

a December note from...



Godspeed missionary care

"...God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart..." 1 Samuel 16:7

The streets of the older section of Budapest where I was visiting last week are cobblestone, and though there are sidewalks alongside, intersections can be rough. As I walked the five blocks from my lodging to meet with a missionary team, I saw a young man in a wheelchair, his lower extremities withered and malformed. He was working hard to stay on track while trying to keep control of the large dog he had on a leash. I marveled at his persistence and thought of what it must be like for him to navigate in this environment that will soon be even more challenging as winter sets in. My mind began to imagine what might have happened to him to leave him in this position, my impulse was to want to help him in some way. His dog insisted on a zone of protection around the wheelchair, though, so I moved on...

...to deal with situations where the impairments were not so visible. Conflicts unresolved, words unspoken, the insidious effects of the stress of living in a foreign land, the debris of a chaotic childhood covertly affecting adult emotions, the decreased sunlight of a northern winter triggering depression that masquerades as personal discouragement. **This is the domain where Godspeed serves**, circumstance and situation that may not be visible but can demoralize, impair, and even remove a missionary from their appointed field of work just as effectively as could major physical illness or disability. A particularly common condition that we encounter among missionaries is that of depression, sometimes of the "clinical" variety that may involve a medical component or require medical intervention. I could describe the typical symptoms and signs, but (with her permission) will let you hear excerpts from a missionary letter as a missionary writes to her family and friends:

"In less than two weeks we will be in the States for our furlough...many of you will ask me, "How are you?" That's the customary American greeting. The traditional reply is, "Fine, thank you."

This time the usual answer will not suffice. The truth is that I am not fine. Last year I alluded to a significant health problem; we thought that by now it would be a closed chapter in our lives. We were wrong. This is a book with multiple chapters. It is an illness that is greatly misunderstood among Christians and is practically taboo for missionaries, the "mature believers". Clinical depression is very real. It is a medical condition with a wide range of symptoms. Its cause is not certain; its cure is not simple, and at times it has been debilitating.

Among the biggest issues for me are mental and physical slowness, indecisiveness, fatigue and anxiety. I remember telling [a team of doctors] that I would not give up but that I might give out. Initially I was advised to tell as few people as possible; I was too fragile for well-intended questions and advice. Now I find myself longing for prayer. I'm not so sure it is wise to keep secret a serious illness.

About three weeks ago the Lord gave me a new perspective on this. Rather than focusing on wellness, I am to focus on what He has for me to learn about Him and about myself. Oh! I am learning so much! I have so very much to learn about pride, humility, and self-centeredness. So pray for me to become more like Jesus, to be refined and purified. Wellness is secondary. This morning I told my husband I needed to be taken care of, that it would be nice to be where my mother and his mother would take care of me. The truth is that I need tender care from you as well, my family in Christ. I have an excellent Christian psychiatrist and the Lord Himself is my Great Physician I could not be more blessed."

As I look back over this year, I am so very grateful to God for His allowing us an opportunity to see Him at work in the lives of His missionaries serving throughout the world. **And we are grateful to you as well, as God has used your gifts, your prayers, your encouragement, and your caring to make those opportunities a reality.** Much has been accomplished during 2003:

- ◆ transition of our ministry base from Maryland to Columbia, South Carolina
- ◆ visits to Ukraine, Russia, Hungary, and France to minister to families and teams serving in those regions
- ◆ conferences and consultations for churches and mission organizations in New York, Alabama, Maryland, North Carolina, Indiana, and Kentucky
- ◆ individual consultations with missionaries living or visiting near our South Carolina home base, who have served in Brazil, Russia, Taiwan, Bulgaria, Peru, Indonesia, Pakistan, and still other countries of the world

And we look forward to 2004:

- ◆ In January, the **ten year anniversary** of the founding of *Godspeed Missionary Care*
- ◆ Further opportunities to meet with missionaries returning from the field and others preparing for field service during a conference in **Indiana in January**
- ◆ Our first visit to **Haiti** where we have been asked to meet with a team during its annual field retreat in April
- ◆ Working alongside other missionary care personnel in Columbia to develop training programs in missionary care for other health professionals
- ◆ The completion of two books I have been requested to write, one for missionaries to help them better prepare medically for mission service, and one for psychiatrists to encourage and prepare them to become more involved in mission service
- ◆ And throughout the year, consultations with missionaries who visit us in South Carolina, as well as on-site work with missionary teams in Ukraine, Russia, Hungary, France, and South Africa.

As I returned to my Hungarian hotel in the dark of the evening, I again saw the young man and his dog, heading back toward his own home. His visible problems were significant, but he was pressing on. **Our missionaries press on as well**, undergoing the attacks of the enemy, the burden of cross-cultural adaptation and separation from family, the isolation that can come from illness and anxiety occurring where help and understanding may not be readily available. **We are blessed to be witnesses of God's plan to strengthen, to heal, and to draw them closer still to Him.** And we are blessed that you care, too...may His love and His presence be very visible in your homes and lives this holiday season.

Godspeed,

Barney, for Karen and the *Godspeed* team

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