

For this issue of Pewsheet Extra, we have Sarah Peters' latest letter from Romania and first, David Hay shares his thoughts on Tuesday@10 which has been transformed into a vibrant midweek meeting, drawing ever larger numbers into its midst.

Tuesday at Ten

Before we go any further, there are a few things you ought to know about me. First, despite the fact that I was baptised as a baby, attended a Church of England Grammar School, confirmed as a youth, am a regular member of the congregation at St Mary's, have a firm belief in God...the truth is I don't consider myself to be a religious person. In fact, I'm often suspicious of people who clearly are. Come to think of it, I'm not too keen on religions at all and I'm not a naturally "churchy" person. And another thing, I have an awful habit of drifting off into my own private thoughts during regular Church services: thinking about anything except the things I should be focussing on. That's nobody's fault except my own. I really, really try but it seems I'm hard-wired in a way that isn't always conducive to traditional forms of worship.

Second, I'm a natural questioner. As a child I must have been a regular "pain" at times for my parents, because I was one of those kids who kept on asking questions. To be precise, it was usually a single question...*WHY?* You know what I mean: why is the sky blue? why does Dad talk with a posh voice when the Vicar comes to the house? That sort of thing. Don't misunderstand me, I didn't grow up to be an academic genius (as you've probably guessed), nor a technical wizard nor anything like that. No, I rarely asked the question *how?* It was nearly always *WHY?*

Third, I'm a morning person. I prefer a sunrise to a sunset, though I love both. Evenings and night time are fine by me for recreation and leisure but I'm probably at my most creative, I reckon, at mid morning.

By now, you're probably asking yourself – so what's all of this got to do with Tuesday at Ten and why has he been invited to write something about it? Well, it's because Tuesday at Ten ticks all my boxes.

The template for each meeting is simple. A few people, currently around half a dozen or so, sit in a semi circle. There's a rota to identify a 'lead' for each week. We say a short prayer together, sing a hymn, then the 'lead' person reads a passage from the Bible, we have a discussion about it, say another prayer, have a cup of coffee and leave. Sixty minutes. Over and out.

That's it really. Sounds a bit dull? Boring even? That's exactly what I thought it would be, until I attended my first meeting, about eighteen months ago. What I discovered was a surprise. The discussions went in all sorts of different directions. People talked about *REAL* things, rather than religious dogma. No one stood on ceremony. It was friendly and relaxed but also relevant and meaningful. Not a bit stuffy or "churchy" if you know what I mean.

Last year, we worked our way through texts from the New Testament until we reached the end of the Book of Revelation. That left us with a choice: to go back to the beginning with Genesis or try something new. We went for the second option and we're currently three chapters into John Lambert's excellent book 'Believe It or Not.' This has generated some really lively discussion and, I have to confess, we have begun to stray a little over the sixty minute mark. Never mind, everyone always seems to leave Tuesday at Ten with a smile on their face. Strange eh?

I recall being asked, a few years ago, to imagine the road to God and Heaven as being like a journey from Longnewton to London. Where did I think I was on my journey? I replied: somewhere on the Darlington Ring Road. Thanks to Tuesday at Ten, and with the help of John Lambert's book, I think I'm now maybe somewhere near Watford Gap! Still got a long way to go but at least I'm moving forward and, one day, maybe I'll reach my destination.

It would be good to see a few more in our Tuesday at Ten group. Why not give it a try?

David Hay

Be Still

One of the recurring messages that has been coming up for me recently is that of being still and taking time to listen to God.

It is so easy to become 'busy' in this era. Long days at work/school, followed by a chance to 'rest' and 'communicate' via technology, watching TV or scrolling through Facebook, then all of the housework that needs to be done, cooking, cleaning, even the tasks of reading the bible, going to church or listening to worship songs, can become time-fillers depending on your reason for doing so. Something to fill time and quench our boredom. There are so many distractions around us, and now we have a shorter attention span, it's no wonder we become dependent on flitting from one thing to the next, taking no time to truly rest, reflect, pray and seek God in the quiet and stillness.

There are many dangers in this. Not only do we miss out on the glory of God within the beauty of the world He created, or opportunities and challenges that come from meeting and talking to someone in person, or the skills and talents we could spend time enhancing and building upon, we also miss out on God Himself, His hope for our lives, and His promises for us.

I am one for saying 'I don't know what to do yet, I just need more time to think and pray about it', but then when the opportunity arises to do just that, I fill it with other stuff I 'need' to do or excuses why I can't take the time to pray now. I have some big decisions to make at the moment, and while I have spent more time praying and seeking God's will than I might have done in the past, there has still been many missed opportunities where I could and should have taken the time, but have instead filled that time with other things. Consequently, my answer is still 'I don't know'.

That's not to say that spending time in the still and the quiet, listening for God, will give me all the answers I desire right away, but as much God wants us to seek Him through His Word, to praise Him in worship and to share Him with others, He also wants us to seek relationship with Him, and that comes in taking the time to talk with and listen to Him. It is amazing to think about all of the glorious opportunities I have missed out on by not stopping even just for a few moments to soak in God's glory. To switch off and remove all other distractions so that's it's just me and Him.

My Mum has recently figured out that, sometimes, when I'm on the phone to them, I will be scrolling through Facebook at the same time, leading me to dip in and out of the conversations. Unsurprisingly, she was not happy about this. We don't speak that often, and even if we spoke more often, it would still be the case, that she is putting in the time to talk to me, she is interested in what I have been doing, wants to know what I have been learning, and wants to share her life and experiences with me, and when I need advice and guidance she is there to listen and offer it. For me to only give her half of my attention during these conversations is frustrating, hurtful, disrespectful, and just plain rude. But this is exactly what we do with God. He wants to give us everything, but when we give Him only half of our attention, if that, we insult Him massively.

It's hard enough staying focused when we are talking to a physical person, but when you can't see, or always hear a response from God to know He is listening, it can be even harder. Yet, we can rest assured that He is always available, always ready and always expectant when we come to Him ('Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.' James 4:8). No matter how many times we mess up, and no matter how long the length of time since we last spoke with Him, He is faithful, He knows us completely and is open to hearing what we have to say, and sharing Himself with us, and giving us the guidance we need.

That is my challenge to myself this week, and from now on, to stop wasting time with fillers and to instead use that time growing in relationship with God. Switching off my laptop, phone and iPad, sitting in the still and the quiet, pushing my mental to-do list aside and just being still, praying and listening.

I'll let you know what comes from it. I expect it will be quite exciting!

Sarah Peters