

**Richard Scott** highlights the danger of losing yourself in your work

# WHOSE LIFE ARE YOU LIVING?

A weekend in a manor house in Derbyshire – the perfect setting for a reunion. Thirty years as doctors and all still in the NHS, bar one couple on their way to New Zealand. Walking and fine dining allowed us to take stock of our present situation, while slides revealing seventies haircuts and sheepish grins took us back in time. In the system, but at the bottom. Everything to play for.

Day one at medical school. The surgeon scanned our eager faces, not liking what he saw. 'Only one of you will make it.' He meant being like him, the Special One. Very deliberately, he'd introduced competition before we'd even got to know each other and the game was on. It started with avoiding the pre-clinical cull and continued into clinical as we came across patients and our new role models – the junior doctors treating them. Capable and dedicated, by necessity they were also highly competitive and we were under no illusion that their journey involving exams and scrapping in the job market would soon be ours. For every game has its rules, and to succeed is costly. How could it be otherwise?

Along with the others I started climbing, but halfway up the hill my world fell apart. Externals were partly responsible – working horribly hard, with any spare energy spent studying, ending a relationship and dealing with a housing nightmare wasn't fun. But these were details. The bigger issue was my focus. Applied to goals set by others, with a touch of hero-worship thrown in, I'd unintentionally attempted to live my seniors' lives, not my own. And God, whom I'd discovered aged 14, had been left well behind. In crisis, I re-devoted myself to Him, but still needed time away on mission to discover who I was. Returning to the NHS six years later, I was finally able to function as myself.

'For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord'.<sup>1</sup> Abroad, I'd been free to do my best for patients whilst remaining true to myself. But how to make a difference back home? God stepped in. First, he moved me into general practice. Then, Alpha challenged me to tell others about my faith. My focus reset, it was clear that whatever else I provided, above all patients needed a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Only this confidence and clarity has allowed me to resist becoming side-tracked down time-consuming avenues at work that claim to be best for me and for patients, whilst delivering neither. Let me explain.

## If hitting numbers rather than saving souls gets us up in the morning, we're no different from efficient secular practices

Over the past 15 years as a GP-evangelist in Margate, I have been energised by talking faith with patients. Recently, I chatted with three desperate patients, one of whom took up my challenge and has begun to attend church. But there are twin dangers lurking for Christian GPs. The obvious one is the highly secular GMC, whose view of what constitutes a good doctor is betrayed by their new guidelines limiting faith discussions. More subtle, but far more pervasive and dangerous in my view is the changing nature of our work. QOF targets and prescribing meetings, to name but two, sharpen practice to an extent, but only through emphasising auditable care at the expense of non-targeted, often softer aspects of medicine, not least spiritual care. With considerable finance at stake, GPs' competitive instincts go on red alert as targets mean money. Christian GPs are not immune from such acquisitive behaviour, justifying their actions in the belief that excellent figures imply excellent doctors. With time and energy limited, our focus can become misplaced as we settle for what our bosses deem important. If hitting numbers rather than saving souls gets us up in the morning, we're no different from efficient secular practices; indeed, we're lost.

Yet, I agree – there is a conundrum. The same Paul who advised 'do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world'<sup>2</sup> also states that 'everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.'<sup>3</sup> But I would suggest that Caesar already gets what is rightly his. The question is, does God?<sup>4</sup>

Whose life are you living?

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### references

1. Jeremiah 29:11
2. Romans 12:2
3. Romans 13:1
4. (referring to) Matthew 22:21