

Can I just sum up the last few sermons? As Christians we should be involved in service in the church and community, we should be growing faith in our families, we should be Christ's ministers at work and we should be making sure we get sufficient rest. The question is how? How can we balance all these conflicting demands on our time?

Look here's a plan. Sunday – day of rest to prepare you to work.

Monday to Friday you work 8am – 5pm then you have time with your family then some rest except on the evening a week when you are involved in some area of service in or through the church.

Then Saturday you spend longer with the family and have more time to rest.

It is easy isn't it?

Of course it isn't. Some will say I have to work on Sunday – that may be in employed work out of the home or in running the home and family.

Others will say I'd love to work 8-5 but commuting takes time and work hours are longer and there seems little time for either family or rest when I get home.

Yet others will say I seem to be involved in so many things at church that I have meetings or activities lots of nights a week.

Others will say family is spread all over the country so it is not easy to have regular small blocks of time with them.

For many of us at different times we find the balance of life swaying in a different direction, now to work, now to rest, now to home and now to family. However, the problem remains how do we find balance in our lives between these sometimes conflict demands on our time?

Well let's begin by seeing this type of pressure in the life of Jesus.

Let's turn to Mark 1:29-39 and I think we can see the four aspects we are thinking about in Jesus' life.

### **1. At home, vs29-31**

It was the Sabbath day and Jesus had been with James and John and presumably Peter and Andrew as well to the synagogue and now, while they didn't come home, they did come to Peter's home presumably to be together. To be with family on the Sabbath day. There in the home Jesus took time to care for the family in that he saw the problem with Peter's mother-in-law and he resolved that problem. Time was being given to family. The result was that a woman who through her illness was unable to work is restored made healthy and at the end of v31 she was able to wait upon them, the word means minister to them. That was her work, her ministry.

But the point we can see is Jesus in the home serving the family. We probably only are aware of this because of Peter. For it is in the home and with the family that much quiet and unsung ministry is done. As we saw with Matthew a few weeks ago it is there that the nurturing and discipling of children is done as well as the caring for others that is seen by no one else but them and God.

Jesus gave time to minister in the family and we have seen that whether our family is close at hand or wide spread this also is part of our Christian life and commitment.

### **2. At Church vs32-34**

Now I realise that this isn't exactly church as we know it but what did happen was that with sunset the Sabbath day ended and so people felt able to come to Jesus to be healed. Clearly word had got round about how he had dealt with the man with the evil spirit earlier in the day and people wanted help. So what happened was Jesus came out from the home and he healed. He used the spiritual gift he had. It may not be church as we know it but he ministered among the people of God with the gifts given to him.

What we see here is Jesus giving time in serving the community and God's people in the same way that you and I are called to serve people in and through the church with the gifts that God has given us.

### **3. At rest v35-38**

Presumably when all the people had gone he went back to Peter's house to bed and then, before anyone else was up he got up and went off to pray. He went to what we read as a solitary place it might be better translated a desolate place or even a wilderness place. It is as if Jesus was going backwards a bit to the wilderness to get himself right again. Having seen the adulation of the crowds he goes alone to God to recall his mission and purpose. But whatever there was rest, rest through sleep and then abiding with his Father in preparation for the work ahead.

He gave time even in his busy schedule to pray. It reminds me of a couple of quotes reputedly from Martin Luther, "Tomorrow I plan to work, work, from early until late. In fact I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer" and "I have to hurry all day to get time to pray."

In all the pressures of life with so many demands of people on his time rest and prayer were key to Jesus and down the centuries to many people who have been used of God.

Last week we were seeing how this applies to us as well.

Gordon MacDonald who has written many helpful books including 'Restoring your Spiritual Passion' write about how his father was a busy man who seemed to be dominated by "hurry".

He recalls, "Automobile trips from home to destination crowded the speed limit, and we barely had time to stop for food or bathrooms. Often we would drive all night. All along the road there were turn-offs called rest stops but we rarely stopped. And, as I remember it we rarely rested. Some rest stops were historical sites; others were parks and picnic spots; still others were scenic attractions. But we sailed right on by because, as dad reminded us, we had to get somewhere."

Can you see yourself in there rushing through life without the rest stops? Jesus rested.

### **4. At work v38-39**

Having been found by his disciples Jesus then sets to work. It involves as we can see a commute as they go off to various villages round about. The work as we can see from v38 is to preach. It takes us back to 1:14&15, "Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God, "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" He went out preaching the Kingdom of God. I'd like to say that when he said "that is why I have come" it is about his overall purpose. However, I have it on reliable authority that actually the word is came out so it could be understood he has come out of Capernaum so he can go on to other places and preach. Whatever having rested he sets off to work and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He gave time to his main ministry, to work. However, as we have seen his work was also God's work. His work was building the kingdom and Gordon reminded us to see our work as sacred not secular in that our work is done to honour God not to please those around us.

C.H. Spurgeon, the Baptist minister once asked a young girl who served as a domestic for a family what evidence she could give of having become a Christian and she meekly answered, "I now sweep under the mats." Service was done not just for the earthly masters who might see what was on top of the mats but for God who see all things.

Work is our Christian ministry.

So here is Jesus in the home, serving in church, resting and working but how does he balance it all?

Well in Dalmatians 39:5 there is a verse.... no there isn't or we would probably not need a series like this.

I can't give you a verse to help you deal with the terrible toos, - too much, too fast, too long, which defines many of our lives. Nor can I give you a verse which will tell you how to get a balance in your life between the seemingly conflicting demands on your time and energy.

However I think we can find a principle and look at Jesus to begin working out that principle in our own lives.

Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom and this passage is in that context. Indeed all that Jesus did was seen within the context of the Kingdom of God and building that Kingdom. So much so that his message to his disciples as we see it in Matt 6:33 was "seek first his kingdom", that is seek first the Kingdom of God. Our priority as followers of Jesus Christ is to be Kingdom people with the Kingdom at the forefront of our thinking.

But what does that mean?

I think it gives a coherence to our lives or at least it can and should do.

I think for many of us we think in boxes. We have a place where we live with our family, a place where we work, a place where we worship, a place where we do our leisure but we tend to see them in separate boxes and the only thing that joins them up is me or you.

So we experience conflicting demands and we struggle to work out should I be giving my all at work, or at home, or at church, or not at all.

But I want us to see this thread running through all things which leads us to see God's kingdom in everything and to be continually praying that in everything his Kingdom may be being built and asking the question of everything is this for the Kingdom?

As someone said to me recently, "it is not a case of keeping the plates spinning but of keeping a dinner service spinning – there is a connectedness through the kingdom.

I want to suggest we should pursue that connectedness in kingdom terms as kingdom people.

In that what we seek is the kingdom of God at home as we seek to raise our family in faith, at work as we seek to minister for Jesus, at church as we serve him in serving others, and in rest as we abide in him to be fruitful at work at home and at church.

In this light prayer becomes vital, as we saw it was for Jesus, because it reminds us who we are and it reminds us that we are about the things of God but also it helps to keep us close to God so that we are more sensitive to him guiding us in the use of our time as it would seem he was guiding Jesus.

Friends I cannot help you find balance in your life between work, home, church and rest. All I can do is point out that the four elements are part of our lives and need to be kept in balance. That all four are part of being kingdom people and that we should be the same kingdom people in all four areas.

In each area our question should be am I building the kingdom of God in and through this?

There should be a consistency in our living in which we seek to be building God's Kingdom at work rest home and church. That is what Jesus was doing, honouring God and building the Kingdom where ever he was and whatever he was engaged in and we seek to follow Jesus in every way.

There is another example I believe of the way in which life is balanced and it is to be found in Proverbs 31.

It is a passage which is often derided because of the almost impossible standard and yet I think it speaks into this balance in life topic.

It is about a woman, a wife and yet I think it can speak wider than that. Here is a wife who is clearly involved in work, v13, "She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands," and v17 "She sets about her work vigorously." She works hard and well. Why is that? Well because v30 she "fears the Lord" and as we have seen recently in Job "the fear of the Lord – that is wisdom." (Job 28:28) It is God given wisdom which causes her to work hard. Then she is involved in what we might call church, that is in serving others, v20, "She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy."

Then she ministers to her family, v15, "she provides food for her family", v21, "When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet", clearly she teaches her children, v26 "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue," and this has an effect on them because v28, "Her children arise and call her blessed."

There is nothing specifically about rest but the fact that in v25 it says, She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come" suggests a rounded person and no one can be that without rest.

Here is an integrated life based on God's wisdom. It is, in a sense like the example of Jesus, a portrait to aim at and sometimes we will hit it and sometimes we will come short but under God hopefully today we will try well at it.

Friends I am not going to suggest it is easy to gain balance in our lives and as I have said many times we go through seasons when one or other of these may demand more of our time or perhaps when we retire less. However God wants us to be integrated people and above all godly people who are seeking first his kingdom rather than our own aims prestige well being or whatever.

So today I can only leave you with thoughts of having the kingdom at the centre of your thinking or questions such as in this am I seeking God's kingdom or my own?

Balance it is hard but it is of God.

I am going to suggest now that having had a few moments earlier in the service you turn back to the people you spoke to and say whether anything you have heard helps you with the pressure points you mentioned earlier or if anything you have heard helps you to help your neighbour with their pressure points, which it strikes me is perhaps a more Christian attitude.

