

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

A medical team provides cataract surgery for Ebola survivors in Liberia.



RUTH SAT ON A BENCH IN THE HOSPITAL COURTYARD WITH A PHOTO OF HER DAUGHTER SHURINA CLASPED IN HER HANDS. SHE WAS COMPOSED AS SHE WAITED PATIENTLY FOR THE NURSE TO CALL HER NAME. ▶▶



When Shurina and her other four children contracted Ebola in 2014, Ruth did her best to care for them, but the virus claimed each of their lives. She remembers cradling Shurina's head in her lap as she took her last breath. It wasn't long before Ruth's husband also died from the stress and grief of losing his children.

In October 2014, Ruth became sick. She immediately recognized the horrible symptoms and checked herself into an Ebola treatment center. "It was too terrible for me," she said, recalling the three weeks she spent there. Ruth saw many of the patients around her die, and she dreamed about her children every night. "Only God gave me strength as I prayed."

Thankfully, Ruth was cleared of Ebola and released. But the effects of the virus lingered. Her joints were swollen and painful, she struggled with memory loss, and she developed a cataract in her left eye. These physical struggles made it difficult to care for her many grandchildren who had been orphaned by the virus.

A SEASON OF GROWTH

Ruth met Thomas Benson, a psychosocial counselor, when he visited

▲ **RUTH'S VISION IS TESTED** prior to surgery to determine the severity of her cataract.

◀ **DR. BEN ROBERTS**, an ophthalmologist who helped perform the cataract surgeries, checks the eyes of post-operative patients.

her village as part of a Samaritan's Purse trauma counseling and agricultural program for Ebola survivors. "We are there to give them hope when they have lost all hope," Thomas said.

Thomas made frequent visits to Ruth's house, listening to her story and offering counseling and prayer. He also brought seeds and tools provided by Samaritan's Purse, and helped Ruth establish a garden on her property.

God blessed Ruth's green thumb; the garden quickly flourished. She sold leftover produce at the market and used the profits to plant more fruits and vegetables, erect a fence, and build a shed where she would sit to pray and read Scripture—and drive away garden pests. Ruth nailed a sign on the fence,

dubbing it "Ma Ruth's Little Garden of Eden."

The nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables helped alleviate Ruth's symptoms, and the doctor gave her medicine that improved her memory. Income from the crops she sold helped Ruth provide for her grandchildren. But her dark, cloudy vision got worse.

CLEAR VISION AND A JOYFUL HEART

When Ruth received word from Samaritan's Purse that she could


come to ELWA, our partner hospital in Monrovia, for cataract surgery, she was overjoyed. She never would have been able to afford the procedure on her own. It took Ruth hours to reach the capital city from her rural village, but she knew what lay at the end of the long journey: restored vision and hope for the future.

As Ruth was led into the operating room, she held her head high and showed no signs of fear. She emerged less than two hours later with a white gauze patch over her left eye and a bright smile on her face.


That week, 84 people underwent cataract surgery at ELWA Hospital. All of them were Ebola survivors or had lost loved ones to the disease. Many were rejected by their communities when they returned from the treatment center because there was so much fear surrounding the deadly virus. "The

survivors have been stigmatized for so long," said Karen Daniels, co-manager of the cataract program. "They've had so many challenges and so much loss."

When the surgeon bent over Ruth and gently removed the patch from her eye, it took a few minutes for her to blink away the tears. But when she took in her surroundings and realized that her vision was clear for the first time in years, her face filled with joy and she lifted her hands in praise. Full of gratitude, Ruth exclaimed, "Many thanks to everyone who has made our vision bright. I am grateful for you."

Loneliness and grief have shrouded the past three years of Ruth's life, but an unshakeable faith in the Savior has seen her through. "He is a loving God," she said resolutely. "Sometimes things hurt us, but we trust Him and love Him still." 

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 **FOLLOWING SURGERY,** Beth Thompson, co-manager of the cataract program, prays with a patient.



PRAY

AFRICA

- ◆ Pray that Ruth's faith will be a shining light in her community, and that God will provide what she needs to care for her grandchildren.
- ◆ Lift up the patients whose sight has been restored, asking God to open their eyes to His love.
- ◆ Pray that, through our trauma counseling program, Ebola survivors will feel the weight of grief lifted and be drawn close to the Lord.

30

26 MONDAY
Genesis 32-35

27 TUESDAY
Judges 17-21

28 WEDNESDAY
Job 19-20

MARCH

1 THURSDAY
Isaiah 51-55

2 FRIDAY
Matthew 23-25

3 SATURDAY
1 Corinthians 1-2

4 SUNDAY
Psalms 27-30

31