

Session Two - Be still



Introduction

Even when we are good at coping, life is often like a terrifying rollercoaster ride which we can't get off. Quite often we rush from one activity to another or one crisis to another, without taking time out to think and reflect. Sometimes this can mean that we feel more overwhelmed by events, and so are less able to cope with them even if we do have some good skills in place. Today we are going to look at three ways of taking time out for a breather and for us to be able to get some perspective on our difficulties, and so hopefully be able to cope more effectively. We start with looking at how we promote relaxation.

1. Relaxation

When we are stressed or under pressure the muscles in our body tense up which can feel physically uncomfortable. It also causes many systems of the body to speed up, and it becomes harder to concentrate and think clearly. If we can learn to 'switch on' relaxation, we can 'switch off' the tension and poor concentration which is reducing our ability to cope.

The simplest relaxation exercise can be done in any circumstances, and involves a three-point check: **jaw, shoulders, hands**.

*Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.*

(Psalm 46, 10)

Jaw - Notice how your teeth may be clenched and your jaw tight. Drop your jaw and waggle it, mouth slightly open.

Shoulders - Notice how high and tense your shoulders are. Drop them downwards and backwards, with a little shake to reduce tension.

Hands - Notice how closed your hands are. Open them out and turn them upwards.

If you have a little more time and somewhere quiet then try the following, called 'autogenic relaxation':

Close your eyes and slow your breathing. Each time you breathe out let a little more tension out of your body. Then concentrate on each part of your body, noticing any tension there and telling yourself to release the tension from it. Start with your feet, then ankles, knees and so on up to your neck, jaw, and lastly the skin around your eyes.

This process will normally take around 15 minutes, and should leave you feeling very relaxed all over. Try not to rush off, but to keep the sense of calm with you as you move on with your day.

Keeping Health in Mind produces a resource called "Breathe", offering a breathing space for anyone wanting time out from the busyness of life.

Guided meditations and relaxation exercises are also available to buy at on-line bookstores. We recommend **www.christianmindfulness.co.uk** but there are many to choose from.



2. Jesus Prayer

This is a short prayer that has been used for centuries to still the mind, promoting calm and an awareness of God.

Position yourself as comfortably as possible, close your eyes if the situation allows and take a slow, long breath in. Then as you slowly release that breath, say quietly **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”**. Let all the air out, and then repeat, slowly. If you do this for around fifteen minutes daily you will soon find that you are able to use this technique during the day without having to leave the situation you are in.



3. Mindfulness

Often we will be so stuck in thinking about past events or worrying about future ones that we do not cope well with the present. Learning to focus on one thing at a time can be really helpful. It is useful to know:

- We think more clearly when calm and relaxed.
- We don't need be afraid to think about one thing at a time until we have achieved some resolution. Multi-tasking is seen as a desirable skill, but it can often stop us from fully attending to issues that we are struggling with. Be aware that anything from washing-up to churchgoing can be used as an unhelpful distraction if they allow us to avoid the situation in hand or overload us.
- Often our past experiences will influence how we cope in the present. For example, if we previously tried to do something and failed, and then

felt bad about it, we are less likely to try the same thing again, imagining that the same will happen in the future. This fear of events repeating themselves can stop us from moving forwards and coping more effectively. So it is really important to try to focus on the moment in hand, rather than thinking back to past events that we cannot change or future events that have yet to happen.

Some other useful principles to be aware of are:

- Try to do what will be helpful for you in a difficult situation rather than what you think is fair. Choose wisely which battles to fight. Sometimes people may not respond in the way we want them to or we may feel that the situation is unfair, but we can only cope with the situations we are given, not those we wish we were in. This may require of us that we play by the rules even if they're unfair, or sacrifice principles to achieve a goal. Remember, Jesus taught us which principles are most important: "Love your God with all your being, and your neighbour as yourself."
- Remember we cannot control the responses of others, we can only respond in a way that maintains our integrity. Try to always treat others as you would wish to be treated and how God wants us to treat them. Act graciously and lovingly.
- Don't judge others; if you are aware that your judgements are getting in the way of you coping effectively try to focus on just the facts of the situation you are in. God is the only one who is actually entitled to judge other people.



Homework

Reflect on what we have discussed today; practise the relaxation exercises and try to apply the mindfulness principle of only focussing on one thing at a time to a difficult situation over the next week. Be ready to share it next week.

Lord God. We often live lives without focus. Help us to accept our past, to live in our present, and to anticipate a glorious future. Amen

Notes

