



“Give God Good Ground”

Jane Baker
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Scripture (NRSV):

Matthew 7:7-12

⁷“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹²“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Sermon:

The date was August 2, 1977. I was in my third clinical affiliation, striving toward completion of my Physical Therapy Degree, at a rehabilitation facility on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio. I was working with a young spinal cord injury patient; he was performing a sliding transfer from the mat table back to his wheelchair. As a naïve student I did not realize that wheelchair brakes could possibly go years before being repaired. This time the brakes failed, the wheelchair rolled away, and my patient slid to the floor. He was not injured, but the event was devastating to me. That night in my despair I wrote a letter to God that went, in part, like this:

“I don’t know what I’m doing nor why I am here. I can’t put strength into their arms, nor understanding into their minds, nor motivation into their hearts. I try to keep YOU centered in my mind, but when I’m struggling to remember what I’ve learned, or when to take the hot packs off, or cleaning up the latest bladder accident, I seem to lose track of your higher purpose. Please know that I’m talking to you even when I’m not thinking of you, and please help me figure out how in the heck I am going to help these people?”

The years rolled on and gradually I was able to replace educated guesses with real information. My motto was to at least “do right” by people even if I could not fix their problems. I learned that many people were more interested in having their fears calmed than in learning a lot of facts; and when I discovered I have a gift of helping people feel safe and calm, that was a win-win. I also learned that how we treat people is more important than what we do for a living. But I still had not found my purpose.

One day I was presented with a lady who had had chest surgery, seven years before. Her pain had never resolved and she had been to many specialists and had many scopes and tests to try to determine the source. Eventually she was sent to PT which meant in this case that her physician had given up on her. Her ribs weren’t moving on the side of the surgery due to scar tissue formation, and so we embarked on a regimen of friction massage, deep breathing, and stretching. In just two weeks her pain was completely gone! How cool was that? Seven years of intractable pain, I laid my hands on her, and she was cured; sounds like a miracle right?

It was fun to call this a miracle, but I knew better. God did the healing; I was just the instrument. Nevertheless, it was a life-changing experience for me. It made me realize that there are thousands of people who are trapped in a prison of pain and disability from their own scar tissue, and I could learn to help them. I was beginning to find a purpose.

My third career-changing event was at a course I took on understanding and improving how we walk and the impact of our bodies interfacing with gravity and “Mother Earth.” The speaker was Gary Gray and his mantra was what he called the Four G’s; “Give God Good Ground.” There is a double meaning to this phrase; first that we learn how to build orthotics so the foundation of our steps on the ground is solid and well-aligned, thus reducing many painful orthopedic complications up the chain of our linked joints.

The second meaning of this phrase is what I want to talk about with you now. God wants us to live happy, healthy, meaningful lives. There are an abundance of miracles provided to us on a daily basis that allow us to be healed, to learn, to nurture relationships. But if the foundation for those miracles is disrupted or blocked, God needs US to help correct the impediment before much of the the healing can occur. Give God Good Ground.

A teaching example I like to use with my patients is that of slamming your finger in the door. If you came to me with a painful, swollen, bruised finger, I might put ice or heat around it, protect it or move it carefully, have you take some pain meds, etc. If you came to me the next day and said, "I smashed my finger in the door again," then we would have to include a conversation about how to avoid that behavior. The cure then becomes to quit doing whatever behavior is causing the problem, not just treating the symptoms. The finger cannot heal until you quit smashing it. And that is how I found my purpose. My job is to discover what the "doors" are in people's lives that are continually blocking them from experiencing the physical healing that God is waiting to give.

If you come to me with headaches and neck pain, perhaps we need to look at your computer set-up. If you complain of back pain, perhaps you shouldn't sit in a chair for so long that you start to look like one. If your knees and ankles hurt, perhaps we should look at the effects of wearing flip flops and Uggs. Can you no longer get out of a chair without using your arms? Perhaps you should use your legs for what they were intended. I don't mean to make solving these problems simplistic, because they can be extremely complex. I am just suggesting that in everything we do, we have choices about how we do them, and we can have an impact on how much God is able to heal.

"For everyone who asks receives, whoever seeks finds, and to everyone who knocks the door is opened." Matthew 7:8. Let's open the door instead of letting it slam in our face.

Give God Good Ground. Create an environment where healing can occur. Create an environment where learning can occur. Create an environment where forgiveness and nurturing can occur. Then step out of the way and watch the miracle happen.