

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**PARABLES OF THE BODY:
INTEGRATING SPIRITUAL LESSONS WITH A
NURSING CURRICULUM**

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A parable from the body

Are you a spiritual diabetic? Our bodies need glucose. It is energy and power in every one of the billions of cells in our body. In one type of diabetes there is not enough insulin produced. In another type of diabetes the cells become resistant to the insulin. Without insulin, the glucose, which gives life and energy to the cells, can actually cause damage in the body.

What is it that our spiritual bodies need as our physical bodies need glucose? Jesus spoke of this after He fed the 5,000. The people came to him wanting more bread, and He spoke of the bread that they **really** needed. He said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63, NIV). **Jesus’ words** are what give life and energy our spiritual bodies.

God’s words are power. Think back to the time of creation. **God spoke**, and light came into existence. **God spoke** again, and trees and flowers were formed. “The creative energy that called worlds into existence is in the **word of God**. This word imparts power; it begets (or creates) life. Every command is a promise, accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and recreates the soul in the image of God” (White, 1903, p. 26).

So God’s word is the glucose in our spiritual body. Can it cause damage? Can it actually bring death in a diseased spiritual body? Can we have too much of God’s word? God’s word is needed, but can it cause damage if it isn’t combined with the insulin of our spiritual bodies?

Paul said, “I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life, actually brought death” (Romans 7:10, NIV).

What is needed when the word of God is a causing damage? Why would someone resist God’s word? God’s word condemns. If we feel condemned, God’s word will not get into our spiritual cells and give us the life that we need. It won’t produce the changes that it commands. We need the insulin of faith and acceptance. Jesus offers us acceptance and righteousness. We can have a relationship that is free from condemnation. “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6, NIV). There is no hope for us unless we are united with God’s power. “I present before you the man Christ Jesus. You must individually know Him as your Savior before you can study Him as your pattern and your example” (White, 1980, p. 170). Are you getting all that you can out of God’s word, or are you a spiritual diabetic?

Introduction

Seventh-day Adventists believe that true education not only provides students with knowledge and ability to work in a profession of their choice, but true education draws them closer to God:

“The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul.” (White, Christian Education, p. 63).

“The true higher education is what makes students acquainted with God and his word, and fits them for eternal life” (White, Special Testimonies on Education, p. 23).

There are spiritual implications in the biological processes. “We may see God working in the ordinary, if only we have the eyes to see. Poets, artists, and musicians may be most open

to giving expression to such dimensions of reality, but they are there for all to perceive (Marsden, 1997, p. 92). “With spiritual eyes we can see God speaking in the beauties of nature” (Ibid, p. 94).

The purpose of this paper is to inspect some of the philosophy of nature while comparing it to several parts of the body. The paper will demonstrate that parables found in the body can be effective in communicating spiritual truths. These parables can be used as worship thoughts at the beginning of nursing classes to encourage a connection between physical and spiritual truths. In using these parables, spiritual lessons that might otherwise be offensive are received by students.

What is a parable?

The word parable comes from the Greek word, *parabolē*, which means a comparison or analogy. “Parable is a form of teaching. Almost all teaching consists in comparing the unknown with the known, the strange with the familiar” (Hunter, 1960, p. 8). Redding (1962, p. viii) compares a parable to a “shell, which He [Jesus] gives His seed to protect it from overexposure and disinterest.” But he also says that Jesus used parables to reveal truths. In order for a parable to “work,” it must be understood. People will respond to parables in a variety of ways, because the parable may “reveal the unexpected, subvert the normal, cast out certainty to make room for hope” (Tilley, 1985, p. 50).

The use of parables was common in Jesus’ day among the rabbis, but is not found in literature outside of Palestine (Ford, 1995). The Jewish theologians still use stories, called “Haggadah,” to teach the ways of the Torah. They feel it reaches people on all levels, from the common people to the highly educated, capturing the heart through the imagination (Young,

1998, p. 8). Telling parables “was popular, and commanded the respect and attention, not only of the Jews, but of the people of other nations” (White, 1900, p. 20-21). Jesus often used parables that He drew from nature and from the familiar events of every day life to communicate spiritual truths (White, 1913, p. 140). He perfected and used parable teaching so extensively that it is identified as His teaching method. Jesus used over 40 parables that are recorded in the Gospels – most of them in the books of Matthew and Luke. One third of His recorded sayings were in parables (Young, 1998, p. 7). There is also a generous use of parables in the Old Testament books of Proverbs, Ezekiel, and Job, etc.

Redding (1962, p. ix) says, “Parables are perfect for today. They are the particular legacy He left for the twentieth century when it ran low of faith – as if He knew exactly what we needed, even to our taste in religion.” Parables bring the world from God’s perspective into the common, ordinary things of life, and allow each person to understand God’s will. Through parables people can view God’s character and see the relationship of the world in which we live with the heavenly, unseen kingdom of God (Young, 1998, p.5). Parables carry a truth in a way that will challenge and interest its hearers as well as allowing the truth to be more easily remembered (Straton, 1959, p. 16).

Parables have been used as an important part of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Ellen White’s popular book, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, is an extensive study of the parables of Jesus. Beginning in the 1950’s William A. Fagal produced a weekly television program [this program was called *Faith for Today* but has now been changed to *Christian Lifestyle Magazine*] of dramatized stories to teach spiritual truths. Many of the church journals have published stories, parables, and allegories as an important part of educating the youth (Ford, 1995).

Jesus used Parables

The Great Teacher loved to bring His hearers in contact with nature, so that they “might listen to the voice which speaks in all created things...He helped them to interpret the spiritual teaching of the scenes upon which their eyes rested” (White, 1903, p. 102). We are given the counsel that we should follow Christ’s methods more closely by simplifying truths with the use of parables and symbols (White, 1946, p. 203).

“Jesus studied plants, animals and man so He might use the knowledge to teach truth...He who had made all things studied the lessons which His own hand had written in earth and sea and sky...He gathered stores of scientific knowledge from nature...He lived to bless others. For this he found resources in nature, new ideas of ways and means flashed into His mind as He studied plant life and animal life. Continually He was seeking to draw from things seen illustrations by which to present the living oracles of God” (White, 1940, p. 70).

Using parables was a way that Christ could present truths and rebuke sin in those who commonly criticized, misapplied and misinterpreted His words (White, August 11, 1903, par. 11). By using many parables He could reach many different minds (White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, p. 253). “Nurses...would find many opportunities to sow the good seed...The teaching of Christ, the simple truths taught by His parables, are just as much needed today as they were when He was in the world in person” (White, *Loma Linda Messages*, p. 77). Parables are useful in putting religious matters into secular terms (McFague, 1975).

Examples of Other Parables

I have enjoyed looking at the parts of the body that my students are studying, and asking God for wisdom to find lessons that the body might communicate to my students. It is helpful to have a connection between what we see and know, with what God wants to teach us. I feel that we need constant reminders of His love, His availability, and the beauty of His ways.

These parables have been developed for a medical-surgical nursing course in the fourth quarter of an associate degree nursing program. The course focuses on assessing and caring for patients with alterations in the hematological system, the renal-urinary system, the lower gastrointestinal system, the pulmonary system, the cardiovascular system, the integumentary system, the immune system and the neurological system. The content of the class, which I have taught, has yielded the following parables:

New Beginnings *(Used for an orientation class)*

Do you like new things? I do! A new dress....A new car....A new house....A new book....Even a clean, new sheet of paper! There's just something special about new things – no defects (usually!)...So fresh...so beautiful...so open to possibilities. On the other hand, used things so many times get spoiled and ruined. They may be broken or stained or marred in some way.

This is a new class, and from this standpoint it is exciting. We can be full of hope for what it holds for us. There are so many possibilities.

I think that God also likes new things. When He made the world He said it was “very good.” He also encourages us to take from Him a new record of our lives every day. He says “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your

impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new spirit** in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh...and I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekial 36:25-27, NIV). He also says that His compassions are “**new every morning**” (Lamentations 3:23, NIV). In fact “if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**. The old has gone – the **new has come**” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV). Let’s not only enjoy beginning this class, but let’s have a new day every day with God’s provision of a new beginning!

Receiving to Give (*Used in a Hematology class*)

An important characteristic of red blood cells is that they easily attach to gases and easily release gases. As a red blood cell passes through a capillary in the lungs it attaches to an oxygen molecule, which remains attached until the red blood cell reaches a capillary where oxygen is needed. There the red blood cell releases the oxygen and attaches to a carbon dioxide molecule, which it will release when it again reaches the lungs. This cycle continues for the life of the red blood cell.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is a condition where a gas binds tightly to the red blood cell. Because this gas is not released, the red blood cells can no longer easily attach and release oxygen molecules. The cells of the body may die as a result of lack of oxygen.

God designed His universe with a beautiful plan of giving and taking. This plan is demonstrated in the red blood cell and in many other places in nature. Plants and trees give off oxygen, which gives life to most animals and people. Humans and animals give off carbon dioxide, which gives life to the plants and trees. The oceans receive water from rivers and streams but give to the clouds, which give to the land, which again give to the rivers and streams.

God's children were created to receive in order to give. His perfect plan is that we receive the life that flows from our Creator, and give to Him praise and joyous service. "By faith you became Christ's, and by faith you are to grow up in Him – by giving and taking. You are to **give all** – your heart, your will, your service, – give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements, and you must **take all**, – Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper, – to give you power to obey" (White, Steps to Christ, p. 70). But sin interrupted His perfect plan of exchange. Self-seeking interrupts this flow of love. Spiritual death is the result of a discontinuation of this giving and taking. Let's be like a red blood cell and take all the goodness that God has to give, so that we can give to others the blessing He gives to us.

Bowels of the Soul

In the King James Version of the Bible the word bowels is used to express deep affection. The newer versions change this word to heart, as in Song of Solomon 5:4: "My lover thrust his hand through the latch opening; my heart began to pound for him" (where the King James Version would say "my bowels were moved for him"). It is also true that our bowels are very responsive to our feelings.

In another way the bowels illustrate the affection God wants us to have for Him. The inner wall of the small intestines is extensively folded, which triples its surface area. The tiny villi on the surface of the wall expand the surface area another 10 times. The microvilli on the villi expand the surface area by 20 times. Altogether this increases the surface area by 600 times. Muscles in the bowel push and massage the chyme (the food slurry that is passing through the intestines). Close contact of the chyme to the villi is necessary for nutrients to be absorbed. God wants to be very close to us. We are sometimes content to be a certain distance

from others as we talk to them. Lovers become more comfortable with greater closeness. God wants even greater closeness and intimacy. When God comes near, He wants us to hold Him close and receive all that we can from Him as the bread of life.

The Place of Exchange

In the kidneys the tiny renal tubules are in very close proximity to the capillaries. There is an exchange process that occurs to remove wastes and retain the needed electrolytes in the blood. When this exchange process stops, death will occur. Our bodies need to get rid of waste!

This process could remind us of two parables about sorting that Jesus told in Matthew 13:47-52: First, "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away." Second, "Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

An interior designer uses old and new things to make a house more beautiful. It is necessary to sort in order to use things at the best time. In the body this sorting is a very intricate, necessary and constant process.

What kind of exchange needs to take place in our spiritual kidneys? Do we need to save and throw things away? What is the waste product? What is valuable to the body? Might it be different for each one of us? We need a daily and moment-by-moment cleansing just as our bodies need the action of our kidneys. We might have guilt to discard. We might need to save a Bible verse to give us hope and guidance. I think God wants to be closely connected to us so He can be our spiritual kidneys.

Psalm 51 says “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me...surely you desire truth in the inner parts, you teach me wisdom in the inmost place...wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Let’s bring all of our corruption and needs to God. He is the One who can sort things out while He saves the good and gets rid of the evil!

Are you Continent?

Incontinent and Continent are old words. My old dictionary (Webster’s, 1957) says that continent has a rare meaning of “a thing that retains or contains something.” The third meaning of incontinent in this same dictionary is “unable to restrain a natural discharge, as urine, from the body.” Do you know the other meanings of these words? Yes, self-restraint, or lack of self-restraint, especially of sexual activity. And “incapable of containing, holding, keeping, as incontinent of information.”

Nurses know the value of continence. I’m sure you are thankful when your patient is continent. It isn’t a pleasant thing to have to clean up from the problem of incontinence. Continence of the bladder is an amazing mechanism that is very complicated and wonderful. It involves nerves, muscles and intact tissue. To be able to expel the waste of our bodies at specific times is a gift that we all appreciate.

These words (continence and incontinence) are used in the King James Version of the Bible several times to describe the value of self-control or temperance. Paul, in talking about a

runner in the Olympic Races of his day, says that the one who wants to win is self-controlled in order to win the prize. He spoke of the importance of keeping our bodies in subjection (continent) so that we can win a prize that will last forever. We can compare the value of self-control with the wonderful gift of continence.

We may find through our experiences that self-control can be difficult. It is not a natural process and needs to be learned, just as a child learns to be continent. Peter tells us to make every effort to add to our faith goodness...and knowledge...and self-control...then perseverance... godliness...brotherly kindness and love (2 Peter 1:5-7, NIV). Paul tells us to “Run from youthful passions” (2 Timothy 2:22, NIV). God wants to help us with this difficult task: “The grace of God...teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives” (Titus 2: 11, 12, NIV). Self-control is listed as one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). When we think of the value of continence, we can remember the value of self-control. It is possible, and it makes life so much more pleasant.

There is a Fountain to Cleanse

There are two fountains inside the urinary system that prevent infection. One is the constant flow of the urine through the urinary tract that automatically flushes out bacteria. The other is the flow of mucin that protects the vulnerable lining of the bladder from infection. God has likened Himself to a fountain or a spring.

Jer. 2:13: “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

Zech. 13:1: “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”

If we block the flow of God into our life, we won't receive the blessing he wants to give us that will prevent contamination of sin, but if His fountain flows through me I will actually become a fountain for others:

John. 4:14: "Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

Pro. 10:11: "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life."

Pro. 13:14: "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life."

Let's keep the Fountain of Life flowing through us so we won't get infected with the contamination of sin.

Shock

An older woman fell in her home, broke her hip and couldn't reach her phone. She lay in agony, in and out of reality with no food, water, or toileting for days until she was finally discovered... "near-dead," in a state of shock. She was rushed to an emergency room. Her biggest problem was not pain or no food or no toileting, as uncomfortable as those conditions were. Her biggest problem was no water, which resulted in the decrease of her blood volume and the resulting loss of the other functions of the body. This situation reminds me of 1 Tim. 5:6, which tells of a widow who was dead while she lived because she lived for pleasure compared to a widow who was really in need and had been left all alone, but put her hope in God and continued night and day to pray and ask God for help. Eph. 2:1 says, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world."

How near death are we? Are we lacking the water of life that Jesus promised us? Are we able to get to Him? There are circumstances that happen to us that make us think we don't want the water that God has to offer. This separation from the water of life can produce spiritual shock. I'm thankful that as long as there is physical life, there is hope that a person will realize their thirst and take a new look at a God who cares – who offers the water that will bring recovery from spiritual shock. “When you were dead in your sins...God made you alive with Christ [the living water!] He forgave us all our sins [wiped out the living near-death we were experiencing]” (Colossians 2:13).

Our Hearts are Pumps

Our heart is a relatively simple organ. Unlike the liver, which has more than 300 functions, it has only one function, and that is to pump blood. It doesn't make the blood; it only pumps the blood. Our spiritual hearts (or our minds) also pump out what goes in.

There is a story of a man who was trying to siphon gas from a motor home by sucking on the hose until he got the gas to his mouth, but somehow got his hose in the wrong tank. Did it matter? Sometimes we put sewer into our spiritual hearts. We have a choice what goes into our spiritual hearts. Does it matter what we think about, what we read, what we watch, what we listen to? Yes, because our spiritual hearts are pumps just like our physical hearts.

What our spiritual hearts receive they pump out into our actions and words. “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45, NIV). David asks this question “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word. I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:9,

NIV). “Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring [Pump] of life” (Proverbs 4:23, NIV). God’s promise is, “I will give them singleness of thought and action so they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them” (Jeremiah 32:39, NIV).

Burns

Our skin serves many purposes. It protects us from temperature changes, infection and water damage. It also makes us beautiful. But when a person is burned this protection is lost. They have pain, potential for infection, chilling, scarring and contractures.

God’s commands and guidelines are like the skin – they are always good and pleasant for us and bring joy and happiness to others. They also protect us and give us beauty. But, like Eve, we often think that we might be missing out on something if we follow God completely. It is not until we are trapped in the sin, that we realize the pain and heartache that sin causes – it is like a burn. We lose the comfort and the closeness of protection we can have in a friendship with God. But like the miracle of skin grafts, we as children of God have the miracle of forgiveness, which the Bible represents as a robe of righteousness – and we might today think of it as the covering of skin.

There are many examples in the Bible of the forgiveness of God, but two of my favorites are the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 and the experience of David after his adulterous experience that resulted in his song in Psalm 51. We have all experienced the burning of sin. But we have a wonderful promise that can help us through the painful grafting process: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, KJV). As we consider burns today, let’s remember that God’s commands and guidelines, like our skin, are meant for our protection and beauty – and let’s stay

away from the burning lure of sin. But when we are burned, we can receive help from the grafting of His skin.

Cancer

The cancer cell is the same as a normal cell except for a few characteristics:

1. Cancer cells don't have a limit to their multiplication – they crowd the borders even if other cells are injured.
2. Cancer cells lose their differentiation (or individuality).
3. Cancer cells don't stick closely together like normal cells – they are more independent.
4. Cancer cells are migratory – they don't stick to the job where they are created to function, but wander about and lose their function.

Sin is like cancer. With self-centeredness, we don't care who we injure. We may lose our individuality in trying to conform to the dress, standards and ideas of others. But the unity with others is destroyed and we become more independent and try to do our job with no cooperation from others. We don't do the job we were given, but wander off looking for a more ideal situation, and sometimes lose our purpose for living.

Cancer is an enemy that causes disruption of normal body functioning. In looking at some of the characteristics of cancer, we are reminded of how sin can cause disruption and disease of our spiritual lives. We are created to live in harmony with God and each other, but sin is subtle, small in the beginning but gradually grows to bring about the death of our relationships with each other and with God. Let's have an early detection program for the first signs of sin!

Maintaining Connection

Are you a spiritual quadriplegic? A quadriplegic has normal bones and muscles and peripheral nerves. The problem of not being able to function is a result of a separation in the spine. The bones and muscles and peripheral nerves are unable to function by themselves – they need a connection with the brain.

Jesus compares us to branches on the vine. He says, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” and “If a man remains in Me and I in him he will bear much fruit” (John 15:11-5, NIV). If Jesus were teaching this class He would probably say, “I am the brain and you are the nerves. If you disconnect from Me, your body won’t be able to function.” As we study the wonderful system of the nerves we realize the importance of cooperation and coordination and staying connected.

In an emergency situation we have to work diligently to prevent permanent paralysis by protecting the spinal cord. Let’s do all that we can to prevent the spiritual paralysis that results from separation from God. We need to do all we can to maintain connection with Jesus, the source of our power. Let’s encourage each other to stay connected.

Be More Than You Are

Nerves don’t look like much in dissection – gray and plain. But they are well protected in the body by bones or deep tissue. They are made for action, and are very important.

Consider Moses and his rod (Exodus 4). When Moses felt overwhelmed by the job God was giving him, God said, “What is that in your hand?” Moses said, “A staff.” But when God had Moses throw it on the ground it became a snake, and when he picked it up, it again became a staff. Later Moses did many things with that staff – like dividing a body of water and bringing

water out of a rock. As Moses held his staff he held more than his staff – the staff became the channel for God’s work, just as a nerve is a channel for action in the body.

You may also be a channel for God. He may be calling you to be His communicator to the rest of the body – the world – so you can communicate His desire for action. He may want you to bring the needs and feelings of the body to Him in prayer. Will you be a nerve for God? He will protect you and empower you.

Peter’s Test (*Used before an exam*)

You have an exam over nursing knowledge today, but you have other tests of your ability to trust God very frequently. There are difficult times in all of our experiences.

Peter (one of Jesus’ closest friends) had a test. Jesus knew it was coming and said to Peter, “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” Peter didn’t know how unprepared he really was. He had confidence in his own ability. He didn’t prepare because he didn’t agree with Jesus’ assessment of what he would do. He spoke what he believed – “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Matthew 26:35, NIV). “Lord, I’m ready to go with you to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33, NIV).

But Peter did fail the test. He did disown Jesus. It was when Peter failed and realized his need that Jesus could trust Peter and give him a work to do. Jesus not only saw Peter’s failure, he also saw his victory. He said to Peter before the test, “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, even though Satan wants to have you. When you return to me strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31, 32, personal paraphrase).

You may have tests in life, but Jesus is praying for you. We can say with the tested man Job, “He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:20, NIV).

Evaluations by students

Students seem to really appreciate these body parables. I can see their attention riveted on the lessons. These are some of the comments I have received in evaluation of these worship thoughts:

“I appreciate your drawing out the correlations between the human body and our Christian journey.” “I enjoy the way you bring out points that we are learning in class and tie them in with Bible examples.” “I like the way you have the worship go along with the lecture.” “I like the analogy between God and what we are studying.” “I don’t think I ever thought about God being like my blood, but it was a good thought.” “I am determined to do well in nursing this quarter. Putting God into nursing like you have done has resparked my passion. I want to talk to you more about this.” “I love starting the day with the Lord. And now you incorporate the physiology with the Word. After all, He created us!” “God is my cleansing fountain, too.” “I really enjoy your worship thought. It reconfirms my belief in the Almighty.” “It is nice to correlate nursing with God’s view. The couple of minutes spent on worship lays the foundation – the real purpose of why I want to become a nurse.”

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