



Center for Medical Missions

Both this month and next we will continue looking at missions, healthcare and the city. Why? If you remember, we did a survey of the “*Your Call*” subscribers a few years ago, and several of the questions had to do with the future needs as you envisioned them and how you saw yourself fitting in the overall scheme of medical missions. The survey revealed that the “romantic” ideas we often have of medical missions from the past do not fit with the growing needs of today and tomorrow.

Daniel Tolan

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The Growing Challenge of the City

by Daniel Tolan, MD

What does Jesus see when He looks at today’s modern cities? He wept over Jerusalem because the people, God’s chosen ones, were more concerned with life and ownership of possessions than the presence of the Messiah. Jesus wept over self-sufficient people and the coming destruction brought on by their actions. He wept over pain, loneliness, suffering, hunger and hurt. I wonder what He would see and what He would weep over today.

As we continue looking at healthcare mission to the cities and urban areas, I want you to stop for a moment and form several images of medical missions in your mind.

Okay, what do you see?

By far, the majority of images would be of rural settings in poor, primitive cultures. Tribal people with large “gauged” earlobes and lips, bone necklaces, black faces, orphans with distended stomachs under a baobab tree, a small airplane landing on a remote hillside bringing the “great white hope” thatched huts and the list continues. These images probably cover less than one-third of today’s world.

Our greatest challenge today in healthcare missions is no longer in the rural impoverished areas. No, our greatest challenge lies in the world’s urban areas.

I seriously doubt anyone had this image of medical missions: a well-to-do appearing man talking on a cell phone in the city!

Some of you may have pictured a city slum, but did you picture yourself working there?

These and many others are the images of the healthcare missions in the world today. While most of you preparing for missionary medicine are envisioning working in the traditional rural mission hospital, the real need and the greatest challenge ahead of us lies elsewhere.

Urban areas contain huge numbers of people. In the next article, Dr. David Stevens talks about the sheer numbers in terms of urban growth and what some of the challenges are to missionary healthcare. I maintain that we have learned how to deal with numbers in the rural areas during the last 100 years of missionary medicine. But we have little to no idea how to effectively deal with the sheer numbers faced in cities. You think it has been hard? It is about to become more difficult.

Mainland China has more than 35 cities with two million people or more. Thriving growing urban areas are everywhere – Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas. Cities contain most of the people in the 10/40 Window and in the secular West. The world’s rapidly growing cities already contains most of the people in the 10/40 window in the west and the south.

Urban areas offer unique challenges. In my years in Africa, we easily organized the biggest show in “town” by holding a village health fair or outreach effort. Let the Church Hospital in Kolkata, India, do the same and see how little stir it creates. You compete with busy urban lives, social events, loneliness, clubs and no resources. And you quickly realize the traditional missionary ministry “is a relic of another era” as one missionary puts it.

Ministry dislocation from cities. While most people live in urban areas, most missionary healthcare and institutions are located away from the largest mission field. One taxi driver in a major African city told me, “The worse thing to do in this city is to get sick. At

home I had the mission hospital but here I have nothing!" Without proximity to the mission field Christian Healthcare Missions is at best only an observer.

Urban Medical Missions

by David Stevens, MD, MA (Ethics)

A billion people moved into the cities during the last 30 years.

Another billion will follow them in the next 10 years in an ever-escalating migration as people desperately seek jobs and a better life. Sadly, most of them will end up in impoverished slums where their social foundations will quickly crumble. Far from their extended families and people groups, many will be swallowed up and sucked down into a multi-ethnic whirlpool devoid of any sense of community or traditional values.

These new urbanites will be more educated than ever before with high expectations of what their futures should hold. This will make their falls into dire poverty even more emotionally cataclysmic leading to more social unrest. Their disquietude will be compounded by pervasive crime, social injustices, illicit drug use and disease.

This future is not difficult to predict since this pattern is already evident in cities around the world. Last weekend I visited my three children who serve with an inner city healthcare ministry in Memphis, Tennessee, and saw the ravages of these migrations among U.S. citizens as well as the large refugee populations they serve. I was also reminded of the principles and practices that are going to have to be followed for medical missionaries to meet this great challenge of the 21st century. The necessity of taking the gospel with healing hands to the remote rural areas is diminishing. The new frontiers of medical missions are the megacities of the world.

What is it going to take?

- Incarnational Ministry – Ministering in an urban environment is harder than working in a rural one. Relationships are more difficult to establish with the middle and upper classes in cities where they don't often know their neighbors and live in household fortresses. Yet these people often have access to healthcare.

It is the poor who need our services. The most effective way to reach them is to live and work among them to incarnate Christ by serving their health needs and being in everyday relationships with them just as pioneer missionaries did generations ago. Living on a compound or in more affluent areas of the city will not get the job done nearly as well. That does not mean going it alone. Where possible, you will need to infiltrate your service area with a team to provide relational support.

Better to live humbly with the poor than to share plunder with the proud (Proverbs 16:19, NLT).

- It won't be "safe" – My son lives next door to a makeshift bordello in the inner city. His neighbor is a pimp who traffics a couple of women and sells drugs out of his house. On the other side of my son, live my daughter and her dentist husband with one of our grandbabies. Across the street from them are some abandoned buildings and a crack house. Occasionally, they have to take cover when gun fire erupts. Yet their healthcare ministry and home church is prospering, and they are happy in the center of God's will for their lives.

The dangers are much worse than Memphis in some megacities. Remember, the greatest risks often bring the greatest rewards for God's kingdom. He does not call us to safety but to sacrificial services.

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe (Psalm 4:8, NLT).

- It needs to be multifaceted – A coordinated strategy will best penetrate these difficult areas. That may mean an urban mission hospital, clinics and community health programs working hand in hand. But don't stop there. Development programs, micro-enterprise loan systems, vocational training, agricultural projects, schools and small scale animal husbandry projects for egg and meat production can make a huge difference in meeting the needs of the local people. In inner city Memphis, Christ Community realized that the poor they served could only walk to the fast food store where no vegetables were sold, so they started an "urban garden" project where they grow and sell reasonably priced vegetables. They also teach people to grow their own vegetables in small garden plots.

No matter what the modality, include a robust evangelism, discipleship and church growth strategy. Helping people to be physically healthy is not enough. Offer them the opportunity of eternal life.

And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching (Titus 2:7, NLT).

With the lack of community, increased crime and a host of other issues faced in impoverished urban environments, it is a challenge to serve in these areas. But great problems often mean great opportunities to reach peoples' hearts and minds. They are desperate for real relationships and purpose.

Their needs are bridges spanning from what you do well to what they need most.

Hands for Jesus

by Jon Hall, DDS

More than 20 years ago in a small town in Georgia, I was sitting in my church's sanctuary as a missionary told stories of what God was doing on the other side of the world. As best as I can understand the concept of "God's call," I received mine right there. I felt this burning passion to be part of making God's name known and treasured in the most unreached places in the world. I was only a kid, but based on my understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Christ, I figured I better start telling others about God right away, right where I was. So that's what I did.

My best friend was an eight-year-old boy named Hakeem. I lived in a racially divided town, and Hakeem was black and I was white. Since I went to church with Christians, I thought they would be just as excited as I was when Hakeem heard the gospel and decided to follow Jesus. So I started bringing him to church with me. I admit I had never thought much about the fact everyone I went to church with was white. It did, however, become painfully obvious when some of those church members decided that was the way it was going to stay. My family was approached and warned that "others" were upset that we were bringing Hakeem because he had the wrong skin color for our church. Being forced to leave the church because their son made a friend who became a follower of Jesus became a real possibility for my parents.

That experience continues to stick with me. I've never been able to understand how it could be possible for people with the very Spirit of God inside them to reject their spiritual brother due to something as simple as skin tone. I genuinely believe some of those people were real Christians, but I also believe they had twisted the gospel to fit within their culture and comfort zone. The irony is my church spent thousands of dollars on evangelizing to the ends of the earth and even brought in speakers to inspire others to do the same. Yet they were unwilling to love their neighbor if it actually affected the way they lived their everyday lives.

I learned it is extremely easy and common for the bride of Christ to be influenced by the culture or people around them. It is even easier to twist the very message and commands of the gospel to suit their own desires and comfort. I've wondered over the last several years if I am doing the same thing. I began to specifically question if it was possible the western "Christian" culture with its emphasis on prosperity and the American dream was influencing my understanding of what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus.

A while back I stumbled across the parable of the treasure in the field in Matthew; as I read it again, it was like a light bulb clicked on in my head. You remember how it goes: A man finds a treasure in a field, and he buries it again because the field is not his own. He sells all he owns, buys the field in his joy. I'd read this story an unknown number of times but I'd never really tried to understand it before. Think about it with me for a second. Why does the man sell all of his possessions? Because that's the cost of the field. Why does the man have joy even while he is losing everything he owns? Because the treasure he is getting is so much more valuable than what he was giving up. What does this have to do with my life? Everything. It is the very message of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. As I began to read the story with new eyes, I saw Jesus was telling those who wanted to follow him that there was a cost for such a decision, and the cost was their very lives.

Truth always become more relevant to me when I see it modeled. During the 1930s as Hitler was rising to power, a young German pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer actively opposed the Third Reich as it slowly took right away from the Jews as well as the German church. He was outraged that the majority of Christians in Germany stood silent in the face of evil. Rather than flee the persecution he knew was coming, he became a leader of the underground church. His bravery resulted in his death as he was hanged at the personal order of Hitler just weeks before the end of World War II. Before his imprisonment, he wrote a book aptly titled *The Cost of Discipleship* in which he described what it meant to follow Jesus. He powerfully depicts the cost:

- “Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods....it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.”
- “It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.”
- “When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die.”

I wonder if that's too radical for our tastes in America -- the idea we could actually live out the truth we confess with our mouths every Sunday. I struggle with it every day. It's easy to say the words “I've been bought with a price and I'm no longer my own.” And yet, I seldom seem to live that way. I wonder if there is a disconnect between what I say I believe and what I actually treasure in my heart.

Jesus focused on making sure His disciples understood their identity. He said extreme things like when he told the crowd they couldn't be His disciples if they didn't give up everything they owned (Luke 14). He also made unreasonable requests of His followers. He did this with Matthew when he walked by his tax collecting booth and told

Matthew to get up, leave his life and follow Him. Jesus wanted His followers to trade in the worthless for the irreplaceable, and to understand if they followed after Him their lives were to be completely controlled by Him for His purposes.

I'm not sure why we've convinced ourselves it's any different today. When I say the word "church," the first thing that comes to mind might be "building" or "Sunday morning." However, when Jesus spoke about the church, he invoked the image of warriors charging the gates of hell. He didn't have in mind a place or time, but rather a people set apart for the purpose of advancing His kingdom and His glory; a people that view His purposes as greater than their own plans.

A friend and I were recently talking with a kid named Brandon about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Brandon lives in inner city Memphis and has faced many challenges to overcome that I never encountered as a teenager. At the end of the conversation, we asked him if he wanted to follow Jesus. After thinking hard for a few seconds, he stated he was interested in the gospel, but he wasn't willing to give up his career dreams in order to follow Jesus. It was an honest objection, and one

I thought could be easily resolved. I proceeded to tell him following Jesus didn't mean he had to give up his plans; instead, he could follow Jesus and still pursue his old dreams.

The problem with my response was that it wasn't really true, and it revealed my own struggles to understand what Christ really desires. The Holy Spirit was at work in Brandon's heart and I should have been able to see it. He was clearly being convicted and challenged to wrestle with his future. Would he submit and follow Jesus, or would he continue down his own self-projected road? Would he be willing to lay down his dreams if that is required, or would he try to "manage" God by making deals and compromises to validate his decisions? As I think about my response, I'm convicted again by how I injected a culturally acceptable message I thought would be more palatable, when God was showing Brandon that becoming a Christian means real surrender of everything in his life – including his future plans – into the capable hands of Jesus.

It shouldn't be any different in your life or mine. We can't continue to profess a faith we neither fully embrace nor demonstrate in our actions. It really comes down to ultimate purposes. If we think our purpose in life is to get saved and pursue the American dream, then we will spend our time focusing on our careers, our houses and the respect of our colleagues. However, if our purpose is the glory of God and salvation of the nations, then many of us will be challenged to give up our careers, houses and the respect of

others to waste our lives on the kingdom of God in the darkest of places in America and overseas. And the kicker is that we'll do it with joy!

If we are truly in love with our Creator and understand our purpose to glorify and enjoy Him forever, then why would we even consider wasting our lives on anything less important? As I read the words of Paul, I long for them to be true in my life. "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him..." (Philippians 3:7-9, NIV 1984). We spend our lives chasing after the things we treasure. That's a terrifying truth. Paul treasured Christ to the point that he didn't mind giving up everything. My fear is we are so tentative to give up anything that we may not treasure Christ much at all. We are perhaps in need of a paradigm shift.

A man named Howard Guinness once posed this question in his book *Sacrifice*: "Where are the young men and women of this generation who will hold their lives cheap and be faithful even unto death? Where are those who will lose their lives for Christ's sake — flinging them away for love of him? Where are those who will live dangerously and be reckless in his service? Where are his lovers — those who love him and the souls of men more than their own reputations or comfort or very life? Where are the men who say 'no' to self, who take up Christ's cross to bear it after Him, who are willing to be nailed to it in college or office, home or mission field, who are willing, if need be, to bleed, to suffer and to die on it? Where are the adventurers, the explorers, the buccaneers for God, who count one human soul of far greater value than the rise or fall of an empire? Where are the men who are willing to pay the price of vision? Where are the men of prayer? Where are God's men in this day of God's power?"

It really does come down to treasure. If we treasure the glory of God then we will care for the people Jesus cared for and go to the places Jesus went. It will be hard and there will be a cost to obedience, but it will be worth it. As healthcare providers, we have incredible opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a broken world, to use medicine as a platform to bring the gospel into dark places, to be radically obedient to a counter-cultural message of surrender to our King, to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21, NIV 1984).

Jon Hall, DDS, is a dentist serving with Christ Community Health Center in Memphis, Tennessee. He lives in the inner city with the poor he serves and cares for every day. More information about CCHC can be found below. To contact Dr. Hall, please email jonhall@silver-cricket.net.

Bibliography

Howard Guinness, *Sacrifice* (Chicago, 1947), pages 59-60.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Announcements:

[Orientation to Medical Missions](#) – July 20-22, 2012 in Bristol, Tennessee.

Three days of exposure to what life will hold for you in medical missions: how to survive, thrive and stay alive while being what God has called you to be in medicine in a cross-cultural setting.

[Global Missions Health Conference](#) – November 8-10, 2012 in Louisville, Kentucky.

It is never too early to put this great conference on your calendar. Students, be sure to plan for the post-conference as well.

[Tanzania](#) – Are you interested in a global health seminar for three weeks in Tanzania?

This is primarily for pre-med, first and second year medical school students. Email [for more information](#).

[List of Urban Medical Missions](#)

[This list is not inclusive of every place by any stretch of the imagination! It is only to get you dreaming of your future and similar ministries.](#)

- [Lawndale Christian Health Center](#) – Chicago, Illinois. LCHC has more than 300 employees, most of whom live in and experience the surrounding community. Lawndale makes a concerted effort to hire and enable from within the communities it serves.
- [Christ Community Health Services](#) – Memphis, Tennessee. Christ Community Health Services focuses on fulfilling the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of the poor, uninsured and homeless in Memphis. Through strategically placed healthcare centers and outreach programs, healthcare and other services are provided to thousands of patients, caregivers, students and families each year. Go where the need is greatest to provide quality services in the name of Jesus Christ!
- [Christian Community Health Fellowship](#) – Christian Community Health Fellowship is a community of Christian healthcare professionals committed to living out the gospel through healthcare among the poor. “What we have in common is that we consider our careers and training in healthcare as a missional calling to serve Christ.”
- [St. Mary Mission Hospital](#) – Nairobi, Kenya. “Health Care Ministry In Service To The Poor.” The hospital strives to provide high standards of compassionate healthcare as ministry and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ with special

emphasis upon service to the poor through its non-profit, yet self-maintaining status.

- [Christian Hospital](#) – Sahiwal, Pakistan. Established in 1915, Christian Hospital has developed into a 160-bed hospital with medical, surgical and public health programs, as well as a fully accredited school of nursing and a girls' hostel. Though open to all segments of society, the hospital primarily serves the poor and disadvantaged. Sahiwal is a city of 250,000 people and is located 2.5 hours southwest of Lahore.