



Cool Under Fire!

by Mark Brunner

A Cool Christian/Never Swallowed! (Matthew 14:9)

What's the greatest pressure you and I could experience in this life? Perhaps it might be the first day on a new job or simply the pressure of having to pay your bills on a weekly basis. While these are certainly pressure-packed situations, they pale in comparison to the pressure that we face when we are confronted by peer pressure.

Peer pressure is defined as that moment when nothing else matters except that we live up to the expectations of others; usually those with whom we work or socialize. Peer pressure is one of the most powerful forces in life and it can do inestimable damage to a Christian's walk in faith.

Here's a story: The following is an instruction as to how to react to hungry pythons, as given to Peace Corpsmen serving in Brazil – "Remember not to run away, the python can run faster. The thing to do is to lie flat on the ground on your back with your feet together, arms at your side, head well down. The python will then try to push its head under you, experimenting at every possible point. Keep calm (that was underscored). "You must let him swallow your foot. It is quite painless and it will take a long time. If you lose your head and struggle, he will quickly whip his coils around you. If you keep calm and

still, he will go on swallowing. Wait patiently until he has swallowed up to about your knee. Then carefully take out your knife, insert it into the distended side of his mouth and slit him up.” (Resource, Sept./Oct., 1992.)

Not wanting to be embarrassed in front of others is a powerful, suffocating force. The more we struggle within it, the more it serves to strangle our relationship with God. The pressure to conform to the will of the crowd is like struggling in the grasp of a python. The more you try to make it right with your peers, the harder it is to get away from the pain that can cause. Living up to the expectations of the world around us is a struggle we can never win because the world aims to get us in its coils and destroy us. There’s only one way to deal with peer pressure. Keep cool and keep your spiritual senses sharp about you. Others may try to swallow you with their pressure, but a cool Christian can never be swallowed.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

God Pressure Is Good Pressure! (Judges 1:1)

I’m one of those guys that just loves taking on challenges, Even where help is available, I just love seeing if I can do it by myself. I guess that it’s a guy thing. Recently I found myself challenged by a rather large piece of lawn furniture. It was one of those swings suspended from a frame with a canopy over it. Altogether it couldn’t have weighed more than sixty pounds. Rejecting help, I perched myself under the canopy and began lifting. Within moments I knew that I wouldn’t be moving it very far. What it lacked in weight it sure did make up in bulk.

When it comes to handling pressures in this life, there are two ways we can meet the challenge. We can do it ourselves and hope for the best or rely on the One who knows no limit whether in bulk or weight.

Here’s a story: There are two ways of handling pressure. One is illustrated by a bathysphere, the miniature submarine used to explore the ocean in places so deep that the water pressure would crush a conventional submarine like an

aluminum can. Bathyspheres compensate with plate steel several inches thick, which keeps the water out but also makes them heavy and hard to maneuver. But how does this compare with the deep, ocean creatures scientists descend into the depths to observe? When the bathysphere's lights are turned on and you look through the tiny, thick plate-glass windows, what do you see; fish with equally thick skins? No, these fish cope with extreme pressure in an entirely different way. They don't build thick skins; they remain supple and free. They compensate for the outside pressure through equal and opposite pressure inside themselves. (Jay Kesler.)

As Christians, we don't have to be hard and thick-skinned to survive the pressures of this life—as long as we appropriate God's power within to equal the pressure without. The evil world around us is full of some pretty bad things that can quickly cause our faith to collapse. But, if we pump ourselves up with the power of God's Word, that pressure can't do us in. Doing it ourselves will mean certain failure. There's someone far more powerful who can help us carry the load.

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With No Time On The Clock! (Judges 6:25-30)

Did you ever accomplish something that you really thought you would never be able to do? For most of us there will come a time in life when the impossible suddenly becomes possible. I remember a number of years ago looking up at a half-finished addition to our present house that I had begun several months prior. Things had not gone well. The weather had not cooperated and some of the work I had already finished had to be replaced due to water damage. I'll never forget the feeling of hopelessness that had begun to settle in on me; that intense feeling of the pressure of unfinished work, that seemed to go on endlessly. I pushed on knowing that there wasn't an alternative. What I had begun I had to finish.

Here's a story: “The Hope College Women's basketball team had made it to the national playoffs. The final game saw Hope 20 points behind with only 10

minutes left to play. The team remained calm and began to narrow the gap. Methodically, they chipped away at the deficit. Then, with just 5 seconds remaining, they threw up a three-point basket to come within one point of a tie game. The final score was decided by a player named Dina Disney. With no time left on the clock, she calmly walked up to the free throw line, sank the first basket and then the next to win the game. When television and press interviewers asked her how she had stayed calm under so much pressure, Dina said that she recited a Bible passage to herself as she took each shot. The passage: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Daily Bread.)

Christ told His disciples that with the faith of a mustard seed they could move mountains. As I’ve discovered in my life, those mountains usually appear in the form of looming deadlines and tasks that seem larger than life. The pressure builds and we may lose hope, fall down and “miss the shots” God puts in front of us. While working under pressure is never easy, God has designed both you and I to make it work. Through His Word He builds us up and gives us the power of Christ within. He encourages us to keep moving on, even when the work seems endless and the risk of failure looms large. When there’s no time left on the clock, Christians come through because Christ has never failed yet.

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Productive Anger! (Exodus 16:2)

With most of us it’s true that, when under pressure, we usually look for the easiest and quickest way out of the problem that has us under its spell. Nobody likes living under pressure. It’s about as uncomfortable a feeling that we can have. Reacting. It happens so fast that we can hardly control it sometimes. Boom! We strike out without aiming or utter a word without thinking. Before we know it, our damage control kicks in and all that we can think of is exacting the same pain or emotion out of the person who has assaulted us.

How does a Christian control the pressure that results from being used or hurt by another?

Here's a story: Many years ago during a New York Knicks–Baltimore Bullets playoff game, one of the Bullets players came up from behind the great Walt Frazier and literally punched him in the face. Strangely, the referee called a foul on Frazier. While most players would have been tempted by the pressure of the moment to take revenge, Frazier didn't complain. His expression never changed. He called a timeout and calmly walked off the floor. Composure in place, he brought the team back out on the floor and, after the penalty shot, called for the basketball. Within a few minutes he had complete control of the game, putting in seven straight shots to win it. To this day it was one of the most amazing displays of productive anger and the ability to control pressure in a stressful situation ever witnessed in a basketball game. (Adapted--U.S. News & World Report, June 14, 1993, p. 37.)

When we find ourselves under pressure's spell there is only one safe way to deal with it—don't look for the quick escape. Inevitably the quick way out is the worst way out. Had Frazier contested the bad call, he might have received an even greater foul. Maybe he might even have been ejected from the game. As Christians there is only one good way to handle anger. Channel it into something productive. When we resist the pressure to take the easy way out, focusing on God's power and wisdom to help us overcome our anger, it's our game to win and theirs' to lose.

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Facing The “300” Moment! (Genesis 25:32-33)

If you've ever had to get up in front of an audience and make a speech, you know what it feels like to feel the pressure of the moment. As many times as I've stood behind a podium, there has never yet been a speaking engagement when I didn't feel some pressure prior to that always, important opening remark. Yet, I can probably count on one hand the times that the pressure was equal to the experience. Nevertheless, that split second prior to taking the microphone in hand is always one that gives me pause. The mind plays tricks on even the most experienced of speakers. In the pressure of the moment it's

easy to freeze, even if but for a split second, in an unrealistic but seemingly very real moment of fear.

Here's a story: Sometimes we look at pressure filled situations and magnify them beyond what is either realistic or probable. Take bowling, for example. Did you know that the odds against rolling a perfect 300 in the game are about 225,000 to one? Over the years a good many bowlers have beaten the odds. However, there are a few who just couldn't stand up to the pressure. One bowler appropriately collapsed when he qualified to join that brotherhood of 300. He approached the alley, lifted the ball and just fell over. And there was another pin jockey who just couldn't bring himself to play the final ball of his otherwise perfect game either. He got to the last frame and, instead of taking careful aim and guiding his ball down the same perfect path he had just done previously a number of times, he silently packed his shoes and ball and walked out – never again setting foot inside a bowling alley again! (Source Unknown)

When we feel pressure in one part of our lives, an exaggerated picture of what we are able to withstand, we may lose our perspective on what God's will is for us. The pressure is real, of that there is no doubt. But when we magnify it, making it a bigger boogiemer than it really is, that's when it and not you and I take possession of our lives. Life is full of "300" moments. There is just no getting around that. But, for a Christian, focused on what is possible to do with Christ at our side, those "300" moments may give us pause but they should never give us fear. Living in the knowledge that all things are possible in Christ, those "300" moments become mere bumps in the road, not the mountains they seem to be.

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