

Zambia Newsletter

Zambia Missions

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Another Unnecessary Death.

I am tired of seeing good people I know die long before they should have simply because of negligence or lack of simple, affordable healthcare. Today is another example. Earlier today a good friend of our family in Zambia died – a death that could have been easily avoided. His name was Gibby. He was just 15 years old. He was a good kid (and Christian) with lots of potential. We remember him as the tall, well-behaved boy who always had a smile on his face. He was close to my two daughters in Zambia and was a frequent visitor in our home. He was one of just a handful of good friends that my daughter Natasha (who just turn 17) has in Zambia. Needless to say, Natasha has been deeply hurt by this experience and has spend much of the past few hours crying. And, what makes me angry is the fact that it could have been avoided.

It was just a few weeks ago that Gibby began to become ill. He went to the doctor and was diagnosed with bilharzias (an illness caused by parasites that attack the liver). The doctor prescribed the medicine, but neither the doctor nor the Chemists in Lusaka had the medicine! This is a common problem in Zambia; yet there was no medicine. But, thankfully, we had the medicine (left over from our past medical missions). Thus, Gibby got the medicine. Unfortunately, we soon discovered that the damage done to his liver was quite sever. Like many Zambians who are plagued by stomach and intestinal problems, diagnosing such illnesses usually doesn't happen until one becomes so sick that necessary action is finally taken. This illness could have been cleared up quickly and easily had he been diagnosed earlier. Unfortunately, it was not and Gibby's prognosis for a good recovery was not good. Perhaps his life could be saved, but his liver was damaged making him vulnerable to other problems. As things would happen, Gibby shortly become sick with cerebral malaria (worst kind of malaria there is).

Consequently, he was taken to the Kafue hospital. We no longer take people to the main hospital in Zambia (University Teaching Hospital or UTH) as we have had too many people die from negligence. Some of you will remember that William (one of our Mission Coordinators) who died at UTH after falling sick with cerebral malaria in March 2007. Upon hearing that his organs were shutting down, we rushed down to UTH only to find that they had failed to insert an IV even

though he was severely dehydrated from high fever. I tried to get them to insert an IV, but it was too late. He died a few hours later. I had also tried to have him moved to a private clinic, but the hospital would not release him and told me that if he died I could be charged with manslaughter for moving him without permission from UTH. It was like he had become a hopeless prisoner to the hospital that was incompetent to save his life. Some of you will also remember the death of Thomas' two infant children and his wife over the past four years, all of whom were taken to UTH. Hence, we have determined not to take anyone to UTH ever again!

So, as Gibby became seriously ill, his family took him to the Kafue hospital (a smaller government hospital just south of our campus). Unfortunately, Gibby's condition continued to worsen and at some point the Kafue Hospital convinced the family to transport him to UTH. When I heard this, my heart sank within me as I feared the worst. Gibby continued to get worse over the past week and, then, yesterday I was told that he had been put on oxygen and was not expected to live. Our daughter Kerin asked about transporting him to a private clinic, but she was again told what I was told three years ago – that he was not well enough to be transported (and UTH would not authorize it) and that if she transported him without permission and he died that she would be charged with causing his death. Again, it was like he was a prisoner held hostage by an incompetent system that could not save his life nor would allow him to be taken where his life could be saved.

Then, this morning (about 2:00 am) came the call informing us that Gibby had died. I was, then, told that he died from choking (suffocated from his air passage being obstructed probably from his own vomit). What's more is the fact that not one nurse or doctor came to check on him during the last 24 hours. Why? Because the doctors and nurses are on strike in Zambia! Why are they are strike? Because the whole healthcare system is Zambia has totally broken down due to corruption in the Ministry of Health. Eighteen months ago the Dutch and Swiss governments announced that they were freezing their donations to Zambia for healthcare because the Ministry of Health is so full of corruption. That was 18 months ago and yet the Zambian government has yet to adequately address the problem sufficiently to unfreeze the Dutch and Swiss donations. The Dutch and Swiss give one-half of Zambia's healthcare dollars. When I first hear this, I predicted that there would soon be riots in the rural areas as the quality of healthcare plummeted to unacceptable levels. But, it didn't happen. I've

heard of no riots or protests from the people. Why? Because the level of corruption was so great within the Ministry of Health that no one noticed the decrease in funding. Nothing was getting out to the people in the first place!

But, it would appear now that the decrease of money coming into the country has finally led to a crisis. Since I am not presently in Zambia right now, I do not know the full story behind what has led to the current doctor-nurses strike; but I would imagine that it is due to one of several causes: disruption in pay, cut in pay, or a failure to give a pay raise over the past year or two. So, I am not quite sure who to be most angry with today: the doctors/nurses, the corrupt government officials, or both! It is just unbelievable to me that doctors and nurses would go on strike knowing that this would lead to countless deaths in the country! Yet, regardless of who is more to blame, it is obviously the result of selfishness. So what if people die. It's like no one really cares! This is also why there was medicine (for bilharzias) to be found a few weeks ago when Gibby was first diagnosed with the disease. How many others have died unnecessarily due to this corruption.

This is why more money, medicine, and humanitarian aid to Africa will not solve the problem. At the heart of it is a spiritual problem. More money and more gifts will only produce more corruption. And, it will not solve the problem of healthcare workers who walk off the job for the lack of money. We cannot pay people to care about the needs of their neighbor. It is only the love of God and the life of Christ that will change people's hearts and solve these problems. This is why we need to be in Africa spreading the gospel of Christ. The solution to the problem is Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, this experience motivates me to want to do more to help the poor and sick of Zambia – the massive of powerless people who are not the concern of the government nor even the healthcare workers themselves. Besides preaching the gospel of Christ, I am also deeply motivated to respond to the human needs of the people to whom we preach. Just as Jesus was moved with compassion to "heal" as well as "preach" (Mt 4:23-25); so I believe we should be moved to respond to people both spiritually and physically. This is why we have started several ministries to provide healthcare, orphan-care, agriculture training, etc. And, today I am strongly moved to do more. It would not take all that much more money for us to provide medicine for the people in our area (e.g. diagnose and treat easily solved illnesses such as bell-hause). I would desperately love to see us start a clinic near our campus, staffed by Christian healthcare workers, who could treat people (with the love of God) and save people's lives so that they don't die unnecessarily and due to negligence. While we might not be able to provide expensive care (e.g. certain surgeries), there is so many we could save with very low-cost, affordable care that they are not getting from the government clinics and hospitals. What do you think? Is this something we should consider doing? Cannot we who have so much not do something to help these people? Must we continue to sit by and watch our friends, new converts, and students (who have such potential to serve God) die needlessly and unnecessarily? .

David

A Tribute to Gibson "Gibby" Miselo

I was busy preparing the senior staff luncheon when I noticed a tall, slender young man darted by the large picture window of our home. We seemed to notice each other about the same time. With a smile across his face, his long arm went straight into the air and his hand was waving side to side and I saw the words on his lips , "How are you Mimi?" I waved with my right elbow, as it was all that was free at the time and returned the greeting. His enormous strides carried him quickly out of my view however his smile remained in my heart. What a treasure straight from the heart of God. Even if you just encountered him along the path one would feel blessed by his gift of joy. He was funny and light hearted. In a culture where rumors abound because of jealousy, I only heard what a blessing he was to everyone.

We were blessed with him for such a few, short years and yet our hearts will always feel touched by God's own heart through the eyes of His precious child, Gibby.

Rest in God's arms, our dear Gibby. We have been blessed by you. You will always be remembered.

Lorie

