

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(15) In the Sickroom (pages 219-224)

Summary:

This chapter addresses caregivers, nurses in particular. Where disease is involved, both caregivers and patients require extra attention to the laws of health.

Thoughts:

In many ways this chapter addresses issues of what we would today call public health: good air, clean water and surroundings, the right kind and balance in diet. Sanitation in the sickroom is still a critical issue today since many illnesses and deaths arise from the hospital environment and things like errors in filling prescriptions. Health care requires great care concerning treatment and the environment in which the treatment is given.

The first part of the chapter addresses caregivers, such as nurses. Attending to the sick involves some peril to oneself. So principles of healthful living are all the more important for active caregivers. The better their health, the better they can handle the strain. So they need to give special attention to diet, cleanliness, fresh air and exercise. Where a patient needs around the clock care, a rotation of caregivers is advised, so that each can remain rested and exercised. With proper precautions, such as ventilation and cleanliness, caregivers need not contract the patient's illness. (219-220)

The second part of the chapter addresses the care of the sick in practical terms. The sickroom needs to be well ventilated, yet an even temperature should be maintained as far as possible. The patient's diet should be healthy, but care should be given that they not eat too much or too little. The one undernourishes the system at a time it needs help, the other overtaxes digestive organs at a time when they are weakened. (220-221)

For the patient's sake, caregivers should be cheerful and calm. Excitement, hurry and confusion should be avoided. For those who are extremely sick visitation should be discouraged. (222-224)

In as kind and tender a manner as possible, caregivers are to teach the laws of health and the consequences of wrong habits. Where possible, they should be introduced to Christ as a friend who will be close to them at this time. Physical and spiritual care go hand in hand. (224)

The advice given in this chapter walks a fine line in patient care between the calmness, tenderness and encouragement the caregiver needs to express and education or "confrontation" regarding wrong habits. It is not clear from the chapter exactly how this balance is to be maintained in practical terms, but at the personal level much expression of acceptance and approval should precede confrontation. With regard to public health today a certain corporate confrontation occurs when laws restrict smoking and ensure clean air and water, even if some citizens feel coerced in the process.

An unspoken implication of this chapter is that we should not expect miracles in the sickroom as a regular matter. Prayer is "soothing" to the patients and a sense of God's presence aids healing, but most of the advice here concerns not divine miracles, but things human beings can do to aid in the healing process. Early in Ellen White's experience she saw the negative outcomes of choosing prayer in place of a physician's care. Her counsel has always been to combine prayer with every possible human means of healing at our disposal.

Quotable Quotes:

“Those who minister to the sick should understand the importance of careful attention to the laws of health. Nowhere is obedience to these laws more important than in the sickroom. Nowhere does so much depend upon faithfulness in little things on the part of the attendants. In cases of serious illness, a little neglect, a slight inattention to a patient’s special needs or dangers, the manifestation of fear, excitement, or petulance, even a lack of sympathy, may turn the scale that is balancing life and death, and cause to go down to the grave a patient who otherwise might have recovered.” (219)

“It is misdirected kindness, a false idea of courtesy, that leads to much visiting of the sick. Those who are very ill should not have visitors. The excitement connected with receiving callers wearies the patient at a time when he is in the greatest need of quiet, undisturbed rest. To a convalescent or a patient suffering from chronic disease, it is often a pleasure and a benefit to know that he is kindly remembered; but this assurance conveyed by a message of sympathy or by some little gift will often serve a better purpose than a personal visit, and without danger of harm.” (222)

“(Nurses) need ever to remember that in the discharge of their daily duties they are serving the Lord Christ.” (222-223)

“The sick need to have wise words spoken to them. . . . The atmosphere surrounding the soul of the one giving treatment should be pure and fragrant. Physicians and nurses are to cherish the principles of Christ. In their lives His virtues are to be seen. Then, by what they do and say, they will draw the sick to the Saviour.” (223)

“In the kindest and tenderest manner nurses are to teach that he who would be healed must cease to transgress the law of God. He must cease to choose a life of sin.” (224)

Tweets of Healing:

Nowhere is obedience to the laws of health more important than in the sickroom. (219)

The better their health, the better caregivers can endure the strain of attending to the sick. (219)

Those who care for the sick should give special attention to diet, cleanliness, fresh air, and exercise. (219)

Those who are very ill should not have visitors. (222)

Caregivers need ever to remember that they are really serving Jesus. (222-223)

Caregivers should be ever ready to blend spiritual healing with physical healing. (224)

He or she who would be healed must cease to transgress the law of God. (224)