January 2019

Contents

- Pearl
- Introduction
- Tools for Dealing with Burn Out
- Lamentations Three Paraphrase by Stan Key
- Burn Out Part II by Jefferson McKenney, MD
- Resources for Dealing with So Much Death by Susan Carter
- A Medical Missionary’s Grief Ritual by Stan Haegert, MD
- Announcements

Introduction to this Issue

Pearl: O Lord, the helper of the helpless, the hope of those who are past hope, the savior of the tempest-tossed, the harbor of the voyagers, the physician of the sick; you know each soul and our prayer, each home and its need; become to each one of us what we most dearly require, receiving us all into your kingdom, making us children of light; and pour on us your peace and love, O Lord our God. Amen. – from the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

Father’s Day 1980 did not get celebrated by the Palpant family. Sam was tethered to Friends Lugulu Hospital as the medical officer in charge. He arrived home well after supper and bedtime. Despite vowing not to, I ranted, “The kids made gifts for you…” Sam interrupted me with a sigh, “I worked nonstop all day. I tried to save another father’s son. The child died. This evening I delivered a baby, making another man a father for the first time.” Tears coursed down his cheeks. This scene is not unlike ones facing many of you on a daily basis. Enough of you have contacted the Center for Medical Missions requesting help. This issue of the e-Pistle is
devoted to offering you resources, a related story on burnout and a liturgy to use when a patient dies—all borne out of healthcare missionaries’ experiences.

– Judy Palpant, Editor (judypalpant@gmail.com)

Tools to Help

“When I neared burnout last year, I had to make some changes in my life. Instead of trying to continue work electronically through text messages and emails during lunch, I began reading back issues of e-Pistle. I appreciated so many of the articles in my hour of need. They contained specific and appropriate nourishment for my unique role as a follower of J, physician and cross-cultural worker.” —From reader’s email

“Reading Lamentations three aloud may be helpful to people experiencing bad things coming at them from people and circumstances. This trauma easily takes root in a person’s spirit as anger with God as the source of the harm they have suffered. Reading this scripture aloud, especially in the presence of another person, gives them the courage to express what they are feeling and words to do so. It’s a door that helps them move towards healing.” —Kathy Crosby, Spiritual Director
A Personal Paraphrase of Lamentations 3:1–40
by Stan Key

If you want to know what someone looks like who has experienced God’s anger and judgment, then let me tell you my story. Yes, you could call me “Exhibit A.” I am the man who knows firsthand what it means to experience divine displeasure. Listen as I explain how God’s been treating me:

He has led me into darkness, not light.
He has brought sickness and disease upon me—I am skin and bones.
He treats me like a city under siege surrounding me with two armies, one named “Bitterness” the other named “Tribulation.”
He has put chains on me and locked me in a walled prison so I can’t escape.
And when I cry out to Him for help—He pays no attention to my prayers.
He has made my path crooked and my road bumpy.
He’s been like a bear lying in wait to ambush me and when He attacks, He rips me to shreds with His claws.
He takes His bow and uses me for target practice. My body looks like a pin cushion filled with all the arrows He’s shot at me.
He has given me bitter poison to drink.
He has filled my mouth with gravel.
I can’t even remember what happiness feels like. I never dreamed God would treat me like this. I thought He was supposed to give me peace, not take it from me! People laugh at me for trusting in God. “Look how He treats you,” they mock! I’m so depressed and discouraged I don’t know where to turn. All I can think about is my pain. Is this the reward I get for trusting in God?

But there is one thing I keep remembering. I can’t dislodge the thought. It saves me from despair and gives me hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and His mercies never end. Yes. That’s it. Like an infinite ocean, there are no limits to His grace. Each new day is proof that His compassion is still there. He cannot be untrue to his covenant promise of love. Others may be unfaithful but not God. He will keep His promises.

I guess you could say I need someone to preach me a sermon. And since I’m a preacher, I’ll preach to myself. “Soul, God is your inheritance! What more could you want than that? So be patient and trust him. You won’t be disappointed in the end. Yes, just calm down and wait quietly for God to act. He’ll save you. You’ll see.”

Here’s the bottom line: God won’t treat us badly forever. Oh, He may permit trouble and hardship for a season, but He will show us compassion once again. He has an infinite reservoir of love and grace. He doesn’t enjoy seeing us suffer. So, let’s examine ourselves and take a hard look in the mirror. Then, let us return to the Lord.

Point to Ponder • For those who are in Christ, joy comes in the morning.

Prayer Focus • Strength and endurance, patience and hope for someone you know who is going through great difficulty.
“And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat” (Mark 6:31, KJV).

Since the last newsletter it must have been pretty clear that Rosanne and I were running on fumes. Obvious enough that our friends and coworkers got together and sent us away to an asylum for a couple of days. Not the insane kind of asylum, but a beautiful, peaceful place at the foot of the mountains a couple of hours from Loma de Luz.

A couple of days won’t be enough. But it helps.

And what helps so much is that it was our friends and co-workers who cared enough to notice. To notice and do something about it. (See principle No. 2 following.)

Lodge at Pico Bonito

In the July newsletter, I wrote about growing weary in well doing, about burnout. I introduced the problem, how pervasive, how destructive to people’s lives, how injurious to the kingdom. Knowing too well what it looks like from the bottom of that pit, I wanted to share solutions, “principles I’ve painfully-learned on the field.” I promised to complete what I had to say in the next newsletter.

This is the next newsletter.

In the interim, the “10 principles” have grown to a dozen. Most of the first half of a dozen principles are in some way self-evident. You might say they come from the easy part of the gospel. Several of them would be recognized by most counselors and might be found in any pamphlet on burnout. The second half dozen are from the hard part of the gospel and, as such, often distinctly counter-intuitive…but still true. And like these couple of days away, no one of these principles is enough. But it is my belief and experience that each one helps.

Surprisingly I heard from quite a number of people who actually read all the way to the end of the previous article. To be quite honest, I don’t like to share private matters in a public forum. But that seems to be part of my odd job, part of my “reasonable service” to my Master. And, a humbling number of people expressed concern for us…are we burned out? So, I’ll be honest. Yeah, we have grown pretty weary in well doing. But we’re still here. We’re still showing up for work.

So, let me share my notes with you. It probably won’t be enough. But it is my hope that it might help someone.

What follows then are a dozen principles and a few short stories: straight from the Gospel Primer of What did Jesus Do? and rigorously field tested on the edge of burnout. The first four I essentially discussed in the previous newsletter, and you can read that letter on our website archives. In short, they were the following:

1.) **We are not made to work constantly.** Illustrated by Luke 5:15-16 and Mark 2:27.
   The balance? People need rest and time away from duty.
2.) **Recognize burnout** (preferably proactively) **and do something about it.** Illustrated by Mark 6:31.
   The balance? People need purpose, but they also need food, rest, time away, variety and loyalty.

3.) **Do something other than ministry.** Illustrated by John 21:3.
   The balance? Go fishing.

4.) **Bear another person’s burdens.** Illustrated by Galatians 6:2 and Matthew 11:28-30.
   (Here, in the last newsletter, I told the story of Doña Julia and Doña Conchetina.
   Both are doing well, by the way.)

Now, here are the rest of the principles:

5.) **Express your gratitude.**
   “One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself
   at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, ‘Were not all ten cleansed?
   Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’
   Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well’” (Luke 17:15-19, NIV 1984).

   It may seem paradoxical, but gratitude is a common characteristic among the Honduran poor.

   I would say I have learned more about the liberating nature of gratitude from them than anyone else.
   Among 100 examples of this past month, Omar comes to mind. Omar was a small vender of eggs and
   bread in the central street market in La Ceiba...until that day four years ago when he was shot by some
   hopped-up marero...shot after he had delivered up what little money he had. Unable to walk and in
   pain for four years with a fractured femur apparently no one could fix, when asked how he felt before
   surgery at Loma de Luz, he said he was just so grateful to have found this hospital...not bitter for four
   years of “needless” pain and debility; instead, grateful for a chance to be healed. From guys like Omar,
   I’ve learned you can choose to be bitter or you can choose to be grateful. **Choose grateful.**

6.) **Practice generosity.**
   “And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he
   will by no means lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42, ESV).

   “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how
   does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John
   3:17-18, ESV).

   That the poor are proportionally more generous than the rich is a tendency, which has been well established
   in the literature of psychology. We see it played out here daily. But we have also noticed that **one of
   the characteristics of missionaries who make it is that they are generous.**

7.) **Remember who you serve.**
   “Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ” (Matthew 23:8, KJV).

   Like it says in the Bob Dylan song,
“You may be the heavyweight champion of the world,
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls,
but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”
In this cosmos you’re going to have to serve somebody. Every soul does.
But you have a choice. Chose whom you will serve.

Once you get that sorted, remember who you serve.

8.) Suck it up.
You still have to do the Master’s bidding until those who need healing are healed, until the field is plowed. So, suck it up.

“...Taking them away privately, He withdrew to a town called Bethsaida. But the crowds found out and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and He healed those who needed healing” (Luke 9:10-11, BSB).


Once, perhaps 20 years ago, when the hospital was still just a building under construction, we had a worker (I’ll call him “T”) badly injured in an accident at Loma de Luz. We got him to Hospital DÁntoni, the best private hospital in the nearest city of La Ceiba, but no surgeon was there to operate on him. Out of some combination of desperation and temerity, we asked if we could. Looking back, we still wonder why they said yes. No credentials shown, I had no hospital privileges there. In fact, we didn’t know a single soul in the entire hospital. They even loaned us a completely disengaged anesthetist...but nothing else. Kind of surreally, we found ourselves operating on a critically injured man (ruptured spleen, torn diaphragm, mangled intestines), but with just Rosanne and me. No scrub tech, no circulating nurse, no knowledge of where things were in the hospital. Just very basic instruments and suture, and a big, incredibly hot, nearly empty room with no ventilation. Rosanne had been feeling sick already, and I don’t know if it was that or the heat and the stress, but not long into the case, before I had control of the splenic pedicle, Rosanne mumbled, “I think I’m going to faint.”

As she was slumping toward the floor, I reached across this man’s open, bleeding-out abdomen, locked Rosanne’s elbows, put my face two inches from hers and said (lovingly, I’m sure), “WELL, DON’T.”

And, you know, she pulled herself together and didn’t. We finished the operation successfully.

I saw T at the Quince de Septiembre parade the other day. Now gray at the temples, he came out of his house smiling to shake hands. If Rosanne hadn’t pulled herself together that long ago day, he wouldn’t have been there. Sometimes you just have to suck it up and do what needs to be done no matter how you feel.

9.) Show up for work.
You have been bought with a price. Your life is no longer your own. So, toe the line and show up for work.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, ESV).

“And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38, NASB).
“Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship” (Romans 12:1, CSB).

Norma (“Normita”) is one of my favorite people at the hospital. She works in Limpieza. I guess you would call her a janitress in English. Normita is a kind and faithful and gentle soul. And, she shows up for work, on time, and does her job, and does it well. I remember a few years ago, Normita was kind of surprised that after the rest of her children were pretty much grown, she found herself pregnant again. Though a little late in life for it, she carried the child to term, and delivered a little boy with Trisomy 21, Down’s syndrome. Surprised she may have been, but, oh, how she loved that little guy. Sadly, he was always sickly and as I recall didn’t quite make it to three months of age. Then, oh, how she grieved...silently mostly...still does. But despite the grieving, the day her postpartum leave was up, Norma was there, on time, back at work.

Not long after she returned, I asked her how she was holding up. She smiled sadly and said, “A person has to do their work.”

They do.

10.) Trust: Sometimes the hardest thing for some of us to do.

“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6b, NIV 1984).

“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:30, ESV).

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9a, KJV).

“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7, KJV).

Sometimes you’ve got no choice. Sometimes you’re just going to have to be still and trust God—that His arm is not too short, that His hearing has not grown dull, that he cares for you.

11.) Have people praying for you.

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” (John 17:20, KJV).

“The Farewell Prayer” (John 17:1-26) is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. It is an intercessory prayer for those who have been faithful to Him who were going to be left behind after His ascension. By example, it informs and reminds us we need people praying for us...and they need to know what to pray for.

I wish I had space to tell a hundred of these stories. But to those who pray for us, thank you. It has made all the difference more times than I can count.

Let people know you need their prayers...and what to pray for.

12.) Remember the Name
“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Philippians 2:10, KJV).

“...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10-12, NIV 1984).

Some of you might recall a true tale I told four years ago this month, about Doña Rubinia, who was shot and facing down her assailants. She called upon the name of Christ Jesus, and her assailants were frozen in place. The one who was about to execute an 18-year-old boy on his knees was thrown by some unseen force clear across the road. I know perhaps half a dozen dramatic stories like that. But I share this with the weight of uncounted personal experiences, most far less dramatic, but many equally desperate. When you have nothing left, when your back is against the wall, preferably before your back is against the wall...as soon as you think of it, call upon The Name...out loud. For He will never leave you nor forsake you...and things will get better. They will.

Then catch your breath, but make a change.

See what might be missing.

It might be one of these principles here. It might be in striking the right balance between the easy part of the gospel and the hard part.

But you can’t quit, you know.

Remember who you serve.

His grace will be sufficient for you.

I promise.

In Christ Jesus.

– Jefferson McKenney, MD, as published in The Cornerstone Foundation newsletter, October 2018

Dealing with so Much Death

Multiple people in the field have asked for help in dealing with all the suffering and death they see daily. I’ve added the topic to our New Medical Missionary Training, having asked Dr. Gene Rudd to share. We recorded his presentation and it is now available online, entitled “It’s Supposed to Hurt.” You can find it at www.cmda.org/cmm. I hope you will take time to watch and listen.
I also approached CMDA’s former Psychiatry Section leader to see if he could suggest any resources. He suggested *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Prevention and Self-care Strategies for the Helping Professions*. The authors are psychologists at the University of Minnesota, and this practical book has lots of resources, references and further reading, plus it includes exercises at the end of each chapter. Most of it is compatible with a Christian worldview, and it recognizes the tension between caring too much and being so self-protective and self-oriented that you’re not doing right by your patients. Available through Amazon, it contains insights into motivations and ideas on how to promote personal resilience.

—Susan Carter

**A Medical Missionary’s Grief Ritual**
by Stan Haegert, MD

I am a family physician who served as a medical missionary in rural West Africa for more than a decade. At that time, cerebral malaria, meningitis and dysentery were epidemic, and we experienced many deaths in the clinic, most often deaths of small children who were the most susceptible to these maladies. One year, 60 people died, and I remember as many as four deaths in a single day.

I experienced severe burnout toward the end of our second four-year term, fueled in part by accumulated grief work that I had not taken time to do. In the local culture, outward expressions of grief were not permitted. There was a belief that if relatives cried or expressed grief outwardly, angels would beat the deceased person longer in “purgatory” and his/her entry into heaven would be delayed. Grieving mothers who had just lost children to death would be severely reprimanded by elders who would admonish them to “just trust God.”

This, combined with the seemingly never-ending crush of patients waiting to be seen, led me to just “put on a game face” and “stuff” any feelings I had about the parade of death with which I was confronted daily. I also hesitated to bring stories about my day’s work home to my family, feeling this would be a difficult burden for them. Our missionary medical team also had no formal mechanism for “checking in” with each other at an emotional level.

Not surprisingly, upon my return to America I needed to revisit these experiences with the help of a therapist and do the grief work I had long neglected.

When I returned to West Africa after my recovery, my family and I developed a “grief ritual” that was very helpful:

- When someone died in the clinic, the team knew I would be taking a break for about 15 minutes.
- I returned home and let my wife (and children if they were at home) know what had happened.
- I retreated to a quiet place. I named what I was feeling (sadness, anger, fear) before the Lord.
- I turned to Psalm 139 and read it aloud. I acknowledged the sovereignty of God and the fact that every one of the deceased person’s days were written in His book “before one of them came to be.”
- I acknowledged that the medical team and I did the best we could, and I mentally lifted the child’s body toward the Lord and turned him/her over to the Lord’s hands.
- My family and I went into our backyard and placed some flowers at the base of one of our trees. It was usually at that point my tears would be free to come and I could return to work.
My wife also tied a ribbon around a tree in the middle of the compound, which was a signal to our non-medical teammates that the clinic team had experienced a grief event and would be grateful for their support and prayers.

If we hold our breath for too long, we pass out. How much better to breathe in and breathe out in a steady, life-giving rhythm! Similarly, acknowledging our feelings of grief and bringing them rhythmically and authentically to our Lord and to the community of believers is life-sustaining rather than life-draining.

Announcements

**CMDA’s new Center for Well-Being**
CMDA has launched The Center for Well-being to help healthcare professionals confront the challenge of burnout and promote well-being. Professional coaching and coach training remain core services. A web domain is being developed, a monthly podcast, “The Healthy Doctor,” premiered in December, an assessment that includes the spiritual dimension of well-being has been authored, well-being retreats are being scheduled and more is yet to come. Stay tuned.

**Remedy Orlando**
Medical missions brings the remedy for disease. And medical missions brings the remedy for sin. But in order to do this, medical missions needs missionaries. Committed healthcare professionals are the greatest need in closed countries to provide God’s spiritual and physical remedy. Join us at First Baptist Orlando in Orlando, Florida on March 28-30, 2019 for Remedy Orlando 2019, a conference focused on bringing God’s remedy to the world through missions. Those days are quickly approaching. Have you registered yet?

We are working with a network of partners in the Orlando area to offer free and low-cost housing for students and missionaries who are attending. You can go to [www.cmda.org/remedy](http://www.cmda.org/remedy) to register. I hope to see you there. – Susan Carter

**Remedy West**
On October 5-6, 2019, a dream comes true. CMDA will launch its first REMEDY West medical missions conference at California Baptist University in Riverside, California.

Students, please take advantage of this remarkable event. Healthcare professionals, you will be challenged in your faith and vision no matter where you are on your career path. You will also have a delightful opportunity to meet and talk with perhaps hundreds of your future colleagues as they consider how God wants to use them to embrace the remedy for physical health and eternal life throughout their careers.

Please mark the dates on your calendars, phone, computer, pads and paper for October 5-6, 2019. We’ve planned this conference schedule so you can avoid SoCal Friday afternoon traffic. Plus, we’ve left both Saturday and Sunday evenings open for travel, other events in your life and time to study, should you feel the need.
We will send you promo videos monthly to introduce different speakers along the way. Watch our first video here on our website and make plans to join us next October 5-6, 2019.

**Christian Health Service Corps**
Christian Health Service Corps in Northeast Texas offers trainings on community health, tropical medicine and international disaster response. See their 2019 schedule at [https://www.healthservicecorps.org/training/](https://www.healthservicecorps.org/training/).