

Winter 2009

# Christian Training

building up the body of Christ



In the last Christian Training Newsletter I wrote about signing up to the "University of Life" for the autumn term and see what I can learn from life and identify some key lessons for myself. During the term I kept a "learning log" and I thought that I would include some of my lessons with you. It maybe that some of the things I've learnt may also be useful for you.

The motto for Life University could be: "Now learn a lesson from the fig tree." (Mark 13:28). In the same way that Jesus pointed towards something from everyday life as a potential teacher I also sought to find lessons from everyday life including conversations, television programmes, newspapers, radio, books etc. As I look through my learning log I found at least 30 lessons from everyday life, this newsletter will look at just a few of these.

Please forgive me if this newsletter sounds a bit like the minister's letter at the beginning of a church magazine. You know the kind of thing – "As I'm sat here in my study I can see a robin in a tree which reminds me..." It was not my intention, quite the opposite!



## Cloning Christians?

I had a conversation with someone who was preparing a talk about making disciples and his working title was "Cloning Christians or Developing Disciples". As we were talking about presentation skills I was particularly interested in the title, (I like titles with a rhythm to them!) but as I thought more about it I wondered what I was involved in cloning Christians or developing disciples.

I'd like to think that I'm involved in developing disciples as I see individuals working out their own journey of faith rather than conforming to my way of doing things. But I do need to be careful, I can sometimes make a very strong suggestion which may well be right for me but is it right for the person I'm talking with? I also see others trying to clone Christians into their own image and I ought to challenge that more.

**Learning point:** I should challenge my own thinking and that of others when we are training others that we are not just trying to get individuals to conform to our image of what a Christian should be but that we should be supporting them in their personal walk and development in Christ.

## What you need to do is...!

I had a meeting with a married couple to chat through their experience of a practical aspect of family life. I recognised that they had different ways of talking with me. One was listening and asking questions the other was telling me how I should do things. It's a bit like the "Cloning Christians" issue, one person was trying to help me find my way the other was showing me the way that they had been which was the "only" way to do it. I know which of the two I would have rather worked alongside.

**Learning point:** The way that I speak to people, and what I say, are both very important. I don't want to tell people how they should do things. I want people to find their own way. So I should listen more, ask more questions and then possibly give comment. I must avoid telling anyone to do anything the way I did it.

## The Secret Millionaire

Secret Millionaire is a Channel 4 programme where "each week a millionaire leaves their luxury life behind, takes on a secret identity and lives undercover in a deprived area of the UK for ten days. Living on a limited budget with no mod-cons they must forge their own way in the community – working and volunteering alongside the locals and finding individuals and projects who they think deserve a cut of their fortune. On their final day, the millionaires come clean and reveal their true identity to the people they have chosen, surprising them with overwhelming gifts of thousands of pounds to improve their lives."

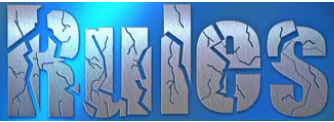


I'd not come across this TV programme before and as well as being entertainment I found it to be another lesson in the University of Life. At the end of the programme the millionaire reveals himself having previously presented themselves as an ordinary member of the community with the same access to money as the rest of us by working or through benefits. During this revelation the millionaire says how they feel about the community/children's/family work of the people they have been working with. This is always positive and encouraging and is always emotional.

**Learning point:** I should be more affirming to others and not to be afraid of giving positive feedback face-to-face. I should try to do this at least once a day.

I watched Secret Millionaire again and was ready this time for the positive feedback by the millionaire at the end of the programme. This time the millionaire said "You are an inspiration because of the way you look after your family single-handedly and run the out-of-school club". This is brilliant feedback.

**Learning point:** Always be prepared to give positive feedback but ensure that it is specific about what is good. It is no good saying "Thanks for that it was great!" without adding "The way that you presented yourself was good and you did a good job of explaining the benefits of the product to the customer" or "It was a very interesting sermon and I found your illustration about the father and his son particularly helpful as I was only this morning thinking through how the prodigal son was so loved by his dad" etc. etc.



## Breaking the rules!

A survey conducted by "Times Online" into the ethical decisions of over 20,000 people gave me a lot of food for thought. It found that we make ethical decisions based on rule compliance when we are younger (in our twenties) and again when we are older (over sixties) and as we grow older we tend to make more ethical decisions because of our "principled conscience". I've had a number of conversations about this over the past few months and as I've developed my thinking on this I've discovered that it isn't just ethical decisions that are determined by rule compliance in twenty-somethings. I can just about remember when I was in my twenties - then I knew all the rules and how they should be applied, my decisions were fairly simple as there was a right and wrong way of doing things. Now in my forties I tend to be more principle-led as most decisions are not black and white but grey, and I find myself more bothered about the results of decisions rather than the "right way" of achieving the results.

**Learning point:** I need to remember that when I'm dealing with different ages in training I should be interested in how they make decisions and to help them apply rules if they are younger or older and to understand where their principles are founded if they are making decisions based on principles. I've also learnt to be more accepting of others and understanding where individuals are coming from. The survey suggested that the change from rules compliance to principled conscience as the foundation for decision making happens when someone is in their early thirties – 33 years of age to be precise!

## Best in your field?

I read an interview with Raymond Blanc where he said, "While you may have the ability to succeed, it is your hard work that really puts you ahead of others. Talent alone will never be enough to carry you to be the best in your field". Is this not the same with God's gifts? He can give them to us but we have to work hard at using them. Paul wrote:

"In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly" (Romans 12:6-8)

**Learning point:** Work hard at the things I'm gifted in.



## 5 Steps to Happiness



I came across a newspaper article which said that if you want to live a productive life and to be mentally healthy then there are five things that need to be done:

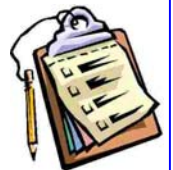
- **Connect:** Developing relationships with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours will enrich your life and bring you support.
- **Be active:** Sports, hobbies such as gardening or dancing, or just a daily stroll will make you feel good and maintain mobility and fitness.
- **Be curious:** Noting the beauty of everyday moments as well as the unusual and reflecting on them helps you to appreciate what matters to you.
- **Learn:** Fixing a bike, learning an instrument, cooking – the challenge and satisfaction brings fun and confidence.
- **Give:** Helping friends and strangers links your happiness to a wider community which is very rewarding.

**Learning point:** Nothing new here, but perhaps we need to more aware of how we can get more from our lives. Jesus said that one of his aims was to give us a rich and satisfying life and we can gain more from our lives by doing the five things above. Even if we do this we still cannot gain eternal life from our own efforts. Jesus said: "Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life." (John 3:6). Now that is a key step to happiness!

## How to become a CEO

During my term at the "University of Life" I found in a business magazine a 10 step guide of how to become a Chief Executive Officer. Here are the steps:

- |                                     |                       |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Do you really want to?           | 6. Find a mentor      |
| 2. Put yourself about               | 7. Network regularly  |
| 3. Hone your emotional intelligence | 8. Stop dithering     |
| 4. Learn to communicate             | 9. Show passion       |
| 5. See the bigger picture           | 10. Clean your shoes! |



**Learning point:** How many of these relate to leaders in the church or mission organisations. It maybe more useful as a checklist of how I'm doing rather than as a "do all these things and I'll get to where I want to be" plan.

Thanks for reading this Christian Training newsletter. I do hope you found something in it useful for your work or ministry. If you have any feedback for me please do get in touch – contact details at the top of this page.

**Brian**