

Your Call

Keeping you focused on God's call for your life

An e-newsletter encouraging and equipping you for a career in medical missions



Center for
Medical Missions
A ministry of Christian Medical & Dental Associations

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Happy 2016! Are you as surprised as I at how quickly 2015 passed? I've always heard that time passes more quickly as one gets older, but I didn't realize time would sprint. Even though the days passed quickly, the Center for Medical Missions had a great year! What fun to train 42 new healthcare missionaries and help 24 medical/dental students and residents fund their international rotation, and inspire countless students and residents to pursue their mission call. I always enjoy connecting with people at the Global Missions Health Conference. Some of those I met at the conference are reading *Your Call* for the first time.

Dr. David Stevens enjoys writing on subjects that are important to you as you prepare to serve, but his schedule is so full he is finding it more and more difficult to get articles written by the deadline. Just this morning he apologized for not having an article ready. He often comments that it is healthcare missions that lights his fire. He has many things to share after spending years in the field. For everyone who is looking for his article, know he will do his best to have something for you in the March issue.

I too have spent many years in the field, but I am not the writer that Dr. Stevens is. I believe you have to think in stories to be a good writer, and I don't think in stories, nor do I tell stories. What I do is answer questions. So if a question comes up as you read through this edition of *Your Call*, or a question arises from something else, please feel free to write and ask. I may not have an answer, but I will probably be able to connect you with someone who does.

As I write this I am reminded of a resource you might find very helpful as you walk the path to healthcare missions - [Ask A Missionary](#). If you have a question that you don't find the answer to, you may ask it on this site and the person who monitors it will see if he can find someone to answer.

Another valuable resource is CMDA's [International Rotation Handbook](#). This is a three-part resource that will help you find and prepare for an international rotation. It can be found at www.cmda.org/internationalrotations. If you are interested in a domestic mission outreach, the best resource is [Christian Community Health Fellowship](#).

There must be other questions you have. I am here for you if you care to ask.

Susan
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Body Bag Living

by Dr. Al Weir

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3, NIV 2011).

We were seeing him in the hospital because his blood counts had dropped, probably nothing serious. As we talked, I learned he was a Korean War veteran and asked him if he was at the Chosin Reservoir, in that "Coldest Winter" where more than 100,000 Chinese poured over the Korean border and drove U.S. soldiers south though

cross-fire and frostbite. His wife quipped, "You know they put him in a body bag." And they actually had, believing him to be dead-until he woke up and began to shake the bag to come out.

Have you ever felt like life had placed you in a body bag and you woke up crying out, "I'm not dead yet!"

Sometimes our lives drift into lassitude where the spark is gone, our mission has faded, we are hanging around with little joy or purpose, our dreams replaced by diversions: body bag living. Within our body bags we buy things or do things to light a spark so that we may see and feel alive again, wanting that energy of self-fulfillment to make our lives vital again.

You been there yet?

We know that this desperate drive toward self-fulfillment was never seen in Jesus' life. When we seek to light that missing spark by acquiring things or experiences or relationships, we do not act like our Lord.

Oswald Chambers put it this way, "Our Lord always preaches anti-self-realization; He is not after developing a man at all; He is after making a man after Himself..The characteristic of the Son of God is not self-realization, but self-expenditure."

So, when we find ourselves and our dreams in a body bag, rather than trying to fight our way out and build ourselves up with self-centered experiences, we should, like Jesus, consider pouring ourselves out for God and for others. After all, Jesus really was the only man to break free from the wrappings of death. Doing it His way is kind of rational.

Dear God,

Even when my dreams have died, let me not seek to build myself up but to pour you out.

Amen

Announcing: New Medical Missionary Training

It is not too late to register for our New Medical Missionary Training that will take place March 17-20, 2016 at a retreat center in Abingdon, Virginia. That is just a few miles from the CMDA National Office in Bristol, Tennessee. If you will be going to the field for the first time within the next six months, this is a conference you will not want to miss. You can learn all about it at www.cmda.org/orientation.

International Rotation Report on trip to South Asia

by Heather Cunningham, MS4

It has been one month since my return from South Asia. Half of my brain has moved seamlessly back into work, medical school and relationship responsibilities, while the other half is still trying to absorb the reality of what I witnessed in the red light districts. Landing back in the U.S. a mere 13 days after leaving, I initially struggled with the anticipated physical jet lag; it is the unexpectedly prolonged emotional jet lag that I am processing now.

Having never been on a human trafficking mission trip, I was deeply thankful to be introduced to the work of our host organization and their ministry to trafficking victims. The statistics are grim, with most trafficking victims being brought in from Nepal, Bangladesh or rural Indian villages at the shocking age of 11 or 12. Abruptly isolated from their communities by both geography and language, they are left without protection or a voice. Women will be raped 20 to 30 times a day, and the children conceived from these unions will either be aborted or born into a system that is highly likely to enslave the girls and drive the boys into lives of drug addiction and crime. Far from united in their approach to this human rights abuse, the police in some parts of South Asia have chosen to accept bribes and ignore the violence, while others, in their attempts to raid the brothels, have merely caused existing brothels to splinter off to regions far from any possible scrutiny.

These disturbing facts were relayed by the staff as we ran daily eyeglass and acute care clinics. As my team screened and treated everything from simple dehydration to sexually transmitted infections and abortions gone awry, we were inundated with sensory reminders of our patients' business: loud music boomed to drown out the sounds of what was taking place behind dirty curtains; few children were ever seen, except for the odd infant, abandoned on a dirt heap, staring from coal-rimmed eyes. The streets were full of men, save for the occasional brightly clad, overly made up young woman lounging in the doorway of a brothel as an advertisement for her brothel owner. With the girls taking shifts, the brothels stayed open all day and all night.

The horror of these places has ignited righteous anger in the hearts of those I inform about my trip. They want to go and arrest all of the brothel owners to end this slavery immediately and punish those responsible. I believe God Himself is angry about the injustice and pain being inflicted upon these precious bearers of His image. I understand the desire to

right these incredible wrongs. But this organization is staunchly opposed to what sounds like a just solution, and their reasoning is undeniably, heartrendingly Christ-like. The staff openly prays and labors for the salvation of every person in the lanes. This includes the brothel owners who rack up fees and charge exorbitant interest, making it nearly impossible for girls to ever pay back the prices that were paid for them. It includes the men standing guard on street corners and brothel entrances, ready to beat into submission anyone who thinks of trying to escape. It even includes the policemen whose job it is to protect the people and who instead ensure the girls' captivity by accepting monetary bribes. This organization wishes to reach them all, which meant that on an average day our physicians served trafficking victims, policemen, pimps and brothel owners alike.

I readily admit that if it had been up to me, I would have chosen not to see anyone but the trafficked women. I was not interested in serving the brothel owners, most of whom were women without a trace of gentleness or kindness in their faces. How could any woman inflict this kind of pain on another woman? But then I learned that one of the translators working in OB/Gyn clinic with me was a former brothel owner. Shocked, I looked afresh at this vibrant woman with her deep and abiding joy in the Lord, who prayed with fervor and advocated fiercely for our patients. She had been a highly successful owner of two brothels. Through the persistent, faithful word and deed ministry of our host organization, she became a Christian and closed both of her brothels, thereby freeing all of the women inside. She is now a staff member and makes a fraction of her former salary.

The gospel reminds us that *no one* is worthy of the infinite cost that was paid to save us from the slavery of sin. Yet, in subtle ways we can live as if some people are more worthy of grace than others. My judgement of the brothel owners was that they were all irredeemably evil. God clearly disagreed. He sees people in need of Him and is now using one woman's gifts and experience to bring others to His fountain of hope and healing. It was profoundly humbling to hear this testimony of the power of the gospel, as well as to be called to repent of my own hypocrisy. While I cast judgement on the brothel owners for being heartless, I was ready to deny them basic medical care. What a poor reflection of the grace I have received!

As I prepare to begin an obstetrics and gynecology residency next summer, I pray that my practice will be infused with similar reminders of Christ's work in the lives of my patients and colleagues. I pray that I will trust their hearts to Christ, knowing that He who loved and saved me in the midst of my rebellion is also calling others to Himself. As I continue to pray and discern whether I am called to healthcare missions, may I carry with me the hope of the gospel, the very power of God, which is able to change even clueless, judgmental followers like myself.

From Susan: If you have a question for Heather regarding this trip, contact Susan at susan.carter@cnda.org and she will pass your question along to Heather.

Wailin' Mamas

by Judy Palpant

My heart exults and praises sing To Him that heard my wailing voice. My winter's past, my storms, are gone, And former clouds seem now all fled. But if they must eclipse again, I'll run where I was succored.-Ann Bradstreet in the poem: "May 13, 1657"

I carry my children in my throat. The lump lodges there. Palpable. Hopes and fears spread like diphtheria toxin from the throat to the heart, or the other way round.

I'm not alone. Audible or inaudible, mothers everywhere groan.

Often, in Kenya I remember hearing a mother's loud, lonely lament over the death of her child. It tore the air. Ear splitting. Heart rending.

"Oh, Mama," I'd say, pausing in my daily routine to ponder this woman's dashed hopes. Only a tall cypress hedge separated our home from the hospital. I could not see her lonely figure, yet the wailing haunted me.

Here in the U.S., more than one of my friends has let out deep, guttural moans as they attempt to articulate stories of trauma in their adult children's lives or reasons for alienation from them.

Yet another friend wept watching a wild wind carry off outdoor wedding flowers and decorations. Heavy rain pelted the dance floor. "This is not how I pictured my daughter's wedding," she exclaimed.

Tears are primal and pervasive in a mother's life.

If they could talk, our home's walls would tell many stories of my own wailings. When our daughter Andrea graduated from college and headed off to her first job, she assured me she'd taken all the books she wanted. I culled through those remaining, readily putting some in a pile to pass along. Others seemed foundational to life. I picked up the Bible we gave her as a child with her name etched in gold. Left behind. In my hands, these treasures proved to be evidence of her increasing rejection of faith. Distress and despair kept me company for hours. People walking past our home that day must have thought something terrible had befallen me. It had.

Some days later I poured out my astonished heart to a friend. As we walked, I asked her, "What does a mother do with her daughter's Bible?" "Use it yourself," she suggested. "For now, it is God's gift to you." So I did. During my quiet time, I discovered my daughter's marginal notations, underlined passages, quotes from pastors and mentors. They reignited my own hope and faith.

During this same period, I worked on photo albums for our three kids. One day I took boxes of photos to a shop where I could use their large tables and equipment. I organized and stacked the pictures of their early years. Our firstborn's pile of photos with his grandparents, aunts and uncles was double that of his two younger siblings. How come? Ah, he was already five years old when we left for Kenya. Even though God provided wonderful African aunts and uncles for our children, there had been a cost. Fighting waves of sadness, I packed my stuff, went home and laid everything out on the ping pong table in the basement. My heart faced the facts. Tears flowed freely, but the photo albums were finished in time to give them to my adult children for Christmas that year.

And eventually, I wrapped up our daughter Andrea's Bible and packed it in my luggage for a trip to Arizona to visit. She had since returned to the church although with her questions still in hand. Now married, she was working on her spiritual memoir. As she unwrapped the package and saw her old Bible, she said, "Thanks, Mom. This means a lot to me." I told her about the day I packed her books and wailed. She responded: "I actually did have another Bible with me." "But your mother didn't know that," her husband quickly added.

The saga continues with the next generation. After my daughter-in-law Darien took her youngest child Clara to her first day of kindergarten, she stopped by a coffee shop for a latte. Time and again, she dropped out of line, motioning the person behind her to go ahead. Grief lodged in her soul. How could she go on without her little pal Clara? That day, now two years ago, she never found her voice.

Recently, she pointed me to the comparison of motherhood to the slow ascent of a majestic mountain. "Nobody told me I'd be climbing and crying so often." Having nearly summited Mt. Rainier's 14,400 foot peak twice, she understands high goals, struggle and disappointment.

Hymn writer George Matheson also knew something of the symbolic climb. Having lost his eyesight at age 18, he knew uncertainty with every step. He also leaned on God's promises. In stanza three of "O Love that Wilt Not Let Me Go," he wrote: *O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to Thee; I climb the rainbow through the rain...* Picture pilgrims toiling up the side of a rainbow—stepping into the rarified air as gray mists change to prismatic splendor at their feet. Matheson's 1883 hymnal committee, however, had objected to the word "climb" and suggested he use "trace" instead. Reluctantly, he complied and we lost the more active verb.

But whether climbing or tracing rainbows in our laments, God is moved by our tears. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem. He carries us in His throat. He hears our travail. The sign of His covenant promise, the rainbow, was never more vivid than after the burial of my dear friend's adult son who committed suicide. The stormy weather accompanying the service under the graveside canopy gave way to a brightly colored arch in the sky. Its vibrant, rich colors spread across the front page of the local newspaper the following day.

On the Via Dolorosa, Jesus told the women of Jerusalem not to sob for Him but to cry for themselves and their children. Mary had been forewarned by Simeon at the time of Jesus' dedication, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35b, NIV 2011). The weeping prophet Jeremiah exhorts us to pour out our hearts like water for our children (Lamentations 2:19). He also charges the women to teach their friends songs of heartbreak and to model lamenting for their daughters (Jeremiah 9:20). Did the Hebrew women do this?

Some mamas are given to shared tears. Some of us shed them privately on our pillows. The Psalmist assures us that God hears our sobs. He stores our tears in bottles. Every moan is registered (Psalm 56:8). "Listen to this! Laments coming out of Ramah, wild and bitter weeping. It's Rachel weeping for her children, Rachel refusing all solace. Her children are gone, gone-long gone into exile" (Jeremiah 31:16, MSG). The sisterhood of mothers joins Rachel. To be a mother is to cry. I wear a bracelet with a charm. One side reads "live" and the other "cry." They go together.

Like my mother before me and my daughter after me, we are three generations of women who weep for different reasons. My mother's recent "I'll be praying for you, Dear" carried deep understanding. She knew how I felt about heading to Seattle

to say goodbye to our youngest son and his family as they left for five years in Australia. She once said goodbye to us as we took our kids to Kenya. And I empathize with my daughter feeling exhausted and isolated in her motherly care for four young children.

The poet George Herbert describes our woes as *earnest sorrows, rooted miseries...sure-footed griefs, solid calamities*. He models godly lament in his poem "Bitter-Sweet:"

*Ah my dear angry Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.
I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve;
And all my sour-sweet days
I will lament, and love.*

This morning when I went to wake up my 95-year-old mother, she was singing in bed. For some inexplicable reason in the last few months she has traded in her sighs and groans for humming and singing. It is constant, even annoying at times. Never mind Pandora playing "The Nutcracker," she's singing "Fill My Cup Lord." She smiled and lifted up her hands. "I'm just singin' in the rain," she said.

A few years ago, my mother told me, "I've given up worrying." Now, when she mutters under her breath, she tells me she is praying. I believe her. Her mother-pilgrim journey continues-praying for me along with her other children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Landing on the side of hope and joy, she's cashing in on all those years of travail. This is scriptural. After Rachel refusing solace, the prophet quotes Almighty God as saying: "Stop your incessant weeping, hold back your tears. Collect wages from your grief work. God's Decree. They'll be coming back home! There's hope for your children. God's Decree" (Jeremiah 31:17, MSG).

As a child, I memorized David's comforting words in Psalm 30:5b: "...weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (KJV). Over the years, I've heard these words glibly quoted, as the metaphorical "night" lasts for weeks or even years. Still, the dawn of God's faithful promise predictably brightens as we climb the rainbow through the rain.

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