

Lessons from Jesus on

HANDLING PEOPLE

PRESSURE

'Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' Matthew 11:28

We all face different types of pressures daily, especially from people who require one thing or another from us. Sometimes we may feel like we're being bombarded and overwhelmed in trying to address these pressures in addition to other things we're balancing.

But God's plan for us isn't for us to live a harassed life and Jesus gives us a template for how we can handle such. Jesus dealt with multitudes during His earthly ministry as throngs of people bombarded him daily looking for one thing or another. Yet in spite of the magnitude of what He had to deal with, Jesus was never hurried or stressed out.

How did he cope with the pressures? What was his attitude towards the crowds and their demands? How do we learn from him in dealing with the different multitudes of pressures and challenges in our own lives? We will look at these and more this series and we pray this study blesses you, positively impacts every aspect of your life and stirs up a hunger for God in you.



Day 1

The People Circles

'...Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles....' Luke 6:12-13

Jesus was always surrounded by great crowds seeking healing and other things from Him. But one of the first things He did was have people join Him because He knew He couldn't fulfil His assignment alone. He also knew that not everyone would play the same role in His life so He had to put people in the right circles in order to be effective.

'After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ' Luke 10:1

'He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. ' Mark 3:14-15

Jesus had 4 people groups – the multitude were not interested in getting to know Him they just wanted what He offered. Then those who walked with Him but were not necessarily close to Him. Then there were the 12 key people that walked closely with him, those He could trust and were integral to His fulfilling His purpose. Within the 12, there were 3 who were very close to him – his inner circle whom He could be vulnerable with. These all followed Jesus to varying extents and He had a different strategy for dealing with each of these groups, based on their proximity to him. We may not all have crowds following us, but the principle remains the same. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to know how to identify and then relate with the different circles so we don't burn ourselves out trying to form relationships with those who in their hearts are relating with us on a transactional basis or exposing our innermost thoughts to those who at best should be kept at social levels. If Jesus had to pray all night to identify these people then it's clear we can't undertake this grouping based on head knowledge alone. Not everyone in our lives is meant for every aspect of our journey.

Prayer: Holy Spirit help me identify my people groupings. Please show me where I am in this grouping in my relationship with Jesus and draw me nearer daily.

Day 2

Dealing with Overwhelm

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)

Imagine being in Jesus' shoes – everyday throngs of people surrounding you clamouring for one thing or the other. Being so busy going from place to place that you barely have time to eat not to talk of rest. Yet nowhere do we see Jesus snapping at people or complaining of being burnt out. That's because He knew something powerful – the key to a successful day was starting in the presence of God.

Yet He frequently withdrew to the wilderness to pray. (Luke 5:16)

'The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.'" Psalms 32:8

Jesus took his prayer life very seriously. He knew he couldn't function effectively without it. By being in God's presence he received direction, instruction, strength and so much more that equipped him for the work he had to do. Jesus was always at the right place at the right time with the right people doing the right thing as a way of life. This definitely minimized a lot of the stress He could have experienced in a day and it's a possibility available to all believers.

"LORD, in the morning you will hear my voice; in the morning I will pray to you, and I will watch for your answer." Psalm 5:3

"Your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left" Isaiah 30:21

We certainly can pray at any point in time but starting the day with prayer that helps to set our day in order and equips us for the challenges the day may bring. So our morning prayer is not just bringing our plans before God and asking Him to approve, but submitting the day into His hands and asking Him to reveal to His plans for the day. When we do so, He takes charge of the day and provides direction.

Prayer: Lord please order my steps today and help me walk in accuracy throughout the day.

Day 3

Identifying Good Vs God

'And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you." ' I Kings 19:7

One of the things that brings pressure is embarking on activities/projects that are outside of our God-given schedule as sometimes we try to do so much for practically everyone we come across. But in God's construct, there's always grace for His agenda – so even if the work seems hectic or there are many activities, grace is available to us. If we start coming under pressure then we need to pause and evaluate what has gone off balance and ask ourselves critical questions – are we actually supposed to be doing all the things we're involved in at this point in time?

'Nevertheless you shall not build the temple, but your son who will come from your body, he shall build the temple for My name.' I Kings 8:19

David wanted to build a temple for God, which appeared to be a good idea, and even Nathan the prophet aligned with it. However God had a different plan – David's role was simply to provide the resources, and Solomon would build. Had David insisted on going ahead, he would have come under strain because He wouldn't have had the grace for this specific assignment. It's important we understand that not everything that's good is necessarily God's plan for us at that point in time. As we relate with our Father in heaven and bring our plans before Him, He helps us identify the things we should be involved in.

'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain...' John 15:16

Jesus made something very clear – we are meant to follow His leading in all areas. However sometimes we go beyond His scope for us and take on more than is necessary. At such times we need to prayerfully go back to Him and ask for mercy and grace to identify what things we're involved in that we shouldn't be.

Prayer: Lord please show me where there is misalignment between Your plan and my activities. Show me the responsibilities I need to let go of and the ones I should take on board. Let Your grace be abundant in my life to do Your will.



Day 4

Retreating for Strength

'But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.' Luke 5:15-16

Jesus was incredibly popular and very much in demand. If His earthly ministry took place today we can imagine how many emails, phone calls, invitations to programs He would be getting on a regular basis. Yet He taught a very important principle: the power of retreating. We may fall into the fallacy of thinking the only to meet everyone's need is to keep doing more, but sometimes the best we can do for ourselves, and others is to cease from activities for a period. There are times we may need to withdraw from the constant messaging, phone calls, emails, etc. in order to re-calibrate our minds and hearts so we don't come under undue pressure to provide and/or perform.

'...and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.' Genesis 2:2

Rest is a word we don't use very often. Rest doesn't necessarily mean sleep, it's simply a cessation of activities. This could be switching off your devices for periods during the day in order to refresh your mind. It could be extended periods of retreat to reflect, meditate, pray and gain accurate perspective. It means different things to different people based on what we're going through at the time.

'He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul...' Psalms 23:2-3

When we hand our schedule over to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to prune us and our use of time, we give Him the opportunity to take us on a journey of restoration both of our bodies and our souls. As we are restored, we receive strength to complete existing tasks and take on new ones with the right perspective of what is really important as opposed to what is urgent at the time. Urgent things vie for our immediate attentions (phone calls, messages, etc) while the important things are those that will help us accomplish the objectives for the day/period. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be rested enough to distil what really makes the day count.

Prayer: Lord help me follow your leading on what really counts. Show me the specific pattern for restoration I need to follow per time so I don't get overwhelmed.

Day 5

Guarding our Gates

'Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.' Proverbs 4:23

People pressure doesn't always come from direct interaction, as there are times we feel pressure based on what we hear people around us say or see them do which shapes our perception of reality. What we see, hear and think about consistently have a direct impact on who we become and how our lives turn out. This means we need to be circumspect about what we open ourselves to.

'Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."' I Corinthians 15:33

'He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.'
Proverbs 13:20

The more we look/listen to something even if we're not primarily involved in that activity, we run the risk of falling into the behaviour patterns of the things we consistently permit in our space – physically or digitally. Therefore we need to constantly audit the conversations we permit ourselves to listen to, the social media accounts we follow, the TV programs we watch, etc. as they are all influencing us whether we realize it or not.

'...Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.' Philippians 4:8

'As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.' Proverbs 27:17

To fix our thoughts on something we have to engage the gateways to our mind which are our eyes and ears. In order to think about the right things, we have to look and listen to the right things and spend time meditating on them. Beyond meditation, we also put the right things into practice in our lives. As we do so we become less susceptible to pressure to conform to the things around us that do not align with God's preferred pattern for our lives. It helps even more when we are surrounded by like minded people who help provide a support system for us to stay on the desired path.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me identify the triggers in my life that bring me under pressure and I'm not even aware. Help me to discern by the power of the Holy Spirit and audit what I allow to enter my ear and eye gates.

Day 6

Caring for Others

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them... Matthew 9:36

Sometimes the pressure we come under is based on what we want to do to impact others. Jesus had compassion for the thousands of people that followed him on a regular basis. Rather than be overwhelmed by being surrounded by such a huge crowd of people, Jesus showed care for them, thinking of their welfare and did what was in His power to do for them and made significant impact in their lives.

'Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" ' John 6:5

Jesus had compassion for people, but He never stopped at just feeling, He always backed things up with action. Everywhere He encountered a need He met it. What was His success strategy? He realised He needed to partner with others to meet the needs. If Jesus had limited himself to doing it all alone, His ministry would not have had the impact it did within its very short time frame.

'Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him... and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.' Luke 8:1,3

There may be areas we see gaps around us where we can take action. The same way Jesus had the disciples working with Him, we also don't have to carry the entire burden ourselves and should ask the Lord to connect us to likeminded people who can assist us in shouldering these burdens so we can jointly make impact either for those close to us or the multitude around us. There are tangible things we can do to make our environment better – without looking to be rewarded for it. Let's commit to doing something and seek the Lord for the right partners.

Prayer: Lord show me the area of society I can make an impact and please connect me to the right partners.



Day 7

Handling Popularity

Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “*Hosanna* to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ *Hosanna* in the highest!” Matthew 21:9

When Jesus came before Pontius Pilate and he gave the Jews an option of who could be released, the multitude chose the notorious Barabbas over Jesus (Matthew 27:20). The same Jesus who had walked with them, healed many, looked after the welfare of many was now the one being chosen for crucifixion. Jesus knew why he came to the earth and that He was going to be crucified in order for God’s plan to redeem us to be completed. But rather than treat the multitude with disdain, He cared for them and at the last-minute asked God to forgive them.

‘Obviously, I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.’ Galatians 1:10

We need to be careful when we place our security in what people are saying about us, rather than what God is saying and what He has asked us to do. Even those closest to us can disappoint us – deliberately or otherwise. Jesus knew his mission, He kept his eyes fixed on God and not on people. What would have happened if Jesus had staked his success on his popularity with the multitude? It’s fair to assume that some of the people whom He healed, counselled, fed, etc were part of those asking that He be crucified. The same people who applaud today can criticise and destroy tomorrow.

‘Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.’ Psalms 119:37

Whose approval are we really living for – the people or God? It’s easy to be swayed by what people say because it’s constantly in our face. But what is more important and the real game changer for our lives is what the Lord says about us. We need the Holy Spirit to help us keep our eyes fixed on God as He’s the only one that can sustain us through both the good and challenging times, regardless of what people are saying. Especially as God’s instructions may be totally contrary to popular opinion.

Prayer: Lord help me prioritize pleasing You over pleasing people. Help me not to be moved by the opinion of men, but by what You say.

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