

# IMITATING CHRIST

## in wisdom and courage

A striking feature of Jesus' ministry is the wisdom he showed in responding to questions and in training his disciples. His example is highly relevant to us in our dual role as carers and trainers.

### Wise answers

When asked difficult questions, Jesus not only answered shrewdly but invariably made capital out of them. For example, the Pharisees and Herodians sought to trick him with the question, 'Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' Jesus' challenging reply: 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.'<sup>1</sup> He was also able to discern underlying issues: he knew, without being told, what his critics were thinking.<sup>2</sup>

### Wise doctoring

We need wisdom to live aright and make the most of our opportunities for advancing the kingdom of God. We may not have our Lord's special Holy Spirit anointing, but we do have his assurance that God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.<sup>3</sup> We also have the promise of God's Word: 'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should pray to God, who will give it to him; because God gives generously and graciously to all.'<sup>4</sup> Most patients have problems that lie below the surface. Many patients recovering from a road traffic accident are burdened by self-accusation as they recall that injuries sustained by others are the result of their own carelessness. A sense of guilt is also common among patients undergoing termination of pregnancy.

### Wise teaching

Jesus was wise in the training of his disciples, which he made a priority. We can learn a lot from his methods. He taught through the natural flow of daily events and made effective use of questions. He showed wisdom as well as courage by giving his disciples responsibility, sending out the twelve on their own without his presence to gain practical experience.<sup>5</sup> On another occasion he sent 72 of his disciples out in pairs, to serve and then return for debriefing.<sup>6,7</sup> He did not hesitate to correct them when they displayed wrong attitudes.<sup>8</sup> He was also sensitive to their physical and mental needs. Once, when the pressure was particularly great, he said to them: 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'<sup>9</sup> He also taught his disciples individually, particularly Peter who he marked out for leadership.<sup>10,11</sup> Above all, he prayed for them.<sup>12</sup>

There are many examples here for us: taking opportunities for teaching out of situations as they arise; being honest with our students about their mistakes; caring for their physical and mental welfare; giving them opportunities of gaining practical experience and learning on the job; dealing with them individually as well as in a group; praying for them, and teaching by example.

### Courageous actions

Another characteristic of Jesus' life is his courage. There are many examples in the Gospels of his bravery in the face of hostile

criticism, physical danger and frequent death threats. He showed calmness when confronting the Gadarene demoniacs, the menacing crowds at Nazareth who tried to throw him off a cliff and the soldiers who came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane.<sup>13,14,15</sup> His courage was also shown in the way he challenged the hypocrisy of his powerful opponents.<sup>16</sup> On one or two occasions he physically disrupted their business in the temple by overthrowing the tables of the money-changers.<sup>17,18</sup>

### Courageous conscience

There are occasions when healthcare workers need courage and a willingness to court unpopularity. We may have to incur the wrath of our superiors if we decline to do something our conscience tells us is immoral or unethical. I have never forgotten an incident when a fellow medical registrar was asked by the most eminent cardiologist in Britain at that time to tell a patient an untruth. 'I am not prepared to do it,' he said. 'It is against my principles.' 'Principles!' thundered the chief, 'What do you know about principles?' The registrar stood his ground - and soon gained the consultant appointment for which he was training.

### Courageous criticism

We need to be prepared to speak out against shortcomings and injustices in the health service, especially as they affect patients and other members of the health team. Though we must do all we can to carry our colleagues with us, we must even be prepared, occasionally, to accept the despised title of whistle-blower. It is un-Christlike to make our feelings known only when we ourselves feel wronged or under-valued. Of course, there is one enormous difference between Jesus' authority and ours. We dare not say, as he could: 'Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?'<sup>19</sup> Alas, we are far from perfect, with a strong underlying tendency toward hypocrisy. Nevertheless, as servants of God, we are commanded to reprove and rebuke sin, and be salt in a putrifying society.<sup>20,21,22</sup> But, whenever we have to criticise others, we should always do so with a ready admission of our own imperfections.

The imitation of Christ is an ideal to which we shall never attain, but ought constantly to keep as our goal.

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### references

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| 3. Luke 11:13   | 8. Mark 10:13-16              | 17. John 2:14-16   |
| 4. James 1:6-7  | 9. Mark 6:31                  | 18. Luke 19:45-48  |
| 5. Mark 3:14-15   | 10. Luke 22:31-32             | 19. John 8:46      |
| 6. Luke 10:1  | 11. John 21:15-22             | 20. Matthew 18:15  |
| 7. Bruce AB. <i>The Training of the Twelve</i> . Edinburgh: | 12. John 17:9                 | 21. Ephesians 5:11 |
|   | 13. Mark 5:1-13               | 22. Matthew 5:13   |
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