

The Opportunity that being a health care student provides; Part 2

(Suitable for use within a group over approximately one hour, or for an individual's personal Bible reading)

Thinking about life as a student in healthcare

It doesn't take long for healthcare students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, to realise their course is unique in many ways. As a medical student, I remember an early first year tutorial: the apprehension as we tentatively took out our shiny new stethoscopes and tried to listen to a heart- a fellow student's- for the first time. This, I realised, was no ordinary arts or science class; this was 'medicine'.

Another unique aspect is the journey the courses take you on: alongside the same group of people for three, four- up to six years, in some universities. Some of those will become lifelong friends, relationships forged in the stressful atmosphere of exams, unfair tutors and the overbearing expectations of ourselves and others. Others will remain acquaintances, but there will always be an instantaneous bond around shared experiences- even when you meet them in the corridor many years later.

1. The close atmosphere in our courses should be a fantastic opportunity for evangelism. What are your experiences so far? Do your uni friends know that you are a Christian? Have you faced any situations where your faith has been relevant in uni-related discussions (such as ethics, or evolution)?
2. What makes it difficult sometimes to talk to your non-Christian uni friends about Christianity? What sorts of pressures within yourself, and/or within the 'culture' of your classmates, stops you from talking to others in your course about Jesus?

What does God have to say?

Read Matthew 13:18-23.

The 'parable of the sower', as it is commonly titled, is told in Matthew 13:3-8 (also Mark 4, Luke 8). It is one of the more well-known- and, by virtue of Jesus' 'explanation' in verses 18-23, is thought to be one of the more well-understood. Finally, a parable which Jesus actually spells out!

1. Who does 'the sower' represent in 'real life'? What is the 'seed'?
2. Can you think of people who you know who are real life examples of those whose seed has fallen in each of these four places?
3. What do these phrases bring to mind when you read them
 - a. "does not understand it" (v19)
 - b. "trouble or persecution" (v21)
 - c. "worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth" (v22)?

Our passage describes the four places that the 'seed' (Mark and Luke explicitly call it the 'word' of God in their accounts) can fall. The four places directly lead to four outcomes, only one of which is productive and fruitful- the 'good soil'. This seems obvious, but is crucial to understand- especially in the context of agricultural Israel.

Planting crops was an investment of time, finances and physical energy. A harvest isn't just an added bonus of sorts, but is an expected, and indeed **required**, end-result of sowing the seed. A failed crop could mean emotional hardship and financial ruin in a family for generations. When birds eat, roots fail to develop, or thorns choke, this is not just a missed opportunity: it is a tragedy, a disaster.

It is not necessarily a popular idiom, but God's word is sown with the expectation that it is fruitful. And even further- that God, as the sower, can bring an extraordinary harvest. It is documented that a good harvest in the time of Christ, when optimal conditions prevailed and precise technique of planting in good soil was undertaken, may have been 10 times what was sown. The harvest in the parable is far greater than that!

The seed is sown presumably with the expectation that it will produce fruit - or there would be no point!

4. What does it mean that the seed in the third scenario (verse 22) is unfruitful? If the 'thorns' were removed, could it (theoretically) be fruitful?

5. Why do you think the person who hears God's word and understands it is a scenario that can bear fruit?

The parable (as when it is told in verses 3-8) seems to indicate that only a fraction of the seed actually fell on productive soil. Notice the harvest in verse 23 – and this despite a large portion of seed falling on poor soil. A good-sized result from a diligent farmer in the Ancient Near East would be a crop of about 10 times what he sowed.

6. Bearing in mind that only a small proportion of the scattered seed had any chance of bearing fruit, what does the size of the eventual harvest (30, 60, 100 times – see verse 23) tell us about the sower? About the seed?

Putting it into practice

Reflect again on the four scenarios. It's clear that the scenario with the good soil, producing a harvest, is God's desire when He plants the seed.

1. Which scenario best describes you personally at the moment? If you feel comfortable, share your answers with each other in your group.
2. If you do not feel that you're in the 'good soil scenario' right now, what practical changes can you make to move towards being fruitful? How can others in your group pray for you as you make these changes?

The third scenario is one that can be particularly relevant to us as educated, high achieving, and potentially very materially wealthy individuals.

3. Why does Jesus describe wealth as 'deceitful' (v22)? Can you think of any other passages in the bible also speak about wealth in this way?
4. Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.
 - a. Why does Timothy give this directive to rich people?
 - b. How do these instructions to rich individuals allow them to 'take hold of life that is truly life'? What is the 'coming age' that he mentions?
 - c. Returning to our passage in Matthew - how does a 1 Timothy 6 approach towards money help us to avoid being choked and unfruitful?

The harvest in verse 23 can be read as personal fruitfulness that God has enabled in an individual (recalling perhaps the fruit of the Spirit), but can also be read as spreading the good news of Christ to others in evangelism (fruitfulness in this sense refers to kingdom growth and depth).

Think back to the start of the study and the opportunity that being a healthcare student presents to share your faith with those around you.

5. In what ways has God called you, specifically or otherwise, to share His love with friends in your course? What might this look like practically?
6. As a group of Christians in your course or year group, how can you work together to make the most of your opportunity to share the gospel (so people can hear the word and understand – see verse 23)? What steps can you take to be a community within your course that reflects Christ and so make hearing and understanding the word attractive (see also Titus 2:10)?

Spend some time thinking again about the more-than-expected harvest from the scattered seed.

7. How does being conscious of God's power to achieve this size of harvest change our:
 - a. perspective about evangelism?
 - b. practice of evangelism?
 - c. view of our role as humans in evangelism?
8. How does it serve as an encouragement to us when we encounter difficulties or discouraging times in evangelism?

God wants all people to come to Him (see 2 Peter 3:9), and can indeed do far more than we can imagine to achieve

9. Close by praying for each other, and for your friends in your course, that they may know the love of Christ, and that God may work through you or others to bring them to Him. Thank God that He is the God of the harvest!

Bible Bites

(Suitable to be completed over approximately 20-25 minutes)

The Opportunity that being a health care student provides; Part 2

Thinking about life as a student in healthcare

A unique aspect of many healthcare courses is journeying alongside the same group of people for several years. Some will become lifelong friends through the trials of assessments, exams and life's difficulties. In fact, you will share an instantaneous bond even with uni acquaintances you meet many years later. The close atmosphere in our courses should be a fantastic opportunity for evangelism.

Consider:

- Do your friends know you are a Christian?
- Have you avoided any situations where your faith has been relevant in uni-related discussions (class related or social)?
- What makes it difficult sometimes to talk to your non-Christian uni friends about Christianity?

What does God have to say?

Read Matthew 13:18-23:

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty

The 'parable of the sower', as it is commonly titled, is told in Matthew 13:3-8 (also Mark 4, Luke 8), and explained in our passage. There are four places that the 'seed' (Mark and Luke call it the 'word' of God in their accounts- meaning the 'sower' is representative of God in the story) can fall. The four places directly lead to four outcomes, only one of which is productive and fruitful- the 'good soil'. It is important to realise that the farmer sows the seed **expecting** that it bears fruit- or he would not plant it!

The parable (as it is told in v3-8) seems to indicate only a fraction of the seed fell on productive soil. Notice the size of the harvest in verse 23. A good-sized result from a diligent farmer in the Ancient Near East would be a crop of about 10 times what

times what was sown.”

Putting it into practice

1. Which of the four scenarios (the path, rocky ground, among thorns, good soil) best describes you at the moment? If you do not feel that you're in the 'good soil scenario', what practical changes can you make to move towards being fruitful?
2. The “deceitfulness of wealth” (v22) can be a particularly tricky issue in our wealthy Western society.
 - 1 Timothy 6 says “command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God”. Why does Jesus describe wealth as deceitful? How does putting our hope in God offer a better alternative?
 - The passage in 1 Timothy continues: “command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share”. How does a ‘1 Timothy 6’ approach towards money help us to avoid the third scenario in our passage and be fruitful? What practical things can you do for others around

The harvest in verse 23 can be read as personal fruitfulness (recalling perhaps the fruit of the Spirit), and also a harvest in terms of spreading the good news of Christ to others in evangelism.

God wants all people to come to Him (see 2 Peter 3:9), and can indeed do far more than we can imagine to achieve this!

you who are in need?

3. In what ways has God called you to share His love with friends in your course? What might this look like practically? How can you work together with other Christians around you to make the most of your

opportunity to share the gospel?

4. Think again about the more-than-expected harvest from the scattered seed. How does being conscious of God's power to achieve this size of harvest change our perspective about, and our practice of evangelism? How does it serve as encouragement to us when we encounter difficulties or discouraging times in evangelism?