

A close-up photograph of a young boy with dark skin drinking water from a public tap. He is holding a cup to his mouth, and water is dripping from his hands. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The image is overlaid with several semi-transparent circles and a grid pattern.

a call to risk

John Greenall explores
the call of Christ to take
real risks in the service of
his kingdom

It's the early hours of the morning, and I'm standing in a cholera camp looking at the scene around me. There are people everywhere – on beds, on benches, on the floor, even lying in wheelbarrows. Sunken eyes look up at me as I look at the line of IV drips and giving sets attached to patients, the stench

of chlorine lingering in my nose. The number of people is overwhelming – there are around 700 patients in a camp with a capacity for 200.

Walking amongst them in the hastily erected tents is a team of nurses, doctors and medical students who are tending to the sick, cleaning

up the vomit and diarrhoea, setting up IV drips for some and giving oral rehydration to others. One student is praying for a particularly sick elderly man. As I turn around, a 7-year-old is carried in – he looks about four, malnourished, barely breathing. A cannula is sited, and we pray he might live.

I wrote the above just over ten years ago during the cholera crisis in Zimbabwe. There were 98,585 reported cases and more than 4,000 deaths. The health service was overwhelmed. And yet in the middle of it all, something beautiful was happening. Christians were staying and caring for others in the harshest of circumstances. I found myself wondering, *'what drives people to be the hands and feet of Jesus, even though it might cost them?'*

So, to our current situation with COVID-19. What might it mean for healthcare professionals in the coming days and weeks? Perhaps risking our mental and physical health; being isolated from our families; being placed in intolerable situations, and seeing people die horrible deaths. Whilst we are not called to burn out or be unwise, we may be called to risk ourselves and put others' needs before our own.

My favourite parable is Matthew 13:44, where Jesus says, *'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.'*

Imagine walking in a field and coming across a treasure that is worth far more than anything you can ever gain in this life. More than a home, a family, a good job, even the joy of helping people. And you go home, and you sell everything to buy that field. People ask you, 'What are you doing? What a foolish thing to do!' But you go away with joy because you have found something worth losing everything for.

Billy Graham knew the treasure he found, and he gave his life to it. Before he died, he said, 'Some day you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.'

Like many who have gone before him, he had faith in the all-providing, all-satisfying son of God, Jesus. He knew he was safe; he knew that God is on the throne and is sovereign over life and death, sickness and health. The reality is that we are safe. Whether in life or in death,

we are eternally safe in him (John 10:28-30).

Every crisis brings both threat and opportunity. You can't untangle the two. Whilst threats surround us, so do opportunities for people to learn about Christian caring. Not only from Christians, perhaps but also from non-Christians who nevertheless bear the image of God and serve alongside us, perhaps not acknowledging the source of their empathy for fellow image-bearers.

So, let's be the hands and feet of Christ and show him to the world. 'Nothing makes the worth of Jesus shine more brightly than sacrificial love for other people in the name of Jesus. Laying down our lives for the good of others magnifies Jesus more than anything else'.¹

'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (John 15:13)

Many great men and women have gone before us. Many of them medics and nurses. Many of the 245 million Christians who suffered high levels of persecution last year we won't have heard of. But we will meet them in heaven. Instead of asking, 'Why should I take risks for Jesus', many of them have said, 'How can I

NOT risk myself for Jesus?'

Back to the cholera camp. I walked over to one of the final year medical students who had been co-opted to help and asked him why he was there. He replied, *'God is not a God who stands back and watches... Jesus is in this cholera camp, amongst the vomit and the diarrhoea, full of compassion for these people. I asked myself where Jesus would be at Christmas, and I knew he would be here, so I wanted to be here too.'*

'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:38). 🙏

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1. Piper J. Risk Is Right: Better to Lose Your Life Than to Waste It. Wheaton: Crossway. 2013, 15