

Learning the Healer's Art

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This year the Brigham Young University College of Nursing celebrates its 50th anniversary. It all began in 1952. That year David O. McKay was our prophet, Dwight D. Eisenhower was our president, and Dick Clark began American Bandstand. The BYU College of Nursing held a fashion design contest for the nursing uniform. Students wore this winning entry. Thank goodness for men now being in the profession or we might still be wearing that little blue dress to school every day. A lot has changed in 50 years!

Though the College of Nursing began at BYU in 1952, Church leaders, through the Relief Society, had always supported nursing education. Belle Spafford was then general president of the Relief Society (and she served on the panel of judges for that winning nurses uniform contest) (see Maurine M. Harris, comp., *History of the Brigham Young University College of Nursing*, Volume 1 [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1974], 9; also see private scrapbook collection, Brigham Young University College of Nursing). Sister Spafford received an honorary degree at BYU commencement the same year the Nightingale Pledge was taken by the first BYU nursing graduates. Today is her birthday. Born 107 years ago on October 8, Sister Spafford was general president of the Relief Society for

nearly 30 years, from 1945 to 1974. Those were my growing-up years. Through my mother and grandmother, who spoke her name in reverence, Sister Spafford was my first exposure to the work of the Relief Society.

Over the last decade the College of Nursing has adopted a theme I would like to explore. The phrase is “I would learn the healer’s art,” a line from the third verse of the hymn written by Susan Evans McCloud and K. Newell Dayley (“Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 220).

Our heritage of learning the healer’s art began at the very dawn of the restored Church. Soon after the Relief Society was organized in 1842, the Prophet Joseph Smith set apart “noble and lofty women . . . to go about among the sick and minister to their wants” (in “Nursing in the Relief Society,” *Relief Society Magazine* 2, no. 7 [July 1915]: 316–17). When the Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young established a Council of Health. Women went east to medical school. In 1873 (the year Linda Richards graduated in New England as the first professional nurse in the United States) President Young called for three women from

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each ward in the Church to study nursing. Eliza R. Snow personally traveled the valley recruiting nursing students “for Zion’s sake” (in “An Address by Miss Eliza R. Snow,” *Woman’s Exponent* 2, no. 8 [15 September 1873]: 63). The first classes were taught by the women doctors of the Church. Graduates “were blest and set apart for their professional work” (in “Home Affairs, Classes in Obstetrics,” *Woman’s Exponent* 10, no. 6 [15 August 1881]: 44). One of my favorite images is the picture of Dr. Ellis Shipp surrounded by her nursing students. (As a dean, I wish I could sit in my Sunday best bedecked with flowers and surrounded by adoring students with tidy coifs and starched white uniforms.)

By 1898 the Relief Society School of Nursing was begun. Sister Emma A. Empey served as superintendent of the school and supervisor of charity nursing during its entire tenure. She was the Florence Nightingale of the BYU College of Nursing. Tuition was \$50 for the entire program. Graduates were set apart by priesthood leaders and “honor bound” to serve where needed and to charge no more than \$6 per week (“Pioneer Midwives,” in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage* [Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1963], 6:493–94).

Those early nurses were not only trained in the latest science but they faithfully learned and practiced the art of healing. They saw their work as a spiritual calling. They often stayed with families for whom they cared, they prayed with them and for them, and they called for the elders for priesthood blessings. The women of the Relief Society founded the Deseret Hospital in 1882 specifically to provide quality health care in an environment of faith and healing. By 1905 the Groves LDS Hospital was established. It became the mother school of the University of Utah and Brigham Young University Colleges of Nursing.¹

It is an honor to serve among faculty and students with such a heritage who temper their fascination for science with a devotion to the

Lord and understand that it is the Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the source of all healing.

I have shared before my memory of the first day I set out to practice healing. It was not quite 50 years ago—but close. I could hardly sleep the night before my first day as a nurse. I remember it so vividly. The spring air was cool, and the sun seemed unusually bright. Two conflicting feelings left my heart pounding. First, I felt courage and couldn’t wait to put that first tube into the first orifice. On the other hand, I was afraid that by sheer inexperience I would violate the promise to “do no harm.” As a student nurse I did not have the blessing of the computer-simulated patient that our students now have.

Today BYU College of Nursing students can program a mannequin they call Sam to have any illness or injury. He responds to their treatments and drugs. Student nurses have actually killed him a few times! Consequently, they also learn how to resuscitate him as well as any doctor on TV can.

That first day I carefully pulled on my support hose, little white nylon dress, and ugly prescription shoes. My crowning glory was the starched white cap that held my long hair tucked tightly beneath. I couldn’t wait to handle the instruments, titrate the fluids, and perform the treatment procedures. I wanted to cure. I wanted to care. I wanted to heal.

I have learned a lot about healing since that day. I have learned that healing is a process of restoring and becoming whole. This morning I would like to share six lessons I have learned about the healer’s art.

Healing Hurts

First, healing hurts. When I was a young nurse in the hospital, hardly a day went by that a patient did not ask, “Will it hurt?” If I had been truthful, the whispered answer would nearly always have been, “Yes, it will hurt.” I have learned that healing hurts. Life hurts. Healing really only begins when we face

the hurt in its full force and then grow through it with all the strength of our soul. For every reward of learning and growing, some degree of pain is always the price. Author M. Scott Peck reminds us that if you do not want love or pain, you “must do without many things” (M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978]: 133). I think you would do without dating, graduating, getting married, or having children.

Sometime in your life you will know a crashing crisis or heavy heartache that will threaten all sense of logic or hope or certainty—from which, no matter how you emerge, nothing will ever be the same. Hurts come as unique losses, unwelcome surprises, fading hope, or grief.

This semester you may not get the 4.0 grade point average you need to keep your scholarship, or you may not get your first choice in graduate school or career. Perhaps that special person did not have the same “revelation” you think you had. Maybe this is the best you will ever look. Maybe someone you counted on wasn’t there for you. Perhaps someone in your past hurt you deeply. I know that pain. Also, I live a little of every day waiting for heaven to see my son and mother again. Last semester two of our nursing students lost their fathers. I imagine that no success in school or career or life will be quite the same for them.

Some of us suffer the wrenching consequences of sin or just poor judgment. Some of you may now be entangled in activities with others—or perhaps on the Internet—that you wish you had never started. Or you may have fallen into a trap of debt. We hurt when we see our own failures or helplessly watch the unwise decisions of others. Our lives are changed forever not only by the pain but by facing our need to heal.

Sometimes we simply have too many demands or feel like we just don’t measure up. Daily life’s hundreds of additive stresses can drain hope and energy, drop by drop, toward spiritual depletion—leaving a need

to heal. Pain is part of living. Pain brings us to the source of healing.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland warned:

The world around you is an increasingly hostile and sinful place. Occasionally that splashes onto us, and perhaps, in the case of a few of you, it may be nearly drowning you. . . .

. . . You can change. You can be helped. You can be made whole—whatever the problem. All he asks is that you walk away from the darkness and come into the light, his light, with meekness and lowliness of heart. . . . Christ has “borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” Isaiah declared, “and with his stripes we are healed”—if we want to be (Isaiah 53:4–5; Mosiah 14:4–5). [Jeffrey R. Holland, “Come unto Me,” Brigham Young University 1996–97 Speeches (Provo: BYU, 1997), 189; emphasis in original]

We can partake of the healing medicine of the Atonement of our Savior, who promised, “I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee” (2 Kings 20:5).

Healing Is Active—You Have to Be There

My second lesson is that healing is active—you have to be there. Your friend or your husband or wife or your mother cannot do it for you. You have to face the problem and the pain. To begin healing, you must acknowledge and *feel* the hurt. Only those who don’t feel, those without conscience, cannot heal.

My mother once told me of an experience she had one winter morning as she drove down to check the cattle in the lower pasture. She noticed a car off the side of the road. Inside she recognized a young mother and three children. When my mother asked if they needed help, the woman tearfully reminded her that this was the place of the accident two weeks earlier that had killed her husband. She answered, “We are just here to feel the hurt.”

On that first day as a nurse, I assumed cure, care, and healing to be synonymous.

I have learned they are not the same. Healing is not cure. Cure is clean, quick, and done—often under anesthesia. The antibiotic kills the pathogen; the scalpel cuts out the malignancy; the medication resolves the distorted chemistry. Healing, however, is often a lifelong process of recovery and growth in spite of, maybe because of, enduring physical, emotional, or spiritual assault. It requires time. We may pray for cure when we really need healing. Whether for cell reconstruction, for nerve and muscle rehabilitation, for emotional recovery, or for spiritual forgiveness, healing needs work and time and energy.

Healing cannot happen in a surgical suite where the pain is only a sleepy memory. Cure is passive, as you submit your body to the practitioner. Healing is active. It requires all the energy of your entire being. You have to be there, fully awake, aware, and participating when it happens.

Healing Is Private

My third lesson is that healing is private. The hymn “Lord, I Would Follow Thee” describes “hidden sorrow” in a “quiet heart” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 220). Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote, “It is such a secret place, the land of tears” (*The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1943], 28).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught:

There is, in the suffering of the highest order, a point that is reached—a point of aloneness—when the individual (as did the Savior on a much grander scale) must bear it . . . alone. Even the faithful may wonder if they can take any more or if they are in some way forsaken.

*Those who . . . stand on the foot of the cross often can do so little to help absorb the pain and the anguish. It is something we must bear ourselves in order that our triumph can be complete. [Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 43]*

Healing is not only private, it is sacred. Private healing is not healing by abandonment. There is something so sacred about partaking of the power of the Atonement to overcome suffering, disappointment, or sin that it happens in the privacy of that special relationship between the mortal and the divine. Healing involves a private personal communion with the Savior, the Master Healer. It inspires a very personal reverence and awe. While on the earth Jesus often healed in private and then departed. When He healed, He often charged, “See thou tell no man; but go thy way” (Matthew 8:4; see also Luke 8:56).

To say that healing is private is not to diminish the marvelous power that comes from the help and compassion of others. Indeed, private healing often may not happen without the help of others. But much of the work of healing is done alone, inside the heart, in the company of the Spirit of the Lord.

Such secret healing is not a single event. It happens as a process of living. You cannot simply take off a day or start tomorrow like a new diet and return healed. It happens quietly while you face the pain. It happens over time as you live, work, study, and give to others.

Healing Teaches Us

The fourth lesson of the healer’s art is that healing teaches us. When we have a terrible loss or pain, we may seek to “get back to normal” or to the way things were before, but they will never be the same. Pain changes us, but not in the same way that healing teaches us. Healing can help us to become more sensitive and more awake to life. Healing inspires repentance and obedience. Healing invites gifts of humility and faith. It opens our hearts to the profound complexities of truth, beauty, divinity, and grace.

Orson F. Whitney wrote:

No pain that we suffer . . . is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of . . . patience,

*faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer . . . , especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven. [Quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 98]*

We Must Help Others to Heal

The fifth lesson of learning the healer's art is the obligation and great gift it is to help others to heal.

President Hinckley admonished:

*As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, ours is a ministry of healing, with a duty to bind the wounds and ease the pain of those who suffer. Upon a world afflicted with greed and contention, upon families distressed by argument and selfishness, upon individuals burdened with sin and troubles and sorrows, I invoke the healing power of Christ. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Healing Power of Christ," *Ensign*, November 1988, 59]*

Every day someone in your path is hurting, someone is afraid, someone feels inadequate, someone needs a friend. Someone needs you to notice, to reach out, and to help him or her to heal. You may not know who that is at the time, but you can give encouragement and hope. You can help to heal wounds of misunderstanding and contention. You can serve "in the cause of the Master Healer" (Hinckley, "Healing Power," 52).

Healing Is the Gift of the Savior, Who Calls, "Come unto Me"

The last and greatest lesson of healing is that it is a divine gift that is always there from a loving Heavenly Father. If you have a pain or sorrow or disappointment or sin or just a

grudge that needs healing, the Savior simply says, "Come unto me."

In the last few weeks as I have studied the scriptures, I have read only the accounts of Jesus healing. I have been humbled and amazed by how much of the Lord's mission on this earth was devoted to healing. When Jesus called and ordained the Twelve, He specifically gave them the power to heal (see Matthew 10:1, Mark 3:14–15) and instructed them to go about using their gifts "freely" (Matthew 10:8).

As Jesus healed, the scriptures say, "All the people were amazed" (Matthew 12:23). They brought their sick, their "blind, and dumb" (Matthew 12:22), those that were "possessed with a devil" (Matthew 12:22; also Mark 1:32), and their dead. They sought Him every day and into the evening. So great was His reputation and His healing power that they sought to "only touch the hem of his garment; and as many as touched were made perfectly whole" (Matthew 14:36). "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching . . . and preaching the gospel . . . , and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matthew 9:35).

When Nephi was shown the vision of his father, Lehi, he saw the multitudes and the sick who were "healed by the power of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 11:31). When the Savior appeared in the Americas, He healed "every one as they were brought forth unto him" (3 Nephi 17:9).

President Hinckley promised:

Jesus of Nazareth healed the sick among whom He moved. His regenerating power is with us today. . . . His divine teachings, His incomparable example, His matchless life, His all-encompassing sacrifice will bring healing to broken hearts, reconciliation to those who argue and shout, even peace to warring nations if sought with humility and forgiveness and love. [Hinckley, "Healing Power," 59]

Elder Holland reminded:

That is why we make solemn covenants based on Christ's atoning sacrifice, and that is why we take upon us his name. In as many ways as possible, both figuratively and literally, we try to take upon us his identity. We seek out his teachings and retell his miracles. We send latter-day witnesses . . . around the world to declare his message. We call ourselves his children, and we testify that he is the only source of eternal life. We plead for him to swing open the gates of heaven in our behalf and trust everlastingly that he will, based upon our faithfulness. [Holland, "Come unto Me," 188]

Elder Holland further noted:

The Church . . . is more like a hospital provided for those who wish to get well. . . . For some of you that is simply to live with greater faith, to believe more. For some of you it does mean to repent: Right here. . . . For virtually all of us it means to live more by the promptings and promises of the Holy Ghost and to "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men." . . . (2 Nephi 31:20). [Holland, "Come unto Me," 189]

One hundred eighty-two years ago, the heavens were opened. One hundred and sixty years ago, the Relief Society began the education of nurses to care for the healing needs of the Saints. Fifty years ago, a college of nursing was born at BYU to enable students to learn science, skill, and healing. Today each

of us at this university with its special mission has a unique opportunity to come to know the Master Healer and to learn the healer's art. I leave you my testimony that He lives, the Savior, the Master Healer, the One "with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2). I say this in His name, amen.

Note

1. See *A Centenary of Relief Society, 1842–1942* (Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1942); *History of Relief Society, 1842–1966* (Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1966); "To Provide Nurses," *Deseret Evening News*, 18 May 1898, 4; Emma A. Empey, "Relief Society Nurse Class," *Woman's Exponent* 32, no. 9 (1 February 1904): 70; Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992); Elaine Shaw Sorensen, "'For Zion's Sake': The Emergence of Mormon Nursing," *Nursing History Review* 6 (1998): 51–69; Elaine Shaw Sorensen, "'Ambition Enough for Zion's Sake': Our Heritage of Health Care," in Susette Fletcher Green and Dawn Hall Anderson, eds., *To Rejoice as Women: Talks from the 1994 Women's Conference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 263–82; Elaine Sorensen Marshall and Barbra Mann Wall, "Religion, Gender, and Autonomy: A Comparison of Two Religious Women's Groups in Nursing and Hospitals in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Advances in Nursing Science* 22, no. 1 (September 1999): 1–22.