



A #StudySeries that aims to show you four ways you may be applying unnecessary pressure to yourself, and how to take the pressure off through the truth of Scripture.

DECKDEVOTIONALS

About this #StudySeries

About a month ago the Lord spoke this to my heart...

"I never asked you to do that."

The way I was approaching something internally suggested I thought the Lord expected something of me that He simply never did. I was applying unnecessary pressure to myself, and it was impacting a lot.

It got me thinking...we put a whole lot of unnecessary pressure on ourselves to do and be things God simply never asked us to do or be. Sometimes a reminder of the fundamentals brings us back to a beautiful place with the Lord.

In this #StudySeries I break down 4 things God never asked of us:

- 1. Achieve Perfection**
- 2. Have it All Figured Out**
- 3. Burn Out in His Name**
- 4. Determine Our Identity**

My prayer is that if any of those things creates curiosity in your heart, you'll go through this brief devotional study and Take the Pressure Off along with me.

Day One | Take the Pressure Off: *Achieving Perfection*

God never asked us to be perfect. Oh, the pressure this would take off our shoulders if we truly understood. The interesting thing is, we don't even have a perfect idea of perfection. To us, pursuing perfection is about *doing* things perfectly, while God's definition of perfection is about *being* perfect, which He showed us through Jesus Christ.

So where does this pressure come from, then? While there are many possible sources, here are the three I would venture to say are most common -

1. 1 Peter 1:16 "*since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*"
2. Matthew 5:48 "*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*"
3. Personal experiences; the way you were parented or the faith community you grew up in being legalistic by nature in their teaching and philosophies.

1 Peter 1:16 "*since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*"

When Peter reminds us of these words of Christ, they do not indicate a call to be morally perfect in deed. That word "holy" speaks to being set apart. I have found many people, myself included at one time, thought this verse called me to pursue perfection, but what it really calls us to is setting ourselves apart for the purposes of the Lord rather than of this world. The byproduct of a life in pursuit of holiness is *being* more Christ-like in character, not necessarily "doing."

Matthew 5:48 "*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*"

This is one that gets taken out of context quite often. Without full context, this just looks like a pretty cut and dry command to *be* perfect. If we put it in context, we find that Jesus is addressing the Pharisaical philosophies of legalism, and how that is not the way to the Father. He's saying if it's about the law, then you need to keep it perfectly to be perfect...and He says that after making the point in various places through Matthew 5 that it is not about keeping the law, but a matter of the heart. Again, perfection is about *being*, not doing. The Pharisees did a whole lot that looked and seemed right by deed, but their hearts were far from the Lord.

Personal experiences.

Some of us grew up in religious systems or churches that insisted your standing with God was based on how much you did. Some of us grew up with parents that constantly applied pressure to do more, be better causing you to both become your own worst critic in life, and possibly even to mistakenly think your Heavenly Father puts that pressure on you as well. Those types of personal experiences are very damaging to our understanding of what God actually asks of us. So let's look at God's heart on the topic -

If God knows that we do not have a perfect understanding of this perfection we put pressure on ourselves to pursue, then how could we expect perfection from us? God doesn't put unfair expectations on His children because He knows us; He is very aware of His creation.

Paul addresses the Pharisaical mindset in **Romans 3 (v21-23)** -

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

Righteousness, which is innately tied to the idea of perfection, does not come through the Law, it comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. Not one of us can or will get it right on our own.

Paul addresses this idea of the law again in **Galatians 2 (v21)** -

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

By putting pressure on ourselves to achieve perfection, we're saying we have no need for Christ.

The truth is, our works are simply an overflow of the reality of our heart. The Bible speaks to that as well in Proverbs. Which tells me two things:

- *When we get caught up on trying to achieve perfection by doing, we're skipping the heart part of it all, which is what God looks at.*
- *When we fail at doing something, something physical/tangible - like if our marriage fails - there was a heart issue that preceded the failure.*

>> So then what is it God does ask of us?

To trust in the perfection of Jesus Christ.

God simply asks us to know, believe and live out our faith that Jesus was perfect - perfectly humble, perfectly obedient (Phil. 2), perfect in all things - to make a way for us to be in relationship with the Father despite the reality of our imperfection.

Day Two | Take the Pressure Off: *Having it All Figured Out*

God never asked us to have it all figured out, and for good reason...

To figure something out, you have to first fully understand it. Think about Geometry, for example. The thing about most math subjects is that each lesson builds on the last. The theorems we learned last week have come into play as we worked through figuring out the problems in this week's lessons. If the kids, or me for that matter, don't fully understand the principles used to get to the solution, then figuring out the problem - correctly - is nearly impossible short of a very lucky guess... which wouldn't count because they have to show their work ;)

There are a few places in Scripture where we are pretty much promised we won't understand everything.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. - Isaiah 55:8*

The Lord operates according to His ways and thoughts, which are high above and beyond ours.

Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." - John 13:7

Jesus was speaking to the disciples here about what was to come regarding His crucifixion as He washed their feet. The encouragement in this is straightforward - you don't fully understand this right now, but hang in there and it'll make sense later. Ever heard that type of encouragement from the Lord? It's a sobering reminder of Isaiah 55:8 if you ask me.

*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.
Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. - Matthew 6:34*

Here Jesus encourages us not to get caught up in worrying about tomorrow...not to start trying to figure out moments and days beyond the one we're in.

I share all of that to say this -

The Lord tells us over and over again throughout Scripture that we will not fully understand everything; everything we face, everything He does, the way everything in life unfolds. That's a promise. Yet, most of us often continue putting pressure on ourselves to figure out the details; figure out what God is doing, and the reasons why. Talk about pressure... we put pressure on ourselves to do something God tells us we won't be able to do! (Much like the pursuit of perfection, really).

We do have the Word of God to guide us; to give us the wisdom to make decisions each day, and simply live. There are things we can know for sure about ourselves, our Creator and our Savior. But you and I don't stop there. We start trying to figure out why we are where we are right now; why we're up against what we're up against; why that relationship didn't work out; why God is guiding us to make a certain decision that opposes what we would have decided with our own reasoning. The truth is, we may have something figured out that aligns with God's character, makes sense of the facts we have about our situation and makes sense in our mind according to what we know. And still, God may be doing something different for reasons we don't yet know.

There is a place our understanding ends, my friends. God doesn't ask us to keep spinning our wheels to find the answers when we reach that place.

>> So then what is it God does ask of us?

To trust that He's sovereign, leading us with intention, and has it all figured out already.

The Lord may have promised us we won't ever figure it all out, but He also made us another promise we can rest in... He already did figure it out. Before the foundations of the world.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.*
- Proverbs 3:5-6

We all know these verses well, I'm sure. They've become coffee cup verses, which causes us to miss the profound promise within them. If we "show up" to life, and seek Him rather than trusting in our limited understanding of ourselves, our circumstances and the reasons God may be doing what He's doing, He will guide us down the paths that Ephesians 2:10 tells me He already laid out for me.

He's the one with all of time laid out before Him. I'm the one who sometimes gets tripped up in mere moments. I am done carrying the pressure of having it all figured out when God promised He already does, and all I have to do is trust that and walk with Him.

Day Three | Take the Pressure Off: *Burning Out in His Name*

God never asked us to burn out in His name.

There is a difference between diligently and faithfully serving the Lord and burning out, and that difference is found in our motive, which often indicates what we truly believe about God.

I [stumbled upon this article](#) the other day that speaks to some of the top reason marriages fail so quickly today. Number five on this list indicates that one of both individuals in the relationship get so caught up in the busyness of life they fail to connect on any level consistently. It's interesting because usually everything they are doing is for the sake of the kids or the family or careers...seemingly good things, really. But when making time to connect isn't a priority, their relationship drowns under the pressures of what they've labeled "good" and it ultimately often fails, which is far from good.

In Mark 1, Jesus sets a really beautiful example for us. He has just started His public ministry, and was healing nearly an entire city.

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. - Mark 1:32-33

Early the following morning, He slipped away before the sunrise to be alone with the Father; to pray, commune with the Lord.

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. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." - Mark 1:35-37

Did he still have things He could be doing? Peter's statement when He finally finds Jesus certainly indicates He did. Did he succumb to the pressure of staying busy at the cost of finding rest with the Father? No, He went anyway. ([I write more about this specific passage here.](#))

Jesus was undeniably faithful to the calling the Lord placed on His life. He was faithful in ministry and perfectly obedient. Notice how this didn't mean He had to burn out, or be enslaved to the idea that His relationship to the Father was intrinsically tied to how busy He was doing the work of ministry.

Some pretty damaging lies can come out of getting caught up in a cycle of burn out. A friend text me last night and within her [very timely, encouraging text] she said, "*The Lord ended up having to remind me that my worth is in Him alone, not in service.*" That hit me right between the eyes. Sometimes without realizing it we trade in the joy and rest that comes from simply being with the Father for the pressure of serving to earn worth. Quite

frankly, I think if those of us who find ourselves in this cycle of burn out often were to be honest, we'd find that our busyness is more about filling voids within ourselves than it is about bringing glory to His name.

To circle back to something I said early on in this post... there is a difference between diligently and faithfully serving the Lord and burning out, and that difference is found in our motive, which often indicates what we truly believe about God. It indicates what we truly believe about God in that when we put pressure on ourselves to stay busy under the guise of serving the Lord - to the point of burn out - it indicates that we believe our relationship with the Lord and His thoughts towards us are hinged upon what we do. That is the funnel to legalism, friends. Yes, works will flow out of our relationship with the Lord, but He desires to commune with us above all. He's looking for a consistent heart connection.

>> So then what is it God does ask of us?

To be faithful to what He's called us to do, yes, but to first find our strength and rest in Him.

Not only has God never asked us to burn out in His name, He invites us to do the opposite -

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. - Matthew 11:28-29

Take the pressure off and stop the perpetual cycle of burn out. That was never intended to be the life of the believer. We serve a God that invites us to rest in Him so that we may have the strength to walk out our faith and calling in this life.

Day Four | Take the Pressure Off: *Determining Our Identity*

God never asked us to determine our identity, or to “create” ourselves.

I realize this sounds a little vague, so let me explain. Many of us live our everyday lives with the pressure to paint the picture of who we are, and what we want our lives to look like. We set out to discover who we are, and what our purpose is, often looking for giant neon signs lighting the way. I don't know about you, but my goodness did pressure land on my shoulders when I approached life this way.

We live in a culture that cannot define very simple, definitive things. Creating ourselves is a daunting, never-ending journey; a journey God never asked us to go on.

*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
- Psalm 139:13-14*

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. - Ephesians 2:10

Please hear my heart - we're not puppets on a string. God is not in Heaven controlling our every thought and action just as God did not shape us, breathe life into us, and then say, “Ok, now go figure out who you are; go create a life for yourself.” No, He intentionally formed us each individually before our eyes opened on earth for the first time, and prepared good works for us to walk out in advance of our first breath. Beyond that, He tells us exactly *who we are* in His Word -

In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will...In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will... - Ephesians 1:5, 11

We are His children; we were chosen and adopted into the family of God.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. - 2 Corinthians 5:17

We are new; a new creation in Christ with a new identity.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. - Galatians 5:1

We are free; free from the bondage of sin, the Law and the old man.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. - Romans 12:4-8

We are an intricate part of something bigger than ourselves; we are one member of a larger body, uniquely gifted and called to serve in different ways.

We are all individuals, specifically created by the Lord, with different gifts, strengths and callings. God did not use a cookie-cutter in creating us; we have the joy of going through life discovering how God gifted and called us, and developing those things with Him. It's a beautiful process!

As said above, at the core of our identity, we are:

- Chosen... *not rejected, forgotten or unwanted.*
- A Child of God... *not an orphan, short of love, floating along in this world.*
- A New Creation... *not defined by the traits and behaviors of who I was without Jesus.*
- Free in Christ... *not bound to living in sin, according to the Law or expectations of man.*
- Uniquely Gifted & Called... *not another face in the crowd with nothing to offer.*

My goodness, how careful the Lord was to tell us exactly who we are in Him in His Word. I can't help but wonder if it's because He knew we would live in a world that is constantly trying to tell us who we are in their eyes.

>> So then what is it God does ask of us?

To know, intimately, who He says I am in and through Christ alone.

I have chased the neon signs and empty promises of finding my identity somewhere in this world. I came up empty and confused every single time. I am done carrying the pressure of trying to create myself. When I know who I am in and through Christ, I have an unshakeable understanding of my identity no matter where life takes me, or what lies the world tries to sell me.

In a world that lacks definitiveness, let's turn to the definitive identity we forever have in and through Jesus Christ, and bask in the joy of continuously discovering more of who we are in Him.

Notes

Day One: ***Achieving Perfection***

Day Two: ***Having it All Figured Out***

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