

# Doctor of Ministry

by Jeanette A. Stewart

**Jack Cooper** knew he was out on a limb. In the midst of a most unexpected phone call, he faced an important decision. He ran quickly over the facts in his mind. He had been building a practice in ophthalmology for the past eight years. A Jewish ophthalmologist who practiced in the same building had just died. Dr. Cooper had known him well enough to exchange greetings in the elevator, but nothing more. Now his son was on the telephone, offering his father's practice to Dr. Cooper.

"I'm out on a limb, but if God wants to saw the limb off, I'm willing to go down with it!" Dr. Cooper thought to himself.

He spoke slowly. "Thank you for your most gracious offer. However, there is something that you must know. I am a Christian; consequently I'm committed to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with my patients. Although most of your father's patients are Jewish, and I wish to treat them in a sensitive and respectful way, I am unwilling to change this aspect of my life."

There! He'd said it! He waited to hear the whine of the chain saw and the cracking sounds of a branch beginning to bend, then fall.

"I know that about you, as did my father. However, I must warn you that you may lose the Jewish population of your practice if you continue to share your religious beliefs. Nonetheless my decision stands, the practice is yours."

Dr. Cooper was stunned. His life's purpose was to preach, teach, and heal in the name of Jesus. Never had he doubted that God would honor that goal, but this new development was beyond anything he ever had anticipated. As he wondered why this Jewish

ophthalmologist had chosen him as the recipient of his practice, he also began to reflect on how God had worked in his life to bring him to this point.

It wasn't that many years before when Dr. Cooper would have felt differently about the importance of personally sharing the gospel. Although he had maintained a simple faith in God from childhood, he learned little of the Scriptures throughout his early adult years. After graduating from Southwestern Medical School, he had completed his ophthalmology training at the prestigious Wilmer Institute at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

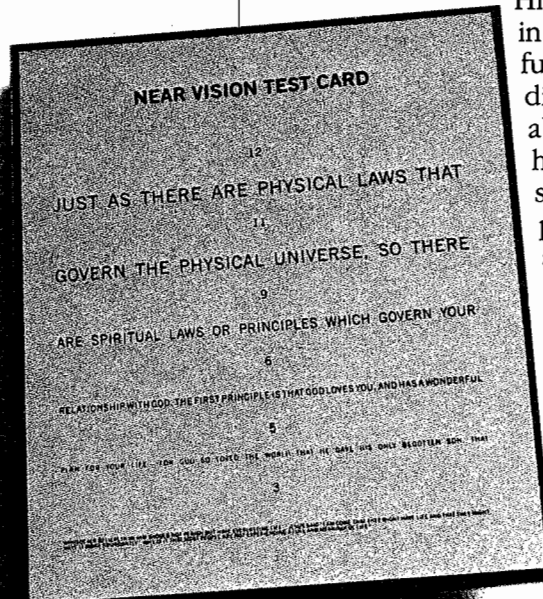
His commitment to excellence in medicine, and time spent fulfilling a military obligation distracted him from thoughts about God. However, when he and his wife Nancy finally settled in Dallas to start his practice, their lives underwent a slow change.

Mrs. Cooper started to attend a home Bible study where she began to understand the importance of God's Word and how it applied to her daily life. As a result, she motivated her husband to study the Scriptures more intensely. Through his personal study, the influence of several people, and involvement in parachurch

ministries, Dr. Cooper grasped the dynamics of an obedient Christian life. Both Dr. and Mrs. Cooper became enthusiastic with their new discovery.

During that time they attended the first Lay Institute Conference sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ at Arrowhead Springs, California, where they learned how to share their faith effectively with

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**CONNEXIONS** *Building Relationships on Common Ground*  
Connexions encourages Christians to build relationships with people in their network so they can penetrate the intellectual, emotional, and volitional barriers their friends have toward Christianity.

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others. Shortly after, Dr. Cooper accompanied Bill Bright and several other laymen on an evangelistic tour of Latin America. Two results grew from this excursion: motivation and experience in communicating the gospel. Life would never be the same again!

On his return, Dr. Cooper determined to find a way to integrate his belief in Christ with his practice of ophthalmology. He began speaking to many patients individually, explaining to them the gospel, answering their spiritual questions, helping them to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. However, his commitment to provide excellent ophthalmic care did not always leave him the time he wanted to provide for patients' spiritual needs. Thus the seeds of a new idea were planted in the back of Dr. Cooper's mind.

One day Dr. Cooper shared the gospel with a patient whom he was privileged to lead to Christ. This patient was a lithographer. The seeds of Dr. Cooper's new idea began to sprout. He later called this lithographer to ask him for help. Together they designed and printed materials to use in Dr. Cooper's office so that he could communicate the gospel to every single patient. They devised a reading card (used to test a patient's vision) which succinctly explained the gospel. While being a legitimate reading test, this card also contained the truth about Jesus Christ. Dr. Cooper was well on his way to making the gospel available to each of his patients.

Now, with the inheritance of his colleague's practice he faced an entirely new group of people, those of Jewish faith. He wondered how to effectively communicate that Jesus is the Messiah. With the help of a missionary to Jewish people, he developed materials sensitive to the needs and concerns of Jewish patients. Then his lithographer friend quickly printed new, reversible eye charts: one side for use with

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Jewish patients, the other side for non-Jews. Dr. Cooper felt ready to face his new challenge.

Contrary to the ominous prediction of the man who gave him his new Jewish practice, no great fallout occurred. Surely Dr. Cooper's dedication to medical excellence was responsible for the continuing growth of his practice. Along with this growth, Dr. Cooper also expanded the Christian materials in his office, making Bibles, religious books, and other spiritual literature available in his waiting room. Now he keeps forty different translations of one particular tract on hand; he has seized opportunities to use them with patients of twenty different languages! He estimates that in the past 25 years, over 100,000 patients have been exposed to the claims of Christ through his ophthalmic practice.

One might wonder how Dr. Cooper maintains a spiritual focus during his busy workday. One method that helps him is writing a relevant scripture verse each

day at the top of his schedule of patients. As he relies on the Holy Spirit to prompt him when a particular word of encouragement, challenge, or comfort is needed, he feels that he can combine excellence in medicine with excellence in ministry. Although he cannot provide follow-up and discipleship training for every patient who accepts Christ, he realizes that sometimes his ministry is planting the seed of the gospel, while at other times he waters or reaps the spiritual harvest. To put it in his words, "It takes many drops of water to fill a bucket and I represent just one of those drops."

If Dr. Cooper's ministry to his patients can be described as just "a drop in the bucket," then one would say that he floods the lives of the students to whom he ministers through the Christian Medical Society. Although Dr. Cooper serves as the advisor to the student chapter of CMS at Southwestern Medical School in Dallas, he furnishes much more than advice. Together Dr. and Mrs. Cooper take a personal interest in the medical students. They entertain them in their home with frequent invitations for brunches or dinners, which helps provide an outstanding example of integrating Christianity with everyday life. In addition, Dr. Cooper spends every Friday lunch hour on campus, teaching a Bible study and discipling students. Importantly, many of their disciples have gone on to make disciples of their own, thus perpetuating the Coopers' ministry and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Cooper is a man who strives to live up to his stated purpose. In spite of any obstacle that might hinder his way, he presses on in order "to preach, teach, and heal in Jesus' name."

*Jeanette Stewart is a freelance writer living in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina.*