

Matt Baines encourages us to focus on what really matters

EYES FIXED ON HIM

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.
(Hebrews 12:1-2)

During a difficult season four years ago, I realised that my sense of worth was becoming closely woven in with extrinsic factors, such as status, role, church responsibilities, and career. I had neglected the essential and fundamental message of God's grace.

Grace is a baffling concept to grasp in the 21st century. The prevailing culture, including social media, implies that my value is linked to external approval, which is insatiable and unsustainable. Often sowing seeds of dissatisfaction and restlessly demanding more of me. The message of the Bible is one of a truly unconditional and undeserved eternal love.

I understood afresh that grace means I am accepted, justified, and loved infinitely, regardless of what I do. If I sat at the back of church and did nothing other than enjoying God quietly (being 'insignificant' in man's eyes), this would be enough.

During this period, God spoke two fundamental truths to me in the passage above from Hebrews. Firstly, we all have our individual race 'marked out for us'. Our race is never the same as anyone else's, and we are simply called to run with what God has placed before us. We are to be forward-focused, 'blinkers on', not distracted by people around us, not comparing and not

hypothesising that others may be running 'better' than us, and not comparing ourselves in areas such as faith, status, and work.

Secondly, we are to focus on Jesus – eyes fixed on him, ignoring the noise, consumerism, culture, and celebrity of the world we are in. For too long, I had been focused on my natural accomplishments, my earthly roles, and achievements, and not focusing enough on Jesus and his unconditional grace.

As a GP, I encounter many patients who compare themselves to others; who live with regret, condemnation, or in the shadow of relatives. I see how this affects their sense of self-worth, their identity, and ultimately their health. Although there are many causes for this low self-worth, what is overwhelmingly evident is that much of it is exacerbated by social media, the prevailing culture, and societal pressures.

As Christian healthcare professionals, we have opportunities to apply biblical principles to help patients address these problems. This can involve promoting individual value – knowing that we all have a unique purpose and race to run. It can be to encourage them on the journey of taking the focus off others and championing their intrinsic value. And lastly, inspiring them to focus on something bigger than themselves, something greater, something eternal.

By truly grasping the grace message, we can understand that our value is not linked to what we do or our position. Rather, it is tied to our individual and unique worth in Christ. This is genuinely liberating, leading to great contentment and much peace.

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