

The Center for Medical Mission's *e-Pistle* January 2015

I'm wishing you a blessed 2015 as the year gets started! I'm actually excited to be putting the *e-Pistle* together today as it encourages me to think of and pray for many of you specifically. I trust you had a joyous time celebrating our Savior's birth and that your 2015 has gotten off to a great start. As usual, things are very busy in Bristol but we are grateful for every opportunity the Lord gives. I know you are even busier, so I ask the Lord to strengthen and lead you in setting boundaries within which you minister. As you know, you cannot do it all. But be encouraged! The Lord accomplishes what He wills even when you cannot assist! I know that doesn't make it easy to step away, but you can trust the Lord!

Here at the start of 2015, I want to mention to those of you serving full-time in healthcare missions that this would be a great time to join CMDA if you have not already. Membership for full-time healthcare missionaries is free. If you have access to the internet, you can easily join at www.joincmda.org. Your free membership will give you access to electronic versions of CMDA's publications like *Today's Christian Doctor* and *Christian Doctor's Digest*. If you have questions about membership, Raquel would love to answer. raquel.mclamb@cmda.org.

Are you participating in the [2015 CMDE Conference](#) which will take place February 23 – March 5 in Chiang Mai, Thailand? I plan to be there and hope to connect with many of you. I will be there to listen to your ideas of how I can serve you better. Of particular interest to me will be learning what ministry sites are equipped to receive medical students and residents for international rotations. [If you want to receive medical students and residents for international rotations, please see me while in Chiang Mai.](#) If I already have information, it will need to be updated. I expect to have a form which you can complete that will give me sufficient information for the [Handbook for International Rotations](#). Many students have trouble finding a spot. Should your ministry be included? To those who will not be in Thailand, please let me know if you want your ministry included in the Handbook and I will see that you have a chance to submit your information.

I will be leading one breakout session while at the CMDE conference. We will be talking about services offered by CMDA. I hope you will be there so you can learn what is available as well as help me understand how I can serve you better.

I've got several articles to share this month, so I'd better get started. I'm pretty sure there is something for everyone in this newsletter. Remember I am here to serve. Just ask.
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Included in this newsletter are:

[Cura Animarum](#) Humble Apologetics by Rev. Stan Key
[Count Your Children's Blessings](#) by David Stevens, MD, MA (Ethics)
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Cura Animarum
Humble Apologetics
by Rev. Stan Key

*If anyone imagines that he knows something,
he does not yet know as he ought to know.*

Perhaps the greatest damage that can be done in our efforts as Christians to “defend the faith” is to do so with a spirit of pride. More arguments are lost by arrogance in our attitudes than by errors in our reasoning! Our apologetics must be humble because the God we serve is humble. He comes to us revealing truth, not in paternalistic condescension, but rather in the form of a peasant carpenter from Nazareth. With God, truth is not a pill we are forced to swallow but rather a journey we are invited to take. Our intellectual defense of the faith must be humble in at least three respects:¹

EPISTEMOLOGICALLY HUMBLE. Don’t let the big word scare you. Epistemology is that branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge. Christians should be first in line of those who humbly acknowledge all that they don’t know. It takes great wisdom to know how ignorant we really are! Our understanding of human sinfulness should alert us constantly to the reality of how partial, distorted and biased human thinking is...even at its best. The apostle Paul, writing under divine inspiration(!), frankly acknowledged that “...now we see in a mirror dimly...” (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV). Rather than pretending we know all truth, we should humbly acknowledge that we know the One who does!

RHETORICALLY HUMBLE. In our conversations and debates with others, we must avoid any tone that conveys triumphalism or the assumption that “any idiot ought to submit to the strength of this argument.” Rather, we should constantly show that we too are learners and we respect the intelligence and moral integrity of those with whom we differ. While our arguments will hopefully help to make faith plausible or even possible for someone, we should never assume that they make the outcome inescapable. God has chosen to order our universe in a way that faith is an option...not a foregone conclusion. D.T. Niles said it so well when he stated that “evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”

SPIRITUALLY HUMBLE. Those who take seriously the mandate to take our faith into the public arena and debate the issues there know first-hand that only God can do the work of drawing our neighbors to the truth. Only God can open eyes that are blind and thaw the heart that is cold. We are merely channels. The point is not to prove *my* point but to exalt the One who called Himself the Truth (John 14:6) and who sends His Spirit to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). “*He must increase, but I must decrease*” (John 3:30, ESV).

So why engage in apologetics? Because we love the Truth and we love our neighbors. Furthermore, we are convinced that if God can speak through a donkey (Numbers 22:27-34) he might just be able to speak through me. Hee haw!

¹The idea for this three-point outline comes from, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* by John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Oxford University Press, 2002). See especially his final chapter (pp. 227-232).

Count Your Children’s Blessings by David Stevens, MD, MA (Ethics)

I’ve been digitizing mountains of slides the last few weekends, which has brought back a lot of good memories from our years as missionaries in Kenya. (It has also made me wish they would make a faster scanner that was high quality and low cost! As it looks now, I will be at this for many months!)

Browsing through all these old photos makes me even more thankful we had the opportunity to parent our three children on the mission field. Raising our children overseas was our greatest fear before we went to Kenya, but it is one of our greatest blessings in retrospect. Why?

- We had way more time together as a family than physicians’ families have in the U.S. I saw innumerable pictures of us around the table entertaining guests and friends. What other physician has breakfast, lunch and supper with their children almost every day during their most formative years?
- We faced challenges together that bonded us. I will probably frame a print of the slide I found of my son Jason helping me change a flat tire along the side of the road. It is so cute. I think he is about seven years old and is tugging as hard as he can on the lug wrench to loosen a bolt.
- Our children became comfortable making new friends of all ages at an early age. Missionaries are always

meeting new people, whether they are on home assignment, welcoming visitors on the field or fellowshiping with nationals they came to minister to. Photo after photo showed our children holding hands, reading stories, playing games, visiting homes or doing other activities with both children and adults.

- Our children had incredible missionary “uncles” and “aunts” who invested in their lives. One of my favorite pictures is of Jason and Jessica coming out of the kitchen proudly holding a cake one of their “aunts” helped them bake for our anniversary. The photo of them “Trick or Treating” in homemade costumes is priceless. (Did you know you can make a tree costume out of construction paper with a bird that pops up when you pull a string?) They were knocking on the front door of one of their “uncle’s” houses. Every birthday was an excuse for all the missionaries to come over for cake, fun and party hats to celebrate. Yeah, you look funny with a stethoscope around your neck, a white coat and a multicolored cone hat on your head!
- Our children had incredible experiences while growing up—from snorkeling in the Indian Ocean to riding camels, from going on innumerable safaris and seeing the animals to visiting other countries as we traveled to and from the field. I’ve got the smiles on record to prove it!
- They experienced sacrificial ministry and internalized that it should be the norm for their lives as well. I chuckled as I saw a slide of my two oldest children, ages eight and 10, standing on stools in the operating room gowned and masked watching me perform a C-Section. (They didn’t wonder what Dad did when he went to work!) One of the cutest shots was Jessica trying to look into Jason’s ear with an otoscope. She never got over that fascination with the human body and became a nurse practitioner. Other images captured them sitting on the ground under a tree as I preached. It is no wonder all of them are involved in missionary service now.
- Daily life taught them an incredible amount. A series of pictures showed them watching the local “butcher” skinning a cow hanging from a tree across from our house. That was regular entertainment! Another shows Jason holding a piglet. We used leftover food from the hospital to feed hogs and then butchered them for meat. I was there in my white coat to give the little squealers a shot of iron soon after they were born. Another shot shows Jason sitting in front of me on a Community Health motorcycle and then the next slide is of us visiting a water-driven grist meal below the waterfalls.
- They had an incredible education. We started out homeschooling, but that grew into a one-room schoolhouse better equipped than most schools in the states. In the mid-1980s when most public school rooms did not have computers, there were three computers in a classroom for just eight children, along with the best in audiovisual resources. All of it was donated and was used by incredible teachers who were friends and colleagues and had been called to teach them.
- They learned the power of prayer. There was always some problem, crisis or patient we were praying for as a family. They not only learned to pray but also realized God answered prayers. We celebrated when God intervened!
- They matured more quickly than kids their ages in the states. Many of the factors above contributed to that maturity, but boarding school took it to an entirely new level. We gave them the choice of when they wanted to go, and they chose to go in the fifth and sixth grades. It was harder on us than it was on them. In fact, they loved it. Pictures reminded me of them, their friends and teachers as we were invited for special occasions to the school, dropped them off or picked them up. We have a picture of Jason holding up a trophy he won and another one showing him standing on crutches after a rugby scrum where he ended up on the bottom of the pile!

I could go on, but I don't want to get too nostalgic. I bet you could add your examples as well. I just want to make a point. If you are serving overseas, it is easy to get caught up in the routine and not see the incredible blessings God is giving you every day. Yes, the amount of work is huge and the days (and nights) can be long. Separation from family is hard, but among all the other blessings you receive while serving the Lord, God is using your faithfulness to bless your children and others as well.

I needed to remind myself of that for another reason this weekend. On Saturday, I “FaceTimed” my daughter Jessica who lives in the “hood” in Memphis. She and her husband John David serve in a healthcare ministry in inner city Memphis. When she answered, she was sitting on the couch with Josiah, our 3-year-old grandson. It was 5:30 in the afternoon and Josiah’s first words startled me, “Paw Paw, a little boy just got run over!” It was worse than just that.

Jessica went on to explain how a group of teenagers got into an altercation that afternoon while walking from the local high school, and one boy was shot and killed a few blocks from their house. A police car speeding to the scene then hit a little boy and killed him a block away the other side of their house.

How do you explain that to a three year old? Jessica related that she realized she had to explain it to Josiah because everyone would be talking about it. They had just finished praying for the boy's siblings and parents when I called.

My grandchildren are maturing quickly, too, as they experience the many other blessings of missionary life. It is not always safe, it is not always easy, but it is a good thing.

And He Carried Them All the Days of Old...

by Arianna Shirk, MD, Kijabe Hospital

(written just before Christmas 2014)

For the past three weeks I have been in the nursery, taking care of precious newborns and their vigilant, beautiful mothers. I have watched them grow and feed, watched antibiotics act as magic and babies too sleepy and struggling to breathe thrive and go home with hopeful celebration. I have taught my interns and watched as they become more confident as they lay out their plans, as they resuscitate and welcome struggling infants to the world. We have sent home over 40 babies with a hug and careful teaching—to begin the journey every mother and child take—of worry and providence, of helpless need met with fierce, protective love.

But in those days, I have also stood, with tears, at the bedsides where our hands could not provide enough healing and fierce love would rend broken hearts. 12 days. 8 deaths. We have come close to saving each one, and it is that fleeting hope dashed against rocks that has been so hard.

The first, an itty bitty boy, four months premature with lungs too small. "I hear he's so tiny," the mother told us, afraid to see or touch such fragility as we urged her to his bedside. But he was born crying, and he fought for 72 long hours with the best that we could give him—medicine to mature his lungs, fluids for his fairy veins, a heated incubator for his fragile skin. He died in my arms on my call night—because we can't put one so small on a ventilator, and because every child should be held at least once.

The next, a small one born without the connection from her mouth to her stomach—sick with an overwhelming infection after her surgery to repair it. We turned our ventilator into an oscillator to help her lungs breathe and gave her the best antibiotics that can be found in the world. And I stood with the mom as her entire body collapsed into mine. "Don't tell me when it's over," she said. "I will come when I can face it..." I held vigil at the child's bed that night and brought her to morning light. But the next day, infection won, and she died as she turned one week old.

The third, a tiny one born two months too soon with twisted hands and a curving spine, with kidneys that would not work and with a heart twice its normal size. She improved, then took steps back, then improved again. Every morning, every evening, I stood with the mom. "I want to know we did our best, but, please, tell me when she is not getting better," she said. Day six, the infant's lungs were failing and her eyes no longer opened in protest to our labs. We turned off the monitors and placed her in her weeping mother's arms. She asked for a picture, and as we prayed, she looked up through our tears, "Thank you," she said, "you have cared for me well."

And so they continued to come...and I have continued with my colleagues to strive, to fight, to seek, to pray, to breathe, to mourn. I have been buoyed by hope with small victories and battered by the blow of battles un-won. Tuesday, I took a day away from everything and went and sat among the trees in complete silence. And in those moments, I found these words in Isaiah:

*In all their distress he too was distressed,
and the angel of his presence saved them.
In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*
(Isaiah 63:9, NIV 2011)

And I knew—I am not crying alone, my burden is shared by One who feels it even more deeply than I do. As we walk daily toward the manger this week, to the newborn sent to the world for unspeakable pain and incredible purpose, I am grateful that He still redeems the sadness. That the angel of His presence offers comfort when I cannot. And that in my weariness He lifts me up and carries me, just as in days of old.

Awake at 3 a.m.

by Judy Palpant

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“Sleepless in Seattle” read the cute night shirt in a Seattle airport shop, obviously one clothes designer’s clever consumer come-on borrowed from a popular movie with a catchy title. But it wasn’t only true of Seattle. People are also sleepless in San Diego, Sarasota and St. Louis.

We lie awake, anxious and preoccupied, for many reasons. The church elder’s mind churns after the late committee meeting. The CEO’s conscience replays a telephone conversation earlier in the day. Parents’ ears remain tuned to the infant’s breathing or strain to hear the sound of the car entering the garage before a teenager’s curfew. A retired gentleman wonders how he and his wife will pay for healthcare, while another frets about a new lump.

Common solutions for sleeplessness sometimes help: Count sheep. Count your blessings. Cut the late-night cup of coffee or the chocolate. Take a warm bath. Buy earplugs to block out the noisy fish tank or use the sedative the doctor prescribed. But for some of us, these remedies don’t suffice. At night, the troubles that rode below the surface all day suddenly and persistently take center stage.

Two crises delivered my own sleepless nights. When my son spent time in Southern Sudan, I tossed and turned night after night, silently groaning prayers for his safety in that war-torn country. I imagined grenades exploding as his vehicle traversed the roads or bombs raining down while war planes flew overhead.

The second crisis came two years later. After a trip to Thailand I developed a SARS-like respiratory ailment. For two months I spent long, lonely nights propped up on pillows gasping for breath. An owl kept me company with its low-pitched, plaintive call. In my distress, my friend George came to mind. He had lain awake many times and developed a simple idea I knew could help me.

From Fear to Faith

George found himself sleepless in Spokane after a cancer diagnosis. At night he grappled with fears, dog-paddling to keep his head above the dark waters swirling around him. Though his faith journey had taken a detour in adolescence and he currently calls himself a seeker, George turned to Scripture. He remembered the Catholic rosary from his childhood catechism classes and the structure it gave to prayers. He decided that silently reciting a series of memorized Scriptures might help him refocus his mind and fall asleep. Piecing together a list of Bible verses, he created what he calls his “sleepless night liturgy.”

The idea of a liturgy may feel unfamiliar to some. Traditionally, liturgy refers to readings or prayers that are recited aloud during church services by the worship leader and congregation. (The Greek word *leitourgia* means “work of the people.”) Commonly used liturgical pieces include the Lord’s Prayer or the Apostles’ Creed.

When we repeat these words regularly, we store them away, and they can take on new meaning in light of current events or personal problems. Throughout history, such repeated texts have provided a spiritual port in the storm—a framework for prayer when our own words seem inadequate. They help transform the *fear-full* person into a *faith-full* one.

We might turn to familiar words we’ve learned in liturgy in any number of circumstances. When my mentor Elisabeth was grieving the loss of her husband, she faithfully attended church to be with other people and hear the simple, reassuring words week after week: “The Lord be with you.” “And also with you,” she joined in reply.

My friend Scott and his brother were once caught in a violent storm while on a fishing boat in the Bering Sea off the shores of Alaska. He donned his wet suit, helplessly stared at the 30-foot waves and began saying the Lord's Prayer over and over.

Another friend Lynn suffered a progressive paralysis. One Thursday, she'd hoisted 50-pound bags of horse feed; a week later she could barely lift a finger. While in the hospital, she asked a visitor to say Psalm 23 with her.

In the same way, repeating the pieces of his sleepless-night liturgy gave George good, repetitive work for his soul. It focused his distracted mind and facilitated his appeals to God.

I too needed a dependable tool to move me toward faith and away from fear when my head hit the pillow but sleep wouldn't come. So I developed a liturgy of my own.

Words of Reassurance

Compiling my liturgy took some thought. The Scriptures George selected for his list centered on faith, but what did I need? What fears kept me awake? Which of God's attributes should I focus on? Which promises from God's Word spoke to my heart? These were all questions to consider.

I decided I needed God's reassurance and chose the theme of trust. I searched for Bible verses that spoke to those needs and brought both conviction and comfort. The search yielded a familiar verse: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3, KJV). That Scripture had first come to my attention at my bridal shower 34 years earlier. An elderly woman named Ruth had carefully inscribed it on a small card that accompanied her gift. Since then, in each home my husband and I have shared—in Philadelphia, Tucson, Kenya, as well as Spokane—I've kept the card in the kitchen window sill where I could see it daily and remember the Peace-Giver. Now it became the first element in my nighttime liturgy.

I've learned some things about Isaiah 26:3 that make it a particularly meaningful part of my list. In the Hebrew text, this verse refers to the entire human being, not just the mind. The word *shalom* is repeated in the original, indicating emphatic peace. In English the idea is translated as "perfect peace." By saying this verse, I declare my focus and trust to be in God alone. I am His work in progress. He promises to give peace to the whole of me—body, mind and spirit.

The second component of my liturgy surfaced in a Bible study. It came from the opening question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q: what is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life or in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

I chose this piece because it brings security. When Mary learned from the angel that she was to carry the Messiah, she replied simply, "I belong to the Lord, body and soul, let it happen as you say" (Luke 1:38, Phillips). I want to echo her confidence in the face of uncertainty.

Next I chose a portion from a hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," that reminded me God is my help, my hope, my shelter and my home.

I first started singing and praying this hymn, which is based on Psalm 90, when my children became adolescents and I often felt like they "had me over a barrel." Silently rehearsing it as I recall the Lord's faithfulness in specific circumstances increases my hope for the future.

The fourth piece was Psalm 131. I'd heard this pithy psalm mentioned by a speaker who had memorized it because it pointed to hope in God. The psalmist puts words to my longings for a quiet, hopeful spirit like "a weaned child" (verse 2).

I didn't have the passage memorized, so I photocopied the words onto a small piece of paper, tucked it into my sweatshirt pocket and learned it while walking.

With these four pieces in place, I began using my liturgy. It proved especially valuable while I was helping my daughter plan her wedding. I'd lie awake at night sorting out the guest list: *If we invite Jack and Irene there won't be room for Bill and Betty*. My mind ruminated on one name after another until I remembered the first verse I'd chosen for my liturgy, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace..." That led me to remember the other pieces. Like a child swinging from one bar to the next across the monkey bars, my heart and mind moved from scripture to hymn, from confusion to clarity, from restlessness to calm.

Long after we celebrated Andrea's marriage, the liturgy remained and took up residency in my life. Since then I've added to it. It is a work in progress that currently contains three Scriptures, three hymns and the Heidelberg Catechism question.

Finding Rest

My sleepless-night liturgy helps my mind leapfrog over useless meanderings straight to a trustworthy God. When I catch myself wide awake and fretful, I reach for the familiar, memorized words. The Holy Spirit also pushes pieces of the liturgy to the forefront of my mind as I encounter times of need during the day, such as when I'm thrust into a moment of despair or when the dentist's drill digs at a tooth. I find myself repeating the words in the midst of discomfort, inviting God to be present in that place and time. Doing so brings me a tangible experience of the childlike faith that can bring rest.

My granddaughter Hannah has given me a picture of this restful faith. When she was three, she jumped on her bed a bit too hard. A small bulletin board fell between the bedroom door and the wall, jamming the door shut. The adults in the house worked feverishly for an hour before we could get it to budge. At the end of the ordeal, we opened the door to find Hannah sound asleep. She trusted us to work on her behalf and rested while we labored. That's what a sleepless-night liturgy can do in us. It elicits the same kind of trust in a God who acts on our behalf and never sleeps.

The quest is always on for peaceful sleep and pleasant dreams. Yet for those who experience their darkest moments in the deepest parts of the night, obtaining these remains a challenge. The sleepless night liturgy draws us close to the Prince of Peace while we wait for Him to give what our souls and bodies crave: rest.

This article first appeared in the November/December 2008 issue of Discipleship Journal. It is reprinted here with permission from the author.

Dissatisfaction

by Ronald Koteskey

Bill and Bev had completed their first four-year term on the field, and they were rather dissatisfied. As they talked together, they realized that neither of them had much satisfaction from serving as missionaries. They were still in love, but they were both disappointed with the way their marriage was going. They both loved their children dearly, but they were not nearly as excited about being parents as they were before they became missionaries. In fact, they had less interest in missions than they had before they served as missionaries.

They tried to think of why this had happened. Had they mistaken God's call? Should they change fields or agencies? Should they just stay "home" and become attrition statistics? They finally decided to see what the Bible had to say about dissatisfaction and satisfaction.

What does the Bible say?

To their surprise, the word "dissatisfaction" did not even occur in the Bible, at least not in the translations they had. They found many passages about satisfaction, but most of them were in the Old Testament. Some of the verses were relevant, especially those in Psalms and Proverbs.

Again to their surprise, the New Testament had very few references about being satisfied, and most of those were about eating until one was satisfied. That was little help for their confusion about their own general dissatisfaction, and they began to wonder.

What has missionary research found?

People have done little research on dissatisfaction in missionaries, and what has been done has been related to marriage rather than to their general satisfaction. However, two good studies have been done.

First, Christopher Rosik and Jelna Pandzic wondered about changes in marital satisfaction over a couple's years of service as missionaries. They predicted that satisfaction would decrease during the first few years of missionary service, and then it would increase as the couple adjusted to the new culture.

Between 1982 and 2003, they asked 28 couples to complete the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) three times: (1) during candidacy, (2) at the end of their first four-year term, and (3) at the end of their second four-year term. The missionaries ranged from 23 to 42 years of age at the beginning, and they had been married from 1 to 16 years.

As Rosik and Pandzic expected, they found that satisfaction decreased during the first term of service; however, it did not increase during their second term of service. Age and number of children made no difference; missionaries in their 20s, 30s and 40s all became more dissatisfied with their marriages during their first term of service, and they did not become more satisfied during their second. ("Marital satisfaction among Christian missionaries: A Longitudinal analysis from candidacy to second furlough." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 2008, Vol. 27, pp. 3-15.)

Second, Stephen Sweatman also studied missionaries during their first term of service. He looked at the relationship between marital satisfaction and psychological symptoms. He also used the MSI to measure satisfaction. In addition, he used measures of anxiety and depression. He asked 34 couples to complete the inventories, and he found a significant correlation between depression and marital satisfaction, the greater the depression the higher the dissatisfaction ("Marital satisfaction, cross-cultural adjustment stress, and the psychological sequelae." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 1999, Vol. 27, pp. 154-162).

These two studies found that the level of marital satisfaction could be related to other variables, such as years of service and depression. Because both of these studies were conducted on missionaries and concentrated only on marital satisfaction, other questions rise. Do non-missionaries find similar declines in satisfaction? Do these changes in marital satisfaction also indicate similar changes in life satisfaction?

What has secular research found?

Fortunately, these questions have been answered by other research. Boyd Rollins and Herald Feldman studied marital satisfaction over the family life cycle in the 1960s. Rather than using the age of people, they defined the stage of the life cycle by the ages of their children as follows:

1. No children
2. Oldest child 0-2
3. Oldest child 3-5
4. Oldest child 6-12
5. Oldest child 13-21
6. First child gone to last child gone
7. Empty nest to retirement
8. Retirement to death of first spouse

Rollins and Feldman asked 852 American couples living in Syracuse, New York, at different stages how satisfying their present stage of the lifecycle was. They found that both husbands and wives were most satisfied with their marriage during stage 1 (no children). Then their satisfaction declined through stage 4 (oldest child 6-12), and finally it started to increase again, rising to about that of stage 1 after they retired.

Fortunately, they also asked people if their present stage of life was "very satisfying" in general, not just in their marriage. As shown below, they found that at stages 1 and 2 (no children or oldest 2 or less) about 70 percent of both husbands and wives reported that it was "very satisfying." After that, there was a constant decline in

satisfaction until only about 10 percent found stage 6 (when children were leaving) “very satisfying.” The percentage then doubled for stage 7 (empty nest), and it rose back up to about 70 percent in stage 8 (retirement to death of spouse). (Marital satisfaction over the family life cycle, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1970, February, pp20-28.)

Thus, similar changes in life satisfaction occur in people who are not missionaries during the same ages it occurred in missionaries, and changes in marital satisfaction parallel changes in life satisfaction. One question remains, and that is whether this change in dissatisfaction occurs only in Americans or does it occur in other cultures as well?

This question was answered recently when Hannes Schwandt at Princeton University conducted a study of life satisfaction in Germany during 2013, research on a European population. He surveyed 23,161 Germans between the ages of 17 and 85, asking them to rate their life satisfaction. He found the highest satisfaction at age 23 and the lowest satisfaction at 55, and it peaked again at age 69. His study was published by the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics at <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1229.pdf>.

Thus people in Western cultures experience an interval of much dissatisfaction in the middle of life whether they are missionaries or not. The missionaries in Rosik and Pandzic’s study were all in age categories during which satisfaction is declining, so all ages reported increasing dissatisfaction during their first term.

To borrow the first few words from the opening lines of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, there seems to be a “winter of discontent” in the middle of life, a period when people experience far less life satisfaction.

What are the implications?

Missionaries often experience less and less satisfaction with their lives as they serve in other cultures, and they may conclude that the problem is unique to them or a result of their missionary service. Of course, some of that decline in satisfaction may be theirs alone, but they must remember that many people experience that increasing dissatisfaction from their early 20s before they had many children until their mid-50s when their last children leave home. They should not blame God or give up on missionary service. If they recognize that at least part of that decline is common to most people, they are less likely to become discouraged and quit. It is much better to “bloom where they are planted” rather than spend those difficult years moping around and doing little of the Lord’s work.

Is there any hope for satisfaction?

Stage 7 of the life cycle mentions the empty nest, and that may make people wonder about the feelings of grief and loneliness of the empty nest syndrome. It is true after the last child leaves home that some parents may report depression, loss of purpose and anxiety. However, far more people find the benefits of having time for each other as well as the freedom and time to do what they have wanted to do for years. Rollins and Feldman found that people were twice as likely to find their lives “very satisfying” during the empty nest years.

Furthermore, most people find little dissatisfaction with retirement. During stage 8, about 70 percent of people find retirement to be “very satisfying,” back up to the level it was when they were in their 20s.

Robert Browning expressed it well in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:



Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

For other topics please visit www.missionarycare.com. Also please let your non-medical colleagues know about these free resources.

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