

managing time

Peter Saunders & Caroline Bunting consider how Jesus managed time

Time, or rather the lack of it, is a subject close to every medic's heart. Perhaps we laugh ruefully at Ecclesiastes' claim that 'there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.' (Ecclesiastes 3:1) If only! When you pause for breath, you might notice that the days have become weeks, the weeks have become months; and a year down the line you have not really made any significant progress. The books you bought with enthusiasm are lying unread on the shelf. The friends you vowed to spend time with are still wondering if you will ever slow down long enough to find out how they really are.

And even worse, the time you spend talking to God and reading his Word is taken in snatched

moments (if at all), with one eye on the clock and the other half-closed.

When we are too preoccupied or too tired, there is little chance of deepening a relationship with our heavenly Father. Jesus provides an example to follow. Despite huge pressures on his time, not least from physically and spiritually needy people, time with his Father was his priority.

Jesus uniquely maintained a balance between worship, prayer, family, friends, work and rest. To do this, he maintained an intimate relationship with God and had a clear view of his life task.

The following are some of Jesus' characteristics which, as our model, we can follow to help deepen our relationship with God:

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Jesus guarded his devotional life – he regularly spent time in prayer and studying the Scriptures, especially during periods of intense activity.¹ He was immersed in the Word of God. Be readers and students of the Bible – make it one of your first priorities.

Jesus did not sin – sin weakens our witness more than anything else. We need to be clean right through. By rejecting wrong thoughts and behaviours, we have more time and energy to be used by God.²

Jesus had a clear strategy – we find Jesus' mission statement in his sermon to his own community in Nazareth: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'. (Luke 4:18-19) We need to have an overall purpose and vision in line with our own calling within the body of Christ. We must take control of our lives by choosing to obey God in the same way Jesus did.

Jesus fulfilled everything in his mission statement, but he had a priority – preaching the gospel – which took precedence over all his other ministries.³ There are many orders of priority given in the Bible, such as the gospel having priority over healing. For each of us, the priorities will be different, but there are certain activities and people God wants us to prioritise.

Jesus made time for individuals – during Jesus' busy ministry, he did not let the urgent crowd out the important. Jesus was going to see someone who was critically ill with an acute infection when he was stopped by a woman with long-standing menorrhagia. She got his full attention and then, as if to vindicate his decision, God enabled him to raise Jairus' daughter from the dead.⁴ In your ministry as medical students, you will not be able to spend time with everybody. Pray that God will show you the people that he wants you to pause with.

Jesus' strategy was not to do all the work himself but to equip others – this can be particularly hard for us in the medical profession. Many of us are independent pioneers and loners; but God wants us to equip others to do our work so that the work multiplies. We may find that those we equip end up doing a far better job than we did.⁵

Jesus chose his company – we become like those we spend our time with. How many of the men and women God used in biblical history spent a period of their lives as understudy to some role model? Think of Joshua and Moses, Elisha and Elijah, or Timothy and Paul. Latch on to those older Christians you can really learn from. Seek to learn what it is that makes them effective in God's service and emulate it.

Jesus realised it was important to withdraw and rest – even in the face of pressing need. We also need to take time out from study and ministry at regular intervals. Burnout is a major problem for Christians in the medical profession, as we are motivated by a strong sense of responsibility and are aware of the vast amount of unmet need.

Jesus was never idle – hard work brings God glory because we are emulating God who himself works. It's important that we think of all service to God as work, not just studying for our future career. Spending time with our families and friends is just as much work in God's service.

Our prayer is that we would learn from Jesus to use our time in a way that most glorifies God. If our diaries are too full to fit in eternal priorities, then we must reorganise our schedule around God's concerns, instead of allowing these priorities to be compromised. But don't let worries about time management consume you. Trust God for his grace is all sufficient; his Spirit lives and works in you. ■

REFS

1. Luke 5:15-16
2. 2 Timothy 2:20-21
3. Luke 4:42-43
4. Luke 8:40-56
5. Matthew 9:37-38