

Dear all

As we enter into the summer period I am looking forward to a holiday in Orkney from 20-27 July 2019. It will be good to spend time with Laura without horses and work! I'm hoping that you too will be getting a break, whether a 'staycation' or otherwise!

If I was asked for a highlight from the 2018-19 session I would probably point out the teaching series from John's Gospel. That was a special time of study and preparation in 'spending time with the Master' in the Upper Room, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. I prepared 12 sermons in that series - around 200 hours of personal study. When undertaking that series I was also privileged to be studying for our evening sessions in 1 John (8 sermons representing around 140 hours). Spending so much time in the Scriptures means you get in tune with the style of the writer but, beyond this, you also get to hear the truth of God in a prolonged setting. I love this dimension of my work at TCF and I feel enormously privileged to be allowed the time to study! However, I fear that this exposure to the truth of God gives me the burden to live in the light that has been given, but no-one is equal to that.

Another highlight is the time spent with individuals in reading and then discussing what we have learned. The books being read at present include 'Hearing God' by Dallas Willard; 'Talking with God' by John Eldridge; 'Knowing God' by J I Packer; 'Prayer' by Tim Keller and a few others. As I benefit from these times, again I am thankful to the Lord for giving me this opportunity. Doing life like this is quite special!

Something I find more difficult to do is to maintain a personal reading habit. The TCF Bible Reading Scheme is published on the website thanks to Steve Braithwaite and although I don't know how many follow the Scheme as their own personal reading plan, I at least enjoy spending more time meditating on each passage because they are shorter than many reading schemes (I had always read through the bible in a year but, for me, that had become a bit of a checklist approach). At present Job is a challenge to the senses. Much of what Job's friends are saying is true but it is *not true* of why Job is suffering. It is certainly true that 'Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves' (11:8) and 'If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away...' (11:14). What is not true about this advice is that it is offered as an explanation for why he is suffering. This is the difficulty in reading Job, there is much truth in the advice of the friends but it is wrong in the context of Job's suffering. This is such an important lesson to learn and I have been reflecting much on the value of just simply listening and just 'being' with someone.

The other dimension of difficulty in personal reading is finding the time to do it for enjoyment but I must admit that some recent books have been so enjoyable. Peter Williams' book 'Can we trust the Gospels' is a very readable but thorough rehearsal of many of the reasons why the Gospels ring true as eye-witness accounts. They are, and this should build our spiritual confidence. I am also enjoying 'Katharina: Deliverance' by Margaret Skea. This is the first of two novels based on the life of Katharina von Bora, the escaped nun who married Martin Luther and is a very illuminating and entertaining read. Margaret Skea is a multi-award winning historical novelist and she is married to David and together they serve God in Kelso Evangelical Church in the Borders.

So, on this holiday in Orkney I am already anticipating some reading time and I have selected 'Fool's Talk' by Oz Guinness and 'Turn of the Tide' by Margaret Skea (the first in her Munro trilogy of medieval Scotland). The holiday and relaxation, with the best of loving company will help set me up for 2019-20.

As we anticipate a new session from September 2019 there are a number of new initiatives to look forward to - Christians Against Poverty (Debt Centre for Perth opening up), TryPraying (a whole church approach to personal prayer for 7 days but resulting in passing the booklet on for a friend to TryPraying) and Footwise (a personal podiatry service by volunteers for elderly and disabled people). All of these initiatives are to be co-ordinated by our Pastoral Worker Jacob for whom the remainder of 2019 will be very busy. Without Jacob's help we probably wouldn't be able to undertake these new initiatives albeit that they will require volunteers from the TCF Family to actually deliver! I should also say that without Jacob's help and company, my role as Pastor would (was) certainly more isolated and difficult despite all the support from my fellow elders. but to share the ups and downs of daily pastoral ministry in a team is quite the blessing!

Jim