

# Working Challenges

*Six sessions on the Sermon on the Mount looking at key challenges at work*  
**Week 5: Our Stress at Work (Matthew 6:25-34)**

**ICEBREAKER:** Have a competition and see who can hold their breath for the longest.

**Introductory Illustration:** Free-diving is a 'sport' where you see how deep you can dive just by holding your breath and diving down with huge flippers. There are two challenges. One is being able to hold your breath for a long time. Free divers can hold their breath for about 4-5 minutes. The second challenge is managing the greater pressure that is exerted on you as you go further down into the water. Free-diving is actually a very helpful picture of what many of us experience in our day to day lives. There are times in life when we find ourselves experiencing increased pressure.

## 1. The Definition of Stress

**The point:** "Stress is the reaction of mind and body to increased pressure". And for our purposes stress happens when we feel we are unable to cope with the increased pressure we are facing.

**BUZZ GROUPS:** Discuss what it is that causes you most stress and worry in your work at the moment? When do you feel unable to cope with the increased pressure at work? Or outside of work?

## 2. The Effects of Stress

**The point:** When we are stressed, the stress can show itself psychologically – in the mind. We become distracted, unable to concentrate, anxious, aggressive, irrational, self-absorbed. Stress can also show itself physically too – in the body. Not being able to eat or sleep, tightness around the chest.

**The illustration:** Give an example of how stress has affected you.

**The application:** Research from Harvard University says work stress is as harmful to health as smoking or taking no exercise. Stress has overtaken the common cold as the biggest cause of sickness from work

**BUZZ GROUPS:** Discuss what negative effects of stress you have felt personally. How have you dealt with this? Do you think you deal with it the way Jesus wants?

## 3. The Solution to Stress

Most remedies try to deal with the symptoms of stress, whereas Jesus' teaching goes straight to the underlying cause. Jesus gives us three dimensions to stress-management.

### A: The Intellectual Dimension

**The point:** Read v.27 and v.34. Use our brains –**See that Worry is a waste of time**

**The illustration:** John Stott writes re. v. 34: "If our fear does not materialise, we have worried once for nothing; if it does materialise, we have worried twice instead of once. In both cases it is foolish; worry doubles trouble".

## **B: The Emotional Dimension**

**The point:** Read v.26 and v.28-30. Engage our emotions – **and Savour God's greatness and our great value to him.** God is our Heavenly Father who is more than big enough to take care of every detail of our lives, and he places such great value on us ('much more' repeated in v.26 and v.30).

### **The illustration:**

A Poem: "Said the robin to the sparrow, I should really like to know, Why these anxious human beings, Rush about and worry so. Said the sparrow to the robin: Friend I think that it must be, That they have no heavenly Father, Such as cares for you and me."

A Quote: "Jesus tells us to look at the birds, the flowers, the grass of the field, and we all love to look at the beautiful things in this world. But so often we go and draw the wrong conclusion. We think that God must really care about that beautiful view. Then we look at ourselves in the mirror and in most cases it's not such a beautiful view, and so we end up not being able to believe that God cares for us and all the details of our little lives. What fools we are for having such little faith. It cost God just a word to create this world, but it cost God the life of Jesus to bring you and me into relationship with Him. That's how much more valuable we are to God." *Working without Wilting* - Jago Wynne

**BUZZ GROUPS:** "It cost God just a word to create this world. It cost God the life of Jesus to bring you and me back into relationship with Him". How does this make you feel?

## **C: The Practical Dimension**

**The Point:** Take Action – **Switch to focusing on the things that matter most.** Jesus tells us not to worry about v.31 so we can worry about the more important thing – v.33. Read v.31-33. Jesus is not saying we shouldn't be concerned about anything else at all. Jesus thinks it is right to have a priority of concerns. After all, at the end of v. 25 he has already said that life is more important than food and the body is more important than clothes. But so often we have the wrong thing at top priority.

**The Application:** Seeking God's kingdom is about wanting Jesus to be King in all areas of our own lives, and wanting him to be King in other people's lives too. Seeking God's righteousness is linked, but perhaps it has more of a focus on encouraging God's standards in society. The HTB mission – "the evangelisation of the nations and the transformation of society" – very much fits in with seeking first God's kingdom and God's righteousness.

**MINISTRY IDEA:** Encourage everyone to stand. Thank God for how big he is, that he is our Heavenly Father, and thank him for how valuable we are to him. Encourage each person to lift up to God the particular stress they are facing. Ask God's Spirit to change our thinking - See that worry is a waste of time. Ask God's Spirit to change our feelings - Savour God's greatness and our great value to him. Ask God's Spirit to change our actions - Switch to focusing on the things that matter most.

If any particular people facing huge stress at the moment, get them in the centre one at a time and have everyone pray for them. Then pray in 2s/3s.