

Meditation March 9th

During Lockdown, we decided to have a family book group, and each of us has taken it in turns to suggest a book to read. The latest suggestion (not mine!) was to read Moby Dick. This, while undoubtedly being a great work of American literature, does require application and effort. I am reading it on my Kindle and am trying to read about 5% each day. Slowly I am getting there, and I will hopefully have finished it in another couple of weeks.

Something else I am working on is learning German. The reason being that our son currently lives and works in Berlin. I have a Collins book to help me learn the language and am attempting to do a bit each day.

But however much I might want to to speak German, or finish Moby Dick, neither of these things will happen without consistent and incremental effort being put in. I cannot suddenly turn up in Berlin and expect to be able to speak fluent German overnight.

The reason I am mentioning these things is not so that you can ask me when you next see me how I am doing (or not doing!) with these projects, but because I have been challenged this week to keep on going with spiritual disciplines. If I want to become more godly, grow in grace, become less anxious about issues, I need to persist with these disciplines.

“Train yourself for godliness, for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way”

1 Timothy 4:7

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever”. 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

The following quote is from Dallas Willard, writing about spiritual disciplines

“You cannot improve or grow directly by will power. Instead you do what you can and with repetition over time you are gradually empowered to do what you could not do at the start.”

Richard Foster says “ By themselves the spiritual disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God’s means of grace.”

When things are stressful, or I am under pressure, I want to deal with the situation. I can then resist spending time in meditation and prayer, choosing instead to get on and sort things out. Of course it isn’t always possible to do anything at all, but we can resort to needless anxiety and worry, which gives us the illusion of control. I came across this quotation from Francis de Sales, who was a 16th century Jesuit, which describes this situation

“Anxiety arises from an unregulated desire to be delivered from a pressing problem or to obtain some hoped for good....Birds that captured in nets become inextricably tangled therein because they flutter and struggle so much.....When you are conscious that you are growing anxious, commend yourself to God and resolve steadfastly not to take any steps whatever to obtain the result you desire until your disturbed state of mind is altogether quieted.. so as to act from reason rather than impulse”

I am stirred to examine my habits of spiritual discipline. Here is something to spur us on:

“We have not advanced very far in our spiritual lives if we have not encountered the basic paradox of freedom...that we are most free when we are bound. But not just any way of being bound will suffice; what matters is the character of our binding. The one who would be an athlete, but who is unwilling to discipline his body by regular exercise and by abstinence, is not free to excel on the field or the track. His failure to train rigorously denies him the freedom to run with the desired speed and endurance. With one concerted voice, the giants of the devotional life apply the same principle to the whole of life: Discipline is the price of freedom.” Elton Trueblood (C20th Quaker theologian)