



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Stressed Out / Week 2

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

BOTTOM LINE

Trade your stress for His strength.

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students understand that they have the power to trade their fear of what others think for a bigger foundation of joy and purpose.

SCRIPTURE

Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe (Proverbs 29:25 NIV).

CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE

In this verse, Solomon reminds us that fearing man in any way—which includes fearing what others think about us—

will end up trapping us. It will snare us and prevent us from making progress in our lives. On the other hand, when we trust in God (instead of fearing man), we're kept safe. Safe from what? Safe from the snare and the fear of man. When we're free from the snare, we're free to move forward and move in the direction God is leading.

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

In this series, we've been talking about things that create anxiety, worry, and fear in our lives.

If stress is inevitable in our lives, then the best thing we can do is learn to deal with it in a healthy and helpful way.

TENSION

I think if we were honest, we'd admit that one of the things that can stress us out more than anything else is the awareness of how we fit in, or *don't* fit in, compared to everybody else.

Ultimately, I think this stressor really boils down to one thing: self-consciousness.

Awareness of yourself + your perception of how much other people accept or reject you = stress.

Here's another way that self-consciousness leads to stress: other people's expectations of YOU.

If we're going to handle stress in a healthy way, we have to figure out how to live our lives with other people watching.

TRUTH

Thousands of years ago, King Solomon, often thought of as the wisest man who ever lived, talked about this tension.

King Solomon knew what it was like to constantly live aware of what people thought of him.



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TEACHING OUTLINE

When King Solomon wrote wise sayings, which he did a lot, he would often contrast two statements against each other.

A “snare” is a trap. And what does that trap do? It keeps you where you are.

Some of you can already see how your stress—due to expectations or self-consciousness—has trapped you and kept you where you are.

When you trade your stressed-out self-consciousness, for a bigger foundation of joy and purpose, which comes from God, you get un-trapped.

Trade your stress for His strength.

See, I think we could all throw out a bunch of words to fill in this sentence: *THE OPPOSITE OF STRESSED OUT IS* _____.

When we trade our stress for His strength, those things are possible.

APPLICATION

One of the most important ways to keep this trap from overpowering you is to **identify it**.

First, identify the trap. Then, identify the trapper.

We have to quit giving up! When we ask God for His help, we are so much stronger than we think we are. God is bigger than the trap.

LANDING

God is with you. So trade your stress for His strength.

INTERACTIVE

This Interactive happens during the Introduction. Search for “happy gif” or “relaxed gif” online and choose five. Search for “stressed out gif” and choose five. Create five PowerPoint slides and place a “happy/relaxed gif” on the left side of the slide and a “stressed out gif” on the right of the slide. (If you’re not sure how to animate gifs in a PowerPoint slide, Google can help.) Read the statements below and tell students to move to the right or left side of the room based on which gif best describes how they feel in response to your statement.

1. School starts tomorrow.
2. Your teacher assigned a group project.
3. Your mom texts, “Call me. I have a surprise for you.”
4. Your final exam grade is based on a class presentation.
5. SAT/ACT scores come in the mail.
6. Seniors, this one is for you. You graduate in [insert exact number of weeks].
7. Freshmen, this one is for you. You graduate in [insert exact number of weeks].
8. Your folks are busy tonight. Dinner is up to you.
9. Your math teacher says, “I have your quiz grades.”
10. Youth group is tonight. (Hopefully they all go to the happy/relaxed side!)



TEACHING SCRIPT

Stressed Out / Week 2

PRELUDE

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BOTTOM LINE

TRADE YOUR STRESS FOR HIS STRENGTH.

INTRODUCTION

1 MINUTE + INTERACTIVE

In this series, *Stressed Out*, we've been talking about things that create anxiety, worry, and fear in our lives.

For example, have you ever . . .

- Had a mean teacher who made your heart race?
- Had an angry coach or director who made your neck or shoulders feel tight?
- Had a dating relationship that made you nauseous with worry?
- Had a fight at home that made you physically shake from frustration?
- Had an upcoming assignment or test that made it impossible for you to fall sleep?



INTERACTIVE

The Interactive for this message happens right here in the script. Check out the Communicator Guide that precedes this script to find out what to do here.

This list could go on and on, but you get the idea: That's stress. And we FEEL things that stress us out both emotionally **and** physically.

This series is all about how to handle the stress villains.

Maybe after last week you're thinking, *This is totally depressing to talk about*. And you're right. Stress is no fun to think about. But the point of this series isn't to stress you out more. The point is to give you some tools to use when you feel those stressors showing up—things that will help you relax and live a more abundant life.



Because if stress is inevitable in our lives, then the best thing we can do is learn to deal with it in a healthy and helpful way.

TENSION

4 MINUTES

I think if we were honest, we'd admit that one of the things that can stress us out more than anything else is the awareness of how we fit in, or *don't* fit in, compared to everybody else. We might use a lot of different words to describe what that is, but ultimately, I think this stressor really boils down to one thing:

Self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness is what drives us to ask ourselves questions like . . .

- Am I funny enough?
- Am I athletic enough?
- Am I popular enough?
- Am I cool enough?
- Do I look good enough?

If you think you're not self-conscious and you don't care, let me bring up one word: **Acne.** As a teenager, when I had acne (which was a lot!), I became immediately aware of myself—particularly my face—when I was around others. *That's* self-consciousness. And unless you have magical unicorn skin, you're gonna deal with acne.

Self-consciousness makes you aware of multiple things:

- You.
- Other people seeing you.
- And how you think other people perceive you.

And all of these realizations happen at once! If you've ever been fixated on your own acne simply because you know you're about to be around a bunch of people, you understand self-consciousness. And you know how much it can stress a person out!

Awareness of yourself + your perception of how much other people accept or reject you = stress.

But it's not just our physical appearance that can create a sense of self-consciousness. Have you ever been left out when your friends were hanging out? Left out of a party? Left out of a trip to Taco Bell? In that moment, you became aware of something: *I wasn't invited.* You become aware that you didn't fit in enough to be asked to join. That someone thought you weren't good enough to be included. Or, you weren't thought about at all!

Yep. Self-consciousness. And stress. No fun!

Here's another way that self-consciousness leads to stress:

Other people's expectations of YOU.



- Let's say you play a **sport**. Outside of rare exceptions, you probably have coaches who expect you (and push you) to perform at a certain level. Chances are they're just trying to get the best out of you, but it still feels like a pressure that stresses you out, doesn't it?
- Maybe you have a parent or stepparent who expects you to make certain **grades**. Or get into a certain college. Or dress and act a certain way. Or follow in their footsteps. Or pursue a future that they wish they could've gone after themselves. Sometimes they don't even have to say a word; you know what they're hoping you will do, and it stresses you out.
- Maybe you have people who expect you to be a **leader**. And when you're not, you get stressed out because you feel like you're letting them down.
- The same could be true at **church**. There's this expectation that you're going to be a leader in your youth group. If you don't, you feel stressed out. Or if you do, you feel stressed out because you're always aware of ways that you could be better or do more.

These tensions, for the most part, revolve around other people that we're around ALL THE TIME. So if we're going to handle stress in a healthy way, we have to figure out how to live our lives with other people watching.

The good news is, what we're about to look at will help!

TRUTH

4 MINUTES

You may feel a little better knowing that people have been struggling with stress for a long time. In fact, thousands of years ago, King Solomon, often thought of as the wisest man who ever lived, talked about this tension.

King Solomon may not have stressed about not being included in a group text, but he knew what it was like to constantly live aware of what people thought of him. Think about it. He was a *king*. People had all kinds of thoughts about . . .

- Him.
- The people he ruled.
- The foreign leaders he interacted with.
- The people who worked for him.
- His family.

When you're in charge, you don't have the luxury of other people being neutral about you. Everyone has thoughts and opinions, and chances are, they aren't keeping them secret.

When King Solomon wrote wise sayings, which he did a lot, he would often contrast two statements against each other. It was his way of getting readers to pay attention to both. Why? So we'd see how one leads us to a better place, and one leads us to a place we don't ultimately want to be.

Here's the first part of one of his sayings, found in the book of *Proverbs* . . .



“Fear of man will prove to be a snare” (Proverbs 29:25a NIV).

Let’s pause here for a moment before we go to the contrasting statement. A “snare” is a trap. If you set out a mousetrap, what are you hoping to do? Catch a mouse. And what does that trap do? It keeps you where you are. It makes it impossible for you to move.

Some of you can already see how your stress—due to expectations or self-consciousness—has trapped you and kept you where you are. You feel stuck in fear, frustration, insecurity, bitterness, self-doubt, and so on.

We hate all of it, but we get stuck in it *anyway*. Why? Because that’s what traps do! Nobody gets caught in a trap and says, “Finally! This is the life I’ve always wanted!” No, they think, “This is awful! I can’t move! Help!”

So Solomon offers the alternative in his contrasting statement:

“But whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe” (Proverbs 29:25b NIV).

Kept safe from what? The trap. When you trade your stressed-out self-consciousness, which comes from worrying about what other people think, for a bigger foundation of joy and purpose, which comes from God, you get un-trapped. You rise above the joylessness of being stuck.

In other words, you . . .

Trade your stress for His strength.

See, I think we could all throw out a bunch of words to fill in this sentence:

THE OPPOSITE OF STRESSED OUT IS _____.

We could use words like . . .

- Joyful.
- Peaceful.
- Calm.
- Secure.
- Confident.
- Happy.
- Strong.
- Hopeful.

We all want those words to be reality in our life, but we don’t experience any of them when we’re trapped.

We need something else! When we trade our stress for His strength, those things are possible.

- When we stop placing our greatest value on what other people think, when we stop worrying about how other people see us, and when we stop overthinking why we weren’t included . . .
- And instead, we pursue a sense of belonging that comes from the One who made us, and pursue seeing ourselves as He sees us . . .



- Then the trap of stress and worry and self-consciousness loosens, and things like joy and peace become more possible for us to experience.

That, my friends, is trading your stress for His strength!

APPLICATION

4 MINUTES

One of the most important ways to keep this trap from overpowering you is to **identify it**. For most of us, we don't even recognize when we're being dominated by our self-consciousness and expectations. It's our natural default in how we think and see the world.

So where do we start?

Here are two steps that can help:

1. **Identify the trap.** WHAT is it that makes you most self-conscious and stressed out because of pressure and expectations? I'm going to list a few, but your trap may be something else. Hopefully this list at least helps you identify it. And don't feel embarrassed or ashamed if it feels like your trap is something silly. We're all in the same boat.

So what's your trap? Maybe it's . . .

- Your outfit or how you feel like you look that day.
- A big test or exam coming up.
- Scrolling through Instagram.
- A big game or upcoming performance.
- Lunchtime in the cafeteria.
- One particular class in your school schedule.
- Homework.
- The weekends, when people seem to be hanging out with friends.
- Listening to sermons at church.
- Every other weekend, when you stay at your dad and stepmom's house.
- College applications.
- Looking in any type of mirror.
- Gym class.

You get the idea.

Now, to the second step toward freedom:

2. **Identify the trapper.** WHO is it that makes this experience particularly stressful? Maybe it's . . .
 - Your best friend.
 - A coach or teacher.
 - A parent or stepparent.
 - The mean girls.



- The group you used to be friends with.
- Me, your student pastor!
- One particular person who intimidates you.
- Your ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend.

Again, it may be someone who's not on this list. But they're on YOUR list.

Now you've identified what and who traps you. And that's huge! There are a lot of adults who don't know how to do that. But what now? Well, let me set this final point up with a super-quick story:

There was a mom who took her son to some type of zoo, circus, or fair that had elephants as part of its attraction. And the boy noticed that the elephants were chained to the ground. After looking more carefully and watching the elephants for a while, the boy asked, "Mom, why don't the elephants just pull up that little chain, trample this little fence, and walk off? Aren't they strong enough to do that?"

The mom answered, "Of course they are. But they've been like that since they were little babies. And back when they *weren't* strong enough, they tried to fight back, but they couldn't. So eventually they gave up. So now, as fully-grown elephants, they don't even try."

This is what we do. We feel powerless because we've tried to fight it before and failed. So now we think it will be this way forever, and we allow certain people and situations to trap us over and over. And after a while, we don't fight it anymore.

We have to quit giving up! When we ask God for His help, we are so much stronger than we think we are. God is bigger than the trap. Instead of giving in, figure out what you want to experience instead, and make a plan for what to do when you feel the trap closing in on you again.

A great time to choose a different response is *before* you walk into situations or run into people who can trap you. You've identified the trap and the trapper. Before you see or encounter them, remind yourself of something bigger, higher, and more secure. Remind yourself that God is with you, and He is stronger than the trap. I often repeat the verse we looked at today over and over when I feel self-conscious and worried about what people think of me.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

The point is, you can search for something higher. You can think about something better. You can rest on something stronger. You can find your peace in something more secure. Like those elephants, you are stronger than you think you are! God is with you. **So trade your stress for His strength.**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS