

Church Illustrated

The church, as a hospital

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HDBC

There are some institutions that are essential, but are often ignored until they are needed. **Funeral homes** are essential, but you seldom think about them until you need one. A **gas station** is essential but often ignored until you notice that you are extremely low on gasoline. **Banks** can fall into that category. You don't really think about them until you need to borrow some money. Then there are **hospitals**. You can drive by a hospital every day and never think a thing about it until you have a medical emergency. Then, suddenly, you are glad it is there.

I'm so thankful that at this point in my life, I have never had to spend a night in the hospital as a patient. I'm more thankful that we have a couple of great hospitals in our city because I feel sure my time as a patient is coming. A hospital is for sick people. You may not think much about it while you are healthy, but when you get sick or injured it immediately comes to mind. It is designed to be a place of healing, restoration and hope.

The church is a lot like a hospital. This metaphor is not as clearly presented in the Bible as the metaphors of a flock, a body or a family, but it is certainly there. We see it in the words and actions of Jesus, as well as in the instructions found in the writings of the apostles.

Remember the words of Jesus found in Luke 5:31-32. *And Jesus answered and said to them, It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick: I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners.*

Remember the words of Paul found in Galatians 6:1-2; 10. *Brothers and sisters, even if a person is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you are not tempted as well. ² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. So then, while we have opportunity, let's do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*

Then there are these words found in Heb. 12:12. *Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

So, how is the church like a hospital? Let's not make it complicated. Two simple truths about hospitals offer a great picture of the church.

- 1) Hospitals are a place where **the sick and broken are welcomed.**
- 2) Hospitals are a place where **the sick and broken get well.**

Let me quickly say that when I use the word **place** I'm not really talking about a building or even a geographic location. I'm talking about a group of people who have come together with a common mission and who work together.

We often think of a hospital as a building, but really it's the people who make a hospital. Imagine going to a hospital and finding no one there. You would not get the care you need. *My dad had a severe brain injury and needed specialized care. We took him Touro Hospital in New Orleans where he stayed for several weeks. What made it interesting was that this was only months after Katrina and the hospital was only 40% staffed.* They were limited, but without those folks, he would have gotten no care. It's the people who make the difference. The same is true of the church. The church is not a building but the people. You can have a church without a building. You can have a building without a church. So, keep that in mind when I use the word **place**. I'm really referring to the body of people.

Like a hospital . . .

1. Our church should be a place where the sick and broken are welcome

When people are sick, injured or hurt, they should feel that a hospital is a safe place, a place that will welcome their presences. To come to a hospital you don't have to be whole or healthy. In fact, hospitals cater to just the opposite. They open their doors for the hurting, sick and injured.

The same should be true of the church. We want everyone to feel invited, especially those who are hurting. If a hospital only interacts with healthy people it fails in its mission. The same is true of the church. If we only welcome those who seem to have it all together, and seem to have no serious issues, then we fail.

Remember the words of Jesus in **Luke 5:31-32**? *It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners.*

Jesus not only made this clear in his words but in his actions. He was constantly drawn to the sick, the broken, the hurting. He was drawn to those whom the culture had shunned. Sexually immoral. Tax collectors known for their greed. Power-brokers who hurt other people for personal gain. Blue-collar fishermen just trying to make a living from week to week. The church should be a reflection of Jesus.

We, at HDBC, are just a group of broken people who are in the process of being fixed. We are not all broken in the same way, but we are all broken. However, our brokenness does not define us. We are defined by the ongoing redemptive work of the great physician, Jesus. We are being restored, being fixed, being made whole. We love that! We love that Jesus has saved us forever and is in the process of working out His salvation in us.

But if we turn all our focus inward and only think about ourselves, we will cease to be the church. Even as Jesus is remaking us, we must look outward to those around us who also need to be saved and remade. Our actions, attitudes and lifestyles should cause the church to be a magnet for others, who are also broken and hurting. What they see in us should cause them to be drawn to the Savior, the great Physician. **Let's make sure we do nothing to hinder their progress toward Him.** In fact, we should facilitate their coming to Him. *Opening the door to the ER. Coming out in an ambulance to bring them in.* Greeting them and welcoming them.

So, are we attractive to the hurting? We need to be. In order for that to be true, I think there are two things we need to work on, honesty and grace.

1) Honesty

We need to be honest about who we are. We must be honest about our own struggles & brokenness. If we come across as those who have it all together, we will not attract the very ones we need to help. We need to make sure we don't send the message that we are perfect, whole and complete. In terms of our relationship with God, we are. But in real living, we still struggle. We need to own it.

2) Grace

Not only do we need to be more transparent about our own struggles, but we need to practice grace toward others. Because we have been saved and found the goodness of God's grace, we can easily look down upon those who have not been so blessed. In a very subtle process, we can begin to think that are just a little better than others because of what God has done for us. We can think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and we can think less of others. We can exalt ourselves and in the process, look with judgmentalism toward others. WE MUST resist this tendency.

A first responder must avoid being horrified by the blood that is lost, the flesh that is torn or the bones that are broken. He must focus on the person and what steps need to be taken to save their life and help them heal. In a similar way, when broken people come to engage in our church we must not focus on the ugliness of their sin or the messiness of their life. We must first see them as a person whom God loves and who desperately needs to meet the Savior, the great Physician. In other words, our first response should always be **grace**. We want to do that so well that word will get out in the community that our church is a safe place for the broken, hurting and sick.

In his book, *What's so Amazing about Grace?*, Philip Yancey shared the story about a friend who was a social worker. The friend counseled with a prostitute who was trying to escape her lifestyle. She got into prostitution initially to support her drug habit. Then she got into more expensive drugs and started renting out her two-year old daughter to men who wanted sex with a child. She wanted out, but didn't know what to do.

The social worker asked if she had thought about going to the church for help. She responded, ***Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse!*** How tragic is that? Yancy points out in his book that the very people who run from the church today are the people who ran to Jesus in His day.

We need to ask ourselves, from time to time, are we attractive to those in the community? Are we doing the things that would make those around us who

are hurting, feel like they would be welcomed here? When they come, do we actually welcome them? If not, we may to work on our honesty and grace.

2. Our church should be a place where the sick and broken get well.

The purpose of a hospital is to facilitate healing. To that end, hospitals have all kinds of people doing all kinds of roles. They are all important. **Nurses, technicians, dieticians, therapists, pharmacists, administrators, custodians, clerks, social workers, accountants.** All are important. But the most important person you want to see at the hospital is the doctor. He is the primary agent of healing. When someone goes to the ER, they expect, eventually to see a doctor. This is not to minimize the importance of all the other people, but the doctor is the primary agent of healing in a hospital.

In the church there are all kinds of people with all kinds of roles. All are important. But none more important than the great physician, who is Jesus. We are like important auxiliary staff at a hospital. Our goal is to get people to the only one who can bring healing and restoration; and that is Jesus.

Jesus is the great physician. He is the only one who can heal, not only physical needs, but most importantly, spiritual needs. There is a sense in which the church is simply here to facilitate the work of Jesus in the lives of other people. **We are the support staff helping people get to Jesus.**

A hospital tends to be primarily focused on physical health. The church goes much further because Jesus goes much further. Other account in Luke 5 offers some insight. There was a man who was crippled in both legs. He had a group of friends who believed Jesus could heal his legs if they could just get him to Jesus. So, they took him. But the house was crowded and there was no easy access to Jesus. So, they did what friends do. They made a way!

They tore a hole in the roof and lowered the man through the hole right in front of Jesus. That's the kinds of friends we all want. Notice Jesus first words to the man. ***Friend, your sins are forgiven you.***

In complete disregard for his physical condition, Jesus took care of his most important need, and that was to have his sins forgiven. Jesus was much more concerned about the man's eternal life than his immediate physical

health. Now, if you read the rest of the story, Jesus went on to also heal the man's legs. He did both. But my point is to note which was the priority.

In a similar way, we can meet the physical needs of people, but that must never be our priority. We must always look beyond the immediate needs to the spiritual needs of people. The goal is not to make people more comfortable in this life, but to get them to Jesus, who can change them forever. We must never get distracted with important but lesser things.

Application

1. We must work to be attractive to broken people

We do that when we are honest and transparent about our own failures and when we act with grace toward others. Think about how Jesus acted toward **Zacchaeus, Matthew, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery.**

2. We must not leave people broken

The goal is not simply to make them feel good about their brokenness, but to lead them to healing and restoration. We welcome them as they are, but we don't want to leave them as they are. That comes only through a relationship with Jesus. Jesus wants us to come as we are, but He will not leave us as we are. He wants to change us. Our job is to get people to Jesus, to point people to Jesus and allow Him to change them.

It's June 5, 1944. Nazi Germany has taken over Europe. Poland has fallen. France has been overrun. Britain is hanging on by a thread. Around 9:30 p.m. the 101st Airborne takes off from England for Normandy. It is the eve of the great invasion to liberate Europe. Operation Overlord. We know it as D-Day.

Two U.S. medics, Kenneth Moore and Robert Wright are among the 13,000 paratroopers dropped into France that night. In the drop they lost their supplies and did not hit their target drop site. They landed near the village of Angoville. Soon the Americans and Germans spot each other and the fight begins. Over the next 36 hours the little village fluctuated between American and German control.

Moore and Wright are not there to fight the enemy. They are there to care for the wounded. As the wounded began to grow, they realized they needed a place to care for the wounded. Wright spotted an old church and they decided to take

and treat the wounded there. The church building was 900 years old. It was a very plain structure made of stone with a handful of simple wooden pews. They put a Red Cross flag on the outside to let both sides know it was a hospital.

Moore found an old farm cart and began to comb the village for wounded men. He found one and brought him into the church and laid him on one of the pews. He found another and did the same thing. Those pews, which once held worshippers, now held the wounded and bleeding. The two medics worked hour after hour, not only treating Americans but Germans.

At one point a German soldier bursts through with his gun pointed at the men, but withdrew when he saw what they were doing. At one point a bomb dropped right through the roof and landed with a thud on the stone floor. It just lay there. For seconds everyone froze and looked at it. But nothing happened. It was a dud. They grabbed it and threw it out the window, just to make sure.

At 10:30 that night, the place was packed with the wounded. All the stained-glass windows have been destroyed by bullets. About 36 hours after they landed, the fighting moved on from that area. The two medics moved with them. But during those hours they two men treated about 80 men. Both were later awarded the Silver Star for their work there. Wright would win three Purple Hearts.

If you go to the village now, the church is still there. But there is something unique about it. After the war ended, the villagers were cleaning up and trying to get things back to normal. When they entered the church they saw that the pews were covered with the stains of the blood of the wounded from that first day of fighting. But the people made an important decision. They decided not to replace the pews with new ones. They also decided not to clean those up or to sand them down to remove the blood stains. They preserved them, with the blood still in the pews.

They wanted to make something absolutely clear to future generations. This church that had been built in the 1100s to be a place of hope and healing for broken, hurting people and that on June 5, 1944 that is exactly what it was. But more than that, it would be a message to future generations that it was still a place where broken, wounded, hurting people could come and find healing.

I want us to be that. I want this body of believers to be seen as a place where the hurting and wounded and broken can find the kind of healing that only Jesus can provide.