

I don't know if you've been watching the **World Snooker Championships** from the **Crucible Theatre** in Sheffield. The world's top players battling it out to be crowned **World Champion**. One of the things I love about individual sports, be it snooker, tennis, cycling or anything else is the way the players hold themselves together under incredible pressure.

Can you imagine what it must be like to get down to **pot the final black** knowing if it goes in you will be **crowned world champion** and if you miss it, well who knows, maybe that once in a lifetime opportunity will be lost forever. How different would **Denis Taylors** life have been if he hadn't of been able to hold himself together in that famous final in 1985.

What is it that enables these people to hold themselves together, when the rest of us would be overcome with nerves or fear? Sports people talk a lot about **trusting the process**. What does that mean?

It doesn't matter if you're **Rory McIlroy, Mark Allen or Ronnie O'Sullivan, Rodger Federer or Chris Froom**, none of these people get to the very top of their sports without incredible amounts of practice. Day in day out doing the same thing over and over again in order that when the big moment comes everything is second nature.

The final black in a world final is just like any other pot, because every pot has been broken down into a well-practiced set of movements. Everything from stance, to how the shot is lined up, how the cue is delivered through the ball... everything is practiced over and over again.

The great South African golfer, **Gary Player** was once asked about being a lucky golfer. He responded by saying: *The harder I practice, the luckier I get.* Gary Player's success was nothing to do with luck and everything to do with practice.

Nebuchadnezzar knew that his **dream** about the **statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay** being smashed was significant. He knew that God, or a god, someone or something was trying to speak to him. Nebuchadnezzar, however, couldn't interpret it. He had **no process to fall back on**, no experience and so he called on all his wise men and magicians.

As we read the story, we might be expecting Nebuchadnezzar to tell these men what he dreamed and then ask them to explain it. The one thing he probably had a lot of experience and practice in was people telling him what he wanted to hear, but such was the importance of this dream he wanted the truth.

The problem the **wise men** had was that they also had **no process** to fall back on. They were used to simply giving stock answers about the king's dreams, usually answers that presented the king in a positive light. How could they do this when they didn't even know what the dream was and if they couldn't tell the king the dream, he would know they were frauds and certain punishment would follow.

This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. (Daniel 2:12) This created a problem for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah because they were counted among the wise men of Babylon and so the **Arioch**, the **commander** of the **king's guard** came to put them to death.

This is the point in the story where we see the difference between a **top snooker player** and someone like me, the difference between someone who has a **well-practiced relationship with God** and those who don't.

Notice how the wise men responded to the king: ***What the king asks is too difficult. No-one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.*** (Daniel 2: 11) In one sentence these men revealed the depth of their faith and the genuineness of their advice. You ask to much, the only way to know the answer is through the gods, but they don't live among humans, we have no access to them, no way of knowing their thoughts.

These men fell apart because they had nothing to fall back on, no process, no relationship with the gods they claimed to serve. They were on their own and the pressure overwhelmed them.

Daniel's response was very different. Let's take a minute to take the scene in. The **commander of the king's guard** appears to take Daniel for execution. It seems there was something of a relationship between the two. He explains to Daniel what's about to happen and Daniel is able to ask why? ***Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?*** (Daniel 2:15)

Daniel didn't fall apart; I might have run and hid. Daniel went to the king and asked for time to give him the answer he longed for. There is no sense of Daniel saying to **Nebuchadnezzar** come on sir, be reasonable. He simply asked for time.

The next thing Daniel did was to go see his friends and urged them to **plead to God**. This was Daniel's practice; this was his process and **Daniel trusted the process**. This was so engrained in him, so well-practiced. We saw this process at work in chapter 1 when he asked to be allowed to **eat vegetables** instead of the king's food.

We know the story; Daniel interpreted the dream and he and his friends were elevated to positions of power and responsibility.

Do we trust the process? Do we have a process to trust?

We as a church are beginning to think about our **direction, God's leading, our mission and vision**. That process has only just begun, but it has started. Kirk and Session and Committee met for two workshops this week helping us to think about where we're now and where we would like to be and how we'll get there. (When we have more to say we will of course keep you up to date.)

I don't know about you, but when I embark on something like this which is big and important, I can be more than a little **overwhelmed**. It can seem like a big task, maybe an **insurmountable** task. The church is a big and sometimes an unwieldy organisation. Everyone has an opinion, and everyone has a direction they think we should be going in. **How do we pick out God's voice**, how do we bring everyone with us?

How do we avoid dangerous fallings out, splits, hurts and damage?

We trust the process. That process has to be prayer. It can't be prayer that is tagged on, almost like the finishing touch to a plan. We have all been guilty of this: *Lord we have decided upon this and so now we pray your blessing on this thing we have decided.*

That process will only lead to failure because all we are doing is asking God to rubberstamp our plans. Daniel's understanding of prayer was something much more fundamental. It was the thing he **began** with. The answer to the king's dream only came after Daniel and his friends prayed.

Are we trusting in the process? Every Sunday morning there's opportunity for us to pray before the service. Folks gather in the creche room and at the minute only a few are meeting in there. Can we as a church really say we're trusting in the process?

On a Monday night and Wednesday morning we've been meeting for prayer and bible study and while it's been wonderful to meet with the folks who do come each week, the reality is that for the size of our church, very few come. **Are we trusting in the process?**

I'm really not trying to make people feel guilty or put more pressure on already busy people. I am incredibly grateful for the people I know who are praying for the church at home in your devotions, thank you for that. The point of the story of **Daniel** and **Nebuchadnezzar's dreams** is that if we are to be able to face the big moments in life with the **confidence of Daniel to stay calm** then we need to be able to fall back on a well-practiced process of **faith and trust in God**.

So, this morning can I encourage us to get lucky in our planning and living for Christ. Not because I believe in luck, I actually don't believe such a thing exists nor do I put any faith in it, but just as **Gary Player** experienced more luck, the more he practiced, **so the more we practice our faith and confidence in God through prayer, public and private**, the more we will discover the direction and vision that we as a church are searching for.

Come and join us in prayer and learn with the rest of us to trust the process.