

THE BIBLE AND WORKPLACE ISSUES

Some
Biblical teaching

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Handling stress at work

³⁸ *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.*

³⁹ *She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.*

⁴⁰ *But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

⁴¹ *"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,*

⁴² *but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10.38 - 42*

An ICM survey not long ago showed that 72% of people enjoy their jobs. That is good to know! Yes, they complain about them, but they also like them.

The Bible tells us that work is good because we are made in God's image, Genesis 1.26, 27 and God himself is a worker who made, sustains and saves the world. So, being productive in some way, whether it is at home as a mother, or in voluntary work or in paid employment, is part of what it is to be a balanced human being. If we have our usefulness curtailed through illness or redundancy, we feel diminished as people.

What is stress?

But though work is good, statistics show that stress affects about 1 in 5 of the working population (this is according to BUPA). Some say workplace stress is the single biggest cause of illness in the UK.

Stress is our inner response to the pressures of life. Pressure itself is not bad. It is good to be stretched a little and rise to the challenge. But sometimes pressure becomes too intense. Stress is basically anxiety that results from the demands made on us being greater than our resources. The ground-breaking research of Sir Michael Marmot among Civil Servants years ago, showed that the lower you are in the working 'hierarchy', the higher the risk of heart disease and shorter life. He said that this was because stress is caused by high demands on people who have low control and low support in their jobs.

The advent of computers in offices and commerce have accelerated the pace of work. Smart-phones can mean that your company wants you to be always

keeping up with your emails and responding immediately etc. In a recession, firms cut staff and employees are expected to do the work of two or even three people. We can think that pressure and stress are products of twenty-first century society. But that is not so. Back in a slower age of agriculture and manual labour, there were other things to worry about. Would the weather wreck the harvest? Would thieves come and raid the barns?

Martha got stressed in offering hospitality, Luke 10.40. Even the Lord Jesus knew what it is to be 'deeply distressed and troubled', Mark 14.33, as he contemplated what was being asked of him on the night before he would be crucified. So don't think the stresses of modern life are beyond Scripture's ability to address.

Signs of too much stress

Long-term or chronic stress can lead to depression and 'burnout', and can even increase your risk of having a heart attack or a stroke. It is important therefore to know the danger signals.

Physical signs

These can include muscular tension, loss of appetite for food or sex, overindulgence in sugar or alcohol, high blood pressure, headaches and continually feeling tired.

Emotional signs

We can become angry, impatient and irritable. Or we may lose our confidence, feel victimised and withdraw from people.

Intellectual signs

We find it difficult to concentrate. Making decisions about even fairly trivial things seems to be impossibly complicated.

Spiritual signs

These might include inability to pray or read Scripture, loss of purpose or hope, doubting God's goodness. In the incident which Luke recounts in the home at Bethany, it appears Martha is angry with Jesus. 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' Luke 10.40.

We need to be aware of the signals and if we start to experience them, be ready to do something about it.

Causes of workplace stress

We can picture ourselves as a metal spring with weights dangling on the end. The weights are the demands on us. These are what stretch us. We are designed to carry some weights or pressures, to extend as we do so and then go back into shape when the weights are removed. Life should be a sequence of cycles of

extension and followed by relaxation. Our problems arise in three main ways. 1. The spring becomes weak by being extended for too long. 2. The weights are simply too heavy. 3. Help in carrying the weights is not there or removed. Here are four common 'weights' we carry.

Change

Change moves us out of our comfort zone. It brings us into the unknown and can make us anxious. At work change occurs when there is a new company strategy being implemented or your company being taken over. Stress may come from a new computer system being installed with which you are not familiar or a line manager who does not make his/her expectations clear. Stress, of course, will be caused by changes at work that might result in redundancy. Changes bring stress. It is why most people are not keen on change.

Demands

Increasing workload, deadlines and a never-ending 'to do' list can cause stress. We may be given new tasks which are beyond us or for which we have received no training. In some situations we might be able to talk these through with managers. But sometimes it seems impossible to raise our problems. We feel bullied. We may cover up problems causing more difficulties and more stress.

Driven-ness

Self-expectation is one of the primary factors in stress because it is not just another 'weight.' It multiplies the effects of the two preceding weights. Certain types of people experience this driven-ness. These include the 'superman' who misses coffee breaks and rushes around trying to be in two places at once because he/she thinks they can always work faster; the perfectionist who views anything less than spectacularly good as a failure; the people-pleaser who fears criticism and does not want to 'let people down'. It seems it was in this last area that Martha's cause of stress was really located. What she wanted to do to please him, was more than Jesus required.

Spiritual attack

We must not forget the spiritual dimension here. Christians are involved in a spiritual battle, Ephesians 6.13. Often when we are facing some difficulty, the devil takes the opportunity to have an extra go at us in some way.

Think through your own situation in the place where you work. Maybe you relate to one or more of these causes of stress. Maybe you can identify others factors pertinent to you.

Ways forward

Jesus didn't value Martha more for her dashing around, but he did spot her need not to get stressed out by his arrival and he did try to calm her down, Luke 10.42. "Martha, Martha", the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed." How can we stop and practically bring a little more calm perspective for ourselves?

- *Respect the God-given patterns of work and rest*

The working week in the UK tends to be about 3 hours longer than the European average. The pressure is to work ever longer hours. In Japan there is a culture which dictates that no-one leaves work until the boss leaves the building. That country also has a very high suicide rate! We need to resist such things for our own good and that of our colleagues. Genesis tells us God made morning and evening. He has given us the day to work and the night to rest. God has given us the weekly Sabbath; a complete day each week away from work. Try to stick to those patterns. The extended spring needs to relax back or it will lose its bounce.

- *Find your personal worth and identity in God's love*

Dame Carole Black did research into working people and she writes: 'For most people, their work is a key determinant of self-worth, identity and standing in the community'. Thinking that way, we will put extra pressure on ourselves to perform in order that to be esteemed by others. But Christian, your worth as a person is not first of all dependent on your levels of performance at work. God loves you and values you. Christ died for you. You don't have to prove anything to anyone. You are a child of God. Martha was loved by Christ for herself, not because of what she did for him.

- *Try to organise your work in a better way*

It may not be possible. But it may be. God has given us our minds and we do better when we use them. It may be that a little time at the beginning of work to think about what needs to be done (write a list?) and then to prioritise what must be done today and what can be left until tomorrow, would really help. Don't fall into putting off the difficult tasks while you just do the tasks you enjoy.

- *Work at improving relationships in your workplace*

Much stress at work is caused by bad or non-existent relationships between people who work together. It's not a happy place to be sometimes. Perhaps you cannot ask for advice without being sneered at. That only adds to the stress. But where people work as a team, things are different. A 1994 study of social work teams found it was not the intensity of the pressures that determined levels of employee stress, but rather the effectiveness with which teams, led by their managers, coped with these pressures. As Christians, who know peace with God through the cross of Christ, we are called to be peacemakers. Are you someone

who helps build good relationships in your workplace?

- *Foster faith and pray about your working life*

Much stress is caused by uncertainty. Will I meet the deadline? Is the company failing? But we have a sovereign God who works all things for our good. Learn to trust him at work. 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,' Philippians 4.6,7.

- *Recognise who you are ultimately working for*

We do not work simply for our company or earthly boss. We work for the Lord Jesus Christ who loves us, understands us, will reward us and is in ultimate control. 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward', Colossians 3.23,24. Look past difficult people in the workplace to Christ.

- *Grasp the bigger picture of work*

Stress can come if we think our work is pointless. But every honourable work, however humble, needs to be seen as cooperation with God for the transformation of the world he has committed to our care, Genesis 1.28. This applies alike to industry and commerce, to public services and the professions, and to work which may not be paid, like full-time caring for an elderly relative or motherhood.

Martha in her stress had missed the 'one thing needed' which her sister Mary had discovered – sitting at the Lord's feet and looking to him. As with every area of our lives, the way forward at work comes through fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Handling redundancy from work

¹ *How long, O Lord ? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*

² *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

³ *Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;*

⁴ *my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

⁵ *But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

⁶ *I will sing to the Lord , for he has been good to me. Psalm 13*

‘You’re fired!’ Those ringing words have become the catch-phrase of Sir Alan Sugar’s hit TV programme, The Apprentice.

To see it happen to someone else on screen is one thing. But to be on the receiving end yourself in real life is quite another. To lose one’s job, for whatever reason, is traumatic. One man put his experience of being asked to leave his paid work like this: ‘If you are not earning, you begin to doubt yourself...You are not wanted and so you must be no good’.

The twenty first century is seeing amazing advances in technology. With the advent of robots, some experts estimate that between 10% and 40% of jobs will go. Some of us might lose our jobs. What are some of the Biblical pointers as to how to face redundancy?

There is no Bible passage of which I am aware which specifically addresses the problem. But on the other hand, Scripture has much to say about coping with trouble generally, of which being made redundant may be seen as one specific example. So Scripture does speak to us on this matter.

We turn to Psalm 13, where we find David, the man who would become Israel’s king, in deep trouble. He feels like a forgotten man, v1a: *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?* It is not made clear precisely what trouble David was in, so the text is meant to speak to us about facing trouble generally in our lives and we can apply it to our own situation. The psalm takes us on a journey in which David climbs out of the depths of despair in v1,2 to a position of confidence and hope in v5, *But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

The psalm breaks into three pairs of verses and as we look at it, we will keep the trouble of redundancy in mind. We will see the emotion, the reaction and the foundation.

Emotion: Feeling our anxiety v1,2

There is intense inner turmoil. *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?* v1,2.

David's anxiety caused him to lay awake on many nights, and when he woke up in the morning, nothing had changed. The situation was still as dark.

The psychological effects of redundancy are well known. What do people feel when they lose their job?

You feel the shock You are told by your company that jobs are at risk. You hope against hope that it won't be you. But then it hits you like a train, especially when you get the letter in black and white, 'I am afraid your services are no longer required...' Just like David in verse 2 you find yourself undergoing an internal battle - wrestling with thoughts and fears.

You feel belittled There is usually a loss of confidence and self-worth. God made human beings to work, Genesis 1 and 2. To work is part of who we are. To have that taken away is a major loss. You begin to compare yourself with your colleagues who kept their jobs; mentally they can turn into 'enemies', v2.

You feel stressed Verse 2 talks about being pitted against an opponent in the wrestling ring. Redundancy looks like a huge adversary. Facing redundancy is stressful. It is stressful first because you now face uncertainty in major matters. 'How are we going to pay the mortgage? I don't know.' It is also stressful because of the life-changes it forces on you. 'Going to sign on at a job centre is a thing I have never done before.' You will go to stressful interviews and be assessed. If you did get a new job, you will be with new people, and learning new tasks, new travelling. All this is worrying.

You feel down In v2 David says, that every day he feels sorrowful, v2b. Redundancy makes us feel sad, demoralised and pessimistic. You've lost your job, your routines, your friends at the office. Some people, allowing themselves to dwell on the idea that 'I'm no good', slip into depression. Looking ahead to v3,

David feels in darkness. Perhaps his trouble has made him ill. And, of course, that's not good because the inertia of illness or depression will make it even harder to motivate yourself to fill in the forms and go to interviews and so find a job.

Taken as a whole, it's a horrible combination. And the problem is that often this goes on a long time. 'How long?' David keeps asking in v1,2. 'Why doesn't God get me a job?' You can easily get to feel that God is against you. So there can be a spiritual dimension to redundancy. Churches really need to get around and support brothers and sisters who are made redundant.

But, and it is a big but, what you must hold on to personally, Christian, is that trouble does not mean that God is against you. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that Christians are exempt from the troubles that other people face. Here's David in our psalm, the man 'after God's own heart', God's chosen king, facing deep trouble. God has not got it in for you anymore than he had it in for David. Nor has it happened because you are a bad Christian. Such things happen even to the best Christians. Think about Job of whom God said, *He is blameless and upright*, Job 1.8. Rather, what is going on is that God wants to prove himself to you and be your companion with you through this trouble. God often uses trouble to grow us and enrich us as Christians. Romans 5v3,4 say *We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

Reaction: Praying our Identity v3,4

Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

If you don't understand where David is coming from this could look like a very arrogant, self-centred prayer. Why shouldn't David's enemies be allowed to triumph over him? Who does he think he is? No. The reason David prays like this is because of his special relationship to God. He is God's man, God's chosen king. The thought is that, if David is crushed, how will that reflect on God? What will the enemies think of the LORD? So it is really out of his relationship to God, out of his special identity, that David prays and urges God to help him in his trouble.

Now though you and I aren't king David with his unique role in the history of redemption. Nevertheless we are special to God. We are Christians. We are known to belong to the Lord Jesus. We need the Lord's help not to be crushed

under the pressures for his name's sake.

We also need to remember our identity in Christ. In the cauldron of the emotions we feel in losing our jobs, the devil and our indwelling sin, which sees things from a worldly perspective, will keep telling us that we are failures, that we are worthless. The worldly man builds his self-worth on his successes, his prestige, his position in the company, his prospects, the size of his salary. But the gospel says that all that is secondary for you. The whole world system shouts at you, 'You're useless,' and would add to your feelings of despair.

But we must not give in, but rather react in faith. God says something very different about us and we need to take our stand on what God says. He tells you that even without a job you are still chosen by him, still his child. You are precious to him, you are a joint-heir with Christ. And these are the things that really matter. In the light of eternity whether you were employed continuously from the age of 21 to 70 will not matter at all. Your ultimate dignity and worth are not founded in your employment, but in the love of God to you in Christ Jesus. He has chosen you to salvation and to be his child. Perhaps we could extend Paul's words in Galatians: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, employed nor unemployed... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.... and heirs according to the promise.*

And it's out of our identity in Christ that we must pray to God. 'Lord, I'm known as a Christian. Your name is upon me. Please Lord answer my prayers either for a new job, or for the strength and grace to handle this on-going situation calmly and trustingly in a way that glorifies you.'

Some time ago one woman in our congregation was made redundant at Christmas time. However, praise the Lord, she eventually got employment after many weeks. But she said to me that, though over that time she has had to apply for around 500 jobs, she nevertheless had a great sense of peace that God was with her. She handled that period of redundancy really well. 'Lord I would love a new job, but whatever happens give me your grace that as your child I may glorify you.'

Foundation: God our security v5,6

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

Whatever our situation, whatever trouble we face, we still have a choice and David chooses to trust in the LORD his God. *I will trust in your unfailing love v5.*

That is where he places his hope; that is his foundation.

Let me emphasize, he trusts in God. When we are in trouble it is great to have Christian friends around you to support and encourage you. And that is what they should do. But don't look to them as the foundation. Look to God. If you look to them you may well be disappointed in the end. They are only human after all. They may well let you down at some point. They shouldn't but they do sometimes because they are sinners like you. No. Let's receive the kindness and help of friends, but let's be like David who has his trust ultimately in God.

Now v5 speaks of the love of God. When going through trouble, we need to realize something very important. The place where we are to read the love of God for us is Calvary. We do not read God's love from our circumstances. We read it from the Christ and his cross. Our circumstances may be all kinds of things, but God still loves us. The apostle Paul was ill, shipwrecked, beaten, mistreated and slandered, yet still he knew God loved him because he gave his only Son the Lord Jesus for him. *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins,* 1 John 4.9, 10. So in the midst of your redundancy, God still loves you.

And notice how v5 of Psalm 13 describes God's love; it is unending, it never ceases in and of itself and it is never thwarted by anything else. God's love is utterly reliable and faithful.

During times of trouble, like redundancy, that is the great truth about God in which we need to continually immerse ourselves. The unending love of God is our foundation.

Time doesn't cause it to fail. God is from everlasting to everlasting and he never changes. Time cannot cause the love of God to cease towards us. If it did, he would no longer be the God of the Bible.

Sin doesn't cause it to fail. In times of trouble we might foolishly turn to something sinful for comfort. It is a bad move. But God doesn't cast us off. Think about David, the writer of our Psalm. Think of his adultery with Bathsheba and consequent engineering of her husband's death. Did God's love cease towards David? These things saddened and even angered God. They caused ongoing trouble in David's family life down the subsequent years. But they did not cause

God to stop loving David. It was to atone for our sins that God sent his Son. That is the very evidence that he loves us despite our sins.

The accusations of others doesn't cause it to fail. Satan stands against us to expose us and accuse us in every possible way. Even against Job, the most upright man on earth he brought accusations. But God himself answers Satan's charges. We may have plummeted in the estimation of others and even of ourselves, as we have been made redundant. But that doesn't in any way affect God's love for us. If God is not put off us by the powerful criticisms which Satan ranges against us, he certainly will not be swayed by the opinions of puny people. Other people's estimate of you, often perverse and ill-informed, leaves God's love for you totally unmoved and as fervent as ever.

The relative poverty which you suffer doesn't cause it to fail. When David was a poor shepherd very few people took notice of him. When he was King David, rich and influential, many people wanted to be around at his house and be his buddy. People are like that. But God is not. God was David's faithful friend rich or poor. In the relative poverty you experience because of redundancy those who once wanted your friendship may now drift away. But God will not. His is unfailing love, v5.

On this wonderful foundation of the unceasing love of God, David takes his stand during his time of trouble – and finds himself, v5, 6, rejoicing and singing amid his difficulties! If any of us have to face redundancy and hear those terrible words 'You're fired!', may we be given grace to handle it with faith and to the glory of God.

Handling sexual temptation at work

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

²The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

³When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did,⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.⁵From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field.⁶So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,⁷and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"⁸But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care."⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"¹⁰And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.¹¹One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.¹²She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

¹³When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house,¹⁴she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed."¹⁵When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

¹⁶She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home.¹⁷Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me.

¹⁸But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."¹⁹When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger.²⁰Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison,²¹the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. Gen. 39.1-21

In a 2013 study of 2000 people, it was found that couples who first meet in the workplace are more likely to have a long and lasting marriage than those who first set eyes on each other in other contexts. It seems that colleagues at the office can learn to love each other and get on really well.

But, of course, with between 30% and 40% of marriages ending in divorce, there is also a downside. In today's sexualized culture, the workplace can be the place of flirtations and illicit relationships. It can be a place of sexual temptation. For women it can even be a place of unwanted sexual attention and perhaps of abuse.

The Christian needs to stay pure and know how to navigate the maize of temptations around sexual liaisons at work.

It is noteworthy that the well-known story of Joseph's battle with sexual temptation in Genesis 39, occurred in his place of work. He was a child of God but through a number of strange providences he had ended up a slave to one of Pharaoh's officials. What can we learn from the attempted seduction in Potiphar's house?

A place of danger

Why can the workplace be a dangerous place sexually? Aside from the fact that people of both genders generally go out to work, there are a number of reasons why our place of employment might present a temptation.

- *Atmosphere*

Joseph, v1, had been taken from the Promised Land to Egypt. He had been taken from a place where God was known and his righteous requirements acknowledged, to a place where they were not. Sadly, it is frequently like that for many Christians as they travel from home to work. Most offices, factories and shops know nothing of God these days. You enter an amoral environment, where pragmatism and profit are the only rules. The idea of Bible ethics in business is frequently not only despised but seen as a positive impediment to progress. An amoral atmosphere in business ethics can easily spill over into personal ethics and that can lower our defences. People think, 'No one cares here, so why not?'

- *Time*

Joseph was spending a lot of time around Potiphar's wife, v2. We spend around a third of our week with our colleagues at work. When you take into account

long hours of work, the time spent commuting, sleep and time with the children, you may be more often alone with colleagues than you are with your spouse. People in similar situations, under similar pressures, spending lots of time together hopefully do develop a closeness, a team-spirit. There is nothing wrong with that. But if that closeness is with a colleague of the opposite sex, it may get too close.

- *Stress*

It would be no surprise if Joseph felt pretty vulnerable at this time. After all he had just been rejected by his family and had suffered the indignity of being sold as a slave. Here he was in a foreign land where no one knew or cared about him. Confused and hurting he may well have felt the need for some affection and tenderness.

Despite the controlled exterior, the workplace is a place where people often get hurt emotionally. Targets are not met and the boss gives you a hard time. You miss out on that promotion. You have a bad day and are made to look dumb by someone who is your junior. The competition and stress of the business world can leave people lonely, tired and vulnerable. That is just the time where we might long for consolation from 'someone who understands'. Except that someone might be a colleague rather than your spouse.

- *Authority*

Despite the current awareness of sexual harassment in our culture, this is still a great problem. The recent exposure of the sexual exploitation of actresses in Hollywood and the consequent #MeToo campaign has highlighted the misuse of power in this way. Here we find Joseph being asked for sexual favours by a superior, Potiphar's wife. She was someone who could put in a good word for him, get him promoted or get him sacked, v7, v10, v11. The workplace always has a power structure that can be abused to bring sexual pressure to bear.

These factors are worth contemplation. Perhaps the relationships in your office or shop or wherever are good and right. But do not be naive. And if you are the victim of sexual abuse by a superior in the workplace you must have the courage to speak up. Businesses usually have a procedure for dealing with such misconduct. The Human Resources department will want to know.

Taking steps

But what can we do to protect ourselves from sexual temptation at work? Some ideas present themselves from the story of Joseph.

- *Be an up-front Christian*

Even though Joseph was a slave, he witnessed to his faith. 'How could I do such a wicked thing,' he said to Potiphar's wife, 'and sin against God?' v9. That did not put her off, but it might put off some people from making advances. Why not have a Bible or New Testament on your desk at work. It could act as a reminder to you of your commitment to Christ, and act as a friendly signal to others of where you stand.

- *Be walking with God*

The recurring theme in Genesis 39 is 'the LORD was with Joseph,' v2, v3, v5, v21. It was because God was with Joseph that Joseph had the strength and the sense to resist the seduction when it came. We need to maintain the spiritual basics of prayer, worship, Bible reading, witness, fellowship and honesty. It is worth remembering that before James tells us to, 'Resist the devil,' he emphasizes the need to, 'Submit yourselves then, to God,' James 4.7. If God is with us and we are with God the devil flees.

- *Beware of rationalizing*

Falling into immorality or adultery always involves a process. You walk a pathway. It does not just happen out of the blue.

Step 1, takes place in the thoughts.

Step 2, involves some positive signal from the object of desire.

Step 3, involves the emotional attachment nurtured by both people.

Step 4, is finding the time and place.

Step 5, is the sin.

At each point down that deadly path, our sinful nature will find an excuse for you to go ahead to the next step. 'It is only a thought, it can't do any harm.' 'We are close, but we are doing nothing wrong.' 'Everyone is allowed one mistake.' Give no room to such rationalizations. Joseph gets 'the come on' loud and clear, but he will not allow sin a foothold, even in his mind. 'He is aware that adultery is 'such a wicked thing' v9

- *Be ready to run*

In the end, the pressure was such that Joseph had to simply take to his heels. 'He left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house,' v12. Perhaps someone reading this finds themselves getting involved too deeply with someone in their place of work. It is better to run, to resign your job, than to wreck your spiritual life and (if you have one) your family. To run may initially bring trouble, but it will

eventually bring blessing, even as it did for Joseph.

Lastly, if there are married people reading this, perhaps I ought to address you as the other partner. Be aware that when your spouse goes to work he or she may enter a world with its own peculiar set of sexual temptations. Therefore, you do your best to make sure that home is the best place and that the relationship with you is the source of tenderness and joy that it ought to be, Proverbs 5:18,19.

