

Meditation March 29th

I have been following a lent course based on the book “Kneeling with Giants’ by Gary Neal Hansen. The subtitle is ‘Learning to Pray with History’s best Teachers’

So far I have only looked at 4 different subsections. I wasn’t sure what to expect when I started the course: I suppose I was thinking principally of intercessory prayer and petitioning God. The last section of the book does talk about these aspects of prayer. However much of the book is devoted to exploring ways of drawing close to God and communicating with him. The teachers cited include Ignatius, Calvin, St Benedict, Luther , the Puritans, the author of the Cloud of Unknowing, and others.

What has struck me in the 4 different ways of praying that I have looked at so far, is the expectation that God will communicate, and the need to cultivate ways of making this possible. This week and last week the focus has been on the teachings of the Puritans. Apparently the Puritans were very much given to journalling, as a means of looking for ‘traces of God’ in their lives and also with the aim of developing sound Christian character.

John Beadle was an English Puritan living in the C17th. He felt that keeping a journal was crucial to spiritual growth and wrote a book about it. As Moses kept a record of the Israelite’s travels so, says Beadle, we should keep a track of God’s guidance in our lives. The idea of the process is to nurture an awareness of the presence of God, see God at work in all our life and note how God brings about blessing in our lives. Beadle claimed, that if we would only look, we would see God’s name, wisdom, power and faithfulness in every drop of rain and blade of grass.

This may not sound initially like prayer, but the idea is that as we become more aware of God, thankfulness and awareness of God grow.

Beadle suggest several ways of finding ‘traces of God’ , I have copied some of them from the Kneeling with Giants book as follows

1. Recount the process through which you first came to faith, or through which you came to a significant deepening of your faith. Who was involved? What happened?
2. Recount a time of life when you received particular help from God, whether in facing a trial or accomplishing something. Who was involved? What happened?
3. Recount a time when you were (or someone you love was) delivered from danger of some kind. Who was involved? What happened?
4. Recount a story in which someone, by the grace of God, helped you in a significant way. A parent? A teacher? A co-worker? What was the gift that God brought you through this person.
5. Recount a time when a prayer was answered.

I have only dabbled with this over the last week, but it has been a very useful exercise. The writing was easier than I expected. Journalling my conversion it was easy to see how God had drawn me and kept me. Harder was journalling about a difficult period of my life. At that time I was struggling with fatigue and depression, and our eldest child was profoundly disabled. My thought initially as I wrote was "Where were you God?" when all this was happening. But as I thought about it I could see different ways in which he was present, through people and places, and although I may have felt abandoned, in fact I was not, which is greatly comforting. Writing about it makes it easier to look objectively at events and remember unremembered blessings.

The process has spurred me to try to look harder for, and to be more thankful for, traces of God in my life.