

Working Challenges

Six sessions on the Sermon on the Mount looking at key challenges at work
Week 3: Our Colleagues at Work (Matthew 5:21-48)

ICEBREAKER: Ask everyone to think of their most difficult colleague at work. Discuss in 3s what makes them so difficult. Feedback centrally on who has got the most difficult colleague!

Introductory Illustration: The comedy series, the Office, starring Ricky Gervais. Just as the series Friends was called Friends because it was about the relationships between different friends, so the Office could just as easily have been called Colleagues because it is all about the relationships between different colleagues.

- The dissatisfied with life colleague. Tim. Played by Martin Freeman.
- The frustrating colleague. Gareth. Who gets on everyone's nerves.
- The attractive colleague. Dawn. Who Tim fancies, but she's engaged to someone else.
- The nightmare colleague. The boss. David Brent. Played by Ricky Gervais.

The programme was so popular because we can all relate to people in our workplaces who are like each one of the characters.

1. How to relate to frustrating colleagues – like Gareth (v.21-26)

The illustration: Give an example of a frustrating colleague of yours, and how you feel angry with them.

The point: Read v.21-26. Jesus says we need **Quick Reconciliation rather than Growing Anger**. If we leave anger unchecked, it can quickly reach devastating levels and cause untold disaster. As Christians in the workplace, we need to take the initiative in being reconciled with our colleagues, even our frustrating ones.

BUZZ GROUPS: Discuss whether there are any colleagues you need to be reconciled with. Discuss practically how you are going to seek reconciliation.

2. How to relate to attractive colleagues – like Dawn (or man version!) (v.27-30)

The point: Read v.27-30. Some of us will have failed in what Jesus says in Matthew 5:27. But even if we haven't, all of us will have fallen at the very next hurdle – Matthew 5:28. As Jesus performs his heart scan on us, it becomes clear that we have all committed heart adultery. Looking lustfully must include thinking about someone - "you're attractive and I want you to find me attractive" - when that person is not someone we could seriously consider as a marriage partner because a) they are married, b) you are married or c) they are not a Christian.

Jesus suggests we need **Radical Decisions rather than Casual Lust**. It needs to be radical because Jesus says that failure to take this seriously means we're in danger of hell. He says that sexual sin can lead us down a path to somewhere where there is actually no connection to him at all (v.30).

The illustration: Give an example of how you have committed heart adultery at work. Or remind people of the example of Joseph in Genesis 39 with Potiphar's wife. He didn't flirt with casual lust. He fled from it. He made a Radical Decision.

The application: Jesus doesn't mean a literal, physical self-maiming. After all, if I gouge my right eye out, I can still commit heart adultery with my left eye! But he does mean that we should make radical decisions about what we look at (our eyes – v.29) and what we do (our hands – v.30).

BUZZ GROUPS: Discuss in single sex groups how we are doing in this area. Are there practical steps we need to take over what we do with our eyes (e.g. the glances, the internet sites) or with our hands (e.g. not spending prolonged time with people we find attractive, not going on business trips when it is just the two of us, not developing an 'exclusive' relationship with them in our conversations/lunchbreaks/emails).

3. How to relate to nightmare colleagues – like David Brent (v.33-48)

The illustration: We all have nightmare colleagues. The question is how should we respond to them. One website about office politics gives this testimony about their nightmare boss - "After repeated torrents of verbal abuse, I have to confess to, on two occasions, putting laxative in my manager's tea at mid morning tea break"

The point: Jesus' suggestion is a little different. Read v.38-39, 43-44. He suggests we need **Practical Love rather than Rightful Revenge**. He calls us to show this love for two reasons: a) It marks us as in God's family (v.45), and b) It marks us out from the world around us (v.46-47)

BUZZ GROUPS: Discuss how you can show practical love to your nightmare colleagues

Conclusion:

QU: What is the repeated phrase in all of the sections from 5:21-48?

"You have heard that it was said – but I tell you...."

QU: What is Jesus saying by using this phrase?

Jesus is taking us away from the external legalistic law, and taking us on a journey from the external action through our body - on a journey to our hearts. It leaves us in a place of dissatisfaction with ourselves (like Tim in the Office) – not able to "be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect" (v.48).

This dissatisfaction is a good place to be. As we are dissatisfied with ourselves, we can again throw ourselves on the mercy and grace of Jesus. We deserve his growing anger, but because of the cross, we can know reconciliation. We deserve his rightful revenge, but at the cross, he displays his practical love for us. It is a love that is not just a passing fad like a casual lust, but a love that involved a radical decision to go to the cross and pay the punishment for our sins.

When we are comforted by how Jesus has treated us, that comfort is the spur, in the power of the Spirit, for us to treat our colleagues in the same way that Jesus treats us.

MINISTRY IDEA: Spend a time of silent confession for where people have had wrong attitudes and actions towards their colleagues (individuals could write them down on paper and then throw in a bin).
Speak out forgiveness in Jesus name, marvel at his love for us, and pray for His Spirit to transform attitudes and actions towards colleagues.

[See chapter 7 in *Working without Wilting* by Jago Wynne (IVP) for more info]