



lessons not learnt in the lecture theatre

Lydia Akinola shares some unexpected learning

I used to think getting into medical school was the hard bit. Once in, the next five years would zip past like a suitably thrilling rollercoaster ride; the obligatory ups and downs all merging into one exhilarating race to the end. I mean, once I'd slaved away at revision, conquered those exams and charmed profs at interviews - everything else would be a piece of cake. Evidently, we were amongst the brightest pupils in school, excelling academically thus far, so medical school would be just the next stepping stone to what would hopefully be a long and successful career in caring.

humility

Things were going exactly to plan until I became seriously unwell in second year, had to take an extended leave of absence and ended up failing my OSCE exam in third year. The 'medical school adventure' came to a crashing halt. Here, I learnt my first lesson: humility. You see, up until that point, I thought I'd got where I was based on my own merit. I believed that my hard work could and would carry me through to that coveted end point: life as a doctor. Failure

was foreign and simply for those who didn't try hard enough. 'God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble' (James 4:6). I had failed to recognise God's grace in helping me thus far.

After that, I went from one extreme to another, and medical school became physically, emotionally and mentally exhausting. The reality was that studying medicine meant sleepless nights spent cramming for exams while my friends relaxed and socialised. After a long day of placement this left me feeling drained. To make matters worse, I'd compare myself to others, feeling that no one else was struggling, everyone else was better than me. Maybe God had made a mistake and I should have studied something entirely different, as I clearly wasn't cut out for this degree.

Throughout God's word, we see God's people struggle at various points in their lives. Instead of doing *exactly* what God asked and speaking to the rock for water, Moses decided to do as he had done before and strike the rock, and was therefore unable to enter the Promised Land.¹ David should have kept his hands off Bathsheba,² and despite his assurances to the



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contrary, Peter denied Jesus three times.³ Often these problems were a result of pride and man's sinful nature, but occasionally even those apparently faithfully following God's instruction ended up in difficult situations; Paul and Silas were preaching the gospel, but found themselves imprisoned and flogged.⁴

faith

My second lesson was faith. Just as often as we see God's people in sticky situations, we see God faithfully restoring them to himself. The situations that they faced could have been matters of life or death, but those that trusted in God were able to see his glorious plan unfold. The Israelites did reach the Promised Land,⁵ David was still a man after God's own heart,⁶ and Jesus restored Peter.⁷ A magnificent earthquake set Paul and Silas free⁸ and brought many to salvation. In my own life, fear and failure lead me to a stronger faith in Almighty God. I have seen that my own efforts can and do fail but through this I can appreciate that God's plans never fail. I mess up and go wrong, but God never makes mistakes;⁹ I may not know what to do next but I can trust that God holds the future.¹⁰

God requires that we trust him. 'Be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10) reminds us to let God be God; without faith, we cannot please him.¹¹ But this does not mean that life will be easy sailing. With job allocations and F1(!) now looming I have had to continually surrender my fears and worries to God and remind myself to trust in him. But the priceless lesson I have learnt from medical school is that my help comes from God. He strengthens, helps and upholds and transforms.¹²

peace

My latest lesson has been peace. I used to worry about whether I would get my top-ranked location in foundation job applications or end up somewhere completely unexpected. But when I surrendered it to God, peace filled my heart. Neither outcome occurred, and I am happy to announce that I will be continuing my stay in South Yorkshire. When we trust in Christ, we are kept in perfect peace.¹³ I'm safe in the knowledge that my identity is not primarily that of successful doctor or brilliant academic (not that these are bad qualifications), but as a child of Christ.

I used to think getting into medical school was the hard bit, now I realise that nothing about a career in medicine is necessarily easy. I mean, you slave away at revision, conquer those exams and charm consultants at interviews... but undoubtedly you will run into difficult post-graduate exams, grumpy managers and challenging patients who test and try you. As well as, hopefully, countless opportunities to be glad and rejoice in the amazing gift a career in medicine is.

Evidently, I am not the best student; having struggled academically thus far. But medical school was not just the next stepping-stone to rest of my life but where I learnt some of life's most valuable lessons, albeit mainly outside the lecture theatre. ■

REFERENCES

1. Numbers 20:8-12
2. 2 Samuel 11
3. Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75;
4. Acts 16:16-40
5. Joshua 1:3
6. Acts 13:22
7. John 21:15-17
8. Acts 16:26
9. Job 34:12
10. Psalm 139:4
11. Hebrews 11:6
12. Isaiah 41:10, 18-20
13. Isaiah 26:3