

Digging Deeper: Under Pressure & Stressed Out Week 1

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THE MAIN THEME

Pressure and stress are unavoidable parts of life. They come through work, relationships, health, finances, family, uncertainty, change, loss, and things we cannot control. Pressure is the demand to perform when something we care about is at stake, while stress is the emotional, mental, and physical strain that comes from circumstances beyond our control.

But pressure does not have to destroy us. It can either crush us and lead to chaos or become something God uses to conform us for His commission. Jesus Himself experienced intense pressure in the Garden of Gethsemane. Rather than allowing pressure to control Him, He surrendered to the Father and prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

VERSE OF THE WEEK

Luke 22:42

“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

WHAT NOT TO MISS

1. Pressure and Stress Are a Part of Life

Following Jesus does not remove us from difficult circumstances. Pressure and stress are part of the human experience. Jesus faced betrayal, suffering, uncertainty, temptation, and the weight of what was coming at the cross.

The goal is not to pretend pressure doesn't exist. Instead, we need to recognize it, understand it, and learn how to respond to it in a way that honors God.

2. Pressure and Stress Often Reveal What We Care About

When something important is threatened, pressure rises. Work expectations, relationships, health, finances, family, performance, and the future can all create pressure because these things matter to us.

Pressure can therefore become an opportunity for self-examination. Instead of only asking, “How do I make this pressure go away?” we can ask, “Why do I care so much about this?” That question can reveal what has captured our hearts.

3. Pressure and Stress Squeeze You and Reveal What Is Inside

Pressure has a way of exposing what is already inside us. The sermon challenges us to consider three questions: What do you care about? Why do you care? How do you cope when that thing is threatened?

Our response to pressure can reveal whether we are trusting God, trying to maintain control, seeking approval, protecting our comfort, or depending on something other than Him.

4. Pressure Can Create Stress, and Stress Can Create Pressure

Pressure and stress are connected but not identical. Pressure involves demands, performance, expectations, agency, and outcomes. Stress involves circumstances, uncertainty, limited control, strain, and coping. Each can intensify the other.

Recognizing the difference helps us identify what we can actually control and where we need to surrender the things we cannot.

5. Jesus Shows Us How to Respond Under Pressure

Jesus entered one of the most intense moments of His earthly life in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was deeply anguished and prayed earnestly. He acknowledged the difficulty before Him, yet surrendered His will to the Father.

Jesus did not deny the pressure or pretend it wasn't painful. He brought it honestly before God and chose obedience. His response reminds us that faith does not mean we never feel overwhelmed; it means we can bring our deepest struggles to God and trust Him with the outcome.

6. Pressure Can Crush Us or Conform Us

The central thesis of the series is that pressure and stress can crush us and lead to chaos, or they can be used to conform us for God's commission.

The same circumstances that expose our weaknesses can become opportunities for God to shape our character. Instead of allowing pressure to pull us away from God, we can allow it to push us deeper into dependence on Him.

7. Pay Attention to How You Are Handling Pressure

The sermon gives a practical opportunity for self-assessment: identify the pressures and stresses in your life, examine why you care about them, and honestly evaluate how you are handling them. The categories range from flourishing and doing well to surviving, overwhelmed, and drowning.

This isn't about judging yourself. It is about becoming aware of where you are and inviting God into those areas. Pressure can become a doorway to greater dependence, wisdom, and surrender.

LIFE APPLICATION

Ask yourself this week:

What is the pressure in my life revealing about what I care about?

Take an honest inventory of the pressures and stresses you are carrying right now. What are you worried about? What feels out of your control? What expectations are weighing on you?

Then ask yourself: Why do I care so much?

Your answer may reveal something deeper about your desires, fears, expectations, or priorities. Bring those things before God instead of carrying them alone.

Like Jesus in Gethsemane, we can acknowledge what is difficult while still surrendering the outcome to God. This week, don't simply ask God to remove the pressure. Ask Him to use it to shape you, deepen your dependence on Him, and prepare you for His purposes.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

MONDAY — Pressure Is Part of Life

Read: Luke 22:14–20

Reflect: Jesus knew suffering was coming, yet He continued faithfully toward the Father's purposes. Pressure does not mean God has abandoned us. Difficult seasons are part of life, even for those who faithfully follow Christ.

Pray: “Father, help me recognize that difficult seasons are not evidence that You have left me. Give me faith to trust You when life feels heavy.”

TUESDAY — What Do You Care About?

Read: Genesis 3:1–5

Reflect: Adam and Eve faced pressure when the serpent challenged what God had said. Their response revealed what they desired and whom they were willing to trust. Pressure can expose the desires competing for our hearts.

Pray: “Lord, show me what my pressures are revealing about what I care about. Help me place my desires under Your authority.”

WEDNESDAY — When You Cannot Control the Outcome

Read: Psalm 46:1–3

Reflect: Stress often grows when circumstances are beyond our control. God does not promise that everything around us will remain stable, but He promises to be our refuge and strength. We can surrender outcomes we cannot control to the One who can.

Pray: “God, help me release what I cannot control. Teach me to trust You when circumstances are uncertain.”

THURSDAY — Not My Will, But Yours

Read: Luke 22:39–43

Reflect: Jesus experienced deep anguish in the Garden, but His prayer was ultimately an act of surrender. He brought His desire honestly before the Father and then submitted Himself to God's will.

Pray: “Father, when my plans and Your purposes seem different, give me the courage to pray like Jesus: not my will, but Yours be done.”

FRIDAY — What Is Being Revealed?

Read: Psalm 139:23–24

Reflect: Pressure can reveal what is happening beneath the surface. Instead of running from what difficult circumstances expose, we can invite God to search our hearts and lead us in His ways.

Pray: “Lord, search my heart. Show me what pressure is revealing in me and use it to make me more dependent on You.”

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Ask participants to identify one current source of pressure or stress without immediately trying to solve it.
 - Encourage the group to distinguish between pressure as a demand to perform and stress as the strain of dealing with circumstances beyond their control.
 - Ask: “*What does your current pressure reveal about what you care about?*”
 - Discuss how Jesus responded to overwhelming pressure in Gethsemane.
 - Emphasize that acknowledging pressure is not a sign of weak faith. Jesus Himself experienced deep anguish and brought it honestly before the Father.
 - Invite participants to consider whether their current pressures are crushing them or becoming opportunities for God to conform them for His purposes.
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THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Take a Pressure and Stress Inventory this week:

- Write down the pressures and stresses you are currently experiencing.
- Identify which ones you can influence and which ones are beyond your control.
- Ask yourself why you care so deeply about each one.
- Notice how you typically cope when those things are threatened.
- Bring one specific pressure to God in prayer each day.
- Pray, “Not my will, but Yours be done.”

Then follow through.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the biggest source of pressure or stress in your life right now?
 2. How would you explain the difference between pressure and stress?
 3. Why do you think pressure often reveals what we care about?
 4. What has pressure recently revealed about your priorities, fears, or desires?
 5. How does Jesus' experience in Gethsemane change the way you view your own struggles with pressure?
 6. What makes it difficult to surrender things that are outside of your control?
 7. Do you tend to let pressure crush you or use it as an opportunity to grow? Why?
 8. What is one area where you need to pray, “Not my will, but Yours be done”?
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PRAYER POINTS

CONNECT

Thank God that He is present with us even when life feels overwhelming and that we can bring our pressures honestly before Him.

CARE

Pray for those who are overwhelmed by work, relationships, finances, health, family, loss, uncertainty, or circumstances beyond their control.

CULTIVATE

Ask God to use pressure and stress to reveal what is in your heart, deepen your dependence on Him, and shape your character.

COMMISSION

Pray that God would use the way we respond to pressure to demonstrate His peace, faithfulness, and transforming power to those around us.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You for showing us what it looks like to remain faithful under pressure. Thank You for meeting us in the moments when life feels overwhelming and reminding us that we do not have to carry everything on our own. Help us recognize what our pressures reveal about what we care about, and give us the courage to surrender those things to You. Teach us to trust You with what we cannot control and to respond to stress with faith instead of fear. Use every difficult season to shape us, strengthen us, and prepare us for Your purposes. May we learn to pray as Jesus did, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” Amen.