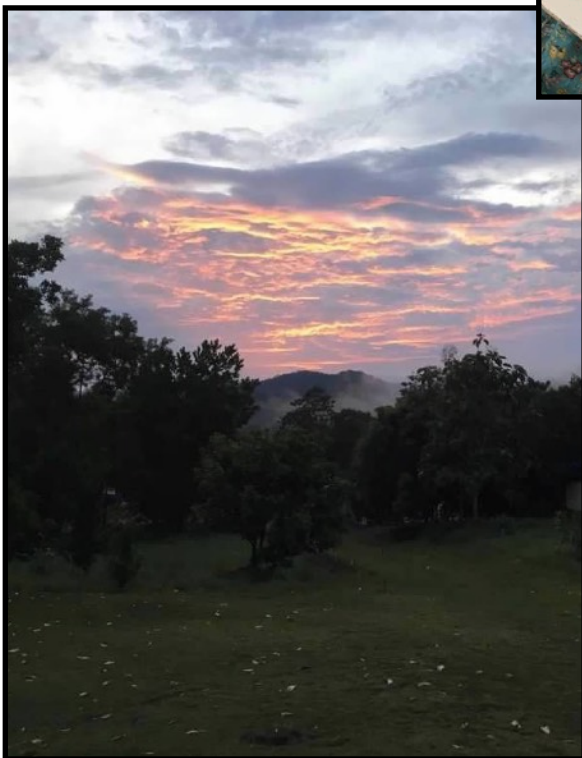
Sierra Leone
— WEST AFRICA —

STEPHEN & LAURA
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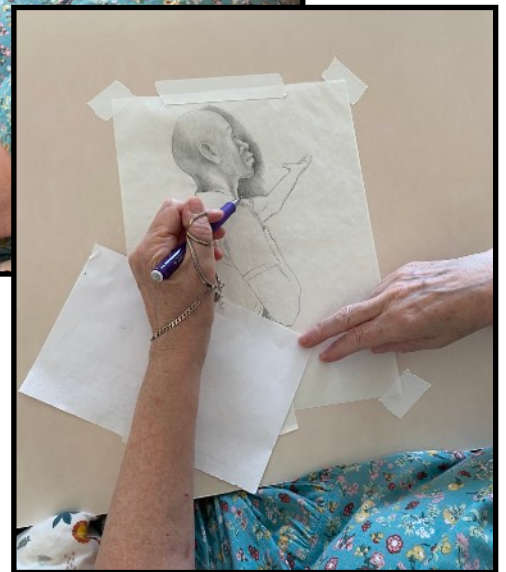
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Below: A portion of the mission property that is being disputed. And the lovely sunrise we get to see each morning! Not including the church property, we have about 5 acres for the mission station.



One of Laura's recent projects was designing a new prayer card. It's so nice to have her back to her typical tasks. You wouldn't want me doing this job! We will be having these printed along with business size contact cards and will get them sent out to our supporters as she is able.

Below: In the "studio recliner" propped on pillows working on her new project, and of course with a cup of tea!



One of our granddaughters is an aspiring photographer so we had her take some photos for us. These outfits are made of traditional hand woven country cloth and were a gift of honor from The Bible Mission Church. The colors, similar to a Scottish tartan, are particular to our Valunia Chieftdom. They were a costly gift from very poor people who were glad to bestow such honor on us. Very humbling indeed.