

Update 21, written March 26, 2013

“Better to be a patient of God.
Then a Doctor of Theology.”

Pastor Nicholi

I see myself in all of them...fear, unwillingness, pride and joy. My patients so often show me a living picture of my own relationship with God.

Anton - We've been seeing him for about 4 months. His wounds had responded well to treatment and he and his mom were very compliant with our instructions. Over time I began noticing how Pastor Misha had taken a special interest in them. He'd pull them aside to talk. He'd put off lunch so as to be able to sit together and talk with them longer. Something good was going on. He was the last patient of the day so with no line pressing us, I asked Anton to tell me the story again. "Tell me again how you got these wounds."

'About a year ago my leg blew up. It was as big as an elephant's leg – red and swollen and leaking water. It was when I was shooting drugs into my groin. I went to the hospital and the doctor said, 'We don't take care of people like you. (Anton has AIDs and TB as a result of his addiction.) He told me to go to a Babka (spirit healer). I went there. She gave me some homemade ointment to rub on my leg. It helped but not much. I couldn't go anywhere. My leg was wet from the knee down all the time. Then I came to you.

"How did you know about us?" I asked. "Tanya told me." [I knew who Tanya was. She also had shot narcotics into her legs, contracted AIDs, had deep wounds on both legs and had heard about us through the Pentecostal believers that visited the infection ward of the town hospital. It was through them that Tanya had asked God into her heart and life. One of their church brothers had actually driven Tanya to us and over a period of several months we did what we could to ease her situation. Not long ago she had died.]

"Anton, have you stopped shooting?" "Yes" he said smiling, "I stopped a year ago when this all happened. I go in for methadone treatments now. They are always lowering my dose. I want to get clean. Pastor Misha said he would help me get into a Christian Rehab Center." I smiled back and said, 'Wow, Pastor Misha doesn't offer that to very many people. He must see something special in you.' "I really want to Kristina. I really want to go. As soon as these wounds on my leg heal I want to go."

Unfortunately this conversation took place over a year ago. When his wounds healed we no longer saw him. Pastor Misha has called but there were no invitations to come and visit. Anton has Pastor Misha's phone number should he one day change his mind. It seems to me that for both he and his mom fear of the unknown (getting off of methadone, making life changes), hold them trapped.

Am I not the same? God does so much amazing work in my life and yet I remain distrustful. I forget to look back and see His faithfulness. I don't recall all that He has done with gratefulness. Rather, I only see how hard the next step is and freeze up. God holds out His hand to help me through that too but I don't take it because fear has replaced faith.

Sergi – His lower leg wound was 5 by 6 inches wide and down to the bone. My

questions tumbled out – How did it start? How long have you had this? Why didn't you come in much earlier? "It started as a scratch about 3 years ago. I thought it would heal on its own. It didn't really bother me until now." He grinned up at me with all the confidence of a boy who had just slide into home base. Sure he had a 'road rash' but he was here now; put a Band-Aid on it and all would be fine.

I haven't found the chapter where it says, '...and Jesus chewed him up one side and down the other.' In truth, I'd really like to find that verse to justify my behavior. Amazingly my patient took my scolding with a smile. His response - "*You will heal me.*"

Over the next 6 months we worked and the wound decreased in size. But then came the time when progress stopped. I asked him to get an x-ray to rule out a bone infection but he didn't want to. I asked him to return to increased time with his foot elevated (to decrease the swelling) but he was tired of that. I told him that he could go see a surgeon and ask him to be evaluated for a skin graft, but Sergi saw too many possible problems with that option. I didn't have any more super dressings (only simple ones) and I couldn't tell him exactly why his wound wasn't progressing.

Soon after, he stopped coming. When some dressings that were just perfect for him had arrived, I called him. He promised to come the next clinic day but never did. My guess is that because it no longer hurts, Sergi has decided that he would just live with things the way they were.

Am I not the same? Like a 4 by 5 inch sin of unforgiveness, gossip or grumble...I can kinda pretty easily cover it up. Most folks don't, at least not often, see my problem and therefore it doesn't bother me much. But, in reality my sin is a smoldering fire that festers inside.

Vladimer – An unset-able fractured right hip 3 years ago, led to an edematous leg which resulted in water blisters that got infected. The right leg is one huge circumferential wound; the left leg wound is only slightly smaller. The wounds are large, deep and moderately complicated but that is because no one ever has dealt with the underlying problem – edema. If we get rid of the swelling Vladimer isn't going to be in the pain that he is in; blood flow will increase to the wounds; and the wounds should go on to heal.

But, it is as if he has both feet on the brakes. 'All of your ideas are impossible. You can't possibly understand how bad things are for me. What you are telling me to do is hard on my nerves.' Twice now I've nearly thrown up my hands in exasperation. But as frustrating as he is, deep down I know that Vladimer doesn't know any other way because he doesn't know God. Rather than seeing God's hand in this situation to save him from himself, Vladimer is clinging tight to that last strand he has – pride.

Am I not the same? I slam both feet down when God wants to work on my underlying problem of "I want my way" pride. While I've had to be firm with Vladimer, may I show him the same abundant patience, mercy and grace that God has shown me. True, I've had to compromise on less than the fastest method in order to give the patient choices and thus, some control. But let me error in this way before just giving up, walking out and leaving the patient to suffer the consequences of his own choices.

Lena – When I first saw her she reminded me of a whipped puppy. Trembling with fear and in so much pain, she cowered more than walked into the room. In that first visit, God gave me the wisdom to not even touch her but rather sit back quietly and listen. A rooster had pecked her right leg some 3 years ago. Underlying edema, a stroke, trying for far too long on her own and then suffering under uneducated hands had resulted in the

mess that lay under that gauze.

She only had a crumb of trust left and had placed that morsel in the hands of a friend (a lovely believer who is a member of one of the local churches). At Vera's gentle coaxing Lena came to us and what joy it has been to watch her bloom!! Lena asked all her questions; followed through with our instructions and despite the fact that she has to hire a car to come in from a distant village, she has returned on her own each week.

Lena has been the ideal patient; hungry for knowledge, obedient and faithful. This past week she had to wait in the waiting room for over an hour but that didn't bother her. "I would come just to be able to listen to him (Pastor Misha sharing in the waiting room)." Because she is no longer in pain, she no longer needs her cane and her smile has returned. My heart is so happy for her as we see progress each week.

Am I not the same? Like the patient, I also know the same healing and see the same progress when I come to God hungry to know Him better. When I am obedient and faithful I also have that overflowing joy!!

I see myself in all of them....fear, unwillingness, pride and joy.

My fear...no, it doesn't govern me like it used to but it shouldn't govern me at all. As Ann Voskamp wrote, "'God reveals Himself in rearview mirrors.' I know that God is all good and all His ways are for my best. But I listen to lies...and doubt; experience spiritual amnesia and forget...again.

My unwillingness. Like the Israelites I don't kick out the enemy from the Promised Land. Taking it as a suggestion rather than a command, I make it all 'ok' in my mind, live with the sin and then howl when I'm ambushed.

My pride. God requires obedience from me and yet my 'I know better' bitterly complains! I squirm to get out of those clutching/smothering rules that are really freedom giving/ life saving boundary lines.

My joy. A wound tells the truth. The patient can say most anything but I know if they've followed instructions by looking at their wound. I am happy for my patients when progress is being made. I too receive a gift when their wounds close. What is the one gift I can give to God? Obedience. It is really the only gift I can give God and it brings us both great joy.

"God's love does not seek value; it creates it.
It is not because you have value that you are loved.
It is because you are loved that you have value."
William Sloan Coffin

The week's ahead hold a lot for me so as you are led, please hold in prayers....

*Temporary Residency Permit – This is the document every foreigner must have if they are in Ukraine longer than 90 days. With God's help, I received it one year ago. As they are only good for 1 year, it is time to apply for another year's extension. The paper work process began last week. I am hoping to receive it but let God's will be done in this situation.

*Vacation Bible School – approx. 30 boxes of supplies are on their way. I am praying for them to arrive in a timely manner so that I can get them sorted out. I'd like to have the VBS stuff sorted and ready should I not receive my Temp. Residency Permit by late April and thus have to leave the country quickly.

*In the next 4 weeks, I need to get my permit (which means staying in town and ready to go to appointments); sort the VBS supplies (a 3-4 day project, hoping friends are able to help), make a trip to Zaporoshja and Berdansk (means being on the road 5-8 days, seeing patients & teaching) and be ready to fly out on April 28th. I will be attending a conference in Prague and then returning to Kiev to give 4 workshops at the Christian Medical Conference for students. I've seen this crunch time coming so a lot of fronts are ready but I would ask for your prayers for wisdom (what to do when & how) and obedience (not getting stuck on my plan but rather doing all and nothing more than my Father asks).

I know you will be celebrating Easter this Sunday so I wanted to wish you all a very Blessed Resurrection Sunday! Christ has Risen!! He has Risen indeed!

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