



Pressure Points 2010

Five studies on living positively in a time of pressure and living generously in an age of grasping

Many people are feeling the impact of the current economic downturn. If you want to help them respond positively, why not look at Pressure Points 2010, a new five week course, which fits between Ash Wednesday and Holy Week (leaving Holy Week free for services) or between Easter and Pentecost.

- For individuals, pairs, triplets or groups - or on your own
- Bible study and suggested discussion questions and activities
- Includes A4 sheets to download and print/copy
- Extra resources are available free online to supplement printed material
- Based on material adapted from Foundations21 and edited by Paul Simmonds
- No charge but contributions to **BRF** via [Foundations21](http://www.foundations21.org.uk) appreciated.

For this course not everyone needs access to Foundations21, but the person leading each week needs to register (free) by going to www.foundations21.org.uk
We would however encourage anyone who wants to, to register.

IMPORTANT if you download this as a PDF you, and anyone you send it to, can click on the Bible passages and other [links](#) and go straight to Bible Gateway and other websites.



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Pressure points – feeling the pressure and feeling the presence

For extra material on this topic register free at www-foundations21.org.uk then log into www-foundations21.net and follow [this link](#) to Room 2, Luke Level 3, Waymarker 1.

Welcome

Warm up activity: Go round and tell the group what are your two current favourite songs or hymns – thinking of the words as well as the tune. Why?

To talk about: Where are the pressure points for you and your work and home networks? Go round and each talk for 'just a minute' about a situation that you know about where you or someone you know is experiencing particular pressures at the moment. (If you are a new group you may simply want to describe unnamed situations until you feel you know each other better.)



A Story to read out.

In 1945 a young German soldier named Jürgen Moltmann was in a prisoner-of-war camp in Sherwood Forest, England. There, the Nottingham YMCA started him on the theological study which in time made him one of the great 20th-century theologians.

Many German prisoners collapsed inwardly with despair, guilt and shame at the horrors of the Second World War. 'The same thing almost happened to me,' wrote Moltmann later, were it not for a 'rebirth to a new life' which made Christian faith real for him. 'It was the experience of God's presence in the dark night of the soul: "If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there" (Psalm 139).

'A well-meaning army chaplain had given me a New Testament. I would rather have

had something to eat. But then I became fascinated by the Psalms and especially by Psalm 39 ("I kept completely silent, but it did me no good, and I suffered even more... Listen, Lord, to my prayer! My eyes are flooded with tears, as I pray to you. I am merely a stranger visiting your home as my ancestors did").

'These psalms gave me the words for my own suffering. They opened my eyes to the God who is with those "that are of a broken heart"... I know in my heart that it is there that he found me, and that I would otherwise have been lost.'

From *Experiences of God*, Jürgen Moltmann



Word

Psalm 25 is a personal prayer for guidance and help. Here is part of it:

Read aloud [Psalm 25:1-8 and 15-22](#)

We don't know the particular trouble the writer was in, or why his enemies hated him. That makes his prayer general enough for us to use in many different situations.

Notice how the writer:

- is concerned to know God's way and to follow it (v. 4)
- wants to trust God and be honest with him (v. 17)
- expresses confidence that God will sort things out, even if that doesn't seem to be happening yet (vv. 20-21)
- ends the prayer by asking God to deal with other people's troubles as well as his own (v. 22)

As a group, briefly share any insights from Psalm 25 and then move on to...



MY PSALM!

A good way to explore prayer is to think what you would do if you were writing your own psalm.

As a whole group, or in twos and threes if the group is large, discuss the kind of things you might include. You could write down a few lines.

- **It could be** an expression of praise, a longing to know God better, or a cry for help for you or for other people.
- **Decide what kind** of psalm you want to write, according to how you're feeling and what ideas come to mind.
- **It can be** as short or long as you like (Psalm 117 has two verses; Psalm 119 has 176 verses!)
- **It doesn't have** to be polished. It does have to be honest.

Why not try and write your own psalm, or at least a few verses, before next time and share it with the group. (You could email it to them.)

Worship and Prayer

Turn your thoughts into words of prayer and praise to God.

Pray for those who need guidance or help and especially for those who lack the words to express how they feel to God.

2 Pressure points – Believing in tough times

For extra material on this topic register free at [www.foundations21.org.uk](http://wwwFOUNDATIONS21.org.uk) then log into www.foundations21.net and follow [this link](#) to Room 2, Luke Level 3, Waymarker 2.

Welcome

What poems/stories/limericks etc., do you know by heart?

Did anyone write a psalm?

What things do you particularly value in your life today?

Word

The Message of Job

Leader: Remind the group of the story of Job, which is one of sudden financial loss combined with bereavement and ill health. Summarize [Job 1:13-22](#) and optionally read out [Job 2:11-13](#).

• **It is often assumed that the book of Job is about** the question of why good people suffer. In fact it asks a different question: **Does Job believe in God because God makes life good for him, or simply because God is God?** Will we still love God even if life is tough and he seems to be offering us no special favours?

• **When God speaks** (Job 38—41) he helps Job to see his question in a new light. More important than any explanation is the experience of God, which comes to him through his suffering. Beyond the anger and the questions, we can discover God's presence.

The teaching of Jesus which might have helped Job!

Job's agony leads him to ask many questions, not only about suffering. Here are some of them:

1. 'God, why have you turned your back and count me your enemy?' ([Job 13:24](#))
2. 'Will we humans live again?' ([Job 14:14](#))
3. 'If I knew where to find God...' ([Job 23:3](#))
4. 'Why doesn't God listen to me?' ([Job 31:35](#))

Look at the following passages and think how these passages address this question. Can you think of alternative passages?

Question 1: [Luke 15:11-32](#)

Question 2: [John 11:25-27](#)

Question 3: [John 14:5-7](#)

Question 4: [Luke 11:5-13](#)

Group task What would you say in a letter/email to someone who said that they didn't feel that God was listening to them. Are there other parts of the Bible you would refer them to? Discuss as a group or in pairs.

Worship and Prayer

Speak to God together about your own situations. Give thanks for the blessings that you have and bring to him the pressures of the present time.

Pray for people who seem to have lost their way or are overwhelmed by pressure. Pray that they may sense the presence of God and the embrace of Christ holding them or the hand of Jesus in theirs.

To finish

Remember, Lord, your compassion and love, for they are everlasting.

Lord, have mercy.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions, but think on me in your goodness, O Lord, according to your steadfast love.

Christ, have mercy.

O keep my soul and deliver me; let me not be put to shame, for I have put my trust in you.

Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen

Based on Psalm 25

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Pressure points – money and all that stuff

For extra material on this topic register free at www-foundations21.org.uk then log into www-foundations21.net and follow [this link](#) to Room 10, Luke Level 1, Waymarker 2.

Welcome

When was the first time in your life when you felt money was a problem rather than a pleasure?

Word



Nowadays having debts is almost the norm. Few could contemplate buying a house or a car without a loan. Perhaps debt is only a problem when it gets out of hand and keeps us awake at night and threatens our self worth.

Spend 5 minutes in silence reading the passage below and allowing it to alter the way you feel about whatever is burdening you – not forgetting financial issues. How can Jesus help when we feel the situation is of our own making?

Jesus said, 'If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest.' And then he added, 'Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light.'
Matthew 11:28-30

'Anybody with any maturity knows that an experienced Christian is more eager to have God use him than he is to use God for his own ends; but this does not mean that God is absent from the processes of business and livelihood, nor unconcerned about them, nor unable to reveal Himself through them. When we begin to look upon work, business, money, as potential sacraments through which God can work, we shall make better use of them.'

Samuel M. Shoemaker (1893-1963)



Money and possessions are areas where people vary hugely depending on their age and situation. There are few hard and fast rules.

Any study is bound to be too simple for some and too detailed for others, so we will try and deal with principles that can be applied in a variety of situations.

As a group discuss the questions below.

My possessions and money

What is your approach to money and possessions?

When we talk about money we need to follow the example of the gospels and talk about possessions and money as an indicator of our attitude.

Which of these is true for you?

- 1. I find handling money a challenge.
- 2. I manage my money pretty well and keep my finances well under control.
- 3. I tend to spend it if I've got it.
- 4. I don't do much planning.
- 5. I am fine because I never have any!
- 6. I know I am not much good with money so I get other people to help me.

The way we were brought up, our friends and family, and sometimes our work situation will influence our basic approach to money.

The Bible teaches us a lot about money and possessions and our attitude to them. In fact Jesus talks a lot about money and possessions.

Some of us may need healing from the effects of ungodly attitudes, which can range from miserliness to complete indiscipline!

There is a huge pressure to live at a particular standard of living – yet most of us live at a better standard than most of the rest of the world.

If you can do it in the meeting, perhaps using a wireless laptop, go to www.Globalrichlist.com and see where some of you come in the Rich List. Everyone is there somewhere! If not do it at home.

Tip for the Leader: do this for yourself beforehand and bring the result to the meeting.



Debt is a difficult issue. Be sensitive to those who may have been badly affected by debt in the past or those who are facing it now or are worried about it. Introduce the topic to the group using this material. Select discussion questions carefully.

Living with debt

'My mother would never dream of being in debt, but now it's part of life – student loans are mandatory and many people buy houses, cars and many other things through loans.'

The level of debt in the UK has reached huge proportions and, should interest rates rise, many households would become financially unsustainable. Homes could suddenly be under threat and debts become unmanageable.

In the Old Testament times, getting into debt was regarded as something to be avoided and, for those who fell into debt through bereavement or other circumstances, debt relief was mandatory in the seventh year.

Debt as we have it in a consumer society is of quite a different order.

Discuss a selection of these questions.

To what extent is ongoing debt (of various kinds) part of a justifiable Christian lifestyle? What is your view of debt?

What kind of debt is justified: a mortgage? a student loan? a loan for home improvement a car or other capital purchase?

Do you think debt is a last resort to be reserved for emergencies only? Why?

Research from AXA shows money is a significant cause of worry, anxiety and stress.

Dr Roger Henderson, a GP and leading mental health expert, recently published a paper about identifying the condition Money Sickness Syndrome (MSS). According to his research, almost half (43%) of the UK adult population is affected by money worries and have experienced MSS symptoms. 3.8m people admit money worries have caused them to take time off work and more than 10.76m people suffer relationship problems because of money worries, with almost one in five complaining of a sex life slump.

As a Christian community, how do you respond to the challenge of helping other people with advice and support in this rather personal area?

You will find more resources here: www.creditaction.org.uk

[Christians Against Poverty](#) has a number of stories on their site to inspire you.

Red2black is an initiative of Stewardship. www.red2black.org.uk and they have some videos which may some people might value.

Worship and Prayer

Read Matthew 11:28-30 and thank God for his great care for you and others.

***Something to ponder:** Do you think that children enjoy Christmas more or less when they have bigger and better toys?*

4 Pressure points – what a giveaway.

For extra material on this topic register free at www.foundations21.org.uk then log into www.foundations21.net and follow [this link](#) to Room 10, Luke Level 3, Waymarker 1.

Welcome

Can you think of a time in your life when something large or small that was given to you was so generous that you were rendered speechless!

Word

The Bible has a lot to say about money.

Quick Quiz: Can you remember what these Bible passages teach about Money? (**Tip for the Leader:** you don't need to do them all.)

- God's generous offer - [Malachi 3:8-12](#)
- Money makes the world go blind - [Matthew 19:16-24](#)
- Silver service - [Matthew 6:24](#)
- The other side of the coin - [Matthew 22:15-24](#)
- Clocking on - [Matthew 20:1-16](#)
- Even as I had pity on thee - [Matthew 18:21-35](#)
- Ready, steady... maybe - [Matthew 8:18-22](#)
- What would have happened if they'd had money? - [Acts 3:3-6](#)
- Danger - God at work - [Acts 4:34-37; 5:1-11](#)
- She could easily kept one for herself - [Mark 12:41-44](#)
- What a gift! - [1 Chronicles 29:1-20](#)
- You're giving too much - [Exodus 35:21-29; 36:3b-7](#)
- All's well that ends well? - [Revelation 21:3-4](#)
- Smile - [2 Corinthians 9:7](#)
- No strings attached - [Luke 6:35](#)
- It's all mine - [Psalm 50:7-15](#)
- Sharing brings blessing - [Proverbs 22:2, 7, 9](#)



Although Luther once quipped that the last part of a person to be converted was their wallet or purse, someone whose wallet was clearly converted was Sir John Laing, the founder of the famous building firm.

When he was 30, his building business was in severe financial difficulty. He made a commitment for life that he summarised as follows:

'First, the centre of my life was to be God – God as seen in Jesus Christ. Secondly, I was going to enjoy life and help others to enjoy it.'

In addition, he drew up a financial plan that was to govern his giving to God:

**'If income is £2000, give £200; live on £500, save £1300.
If income £4000, give £1500; live on £500, save £2000.'**

That was written in 1909 and he was talking about annual income.

When Sir John's will was published in 1978, to the amazement of many, his net estate totalled just £371. As his biographer wrote, 'The man who had handled millions had given them all away.' [More here](#)

Laings built the first concrete runway in 1935, the first stretch of the M1 and Coventry Cathedral.

From a booklet called 'Money for God's Sake', produced by Simon Jenkins Associates



Tithing then and now.

Nothing in the New Testament suggests that Jesus and his contemporaries didn't still follow that guideline. Jesus specifically affirmed that people should give both God and the state their dues.

Luke 20:25

Calling it legalism doesn't mean that God doesn't remain serious about what we give. In fact, the New Testament suggests that the early church gave far more than the 'base line' ten percent.

The early church, like the church today, included people who depended on others for their income so Paul is sensitive to this. He says, 'On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum in keeping with his (or her) income.'

1 Corinthians 16:2

Some people whose spouses are not Christian, or who have specific commitments already (for example to an elderly dependent relative), will have to take that into account. God understands!

If you are just beginning to give don't feel guilty

– set aside a certain amount to start with, you can always plan to gradually increase it year on year. Remember it is a spiritual activity not an accounting activity. It is not a fee payable to God; it is asking what of God's money, which he has lent me, should I allocate to his work and how much to my own needs?

Group question: supposing you were teaching a young person (whether you are young yourself or a grandparent) about Christian giving, what principles would you suggest?

Group Question: many people Christians and non-Christians alike have been badly hit by the economic downturn, though some seem to have benefitted. In what way do you see the generosity of the Christian community fulfilling Jesus' command to love our brothers and sisters working out practically?

Conclusion

Having read the story of John Laing, earlier, contrast this with Matthew who became a disciple. He was in financial services. The problem is that before becoming a disciple his desire to make money overcame everything else. He was prepared to sacrifice the friendship of his neighbours and friends in order to make more money more quickly. He signed up to work for the Romans – the occupying force – to collect dues from local people. He was a bailiff working for a foreign power.

Whether it is the gang leaders in Haiti or Hong Kong, the Landowners in Brazil or the loan sharks in the UK, there are always people ready to exploit others unscrupulously for their own gain.

Our own reaction, no doubt, is, condemnation. But do we ever exploit other people through our power or financial advantage?

The 'twelve' gave up everything to follow Jesus – homes, jobs and friends. But that is not the call to everyone. Martha and Mary were the kind of disciples of Jesus who supported and prayed for 'The twelve'.

If you want more details look at [Luke 10:38; Matthew 9:9](#).

If some of the group are interested in wider economic issues here are two articles from a Christian standpoint.

Alan Storkey author of Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers writes on 'Economic Life: Crisis and Reform, Winter 2009 – A biblical economic reformation, [here](#).

Moving Beyond the Economic Downturn – Theology and Economics Analysis and Reflections by members of the West Midlands Industrial Mission Association
[Short version with questions](#)

Worship and Prayer

Spend some time praying together for the needs of people in the current economic situation.

Perhaps this is an appropriate moment to say: if you are enjoying this course, it has been supplied free, but a donation will help us to do more in the future!

Go to <http://wwwFOUNDATIONS21.org.uk/donate/> for more information.



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Pressure points: A matter of death and life.

For extra material on this topic register free at wwwFOUNDATIONS21.org.uk then log into wwwFOUNDATIONS21.net and follow [this link](#) to Room 4, Luke Level 2, Waymarker 1.

Welcome

To get you thinking: recall an incident or a time in your life when you experienced a great sense of sense of relief.

During this course we have been thinking about times of pressure and how we cope. After the pressure often comes the relief when it's over or when things have eased a bit. Read out this story.

'Dead man' answers door

AN ELDERLY couple could not believe their eyes when they went to their 'dead' friend's wake – and he opened the door.

Pensioners Maurice and Shirley Dodwell thought they had just sat through the cremation of their pal Roy Spencer. But when they arrived at his house for the wake they found he was alive – and they'd been to the funeral of another Roy Spencer.

Maurice, 76, who had spotted his chum's name in a death notice in a local paper, said: 'It was a terrible fright. I thought I'd seen a ghost. I had to go and sit in the car for a while because I was so shocked.'

He and wife Shirley, 70, had been determined to pay their last respects and took son Kevin, 40, to the crematorium service in Cheltenham, Glos. When they heard fellow mourners mention a wake, they drove round to Roy's house.

Retired busman Roy, 62, said: 'They turned up in black suits and ties – and were stunned when I answered the door. I may have had three heart attacks and a bypass but I was happy to assure them I was still alive and kicking.'

© 2005 Christian Herald now [Inspire](#)

Word

The Resurrection must have been a bit like this - a huge sense of relief! But of course the pressure was back on the disciples again when Jesus left them, and they had the task of taking his message to the world. But let's go back for a minute prior to the Resurrection to the huge pressure on the disciples as Jesus took them to Jerusalem, a place the disciples knew would be dangerous.

Jesus himself had some inkling of what was to come. He knew something of what was going to happen - not the detail, but that he faced death.

[Luke 9:44-45; Matthew 16:21](#)

So let's look at resources for the place of suffering.

Jesus seems to have had Psalm 22 on his mind. Just before he died he called out the opening words of this Psalm in desperation. Many see it as a prophecy of the sufferings of Jesus.

Read as much of Psalm 22 as is appropriate for your group, perhaps [1-19](#)

Then allow people to read it quietly again to themselves and pick out a phrase that strikes them. It might be something that applies to them or it might be something that seems to fit with the pressure Jesus was faced with.

Psalm 22 from the New International Version

**For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning."
A psalm of David.**

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?
- ² O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, and am not silent...

Ask people to share with the group the answers to these two questions

- Which parts of Psalm 22 remind them of Jesus' suffering?
- Which parts do you identify with?

Read aloud this link: We sometimes pray: 'Oh God who brings good out of evil and life out of death...'



Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, wrote in the Times in Easter 2009 these words:

'We who live in the interval between Jesus' Resurrection and the final rescue and transformation of the whole world are called to be new-creation people here and now. That is the hidden meaning of the greatest festival Christians have.' (The full extract is below)

The Church must stop trivialising Easter

Christians must keep their nerve: the Resurrection isn't a metaphor, it's a physical fact

Private Eye ran a cartoon some years ago of St Peter standing in front of Jesus' Cross and saying to the other Disciples: "It's time to put this behind us now and move on." It was a satire not on Christian belief, but on politicians and counsellors, and their trivialising mantras. It depended on Jesus' death being not just an odd, forgettable event – and that it was His

Resurrection, rather than a shoulder shrugging desire to "move on", that got the early Christians going.

Easter was the pilot project. What God did for Jesus that explosive morning is what He intends to do for the whole creation. We who live in the interval between Jesus' Resurrection and the final rescue and transformation of the whole world are called to be new-creation people here and now. That is the hidden meaning of the greatest festival Christians have.

The Right Revd Dr Tom Wright is Bishop of Durham

[The Times April 11 2009](#)

How can we bring relief to pressured people and resurrection life to despairing people?

What stories do you know of people who have been transformed?

Pit ponies confused!

The story goes that after the Welsh revival the pit ponies wandered around aimlessly. They were so used to being ordered around with curses and oaths that they didn't know what to do when the miners gave up swearing!

Jesus said that he didn't come to call those who considered themselves to be right with God already, but those who were only too aware of their own shortcomings.

Those who are too ashamed or too honest to seek God for themselves in church or wherever, are often those who have the most dramatic 'conversion' experiences. There are some more examples here from [Worcester](#), England.

Worship and Prayer

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home.

Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.

May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;

we who drink his cup bring life to others;

we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.

Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

From [Common Worship](#), The Church of England © The Archbishops' Council 2000.

