

God has got plans for us

The best thing about my new job is its remoteness – 60-mile round trips for house calls through the beautiful Yorkshire countryside. A whole hour per patient to admire the scenery and relax, think and pray, brood or just-be-alone! Last week I decided to use the drive to plan this issue of *Juniors' Forum*. I always think better with music on but the only CD in the car was my little girl's favourite anthem collection, *Party Time* by good old Ishmael!...and I don't mean Hagar's son!² Worryingly, I was soon hooked on track five, *God has got plans for us*, but it got me thinking...

Think right back, to your school days. When did you decide to become a doctor? What did you do to make sure that you got into medical school? And now as a houseman, Foundation or ST doctor, you've read *So you want to be a brain surgeon!*³ from cover to cover and are planning your future.

What's your plan?

For some of us, life's management plan was always marked out in large block capitals. I think back to my very first week at medical school and a fellow fresher telling me earnestly that the only kind of doctor he was interested in becoming was a vascular surgeon – he's recently been awarded his CST in vascular surgery. Then I recall sitting in the Swanwick conference centre's conservatory at the 1996 CMF student conference, listening to my friend Sarah saying that she thought God wanted her to become a missionary gynaecologist. And just this last February, we sat in the same conservatory discussing her impending appointment as the gynaecologist for an African hospital. For some of us though, life's plan has never been darkly inked. My closest Christian friend at medical school felt that God wanted her to train as a doctor but not necessarily practise medicine – she's now a school teacher.

Last minute revisions get scrawled over the clearest of life plans. Has this happened to you? The MMC fiasco, tiredness and jadedness, medical errors and complaints, family illness and troubles, true love and babies, unrequited love, physical and mental illness, personality clashes and run-ins with the boss – these are just a few of the joys and trials that have obstructed my friends' career paths. And speaking personally, this year has seen my carefully-crafted London-based life fall apart.

Whose plan?

The Bible is very clear that God has a plan for each of our lives and that he's prepared in advance good things for us to do.⁴ Having said that, he doesn't promise us an easy road, nor does he promise to tell us way in advance the path he has marked out for us. The psalmist tells us that God's word is a lamp to our feet,⁵ not to our horizon! Even if we have correctly discerned the particular mountaintop he's leading us to, often we may get over one ridge only to find a great big valley in between, full of rocks and a river to cross before we get to our final destination!

James even goes so far as to tell us that we are to 'consider it pure joy' when we face trials, because these are the things that produce perseverance – an essential quality for true maturity.⁶ Paul reminds us that 'in all things', presumably the good and the bad, 'God works for the good of those who love him'.⁷

Good things can certainly come from difficult situations when our carefully laid plans are turned upside down. Matt Kehoe has written before in *Triple Helix* of the job crisis that led him to work in New Zealand.⁸ And through this completely unexpected turn of events he has been able to contribute significantly to the recent growth in the New Zealand CMF – not something he would have foreseen!

God's word is a lamp to our feet, not to our horizon

Scripture gives plenty of examples. Paul and Barnabas fell out over whether to take John Mark with them on a missionary journey.⁹ No doubt observers thought this was tragic – the breaking of a great partnership! But in God's providence it simply meant that more people got involved and the gospel was spread further afield than it might otherwise have been. Likewise, Paul getting shipwrecked¹⁰ seemed like a complete disaster, but it ended up as a demonstration of God's protection with the added benefit of giving Paul three months to evangelise Malta!¹¹

Trust and obey

So whether it's exam failure, missing out on your ST rotation of choice, having to relocate suddenly or any other seeming disaster, God really is bigger than all of that – even if our own decisions or failings played a part in the situation. It isn't easy to see what he's doing in the midst of the turmoil. When life isn't going our way, it's tempting to dream up a quick-fix, Baldrick-style 'cunning plan!'¹² But it's better to hang on in there and trust him. One day you'll sit back, deploy the retrospectroscope and see God's definitive management plan for your life.

Rachael Pickering is a portfolio GP moving from London to Yorkshire and is handing over the editing of the Forum for 2009

references

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