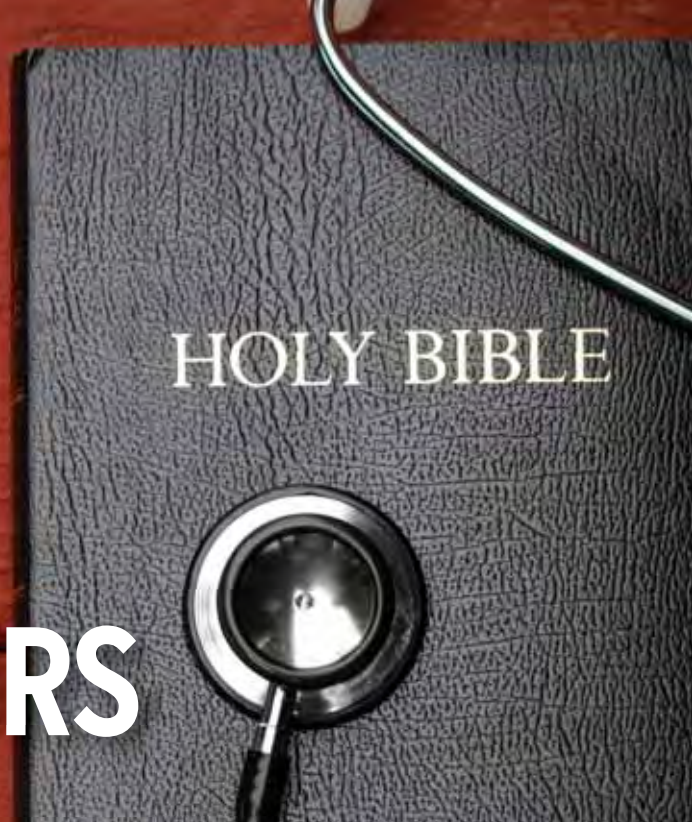


Michael Bryant has advice for juniors who struggle to connect with church life

JUNIOR DOCTORS AND THE LOCAL CHURCH



Why is it that junior doctors find it hard to become part of local church life? It should not be like this. Paul tells us that the church is God's way of showing his wisdom.¹

Church is the only place where an eclectic mix of people from all walks of life comes together with one big focus, Jesus Christ.²

Yet so often, young doctors struggle to become actively involved in church. The pressures of long hours, often including weekends and nights, can lead to doctors missing out on vital fellowship. Add to that the constant stresses of relocation between cities and it is easy to see how junior doctors may lose touch with church.

Ironically, this is the stage of life where doctors need most support. The obvious temptations of medical school increase on graduation, with many young doctors finding themselves with less accountability, increased spending power, as well as the chance to reinvent themselves in new surroundings. We are sitting ducks for the tsunami of jaded frustration so prevalent in the NHS, which runs contrary to the joy found in Christ. It saps not only enthusiasm for work but passion for the church.

Take the initiative

So what can be done? It is vital to take the initiative from the start. When I first moved to Swansea, I met with the pastor of our church. I explained my emergency department rota before coming into membership. This led to my being hugely blessed by an assistant pastor. He realised that I was working on most of the evenings when the church discipleship course was running and he was able to take time out to meet with me individually. It enabled me to catch up on teaching often at unusual times between shifts. One bonus was that I went into tiring shifts spiritually encouraged.

Offering to serve when you can, perhaps in ways which don't necessarily involve strict weekly commitments, can be a huge step towards making your church feel like it's a home. The more time you invest, the easier it is to become a 'living stone'³ within the body of Christ and as such other Christians will take time to invest in you. This will help you to see your medical career in its proper context, rather than all-consuming.

The culture of mobility in operation throughout training has special problems, like friendships falling apart before they are fully

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formed. There is, however, another perspective. All Christians are aliens and strangers in this world.⁴ Many first-century believers were people on the move. For example it is estimated that Paul travelled over 10,000 miles on the missionary journeys recorded in Acts, spurred on by his calling to proclaim the gospel.⁵

As junior doctors on the move, it can be helpful to see each new stage as God sending us out to share the gospel and be a blessing to other Christians. Timothy was sent by Paul to be an encouragement to believers in Thessalonica.⁶ When looking to move to a new city, it may be helpful to pray with the leaders of your current church. Ask if there is a church they would recommend where your gifts can be used. As an example, I have been able to use the experience of being part of a church plant in my current church which has a similar vision.

Opportunities

Many junior doctors will have a natural maturity from working with patients at the end of their lives. That can be a blessing to a church. My wife and I have been able to apply this into a hospitality ministry where we have been able to comfort and encourage younger believers, simply by using the listening skills practised every day in work.

Many young doctors often begin to ask questions about God as they start work, coming face to face with mortality for the first time. Answering these questions with the truth found in Christ is far easier when there is a church that non-Christians can feel welcomed into. So for the sake of reaching our colleagues with the gospel, as well as our own growth, commitment to a local church is vital.

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references

1. Ephesians 3:10
2. Ephesians 4
3. 1 Peter 2:5
4. 1 Peter 2:11
5. Calculating the time and cost of Paul's missionary journeys. *Open Bible Blog*, July 5 2012 bit.ly/O29K15
6. 1 Thessalonians 3:2