



July 3, 2024

A Note from Pastor Jon

Greatest Hists: Revisiting some previous Letters of Encouragement, in celebration of all God has done during these last four years!

Dear Friends,

I wrote this way back in the fall of 2020 as I started my first internship at Nationwide Children's Hospital. So much of this message still resonates with me today, four years later, even on a night when I am working a paid shift on call, writing a sermon, making a visit, entering into a meeting...

I hope this message can still resonate with you!

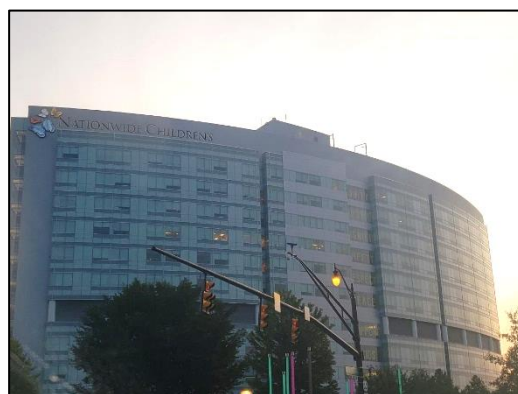
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Originally sent September 30, 2020:

I am sure many of you know that I am nearing the end of a master's degree program that I started in the fall of 2018 in the field of Practical Theology, with a concentration in pastoral care and chaplaincy. A requirement of the degree program is that I take part in a chaplain internship at one of our local hospitals through a program called Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).

CPE dates back to the 1930s and serves as an integral part of three of our greater Columbus area hospital systems. I applied, was accepted, and on September 10th I began my CPE journey at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

Over the next 18 weeks I will dedicate 400 hours to the program. On Mondays, along with six other CPE interns, we have a collaborative time of learning and reflecting. I will also spend most of my Thursday



nights and a couple of Saturdays as the on-call resident chaplain at NCH.



YES, it is as overwhelming as it sounds. During on-call shifts I am the ONLY chaplain in the hospital, responsible for answering emergency calls for patients, families, and staff members.

I recently experienced my first night on call. Just fifteen minutes into my shift, my pager alerted me to my first trauma call. Less than thirty seconds later I was getting another call to prepare to be with a family who would soon experience the loss of their child. Fifteen minutes later, another page alerted me that another patient would soon arrive in need of serious care.

This was my baptism by fire. In case you are wondering, no, the night did not slow down. I think I might have gotten a couple hours of rest between all of my emergency calls.

The night was overwhelming, to say the least.

On top of the on-call shifts there will be reflections to write, presentations to give, and meetings with my supervisor at NCH. This schedule, beyond the on-calls, added to the overwhelming feelings around these next 18 weeks.

Let's face it, the rest of life doesn't come to a standstill. I still have my other course work to navigate, along with family, church, and every other challenge that life will present over these coming weeks.

At the end of my first official class day, the Monday after my first on-call experience, I walked into a lobby area at NCH and found a chair facing outside the hospital. I watched as parents walked with their children, entering and leaving the hospital, and I imagined what clinic they might be visiting or what bad test results they may soon receive, and whether I would be the chaplain called to their room sometime in the near future.

How am I to handle all that is presented to me?

I once again felt the weight of all that was before me.

I took a deep breath and reached inside my bag to grab a book of poems by David Whyte.* The book was a gift, and I had put it in my bag a week earlier and not thought much about it. I am not a big fan of poetry. I might even say I don't like poetry very much. I'm starting to learn, however, to appreciate some good poetry.

Having never opened the book, I turned to the first poem and read these words:

*Start close in,
don't take the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don't want to take.*

**Start close in.
Start with the first thing.**

I think if we are honest with ourselves, it is often the first step, the first thing, that we don't really want to do. Likely there's an exciting possibility that could come later down the road, but we aren't excited or we are flat out hesitant to take that first step.

That first step is daunting.

That's how I was feeling in that moment at the beginning of my CPE journey.

There are things coming down the road that I am excited about as I look at the schedule for CPE: being a part of bringing some joy to kids and their families in the hospital around the holidays, some of our scheduled teachings around some interesting topics, and learning to be a better pastoral caregiver.

I can't get there, however, without taking that first step.

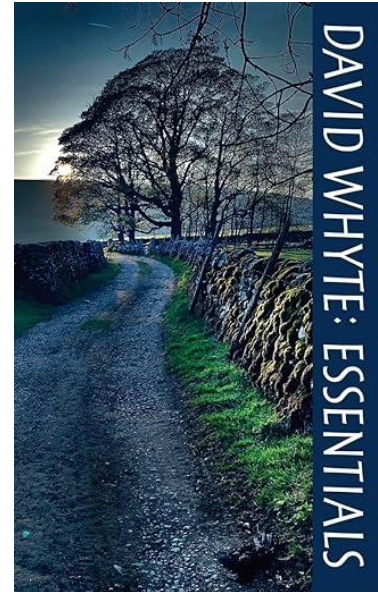
It's not about what is later down the list of assignments, or the on-calls that are to come, or the sermons to write, or the emails to be sent, or the phone calls to be made, or any other task that I am anticipating or dreading.

What I realized in that moment and have reflected upon for about the last two weeks is the challenge of simply taking the first step.

You may be facing challenges at work or in school.

You may be facing a long journey with health issues.

You may not even know what unexpected trial is just around the corner.



Whatever it is, I want to encourage you that — in whatever challenge you may be facing — to simply take the first step. You can't and you won't reach the second, third, or final step until you take the first.

I'm glad I've taken the first steps in my CPE journey. The first two weeks have been filled with a lot of fulfilling moments, and I know the weeks that follow will be the same.

Start close in,

Jon



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*David Whyte, *David Whyte: Essentials*, edited by Gayle Karen Young Whyte (Many Rivers Press, 2019).

<https://bookshop.org/p/books/david-whyte-essentials-david-whyte/13367501?ean=9781932887501>

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