

Catherine

By Randy Nash



I am still amazed how God uses plain ordinary people to do extra-ordinary things. Catherine was one of those people. I met her on a Monday morning. She was a patient in the hospital with terminal cancer.

She was an ordinary fourth grade teacher. You could tell though that she was loved by her students the minute you walked in her hospital room by the hand-drawn pictures on the wall expressing well-wishes and love for her. The cancer had made her very frail.

My job as a paramedic was to make an assessment, write a report, and transport the patient for treatment. So I had to ask a good number of questions in a short amount of time since the ride to the radiation facility took only a few minutes.

I proceeded with my routine of questions only to be interrupted by Catherine with her first question: “Why are you not in church?” “Because someone has to take you to your treatments, and besides it is Monday,” I quickly responded. “Oh,” she said, “I thought it was Sunday.” “Do you go to church?” “Yes, I go to church.”

I tried to cut her off but she persisted. “Where?” she continued. “Northland Christian Church.” I kept my answers short to get back to the task at hand. “That’s a good church,” she responded. “Are you married?” she continued her questioning. “Yes, I’m married,” I answered. “Where did you meet your wife?” she asked. “At Ozark Bible College.” “Why aren’t you preaching?”

The question set me back. No one had asked me that question since I had left the ministry a year and a half earlier. It was my first ministry and had turned into a disaster. So I left and poured myself into another “ministry,” paramedics. “I’m just not!” I snapped.

We soon arrived and I couldn’t be happier. We unloaded Catherine and got her to the treatment table. “You should be preaching.” The words spoken hung out there and I had no response. They were words spoken out of love. I could see it in her eyes. I said nothing and left. And I thought I was done with Catherine.

As luck would have it we got the call to return Catherine to the hospital. I decided not to talk at all on this ride back even though Catherine's condition had visibly worsened.

As soon as we started back she started in, "Did you think about what we talked about?" she asked in a quiet voice. "I didn't realize we had talked about anything," I said in as nice a tone I could muster. She persisted in talking to me about the importance of God's call on my life. I remember thinking, "This woman has no clue of my life." I became rude to her just to get her to stop.

I am not normally rude by nature, but Catherine was too close to home for someone who didn't know me. We got her back to the hospital bed and wished her well and left. But I couldn't get Catherine off my mind. I felt bad because of how I treated her.

Our shift was over the next morning and I decided I would go and apologize for my behavior.

I arrived at the hospital and went to her room only to find Catherine's husband sitting quietly beside her bed. At first I thought she was asleep but soon realized she was gone to be with the Lord. I stood there in disbelief.

"You're Randy, aren't you?" Tom broke the silence. "Yes I am. I am sorry for your loss." I couldn't think of anything else to say. "Catherine knew you would come and she left something for you," he said quietly as he handed me a piece of paper with a Scripture verses written on it. "She said you would know what to do with it."

As I looked down I read these words: "In your heart set apart Christ as Lord. Always be ready to give to those who ask of you the reason for the hope that you have. But do it with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience. So that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ Jesus will be ashamed in their slander" (1 Peter 3:15-16).

You see, I left the ministry because of slander. And Catherine, this ordinary school teacher who didn't know anything about me, allowed herself to be used by God in an extraordinary way.