Dr. Luke: Polio

Polio is a disease which has been here on earth since the beginning of time. It has only been in the last fifty years doctors have been able to begin to prevent it from happening. Polio is found mostly in places like Africa and parts of Asia. It is a disease which can be stopped from happening if shots are taken. It is important to know what to do if there is a polio outbreak where you live for you and your family.

The poliovirus gets inside of people through their mouths. It is passed through feces to hands to the mouth. Generally if one child gets polio in a family, then all of the children will get it. If one child gets polio it takes anywhere from 3 days to 30 days for other children to catch the polio virus.

Most of the world no longer has polio; that is a true blessing. The countries which still have polio are Nigeria, India, Afghanistan, and the eastern Mediterranean area. At one point, many years back, polio was found in all parts of the world. However, in the last fifty to sixty years it is no longer found in the Western Hemisphere like Canada, the United States, Mexico, Peru, Brazil and other countries in South America. It is not found in Europe and much of Asia. It is hoped soon that polio will be completely gone from the world. That should be a cause for great rejoicing. This is one reason for all children to receive the shots for polio and that is so no one in the world would ever get it again.

One of the things which helped make polio go away was the making of an oral vaccine by a scientist named Dr. Salk. Later a shot was developed which is even better than the oral vaccine. One of the things about polio is that not everyone who has the polio virus gets sick from it, however, the person who has the polio virus can pass it on to someone who might get sick. Doctors cannot tell who will get paralyzed from the polio virus or who will not. So, it is better for everyone to get the shots than risk dying or getting sick. Most of the time it is only children who get shots, like Lei’s baby we will talk about. Sometimes, during the summer months there will be outbreaks of polio and then adults who have never had a polio vaccination need to get a shot also.

Lei was at the clinic with her two month old baby boy. The nurse came into the room and told Lei her baby would need baby shots. They are called immunizations. Lei had heard other mothers talk about these shots but did not understand why her baby needed these shots.

The nurse told Lei the baby would get several shots including a shot for polio. She also told Lei the baby would need to get these shots when he was four months old, six months old, eighteen months old, and four years old. One shot is not enough to provide protection to a child; each child needs to get all of the polio shots to be protected.

Lei cried when her baby got his shots in his upper leg. She was surprised the baby got them there. The nurse told Lei babies get their shots in their upper leg until after age two years, then, when they are four years old, depending on how big their arm muscle is, they might get them in their upper arm.

On her way home from the clinic Lei met a friend of hers who was a nurse and Lei told her the baby got shots today, including polio. Her friend told her that was a very good thing to happen as it would help keep the baby healthy. Lei was confused. How could a shot help keep her baby healthy?

Her friend told her "polio is a virus, something so small it cannot be seen except with a very special instrument used in laboratories. Even though it is very small, it could do very bad things to your baby if he did not get the shots and got the virus. Polio could make some of your baby’s muscles very weak or not work correctly. Sometimes, depending on which muscle the polio virus gets into, it can make children not be able to walk; they must have braces to walk. Sometimes a child cannot use an arm or hold his head upright. Sometimes it can even get into the muscles of the lungs which help people to breathe. Sometimes it is so bad the child can die from not having muscles to breathe for himself."

"Taking the shot helps the baby not get the polio virus. The shots provide protection to the baby if he is exposed to the polio virus by other children or adults. It is very important to have the baby take all of the polio shots they are supposed to take. This can be as many as five shots from between the time they are two months old and four years old. As a mother you must remember to get your baby his shots. Some mothers take their children to clinics for shots, some to hospitals, some to special vaccinations clinics which are held in their neighborhood or town. It is not so important where your child gets his vaccination shots as it is to make sure they get them all."

There is a story in the Bible which talks about a boy named Jesus who grew in stature, which means physical health, in spirit, which means he has a part of his life which was a relationship with God, and in favor with God and man, which means he had a social component or had family and friends. Jesus came as a baby and grew into a man with a purpose.

The bible writes about Jesus becoming a man and even tells stories about Jesus healing people who had lots of different things wrong with them including a man who had paralysis. This is a story in the Bible: “One day as he, that is Jesus, was teaching, leaders came to him from every village of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right before Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he cried, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” When the leaders (that is those leaders from all of the other cities and regions who came to hear Jesus) they were upset with Jesus. They thought "Who is speaking? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked: "Why are you thinking these thoughts in your heart? Which is easier to say: '‘your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk?" But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins…" “He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately the man stood up in front of them, took what he was lying on and went home praising God for what had happened. The people who saw this were filled with amazement and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."” This is an amazing and true story.

We have learned about Jesus healing a physical illness called paralysis; Jesus can also heal spiritual illness. The spiritual illness is called sin, or missing the mark of what God wants us to do. When Jesus healed both the physical illness, his paralysis, and the man’s sin, he provided the man with complete healing.

In thebook of Romans, found in the Bible, it is written this: "everyone has sinned; yes, every one of us." Sin means we have not met God’s standards. The only way Lei can have a relationship with God is to ask Jesus to forgive her of her sins.

As they walked home, her friend asked Lei if she would like to have a relationship with Jesus. "All you had to do is ask Jesus for forgiveness of you sins" Her friend told Lei she needed to say a prayer like this one: “Dear Jesus, I have sinned and I know I have done wrong. I believe God exists and that you are his son. Jesus, I believe you came to earth to die on the cross for my sins so that I can be saved. I believe you rose from the dead and are still living today. I want to have this new life through Jesus.” Lei wanted to do this and asked Jesus into her heart by saying the words. Lei was very happy and wanted to learn more.

The Bible talks about Jesus as a boy because it was important for Jesus to be healthy growing up. It is important that all babies get their shots and grow up healthy. It is important Lei ask Jesus into her heart to forgive her of her sins.

It is important Lei get her baby vaccinated with special shots to protect her baby from illnesses, like polio, which can cause problems with his muscles, even cause him to die. Lei is happy she can take her baby to a clinic to get special shots to protect him. It still makes her want to cry when her baby gets shots and cries, but now she understands how important it is for him to get these shots

Lei’s friend also told her something very unusual which can sometimes happen to adults who had polio as children. Sometimes, not very often, adults who have had polio, even if they do not have a muscle weakness, can have what is called Post Polio Syndrome. Sometimes as long as thirty years later, people can have increased muscle pain, new muscle pain or even paralysis. This type of polio is not infectious.

The polio virus is very contagious, that means easily spread and caught by others; post polio syndrome is not infectious. It is important to go to the doctor and let them run a test to make sure it is not polio. As said earlier, the only time adults get a polio vaccine is if there is an outbreak of polio and the adult never has been vaccinated.

Sometimes people will say “you can get polio from the vaccination.” It is very, very rare for this to happen. Scientists have worked very hard to make the vaccines very safe for every child to take. The scientists and doctors want polio go to away forever from our world. It is very important you get your children vaccinated for polio not just once, but all four times. It is very important for mothers to remember to get their children vaccinated.

Sometimes children will have a sore leg or sore arm from getting the polio vaccination. This is called a side effect. Most of the time a mother can give their child a small amount of acetaminophen and the soreness will go away. Do not ever give a child aspirin to help with soreness or a fever. It can cause a very bad problem that is worse than most cases of polio. If a child has something worse than a sore leg or arm, the mother needs to go back to the clinic or hospital where the polio vaccination was given.

We have learned about polio and how to prevent it by getting the polio vaccination. We have also learned about Jesus who came to earth and died for our sins. If you decide to pray the prayer Lei prayed, asking Jesus to be your Savior, then you can have peace with God and eternal life with him. Having eternal life in heaven with God is even better than not having polio.