



I want a Christian psychiatrist:

Finding a path back to mental and spiritual wellbeing
Dr David Enoch

- Monarch Books, 2006, £8, 192pp, ISBN 9781854246844
- Reviewed by **Claire Wilson**, a Clinical Research Training Fellow in General Psychiatry in London

Iwant a Christian psychiatrist' is the premise for Dr Enoch's reflections and is prompted by this same request that he has frequently received from prospective patients. He presents some of the difficulties faced by Christians experiencing mental illness, alongside opportunities for the Christian community to offer support.

Dr Enoch challenges some of these difficulties against a backdrop of parity of esteem between physical and mental health and asks us, should physical, spiritual and mental health really be any different?

While the book is suitable for the lay reader, it is also of relevance to Christian healthcare professionals, both psychiatrists and non-psychiatrists alike, indeed for all of those working with patients experiencing mental illness. It provides an insight into and rebuttal of the unique experiences of the mentally unwell Christian, including the guilt, shame and sense of failure.

Dr Enoch also highlights the barriers that these experiences can present to the Christian patient's engagement with treatment, and defends the medical model as one which can sit alongside pastoral support. Indeed, he discusses many similarities between Christianity and psychiatry and lessons that can be learned from both fields. In the process of so doing, he proposes several ways in which the church can serve members with mental illness, including prayer, counselling and a greater knowledge of the support available. As such, this is also a useful read for churches.



Thank God it's Monday (new edition)

Mark Greene

- Muddy Pearl, 2019, £13, 192 pages, ISBN 9781910012574
- Reviewed by **Liz Capper**, former Chief Nurse at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London and a former CMF Trustee

In the secular world of the NHS, you can talk openly and passionately about football, pop artists or *Strictly Come Dancing*, but not about your Christian faith. This book reminds us that we spend more time with our colleagues at work than almost anyone else. As Christians, our behaviour, attitudes and responses to every up and down are under constant scrutiny. Our lives tell out the reality of our faith.

Mark Greene regrets the lack of teaching from church leaders to help Christians focus on opportunities to witness in their day-to-day activity. Church members need to have their eyes open to the pressure individuals face and to commit to pray for boldness, courage and wisdom for each other. Greene reminds us there is not a hierarchy of Christian service. God calls each individual to serve him and make him known wherever they find themselves.

It is essential that Christians working in healthcare become part of a group who will pray and keep contact with non-believing staff. Shift work makes regular commitment difficult and it is easy to drift away and loose heart, but understanding and support keeps Christians in the health service focused on living for the Lord.

Nursing and medical students are actively warned about the inappropriateness of talking about faith matters. The fear of being accused of intolerance or religious offence is very real. It can suppress a Christian's witness at work to the extent of only being open about faith off duty. This book reminds us of all Jesus has done for us and the imperative of telling others. It demonstrates that intentional praying, godly living and wise use of opportunities can wonderfully open doors.



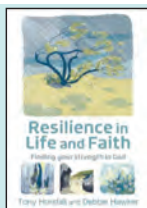
Lifecare

Solome Skaff

- Muddy Pearl, 2019, £15, 254pp, ISBN 9781910012611
- Reviewed by **Angharad Gray**, a psychiatrist working in Buckinghamshire

We are all in need of emotional healing and strengthening – to a greater or lesser extent. *Lifecare* is a purpose-filled 'course in a book' that I can wholeheartedly recommend. Biblically sound and God-honouring, it is richly insightful in its approach to the mind and is psychologically mature. It illuminates a way for us to thrive mentally and spiritually whilst growing in faith in Christ. Particularly helpful are the interactive pages toward the end of each chapter, as they encourage the reader to engage actively at a level that makes this book an accessible, personal learning experience. The author maintains a careful and sensitive awareness to the probability that some readers may well have experienced deeply traumatic and complex interpersonal problems, pointing to the hope of transformational change ahead (yes, possible even in this life) through grace.

Although it may be the case that God could perhaps use this book to draw a person to Christ, it is essentially a book written to encourage and empower those who have already come to faith, as the basis for encouragement discussed rests largely on the work accomplished from justification, plus sanctification and discipleship. It is my impression that for some, either attending a face-to-face *Lifecare* course, or alternatively, committing to systematically working through the book with a trusted and mature believer, (rather than studying alone) would help maintain the necessary motivational strength, patience and resilience for change, to make this the efficacious, life-changing experience intended by the author.



Resilience in life and faith

Finding your strength in God
Tony Horsfall & Debbie Hawker

- Bible Reading Fellowship, 2019, £10, 192pp, ISBN 9780857467348
- Reviewed by **Julian Churcher**, a psychotherapist, painter, and a former GP and CMF staff member

Fluently written and an enjoyable read, the two authors of this volume complement each other in style and emphasis, clearly bringing seasoned experience to their subject. Drawing from a variety of disciplines, they reference other sources dating from the 1960s to the present.

Their approach is to describe spiritual, physical, emotional, cognitive and social aspects of resilience, while always emphasising the interconnectedness of each. Male, Old Testament examples of each aspect are interestingly described. A separate chapter looks at resilient women in the Bible. Paul's experience ('strength in weakness') and the supreme model of Jesus, illustrate resilience under the new covenant.

What can occasionally sound like trite advice (ie. to eat sensibly and get enough exercise, sleep and recreation) that might elicit a justified groan from hard-pressed clinicians, is put in the context of community. Interdependence and honesty about our emotional life are commendably promoted. The reader is urged more than once (with a helpful reading list) to develop in advance their theology of suffering.

Reading this has helped shift my perception of 'resilience' from simply 'individual toughness in adversity' to a more social concept, something like: 'doing life well in communion with God and in community with people'.

I loved reading that: '*Sometimes resilient people stay during a crisis, and sometimes they go*'. This typifies the imaginative, creative, flexible and above all wise approach of this volume, which I highly recommend.



Am I just my brain?

Sharon Dirckx

- The Good Book Company, 2019, £8, 128pp, ISBN 9781784982751
- Reviewed by **Rebecca Hodnett**, a Clinical Teaching Fellow at the Royal United Hospital, Bath

I was intrigued when I received my copy of this small, but potent book through the post. As a doctor and a soon to be neurosurgical trainee, I have come across many colleagues at work who would strongly favour the stance that we are simply our brains, and that the advances in neuroscience through functional imaging are proof of this.

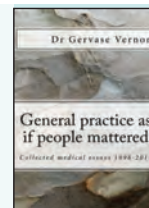
Dr Sharon Dirckx has a deep history with both the world of neuroscience and apologetics. With her gift of teaching, she begins to unpack the underlying assumptions behind these questions: Why do we think? Are we purely machines? Is the belief in a soul out of date? Is free will an illusion? Has science finally explained religion away?

This book gives us a framework to tackle these questions and helpfully includes a glossary of terminologies early on (for which I was most grateful for). Dr Dirckx successfully presents balanced arguments, condensing and explaining the findings in neuroscience. Her argument is further enriched with long-standing philosophical perspectives whilst bringing us back to what the Bible has to say on the topic.

'Brains don't think; people think using their brains!'

The book brings us to the conclusion that our consciousness, which gives meaning to our thoughts, must come from a meaningful and conscious creator God!

A comprehensive yet accessible read – I would challenge you to not only read this for yourself, but also to share it with your sceptical colleagues!



General practice as if people mattered

Collected medical essays 1998 - 2017
Dr Gervase Vernon

- CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018, £5, 202pp, ISBN 9781984360168
- Reviewed by **James Tomlinson**, a practising GP living in Birmingham

A collection of essays on diverse themes, this is a book to dip into and savour. The author's insights are shaped both by his Christian faith and by his work as a doctor in Malawi, as a GP in Essex and as a medical examiner working with a charity supporting asylum seeker health. The overall impression from these disparate pieces (many previously published in the *British Journal of General Practice*) is that of a person-centred doctor with a passion to practise good, value-derived medicine.

The writing is reflective, rich and honest considering carefully the authors experience alongside relevant literature. Helpful anecdotes are shared and lessons drawn. For me, the sections on what is a GP, the consultation, and the place of moral dialogue with our patients were thought-provoking and refreshing.

A recurring theme through the book is the challenge and limitation of converting the stories, patients tell us, with their differing framework of understanding for their symptoms, into the doctor's language – that of science and the rational (and conversely, interpreting the understanding of medicine to the patient).

With increased expectations on our limited (10 minute) consultation time as GPs both from patients themselves and from the State (eg. Quality and Outcomes Framework targets, medicines management, electronic referral, etc.), this book is a timely reminder that we can and must practise medicine as if people really matter.