

Text: Mark 3:7-19<sup>1</sup>

Title: How did Jesus handle pressure?

Date: March 6, 2011

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Pressure. Stress. We all experience it.

One over-worked secretary told her boss: “When this rush is over, I’ve going to have a nervous breakdown. I earned it, I deserve it and nobody’s going to take it from me!” (Billy Graham, The Secret of Happiness as quoted in Charles Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, p. 535)

One mother described her life in these words...

“The life I have chosen as wife and mother entrains a whole caravan of complications... It involves food and shelter; meals, planning, marketing, bills and making ends meet in a thousand ways. It involves not only the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, but countless other experts to keep my modern house with its modern ‘simplifications’ (electricity, plumbing, refrigerator, gas-stove... dish washer, radios, car and numerous other labour saving devices) functioning properly. It involves health; doctors, dentists, appointments, medicine ... vitamins, trips to the drugstore. It involves education, spiritual, intellectual, physical; schools, schools conferences, car-pools, extra trips for basketball or orchestra practice; tutoring; camps, camp equipment and transportation. It involves clothes, shopping, laundry, cleaning, mending, letting skirts down and sewing buttons on, or finding someone else to do it. It involves friends, my husband’s, my children’s, my own and endless arrangements to get together; letters, invitations, telephone calls and transportation hither and yon.” (Anne Morrow Lindbergh as quoted in Kent Hughes, Mark, vol 1, p. 84)

A study recently done by the American Institute of Stress reported that as much as 90% of the visits to primary care physicians in the United States are stress-related.

Demands. Expectations. Time. Deadlines. Fatigue. Worry. Anxiety. Stress.

“Stress” is a relatively new word in our vocabulary, having been coined in the 1950s, but it describes an old problem. And it’s a problem that Jesus recognized and to which he offered a solution:

**“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”  
Matthew 11:28**

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Whenever someone invites you to learn from them you want to make sure they've got their act together. We want to take advice from someone who takes their own advice. So...

### **“How did Jesus handle pressure?”**

Let's take a look at the kind of pressure that Jesus faced. I'm reading this morning from The Gospel According to Mark, chapter three, verses seven to nineteen. It's a story from a moment in Jesus' life and ministry when pressure began to mount up and it gives us insight into the way in which Jesus dealt with the crush of life. Mark wrote...

**<sup>7</sup> Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea <sup>8</sup> and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. <sup>9</sup> And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, <sup>10</sup> for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. <sup>11</sup> And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” <sup>12</sup> And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.**

**<sup>13</sup> And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and have authority to cast out demons. <sup>16</sup> He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); <sup>17</sup> James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); <sup>18</sup> Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, <sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.**

**First** of all, Jesus experienced pressure from **people who were out to get him.**

Our reading today began in Mark 3:7 with Jesus walking alongside a lake. But we need to remember where he just came from. In verse 6 we read...

**“The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.” Mark 3:6**

Jesus had just completed a series of five confrontations with the religious leadership of his day. The confrontations began with questions about Jesus that they mulled over in their hearts and ended with their decision to put Jesus to death. We might have people who dislike us intensely for various reasons; we might even have people who try to make our lives as miserable as they can, but

there would be few of us who know the pressure of having someone actually plotting to end our lives!

Of course, many of our brothers and sisters in Christ do face this threat every day. Today in the bulletin you can read about a Christian in Afghanistan who faced a serious threat from many who are opposed to his Christian faith. Christians in Afghanistan and in many other parts of the world have been killed by mobs whose hatred is directed against the Gospel of Jesus. As I read the testimonies of these people, the common theme that appears again and again in their stories is that they look to Jesus to help them cope with the fear and the pressure of these attacks. They run to him for help because...

They are confident that Jesus knows their situation!

**Second**, Jesus faced pressure from **people who were out to get something from him.**

**“And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.” Mark 3:9-10**

Word about Jesus' ability to heal had spread far and wide! People came to him, not only from the immediate area of Galilee, but from miles away. Mark mentions that people had come from as far away as Idumaea, a region in south of Jerusalem that was almost 100 miles distant. These were sick people who had heard that Jesus was able to heal people with fevers, people with paralyzed bodies, people with deformed limbs and even people who had leprosy, the ancient equivalent of the modern day AIDS epidemic.

Imagine living in a culture without medical care and hearing that someone had the power to take away the illness your child or wife had been suffering from for years! You would bundle them up and carry them if you had to, covering whatever distances were necessary, just to give them a chance to become whole! And that's what people did with Jesus. Mark says that there were so many people pressing in upon Jesus that they were actually falling upon him. That's the literal translation for the phrase, "pushing forward," in verse 10.

The crowd was pressing in upon Jesus so intensely, begging that he heal them, that Jesus asked one of the disciples to stand ready with a boat just off shore in case he needed to escape the crush of the crowd.

Do you have people pressing upon you, asking you to do things for you? If you're a parent you probably feel overwhelmed by demands at times. If you're a competent person you probably experience that overload of demands. The common wisdom is that if you want something done you ask a busy person. The requests are all good ones and we often feel compelled to attempt to meet the

demands. Ability draws opportunity. But too many opportunities become pressure that can lead to stress which can lead to exhaustion and collapse unless we learn to pace ourselves.

Jesus knows what it's like to be pressured by demands.

**Third**, Jesus dealt with pressure from **forces that were trying to get him off track.**

**“And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.” Mark 3:11-12**

Not only were people with physical illnesses seeking out his help, but people whose lives were being torn apart by evil forces were coming to Jesus. Perhaps friends and family brought them to Jesus because they had heard that Jesus had been able to free others in the grip of evil forces. Or perhaps the people themselves, with all the strength they could muster, brought themselves to be freed. But as they approached Jesus, the evil forces would instantly recognize Jesus for who he really was and would cause the person to fall down before Jesus and the spirits would cry out, “You are the Son of God.” (Mark 2:12)

In Mark chapter 1 we read of a similar situation. A man with an evil spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum had been freed. The evil spirit had recognized Jesus and had cried out...

**“I know who you are – the Holy One of God!” Mark 1:24**

Jesus responded to that cry that same way he responded to these demonized people – he ordered the spirits to be quiet and not declare who he was. Why? The spirits were absolutely correct: Jesus is the Holy One of God. He is the Son of God. Why wouldn't Jesus want this truth to be spoken?

It's because Jesus had a plan and it wasn't time, yet, for people to hear this truth stated so plainly. For many people, Jesus was a miracle worker – a man who was on touch with God's power in an unusual way and for many that's all Jesus would ever be – a man who did remarkable things.

But Jesus had more important work to perform than the healing people's bodies and the freeing of their lives from evil spirits – his greatest work would bring us freedom from the punishment for sin and cleansing that would free our spirits from guilt and shame. His greatest work was the cross. And the knowledge that Jesus was the Son of God, the Holy One of God, had to be understood from the foot of that cross and from the open door of the empty tomb.

One day Jesus took his disciples to the top a mountain and there displayed his divine glory to them. Mark says that...

**“he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.” Mark 9:2-3**

Then a voice spoke from heaven and said...

**“This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” Mark 9:7**

The disciples were awestruck by this revelation of the divine, supernatural nature of Jesus – he ***was*** the Son of God! They were overwhelmed by this event and struggled to know what to do with what they had just witnessed. But Mark tells us that...

**“And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”  
Mark 9:9**

Jesus had an agenda for the revelation of the truth about who he was. The evil spirits knew his true identity better than anyone, but they were trying to push Jesus “off message.” Jesus wouldn’t let them. He stuck to his plan.

Do you have people who try to get you to reorganize your life to fit their priorities? Do you know people who are more than willing to tell you what they think you should do with your time? Do you feel pressure from people or circumstances to alter the things you think are important? Remember: “the good is often the enemy of the best.” You need to determine what is really important to you and you need to make sure you focus on accomplishing those things. If you don’t determine what your priorities are, you can be sure that somebody will!

Jesus knows what it’s like to be pressured to set his priorities aside.

**So how did Jesus handle pressure?**

**First of all...**

***After working hard, Jesus took a break.***

**“Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea...” Mark 3:7**

Mark identifies a pattern in Jesus’ ministry. After accomplishing something significant in ministry, Jesus always took time away.

After spending a busy day of ministry in which he healed Peter’s mother and many who had illnesses and demons...

**“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” Mark 1:35**

After healing a man with leprosy, the crush of people became so great that...

**“Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places...” Mark 1:45**

After healing a paralyzed man in Capernaum...

**“He went out again beside the sea...” Mark 2:13**

And here, at the end of a very intense series on confrontations with the religious leaders of his day, “Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea....” (Mark 3:7)

Jesus knew how to pace himself. Getting by himself in a “solitary place” or a walk by the lake with his friends – Jesus took time away from the pressures of ministry.

Two pastors were talking one day. The one pastor said to the other, “I never take a day off because the devil never takes a holiday!” “You’re right,” the other pastor responded, “but I don’t think we’re supposed to follow his example. My Bible tells me that God rested and so will I.”

In Mark 6:31 in the King James Version it says that one day, Jesus said to his disciples...

**“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.”  
Mark 6:31 (KJV)**

Vance Havner was an American pastor who had the gift of coining a phrase. He once said, **“If we do not follow Christ’s example to ‘come apart,’ we may indeed, just come apart!”** (as quoted in Kent Hughes, *Mark*, vol. 1, p. 85)

You don’t need to take a whole weekend or even a whole day to do this. When I was in Coaldale one of the things I used to do on my lunch hours was drive to the river bottom park in Lethbridge and just sit in the car listening to the wind in the trees and sound of the birds and eat my lunch. I’d read a piece from a Bible I keep in the car and just be quiet for a bit. It was just a lunch hour. But it helped me to take a break. Maybe for you, it would be just pulling the car into a pullout at the side of the road for 15 minutes to help you catch your breath and rethink your day.

If you’re pressured, take a break – Jesus did.

Second,

***Before making decisions, Jesus took time to pray***

**“And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.” Mark 3:13**

Now, you’re probably looking at that Scripture and wondering “Where does it say anything about praying?”

Well, I’m cheating a bit. Luke tells us the same story in his Gospel about Jesus selecting the apostles on the mountain and this is how he records it...

**“In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles....” Luke 6:12-13**

The point here is simple: If Jesus had to do this, even though he is the Son of God, how much more do we, adopted sons & daughters of God, need to follow His example?

For me, prayer isn’t so much about telling God what I think He should be doing. It’s more about God telling me what I should be doing. I find that in prayer He has an opportunity to reorient my priorities to reflect His priorities. **E. Stanley Jones**, a great writer on the spiritual life, once wrote...

**“Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God.... He gives me what I need for character, conduct and creativeness, so I’m rich with His riches, strong in His strength, pure in His purity and able in His ability.”** (as quoted in Kent Hughes, *Mark*, vol. 1, p. 86)

Earlier in the service today we reflected on Andrew Murray’s maxim that...

**“Waiting on God ascribes to him the glory of being all to us.”**

The Scripture that inspired Murray’s meditation was Psalm 62. David wrote...

**“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.” Psalm 62:1-2**

When we take the time to stop and lay our lives, our burdens and our pressures before the Lord, his peace will give us the ability to see our world shaken but not destroyed. When we wait on God our lives can take the hits that come our way, but not be utterly demolished. We are shaken, but we keep standing!

If you're pressured, talk to God – Jesus did!

**Finally,**

***To accomplish His mission, Jesus recruited help***

**“And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” Mark 3:14-15**

Many people tried to push themselves into Jesus' life, but these men were invited in. Why? Because Jesus wanted to multiply his ministry through others.

He knew that a day would come when he would be taken away but the task of spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom would have to go on. It would be these 12 who would keep it going.

He knew that as one man, he could only reach one village at a time. But when he sent out the 12 apostles to carry the message and the power of the Kingdom into village after village, the work of the Kingdom would spread faster and wider than anything he could do on his own.

And he knew that as he shared his ministry with them, they in turn one day would share their ministries with others and so on and so on and so on, until all the world was reached with the message of the Kingdom of God.

The Apostle Paul took Jesus' lesson to heart and when he trained Timothy to share his ministry, he told him...

**“what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Timothy 2:2**

And so on, and so on.

Why do we try to do things on our own when Jesus built a team to work with? If the Son of God understood the necessity of sharing his ministry with others, why do we try to carry burdens that crush us? Why don't we ask for help? Why don't we spend the time and energy sharing ministry together?

**How can we avoid being crushed by the pressures of life?**

**Take a break ... Jesus did!**

**Talk to God ... Jesus did!**

**Ask for help ... Jesus did!**

Does this poem by Annie Johnson Flint express your experience?

**Pressed out of measure and pressed to all lengths;  
Pressed so intently it seems beyond strength.  
Pressed in body and pressed in soul;  
Pressed in the mind till the dark surges roll;  
Pressure by foes, pressure by friends;  
Pressure on pressure, till life nearly ends.  
Pressed into loving the staff and the rod;  
Pressed into knowing no helper but God.**

Annie Johnson Flint

(as quoted in Charles Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, p. 536)

- **Invitation to the Lord's Table**
- **Songs of Communion:**
  - Behold the Lamb
  - The Wonderful Cross
- **Benediction:**