

regular features

# *leadership* : developing resilient disciples

John Greenall explores how God works in us





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was the only Christian on my fourth year paediatrics rotation. In fact, ditto for psych and care of the elderly. Neuro was different; two of my friends from church were there, but they didn't seem to take their faith too seriously and blended in with the crowd.

As you look around, do you sometimes feel like the odd one out? Like you are a stranger, alone in a foreign land? Perhaps you relate to Daniel and his friends as they arrived as exiles in Babylon, temporary residents in a land not their own and hostile to Christian beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

This 'feeling' is supported by the facts. Only 5% of the UK population now attend church.<sup>2</sup> On top of that, research in the USA among young people suggests that nearly two-thirds of young adults who were once regular churchgoers have dropped out.<sup>3</sup> This is sobering stuff.

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 can CMF help you with that?

Recently the Barna Group have produced some intriguing research, flipping the question from 'who are the young people leaving?' to 'what characterises those who are staying?'<sup>4</sup> They identify a small group, around 10% of the 100,000 18-29-year olds surveyed, whom they term 'resilient disciples'. They are exiles who remain faithful to their true home; a countercultural group of Christian young people whose faith is robust and who display four key characteristics (see Box 1).

### learning communities

How do you measure up to these characteristics? And how are you growing in them during your time at university?

The fact is, it's not enough to be discipled in one hour a week at church, or at an annual CMF Student Conference. To become 'resilient disciples' in our digital and fragmented world we need, more than ever, to be in small peer learning communities.

### Box 1: characteristics of resilient disciples

- Christ followers who 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

This is how Jesus did his ministry after all.<sup>5</sup> Amid ministry to the masses he focussed most of his time on twelve people. He didn't build his ministry



**Being a Deep:ER Fellow has been a joyful and encouraging time that has deepened my faith in the sufficiency of God's grace. I have been privileged to be discipled by mature Christians alongside other Fellows who, like me, are maturing in their faith. Serving international students and juniors - who have such joy, faith and hope in our Lord Jesus Christ despite many challenging situations in their home countries - was a wonderful encouragement.**

Leo, Deep:ER Fellow 2019-20



around how much of a crowd he drew, perhaps in contrast to how we can be tempted to measure success by attendance and reach.

One could say that Jesus chose to focus on developing a small number of 'resilient leader disciples', just twelve people who catalysed the movement of the worldwide church. Even today as I travel, I see that God so often moves through small minority groups who live as aliens and strangers.

What are the characteristics of these leader disciples? How do we become resilient leader disciples, those who make disciples in medicine and nursing? Here's where it gets more specific and more exciting, because the Barna research shows that cultivating five specific practices helps to form resilient faith (see Box 2).

**In the past, my view of God tended to be restricted to what he was doing in my life or in the lives of those around me. My learning on the Global Track about the history of global mission and mission today being from 'everyone to everywhere' has helped me to really understand the Lord has been establishing his worldwide kingdom since the beginning and he will continue doing so into eternity. He is at work and he invites us to join him.**

Daniel, Global Track Participant 2018-19

Why not pause and consider how you are doing on these metrics? It can be tempting to think we are at university to learn our profession and that we'll integrate it with our faith later. But people like

## Box 2: five practices that characterise resilient disciples

- **Practice 1:** Experience intimacy with Jesus. Resilients clearly identify as Christian, consider Christ central and experience intimacy with God
- **Practice 2:** Develop the muscles of cultural discernment. Resilients learn wisdom for living faithfully, stewarding their sexuality and their money and are anchored by the Bible.
- **Practice 3:** Forge meaningful, intergenerational relationships. When isolation and mistrust are the norms, resilients connect meaningfully to a local congregation and have strong relationships with older adults.
- **Practice 4:** Train for vocational discipleship. Resilients are equipped with a robust theology of work and calling. There is no sacred-secular divide and they are engaged Christianly in their workplaces.
- **Practice 5:** Engage in countercultural mission. Resilients have a strong sense of mission worked out in countercultural practice in their lives. Life is about God's wider mission in the world and not one's personal fulfilment.

Daniel, Joseph and Esther show the importance of spiritual preparation and demonstrate a clear principle: God uses early experiences to shape the hearts and minds of his servants.

## act now!

So, don't wait until you've graduated. Take the findings in this research seriously. Spend time with Christians you see who embody the characteristics of resilient disciples. Get involved in a church which encourages these five practices. But let me also



### Box 3: current CMF tracks aimed at students

- Evangelism and Apologetics Track
- Speakers Track
- Global Track
- Health and Justice Track
- National Students Committee
- Deep:ER

urge you to get stuck in with CMF both locally in your groups as well as centrally through one of our tracks (see Box 3). Tracks are peer-learning communities of 6-24 students and juniors who are keen to learn and grow in various areas, including organisational leadership, thought leadership, specialty leadership, cross-cultural leadership, evangelism and apologetics and social justice leadership.<sup>6</sup>

CMF is ideally placed to engage you in all five practices of 'resilient disciples' and be the culture-shapers and leaders of the future. For instance, our tracks focus on growing a close walk with Jesus. We teach cultural discernment - not just what to think, but how to think critically, how to evaluate and understand propaganda, fake and real, truth and post-truth, worldview and theology, and so much more. We prioritise intergenerational learning relationships with mentors who have gone before you. We develop vocational leaders<sup>7</sup> who are passionate about disciple-making, helping medics and nurses to live and speak for Jesus Christ not only on Sundays or at small groups, but in the nitty-gritty of daily life. Finally, as learning communities we encourage one another to live counter-culturally with a missional outlook.

If you're like me on my peripheral placements and you feel isolated and alone, don't be surprised. We've seen exiles thrive in Babylon before, and we can see it again. My prayer is that God would raise up many 'resilient leader 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). ■

**Speakers Track has helped us learn how to prepare, intellectually through deeper understanding of philosophical truths; persuasively by listening carefully to the language and underpinning heart of debates; theologically by leaning more on God's Word; and, spiritually, remembering that the Holy Spirit is promised to empower us. We've learnt from more experienced leaders who have provided much personal encouragement and advice. As a learning community we have built solid friendships that will extend beyond the Track itself.**

Grace, Speakers Track Participant 2018-20

#### REFERENCES

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3. See the research summarised in Kinnaman D. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith*. Ada: Baker Books, 2016
4. Kinnaman D, Matlock M. *Faith For Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. Ada: Baker Books, 2019
5. eg Mark 3:14
6. For more details see Greenall J. Leadership: 'out-there' & 'in-here' leadership. *Nucleus* 2017;47(2): 22-24. [bit.ly/3bPhFS](https://bit.ly/3bPhFS)
7. Greenall J. Leadership: vocational discipleship. *Nucleus* 2017;47(3):20-22. [bit.ly/2LMCV2i](https://bit.ly/2LMCV2i)