

Cricket

With the Ashes won and the world cup now in progress I was prompted to write this month about cricket. I've always enjoyed cricket, watching it to some degree but more so playing. During my teens I would often bowl but as I got older I turned more to batting. I was never a great batsman but I could keep the ball off the stumps quite well and hang around for a bit.

Between about 1995 and 2000 I played for a church cricket team. When I joined the team I enjoyed the practice sessions and turned out regularly. When it came to the matches though I found I had little to contribute. By this time I couldn't really bowl at all and the team already had a number of good batsmen. I found myself batting at number 10 or 11 and was rarely required to bat at all given that it was always a limited over match. Without bowling the only part I played in the game was to make up the number in the field. For me this was quite unsatisfactory in terms of fully enjoying the game as well as what I felt it did to my reputation as a cricketer. I found myself getting quite annoyed and sulky about all this particularly when the batting order was announced at the start of each game.

I eventually brought it before God in prayer and I felt the Lord tell me to go out and make a point of encouraging everyone. Against my nature I made every effort to do this and volunteered at each match to stand in as umpire at the start of our innings. In time I started to forget about my image and enjoy this new found role. Then during a particular match for some reason I had to bat higher up the order, 6 or 7 I believe. Needing only 90 or so to win our first few batsmen all got out cheaply. So I came in with a lot of overs to spare and slowly but surely (I don't score runs that quickly) we began to increase our score. Having made over 30 and getting to within 10 runs of winning, a rush of blood to the head saw me get out but our last two batsmen scored the remaining runs needed to win the match. From that time on I was asked to bat first, the idea being to play out the better bowling to allow our more free scoring batsmen a chance to hit out at the weaker bowlers who came on later. I rarely scored more than 20 or 30 but the ploy seemed to work. I'm grateful though for those early matches when I learned a valuable lesson about humility and was enabled to appreciate a less glamorous yet hugely important role for the team.

The second lesson I had to learn was to be able to let go of something that I treasured for the sake of what is right in regard to the bigger picture. Cricket and young families (as well as an increasing role in church and work commitments) do not mix. It took me a while to come to the decision but in the end the cricket had to go. And I had to learn how to let go of it graciously. That took a little longer but when you let some things go it seems that other opportunities often come along. A year or so later at Theological College in Bristol my services were required for the College football team, but that's another story.