

## Dealing With Pressure Biblically

Pressure: stress, too many things to do, too little time. It's part and parcel of our complicated 21<sup>st</sup> century life. More and more, we are seeing people dropping out of ministry, jobs, even marriages, saying, "The pressure was too much." Burn-out. What can we do in such a stressful life?

We've been looking at dealing with various issues biblically, like anger, depression, hurt and worry. We've been seeing that the Bible does have the answers to these problems, though one has to make the effort to search for them. We've also seen that the Bible's answers are very different to the world's answers, and sometimes they are not the answers we like to hear. The world's ideas most often involve some form of escapism, or blame-shifting, or something that makes me feel better about my pain, my anger, my hurt, but never actually deals with the cause. People often get angry when they hear that the Bible's advice is simple, but also requires work and change within. We like to hear that it is someone else's fault; we hate to hear that our own reactions have been sinful and have complicated our lives.

The same is true when it comes to dealing with pressure and stress. The world says, "Take a holiday, go out to nature, have a hobby, play a sport, do some exercise, manage your time, manage your life". All these things are, in fact, good things. But once again, we must get the Bible's perspective on dealing with pressure.

Now, like with the other topics we've dealt with, we've come to see that our greatest problems are not around us, they are inside us. We've come to see that we can seldom change circumstances, we can seldom change other people, but we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, change within. This is especially pertinent when dealing with pressure. The multiple pressures in our lives are more often than not beyond our control. We cannot change the fact that we must be a partner, a parent, a worker, a colleague, a friend, a servant in a ministry. Some bail out of the responsibilities that millions of others live with every day, and say, "It was too much for me"

It may have been too much for them, but millions of others handled it in different ways. What's the difference? One literally shirked God-given responsibilities, and claimed weakness as an excuse. They are unwittingly stating that they want an uncomplicated, trouble-free life without the pain and complications that everyone else must bear. We cannot get out of certain responsibilities. God has built life that way, with privilege, comes responsibility. Responsibility is rewarded with privilege. You want the privilege of children, you must have the responsibility of being a parent. You want the privilege of money, there's the responsibility of working. You want the privilege of sex, you must take upon yourself the responsibility of marriage. Anyone who tries to get privilege without responsibility is trying to shirk God's laws, trying to get a loophole in His world. It won't work. For the privilege of rest in this life, you need to do the responsibility of work. So we must first accept that responsibilities and pressures are part of this life. They are not evil, and our goal in life must not be to have as few of them as possible. Our goal must be to handle them properly. So what do we do?

**First, Deal With the Biggest Burden of All.** Hebrews 12:1 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." The thing which perhaps stresses people more than anything

else is guilt: legitimate guilt over real sins they have committed against God. I think it was Billy Graham who said that perhaps the majority of patients at mental hospitals would be cured if they dealt with their guilt. Guilt over our sins, past and present, must be dealt with, for it is often the pressure, the stress that stays, hovering in the background, never dealt with, but always a burden on our souls. Dealing with it involves seeing your sin as God sees it, which is awful, and then confessing and forsaking it. Forsaking it means not only refusing to repeat the sin, but refusing to remind yourself of it, which is often how guilt works. A sin which God has forgiven, you have no right to fetch it and meditate on it. See how guilt became the most stressful thing in David's life in Psalm 32 and 51. Confess and forsake.

**Second, we need to Remove the Unnecessary Pressures.** While we know that some responsibilities are never meant to be shirked, some things in our lives are unnecessary clutter. We are simply overcommitted. It may be one too many hobbies or sports, or committees that we are involved in, it may be an additional ministry we took on simply because we felt guilty no one else was filling the gap. It may be taking all the burden upon ourselves like Moses did, instead of trusting others and their abilities to handle some of the responsibilities. Often the unnecessary pressures in our lives we added because of something **in** us that is wrong, an independent spirit, a lust for other's approval, a lust for money, a lust for control. These are the things that need to be repented of. Write down what you believe are your God-given responsibilities. See then, by the remaining pressures in your life what is unnecessary, and consider why you added it in the first place.

**Thirdly, We Need to Follow the Ultimate Example.** Hebrews 12:2.

Jesus had a lot of pressure. Everyday, His time was taken up with healing, counseling and teaching literally thousands of people who physically pressed upon Him. He had the responsibility of personally training and discipling 12 men who would be His representatives when He was gone. He had the responsibility of the eldest son, to take care of His aging mother. He had the responsibility to spend much time in prayer, and meditation on the Word, which He did. He had the pressure of having to accomplish all this in the short space of three years. Above all, weighing on His mind the entire time must have been the unimaginable burden of bearing the sins of the world at Calvary. Yet He succeeded, He did not buckle under the strain. We say, "Well, He's God! It's not a fair comparison". Remember, that though Jesus was 100% God, He was also 100% man. The Bible is clear that He, too, experienced hunger, thirst, and fatigue. Hebrews 4:15: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin." He had God's strengths, but He also had our human weaknesses. How did He cope? The answer lies in a **Renewed Mind**, and a **Consecrated Body**.

Imagine for a moment yourself as a wooden beam put across a gap. As a weight is added to that board, its strength will determine how it reacts. The more pressure is added, the more that board has to take to remain firm. Now the same is true of us. We have two supporting beams to handle pressure, the mind and the body. Both must be disciplined and firm to handle all our God-given responsibilities. When the mind is undisciplined, or unrenewed, the various pressures will begin to result in many possible ways: nervousness, panic attacks, irritability, compulsive behaviour, withdrawal, phobias and irrational fears. Furthermore, when the mind does not handle the pressure properly, the second beam has to take the strain. That can then lead to

physical problems like cramps, ulcers, headaches, stomach disorders and muscular tensions. The body will take the strain when the mind has caved in. A body that is not being consistently consecrated to God will betray us during pressure, and complicate our lives, not help us. The body will seek to relieve the pressure with indulgences that often are simply sinful.

We need to understand the necessity of discipline, and practice it consistently. A disciplined mind, will be a renewed mind, a disciplined body will be a consecrated body.

Most of us know that being self-disciplined is a good thing. Most of us practice some form of mental and physical discipline in some areas of our lives. Our problem is that we are selective and inconsistent in our application of mental discipline. We may be very disciplined in our thinking when handling pressures at work, but poorly disciplined when thinking about pressures at home. So, ultimately we end up with beams that are bending and cracking under the strain.

The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of a renewed mind and a consecrated body. Though His mind was perfect and needed no renewing, His mind is the perfection that we mean we speak of a renewed mind. He was disciplined in mind, and disciplined in body. Notice His mental discipline for enduring pressure. “for the joy that was set before Him”. That speaks of meditation on His future. He kept His thoughts on His ultimate purpose. In other words, He exhibited a renewed mind, one that thought about life and its pressures from God’s perspective.

He knew that He could do nothing except by the Father’s power and permission. He said in John 8:28-29 “...and *that* I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” God never meant for you to carry life’s burdens alone. We must meditate on verses like John 15:4-6; and 2 Corinthians 3:5 emphasising our total dependence on God. Sometimes God allows great pressure into our lives because of how independent we are, and we need reminding that we need Him to cope with the smallest of tasks.

Second, Jesus focused on the purpose of His trials. He meditated on God’s purpose for the pressure. He kept His hope in God’s faithfulness and goodness. He meditated on the eternal perspective for the pressure. “for the joy that was set before Him”. His focus was an eternal one, that could see the ultimate purpose in the pressures and responsibilities He faced. Consider that God does not want to break you, but He does want maximum usefulness from your short time here on earth. Now He is not going to get more usefulness from you by giving you less responsibilities, but frankly, by giving you more. Stewardship parables teach that those who handle what they have been given correctly, will be given more. That’s what God wants to do. So when we are buckling under the strain, God knows, sympathises and prays for us, but His ultimate purpose is going to be for us to learn how to handle pressure, not how to alleviate it. He wants us to be able to take great responsibilities upon us, for then we will have great privileges with them too. That’s His love. We need to bear that in mind when we face pressures and responsibilities. Likewise, we need to meditate on verses like James 1:2-3; I Peter 1:6-7; and the verses we’re looking at Hebrews 12:1-3 to gain God’s perspective on pressure.

Thirdly, Jesus meditated on God's power and provision for Him. Jesus knew that the trials were from God, by God and part of God's plan, He knew He didn't have to bear them alone, and trusted in the power of His Father to do each of them perfectly. He didn't try to just 'make it through the day'. His trust in His Father's power enabled Him to be extremely useful and effective in all His trials. Remember His reply to Peter when Peter got violent in the garden when the soldiers came to arrest Him. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus was meditating on His Father's abundant power and presence at a very critically stressful time. We need to meditate on verses like I Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 3:20; Luke 1:37, that emphasise God's power and provision for every situation.

Jesus did not deal with pressure by 'getting away from it all' or by trying to shirk His responsibilities, or by giving them all to others. His mind dealt with each from God's perspective.

A renewed mind comes when two things have occurred: 1) till we no longer forget what we are meditating on; and 2) until we believe its truth and our behaviour reflects that we believe the truth. If your responses are one of the following: "Not another burden!...I've got enough to worry about" or "This stuff always happens to me! Doesn't anyone care?" or "I think this responsibility is stupid, but if I have to do it to get my way, I 'll put up with it.", then your mind is not yet renewed. You are still thinking about your pressures from a human perspective. Christ would not have handled His earthly pressures with responses like that ,as He considered pressures from God's perspective.

Jesus also showed that He had a **consecrated body**. His body was disciplined, and a body consecrated to God works together with a consecrated mind to produce usefulness in life. Romans 12:2.

How do I discipline my body? I Cor 9:27. Paul's goal is to not lose out on rewards because of poor physical self-discipline, by his body getting into sin, even though he had preached correctly.

Never let your body control your soul and spirit. You make your body your slave, and you do so consistently. When you fall, and you will, confess, forsake and keep going. Muscles get bigger and fitter, because you keep training them. Continual discipline is the key.

Food. Proverbs 25:16: "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." Eat till you're satisfied, not till you're stuffed. Avoid indulging every appetite when conscience says not to. Eat good foods too, not always what you want. Consider that not wanting to put on weight is an acceptable motive for eating properly, but not a very spiritual one. A higher motive is to want a consecrated body, dedicated, useful and fit for the Master's use.

Sexuality. Meant for marriage. Seeking sexual pleasure in any form outside of marriage is wrong, and feeding the lusts of an undisciplined body.

Sleep. Proverbs 20:13. "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, *and* thou shalt be satisfied with bread." Don't love it too much. Discipline your body to get up when you have slept enough. Garden of Gethsemane, why couldn't His disciples keep their eyes open? Their bodies were not as disciplined as His was, and on the night when it counted , they couldn't go the distance. Mark 1:35 speaks of

how Jesus would rise a great while before day to pray , His body was disciplined in this regard.

Exercise of some form is a good idea. Do what you need to do to make sure your body has strength and vitality enough to cope with everyday living.

A disciplined body & mind also includes adequate rest Ps 127:2 “*It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep*”. Mark 6:31 “And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.”

Fasting. Fasting has many purposes, but one of them is to bring your physical appetites into subordination to your will. You say no to food, for married couples even sex, and you are thereby saying , I am disciplining my physical body for spiritual reasons. You strengthen and entrench self-discipline in your life necessary to handle life’s stresses.

Ultimately, realise the goal is ‘run with patience ’v2 , endurance, obedience even under pressure. The goal is not to have less pressure, it’s to obey in spite of pressure. To seek to ‘depressurise’ our lives will not work. Eliminate what was not meant for you, where you are over committed, but can’t eliminate all pressure or the necessary ones. God is glorified by children who handle their responsibilities with joy and with His strength. I know, dear friend, that these words can sound theoretical and impractical , but ultimately , we need theory to guide us practically. We must meditate on the exact words of God to have any chance of reacting correctly to the pressures of life.

Ultimately, God wants us to enjoy this life. He’s not going to remove responsibility from you, because that would mean removing privilege from you too. He wants us to eliminate wrong responsibilities, eliminate guilt over sin by confessing and forsaking it, and then learn to handle our responsibilities like Jesus did , with a renewed mind and a consecrated body.