

Tuberculosis / Entering the Land

Tammy: Oh, Carol, I am sorry to be so late. My daughter is feeling really sick today. She's had a cough for a week and it's so frustrating. It just doesn't seem to want to go away.

Carol: Oh I am so sorry to hear that. Is she at home resting?

Tammy: Now, she is. I took her to see the doctor this morning and she said that it was a mild cold and that I probably wouldn't get sick! So, I took her home, made her some tea and got her settled in bed.

Carol: That's good! Tea sounds like a nice idea about now. How about we have a nice cup of chamomile tea together as we chat today.

Tammy: Oh, a tea party, that sounds like exactly what I need!

Tammy: Hello, and welcome to Women of Hope. Today we have Doctor Kerryn back again. She's come in to talk about a more *serious* type of cough – tuberculosis or TB.. Good morning Doctor Kerryn. Thank you for coming today. We don't know much about Tuberculosis so maybe you can tell us your experience with TB?

Dr K: Good morning Tammy...and Carol...and welcome to our 'tea party' I've seen TB patients in a few countries now - Australia, India and Tanzania. There's one thing they *all* have in common...they *all* need treatment and *all* need someone to care for them.

Tammy: Dr Kerryn, what causes TB?

Dr K: It's caused by a germ...a bacteria called *Mycobacteria tuberculosis*. People are affected with it all around the world. In fact, nearly one third of the world's people have the germ living in their system! That's one person of every three people in the world.

Carol: That's a lot of people. You say they have the germ, does that mean they are all sick with it?

Dr K: No. People usually catch TB in childhood but the body's *immune system* usually stops it from causing any problems. Often it lives in a sealed off part of the lungs. This is called *Latent TB*. Our immune system usually helps us to fight off diseases but when it weakens, for many different reasons, the germ can become more active and cause problems all around the body.

Tammy: So you are telling us that most people with TB don't even know they have it?

Dr K: That's right. It hides away. To test whether your body has the germ, you can have a special test called a *Mantoux* or *Tuberculin* test. You have a small injection into your arm. The nurse or doctor looks at the site of the injection two days later to see how your body reacts. If you *have* latent TB, you can have treatment with a special medication. You would take this for six months to lower the risk of the germ becoming active.

Carol: So why don't we use this medication all the time?

Dr K: Everyone has a different risk of the germ becoming active, based on their age, and any other health problems...and also if they have close contact with other people who might have a weakened immune system. If someone in your family has TB it's important to have a Latent TB test...or if a close friend or work mate has it. Then, if you also have it you can talk to your doctor about treatment.

Tammy: How do people catch TB? You mentioned family, friends and people at work.

Dr K: The TB germ is usually spread through the air when someone with active TB in their lungs coughs. Fortunately, it dies when it's in contact with light and lots of fresh air. However, if you live or work where there are a lot of people in a small space, you would be more likely to catch it.

Tammy: So, if someone at home or work has TB and you spend lots of time with them, then it's a good thing to get a check for *TB*.

Dr K: That's right...get a check for both latent *TB* and *active TB*.

Carol: I think you had better tell us what *active TB* is?

Dr K: Active TB means that the TB germ is causing problems in your body. Sometimes this can happen when you *first catch* the germ. More often, when your body is weakened with something else, the germ starts to move around and cause problems.

Tammy: You said, "when our body is weakened with something else." What types of things weaken our body?

Dr K: The most common causes are not *enough* food, or not eating good *healthy* food... stress... lack of sleep... and working long hours. Infections like HIV will make the immune system very weak. Sometimes certain medications can have the same effect, like *prednisolone*...used to treat arthritis, asthma, bronchitis and some skin rashes.

Carol: So, to stop something like TB, it's important to eat enough food...and that needs to be – good healthy food, like meat, fish, chicken, fresh vegetables and whole grains. You need to sleep well...not work too hard and take some time to relax! And if you have HIV it must be treated properly.

Dr K: Yes...good food, rest and treatment of HIV are all important for treating TB properly.

Tammy: Good food and times of rest are important for all of us aren't they? Could you tell us where Active TB goes in the body?

Dr K: It's a very interesting but deadly germ. It usually affects the lungs, but can be in the kidneys...the bones...the brain...the skin...and the lymph nodes...these act as filters or traps for foreign particles in our body. It can really go anywhere in the body.

Tammy: And what would the symptoms be if this happens?

Dr K: The typical symptoms are a cough lasting more than two weeks...and you would cough up sputum or phlegm with blood in it. You may have a fever...feel short of breath...feel very tired or lose weight. It can really cause anything - depending on which part of the body is affected!

Carol: So, you're saying that we should be careful of a long-lasting cough, fever, coughing up any blood, feeling very tired and losing a lot of weight.

Dr K: That's right, Carol. If you have any of these things, please go and see your doctor or health care worker for a test. You will have to cough up 3 samples of sputum to send to the laboratory and have a chest X-ray. From these tests, plans can be made for your treatment. If you do have TB, it is really important to also have an HIV test...TB can be a sign of the body having low immunity.

Tammy: Here on *Women of Hope*, we're talking about TB or tuberculosis with our good friend, Dr Kerry. Dr., I've heard that TB treatment takes a long time.

Dr K: Yes, if the TB is in your lungs, the treatment is for 12 months. The first 2 months involve 4 tablets per day then there are less tablets after this. Sadly, quite a lot of TB germs are no longer killed by the normal medicines. If the treatment does not make you start feeling better, you may have to have some more complicated treatments. If the TB is in other places in your body, the treatment can be different too. Most countries provide free TB treatment, as it's such a terrible disease to have and is so easily spread.

Carol: As with any medication - It is important to take *all* your tablets and, as we said, look after yourself!

Dr K: It is so important to follow your healthcare worker's instructions and to take your medication regularly...and for the correct amount of time. Otherwise, the TB germ might still be in your body and if you become sick with it again, the treatment may not work.

Carol: Well, thanks to you, Dr. K, we know how to recognize TB and what to do if we think we might have it, but tell us how we can avoid catching TB?

Dr K: The BCG vaccine gives some protection, but it does not *always* work, *every* time. Babies in places with high TB rates should have the BCG vaccine soon after birth. Anyone with TB should stay away from other people as much as possible until the doctors say they are not contagious and they won't pass it on to anyone else. Sometimes this means staying in hospital until their sputum no longer shows large amounts of germs. Sometimes, it means wearing a mask to catch the germs when they come out of their mouth. Anyone with a cough should cover their mouth with their hand when they cough and then wash their hands. A handful of tissues are better but more expensive and you need to put them in a rubbish bin...and still wash your hands! People should

not spit on the ground as the TB germs can be blown by the wind and other people can breathe them in.

Tammy: So, anyone with a cough should not spit near other people...especially if they have TB.

Dr K: Well, we don't want to give our germs to other people and make them sick do we!

Tammy: That reminds me of another good practice: washing our hands! We should always be careful to wash them after we blow our nose or cover our mouths when we cough or even help someone who is sick. And I'm glad I got my daughter to the Dr. today!

Carol: I am too, Tammy. I hope she will be feeling better real soon. And thank you Doctor Kerryn for talking with us about TB today...

Tammy: ...Oh – I was so interested that I forgot to drink my tea – it's cold. I'll make another cup. Would you like another one Carol?

Carol: Yes please...maybe you would like to go and make another cup before Ros comes to tell us another story from God's word, the Bible...

We've been talking to Dr Kerryn about TB and how easy it is to pass on the germs of TB to another person.

Tammy: And I washed my hands before I made the tea, because I don't want to pass any germs I might have on to Carol.

Carol: Thanks Tammy...and now here's Ros – to tell us another story from God's word. Welcome Ros.

Ros: Thanks Tammy, hi Carol...and hello – I hope you're enjoying a fresh cup of tea... We've been hearing stories from long ago, how God the creator called a tribe of people called the Israelites to worship and follow him. That was so that they could show the world what he was like.

Tammy: Yes; we heard how God rescued them from slavery and led them through the desert...

Carol: ...and God gave them his law to live by - what a great gift that was!

Ros: They had a lot to learn, and God was sometimes angry with them when they grumbled and rebelled. But he always kept going, providing their needs and teaching them that they could depend on him. Well, after years of living as nomads, they got near to the land that God had promised their ancestor Abraham. It was called Canaan then.

Abraham's descendants had grown into many thousands, and others had joined them along the way, people who wanted to follow their God. Can you imagine them, all camped just outside the country, waiting to hear from God? And that's where today's story starts. Let's listen to the story from God's true word, the Bible. (Extracts paraphrased from the book of Deuteronomy)

Moses was their leader, but he was a very old man by this time, and God had told him he would die soon. So Moses called them all together, and he made a very long speech. It was all written down, and in the Bible it is called the book of Deuteronomy. Moses reminded them of all that God had done for them, and how often they had rebelled and grumbled. (Deut Ch 8) He reminded them that God was the creator of the whole earth, not just a local god of their tribe (Deut 4:32). Moses went over the agreement that God had made with them, and reminded them of the good laws he had given them.

The adults who were listening to Moses were just children, or not even born yet when the law was given, So God had to *renew* his agreement with them - he called it a 'covenant of love' (Deut 7: 12-15). He promised again to look after them in their new home, and to make them grow and flourish. But he also made some conditions - they must obey his laws, and especially they must not just blend in with the people of Canaan, or marry them. The most important warning was this: they must not have anything to do with the idols and spirits that the Canaanites worshipped. They were told to destroy the idols, and not even keep the gold and silver that these were covered with.

Carol: Ros, can I ask you a question?

Ros: Sure Carol.

Carol: I understand why they shouldn't marry people who followed other gods. It would be very tempting to follow the local customs of your husband or wife, and get involved in idol worship. But why couldn't they use the gold or silver after it was melted down?

Ros: Moses said that God hated anything to do with those false idols, because he knew it would be a trap for his people. All those things were like the germs that cause diseases, like the TB bacteria, and HIV virus, that we've talked about. They could infect the thoughts and the love of God's people and gradually lead them in the *wrong ways*. So God warned them that if they were not true to him, he would discipline them, and even send them away from the land. But if they returned with all their hearts to God, he would bring them back. But he made sure they knew that whatever happened, he would not remove his faithful *love* from them.

Now, listen carefully to the words of Moses at the end of his speech: he said 'Today I call heaven and earth to witness that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. *Now choose life*, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.' (Deut 30:19-20, based on NIV)

And you know, God still offers us that choice. Will you choose to follow God, and choose life?

Carol: God is so patient, isn't he? We can always depend on his faithful love for us. But he expects us to stay true to him. We can learn a lot from these warnings.

Ros: Now let's hear what happened next, in this story...here on *Women of Hope*.

The boundary of Canaan was the river Jordan. It was spring, and the river was in full flood, overflowing its banks and spreading across the plain. The people could see no way of crossing it, with all their baggage and animals. Then the order was given: 'When you see God's covenant box being carried by the priests, you should follow it at a distance. You haven't been this way before,

so follow them' (Josh 3:3-4). So the people packed up and got ready, wondering how they would get across the flooded plain.

Then the priests took the covenant box on their shoulders. This box held the law of God in it; it was a special symbol of God's presence with them. They marched up to the edge of the water, and then they marched...right into the river!

Tammy: Wow, they must have been confident that God was going to do something special!

Ros: ...And God did! Immediately...the river stopped flowing - it had been cut off further upstream. Soon the riverbed was uncovered, and it quickly dried out. So the people were all able to walk across. Then they knew for sure that God would continue to look after them as they moved into the land (Josh 3:9-10). And that night they ate food from the *promised land* for the first time. That's the end of this part of the story...and the beginning of their new life.

Tammy: What an amazing experience - a real miracle!

Ros: Yes, it was a miracle. I talked to my friend who is an archaeologist...he studies the remains of ancient settlements. He told me that you can see where an earthquake could have dammed the river for a while just at the exact moment they needed it.

Tammy: Let's see if we can remember the first part of the story. What did Moses remind them about?... That's right, he made sure they understood that God was the creator of the whole earth...

Carol: ...and that he had called them and looked after them...

Tammy: yes, and he had made a special agreement, a covenant of love. They had agreed to keep the good laws that God gave them.

Ros: What was the *most* important warning Moses gave them? What do *you* think?

Tammy: I think it was this...they were not to have anything to do with the religion of the people who lived there already, because it would lead them in the wrong way.

Ros: They would have remembered this, because it was in the last message they heard from their beloved leader, Moses. It's a very important warning, and it's meant for us too. What can we learn about God from this? God wants us to follow him only! And what about the second part of the story?

Carol: The Israelites were stuck on the other side because the river was flooded! They had to have faith, and follow instructions, and then God stopped the flow of the river and made a way for them to walk across into their new home-land.

Tammy: They trusted God, did what he said, and he showed them the way forward. I love this story! I can just imagine them *holding their breath*, waiting to see what God would do. Sometimes I

feel like that when I can't see the way forward, I have to trust that God will show me the next step to take, and bring me safely through the situation. And he does - often in very surprising ways. That gives me confidence that he will always be with me, just as Jesus promised when he was here on earth.

Carol: Tammy why don't you read that promise to us?

Tammy: I'd love to. It's a special promise, because it was the last message from *our* beloved master Jesus. He said 'Listen: I will be with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matt 28:20)

Ros: Why don't we say it together? You can join in too. Jesus said...?

Tammy and Carol: 'Listen: I will be with you always, to the end of the age.'

Carol: We've learned a lot today about God's patience and faithfulness, and how he wants us to trust him and follow him only. I hope this week you can think about this story and what it tells you for your life.

Tammy: It's time for us to go, dear friend. If you have any questions, we would love to hear from you. So goodbye for now. Have a wonderful week and God's blessings on you.

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