

What it means to be a Christian Doctor

I chose to study Medicine, as I felt God was calling me to use the gifts and skills He had given me to help and serve other people.

It is a hugely rewarding, stimulating career and it is a real privilege to care for others at the most difficult times of their lives. Nevertheless, there are many trials and challenges to face along the way. Being a doctor is more than a job. It is a vocation.

By nature, most doctors are caring, compassionate and hard-working. So what does it mean to be a Christian doctor and what particular challenges do we face?

1. To be salt and light in the workplace

Despite the best medical care, there will always be pain, suffering, anxiety, anger and tears. As Christian doctors, we are called to shine a light in this dark place.

God calls us to love as He loves: the unkempt alcoholic, the self-harming teenager, the elderly patient with dementia, the outspoken member of the team. He teaches us to be humble (in God's eyes the cleaner is as important as the consultant) and to look out for the rest of the team, even when the going gets tough.¹

2. To serve God

We will never get everything right but the Bible teaches us to “work at it with all your heart”²: striving to get the diagnosis right; doing the best that we can for our patients; going the extra mile. We need not worry about pleasing the consultants who will write our references. “It is the Lord Christ [we] are serving” and He demands the highest standards of care, compassion, honesty and integrity.

3. To share our faith with those around us

God calls us to share our faith with others³. It clearly isn't appropriate to share the gospel with every patient or colleague that we meet, but God opens doors and we need to be prepared to step out in faith.

This can be a troublesome area for Christian doctors. It is easy to be misinterpreted and doctors have been reprimanded for sharing their faith with patients.⁴ However, it is hard to deny that issues of faith and spirituality become more important to patients when faced with illness and death. God uses each of us in different ways to reach out to those around us.

4. To approach our work with joy

Cynicism is rife in the NHS. Morale is low. Staff feel overworked and under-paid. The challenge for us, as Christians, is to “do everything without grumbling or arguing”,⁵ to stand up for what is right and to approach our work with joy.⁶

5. To maintain and grow in our relationships with God

In order to be “salt and light” in the workplace, we need to be walking closely with the Lord. Long, unsociable hours lead to exhaustion and shift-work plays havoc with routine, making it difficult to have a regular “quiet time” and attend church. Doctors in training frequently have to relocate, moving miles away from spiritual support and having to find a new church. All of these factors make it a challenge to maintain and grow in a relationship with God.

6. Trusting that God will sustain us

We face tough situations and circumstances every day. But God is there with us, in each and every consultation, equipping us, guiding us, helping us with difficult procedures, giving us the words to say.⁷ When we are exhausted, He sustains us and gives us the energy to continue.

Having had only four hours’ sleep before a night shift, I opened the Bible to Psalm 18:28 “*You, Lord keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.*”

7. Honouring God in our careers

The Bible warns us against turning good things into idols⁸. It is all too easy for Medicine, something which we enjoy greatly and in which we find great satisfaction and reward, to become an idol. Work becomes our life. We find our identity and security in our job, rather than God. We idolise success and the praise of others, rather than seeking to glorify God. We work harder and harder, knowing there is always something more to achieve... all the more drifting further and further from Christ. Whilst we need Christian doctors in all specialties, we must think carefully about the impact that a particular career path may have on our faith.

8. Serving the poor and needy

Christian doctors are called to serve the poor and needy.⁹ For some, this will mean travelling abroad to work in a developing country, serving outcast members of society in this country, or speaking out against issues that affect the vulnerable and poor. Whilst we are not all called to “go” we must be open to God’s calling in our lives.

9. Giving generously

Doctors earn a healthy salary. The first pay cheque is quite a novelty after six years of student living! The Bible warns us against the love of money¹⁰. We need to learn to be wise stewards of wealth and prayerfully consider how we can give generously to God’s work.

10. Speaking out about ethical issues

Christian doctors are faced with ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. We are in a unique position to be able to present these issues from both a biblical and a medical perspective. We have a responsibility to take a stand for what is right and to influence the medical profession and policy makers on a national level.

Christian Medical Fellowship

The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) was formed in 1949 and currently has over 5,000 members. CMF unites and equips Christian doctors and nurses, offering opportunities to lead and to serve; providing resources and training on a wide range of issues; and supporting Christian doctors when facing challenges in the workplace.

Prayer points

- That Christian doctors would seek to glorify and serve God in the workplace
- That we may be open to God's call to serve the poor and needy
- That we would be diligent in making time to pray and read God's word; that we would be walking closely with Him day by day; that we would quickly find fellowship, both at church and in the workplace
- For those working as missionaries abroad: that God would equip them for their work and that they would trust in his provision
- For boldness and courage to share our faith with colleagues and patients – sensitively and when appropriate
- That we would be good stewards of our wealth and give generously to God's work
- For discernment and guidance in making tough ethical decisions; for boldness to stand up for what is right

¹ Philippians 2:1-4

² Colossians 3:23-24

³ 1 Peter 3:15

⁴ <http://www.cmfblog.org.uk/2012/06/22/reprimanded-by-the-gmc-for-sharing-faith-with-a-patient-dr-richard-scott/>

⁵ Philippians 2:14

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

⁷ Philippians 4:13

⁸ Exodus 20:3

⁹ Luke 4:18-19

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 6:10