

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 6B Laura Holt**

(Wife of Stephen Holt, Missionary to Sierra Leone, Africa)

To get the full blessing and understanding you must read lesson 6A.

return pages 8 & 9

Traveling for the circuit meant that Stephen would be away from home a lot during the dry season, which runs from December through June. Unfortunately for me, this also meant I would be home alone. You see, I have a chronic health condition which, to my great frustration, severely limits my physical activities meaning that I'm unable to travel with the training and evangelism teams. In time my health would necessitate my leaving Sierra Leone, but God has incredibly made an unexpected and unusual way for me to travel with the evangelism teams.

In a corner of our hill-top mission station is my art studio and print shop where I produce the materials for the Illustrated Evangelism booklets, which are so effective in this highly illiterate country. In addition to the booklets, selected scenes from those booklets are enlarged to mural-sized pastel drawings which are hung up to use in church meetings where many smaller villages come together. This makes for an effective conclusion to the days of village-to-village personal work conducted by the teams using the booklets. It is through these booklets and large drawings that the Lord allows my heart to travel with the teams who carry out the physical work which I am unable to do. The Lord has made me very content with not going because, if I stay behind and do my part, others can do their part, and these places can be reached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One particular hub-and-spoke grouping of churches our teams travel to is known as "The Gima Circuit." These are places accessible only by foot. Stephen, along with the rest of the team, must carry in everything they'll need for the week of evangelism and training there. Foya is the larger "hub" village around which is a cluster of much smaller "spoke" villages. These scattered remote villages, far from the well-traveled road, are just tiny, forgotten pockets of humanity — souls for whom Christ died, forgotten by man perhaps but not by our loving heavenly Father, who wishes for these people to know Him. God knows the names of these places. He knows the dear faces, the tired

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

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

eyes, the fearful hearts held in the bondage of witchcraft mingled with man's religion. He knows the weary bodies of those in the team who are willing to trudge the hill trails, willing to sleep where they can and eat what is put before them in order to take the Gospel message to these long forgotten ones. And the Lord knows my heart, the one who stays behind, longing to be among the party going but cannot. I often sit at my drawing table with tears trickling down my cheeks in speechless wonderment with what God has so graciously given me to do for Him.

As time has a way of doing, the years continued to roll along. In 2014 we held a glorious celebration as the first 4 graduates had completed their course of studies at our Bible Institute. Later, in January 2017, exactly five years to the day after The Bible Mission Church was started, Brother Alfred Menjor, one of our graduates, was officially ordained as the pastor of this little flock. "We've seen baby dedications, and we've buried some babies too." There have been baptisms and the church is steadily growing, not only in numbers but also in understanding of our great God through sound Bible teaching and preaching. The distance between that beautiful first moonlit night motoring across the bay and the current day-to-day events on the mission station continued to widen. We had been in Sierra Leone for 5 years now watching our Lord's hands work in many situations, giving us the wisdom to complete each task correctly.

Our Stateside mission manager inquired by email in early April of 2014, of some news articles regarding a few cases of the feared Ebola virus which had been confirmed in the neighboring country of Guinea. I told him we were indeed aware of these cases but assured him they wouldn't be any threat to us; however, by June we needed to send out an urgent prayer request stating that the Ebola disease was now in Kailahoun District where the virus crossed into Sierra Leone from Guinea. That district was now in a state of emergency, with schools closed and public gatherings banned. Although Kailahoun District is quite some distance from us, the pace at which the virus was spreading was certainly alarming; and it appeared to be largely unchallenged in its rapid advance. It had taken everyone by surprise, including us, and we desperately needed prayer for safety and wisdom.

Complicating this issue was the fact that we had a mission intern who had been with us for a year and was due to return to the States at the end of

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

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

July. Aimee had just turned 25 and had very little travel experience. There were verified reports coming from the airport of people trying to leave Sierra Leone who did not pass the rudimentary Ebola screening and were being detained at make-shift holding facilities. Due to extremely limited cell service, we would have no way to communicate with Aimee after she left on the water taxi. Should a problem arise before boarding the plane, she would not be able to contact us. We were quite uncomfortable with the potential for problems this presented. How should we handle the compounding complexities of the emerging Ebola crisis? We needed much wisdom.

By July 27, Stephen made the difficult decision for me to leave Sierra Leone with Aimee as soon as possible. He would stay behind. Before we ever left for Sierra Leone, we had made various emergency exit plans; it is an unstable region, and we needed to be prepared upfront. We had always supposed that the emergency would be political or social in nature, and our plan always involved my leaving first if at all possible. But this was escalating way too quickly; I did not feel at all prepared to depart the country much less to leave Stephen behind with this crisis unfolding at such an alarming rate.

Things happened all too rapidly, scarcely giving me time to think. I cannot describe the torture of my heart as I prepared to leave Stephen. I barely had three weeks to pack my bags, store items he would not need, write instructions for the care of the dogs and chickens. There were more prayers and tears than I can count. As I sat at my drawing table usually covered with artwork was now covered with medical books on what to do if Ebola hits our village or worse — *our home*. A sick horrid feeling washed over me as I could barely believe what I was doing. There were only three days left before we would depart for Freetown. I looked out the window above my drawing table to watch Stephen working on the truck and found myself wondering, “*Will Ebola afflict our village or our family? Will I ever see him again?*”

On Saturday, August 30, Stephen dropped Aimee and me at the water taxi for the 40 minute ride across the bay to Lungi Airport. This time I would cross the bay without him as he headed back home — alone. But somehow it was all ok; somehow it was well with our souls.

Aimee and I were on the last flight out; all airlines suspended services for the next two months, some even longer than that.

Though I missed Stephen dreadfully, my time State-side was anything

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

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

but boring. Life was full and busy while I enjoyed family and our four young grandchildren. I traveled to many of our supporting churches giving talks to ladies' groups and personal updates to churches on the work in Sierra Leone as well as extending our gratitude for their faithful financial and prayer support. I spent time in New England visiting with our extended families. I even taught a 15 week ladies' class at the same Bible institute we had attended so many years before. My time passed quickly, and, before I knew it, I was packing again. By the time the *Ebola* crisis was past, nearly two years later, 11,315 people would die in the outbreak, 3,995 of them in Sierra Leone.

On May 1, 2016, after 20 months of separation, I began the long and tiring journey back to Sierra Leone. Upon picking me up at the familiar water taxi in Freetown, Stephen could immediately see that I wasn't well. During our many years in West Africa, I had endured several bouts of malaria along with other serious tropical fevers and illnesses. These exposures were clearly having effects on my health. Because of my life-long health problems, I'm accustomed to chronic fatigue, so I didn't give it much consideration, thinking I was just excessively tired from the travel. I later realized my energy was totally sapped, and I was exhausted much of the time. I also rested a lot, something very much out of character for me. Most disturbingly, I began to notice that my chronic pain was becoming unmanageable, adding to the physical strain of my daily work load on the mission station. Little did we know this would be my final year in our new homeland.

Ah, home in Sierra Leone at last and it's quiet. The 20 foot elephant grass stocks that surrounded our home had all the life's water sucked out as we head into the worst of the dry season. Then began the sound of bush fires - the grass stocks pop and explode loud as fireworks. This day we were surrounded on three sides by this evil fiend, fighting it for nearly five hours amid the unrelenting barrage of exploding racket.

As usual, it was this dreaded sound which initially alerted me to the fire's approach just off our south boundary and down the hill toward the river. I was hopeful the fire would divert from our line, as I sat working at my drawing table situated under the south-facing window where I could easily keep an eye on it. But I know how unpredictable these fires can be. Fortunately, Stephen was home that day; there have been several times in years past

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

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

when I've held off a fire by myself. I'm all too aware that those days are long gone.

Later, as the flames drew closer, I could see Stephen pacing, shovel in hand, monitoring the south bound, and just when it seemed we had escape the brunt of the fire, the winds fiercely shifted as they often do in the afternoons during the dry season. Try as he would, there was no way for him to keep it from crossing onto our property. The driving wind was causing the flames to jump our maintained firebreak. Eventually neighbors and church members came streaming onto the property and lent us a much welcomed hand. By the time it was over, we had been completely engulfed on three sides with flames threatening our office and generator shed.

A few wispy filaments of smoke were leisurely twisting their way into the darkening sky of evening. The sickening acrid smell of the charred land would stay with us for weeks. As I took account, our destruction was discouraging. The garden — green beans, carrots, cabbage, lettuce — gone. Three mango trees over-laden with ripening sweet fruit, had lost all their full bounty. A lot of waste for someone's carelessness. As we would find out the next day, some youth had cleared an area near the river for a "*jamba*" (marijuana) smoking station. They didn't care that the fire could harm someone else and simply walked away leaving it unattended.

Exhausted, I collapsed in a chair with a cup of hot tea, appreciating the quiet and the peaceful singing of a few evening birds. Looking out the same window above my drawing table, I saw the sad remains of my beautiful flower bed. The bright orange lilies were just starting to send up their green leaves. There would be no joyful blossoms this dry season.

Several weeks after that devastating fire, early on a Sunday morning, I decided to poke around a bit just to see if there were any signs of life in the scorched garden. I was completely overwhelmed when I came to the long, wide strip dividing the front yard from the garden; this is my prized flower bed. There, under the drifts of burned and shedding mango leaves, all down the center, hordes of green leaves were emerging along with fat, purple-tinted lily buds — far more than I had ever seen before! How could that be? I was hoping for maybe just a few, and yet this year I'll be treated to the greatest show they've ever given me! They were completely undaunted by the heat of

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

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

the fire. Indeed, they were emboldened by it, coming through as more than conquerors, stronger and more glorious on the other side.

Church was gathering later that morning, but again I wasn't able to attend as the wooden benches are very difficult for my unsupported back to endure when I'm unwell. But I do enjoy sitting on our veranda to listen to the song service. This day was a joyful round of many favorites including, "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be. When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and *SHOUT* the victory!" What a thrill to just sit listening and basking in the fruit of our labor — hymns of praise to Jesus Christ being sung by, primarily, former Muslims. I love to hear them boisterously punch up the word "shout!" The victory in Christ is so real to them.

"These are your lily blossoms," the Lord quietly said to my heart. With tears suddenly welling up in my eyes, I replied, "Yes, Father, they certainly are." We had come through many difficult trials together, some of which, at the time, seemed as though they might scorch the very life out of us as well as the ministry. Yet once the heat of each fire had passed, there were some signs of fresh life emerging around us. As more than conquerors, we're emboldened, stronger, and shining more brightly on the other side. Our strength in Jesus is revealed by fire, and we are indeed brought out into a wealthy place. I rejoice and praise the Lord, thankful that we came to Africa.

Epilogue

Just a few months after that terrible fire, on June 3, 2017, I left Sierra Leone, my health completely broken from the devastating effects of yet another severe bout of malaria. Though Stephen again stayed behind to keep the work going, he later returned to the States for a year to help me through some of the hardest days I would face in this difficult trial. He then returned to our adopted homeland alone in December 2018. We can't just abandon the work with so much invested into it. After much prayer and counsel from godly men and women, we made the commitment to live apart while we wait and pray for the Lord to send another couple to help us with the work started in Sierra Leone.

It can be disheartening for me at times to be so distant from the labor of love to which we were called to serve together. Yet, the Lord often sends along a sweet reminders that I'm not as far removed as it may feel.

King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

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

On October 15, 2019, this phone call from Stephen demonstrates how I remain a vital part of the ministry in West Africa. “It was so funny, Laura,” Stephen animatedly told me. “I could barely understand him he was talking so fast! This guy was so excited that he was trying to get his story out all at once!” Stephen was relating to me a thrilling scene which took place near the open market in our village. He went on, “I was walking home when someone started calling my name so I turned and there was a breathless young man waving his hand and running toward me from one of the houses near the market. He had been present when Moses and I were doing public evangelism; he was drinking palm wine at the bar where Moses preached using one of your wordless books. Well, the Lord just would not leave him alone. So after wrestling with God for two weeks, in the quiet of his own room, he decided for Jesus. He has left Islam and come out for Christ!”

Another remarkable development and cause for rejoicing is that a young couple from a church in Tennessee has responded to the Lord’s call on their life, and they have surrendered to serve with us in Sierra Leone. After nearly 12 years of service, we will soon have full-time help.

On the Atlantic’s eastern shore, in Sierra Leone, a young Muslim man is now gloriously saved because he could see as well as hear the Gospel message; his eyes had affected his heart and he placed his trust in Jesus Christ. Far away from him, on the western shore of that same ocean, in my small studio in Florida, I continue to be connected to the work with Stephen producing artwork used in the evangelism effort in West Africa. One day, my tears of sorrow for the temporary separation from Stephen will be replaced by everlasting joy. One day, when we all get to heaven, I will meet this young man, and be eternally grateful that we had gone to Africa.

Notes

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 6B – Laura Holt**

(Missionaries Stephan & Laura Holt Sierra Leone, Africa)

Name _____

1. What can we learn from Romans 8:37?

2. How did God prepare Laura to become a missionary?

3. Explain the hub and spoke principle?

4. Who was Aimee?

5. How many died in Sierra Leone when the Ebola virus was over?

6. Why did Laura have to finally leave Sierra Leone?

7. What sound does elephant grass make when it is on fire?

8. What did Laura do to support the missionary work?

9. Why did Laura leave the security and comfort of her New England residence to live in a third world country?

10. What destruction incurred from the fire of June 3, 2017?



King James Bible Study Correspondence Course

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

11. Explain 1 Peter 1:7 in light of Laura's life?

12. What can we learn from Laura's testimony?

13. What part of this testimony clarifies 2 Peter 3:9?

14. Explain Hebrews 12:2 in detail.

True/false

- Even when no one is looking sin causes death.
- Much joy comes from affliction.
- If you are willing to serve the Lord, He will make you able.



Scripture memorization, write out these verses on the back on this page:
2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 1:7
(Must be in KJV)

Any questions?