

Working Challenges

Six sessions on the Sermon on the Mount looking at key challenges at work

Week 6: Our Life at Work (Matthew 7:13-8:3)

ICEBREAKER: What has been the biggest encouragement or the biggest challenge or the biggest help in this series on Working Challenges?

1. Be Clear! Today is Decision Time (7:13-14)

The illustration: Give an example of a time that you were faced with a decision between two options – where the seemingly more attractive option would actually lead to disaster (e.g. whether to revise for an exam or not).

The point: Read v.13-14. In life, Jesus says there are two gates, two roads, two destinations, two groups of people. There is no third way. One road is broad with easy entry and no boundaries. You can do what you like, living a life of ease without having to keep the standards Jesus has just set out in this sermon. There are loads of people on this road – it's great fun. The other road is narrow. It's narrow to enter. There are boundaries, and the going is much more difficult. We're required to do what Jesus says. There are only a few people on the road. On the face of it – we'd all choose the broad road. It seems the attractive option, until we realise the destinations of the two roads. Broad is the road that leads to destruction. Narrow the road that leads to life.

The application:

- a) If there are any in the pastorate who have not committed their lives to Jesus, you can give an encouragement to enter the narrow gate.
- b) You can be clear on the cost. There is lots that is wonderful about being a Christian, but it is not a life of ease. The Christian is looking to have Jesus as Lord of every area of their life – their relationships, their time, their wallets, their attitudes, their work. And that has a cost. I am no longer Lord of my own life. Jesus is.
- c) You can encourage. Jesus knows how tough it is as a Christian. We may be amongst other Christians in pastorate, but back in our workplaces, most of us are in the minority as Christians. We feel the fact that there are few others on the road much more acutely at work.

BUZZ GROUPS: When, at work or in other bits of life, does the narrow road of being a Christian seem most of a struggle for you? What practically can you do in these times?

2. Be Watchful! Today could be Deception Time (7:15-20)

The point: Read v.15-20. False teachers can distort the Christian gospel.

The application: Don't be swayed by the superficial externals of a leader (someone being a vicar or a bishop or a professor; someone with outward charm, or intellect, or good looks). Rather look beneath the surface at the fruit of their lives. By their fruit you will recognize them (v.16 and v.20)

3. Be Self-aware! Today could be Delusion Time (7:21-27)

The illustration: Give an example of when you have been driving along a road thinking you were going in one direction, when you discovered you were going a completely different direction.

The point: Jesus says we need to check that we are not deluding ourselves as to which road we are actually on. There are two ways we could do this:

3a. Saying but not doing (7:21-23)

The illustration: Read v.21-23. Give some modern day examples of v.21-23. E.g. Lord, Lord, did I not read my Bible in One Year every day. Lord, Lord, did I not go on the prayer ministry course and heal 8 people before breakfast.

The point: Verse 21 is the challenge. It's no good saying Jesus is our Lord, if we are not actually looking to submit to Him as Lord of our lives. Saying but not doing is no good says Jesus. We need to be saying and doing.

3b. Hearing but not doing (7:24-27)

BUZZ GROUPS: What are the similarities and what are the differences between the wise and foolish builders in vv.24-27?

The point: There are plenty of similarities between the two builders. The difference only becomes apparent when the storm comes. Putting Jesus' words into practice is the key. Hearing but not doing is no good says Jesus. We need to be hearing and doing.

The application: In the Sermon on the Mount, we have heard Jesus' words loud and clear. Particularly regarding the workplace – how we relate to colleagues, how we deal with stress, our attitude to money etc. Have we been putting this into practice?

BUZZ GROUPS: If a member of the pastorate were a fly on the wall of your workplace, would they be surprised by what they saw of you? In other words, are you a person with integrity between your words and your actions, between your externals and what is going on in your heart, and between how you live at church and at work?

4. Be Amazed! Today is Dependence Time (7:28-8:4)

The point: Read 7:28-29. Jesus' sermon is a challenge, yet the crowds are amazed at his teaching. Jesus' words are not meant to drive us to despair, but to dependence on him. We are left in a similar position to the man with leprosy. Read 8:1-4. When we see Jesus' standards and how often we fall short, we can only cry out – "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

The application: Depending on Jesus is how we enter through the narrow gate, and depending on Jesus is how we continue on the narrow road. Let's depend on Jesus for the strength to live as cleansed people as we look to battle with the sin in our lives and obey all that Jesus says. We can depend on him for our life at work and for our life outside of work.

MINISTRY IDEA: Read Matthew 7:7-11. Get each person to depend on Jesus and ask God for the good gift they need from their Heavenly Father to live for him in the challenges of their working situation. Pray for one another to receive what they need.

Pray the Lord's prayer a line at a time (Matthew 6:9-13) – and encourage individuals to speak out short prayers to their Heavenly Father relevant to all the teaching and discussion during this series of studies.