

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

An Outreach of Highway Evangelistic Ministries
5311 Windridge lane ~ Lockhart, Florida 32810 ~ USA

Women Heroes of the Faith**Lesson 6A – Laura Holt**

(Missionaries Stephan & Laura Holt Sierra Leone, Africa)

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The moon was full and huge over the bay with the night sky a thick, inky black as smooth and beautiful as plush velvet. Without any city lights to detract, the sight took my breath away as I silently thanked God for safety in our two very long days of travel. It was past nine o'clock, and we were exhausted while our two dogs were holding up well in their large crates. Our 50 pound sea bags, six in number, were packed around us not leaving much leg room as we motored along in the open boat heading toward Freetown, the capital city. Part way across the bay, we diverted from our course. The skipper of the boat did not have enough fuel, he explained, and would need to meet a friend, who was out fishing, to get some fuel from him. It would be nearing 2:00 am before our weary heads could lie down. Welcome to Sierra Leone, West Africa!

As we sat waiting for the fuel transfer, my mind went back to our unlikely story. "How did we even get here, Lord?" Stephen was 56 and I was 47, not the age's one would think for beginning missionary work in the poorest country in the world — a country which can't even produce enough electricity for lights in their capital city. We would have many hard trials along with many joys awaiting us in the years to come, but for the time being, all I could do was look at that beautiful moon, seemingly low enough to dip into the water, and marvel that we were even here at all. We were in Africa!

It was difficult at first for me to adjust to the vast differences of life and culture. Sometimes I felt like I had stepped off the back end of nowhere as the complete otherworldliness of our new home enveloped me, threatening to overcome my resolve. But the Lord was so gracious to smooth out some of the sharpness. He helped me adjust as He constantly gave me reminders of Himself, often from unlikely sources.

One thing I learned right away is that the open markets in Sierra Leone are quite the experience. People, voices, colors, animals, and chaos to me was rather fun. But then there were the many smells, raw and pungent — rotting fruit, dirt, endless smoke, open sewers, potent palm wine, and throngs

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of sweaty bodies. The meat stalls, the fish and garbage everywhere. They all combined and mingled to make one overwhelming, unforgettable odor.

But then, on occasion, something mysteriously sweet and refreshing would arrest my attention. At first the scent was illusive, and I could not quite detect what that fleeting, vague sweetness was amid the stench of the market. At last, one day, I saw them! Women sitting on short stools with overflowing baskets of oranges, peelin away just the outer skin, while leaving the white pith attached to the flesh. These were then neatly arranged on a platter atop a child's head and sold as a kind of primitive juice box. You firmly squeeze your orange, much like massaging it, and thus release the juice which remains contained within the core. You then bite off the end and suck out the juice, while continuing to firmly squeeze. Their delightful aroma is a veritable oasis in the midst of the filth of the market. Their sweetness rises above even the foulest odor. Oh how the Lord opened my understanding as I saw this sweet fragrance in an exquisite new way.

"Isn't that just like our Lovely Lord Jesus?" I thought to myself continuing on in the market. Even a touch of the hem of His garment can cheer and relieve the heartaches of life. Leaning on His everlasting arms, encircled by His perfumed robe is the very place of comfort, peace, and security despite the chaos happening all around. Using a basket of oranges, the Lord reminded me of His never failing presence and that He would guide and direct us as we served Him in this strange new land. This early lesson has stayed with me as the years have unfolded many new and wondrous things.

You might, quite naturally, be wondering just how it is that we came to be missionaries later in life. We had been married seven years when we became Christians. At that time Stephen was on active duty in the United States Coast Guard. Being a military man (he went on to serve for 20 years), he approached all of life with the same dedication to duty required of him by the Coast Guard. This philosophy of life then naturally found its way into our new life of Christian service. If Stephen was going to do something, he would do it 110%, and I was thrilled to be right there along with him in this exciting new adventure as we served at our church in any capacity we could. We even started a circuit of six nursing homes in which we ministered for 13 years

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bringing music and preaching to the residents. After the marriage of our daughter to a fine Christian man, we excitedly realized that we could now do anything we wanted. Stephen had completed his commitment to the military, and I had finished homeschooling our daughter. There were no ties to prevent us from leaving our native New England location and moving to DeLand, Florida, to attend Bible school at a thriving church institute. Our first semester included a course on Church history which deeply touched our hearts, especially the period known as the Dark Ages when illiteracy was the norm. “We’ve been given so much in being able to freely read, but so many young people do not have that privilege,” I said to Stephen. “Yes,” he replied, quoting Luke 12:48b, *“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.”* We began to casually consider serving as missionaries to a less fortunate, third-world country.

Stephen and his friend Ray, a pastor in Alabama, were deep in a phone discussion about Sierra Leone. *“All that country needs is someone to go there and teach them the Bible before the Muslims take over completely,”* Ray passionately conveyed to Stephen. Their conversation went on for another hour, but Stephen did not hear much else that Ray said. His mind was fixed on that one statement, and the seed sunk deeply into Stephen’s heart taking firm root. This is when God impressed upon Stephen that he could be that “someone.” We began earnestly praying about the possibility of serving in West Africa. We read everything we could about this small country, a former British colony, which was then just beginning to emerge from a brutal 11 year long civil war. We talked about it, we prayed about it, we looked at every angle, and implication of what this would mean for our lives. Then, on February 10, 2005, following a sleepless night spent in prayer, Stephen knew that the Lord was leading us to serve in Sierra Leone. Together, that early morning, with a mixture of joy and trepidation in my heart, we dedicated our lives to that unmistakable call. We made our permanent move to Sierra Leone in 2009.

After six months of living on the congested peninsula just outside Sierra Leone’s capital city of Freetown, we moved to the home we built on the rough beginnings of a five acre mission station in a remote bush village. Our electricity is from solar panels and a generator. Our running water is from a

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tank on a tower which uses simple gravity to supply our home. The tank is filled twice a day by a generator-run pump that carries the water from our well up the hill to our tank. We raise chickens and maintain a garden to supplement our simple diet. And it would be 10 years before we even had cell service and internet! Though very different from the typical American lifestyle, we don't view these circumstances as sacrifices but rather as challenges to be met with a spirit of adventure and creativity.

We had been in Sierra Leone for less than a year when, on September 5, 2010, I held my first day of children's church. I was finally teaching the children to which I felt called as a missionary wife, called to love them as the Lord loved me. As I was cleaning up the classroom and thinking about the lively fun of our first day, I looked out over the misty Kangari Hills and it hit me all over again ... we now live in Africa!

When we were first born again and had dedicated our lives to serving our Lord Jesus, I was 27 years old and had just started college. I was finally training to become an art teacher. But then, with our wonderful new direction in life, I soon left that long desired goal for the purpose of teaching our daughter in the early days of the Christian home school movement (a trend which is quite prevalent in our country today.) Upon our daughter's graduation from high school and commencement of her own college training as a music teacher, I — at 38 years old — went back to art school. By now my desire to be a teacher in the public school system had waned, but my love for art had not. With that rekindled desire, I decided to pursue training in the field of natural science illustration with a focus on drawing birds and insects. My goal was a freelance career illustrating children's books, and I was well on my way to fulfilling that goal until that life-altering phone conversation Stephen had with his friend Ray. Other changes were also on my horizon, changes which would directly use my training in children's book illustration.

"Hey Honey," Stephen called to me one Saturday morning. "Do you think you could do a quick and simple black and white line drawing of Cain and Abel for the adult Sunday school class...*Tomorrow?*" I chuckled to myself, that's my darling husband, always springing some surprise on me. But I assured him it would be no trouble; I want to help him in any way possible as we labor together in Sierra Leone. I prepared the large-scale drawings quickly

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enough but decided that they really needed some color. So I got out my pastels, and that day the concept of “*Illustrated Evangelism*” was born. That simple Sunday school lesson had such an impact because people could see the lesson. This would now become the main focus of my part in the ministry.

We all know the expression, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Well, in Lamentations 3:51 the Bible says it this way, “*Mine eye affecteth mine heart.*” And it’s so true — the things we let in through our eyes have a direct impact, for good or bad, on how we think, feel, and respond. With the highly effective and freely available school system in the United States, it may be difficult to comprehend that this is not the situation in many countries around the world today. Sadly, Sierra Leone does not have a well-developed system to educate their young ones, and fully 60 percent of the population reaches adulthood not being able to read and write. Today Sierra Leone has the eleventh lowest literacy rate in the world, but when we first moved to this needy country they ranked with the fourth lowest rate. Little did we realize just how valuable my art training would be as we began to develop ways and means to bring the gospel to these warm and friendly people for whom traditional evangelism materials, such as gospel tracts and scripture portions, would not be broadly useful. They needed to be able to see the gospel and other Bible lessons.

Working together with Stephen and our Bible institute students, I began to develop illustrations to depict Bible stories which would be most effective for evangelism. Now we regularly use large scale pictures for public preaching to children and adult Bible classes in area schools where we have open invitations to teach Bible lessons to students of all ages. For house-to-house visitation we have developed evangelism booklets. These booklets use only pictures; there are no words. This makes it possible for even our illiterate ambassadors for Christ to present the gospel in a manner which will hold the attention of the hearers. They only need to learn the basic story line along with some Bible verses; they don’t have to be able to read anything to give the gospel in this manner. It’s especially exciting for our illiterate women to participate in the gospel ministry as they are sadly too accustomed to being shunned and left out of such activities. This wordless format also helps our literate workers to stay focused on one basic Bible story, making their gospel

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delivery less scattered and more effective. Seeing people understanding enlightened, watching their faces light up is a joy that is beyond words and without price. “God has sent Mummy Laura to us so we can understand the Bible!” an elderly woman told one of our evangelists as he used a wordless booklet to teach her some Bible truths in picture form. Illustrated Evangelism taps into the oral tradition and custom of story-telling common to West African culture, making it a perfect fit for the people.

The sun was beginning to set behind the blue-green Kangari hills while Stephen’s eyes were bright with excitement as he animatedly talked about his latest adventure idea: the time was right to begin the circuit of training and evangelism throughout Sierra Leone. We would work in partnership with established churches that were languishing, some even dying for lack of sound Bible teaching. “I really believe that the military model of 'Exportable Training' would greatly benefit these people,” Stephen mused as we sat on the veranda in the early evening. He had that familiar far-away look in his eyes as he dreamed and planned. “We will take the school to the students! The country is small enough that we can establish a hub-and-spoke network to cover all the regions and provinces.” This vision had been one of Stephen’s earliest ministry goals when we first knew we were going to be missionaries.

Before moving to Sierra Leone permanently, we had visited the country and knew that there was certainly no lack of churches. The greatest need was an understanding of basic Bible doctrines to undergird the believers’ faith and give them confidence to share their faith with others for the purpose of bringing the lost to our precious Savior, Jesus Christ. We were in Sierra Leone for the purpose of teaching and training rather than focusing on the establishing of churches. The main emphasis of his training would be public ministry and scriptural evangelism methods.

(Be sure to read the next lesson 6B, to get the rest of the story.)

Notes

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(Missionaries Stephan & Laura Holt Sierra Leone, Africa)

Name _____

1. What is the Capital City of Sierra Leone?
2. What was the sweetest smell in Sierra Leone?
3. How did God use Laura to minister to the peoples in Sierra Leone?
4. What was the name of the Pastor who suggested that Stephen and Laura become missionaries to Sierra Leone?
5. What branch of Service did Stephen serve for 20 years?
6. Being one of the poorest countries, what ability were the people lacking to allow them to understand the Gospel?
7. What ministries were Stephen and Laura involved in prior to becoming missionaries?
8. The course about the Dark Ages that Stephen and Laura took in Bible School, why do you think they touched her heart?

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9. How old was Laura when she began when she began missionary work in Sierra Leone?
10. Explain Lamentations 3:51.
11. Where did Stephen and Laura get the education that prepared them to be missionaries in Sierra Leone?
12. Why did Stephen & Laura fall in love with the people of Sierra Leone?
13. Explain Luke 12:48b.

True/false

- Laura was in poor health even when she was ministering in Sierra Leone.
- Laura left children and loved ones to serve the Lord in a foreign country.
- Laura was just an ordinary woman who gave her life to Our Precious Lord Jesus Christ for His use.



Scripture memorization, write out these verses on the back on this page:
Luke 12:48; Lamentations 3:51; Mark 16:15
(Must be in KJV)

Any questions?