

**Sermon Series:** Pressure Points  
**To be used with:** Session One; The Pressure of Trials  
**Sermon Title Possibilities:**  
 Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This;  
 These Are The Times That Try Men's Souls  
**Scripture:** Matthew 14:13-32

**Connection to Unit Theme:** We think of pressure as something to be avoided. We don't like "high pressure" sales-people. We talk about being stressed out by the pressure we feel at work. But pressure can also be a powerful tool. A pressure washer is indispensable if you want to clean your house. Pressure in your tires helps you drive smoothly over bumpy roads. And pressure in the earth's crust can, over time, transform coal into diamonds.

### Introduction:

#### **Option 1: These are the Times that Try Men's Souls**

The date was December 23, 1776. General George Washington's continental army stood on the banks of the half-frozen Delaware River. On the other side of the river was a force of German mercenaries, known as Hessians. The army had already suffered several defeats in battle. They were cold and hungry. Three days before Christmas, and they were homesick. And it was at this point that General Washington opened up a little book by Thomas Paine, entitled *Common Sense*, and he read these words to his discouraged troops:

These are the times that try men's souls.

Washington went on to describe "summer soldiers" and "sunshine patriots" who lose heart in times of crisis. Washington didn't try to sugarcoat it. He didn't try to show them how things weren't so bad, or that they weren't as cold or hungry or homesick as they thought they were. He just laid it out there: These are the times that try men's souls.

#### **Option 2: Read the children's book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst.**

[This story is about a boy named Alexander who is having a really bad day from the time he wakes up ("I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair") to the time he goes to bed. ("I got soap in my eyes from my bath, my Mickey Mouse night light burned out, and I bit my tongue. The cat wants to sleep with Anthony, not with me.") His mother assures him that some days are like that.]

Are you having some times that are trying to your soul? [*Or, option 2, What do you do when you have a terrible, horrible, no good very bad day?*] Maybe you just feel like you're hitting a brick wall in your job, or with your family or marriage. Maybe you are facing a health crisis. In this economy, maybe you feel like you are one major home repair away from going under financially.

Aren't you glad that Jesus understood those times too? In Matthew 14, we read about a day that, other than the day of His crucifixion, may have been the most difficult in Jesus life. In one day, He experiences the death of a family member, the crushing demands of ministry, a terrible storm, and disappointment in His disciples. Let's see what we can learn about soul-trying times [terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad days] from Jesus.

Read Matthew 14:13-32, and highlight the stressful, trying times of this single day in Jesus life. Make the point that if Jesus Himself experienced difficult days, we can rest assured that we will too. Jesus promised us that "in this world, you will have trouble" (John 16:33)

**1. Retreat isn't just an option, it's a necessity. (v. 13, 22-23)** When Jesus first heard about the death of His cousin, John the Baptist, He needed time by Himself. Jesus withdrew to a quiet place in order to connect with His heavenly Father. Lots of times, we tend to feel like things are. When Jesus heard about John the Baptist, He withdrew to a solitary place. The implication is that He needed time to grieve, and process. Apparently, He didn't get to finish His quiet time, because after the feeding of the 5,000, verse 22-23 says He had the disciples dismiss the crowds while He went up on the mountain. This time, the text specifically says He went "to pray."

- During trials, we have to be able to get some distance and solitude
- During those times of solitude, we need to connect with our Heavenly Father.

*Application Ideas:* Where is your "solitary place?" How can you make time in your busy life to get there? Whether it is a lunchtime run or a weekend retreat, recognize the signs of when you need to recharge, and make it a priority.

## **2. You don't get a pass on compassion (v. 14-21)**

While Jesus sought some alone time, the crowds still followed Him. His own difficulties didn't exempt Him from feeling compassion for others who were sick and hungry. There were still needs to be met. When Jesus fed the five thousand. You might emphasize that He enlisted the disciples to help (v. 16-18). And even more importantly, He gave thanks (v. 18). He wanted the disciples help; He needed the Father's help. Expand on those points.

*Application ideas:* Identify people or areas of ministry where you can be a blessing. Be aware of how helping someone else can help you put your own trials in perspective. This might be a great time to talk about ministry areas in your church that need help, or a testimony from a widower or someone who had just lost her job who chose to invest in someone else rather than dwell on their loss.

## **3. Jesus is with us in the midst of our trials (v. 22-31)**

The disciples were having a rough time of their own. Point out that even when they were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do (v. 22), storms still came. But so did Jesus. You may refer back to John 16:33, but this time emphasize the second part of it: "Take heart; I have overcome the world." Also, emphasize that the waves did not calm down when Peter stepped out on faith. Even though Jesus had invited him to come to Him, that didn't mean the storm stopped. That's a crucial lesson for followers of Christ. But emphasize the use of the word "immediately" in verses

27 and 31. At the height of our storm, Jesus “immediately” encourages us. When we cry out to Him, Jesus “immediately” reaches out and catches us.

*Application ideas:* Be aware of Jesus’ promise to be with us in the midst of our most difficult trials.

## **Conclusion**

*[If you use Option 1]* We talked at the beginning of this message about how General George Washington spoke to his troops on the banks of the Delaware River. But let me tell you the rest of the story. Three days later, on Christmas night, Washington and his troops crossed the Delaware, took the Hessian army by surprise, and changed the course of the War. When others heard what the Washington’s soldiers had done, during those times that tried their souls the most, they were inspired to join them.

Wouldn’t you love to be that kind of example to your family members? Your neighbors? Your coworkers? Christians won’t be known by the absence of trials in their lives, but by the response to trials in their lives.

*[If you use Option 2]* Think back to the last line of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. As Alexander is falling asleep, he remembers, “Mom said some days are like that. Even in Australia. If you are a Christian, you aren’t known by the absence of trials in your life, no matter where you live. Instead, you are known by your response to trials in your life. That is one of the defining differences between a Christ follower and someone who doesn’t know Christ.

In small groups this week, you learned how God desires that we choose our attitude, trust His heart, and surrender our spirit, even in the midst of trials. You learned that James encourages us to “count it all joy” when we experience trials. We can’t do that unless we have trusted our hearts and surrendered our spirits to Him. [move toward invitation]

*James Jackson is the digital content editor for Bible Studies For Life. He is a frequent youth camp speaker and itinerant preacher. He lives in Nashville, Tennessee with his wife, Trish, and their two sons, Caleb and Joshua*