

THE PRESSURE TEST

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God. The Pressure Test challenges the true commitment of your heart!!!!

There isn't a person alive who doesn't face some pressure. Pressure doesn't have to get the best of you, but it will always be there.

Whether you have a great job or are unemployed, you're going to feel pressure. Whether you're married or single, whether you have children or not, you're going to feel pressure. Whether you're male or female, tall or short, black or white, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, Jamaican, or African, you're going to feel pressure. After noticing that even those who I believed were strong in their faith often dealt with pressure in unhealthy ways, I asked God why. I believe I have been shown some things that will be a benefit and a blessing to you, and that will help you learn how to handle pressure the right way.

Let's talk about the Pressure Test.

The Pressure Test will reveal whether affliction or persecution will cause you to seek refuge, consolation, or relief from any God other than the Most High God. The Pressure Test challenges the true commitment of your heart. It will expose whether your love for God is a mere matter of convenience or if you will bless the Lord at all times. Jesus told us, These things I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world John 16:33. The word peace in this verse come from the Greek word *eirene*, which corresponds to Hebrew word *shalom* which means completeness, soundness, nothing missing, and nothing broken. In Jesus we can have

completeness and soundness with nothing missing and nothing broken in our lives. Praise God for that! However you can't just pay attention to the first part of the verse and ignore the rest.

Jesus goes on to promise us that we will have tribulation. He didn't say in the world there's strong possibility you'll have tribulation. He didn't say in the world, if you do things wrong way, you'll have tribulation. He said if you living in the world, you can take it to the bank: tribulation will show up. There is tribulation that will come your way whether you're doing the right thing or the wrong thing. I know you'd rather not have to acknowledge that fact. But reality is that it's in the Bible, and it is going to come to pass whether you like it or not. The word tribulation come from a Greek word *thlipsis*, which literally means pressure. So when Jesus say in the world you shall have tribulation, what He actually saying is in the world you shall have pressure. There's not a person alive who is able to live life without it. Because Jesus took the time to make such a direct statement about the pressure we will face in this life, it behooves us to learn how to deal with it. The apostle Paul was a perfect example of how we should deal with pressure-filled situations. He ran into more trouble than anybody I know of. He was beaten with rods multiple times, stoned, and shipwrecked. He was often hungry and thirsty. He had trouble with bandits, with his own people, and even with the Gentiles he was sent to minister to. Yet consider his words

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. Act 20:22-24

Throughout his many hardships Paul always maintained an attitude that said, None of these things are going to move me. Paul understood that he had a mission and assignment from God, and if he backed down and cowered because of the pressure, he would not be able to obtain all that the Kingdom of God had to offer him. Many people don't deal with pressure the way Paul did. I've seen some people drink alcohol or use drugs when they're under pressure. Getting drunk or high allows them to escape the reality of what they're facing. However, when they come out of that high or drunken state, the problem is still there-and it may even be worse because of what they did or said while intoxicated.

Some people who don't deal well with pressure can't sleep. Others develop ulcers. Some lash out at other people-just say the simplest thing, and they're ready to bite your head off!!! Other people get up in the middle of the night and grab a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken with biscuits, honey, and mashed potatoes to comfort them. When the pressure is off, however, they complain because they're five pounds heavier. Then there are those who don't eat at all when the pressure hits. Some people respond to pressure in their life by becoming extremely depressed. They disappear for days at a time. They watch the caller ID when friends and family are trying to call. It's not that they dislike the people who are calling; it's simply too much for them to communicate with someone while they're under the weight of the pressure. Some people lie when they're under pressure. Even some Christians, if backed into a corner, will come up with a fast lie. Once they tell one lie, they have to tell another one to back up the first one-and before you know it, they're wrapped up in a whole web of deceit just because they were afraid to deal with the pressure the right way.

Many people develop a running spirit when they're under pressure. They'll go from city to city, church to church, job to job,

relationship to relationship-running away at the first sign of pressure. They don't realize that there is nowhere on earth you can run from pressure.

LET GOD'S LOVE SATURATE YOUR HEART

If you're going to successfully pass THE PRESSURE TEST, the first thing you have to do is let God's love saturate your heart. I know this seems elementary because you already know God loves you. But if you really have a revelation of how much He loves you, then no matter what tribulation the enemy tries to bring your way, that pressure will not peel you away from your loving Father and make you run away from Him.

The Bible says, Who's shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulations, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, no powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord Rom 8:35, 37-39.

Let this fact saturate your heart until it becomes all you think about when trouble shows up. Saturating your heart with the Word of God is like marinating your food rather than just seasoning it. If you sprinkle some seasonings on top of the meat you're getting ready to prepare, the flavor just sits on the outside. But if you marinate the meat for a while, the flavor gets down deep and every bite is infused. You need to take the time to marinate in the love of God so you can deal with the pressures that show up in your life. When you have a revelation of how much

God loves you, it takes the pressures off of you and puts it back on His love.

BE COURAGEOUS

The second thing you must do to pass THE PRESSURE TEST is choose to operate in courage when under pressure. The Bible says, And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in the love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world (1 John 4:16-17).

The day of judgment is the day of test, trial, and temptation in your life. Knowing God loves us and we love Him gives us confidence that we can overcome anything that shows up in our lives. It's like when my younger brother would mouth off at kids who were older-and bigger-than he was. He wasn't afraid because he knew that I, being his older brother, would defend him. Sometimes boys who were bigger than me would pick on my brother. Even though I was scared, I know that if we wanted to live in peace and not have to deal with those bullies again, I was going to have to stand up to them. You can't let the devil think that every time he brings pressures your way you're going to quit or run.

The moment you let the devil think he's running the show he will push you around, always telling you what you can and cannot do. So you just need to rise up and declare. I will not be pushed around by pressure. I will not be bullied because the Lord loves me. You won't be afraid of what may come toward you when you have a clear revelation of the love God has for you. First John 4:18 tells us, There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear. Courage is not the absence of fear, someone once said. Rather, it is being terrified but willing to keep persevering anyway. If you had no fear coming against you, there would be no need for courage. Deciding to operate in courage means you're not going to let the contrary circumstance get the best of you. Even if you can't see how things are going to work out, it means you're going to keep walking forward. The Bible tells of a woman who heard about Jesus and decided to be courageous and go and see Him.

And behold, a woman which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. Matthew 9:20-22

When this woman showed up in the crowd, she was taking a chance that somebody might point her out and say she had no business being out among the people. She was ceremonially unclean according to Levitical law and could have been stoned to death before she ever got to Jesus. Just like this woman, if you're going to put the pressure on your pressure instead of it putting the pressure on you, you have to make a decision to operate in courage. Taking a bold, courageous step could be exactly what's needed to turn your situation around. Joshua was another person in the Bible who had to learn to be courageous in times of great pressure. When Moses died and he was chosen to lead the children of Israel, Joshua had to step into big shoes. Four times God had to instruct him to have courage. But God didn't just tell him to be courageous without also telling him how to do it. God said, Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:9).

You have no reason to be dismayed by the circumstances you're facing because the Lord your God is with you! He said He will never leave you or forsake you Heb 13:5. Have confidence in His promise to be with you and refuse to fear.

RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF PATIENCE

The next thing you must do to pass THE PRESSURE TEST is learn to be patient in tribulation. The Bible says, Rejoice and exult in hope; be steadfast and patient in suffering and tribulation; be

constant in prayer....Roman 12:12 The word patient here come from a Greek word that mean to endure, bear bravely, and calmly. It literally means to abide under, which means to continue living the same despite your circumstance. Don't let the devil dictate what you're going to do; stay the same and be constant in the things God has instructed you to do. Sometimes people think that patience means sitting back on the sideline and just waiting for something to happen.

That's not the kind of patience the Bible instructs us to have. Biblical patience is when you remain in faith and continue to obey God despite what the enemy tries to bring you way. If you want to take hold of the promises of God, you need to be patient. The Bible says, Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.....Hebrew 10:35-36 Even if what you see is contrary to what you want, keep getting up every day praising God. Keep a smile on your face. Hebrews 6:12-15 tells us that through faith and patience we will inherit the promise of God. As long as you continue doing the things God has told you to do, refusing to be moved by the pressure the enemy is bringing your way, you will receive what the kingdom of God has for you.

ADJUST YOUR PERSPECTIVE

The next step we must take to pass THE PRESSURE TEST is to refuse to give the pressure we're facing more credit than it deserves. The apostle Paul wrote, For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:16-17). As we've already discussed, Paul's life was not smooth sailing all the time. But Paul called the afflictions he faced light. It's clear that he had a different mind-set than most people have.

No matter how tough your situation, you can't afford to magnify it. The larger you make the problem, the harder it's going to be for you to overcome it. You need to daily declare that your God is bigger than your problem. There is nothing too difficult for Him. When you begin to magnify the Lord and declare His greatness, you'll see that the weight of the pressure becomes lighter and lighter and lighter. It may not be because the situation has changed but because your perspective has changed now that you're focusing on almighty God rather than your problem.

CHOOSE THE JOY OF THE LORD

Another thing you need to do to pass THE PRESSURE TEST is decide to laugh at the devil despite the pressure you face. Paul said, I am filled with comfort, I am exceedingly joyful in all tribulation (2 Cor. 7:4). Paul was sure to laugh in the midst of his pressure. Why? Because he was confident in the fact that God would see him through it all. As he magnified God, he came to realize that Satan is not as powerful as he tries to make himself out to be. Isaiah 14:12-17 says: How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didn't weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners!!!

When we actually see Satan, we're going to be surprised by how small and powerless he really is. People give the devil way too much credit. Don't give Satan-or the pressure he's trying to bring

your way-any more credit than it deserves because our God is still an awesome GOD. Don't allow what you see or what others say about the situation cause you to become afraid. Have faith in you covenant with God just as David did when he fought against and defeated Goliath. Run at your pressure with a heart full of faith! The Word of God tells us in James 1:2. Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. One day my wife, April, and I were in the car when we received a phone call with some really bad news about someone we care about. It was such bad news that my emotions were tempted to go down, but I'd been meditating on this verse in James for a while. So I said to April, let's laugh. While we were driving down the expressway, we started saying ha, ha, ha. It was just as dry as dry can be. My mind said, This is stupid and you look stupid! People driving past probably think you're crazy.

But I kept doing it. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Between laughs my mind wanted to go back to thinking about the bad news I had just received, Instead I set my mind to count it all joy and kept laughing. We had not even driven one mile when the anointing kicked in!!!! Now I was concerned because I was laughing hysterically and still needed to control the car. By the time we exited the highway, we were totally set free! What's the moral of this story? It doesn't matter how you feel. Go ahead and laugh at the devil. Ha,ha, ha!!!!

I'm not telling you to do anything that God Himself doesn't do. Psalm 37:12-13 tells us, The wicked plot against the uncompromisingly righteous (the upright in right standing with God); they gnash at them with their teeth. The Lord laughs at the wicked, for He sees that their own day of defeat is coming. That's all you're doing. You're laughing at the devil because you can see that things are not going to end the way he thinks they will.

MAKE TRUST YOUR FOUNDATION

If you want to pass THE PRESSURE TEST, you also must make a decision to trust in God. The Bible says, Trust in the Lord with all

thine heart, lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy way acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths Prov. 3:5-6. If we don't make a firm commitment to trust God, then we'll find ourselves letting the pressure overtake our lives. Trusting God can't just be something we say out of our mouths. It must be something we do. People may say they trust God, but that doesn't necessarily mean they trust Him. Psalm 55:22 in the Amplified Bible says, Cast your burden on the Lord releasing the weight of it and He will sustain you He will never allow the consistently righteous to moved (made to slip, fall, or fail). Give your problems to Him and allow Him to bear the weight of pressure for you. You can trust Him to bring you out on the other side victorious. Psalm 62:8 says, Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is refuge for us. Selah

Selah means pause and calmly think about what you just read or heard. What a wonderful thing for us to stop and think about_God is a refuge for us. We can run to the safety of God presence, and He will protect us there. There is not a person alive who can keep you safe from all harm, but God can.....Trust in Him to do it for you today!!!!

RUN TO THE SECRET PLACE

One final thing you must do to pass THE PRESSURE TEST is decide to abide in the secret place.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the

destruction that waste at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou had made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. (Psalm 91:1-10)

God's protection and deliverance are blessings that stem from abiding in the secret place of God's presence. When you abide in the secret place, times of pressure won't feel so heavy anymore because you'll be with Him. Not everyone will take the time to enter the secret place. Some people just won't get away from all the distractions in order to get there. But if you do what it takes to get before God and press into that secret place, you'll find His protection and power.

One of the best ways to enter into God's presence is through worship. This can be done in a public service, of course, but worship is a personal thing between you and God. Genuine worship requires you to think and talk about who God is instead of focusing on what you're going through. It's not pleasing to God when we allow pressure to overtake us. He doesn't want us to let it bombard our minds and control our actions. But when God see us step up and act upon His Word despite what we're going through, that makes Him smile. When we submit our daily life decisions to God's Word, that is worship that pleases the Father.

The more you spend time in God's presence through worship, the more strength you'll gain to stand on the Word of God in the midst of the pressure you're facing. Before you know it, you will have worshiped your way right out from under the pressure. And you will have passed THE PRESSURE TEST.....