

SESSION 2 – REST

Say an opening prayer

Let's start this session by getting a couple of facts in place.

First. **Hard work is a good thing.**

The Bible is very negative about idleness

Proverbs 6:6 says **Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider it's ways and be wise –**

The challenge to the idle is very strong – it's a challenge of course not to the involuntary unemployed person – but the voluntary unemployed person. It's a challenge to the idle rich rather than the unemployed poor.

The Bible is negative about idleness and it is positive about hard work

We worked night and day, says Paul to the Thessalonians – labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

The Bible says – Hard Work is a good thing.

But, second, it also says - **Rest is a good thing**

We are to rest – because God himself rested.

The fourth commandment – Exodus 20:8

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

In the New Testament, I think we see that there is no longer a need to be legalistic about the Sabbath. The Sabbath day actually points to the rest we now enjoy in the gospel. But the Sabbath pattern still offers us a good guide on how to take rest.

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened said Jesus – and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

So as we think about rest – the absence of rest is not the presence of hard work. No the absence of rest is the presence of burdens – burdens of sin, and burdens of the stress of life.

And we're going to think particularly about the burdens of stress in our lives in this session.

Now – I don't know what you list as your other interests on your CV?

Reading, Sport, Music, Going to the cinema, Cooking.

But possibly not Free-diving. There are two main challenges with the sport of freediving – if you can call it a sport. The first challenge is being able to hold your breath for a long time. Freedivers can hold their breath for 4 or 5 minutes. I tried to see how long I could do – I conked out after about X seconds. But secondly – and more critically – the challenge with free diving is to be able to manage the greater pressure that is exerted on you as you go further and further down into the water. Freedivers have to learn how to equalise the pressure in their ears and sinuses and mask so they are able to keep going down further and further into the water despite the pressure increasing.

Now I tell you about freediving because I think it 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. Not from diving deep down into a giant cylinder of water whilst looking like a mermaid – but increased pressure just from the circumstances of life at any given time. Increased pressure in a relationship. Increased pressure because we are moving house. Increased pressure because we are ill. Increased pressure because we have financial worries. Increased pressure because we are late to catch a train. Or increased pressure because of what is going on for us at work – a nightmare boss, too much work with unrealistic deadlines, we feel undervalued, we feel the threat of unemployment.

All of those – they're examples of when we are like that free-diver – diving deep into the water and experiencing increased pressure.

You see a definition of stress is this -
Stress is the reaction of mind and body to increased pressure.

And for our purposes – as we think about Stress as a negative concept - stress happens when we feel we are unable to cope with the increased pressure we are facing.

And as a result we have a negative reaction of mind and body.

So when we are stressed, the stress can show itself psychologically – in the mind. We become distracted, we are unable to concentrate, we get anxious, we become aggressive, we become irrational, we become self-absorbed. We lose perspective.

And stress can also show itself physically too – in the body. Not being able to eat, not being able to sleep, tightness around the chest. When I'm too stressed I start feeling tight round here. It's not a heart attack, but it's a warning sign to me that I am starting not to cope.

Stress can effect anyone and everyone. Stress afflicts even the finest and most able. And the effects of stress are no small thing.

Research from Harvard University says work stress is as harmful to health as smoking or taking no exercise.

The Institute of Personnel and Development says in the UK, 6.5 million working days are lost to sickness due to stress.

BUPA reckon that 270,000 people take time off work every day due to stress.

Stress has overtaken the common cold as the biggest cause of sickness from work

I guess pretty much all of us will have struggled with stress at some point or other. And there will be some of us for whom struggling with stress is a live issue right now.

Give a personal example of how you struggle with stress. For example I might say:

For me, when I am stressed it results in me waking up in the middle of the night and not being able to get back to sleep. My wife also tells me – and she's right – that when I am feeling like things are out of control in my work, then I compensate by being too much of a control freak in the home – being a dictator of a parent etc. And when stress has been happening for a period of time, if I am not careful I start feeling tightness around my chest. It's not a sign that I am about to have a heart attack, but it is a sign that I am beginning not to cope.

Encourage people to get into pairs and discuss the following two questions:

BUZZ GROUPS:

Where are you experiencing, or have you experienced, increased pressure?
How have you reacted physically and emotionally to this increased pressure?

So what's the solution when we feel stressed because of an increased pressure? Can the pressure be managed like the freediver manages and equalises the increased pressure as they dive down?

Well stress management – as it's called, is big business. If you look into it, you'll read various suggestions of techniques for managing stress such as meditation, progressive relaxation, cognitive therapy, stress balls, time management.

You'll read of little tips such as accepting offers of practical help, talking to someone, taking a holiday, hitting a pillow to let off steam. [My favourite tip for stress that I've read was diffusing lemon extract into the air.... According to research, computer keyboard errors have been shown to fall by over 50% when lemon is diffused into the office atmosphere.](#)

Now I don't want to knock all of those things I have just mentioned – although I'm not going to be handing out free samples of lemon extract at the end. Just magic stars. But I do think there is a big big flaw with all the things I have just said. And the big flaw is this.

All these remedies try to deal with the symptoms of stress. The symptoms. What we can see on the surface.

Whereas Jesus' teaching in our passage goes straight to the underlying cause. He tells us how we can manage our stress. At the deep underlying causal level.

It's a challenging teaching from Jesus – he is drawing a division between two groups of people. It's not a division between those who face stressful situations and those that don't. No - we all face stressful situations.

No the division is based on how we cope with the stressful situations. And the challenge for many of us here is that Jesus says that many of us who think of ourselves as very religious, very Christian, actually when it comes to the area of worry and stress, actually we act just like the person who is not a Christian.

So it is a challenge to us who are Christians – but it is also a passage of huge help because Jesus gives us stress management in three dimensions.

And the first dimension is this:

The Intellectual Dimension

And it's an intellectual dimension because Jesus is simply giving us a lesson in logic. And as he does this – Jesus wants us to use our brains – and **see that Worry is a waste of time.**

Have a look at verse 27 –

27 Who of you by worrying – says Jesus - can add a single hour to his life?

Jesus says we can't add anything to our lives by worrying. Worry can only subtract from our lives by causing things like ill health.
It's foolish to worry.

Or look at verse 34 – the last verse.

34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

So worry – it is about tomorrow, but it is experienced today. When we worry – we are stressed in the present about some event that may – or may not - happen in the future.

Listen to what John Stott has written about this verse – he says “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”.

So it's a waste of time – and effort and emotion - to worry.

The second dimension of Jesus' stress management appeals not so much to our intellect as to our emotions. This is **The Emotional Dimension** to stress and worry.

Have a look at verse 26, would you.

26Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Birds work hard. But they display activity without anxiety.

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.

The birds trust a Creator in a way that we human beings seem incapable of trusting our Heavenly Father.

Give an illustration about a child trusting a father. For example I use the illustration below about my daughter.

When our daughter was a few months shy of her second birthday, I remember we went on a family holiday in Cornwall with my parents. She loved going in the sea so much that her grandparents bought her her very own tiny surfboard.

She was a little confused about it – she referred to it as her ironing board. But despite the confusion in vocabulary, she loved going surfing. I'd hold her on her board and she'd catch some small waves in the water. In fact she loved it so much, that again and again, when we weren't in the sea, she just ran into the sea and pointed out to sea and shouted 'Out, out!', and she headed straight out.

Obviously this was not entirely safe, so I'd have to charge into the sea after her, and then out to sea we would go together, with me holding her hand as she walked out right up to her neck, and then with me pulling her up out of the water as each wave reached her so she wouldn't go completely under.

Partly this kamikaze behaviour was because she seemed to be an adrenaline junkie thrill seeker. But partly it was because she trusted me, her dad.

So she didn't mind charging into the sea when she was only 20 months and couldn't swim.

She didn't mind walking almost out of her depth in the sea.

She didn't mind waves much bigger than her coming her way.

Because she trusted that I would look after her. She trusted me because, imperfect though I am, she knew she had a dad who loves her and values her.

And so how much more should we who are Christians here trust and rely on our perfect Heavenly Father.

I won't always be able to protect my daughter in everything she gets up to in life. I won't be around all the time. I'll make mistakes and do the wrong thing or say the wrong thing.

But we, as Christians, have a great God. A Heavenly Father who looks after us perfectly. Who won't necessarily wrap us in cotton wool – but who will always be with us and always do what is best for us and care for us in the best way.

If we start actually believing that – then we will be able to manage our stress far better - because we will not be people of little faith in a little God. No - we have a Heavenly Father who is more than big enough to take care of every little detail of our lives that we get so worried and so stressed out about.

So we have a great God - but also just look at the phrase Jesus repeats in this passage. Look at verse 26 again.

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

And then look at verse 28 where he talks about lilies and grass rather than birds.

28"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Are you not much more valuable than they?
Will he not much more clothe you

Much more. Jesus wants us to realise – not only how great and mighty our Heavenly Father is, but also he wants us to realise how much more valuable and precious we are to Him than anything else in his creation. Our great value.

Jesus tells us to look at the birds, the flowers, the grass of the field. And we all love to look at beautiful things in this world. But so often we go and draw the wrong conclusion. We think that God must be really present in that spectacular setting, or that he must really care about that beautiful view.

And then we look at ourselves in the mirror and in most cases – it's not such a beautiful view – and we just can't believe that God cares for us and the details of our little lives.

What rubbish says Jesus. What absolute rubbish.

It cost God just a word to create this world.
But it cost God the life of Jesus to bring you and I into relationship with Him.

Christ's first priority in his death was not to rescue the blue whale or the lesser spotted kingfisher or the Niagara Falls. Christ's first priority in his death was to rescue you and me.

How much more valuable are we to God.

And it's when we combine the greatness of God with the great value he places on us, it's then that we feel the full force of the emotional dimension of Jesus' stress management.

Because we see that Jesus wants me, and Jesus wants you - to **savour how valuable we are to our heavenly Father.**

And I really do mean savour it. Let our emotions be helped and buoyed up by God's greatness and our great value.

Emphasise that this is your own challenge, and not just their challenge. For example, I will say:

And please hear this - I am teaching this to myself just as much as to any of you. I get stressed and I worry far too much. Just ask my wife. About the future. About provision for me and the family. About decisions to be made. I worry. I need to hear this lesson – just as I guess many of you do too.

So we've had the intellectual dimension and the emotional dimension in Jesus' stress management..

Let's finish with third dimension – the **Practical Dimension to stress**

Give an example of how someone doesn't need to worry about one thing which enables them to worry about something else which is more critical. For example, I use this illustration:

A few years ago I was walking to a meeting with someone – when as I was standing on the corner of two streets, some police motorbikes pulled up directly in front of me and stopped all the traffic, allowing three smart black cars to drive past without having to stop.

And as the cars turned the corner right next to me, who should I see through the darkened windows of the back seat of the first car, it must have been just a couple of metres away from me – who should I see but our former Prime Minister – Gordon Brown.

He had some papers on his lap – and was talking to someone on his mobile phone.

Now I don't know what you would think in such a situation. But I must admit that my first thought as Gordon and his entourage sped away, was – it's rather sad this – my first thought was – lucky Gordon – he doesn't need to worry about traffic jams when driving through London.

But it's true isn't it. With the police stopping all the traffic – Gordon didn't need to worry about being held up or late for a meeting. And it enabled him rather to worry about more important matters – whatever his papers and his phone conversation was about – the fight against terror, the state of the nhs, I don't know.

And in a way Jesus is saying a similar thing to us here.

Gordon doesn't worry about the traffic – so he can worry about the more important thing - terrorism.

Jesus says to us don't worry about v.31 so we can worry about the more important thing – v.33.

31So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33But – verse 33 this is what to worry about – this is what to put your energies into - seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,

You see in one way we have been made to worry and stress. We're not supposed to just float aimlessly through life. But so often our focus is on the wrong things.

Jesus says the practical dimension to stress management - what we are to do - is to switch our perspective. Our salary, our health, our prospects, our children's prospects – they so often dominate our thinking. Jesus says No - **Switch to focusing on the things that matter most.**

And Jesus says two things matter most - God's kingdom and God's righteousness. He says – seek them first.

He's 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 verse 25 he has already said that life is more

important that food and the body is more important than clothes. So – yes it is right to be concerned about other things. To have a priority of concern.

But so often we have the wrong thing at top priority.

What is your top concern at the moment? What is dominating your thinking?

Are you stressing about how much you should be being paid? It is important – but it is not of first importance.

Are you stressing about who you're going to marry? It is important – but it is not of first importance.

Are you stressing about which dress you should wear at the party next weekend? It is important - but it is not of first importance. (adapt these to suit the situations of your pastorate)

Switch to focusing on the things that matter most.

Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness.

And seeking God's kingdom – I take to mean desiring the spread of Jesus – who is the King of the Kingdom. It means wanting Jesus to be King – to rule - in all areas of our own lives – and wanting him to be King in other people's lives too.

And then seeking God's righteousness. It's linked – but perhaps it has more of a focus on encouraging God's standards in society – not so much about the rule of God as about our right living for God.

And so Jesus says it is those two things – God's kingdom and God's righteousness. His rule. Our right living. Those are the things that matter most.

And Jesus actually says - if we do put God's kingdom and God's righteousness first then – the rest of life actually begins to fall into shape.

Look at verse 33 **seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

All these other things do have a place in our life. But not first place.

So – as we close – I wonder if you might hold in your mind the thing that is stressing you out most at the moment. The area where you feel like that free diver experiencing increased pressure, and you're feeling like you can't cope.

And would you apply Jesus' three dimensions of stress management to this area of your life. For a few of you that may mean needing to get right away from the pressure, to swim back to the surface, perhaps to quit your job because of all the stress it is causing.

But for the majority of you it will mean remaining in your working situation – remaining in it but

In your thinking - See that worry is a waste of time.

In your feelings - Savour how valuable you are to your heavenly Father.

In your actions - Switch to focusing on the things that matter most

And I think you'll agree that these three dimensions are the best stress management technique on the market today.

But money can't buy this stress management package.

No – it is simply a free bonus gift for the person who trusts in the one true God.

MINISTRY TIME:

Pray centrally for everyone – particularly for those who are currently experiencing a high degree of unrest and stress.

Have a time of waiting for the Spirit to give particular words/verses/pictures that might be relevant to specific people in specific situations.

Determine who responds to the Bible teaching and is struggling with unrest and stress, or who responds to the words/verses/pictures – and encourage others to pray for these people