

Are You Struggling to Receive From God?

There can be times in our daily workplace that take away our breath. I had such an encounter a few years ago.

I had been working the burn unit as a travel nurse when I was assigned to care for Doug, a 53-year-old man who looked 80. He suffered from a fatal bacterial flesh-eating disease called necrotizing fasciitis. Doug's condition had started as a painful pimple on his right inner thigh and progressed to his entire pubic area and left inner thigh.

I learned from veteran nurses that a patient diagnosed with necrotizing fasciitis was not contagious but rarely survived this severe of an infection. Doug's unbearable discomfort caused him to tense up, scream in pain and speak harshly with whoever was trying to care for him. Morphine administered intravenously seemed to do little to ease his pain. Three times a day we performed extensive dressing changes. When I changed his dressing the first time, I felt as if I had stepped into an autopsy. I could see entire muscle groups, tendons, fascia and more.

Doug tended to be a difficult patient, lashing out at nursing staff because of his pain. Despite his situation, however, Doug and I hit it off. Other unit staff noticed, so whenever I worked, I was assigned to care for Doug.

Doug and I had plenty of time to get to know each other. Throughout my 12-hour shifts, I checked on him often. During those visits, he talked about how he started using drugs when he was a young teen. He had joined a circle of friends in the drug world and began dealing on the streets. His prior drug use and poor self-care exacerbated his condition, making it even harder to fight off his severe infection.

During those long dressing changes, we also talked about Doug's spiritual beliefs. He confided that it just didn't seem

important to go to church, although he believed there was a God and that Jesus was real.

Daily I would offer to pray for Doug. He always politely said, "No."

Finally, one day I respectfully asked, "Doug, why do you resist prayer?"

"There's this man who bought drugs from me and never paid me my money. I want to settle the score before I think about church and God," he replied with a scowl.

I gently reminded him vengeance wasn't a worthy trade for his soul. Doug didn't seem to understand that he wasn't likely to survive.

One day we received word that a severe burn patient was being flown in by helicopter. Because burn patients have priority, we moved Doug to a step-down unit to provide a critical care bed for the incoming patient.

Before drifting off to sleep one night about a week after Doug was transferred from the burn unit, I silently prayed for Doug. Around 2:00 a.m., I was awakened from a disturbing dream. In it, I saw a barefooted Doug wearing his pale blue hospital gown. As he looked at me, I could hear his thoughts: "My pride kept me from letting you pray with me."

I analyzed the dream and wondered if God had given me a message for Doug. I felt I should go to Doug and gently talk to him about pride.

Two days later, when I returned to work, I headed for Doug's room. I walked in hoping that maybe now Doug would accept God's free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. To my surprise, his room was empty. My heart sank.

On the way back to my unit, I hopefully thought maybe Doug had been released, although that seemed impossible because of the extensive care he needed. But I also knew Doug didn't have

insurance and might have been released if care could be provided at home.

I walked to our unit break room and sat down. Tina, a certified nurse assistant, was on break. Though we chatted a bit, I couldn't get Doug off my mind. I asked Tina if she knew what might have happened to him.

Tina replied, "A couple of nights ago, Doug's condition got worse. They brought him back to the burn unit. Doug asked me to call the hospital chaplain. He wanted to make things right with God."

With compassion in her eyes, Tina said, "He died later that night."

I was thrilled! God broke through Doug's pride and defenses. It would seem Doug made peace with God before he died.

As Christians, we have the unique opportunity to listen to others' circumstances—past and present. Doug was a difficult person whose intense physical care was complicated by his anger and challenging personality. Based on his past drug history, it would have been easy to avoid Doug or think he was reaping what he had sown. But Jesus tells us to be careful with our attitudes toward others, to not be scornful or think less of anyone, remembering He shows mercy to all people.

Liz Gwyn, author of *Amazing Stories of Life After Death: True Accounts of Angelic, Afterlife, and Divine Encounters*, received her MSN in 2009 from Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina. A gifted speaker, Liz has close to 20 years in professional and lay ministry. She excels in communicating the Word of God to eager listeners and has a heart to reach the lost. With a degree in nursing, she also understands the deep emotional pain many endure—spiritually and physically.