



Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

Stephen & Laura Holt
Sierra Leone, West Africa

AUGUST 2011

Due to continuing Internet difficulties this letter is a bit late and regrettably will not be accompanied by any photos. I sincerely apologize for this and hope to have photos for the next letter. There is a lot to report on and trust you will find this update interesting.

EVEN A DARKNESS WHICH CAN BE FELT (EXODUS 10:21): In an effort to promote good community relations, I offered to rip some logs into framing timbers for the community school which is being built on the edge of our property. Using my skill saw and a generator, I ripped 30 2x12 inch planks. As is always the case, I was quickly surrounded by a group of kids who gathered to watch me work. They have the notion that foreigners hire people to do their work and are amazed to see Laura or myself engaged in physical labor. I stopped the generator while changing saw blades and each little one had something to tell me – all at the same time. While changing the blade and listening to the kids' excited chatter I could hear a crowd approaching. A group of over 50 women from the Bondo Secret Society (see previous letter) had just left their hut near our property. While beating drums and chanting, they were feverishly dancing around a group of young inductees leading them through our property and into town. Feeling violated by this satanic intrusion, I knew I had to launch a counter attack so I began preaching the blood of Jesus Christ and the resurrection followed by a round of “Nothing But The Blood.” They decided to quickly move along and continued into town. It's the initiation season for new recruits throughout the chiefdom and the ceremony which lasts many days and nights climaxed the following Sunday morning. That Saturday night the sounds were too much to sleep through. At 2 a.m. the dogs broke into a furious rage, barking and running about the yard like they were chasing someone – *or something*. As I walked around outside, I could see fires and hear the revelings from the the bush on the opposite side of the river. No wonder the dogs were going ballistic. The air was electrified; the town seemed to vibrate with a dull hum broken only by drums and more chanting. These women have spent their day in hard physical labor as they always do and all night have danced and screamed themselves into wild ecstasy only to work again all day with no sleep; none of them truly understands the dark source of this power. Church service that Sunday was a terrible strain and struggle as many of the professing Christian ladies were also participants in these all night spirit vigils. The week following this satanic ceremony the town began to settle back to its more normal chaos.

The son of one of the church founders has recently moved back to Baomahun from Freetown. As is so often the case with those who claim to be Christian, this man is very Pentecostal and does not appreciate that the church is desiring to learn and follow the Bible. Though he has been away for several years, he has much sway over the locals strongly voicing his opposition and publicly threatening undermine our work while doing all he can to keep the church in Pentecostal bondage. We also have an ongoing problem with a husband and wife who both claim to be saved. The wife has moved in with another man in town but she and her husband both still attend church though they sit on opposite sides of the building. When trying to help them with biblical counsel, the wife refuses to meet with me and her husband. She says that since she has lived with five other “men of God” she knows more Bible than me and although she cannot read she claims she is being led by the holy Spirit who always guides her in the right way – even to live in open fornication. This same woman keeps the other church ladies stirred up as she encourages them to desire the pulpit, speak in tongues, and other Pentecostal errors. The work is slow here, it takes a great deal of time and patience to pierce the darkness in which these dear souls have lived for multiplied generations. But we are seeing progress.

THE ENTRANCE OF THY WORDS GIVETH LIGHT; IT GIVETH UNDERSTANDING UNTO THE SIMPLE (PSALM 119:130). As I continue to teach and preach the Word of God, the light is beginning to pierce this thick darkness. We have started a Wednesday night hymn singing class which is regularly attended by six Bible school students one of whom is a young woman from church who is literate. Unknown to me the Lord has been working on the hearts of these faithful students to start a prayer meeting one hour before our hymn class. All with no prompting from me we had our first prayer meeting on June 22nd with five in attendance. When we were done they were so thrilled and excited that we had our best hymn practice ever.

Although these students can read English they generally do not read very well so to learn a new hymn I begin by reading the words to them a few times while they follow along. Then we read it out loud together several times before adding the tune. This works but it is very *slow*. I am learning patience and they are learning sound doctrine. Recently Dennis, a former Pentecostal pastor, abruptly stopped singing while we were learning *Saved By the Blood*; he just stared at his hymnal for several minutes and then smiling he said, "Look at that, it says 'my sins are all pardoned my guilt is all gone.' How wonderful is that, no guilt, no guilt, and I am pardoned!" He was as excited as a little boy and said "Lets do it again!" By then we had already been singing that one hymn for over an hour but it just caught him. Dennis was saved 13 years ago at a Pentecostal church and has never heard any traditional hymns of the faith. The following Sunday we sang our first special in church – "Glory I'm Saved" sure beats the usual Pentecostal praise and worship carnal foolishness. We are trying to introduce traditional hymns into the regular church service and this will certainly help that effort. With the literacy rate being only 38%, Sierra Leone is ranked in the bottom 20 countries for literacy. Teaching sound Bible doctrine through music is a very important factor to increasing their understanding. We are grateful to those who have recently donated used hymnals which will be shipped in the container which Laura is coordinating. Your literate brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone appreciate your generosity and will make good use of this gift as they diligently learn hymns to teach to those who cannot read.

On Sunday June 26th, we had an outstanding meeting at Pelewahun-Tendabu. Brother Alfred taught the adult Sunday school lesson and I did the preaching service while Brother David Johnny translated for me. He is very tolerant of me and we work well together. Several churches were represented and some of the pastors and church leaders who have been to our Bible seminars were in attendance. There is a different countenance about the people of the Tendabu group which I can only attribute to their steadfast rejection of the Pentecostal doctrines and praise and worship carnality. They sing in Mende and although I cannot understand the words, there is an obvious joy in their singing. Brother Alfred translated some of the singing for me and it uses many Bible themes. Though they are not singing what we consider traditional hymns, they are singing true godly worship which is such a joy to my heart.

THE HORSE IS PREPARED AGAINST THE DAY OF BATTLE: BUT SAFETY IS OF THE LORD (PROV. 21:31): Recently Brother Joseph and I had traveled into Bo to pick up some supplies. Some of the roads in Bo are being repaved, courtesy of the World Bank, but are still far too narrow for the throngs of commercial and private vehicles which choke them. With the development of three major mining companies in our immediate area, cement and sand are two highly sought commodities and anyone with a truck stands to make good money hauling construction supplies for these companies. As a result, there are trucks which should have been condemned decades ago adding to the mayhem on the already over crowded roads. Joseph and I were nearly involved in a multi-vehicle crash with such a truck. Had we been 20 seconds behind or 18 inches closer to the center of the left lane, our truck could have easily been ripped to shreds. The driver of a commercial flatbed truck carrying too much sand and traveling too fast without sufficient suspension or breaks lost control while trying to avoid hitting a motorcycle. One wheel locked up causing the truck to careen off the vehicle directly in front of us. Continuing in his path of destruction he narrowly missed us and crashed just behind us. It took 90 minutes to clear the road before we could continue on our way and in that time no medical attention had yet arrived. The driver of the vehicle in front of us did not appear hurt but the driver of the truck was very seriously injured. We have no adequate words to thank you for your prayers. The roads here are dangerous and our only safety is only of the LORD. Two days later Joseph asked if he and I could take one day and set aside an hour to pray together. He said, "I think we are under attack and it is a spiritual attack so what else can we do but pray." Glory to God. With everything else that has been going on at church, the Lord knew I needed that.

Work is nearly finished on the caretaker house and it is looking very good. The mission property must give a good testimony and we are being careful to make this house look as nice as the rest of our buildings. Joseph is eager to have his wife and boys with him; currently they live in Bo. School is out for the summer so John and Timothy will be with us in Baomahun. We will certainly appreciate having two extra sets of hands to help with the endless job of keeping the jungle at bay. Maintaining a visible property line is very important for physical as well as sanitary safety as there is little respect for personal property and all unbrushed land is considered a toilet area.

On Sunday, July 1st, while at church someone tried to break into our house. They were successful in opening a window at the rear of the house but since all the windows are barred the criminal used a length of pipe to reach in through the bars in an attempt to pull something of value to the window. In the process he knocked over a small table of books which alerted the dogs at the other end of the house. This seems to have happened just before I returned from church; the dogs typically are waiting at the top of the hill to greet me on my approach but this day they were both at the back guarding the open window and were still quite agitated. There has been a steep increase of robberies in town. One miner from our church had his gold stolen twice in three months and I am sure we can expect more of this kind of activity as word of the increased mining activity reaches beyond Baomahun attracting fortune seekers. Laura has had a several hundred feet of chain link fencing donated to be shipped in our container. This will help secure the immediate area around the house and class room and we are very grateful for this generosity. Again, this underscores that our safety is of the Lord.

One Monday afternoon I had taken the dogs to the river for some exercise. At this time of year our afternoon rain storms can blow in suddenly so I had left all of our windows closed. Upon my return I noticed that the closed house had the smell of death so I set about to open the windows and find the source of the smell. Near each door we place pieces of sticky paper to catch the lizards that like to steal their way into the house so I removed those which had caught some not-so-careful lizards. Then at the back door I saw what I thought was a huge lizard stuck to one of these traps. However, after retrieving my glasses I realized that it was a spitting cobra which had slithered across the sticky paper and was struggling to free itself. Yes, I really am that handicapped without my glasses. It was then that I remembered I had forgotten to replace the shower drain cover after draining our washing machine earlier that day; the cobra had most likely come in through that opening. I find that I walk more cautiously around the house now; no bolting into dark rooms without first looking around – just in case!

GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY: Laura is making excellent progress on all her work in the States. She spent a month with her mother in Rhode Island to nurse her at home following hip replacement surgery. We praise the Lord that she is recovering extremely well and that Laura was able to be home to assist; she did not know of her mother's need for surgery until she arrived in the States; this timing was clearly orchestrated by the One who holds our times in His hand (Palm 31:15).

Laura has been in contact with a team of radio planting missionaries who assist in setting up Christian radio stations; their resume is impressive and we are looking forward to working with them. We were told that the government licensing is the “biggest piece of the puzzle” and were encouraged to solicit much prayer on that regard. With John and Timothy staying at the house, I will soon be able to make a two day trip to Bo to begin the process. Our Wednesday night prayer group will be making this a front line petition and I am eager to see them pray through something this big.

The many other projects that Laura is working on are pulling together nicely. She will be shipping desk top publishing equipment so we can print, laminate, and bind our illustrated evangelism books. There is much happening on both sides of the puddle as the work on Mission Mountain moves steadily ahead. I have been very busy during her absence trying to keep up with all of my regular work plus fill in with house work and administrative tasks which she normally attends to. The dogs miss her terribly and are only now beginning to eat their normal amount of food; they have never been away from “Mama” and somehow my cooking is not quite the same.

At the beginning of July Laura drove from New England to DeLand, Florida with our daughter, son-in-law, and our four *perfect* grandchildren. They spent two weeks with Grammi in Florida and had a great time of fellowship, sight-seeing, and serving the Lord with our home church. We are grateful to the Smith family for graciously allowing them to use their beautiful water-front home; this made it possible for Laura to stay with them and gave them some very special time together. It is always hard to say good bye to family and friends but now our grandchildren have some special memories of time with Grammi.

❧ *From Laura's Journal* ❧

And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. Isaiah 58:11

Being a life-long New England girl, I love a crisp, just picked Granny Smith apple on a brisk autumn day. It would be a delight to my heart to be able to grow apples on our small homestead in West Africa. But there is a problem with that. Apples need the chilling of winter to set the buds which will blossom in the spring and bear fruit in the fall.

Here in Sierra Leone, we have started some mango seedlings. Of all the tropical fruits we now have, the Guinea mango is my favorite. While studying these young seedlings and doing detailed drawings of them, I learned much about the wisdom of my Heavenly Father.

Mango pits are large and flat with slightly domed centers. The extended rainy season settles them into the mud of the jungle floor to just the right depth where they germinate and grow. They need warm weather and lots of moisture to bear their sweet juicy fruit. Obviously New England would not be the proper setting to expect a mango tree to take root downward and bear fruit upward.

So in His infinite wisdom God set me in Baomahun, Sierra Leone, West Africa. He is much wiser than I for had I chosen it would not be here; I would have been the apple tree. But God wanted me to be a mango. He knows the environmental setting, type of soil, and just how much sunshine and rain I need in my life to the intent that I might take root downward and bear fruit upward – for Him.



Our web site has recently received some much needed and long over due attention and though changes are still being made we encourage you to stop by for a visit at gatherthefragments.com. When Laura returns to Sierra Leone, the maintenance of the web site will be turned over to our daughter who will be able to regularly update photos, journal entries, and other news. Thank you for your continuing support and prayer; each of you is an encouragement to us.

Because He is Worthy

Stephen and Laura Holt