

I thought this morning we could look at 'posture'. It's something as dentists we often neglect and it's only when you get to your forties, you feel the stiff neck or sore back after a long week of work, or maybe that's just me! Last month, my mother-in-law had spinal surgery and during the long, painful recovery, has been saying how heavy her head feels on her shoulders. It made me think again about posture – not just physically, building core strength but spiritually, our posture before God and others, especially in the workplace. Have we healthy patterns of work and rest or do we feel that weight on our shoulders we were never intended to carry alone?

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28 (reading from The Message):

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn how to live freely and lightly."

How do we learn these unforced rhythms of grace in dentistry? What does it look like to live freely and lightly in the surgery and walk in step with Him?

If you have a Bible, you can turn up Romans 12:1-2. Paul teaches us a lot about posture and our daily life as worship - not like a personal trainer to build our own core strength, but surrendering ourselves and learning to lean entirely on Him as our strength, allowing Him to transform us from the inside out by His Holy Spirit.

The first word you'll see in Romans 12 is "Therefore" and as we're always taught, we need to ask what it's there for, so we're actually going to start reading from the end of chapter 11, verses 33-36 which in my Bible is headed 'Doxology' – literally an outburst of praise from Paul as he reflects on what he has already written to the Romans in chapters 1-11 about our salvation in Christ and His inexhaustible riches – theology that brings him to his knees in awe and gratitude and is the starting place for our posture as we join in worship - let's read together Romans 11:33-36.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

³⁵ "Who has ever given to God,

that God should repay them?"

³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Paul's own expression of humble wonder and dependence echo other passages like Isaiah 55:8 (God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours). You'll see two exclamation marks in verse 33 – literally, 'Wow!' at God's extravagant generosity and depth of wisdom. Then two question marks in verses 34 and 35 – rhetorical questions to which the answer is 'nobody' – very similar to Job's conclusions after suffering and questioning "things too wonderful to know or understand" and similarity with Colossians 1:16 – "All things were created by Him and for Him."

John Stott points out "Theology and doxology should never be separated – all true worship is a response to the self-revelation of God in Christ, in Scripture and arises from our reflection on Who He is and what He has done"ⁱ which is why when we read Romans 12, "Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy", that is loaded with eleven rich chapters expounding God's grace and Christ's sacrifice on the cross so we could know full redemption and resurrection life by the

power of the Holy Spirit – so in view of all that says Paul, what is our response? Let's read on...Romans 12:1-2.

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The Greek word used for worship at the end of verse 1, 'latreuo', usually referred to Old Testament priests. As a result of Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross and priesthood of all believers, the offering of worship is no longer a dead animal but a "living sacrifice" – ourselves. "Living sacrifice" seems to be a paradox but depicts Paul's words from Romans 6:11,

"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ...offer yourselves to God in Christ, as those who have been brought from death to life and offer the parts of the body to Him as instruments of righteousness."

I wonder with our tray of dental instruments, do we consider ourselves as an instrument in His hand?

We always say in our homegroup, 'the problem with a living sacrifice is it can crawl off the altar' – despite the best motivation for living the holy life here in verse 1, we still mess up. In the Old Testament, the sacrificed animal had to be unblemished and set apart for God – it is only because of Christ's once and for all perfect sacrifice that we can come before Him and be made right, His blood covers all our sins and His tender mercies are not only the starting point of all our worship but the ongoing grace and sustaining power as we seek to live holy and whole lives, consecrated and set apart for Him.

In the Old Testament, sacrifice represented the position of the heart and the same of our posture today – an undivided heart is pleasing to God. In dentistry, it can feel like much of our day is spent people-pleasing – meeting expectations and ensuring each patient leaves satisfied but if our work is worship, we are living first and foremost to please God, not man. By default though, seeking Him first and serving out of His overflow of love, joy, peace, patience means we can be carriers of His non-anxious presence, to listen and care for people well, opening up even greater potential and depth for the interactions we have each day that people encounter something of the kindness and compassion of God. Learning to live from, not for acceptance, frees us from the tyranny of people-pleasing in the fickle, two-dimensional plane to seek what pleases God which in the realm of eternity will be much more fruitful and enjoyable if we're fulfilling our calling and chief end in life to glorify Him.

Romans 12 is the very practical outworking of discipleship – in chapters 1-11, Paul focusses on theology and doctrine but Romans 12 is where the rubber meets the road, where faith is lived out, literally getting down to earth. First our relationship with God in verses 1-2, then our relationship with others from verse 3 onwards. If you've time later, read the rest of chapter 12 and 13 as there is some real practical help in dealing with patients and even submission to authorities if we're conflicted with current NHS challenges or politics.

The last phrase in verse 1, "this is your spiritual act of worship" uses the Greek word 'logikos', which some translations call 'intelligent or reasonable service' and can also be translated as 'of the word' or 'logical' – following on from all God has done for us, the logical outworking of our faith and love for Him is to lay down our lives in worship. Our relationship with God was never meant to be transactional, but transformational and verse 2 onwards unpacks the key to healthy posture when we feel the pain and strain, not just of dentistry but the stress of the fast-paced, fear-driven culture

we live in. Even the word, 'culture', in microbiology is the growth medium you place in a petri-dish to allow the micro-organism to develop – it usually absorbs whatever culture it is in and thrives or dies accordingly. Jesus calls us to be in the world but not of it – we cannot just absorb what is going on around us as the norm and fit in – it is not conducive for life to thrive. Jesus came so we could know life to the full and abide in Him, immersing ourselves and saturating our minds in His Truth so He permeates every aspect of our lives and empowers us to share His daily bread and living water with a hungry, thirsty, needy world.

God's pattern for life and work could not be more opposed to the world's pattern – instead of following our own agenda, our focus is God - 'What is He doing here? What does God have to say or how will this fit into His plan or glorify Him?'

The two verbs in verse 2, "conformed" and "transformed" are both present, passive imperative tense – an ongoing refusal to just blend in or go with the flow but to be transformed from the inside out by the renewal of our minds, changing our thoughts, attitudes and behaviours. The Greek verb, 'metamorphoo' is also used in Matthew and Mark for the transfiguration and 2 Corinthians 3:18 of believers changed into the likeness of Christ. Like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, there is beauty and mystery and utter dependence as we grow into our full purpose. As we sink our roots deeply, delighting in Him and meditating in His Word day and night, like the tree in Psalm 1, so we are nourished and flourish, bearing fruit – not just so we are transformed from within but so we share His blessing with others and transform the culture around us....but how? Paul says, "by the renewing of your mind" - intentionally centring our thoughts in Christ, delighting in Him as our first love and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our thinking – verse 2, "so you will be able to test and approve (or discern) what God's will is."

Smith Wigglesworth said, "Consume the Word of God until it consumes you."

- 3Es: 1. Evaluate every thought – take it captive and see if it stands up to the Truth of God's Word; 2. Eject unhealthy thoughts and 3. Entertain His thoughts like Philippians 4:8:

"whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praise-worthy – think about such things...and the peace of God will be with you."

Pete Greig always talks about the "18 inches from the head to the heart." I love the Lectio 365 app and think there's something really powerful about posturing ourselves to listen to God's Word repeated and letting it drop from our minds into our souls so I wanted to end by reading out another translation of Romans 12 to reflect on what it means for each of us for our posture in work.

The last few years have taken a lot out of us, sometimes we struggle to see where God is in our workplace. I came across a few quotes I'd written in a journal several years ago when I was disillusioned with work. These words from Richard Foster's book, 'Streams of Living Water' jumped off the page: "He is, you see, Lord of all vocations and He really can teach us how to fulfil our calling. If you are a dentist, Jesus can teach you to do dentistry as if He were you" ...he calls it "incarnational dentistry" and talks about the "Christian spirituality of work – if ours is God's world, any true work for the improvement of human life is a sacred undertaking...when we decide to allow our entire life to be a channel of divine love...we have a sense of calling, a God-given ability to do a job linked with a God-given enjoyment in doing it."ⁱⁱ

Practising the presence of God in the middle of a busy day might be as simple as breath prayers before each patient, a praise pause when we're washing our hands or remembering Jesus in the empty chair in the surgery, but worshipping God in our work means seeking His face in all we do – seeing patients as He does and being open to how He wants to use us. God wants to gift His people

with creative solutions to the world's problems, even the NHS and current challenges in dentistry to bring about His Kingdom transformation. With Him, nothing is impossible so let's consider our posture and all our work as worship as we read Romans 12 from The Message:

“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out...”

Let's pray - we praise You, Father, You alone have infinite knowledge, wisdom and love. Forgive us when we try to figure things out alone or detach our work from worship – give us undivided hearts. We pray Your healing touch on the pains and strains we feel from work, both physical and spiritual. You are the Lifter of heads and Binder of wounds. Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light so carry the weights we were never intended to shoulder and let us walk in step with You, learning how to live freely and lightly. We commit each workplace represented here today to You now and ask for renewed strength and fresh vision and purpose. Help us to see people and situations as You do, give us Kingdom hearts and minds to live out Your resurrection hope of transformation. In Your Son's precious Name, Amen.

ⁱ John R.W. Stott, *The Message Of Romans*, 1994, IVP, P311

ⁱⁱ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water – Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, 1999, Eagle Publishing, P219, 223-224