



BY PAMALA K. MCCARVER

Responding To God's Call

ABSTRACT: *Life is very busy for most nurses who may find it hard to share of themselves outside of work. This nurse discovered God's call to serve a young boy with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and his family through a Facebook post. What she subsequently learned about how God calls and uses Christians changed her life—and the life of the family.*

KEY WORDS: *Christian nursing, Facebook, ministry, service, vocation*

THE CALL

I was introduced to Nicholas in the most contemporary of ways, via Facebook. An online friend had commented on a site that caught my attention, "Pray for Nicholas." My friend was Nicholas' home hospital teacher. I was relatively new to Facebook and it was the first time I had seen the word "pray" in a profile.

Nicholas was a 5-year-old boy from our community who had stage 3 non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Nicholas had been in the hospital due to multiple infections. His chemotherapy had been stopped; he was very sick child.

Nicholas' Facebook story began August 3, 2011. His mother, Danielle, posted, "I just want to ask everyone for your prayers. [We] are in the hospital with Nicholas and they found lymphoma (cancer) in his chest."

I discovered reading Nicholas' story that he was the oldest of four children. His parents were both 24. The school where he had attended

kindergarten the previous term was collecting "Nickels for Nicholas" and organizing bake sales to help with expenses. Trips to the pediatric treatment cancer center were a 340-mile round trip drive. In addition to mileage costs, there were also other expenses related to long-term hospital admissions. Nicholas had just been discharged from a 3-week admission; his sixth birthday was in 2 days.

on his birthday. I received Nicholas' mom's approval and the press released the story.

I went to Nicholas' home on his birthday. I expected my visit to be a one-time meeting. Nicholas had lost 15 lbs since his diagnosis. He was thin, pale, and appeared very sick.

I will never forget his smile as the fire trucks drove up the street where he lived with lights flashing and sirens sounding off in celebration of his special day. The moment was moving. Nicholas' story was broadcast at the top of the evening news and his picture was front page of the next morning's newspaper.

DISCOVERING NEEDS

During this special birthday visit, my husband and I discovered this family

*Reading his story on Facebook, it was clear that
Nicholas' family needed help.*

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Nicholas' story is shared by permission of his family.

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Reading his story on Facebook, it was clear that Nicholas' family needed help—more than the planned bake sales could generate. I was compelled to raise awareness within my community sensing people would be willing to support this family.

My husband is the fire captain at the local fire station. As captain, it would not be difficult to get the press to do a story that included fire trucks and a little boy struggling with cancer

had many needs. For the weekly 340-mile round trip to the cancer center, Danielle wondered if their older model van would make the trip. The van had previously broken down on one trip so this was a pressing need. As winter was fast approaching, my husband thought it would be nice to deliver firewood for this family. Living in a mountain community wood is not hard to obtain. With the help of friends, we delivered two pick-up



truckloads of firewood. When we arrived, Nicholas came out in the cold to thank us. He put a bright green rubber bracelet on my arm with the words, “Hope for Nicholas.”

My hour commute to work provides ample time to listen to Christian radio, which prepares my heart for a long day in the hospital’s Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. It was the beginning of December and Christmas music filled the air. A familiar song

would contribute to his already poor health. I knew by the end of that call she needed more than a car—she needed someone to journey alongside her.

For me, it was a matter of obedience. I have served over 30 years in healthcare. Working per diem provides flexibility and opportunity to learn many services. Four years ago, I had spent a year serving in hospice. I had gained the experience to journey through pediatric oncology with her.

he hear, he answered. The next day Nicholas was started on new medication and within a few days he was released from the hospital. The day I got home from the hospital, I received a phone call from a stranger named Pamala.

HERE I AM, SEND ME

A couple of months after I met Nicholas I pondered how I could I have been chosen to serve this family and help them grow in their faith? As I listened to Danielle share her story during our 11-hour days, I realized it was not about me. I thought of the prophet Isaiah:

*I have many times read the story of the call of Isaiah...
It was not until I met a 6-year-old boy that I really
understood what the prophet was sharing with
his readers.*

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory . . . Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me! Isaiah 6:1-3, 8

took on new meaning as I listened to the lyrics of *The Christmas Shoes*. One line says “I knew that God had sent that little boy, to remind me just what Christmas is all about” (Ahlstrom & Carswell, 2001). Looking at my green bracelet, I realized God had sent this sick little boy as my Christmas gift. I invited Nicholas and his family to the children’s Christmas program at church the following Sunday. Nicholas had not been around other children since his diagnosis. It was the first time Nicholas’ and his mom had been to church. They continued to come as they were able and Danielle joined a woman’s Bible study.

Finding a reliable car was not as easy as obtaining firewood. I prayed, begged, and harassed anyone that would listen. I am learning to be careful what you pray for; you might be the answer to your own prayer.

One afternoon, Danielle shared her concerns for the impending trip for weekly chemotherapy. Her son was sick and she was concerned the chemo

I could easily have rationalized that I had too many other things to do or that I would rather not walk this path. However, I believed God had already called me to journey with this family. At this stage of my faith journey I’d learned the benefits of obeying God. My choice was made.

Our weekly journey to Valley Children’s Hospital in Madera began at 5 a.m. In the beginning I asked, “Why me?” By the third week I wept in gratitude, “Lucky me.”

The 6-hour drive and the 5-hour clinic appointments were an opportunity for a young mom to share her story. Just recently she shared her story with the women in her Bible study:

I do not come from a Christian home.... As I sat in the hospital watching my son’s health decline, I thought this is the end; my son is going to die. I cried out, ‘I do not know if there is a God or something out there, but if so please help my son, please help me.’ Not only did

Oswald Chambers wrote about these verses, “God did not address the call to Isaiah; Isaiah overheard God saying, ‘Who will go for us?’ The call of God is not for a special few; it is for everyone. Whether or not I hear God’s call depends on the state of my ears; and what I hear depends on my disposition” (Chambers, 1994).

This new way of viewing God’s call brought me to a place of repentance. I knew without a doubt there were many times when God had called but I was too busy doing good things and I missed his call. How many times had I rationalized my service for my church, my Bible studies,

my family, and my job, and ignored the people whom God placed in front of me? I wondered how many times I had told others I would pray for them when God wanted me to do much more. I thought of the words of James 2:15-17:

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

THE SACRED JOURNEY

The opportunity to journey through pediatric oncology with patients like Nicholas is a privilege only a few are allowed. Patients, parents, family members, and staff enter daily battles fighting a horrific disease. Listening to their stories I felt like Moses on holy ground. I sensed the presence of God. (Exodus 3:5). In one of the last interviews with Mother Teresa she was quoted, "We try to pray through our work by doing it with Jesus, for Jesus, to Jesus. That helps us to put our whole heart and soul into doing it.

After that trip I had an idea. There was something about the costume that not only helped Nicholas, but also had an effect on anyone in his presence. There was little that I could do for Nicholas physically but I could help him emotionally. We started planning the costumes he would wear for future treatments. As Nicholas arrived for his treatments the staff eagerly awaited the cowboy, the ninja, the dirt bike rider, or the power ranger.

As I watched Nicholas fight cancer, I experienced what researchers were investigating about whether the mind matters in cancer survival. Initially modern medicine focused intently on fighting cancer with medical management. In this new model that considers the role or attitude and thinking about illness, many believe the healthcare team "overlooked a natural ally in the battle—the patient's personal mental management of the stresses associated with cancer" (Spiegel, 2011, p. 502). Many physicians believe that the stage and tumor type, general health, and medical treatment explain the differences in outcome. Many patients believe that an attitude can make a difference in the outcome of the disease. Spiegel's finding suggests

awards in his AWANA program. The American Legion awarded him "The Good Deed Award" for raising \$1,300 and awareness for a bone marrow transplant for a friend he met at the cancer clinic. Danielle, Nicholas, and their friends hosted a Swab Event and bake sale. Everyone in the community was provided the opportunity to provide a buccal swab, which registered them with the worldwide registry of bone marrow and stem cell donors. Nicholas also was chosen as the 2012 campaign child for a Make a Wish fundraiser, "Helmet of Hope." He worked tirelessly from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m. raising money so other children with life-threatening medical conditions may have a wish granted.

I do not know why little boys have to suffer with cruel diseases but I know that God works all things for good and he has been with this family throughout their long hard journey. I think they would agree with the words of singer songwriter Laura Story in her song *Blessings* (2011),

*'Cause what if your blessings
come through rain drops
What if Your healing comes
through tears
What if a thousand sleepless
nights are what it takes to know
You're near
What if trials of this life are
Your mercies in disguise.* 

*The call of God is not for a special few; it is
for everyone.*

The dying, the cripple, the mental, the unwanted, the unloved they are Jesus in disguise" (Desmond, 1989).

Like other young boys, Nicholas enjoys wearing costumes. The first costume he wore as he returned to the clinic for chemotherapy was as a pirate. He had lost so much weight that the adult hat and the costume dwarfed his little body.

that emotional support is not only psychologically beneficial but also medically effective.

Fourteen months later, I sat in the same clinic where my journey with pediatric oncology began. I marveled at God's abundant answer to a young mom's prayer. Nicholas is now on monthly chemotherapy maintenance. He has a church family and has won

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