

WEY VALLEY – CIRCUIT LETTER - 28 February 2024

Barrie Tabraham

Thoughts on 'Dryness'

February can be a depressing month. Apart from the celebrations surrounding St Valentine's Day, it usually has little to commend it. And I have never understood why, in a Leap Year, the powers that be decided to add an extra day onto February of all months. Why not have June 31st every fourth year, and lengthen summer?



But seriously, there are times – we are told by reliable sources – when we are at our lowest ebb. February is the month when we are apparently at our most vulnerable, and – on a smaller time scale of, say, 24 hours – we are at our weakest around 3.00 am. If, like me, you tend to wake up at odd times during the night, then if we are wise, we should avoid both making any significant decisions in the early hours, and also worrying needlessly

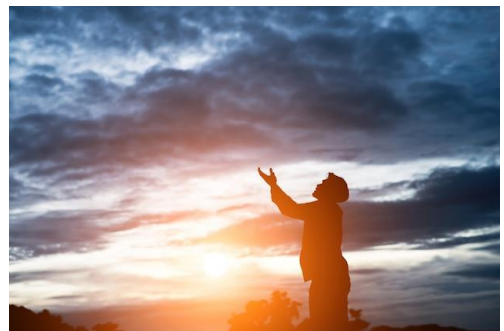
about current problems that face us.

That seems to me to be fairly straightforward, and we can develop our own strategies for coping both with long night hours and maybe even the month of February itself! But if we're honest, as Christians we will find that our spiritual lives can go through cycles of ebb and flow, and there can come to all of us moments when the last thing which we feel like doing is to pray.

The late **Neville Ward** was a remarkable Methodist minister who, whilst not being a particularly gifted public speaker, had an extraordinary insight into the life of prayer. He wrote a number of classics, including a surprising (for a Methodist) study of the rosary, entitled *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy*. His most famous book, which was required reading for ministerial candidates, was *The Use of Praying* and this can be picked up second hand for a few pounds. However, the one which influenced me most was the lesser known but equally profound *The Following Plough*, which included an extraordinarily helpful section on spiritual 'dryness'.

There are times, more than we would care to admit, perhaps, when God seems out of sight. The cause may be tiredness, illness, or perhaps a major distraction in our lives (bereavement, a tragedy, possibly) which, for a moment, threatens to loosen the bond which exists between us and God. It may be that as a result we fall prey to serious doubts or simply that we feel a kind of staleness in our spiritual state. In these moments, worship can become routine, prayer difficult or simply a chore, and inspiration threatens to dry up.

In *The Following Plough*, Neville Ward writes this:
The condition of being bored with the spiritual life and finding prayer just about the last thing one wants to do has always molested people who have wanted God.



We are in good company if we feel like this sometimes. Even **Cardinal Newman** once wrote that he felt “*like a man who is trying to walk with his legs tied together... as though I were bound with chains.*”

Neville Ward offers some helpful advice here. He talks about an ‘ebb and flow of enthusiasm in the spiritual life which has to be accepted and expected’, and that we must not feel either guilty and ashamed when we are in this state, nor that God has somehow abandoned us. One antidote, he offers us, is the need to renew and refresh the bonds which we have made with God, by simply doing something new in our spiritual life – exploring new ways of praying, different forms of spirituality, worship, and so on.

However, it seems to me that one essential thing to do is to remind ourselves of the objectivity that lies at the heart of our journey of faith. **That is, that God is, & always will be, for us.** An earlier divine wrote just as honestly about the same subject – words which have helped thousands of Christians over the centuries (and me); in his “**Confessions**”, **St Augustine** writes:

O God, hope of my youth, where were you all this time? Where were you hiding from me? I was looking for you outside myself and I did not find the God of my own heart”

Then he adds later:

O God . . . you are everywhere, and everywhere you are entire. Nowhere are you limited by space . . . You were there to help me and listen to my sighs. You were my helmsman when I ran adrift, and you did not desert me as I travelled along the broad way of the world.

Whilst we would all want to have well-organised spiritual lives, we well know that life is essentially untidy and we are prone fall short of the standards which we even set ourselves. Perhaps if we relaxed more and remembered how Christians before us learned to cast their cares upon God, we might be more easily reassured of God’s goodness and love, and infinite patience with us.

*For the love of God is broader
than the measure of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.*

Frederick William Faber (*Singing the Faith* 416)

A Prayer: Loving God, help us never to make prayer a *work*, or to see it as a duty. Help us to see our life of prayer as more than simply talking to or even with You – but as being with You, sharing ourselves, our hopes & dreams, our guilt & fears, our joys and sorrows, our concerns and anxieties – all in an intimate relationship in which we are increasingly caught up, and by which we are gradually changed by your Spirit of love. Amen.

Every blessing to you all,

Barrie Tabraham

Resources/Good News

Day of Reflection 2024

Marie Curie is holding an annual day of reflection on Sunday 3 March. It's a special moment to remember those who died during the pandemic.

Everyone is encouraged to take part in a minute's silence, share the name of who you're remembering on the day and plan a reflective event or activity.

There's lots of information on their website, including resources, personal stories and details of the telephone support service.

[Day of Reflection 2024 | Marie Curie](#)

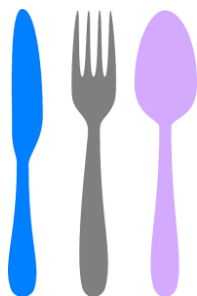
Circuit Mission Supper

A reminder that the Circuit Mission Supper is taking place on

Saturday 2 March 6.00 for 6.30pm

Trinity Methodist Church

Brewery Road, Woking, GU21 4LH



There is parking in the car park opposite the church.