

## A Stop Called "Malpractice" Along the Road of Sanctification

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A healthy, young, teenage girl, sitting on my exam table, full of life and vigor; a prescription for an antibiotic for an ear infection; two days later, on Christmas eve, two neurologists certify brain death from meningitis and discontinue her ventilator. That Christmas eve, as my young patient slipped from coma into death, the emotional and spiritual lives of the physicians and the patient's family would become inextricably entwined in an ever-so-painful pilgrimage that would last nearly four years and would exact a devastating toll on all involved.

The news first came to me through the newspaper: "Doctors sued for wrongful death of local teenager." There was my name in print for everyone to read and see. Several church members questioned, "Was that your name I saw in the paper the other day?" The lawyers alleged that I was negligent, demonstrated poor judgment, and provided substandard care; therefore, I was directly responsible for this young woman's death. The allegations sounded like my own death sentence, and I felt that my spirit had been mortally wounded. Pain, guilt, and doubt encompassed me like a darkness from which there was no flight into the light. Outwardly, I defended what I had done. I called the allegations without foundation, yet I harbored a gnawing doubt that ate at my spirit like an ever-growing cancer. I had always viewed my practice as a vehicle for healing, a vehicle to spread God's love, mercy, and grace. Now I was being charged with misuse of that trust. My actions had led to death, not healing; to anger, not joy; to pain, not freedom. Did God repent of the trust He had placed in me? Had I grieved God's Spirit as King Saul did? I was equally troubled to know that out there in the city, there was a family that truly believed I was responsible for the death of their daughter. They regarded me as a murderer just as certainly as if I had pulled the trigger of a gun and killed their precious daughter in cold blood.

I was driven by a need to justify my actions, and almost like an act of penance, I searched the literature and read almost all of the major articles on meningitis written over the last 40 years. I studied the statistics and every presentation and every complication of meningitis. I became convinced of my innocence. Methodically, I formulated an answer for every potential question that might be asked of me by a plaintiff's attorney. I could document my every word with multiple resources. I could challenge any expert with multiple references. I was convinced that no one could refute the evidence I had collected through painstaking study. This was my time to prove to the world and myself that I was competent, and especially, that I was innocent of the blood of this young girl. I would prove to my colleagues, to the girl's family, and to God that their trust had not been unfounded.

At the same time, one of my close friends, a pastor and my prayer partner, developed cancer. I met with him often to pray. I would begin by praying that God would lessen his pain and relieve his suffering. I also prayed for his healing. I was troubled as to why God would afflict him, a young pastor with a wife and infant daughter, an excellent Bible expositor and a man mightily used by God. One day, as we talked before our prayer time, he reflected upon one of his doctor visits. He told me of his love and concern for one particular doctor

a godless and arrogant man. He asked me to pray that he be allowed the privilege to continue to suffer if that suffering would lead to his doctor's salvation. Yes, he would even be willing to die for the salvation of this physician. He explained that for one, long, dark night he had lain on the ground, grasping the foot of the wooden cross that stood outside his church, and God had met him there at the foot of the cross. When he finally arose, he had found new purpose and a strength to endure.

His pain could bring joy to the heart of God. Would I pray that he not waste his suffering? Would I be willing to pray that his suffering continue so that he would have repeated opportunities to witness of God's majesty and grace to his physicians? As his friend, could I pray that God break him even more-if it would be to the glory of God to conform him more into the likeness of Jesus?

Questions flooded my mind. Was I wasting my suffering? Had God placed me in the refiner's fire to burn away pride and arrogance? Had God intended to break me of my self-confidence that I might rely more on Him? Had I begun in the power of God's Spirit and now tried to finish in my own strength? Was God trying to form me more into a man after His own heart? Had I strayed from my first love? Would I have the courage of my friend to pray that I be broken even more if it would be to the glory of God? Was God planning to speak to my colleagues and patients in my brokenness in a way He could not speak through worldly wisdom?

I began two years of serious intercession for fellow physicians, the teenage girl's family, and others I knew. As I would pray afresh each day, I could sense His approval. I once again began to know my first love. Yes, perhaps it took a lawsuit to get me on my knees before the throne of grace. I had to have pain before my loving Father could comfort me. He had waited for me patiently each day but I had gone my own way. Now I was comforted and surrounded by the presence of a loving God. Was this God's plan? Had He intended this all along for my good to bring me back to Him?

When the day for me to testify finally arrived, questioning went on for hours. Every possible implication of the case was explored. The same points were covered over and over, each time with a slightly different twist. After years of research, I could refute any suggestion of negligence. I had ample opportunity to display my knowledge. I quoted references, I commented on this point and that. In my pride I felt that I was untouchable. At last the proceedings were over. My attorney assured me that I had done well. Then the unimaginable happened: I came face to face with the family. The family I had prayed for. The family I imagined hated me. The family that believed I had killed

their precious daughter and murdered their hopes and dreams. The family that had waited years for this moment to inflict more guilt, to blame me again for their pain and their loss. Without forethought, I reached out my hand to comfort the mother, to ask for healing and forgiveness. But before I could reach her hand, I broke into uncontrollable sobs. Tears streamed down my face. I covered my face with my hands. I was unable to speak for the tears. As hard as I tried, I could not regain my composure. More tears flooded my face. Everyone was watching. The self-assured doctor of a few moments earlier-broken and humiliated. Her eyes softened and gradually they also began to fill with tears. Stern resentment and anger kindled over years changed in that instant into understanding. Anger and resentment fell away, and forgiveness flowed without a word. There was understanding without comprehension. Two broken hearts briefly touched. God was in our midst, working for His glory, and He was well pleased.

Two weeks later, I was notified that I had been dropped from the case. Four years of pain ended with a two-minute telephone call. The voice on the other end simply stated, "The family and plaintiffs attorney will not seek damages from Dr. Kuhn," and the ordeal ended as abruptly as it had begun. I am convinced that no one will ever remember my testimony. But I am also convinced that everyone present will remember my tears at the feet of a mother whose wounds had been reopened by that testimony. Those present will remember a tender, gentle, quiet moment, when all the affairs of the court were laid aside, when few words were spoken, and when there was healing in brokenness.

Was God glorified? Had I wasted my pain? Did all this have some eternal significance or was it just another shallow, selfish, humanistic pursuit? Was He exalted in my testimony? Was He glorified in my anger, doubt, or self-pity? Or was He exalted in my submission, my pain, and my brokenness? I still am unable to pray like my friend, "God, break me even more if it is to Your glory, if it is for the salvation of even one of Your loved ones." God's heart must have mourned in our anger and He must have rejoiced when our hearts briefly touched.

I am thankful that God loves me enough that He wants

to purify me, to conform me little by little into the likeness of His Son-gentle, broken, and humble before the Father's throne. I thank Him that He loves me enough to put me in the refiner's fire, a fire that leaves us exposed and vulnerable, yet a fire that cleanses and purifies. That is sanctification. His Holy Spirit cleanses the sin from our hearts and molds us into the likeness of His precious Son, Jesus. Sometimes sanctification comes in the form of a malpractice suit. Let us not waste our pain but use it for His glory and for eternal purposes. Often, it is in our weakness, not our strength, that God is glorified, and it is in our brokenness that we find healing.

Often, before I go to work, I pray this simple prayer. "Lord, now as I reach forth my hands to touch, reach forth through me to touch and heal in the name of Jesus, to the Glory of God, by the might and power of Your Holy Spirit. Not for my glory, Lord, but for Your glory. Not to build me up, but to build Your church. Amen."