‘Into the Deep’ series
Week #1 - No Stress
Learning to step into another new year with God

Passage - Romans 8:18-39
9.30a.m. Sunday 31 December, 2017

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Introduction
In the movie Dead Poets Society, actor Robin Williams plays a professor of literature at an elite New England prep school, set sometime in the 1950’s. Early in the movie Robin Williams encourages his young students to drink deeply from life, to live it to the fullest, to get the most out of every day. He uses a Latin phrase that you may remember: Carpe Diem. It means "Seize the Day." It means don’t let opportunity pass you by; take it when you can.

I've been thinking about this phrase as I have been preparing for this coming year of 2018. A have a 4 week series called Into the Deep. It's about piercing the surface level life. You could say it's about learning how to carpe every single diem ... for the rest of your life.

Talking about Carpe every single diem – one day helping Yvonne’s parents – shovelled 2 tonne of dirt by hand, cut down tree branches, took a load to the tip, shifted 1000 bricks, installed a new dishwasher, replaced rotten skirting board and painted – and that was my holiday ALL IN ONE DAY. WHY? I wanted to seize every day while I was with Yvonne’s parents to help them with jobs that they can’t do. The last full day I was there I cleaned out the septic tank. It had clogged up the pump and their house was in danger of backing up with smelly water through the drains. After several hours of cleaning out the tank and pump, I had to re-connect the pump to the drain lines. It was impossible to do it from the outside. I had to do it from the inside – there was no other way to fix it, but to get into the tank and get dirty. There was no other way to stop the junk than to
go deeper – up to my knees in gunk.

Now I know that a lot of you would not have done that sort of a dirty, smelly job, but it had to be done and fast. It was about piercing the surface – jumping in deep - forgetting about the immediate and looking beyond. It was about living it to the fullest for the sake of others.

When Yvonne’s mother came home – she had been out of town doing some shopping – and she discovered what I had spent the day doing, she hugged me, smelly clothes and all and thanked me. I didn’t realize how important that task was to her. She had rung up to get someone to fix it and no one came. I felt a million dollars … I had seen my Mother-in Law’s joy … I had been the answer to a problem – I had seized the opportunity to risk it all and I got to share in the blessings. *I also reckon that cleaning out the septic tank should hold me in good stead with the Mother-in-Law for a few years to come.*

I've been thinking about this: **What does it mean to be a deep person?**  **What does it mean to have a deep life?**  **What does it mean to really live life to the fullest?**  This is a phrase I have used countless times in my sermons, because it’s a phrase that Jesus used. He said, *"I came to give life—life in all its fullness." (John 10:10 NCV)  Other translations say that he came that we might live "life more abundantly."*

One day not long after we moved back to Qld, I decided to take a day out to reflect and re-align and to listen to the Lord. I went for a drive in the district where my ancestors settled in Qld. I visited the graves of my great grandparents – drove up to the hill at Tallegalla and then around the district where they lived, and I couldn’t help thinking *“If they were here (alive) now, what would they have wanted for me? What legacy did they work hard for?”*

I’m sure it wasn’t so that I could be comfortable and just live a surface life and amble along with a mediocre spiritual journey. No! I reckon they would’ve wanted me to press hard and to go deeper in life – in my faith and in my relationship with the Lord. To build on what they had laid before. To seize the abundant life that Jesus died for on the cross and now offers. The greatest part about this series (Into the Deep) is that when you decide to go deeper you realize that there is so much more with God. The other thing you realize is that it’s all a free gift from the Lord. He is urging each of us to reach out for it.

He is like a father who is awaiting the arrival of his children who have travelled far to see him. That’s the whole point of the cross → He is dying for you to go deeper.
How do we get there? Well, that's what this series is about. For the next four weeks we'll take a look at four things you can do to live a deeper, more satisfying life. You may have wasted some of your days in the past, maybe even some of your years in the past ... you may have even wasted entire decades ... but today you can start taking steps that will lead in the direction of a richer and fuller life, a life that can be lived, in the words of Jesus, more abundantly ... starting today ... right now.

THE FIRST STEP INTO THE DEEP ...

So, where do you start on the road to a more rewarding life? The first step is always the hardest. Step number one is learning to conquer stress. You often hear people use the term stress management. The truth is, I have no interest in stress management. I'm interested in stress demolition. I'm interested in stress eradication. I don't want to learn to live with stress. I want to learn to live without it.

Obviously, stress is something that we all have to face. And the truth is, it's a killer. It can kill your body, we all know that. It can also kill your relationships. Satan will use stress in your life to attempt to destroy you. Stress can kill your joy. It can even kill your ability to taste food. No kidding.

I was watching a special about stress recently on the television. They referred to some research that's been done in this area, measuring dopamine levels and brain activity and their connection to states of stressfulness. The bottom line of the study is this: When you're stressed, food doesn't taste as good, the sun doesn't shine as bright, the air doesn't smell as fresh, music doesn't sound as good, jokes aren't as funny as they would be otherwise, and on and on. I don't know about you, but anything that is going to prevent me from enjoying pizza to the full extent - I don't want any part of it!

In all seriousness, stress is the deeper life's biggest enemy. I know – I’ve been there. Satan tried to keep me there! He knows that he has you when he distracts you into staying where you are – rather than stepping out into the deep ... into the unknown with Jesus? What happens when you step into the unknown with Jesus – you have to trust Him ... you see miracles ... you see His power, not yours ... you mature ... you don’t let the little things (like Martha syndrome) take control.

And here’s the worst thing about stress. Most of the time - in fact nearly all of the time - its power is merely perceived. In other words, much of the time we're stressed about things that don't really matter. Did you know that the thickest pea-soup London fog can be compressed into a glass of water? Do you get stressed about things that don’t really matter? Perhaps you take on other’s stress ... perhaps you are addicted to stress.
because that’s all you have ever known – deadlines, failures, constant tiredness, no time for leisure, strained relationships.

Now, obviously, there are times when one kind of stress is appropriate. There are times when you truly are in the midst of a perilous situation. I remember one night I had just preached at a church night service – packed with young people/young adults. It was right at the end of the service and one of the guys in the back row came and saw me down the front. He was always rough and tumble, he was a tradie. He had cattle dogs and a hotted up ute. Whenever I visited his house, his dog would ambush you from the roof – jumping on you to surprise you. You took your life into your hands.

This night he spoke to me and wanted to see me outside. My first thought was, "What have I done/said? What if he’s going to thump me?” It was at that point that I caught sight of the hand gun he had tucked in his belt under his long trench coat. Now my mind was really going fast. The questions were coming thick and fast. Do I even go outside? What if I don’t? Will he shoot up the Church? There were kids and young people there. Without telling my wife I decided to go outside.

Talk about stress. I was scared. I didn't want anyone to get hurt, but neither did I want to lose my life. And so I shifted into what is called the fight-or-flight response. Our bodies are designed this way in order to deal with imminent danger. Your heart speeds up, your blood vessels constrict, your pupils dilate, and fat is released into your muscles so you can run or protect yourself or do whatever you need to do. So, in my fear, I felt this surge of adrenalin as I considered my options.

Fortunately, I was able to resolve the situation without getting full of holes – he just wanted to talk about a very difficult situation in his life, and he had come to an impasse and he was going to end his life that night. So he came to Church to talk to me before going through with it. Well, as it turned out God got the glory, we walked and talked through the city (gun still inside the trench coat) about God and his purposes. He eventually got to his home – I took him inside and said goodbye … and I started to walk home (a few kilometres from his place) - I was safe again. Within a few minutes, my breathing went back to normal, my heart rate went back to normal, and all my fat went back to its resting place, because the danger had passed. That's how fight-or-flight response is supposed to work.

I'm sure everyone here has some kind of story to tell about a brush with danger, and the physical reaction you experienced. This is how our bodies react whenever we face danger.
However, over the years we have conditioned ourselves to react this way not only to dangerous situation, but to things as mundane as traffic. Have you seen that happen? And we have conditioned ourselves to react this way to being interrupted at work. And we have conditioned ourselves to react this way when we can’t get a parking spot or when our internet goes down. Or when we have to stand in line at the supermarket or the ATM. Basically, whenever we don’t get our way.

There are some people who spend the entire day going in and out of the flight-or-flight response over every little thing. And, even worse, there are some people for whom fight-or-flight never ends. They spend the entire day stressed to the limit, as if they're engaged in hand-to-hand combat. You undoubtedly know people who are that way, and you've probably been that way yourself at various times.

**Needless to say, this is not conducive to the abundant living Jesus talks about in John 10.** That's because most of our stress is perceived stress. On top of that, most of our stress is disproportionate to the situation. In other words, we tend to make a big deal out of nothing.

One day I was running a little behind schedule and I was in a rush to make it to a meeting on time. But that day the universe conspired against me and caused me to get caught at a red light. My response? I absolutely erupted. I slammed on my brakes and I hit the steering wheel and I complained vociferously. I also looked at my watch to see just how much this delay would set me back (every second seems like an eternity). I waited for the light to turn green and I checked my watch again. Guess how long? I'm embarrassed to tell you. Ten seconds. Can you believe it? I lost my cool over a ten second delay. This isn't good, because now that I’m a grandfather & in my 50’s, I don't have that much cool to spare.

But, do you know what? If we're not careful, we can easily lapse into this habit until it defines us. It becomes how we live all day every day. And let me tell you, it's a terrible way to live. It’s not how Jesus intended us to live ... and it’s not how we should plan to live in 2018.

**This kind of stressful anxiety is the enemy of the deeper life.** And when you get into what the Word teaches about it, you see that it is a completely unnecessary state of mind. The only time you should really be stressed is when you’re in a situation that's completely out of control. And here's the catch. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you'll rarely (never) encounter such a situation.

Do you know why? Because ‘Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.’ That's 1 John 4:4, by the way. It's a good verse to memorize. This verse reminds us that
even when the world is falling apart all around you, you don't have to worry, because you have the Spirit of God living in you. And God's power is greater than any chaos that exists in the world. That means that, as a child of God, you'll never encounter a situation beyond his ability to manage. And it means, as a child of God, instead of living every moment of every day in fight-or-flight mode, you can relax and enjoy life's journey.

A deep, fulfilling, satisfyingly abundant life will never just fall in your lap. You have to choose it. You have to reach out and take it. HOW?

By giving God the place you've been giving stress.

Most of our stress is perceived stress. We're stressed because we tell ourselves the wrong thing - that this problem or this situation or this inconvenience is more important than it really is. Just as stress starts with you telling yourself the wrong thing, it stops when you begin telling yourself the right thing.

So today I want to remind you of three secrets of un-stress. Except they're not really secrets. They're found in the book of Romans, chapter 8. If you'll remind yourself of these three principles throughout the day, you'll eliminate the lion's share of stress from your life. So, take your Bible and turn to Romans 8. The first principle I want you to remember is ...

1. The Principle of God's PRESENCE: He is with you always.

Every believer knows this, sort of. LET”S TEST IT → let’s say that to come through the Church doors next week I set an exam for everyone to do. There’s only a few yes/no questions. Imagine if you were asked this question on an exam - Is God with you always? - we would all get the answer right. Of course he is. But when you bring it to a practical level ... well, we sometimes don't live that way. (Don’t stress – there will never be an exam to come to Church – why? Jesus is a free gift)

Craig Groeschel (Christian author/speaker) uses the term "Christian Atheist" to describe someone who believes in God, but lives as though God doesn’t exist. Groeschel is the pastor of one of the largest churches in the USA, and he admits that for years he lived this way himself. For years he did ministry as if it all depended on him and God had nothing to do with it. As a result he was always tense, he was always irritable, he was always stressed -- and no amount of success could bring him peace of mind. (I think as Pastors, we can all relate to that. I think God must get sick and tired of us doing it our way to start with, and then eventually we work out that it doesn’t go like that.)

Many people live this way. They live as if they're all alone over here, and God is way over there, way off in the distance, sometimes paying attention, sometimes not. If that's
the way you live, then no wonder you're stressed out. No wonder you're worried. No wonder you're on edge. Who wouldn't be?

The Bible teaches us something different. The Bible says again and again that God is with you, right here, right now. Many people would say, "Of course he's with us right now. We're in his house." But he's also with you when you're in your house. And when you're at work. And when you're in the car. Even at the red light.

God spoke these words to Moses, and he speaks them to you today: "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." (Exodus 33:14)

When you find yourself getting stressed over something little or something big, take a moment to remind yourself that God is with you. He's not "over yonder" in the distance, he's right there beside you. And he's saying, "I don't want you to be stressed. I want you to be at rest."

God is always present with you, so make it a point to be present with him. Acknowledge his presence. Throughout the day take the opportunity to say, "Thank you, Lord, for being here with me. I welcome your presence."

Paul spoke about this presence in the book of Romans (Chapter 8). He said...

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

He goes on to say...

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It's the principle of God's PRESENCE. He's with you all the time. And he's here to stay. He's not going anywhere. No amount of trouble can change that. He's with you. That's the first thing I want you to see. The second principle I want you to see is...

2. The principle of God's PURPOSE: There's no such thing as random.

Listen to what Paul said in verse 28 of Romans 8.
28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Some versions say, "God causes all things to work together for good."

**When you give your life to Jesus Christ, He becomes the architect of your future.** He designs and directs the details of your life so that you can become the person he created you to be.

A few years ago some friends of ours had a fire in their house. It wasn't destroyed, but there was quite a bit of damage. They hired some renovators to come in and restore and remodel and rebuild - and the end result is that their house somehow got bigger: they ended up with more livable space than they had before. And even though the fire was not a good thing, the renovation team was able to make something good out of it.

God is at work in the same way in your life. He can take the fires that you experience and cause them to become something good. More livable space.

We see this in the book of Genesis, in the story of Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery and told their father he had died. Joseph became a slave for years, then was put in prison for something he didn't do. Talk about a fire in his life – he was guttered!!

But God was at work in the details of Joseph's life. He eventually became one the most powerful men in Egypt. He was responsible for saving the country from the effects of a disastrous drought. He was also able to save his family and provide security for his aging father. When his brothers came to him and said, *"Please don't seek revenge against us,"* Joseph said...

*You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. (Genesis 50:20 NLT)*

As Rick Warren says, **God has a plan for every problem. He has a purpose for your life and he knows what he's doing.** The good thing is that you don't have to understand all the details of God's purpose to be part of it. You just have to trust him.

**GOLF STORY** – I played golf with my son recently. On one long hole, he had the worst dog slice off the tee and was in behind the trees. Mine was down the middle of the fairway. As I was watching I thought he’ll hit the next tree and the next and then he’ll get angry. I can just see it now! To my surprise, cool as a cucumber, he curved it intentionally around the trees and out onto the fairway quite a distance down past my ball. After complimenting his shot, he admitted that I had taught him how to do that. He told me that he always remembered me telling him not to stress and that the best shot in golf is the recovery shot. You will always get into strife/rough at some point
in the game. If you can learn the recovery shot, you’re in the driver’s seat. You need to realize that life will always give you opportunities (yes they are opportunities not problems) to discover how to recover. They are not just random bad things that are out to conspire against you or to intentionally stress you.

So when it appears that one random mishap after another is taking place in my life, I remind myself that there’s no such thing as random. God has a plan. He has a purpose. He’s working all things together for good. When I trust in his purpose, stress loses its power. Here's the third principle I want you to see.

### 3. The principle of God's PERSPECTIVE: Learn to see the big picture.

One of the top US Basketball coaches (Dean Smith) once said, "If you’re going to make every game a matter of life or death, you’re going to have a lot of problems. For one thing, you'll be dead a lot." Dean Smith wasn't just some youth league volunteer coach at the YMCA. He's one of the legends of the game. He's in the Hall of Fame. He coached Michael Jordan, as well as many other superstars. He coached North Carolina for 36 years and took them to the Final Four 11 times. This guy knows basketball and he knows coaching and he knows winning ... and he knows that every game isn't do-or-die. You have to look at the big picture of an entire season, or even a sequence of seasons, in order to accomplish your goals as a coach.

We get stressed when we live as if this moment is all there is. The Bible teaches us that this moment isn’t all there is. This moment is just one drop in the ocean of eternity. That's why we need to learn to see the big picture. If you suffer a setback today, or if you have to deal with a disappointment today, or if you have to face infuriating frustrations today ... it's not the end of the world, because we don't live for today, we live for eternity.

Here's how Paul said it...

> 17 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

He's saying, "God has some big things in store for his people. We can endure some hardship, because the best is yet to come." That's why he said in 1 Corinthians 2 ... 

> However, as it is written:
“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”
— the things God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

I used to think this verse was about heaven, but if you read it in context, you’ll see it’s not exclusively about heaven. It's about life - life here, and life forever.

Here's the paradox. In order to live life to the fullest, we need to realize that this life isn't all there is. We need to realize that this moment isn't all there is. We need to realize that most situations really aren't do-or-die situations, and when we look at life from God's perspective, in terms of eternity, we're better able to determine what really matters. If you want to drink deeply from life, learn to see each day from God's perspective.

CS Lewis once said, "I have discovered that the people who believe most strongly in the next life do the most good in the present one." That's because people who see from God's perspective understand what is important and what isn't. They don't get stressed out about who's been voted off the island and they don't get bent out of shape when the waiter gets their order wrong because they understand that these things aren't matters of life and death. In fact, in the big picture, they don't matter at all.

Do you want to eliminate a big percentage of stress from your life this year (and forever)? Learn to see the triviality of your problems in comparison to the greatness of God.

CONCLUSION

The Bible tells us about a deep life, an abundant life that is ours in Christ, a life full of joy and meaning and purpose and fulfilment. It belongs to each and every one of us. It is ours for the taking.

You can start moving in to the deeper life today, with a determination to turn away from the temporary, to let go of worry and anxiety, and embrace instead the greatness of God. You don't have to be a prisoner of stress, because God is with you. He is working out the details of your life - even the seemingly difficult ones - for your good and his glory. And he's doing it not just for the passing moment of today, but for all eternity.

Taking the first step into the deeper life comes down to this: A willingness to let go of the little things and start trusting God for the big things.
Do you know what will happen?

You'll rest better. You'll work better. You'll feel better. You'll live better. You’ll live deeper and richer and more abundantly than ever before.

Are you prepared to let go of the little things and trust Him. May you start moving into the deep end today – forget about the surface – look deeper in 2018. **Let’s pray.**

Loving Father God, our prayer is that we would step out more this year into a deep and vital relationship with you. We can only do this in your power and by your Spirit. Plant in us courage to take new steps and as we do remind us continually of your presence, your purpose and your perspective. May our lives as a result be a blessing to you and to others. Remind us constantly that you are with us and for us and nothing can ever get between us and your love. Thank you for loving us deeply (nothing less than that would’ve cut it). Thank you for Jesus and the depth of your love in setting us free to live abundantly. May this year be a year of going deep with you. Teach us to trust you as we recover and respond to the events of this life as we see them in the context of an eternity with you. Thank you for going deep in your love for us on the cross. Amen

**Closing Song – Jesus, all for Jesus**
Romans 8:18-39 (NIV)

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[i] have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.