

# “A Strategy for Pressure”

Psalm 23, John 8:12-19



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All I have to do is mention the words stress and pressure, and we can all identify. Everyone one of us experiences stress and knows that it is one of the major causes of physical and emotional sickness in our society. We all long to find some solution to its debilitating effects. Pressure—stress—too much to do—deadlines—conflicting demands between what we want to do and what others expect from us—worry—guilt over the past—disturbing pressures—we all feel it; and so often when we Christians experience stress and pressure, difficult and sometimes agonizing questions emerge within us.

- ♦ If I am a Christian, why do I still have stress and pressure?
- ♦ What might be a Christian response to stress?
- ♦ How do I get beyond a yo-yo Christianity of ups and downs?
- ♦ Why is it that some people are able to take life's strains and stresses and others seem to fall apart?

♦ How can I find a strategy for living with pressure? We've all asked these questions about ourselves and others.

This morning I stand with you as I preach this message. As a matter of fact, if I could turn my back and hear what I'm saying, I need to hear what I'm going to say as much, if not more, than anyone in this sanctuary.

As I thought about this whole issue of pressure, I wondered if we were going to make up an application form for a contest for the most pressured American, what questions would we want to include on that form? What would be some of the criteria that would enable a person to be a candidate for this most distinguished award? These are some of the questions I came up with for that application form:

- ♦ Do you ever plan more for any one day than you can accomplish?
- ♦ Do you ever get angry at yourself when you don't accomplish what you've planned?
- ♦ Do you ever feel panic inside when you don't finish what you want to do?
- ♦ Do you ever take your worries of unfinished things to bed with you?
- ♦ Do you ever become impatient with people because they don't do what you want them to do when you want them to do it?
- ♦ Does the memory of unresolved failures and hurts of the past add pressure and keep you from enjoying today?

Did you say “yes” to any of these questions? If so, then you might be a good candidate for the most pressured American award. But don't get too confident about winning—I'm also applying. The real question is, “How do we live with stress and pressure?” That's the focus of this message this morning.

The good news that I want to share with you today is that Jesus Christ has given us a solution for pressure. The one who made us—the word of God—the magnificent Creator—came in flesh to reveal to us how to live in the

midst of excruciating stress and pressure; and in one of his most significant “I am” statements—perhaps the least understood—he gives us the secret.

Jesus lived under terrific pressure. Wherever he went, the crowds pressed in on him. They wanted his healing. They were magnetically drawn to the warmth of his countenance and to his words. Others wanted to manipulate him. None of them understood his preaching of the kingdom of God, and only a few became his disciples. His family didn't understand him. His disciples resisted him. At every turn they tried to keep him from going to Jerusalem and to the cross. The scribes and Pharisees tried to twist him and to keep him from being the kind of Messiah he was meant to be. The Zealots wanted to use him for their political purposes, and the priests finally engineered his death because he would not buckle under. Jesus knows what it's like to live under pressure, and the way he took it is the answer for you and me.

At the height of his great debate with the Pharisees—as they focused their blast—Jesus had said, “I am the light of the world,” and they said, “You are testifying on your own behalf.” He responded, “Even if I do testify to myself, my testimony is valid.” And then he made an incredible statement that is not easily translated into English. It goes something like this, “I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.”

In the Hebrew courts at that time it took two witnesses to validate any claim, and so Jesus is meeting the legal code and saying, “All right, I am God with you and, therefore, I am my own self-authenticating witness; but if you need two witnesses, the Father who sent me bears witness to me.” And then he said, “I know from where I have come and where I am going.” He knew his roots, and he knew his destiny. Therefore, he could stand in the midst of excruciating painful pressure. This passage of Scripture teaches us five different things to sustain us in the midst of pressure.

The first is this: Know who you are. That's what Jesus meant when he said, “I am the witness to myself.” It was

as if he said, “I know who I am. I will not be pressured or twisted or distorted or manipulated.” We will be under pressure until we know who we are. People will push us around in directions we do not want to go. But none of us are victims. No one can put you under pressure without your permission. It’s because we are uncertain about who we are that people can take hold of us and twist us and adjust us.

Jesus teaches us who we are. Listen to him. We are his beloved. We are his followers. We are his disciples. We are the children the God—the saints of God—the loved and the forgiven. Once we know deep inside of us that we belong to God, then we can begin to deal with the pressure. You see, there are many selves inside of us competing for control, and it isn’t until all of these selves are unified into one around the person of Jesus Christ that we can walk confidently in this world doing what we were called and meant to do.

Second, play to the right audience. Jesus Christ not only was a witness to himself, but he played his life to the Father. He said, “And the Father who sent me bears witness to me.” We will always be under pressure until we play our lives to God only. It’s a tragedy to spend your whole life playing to the wrong audience, to some other person—a spouse, a parent, a friend, to some company, to some place, or to some image of yourself. It’s only when we know who we are and dare to do everything for the glory of God that we can live with pressure. Do all that you do as if you were doing it for Christ. Is your life being played to the right audience?

Third, discover what you are meant to do. Jesus said, “I know from where I came and to where I am going.” He knew how to select those things which were in keeping with God’s will and eliminate those things that weren’t. Most of us are under pressure because we take on things that were never meant by God for our lives. There is enough time in every day to do what God wants us to do. Do you believe that? Of course, there are times when the schedule gets overloaded. But anytime that for a long,

consistent period we live under pressure, it’s because we are taking on far more than God wants us to do.

But more than that, our fourth strategy for pressure is do what we want to do. That’s what Jesus Christ teaches us. Now I can just imagine that you are saying to yourselves, “What do you mean by that? Life is made up of being responsible and doing what you ought to do. I was raised that way. Weren’t you?” But you see, pressure often comes from the conflict between what we want to do and what we have to do; and when our lives are under the control of the Spirit of God, we begin to want to do what we are supposed to do. We can stop the love/hate approach to life. We can stop the push and pull.

How often we are our own worst enemies and we approach life with a love/hate relationship. If you are working for a company that makes demands on you that are irreconcilable with your goals and your life agenda, then get out of it; or ask God to put a new heart into you so you do your work with freedom and joy. If we spend our lives under the conflict of agenda, it’s tragic. Life is too short to spend it doing something you don’t want to do. Jesus Christ gives us the freedom to want to do what he wants us to do. Victor Frankel once said, “The one last freedom which cannot be taken from us is the freedom to choose what our attitude will be to any circumstance.”

The last thing we discover from Jesus is that there must be an internal pressure that equalizes the external pressure. And that’s what he promised when he said, “The Father and I shall come and make our home in you.” When that happens there can be an ebb and a flow to our lives that releases the pressure. Times alone with God for prayer, Bible study, and quiet reflection on what the good news means to us prepare us to take the pressure or to take those steps that will relieve the pressure. Times alone with the Lord also enable us to let God take the night shift in our lives and to allow him to go on working while we get the rest and renewal we need. As we live our lives in Christ’s peace, we can live by his timing—not ours—not the world’s. Why is it that we so often live under terrific

time pressure? There’s no panic in heaven. Jesus was never in a hurry because he knew that all things fit together and work for the glory of God.

What would your life look like if you were handling pressure in these five ways? What would your schedule, involvements, and priorities be? Get in touch with yourself. What is pressure doing to your peace of mind and the health of your body? What are the causes of stress and pressure in your life? What is bending you out of shape, boxing you in, stretching you beyond what Christ has ordained?

Someone has written the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm for busy people, and I’d like to end with it this morning...

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not rush. He provides me with periods of stillness which recreate my serenity. In walking in his ways, I know efficiency that comes from calmness of mind. In his will is my peace. Even though I have a great many things to accomplish every day, I will not fret for his presence is here. His timelessness and his all-knowingness they give me balance. He prepares refreshment and renewal in all of my activities by anointing my mind with the oils of his tranquility. My cup of joyous energy overflows. Surely harmony and effectiveness will be the fruit of all my hours. And I will walk in the pace of the Lord, and I will dwell in his house forever.*

Now that’s the way I want to live this next week. How about you?