

Living it out (Application):

What is most stressful for you at the moment?

What are the effects of stress for you?

What burdens do you need to share?

Study

Read John 14:23-27. What might be drawn out for those experiencing stress in their work?

Turn to Gen. 3:17-19. What do you find significant? How does it relate to your experience of work?

Read Matthew 11:28. How might we bring our burdens to Jesus?

Coming Up at St Mark's

Wine tasting evening at St

Mark's...eight fine wines, £10 a head, proceeds to Tearfund. Friday 21st June, 7.30pm. Please book through the office.

Andy's ordination..Just to flag up, Andy P will be ordained a priest at 9.15 service on 30th June and celebrate communion at 11.15 that day..

Date for your diary. **Church hog roast and summer celebration**, for all the family...keep lunchtime on Sunday 14th July.



Please pray for...

There is an **urgent need for helpers** at our 9.15 children's groups – particularly Xcel and LOL. Please pray for more workers for this brilliant work discipling young people. Thank God for the existing leaders of these groups.

Continue to pray for **Eric Waters, Margaret Brown and Saheli Chaudhury**, recovering from hip operations, for swift recovery and strength. Saheli says, "I am so much better. I am astonished by the skill and dedication of the team who took care of me....I have my joie de vivre back!"

Continue to pray for **Andrea, David, Stephen, Ruth and Paul** – for God's grace and presence in their lives.

Pray for the **process of change** at St Mark's – for a sense of God's leading and being able to discern his voice as we reflect on our plans for the future.

Pray for the people of **Syria**, for a healing of the land and reconciliation.

Mission Partner Focus:

Give thanks for **Jemima Parker, John and Anne Carter** in their roles in the diocese. Pray for God's leading and vision.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

Be blessed as you seek to find perspective, striving first for the kingdom of God and offering all things to the King. Be blessed knowing your limits, in the freedom of knowing that you are not the answer to every problem. And be blessed as you share your burdens with Jesus, in the knowledge that nothing is too big, and nothing is too small to bring.

Worship/reflection:

Watch Simon's story of coping with the demands of a stressful job (you'll find it on our YouTube channel – type in 'Simon's story' and 'coping with work stress in the way of Jesus'. Spend time in silence, offering to God the different areas of your life.

Coping with work stress in the way of Jesus

Within our teaching at St Mark's this year we have woven in a series focusing specifically on work related issues. Such a significant part of our lives is work related, and we've sought to consider what it means to be a disciple of Jesus at work. Part of this has been to consider the dynamic and value of work, the need for a regular cycle of rest, and other work-related topics such as ambition, coping with disappointment, making difficult decisions and so on.

This week's focus is 'coping with work stress in the way of Jesus'. Whether we are in full-time employment, retired, looking for work, or fit in to another category, it's a topic that is applicable to us all, in subtly different ways.

I can speak confidently from personal experience that pressure can be a really good thing. If there wasn't such a thing as the phenomenon known as 'a deadline' I would probably still be in school. I personally need the stimulus of pressure and expectation - it helps me to develop and get things done.

But in those times when pressure has been particularly intense I have experienced a number of effects. They've been:

1. Physical – shortness of breath (and laboured breathing), tight chest, twitchy eyes, aches, pains and general discomfort.
2. Psychological – lack of perspective and glumness, loss of humour and tetchiness.
3. Spiritual – having lack of desire to pray, becoming inward looking and weary.

Too much pressure and we have a problem. Stress might be defined as an adverse reaction to excessive pressure.

So, pressure can be good, and pressure can be bad.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 2nd June 2013

But, we are engulfed in an enormous problem. There is a stress pandemic. 13 million working days each year are lost in the UK to stress. Just thinking about it is enough to make you anxious.

How do we, as followers of Jesus, respond? How do we cope with the expectations and pressure that other people place upon us?

Let's look at three areas that might help us to begin to answer these questions.

1. Find Perspective

When I read this heading to my wife Claire, she was concerned – “you're not going to do that whole thing about “you've got a roof over your head, a family who love you, blah, blah, blah...” are you?! I know it's true and all, but it isn't particularly helpful.”

Thankfully for Claire this isn't where I'm going – the perspective that I'd like to draw us to relates to the very practical issue of assessing where we are (+ where we're heading), and what we are building.

First, assessing where we are – it is perfectly natural to go through times when we are particularly busy, where we feel stretched, and under a greater pressure than normal. I am pleased, for example, that my mum (and dad, I'm sure) were prepared to get up in the night to tend to me when I screamed and wailed for food and attention (I assure you it hasn't happened for a number of years). I'm also pleased that my doctors studied hard during their finals, and put in the hours in their training posts to develop their skills and understanding. Such times are important, but it is worth considering how they can be navigated, and how we can be sustained through them.

Within the 'God at Work' Course, Ken Costa (the chairman of Alpha International, and a prominent investment banker) suggests to 'analyze your trend line'. Look at your diary and chart out where the pressures are and where you'll have space to rest and recover. Dedicate those areas of busyness to God, and pray that he would sustain and renew you, equipping you to build the kingdom where you are.

A natural question when we go through times of intense pressure in our work is 'why am I doing this?' 'Why bother?' 'Why put myself through it?'

There might be a very obvious explanation - to put food on the table, or pay the mortgage (and these things can be honourable and right) - but it is important to reflect on our motives. We can so easily be the victim of our own, and other people's expectations. We can tie up our identity and value in our work and accomplishments. However well intended, these things in themselves are not enough, they will not bring true purpose or meaning. They will ultimately lead to futility.

Jesus calls us bring the whole of our lives – our time, our purposes, our work – before God, and to find perspective in something bigger than ourselves:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt. 6:3)

Jesus does not deny the importance of the everyday, the necessities and pressures of life, but he calls us to see them in their right perspective.

2. Know your limits

We have a little fan heater at home that is really useful for a blast of instant heat. It has three settings but whenever we set it to the third (and hottest) setting it begins to smell of burning plastic and fuse: out. There is a simple solution for avoiding this – don't set it to the maximum setting. It's easier said than done, and when the room feels particularly frosty there is always a temptation to set it to the max.

So often, we do the same thing to ourselves. We push past our limits and end up physically, psychologically and spiritually exhausted. Often our bodies will tell us if we are experiencing stress. A good balance of work and rest is the starting point for avoiding burn-out. Since we have considered this in detail in the earlier 'The seventh day: Rhythm and Rest' session, I will not expand particularly, but I will add that there can be a freedom in being aware of our limits.

As peculiar as it sounds, there can be genuine reassurance in the awareness of our own mortality. The world will go on without us:

“You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19)

This is not to deny our undoubted value and preciousness to God (that he would even give his son for us...), yet there is a wonderful balance in scripture between the worth that our Creator shows to us, and our insignificance before his omnipotence (cf. Job 38-42; Psalm 8).

We will find freedom and joy as we become aware of our own glorious limits.

3. Share the burden

I read an article recently based on the blog of a palliative nurse who recorded the top five regrets of the dying. Amongst the top regrets was 'I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings'.

So often we feel the need to carry the world on our shoulders, and not share the burdens that we are carrying. Jesus says:

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28)

There is no better place we can go to express our deepest desires, and to lay down our burdens, than at the feet of Jesus. As Simon expresses in the video, we find peace and liberty as we surrender our hopes and fears to the Lord.

Jesus has called us to be church, a people living as community together, sharing life with God as our King. A big part of this is sharing our burdens with one another, and praying for and supporting one another through all sorts of situations.

That's why we place such a strong emphasis on homegroups at St Mark's – they are a place in which we can build relationships that are nurturing and encouraging. They can be a place in which we share weight the weight of our worries and cares with one another, and pray for one another.

We needn't wait for a crisis or crash before we share our burdens, nor should we let our pride tell us that we can cope on our own – we are part of a people, a community, called to connect all of our work and endeavours to God's plan for the world.