

The Center for Medical Missions'

e-Pistle

March 2009

Welcome to the March issue of the e-Pistle. I hope you find the information useful and informative. I am looking forward to receiving some responses to the question I pose in the final article.

Here is a list of articles that follow:

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School Daze

Section XIII: Family

By David Stevens, MD

Schooling our children almost torpedoed Jody and I going to the mission field.

When we arrived in Kenya in 1980, every child went to boarding school in second grade at the young age of seven. We could not imagine that and so it became a recurrent topic of discussion during my last year of residency and as we raised our support. Jason, our oldest, would be three when we arrived in Kenya; and seven did not seem that far away.

We began looking at our options. The home schooling movement was just starting and Jody's sister was one of it's pioneers. Jody pumped her for information and began looking at curriculums. Despite what she learned, she was still not comfortable taking on the challenge since she had not been trained in primary education. She was thrilled when she found out another new doctor's spouse, scheduled to arrive about the same time as us, was a primary teacher. They began to plan to open a small school for all our children and others that might want to come.

I still remember discussing whether we should come home when the kids got to high school and then return when they went to college.

Then God began to deal with our lack of faith. His still small voice said, "Dave and Jody, do you believe I can take care of everything EXCEPT your children?" "Do you think that only you can assure their safety, their education and their future?"

He reminded me how well the other missionary kids at Tenwek had turned out. When I went to Tenwek as a student in college, one of Dr. Steury's sons, who was around eight at the time, had taken me on a tour of the compound sharing facts about the birds, the fauna and much more. I had been very impressed with his maturity and knowledge.

The question boiled down to this, "Could I trust God with my children?" That is a question every missionary has to deal with whether it is for issues of disease, personal safety or education.

God was right. We were not yet like Abraham. We had not put what we considered most precious, our children, on the altar. Through more prayer and reading God's Word, we made that commitment.

That doesn't mean we unhooked our brains and common sense and abrogated our responsibilities to our children. We just operated from a different assumption, a different foundation of trust and belief that God could guide us, that he was by our side and had a plan all worked out.

Let me share a few principles we learned in the process that may help you as you journey or continue to journey down this path:

- Every child is different. What works for one, may not be the best option for another.
- Now more than ever, mission organizations do not want to dictate educational options to missionaries and are very open to funding (of course you may have to raise the money) the option you choose.
- The mission field often can provide a wonderful community for raising your children. Other missionaries and some nationals become "uncles" and "aunts" who are much closer to your children than their real uncles and aunts could ever be. Our children are now in their late twenties and still love and want to be with their missionary "uncles" and "aunts."
- Missionary kids as a group are high achievers later in life. They are comfortable with different people and different cultures. They love to travel and have a much broader range of experiences than kids in their home country. They have a more realistic opinion of themselves and a Biblical worldview. They have seen suffering, pain and poverty and genuinely care about people.
- They are not money focused. They have been rich (when they are with their overseas national friends) and they have been poor (compared to their friends on home assignment.)
- They say the best way to bond a family together is to take them camping because you face a common challenge. Life on the mission field is one long camping trip, full of challenges and learning to adapt. Because of this your kids will likely mature more quickly and be closer to you.
- As a doctor, I had much more quality time with my children than doctors in the States especially during their most formative years. Since we were in a rural area, there was no place to go at night except home. We made our own fun, shared hobbies and talked. I had breakfast, lunch and dinner with my children almost every day.
- We did not lack educational tools. People were eager to help us educate our children well. In the mid-eighties when most school rooms in the US did not even have a

computer, our little one room school room had three computers for eight children. We also had the latest and best audio and video aids.

- Boarding schools can be poor, average or great. Most are great like the one we had. We told the children they could go to boarding school when they were ready. The two oldest went in 5th and 6th grade. They missed us and we missed them but we saw enormous spiritual, educational and emotional growth in their lives during this time. They still consider their boarding school the best school they ever attended.
- Boarding school was much harder on us than it was the kids. If we were not careful, we could communicate that to them in our words, tone and actions and make the whole situation much more difficult. If we approached boarding school positively, they did too.

We did a lot of different options. We home schooled, had a one-room school house and sent two of our kids for boarding school. God used every one of these options for our children's good during different phases of our service overseas.

When God called us back to the States you know what one of our biggest battles was? We did not want to bring our children back to the US school system and culture. Doesn't God have a sense of humor? What we feared most was now what we valued most.

We weren't in a daze, confused and unclear, for very long. We just had to remind ourselves that we had already put our children on the altar. God could take care of our children in the social and spiritual jungle of the US.

He did!

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Cura Animarum

By Rev. Stan Key

POST TENEBRES LUX. This Latin phrase is written in large letters on the "Reformation Wall" in Geneva, Switzerland. "After darkness light." Katy and I stood before the wall trying to absorb the magnitude of what God did in 16th century Europe. Almost as long as a football field, the wall depicts some of the major personalities and events of the Reformation. Large statues of John Calvin, John Knox, Theodore Beza and William Farel dominate the central part of the wall. These were the Geneva reformers. Stretching then to the right and to the left, also cut into stone, are depictions of other aspects of the Reformation that shook Europe like an earthquake: German Lutheranism, English Anglicanism, Scottish Presbyterianism, French Huguenots, New England puritans and others.

As we worked our way up and down the wall reading texts and thinking about these men who changed the world, our attention became fixed on one text in particular. Written by a reformer whose name I didn't even recognize, our hearts were stirred as we read what Randolph Cecil said in 1561.

"The voice of one man preaching is capable in one hour of putting more life into us than the clamor of 500 blaring bugles blown incessantly in our ears."

Amazing, isn't it? One little man in one little pulpit during one little hour can dispel more darkness and create more light than all the libraries of Europe. The Reformation transformed the world because the Word was preached with power in pulpits once again!

Preaching is a distinctive of the Christian faith. Buddhism lives by meditation, Islam lives by prayers and pilgrimage, Judaism lives by obedience to the Torah, Confucianism lives by a code of ethics... but Christianity lives by preaching. In *Moby Dick* Herman Melville has one of the characters compare a pulpit to the prow of a ship. "The pulpit is ever the earth's foremost part: all the rest come to its rear; the pulpit leads the world."

Paul put it this way: ... *in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. I Cor. 1:21).*

Are you ready for a little foolishness this morning? Post tenebres lux. Take courage and preach!

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The ABCs of Church Planting

By Charles Fielding, M.D.

Since the turn of the millennium, among countries that had been the most closed to the gospel, God has been using war and natural disasters to break down these ancient barriers. An area of Northern Africa, considered to be one of the least evangelized regions on earth, entered into war and was opened to humanitarian aid agencies. I traveled to that area and visited several Christian organizations. After hearing each group tell about the relief they were providing in the name of Christ, I politely asked if they had intent to leave behind a multiplying church. On each occasion I was told that they did not. The leader of one group did say, "That is a good idea. Someone should do that." At the same time, in the capital where millions live in slums, preachers and seminarians focus on the spread of the gospel but invest little time with the poor.

A small team, made up of missionaries from a variety of agencies, recognized this unique opportunity from God. None had a background in health care and I gave them one week of training in community health/church planting.

Basing out of a city near the war zone we traveled by helicopter in and out of a very poor area, camping for ten days at a time. Because I am a doctor we were able to open a free medical clinic and provided care to all that we could see each day. We were continually thanked for our work and we answered with a standard response. "Please do not thank us," we would say. "We are disciples of Jesus Christ. He knows about your suffering and He loves you. He has sent us here, as His representatives, to serve you." We always invited people to come back to our compound after work hours, if they would like to hear stories about Jesus. In the beginning, no one came.

After many weeks we concluded our medical clinic and began teaching the people how to prevent the diseases that were so common. 35 men came to our first lesson. We taught them about the prevention of some physical diseases and I then shared the Bible story explaining how sin had resulted in a curse over the earth. I also told how God had promised to send a man who would free us from the curse.

On the next week we had 40 men in attendance. We taught more lessons about physical health and I continued my story about God, man and sin. I told about the prophets who gave more information about the curse-breaker and then told about the miracle birth of Jesus.

The next week was to be my last chance with the group and 50 men came for the lessons. On that day, though, the health lessons took more time and the translator told me that I must conclude the training so that the men could go for their Muslim prayers. I was disappointed but dismissed the group saying, "a farmer from America has donated one bag of seeds for each of you so please pick this up on your way out. If anyone would like to hear the end of the story of Jesus, you may stay." At that, all 50 men rose, took a bag of seeds and returned to their seats. Not one man left. After telling the end of the gospel message I apologized for taking so much of their time that day. "Do not apologize," one man spoke out. "Your message today is the most important lesson we could have ever heard."

On Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13 and 14) he traveled with Barnabas into an area where the gospel had never been. The team entered a number of cities and always found a platform for preaching in the Jewish synagogue. In each town the community was divided. There was opposition to their message but disciples were also made. From one city, we are told, the gospel spread throughout the entire region.

After many months of difficulty, having traveled in a circular route, Paul's team was close to their starting point, and Paul's original hometown was very close. But, surprisingly, rather than follow the route home, the team turned completely around and retraced their steps. Their purpose for this was to visit with each group of disciples that they had formed. They strengthened and encouraged the disciples and appointed elders in each church. Paul followed this pattern on subsequent missionary journeys with amazing success being considered by many the greatest apostolic worker of all time.

His methodology was quite simple with just three basic steps. He first *accessed the community*, he *made disciples* and he then *empowered the church*. The result was such that, after about fifteen years, Paul declared his work throughout that entire region to be completed and longed to move on to Europe. Paul had worked among only a few cities but, just as Jesus had done with his disciples, he had put into place a mechanism, powered by the Holy Spirit, that could be trusted to perpetuate the gospel in his absence.

Almost two thousand years later we find the apostolic work of Paul and others of his era to have been well founded. The gospel has spread to such a degree that the majority of earth's inhabitants will come in contact with the gospel within their lifetime. On the other hand, those still cut off from the gospel are surrounded by effective barriers, certainly devised by spiritual forces opposed to God and His offer of grace.

Missionaries from Northern Africa across Asia to Indonesia are not able to follow the simple methodology of Paul primarily because they are not able to establish a platform for preaching the gospel. Where Christ is preached, God's elect have responded. But the vast majority of lost humankind is partitioned from the gospel primarily by the religions of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

In response to this, effective missionaries are remembering the teachings of Jesus and are adding two steps to Paul's church planting methodology. We call the resulting strategy *The ABCs of Church Planting*. They are:

- A. *Access* unreached communities—taking the gospel where it has never been.
- B. Get *behind* closed doors—to any place where it is safe to share the gospel.
- C. *Care* for the needy—demonstrating the compassion of Christ.
- D. Make *disciples*—who will readily risk their lives for the gospel.
- E. *Empower* the church—to equip disciples to advance the gospel even further.

As I travel from country to country I universally find that missionaries, and nationals reaching their own country, agree with these five simple steps. The establishment of a platform for preaching in restricted areas is best done with families often inside their homes; in the same way that Jesus taught and that Peter shared with the entire household of Cornelius. And, in keeping with the teaching of Jesus, and to give credibility to the speaker, it is right that we care for the physical needs of the families that we visit. But, sadly, there is often a breakdown between this plan and actual practice. Commonly, apostolic workers have either strength in the ABC, from the list above, or in D and E. They behave mostly as either *healers*, who care for those in need, or as *preachers*, who proclaim the gospel and build the church.

My intention, at this point, is not to be critical. Those people groups who have yet to receive the gospel are unreached for very good reasons. After 2000 years of evangelical and apostolic activity, only the most impenetrable regions of the world are still isolated from the gospel. But, remembering that we are battling against the most deceiving of adversaries, it is my intention to call disciples back to the basics. Although we were once children of Satan, we have been artificially adopted as children of God and, consequently are being re-created for His purposes. His Spirit will guide and empower us only to the degree to which we crucify our passions and, especially, our identity. If one thinks of himself as a healer, then he will engage himself in healing activities. If one thinks himself a preacher, then he will preach. Our mandate, on each occasion that Jesus commissioned his disciples, though, was for each of us to preach *and* to heal. (Mt 10:7-8; Mk 6:7, 12 – 13; Lk 9:2; Lk 10:1 – 9) This must be an integral part of our identity, if we are to be authentic disciples, and must be put into the spiritual DNA of the disciples that we make.

In the story about Northern Africa, we left the area just two days after giving out the seeds and telling the gospel message. We stayed away during the rainy season but the team returned a few months later and two people gave their lives to Jesus within the first week. And then people came, usually after dark, to hear the gospel on almost every day. Many came to salvation over the next few months and the first church among that people group was formed. We believe the key to the response to be the team's juxtaposition of mighty works of compassion with the

mighty gospel message. The disciples are immature and weak but it is certain that the Holy Spirit can be trusted to mature that to which He has given birth. And perhaps, as we saw in Paul's first missionary journey, the gospel will spread throughout that entire region.

Disciples of Jesus Christ are remarkable beings. Their home is in heaven, their commander is Jesus, and their personal agenda is simply to obey Him. Even without training from seminary or medical school they have the capacity, because of the Christ that is within them, to step boldly into territory now claimed by the enemy, preaching *and* healing, advancing the gospel to the very ends of the earth.

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Visiting Medical Students and Residents – Is Anyone Following Up?

By Susan Carter

Wow – I've been back from my international rotation for 3 months. It seems like forever. I had such a great experience and learned more than I ever dreamed I would.

I asked the Lord to use this time to give me direction for my future and really thought the missionaries I served with could help me work through some of the issues. I saw how busy they were while I was there so I didn't get to ask as many questions as I wanted. Now the weeks are passing and the experience is getting further and further from my mind. Why haven't I heard from anyone at?

Might you be the one he/she is waiting to hear from?

As I write this, I think back to my time in the field and how poorly I corresponded with visitors after they left. So I am not going to preach at you. Rather, as a person interested in helping recruit coworkers for your ministry, I wonder how many ministries are actually following up with medical visitors? I'm sure there are many of you who do put effort into continuing contact with medical students and residents in particular. Hopefully, there are even some ministries that have an entire follow-up system in place.

In the last 14 months, CMDA has given international rotation scholarships to 61 residents and 28 medical students. The majority of these wrote on their application that they either have a call to medical missions or are seeking the Lord's direction. While I try to send a follow-up letter within a couple weeks of their return, I can't relate to them in a way that someone who served with them can.

If you do not already have a system in place for following up with your visitors, I hope you will put some effort into developing it. I know missionary doctors already have more than enough to do but an e-mail only takes a few minutes. If you can't do it are there other people who could take on this task –spouses, non-medical personnel, etc?

I would love to share your follow-up strategies with others in the next e-Pistle if you are willing to share. I invite you to write your story and I will use it directly, or if you would just like to share some ideas that work for you and your ministry, I will put them together. I know there are ministries that would benefit from learning from others. And anyway we can help do a better job of following up future co-laborers will be a good thing.

I don't know how many of the large pool of possible co-laborers that visit go to the mission field long term but I believe you and I can improve that number! Let me know how the Center for Medical Missions can help you in this area.

Today, could there be a former medical student or resident visitor who is hoping to hear from you? Why not jot them a note right now.

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Center for Medical Missions

PO Box 7500
Bristol, TN 37621
423-844-1000
www.cmda.org/cmm

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