

**“We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5)**

**“You also joining in helping us through your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:11)**

# West African Mission Update

April 2005

Steve & Patricia Phillips

**Dear brethren,**

**Jesus our Lord is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.** All spiritual movements of heart meeting with the approval of God must originate and consummate in Him. He is both Author and Finisher of faith.

Genesis 1:1 emphatically declares this to be so at the inception of history’s revelation: God is central, supreme, and first in everything. He has priority before all for He is from the beginning.

Whether we acknowledge Him as First in this life or not, we shall all acknowledge Him as the Last on that fearful coming day of reckoning. Then we will clearly apprehend that the things we accounted to be of first importance were worse than last; and we who promoted self as first will be found to be last: dishonored, rejected, and tormented by one’s own undying conscience throughout endless ages. And for what? And then what?

All of our first pursuits, the “I can’t right now, I first need to...,” will be viewed from the standpoint of horror, panic, and remorse without remedy. Remedy is a matter for the present, not an afterthought when Jesus the Lord is met as the Last.

**Better now to seek first the kingdom of God** and His righteousness [Mt.6:33]. Better to first cast the beam out of your own eye [Mt.7:5]. Better far to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all you mind. This is the first and great commandment [Mt.22:37,38]. Yes, this is far better than the would-be disciple who dictates his own agenda from distorted demands, saying, “Lord, permit me first” [Mt.8:21].

How could the Lord succumb to, “Permit me first...” from his supposed servant? It is unthinkable. May the Lord Himself impress our hearts with the reality of Col. 1:18, that in all things He might have the first place.

**This has been a month of firsts for us** in many ways. The first booklets, *The Believer at Work*, were distributed when we first arrived at the Freetown airport. There we met our first attempt to defraud us of our money and the Lord’s first deliverance of us from their schemes. Meanwhile, customs officials, airport personnel, and the public relations officer for the entire airport all received their own copies of the booklet.

My first prayer on Sierra Leonean soil was uttered in the transport bus Quintin and Peters had arranged to convey us to Regent, to the amazement of the Muslim driver. We

all drank for the first time on the ferry from freshly opened coconut shells, expertly sliced open with a machete by the local wheelbarrow vendor.

We arrived in Regent, some 7 km from Freetown, the first town we have lived in that has no market at all; nowhere to buy food and other household necessities. After some few days, Stephan and Seth killed their first bush rat, with Seth pulling the muskrat-like animal out of his burrow by the tail while Stephan dispatched him post haste with a machete. We all ate it, of course, nicely roasted on an open fire.

**Peters had his first bicycle accident** on Stephan's bike; sliding downhill in gravel and dirt on palms, elbow and chest. That afforded my first occasion for emergency first-aid.

The first rain following dry season flooded Patti and my bedroom with one half inch of water, soaking all the papers in my briefcase, some to the point of illegibility. Seth and one brother who is living in our house killed their first black mamba outside of Quintin's window. That one got eaten as well. A neighbor brought a wounded and abandoned new-born puppy to our house, saying that Christianna needed to have it. So she has her first puppy, that she is nursing unto health.

And yes, Patti and I both have met our first bouts with malaria, which resulted in Patti being taken to the hospital for the first time. There she was attended to by a kindly Chinese physician who was trained in Texas. This also afforded Patti's first gospel opportunity with a Muslim medical assistant who attended her.

**Easter week provided several firsts.** On Good Friday, in various places effigies of Judas were constructed out of straw, dressed up in clothes, complete with Bible in hand, and then thoroughly beaten and scattered with sticks. Sunday witnessed the first spectacle of homemade kites being flown even by men to celebrate the resurrection. Monday was going to Galilee, parties at the beach.

The Anti-Corruption Commission received their first copies of *Believer at Work*, along with the International Accountability Group, an adjunct of Transparency International. Copies were taken to a national convention convened to address the moral and spiritual solutions to the problems of corruption in SL. They have indicated that they wish for 80 copies for a West African convention with delegates from many nations, coming up in the month of May.

Preparations are underway for my first proposed radio Bible teaching endeavors. The programs will be one half hour weekly and will reach the greater Freetown area which contains 50% of the country's 4.9 million people [according to the official census of December, 2004].

This week begins my first lessons with Quintin and Peters in NT Greek. We discuss the Word of God daily on various topics and as they progress in *The Discipleship Experience*. One of the great joys is leading them through systematic analyses of various texts, where they are required to reason through for themselves and weigh interpretive options to derive the correct understanding.

**The first group of disciples has formed** in Murraytown, a district of Freetown. There are about 12 who regularly attend, four of whom are particularly spiritually keen. When they resume classes at their various campuses this coming week, we are planning to do

gospel outreach as well as Bible teaching there on the university campuses where they attend. These were the brothers that Peters stayed with for about two months when he first arrived in SL.

We have held our first house fellowship where some 10 adults joined us for the breaking of bread, prayer, singing, and exhortation contributed by several brothers.

This past weekend was my first trip to the Provinces on public transport, riding in a mini-van packed with 23 people, plus loads of various types for the three-hour journey in 100 plus-degree heat and 90%-plus humidity. A full 50% of the chiefdoms in SL [of which there are 149] have no Bible believing church at all in their areas.

We traveled about 85 km from Freetown to a remote area that had been completely razed and burnt by the rebels during the war. All of the houses there now are new, within the last three years, built of mud block in this subsistence agricultural region.

One faithful brother, Abu, moved there with his family and began preaching about three years ago in this completely Muslim area. The Lord has blessed his efforts and we met about 20 who came for the two-day teachings on "What is the Gospel?" and "Assurance of Salvation."

The Lord blessed His Word and we witnessed about eight people earnestly indicate their desire to receive Christ Jesus as Lord. The message was well understood according to the indigenes who know the Krio [Creole] language well. We will see this dear brother Abu again this week to further encourage him in the ways of the Lord.

**This is a sweeter first fruit** than the translucent coral-pink blushed African apple that graces our compound with its refreshing fruit.

Do pray for us as we seek the Lord's guidance about all that is before us in our attempts to influence this country for everlasting good for the sake of Him who is the First as well as the Last.

**With all of our love,  
Steve and Patti**

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