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Discovering Your Freedom in Christ SESSION 3: SET FREE FROM STRESS

What we want students to learn: For students to learn that in Christ, they have been set free from the stress and anxiety of their lives. In Christ, they can know true rest.

Main Scripture: Matthew 11:28–30

Session Snapshot: One of the most defining characteristics of this generation of young people is how stressed out they are. Anxiety has reached epidemic proportions in teenagers. The stress students feel from the expectations put on them, by themselves and others, can be overwhelming. Relationships. Academics. Athletics. Money. The future. These factors (and so many more) contribute to the stress our students feel. It leaves them overwhelmed, exhausted, and sometimes, hopeless. And yet, the promise of the Gospel is rest. Rest and peace and purpose. A new way of life with a different outlook. In Matthew 11, Jesus promises rest for the weary, and freedom from the stress of our lives. THIS is a message your students need to hear.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is a focused, brief overview of some of the background info for the main passage you will be teaching.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each Small Group Leader's Guide comes with a **Teacher Prep Video**. These are simply short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your Truly Free Lesson 3 Teacher Prep Video, simply click on the link below:

Lesson 3 Teacher Prep Video (https://youtu.be/vE-Ztl_nUAY)

THE DETAILS

- **Author:** Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his Gospel.
- **Time frame:** Most people hold to Matthew's Gospel being written in the late A.D. 50s or 60s, though some think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.
- **Purpose:** Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his Gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

THE MAIN POINT

The main point for this passage is that, through saving faith in Jesus, we can have rest for our souls. Students are anxious and stressed. Jesus promises a deeper peace that can only be known when we surrender our lives to Him. It is a rest that serves as the foundation for how we see the world. When viewed through this assurance that Christ offers, the stressors of our lives pale in comparison.

THE TAKEAWAY

The takeaway is to see the rest and peace that Jesus offers in contrast to the world. Students are burdened by expectations. Some of these are their own. Many are the expectations of others. While these pressures are often quite real, and can't simply be forgotten, approaching the expectations they are under with the confidence of Jesus' promise of rest helps put these expectations in their proper place.

(It's worth noting here and elsewhere in this session that some of your students may struggle with anxiety that has its source in their biology and not simply their circumstances. For a student who struggles with clinical anxiety, they must get treatment by a licensed health professional. The beautiful truth of the Gospel is that their eternal peace and rest is assured in Jesus. But for some, anxiety is a physiological issue that needs to be treated like any other illness. These students need to see the spiritual care that God offers as the foundation for the physical care that counseling and potentially medication offers.)

LESSON PLAN

The **Lesson Plan** contains three elements: an introductory activity called **Getting Started**; the Bible study section called **Digging In**; and an application-focused segment called **Wrapping Up**.

GETTING STARTED

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This lesson will utilize pages 21-25 in the **Truly Free** Student Book.
 - This activity will use page 21-22.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - None

FIRST, have students turn to page 22 in their Student Books. Explain that in the world we live in, stress is just a part of our everyday lives. We don't even realize it half the times, but we walk around stressed to the max. It's just normal! Explain to students that you're going to spend some time talking about what stresses them out.

THEN, direct their attention to the categories on page 22. Have them take a moment to choose which category causes them the most stress. This should be a light-hearted discussion and shouldn't get too serious too soon. Have them look at the categories, and if one doesn't represent their number 1 cause of stress, have them come up with their own for the "?" blank. When they've had a moment to think, call out the categories, and have them vote on which one causes the most stress.

NEXT, instruct them to take a moment, and for the category, they've chosen, write down a specific thing in that category that causes them stress. (For example, if they chose the "social media" category, they might write "Feeling like I have to have the perfect picture or caption.") Give them a few minutes to come up with their answer, then allow time for them to share.

FINALLY, when everyone has gone, read the intro to Session 3 from page 21. When you've finished, transition to the **Digging In** section of your lesson.

DIGGING IN

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This activity will utilize pages 23-24 in the **Truly Free** Student Book.
- **Additional Instructions**

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- o You'll want to make sure students have something to write with, and a Bible or Bible app.

FIRST, instruct students to turn to page 23. Explain that you are going to be working through three relatively short verses, but that these verses contain POWERFUL truth. Have them turn to Matthew 11:28-30 in their Bibles or Bible apps. While they are finding the passage, provide some context for the book using the "Details" portion of your Lesson Plan. When students have located the passage, read or have a volunteer read Matthew 11:28-30.

When you finish, direct students' attention to verse 28. Have a student re-read the verse aloud. Then, work through the questions below the verse with them. The questions and answers are listed below:

- **What are the things that make you tired?**
 - o Answers will vary. Allow students a moment to write down their list. Then, lead them in a brief discussion of their answers. Make sure you highlight the different kinds of tired. There is the physical tiredness that comes from exertion. There is an emotional exhaustion that comes from any sort of relational stress. There is mental exhaustion that happens when they study for tests or experience rigorous academic exercises. But there is also spiritual exhaustion. This happens when the weight of our sin weighs us down, or we are more aware of our sin nature as we try to pursue God.
- **What does Jesus say He offers to the tired in vs. 28?**
 - o Answer: Rest
- **Think about a deeper level of exhaustion. Think about the exhaustion that you feel from the stress and anxiety in your life. Describe how you feel when you are stressed or anxious.**
 - o Answers will vary. But make sure you highlight the fact that when Jesus says, "come to me all who are heavy laden," He's not talking about a physical burden. He's talking about our worries. The spiritual. The emotional. The mental. That's what He says to bring to Him.
- **So that we don't miss it, what does Jesus promise us if we bring our burdens to Him?**
 - o Answer: Rest!

THEN, direct their attention to the top of page 24. Explain that you're going to go a little deeper into exactly what Jesus meant. Have a student re-read vs. 29 aloud. Then, work through the questions below the verse with them. The questions and answers are listed below:

- **Do you know what Jesus meant when He said, "Take my yoke upon you"? (Hint: Jesus isn't talking about an egg's yolk.)**
 - o Answer: A yoke was sort of a wooden beam that you would place across the shoulders of an animal, an ox or a donkey, that would allow you to control them. You would attach reins to the yoke, and in this way, you essentially steer the animal. This is how you might plow a field or pull a cart.
- **OK, so, knowing that, what does it mean, then, to "take Jesus' yoke upon you"?**
 - o Answer: Jesus is saying that to find the peace and rest that He offers, we must take His yoke upon us. We must allow Him to lead us. We must surrender the leadership of our life to God.
- **The way of Jesus is gentle. The way of the world is anything but. How does the world around you contribute to your stress and anxiety?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **We find rest for our souls when we "learn" from Jesus. First, how does it sound to be offered rest for your soul?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **Second, what does it mean to "learn" from Jesus?**
 - o Answer: To learn from Jesus is to be in a relationship with Him. We are called to know Him and to

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submit ourselves to Him.

NEXT, instruct students to look at the bottom of page 24. Explain that you're going to tie everything up together by unpacking what Jesus had to say in verse 30. Have a student re-read vs. 30 aloud. Then, work through the questions below the verse with them:

- **Think for a second: how would you describe the “yoke” of stress and anxiety?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **Compare that with how Jesus described His yoke. What is the difference?**
 - Answer: Jesus said that His yoke was easy and that His burden is light. That's not typically what you would think of when you think of a yoke or a burden. The yoke used to lead an ox would be super heavy. The cart they would carry would be heavy too. But Jesus says the yoke of His lordship over our lives is easy and light. This is one of the great paradoxes of Christianity: by surrendering to Jesus, we don't lose anything. We only gain.
- **Have you ever felt the heaviness of your anxiety and stress? What does it make you feel like?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus promises to lighten your burdens?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, wrap up your time in Bible study by saying something like:

- **The stress and anxiety of our daily lives can weigh us down. It can exhaust us spiritually and emotionally. At times it can even be overwhelming. Jesus promises that in Him, we can find rest. We can know peace. He doesn't promise that we won't be stressed or anxious. He doesn't say that all of our troubles will go away. What He says is that in the face of those stressors, He offers the baseline of peace, the assurance of rest. It's the unshakable confidence that says no matter what you face, you're good.**

Ask if anyone has any thoughts or questions, then transition to the *Wrapping Up* portion of your lesson.

WRAPPING UP

- **Student Book Pages**
 - This activity will utilize page 25 in the *Truly Free* Student Book.
- **Additional Instructions**
 - Make sure students have something to write with.

FIRST, instruct students to turn to page 25 in their books. Remind them, as you did in the first two sessions, that the most important thing for us to do when we encounter God is to respond to Him. Remind them that this time in the session is for them to consider how they have been changed by the truths they have just learned.

THEN, remind them that the prompt on page 25 is a way to help them think about how to process God's work in their lives. Have them read the question and come up with their answers. (As a reminder, this specific format will be a repeating feature for these small group sessions.) You can have them take a moment and fill it out on their own and then

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share their answers with the group, or you can process the question as a group discussion. Either way, take some time to allow students to work through the question and consider how they are changed by what they learned.

(NOTE: Some of your students may struggle with clinical anxiety. These students need to see the spiritual care that God offers as the foundation for the physical care that counseling and potentially medication offers. If, during your discussion of anxiety, you feel that a student may be struggling with a deeper condition, make it a point to let someone in your church's leadership know of your concerns.)

FINALLY, when you've allowed time for students to work through how they can apply these truths to their lives, close your time in prayer.

Don't forget to inform students of the devotions located on pages 35-42 in their Student Books. Provide them with a schedule or some structure as to when you would like for them to work through them. (The first devotion is on page 35.)