



A New Year resolution

write this at the start of a new year, when many people make resolutions. It's an opportunity to make a change – a positive action to stop doing one thing, or start doing something else. Although never particularly drawn to resolutions, I have been challenged to rethink my attitude and behaviour by a Christmas-present book. *A Heart of Compassion*¹ is written by a Christian GP, who recounts all he has learned through his interactions with the downtrodden in society.

He writes: 'God's grace, his love, and his heart of compassion, do not seek a reason to be offered. God simply sees each one of us as beautiful, the most handsome of men, the most beautiful of women, and he simply loves us for who we are.' He challenges the reader to live this compassionate life, to see everyone through God's eyes, and to take action.

Social action

Sara Morgenstern is a junior doctor working in London. She explains why and how she got involved in social action, the challenges and the rewards, and why we too should reach out:

I believe God is passionate about 'social action', specifically 'social justice' and that's why I'm involved in it. In Micah we are told to 'act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'.² The prophet Amos describes how much God hates hypocrisy; how he is more interested in justice than in Israel's sacrifices and outward piety.³ Throughout both Old and New Testaments we see God's desire for justice to be done, and his concern for the poor and downtrodden. We also see his anger against those who ignore injustice or actively oppress others. Jesus quotes Isaiah when he declares that he has been sent to 'preach good news to the poor...to release the oppressed'.⁴ I do not think it is possible to follow Jesus and ignore injustice in our world.

My personal involvement started during my teenage years, when I began to understand God's heart for the poor. I helped out in 'Soul Survivor' days, clearing litter and generally serving people on rough estates. I arrived at uni particularly wanting to work with homeless people, and got involved in the homeless soup run at my university. It was a great way to start as the time commitment was whatever you could afford; although I went on to help organise, and then chair the group for two years! I still drive the minibus when I can.

Through running the group God gave me many other opportunities, including visiting an elderly lady via a Christian charity in Roehampton called Regenerate-RISE.⁵ I've now gone on to become a trustee for them, and still visit the lady, who's become my friend.

There are many rewards from being involved in social action, doing something practical to express God's love to the disadvantaged and to counter injustice in the world. Through the soup run we see our views on homeless people challenged and changed, just by getting to know them and their situations. I for one realised that they too were God's children,

deserving to be treated as such. Feedback from the homeless who come has remained overwhelmingly positive, which also spurs you on when it's raining, or when challenges come. As a Christian I found I had many opportunities to have discussions with people about God, often initiated by them rather than me! I've even been able to pray for the occasional person on the street with the group's agreement... and this despite it not being a Christian group. In my work with RISE the most satisfying thing is to see God's character embodied, specifically his love and care for those who are lonely or isolated, and to see people changed by it.

There are many rewards from being involved in social action

The challenges are as you would expect – getting funding, prioritising time to be able to get to meetings, and overcoming differing points of view as to the way forward. But through it all I've seen God at work behind the scenes, bringing in his kingdom.

I now see social action not as something we are called to do once a week, but as a way of life. My dream (one that I pray God has put on my heart) is to be a GP, living and working in a community not only to meet peoples' health needs, but also their social and spiritual ones. What's yours?

Having a heart of compassion

As junior doctors we face many different time pressures, and many of us will already be involved in outreach and service. You may not be challenged to the same extent of involvement as Sara, but in our daily practice we all face those in far less fortunate situations, those who are vulnerable, and those who society tries to ignore. How do you respond to these patients? We do not have to go out onto the streets to begin to reach out: it's a way of life, it's a change of heart and a fresh reminder of grace, it can start right where you are, right now.

*Open my eyes, Lord, to people around me,
Help me to see them as You do above;
Give me the wisdom and strength to take action
So others may see the depth of Your love.⁶*

Katy Lane is an FY1 doctor in Leeds

references

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| 1. Clarke P. <i>A Heart of Compassion</i> . Authentic Media, 2006 | 4. Luke 4:18 |
| 2. Micah 6:8 | 5. www.regenerate-rise.co.uk |
| 3. Amos 5 | 6. de Haan K. Cited in <i>Our Daily Bread</i> , December 2008-February 2009 |