

MANAGING OURSELVES

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This week's message is a follow-up to last week's column about OUR BEST PLACES TO THINK. We need places where we have the solitude to think and meditate. Sometimes these places involve activities that don't take much planning or forethought, such as hiking in the outdoors, or finding a quiet church in which to contemplate. I do some of my best thinking in my raspberry patch, the garden, while fly-fishing and when undertaking farm work that doesn't require a lot of focused attention.

How we meditate. It is less important where we meditate than HOW we meditate. Some farmers can pray best in their tractor cabs while engaged in farm work that requires little concentration. For me, raking hay is an easy task that allows me time to think. Some people sit in their cars and trucks in restful or scenic places. I can drive my car on long easy trips and meditate the whole way, unless driving conditions dictate otherwise.

Our attitudes are important. We should enter prayerful moments asking to be open to new ideas and responsibilities.

I usually have to pray to accept the course that lies ahead rather than to have my way. It's almost always hard to accept whatever comes.

Like the time a few years ago when my urologist called me at home in the early evening to tell me I had prostate cancer. I had hoped and prayed the days before my diagnostic tests that I didn't have this unwanted disease. When the biopsy results indicated significant cancer cells and that complete body scans were necessary to learn if the cancer had spread, I didn't want to accept the prognosis. I wanted things my way.

The experience of cancer was good for me. I chose surgery as the method of treatment. I was fortunate the cancer had not spread outside my prostate, though it was contained by a membrane the thickness of a sheet of newspaper. What does that say about being cared for! Cancer gave me an opportunity to remake myself into a better person. It provided an opportunity to practice "Not my will, but God's will."

Not all answers come right away. Sometimes we have to work on issues repeatedly to figure out how to go about things properly. We are usually our own worst enemies. It takes self discipline and lots of practice to open ourselves up to outcomes we can't control or don't want.

We can usually tell when we have the correct approach because we feel at peace. We may even feel exhilarated.

We get nudges all the time but sometimes don't pay attention. Often we get so caught up with ourselves, our work, our likes, and what we perceive as our obligations that we miss the signs telling us changes in our behaviors are necessary.

A farmer friend of mine recently told me about little signals that he used to miss but now heeds because he has started going for walks during which he meditates. He has found tools that he lost

earlier along the road and in his fields. He knows they were found to bring meaning and comfort to him about issues that he was unresolved about.

The signals my friend now pays attention to contributed to him coming to accept things in his life that he has not wanted to accept in the past. This friend has become an unofficial minister in his community to many in need of understanding. He has come to terms with people who severely wronged him. But for taking the time and effort to meditate regularly, he would have missed these opportunities to make himself a better person.

We are in charge of our behaviors. That's one of the wonderful features about behavior. We usually can't control what other people do. We usually can't control many of the factors that impact our lives, such as the weather, government, and events. But we can control whether or not we take the time to pray, how we behave and what we think about.

Meditation is highly restorative and spiritual. There are few moments as beneficial as these contemplative experiences.

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