

March 2018

Dear Friends,

As you read this, we will be well into the season of Lent, culminating at the end of March with Holy Week and Good Friday.

It is a season that gives us an opportunity to review and assess our spiritual life and where we stand with regard to God. As part of my personal Lent studies, I have been making a series of videos reflecting on lessons I have learned from going to the gym, and applying them to our spiritual life. You will find them on the Moor Lane Church website, www.moorlanemethodist.org.uk.

I remember the first time I went to the gym for my induction. I had no idea quite what to expect. There were arrays of equipment all for working on different muscle groups. There were free weights: dumbbells and barbells that I was going to stay well clear of, and there were rows of treadmills, rowing machines, cycles and the like.

As I wandered around with one of the staff, I saw people working hard and lifting, pulling or pushing weights that were way beyond my league.

It seemed quite daunting.

One of the biggest challenges that people face in going to the gym is...going to the gym. We have a preconception that everyone else is going to have the physique of a Greek god, while we by comparison do not. In fact, when you see people who go to the gym, you find all different shapes and sizes and all different levels of fitness.

Going to the gym was much less daunting than I had feared. I found someone to show me what to do and I thoroughly enjoy it. I am now one of those people whom I saw throwing weights around.

There is a parallel with our spiritual life.

One of the things that we identified in our Circuit Review last year was a sense of lack of confidence with regard to spiritual things, whether that be prayer, Bible Study, or talking to others about Jesus. There is a natural presumption, similar to that of going to the gym, that we will stand out and be embarrassed when we try something new. It can seem safer not to bother.

But like the gym, we find that our preconceptions that make us afraid are not real.

There is also the perception that it is too hard to get to a point where we are confident in the gym – we will always struggle, we think – and it acts as a disincentive to get involved and be changed. I took the decision to engage a personal trainer, who could show me the correct form and the correct exercises to enable me to progress. As we worked together, I began to see changes. I felt fitter and stronger; skinny fat turned to skinny muscle. What seemed impossible when I first went to the gym became commonplace and new targets presented themselves.

The lessons for us in the church are many. Here are a couple.

For many people, going to church is a really daunting thing. There may be an assumption that our liturgy and rituals will seem puzzling and perplexing. There is a fear that they will be the only ones who don't know what to do. And so, the natural outcome is that it is easier not to go to church. Where we can help is

to provide a friendly word of assurance that their fears are unfounded, and that we will guide them through the service. Who could you invite and encourage?

The second lesson is that even if we start with a lack of confidence in religious or spiritual things, we don't have to stay that way. We can learn, we can try, we can grow in confidence and realise that we can overcome our initial concerns. If you would like to engage a 'personal trainer' to gain more confidence in your Christian walk, why not talk to one of the Mission and Ministry team?

May God bless you through this season of Lent.

David