


Make haste to help us, O God

Caring for a loved one remotely

April Yamasaki

Twelve days before I wrote this essay, my husband had a medical emergency. While he does feel better, at the time of writing, he is still in the hospital hooked up to various medical things, waiting for more tests and next steps.¹

Any medical emergency is hard, and it is even harder in a pandemic. In our case, COVID-19 protocols kept us from seeing one another until day 8. That is when his hospital doctor temporarily designated me an “essential visitor” so he could talk with us both together.



How do you care for a loved one in the hospital when you cannot be there? How do you care for yourself in a personal medical crisis in the midst of a pandemic?

During our days apart, my husband and I had been in touch daily by phone, and I could hear that he was feeling better. But what a relief it was to see him in person! Even though he was still recovering—and even though I had to wear a mask the whole time—it was reassuring

to see the light in his eyes when he saw me, to hear his voice without the static of the hospital phone, to see him laugh at a joke, to spend some precious time together.

But now we’re back to days apart for who knows how long. To limit the spread of the coronavirus—especially in a hospital setting—we will bear with whatever restrictions are necessary. It is difficult to be apart, and it makes communicating with nurses and doctors more cumbersome, but we want to do whatever we can for the health and safety of patients, medical personnel, and all concerned.

At the same time, we need to do what we can to address our own situation. How do you care for a loved one in the hospital when you cannot

¹ An earlier version of this article first appeared at www.aprilyamasaki.com; it is printed here with permission of the author.

be there? How do you care for yourself in a personal medical crisis in the midst of a pandemic? Below I share what is helping us make it through, shared with my husband's permission and with the prayer that our experience might help others with a loved one in the hospital during this time.

Keep calling

Six years ago, when my husband had his cancer surgery, I was at his side at the hospital every day. I was there to talk with his nurses and doctors in person. But none of that has been possible this time around. Instead, I have been phoning a lot and waiting for phone calls back. To talk to a nurse, I have discovered the best time to call is late morning or late afternoon. To talk to a doctor, I need to wait for a call back, which may or may not be the following day.

To talk to my husband—he who has always said, “I don’t need a cell phone,” although I think he is rethinking that now!—I call directly to his nursing unit where the phone often rings fifty to one hundred times before someone answers. Then I am transferred to his nursing team where the phone often rings another fifty to one hundred times before someone answers. Then my call is transferred to the portable phone, which is taken to him. But sometimes the phone is not answered after one hundred and twenty rings (yes, I counted before I gave up), and sometimes the portable phone is not charged up or has to be hunted down.

Six years ago, when my husband had his cancer surgery, I was at his side at the hospital every day. I was there to talk with his nurses and doctors in person. But none of that has been possible this time around.

A friend suggested that I could get my husband a cell phone. Another friend offered to loan us a spare. But my husband was too exhausted even to try. “It takes all my energy just to know where I am,” he said. I could well understand that, in part because he was so sick, and in part because he had moved

from emergency to the medical unit, from Team 1 to Team 2, then back to Team 1, having his bed first in the hallway, then a room, then another room, and back to Team 2 again, with most of those moves happening at night when he was half asleep. I had a hard time keeping track of where he was too!

At long last, though, he was moved to a room with a telephone that worked, so in the end all that moving was good for something, as I was able to call his room directly. At least that has been working well for the last few days, but last night my husband called to say he was being moved yet again! We dearly hope the phone will be working in his new room too, or it is back to calling through the nurses' station once more.

Keep caring

I put together a care package for my husband every day and drop it off at the hospital front desk. Then I call his nursing unit so they will know to pick it up and deliver it to his room. Even though I cannot be with him in person, a daily delivery is an expression of love that also provides some



Even though I cannot be with him in person, a daily delivery is an expression of love that also provides some tangible care.

tangible care. I am grateful that we live close enough to the hospital for me to go there every day.

Since my husband went to emergency without a bag, my first care package included what I thought were hospital essentials: toothbrush and toothpaste, dental floss, favorite socks, a bathrobe.

The nurse in emergency suggested some change in case my husband wanted to buy something. I could not think what he might buy in the hospital, but on her suggestion, I added that too.

As my husband began to recover, I started including some of his favorite foods, although I checked first with the nurse about any dietary restrictions. Could he have my homemade oatmeal scones on his hospital diet? What about his favorite chocolate-covered almonds? Other non-food items soon followed: his watch, some light reading, a stylus for his iPod. I knew my husband was starting to feel more like himself when he asked me to bring his Greek New Testament and a bottle of Pepsi!

Keep taking care of yourself

When you write a book on self-care, people expect you to be good at it. But just like everyone else, I am still learning. Sometimes it helps to talk. Sometimes I need to be silent. Sometimes I need to cry. One afternoon I felt so agitated that I called a friend who let me pour out my anxieties. The day I finally got to see my husband, I could not talk about it with the

next two people who called me, so I did not mention it. I made curry with sweet rice just for myself but then could hardly eat it.

I canceled appointments and postponed writing assignments. The first Sunday my husband was in the hospital, I was scheduled to preach for our church, and my sermon was mainly finished before we went into crisis. So I sent it in as usual but let someone else read it for the Zoom service since I felt too on edge to be there myself. Yesterday I joined the service again but slipped out early.

When you write a book on self-care, people expect you to be good at it. But just like everyone else, I am still learning. Sometimes it helps to talk. Sometimes I need to be silent. Sometimes I need to cry.

In all of this, I realize that I am not alone. Family, friends, church, and people I hardly know have been so kind and caring. Many have offered their listening ears and praying hearts, phone calls and cards, emails and Facebook messages, time to go for a walk or for coffee. I cannot do all those things right now, but one day I will, and in the meantime, I am deeply grateful. A friend of a friend even sent me some smoked salmon, personally delivered by our mutual friend and thoughtfully put together with a Mexican rice mix and a can of corn so I would not even have to think about what to have for supper. Others have said, *If you need anything, just call.* Our caring community has been an essential part of these days, and they will be there, I know, in the days ahead.

personally delivered by our mutual friend and thoughtfully put together with a Mexican rice mix and a can of corn so I would not even have to think about what to have for supper. Others have said, *If you need anything, just call.* Our caring community has been an essential part of these days, and they will be there, I know, in the days ahead.

Keep praying

When my husband first went into emergency, these words came to me almost immediately: "Make haste to help him, O God." Those words from Psalm 38:22 became my constant prayer, and soon I added to them. When my husband said he felt disoriented in the hospital, I prayed more specifically for his body and his mind. As our time apart took its toll, I prayed about that too.

Now this is the prayer that calms me down when I feel anxious, the prayer that helps me sleep at night. I hope that this prayer will help those who have a loved one in the hospital. And so I conclude with this prayer and encourage those caring for a loved one to adopt and adapt it for their use as well.

*Into Your hands of Power, Presence, and Mercy,
I commit _____'s body, mind, soul, and spirit.
Make haste to help him/her/them, O God.*

*Into Your hands of Power, Presence, and Mercy,
I commit my body, mind, soul, and spirit.
Make haste to help me, O God.*

*God, please protect _____ in this ordeal.
Although I'm not able to be with him/her/them,
I know that you are there always.
And even if I were able to be there,
I can't protect him/her/them the way you can.*

*You are the God of Power, Presence, and Mercy,
so please protect him/her/them,
sustain him/her/them,
heal him/her/them,
and bring him/her/them back safely home to me.*

Amen.

About the author

April Yamasaki is an ordained minister with twenty-five years of experience in pastoral ministry who writes about spiritual growth and Christian living. Online and print publications include *Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, *The Redbud Post*, *Godspace*, *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, *Leader*, and *Rejoice!* Her books include *On the Way with Jesus*; *Four Gifts: Seeking Self-Care for Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength*; and *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Personal Renewal*.