

A Life of Love Remembering Tom Little, O.D.

"There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:13



Tom & Libby Little

One Saturday morning in August our staff at MedSend was shocked and grieved to receive an email message from Libby Little informing us that her "darling Tom" had been killed, along with nine other members of his medical team. By now, you may have heard of Dr. Tom Little and his colleagues since the story has made headlines around the world. They were executed by the Taliban as they returned from a medical clinic in a remote region of Afghanistan. But you may not have realized that Tom Little was a MedSend grant recipient.

We want to share a little about this remarkable man whose recent service you, as a MedSend supporter, have helped to make possible.

When Tom Little was awarded a MedSend grant in 2008, he and his wife Libby had already spent almost 30 years serving in Afghanistan. Despite wars and political turmoil, they raised their three daughters there while Libby served as a teacher and Tom supervised a network of Christian eye hospitals and clinics around the country that provided desperately needed eye care. Although the Littles lived their lives true to God's calling, they respected the laws of Afghanistan and did not proselytize. In 2006, the Littles returned to the U.S., where Tom studied to become an optometrist. When he graduated in 2008, Tom and Libby were able to return to Afghanistan almost immediately because MedSend was making the monthly payments on his educational loans.

On a trip to the U.S. last summer, the Littles paid a brief visit to our office. Those of us who met them were enthralled by this humble couple and their stories. Despite jet lag, Libby was warm and outgoing, while Tom was more reserved, but deeply thoughtful. They expressed concern about the current situation in Afghanistan, in which the threat of kidnapping was so high that Libby had to be escorted wherever she went. Nevertheless, their deep love for and commitment to the Afghan people was unwavering. We felt inspired and privileged to play a part in enabling their service.

During the summer, we learned that Tom was part of a medical team that was about to embark on a particularly difficult journey to bring eye, dental and mother-child clinics to a very remote region of Afghanistan. To avoid traveling through an area of heavy fighting, their route would involve hiking about 80 miles over a 16,000 foot pass. The medical equipment would be brought into the valley by horses, but since the pass was still snow-bound, it had to be lugged by hand to another set of animals on the other side – especially strenuous at such a high altitude.

Libby was not physically part of the team, as she was in the U.S. awaiting the birth of the Little's first grandchild. Yet every 12 hours, she spoke with Tom via cell phone. She also emailed regular updates to MedSend and others who were praying for the team. We rejoiced to read that the team made it over the pass and to the village where they began conducting the clinics. Yet for the first three days, the weather was miserably cold and wet.

Libby wrote: "The villagers kindly opened their home to them, but it was hard going on hundreds of patients each day who had walked such distances and had no shelter but the

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trees. But the crowds keep coming!" By the sixth and last day of clinics, the team was exhausted.

"Some of the doctors have spent long nights watching and caring for some very seriously ill patients," Libby reported. Yet they began the perilous return trip at 4 a.m. last Tuesday, facing "a solid torrent of freezing rain above 13,000 feet with blinding snow at 16,000 feet," the most awful weather Tom had ever seen. The group dragged themselves to a shepherd's hut, where they crammed together to keep warm. Their clothing and sleeping bags were soaked. They had given their dried beans and rice to the villagers so they ate MREs, prepacked high-calorie military food. After walking another day, they made it to their vehicles, where the swollen river was impassable. They hoped that the river would go down by the next morning, when they would rebuild the road and be on their way. After that, Libby did not hear from Tom again.

As we try to make sense of what seems utterly senseless, it is helpful to read what Tom wrote in a 2008 newsletter. We have printed excerpts below. Please join us in praying for Libby and the Little family and also for their "family" in Afghanistan. We pray that what the Littles have begun, and what Tom literally gave his life for, will continue to flourish and bear much fruit.

When things aren't what they ought to be



"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Rom. 12:21

Dr. Tom Little

The Greek word that is used for "evil" in this text is "kakos" which has a very wide usage regarding all that is bad. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, however, perhaps best sums up its meaning with the short phrase "not such as it ought to be". Perhaps this phrase points to the heart of what universal evil is all about but at least it fits very neatly with the situation here in Afghanistan. Things certainly are not what they ought to be! There is an ugly war that is being waged in much of the country, corruption is rampant within the central government and hopeless poverty is the norm for the multitudes of ordinary Afghans while the few that are well off routinely flout their often ill begotten riches in ways that can only be considered distasteful. In addition, security even within the capital city is compromised as bands of criminals roam the streets looking for murder or kidnap victims. Afghans have endured this threat for quite some time but in the past months foreigners have become the prime targets.

We are tempted to respond to this unfortunate situation by words and/or acts of anger and revenge. It is also easy to make the generalization that every unknown Afghan that we happen to meet may be the ones that are out to "get us". Such a life of suspicion is good neither for us nor for the unfortunate folks that we daily happen to meet. In fact, just as Paul warns, we can easily be overcome with this evil that is around us and thus contribute to this "kakos". Libby and I are learning now that it does take a conscious effort of prayer and action on a very personal level to reverse this process. This "overcoming evil with good" can take many forms at our workplaces, with our neighbors or in the bazaar. It could be summed up, however, by both demonstrating in practical ways and/or if necessary speaking about grace, justice, mercy and agape type love.

Please pray that we will indeed contribute to the "good" that we trust will eventually overcome the deep-seated "kakos" that exists in this place. May He also use you for this purpose in your own places.

- Tom Little, November 2008