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SEFTON MARSHALL | GC3 OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

LEARN TO DO RIGHT; SEEK JUSTICE.

GOD'S HEART BREAKS FOR THE DISPLACED, DISADVANTAGED, MARGINALISED AND EXPLOITED IN THIS WORLD. IN THE BIBLE THESE GROUPS OF PEOPLE ARE DESCRIBED AS 'FATHERLESS', 'WIDOWS', 'THE POOR', 'THE FOREIGNER', 'THE AFFLICTED' AND 'VICTIMS'.

While that's not an exhaustive list, it certainly paints for us a picture of what concerns God, of the spread of those who matter to Him, of people who are unable to help themselves. Images and reports of many people fitting these categories are constantly before us as we connect with news feeds of what is happening in our world around us. We're regularly hearing of atrocities meted out by those in positions of power and

influence on those at the other end of the social spectrum. It is on good biblical authority then that we know these situations break the heart of our God, the 'father to the fatherless', the 'defender of widows'. (Psa 68:5)

It is little wonder then that people are taking these biblical understandings to bring compassion to people trapped in situations from which there is no clear exit. We immediately think of physical

incarceration, but cultural norms driven by ignorance also unwittingly ensnare people in impoverished habits and lifestyles. Practices around health issues severely restrict dignity in daily living, restricting employment opportunities, for instance. I am sure you will be aware of other situations of equal or greater debilitating significance that readily come to mind.

God is at work calling His people to model His heart to those in unfortunate situations. More and more, particularly young people are responding to what are generally described as social justice issues. More and more I am hearing ▶

stories of bold innovative ways that are used to bring hope and God's love to those who are locked in circumstances that provide no freedom to live as God intended. Young people who are deliberately making tertiary education choices to enable them to impact lives for eternity. They are investing their time in training in law, medicine, aviation, education, business, counselling, ... you name it, so they can make a difference for the disadvantaged, using their knowledge and experience in practical life-changing ways for God. Many will be taking advantage of the demand for

their skills in countries they wouldn't otherwise have entrance into.

Tertiary training comes at a cost. We all know that. Student loan balances can quickly balloon out, to an extent that might put consideration of going to do God's work cross-culturally on the back-burner for a time. The practical need to repay a student loan may take longer than the work period to achieve full registration to the appropriate regulatory body of the chosen discipline. There may be years of loan repayments ahead.

If you identify with this situation, I'd love to talk with you. There are a couple of ways we at GC3 may be able help

you. Recently we gained a status that enables 'volunteers' associated with us to have no interest charged on student loan balances for the first two years they are overseas. In addition, we are aware of funders whose heart is for student loans to not be a barrier for young people undertaking the mission God has called them to. If this is where you are at, then be sure to contact me.

Let the words of Isaiah drive us forward, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." (1:17) Will you become an agent of change for God in our world? ■

JOHN DE JONG

MISSION AND MONEY

"MONEY OFTEN COSTS TOO MUCH,"¹ A PROFOUND LITTLE STATEMENT THAT IS PERTINENT TO MISSIONS.²

Missionaries from western countries like New Zealand are often vastly wealthier than the people that we go to. For example, in 2017 New Zealanders earned on average \$50,000 a year,³ while in 2018 the minimum wage in Myanmar would give \$1,177 a year.⁴ Having recently returned from Myanmar, we know from experience how difficult it is for a family to live in NZ on \$50,000pa – it's tough, and we don't feel at all like wealthy people. But if we moved to a place like Myanmar, based on these figures, we would suddenly be at least 42 times wealthier than the people with whom we would be serving. Just think about that for a moment. If you earn about the average NZ income of \$50,000pa, how many of your friends that you regularly hang out with have an income 42 times greater than that – \$2,100,000? Think about the problems it would create. "Let's go out for dinner, I'll pay for the food, you get the drinks. How about that \$700 bottle of wine?" Or, "We're going skiing in Austria. Wanna come?" The only way most of us could join in is if they pay for it, which changes the dynamic of friendship, and is why most of our friends are of a similar socio-economic level to ourselves. If

our close friends earn a lot more than us it's still probably only twice or three times as much, not 42 or 100 times as much. Thus, it is no surprise that we have heard missionaries discuss whether it is possible to make genuine friends with local Christians on the mission field.

With the church established on the six continents of the earth, mission is often now done in partnership as we go to join with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the work of the Gospel. But although we go as equals, we are divided by money and privilege. Even if we live as they live, living simply and in trying conditions, if there's a military uprising we will be allowed into the US Embassy for protection – they won't be; if we are struck with a medical emergency we will receive treatment, even emergency medical evacuation – they won't; one way or another our children will receive a quality education – their children won't; and at the end of it all we will usually return to and live in the comparative comfort of a country like NZ – they will remain where they are. The list could go on.

A short article like this can't address the issues raised by the vast economic differential between missionaries and



John is married to Rebecca. They both grew up in West Auckland and met at Lincoln Road Bible Chapel, which is still their home church. In 2005 they moved to Yangon, Myanmar, to work with the church there. They took Adam (two-and-a-half years old) and Grace (10 months) with them. Sarah and Charlotte were born over there. John taught Old Testament and Hebrew at the Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (MEGST), along with preaching and teaching in the local church. Rebecca was involved in women's and children's ministry, as well as home schooling the children. They returned to Auckland to live in October 2017, and John has found work lecturing in Biblical and Intercultural studies at Laidlaw College, based at the Henderson campus.

the people we often work with. The important thing is to recognise it as an issue for mission and to be prepared for the problems it can raise. In addition to creating a barrier to genuine relationships, other potential problems are:

Being put on a pedestal. Local Christians may be reluctant to give

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson.

² See especially Jon Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem—Revisited*, Rev. and expanded ed, The American Society of Missiology Series, no. 15 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2006).

³ <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/money/2018/03/the-optimal-nz-salary-is-more-than-three-times-the-average-wage-study.html>

⁴ <https://checkinprice.com/average-and-minimum-salary-in-yangon-myanmar/>.

advice or offer critique if, for example, we're funding the programme. This can prevent us truly entering their culture and learning to see things from their perspective. Instead we can become (falsely) assured that our western worldview is the only way of looking at things. We can also be in danger of suffering a kind of "rock star" delusion, because of the way people may treat us. Scripture warns us, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you" (Rom. 12:3 NIV).

Becoming the boss. "He who controls the purse strings makes the rules." Money is inextricably linked with power, and this is an issue we face on the mission field. Money given by Christians from (comparatively)

wealthy nations like NZ can be used for great good, but care must be taken in how decisions are made, and the role of local Christians in that process. This is hardly a new problem. At the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Whitby, 1947, the slogan was "Partnership in Obedience," to which an Indonesian pastor quipped, "Yes, *partnership* for you, but *obedience* for us."⁵ We must strive to genuinely realise how Christ has made us into one people, recognising how money can threaten this relationship. "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:4-5 NIV).

Creating dependency (and other problems): In 1960 Lesslie Newbigin described the crippling effect of "money which comes from afar,

remote, anonymous, and apparently inexhaustible."⁶ There is no question that we should give financially and give generously: "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Rom. 12:13 NIV). But it is widely recognised, not only in missions but in secular development as well, that great harm can be caused by injecting large amounts of money into a community. No easy answers to this one, and no one size fits all solution, but again, we need to be aware of the dangers and seek wisdom from others who have experience in this area.

The issue of money and missions is a complex reality arising from an incredibly unequal world which divides the Body of Christ. There is opportunity for great good, but also the danger of manifold problems. We need to think carefully about missions and money. ■

⁵ Quoted in David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 466.

⁶ "The Pattern of Partnership", in *A Decisive Hour for the Christian Mission*, eds. Lesslie Newbigin et al. (London: SCM, 1960), 35.

REBEKAH | DAY 31, GC3 DAILY PRAYER GUIDE

A CHALLENGE TO MY WORLDVIEW

KUDJIP HAS BEEN MY HOME FOR THE LAST TWO MONTHS, WHERE I AM WORKING AS A MEDICAL DOCTOR AT THIS 120-BED HOSPITAL. AS WELL AS A LOT OF LEARNING AND GROWING MEDICALLY, I'VE ENJOYED GRAPPLING WITH A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD AND PARTICULARLY ILLNESS. THESE EXPERIENCES HAVE CHALLENGED SOME OF MY OWN IDEAS, AS WELL AS PROVIDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ME TO CHALLENGE OTHERS' BELIEFS AND SPEAK CHRIST INTO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS.

** Name changed for privacy.*

One experience that will stay with me for a long time was Baby of Katherine.* Babies here are not named until they are several months old, as the chances of babies dying in the first few months is so high, so all nursery babies are just Baby of ".....". This baby was born at 1.7kg and progressed well for a few weeks before suddenly becoming very unwell with ▶





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a presumed infection. After starting antibiotics, I was called in later that night as the baby stopped breathing. While we can breathe for the baby for a short time, apnoea is usually the end stage of overwhelming infection and the baby will soon die. However, the nurses were not as busy as usual, and so kept breathing for the baby as long as they were able to. Miraculously, I arrived the next morning to find Baby of Katherine still alive and starting to breathe on its own again after our nurses ventilated the baby by hand all night. Baby continued to improve as the antibiotics worked, hit the 2kg mark a few weeks later and was recently discharged.

As I marvelled over this baby's miraculous survival and our staff's dedication, one of the midwives stated that the baby had of course improved as a longstanding disagreement between the parents had just been sorted out. I was taken aback with her understanding of this baby's illness, and her attribution of the cause. But this is not an isolated case. I've seen time and again similar links made.

Traditionally in PNG, there is always someone or something to blame for death and illness – a curse placed, bad spirits, something put inside the body by someone else or trouble between family members. As I start off in this context, I'm still learning, trying to understand where these beliefs come from as best I can. Where the safety of a patient is at risk, I will try to challenge these beliefs, but respect them where I'm able to do so safely.

The addition of Christianity to the animistic culture of PNG sometimes just changes the attribution to someone's sin. This can be hard to argue with biblically, with many examples of illness and death caused by sin, such as David and Bathsheba's first son. Yet we are not held captive by fear of other spirits, and through Jesus' blood we have the forgiveness of sins and power over the darkness.

One powerful example of challenging these beliefs was demonstrated to me as I watched one of our long-term doctors counsel a mother whose baby had been born blind. Often when a baby



dies or has an abnormality, the mother is blamed for the outcome. She could have had bad thoughts about this baby, could have slept with her husband during the pregnancy, or simply worked too hard. In this case Scott explained to this mum that the baby had its own "plan" (Tok Pisin's best explanation of genetics), that were likely responsible for the blindness. He then went on to explain that in the same way that people might blame her and ask what she had done wrong, so too the Jews wondered why a man was born blind in the Bible. But Jesus told them no one had sinned, it wasn't anyone's fault, but an opportunity for God's power to be demonstrated (John

Seeing relationships and spirituality clearly active, relevant, and at work in people's health certainly challenges some of my views of health and illness.

9, below). He challenged her that this baby's disability provided their family an opportunity to rely on God, and to see where He was working in their lives. The relief on this mother's face was obvious, and for me brought this story and God's good news to life.

Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?"

Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."

John 9:1-5 The Message

On the other hand, the broad view of health can be beneficial as it means that Papua New Guineans are very open to factors other than the physical affecting their health. It reminds me of a Māori view of health or hauora, represented in one form by Te Whare Tapa Whā, the four walled house. This acknowledges not only the physical determinants of health, but the emotional, spiritual and family components. This is important teaching in medical school, but from a Western cultural and medical perspective it is often counter intuitive. We so often want a concrete scientific explanation. Seeing relationships and spirituality clearly

active, relevant, and at work in people's health certainly challenges some of my views of health and illness.

Sometimes this broader picture identifies factors affecting someone's health and provides real benefit for the patient when considered and treated. One afternoon on the labour ward I heard one of the midwives praying with a teenager who was pregnant after a rape. She had been in early labour for some days and hadn't established into active labour yet. Neither her nor her mother wanted this pregnancy, and so Sister Meti was praying that they could accept what had already happened. She prayed the family would be able to "*lusim rong bilong em*" (Tok Pisin phrase for forgiveness, literally meaning to lose the wrong of the one who has hurt you) and welcome this baby regardless of the situation. This was a really important component of this young woman's care that I likely would have completely missed as I skimmed through her chart.

A common presentation at Kudjip is collapses, faints or non-epileptic seizures. These can be hard to differentiate from epileptic seizures, cardiac events causing collapse or other medically identifiable causes, but once we have excluded these the most likely explanation is psychological. The mind is a very powerful thing and affects our bodies in ways that we don't fully understand. Nervous diarrhoea, palpitations when you feel stressed, and 'butterflies in your stomach' are all common ways that people experience this. It can come across as 'all in your head' or 'made-up,' but is far from this. This is a hard-enough concept to explain in New Zealand, where English is my first language, and I imagined it to be even more difficult cross-culturally.

Reality proved quite different as I saw several patients in this situation. One woman who came in with a possible collapse or seizure was described as having episodes where she went 'starry-eyed' and blank. She had had a lot going on recently – a grandson killed in a car accident and then her son-in-law had murdered someone. As these thoughts turned over and over in her head, she told me it just became too much and overcame her, leading to this episode. Similarly, another woman found collapsed on the ground was a widow with four children, struggling with school fees at the beginning of the year that she just couldn't cope with.

The Tok Pisin word for a problems or concern – *hevi* – is one of those I like better than the English. It describes the weight of some of the issues we carry, the way they can drag a spirit down and be such a burden. These women were both so open to the idea that their *hevis* had caused their collapses, which opened the door to talk about the One who offers to carry our burdens. Such a great example and a beautiful picture of not only God at work, but also a broad view of health!

To sign off, a Psalm I shared with these ladies that has stuck with me over the last few weeks as I carry my *hevis*.

Psalm 55:22 – Olgeta hevi yu karim, em yu mas putim long han bilong Bikpela, bai em i karim na bai em i strongim yu. Bai em i no larim wanpela samting i bagarapim ol stretpela man.

Psalm 55:22 The Passion Translation (TPT)

So here's what I've learned through it all: Leave all your cares and anxieties at the feet of the Lord, and measureless grace will strengthen you. ■





MELANIE CROSBIE | HEADSPACE YOUTH DIRECTOR ASSISTANT

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

LAST YEAR THE HEADSPACE TEAM HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF HAVING WIJIT JOIN US AS AN INTERN. WIJIT IS 24, LIVES IN THAILAND, AND IS ORIGINALLY FROM BURMA. HE HAS HAD CONTINUED CONTACT WITH HEADSPACE FOR MANY YEARS, FIRST THROUGH HIS SCHOOL THAT HEADSPACE VISITS, THEN THROUGH JOINING THE TEAM AS A TRANSLATOR ONCE A YEAR AND IN 2017 FOR THE FULL TRIP. HE HAS SHARED WITH US HIS STORY, WHICH SO BEAUTIFULLY DISPLAYS THE DIRECTION AND PROVISION OF GOD OVER THE YEARS OF HIS LIFE.

Born in Burma, Wijit is the older sibling to two younger brothers, Messi and Goku. He lived with his grandparents for most of his childhood but was forced to become a monk when his grandfather passed away, leaving his grandmother unable to care for him and all of his cousins alone. He moved out of his grandparents' home and learnt from the monks until he was twelve, when his parents took him and his brothers to Thailand, with the intention of moving into the Mae La Refugee camp. However, because they

did not have a UN card, they weren't able to stay in the camp and instead landed in Noh Bo, a small village on the Thai side of the Thai/Myanmar border. Leaving Wijit, along with his brothers in the village, his parents headed towards Bangkok to find work to support their family.

In the village, the brothers had plans to study at the Thai school, but once again due to a lack of the correct documents, this plan was thrown off and instead they enrolled at Noh Bo Academy School. The academy is run by a Christian



organisation but has mostly Buddhist students who are simply there to learn English from volunteers. Wijit was one of these students. He arrived at Noh Bo a Buddhist, with little and relatively skewed knowledge of Jesus. His understanding of Jesus was that when Jesus was young, he went to study with a monk who taught him about Buddhist things, told Jesus not to teach about Buddhist things, but that Jesus loved his people so much that he went out and taught them Buddhist things anyway! Alongside

this interesting information, Wijit laughs when he remembers why his friends told him to beware of Christians. They told him Christians were smart people who would trick you with snacks to convince you to go to church. Because of his understanding of Jesus and Christians, Noh Bo was a frustrating place for Wijit to begin with. In his eyes their saving grace were their English volunteers.

Having native English speakers was undeniably useful to someone wanting to improve their English. It was here that Wijit first crossed paths with Headspace, befriending them for their usefulness in improving his English. Although he wasn't really interested in Christianity, he was intrigued as to why they brought teams back year after year. For Wijit, Grade 10 was a turning point, he made the decision to believe in Jesus and started attending church. For the rest of his time at Noh Bo he struggled with this new belief as everyone around him was Buddhist, including his parents who he was afraid to tell of his newfound belief. Wijit explains that in the village around three quarters of people are Buddhist and so he chose not to fully commit to his new belief so as not to alienate himself from his friends there. It was in his last year of school, three years after deciding to believe in Jesus, that he began to pray. He prayed hard about what he was going to do when he left Noh Bo. It was then that he met a volunteer who supported him to go to university in Chiang Mai. It was the first time he had heard about



university and he could only imagine that it would be so much bigger than anything he had ever come across. With no clue what to study he chose the subject he already knew best, English.

They told him Christians were smart
people who would trick you with snacks
to convince you to go to church.

His move to Chiang Mai was a big and exciting development. He was the only one out of thirteen students to go to university, most of the others still live along the border. He moved to the city by himself, trusting God to guide him as he went. The very night before he moved, a group of students from Chiang Mai came to run an English Camp at Noh Bo for a couple of days. They chatted

with him and upon learning of his plans invited him to come along to their church and meet their pastor who ended up helping Wijit study the Bible in his first months in Chiang Mai. In this church he found a home and a community of supportive and loving friends. Here he decided to get baptised, a huge decision for him as it meant talking to his parents about his faith. This conversation forced Wijit to stand up for his decision and explain that it was in fact his decision and not something forced upon him by white people who were supporting him to go to uni. This wasn't his only struggle in his time in Chiang Mai. University itself was never easy. He was studying English in a Thai environment, when his first language ▶



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was actually Karen. Nevertheless, he succeeded, graduating and becoming the first person in his entire family to do so.

It was of course, our great privilege to have Wijit join us as an intern the year following his graduation. Wijit talks about this past year as a once in a lifetime opportunity. Of course, it wasn't easy living fully immersed in a new culture, including studying with Pathways and being a part of our Headspace leadership team. He speaks of how this year has

altered his worldview, how it has grown in him an understanding of how God has been looking after his life and how this has grown in him a desire to want to help others. Now, as he returns to Thailand, he is not afraid of not getting a job, but is happy to leave the outcome in God's hands, to see what mix of his English, Thai and Bible skills will help people.

We hope that you will join with us in thanking God for all He has done in and through Wijit's life and all he will continue to do! ■



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