

**Anika Lillicrap** shares her experiences of past mistakes, medical training, marriage, miscarriage and motherhood



# FROM MEDICINE TO MOTHERHOOD

## key points

Looking back on key moments in her life the author testifies to God's gentle leading helping her to adapt as circumstances changed.

After a night of teenage rebellion a profound sense of guilt brought about a genuine and deep repentance that was the start of a life lived to please God.

Through the pain of sub-fertility and miscarriage God was refining her faith and encouraging a deeper trust in him. Now as a mother the author gives thanks to God for her 'ordinary' but fulfilling role.

Standing on the edge of my dreams, about to enter medical school, what did I expect? I expected to become a successful doctor, perhaps a Paediatrician. I wondered about becoming a medical missionary. There was something noble, almost glamorous about that idea. What a great asset to God I could be! I hoped I'd get married and have children too. Somehow it would all work out perfectly and I would make a significant difference to the world, build a name for myself, achieve things for God and enjoy family life. I never thought I'd be where I am now.

I was a young Christian when I started at university and had already seen God bring unexpected changes to my life. I grew up in a non-Christian family and started boarding school aged eleven. From the clever, popular, self-assured child I was, God brought me to a place of doubt and insecurity in my early teens. This culminated in me accompanying an older girl to the off-license one Saturday afternoon and sharing a large quantity of alcohol with her. I can't remember much of what followed but know that the next morning I woke, filthy, smelly and rather confused, in the school sanatorium. I was told to wash, dress, have some breakfast then go to chapel (normal school routine on a Sunday) after which I would see the Headmaster.

For the first time in my life I was in big trouble.

I felt sick with anxiety and as I sat in chapel, in the same pew I'd sat in almost every day for the past three years, I felt ashamed. Crushed under a burden I'd never seen or acknowledged before; guilt. I knew I'd let people down: myself, my friends, my teachers, my parents, but I now also had a sense that their forgiveness wouldn't be enough. All of a sudden I understood that I had let God down too.

I know now that this was God's Spirit at work in me convicting me of my sin. I knew I had to say sorry to God, for this act of rebellion along with all the others in my past. For the first time ever I sincerely prayed 'God, if you're there, please forgive me.' And what followed was another new experience; my burden lifted and I felt overwhelming and liberating peace. 'The peace of God which transcends all understanding'<sup>1</sup> had replaced my guilt, and instead of anxiety I now had courage to face the Headmaster and accept whatever punishment he would choose to give me. He chose to suspend me from school for a week.

God used this unexpected low point in my school career to teach me of my need for him, and his love for me. I didn't yet fully understand how the work of Jesus on the cross had bought my forgiveness; that would come in the years ahead, but I did now have a new desire to try and live for God.

But how insidious is the influence of our culture which along with our sinful hearts teaches us to worship and serve ourselves. The appeal of worldly

success nestled closely amongst my desires to help people, please my parents and serve God, and soon became the driving force behind my application to medical school.

Thankfully, as the years have unfolded, God has graciously been refining me. I married Matt at the end of my third year at university and as we began married life God challenged me to view my role as a wife above my role as a (future) doctor. I continued my studies alongside Matt, qualified as a doctor and began working – eager to do a good job and be well thought of. Then, during my Foundation Programme along came two unexpected things. The first was a growing realisation that my work was consuming me, preventing me from supporting and encouraging Matt as his wife, and the second was subfertility.

## God has done some major surgery to my sense of identity, which had been bound up in being a successful doctor, respected and esteemed by society

The latter of these was the more difficult to bear. For two years we struggled with failure and frustration, both of which I, like most medics, was unused to. There was failure to have a successful pregnancy and frustration at not being in control. We grieved over two miscarriages and questioned God's purpose, but in the end learnt to 'find refuge in the shadow of his wings'.<sup>2</sup> God does not promise that all couples will have children, but he does promise to work through all things for our good, to make us like Christ.<sup>3</sup> I was not in control, but he was. God gently taught me to relinquish my desire to control our circumstances and instead trust in his goodness and sovereignty. And how liberating this was! God had already given me the most precious gift of his son – I needed nothing more. How could we do anything else but trust him and obey?

During this time Matt was becoming more and more involved with church ministry, and feeling a growing desire to do this full-time. An opportunity to work for CMF as a part-time staffworker arose, and our pastor and previous CMF staff encouraged Matt to do this. Our deanery took over a year to respond to his application to train flexibly, when we were again met by two unexpected events – I became pregnant, and Matt's part-time training was approved! Nine months later Charis Joy was born, and soon after Matt began working for CMF.

Now I was not only a doctor, and a wife, but also a mother. It was time once again to consider how I could best serve God with my life and career. God asks young women to 'love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their

husbands'.<sup>4</sup> Would I make this my ambition? Would I let go, once and for all, of my own dreams and adopt God's ambition for my life? As Matt and I considered this we concluded that I could best do this by staying at home full-time, at least for now. So, despite pressure from well-meaning colleagues that I would be wasting my talents, I handed in my resignation. God has done some major surgery to my sense of identity, which had been bound up in being a successful doctor, respected and esteemed by society. Now I do the 'ordinary' work of a mum, often seen by no one except the three little ones God has blessed me with, but this is glorifying to God, and what I was made for. It's an important job – more important than the job I did as a doctor. Another mother's response to the question 'what do you do for a living' was this:

'I'm socialising two *homo sapiens* in the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition that they may be instruments for the transformation of the social order.'<sup>5</sup>

I might try that next time I'm asked!

As I work to support my husband, and raise Charis, her sister Thea who was born just over a year after her and her brother Toby who arrived 15 months after that, I'm investing my gifts and training. Rather than pursuing my own professional development, I'm now working for the personal and spiritual development of the children God has entrusted to me. God has given me opportunity to use my medical training in other ways too: I partnered Matt in his CMF role and now support him back in full-time hospital medicine. I've been able to get alongside female medical students and encourage them in a way Matt obviously couldn't and have had opportunity to use the inter-personal skills I gained at medical school to assist Matt in leading our Bible study group. My medical background has also enabled me to volunteer at Tyneside Pregnancy Advice Centre, advising and scanning pregnant women. Nothing is wasted.

So here I am, far from my girlish dreams of being a high-flying doctor or even a medical missionary. But I'm where God wants me. He has given me a new dream, and I'm living it. I never thought I'd step out of medicine so soon after entering it; I never thought I'd be fulfilled by being an 'ordinary' wife and mum, but by God's grace I am.

*Anika Lillicrap is a full time mother of three young children*



## references

1. Philippians 4:7
2. Psalm 36:7
3. Romans 8:28
4. Titus 2:3-5
5. Campolo P., quoted in *The Word for Today*, UCB January 2000, p.37