

# working for Jesus

John Greenall & Alex Bunn consider study and work as a Christian at university and beyond



**A**s you embark on several years of study, you will spend most of your waking hours engaged in writing, reading, revising, placements and lectures. And yet we rarely hear a sermon on work. So here are four things for you to take into your studies:

## your work doesn't define you

The day before I started medicine, a dear old lady at my church squeezed my cheeks (yes, really) and said, 'you're so clever, I always knew you'd become somebody special'. Now, she meant well, but constant praise like this can lead to pride that says 'I am better than others', and I become defined by what I do.

There's a massive temptation for healthcare workers (and students) to place their identity in their work. As Tim Keller often says, many people seek a kind of salvation from career success.<sup>1</sup> I believe many medics do the same but in a different way; saving others can become a means of trying to save themselves. The good news for the

Christian is that you are free from the relentless pressure of having to prove yourself. You don't need to work *for* your identity, you can work *from* your identity.

To know who you are, you need to listen to what God says about you. Let me challenge you to prioritise time with God in prayer and in his Word throughout your studies. The habits you lay down now – whether good or bad – will continue throughout your career.

## your work matters

You may be going into medicine with a desire to see amazing things happen. And yet, very soon you may well be irritated by immunology or confused by cholelithiasis. In ten years, you may look around you and find you are deeply disillusioned because as much as you are trying to make a difference, you are being swamped by red tape, or overwhelmed by 'the worried well'.

Lectures can be boring. Supervisors can be demanding. Work can be frustrating. And let's be



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honest, we can sometimes despise what we do. As a Christian, you can be confident that your work matters; it won't be meaningless it won't be forgotten. As Paul says, 'your labour in the Lord is not in vain'. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

It's amazing to know that all we put our hand to will come to fruition. One day you will work with joy and satisfaction, on a renewed earth. You will not despise work; it will no longer frustrate you. That is the Christian hope.

## your work is a vocation

Surveys show that as few as one per cent of medical students feel that medicine is a vocation as opposed to simply a job. In fact, you may feel that the important spiritual work is done by pastors and evangelists.

A job is a vocation when someone else calls you to do it and you do it for them rather than yourself. It is so easy to forget this as we study or try to please our university or our supervising consultant. But as a Christian, there is a whole dimension of work that can transform it even in the darkest of times. We passionately believe that God is calling every medic and nurse to glorify him in and through their work.

Paul gave this advice to slaves, which might equally apply to students:

'Serve wholeheartedly [with zeal, enthusiasm, eagerness], as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do'. (Ephesians 6:7-8)

So, what kind of work does God reward? Well, not just evangelism, but washing floors, cleaning laundry, emptying bins... calming the alcoholic urinating in the casualty bin on a Saturday night, writing a thorough essay, comforting a depressed friend, answering emails promptly.

Do you ever go to work and say 'Today I am going to work for Jesus?' 'I'm changing this canulla

for Jesus?' 'I'm doing this revision for Jesus?' All that we do is for God's glory. We need supernatural power to do this; it isn't easy in our own strength, because it goes against the grain. In fact, being a preacher or a missionary is often easier – there is a certain spiritual glamour in doing it – compared to the messy world of work in our secularised society.

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### your work is God's grace

As you study, it can be so tempting to feel special. How hard you worked to get your A-levels, how you performed better than your peers at interview... and so on.

And yet as I reflect on my life, I realise that I didn't produce these doors of opportunity, they opened for me. I didn't earn my gifts of memory and application; they were given to me.

Everything I have is because of God's grace. When I understand how loved and accepted I am in Christ, suddenly my work can be risked. I can risk my reputation, my position, my influence – because they are not the ultimate thing in my life. I am truly free. And we will become people of greatness when, like Esther, we are truly able to say, 'If I perish, I perish' (Esther 4:16); not trying to make ourselves great, but by serving the one who is truly great and gives us all things.

CMF is here for the whole of your working life. We want to help you engage with the difficult questions of student life and the workplace and, as a movement, support one another as we act as Jesus' hands and feet in healthcare. ■

#### REFERENCES

1. Keller T. *Every Good Endeavour*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012:108

This article draws from two longer treatments of the subject in *Nucleus* by Giles Cattermole and Alex Bunn [bit.ly/2awBCz8](http://bit.ly/2awBCz8), [bit.ly/2aKUEEU](http://bit.ly/2aKUEEU)