

Mike Reynolds draws out four goals for the Christian doctor from Jesus' healing of the cripple in John 5

Jesus on ward

After two years as CMF regional staffworker, I returned to full-time medicine as a specialist registrar. Not only did my working practice and time commitments change but I had new responsibilities and pressures. I began to struggle again with many of the issues I had warned students about. Coping with a patient's near death due to my possible error and giving a student talk on 'dealing with exam stress' seemed miles apart.

Many Christian doctors lose the enthusiasm their faith once had. It's easy to find ourselves just struggling to keep afloat. Faith may have little impact on work and the lives of those around. Career plans seem of utmost importance, determining future plans. Medicine and money become idols. Fiddling research (but losing integrity) is tempting. People become pathologies. Tiredness and stress lead to cynicism. We complain about our lifestyles and start to see medicine merely as a job rather than a privilege to serve God by serving others. Our arrogance separates us from other professionals and we carry this sense of elitism into our churches and spiritual lives. Spiritual schizophrenia develops: we have a fragmented mind with our faith becoming separated from our day-to-day living.¹ We struggle with peer pressure and easily compromise our witness. Time constraints become complicated by administration, planning, revalidation and finally patients. We lose our perspective on what it means to be like Christ on the wards.

Let's return to first century Jerusalem to see how Jesus dealt with pressure. He too had many demands on his time but was able to keep them in focus. We need to bring a Christ-like perspective to our practice of medicine; to ask 'What would Jesus do?'

Jesus was compassionate

Read John 5:1-18 and imagine the scene. It is the Sabbath and Jerusalem is full of pilgrims from all over Israel who have travelled for one of the three main festivals. Near the Sheep Gate is a shady area with covered colonnades and a pool. Many blind and paralysed people are gathered, sheltering from the heat of the day and hoping that they will be healed of their infirmities. In the midst of the hustle and bustle, Jesus comes along and singles out an individual. He pauses and spends time with just *one* person. He learns about him, his condition and suffering. He is not cynical or arrogant in his approach but shows compassion, dealing with this man as if there was no one else around.

Jesus approached people as individuals at their point of need. Additionally, by the skilful use of questions, he was able to draw out their wants, fears

and hopes. Even in the busyness of the day, he made time for them.

In the earlier chapters of John, we see Jesus making time for a variety of other people. In the middle of the night he talks with Nicodemus, a religious leader. After a long journey he makes time for a Samaritan woman who has come to draw water at the well. What were the consequences of these actions? Nicodemus is listed as an early believer and the Samaritan woman also comes to faith, as do many other Samaritans.² In our task-orientated world let us not lose sight of individuals and relationships. At the end of a long clinic or post-take ward round, we still need to view each individual as Christ does, someone created in his image.³

Jesus was charismatic

Jesus was charismatic in the sense that he used his gifts. He saw the need of the paralysed man and healed him. He didn't leave him with platitudes but dealt with the problem. Notice also how Jesus then slipped away into the crowd. What might have happened to us in such a situation? Would we have ended up speaking at healing seminars and running retreats?

Jesus wasn't arrogant about his gifts. Neither should we be. We are privileged to have medical training but we must use these gifts humbly, to the best of our ability. We must take care to keep our skills and knowledge up to date and be humble enough to expect correction and change.

Jesus was evangelical

Francis of Assisi is often quoted as saying, 'I share my faith with everyone I meet and occasionally I use words'. Nothing neutralises our witness more quickly than an ungodly life. However, we can use this as an excuse for keeping silent about Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't just do good works with his hands when he healed the paralysed man: he found that man again and told him to stop sinning because he needed to repent. We simply can't hide behind our good deeds, holding back the unpalatable truth that something worse may happen. Jesus did good works but he also preached the gospel. He was not afraid to talk of hell.

rounds

Standing against the 21st century's opposition to the Christian faith, we must proclaim the gospel.

Of course, proclaiming this gospel to rebellious mankind can seem foolish. The difficulty and the size of the task can overwhelm us. Thankfully, God has given us only three things to do. Firstly, we should preach the gospel as clearly as possible, answering all questions as sincerely as possible.⁴ Secondly, we should pray for each individual who hears the gospel.⁵ Lastly, by the grace of God through faith in the finished work of Christ, we should live a life that in some way commends the gospel we preach. Once we have done these things with compassion, some individuals will respond. Does our behaviour win people for Christ?

Some doctors argue that we have no time to share the gospel or that we should not abuse our doctor-patient relationship by doing so. However, the General Medical Council has ruled that doctors are free to share their faith with patients provided they do it in an appropriate and sensitive way.⁶ We should pray for, and take, these opportunities. It is good to get into the habit of slipping a question such as, 'Do you have a faith that helps you at times like this?' into the social history. It probably won't be appropriate to probe more deeply there and then but the patient's answer may well reveal something that we can pick up on later. Neutral questions such as, 'Do you have spiritual resources you can call on?' or 'Are you interested in spiritual things?' are open-ended enough for us to introduce the subject without being pushy or offensive.⁷

Jesus was persecuted

The Jews persecuted Jesus for two reasons. First, he healed a man on the Sabbath, and told him to pick up his mat and walk. This went against the Jewish understanding of Sabbath law, but was in harmony with God's plan for the Sabbath. As God did not stop his deeds of compassion on the Sabbath, neither did Jesus. In our society we also need to stand against the prevailing thoughts, attitudes and ethics that are contrary to the character and revealed word of God. A biblical insight into current ethical problems will enable us to stand out for Christ when we are put into the spotlight. It can also be an opportunity to present the gospel message to our friends and colleagues. The boundaries of medicine are changing at a great rate and new ethical issues can arise with little warning. In order to be able to respond quickly with godly wisdom, we should prepare ourselves with regular Bible study; applying God's word to the issues of the day.

Second, Jesus was persecuted because he called

God his Father, thus declaring himself equal to God; he also taught that salvation came through him only.⁸ We too will face persecution when we say, 'Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved'.⁹ When we stand against the materialistic, relativistic and atheistic world around us, we are following in Christ's footsteps. We are following Jesus' model.



LIKE JESUS WE NEED TO PRAY EACH MORNING, 'LORD, SHOW ME WHO I CAN PAUSE WITH TODAY'

Final exhortations

Let us guard against idolatry, cynicism, arrogance and spiritual schizophrenia and seek to follow Jesus' model. We need compassion to see people as Jesus sees them. We need to be charismatic, using our gifts and abilities to serve God and others. We need to be evangelical, proclaiming the gospel to a dying world; and we need to expect persecution for proclaiming and living Christian values.

Finally, like Jesus at the pool of Bethesda, we need to pray each morning, 'Lord, show me who I can pause with today'.

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References

- 1 Land N. Spiritual Schizophrenia. *Nucleus* 1997; October:7-14
- 2 John 3:1-21, 4:4-42, 19:39
- 3 Genesis 1:26
- 4 1 Peter 3:15
- 5 Romans 10:17
- 6 Doctors' use of professional standing to promote personal interests or belief. *GMC Annual Report* 1993:4
- 7 Palmer B. Should Doctors evangelise their patients? *Nucleus* 1996; October:2-12
- 8 John 5:19-27, 14:6
- 9 Acts 4:12

KEY POINTS

Jesus' healing of the invalid at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-18 provides a comprehensive and balanced model for the Christian doctor. Jesus was compassionate, making time to meet the man as an individual at this point of need. He was charismatic, in that he used his gifts of healing humbly and to the best of his ability. He was also evangelical in calling the man to repentance and faith. And he was persecuted when he demonstrated love rather than legalism and claimed a special relationship with God the Father. In God's strength we need to follow his example and each day ask God whom we should pause with.