

Thought for the Day 24-30 May 2021

by Andrew Goodman

This week's Thoughts for the Day are inspired by James Kerr's book *'Legacy: 15 Lessons in leadership - What the All Blacks can teach us about the business of life'* (2013)

Monday 24th

Sacrifice - Do extra



At the time of writing the book, the New Zealand All Blacks were the current Rugby World Cup holders (after an emphatic 8-7 over France on home territory), and the author claimed that they were the most successful rugby team in

history. Champions do extra: the extra set at the gym, the extra burst of hard work, the extra sprint, the extra kicking practice, the extra effort. In elite team sport, the aim of doing extra is not just for the individual - it is for the team to have a competitive advantage and to win.

The theme of sacrifice runs through the Bible, culminating in the New Testament with the description of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice. The apostle Paul, on one occasion at least when writing to Roman Christians, exhorts God's people to live a sacrificial life as 'worship'. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *'The Cost of Discipleship'* in 1937 against a background of pre-war Nazi

Germany, and was martyred in 1945 for his opposition to the Nazis.

The concept of living a sacrificial, disciplined life is perhaps not immediately attractive? Does it help to put it in the context of benefitting 'the team' in some way? As it becomes possible to gather together in our Church buildings after a long gap, will we sense that there is an element of cost to worship, and that it is not just for our own benefit?

'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.' (Romans 12:1 NRVSA)

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Tuesday 25th

Ritual - Create a culture



Just before kick-off, the All Blacks' opposition face the 'haka' (see the YouTube link below). It is a ritualised challenge of Maori origin which the All Blacks use to reconnect with their fundamental purpose, to reconnect with the core of their culture. It has adapted in recent years to acknowledge that New Zealand society, and consequently the All Blacks team, have changed - they

are now made up of Tongan, Samoan, Fijian and other cultures, not just Maori and European.

The 1999 book *'Mass Culture'*, edited by Pete Ward, explores the act of worship that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, variously labelled 'Eucharist', 'Holy Communion', 'The Lord's Supper', 'Mass', 'Breaking of Bread', depending on your Christian tradition. One contributor to *'Mass Culture'* writes, "You have to change to remain the same".

One of the challenges facing St Andrew's and St Mary's today is the same as in 1999 - how should this ancient act of Christian worship evolve and develop so that it has an impact on believers, on culture and wider society?

'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.' (Romans 12:2 NRVSA)

'Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.' (Romans 12:2 The Message)

The Haka: https://youtu.be/yiKFYTFJ_kw

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Wednesday 26th

Character - Sweep the sheds

Carisbrook, Dunedin, 19 June 2010: New Zealand 42 - 7 Wales. Dan Carter scores 27 points, one of the finest days



of many fine days the world's best fly-half had in his long career. And Richie McCaw becomes the most successful All Blacks captain ever. There is celebration, debriefing and a toast to McCaw. Then, two senior players begin to sweep the sheds. Why? Because of the ethos that individual discipline is essential for making a team better. A good team leaves the changing room in the same condition as when they arrived before the match -

they don't leave their mess behind for someone else to clear up.

The character of Ruth in the Old Testament is a living demonstration of loyalty, service and humility. After the death in her home country of Moab of her father-in-law, husband and brother-in-law, she followed her mother-in-law (Naomi) when she returned to her home of Bethlehem. Ruth the foreigner worked hard gleaning in the fields at harvest time, at risk of sexual assault, in order to provide for Naomi.

John refers in his gospel to many other signs and things Jesus did which he had not written about in his account of

Jesus' life. We will have heard in the media of stories of service and character exhibited during the Covid-19 pandemic, but there will be many more that remain hidden from public view. May we keep on learning to do good, seeking justice, rescuing the oppressed, defending the orphan and pleading for the widow, as encouraged by the prophet Isaiah (1:17).

'For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.' (Romans 12:3 NRVSA)

Thursday 27th

Responsibility - Pass the ball

As with many sports, elite professional rugby teams of 15 players (plus replacements) can be outnumbered by their management teams. The All Blacks management felt they had to transfer leadership from senior management to the players - the traditional 'us and them' became just 'us'. The different phases of the game of rugby - attack, defence, scrum, line out, etc. - mean that every member of the team has a position in the field and a leadership responsibility at some point in the game.

Tom Peters, perhaps best known for writing *'In Search of Excellence'* in 1982, wrote, "Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders". Christians understandably focus on making disciples. However, we also see that Jesus transferred leadership prior to his departure and, thankfully for us, God also sent us the Holy Spirit to teach

us, remind us of Jesus' words and equip us to nurture his people.



We all have a leadership role at some point in the life of our church communities. It won't necessarily be for life; it might be just for one moment in time. It will be for the benefit of the whole community, so let

us encourage one another to take the opportunity whenever it arises.

'For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.'
(Romans 12:4-8 NRVSA)

Friday 28th

Preparation - Train to win

Mastery in anything - a sport, a skill, a craft, business - requires practice. Elite sportsmen and women don't just condition their bodies - they train intensively to condition the brain to perform under pressure. In rugby, this is not unique: England rugby followers may recall the 2003 Rugby World Cup winning team's 'T-CUP' mantra - 'Thinking Clearly Under Pressure'.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego found themselves under pressure to comply with King Nebuchadnezzar's edict to worship his golden statue whenever the music played.

They resisted because they worshipped the God of Israel, which led to the three of them being thrown into a fiery



furnace heated up seven times more than normal.

However, the King was astonished to see four people in the furnace. They came out completely unharmed and the King blessed their God.

Studies have revealed the pressure applied by the Covid-19 pandemic on our physical and mental health, often exacerbated by pre-existing underlying disparities and inequalities in society. It is a hard thing to fathom sometimes, but God is with us when we persist at worship, prayer and study, combining them with action.

'Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.' (Romans 12:9-13 NRVSA)

Saturday 29th

Learn - Leaders are teachers

The All Blacks leadership created an environment in which people can develop their skills, their knowledge and their character. In elite sport, if this can bring just a 1% improvement in one aspect of the sport, that can result in a winning margin. With electronic timekeeping, the difference between Olympic gold and silver can be 0.01 (one hundredth) of a second.



In 2003, Dave Brailsford (at that time the new performance director of British Cycling) began to apply the strategy of seeking 'marginal gains' so that British cyclists would go on to win future Olympic medals and the Tour de France. We could perhaps predict some of these 'marginal gains' - small adjustments to bike seat design and wind tunnel testing for different indoor cycling suit fabrics. But how about

identifying the type of pillow and mattress for the best night's sleep, or painting the inside of the team truck white which helped spot any dirt particles that might affect bike performance?

Jesus knew his Bible and exhibited the characteristics of a good leader who acknowledges that, '*Mortals make elaborate plans, but God has the last word*' (Proverbs 16:1,

The Message). He committed his work to the Lord so that his plans were established (as per Proverbs 16:3). People also addressed Jesus frequently as 'teacher', so let us discern what we need to know about the teaching opportunities we have that reinforce our churches as learning and servant communities.

'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.' (Romans 12:14-17 NRVSA)

Sunday 30th

Purpose - Ask 'Why?'

From 2004, the strategic objective of the All Blacks was to create, 'an environment... that would stimulate the players and make them want to take part in it' - summarised in six words: 'Better People Make Better All Blacks'. That is, by developing the individual players and giving them the tools, skills and character that they needed to contribute beyond the rugby field, they would also, in theory, develop the tools, skills and character to contribute more effectively on it.

A rugby team has 15 players who work together towards a common purpose, i.e. to win. For some of us, perhaps, the 'elephant in the room' with this week's Thoughts for the Day might have been any comparison between a Church and an elite, professional national sports team, especially

in such a physical sport as rugby? In what sense should a church seek to compete to win, to become the champion?



Archbishop William Temple said that, "*The Church is the only organisation that does not exist for itself, but for those who live outside of it*".

If the purpose of a rugby team is to win the match against its opposition, perhaps we could view one of the purposes of a Church is to win over the opposition. And in both instances, being part of a team is the most effective means for countering opposition.

'If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord". No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' (Romans 12:18-21 NRVSA)