



The Doctor's Life of Faith

Janet Goodall

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Preface

The seeds for this book were sown at a regional conference of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association (ICMDA) at Schladming, Austria, in 2008. The conference was attended by graduates and students from across Europe, with varying levels of understanding about how the Christian faith should work out in practice. Dr James Tomlinson, then ICMDA's representative for Eurasia, had asked me to lead a seminar about finding God's plan for our lives.

I have thought more about the subject since then. At first glance it suggested a search for God's personal guidance in life. Although not excluding that, there is a bigger picture. God's overall plan goes much wider and deeper than just what happens to me. God has a master plan. It is the same for all who believe and trust in him. Even so, not everyone understands that there is such a plan, or how it may apply to them. Even for committed Christian believers, the individual's route towards God's final goal will involve very different experiences.

This has been true in my own life. My Christian parents hoped to be missionaries but were unable on health grounds to live and work abroad. Instead they entertained many a visiting missionary in our home. At the start of my medical training I thought I too was heading for the mission field, possibly in India. Instead I became a consultant paediatrician, first in Uganda, then for many years in Stoke-on-Trent. As a single woman, and especially since retirement, I have been free to travel and share professional and biblical insights widely in many parts of the world, from Australia to Zululand.

Both aspects of this teaching have been illuminated by the recognition that we are all made in the image of God. An important part of that imagery is other-centred love. This is the kind of love often seen between new babies and parents, but supremely displayed in the life, death and rising again of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we study the word of God further, his astonishing plan becomes clearer. God the Father wants each of his children to become more like his Son Jesus, through the transforming work of his indwelling Spirit.

Over the years since that seminal conference, I have observed that there is great ignorance about the Bible and its story. This is true not only overseas but even among those brought up in once-Christian Britain. A century ago, the Bible was valued and widely taught in our schools as well as in churches. Now a surprising number of British people no longer have a copy of the Bible in their house. Television quiz shows reveal how often otherwise intelligent competitors have minimal biblical knowledge. Even regular churchgoers tend particularly to neglect the Old Testament Scriptures.

People with roots overseas may think that in moving to Britain they are entering a Christian country. This includes a great number of the health professionals who have found work in our National Health Service. Yet they often find many of the advertisements they see culturally offensive. They can be shocked by lax public morality and behaviour. If they judge these to represent Christianity, they are unlikely to take the faith seriously. My hope is to offer a clearer picture of the purpose of the Christian faith and what it offers to the searcher for truth.

It has been a good refresher course for me to think over the Bible's wonderful story of God's plan for his world and the people in it. The Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF) has played an important part in my personal, professional and spiritual development since 1956. Drs John and Peggy Edmunds, senior members of the Fellowship at the time, inspired me with their loving hospitality. I was then a junior doctor on Peggy's paediatric team, and she is still a great supporter in prayer. Ever since that early encouragement, CMF has provided professional wisdom, good friends and an occasional platform for speaking and teaching. I am especially grateful for this opportunity to share more widely some of the fruits of that influence. I want to express my thanks to Dr Peter Saunders (Chief Executive Officer), John Martin (Head of Communications) and Tom Roberts (Communications Coordinator) for reading, editing and agreeing to publish the work.

ICMDA has broadened my experience, providing much-valued fellowship with friends in other countries, as well as glimpses into the problems some of them face. A few have given permission for me to retell

their stories and readers will surely be touched and grateful for that. More ideas than I realise must have come from various writers, speakers and friends. My chief source of inspiration, however, has been the word of God, the Holy Bible. It is my hope and prayer that readers of my little book will be encouraged to become students of the Bible's 66 books. It is still the world's overall bestseller. Biblical quotations are from the New International Version. For those who use English as a second language the Good News Bible is recommended as it was produced with these readers in mind.

James Tomlinson has been a real encouragement from the start. Many other friends, too many to be named individually, have prayed for, read or commented on the work in progress and for that I thank them all, especially Anne Beaumont, Garth and Terry Hastings and Valerie MacKay. David Finn helped me over the last hurdle before the publisher's deadline. Roger and Frances Delf have repeatedly provided a quiet haven as needed, and a number of computer experts have intermittently come to my aid. Without the knowhow of Nicholas Harrison, Michael Hopkins and Stephen O'Brien the script would occasionally have been lost in space instead of becoming the volume you now hold in your hand. May its message enter your mind, touch your heart and affect your goal in life.

Above all, of course, I thank my loving heavenly Father for his guidance over so many years – and I acknowledge that he has not finished with me yet! I have written of much that he is still teaching me to put into practice.

Janet Goodall
February 2014

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*For my good friends Astrit and Elena Rrukaj who, with many others,
have come to Britain from afar to serve our national health here.*