

CONSTRUCTIVE WORD

The Esala Prayer Letter—November 2018

...attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:12-13



Dear Friends,

A blessed Advent and Christmas season to you! As part of our “expectant waiting” for Christ to come to us in our struggling and hurting world, we got to study Jesus’ great-great-great-great-great...Moabite grandmother with (mostly) women in Ghana this past month. Thank you for your prayers! For the sake of space, I’ll only be highlighting a Contextual Bible Study (CBS) that we did with seamstresses, but other exciting things took place.

Nathan and I met in Ghana as planned at the end of October to do Contextual Bible Studies. One population that had been identified during a previous trip was seamstresses. In Ghana, there is an apprenticeship system for learning hands-on professions like hair styling and sewing. There’s a legal contract to guide this 3 ½ year program that lays out expectations for the teaching seamstress, apprentice, and parents.

At first glance the process seems straightforward. However, economic hardship is an everyday reality for many people in this subsistence farming community, and the requirements to provide food, a sewing machine, and cloth are often not met by the family. This is stressful for the teacher and apprentice. It’s more complicated than I have room to describe here. It’s not unusual for parents to arrange a marriage for their daughter in the midst of her training program and then to suddenly show up to take her to her



Michael Ersland, LBT exegetical advisor for the Komba Old Testament translation project, registers apprentices for a CBS – Contextual Bible Study – on Ruth.

husband’s home. Parents believe this type of arrangement is a necessity to provide for their daughter and for themselves. However, these forced marriage situations create problems for the girls.

CBS starts with a current problem and connects it to a relevant Scripture text as a means of opening the conversation with those most affected by the problem as they begin working towards a solution. Knowing about forced marriage, we decided to explore the story of Ruth, because it’s a story that these girls could identify with. A lot of things struck me during our time with these ladies. First, many were not familiar with the story of Ruth and Naomi. One of the facilitators, Elijah, did an awesome job telling and retelling the story. He and another seamstress also read the unpublished Ruth translation since only the New Testament is currently available in Komba. We had to take a very “oral” approach including the use of illustrations. (Below is an illustration by Yajim Amadu from an easy reader edition of Ruth.) What



Ruth gleaning among the sheaves (2:7)

Praise God with us...

- that Nathan's time in South Africa was inspirational and productive as he worked on PhD writing and expanded his experience in CBS.
- that we had safe, uneventful travels.

Pray with us...

- that the conversations that were started during our time in Ghana will continue and that God's Word would be used in ways that truly transform lives.
- for the Komba translation team as they continue to translate portions of the Old Testament.
- that Sarah's father would continue to recover from his knee injury and surgery. (He was injured playing soccer and super grandpa with our kids while we were in Ghana.) Thankfully he was able to get back home to Wisconsin where he could get the medical attention and surgery he needed. Sarah's sister and niece drove out from Pennsylvania to care for the kiddos!
- that God will bless my member care work with LBT missionaries. Pray for new LBT missionaries who are celebrating Christmas away from family. It can be a homesick time.
- that Nathan's PhD writing will continue to be shaped and refined so that he can finish well.

As you wait for the coming of Jesus, you are likely to recall that Jesus' mother Mary went to visit and gain strength from her older cousin Elizabeth. You might also enjoy reflecting on two other women, Jesus' Moabite great-grandmother Ruth, and her mother-in-law Naomi. These brave women were without land in the promised land, without food, and without men in a patriarchal society. What Ruths and Naomis are trying to make their way among us? Could you or I offer encouragement or support, trusting that there is enough abundance in God's kindness to provide for all of us?

Joy in the journey,

Sarah for Nathan and the gang

was also interesting to me was that the groups of women we worked with this time reached different conclusions than the groups from past Ruth studies Nathan has done in this same area. This was fun, and when Nathan pushed them on their thinking, they were able to support their reasoning.

We helped get difficult but important conversations started. We were able to meet with one seamstress and her apprentices for a follow-up evaluation and gained a greater understanding into their world. For example, illiteracy is a big issue—the girls that often go into seamstress work have not received much formal education. Think about having a person come to you with cloth to sew something. They have ideas in mind of the style they desire and have unique measurements. You can keep all this in your memory. But could there be a functional literacy class for seamstresses to help them in their work? This was just one of many ideas that emerged from follow-up conversations.



Elijah and Nathan are a bit worn out after several hours of facilitating, while Sarah smiles at what has just transpired. She encouraged the women to support each other in their struggles.