

PRESSURE: HOW TO REDUCE IT

Matthew 11:28-30

Good morning! We're on the second part of our series on "Energize!" Since Thanksgiving and Christmas are just around the corner plus the fact we're celebrating our anniversary and we'll be very busy the next few weeks, I thought we prepare for all these. So, we're looking at certain principles in the Bible we can apply in our lives to keep our energy going. Last week, we looked at how to restore your passion. Today, we're going to look at "Pressure: How to Reduce It".

Have you ever felt pressured in your life? I sure did. I was 40 and I wasn't married yet. Everywhere I went, people were asking, "When's the big day?" And I would answer, "May 8" And they'd say, "Really, you like a May Bride, not a June Bride?" And I'd say, "No, May 8 happen." Well, as it turned out, God provided in his time, and he gave me a June Bride. Now, I'm always under pressure. Just kidding. Truth is, I thank God because of my June Bride. I wouldn't have lasted long in ministry if not for my June Bride. She has supported me since day one, taking off some stresses in my life which could have made me go under. In fact, as many of you know, our church experienced some sort of an upheaval many years back and I wanted to quit but she was the one who kept telling me, "Don't quit. Stay on. God is faithful." That's why I'm still here. When you prayed for me on Pastor's Appreciation Day, it's good she was prayed for as well because both of us need your prayers. As the saying goes, "Behind every great man is a woman rolling her eyes." Oops, I mean, "Behind every successful man there is a woman who prays for him and believes in him, encourages him to be great, and supports him through hard times." That's a quote from anonymous and I agree. Amen, men and women?

Today, I'd like to share with you how I survived those pressure-laden years in my past. And there were other pressures I experienced, some small, some big, and many of you, I'm sure, felt pressure as well, and in fact, some of us are feeling pressure right now, at work, at home, at school. Whether we like it or not, pressure will come. We can't avoid it. But we can reduce it.

In Matthew 11, in just three verses, Jesus gives you everything you need to know about stress management. You can put away all of your seminar tapes, all your philosophy, all your motivational stuff, all your self-help books. Everything you need to know about stress management is in these verses.

Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* This passage is so filled with material we're just going to focus on each word in today's message. I want you to take note of four words – "come," "take," "learn," "find." If you do the first three – come, take, and learn, the Bible says you will find rest for your souls.

So, **how do you reduce pressure in your life?**

1. The first step is come to Christ.

Come to Christ, that's it. Turn to Jesus. In the Bible many people came to Christ for lots of different reasons. Some came because they had a problem. Some came because they had a question. Some came because they had an illness. Some came because somebody they loved had died. Some came because they were hungry. It's interesting, Jesus never criticized anybody for the reason they came to Him. He didn't care why they came as long as they came to Him.

Now, this is not an area you normally think about – rest. Coming to Jesus for rest. You might think about coming to Christ for salvation. Or you might think about coming to Christ for forgiveness. Or you might think about coming to Christ

for purpose or for wisdom. But Jesus says, No, I want you to come to Me also for rest. For stress reduction. For management of your pressure. He says, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*” That’s probably not something you usually think about coming to Christ for. But He says, that’s what I want to give you. I want to give you rest.

What kind of rest. He says, it’s rest for your soul. This is much deeper than physical rest. It’s soul rest, spiritual rest. Emotional rest. Mental rest. Your problem in stress is not overworked muscles. In fact, most of us could use a few more working of our muscles. Your problem is not overworked muscles. Your problem is an overworked mind. Overworked emotions. Overworked anxiety. Overworked tension. It’s soul rest you need. Physical rest is not enough. You need spiritual recharging, emotional recharging, mental recharging. You need relief from anxiety and from tension and from guilt and from fear and from bitterness and all these different things. Jesus says, when You are stressed out the first thing you do is come to Me.

Let me ask you a question. Who do you normally turn to first when you’re stressed out? What do you naturally go to for relief? I guarantee you it’s probably not Christ. When you’re stressed out many of you the first thing you turn to is television. You flop down on the couch and turn on the TV. Or you may turn to your Jacuzzi and sit in a hot tub. Or you may turn to food. Or you may turn to a pill when you’re stressed out. Or you may turn to drink. Or you may turn to some hobby. Jesus says, none of those things are going to take care of soul rest. They can’t relieve your emotional, spiritual tension. They’re not going to work. They might work on the body but they don’t work on your heart and your mind. None of these can rest your soul. In fact, only God can give rest to your soul.

Isaiah 40:29-31 says this “*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and*

fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Twice it mentions “strength”. He gives strength, he renews strength. What does that mean? That’s strength you didn’t know you had because you don’t have it. It’s strength that comes from God. It’s external strength. It’s like getting plugged into the power source. God says, “Don’t plug into TV. Don’t plug into food. Don’t plug into social media. Don’t plug into all these other things. Plug into Me. The first thing you need to do when you’re emotionally, mentally, spiritually stressed out is get alone with Me.” He’s saying, what you really need when you’re over stressed and you’re overloaded you need more time with God alone. Quiet time with God alone. That’s where you get plugged in. It says “those who hope in the Lord”. Hope is also wait in Hebrew as used in this verse. That’s why many versions say, “Those who wait upon the Lord.” That’s a quiet time with God.

When you’re stressed out the first thing you do is you come to Christ. What does that mean? It means you get alone by yourself and you just settle down, maybe you read the Bible a little bit. Maybe you pray a little bit. But just be quiet. And He says, The focus will begin to shift from you to God and you’ll begin to sense His grace. All of a sudden you’re less thinking about your problem and you’re more thinking about His power. You’re not thinking about your situation. You’re thinking about His sovereignty. You’re not thinking about your circumstance. You’re thinking about the fact that He is in control. All of a sudden the stress starts to drain out of your life.

He says, “There are no qualifications here. Just come to Me.” I’m going to stay on this point until you get it. The antidote to your stress is not a plan, it is not a program, it is not a process, it is not a philosophy, it is not a pill, it is a person.

What you need is God. It is a person, not a program – a person. You need to come to Christ. This is where you get your renewal.

Notice this next verse. *“Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”* (Luke 8:50) Jesus is saying to you, *“Don’t be afraid; just believe, and everything will be all right”*. Come to Christ and everything will be all right.

Number two after you come to Christ...

2. Give up control.

This one is a little bit harder. The reason you get overloaded is you’re trying to control too many things in your life. You’re acting like it all depends on you. I’ve got to hold it all together. If it’s to be, it’s up to me. I’m the general manager of the universe.

I’m going to tell you something. You can let go of it all and the world is not going to fall apart. I know that’s shocking. But if you’ll give up control you’ll realize you had a lot less than you thought you did.

The fact is the greater your need to control things, the more stressed a person you’re going to be. The higher your need to control things the greater the level of stress in your life. I’ll give you a little tip. If you want to lower the stress in your life, let go of control! Let go of control. Don’t make all the mistakes yourself. Let other people make some of them. Spread the blame around a little bit. You’ve got to give up control.

This is why Jesus says in Matthew 11:29, *“Take my yoke upon you.”* I’ve got to explain for those of you who are non-farmers what a yoke is. A lot of you think it’s the yellow part that has all the cholesterol in it. That’s not the yoke He’s talking about. He’s talking about a cattle yoke, which is a wooden frame, which joins two farm animals together. Either you put two horses together or two cattle under a yoke together.

You say, wait a minute! That doesn't sound like stress relief to me! Take my yoke upon you. That sounds like more burden. Why in the world would I want to take Jesus' yoke on me? I'm already carrying too much.

The purpose of a yoke actually is to make the load lighter. It is for the benefit of the farm animal. Because instead of a harness which is on one cow or one horse and the single cow or horse is pulling the wagon, or pulling the plow, or pulling the load, when you yoke two animals together you cut the load in half. Fifty percent is being carried by some other person or some other animal. So actually a yoke has a lightening effect and an increasing weight effect. Because now you're sharing the load. That's why Jesus says in Matthew 11:30 "*For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"

Let me be very honest with you. He says, "My yoke is easy." Is your yoke easy? Probably not. So if you are feeling overloaded right now, if you're feeling stressed out at this very moment it means one thing. You're not yoked to Christ. If you're feeling stressed this morning in your life it means one simple thing. You're not yoked to Christ. Because Christ says, My yoke is easy. Oh, you're saved but you're stressed. You're on your way to heaven but you're stressed out. You're pressured. And you at this moment are not yoked to Christ. Any time you get under stress it means this – you have not come to Christ and you have not given up control. You are not yoked to Christ. That is the symptom of not being yoked. Every time you get detached from God, every time you get disconnected from God, every time you get unyoked from God, you're going to be stressed out. You're going to be pulling the load back by yourself and you're going to be overloaded. A yoke is a symbol of partnership.

A yoke is also a symbol of submission or surrender. A yoke is used to guide, to control, to direct. The load is lighter but in return for a lighter load you give up control. That's why the Bible says in Galatians 5:25 "*Since we live by the Spirit,*

let us keep in step with the Spirit.” You have to keep in step when you’re yoked together. When I’m yoked with Christ we move together in the same direction at the same pace. It is impossible for you to go a different direction from Christ when you’re yoked to Him. And it’s impossible to go faster or slower than Christ when you’re yoked to Him. He sets the direction and He sets the pace because now you’re giving up control.

Come to Christ. Give up control. You take the yoke on you. Surrender. A yoke keeps you from going in your own direction. It keeps you from going too fast. It keeps you from burning out.

Here’s the point. Anytime there’s a delay in your life and God’s timing is not your timing and anytime you’re waiting on God, God has a better plan. Jesus Christ said, “I don’t want to go heal a sick man. I want to let him die. Then I’m going to raise him from the dead.” Which is just what He did. Anytime there is a delay in your life it means God wants to do something bigger, better, and greater. Count on it. Anytime there is a delay in your life with God involved it means God wants to do something bigger, better, and greater. Jesus said, we’re just going to take our time getting there. We’re not in a hurry. I’ve got a better plan. I’ve got a better idea. I’m going to raise the guy from the dead. So let’s just take our time. Let’s have a picnic. He was never in a hurry.

Ok, to reduce the pressure in your life, you come to Christ then you give up control. There’s a third thing that Jesus said. He said...

3. Learn to trust.

That’s the third secret of stress management. He says, *“Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* Jesus modeled how to live a life of purpose and a life of peace rather than pressure and anxiety. He was purpose driven and He was peacefully living because He did not live by pressures but by priorities. He said, Learn from Me.

Here's a third step for stress reduction. Follow Jesus' model. Watch how He lived and do it His way. Do what He did. Do the same thing. If you want balance and help and sanity in your life you learn from Jesus. Not Dr. Phil or Oprah – Jesus! Because everybody on this planet is stressed out. But Jesus says, “I will teach you. Learn from Me.”

Leaning is a process. It takes time. You didn't develop your stressed out, overloaded, hyper drive lifestyle in a day. You're not going to get over it in a day. You're going to have to unlearn a bunch of habits that you've developed and you're going to have relearn to live the life the way that Jesus Christ did. That will lower your stress. And it takes time. It's not going to happen quickly.

So what can I learn from Jesus? He says, “Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble.” The first time I read this I said, “Gentle and humble! How in the world is that going to help me manage my stress? I don't need that. Why doesn't He say, I will teach you confidence and endurance? I'd like that. Confidence and endurance. Why doesn't He say, I will teach you courage and strength? That sounds good. I will teach you time management and goal setting. I will teach you energy, efficiency and effectiveness.

No. He says, you want to lower your stress? I'll teach you how to be gentle and humble. Why does He say those two things? Because the two biggest, greatest sources of stress in your life are aggression and arrogance. Those two things are the biggest sources of stress in your life. Aggression and arrogance. And as a result the two biggest de-stressors in your life are gentleness and humility.

First, aggression. Do you know why we get stressed out? Because we don't wait. We don't pause. We don't consider. We don't delay. We get aggressive. We jump in right now. Let's get it done! And we get over committed because of our own aggression. We do not like to wait. So we're going to get aggressive.

We're going to not pause. We're not going to consider. We're not going to delay. We get aggressive.

Then we get arrogant. How do we get arrogant? We try to control everything. Your ego and my ego is responsible for a lot more stress than we would like to admit. A lot of your stress comes from your pride, from you thinking that you can do more than you can do, that you can control more than you can control, that you can be more than you are, that you can have more than you have and on and on and on. So you try to do it all, act it all, be it all, have it all, please everybody, act like superman or superwoman. And you're not.

So it is aggression and arrogance that causes the stress in your life. You need to remind yourself that you are not the general manager of the universe, that you are not everybody's savior, that you are a cog in a giant wheel. This thing is much bigger than you and me. It's about God, not us.

What was Jesus' secret of peace? You can read the book of John and twelve times in that book He says, "I only do what My Father tells Me to do. I only say what My Father tells Me to say. I only act when My Father tells Me to act. I only respond when My Father tells Me to respond." He lived a life of simple obedience. He was gentle with people and He was humble. As a result He lived a life that was much reduced in stress. And He didn't worry about the rest. He didn't worry about trying to please everybody.

I want to suggest – you've tried a lot of other things to reduce your stress. Why don't you try trusting God? Why don't you try that one?

Proverbs 20 *"A person's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand their own way?"* Why don't you give up trying to get an explanation of why everything's happening the way it does – "Why is this happening to me?" Explanations don't satisfy anyway. Since God's controlling our steps why don't

you just trust when things happen? Why don't you trust instead of trying to figure it all out?

Then when you get tired what is God's promise when you come to him?

Here's what it says in Psalm 142:3 *"When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way."* God watches over you. Just trust Him.

There are lots of warning lights in life that can tell you when you're not trusting God. But let me tell you the biggest one, at least in Northern Virginia. You know you're not trusting God when you start worrying about your finances. When you're worrying about your finances you're acting like an orphan, you're acting like God hasn't promised to take care of your needs. The Bible says *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"* (Heb. 13:5)

God says, "If I'm going to be with you and I'm not going to abandon you, do you think I'm going to let you slip through the cracks? Don't you think I've promised to care for all your needs? Don't you think you can relax and not get stressed out? Don't you know if you come to Me and give up control and learn to trust, I will be with you?"

Folks, I don't know what you're going through right now. But Jesus says to you *"Come to Me. Come to Me. All you who are weary, stressed out and overloaded and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Some of you today in here, or even online, you're about to go under because of the stress in your life. Come to Christ. Give up control. Learn to trust. Come to Christ, give up control, learn to trust. Come to Christ give up control. Learn to trust. If you have to say that fifty times a day to get it in your mind, that is the secret of stress management. *Come to Christ* and get time alone with God. *Give*

up control and taking on His yoke. *Learn to trust* – You're God and I'm not and I trust You.