Leader’s Guide

Episode 9

Will Our Patients Listen?

Summary

Our ability to care for our patients, both physically and spiritually, will greatly depend upon our ability to truly empathize with their difficulties and struggles. Every person is made in the image of God, and we have opportunities to communicate this truth to our patients in a powerful way. If they recognize our care for their physical condition, they will be more likely to consider what we say regarding what only the Great Physician can do for them.

Speaker

Dr. Francis Nuthalapaty is a maternal-fetal medicine physician and Obstetrics and Gynecology Residency Program Director at the Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville, Georgia. He became a committed Christ follower during his fellowship and is sensitive to the power of the gospel in training environments. He and his wife Elizabeth have three children. For further information or to contact Dr. Nuthalapaty, email him at fsn@nuthalapaty.net.

Discussion Questions

1. What from this video inspired, edified, or challenged you?
2. Dr. Nuthalapaty’s experience growing up, despite being in a Christian home, left him confused that the way to be right with God was through right performance. Are there any lingering conceptions of faith and practice that remain from your upbringing that affect your view of the gospel today? Do you have examples of how you have moved past incomplete views in the past?

Some participants may, like Francis in his fellowship, just now be coming to a realization that they have carried an insufficient view of God and the gospel that needs to be revitalized. Perhaps all this talk about sharing the gospel with others has prompted participants to understand the gospel more fully. Take some time to talk with your group about how their understanding of the gospel has grown, so you can all have a better understanding of where people may be coming from.

1. How did Dr. Nuthalapaty’s recognition of mankind being “fearfully and wonderfully made” influence how he communicated physical imperfections to his patients?

Recognizing the hand of God in a person’s life enables us to recognize that an “abnormality” is not an accident, not a random cruel event. Rather, it illustrates the fact that God makes everyone different, with different strengths and weaknesses, and our calling is to seek His purposes in whatever He sovereignly sends our way.

1. Has there been a situation in your own life that devastated you, as occurred in the lives of Dr. and Mrs. Nuthalapaty, but now enables you to better empathize with your patients and minister to them? (See Romans 8:18-25, Romans 12:15 and 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.)

One of God’s purposes in calling and enabling us to live through hard circumstances is so we can minister to others with similar challenges. Whatever difficulties we have encountered can be used for God’s glory, if we look for His grace toward us and are willing to communicate that grace to others.

1. See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What does this verse tell us about how God will use our sufferings, weaknesses and imperfections? Why are healthcare professionals hesitant to be vulnerable with patients?

Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was an instrument in his life to keep him humble. Rather than discouraging him, the eventual result was that it more clearly showed him God’s power through his weakness. Perhaps healthcare professionals are hesitant to express vulnerability with their patients because they want their patients to have confidence in them and in the care they provide, and this is not necessarily bad. However, in whom do we want our patients to ultimately trust? If we subtly communicate to our patients that we don’t need God, then why should they listen to us when we seek to point them to Him? It’s like the parent who takes their child to church but doesn’t go with them.

1. Dental assistant Harriette Forry illustrates in her video clip the “team” approach to spiritual care for patients, that the love shown by one team member could open the door for a different team member to point patients to Christ. Do you have Christian teammates at your workplace? How can you support each other in communicating the love of Christ to your patients? (See John 17:20-21.)

It is a tremendous blessing to have fellow healthcare workers who look to Christ to work alongside you in the proclamation of the gospel, for multiple reasons. First, we are encouraged and inspired by each other’s boldness and willingness to step out in faith. Secondly, our mutual efforts present a unified testimony to our patients. Recognize in John 17:20-21 that Jesus called His followers to unity “…that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (KJV). In other words, so that more would recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Did God answer Jesus’ prayer? See Acts 2:42-47. Is God still answering Jesus’ prayer?

1. Dr. Matt Montgomery shares the following reflection: “I’ve found that both Christian patients and non-Christian patients are anxious to hear what I have to say once I can display to them God’s love in person.”
2. **Are most of your spiritual patient discussions with Christians or non-Christians?**

We cannot know for sure which patients are walking with Jesus and which are not, but at least we can often determine through faith flags and conversation if they are comfortable discussing spiritual things. Our efforts to share God’s love should certainly not be limited to one group or the other; both situations are great opportunities to encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thess 5:11).

1. **What are some similarities and differences regarding these discussions?**

With the patient who is comfortable discussing spiritual matters and who is somewhat familiar with the Bible’s teachings, interaction can be more scripture-filled and meaty.  Alternatively, for the patient less familiar with the things of God it might be wiser to spend more time establishing a relationship through secular conversation, all the while looking for an opportunity to interject whatever biblical truth might speak to the person based on their current situation.  As Dr. Jacob Greuel says in episode 5, “meter the dose.”

1. Dr. Krystal Mattox exhorts us towards “caring about our patients enough to know what’s going on in their life.”
2. **What makes this hard?**

Finding out what’s going on in a patient’s life (more than just their healthcare concerns) takes time, and time can be a precious commodity on a busy day.  Also, some patients may not want to share details about their lives, although this seems rare – in most cases patients are honored when their doctor takes a personal interest in them.

1. **What makes this valuable?**

Showing an interest in a patient’s life beyond their physical health will demonstrate to them that you are motivated by more than just medical procedures, more than just a paycheck, and it could cause them to wonder why you seem to care more than many others in healthcare.  Secondly, the more you learn about their life, the better able you are to speak into their lives with wisdom from the Bible, and the more able you will be to pray specifically for their personal concerns.

9. What is one take-home item from today’s session that you hope to implement?

Additional Resources

1. *The Practical Art of Spiritual Conversation* by Schultz, James Harrison and Rogers, David