

How I Discovered God Exists

by Grace Tazelaar, MS, RN

My freshman year in nursing school was exciting – and tumultuous.

I had just turned 18 when I entered nursing school, excited to study nursing and learn so many new things. There were many firsts – my first patient encounter, first injection, and first surgery observation.

With these new experiences came lots of questions as well. Among them for me was the question of why God allows suffering. How can a good God, if he existed, allow evil? Does God really exist, or was God a figment of my imagination? Was he a psychological weakness, as my high school teacher had suggested?

My diploma school of nursing was in Chicago. The nurses' residence had a sun deck on the roof accessed from the seventh floor. It was known as "seventh heaven." During the day it was great for suntanning. At night, it was a good place to watch the stars and get some fresh air, since we didn't have air conditioning. When Martin Luther King was shot my freshman year, we went to the rooftop to watch the progress of the fires from the rioting that took place. We were on alert for disaster preparedness.

My freshman year in nursing school was also tumultuous for my family. My family had moved to a new smaller home. My mother was hospitalized for a severe depressive episode after she tried to commit suicide. My only sister, a year younger than me, was a senior in high school trying to cope with the move, Mom, and finding a job. My father was a truck driver who worked hard at keeping it all together.

One day, shortly before a scheduled break from nursing school, I received a phone call in the nurses' residence from the emergency room (ER). My father was there and needed me. I went to the ER and the doctor showed me the X-ray of dad's right leg. There was a compound fracture of the tibia and fibula. Dad told me that a 50-gallon drum of foundry sand had fallen on it when he was making a delivery. He was being admitted to the orthopedic ward for surgery the following day.

I now had two parents in two different hospitals, a sister who did not know how to drive and who had just begun her first job as a secretary, and first-year final exams coming up.

That evening, I went up to the sundeck. I told God that I really needed to know that he existed. I had been operating on the premise that even if God did not exist, it was better to act as though God did. It couldn't hurt – life as a Christian was a good, moral, upstanding life. If God did exist and I lived as though he did not exist – doing as I pleased – I could be in big trouble. However, in this crisis, I really needed to know that God was Sovereign, and he was who I had been taught he was. I needed to know that he loved and cared for me and that he would help me through this difficult time.

That night, summer storms were rolling through the area and clouds were moving fast overhead. I looked up at the night sky and saw one star shining between the clouds. "Yep, that's me," I thought. "I'm all alone."

I prayed again that God would show me that he existed. The wind ripped around me and I looked up again. This time I saw two stars in the sky. I took this to mean that I was not alone, that God was there with me and he did exist, and I was comforted.

The apologetic problem of why God allows evil and suffering has continued to present itself throughout my life. Nursing provides opportunities to be with others during sacred moments of both birth and death. I have experienced times of great joy – when I graduated from nursing school, college, and grad school; when my sister was married and then added three children to our family; when I bought my first car and my first home.

I have also experienced times of great struggle: when I lost friends and colleagues in Uganda to the civil war and HIV/AIDS, when my father died within a year of my return to the U.S., and when my sister died of cancer and left behind her husband and children.

Throughout these times, I have never again doubted the existence of God. I had experienced his Spirit wrap his arms around me in the wind on the rooftop deck of the nurses' residence. He put two stars in the night sky to show me he existed—and that I was not alone.



[Grace Tazelaar](#) is a veteran missionary nurse who offers wisdom from years of experience serving God cross-culturally. Find more resources, best practices, and what you need to know about missionary nursing at [NCF Missions](#).