

In Health care for God's Service – Being Distinctive in Mercy Part 1

(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

One of the great thrills of practising healthcare is nutting out a diagnosis from someone's symptoms and signs. There is so much basic science to wade through as healthcare students: it is refreshing when we get a chance to 'solve' a tricky case study, or better still, make a diagnosis on a real patient! It can be particularly exciting if the condition is rare or even life-threatening. Another highlight is having the opportunity to see someone treated or cured, and basking in the success of having made a difference. These moments are part of what makes a career in healthcare potentially so rewarding. But is there a downside?

1. Does the potential of attaining the right diagnosis, implementing the right cure for patients have the potential to offer you satisfaction in your future career? If so, why?
2. Some patients have problems that don't fit any particular diagnosis and many others we're unable to cure or treat, and nothing we do seems to make any difference. If you're honest with yourself, do you think you might find them less rewarding to look after?
3. Have you ever seen a patient who was scorned by their treating healthcare professional (behind their back) for complaining of symptoms that don't match a diagnosis, or a problem that seems not to respond to treatment? If *you* were their practitioner, how would this make you feel about going to work the following day? Why?

What does God have to say?

Read and consider Zechariah 7:1-14.

The book of Zechariah records God's rebuke to the people of Judah when they returned to the Promised Land after exile in Babylon. After seventy years in exile, God has restored His people to Israel, and is directing them to rebuild the temple. Chapter 7 describes the priests enquiring of God as to whether they need to continue their fasting of lament (that Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed) now that things are being restored. Through Zechariah God speaks firmly to them, rebuking them for being so concerned about what had become self-righteous rituals when they were neglecting the things closest to God's heart: justice, mercy and compassion. In the passage they are reminded that this word from God is not new, and is the same word

1. What does God mean when He suggests that their fasting was for themselves? Why would anyone fast for themselves?!
2. From Zechariah 7:1-14 we see God angry at His people. Was this anger simply due to the act of fasting itself or something deeper?
3. Why is it that God's people, historically, have so often fallen away from faithfulness and into religiosity?

Putting it into practice

1. For many of us we may see healthcare as the Israelites saw fasting – a service that pleases the Lord. But as we pour our energies into studying it, we must consider our motives. What motives would God desire we have as we study healthcare? What motives do we have for studying healthcare that God would be displeased at?

2. Consider again the start of the study, where we thought about making a correct diagnosis. Is it possible that your motive to diagnose correctly can be wrong? If our motives are selfish, how might we begin to feel about patients whose complaints don't lead to a definitive diagnosis?

3. Desiring a cure or successful treatment is surely a good thing. But if we are honest, do you think there is a danger that we can desire this more for our own satisfaction than for our patient's wellbeing? Consider how you feel when you encounter patients who you feel powerless to help. What does the effect on our own ego tell us about our motives?
4. Is it possible that patients with unclear diagnoses or frustrating conditions are treated with less respect in our healthcare system?
5. Is it possible that these same people are today's equivalent of the widow, the fatherless, the alien or the poor?
6. How would God have us treat such people?

Bible Bites

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

In healthcare for Gods Service - Distinctive in Mercy Part 1

Thinking about life as a student in healthcare

- Possibly the most exciting parts of healthcare are figuring out the correct diagnosis, and curing or successfully treating the problem. These are the highlights, and make us feel good about ourselves. Diagnosing and treating illness are good things, but do we need to be concerned that our motives are related more to our own satisfaction than our patient's wellbeing?

What does God have to say?

Read and consider Zechariah 7:1-10:

¹ In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. ² The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melek, together with their men, to entreat the LORD ³ by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

⁴ Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: ⁵ "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?' ⁶ And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves? ⁷ Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?"

⁸ And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: ⁹ "This is what the LORD Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. ¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.'

The book of Zechariah records God's rebuke to the people of Judah when they returned to the Promised Land after exile in Babylon. After seventy years in exile, God has restored His people to Israel, and is directing them to rebuild the temple. Chapter 7 describes the priests enquiring of God as to whether they need to continue their fasting (born out of lament that Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed) now that things are being restored. Through Zechariah God speaks firmly to them, rebuking them for being so concerned about what had become self-righteous rituals when they were neglecting the things closest to God's heart: justice, mercy and compassion. Thus God reveals their motives were revealed and rebuked as dishonouring to God.

Putting it into practice

Doing a 'good' thing (like fasting in lament for Jerusalem, like studying towards and working as a healthcare professional) is clearly of no value to God unless our motives are right. If we do these things primarily for our own satisfaction or our own self worth then we have our emphasis wrong.

1. What are some motives for study that you see amongst you and your classmates that may not line up with God's desires?
2. Chasing a diagnosis or desiring a cure or successful treatment are surely good things. Do you think there is a danger that we can desire this more for our own satisfaction than for our patient's wellbeing? Patients with unclear diagnoses or frustrating conditions are commonly treated with less respect in our healthcare system, simply because they deny us those warm feelings of success. Why might this happen?

3. Is it possible that these same people are today's equivalent of the widow, the fatherless, the alien or the poor? How would God have us treat such people?