

## MEDICAL FRUSTRATION AND A FUNERAL IN THE PHILIPPINES

We left for the cemetery to conduct a believer's funeral service. Like many other deaths in many areas of the world, adequate treatment could have prevented this one. As I rode along to the cemetery, I knew that "to depart and be with Christ is far better" but it is so frustrating when someone dies from improper treatment, a simple neglected insect bite, or flu. This was not my first funeral like this.

We've seen babies with active spinal meningitis in a hospital room with other relatively healthy babies; family members operating hand ventilators, and yellowed reused tape on IVs. Cats licking blood from the floor of a hospital; rats scurrying about hospital rooms; no screens, flies, ill results of witch doctor treatment, and useless dying are also common sights. Health professional cringes at the sight of pre-operative patients crowded with post-operative patients lying on cots in a small room with a fan circulating all the airborne particles. Another scene is a small hut in a village where a 3 year-old girl hides in the corner, already conscious her split lip and cleft palate makes her different from other children.

I've also seen others in new, clean, first class hospitals with the latest technology and training carrying them through difficult medical problems—and living. The only difference between the two is being born in a different place. We have seen enough so that you get where you can not understand why some must live where proper treatment gives them more time on earth, and some must live in needy areas to die because of improper care.

Human reasons we hear and go away empty. Theological explanations we know. We believe Romans 8:28. We have also heard the arguments that God could not possibly put a man in Hell who dies without ever hearing about Christ. Why then does He allow many to live where medical treatment is available and many to die where it is not? Sophistry answers nothing but selfish behavior.

World evangelism is supposedly too difficult in our generation, even though in the same breath we profess to believe the Holy Spirit indwells every believer and all the power of God is available to His children. Evidently, the *all-powerful God* enables us to do many other things.

It is not too difficult for *Him* to allow us to build and live in beautiful homes with every convenience at our hand. It is not too difficult for us to buy a new vehicle and pay \$200-\$500 a month for 60 months. It is not too difficult to manicure our artificial fingernails, as well as our lawns. It is not too difficult for *Him* to build another \$10 million dollar church building a few feet from another \$10 million dollar church building.

I think we humans lay too many of our God given responsibilities toward fellow man at theological doorsteps of excuse. We pretend not to understand the reason for much suffering. We blame it on a nebulous, all-encompassing explanation of "the will of

God”, so we do not have to get involved or be responsible for what *our actual responsibilities* are.

Our shenanigans will never eliminate responsibilities God has given to us. Lest you become critical or too spiritual over my comments, I’d venture to say you are not trying to get on the next load to Heaven, although you might actually profess to believe “to depart and be with Christ is far better.” (*Personally, I prefer the rapture versus death as means of departure.*)

Some may wonder why missionary work needs to be involved in medical matters. Come and see. A missionary or anyone else who is called of God does not just stand and talk. If you are worth your salt, you find yourself immersed in marriage problems, child rearing, social issues, administration, writing, plumbing, electricity, living, dying and the whole gamut of human experience.

On the way to the cemetery, it was raining and our jeep, loaded with church members, ran into the rear of another jeep. We were so packed in the back that no one was hurt. The radiator burst in the wreck. We had to unload and go by another jeep. No one was injured. Was it “the will of God” that we hit the jeep? Or, could it be that our jeep was simply driving too close to the other? Don’t we really identify with the Presbyterian minister who tripped over a mop his wife left on the stairway? When he finally hit the basement floor, he got up, brushed himself off relieved to have no broken bones, he said, “Thank God, that’s over with!”

The 22-year-old, daughter of one of our families, was diagnosed last year by Manila doctors—best in PI—as having a brain stem tumor. They began radiation and steroid treatments. They did no biopsy and depended entirely upon MRI films they had made.

She did not improve and became worse. Neurosurgeons in Washington State and Chicago eventually reviewed the PI films and PI doctor’s diagnosis. They all agreed that without a biopsy, the PI doctors were guessing and the diagnosis was in all probability, wrong. The Manila doctor told the family a biopsy was impossible and that to try one would paralyze or kill their daughter. They gave them no hope.

The continued prescription of steroids caused her to develop a Cushingoid appearance and, due to the swelling about her face, she became unable to eat. When Sue and I returned from a trip to another island, we discovered she was in the hospital. She was weak from not being able to eat and had a urinary infection. The doctor wanted to put in a stomach tube and feed her but she refused it. She pointed to letters of the alphabet to communicate since she could not speak due to facial swelling from the steroids. She knew that the tube would force her to be bedridden and she would never get out of bed again. She was in a hospital where few nurses were available and the family had to provide almost all bedside care. We watched, helpless.

My wife explained to the mother how she could puree food and feed her orally by a syringe. We went to the store and found some “Ensure.” Sue explained how to squeeze the food to the side of the mouth in order to keep her from choking.

USA doctors were convinced that had she been in the USA, she could have been treated and probably gone back to a normal life. But we could do nothing where we were. A beautiful 22-year-old Filipina went to be with the Lord and her family grieved.

At the funeral there were about 300 people present. I preached the funeral message. At the cemetery the family is responsible after services to give out sandwiches and a drink to all that attend. We ate the sandwich and foil packaged juice closeby the freshly covered grave.

In keeping with the culture, a week prior to the burial our church held services each evening in the family home as the body lay there in a glass topped coffin. A song, message and discreet gospel invitation were given each evening. As a result, 8 adults professed faith in Jesus Christ. These were from among relatives and friends who were Roman Catholics.

God holds all responsible to do what He has said to do. Flimsy arguments will not stand at the judgment all men will face. Each one of us must face the music one day. For now, God does allow each person to make decisions of whether a new 4,000 square foot house for three people is better than a 15' X 30' thatched roof hut in a jungle. Each one of us decides whether another church in a town of 10,000 with 20 existing churches is better than a church in a place of 500,000 with no church at all. Each one decides whether it would be better to translate the Bible in a language where there is not one, or to put another where 250 different translations already exist. On some level, someone decides to put another hospital in a city where hundreds already operate. Some doctor decides to open another office where many others are flourishing. Some minister decides to go where there are hundreds of others. Is it better to put your abilities in the place where you will get the maximum amount of material goods? Are you doing what others are not? I do not offer the answer, nor do I judge the motives. You decide. The answer does not lie in simply meeting quotas. This is not a plea for all USA churches to close their doors and go to foreign lands. This is not an argument for doctors, dentists, and nurses to close their practices and volunteer to the Peace Corps.

Today, thunder does not reign down from heaven upon those who choose either way. The rainfall and the sunshine are on the just and unjust alike. But there is a muffled drumbeat in the chest of every person, sounding a funeral warning with every beat that precious time to do His will is slipping away. When that ominous drum stops—we will all come face to face with Him and what we have done with God given responsibility.

God so loved that He gave....He tells us to do the same.