

Peace Under Pressure

Presented by Mary Lowman
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Day One

One of the most common problems we all share is handling pressure and stress. I don't know anyone who escapes it, do you? I want to talk about how to have peace amid stress and pressures of our lives.

Now, I'm not going to tell you that you shouldn't have pressure or stress in your life. Honestly, if you constantly lived free of pressure, you probably would not accomplish very much. Any time you start to get involved in anything, any time you decide to contribute something, any time you take on responsibilities, pressure and stress come.

Pressure forces me to be organized and prioritize my time much better. And then, I really believe God uses pressure in our lives to teach us many things. Pressure teaches us to turn to him. Pressure makes us look up more often. Pressure keeps us aware of our need for him.

Of course, there is such a thing as too much pressure, and we certainly need to be careful about that. God reminds me frequently that I can't do everything, and there is a limit to the amount of pressure I should handle. One of the major reasons we are under pressure and stress is because we haven't learned to say no, and we're trying to be superwomen or supermen.

You know, just because you *can* do something doesn't necessarily mean you should. Just because there is something else to be done doesn't necessarily mean you are the one who should do it, or it has to be done right now. Many of us try to be all things to all people, and it never works.

Honestly, I have to admit that sometimes I put myself under pressure because I want the praise of people. I'm doing it for the wrong reasons. Remember this: You'll never get enough applause from people to make you feel significant. Our self-worth must come from our relationship with Jesus Christ.

If your superwoman wings are tired today, just stop and remember that God is not asking you to be a super-person. Perhaps that is why you're feeling pressured and stressed. Let go of that superwoman pursuit and ask God to show you his plan for you and your day.

Day Two

Did you ever think about this: if you don't feel pressured, you aren't? Pressure is a state of mind. If you don't think you're under pressure, you're really not, regardless of what's on your plate to do.

One of the most important concepts we can grasp in our Christian life is that we are what we think. Everything begins with our thought life, and that includes whether or not we feel pressured. I start to feel stressed when I allow myself to think about all there is to do, when I start to worry about next week's deadlines, when I ponder long the "To Do" list that stares me in the face. "How will I ever get all this done?" I think. Then I convince myself there's no way. And now the panic starts to rise, because I'm thinking about all I must do instead of just doing something.

Remind yourself often that you can only do one thing at a time, decide what has the highest priority at this moment, and do it. Allowing those thoughts to hang around and bombard you with "Hurry up, you've got a lot to do," or "You're never going to get everything done at this rate," just pours the pressure on yourself and keeps you from working at maximum efficiency.

The good news is that pressure and peace are not exclusive. You don't have to give up peace and calmness just because there's some pressure on you. And peace is not passivity. Peace doesn't mean you're lying down in gardens, with bubbling brooks and birds singing. Peace doesn't mean the absence of emails or texts or meals to cook or reports to finish. Peace is a state of mind; it begins with our thoughts. And our minds can be at rest in the midst of incredible activity.

One good suggestion to stay peaceful in pressurized environments is to talk to yourself correctly. What do you say or think when you're under pressure? "I'll never get this done." Or "I can't do all this." Why do you feed all that negative stuff into your head? Say instead, "Lord, by your grace I will survive this. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." You will be amazed at how much easier it is to handle stress when you talk to yourself in biblical ways, not in negative ways.

Day Three

Peace even when you're under pressure: Do you think that's possible? While it's true that too much pressure is harmful, it's also true that you cannot escape some pressure if you're involved in anything at all. So, we need to know how to be peaceful even though we have stress and pressure in our daily routine.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3 that the person who intends to love life and see good days must seek peace and pursue it. You have to go for it. It doesn't just happen. It comes when you pursue it.

One thing I recommend is to take peace breaks. When you feel the pressure and panic start to crowd in around you, find some way to take a short break and pray for a few minutes. Get your mind refocused on Jesus. Then go back to face your situation, and you'll discover unreasonable peace—that peace that passes understanding—flowing through you, even though the pressure is still there.

Write Scripture verses on cards to help you to be peaceful, such as Isaiah 26:3: *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.* Put this card in front of you, on your screen saver or smart phone, and read it and re-read it several times during the day. That will help keep your thoughts where they should be; bringing every thought into captivity so they obey Christ.

You could hum a good Christian song to yourself to get your mind refocused on the person who is your peace, Jesus Christ. You can do that while you're talking to people, busily working on something, rushing on the job, or darting somewhere in your car. Right amid all that pressure, you can still know God's incredible peace.

Do you spend time with God early in your day, so you begin your day in a peaceful manner? Or do you begin most of your days in a hectic rush, getting up late, rushing yourself or your family? Remember this: Your day is won or lost in the morning hours. Take time early in your day to put on peace, and your peace is a person, right? Put on Jesus and his shoes of peace. Don't leave home without doing that. And take some peace breaks during your hectic day. Those are good suggestions for staying peaceful in the midst of pressure.

Day Four

Knowing consistent peace in our lives, even though we have pressure and stress to deal with, should be a trademark of Christians.

Of course, Jesus is our supreme example of this ability to be peaceful regardless of the pressures. People were always crowding him, trying to talk to him, trying to touch him. He had a hard time finding any space or time for himself. He was constantly under pressure. But I notice that no matter how busy he was or how much there was to do, he found time to be alone with God. R. A. Torrey wrote something which I copied in the front of my prayer journal and to which I frequently refer. He wrote:

"Some people are so busy that they find no time for prayer. Apparently, the busier Christ's life was, the more He prayed. Sometimes He had no time to eat, sometimes He had no time for needed rest or sleep, but He always took time to pray; and the more the work crowded the more He prayed."¹

Lots of times when our schedules get very full and the pressure starts to come in on us, the first thing we sacrifice is our time with the Lord. That's one reason many Christians don't have real peace in their everyday lives. They've not spent time with the Prince of Peace, they've failed to go to the source of peace, and so they face their pressures on their own.

I remember a season when the pressures and deadlines were great, and so I sacrificed my prayer time for a few days. In his oh-so-gentle way, God showed me that when I sacrifice prayer time to relieve pressures, I do just the opposite: I increase my pressures. He said, "Spend time with me, draw on my strength. You need me now more than ever. And I'll take the remaining time and make it stretch to meet the responsibilities."

Your lack of peace amid pressure may be because you've sacrificed time with the Prince of Peace. Sorry, but it just won't work. Give God the time you need to be with him and see how he stretches the rest of your time for you.

Day Five

How can the people you work with know that Jesus Christ makes a difference in your life? I'll give you one way that will always work. If they see you have peace in your life, regardless of the circumstances, they're going to want to know how in the world you do it. People today are desperate for peace, and as Christians we know the Prince of Peace, the only one who can give us true peace.

But if our lives are just as frayed around the edges as everyone else's, if we don't display the peace of God which passes understanding, then we're missing an incredible opportunity to show Christ to the people in our worlds.

I want to tell you the story of how a good friend found Christ: Janet, who is a member of our board here. Before becoming a believer, she was working in a highly stressful situation. Everyone was under constant pressure, and the environment was crazy. But in all the chaos, she kept noticing one of her coworkers who seemed very peaceful. He did his work as well as anyone, produced what was expected of him, but he just never seemed to be frazzled and stressed like everyone else.

Janet watched him for a long time, and finally she said to him, "How do you do it?" He smiled and shared with her it was his faith in Christ which made the difference. Then he simply recommended she read the Bible and suggested she start with the book of John.

Though Janet had considered herself a Christian, she had never read the Bible, so she decided to see what he was talking about. After a couple of months of reading and investigating, Janet accepted Christ, and a few months after that, her husband did too.

¹ R. A. Torrey, *How to Pray* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1900).

And it all started when one person was peaceful in a chaotic work environment. What a testimony we could have to our world if we showed them that Christ is our peace, and because of him, we can have peace even when the situation is chaotic.

There are many reasons we need to learn the secret of having peace in the midst of pressure. Christ has come to give us peace; he is our peace. We need to be sure we're demonstrating it daily in our lives.