**Ministerial Meandering**

*It’s never to late to train yourself*

I am clearly a slow learner. Having waved ‘goodbye’ to my 70th birthday a while ago now, it seems as though most of my life has been spent thinking about me, what I need, what I want, and how I’m going to go about getting those things.

Just recently I have been reading a number of books that have me focussing in a different direction, and wondering how I could have been so self-absorbed all my life.

This morning as I was walking the dogs, I stopped in the middle of crushing a mosquito that was trying (successfully) to bite me underneath my watch strap, and thought of all that I had, and just how damn lucky I was.

I had clothes on my back, I had had a bite of banana to keep me going, I had a home to go back to, and food that would not go bad because I had a ‘fridge. I had a wife to keep me company and to love - and, of course, I had my dogs that I could actually afford to keep. On top of all this abundance I had a car, a job, my health, and a family that still keeps in contact and loves me. Why on earth would I feel dissatisfied or grumpy, as though I was short of something? And yet, so often, we do.

Compassion - I have been learning - is seeing a need in others and wanting to relieve it; sometimes we can (like the Good Samaritan), and sometimes we can’t, like the war in the Ukraine. Nevertheless, part of compassion is having gratitude for what we **do** have, and maintaining that sense of thankfulness when we find ourselves drifting towards an attitude of selfishness, ‘me first’, and wanting more.

It is, I have recently found, an exercise of the mind - to develop an ‘attitude of gratitude’ and compassion for others. It is also a practical exercise to develop the practice of giving. Science has discovered recently that giving (rather than receiving) promotes the release of the ‘happy hormone’, oxytocin, which seems to be cropping up everywhere these days. Not only does the act of giving release oxytocin (like chocolate!), but it increases our sense of joy and happiness.

One of my books said that the old adage of ‘money can’t buy you happiness’ is *wrong*, because it **can** - but only if you give it away!

In order to acquire this sense of compassion, generosity, and joy, we have to learn to be grateful on a minute-by-minute, and day-by-day basis. This takes training and meditation and/or prayer.

All of us, of whatever colour, creed, or political persuasion, want to be happy; but it seems that the only way we can reliably do that is by cultivating compassion, gratitude, and the practice of giving to others. When we give up on self, self, self, we get more joy. Jesus had it right when he said, ‘He who wants to save his life will lose it, and he who gives up his life will save it. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?’

This does not mean that we have to become doormats for others to walk on, or allow ourselves to be conned into giving to an apparent need that is not genuine - but it does mean that we should spend more time in being grateful for all the blessings that we have.

Now I’m going to have lunch - which at least half the world will not.

Philip+