

## Turning the Crap of Life, Into the Fruit of the Spirit Pressure

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### Life Questions:

What part of your life gives you the most pressure? Is it a relationship. Are you trying to please someone that cannot be pleased? Is it a family member that is never happy? Or, is it a work situation that never seems to be anything but a problem? Somewhere in your life you have pressure. What do you do with it? How do you deal with it? Does God really know you are pressured?

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During this week there has been a visitor at our house, a hawk. Now normally this would be a great opportunity to take some photos and talk about how cool it is to see a hawk at your house. But there is a problem. Apparently, the hawk thinks the local dogs and cats are snacks.

Needless to say this really upset my daughter. And for that matter the dog was not pleased with the arrival. Over the next day or so we began to see the marks she left on our dog. Battle damage as it were. The interesting thing is that as the dog dealt with the bird, she apparently began to learn how to deal with her. Barking didn't scare the bird away – it rarely does with humans. Though someone actually barking at you might scare you for a while, but it doesn't solve the problem. What our dog learned was that confrontation, while not always a foregone conclusion, was going to be necessary. See, the bird was pressing on all sides. She could fly, and as far as I know our dog cannot. That gave the bird a decisive advantage. The bird had long talons and a strong beak, which it appears, she employed multiple times. But after a day or so, the bird left our dog alone. Scared as she is now, wounded; she wasn't the hawk's dinner, or snack or even treat. Because she learned from the first encounter, she was able to deal with the next.

Have you been learning from your encounters with the pressures of life? Are you changing the approach or continuing to bark at the pressure – hoping it will be frightened and run away? Now that you know that tactic doesn't work, now what? Do you cower and hide? Run away? Find a safe place far away from everyone, secluded? How long do you really think you can stay there? Like our dog, eventually you will have to come out for food, water and the results of eating and drinking. What will you do then? How will you handle the hawk sitting on your fence looking at you like you are its lunch?

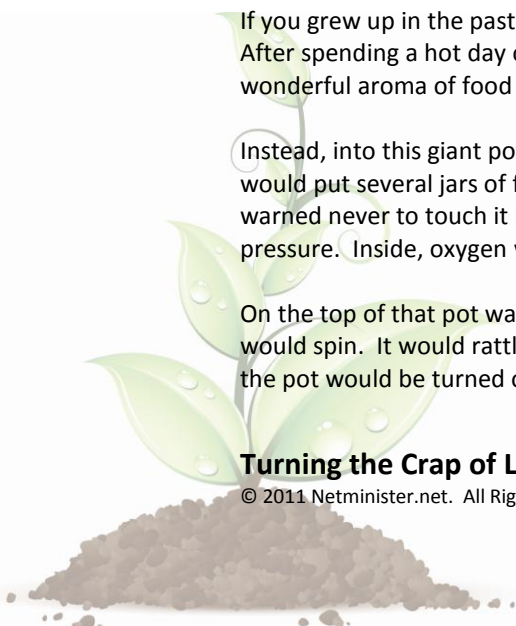
If you grew up in the past 30 years chances are you have seen your family can and freeze for the winter. After spending a hot day outside picking peas, corn and potatoes, you can come inside and smell the wonderful aroma of food you aren't going to get to eat for a few months.

Instead, into this giant pot, all your hard work for the day would go. Probably your mom or grandmother would put several jars of food in this giant tank like construct up on the stove. And if so, you were sternly warned never to touch it because inside of that seemingly innocent looking pot was a boatload of pressure. Inside, oxygen was being removed from that food so that it would last longer.

On the top of that pot was usually a small metal thing that looked, to me, like an upside down top you would spin. It would rattle around making all kinds of curious noises. After a prescribed amount of time, the pot would be turned off, but the pressure inside still that's Ned. You could turn that small top a

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specific way, and it would release the pressure making it possible to safely take off the top without blowing up the house. Now I don't know for sure if it would have blown up the house, but that was what I was told. I kind of wondered.

Like that pot and the dog, everyone regardless of where they are in life faces pressure. Whether as a child attempting to please a family member or a man attempting to please a demanding boss, all of us face pressure, daily, hourly sometimes even moment to moment. Have you ever waited for the results of a test to come back? Waited for a surgeon to tell you the news? Listened to the mechanic tell you how complicated it will be to fix your car? All of us face it every day! Our relationship with God is the key to how we deal with it.

**2 Cor 4:8-9**

**8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed - NKJV**

**7-12If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. As it is, there's not much chance of that. You know for yourselves that we're not much to look at. We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us—trial and torture, mockery and murder; what Jesus did among them, he does in us—he lives! Our lives are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us. While we're going through the worst, you're getting in on the best! (The Message Bible)**

**1. Pressure is inevitable.**

Hey, life is going great, you say. What do I have to worry about? I have a great job, an incredible spouse, I couldn't ask for anything more. Right?

In the early 1990s, there was a proliferation of bands left over from the 1980s. Large hair, extravagant stage shows and makeup – lots and lots of makeup. Into this mix came a small band out of Seattle that changed everything about music. Nirvana came in with exactly the antithesis of everything that rock had been. In an instant it seemed, everyone of those old bands looked stupid. It was as if everyone's eyes had been opened at one moment, that a veil of coolness had been lifted and we saw the people being something they really weren't. Everything changed.

Now you listen to behind the music specials and all those bands point to the moment of Nirvana as the end of their band. Everything they had ended there. When something new came, there was a pressure to be something different. Those that couldn't make that change died out. Now you can find all their hits that use to cost hundreds of dollars in the \$5 bin at Wall-Mart.

The point is that when the pressure came from outside, no one saw it coming. No one said "Hey, let's change music to something completely different." It just happened. Isn't that how pressure comes into our lives so often?



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We lose a job, a family member, something important to us without warning. But here Paul is telling us change is coming; pressure is coming. He points out that we are hard-pressed on every side. Yet somehow we seem to think that the armor of God, being a Christian, and going to church will protect us from the pressures of life. Unfortunately, church is where many of those same pressures come from.

Notice, Paul isn't talking to lost people. He isn't telling people that aren't in a relationship with Jesus Christ how to deal with life. He is telling those of us who claim to be Christians. Guess what? Pressure is coming. I am sure you don't like it, but there is pressure coming and the worst part is that it is coming from all sides. This isn't going to be pretty. Have you ever seen a grape after it has been pressed? Or an olive? Not a pretty sight!

How often do we see our fellow Christians after a nice pressing or in the middle of it? Knowing as we should that it is coming, shouldn't we be ready to help? Shouldn't we have known it was coming? Yes! A thousand times yes! How come we are so surprised when something happens that changes the game? Here it is, guess what, like it or not – and I don't like it thank you – it is coming and from all sides!

## **2. Pressure never destroys us.**

He is the most unheralded player on the entire football team: the offensive lineman. He is seen as big, stupid and dull. We only recognize his failure, rarely his success. But without this seemingly dull player on that line, no running back or quarterback ever get the lines in the paper about their performance. Yet, if you watch a game he is constantly assaulted. Each play another guy, sometimes guys hit him mercilessly. Every play he is going to be hit. No other position on the field has that distinction. How easy it would be to give up after being beaten for an entire game, only noted when you did something wrong, and thought of as mindless. The best lineman's sacrifices go unknown. You know why? Because even though he is hit constantly, he knows it never will destroy him.

How we could take a lesson from the offensive lineman! Dealing with pressure from all sides, never knowing when the next person is going to come flying at him, yet he knows he has a job to do. What seems small and insignificant is vital to the success of the team. Ask any quarterback, coach or running back why they are successful and they will tell you this: it starts with the guys up front.

Paul tells us that we are needing to not only know that pressure comes from all sides but that it never crushes us. That even when we are perplexed we should not be in despair. The term for pressed is a wrestling term – not a professional wrestling term, perhaps a more modern view would be of an MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) competition. In such a competition you are having to deal with an opponent who can come at you from all angles. You have to be on your guard all the time to deal with what is about to happen. Watchful of what is coming next because in a moment when you aren't at your full guard, he can strike. Down you go, sometimes unconscious. These are the challenges Paul faced. But it did not destroy him.

Notice, he is still upbeat. Remember this is the guy that is in prison, and he is upbeat. Still reaching out. How often when something goes wrong in our lives are we ready to throw in the towel, assured that because of our situation we can sit on the sidelines. Everyone knows we are hurt, everyone knows what is going on. We have the right to sit out! No we don't! Paul tells us



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that even with the things that have gone on in his life, he still is pressing on. Still moving ahead. Like our dog, wounded, maybe even scared for life, but that isn't stopping him. Is it stopping you?

Are you letting a spiritual paper cut keep you out? Do you let the words of someone that is being mean to you, about you, keep you from the place God has for you? Really? WHY? Why are you allowing that? Paul didn't, he is showing us a much better way. That pressure in your life has a purpose. God is allowing it because what He has for you is so much greater than you would ever know.

Ever been to a muddy football game? On the sidelines there is at least one fellow who has a pristine jersey. So white in fact that it seems to glow under the stadium lights. Now the question is, do you respect that guy because his jersey is so clean or do you point and laugh knowing that he hasn't been in the game? Is your jersey clean? Does it have the smell of freshness to it? Or is it so muddy you can't seem to tell it from the opposing team? That is what being in the game means, a dirty jersey, tough spots in life. But even at their worst, God is at His best.

### 3. Pressure brings out what is inside.

And no, I am not going to use the pimple as an example of that!

The thing about a pressure cooker is that it evenly applies pressure to all parts of the container inside. In the case of the jars, it doesn't crush them, it only provides a way to remove all the air from the container; thereby making it safe to consume, safe to store for an extended period of time. If pressure was unevenly applied, the jars would shatter. Such is the case if you go to a children's museum where you can lay on a bed of nails. Because the pressure is evenly distributed throughout the length of your body, you aren't turned into a shish-ka-bob. So know this, you have pressure all over you and from all sides, evenly.

Pressure has one very well-known quality: it brings out what is inside of us. Grapes are pressured to get wine out; olives for oil and your life is pressured to find out what is inside. So, what is inside your life right now? What comes out of you when you are pressured? Do you like what it is? Are you able, like Paul, to say look at me. Look how I handled that situation? Not in a sense of pride, but as an example for others to follow? Why not?

My favorite kind of pressure is the kind that Kentucky Fried Chicken uses to cook their chicken. Instead of dropping it into a simple fryer, which I have to admit I find appealing and delicious; they put it into a fryer inside of a giant pressure cooker. This, they tell us, makes the chicken cook faster and more thoroughly. Sounds good to me. Do you sometimes feel cooked fast and thoroughly? I know I do.

Whenever we are pressed, we will soon discover exactly what is important. Have someone tell you that you could die; I guarantee something is going to come out- maybe even dinner from last night. What will flow out of you will be one of two things: either peace, which only comes from God, or you will break down, fall apart. Which is it for you?

When there is a situation at work or in a relationship, do you explode into a rage or are you able to deal with the facts and address them in a way that shows calmness inside? Peace is a gift of



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the Spirit. When we aren't showing it in a time of pressure, then there is really only one reason why. We don't have it.

Do you get mad at God when things don't go your way? Are you a party planner – a pitty party planner? I know a lot of them. I am even pretty good at throwing them myself so give me a ring next time. I can save you on the decorations. God doesn't attend pitty parties. He breaks them up. You see, He is trying to get what is inside you outside. And He will use the situations of your life, the pressures you face to do just that.

One of the greatest examples of this came from a lady I know who was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Great time to get out of the game, go sit on the bench, throw that pitty party we all love so much. Everyone will understand. No one will have anything to say. But not so with this lady! Instead, in the moments when things didn't look good, she would ask those visiting her how they were; how their families were; and how the pressures of their life were hurting them. Just like that, what was inside came out.

#### **Final Thoughts:**

Like it or not, you are going to have pressure in your life. I have to admit, I am rarely pleased with what comes out of my life in those moments. I struggle mightily with it. I want to be that person that really exhibits God's mercy and grace under pressure, but I find that when I try to do it alone, I make a horrible mess of it. What about you? How do you respond? Look, it is coming. There is nothing I or anyone else can do to stop it. My question for you is how are you dealing with it? Are you letting it crush you? Are you getting out of the game, or are you showing a peace that makes people want to follow your example? That is my prayer for you, that you are an example of grace under pressure.

