

Thought for the week

At the centre of my life

Fever Pitch is a memoir by Nick Hornby that recounts his relationship with football, particularly Arsenal Football Club. He readily admits that his support for Arsenal at times became the most important thing in his life.

If you go to any football club or large sports stadium for an event, you are usually surrounded by thousands of fans singing and chanting in praise of their team or particular players. The stadium feels a bit like a cathedral filled with worshippers. It's very moving, and most of the spectators enjoy the relaxation (or drama!) of watching the sport. But are there some for whom this is not just a sport, but rather an obsession and perhaps even a substitute for worship of God? It's an interesting fact that the huge arch, supporting the spanned roof at Wembley Stadium, is much higher than the dome of St Paul's Cathedral. And before we settle cosily into our seats, smug that we don't all have an interest in football, let's consider what else might make us forget all about God.

In the 5th century St Augustine said, 'Thou has made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.' We need to be careful not to fill this 'God-shaped space' with something else. Where do we even start? Could it be money, security, pride in a skill or in our children, or a special collection?

My 'danger zone' may be different from yours, but let's think about money or wealth, since it crops up in both the Old and New Testaments. We have the story of a rich fool (Luke 12:13-21), for example, busy building barns, to the exclusion of what might please God and help him store real, lasting treasure. Or the story of the rich man, with Lazarus, begging outside his gate (Luke 16:19-31). Then we have two people who met Jesus: a ruler (Luke 18:18-27) who walks away sadly because wealth prevents him from following a better life, and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) who realises he has to restore part of his wealth to others, to follow a different path.

We also have direct warnings from Jesus about the dangers of setting too much store by wealth.

Money is a useful and necessary tool, and finding out and accepting how much we really need is perhaps one of the trickiest balances people have to grapple with. Amassing it for its own sake turns it from a tool into an idol. Moses coming down from the mountain to be confronted by the golden calf is a vivid and extreme example of misguided priorities and satisfying human longings for tangible representations of God.

This is captured by the words of the psalmist: 'They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass'! It might be obvious to us that a golden statue can't replace God, but what might we be putting our hope in and how might we be missing out on knowing more of this gracious and loving God?