

A 7-DAY E-DEVOTIONAL

Gritty, Gospel-Based Reflections for Nurses in the Trenches

by Hui-wen (Alina) Sato & Praying Through ministries
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A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

God has given you a heart to care for others, which is what compelled you to go into nursing. You bring this heart into the stories of so much suffering, grief and loss, and much is asked of you on all levels - mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. This ministry of caring for the hurting is holy work.

Yet at times, if you're like me, it can feel so difficult to see where God is in the midst of all the chaos and darkness. There are stories we can't make sense of, and complicated situations where there are no easy answers. Spiritual platitudes don't seem to touch the depth of what we sometimes wrestle with.

This e-devotional is for all of us who mourn for our patients and seek to be comforted. It is for us who hunger and thirst for righteousness to mark and guide our work, not apathy or cynicism. It is for all of us who long to be pure in the hearts that we bring to our patients and colleagues, that we might see where God is at work in and through us.

I love the way Praying Through ministries genuinely understands the uniquely deep heartache of families navigating childhood illness, hospitalization and loss, and meets it with wise, gentle, Gospel-based ministry. My hope for this devotional is that the nurses who walk closely and ache alongside these patients and families will also feel seen and encouraged by the Lord's love.

As you slowly meditate upon each devotional, may the Gospel meet you in the burdens you bear on behalf of the patients and families God has entrusted you to care for.

If this resource encourages you, would you direct other nurses to the website, so that they might learn more about Praying Through ministries and the work they are doing for families and nurses? Our great hope is that together, we can better serve all who are hurting.

*-Hui-wen
(Alina) Sato*



A MESSAGE FROM PRAYING THROUGH FOUNDER

Dear Reader,

Four years ago our newborn son experienced a medical emergency that landed us in a 37-day NICU stay. Then a year and a half later he experienced another medical emergency that resulted in a 3-day PICU stay. In the thick of our medical crisis we were met with some of the kindest, most compassionate, faith-filled nurses. These men and women tenderly cared for our son. They were patient and understanding with us as parents. And they spiritually poured into me with scriptures and the words of their testimonies.

I will forever be grateful for the nurses who walked with us through our darkest seasons, but also for the nurses who minister to children and families around the world. As a nurse you have a unique opportunity to meet families in their suffering. What you say and what you do, no matter how seemingly big or small, has the potential to make an eternal impact.

Praying Through ministries exists to deliver the hope of the gospel to families navigating childhood illness, hospitalizations, and/or child loss, but we also exist to deliver that same hope to the incredible nurses that are on the frontlines pouring into those families.

We pray this beautiful e-devotional by Praying Through ministries volunteer and PICU nurse, Hui-wen (Alina) Sato will be a source of life-giving encouragement. We also hope that over time you'll benefit from the other resources we have created especially for you on our website, prayingthroughministries.org/nurses.

We are grateful for you.
We are praying for you.

— Jessika Sanders



ABOUT PRAYING THROUGH MINISTRIES



Praying Through ministries was founded in 2020 when the world was shut down due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Walking through suffering can often be lonely, but during the pandemic it was especially isolating. Hoping to bridge gaps and build connection through Christian community, the Praying Through Facebook communities (Praying through child loss & Praying through the NICU and hospitalizations) were created for women journeying through the NICU and child loss.

Sharing burdens and praying for one another in these online communities led to organic, authentic, and lasting friendships. From these very real connections, the heart behind Praying Through ministries outreach was born.

Since our inception 4 years ago, our online communities now host over 800 women. Over 6,500 items of Biblical encouragement have been sent to over 2,500 families in over 47 states and in 8 countries. This encouragement has been distributed through our in-person Prayer Circles at hospitals across the USA, through the milestone emails we send to grieving families, and through the series of tangible resources (care packages) we send to families as we walk alongside them through dark seasons of childhood illness, childhood hospitalizations, and/or child loss.

The heart of Praying Through ministries to serve families with tangible faith-based resources, ongoing support, and fervent prayer is also what inspired this e-resource for the nurses that pour into the families we serve.

DAY ONE

A Nurse's Ministry in Heavy Spaces



Carlos's parents dropped him off at school after the usual morning challenges of getting a nine year-old boy out the door. "Where is your water bottle? You need a jacket!" In their frustration, they didn't give him a hug at drop-off as they told him to behave and not cause distractions for his teacher.

Now Carlos lies in a hospital bed in the ICU, unreactive to all stimuli that should have him bouncing off the walls, fully yielded to the ventilator pushing breaths into his lungs. His parents are beside themselves with shock, devastation and regret. They never could have imagined that he would collapse on the playground at morning recess, as an undetected brain aneurysm ruptured, plunging him into permanent unconsciousness.

"I don't know how you all do this work," Carlos's uncle said to me through tears. I had no simple response. I only know that God has uniquely shaped and gifted us to work in these heavy, complicated spaces. Compelled by His love and compassion, we nurses move toward intense situations that often overwhelm or repel others.

Even still, moving from the 'normal' healthy world into a hospital unit full of suffering and death can feel like descending into darkness. In the worst moments, this darkness can be shocking and disorienting, even for those of us who don't generally shy away from it.

DAY ONE (continued)

Do you sometimes feel as though God is absent in these spaces? Oh friend, I know I have felt this way. But these spaces are where we actually join Christ in His work of descending, with eyes wide open, into the unfiltered reality of the world's brokenness. Our Savior knew the perfection and wholeness of Heaven's glory, but He came all the way down into our deepest agony to demonstrate the Father's love. This was the only way rescue was possible. Like Christ, we move from the more comfortable, 'normal' lives we know outside the hospital into the depths of our patients' agony. Like Christ, we bear close witness to the suffering, weep with those who weep, and give of ourselves sacrificially, so that others might in time be restored to wholeness. In times of loss and grief, we cling to hard-won resurrection hope that the world will not always be this way.

How incredible that God entrusts us, in the image of His Son, with the care of people from all ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, and life situations. What a privilege to meet the world in their most vulnerable moments with Christ's mercy, as the Spirit empowers, guides and works through us as nurses. We push back against the darkest forces with gritty courage and the light of Christ. We yearn for His kingdom to come through our present ministry in these heavy spaces, and groan with tears for Him to return again soon to restore all things fully.

DAY ONE (continued)

"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ."

-2 Cor. 1:3-5 NLT

Prayer

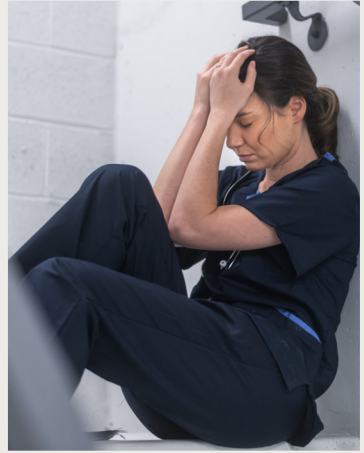
Lord, we confess it is hard to be in heavy spaces day after day, and our hearts lament over the suffering and death we see. Comfort our hearts with the assurance that You are not absent from these heavy spaces, and that you always go before us in drawing near to the brokenhearted. Strengthen us as we carry others' burdens and serve them with our giftings. Renew our hope and our faith daily, to do this hard and beautiful work. Be near to our patients and their families, and be near to us as we walk with them. In Jesus's name, amen.

Points to ponder

- What comfort does it bring, to consider that Christ has gone first into the heaviest of spaces on our behalf?
- In what ways have you seen God use you as His hands, feet, and embodied presence to meet a suffering world?
- When you find yourself preparing to shift from lighter, daily life into the heavy hospital world, meditate for a moment on Psalm 23:4. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

DAY TWO

Invitation to Lament in a Positivity-Obsessed World



It was one of those waves in our unit when all the patient cases seemed to be extraordinarily tragic. Severe child abuse, new devastating diagnoses of terminal cancer, a horrific car accident, a previously healthy child with an overwhelming mysterious brain infection, and a victim of violent crime.

As the Resource Nurse for my 12-hour shift on Monday, I moved throughout the entire unit helping anyone who needed a hand. I took in the stories, looked the shell-shocked parents in the eye when I entered their rooms, and checked in with particularly busy co-workers so they could go on break, to eat and decompress. My fellow nurses and I kept shaking our heads. "The unit is crazy. It's too much."

The next day after dropping off my kids at their elementary school, I found myself hugely disoriented as a couple of moms casually asked how work has been for me. The truth was, I was utterly heartbroken. Yet I felt a strange pressure to sugar-coat my response. There are a lot of reasons for this pressure. I recognize these stories can be so difficult and uncomfortable for non-medical people to take in. I also found that I was buying into the lie, that to express my anguish over my patients was to somehow publicly diminish the hope, joy, and peace of Christ in me.

DAY TWO (continued)

Our culture is obsessed with positivity. Even within the American church, we have often wrongly equated perpetual positivity as the best and truest expression of our belief in the goodness of God.

How do we navigate our internal grief response to the devastating suffering in this world, in light of our desire for real, gritty, God-honoring faith? We look to Christ as our best example. He was stable and secure in His Father's love and sovereignty, but He never dismissed the suffering around Him with glib, peppy platitudes. He took His time compassionately acknowledging the long roads people had walked. In Gethsemane, He poured His heart out to His Father, agonizing to the point of sweating blood (Matthew 26:36-44; Luke 22:39-44). This story isn't literary hyperbole in Scripture; He was actually this distressed over the horrific cost of sin and death. We find comfort in Him as the Suffering Servant; His example frees us from the unrealistic insistence of toxic positivity. He shows us that we can ache with grief and be rooted firmly in Christ at the same time.

The Christian's call is not to try and outperform the world's positivity with bigger smiles, less crying, a more polished image, and louder pep talks. Nor is our call to simply mirror the world's positivity, and then slap a spiritual label on top (i.e. "Everything's going to be ok; God is good!"). Following Christ's example, we see that our call is to soberly acknowledge the darkness for the reality it is, and enter into it with Spirit-empowered courage as people who can freely lament, all while still maintaining a solid hope (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Psalm 62 exhorts us to trust in God at all times, and find Him as our refuge. In between these words of encouragement, the Psalmist invites you and I to pour out our hearts before Him. The world around us may have difficulty hearing our stories as nurses. But we are free in our Father's safe refuge to lament fully for our patients, even as we seek to grow in trusting His ultimate goodness.

DAY TWO (continued)

"O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge."

-Psalm 62:8 NLT

Prayer

Lord, You know all that I carry in my heart for my patients. You know my questions, my groanings, my pleas. I lament, oh God, over the darkness in this world, and I run to You for refuge and comfort. Spirit, You intercede for my patients and for me with groanings that our words cannot express. Father, help me to trust You at all times, even when I don't understand everything I see. Jesus, help me to follow Your example of walking soberly and compassionately with the suffering. Help me to know - and share - a hope in You that is without toxic pretense, a hope that is gritty and true. In Jesus's name, amen.

Points to ponder

- Considering Christ's example of pouring out His heart to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, what does this tell us about how we can express ourselves before our Father?
- Further reading: Read Psalm 89:46-48, and then read 1 Cor. 15:54-58. In light of these passages together, consider how we can both lament with the Psalmist, "How long, oh Lord?" while also looking to Christ with hope.

DAY THREE

Small Offerings in Chaos and Crisis



"I remember you. You showed my son so much love the other day. I know you're busy but I just had to take a moment to say thank you. I'll never forget you."

I was running back and forth between my two very busy patients. In my heart, I was grumbling about how exhausting work had been in the last couple weeks, with tight staffing and so many very sick kids coming into our ICU.

The mom had stopped me in the hallway to share this beautiful word of appreciation, and it took me a moment to register that she was the mom of the patient that I had admitted from the medical floor into our ICU for respiratory distress a couple days ago. He was a teenage boy with severe developmental disabilities, non-verbal and immobile, but he was aware enough to look around, groan when he was upset, and smile when he was happy. I only took care of him for two hours before my shift ended. I hadn't interacted with him much, but I remember putting my hand on his arm, introducing myself, and telling him that we would do everything we could to take good care of him. I never imagined that my brief interactions with him would leave such a lasting impact on his mom.

Hospital life can feel incredibly chaotic, constantly full of crises and complicated patients. Do you ever feel small and powerless to make any significant positive impact, particularly in times of staffing shortages? I know I do, especially on the days I am stretched to my limit and beyond. This is our version of seeing overwhelming crowds with such hunger, and

DAY THREE (continued)

realizing we only possess a few loaves of bread and a couple of small fish to offer (John 6).

Thank God we know the Savior who is more than willing and able to take our small offerings in all this chaos, and use it beyond what we can ask or imagine to minister to multitudes. It's not to say that we will fix every patient's problems on this side of Heaven. It is, however, to say that we do not need to despair that our efforts are for nothing. We can trust God to do more through our meager offerings to impact our patients and coworkers for His Name's sake than we realize. In my brief time with my teenage patient, God used my simple obedience in honoring the 'least of these' in our society (Matt. 25:34-40), to deeply bless the patient's mom.

A wild healthcare system is the perfect context for us as His disciples to learn to live and serve by faith. Here we learn to trust not in ourselves, but in the God who works through us. We don't have to be the most impressive, or the most articulate. We simply follow our Master's example with humility of spirit and simple faith. We treat the most undignified patients with God-granted dignity. We lean on the Spirit, and bear the fruits of love and patience with anxious family members. We learn to be the servant of all (Matt. 20:26) - helping struggling nurses rather than bullying or gossiping about them; caring for 'needy' patients without complaining or rolling our eyes; working with diligence and integrity, rather than lazily cutting corners.

Yes, this requires sacrifice and dying to self. But it also leaves freedom to rest when we need it, because in both diligently working and taking necessary breaks, we demonstrate our faith that God can use whatever we bring in the course of a shift, to bless others and grow His good kingdom.

DAY THREE (continued)

“Then Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up. ‘There’s a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?’ ‘Tell everyone to sit down,’ Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, ‘Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.’ So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

-John 6:8-13 NLT

Prayer

Lord, You see the five loaves and two fish that I bring to my work. It feels so small and insufficient, but I praise You that You are able to take my offerings and bless more people than I can imagine, even in the midst of chaos. Please encourage my heart where I feel discouraged. Help me to walk in faith and faithfulness. Help me to be humble and diligent, and free me to rest when I need it, trusting You to multiply whatever I offer on each shift. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Points to Ponder:

- How does the story of the five loaves and two fish help to reframe perspective and grow our faith, when we feel unsure about how much impact we can really make as nurses?
- Spend some time praying Ephesians 1:16-23 over yourself and other believing coworkers in your nursing unit.

DAY FOUR

The Gospel and the Superhero Narrative



"You healthcare workers are superheroes!" The world's narrative can be such a tempting one for me to buy into. If I'm honest, I like feeling respected, even revered, for working in the intense environment of hospital life. The historical culture of stoicism in healthcare encourages the mentality that I need to always present myself as emotionally unshakable, as I constantly care for others in crisis.

It's true that God has wired and equipped us to deal with the unique intensity of a nurse's world. This is His grace. But does He call us to live from this worldly superhero mentality, to present emotional untouchability as our response to suffering people?

We need to be careful not to equate stoicism with living by faith, or equate perpetual (and sometimes inappropriate) cheerfulness with God's peace that surpasses understanding. After all, He exhorts us to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), and Christ Himself modeled a depth of anguished compassion with Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus died (John 11:33-36).

The Gospel gives us an upside-down counter-narrative that actually frees us to be more open-hearted towards our patients and families, without having to fear that we will be crushed by the weight of all the sadness. In the Gospel, we see how Jesus could have chosen a markedly easier route toward a glorious reign (Matt. 4:1-10), but He chose to open Himself up with a

DAY FOUR (continued)

vulnerability that was only possible because He knew He could commit His heartbroken spirit into His Father's hands. He knew the Father had the final say over all the brokenness of the world, as well as Jesus's own brokenness on the world's behalf. He trusted the Father was making a way through resurrection power for things to be made right. We follow Jesus in both deep vulnerability and tremendous hope (Phil. 2:4-11).

Jesus did not pray for His disciples to be removed or detached from the world. Instead, He prayed for them to be kept from the evil one as they lived entirely differently from the world's ways (John 17:15-16). Satan would love nothing more than to harden our hearts against God or against our fellow mankind as a way of coping with the difficult things we encounter at work. This is not to say that professional and emotional boundaries aren't necessary or helpful. But it is to say that for nurses following Christ, we can stay connected to the tender realities of the world's aching, and rather than hardening our hearts or turning away from God in despair, we can turn to Him all the more in lament and intercession for our patients and for our own selves.

I feel the hesitation from people when I tell them that I let myself feel for and weep over my patients on a regular basis. I hear their concern that I will become too devastated by it all. But I am convinced that this is the way of the cross, and the way of the cross does not leave me in death. Like our Master, we don't have to shy away from being broken for those around us, because we know our Father ultimately loves and carries us, as well as those we are broken up for.

DAY FOUR (continued)

"We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies."

-2 Cor 4: 7-10 NLT

Prayer

Lord, I feel the temptation to perform like a superhero to those around me. Thank You that You free me to be tender and vulnerable, just as Jesus humbled Himself in vulnerability to minister to suffering crowds. Help me to accept and even boast in my weaknesses, so that Your power may be displayed through me. Help me to be in this world but not of it, and keep me from the evil one when it is tempting to harden my heart towards You and towards people. In Jesus's name, amen.

Points to Ponder:

- How is God's invitation for us to find strength in Him different from the world's superhero mentality?
- How does Jesus's work on the cross free us to be more vulnerable towards our patients and families without being thrown into despair?

DAY FIVE

Is it Only the Healed who get the Testimony?



There could be no greater contrast between the two neighboring rooms. In one room, Daniel, the previously healthy six-year old, had been hit by a car and suffered a severe traumatic brain injury. No one had expected much meaningful recovery, but after weeks in our ICU, he was breathing on his own and talking again. His short-term memory remained impaired, and he would require extensive rehab, but his long-term prognosis was favorable and his recovery astounded all of us. In the next room, Camila, the previously healthy toddler, was undergoing a second brain death exam. She had fallen into the family pool while cousins were visiting from out of town. The adults had not noticed her disappearance in the midst of the noisy family gathering. The repeated brain death exam confirmed that her brain was no longer performing any vital functions.

Family members for both patients had come and gone, praying loudly and passionately for healing. Daniel's parents greeted all who entered their room with joyful smiles. "Isn't it amazing? It's a miracle. So many people were praying for him." In the meantime, Camila's parents quietly gripped each other's hands during the brain death exam, desperately whispering their prayers that Camila might somehow open her eyes, breathe on her own again, and reach her arms up for them. Tragically, she didn't.

In both the hospital and in broader culture, those who make incredible recoveries tend to get the easy testimony of God's goodness and faithfulness. But what do we do, then, with those who don't recover in this lifetime? Are they left to quietly exit the back door, hanging their heads in shame that they

DAY FIVE (continued)

didn't have praise of a miracle to report?

These are the real stories that regularly confront us in the hospital. Some patients recover miraculously. Others don't, and there doesn't always appear to be any simple explanation or formula as to who got the healing and who didn't.

The stories of the people Jesus loved are helpful to consider. John the Baptist, Jesus' faithful, beloved cousin, was murdered. Jesus did not rescue him in the 11th hour. Lazarus, Jesus' dear friend, fell ill and died. To Mary and Martha's chagrin, Jesus did not rush to prevent Lazarus's death either, but He did eventually arrive to call Lazarus forth from the tomb, giving him a miraculous second chance at earthly life. It wasn't about one man deserving death or healing, more than the other. The death of John the Baptist honored the Lord. The death and resurrection of Lazarus honored the Lord. Jesus dearly loved both men, but upon first appearance, only Lazarus 'got the healing.'

These stories push us to think through how God's love and goodness run deeper than the presence or absence of illness and death. If Romans 8:35-39 assures me that neither death nor life, nor height nor depth, can separate me from the love of God, it also recognizes that awful lows in life, including death, are a part of the human experience, even for those the Lord loves. Somehow, His love and goodness co-exist with the realities of death and loss. His love still touches down in the depths of grief connected to losing the ones we love, and He ultimately overcomes the power of death.

This doesn't make the suffering of our patients and their families any easier to witness. It doesn't make our patients' earthly deaths any less tragic. But it does remind us that it is not only those with the healing who get to testify of God's goodness and love. He walks closely with all who deeply grieve, His Spirit sustaining, counseling and comforting us. Our greatest testimony is of the Savior who was Himself afflicted by suffering and death. He overcame the grave, so that by His wounds, *all* who hope in Him might be fully healed on the Final Day.

DAY FIVE (continued)

"But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless."

-1 Cor 15: 51-58 NLT

Prayer

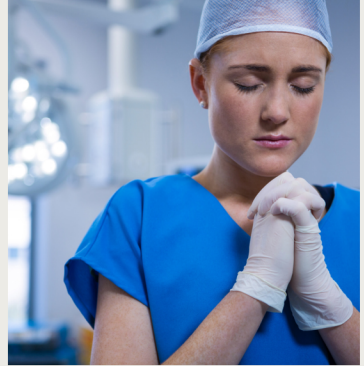
Lord, we always ache for those in our care who are suffering, and we continue to beseech You for their healing. For those who recover, let them testify that You are the One we live for, because You are the One who died for us. For those who do not recover, let Your mercy be upon their loved ones. Even in grief, let them know Your nearness as the One who understands the agonizing sting of death. In their sorrow, let Your love be so evident in Christ. In Jesus's name, amen.

Points to Ponder:

- What does the story of John the Baptist tell us about the testimony of life that we have in Christ?
- Meditate on Psalm 73:23-28

DAY SIX

Revised Expectations, Refined Faith



My patient was one of the sickest in the unit. Vital signs had been labile for days, despite the patient receiving the maximum amount of medical support to sustain viable blood pressures and oxygen levels. I quietly walked into the room so as to not disturb the fervent prayer meeting amongst the family members and visiting friends from their church. "Lord, we know You are in control, not the doctors! We ask You to heal this body. Raise her up again! We believe in You!"

I slipped over to the IV pump to give a medication, and the small crowd finished up their prayers. I felt so somber, looking at the unresponsive patient, tubes connected everywhere. I felt startled by the calm grins of the crowd as I lifted my eyes. "God is good! We know the doctors told us to get ready to say good-bye, but we will wait on Him. We know He will heal her."

Every time I've walked into these scenes over the past 13 years of my career, I would always feel conflicted as a Christian nurse. I love the Lord. I know He can heal any of my patients, and I've seen recoveries that have felt nothing short of miraculous. But I've also seen enough death to know that He doesn't always heal, even after so much expectant prayer.

When Jesus started his early ministry and began to reveal Himself as the Messiah, His followers had enough young faith to leave their old lives and follow Him. Their initial expectations were that this Messiah would finally liberate them from Roman oppression. They thought their faith would only grow and solidify, as the Messiah met these earthly expectations, as He finally answered all their prayers for a good life.

DAY SIX (continued)

But soon, these early followers found that Jesus wasn't doing what they expected the Messiah to do. Why wasn't He calling down fire from heaven to destroy their enemies? Why was He reluctant for word to spread about the life-changing miracles He did perform? Why did He deny His faithful followers a lot of their desires, even arguably important ones? Many turned away, as their expectations of the Messiah were disappointed (John 6:60-67).

His followers never imagined a kingdom where there were blessings reserved for the poor in spirit and those who mourned, not just for those with an easy, carefree life. A kingdom where the Messiah Himself would suffer on all levels, be forsaken by Father God, and die in the company of thieves. A kingdom where the road to resurrection glory was paved with suffering and hard-fought obedience in the darkest moments. As they found their original expectations of God undone, their faith was put through the fire. It was only in the undoing of their expectations, that their faith could deepen and mature into something that trusted God for more than even the sweetest and best earthly gifts.

After witnessing so many recoveries, deaths, and ongoing chronic illnesses, I have found my own expectations undone, and my faith refined. Have you been unraveled sometimes as well? It's incredibly uncomfortable. But with time and experience, we can slowly learn to live in that tension between the miracles and the losses, trusting God as the One still worthy of our affection and loyalty in all things.

I invite you to learn with me, from the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as we consider our precious patients. These three men had full faith that the Lord could rescue them from the burning fiery furnace, but submitted their expectations to His sovereignty. At the end of the day, they set their hearts on worshiping and trusting Him, regardless of their earthly outcome. Their hard-won faith was nestled in the deep conviction that in both life and death, they forever belonged to the King of the Universe.

DAY SIX (continued)

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.'"

-Daniel 3: 16-18 NLT

Prayer

Lord, we confess it is hard to submit our expectations to You when we just ache for deliverance from suffering, for our patients, their families, and ourselves. Teach us to come to You with ever deepening faith, trusting that You are always for us and not against us, trusting that not even death or life can separate us from Your love. You are the Author of our faith. Help us to worship You in all seasons and circumstances. In Jesus's name, amen.

Points to Ponder:

- Read Matthew 4:1-11, and consider how people at this point expected the Messiah to set up a strong, earthly kingdom. Consider what Jesus's faith looked like here, in the face of what peoples' expectations and Satan's temptations.
- What does it look like to submit expectations about our patients to God, while holding steadfast faith in His character and love?

DAY SEVEN

The Savior Came for Patient and Nurse



After becoming a nurse, I developed a heightened sense of vulnerability in both myself and my loved ones. I saw so many previously healthy patients who never imagined ending up in the ICU following a freak car accident, unexpected cancer diagnosis, or brain bleed. I saw how anything could happen to anyone at any time. Even so, I still enjoyed a decently comfortable reassurance in being the strong one helping the weak, the healthy one helping the sick. I could still clock out at the end of each shift and enjoy my healthy life.

Then came the moment I got my own cancer diagnosis. The lump I'd discovered in my right breast was not the benign cyst I'd hoped. I became the patient with a new cancer diagnosis, and felt my frailty in new ways. Soon after I completed surgery and radiation, I was settling into long-term hormone therapy when my husband suffered an unexpected infection after an outpatient procedure. The infection led to an abscess and intense swelling in his epidural space, severely compressing his spinal cord. He went into emergency surgery to treat the spinal cord injury, stayed in a rehab hospital for a month, and then returned home to continue rehabilitating. Six months out from surgery, he can go to work and do daily tasks, but suffers ongoing deficits.

As much as I thought I understood my vulnerability, these personal health crises came as a shocking reality check nonetheless. We nurses are in need of a Savior, just as much as our patients. Not only did I see how close my husband and I got to physical death, I also saw my sin, doubts,

DAY SEVEN (continued)

and temptation in the lowest moments of suffering to 'curse God and die' (Job 2:1-10). Our physical vulnerabilities and spiritual ailments expose the need we all have for the only eternal, perfect One who can reconcile and restore our embodied souls.

We nurses work in the midst of a battleground. We bear witness to such suffering, such anguish, such loss. We also bear witness to beauty, love and restoration. We have some days when we see God working so clearly and so powerfully through us. Other days, we suffer in the thorns and thistles of doing the hard work of healing, within a hugely flawed healthcare system and a deeply broken world. We carry our own personal struggles, aches and pains, even as we show up to try and care for others. We are as vulnerable to illness and injury as our patients are. No one understands the nurse's heart, the nurse's work, and the nurse's need, better than our Savior.

The Savior came for both patient and nurse. At the end of the day, we are all in need of His healing, acceptance and mercy. As nurses, we are called in our frailty and weakness, empowered by His Spirit and strength, and we work each day with beauty and struggle, with our eyes on that future, final, glorious Day of Promise.

DAY SEVEN (continued)

"In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven's Armies will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world. It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. There he will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears. He will remove forever all insults and mockery against his land and people. The Lord has spoken! In that day the people will proclaim, 'This is our God! We trusted in him, and he saved us! This is the Lord, in whom we trusted. Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!'"

-Isaiah 25:6-9 NLT

Prayer

Lord, I am humbled by my patients and by my own frailties. Thank You that You see and know us by name. Thank You for loving us with Your very life. Thank You for letting me be a part of Your beautiful, tender work of ministry to my patients and their loved ones. Thank You that You have made a way for the ultimate healing, the ultimate rescue, far beyond what I can do as a nurse. I worship You, Emmanuel, God with us. In Jesus's precious name, amen.

Points to ponder:

- As you bring your own humanity to our Savior, what personal vulnerabilities can you invite Him into, to speak His hope and healing?
- Read Isaiah 25:6-9 out loud, but replace references to "all peoples / nations / faces" or "we/us" with personal pronouns for yourself ("me/my"). Read it again, replacing those references with the names (and corresponding pronouns) of some patients who have deeply marked your heart. Let His Word bring comfort to you and those whom you have grieved.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hui-wen (Alina) Sato has been a pediatric ICU nurse since 2010. Her passion is to bring voice to the inner heart experiences of nurses, and to provide encouragement and support to fellow healthcare workers who are weary and disheartened by the many challenges of patient care. She has delivered a [TEDTalk](#) on the experience of grief in caregivers, and a presentation with [End Well](#) around preserving our humanity in healthcare, particularly in end-of-life care. Her writing has been published in American Journal of Nursing, Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine, and the Oxford Handbook of Meaningful Work. She lives with her husband, two daughters, two tortoises, and one complicated dog in Los Angeles, CA.



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