

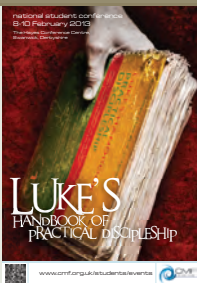
# Luke's handbook of practical discipleship

Holly Shaw reports on the 2013 CMF National Student Conference

I'm ashamed to say it. I almost decided not to go to the CMF National Student Conference this year. As I get good teaching from my church and regular input from my CMF group, both comfortably close to where I live, part of me wondered whether it was worth spending a whole weekend in the middle of term and travelling all the way to Swanwick. I decided to go almost literally at the last minute; I booked on the final evening. It was one of those decisions that turned out to be so right; you wonder how you could ever have considered the alternative.

In the weeks in the lead-up, I went through a fairly difficult time. It left me struggling to avoid disillusionment with the world in general and medicine in particular. On the day of departure, I felt the last place I wanted to go was somewhere full of medical Christians. I just wanted to run away and be miserable on my own. But as soon as I got onto the minibus I knew it was the right place to be.

My mood wasn't entirely counteracted by the journey. It took over five hours from Southampton thanks to the closure of part of the M1 and some dubious navigation. But spending time travelling with the group reminded me of the 'fellowship' element of CMF. 'Fellowship' has always seemed a dated word to me but I've come to realise that it sums up what CMF is - a group of people with a common aim, who build each other up. Despite several detours, including a sightseeing tour of Nottingham and lots of time sat in traffic, we made it in a good mood and just in time for dinner.



The conference provides an environment in which students from many different universities can meet and interact. The first event included icebreakers which abandoned the commonplace 'rock paper scissors' in favour of the more challenging: 'rock paper scissors lizard spock'. This set the groundwork for many more games. On both evenings I had to give up and head to bed shortly after midnight, reluctantly abandoning the endless rounds of Bananagrams,



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Mafia, Jungle Speed and Uno (among others) that continued to be played late into the night. Saturday afternoon was given over to group activities, including

watching rugby, sports and a walk.

But of course, the main part of the conference was the teaching. There was an abundance of that. As well as the three main conference talks and the conference address, each student attended four seminars: topics ranging from creation and evolution to end of life care. I realised what a privilege it is to have access to so many different doctors, each an expert in their particular field, all willing to take the time to teach students.

The book stall is a feature at any good Christian event. It's normally something I avoid like the plague for the sake of my purse and on the principle that I already have a stack of highly recommended books I've never actually got around to reading. But the book plugs at each talk were delivered with such liveliness and humour that I made a trip there. I ended up buying several books and I've even started reading them!

The talk that most struck me was given at the final meeting of the conference. I was not looking forward to returning to university. Jason Clarke opened up Luke 12:35-48, the

parable of the faithful and unfaithful servant. The passage speaks clearly about always being ready for Jesus: this is the defining mark of being his disciple. So many people, especially among my friends at university, do not reject the gospel outright. Indeed, they think it's probably true, but they see it as something they will think about tomorrow, or the next day, or when they've graduated. According to this passage a true disciple follows now and doesn't put off the difficult decisions.

And sometimes they are indeed difficult. Jason spoke about the cost of following Christ, something I rarely hear preached about. More often I hear sermons on the joy and security of following him, which is of course true, but I'd forgotten that Jesus himself tells us to take up our cross daily. Here was a reminder that whatever my situation, Jesus has put me there and expects me to live for him.

Jason reminded us :

*'If we die with Christ, we will live with him  
If we endure with him, we will reign with him.'*

What a promise. It's something I have continued to reflect on whilst back at university. And that is the wonderful thing about the CMF Student Conference: it builds up and equips you for a long time after the weekend itself has ended.

We shared communion together as the conference came to a close, said goodbye and joined the mad scramble to pack up the various vehicles and get on the road before the weather turned nasty. Everyone was exhausted for the journey back. All the freshers fell asleep in the back of the minibus. But despite lack of sleep we were all returning with much to think about and a little more prepared to be a Christian in the world of medicine. ■