A Short Reflection on a Decade of Weakness

I’m being more introspective than normal, but strangely, I feel I need to mark the day.

Ten years ago today I ran my brain into the ground. I had a “break-down.”

Some people don’t like that negative imagery. They would rather speak of a “break-through” or something more positive. But let’s not hide the reality; I broke my brain. It came from my own lack of wisdom, my unresolved insecurities and unhealthy drives, which collided with a complex and conflicted context. I used up all my fuel, and then some. I came to a crashing reverting-to-childlikeness traumatised halt.

In the immediate aftermath was much grace from my church, much strength from my wife and family, and much affection and support from my friends. I was helped to a road to recovery.

I have learned to be open about my experience, mostly on the off-chance that someone reading this is going through the same. I know how useful it is to know that you’re not the only one to fall off that path. As a grumpy old churchwarden remarked to me on my way back to being functional, with a knowing wry look of an old bloke who’s just seen a welp grow up a bit: “So, you’re not as strong as you thought you were, Will.”

No, I’m not. That was the painful thing to learn. It was the most blessed thing to grasp.

Ten years later, I am well. Well, well enough. Like an old sporting injury, it'll trigger a twinge every now and then. But the lesson remains.

Ten years and one day ago I thought I was strong. I put my shoulder under every burden. I didn't realise that there comes a point when you're not mustering your strength, you're cashing it in… and spending it.

My strength was my weakness. I was achieving outcomes according to my capacity and my skill. It wasn't nothing; I had some game. But it maxed out at the size of me. It wasn't that impressive.

Over these last ten years, I can see where the real fruit has been; the stuff that lasts, the real stuff that lingers. The sorts of things which makes you give thanks to God and trust that he's true. It's when you see lives turned around, and people baptised, and find in brothers and sisters in missional arms a fellowship that lingers across years and latitudes. It's that sort of stuff that lasts, and it's not generated by my strength.

I used to think I could exercise force of persuasion; now I know that the real stuff happens by the the Spirit touching hearts.
I used to think I could exercise strong directive leadership; now I know that the real stuff happens when good people find themselves together under the apostolic heart of Jesus.
I used to think I could, and should, fix everything and everyone I see; now I know that the real stuff happens when I wait on the Lord.

This isn't passivism or even nihilism. It's still about being present. It's still about being familiar with sufferings. There's still a need for conviction and passion and purpose and excitement. But that only works when it rests on peace. And peace comes not from my feeble strength, but knowing I am

weak, and held by very strong hands.

In short: Jesus, all for Jesus, all about Jesus, all to Jesus, I surrender.

It has been a decade of weakness, beyond anything I ever asked, or imagined.

Thanks be to God.

This Season As Parable – The posture of faith in a corona closed world.

Like many of us, I've been pondering things in this current pandemic season. I'm finding it helpful to see some parallels between these times and the effect of Jesus' teaching, especially his parables.

Allow me to explain myself: Jesus, famously, made use of parables. Rather than "answering plainly" he would tell a short story. We know many of them by name: The Parable of *The Prodigal Son*, *The Lost Sheep*, *The Good Samaritan*, etc. They have become well-known to us. So well-known, in fact, that we have become immune to their *force*.

Parables are meant to *impact.*

Here’s an example from someone other than Jesus: In 2 Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan confronts King David about his corruption. He could have spoken plainly, but I doubt he would have been heard. Instead, he tells a parable, the story of a rich man who oppresses his poor neighbour. David is *drawn into* the story until he is confronted: “You are the man!”

Nathan’s parable brings David to a *crisis*. He cannot stay where he is. The status quo is not possible anymore. He *must* respond, one way or another. **He can either respond with hardened heart, or he can fall into faith.** In this case David softens his heart and responds with contrition and repentance. The parable has its impact.

When Jesus speaks in parables he brings his hearers to a similar crisis. They cannot remain unmoved. They will either harden themselves against his word, or they will fall into faith.

In Matthew 13:1-9, Jesus shares the famous Parable of the Sower. It’s a beautiful metaphor involving a farmer sowing seed indiscriminately; it lands on shallow soil, weedy soil, hardened soil, and good soil. He later explains the metaphor; the seed is the word of God which can come to nothing in the poor soil of the pleasures and pressures of life, or bear much fruit in the good soil of those who “hear and retain it.”

This story prompts his disciples to ask, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”. Jesus responds by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

> *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”*
>
> *And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”*
>
> *He said, “Go and tell this people:*
> ***“‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding;***
> ***be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’***

> *Make the heart of this people calloused;*
> *make their ears dull*
> *and close their eyes.*
> *Otherwise they might see with their eyes,*
> *hear with their ears,*
> *understand with their hearts,*
> *and turn and be healed.”*
>
> *Isaiah 6:9-10*

Isaiah spoke to God’s people at a point when they were wallowing in complacency after a period of prosperity, even as their world was threatened by a looming invader. They had lost their way. They had forgotten who they were. They were *God’s* people but they had become self-assured, oppressive, and unrighteous, just like the other nations. They didn’t just need *teaching*, they needed *impacting*. Like Nathan with David, they needed a real *crisis.* So Isaiah was to speak to them in a way that only faith would grasp. Without that soft heart, they would be “hearing but never understanding”, confirmed in their hardness.

Jesus speaks in parables to do the same for his generation.

Consider the Parable of the Sower. For those with “ears to hear” with a heart of faith, it is wonderful truth. God’s life-giving word *is* scattered indiscriminately; it’s not just for the strong or wise or holy. God has spoken to everyone, in all places and all circumstances. Heard with a heart of faith, this story generates a yearning to be good soil. It impacts faith and leads to more faith.

But for those who can’t hear it that way, it will have the opposite effect. For those who hold the word of God as something reserved for the upright and pure, a tool for those who have been schooled in the right Pharisaical school, this parable is a confrontation, even an offense. The reponse of the Pharisees to Jesus *was* often condescension, derision, or

anger. They heard but didn't understand. The parable reveals their lack of faith.

When it comes to faith (or the lack of it) within God's people, parables have a prophetic *amplifying* effect. "Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." (Matthew 13:12)

This then, is my reflection: **This coronavirus season is working like a parable to us**, the church. It is having a similar prophetic amplifying effect. **It is bringing us to a crisis.** It's not just a crisis of medical and economic management (although that is real). It's not just a crisis of bereavement and trauma (although that is very very real). It is bringing us to a crisis of faith.

In the westernised world we have chuffed along in our churches in a context of comfort and prosperity. It's a bit like Isaiah's day. We have built a religious industry. We have made our appeals to the masses. We have gotten good at offering something decent on a Sunday, and mechanisms attuned to felt needs throughout the week. But that edifice has been shaken; we cannot even meet together at the moment.

Even as we do our best (and there *is* much good) in the netflix world of livestreams and zoom, we recognise that the former status quo is gone. If we can put 90% of our "product" online, just what were we doing anyway? The question is raised. The moment is impacting us.

The impact is also similar to Isaiah's day; it is raising the question of *identity. Whose* are we? The difference is literally a matter of faith: We are either God's people, and confirmed in that, or we are self-made with a borrowed Christian aesthetic, and that is what will emerge. It's a parabolic moment.

We can imagine the two different responses:

We could do it without God. We *can* rebuild the edifice. We *can* market the spiritual experience. We can even do a decent job of being a neighbourly community on a par with any decent Mutual Aid Group. We can find our activism of choice that wants to put the world back together again a certain way, and get on board. We may even take some of our current moment with us: the comfort of doing church in our pyjamas is not nothing!

It's not necessarily malicious or morally bad, but in this direction it can all be done in our own strength. Like Isaiah's people seeking help from Egypt… like religious leaders dismissing the up-start from Nazareth and turning back to their traditions… we will not hear the call to faith in the current moment. Just put it back the way it was, or the way we now want it to be.

In this direction, the trust is not in God, it's all about us. Extend it out and we imagine not just church, but *divinity itself* in the form that we want it, purged of all that we find disagreeable. This can manifest at any point on the church spectrum: From woke do-goodery, to blinkered protestations, to marketing tactics, to immovable emptied traditions, it can be sweet, or acidic, stimulating, or soporific. But it has this in common: My world, My terms. A Christian aesthetic, but God not needed, not really.

I can see our current parabolic moment amplifying this faith-less response. Yes, I see it around me, but mostly I mean this with respect to *myself*. I want to *do*. I want to *seize the moment*. I want to *plan the future.* This is *my* time! Let us choose the future that most aligns with our sense of self-security and call that "faithful"!

The real difference isn't about choosing one self-made future as more virtuous than another self-made future. If we look at it like that, we are hearing but not understanding.

Rather, **the other effect of this moment is to *undo* us, and**

bring us to God. That is the heart of faith.

We are also seeing this in this moment. People are being undone. They are wondering, seeking, yearning, *thirsting* for something beyond themselves. Perhaps its because we're facing mortality honestly again. Perhaps our pretenses of safety have gone and our simple *smallness* has re-emerged as real. Perhaps life once looked like a rut and rail in a predetermined direction, but now there are *possibliities*. Whatever it is, this moment is undoing us. It is at this moment in the parable that we look up to see the face of Jesus speaking.

Look at the response to Jesus' teaching. Faith often looks like bewilderment. It's the Pharisees that go off with self-assured certaintity of how they want things to be, but the path of faith looks more like confusion. Eyes have been opened, now blinking in the sun, exclaiming both "Lord, at last!" and "Lord, I don't know what to *do!*" The Bible describes this moment in many ways – from *amazement* to being *"cut to the heart"* to declarations of bewailing truth *"I am ruined." "Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man."*, and *"My Lord, and my God."*

The faith-filled response is not so much as a position or determined direction, as a *posture.*

> It is a posture of surrender. It is cross-shaped, a laying down of everything. It can feel like a refining *death.* Let it be that it is no longer we that live, but Christ that lives within us! We repent. We believe.
>
> It is a posture of response. Jesus says, "Come, follow me!", and we leave our nets and follow him. We are stripped of our security, and led into the unknown. But it's OK, we are led by Jesus. He is of greatest value.
>
> It's a posture that bows to grace in the suffering. Of weeping when needed, and laughing at other times. Of praying "Lord, your will be done!"

It’s a posture that waits for him, as the edifices crumble, and the collapse of more substantial things is more than possible. And it ponders firstly, not “What can *we* make of this?” but “What will our Lord now do?” It is aware of needs, and fears, and griefs, and opportunities, and possibilities; but it doesn’t just up and thrust forward. We only do what we see the Father doing. We *wait*.

Above all, it is a posture of worship. We remember who we are, and we are *His*. Our distinctive is our worship: before *anything* (even before we all manner of good things, like a loving community), we are Jesus’ people. Everything else comes from that, or we lose it all, even our love in the end. So we sit at his feet. We stare at his face. We rest our head against his breast. Our love is in him, bearing his name.

Across the spectrum, it has this in common: Lord, your world. Lord, your terms. Lead us, in this moment, lead us. It’s all about you, Jesus.

This season is like a parable, it is impacting us with a crisis of faith. The status quo is not possible. And there are two responses for the churches: to harden ourselves in self-assurance and build our future, or be softened in faith and be his right now.

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The Location of Uncertainty

and the Finding of Peace

If there is any wisdom at all in growing older (my 44th birthday next week is a timely reminder) it involves a recognition that **life is uncertain**.

There is ***outward* uncertainty**: I cannot control much of what happens to me. There is much about my health, wealth, and wellbeing that is outside of my plans. At some point, we all come to grips with the simple reality that life is not as we imagined it would be. We may paint a picture for the next 10, 20, or however many years we have left, but what will emerge will not be what we think. This uncertainty can create anxiety, but we must face it; it is simply the way things are.

There is ***inward* uncertainty**: I, *myself*, am not the person I thought I would be. Usually, I am not even the person I want to be right now. I am weaker, wearier, more broken than I imagined I would be. There is more, much more, beyond my understanding and capacity. Yes, my life's experience grows, and there is increasing familiar ground, and I have come to "know myself" more than I did years ago. But I also have come to know that *I* am uncertain, and anything that I have, or have achieved, is grace more than it is deserved reward; I am owed nothing, given much. I cannot guarantee my own growth or stability; I have come to the end of myself too much. This uncertainty can create anxiety, but we must face ourselves; it is simply the way we are.

President Kennedy famously had on his desk a plaque a prayer taken from the words of a poem. It is a timely reminder, life is uncertain:

O God, thy sea is so great, and my boat is so small.

Uncertainty is often where we come undone. When faced with life's uncertainty we shore up our defenses: we seek to protect ourselves and our loved ones. We scramble to control our environment. We take what is precious to us and we place it in the safest pair of hands we know: and in these lonely uncertain days, the safest hands we see are our own. The safest hands we know is the pair attached to our uncertain selves. Our external uncertainty feeds into our internal uncertainty and so it circles and accelerates until we unravel.

We seek to control our uncertainty, and so we come to the end of ourselves.

The same thing happens when it comes to religion. There's a form of populist "faith" that seeks to reduce life's uncertainty by trying to make life more controllable. It is found in different theological colours:

A **legalistic** form of religion seeks to simplify the game of life, and make it winnable. Life's experience is reduced to a set of known rules: criteria for safety, commandments for victory. "Do and don't do this, and you'll go to heaven; mess it up and you won't." It's all on *you,* but life has been made graspable, achievable, controllable. Your hands are safe.

In the image of the little boat on the big sea, it has attempted to make the boat bigger than it is.

A **relativistic** form of religion seeks to simplify the game of life, by making the game go away. Uncertainty is deflected: *you are the only reality, it's everything else that's moving*. You can't lose, because you have already won! If life feels uncertain, then reimagine it on your terms. Explore everything else as mystery, and you will find that you yourself are the certainty. Your hands are safe.

In the image of the little boat on the big sea, it has attempted to reduce the sea to a puddle.

What I see countering this is not religion, but *faith*. I don't mean "faith" in the abstract (like the way people say "he believes in the Christian faith"), but faith in the concrete sense of *trusting*. To have faith in God, is to *trust* him. **To have faith is to trust another pair of hands.** To have faith in God is to trust God's character, God's size, God's intention, God's purpose, God's word, God's present spirit.

> *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*
>
> *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
>
> *Romans 8:35-39*

What does faith do? What does trust do? **It allows the uncertainty to remain in ourselves**, and then entrusts ourselves to the safe hands of God. Life is uncertain, but he is not. I am uncertain, but he is not. I will wobble and fail to understand, but he will not. Life will let me down, but he will not. *Nothing* will set separate us from the love of God.

Time and time again, in my life, in the lives of others, and especially in the corporate life of the church, this is the battle we face: the battle between control and faith. **Will we try and seize control, and deflect the uncertainty away;** will we reduce God to something he hasn't said, or pretend he hasn't said anything at all? **Or will we exercise faith, and entrust our uncertain selves to our trustworthy Father;** will we exercise the humility of relying on him?

In one direction lies the way of striving, where all depends on me. In the other direction lies freedom, freedom to live and move and have our being. In that direction we rest in someone bigger than ourselves. Uncertainty remains, but it is surpassed. In that direction lies peace.

Thy sea, O God, so great,
My boat so small.
It cannot be that any happy fate
Will me befall
Save as Thy goodness opens paths for me
Through the consuming vastness of the sea.

Thy winds, O God, so strong,
So slight my sail.
How could I curb and bit them on the long
And saltry trail,
Unless Thy love were mightier than the wrath
Of all the tempests that beset my path?

Thy world, O God, so fierce,
And I so frail.
Yet, though its arrows threaten oft to pierce
My fragile mail,
Cities of refuge rise where dangers cease,
Sweet silences abound, and all is peace.

– Winfred Ernest Garrison

Q&A: How would you unpack the Bible step by step to show God's big picture, that grace is a free, unmerited gift?

Sarah asks:

Hi Will,

My Mormon friends believe that they are saved by grace after all that they can do.

One of their former presidents said: "One of the most fallacious doctrines originated by Satan and propounded by man is that man is saved alone by the grace of God; that belief in Jesus Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation".

How would you unpack the Bible step by step to show them God's big picture – that grace is a free, unmerited gift? (And importantly doesn't lead to licentiousness, which is what they have been taught.)

I've talked about the purpose of the OT law, that all our works are like filthy rags, that Jesus takes my sin and gives me his righteousness. But I think I need a logical structure that walks them through it rather than my scatter gun approach. Your thoughts would be much appreciated!

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog or asked of me elsewhere and posted with permission. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/]

Hi Sarah,

Intriguing question! A good place to begin our thoughts is in Ephesians 2, especially verses *1-10*.

> *1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,*
> *2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*
>
> *3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*
>
> *4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*
>
> *8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

There are two reasons to ground ourselves here:

1) There's some explicit language about salvation by grace alone. Firstly, the language is about the *necessity* of

grace: Verse 5, "…it is by grace you have been saved…", verses 8-9, "…For it is by grace you have been saved… not by works, so that no one may boast." Secondly, the language is about the absolute *extent* of grace, i.e. that grace does more than provide the means for our rescue, the grace of God is what actually does the rescuing. This is found in the depths of our predicament: Verse 1, "…you were dead in your transgressions", Verse 3, "…by *nature* deserving of wrath". It is also found in the *agency* of God: Verses 4-5, "*God* made us alive with Christ", Verse 6, "*God* raised us up…", Verse 10, "We are *God's* handiwork…"

2) The context of this passage connects us with a bigger picture; Paul sees the work of Jesus on the cross resulting in the creation of a *"new humanity"* in which the great "mystery" of the Gospel is the inclusion of all people in the covenant promises made to Israel: that "the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise…." (Ephesians 3:6).

It's this second point that perhaps guides us to a framework for the story of grace: It is best to tell the story of God's covenant; his *promises* to his people, and especially to Abraham. Perhaps it might go something like this, as my own feeble attempt:

1) The human predicament is one of rebellion against the ways of God, and God's response is always both righteous deserved judgement and undeserved gracious provision. *Consider Genesis 1-11; the fall itself, the murder of Abel, the hardness in the time of Noah, the attempted usurpation of God by human empire at Babel. In each part the judgement is obvious, but also consider how God clothes Adam & Eve, protects Cain, puts a rainbow in the sky etc.*

2) By grace, therefore, the ultimate provision of God is his *intervention* in human history. In our historical

record, this intervention is grounded in the life of a man called Abram (later Abraham). This intervention is fundamentally *gracious* and it is received by *faith.* There is nothing particularly special about Abraham. He was weak and old. Any righteousness he has derives not from his works or moral fortitude, but as a gift bestowed ("credited") by God and received as Abraham trusted him. *Consider Genesis 12 and how God's gracious involvement with Abraham naturally follows from the rebellion at Babel. Consider also Romans 4:1-3*

3) By grace, God binds himself to Abraham in a covenant, i.e. a promise. Chief among these promises is that *"in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* This is the intervention, the promise of salvation; a new heaven and a new earth. *Consider Hebrews 11:8-10 and consider Abraham's vision with that of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation 21*

4) By grace, God guides Abraham's children towards this blessing. He protects his chosen people, he saves them from Egypt, and instructs them on how they can be true to the promise: "This is how you embrace this grace! This is how you bless the families of the earth." In this way, the Law itself is grace, and there are times when we get a glimpse of that blessing. But mostly, what we see is the rejection of the promise, a refusal to trust God; the law continues to point to the promise and so reveals how far away God's people are from it. *Consider: the entire OT.*

5) By grace, God provides a true Son of Abraham; he is not only of Abraham's flesh, but also a Son of the Promise as well; i.e. he has faith after that of Abraham. He takes responsibility for his people; by meeting the just requirement of their transgression he deals with their *separation* from the promise. And he *receives* the fullness of the promise – the renewal of life, resurrection itself. *Consider: John 3:16 and Romans 4*.

6) By grace, the promise to Abraham is now fulfilled. The blessing of salvation now applies to all the "families of the earth." It applies as we all (both Jew and Gentile), dead in our sins, are "raised up with Christ." We are all made heirs of Abraham, children of his promise. *Consider: Ephesians 2-3 (which is where we started).*

It's a narrative of salvation in which the defining agency is God, the defining action is his promise, and the basis on which the promise applies to me is not me and my faithfulness, but Christ and his faithfulness. When we add anything else to this dynamic, we actually disavow it; Embraced by Jesus, I am child of Abraham and so called to live by faith as he did. Any attempt to prove myself worthy is a disagreement that the heart of salvation is promise; and if I do not share in the promise, I am not a child of the promise; I do not share in Abraham, or in the fulfilment of all that God bound himself to do; I do not share in Christ, and I am not saved. In short: *grace is essential, and absolute*. It is necessary for salvation, and cannot be added to.

Does this lead to licentiousness? As Paul would say, *"Absolutely not!"*. To deliberately sin is also to depart from the way of promise; how can licentiousness bless all the families of the earth? Grace abounds, I am still raised with Christ; but that grace calls me to holiness.

I hope that helps. Having just gone back and read what I have written, it seems terribly insufficient. In the end, what you are doing is proclaiming the gospel. Can I encourage you as you take your question to the Scriptures? Have you noticed how many of my references have been to the book of Romans, especially chapters 4-6? It's a good place to begin, and perhaps to take your Mormon friends.

Image credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/Univ. of Virginia

Q&A: Does a desire for forgiveness mean faith?

Anonymous asks:

If someone claims to be without faith, yet morally knows they have done something "wrong" due to our God given in built moral compass (even if said person chooses to not believe that God gave them the compass) and is looking for forgiveness, does that mean they have faith…? I guess they will only feel forgiven if they realise who they must submit to, which leads them to faith…? It is almost like our inbuilt ability to continually fall short of the inbuilt compass leads us to God. Smart design. Seek and you shall find.

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog or asked of me elsewhere and posted with permission. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/]

This question has come in response to our latest sermon series in the evening at St. Nic's. Thank you for it. You've put forward something very interesting. Let's unpack it a little, explore this hypothetical person's situation, and look to see where faith can be found…

You talk about someone who "morally knows that they have done something wrong." This is an experience that is common to all people (excluding a sociopath or two) and is simply the operation of our conscience. Theologically, we can find the roots of conscience in our identity as image-bearers of

God, *and* in the loss of innocence grasped by the eating of fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But our conscience doesn't depend on faith, it is simply a part of who we are as human beings. Similarly, a pricked conscience doesn't necessarily lead to faith, or anything else in particular. We all know what it means to deaden our conscience, and harden our hearts.

However, there is also an experience that we might describe as "being convicted of sin." This something different to feeling guilty about something, it is about an awareness of a fractured relationship with our maker. It can feel like dread, but always has a sense of hunger to make it right, even if we are at a loss for words and aren't sure of what we can do about it. It's what is happening when the *psalmist* writes, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." This is what is happening when Peter witnesses Jesus at work and *cries out* "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

The big question is whether this sense of conviction is an aspect of faith. I think I'd like to turn it the other way around and consider how faith is present in the conviction of sin. After all, you cannot understand yourself to be disconnected from God's holiness if you don't have some sense of belief that God exists, and that he is holy. The longing for forgiveness is a longing for restoration of relationship, and for me, that is faith:

> *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

True conviction of sin, a ministry of God's Spirit awakening our own, draws us to God in search of his grace, even if it is on our knees. And, as you say, "seek and you shall find."

The conundrum with your hypothetical person is that we see

something of an existential wrestle: Clearly he is looking for forgiveness from someone, yet has “chosen to believe that God has not given them their moral compass.” It’s a tension that can’t last! Either what we are seeing is simply the operation of conscience, or it is true conviction and will find its end. In the meantime it is existential disequilibrium, and while it may take some time for it to resolve, that is what will happen. As you say, it’s a smart design.

What is clear is that it presents an urgency to be ready with the gospel, in word and deed. If someone is seeking the path of reconciliation, we show them Jesus, and bear witness to how he has overcome the power of sin with newness of life. Conviction finds its end in Jesus as forgiveness and assurance, and that is very much the stuff of a life of faith.

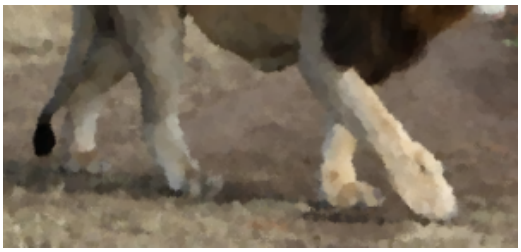
Q&A: How can we cultivate a ‘space’ for God to move?

Anonymous asks:

In your experience, how can we cultivate a ‘space’ for God to move in a way that is natural & supernatural, expected & unexpected? How do we do this in different contexts? Church, work, school, family, relationships etc?

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog or asked of me elsewhere and posted with permission. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/]

What a great question. If we dived in deep we would have enough to write books and books. We can only skim over the surface here.



So let's begin by considering what it might mean for "God to move"…

It is partly, I think, an *experiential* question. It's the same sort of thing when we talk about God being "present"; the raw theological truth is that God is *omni*-present, he *is* everywhere, but that doesn't mean that we are talking nonsense. There are times when we have a greater *sense* of the presence of God than at other times. The psalms (e.g. Psalm 73:28) speak of the "nearness" of God as something to be experienced, he is a God who can be *found*. The implication is that sometimes we might "*grope for him*" like someone stumbling in the dark, and this is our *experience* even though, in reality, *"he is not far from each one of us."*.

Similarly, then, when we talk about God "moving," the raw theological truth is that God is *always* active. What we are talking about is our *experience* of God's activity. Sometimes it is a vague sense of the *wind blowing*. Other times it is a clear sense of direction or even *divine frustration.*. Sometimes the Spirit is *"present to heal"*, so to speak, and sometimes it is *otherwise*. In my own experience, there are seasons when I do not *experience* God's movement; prayer seems lifeless, life seems hard, sin looms, and all ambitions and pursuits seem to turn to dust.

In all this I am glad of the way you have phrased your question. You have said "cultivating *space* for God to move" and this is different to what we are usually tempted to do: to *cultivate* the movement of God itself. When God seems to be absent or static, we long to *experience* his presence and movement, and we try and mimic that experience. We resort to

positive thinking, hype, self-determination, and even belligerence. A lot of the prosperity gospel "name it and claim it" manipulation happens in this space, and we need to be wary of it.

Not that there is anything innately wrong with a little bit of positive thinking, though. Deliberate choices to use our body positively have their place in raising our eyes and counting our blessings. Because the flip side of trying to generate the movement of God is to believe the lie that he *isn't* moving at all. Ezekiel's *depression*, after seeing God work wondrously on Mt. Carmel, is both understandable and instructive. He is locked into a narrative that almost assumes defeat: " I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Taken to their end, these two responses of not experiencing God at work, close us to the truth that God is actually at work, whether we like it or not. The first presumes that his movement depends on our inflated experience. The second presumes that his movement can not overcome our deflated experience. Neither is what we are looking for.

The reality is, is that Jesus *is* building his kingdom; the prayer of his people, "thy kingdom come", *is* being answered. All authority in heaven and earth *has* been given to him; his kingdom *is* inaugurated and will reach its end, and in the meantime he *is* with us always to the end of the age, empowering us to immerse this world in his name and his ways (Matthew 28:18-20). Theologically speaking, that makes me a missional inaugurated-eschatology man.

We cultivate our *experience* of this work of Jesus when we respond to it in faith, actively seeking to follow him on his terms. We diminish our experience of that movement, when we dictate our own terms. The opposite of faith is not doubt, it is control.

In practice, then, what does that look like? You ask for my

experience, let me give you an overview:

It looks like plodding. I remember during our church planting days, when asked to reflect on our experience, I would say "It's slog work for Jesus." It looks like preaching week in and week out, in season and out of it. It looks like simply being *bothered* – bothering to care for people, to take time, to talk, to listen, to fix what can be fixed and to allow the rest of the serenity prayer to kick in as well. It looks like not avoiding responsibility but carrying whatever loads are given to us along the way. It looks like roads in the valley more than soaring above the mountain.

What we come to experience is that the movement of God can be incredibly ordinary, and awe-inspiring in that ordinariness if we care to look. We may want the hair-standing-on-end experience, but heaven cheers for the ordinary extraordinary life-bringing moment just as hard, probably more. e.g. I once returned to my church after a holiday to discover some of my brothers and sisters had taken it upon themselves to befriend and draw close to a survivor of child abuse who was taking a lonely stand in the witness box as she faced her abuser.

Some of the most profoundly applicable spiritual teaching I've heard has been from my wife… while she was talking to our children in the car, driving home from school, in a conversation that started with "How was your day?" We plod along, we seize the ordinary, we don't avoid the mess, we simply *bother*. And God moves.

The regular rhythm of spiritual disciplines is part of this. You may have heard how God has moved at the Ffald-y-Brenin retreat centre in Wales. Their experience rests on their regular rhythm of prayer that invades the landscape. They simply pray, and if God moves in someone, they simply entrust that person to God… and continue to pray. We have brought these sorts of rhythms into our family; morning prayer before school, thanking God around the table for something in the

day. It is ordinary space, in which God can move.

It looks like waiting. This is similar to plodding, but has a slightly different direction. Plodding "gets on with the mission". Waiting is worship, when God seems absent. Waiting is the space of emptiness.

There are many things about the world, church, and life in general that can seem impressive. I have learned in my experience to be less impressed. These things are usually "achievements" – scores, marks, promotions, wealth, numbers, activities, tasks, and programmes. None of them are bad in themselves, many of them are blessings in their way. And we want them. We want them, so we grasp them. We use our strength and our power to pursue them. I count myself in this! God is gracious, and sometimes he uses us, but I have learned that they are not usually the stuff of a "move of God" in the sene that we are talking about. We can't seize God's plan, we are called to active waiting.

The right response to "unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain" (Psalm 127:1) is to *wait*. This does not mean passivity (we keep on plodding after all!), nor does it mean a lack of expectancy in which we fail to seize opportunities. What it does mean is that we refuse to despise the fallow years. We refuse to fill our lives with busy self-justifying activities, a conglomeration of straws to cling to for the sake of self-worth. Rather, we offer ourselves, we put ourselves on the line for his sake by stopping and waiting.

In that waiting, God moves, sometimes more than ever. It is there that he brings about adaptive change in us – a change in who we are, not just in what we might do. The sense of his absence draws us deeper into him. As the level of our spiritual fervour recedes hidden sins are revealed, insecurities manifest, and we find how shallow we actually are… and he calls us deeper.

The movement of God is deep. And we may not even know it until after it is over. A current favourite story of mine is the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24. The two on the road are despondent and low, plodding along in their experience of everything falling apart. We know that Jesus is with them, but *they* don't. It is not until afterwards do they realise that during their journey of despondency, their hearts had actually been burning the whole time. God moves when we wait; he makes our hearts burn.

It looks like active, discerning, worship. This is one of the things I have appreciated in the Soul Survivor movement (which also has its roots in plodding and waiting). They have high production values and excellent musical skills, but they have done well (by and large) to keep these as means rather than ends. They keep their eyes open to discern how God is moving during the time of worship. When they sense an experience of God they often stop the music and allow the silence.

What they are doing is using worship – musical declarations of God's grace and other words – as a form of creating space, encouraging an openness to God, expressing faith. I have found similar in other traditions: devout Anglo Catholics who find this space in ancient rites and the presence of God in the sacraments; reformed evangelicals who thirst for the spoken exposition which brings the Word alive.

There are some things in common to these worship experiences: 1) The focus is God, it is declarative rather than subjunctive ("Lord, you are" rather than "This is how I feel"); 2) The senses are entertained (it *is* an experience), but nothing is forced or coerced; 3) What is done is good in its own right – praises are sung, sacraments administered, the word is preached – and even if there is no significant experience, there's a real sense in which good has been done, we have worshipped the Lord; 4) Time is taken as we diminish our control; whether it be 45 minutes of praise worship, bible teaching, or contemplative prayer, we give God the gift of

time to do what he wants in us. You'd be surprised (or perhaps you wouldn't) how easy it is for a worship leader to be driven by the demands of the clock and the expectations of the flock about style more than substance.

These things from corporate worship can be brought into "school, work, family etc." Whatever we do, we take time to focus on God through something innately good (e.g. private or shared devotions), we allow him to move, we don't try and generate it, and so we rest in him.

It looks like response. Some people talk about seeking a move of God through *expectancy*. We are to pray with *expectancy,* mustering a belief that our prayers not only *will* be answered, but *must* be. I get what is meant, but it's hard to imagine it in practice: Somehow an attitude of "OK God, this is what I'm expecting" doesn't exactly create space for God to move; and anything that does happen could easily be taken as self-justification of prayers well prayed.

Rather, I think that sense of expectancy is better described like this: when we seek a move of God, we do so with a *readiness to respond*. If we ask God to "move in us" and he confronts us with our sin, our response should be to repent. If we feel called to pursue something, we should count the cost and act according to our faith. If we find someone or something laid on our hearts, we shouldn't let that pass but should pursue it further.

For me, that is more helpful than some of the caricatured answers you see: e.g. "The Holy Spirit can't work if you have sin in your life, a lack of expectancy, or if you don't have enough faith." Ouch. Rather, God *is* moving, and our experience of that movement simply doesn't make sense if we don't respond, so we get ready to respond.

To conclude: This is a big topic and a simple blog post can't do it justice. But you ask for my experience, and this is

where I'm coming from. Thank you for the question – I haven't really had the opportunity to put words down on this topic before. You've stirred my thinking, and I'm sure my thoughts and words will develop.

Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God

The Bishop of Oxford, Steven Croft, visited us here in the Newbury Deanery this last week. He spoke and took questions in the evening at a public service and he focused, as he has since his inauguration, on the beatitudes from *Matthew 5*. For the rest of this week I have been mulling these over, especially the first one:

> *Blessed are the poor in spirit,*
> *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
> *(Matthew 5:3)*

In the current Western age, the beatitudes are a prophetic word. That is, they provide a holy and constructive challenge to the status quo of church and culture; they reveal depths in the shallows, stimulation in the slumber, truth in the lie. It appears that +Steven knows how to exercise his prophetic role with gentleness and sincerity. More power to him.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” has exactly this character. The “kingdom of heaven” is our goal, our longing (“…thy Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven…”). The temptation of having any goal, in the West in general and therefore in the church, is that we seek to achieve it in our own strength, in our richness. We gather our resources, we marshall our strengths, we determine our plan, we implement our strategy, we claim our prize! This is the methodology of the wealthy and strong and while it may have some level of “success” (for some definition) it simply cannot bear kingdom fruit. How can it? We can’t have the kingdom of heaven on our terms, only on the terms of the King!

The beatitudes are not commands, you see, they are simply statements of fact. It is the poor in spirit who receive the kingdom of heaven, because it *naturally* comes to them. Why? Because King Jesus founds the kingdom not in power and strength, but in servanthood, humility, and trusting faith, even unto death. Look at all the characteristics of the beatitudes – poor in spirit, mourning with the world, meek, hungering for righteousness, pure, peacemaking, persecuted – and we see Jesus, who received the kingdom, from his Father, was comforted, by his Father, inherited the earth, from his Father, who was filled, by his Father, who was shown mercy, by his Father, who *saw* his Father, and was received by the Father even (and especially) as he took the curse of the cross upon himself and *committed his spirit into the Father’s arms*. Follow the king, and you will enter his kingdom. It’s not complicated, just hard!

It is a simple impossibility that the “rich in themselves” can participate in and build the kingdom. How can we serve the king by serving ourselves? How can we trust the king by relying on ourselves? Just because we can nail and weld something together and make it look like a tree, doesn’t mean we have the living, fruitful, thing.

My reflection on this has brought me to the letter to the

Hebrews, particularly chapters 10 and 11. Here the “poor in spirit” are ones who exercise faith. They are the ones who have “endured a hard struggle with sufferings” (Hebrews 10:32), who have been “publicly exposed to abuse and persecution”, often because they have shared in the mourning and pain of those who are “so treated” and “in prison” (Hebrews 10:33).

They have not “shrunk back” (Hebrews 10:39), but this is not a muscular seizing the opportunity of victory, but an exercise of trust, of meekness, of reaching out to God and committing their spirit, just as Jesus didn’t shrink from the cross. Their “great reward” (Hebrews 10:35) is “what was promised”, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), which is to say, the kingdom of heaven, when all is well under the good harmonious rule of the Author of Life.

Throughout Hebrews 11, the writer puts forward examples of the faithful poor in spirit, simple demonstrations of the same fact of the beatitudes: Abel’s faith (Hebrews 11:4) naturally bears the fruit of approval, Enoch’s trust naturally *pleases* the King (Hebrews 11:5). And something of a summary is given:

> ***And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)***

It’s a statement of fact, conceptually equivalent to the first beatitude. Just as poverty of spirit leads to the kingdom of heaven, so believing in God, *seeking him*, **trusting** him, is the path to approach, please, and receive from the God of Life. Other approaches – the demonstration of strength, the whitewash of religious words – simply pertain to a different category, they bear their own fruit.

It’s not like God is petulant, holding back blessing unless he

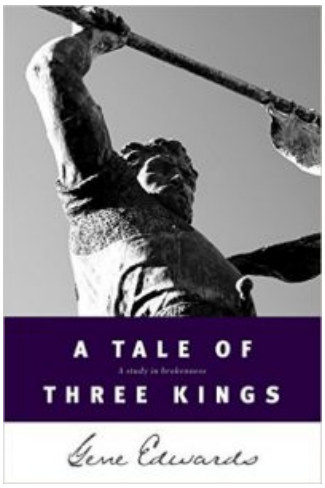
gets his dues; it's just that if something else is worshipped, trusted, honoured, then we get the kingdom of That Thing, and it is destructive. **Who wants to live in the Kingdom of the Rich, the Kingdom of the Strong, the Kingdom of the "Look at Us Aren't We A Lovely Church"?** Yet that is where many of us live in the western world, seeking to please God without faith. It's impossible to do.

Bishop Steven was thanked in the Q&A for his words and asked something about how we put it into practice. Being a good bishop, he didn't give a directive answer; each local church needs to work out what the application of faith means for them. But he could have offered one general exhortation: repentance.

Richness in ourselves is simply a form of idolatry. It's understandable, it's prevalent, it's culturally acceptable, it's usually well-intentioned even if self-defeating – "Let's not waste our many many awesome talents"…. by holding on to and relying on them! But the simple fact is that without faith it is impossible to please God. And that gives us an imperative: We must turn to him, contrite, humble, poor in ourselves, entrusting our talents (and everything else) to him. The hardest thing, of course, is that it begins with me…

Review: A Tale of Three Kings – A Study in Brokenness

What is our posture and place before God?



Gill has often asked me, “How do you see God right now? Who is he to you?” It’s not a doctrinal question, it’s a *posture* question. Am I rejoicing before him, in freedom? Am I figuratively curled up on his lap in weariness? Am I ignoring him, hardened and rebellious, presuming and attempting to usurp, blocking my ears? Am I being contrite, bringing my brokenness to him? Do I see God as someone to be scared of, to avoid? Or can I boldly approach the eternal throne, trusting in his mercy and grace?

It is often useful to ground such exploration in the pages of Scripture; to look to those who have gone before us and see how God reveals and deals with them. What posture do they take? What can we learn? Exegetical care is required, of course, but it is a blessing to observe the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. And dare to seek to his face.

In this fascinating book, *A Tale of Three Kings*, Gene Edwards takes us to the example of King David, to glean what we may. David, of course, is one of the three kings. The other two are Saul, who saw the young David as a rival and pursued him, and Absalom, David’s son, who sought to usurp the throne of his father. Edwards finds in David’s response to both Saul and Absalom, an example of someone who is enrolled “not into the lineage of royalty but into the school of brokenness” (page 8).

If we were to be critical, we could say that Edwards overplays his hand. His framework has David as a "broken vessel" who is able to pursue God through pain (page 12), and Saul is "the unbroken ruler (whom God sovereignly picks) who metes out the pain" (page 15). Of course, in reality, David is not always the David that Edwards speaks of. He is unbroken with regards to Uriah. He is also a belligerent warrior, an inept father, and a wielder of authority who isn't always humble. I'm sure that there were many in Israel for whom David was their Saul!

Nevertheless, this doesn't diminish the force of Edwards' exercise. He takes us into David's experience and unpacks what is virtuous in a way that matches the thrust of all levels of the biblical narrative. As a type of messiah, David reveals Christ, and so Edwards is helping us to imitate him as he imitates Christ, so to speak. Conversely, he wants us to be aware of the "King Saul in you" (page 23) and to be aware of where we may ally with Absalom (page 62).

> *The Sauls of this world can never see a David; they see only Absalom. The Absaloms of this world can never see a David; they see only Saul. (Page 80)*

The result is an excellent tool for self-reflection, particularly for those in leadership. We are taken, for instance, to places where people desire power, "ambition, a craving for fame, the desire to be considered a spiritual giant" (page 41). We are caused to think of why sometimes the wrong people seem to have the power, and how we might respond to that. The example of David who would not bring down the Lord's anointed in his own strength governs much of this reflection.

It takes us to David as a "study in brokenness". This is where we find Edwards' overstatement: That David "forced no rebellion because he did not mind if he was dethroned" (page 47) is not entirely true, and surely it could not be said of

Jesus that “he had authority… but that fact never occurred to him” (page 48); humility is not psychological obfuscation! Nevertheless, the way of leadership as a deliberate path of trust through loneliness and suffering is well made.

> *Legalism is nothing but a leader’s way of avoiding suffering. (Page 47)*

The most important lessons, however, are not just for the leaders, but for Christians in general, for churches and congregations. For me, the biggest lesson Edwards expounds is to **exercise faith such that we are willing to do… nothing.** He looks to David with both Saul and Absalom, and also to Moses with Korah, who didn’t meet rebellion with rebellion, but simply “fell on his face before God. That is all he did” (page 87).

Consider this posture: “**I will leave the destiny of the kingdom in God’s hands alone.** Perhaps he is finished with me. Perhaps I have sinned too greatly and am no longer worthy to lead” (page 93).

My instant reaction was to write this off as unworthy passivism, a reneging of responsibility, a failure to embrace the favour we have in Christ. Surely that is far from the pursuit of God’s mission and a faithful response to his call? But Edwards’ observation is not invalid, and the reflection has merit.

We Christians, individually and as churches, are so very very quick to sacralise our drivenness and idolise our achievements. We intone, “Unless the Lord builds the house…”, and then pick up our own hammer and nails and do whatever we want; any success, on our own terms, becomes proof of divine favour. We pray “Lord, bless my church, and all that we do” and this looks like (and can often actually be) a humble petition, but it can also be the essence of self-reliance. The fact is, it is actually the Lord’s church, and we might

not be doing what he wants at all!

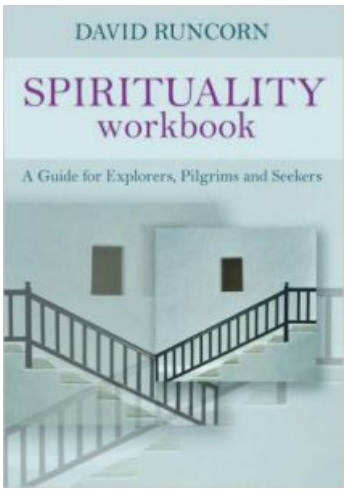
Rather, David *receives* the Kingdom just as Christ would later *receive* resurrection and *"all authority in heaven and on earth"*, not from themselves, but in the laying down of themselves. The posture that Edwards finds for us in Scripture would have us seek to do the same.

My own reflection is this: We are so often like self-centred children. Our Lord offers us *every spiritual blessing* as a gift of grace. Our response should be to *receive* this gift, and the calling and activism that goes with it. Yet our attitude can subtly shift us away from this; rather than receive, we *seize,* we *take,* we almost *demand*. We consider our *inheritance* and treat it like an entitlement. And this is where Edwards' reflection assists: Because the difference between receiving and taking is in the attitude, the *posture*. And that difference is that the receiver *waits*, and does not presume, *doing nothing* until the giver puts the gift in place.

It *is* God's church. And *he* will build it. That honour belongs to no other.

Review: Spirituality Workbook – A Guide for Explorers, Pilgrims and Seekers

Some books are wide-ranging and broad. Some books are deep and specific. David Runcorn, in *Spirituality Workbook*, deals with some of the nitty gritty of everyday expressions of Christian spirituality, and manages to do both; it is both deep and wide. I read the slightly older 2006 edition.



The breadth comes from the simple amount of material covered. Runcorn has put together work from years of the rhythm of theological formation. The chapters are short and independent from each other, but each is a gem of insight and reflection. The content ranges from topical analyses, to reflections on historical persons and movements, to unpacking specific spiritual disciplines.

It is impossible, therefore, to condense the book down into a governing argument, or to give a fulsome summary. For myself, I take from the book a number of insights that interact with, subvert, and even blatantly combat some of the ways in which Christians and churches have capitulated to the spirit of the age.

Consider his early chapter on the spirituality of the desert, which draws on the example of the early monastics. He identifies the motivation of a "longing for God" that cannot be satisfied in an "increasingly worldly church" (page 10). And his enumeration of the value of the wilderness experience includes concepts such as "judgment" and being "confronted with the sheer depth of our need of conversion" (page 11) that are anathema to the comfortable pews of the western world which idolise success and fanfare.

> *"In the desert you leave behind all your familiar securities. You come to a place of confessing your absolute need and the*

> *emptiness of all you have been placing your trust in… The desert is a place that weans us off addictions and false dependencies. If your god is not the true God the desert will find you out. Only the true God can sustain you in the wilderness." (Page 11)*

Consider the irony in his reflection on exile in a changing world, that the word from which we get "parish" and "parochial", *paroikia*, originally meant "a place of refuge or exile" for Christians who experienced themselves as "resident aliens, non-citizens… sojourners in the world… shaped by the experience of enforced mobility, vulnerable exile and disorientating change" (page 23).

Consider the frustration that recognises that "finding and sustaining *community* in today's society is a real struggle" even when "the Christian vision of community is central to spiritual formation, prayer and faithful discipleship" (page 51). Hear the challenging wisdom, quoted from Bonhoeffer:

> *If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian community in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith and difficulty, if we only keep on complaining to God, we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ." (Page 55)*

Ponder his counter to the addiction of churches to self-actualising mission management, as he values a rule of life that resists that greatest of all Christian predilections: the inability to say "no" to something that is good but wrong.

> *It is quite common for churches to have their own mission statement these days. What is less common is to find churches that have gone on to think and pray through together a shared, sustainable shape of living that might make that*

> *vision realizable. Without an agreed boundary to its life and mission, church life proceeds on the assumption that Christian time and energy can extend limitlessly into an ever-increasing range of worthy projects. That this is all "for God" just makes the burden worse!* ***The result is corporate exhaustion, guilt and frustration.****" (Page 65, emphasis mine)*

He gives important correctives for our corporate life: "Worship that is organized to impress outsiders is no longer true worship – which is offered to God alone" (page 70). He gives insight into culture: "The defining identity on offer today is that of consumer" (page 89). He plumbs the depths of spiritual practices that may have become staid: "Intercession involves seeking to be where Christ already is… [it] is a participation in Christ's costly and life-giving presence in the world." (page 122).

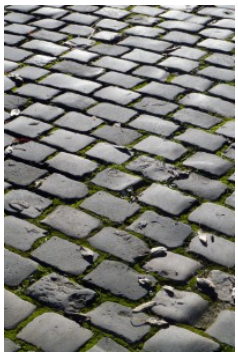
And whether it be in the presentation of the Jesus Prayer or a discourse on sexuality, Runcorn takes us deeper, *uncomfortably* deeper, *blessedly* uncomfortably deeper. Here is the constructive *challenge* of an effective spiritual director. Such challenge disabuses us of immature and insipid notions of Jesus and what it means to follow him. It presses us beyond superficiality and the ubiquitous ecclesial shallows and *provokes* us.

Where we would settle for peace & tranquility, he would take us to the *shalom* of Christ, who also challenges, and provokes and questions our assumptions until we rely on him: the Christ who counters our agendas with "Unless you repent you will all perish" (page 177). Where we would like to waft on clouds of easy ecstasy, he reminds us that "Christian prayer is more often marked by conflict than by feelings of peace" (page 179). Where we would prefer the stagnancy of unrocked boats, we are reminded that true hospitality and receptivity "does not mean becoming neutral" (page 193).

> *It is neither polite nor respectful to just sit agreeing with everything your guest says.* ***We are to offer a real articulate presence, sharing our own beliefs, opinions and lifestyle clearly and distinctly.*** *'An empty house is not a hospitable house,' [Nouwen] says, '****Real receptivity asks for confrontation.****' (Page 193, emphasis mine)*

We have challenge, confrontation, provocation, uneasiness. This is the stuff of life. What we have then, is a book to return to, and a book to recommend. It takes us to depths that are rare in the salt-pan of contemporary corporate Christianity. It is both comfort and correction, broad and deep, and therefore utterly useful.

Sustenance for the Plodding Pedestrian



> *When You don't move the mountains I'm needing You to move*
> *When You don't part the waters I wish I could walk through*
> *When You don't give the answers as I cry out to You*
> *I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!*
>
> *Truth is, You know what tomorrow brings*
> *There's not a day ahead You have not seen*

So, in all things be my life and breath
I want what You want Lord and nothing less