

Remembering Maya

I didn't know Maya very well as she was often ill and didn't make it along to our women's group very often. But on the times she did come she always struck me as a faithful, godly woman who was bearing her illness without complaining. In May she was taken into hospital with breathing difficulties and her prognosis was very poor. Her long-term health issue was rheumatoid arthritis which caused a stiffening of her lungs.

As I went each day in her final week I grew in care and respect for her family and the way they were supporting each other and I also learned more about Maya. Initially she could speak a little although she tired easily. Before long she was put on a respirator and talking became nearly impossible.

One day, I decided I would take my Nepali Bible and read a Psalm to her. I felt like reading Psalm 23 but I was worried that Maya might not have been told that she was dying and it felt a bit like hinting. Paul and I prayed together and he encouraged me to go ahead and read it to her anyway. As I came out of the ICU that day I met Ram Chandra, her husband, and I said how I'd been able to read with her. He said that he had asked her just a couple of days before what he should read to her from the Bible and she had said Psalm 23. He hadn't yet shared it with her. Together we praised God that He had brought Maya the scripture that she had wanted to hear.

As the week went on Maya became more agitated and distressed. She found the respirator very uncomfortable and just wanted to take it off and go home. We knew she wouldn't be going home. We all prayed that Maya would live long enough to see her daughter who had been called home from Norway. Maya did get to speak to her daughter and hold her hand and we praised God for keeping Maya going that long.

At the end of the week, the doctors felt that the situation was no longer sustainable. In consultation with the family a decision was taken to remove the respirator and allow her to slip away. For me this is the worst part of Maya's last week as she became very angry. I think it was the morphine and the oxygen deprivation, but whatever the cause it was very distressing for the family. This was not the Maya that any of them had known and loved. Eventually, she became more peaceful and she died quietly.

At the moment Christians in Kathmandu have a terrible problem in knowing where to bury their dead. With no refrigeration facilities the funeral and burial had to be arranged very rapidly. Around a hundred phone calls were made before finally a place was found. The funeral, just three hours after her death, was raw with emotion. I don't think there was a dry eye in the church and people could be heard crying openly. Each in turn walked forward and placed flowers and scarves on the lid which was partially open over the coffin. When everyone had finished Ram Chandra walked to the front and quietly kissed his wife, tears welled up in me as I saw that tender act of love.

The coffin was carried carefully to a vehicle outside and the body was driven to a sand spit where two rivers meet about two and a half hours north east of Kathmandu. A small local church had given permission to do the burial there. The family began to prepare a grave but they didn't get far before a group of angry locals came threatening to beat them up. Two hours of tense negotiations followed before finally the locals acquiesced. They agreed that given the body and the mourners were there, the burial could go ahead. But they told the local church that the permission is only for the dead of that church and not for people from Kathmandu. So again the family got to work digging the grave on the rocky spit with their bare hands. They returned, exhausted, to Kathmandu at midnight, just eleven and a half hours after Maya died.

Maya was a quiet faithful Christian. For the last few years she has been mostly housebound but despite that she has spent time sharing the gospel with neighbours who she would invite to her room, she prayed and supported her brother in ministry and she spent many hours praying and reading her Bible. It grieves me that the end of her life was so hard but I rejoice that she is now at peace in heaven. I have so much to learn from people like her who face infirmity with faith, who minister despite their weakness and who walk closely to God day by day. Her legacy lives on in her children's faith and in the lives of those she disciplined and encouraged.

Please pray for Maya's family as they grieve. Pray too for Christians in Nepal as they try to work with the government to successfully resolve the difficult issue concerning where they should bury their dead. To hear more about this issue: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12977371>

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