

St Luke's Virtual Clergy Wellbeing Programme

6. Relatedness

After rootedness in God, another biblical principle of well-being is **relatedness** - being related or connected - which encompasses our intra- and inter-personal relationships and our relationship with the rest of creation.

With God

Being rooted and established in the love of God generates the love that flows to our other key relationships.

Before journeying within, we can ask God to be our guide, as we may be travelling to a place we would rather avoid - though desiring to find a deeper healing, which may in turn become a gift to others.

It is to look outwards to discern what God is calling us to, both now and in the future.

It is to look up, to find God immanent and transcendent; God discerned in creation, worship, contemplation and study - and to offer praise and adoration.

With ourselves

We are called to *love others as ourselves*, so we need to attend to our body, mind and spirit.

Our bodies need a healthy daily pattern of exercise, diet and sleep.

We care for our minds by being attentive. We are frequently distracted, but are less happy when we are. Our minds can often drift to worrying about hypothetical future possibilities: contemplation, meditation and mindfulness techniques can help us overcome this.

A simple mindful approach is to focus on our breathing and to allow it to go slower, using a mantra such as 'Maranatha' or 'Come Lord Jesus' - or by counting slowly to five as we inhale and exhale, and focussing on counting more slowly and breathing more deeply and regularly. Better still is to take longer to exhale, as that slows our heart rate. The NHS offers simple guidance on such breathing and on mindfulness techniques¹.

Many of us will be worrying more. It is important to distinguish between the helpful identification of problems to be resolved and the worries about hypothetical issues (the '*what if*' scenarios that run through our minds) for which there is neither solution nor

resolution. If necessary, the latter can be addressed by recognising the concern - but deferring and confining such anxiety to a set time of day, so that it does not control and overwhelm.

We need to pick up on our thought patterns. Are they driven by our insecurities - or by God? Who or what determines what is on our 'to do' list? We need to be aware of busyness as avoidance of fear. God calls us to be secure in our calling: we need to recognise what we are able to do, and not focus on what remains to be mastered.

Equally, it is helpful to notice and 'own' our emotional responses of fear, doubt, tiredness and unreality. These are all normal, and it can be good to share them - but not dwell on them. We can learn to be aware without needing to respond to them. That is, to have a self-compassionate gaze, aligned to that of God. Paul owns and reframes his situation, writing: 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed' (2 Corinthians 4.8).

So we tend to our spirits as we tend to our relationship with God, sustained by God's mercy and grace.

With others

Most of us benefit from regular contact with family and friends and, whilst we miss the physical presence and contact, we can benefit from IT and social media for keeping in touch.

When we are confined with others for long periods, tensions are likely to flare up at times. People describe feeling overwhelmed when others regularly share their anxieties, or by excessive talk about coronavirus. It's a question of monitoring and regulating what is, and is not, helpful.

Likewise we need to regulate our use of social media. Whilst much is supportive and helpful, strong opinions can result in harmful responses. If annoyed, it is good to wait a while before posting and potentially adding fuel to the flame of insensitivity.

We are called to intentional care: looking to find the Christ in others and to make the most generous interpretation of what others say. These are disciplines that we may need to foster and practice.

With the rest of creation

There is research evidence of the gain in spending time being attentive to the natural world. Looking at vegetation (the 'green') and water (the 'blue') space is healing. *Can we use our daily walk to do so, and to reflect on its value to our wellbeing?*

1. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/>
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>

If reading this has led you to want to seek additional support or signposting please contact either the person in your diocese responsible for clergy wellbeing 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 rhythm will also feature in the Virtual Wellbeing Programme. 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>