

Sarah Ross offers some biblical wisdom on juniors' issues

# Juniors' Struggles

Life as a junior doctor can be difficult. We have all seen Christian friends and colleagues struggle, even abandon their career, or worse, their faith. Is there anything we can do?

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In our first years, frequent job moves keep us in a state of change. Long hours and stressful conditions, difficult situations and sick or dying patients (and their relatives) drain our physical and emotional energy. Where do we find resources to deal with this and recharge our batteries? Church might be such a place but circumstances conspire to make it difficult to attend regularly and have fellowship. We may not think that this is important but we are vulnerable when isolated from other Christians. Add in colleagues' cynicism and our ideals and faith can begin to erode. As if that is not enough, most SHOs know what it is to be completely swamped by work, study and membership exams.

The best person to turn to is God himself. There are plenty of scriptural precedents, especially the psalms and prophets, for complete honesty with the Most High; we should feel encouraged to address our concerns and complaints to him.<sup>1</sup> The Incarnation shows us that God has experienced life on earth and is acquainted with sorrows, temptations, stress and a lifestyle not dissimilar to our own.<sup>2</sup> Have you ever read the gospel accounts of Jesus' work in healing and thought it familiar? Of course, he never turned anyone away, lost his temper or sulked with the nursing staff over an unnecessary bleep! Still, he does understand pressure, lack of food and sleep, and emotional demands.<sup>3</sup> There may not always be an obvious answer to prayer or a perceptible presence to let us know he is near. Nevertheless, we are assured of continuing care, commitment and an ear always ready to listen. He knows us well so we don't need to hold back, hide the truth or explain.<sup>4</sup> Who else has written our name on the palms of his hands?<sup>5</sup>

We should regularly re-evaluate life and work. What, if anything, distinguishes us from our colleagues? What are our priorities? Are we running the race of faith or the rat race?<sup>6</sup> It is so easy to be pressured into career-based steps, sitting exams and doing things the accepted way. This may or may not be in keeping with the Maker's plans; we must remember whose will we are doing.<sup>7</sup> The quality of our character, the fruit of the spirit, our



relationships with patients and colleagues should be of greater concern than steps up the career ladder. When another step up the ladder means better hours, or less time resident on call, it is easy to forget that the kingdom of heaven places the servant first and the lowest highest.<sup>8</sup>

Trials and difficulties have a purpose.<sup>9</sup> Right from Job to Jesus, the Bible teaches us that God doesn't tempt us but does use trials for our good.<sup>10</sup> Paul speaks of a progression from struggle to hope.<sup>11</sup> If we can persevere through our trials, we will develop more of Christ's character and gain a hope that will not be disappointed.<sup>12</sup> We are not expected to do this by ourselves. Jesus exhorts us to ask in his name for what we need;<sup>13</sup> he even assures us that these things are already known.<sup>14</sup> We should concern ourselves with the Kingdom and let God worry about everything else. More than that, Jesus tells us that he is always with us.<sup>15</sup> We must prioritise time with God, support and encourage each other and pray.<sup>16</sup> Our faith, refined by experience, is described as 'worth more than gold'.<sup>17</sup> Ideally we should come through our time as juniors having gained a stronger faith along with medical experience and membership.

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## References

- 1 Psalm 10:1; Jeremiah 20:7-8; Habakkuk 1:2
- 2 Hebrews 4:15
- 3 Matthew 4:1-4
- 4 Psalm 139:1-4
- 5 Isaiah 49:16
- 6 Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 9:24
- 7 Acts 5:29; Romans 12:2
- 8 Matthew 19:30
- 9 James 1:2-4
- 10 Job 1:6-12; Hebrews 12:5-11; James 1:13-14;
- 11 Romans 5:1-5
- 12 James 1:12
- 13 Matthew 7:7-8; John 14:13
- 14 Matthew 6:25-34
- 15 Matthew 28:18-20
- 16 Hebrews 10:24-25
- 17 1 Peter 1:6-7