

join us on our knees

Bex Lawton responds
to nurse and midwife
strike action

Propping the staff room door open with her foot, Maria leans out into the corridor and shouts, 'Bex! You coming for lunch soon?'. When I finally pull myself away, it's gone 4 pm. 'I did make you a cup of tea' Maria gestures to

the cup nearest me, 'it might be cold now. Sorry.' 'Don't worry. I think it's my first drink of the day. Don't tell bed five, I keep nagging him to drink, but I'm doing worse than he is!' 'It's better than yesterday. We didn't stop at all. Wouldn't it be nice to get a proper break? Meet up with a friend or sit in a park?'

'I'd settle for drinking a cuppa uninterrupted', I say, pulling myself up to answer a patient's buzzer.

As I return, she asks, 'What would you do if you weren't a nurse?'

'I'd be a florist.' No question. 'Being surrounded by beautiful flowers all day.

What could be stressful about shrubs?'

'Bet it smells better than this place as well', she laughs. 'Actually, I saw that the Waitrose on the corner is hiring. I'm sure the night shift pay can't be that different'.

'I've read that nurses are having to use food banks to feed their families.

'I'm having to pick up extra shifts as agency. I don't know what I'm going to do if petrol prices go up any further. I might have to start sleeping in my car in-between shifts.'

'The problem is I couldn't do anything else.

I love this job. I can't walk away.'

'Me neither.'

This is us at our best, fantasising about what we'd do if we didn't nurse. Laughing. Joking. Making the best of it as we always have. At our worst, we cry in our cars on the way to work, dreading the day ahead, having seen on the work WhatsApp that we're short-staffed and haven't found any help yet.

We know we won't have time to do our jobs as well as we want. Running pillar to post, pulses racing. Stress weighs on our shoulders like a heavy woollen cape from the uniforms in the sixties (although this isn't so easily whipped off and hung up on the coat hook when we get home!).

Both the Royal Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery (RCN and RCM) say that we're at a crisis point. Unfair pay ultimately puts patients at risk, as pay continues to fall behind inflation and significantly contributes to a lack of staffing. This winter, members of these unions were called to vote in a ballot to strike. The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) is also calling upon its members to engage their hearts and minds and to pray. Across our nearly five thousand members (including nurses and midwives) there are varied opinions on whether to strike or not.

Ultimately, it's a conscience issue. But we agree that nurses and midwives are on their knees, and we need to join them. On our knees in prayer. Will you join too? Let's humble ourselves before God, call on him to have mercy on a nation and make a difference.

Here are four prayer actions you could join us in:



Speak

1. speak

Do you know any nurses or midwives? How are they coping financially? Offer to pray for them if appropriate.



fast

2. fast

Consider doing a 'shift fast'. Don't eat until 4 pm, as if you were having a late lunch break. It's not about going on a hunger strike in order to manipulate God into answering our prayers. But he loves us to submit ourselves, body and soul, before him. If you struggle with food, think about a social media fast.



give

3. give

When you do your weekly food shop, buy extra non-perishable goods, and put them in the food bank bins next to the checkout. Pray for those who will need them.



sleep

4. sleep

The RCN reports that nurses are sleeping in their cars in-between shifts because they can't afford the petrol to go to and from work. You could sleep in your own car on your driveway one night and pray for those that need to do so regularly out of necessity. But only if it doesn't put your own safety at risk.

Nurses and midwives won't be the only professions to consider strike action this winter. We're all affected by the cost of living and energy crisis, and we are already experiencing regular postal and train strikes. What will your response be? I hope that if you're facing your own decision on strike action, you'll do so carefully with your heart and Bible open. And, as unions cry out to our government for change, what would you cry out to God? For, *'the righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.'* (Psalm 34:17-18) Amen! 🌸

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