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No Excuses: Journal of Christian Nursing

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No Abstract

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No Excuses: Consistent Christian Living

Why do we need to make excuses for our behavior? One reason is probably that by doing so we can circumvent feeling guilty about our choices. An excuse allows us to deny that the behavior may be unacceptable. Alternatively, it allows us to shift the blame for the action, so that it doesn't seem to be our fault. But what does God have to say about excuse making?

Jesus tells a parable about a man hosting a large banquet who has invited many to come and share in the feast. Everyone seems to have an excuse for not attending. The first potential guest indicates that he has bought a piece of land and needs to

view it. Another gives the excuse that he has purchased five yoke of oxen and is going to try them out. Yet another invited guest excuses himself because he has just gotten married.

In Luke 14:15-24, we learn something of how God views excuses. First, excuses are fairly transparent if we take the time to consider them. In Jesus' day it would have been unusual to purchase land or a herd of oxen without the buyer having viewed them first. Why would the buyers need to go and view their purchases at the exact moment of the banquet (the dinner hour)? Their excuses are obvious.

The individual who claimed he could not come because he was

recently married had a transparent excuse, as well. He could have brought his wife along to the banquet, or he could have gone alone and left her at home for a few hours. The fact that we have not acknowledged certain behavior as wrong does not make it right. God cannot be fooled.

This parable also conveys that making excuses angers God. We are told that the head of the household became angry after hearing so many excuses from the invited guests. The individuals who made the excuses were the ones who lost out, because when they declined, the host extended the offer to others.

Luke 9:57-62 tells a story of Jesus calling a man to follow him. But the man gives an excuse and declines. His father has just died, and he wants to go and bury him. Superficially, this sounds like a reasonable excuse, but was it? Jesus tells the man to “let the dead bury their own dead.” In other words, the priority should always be to put God first. Someone else could bury the man’s father; Jesus was calling immediately.

Romans 1:20 says, “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are *without* excuse.” God says we have no excuse! He has given us the instruments to know him and to know his will. His power is apparent in creation. His Word provides the guide for our actions.

How do we know if a behavior is acceptable or an excuse? Using information from the Bible, we can test whether an action is God-honoring or simply an excuse.

The first step is to *think about* the behavior itself. If we don’t consider it, it is easy to justify actions and move on. Step out of your paradigm and view the behavior objectively. *Would a casual observer think you are making an excuse? Are you being honest or rationalizing your behavior?*

Second, consider the behavior from God’s perspective. *What does*

the Bible teach about it? God has revealed his will to us; however, we need to be in prayer and Bible study daily in order to know it. A spiritual advisor such as a pastor or elder might be able to assist you in providing insight and encouragement.

Third, examine the impact on others. *Will engaging in the behavior glorify God? Does it represent my best effort to place God first in my life? Or is the behavior ultimately self-serving?*

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Finally, *What is my conscience saying?* God gave it to us for a reason. The Holy Spirit will guide our actions, but we must learn to listen and obey. Daily times in the Word are essential to hearing God’s voice.

Nurses are not especially vulnerable to making excuses about our work because we have been trained to adhere to a strict code of ethics. Our profession demands intense accountability. We need total accuracy for medication administration, assessments and procedures. We take pride in being responsible, and we know that we must accept blame for professional errors.

But what about our Christian walk at work? As members of a helping profession, we have excellent opportunities to offer spiritual support. Do we somehow view our commitment to God less stringently than our commitment to our work? In the following situations, look at the behavior of the nurse involved, using the previously mentioned guidelines to decide if the actions are acceptable from God’s perspective or if they represent excuses.

Situation #1: Jackie is an RN on a busy medical-surgical unit. She suspects Dottie, a coworker, also an RN, of stealing narcotics. She has actually observed Dottie obtaining witness signatures for narcotics waste and then not really wasting the medication. Jackie has not mentioned her observation to anyone because she does not want to create a problem on her unit. Dottie does not appear impaired on duty, and the unit is short-staffed.

Analysis: By keeping silent, Jackie is not being truthful. This is a breach of the eighth commandment (Ex 20:15). Jackie acts as if her first priority is not God or his principles, but herself. She does not want to see Dottie fired because it would exacerbate the understaffing situation on the unit and ultimately make Jackie’s job harder.

It is clear that her unwillingness to “create a problem” is an excuse. This situation could be handled in many ways. A confidential conversation with the nurse manager could initiate a discreet inquiry and avoid the creation of “a problem.”

By choosing to ignore Dottie’s behavior, Jackie is also disregarding an opportunity to reach out to a peer in Christian love. We are called to love and care for one another. Without calling attention to her specific suspicions to her coworker, Jackie could attempt to create an environment where Dottie might feel comfortable sharing her problems. Ultimately an opportunity to witness for Christ might present itself.

Situation #2: Maude, an elderly client on the orthopedic unit, is scheduled for a hip pinning after a traumatic fall caused a hip fracture. James is the RN assigned to her case, and he

attempts to get her signature for the operative permit. Maude tells James she has never had an operation before, and she is frightened. She asks him if he would pray with her.

James is a Christian; however, he is hesitant to pray in the room full of technicians and staff. Also, he feels he is too busy, as he has six other clients. He tells Maude that it is more appropriate for someone from pastoral services to come up and pray with her. He promises to go and arrange that immediately.

Analysis: James has three excuses for not praying with Maude. He is embarrassed, is too busy and feels as if it's more appropriate for pastoral services to pray with a client. The fact that he is too busy is clearly an excuse. It would take as much time to organize the visit from pastoral care as to take a moment to pray.

Praying with a client provides spiritual support. It is within the role of the nurse to provide such support. A short prayer at this critical moment would be a strong witness to others in the room regarding James's faith. It was a missed opportunity.

Without introspection, we may all be inclined to make excuses for our behavior. I have missed many opportunities at work to witness, exhort, lift in prayer and encourage because I have made excuses. As nurses we have an unparalleled opportunity to engage in activity that would glorify God. We need to analyze our behavior from God's perspective and say, "No excuses!"

