

Pressure Points

By Shari Miller

Leader's Notes and Bible Passages Available Online

(Please do NOT use the "if time permits" sections when your study session time is limited. These sections could possibly be done by the participant in private.)

Introduction: The dictionary definition of a "pressure point" is: (1) Any of several points on the body at which an underlying artery can be pressed against a bone to stop distal bleeding; (2) Area on the skin that is highly sensitive to the application of pressure; (3) Where problems or disagreements are likely to occur.

Faith Talk: In light of the above definitions, discuss how the term "pressure point" could be applied to emotions and/or spiritual life. **Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group.**

As we consider Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, in this Bible study, we will see how they experienced physical, spiritual and emotional pressure points in their lives. We will also consider how we experience some of those very same pressure points.

Opening Prayer: Dear Almighty Father, We praise You that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. You have given us our body and soul and all our members. You preserve and protect us. When we sin, we know that we separate ourselves from You, the Holy One. Thank You for sending Jesus to suffer and die for us on the cross of Calvary. We boldly ask that You bless this study of Your Word. In Jesus' great Name we pray, Amen.

Pressure Points: Mary and Martha

Read the three references below which refer to both Mary and Martha. Identify in each passage at least one pressure that Mary could have been experiencing and at least one pressure that Martha could have been experiencing.

Luke 10:38-42 **Mary - being a good sister; doing her fair share; wanting to listen to Jesus, but knowing she should help. Martha - "company" pressures (clean house, table set, etc.); being the "in charge" sister; not enough help; possibly envious because she couldn't listen to Jesus because she thought everything else needed to get done; distracted**

³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" ⁴¹"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

John 11:1-44 **Mary and Martha - both had grief over the loss of their brother; "company" pressures (taking care of all the friends and mourners); funeral arrangements; confusion, yet faith, on why Jesus had not come earlier to help their brother.**

¹Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. ³So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." ⁴When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. ⁷Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." ⁸"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. ¹⁰It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he

has no light." ¹¹After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." ¹²His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." ¹⁷On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ²⁸And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. ³²When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴"Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

John 12:1-11 Mary – concern over how to adequately express her love for her Savior, knowing He had predicted His death; Martha – making sure all were served.

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages. ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." ⁹Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Faith Talk: Finish the following statement. Write in your answers and then share with a partner or in your small group. **Encourage the group to write down the pressures they experience and then to share – answers will vary.**

I experience these pressures because of my:

family –
friends –
job –
Christianity –

Pressure Points: *Pain*

A second definition of “pressure points” follows:

Pressure points are nerve bundles found throughout the body. They can cause both pain and healing. Pressure points can both hurt an attacker (as in martial arts) and heal a wounded body. Acupressure is a traditional Chinese medicinal technique that involves placing pressure on the body to relieve symptoms. Modern-day pressure techniques are practiced in reflexology.

What effect does the pressure of sin have on each of us? Read the following Bible passages. Identify the physical, emotion and spiritual effects of sin. **We are holistic people – our sins can cause physical pain, as well as emotional pain – both can lead to spiritual pain.**

Psalm 6:2-3, 6-8 Examples: faint, bones ache, soul in anguish, weary, weeping, eyesight fails, surrounded by evil people

² Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. ³ My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long? ⁶ I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. ⁷ My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes. ⁸ Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping.

Psalm 32:3-4 Examples: wasting away, strength fails

³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

Psalm 38:4 Examples: guilt

My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

Psalm 38:18 Examples: anguish because of the knowledge of sin

I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.

Psalm 40:12 Examples: sins are so numerous they are overwhelming, vision blurs, heart fails

For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

Psalm 88:3 Examples: soul is troubled, aware of imminent death

For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave.

What painful pressures did Jesus endure for the salvation of the world? Read the following Bible passages. Identify the physical, emotional and spiritual effects of Jesus’ punishment for our sins.

Psalm 22:1-2, 6-18 Examples: forsaken by God, scorned, despised, mocked, insulted, no help, heart has failed, strength has failed, a word picture of the crucifixion of Jesus

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. ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." ⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. ¹⁰ From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. ¹¹ Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. ¹² Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. ¹³ Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

Isaiah 53:3-6 Examples: despised, rejected, sorrowful, experienced suffering, not esteemed, punished for all our iniquities

³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Matthew 27:46 Examples: forsaken by God

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Mark 15:15-20 Examples: flogged, crucified, mocked, crown of thorns, mocked, jeered, struck, spit upon

¹⁵Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. ¹⁶The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" ¹⁹Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

If time permits: Use a cross-reference to find other passages that describe Jesus and His work of salvation. Identify the pressures that Jesus experienced. Share your findings with a partner or in small groups.

Pressure Points: *Healing (Relief)*

Faith Talk: List ways or methods we use to try to relieve our pain. Share with your group.

Additions: drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography thrills, gambling
overwork, money, power, belittling others to look superior

Reread the second definition for “pressure points.” Take note of these phrases: “cause...healing;” “heal a wounded body;” and “relieve symptoms.” According to this definition, pressure points can not only cause pain, but can also be attributed to relieving and healing such painful things as stress, headaches, nervous tension, anxiety and even nausea.

Take another look at the three previous references to Mary and Martha. How did Jesus relieve their pressures?

Luke 10:38-42 helped both sisters to focus on the most important thing, Jesus Christ

John 11:1-44 showed compassion for both sisters; performed a miracle and physically resurrected their brother; wept with them; gave them words of encouragement and life

John 12:1-11 Jesus affirmed the offerings of both women (Mary's worship and Martha's preparing a dinner in His honor)

How does Jesus our Savior heal us?

Psalms 130 Takes away the guilt of our sin; gives us forgiveness and hope; redemption

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; ²O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. ³If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. ⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. ⁶My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. ⁷O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. ⁸He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

John 14:16-17 Gives us the Holy Spirit, the Counselor

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Romans 8:22-27 Groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us (even in prayer)

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who

hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. ²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

2 Corinthians 5:1-3 We long for our “heavenly home”; we groan and are burdened, but the Spirit guarantees our hope for heaven

¹Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ²Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Galatians 5:16-25 The Spirit helps us to battle our natural sinful desires

¹⁶So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. ¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Hebrews 12:7-11 Even the discipline or chastisement we receive from God indicates that we are God's dearly loved children; produces a harvest of righteousness and peace

⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Extra Credit Question: The Holy Spirit uses the _____ of _____ to keep us in the one true faith. **Means of Grace** What three things does the Holy Spirit use to “grow” our faith? How are we healed? Hint: See the Bible passages below.

God works through His Word and Sacraments to engender and strengthen our faith; we are forgiven and strengthened for a new life in Him; we have hope for our heavenly future

1 Peter 3:18-22 Baptism

¹⁸For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge^[a] of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Lord's Supper or Holy Communion

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

2 Peter 1:16-21 The Word of God (Old and New Testament)

¹⁶We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."¹⁸We ourselves heard

this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. ¹⁹And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: Where does every Christian find true joy and peace, even through the pressure points of life? See **Nehemiah 8:10b** and **Philippians 4:4-7**. **joy and peace come from the Lord**

Nehemiah 8:10b: Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

Philippians 4:4-7: ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Faith Walk:

1. Help to relieve the pressure of at least one person's sin by sharing with her the Good News of salvation in Jesus this week.
2. Identify people in your life who need pressure relief. How can you specifically help to provide that relief?
3. Book Club Suggestion - *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life* by Joanna Weaver; Random House, 2000.

Closing Prayer: Pray **Psalm 121** together.

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
 where does my help come from?
² My help comes from the LORD,
 the Maker of heaven and earth.
³ He will not let your foot slip—
 he who watches over you will not slumber;
⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel
 will neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵ The LORD watches over you—
 the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
⁶ the sun will not harm you by day,
 nor the moon by night.
⁷ The LORD will keep you from all harm—
 he will watch over your life;
⁸ the LORD will watch over your coming and going
 both now and forevermore.
In Jesus' Name, Amen!

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