

## Missionary Marriage Issues: What about Charlotte?

We began by asking, “What about Dorothy?” Let us end by asking, “What about Charlotte?” Dorothy was William Carey’s first wife, and Charlotte was his second. Not only were the two ladies very different but also both William and the agency which sent them had changed.

November 27, 1800, seven years before Dorothy died, William wrote to a friend, “I was last evening employed in teaching the English language to a German lady who I hope professes the grace of God. She...has been instructed in the school of affliction. Came last year into this country for her health not having been able to speak or stand for some years. Her speech is restored, and she can walk a little. Her name is Rumohr. I trust she has met with some good to her soul in this place.”

William went from being Charlotte Rumohr’s language tutor to being her pastor. Not understanding the existence of denominations within Christianity, the Governor-General in India wrote about William marrying a Danish countess “whom he had converted from a Christian to a Baptist” by “very near drowning her in the ceremony of baptism...performed by that sect.”

January 20, 1808, in a letter telling his sisters that Dorothy had died (38 days earlier), William said, “I am well aware that there is a degree of indelicacy in mentioning so early my design to marry again after a proper time...I shall inform you that I do intend, after some months to marry Miss Rumohr. I have proposed the matter to her and she has testified her agreement thereto. She is one of the most pious and conscientious persons with whom I am acquainted...and it is in consequence of a

wish she expressed, that I communicate my intention to you so early.”

William’s steps toward remarriage so soon were, at first, shocking to other missionaries there in India. However, those missionaries soon realized that William and Dorothy had little emotional attachment during the twelve years of her mental illness. Initial objections soon faded and approval took their place. William and Charlotte married May 8, 1808. This marriage was quite different from his marriage to Dorothy.

### **Charlotte was different.**

Dorothy did not want to be a missionary, but Charlotte had come to India by choice as she looked for something that would cure her physical problems. She was well off financially and could have returned to Europe but had chosen to stay in India. In fact, immediately after their marriage she deeded her house to the mission and the rent from it was used to support national pastors.

Dorothy could not read, but Charlotte read widely, often able to read books in their original because she knew Danish, French, and Italian before coming to India. Then, as noted earlier, while in India she learned English to worship with other missionaries. Finally she learned Bengali so she could better minister to nationals.

Dorothy could not write, but Charlotte wrote courtly love letters to William.

- I thank thee most affectionately, my dearest love, for thy kind letter. Though the journey is very useful to me, I cannot help feeling much to be so distant from you, but I am much with you in my thoughts.
- I felt very much affected in parting with thee. I see plainly I would not do

to go far from you; my heart cleaves to you.

- I shall greatly rejoice, my love, in seeing thee again, but take care of your health that I may find you well. I need not say how much you are in my thoughts day and night.

In her mentally ill state Dorothy opposed William’s ministry, but Charlotte joined William in ministry. She wanted to be a “mother” to the national families and the education of the Hindu girls was her particular interest. Since they had so many common interests, Charlotte and William built a loving relationship in just a few years—and William realized it.

In a letter dated March 11, 1812, less than four years after their marriage, William wrote, “I have a very affectionate and pious wife, whose mind is highly cultivated by education and extensive reading.” How different Charlotte was from Dorothy in so many respects!

### **William had changed.**

After Charlotte passed away, William wrote about their marriage saying that they had “enjoyed the most entire oneness of mind” and concealed nothing from each other. They “prayed and conversed together... without the least reserve...and enjoyed a degree of conjugal happiness while thus continued to each other.”

On January 24, 1814, shortly after Jabez married, William wrote a father-son letter to him. In it he said, “You are now married. Be not content to bear yourself toward your wife with propriety, but let love be the spring of all your conduct. Esteem her highly that she may highly esteem you. The first impressions of love arising from form or

beauty will soon wear off, but the trust arising from character will endure and increase.”

Charlotte died on May 30, 1821. Writing to friends about her death William said it was “the greatest domestic loss that a man can sustain.” Writing to his sisters months later, February 16, 1822, William said, “I am lonely and frequently very unhappy. My house becomes a wilderness and the gloom of having no one to whom I can communicate my feelings is very great.” How different from the letter to his sisters after Dorothy’s death—a letter in which he announced that he was going to marry Charlotte.

### **The agency had changed.**

Andrew, the representative of the agency, who was so relieved when Dorothy finally joined William (under duress) to go to India, wrote quite a different letter several years later. After evaluating the Read family and concluding that although Mr. Read was acceptable, the family would not be allowed to serve. Writing to William September 7, 1797, Andrew said, “His wife and daughter are not willing...but the unwillingness of his wife, and the consideration that she had formerly been in a very unhappy state of mind...were at present an absolute bar.” How different from his reaction to William and Dorothy’s going!

May 1, 1799, in a letter to a pastor, Andrew wrote that a Mr. Brundson had married a Miss Irons “who is willing to go with him.” However, he went on to say that he was not so sure about whether or not the wives of two other candidates were willing to go. The willingness of the spouse had become a pivotal point in deciding whether

or not to accept a family. Apparently Dorothy's sacrifice had brought about changes that have lasted for more than two centuries, changes that have prevented others from experiencing the same distress.

### What about missionary marriages today?

As in the time of the Careys, living in another culture today places much additional stress on marriage. As then, the effect of that stress on the marriage depends on the husband, the wife, and the agency.

In Andrew's remarks noted above, one can see that the Baptist Missionary Society began to screen for marriage and family issues even before Dorothy's death. About the turn of the century the Wesleyan Missionary Society began producing a policy book that shows changes over the years.

- In 1818 missionary candidates were asked nothing about their wives.
- In 1822 candidates had to answer whether they were going married or single, whether or not their wives could be recommended on several criteria, and whether or not her parents had given their consent.
- If a missionary returned to England to find a "suitable" wife, he could take up to a year before returning to the field with his bride.

Today most agencies have even more specific policies about marriage and family. Zealous candidates sometimes are just "sure" their marriages are strong and want exceptions made for them to go. However, the stresses of cross-cultural living take their toll today just as they did two hundred years ago, and it is not wise to push for exceptions to such policies.

Though everyone probably has some reservations about serving in another culture,

husbands and wives must be sure that they have much in common, have open communication, and that both really want to go. If that is not the case, great difficulties still occur today.

### Further reading about Dorothy and Charlotte

Few people knew much about Dorothy's life other than that she was mentally ill until James Beck published his book about her in 1992. His subtitle in the reference below reflects that fact. His book is still the primary source of information about her life.

Beck, J. R. (1992). *Dorothy Carey: The Tragic and Untold Story of Mrs. William Carey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Although little is known about Charlotte's life, some information is contained in Beck's book above. Other details are in the biography of William Carey written by George Smith in 1909 and available several places online. The most information is in Chapter 8, "Family and Friends."

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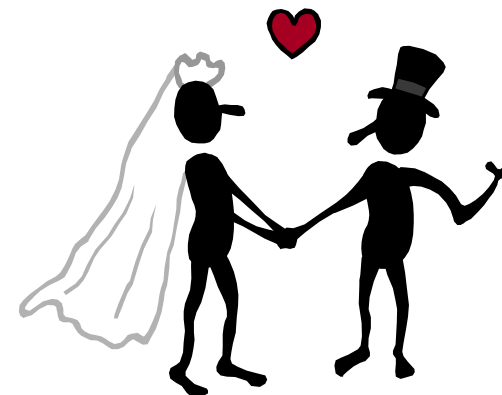
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# Missionary Marriage Issues: What about Charlotte? (Conclusion)

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