A new name

By Steph Doenges on Nov 1, 2010

Names in the Bible are so full of meaning. Someone's name might be a description of their character or prophecy about the future.

In Genesis, chapter 17, God changed Abram's name to Abraham. "Exalted father" became "father of many." Isaac's name means "he laughs" because his mother found it amusing that she would bear a child in her old age.

Esau was a hairy man, and so he was called. Jacob was born grasping the heel of his brother. Any guess on what his name means? Naomi suffered much in her life and changed her name from "pleasant" to Mara, which means "bitter."

Skip ahead a few generations to the birth of Jesus. His name means "the Lord saves."

As a missionary doctor at Kudjip Nazarene Hospital, Papua New Guinea, I started caring for Dai about a month ago. There were two foreboding things about her case from the beginning. The first was her list of medical problems, which was quite impressive and only got longer as time went along. I will get to that in a minute. The second was her name. "Dai" means either "to faint" or "to die" in Pidgin. I wondering if her name had another meaning in her local language? I sure hope so.

Dai came from the Southern Highlands, one of our neighboring provinces. The doctors at the hospital there referred her because she was pregnant and had a low blood count. One of her family members works at a tea plantation near here, so she ended up at our hospital. I saw her in clinic and started her problem list: 23 weeks pregnant with twins, anemia, enormous spleen, asthma and hepatitis B. As tiny as she was, I was amazed that two babies and the big spleen could all fit inside her short little abdomen. And she still had 17 weeks to go.

A couple of weeks later, Dai returned to clinic with nose bleeds and jaundice. Dr. Bill examined her and ordered a complete blood count. Sure enough, her anemia had worsened and platelets were so low that her blood was not clotting well. She was admitted to the hospital where I took care of her. I ordered all the lab tests I could think of and came up with a working diagnosis of "hypersplenism."

Big spleens are common in some parts of Papua New Guinea, usually from multiple infections with malaria. A big spleen can become overactive, collecting platelets and breaking down blood cells. I gave her a couple of units of blood and her blood count stabilized. She was discharged after several days in the hospital.

Another week passed and Dai returned to clinic with yet another problem to add to her list. Now her blood pressure was high, she had a headache and quite a bit of swelling in her legs. Multiple blood pressure checks and a few more lab results confirmed the dreaded diagnosis of severe pre-eclampsia.

Pre-eclampsia is a sickness of pregnancy that is only cured by delivering the baby. Dai's condition continued to worsen. If we didn't deliver the babies soon, she was going to die. Even so, the decision was not an easy one. At 27 weeks gestation, the twins were not likely to survive in Papua New Guinea.

Dai was re-admitted. We gave her medicine to control her blood pressure, and administered magnesium to prevent seizures of eclampsia. It was during this second admission that I decided to call her "Hope."

It took three days to get her into labor. She finally delivered her babies early Friday morning. As I feared, the babies were too small. The first was a boy who died shortly after birth. The second was a girl. She weighed only 875 grams. This one lived through the day but died Friday evening.

Dai herself was quite ill by the time she delivered, starting to show signs of pulmonary edema -- fluid accumulating in the lungs. Dr. Susan was on call and stayed with her through the early hours of the morning. Dai received a couple of units of blood to keep her from bleeding to death and a medication to clear the fluid from her lungs. I saw her later in the afternoon and she was already starting to look better. By rounds on Saturday morning, Dai was doing amazingly well.

On Monday morning, Dai looked like a new woman. What an improvement from how sick she was, and a dramatic example of how delivery cures pre-eclampsia. It seemed as though we had made it through the most critical period. I decided to keep her one more day to tune up her asthma and re-check a blood count.

Tuesday morning I walked into the ward and found the crash cart at the foot of Dai's bed. Not a good sign. Dr. Susan, who was on call again, and a crowd of nurses were hovering over the patient. Apparently Dai had gone outside and fallen down. By the time she was found, she was unconscious. Somehow the nurses got her back to the ward and they called Dr. Susan.

Dai was rolling in and out of consciousness, her blood pressure was low, pulse weak and her abdomen was starting to swell. Dr. Susan did an ultrasound and discovered free fluid in the abdomen that looked suspiciously like blood. Dr. Bill, Dr. Rosie and I all arrived and listened to the story. We concluded that the fall had probably ruptured Dai's enlarged spleen and she was hemorrhaging into her abdomen. We called the surgeon, and Dr. Susan and Dr. Rosie went to give blood. The nurses started a second IV.

The first unit of blood had just started to go in when Dai became unresponsive and stopped breathing. Our team worked hard at CPR, but we were unable to save her. Tears brimmed in my eyes and flowed freely down the cheeks of others.

Sorry for the heaviness of this story. We don't lose many mothers at Kudjip Hospital, and it is always a tragedy when we do.

I want to leave you with the happy ending to this story: Dai was a Christian. She believed in Jesus and tonight she is with Him in heaven. I would imagine that she has already received her new name: "Life."

Zion's new name

"The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted or name your land Desolate. But you will be called [My Delight is in Her], and your land [Married]; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted."
Excerpts from Isaiah 62

Talk about it

● Sometimes when we pray and take steps for physical healing, our prayers are not answered in the way we have asked. Why might that happen?
● For Christians, after all available measures have been taken to preserve life, can the transition from earthly to heavenly life be a form of healing? Why or why not?
● Is it important for Christians to minister to physical needs, such as medical care, as well as spiritual needs?
● How could providing medical care to someone in need be a witness to family members, friends and the person’s community?
● How can you pray for the missionaries and personnel at Kudjip Nazarene Hospital, as well as their patients?

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