

Intersections of Faith and Health

by Grace Tazelaar, MS, RN

I have always been taught that whatever vocation a person might choose, we are Christians first. I was also taught that faith is not a one-day-a-week endeavor. We represent Jesus in all that we do.

[Nurses Christian Fellowship](#) is about Christian nursing. We are not just nurses who happen to be Christian; we desire to be Christians who live out our Christianity through our profession of nursing. This is one place where faith and health intersect for Christian nurses.

I've always been grateful for this teaching and I seek to encourage others to incorporate it into their worldviews. For many nurses, nursing is just a job or a way to make money. It is hard work, unappreciated work, 24/7 work.

However, it is also privileged work. We get to care for people at some of the most vulnerable times in their lives. If we approach our work as Christians first, we get to represent Jesus to people. We get show his love to others as we serve him.

I love helping nursing students grapple with what it means to be a Christian nurse in today's healthcare environment. How can we live out our faith through our nursing practice and give excellent, compassionate care to those whom God has entrusted to us?

Bible Basics

Christian nursing receives much of its unique perspective on healthcare from the Bible. It teaches us about the importance of caring for our physical bodies. The incarnation of Jesus speaks to the value that God has placed on our physical bodies. Jesus gave us the example of caring for the whole person when he healed people and forgave their sins.

Jesus could have done any number of miracles to prove he was the Messiah and improve the lot of the Jewish people. He could have eliminated poverty or overthrown the Roman government and ushered in the expected Messianic reign. Instead he healed people physically. Jesus understood that our faith and our health are intimately connected.

Healthcare has been a powerful tool in communicating the gospel message. Just as people were impressed in Jesus' day that he was able to heal the blind, lame, and demon possessed, many today see the effects of medical science as miraculous and come for

healing. Mission hospitals were and continue to be places where people come to be healed physically and hear the Good News about Jesus.

Challenges in the Crossroads

However, there are challenges to the intersection of faith and health. Healthcare is expensive to sustain both here and abroad. Many churches and mission organizations are trying to get out of the healthcare business. Indeed, many of the church-based hospitals that provided charity healthcare in the U.S. have been sold and many mission hospitals have been turned over to governments.

Healthcare professionals may look to science and technology as the answer to healthcare problems and forget the God who sovereignly instituted the created order that allows us to study and develop healthcare. Healthcare has become big business (nearly 18% of our GNP). It is easy for healthcare professionals to get so caught up in the busyness and business of caring for people physically that we forget we are just the instruments that God uses to heal. We may neglect to provide spiritual care and relegate that to the clergy.

The problem not only lies with those in the healthcare arena but also occurs among those involved in theology and missions. Pastors are concerned about the souls of their congregations and leave the health issues to healthcare professionals. They rarely talk about taking care of our physical bodies. Theologians grapple with the role of faith in healing and some have mistakenly attributed disease to a lack of faith. For those with chronic diseases and infirmities, it adds the burden that not only are they physically impaired, but they are also spiritually deficient. Mission organizations and churches see healthcare as a means to plant churches instead of focusing on the church's role to care for the sick, injured and dying in both physical and spiritual capacities.

Reuniting faith and health is making slow progress. One Christian college now offers a master's degree in [Global Public Health Nursing](#) that will equip nurses for healthcare missions in the future. A few seminaries are exploring issues of faith and health through courses on the role of the church in healthcare. I continue to work with a group of healthcare professionals to develop [Health for All Nations](#) and [Best Practices](#) in healthcare missions.

My prayer is that these and other efforts will bring glory to God and offer *shalom* to people around the world.



[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](#).