

**John Greenall** looks at what our members and research are telling us about being resilient disciples of Jesus working in healthcare

# RESILIENT DISCIPLESHIP IN HEALTHCARE

## key points

- We set out to follow up on existing research to find out what makes resilient disciples of Jesus Christ in the modern healthcare professions.
- We found that many of the characteristics of such disciples, as found in other research, were the very qualities CMF's training tracks and volunteer programmes sought to foster.
- We looked at some small samples of members to see if this held true in the lives of those who had been through our tracks and programmes and present a summary of the evidence here.

It happened at every changeover in August and February. Would any of my new colleagues be Christians? How long would it take to find out if any of the staff on my ward shared my faith? Maybe, like me, you look around our increasingly secular landscape and feel oddly alone. Perhaps you relate to Daniel and his friends as they arrived as exiles in Babylon,<sup>1</sup> temporary residents in a land not their own and hostile to Christian beliefs.<sup>2</sup> This 'feeling' is supported by the facts. Only five per cent of the UK population now attend church.<sup>3</sup> Seminal research by the Barna group in the United States, the 'You Lost Me' report, tells us that nearly two-thirds of all young adults who were once regular churchgoers have dropped out.<sup>4</sup> This is sobering stuff.

And yet...The Bible shows us people like Daniel, Joseph, and Esther who model the importance of spiritual preparation. They also demonstrate a clear principle: that God uses early experiences to shape the hearts and minds of his servants. So how do we thrive in our 'Babylon'? How do we grow as disciples of Jesus and lead others to do the same? And how is CMF placed to develop such resilient faith?

## Resilient disciples

In 2019, Barna released '*Faith for Exiles*'<sup>5</sup> to help us better understand how to develop disciples in 'digital Babylon'. They identified a small group, around ten per cent of the 100,000 18-29-year-olds they sampled who grew up as Christians, whom they term 'resilient disciples'. They are exiles who remain faithful to their true home, a countercultural group of young Christian people whose faith is robust and who display four key characteristics (see Box 1). Barna's research showed that resilient disciples engage in five essential practices (Box 2).

### Box 1: Resilient disciples

- Attend church at least once a month and engage with their church more than just attending worship services
- Trust firmly in the authority of the Bible
- Are committed to Jesus personally and affirm he was crucified and raised from the dead to conquer sin and death
- Express desire to transform the broader society as an outcome of their faith

## Box 2: Five Practices that characterise resilient disciples

- Practice 1: Experience intimacy with Jesus
- Practice 2: Develop the muscles of cultural discernment
- Practice 3: Forge meaningful, intergenerational relationships
- Practice 4: Train for vocational discipleship
- Practice 5: Engage in countercultural mission

We realised that CMF's training track programmes (Box 3) foster several of these practices. These are peer-learning communities of 6-24 members keen to learn and grow in organisational, thought, specialty, cross-cultural, and social justice leadership, and evangelism and apologetics.<sup>6</sup>

## Box 3: CMF Tracks & Committees (total numbers involved, 2015-2022)

- Evangelism and Apologetics Track (28)
- Speakers Track (23)
- Global Track (68)
- Health + Justice Track (22)
- National Student Committee (70)
- Junior Doctors Committee (27)
- Nurses and Midwives Advisory Committee (13)
- Deep:ER (41)

CMF Tracks focus on developing a close walk with Jesus, cultural discernment, critical thinking, theological literacy, and more. We prioritise intergenerational learning relationships with mentors, developing vocational leaders<sup>7</sup> passionate about disciple-making. As learning communities, we encourage one another to live counter-culturally with a missional outlook.

To become 'resilient disciples' in our digital and fragmented world we need, more than ever, to be in small, peer-learning communities like Jesus led.<sup>8</sup>

## Resilient discipleship in CMF

Over the past year, we have researched and published a study seeking to replicate these findings in a vocational healthcare setting in the UK.<sup>9</sup> We surveyed 200 students, junior doctors, and nurses, and seven alumni of CMF Tracks. Our retrospective study contained quantitative (questionnaire-based) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) elements. Within the group of those classified as 'resilient disciples' we looked at whether any patterns emerged in their characteristics of faith and practice.

Some key findings include:

- Ninety-two per cent of respondents fit the profile of a 'resilient disciple'. CMF seems to disproportionately attract such young people in the earlier years of study and training.
- Whilst based on a very small sample size, our data would tend to agree with the Barna research that resilient disciples and non-resilient disciples differ in characteristics. For example resilient disciples were more likely to:
  - have a mentor (70 per cent vs 33 per cent)

- belong to a Christian group outside of church (77 per cent vs 57 per cent)
- serve in church or other Christian settings (91 per cent vs 71 per cent); and
- consume Christian content (a median of 30 vs 15 minutes a day)

Meaningful relationships, vocational discipleship, and countercultural mission were central as in Barna's original research. Some key conclusions and implications:

- CMF is one of many organisations training small numbers in peer-learning communities, spearheaded by our training Tracks.
- CMF and like-minded organisations are well placed to deliver this vocational, countercultural training and to resource and equip the wider church.
- CMF needs to focus on what only we can do, ie discipleship focused around the interface of faith and professions. Both our and Barna's research imply that focusing this way is more effective.
- Mentoring is key; intergenerational relationships focused on being countercultural in a specific area of life and practice. CMF is developing mentoring programmes, training, and guidelines to help develop these relationships.<sup>10</sup>
- One of CMF's primary aims is to promote Christian values in society.<sup>11</sup> Our research suggests exercising Christian beliefs, practices, and values in the workplace might be considered a form of 'mission'.
- Our research did not focus much on how CMF reaches and draws in those more on the periphery. We must consider how we effectively engage with less engaged members, creating a clear pathway from 'lower level' to 'higher level' engagement.
- Thousands of Christian doctors, nurses, and midwives are not CMF members. Given the benefits attested to in this research, they might be missing out. CMF has a role in sharing knowledge and being a welcoming community for Christian healthcare workers.

## Conclusion

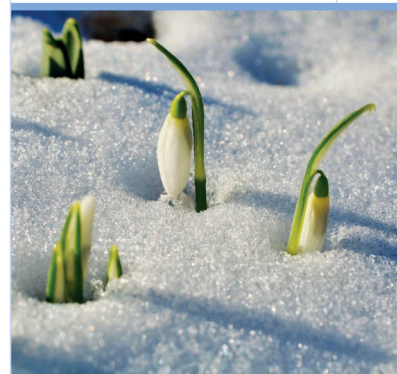
Feeling like exiles should not surprise us; it can be isolating and challenging. Yet we have seen exiles thrive in Babylon before, and we can see it again. It would appear CMF has a role in supporting and encouraging churches to teach and mentor into vocational spheres like healthcare, offering discipleship communities where we nurture resilient faith.

Let's pray that God would raise up many 'resilient disciples' who lead and catalyse others to be whole-life disciples, leaders of the present and the future, united and equipped to live and speak for Jesus in medicine and nursing.

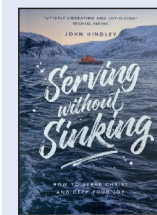
For more details about training with CMF visit [cmf.org.uk/volunteer](http://cmf.org.uk/volunteer) or email [volunteer@cmf.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@cmf.org.uk).

To read the full research please see: [cmf.li/ResilientDisciple](http://cmf.li/ResilientDisciple)

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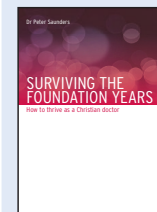
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## references (accessed 19/9/22)

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10. For more information see CMF's Pastoral Care, Wellbeing and Mentoring service at [cmf.li/3cF35ou](http://cmf.li/3cF35ou)
11. [cmf.org.uk/about](http://cmf.org.uk/about)