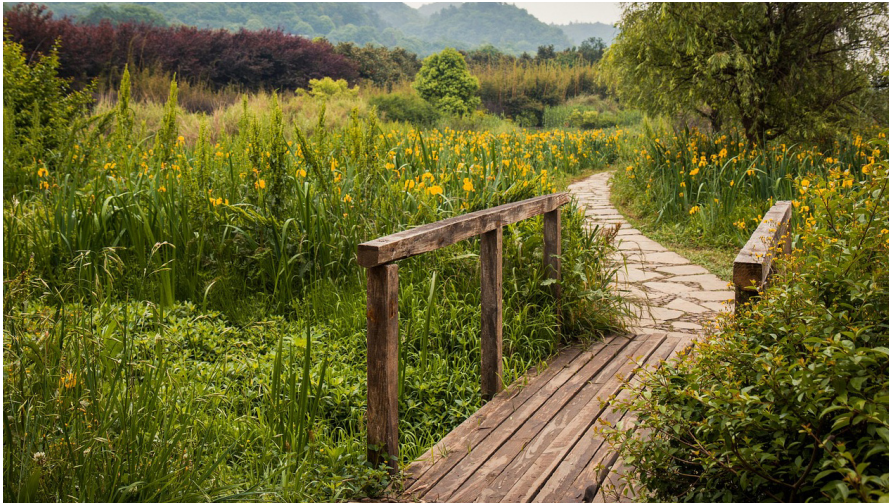


President's Address: Reflections, Lessons and Confessions of my CDF Presidency



I've heard it said that our calling is where our passion and God's purposes meet. My clinical dental career was very much my calling, as I'm sure it is for many of you too. But what is our calling when our clinical career ends? What is our purpose then? That was the question I had to explore three and a half years ago—one that many of you may face in time.

Having now nearly served my three years as CDF President, this is my final Three-in-One President's address to you all, so I would like to share some personal reflections, lessons learnt and a few confessions with you, if I may.

Reflections as CDF President

At my first CDF Conference as President, someone very wisely said, "Focus on the mission, not on survival (of CDF)", and that has stayed with me through my presidential term. It has been a true privilege to represent CDF to our profession, the public, and other Christian, dental and workplace groups. These relationships have proved fruitful and encouraging, raising the awareness

and profile of CDF. I've also had the pleasure of leading the Fellowship and working alongside our wonderful Trustees, Council members, and Admin team, as we serve you, our members. I've greatly enjoyed meeting many of you across England, Wales, and Scotland through regional group visits. Together, we've built a stronger foundation through good governance, updated policies, and a revised constitution. For this, much credit is due to past and present Trustees and Admin staff.

I've been encouraged to see CDF grow in new areas: our student and new graduate work and new coordinator role, support for International Dental Graduates, and enhanced engagement through our Connect Worker. Regional groups and Zoom events have expanded, and we've increased participation at conferences, AGMs, and monthly prayer meetings. Thanks to all involved in these areas and more.

A key part of my role has been visionary thinking— asking questions, embracing change and new ways and ideas,

helping to join up the dots across CDF's work streams, whilst focusing on being mission-led, and ensuring the future prosperity and relevance of CDF. It's been a tall order, but one the Trustees and Council have prayerfully and conscientiously tackled together as we have sought to stay focused on our mission, not our survival. Isaiah 43:18-19, 21 reminds us: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland... that they may proclaim my praise."

Lessons Learnt

God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called. If nothing else, my testimony is this: God is the enabler and the anointer. As Philippians 2:13 says, "For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." He helped me grow in my willingness to serve in leadership, and other ways too, growing and honing my character and skills, and often in ways I didn't think possible. As Ephesians 3:20 says: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us..."

I have learnt the importance of remaining teachable and accountable— being open to change, challenge and growth, even when uncomfortable, and the importance of being courageous enough to step outside my comfort zone, and dream big. Surrounding myself with wise and mature Christians, inside and outside of CDF, for prayer, learning, and informal mentoring, has been invaluable. Thank you to those on whom I have learnt.

My leadership skills have developed, but

continued overleaf..

there is still room for improvement—acknowledging my own limitations and empowering others in their areas of gifting has been part of that process. As stewards of CDF, we must each hold things lightly, seeking collective input and wisdom, and knowing that some initiatives serve a season and then fade whilst others remain. Good leadership discerns what is right with in the context of the fellowship, and not just what is good but outside our purposes. This means foundational principles must remain, but we must also embrace new ideas to remain relevant, accessible and distinctive, viewing our work through the lens of our missional purposes.

Confessions

My CDF Presidency has brought out giftings in areas and ways I didn't know existed or that I had, and has taught me valuable leadership skills. Saying "yes" can often be a path to greater Christian growth and faith. But it can also expose our weaknesses, flaws and vulnerabilities. Painful as this can be, they provide opportunities for growth and grace, for we are all a work in



progress. So if I have been of any credit to CDF or Christ in this role, it is because God has worked in me and through me—for His glory. Where there have been failings, they are mine alone.

However, I am reassured by Philippians 1:6: "confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." So there is hope for me still, indeed for us all. For we have a Saviour who died for us whilst we are still far from him, and in so doing has redeemed us from the pit, and can surely redeem my flaws and failings too. For things meant to harm us, God turns to the good, after all he is the great renewer, restorer and redeemer, and as the Lord says in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". Such on-the-job training is the walk of the Christian disciple, is it not?

I have often joked that I am a control freak—and without control, just a freak, who at times can't find the "off" button! It is no joke but a true confession. However, I have found that when I hand control to Christ, I become a better version of myself: more patient, kind, and aligned with who He created, purposed, and repurposed me after my retirement, to be.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your President. As I step down at the AGM in October, be assured of my continuing support for CDF and the exciting future that God has in store for CDF, in the safe hands of Council and your next President, under the guidance of our Lord.

My love, prayers, and blessings to each of you.

Karen Paterson
CDF President

Snapshots



A feature looking at the difference Jesus makes to our work in dentistry. CDF Students and Newly Qualified Graduates Coordinator

Alistair Bartlett kindly agreed to be interviewed for this edition.

What is your job?

Principal dentist to a two-site, six-surgery mixed practice in the North East of England. My wife Teresa is our manager.

What does your surgery window look out on?

Ha ha ha! This is a regular source of amusement to my staff and patients. I only have one tiny window - it has bars across it, so the blind is never opened. To make up for that, I have a telly above my chair that shows wonderful undersea

videos, and a huge 6ft x 5ft picture of CeCe Beach, Liberia. Staring down from that picture are Bob and Georgina Russell, who I first met on the Mercy Ship in 2008. Even though Bob has been retired for quite a while now, he's still watching to make sure I do things properly.

What are some of the things you enjoy about your work and what are some of the challenges?

Teeth, teeth and more teeth. Teeth are

great. Teeth are exciting and beautiful - their form, their function, their ability to surprise and not conform to the rules I learned at dental school. I still love it when a crown prep just seems to fall out of the end of my air rotor, or when we feel the pop of a periodontal ligament giving way in a tricky extraction. Even after 34 years, I still get a little tingle when I see a well-adapted margin and a neutral occlusion - especially if it's one of my restorations from years ago.

I became aware a long time ago that many of our dental nurses have not enjoyed formal education or have had somewhat chaotic upbringings. Our dentists have had different journeys to the point where they start work with us, but they are often very afraid of the pitfalls of practice life - sometimes to the level where they feel they can't carry on with their chosen career.

As a principal dentist, I get to mimic the way our Heavenly Father behaves towards us on a day-by-day basis. I get to reflect His love, compassion, enthusiasm, commitment to excellence, resilience, and all the other traits we sing about week by week in our churches, to people who would never darken the doors of formal religion.

Of course, balancing resources against need is hard. There are more patients than we can treat, staff need more care than we can give them, and the bills never stop coming. Finding the right balance between gentle and doormat, or work and rest, requires the wisdom of Solomon. I often need to remind myself that even Jesus got tired and took Himself away.

Maybe the hardest people to remember to be kind to are our NHS commissioners. Our dental press - and especially social media - love to demonise the people who are trying to meet the needs of a whole country with a purse and workforce that just isn't big enough. I am grateful on a daily basis that CDF has people to try to fulfil these roles. If you want to know how to witness for Jesus in your job... stand out from the crowd and stand up for them.

How does your Christian faith impact your work day-to-day?

Inside out and top to bottom, we are a Christian practice. Not because many of our staff claim to share our faith in Jesus - they don't - but because His values are our values, and we try to keep copying Him.

When faced with the patient who has studiously avoided using their toothbrush for years, I remember that people in Judea two thousand years ago probably didn't floss and probably had chronic periodontitis, even if they were the Son of God!

The inquisitive child who won't stop kicking my bracket table, the sulky teenager who won't put their phone away, or the entitled old man who's making it his mission at this appointment to tell me everything that's wrong with the NHS - are all "the least of these," whom I can choose to treat like I would treat Jesus - or not!

We thank God that He is old and unchanging, whilst at the same time infinitely creative and new. To be consistent from one day, month, and year to the next, whilst endlessly innovating and reacting to the curveballs that practice life throws up daily isn't easy. But it is how we have been called to be!

Do you have a particular Bible verse or song that God has been using to speak to you recently?

This Sunday we looked at the persecuted church. Every week, my practice team try our best to help people who have arrived in small boats and ended up thousands of miles away from home with limited English. They arrive at our door suffering from both extreme culture shock and a hot pulp or a raging pericoronitis - and we have no space for them.

As my staff get swamped by the demand, or I remember the journey they made when wading out to sea seemed like a better option than returning home, I hear the prayer that Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish:

"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
out of the belly of the deep I cried,
and you heard my voice.
For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows
passed over me...

The waters closed in over me to take my life;

the deep surrounded me..

But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you...

Salvation belongs to the Lord!"

(Jonah 2: 2-6, 9)

How can we pray for you and others in your particular area of dentistry?

Adore the Creator. He made teeth, gums, and everything they are built from. Remember it is Him who heals tissue, controls what bacteria grow, and how calcium dissolves.

Confess that we are flawed individuals. We come up short in a thousand ways, a thousand times a day. We live in a fallen world marred by disease and selfishness, and I am as guilty as the next man.

Thank God that His energy is boundless. When we are tired, He keeps going. When we are worn down by the workload, He is as fresh as the daisy He's just made.

Ask that the Spirit that moved in the darkness over the waters moves over our surgeries - that our whole practices, from the front door to the loft, from opening up to setting the alarm, are sustained by Him.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

South West Regional Day in May



On Saturday 10th May, ten of our South West members gathered at our house in Plymouth for a buffet lunch and catch-up with James Hunter before he and his family leave for Liberia later in the summer. The weather was brilliant, so eating in our small back garden was delightful and relaxing.

After lunch, we moved indoors where James gave a presentation on his visit over Easter to see the dental clinic and therapy school first-hand and then spent some time answering questions. It was great to learn how God has guided James and the family to this point. We continue to pray that the Lord will continue to guide and protect James and the family as they prepare to leave the UK.

Following the obligatory afternoon tea, cake and a selfie, everyone left to journey home. Maureen and David had the longest journey at over two hours. What stars!

Malcolm Prideaux

CDF Regional Groups Coordinator

The Kingdom of God in Healthcare: A Present Call and Future Hope



(This was originally a presentation by Dr Mathew George, a dentist and global healthcare missions leader, given in June 2025 as part of the ICDMDA webinar series. It has been adapted for the Three-in-One with Dr. George's kind permission).

Introduction

The Kingdom of God is a broad, deeply rich biblical theme, and it intersects with healthcare in ways that call us to justice, mercy, and healing - core values of Jesus' ministry.

The Kingdom of God, especially as described in the Synoptic Gospels, refers not to a physical location but to the dynamic reign and rule of God. It is both a present reality - revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - and a future hope to be fully realised at the end of time (Luke 17:20-21; Matthew 6:10).

Jesus' ministry was characterised by proclaiming and demonstrating this Kingdom through acts of healing, forgiveness, and restoration (Mark 1:15; Matthew 4:23). Theologically, it represents the in-breaking of God's sovereign rule marked by justice, peace (shalom), mercy, and holistic well-being. It stands in contrast to worldly systems, redefining greatness through service and humility.

God's Kingdom is about more than personal salvation - it's the full

restoration of creation. The Genesis narrative reveals how God brings order to chaos, a pattern that repeats in Christ's redemptive work and sets a paradigm for healthcare: moving from fragmentation to wholeness.

Creation, Order, and Restoration

The Genesis account presents a vision where God brings structure, purpose, and life to a formless void. This is not just a creation story but a theological pattern: God enters chaos - whether societal, spiritual, or personal - to bring order and healing. This movement from disorder to order is reflected throughout redemptive history. It becomes a paradigm for understanding divine interaction with human experience, and particularly for how we understand healthcare.

Healing, therefore, is not just a physical or medical act. It's a participation in divine activity - a vocation modeled in early Christian tradition where healing was a spiritual act rooted in God's restorative work.

The Significance of the Kingdom of God in Christian Theology

The Kingdom is a present call and future hope. It is God's redemptive plan for all creation, offering wholeness in every sphere of life - physical, relational, and spiritual.

Christians are called to reflect the Kingdom through healing, justice, and

reconciliation. The Church and Christian institutions are agents of this mission.

Several key themes ground a Kingdom vision of healthcare:

- The Kingdom is "already but not yet," present in Christ but not fully consummated (Romans 14:17). Jesus' miracles of healing (Matthew 11:4-5) are signs of this Kingdom breaking into reality. George Ladd's concept of "already and not yet" captures its nature - active in Christ, not fully completed.
- Kingdom love is self-giving and justice-oriented. The sheep and goats parable (Matthew 25) links care for the vulnerable directly to Christ. Mercy, a beatitude blessing, surpasses legalism (Matthew 5:7).
- Every person bears God's image (Genesis 1:27). We honour that through ethical care that restores body, soul, and spirit (Mark 5:34).



Biblical Anthropology — The Whole Person

Central to a theological approach to health is the Biblical anthropology that affirms the dignity, unity, and purpose of every human person. Scripture presents human beings not as fragmented - split between body, soul, or mind - but as integrated wholes.

This view challenges healthcare models that prioritise treatment over presence or intervention over relationship. From a Biblical lens, to heal is not only to cure but to care: to restore the person within their relational, spiritual, and communal

context. It calls for us to provide hope, healing and wholeness.

Healing becomes an act of love, participation in God's ongoing mission of turning lifelessness into life, fragmentation into wholeness, and alienation into communion.

Toward a Kingdom-Inspired Healthcare Vision

What would a healthcare system shaped by the Kingdom look like?

- It affirms access to care as a sacred right, especially for the poor and marginalised.
- It places the last first (Matthew 20:16), focusing resources on those most at risk.
- It provides holistic care - physical, emotional, spiritual.
- It practices compassion, where caregivers are moved by love (Matthew 9:36).
- It partners with faith communities, reflecting the Acts 2 vision of shared healing.
- It holds to the eschatological hope of Revelation 21:4 - God will wipe away every tear.

Ethical Implications - Justice in Access

Justice is a non-negotiable Kingdom value in healthcare. We must recognise how inequities disproportionately harm the marginalised. Scripture challenges favoritism (James 2) and calls us to justice (Isaiah 1:17). Justice-in-action looks like being part of initiatives and policy-making aimed at reducing barriers to care, and embracing the outcast - just as Jesus touched lepers (Luke 5:13), restoring both body and belonging.

Compassion in Practice

Kingdom compassion goes beyond emotion. Jesus was moved to action by human suffering (Matthew 9:36). Healthcare that is situationally-engaged and patient-centred reflects this. For example, comfort rounds in paediatrics not only address symptoms but comfort the whole child and family. Compassion means costly love. It is the willing, personal investment in another's healing and dignity.



Dignity and Personhood

Human dignity is rooted in the Imago Dei. Jesus consistently restored dignity - such as when He publicly affirmed the bleeding woman (Luke 8:43-48), calling her "daughter." We must reject systems that treat patients as data points or burdens. Actively being part of ethics committees and being a Kingdom voice and influence can guard against dehumanisation and ensure respect, especially in palliative contexts. Every patient interaction is sacred.

Community and Wholeness

Healing is never isolated. Acts 2 shows early believers living in restorative community. Modern Kingdom healthcare recognizes that social determinants - housing, isolation, family - affect health deeply. Programmes training all sectors of health workers to support the elderly or disabled restore not only health but connection.

Additional Ethical Kingdom Lenses

- Trauma-informed care with cultural humility fosters healing environments aligned with reconciliation - deeply Kingdom-shaped priorities.
- Environmental degradation disproportionately affects the vulnerable. Kingdom values demand stewardship, recognising that creation care is health care.

Hope and Eschatological Vision

Even where cure isn't possible, Christian hope endures. The resurrection assures that suffering is not the end. Palliative care, grief counseling, and chaplaincy become vital expressions of Kingdom hope. They offer dignity, meaning, and presence in the valley of the shadow. This is sacred work.

Case Studies in Kingdom Healthcare

- Hospice care inspired by Psalm 23: A place of green pastures and quiet waters where chronic patients find peace and presence.
- Faith-based disaster relief: prioritises the vulnerable when others prioritise the powerful.
- Spiritual care teams: offering resilience and hope in difficult settings.
- Compassion forums: professionals gathering to encourage, refresh, and revitalise one another.

Challenges and Opportunities

We face economic pressures, time constraints, and systems that prioritise profit over people.

Like Daniel in Daniel chapter 3, Christian healthcare workers face conscience conflicts and ethical tensions. But we also find opportunities:

- Co-belligerence and collaboration: Partnering with people of different faiths who share the same goals.
- Mentorship: Guiding colleagues and juniors to embrace Kingdom values.
- Christian witness in dark places.

Hope remains. Co-belligerence coalitions can advance shared values. Community, mentorship, and spiritual formation help believers resist burnout and remain faithful witnesses (Matthew 5:13-16).

Conclusion

The Kingdom of God calls us to re-imagine healthcare as a sacred vocation. Every patient interaction is a chance to embody love, justice, mercy, and hope. As Colossians 3:23 exhorts: "Let us work with all our hearts, as working for the Lord." Let's commit to this healing and restoration mission with courage, compassion, and Kingdom vision.

Dr. Mathew George



To watch the webinar in full, including the Q&A time, please go to the ICMDA webinar series page icmda.net/resources/webinars or scan the QR code.

Finding God in the Practice of Dentistry



(This article was first published on the UCCF website in June 2025 and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the author)

If you want a career where you get to play with the very best creation has to offer in the fields of physics, biology, chemistry, sculpture, engineering, computing, psychology, art, business, leadership, law, and of course, surgery, then dentistry is the job for you!

Far from being, as it is sometimes seen, medicine's poor cousin, we get to enjoy a much wider scope of practice than most of our medical colleagues could dream of. We are given the rare privilege of forming long-term relationships with our patients, their children and their children's children. We get opportunities to know more than just their dentition, but also their challenges, hopes and fears. One timely word about oral hygiene can improve the life quality of generations of people and one carefully delivered treatment which didn't hurt quite as much as someone thought it might, can release them from the captivity of fear.

Of course there are challenges, not least in a struggling health service, but if meeting people in their most vulnerable state, bringing healing and restoration to a mouth marred by the consequences of

wrong doing sounds familiar, and you fancy getting paid for the privilege then what could be a better way for a Christian to emulate Jesus in the 21st Century?

Working for the wellbeing of creation

"I hate the dentist!" That is going to be the phrase that defines your life, both when you are at work and when you are at play. And we know why. Nobody likes going to the dentist; the best we can hope for is "I don't mind too much" or "I like my dentist but don't like the dentistry".



So good dentists learn to accept and embrace our role. We know that people need to hear our messages, even when they don't want to. We know that we will be ignored, maligned and blamed for things we never did. But then that was the life experience of almost every Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist and even Jesus himself. And when we

remember the Father's unfailing love and inexhaustible capacity for forgiveness we start over with each new patient and lead them gently down a path they don't want to follow.

Whether you choose hospital, practice or community dentistry in the UK or abroad, or as many of us do, a mix up of many different branches of dentistry, you will spend your working days doing some of the most hands-on restorative healing work imaginable. Uncovering the problems people didn't even know they had, accepting them without judgement, and helping them step by step back towards health. For many dentists, that role won't be limited to their patients, but also their staff. For those of us who run practices, we will be a very significant influence in the lives of the people, and the families of the people, we employ and work alongside.

As a Christian dental student you may have been drawn to study dentistry with a sense of calling. This calling may take you into many different dental environments, both in the UK and overseas. This calling is where your passion merges with where God is at work or has an unfulfilled or unmet need. Dentistry is a wonderful opportunity to co-work with our heavenly Creator, making a practical difference in the world and impacting culture for the best, whether that is through relieving the pain of toothache for an individual or affecting dental public policy and provision locally, nationally or internationally. Your dental course will inspire and equip you to take those first steps along a lifetime career of dentistry in the service of patients and our Father.

But accepting this challenge is not easy. For many dentists, constantly being "the bad guy" chips away bit by bit at our once noble intentions and we find ourselves becoming cynical and callous. It's in those circumstances that the people who carry the mark of Christ can make the biggest difference. When we are at our weakest and the world is at its darkest, His strength sustains us and His light shines brightest.

The Christian Dental Fellowship was formed so that, collectively, Christian dentists, dental care professionals and dental students could support, equip and encourage one another, as we seek to be a positive Christian influence in the profession. So is dentistry a good way to bring the message of forgiveness, restoration and hope to a fallen world? Absolutely. Will your patients love every word you say and every action you take? Maybe not so much. Do you want a career that has a minute-by-minute, day-by-day positive impact on the world? Take up your drill and follow Him.

Worshipping the God We Work For

So far, we've thought about what we as dentists do for the world around us, and we do a lot. But what about the effects of being dentists on us and specifically on us as Christians?

In simple terms, dentistry and discipleship are perfect bedfellows, for they are both lifelong learning disciplines.

To start with, we get a full five years to dedicate our lives to the study of the pinnacle of God's creation. Delving deeper and deeper into the detail of what seems at first sight to be a simple structure reveals layer after layer of complexity and beauty that came into being through our Father's command and our Saviour's making. Then, just when we think we know it all, yet another new layer is revealed.

Each time we find out something new that God did or does, it allows us to worship a little more deeply, a little more fully, and with a little more awe. Far from the study of science removing the role of God in the world, it enhances our respect for Him and deepens our understanding of what He's done. And the best bit? We know that there is more to come. Every answered question in science opens a hundred more we've never even thought of, but He has.

He was there before us, He knew the answer before we even knew there was a question to ask. And He is still there, hanging out down the barrel of a microscope eyepiece or in the curve of a graph, just waiting to be discovered.

But dentistry is so much more than scientific learning, great though that is. We are also allowed to play an active part in healing. Our professional lives are a mirror for what Jesus did for us.

The biggest single branch of dentistry is named "restorative dentistry"; the clue is in the name. Restoring creation to as close as possible to its former glory, taking the form and function or blueprint of the Creator as our inspiration. Hence, undoing the effects of a fallen world, not in some vague, overarching, impersonal sense, but intimately for a single individual, millimetre by millimetre at a time, made with our own two hands, enhanced and enabled by the God-given gifts we are endowed with and learn to use. Every filling, every extraction, every procedure, is a one-off act of healing, built for a recipient of one – the patient – and seen only by an audience of one – Our Father. So, as dentists, we get intellectual stimulation and emotional appreciation of what God has done, and we get to act out thirty times a day, small miracles of resurrection.



Witnessing to the world

Yet we do all of this in a broken and fallen world. We work in systems that are underfunded, stretched and inadequate. We live under the constant threat of complaint and litigation, of pressure and competition and in an environment where stick has become dominant over carrot.

Supporting our colleagues who give their all, but find it's never enough, is part of our role too.

We all fail and need forgiveness, but when we have a professional culture where blame walks tall and shouts her accusations loudly, Christian voices of love, kindness and gentleness are

needed all the more. This is one way we can mould the culture of our working environments, witnessing to the loving support and acceptance of Jesus as we come alongside our colleagues and peers, journeying with them.

The pressures of the business of dentistry, be that private or NHS, practice, hospital or community, place us on a direct collision course with the principles of health care: "I want to give my all to this patient, but I have a hundred more waiting"; "I want to spend my life in the service of others but if my business doesn't make profit, I can't help anyone".

So we need to be grown-ups in our faith as we wrestle with these dilemmas and grapple with the ethics of such complexities, leaning on the Word and counsel of Christ. Somehow our role is to mirror Jesus in the way He pursued his big picture mission relentlessly and without swerving, while in the same moment finding time for the individual who presents needing help.

Your fellow students, your colleagues and your professional peers will all see the way you do that. Like all professions, dentistry is a small world, and reputations take a long time to build and moments to destroy. Living a life in the mouths of others isn't easy, but if you do, you won't always need yours to bear witness for Him. Your fingers, your appointment book, and your attitudes and actions will do that for you.

So what to do?

Are you thinking about applying to university and embarking on this career? Are you at university and wondering if the hours in the library and the phantom head room are worth it?

Yes, yes and yes! Dentistry is a wonderful career. Minute by minute we re-enact inside our patients' mouths what Jesus did for us on the cross. Month by month we mimic what the Father did in the process of creation. And year by year we get paid to display the work of the Spirit as we bear His fruit.

Alistair Bartlett

CDF Students and Newly Qualified Graduates Coordinator

Planning Treatment, Planning Life: Trusting God in Unclear Moments



As Christian dentists, we spend our professional lives making decisions that impact our patients' well-being. Some decisions are simple: a patient presents with occlusal caries, so we do a filling. They have subgingival calculus, so we do root surface debridement.

The path forward is clear, the evidence is strong, and there is little room for debate. But dentistry, like life, is rarely that straightforward. Many cases require careful consideration - cases where there is no single "correct" answer. A patient presents with multiple dental issues, some functional, some aesthetic. Should we restore spaces with dentures or implants? Should we take a direct or indirect approach? The best decision depends on many factors - age, finances, medical history, personal priorities, and even the clinician's skill set. What is right for a 30-year-old professional with a stable job may not be right for a pensioner with limited savings. A treatment plan that fits one dentist's expertise might be unwise for another. In the end, we must make decisions based not on a universal formula but on our training, experience and an understanding of what is best for the patient in front of us. And just as in treatment planning, the Christian walk is filled with decisions that are not always clear-cut.

When God Doesn't Give a Clear Answer

During the process of applying to serve

in Liberia, my family and I faced a significant decision. My boss offered me a 20% share in his practice in exchange for an eight-year commitment as an associate, while at the same time, we were exploring the possibility of moving to Liberia to serve as dental missionaries. Neither of these options was sinful. The Bible doesn't command me to go to Liberia, nor does it prohibit me from becoming a practice partner.

There was no neon sign from heaven, no dream, no audible voice directing me one way or the other. So what do we do when faced with two legitimate choices and God isn't making the answer obvious?

This is where treatment planning came to mind. Just as there are times when a patient's case requires us to weigh multiple good options and make the best choice based on our training, experience, and judgment, God sometimes asks us to do the same in our own lives.

Faith, Wisdom, and the Freedom to Choose

Proverbs 3:27 says: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act." Sometimes, God places decisions before us and gives us the freedom to act. He has shaped us through our experiences, our study of Scripture, and the wisdom of those around us. Just as we don't always get a step-by-step manual for every dental case, we don't always get one for life decisions either. Instead, we must draw on what God has already provided - His Word, our past experiences, the counsel of wise Christians, and the peace (or lack thereof) we feel in prayer.

In dentistry, we make decisions not based on what is theoretically best, but on what is best for the patient in front of us. In the Christian life, God sometimes lets us choose - not based on what is "right" in an absolute sense, but based on what is best given the person He has

shaped us to be.

Walking in Faith, Not Fear

This perspective is freeing. It removes the anxiety that we might be making the "wrong" choice when God has not given us clear guidance. If we have sought Him, examined our motivations, and made a decision that aligns with His Word, then we can walk forward in faith, trusting that He will be with us.

In the end, my family and I have chosen Liberia. It's not because we have had an undeniable sign from God but because, based on our training, experiences, and the passions God had placed in our hearts, we believed it was the right decision. Others in the same situation might have made a different choice, and that would have been fine too. I know that whether we had chosen Liberia or stayed in the UK, God would have been faithful. His plans are not derailed by our choices, and He is sovereign over all things. The beauty of walking with Christ is that He goes before us, no matter which road we take, using every decision for His glory and our growth.

Like treatment planning, the Christian walk is not always about finding the one perfect answer - it's about seeking wisdom, trusting the experiences God has given us, and making the best decision we can, knowing that He will walk with us no matter what. "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps." (Proverbs 16:9)

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If you'd like to sign up for James and Anna's newsletter and prayer updates from Liberia, please go to www.thehuntersinliberia.co.uk

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