

ARE WE PAYING ATTENTION TO THE WORLD AROUND US?

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We “missions” people have a heart for the world. For me, that is usually focused on those who are *very* distant—say in North India or SE Asia or the Middle East. But last Saturday, for reasons I won’t explain, my wife was in the ER for 10 hours. She was then admitted, had surgery the next day and then stayed one more day in a very well-known hospital in the major city we were visiting—far away from home.

During our stay at the hospital, we talked with people we would have never had reason to meet or speak to. I wondered if any of them had talked with a serious believer in Christ before.

There were a lot of hurting people in the ER. They call it the “ER” for a reason, but I’m talking about the doctors and nurses too. A large percentage of patients during our stay looked like they lived on the street. Many seemed to have mental issues in addition to whatever physical problem put them in the ER. Several were alone, without anyone at their side.

A few men even threatened the staff or “everyone in the room.” One guy—offended by a staff person somehow—said he was Taliban and was going to blow up the place and the White House (not far away). Unrelated to that, there was actually a “lock down” for a few minutes that seemed to be a false alarm.

Most of the ER residents (doctors in training) were Caucasian, but we saw a number of cultures represented

throughout the hospital. Once in pre-op, two female nurses came in speaking another language which I could not hear well enough to recognize. It was obvious they were close friends.

Once when they were working with my wife, I asked them where they were from, and one said “guess.” I said Lebanon, but should have realized it would be Iran. They immigrated about 15 years before and were both married with children. I asked about their religious background knowing it was likely Muslim. One said she wasn’t really anything, but I was pretty sure she said that for fear of what I might think of her. The other said quietly, to her friend, “we are Muslims...,” which I took to mean cultural Muslims—meaning they weren’t Christians or Buddhists or Hindus.

There are always a bunch of Filipino staff at most hospitals, at all job levels. One was the assistant to our daytime nurse—always bright and cheerful. Our main daytime nurse was African American and did an excellent job. Our night nurse got into nursing after years in the restaurant business with a relative. He was from Morocco. He was also a real character, the perfect person for such a job.

We didn’t have the time to talk with all of them about faith, but all of the ones who talked to us reacted positively. Here are a few reflections:

1. Are we really ready to speak winsomely, with grace and truth? If there is something you felt you need to do to prepare, like memorize a couple of parables or key verses in books like Proverbs or Romans, then do it now! And

remember, you will get better at it—and in trusting the Lord to speak through you.

- 2. Are we afraid to share?** With the negative climate towards Christians in the U.S., we need to ask ourselves if we are just fearful. I do not suggest we need to talk with strangers (like those I mention above) who are not interested. If that is the case with someone, then just move on. If you are talking with people whom you will see again, be praying for them and looking for opportunities God provides. Often, in church history, it has been life’s difficulties that draw people to Christ.
- 3. Are you trusting God and stepping out in wise, courageous faith?** The Lord open some doors because we ask him to (James 4:2b). So why not pray “something into existence” (as John Piper puts it, based on James 4). Pray first that you will step out by faith—perhaps in an uncomfortable situation—and that He will open hearts to himself.
- 4. Just tell your story with Christ.** People usually will not get mad at what happened to you. We don’t have to have a “canned” approach to sharing our faith.

People need the truth that is only found in Jesus Christ and the gospel he accomplished. That seems clearer today than any other time in our lifetime. We need that same power to reflect Jesus to the world. MF