

St Luke's Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme

7. Rhythms and wellbeing

Rhythms are another Biblical principle of wellbeing: daily, weekly and seasonal, as typified in God's gift of the Sabbath. These temporal rhythms are complemented by a spatial equivalent; using spaces for defined purposes.

As our circumstances change, we need to be willing to develop new rhythms and patterns or to adapt old ones so they are fit for purpose. It will take time for the new pattern to become established.

Recognising that most of us at present tire more easily, it helps to establish a daily routine with set blocks of time of one hour or less - certainly no longer than two hours – for specific tasks and to stick to our plan.

Specifically we should:

- Be realistic about what we can currently achieve
- Allow time daily for physical activity, rest, prayer, socialising and sleep; all of which are essential for health and wellbeing
- Establish a weekly pattern - with specific activities or treats on set days. This could be a pattern of social contacts, special meals, playing games, having a film night or music night etc.
- Keep the Sabbath – identifying how to keep that day special, only interrupted by work in an emergency.

Using space creatively

If you can, you might allocate rooms or areas for specific functions; eg for work, prayer and leisure. Closed communities are used to having such functional demarcations. Lings¹ reminds us of the monastery's seven areas; the cell as quiet space, the chapel for corporate prayer, the Chapter House for discussions and decision making, the cloister for exercise, prayerful reflections and quiet conversations, the garden as a place of manual work (but also where we appreciate God in creation), the refectory for socialising over a meal and the scriptorium for mental work. This might help us, where practicable, to demarcate similar spaces in our homes.

Additional guidance on activities drawn from sociology and psychology

The Foresight Report² offers five ways to wellbeing: to connect with others, to stay active, to learn a new skill, to give and to be attentive. It is also good to have activities that bring pleasure, those that offer us a sense of achievement, (including housework as well as new skills!) and social contact.

Christians might like to add a sixth way - of gratitude: as the Bible has so much to say about the blessing of thanksgiving. Similarly, psychology research has shown that thanksgiving increases our wellbeing, sleep and sense of purpose, boosts our immune system and reduces depressive symptoms³. A five-minute-a-day gratitude journal is sufficient.

Similarly, the Ignatian *Examen* prayer⁴ invites us, as part of reviewing our day, to give thanks to God for its blessings.

Making it happen

It is helpful to consider which aspects we are managing well and where we are falling short. That is, to ask:

Where am I doing well, and how might that be enhanced? What is the most important change I need to make to be better rooted, relationally secure and attentive to my rhythms?

It helps to set out a daily plan the night before - or first thing in the morning - and to make sure you stick to the plan. It is easy to move off one activity before it is complete, either in response to new demands or through inner restlessness. To do so limits our focus and achievement. If tempted, first ask yourself if it is the wisest course of action. Sometimes we will need to be flexible in response to a demand both urgent and important, but often we can use interruptions as an excuse or displacement - when we would be better served by maintaining concentration and completing the key task.

It is good to review each day, perhaps using the *Examen*. In relation to my wellbeing, I ask God to help me review the day.

I give thanks and consider where I have remained close to God and where I have not. What areas do I need to address? Then I ask God to give me the grace to enable me to do so tomorrow.

Nurturing wellbeing

Our wellbeing has a positive impact on that of others. So by caring for our own wellbeing, we offer a positive role model.

How else can I help others develop and embed their own positive wellbeing practices? Can I share and discuss my own examples of good practice with others in conversations and virtual groups?

As I reach out beyond family, friendship and congregational networks, how can I share the Christian practice of wellbeing more widely? And how can I prayerfully encourage those in authority with theirs?

Conclusion

The current restrictions to 'normal' life mean we are pioneering a 'new normal' with very different associated benefits and challenges. However, the underlying call to wellbeing still rests in our primary relationships with God, others and ourselves. Whilst God will always be our priority, it is vital that we don't neglect ourselves in the equation. All of our relationships suffer when we don't care for ourselves.

1. George Lings 2015. Seven Sacred Spaces: Expressing Community Life in Christ (originally Encounters on the Edge no. 43) published by the Church Army and available from ask@churcharmy.org
2. Full Foresight Report available on <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/mental-capital-and-wellbeing>
Brief slideshow from the Foresight Report - five ways to wellbeing - available on https://issuu.com/neweconomicsfoundation/docs/five_ways_to_well-being?viewMode=presentation
3. The Research on Gratitude and Its Link with Love and Happiness - <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-research/>
4. The Examen prayer - <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray/>

If reading this has led you to want to seek additional support or signposting please email nicolacanhams@chichester.anglican.org - Head of the Wellbeing for Clergy (WCF) service for the Diocese of Chichester or St Luke's via its website or on 020 7898 1700.

This reflection is adapted from a longer article by Michele Hampson, honorary adult psychiatrist and priest in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham. Michele's reflections on rootedness and relatedness featured in the Virtual Wellbeing Programme in Weeks 5 and 6. The full article is available on the Church of England website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidance%20on%20mental%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20and%20Coronavirus.pdf>