

Don't keep your studies and your 'church life' in two different boxes

This article was written by Emily Sturgess (CiS Development Officer) for the UCCF Science Leadership Development Network blog, November 2016, and is reproduced with permission.

I found life as an undergraduate Biology student awesome, in the literal sense of the word. Almost every day I would come back from lectures or the library amazed by something new I'd learned about a ridiculous organism, or amazing reproductive system, or insane behavioural theory. Biology is something I'm passionate about, and loved having the opportunity to soak it up for three solid years, even if the exams and essays themselves were stressful! Even now, eight years since I started university as a fresher, having since trained as an ecologist and now working full-time for Christians in Science, I will still get a moss identification text book out to flick through to soothe my soul if I'm feeling a bit tense. Getting stuck into science is such a joyful thing.

But life as a scientist and a Christian at university is not necessarily an easy one. I don't say that to set you up for a fall, and some may well find that it isn't an issue; but the reality of atheistic scientism on the one side, and fundamental anti-science-ism on the other can make walking the middle ground as both a scientist and a Christian a tricky one to negotiate. People might not understand how you can be 'logical and rational' and have a faith; or on the other side, might not see how you can believe what modern science shows us about the universe and keep your faith.

However, the life of a science student as a Christian is a highly fulfilling one. Using our talents and gifts to explore, understand and explain the world around us is a huge privilege. Many find that, as Christians, the more we understand of the world around us the more we understand of the character of God, and the deeper the call to worship the creator and sustainer of the universe grows. For some it's the beauty of elegant mathematical equations. For others it's the intricate complexity of a folding molecule. For others it's the stunning way two germ cells can develop into a fly, an elephant, an oak tree. Whichever aspect of science it is that grabs your attention, it's a wonderful way to draw closer to God, think more about who he is, and to serve that academic field.

Thinking about how our faith impacts what we're studying (and vice versa) is deeply important. While it's true that there is nothing that should stop a scientist from being a Christian, the questions people may raise are legitimate. Even if you're happy not causing your faith and your studies to interact, it's worth giving it some thought. Integrity is such a valuable thing, and knowing that you've thought through your subject and your beliefs in light of each other will help when people ask you about them, and when you come to make decisions about what you want to do with this degree you've worked so hard for.

Don't keep your studies and your 'church life' in two separate boxes. Allow them to inform each other, and they will both be the richer for it. (Trust me!)

To help you get into it, the Christians in Science website (www.cis.org.uk) and app (<http://get.theapp.co/9f13>) are full of resources to help you navigate the world of science and faith – whether you've never thought about how they might interact before, or if you've got really specific questions about the theological implications of a particular element of science. Our resources are arranged by subject and media so you can either go in looking for talks to listen to, or with a subject you want to explore.

Specifically for students we have a series called 'Being a Christian in...', with seven science subjects represented, and a few more in the pipeline. They are written by a student and a professional in

each field together, with advice, support and encouragement for specifically what it's like to be a Christian in Biology, Physics, etc. They are a brilliant place to start for any science student!

We also have a set of resources to introduce you to different science-faith topics – it's not all about evolution, after all, although we do have a leaflet on that if you're interested! Written by experts in each topic, the 'Thinking About...' leaflets give a short introduction to how Christians in the field are approaching issues like stem cell research, the big bang, neuroscience, and several more. They're great stimuli to new thought, and also suggest further reading.

We also have a whole range of past articles and talks that have been given that will take you deeper on various different issues. The resources are there not to be intimidating or another thing to tick off your reading list of 'things you must get done this week', but as a genuine aid to your thinking, and your journey with God. Dip in and out of them, allow yourself to mull them over, pray about them and chat them through with friends, Christian or not.

At Christians in Science we're really excited by UCCF's leadership development network for the sciences. It's such a great thing to be *salt and light* in your departments, and we want to encourage that, so that those of you who carry on professionally into the academic world will continue in that as you start your careers, solid in the knowledge of who you are and what God's called you to. The scientific world needs as many dedicated, passionate, loving, inspired people of integrity as it can get! Give it all of who you are – and we'll see you in the lab!