

## Pushed To The Limit

1. Warm-up question: What did you do for fun over the Independence Day Weekend?
2. Life constantly tests us in ways large and small. So let's start there, with some of the ways life is currently testing us.
  - a. Life is full of little provocations: lost keys, rainy days, tangled Christmas lights, slow vehicles in the passing lane, etc. As you look back over this week, what are some small ways life has tested you?
  - b. Life's little tests can be annoying, but it's the big things that often shake us to the core of our being. Right now in your life, what is one of the biggest ways life is challenging you? In what ways are you feeling tested by that circumstance?
3. Jesus went through the same kinds of things we do, from little frustrations – like tiredness, hunger, and scheduling demands – all the way up to the greatest challenge of his life – his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. On Sunday, we focused on Jesus' trial, looking for clues as to how he managed the enormous stress of that moment so well, hoping to learn from his example. Read Matthew 26:57-68.
  - a. The passage we just read seems to describe a “pre-trial hearing” where the chief priest and a subset of the Council of Elders were trying to pull their case against Jesus together for the official session the next morning. The text tells us that “many false witnesses came forward.” Have you ever found yourself in a situation where it felt like lots of people were making false accusations about you? How did that feel?
  - b. To prevail at trial, the chief priest had to find at least two witnesses who agreed with each other. He finally did. Two of them accused Jesus of making a terroristic threat to destroy the Jerusalem temple. Do you suppose Jesus ever said anything like that? If so, what do you think he meant? (Compare John 2:18-22.)
  - c. Despite all these accusations, verse 62 says, “Jesus was silent.” Could you imagine yourself in that situation not responding? Why do you suppose Jesus didn't respond?
4. Jeff suggested Jesus' silence reflected a deliberate choice not to allow himself to be drawn into a pointless conflict and invest great emotional energy in a futile effort to persuade his critics. From this Jeff drew a practical lesson: **In provocative situations, give yourself permission to take a “sacred pause” to discern whether to respond. You don't have to react to everything. Pick your spots.**
  - a. Maya Angelou once said, “I have learned that when someone says something that's untrue about you, the best thing you can do is to live in such a way that no one will believe it.” Do you buy that? Why or why not?

- b. Isaiah 30:15 says, “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” How do those words speak to you? What do they mean to you?
  - c. In Psalm 46:10, God says, “Be still and know that I am God.” How do those words speak to you? What do they mean to you? In what situation of your life right now, do you feel called to apply that wisdom?
  - d. We’re all put together differently. Some of us are very reactive and volatile; others of us tend to be more understated and reflective. When you find yourself in a provocative situation, is it easy (or difficult) for you to refuse to be provoked? What are some practical ways we can get better at this?
  - e. Often without thinking, people reflexively engage every provocation life sends their way. By his example, Jesus gives us permission to pick our battles – to simply refuse to engage when we feel so led. Have you ever deliberately refused to engage a provocative situation? How did that work for you?
5. In our scripture reading, once the high priest realizes Jesus is never going to respond to his accusers, he changes his approach and simply asks Jesus what he believes to be true about himself. That’s a question Jesus is prepared to answer. In response, he affirms his self-identity as “Messiah, the Son of God,” then goes on to associate himself with a famous “Son of Man” prophecy found in the book of Daniel.
- a. Read Daniel 7:13-14. What does Jesus’ quotation of Daniel’s prophecy tell us about “where his head was” during this trial? What does it suggest about how Jesus was emotionally and psychologically coping with the pressure of his trial?
  - b. Jeff compared what Jesus does at his trial to the “It Gets Better” campaign and to the advice Taylor Swift gives kids who face bullying in her song “Mean.” Have someone pull up the lyrics of the song and read it to the group. The basic idea is, when facing something terrible, instead of focusing on the ick of the moment, focus on the promise of the future, i.e., your next reasonable hope. Do you think that’s wise advice? Can you think of times when that kind of reasonable future hope has kept you going?
6. From all this, Jeff drew a second lesson from Jesus’ trial: **When present circumstances are grim, let an inspired vision of the future sustain you. Claim your prophecy. Future hope fuels present strength. Find your next reasonable hope.** In response to Question 2b above, some of us identified the greatest challenge we currently face. Let’s take a minute in silence and each of us ponder our great challenge and see if we can sense what “prophecy of hope” God’s Spirit wants to speak to us regarding our challenge. Then, as you’re comfortable, let’s share what we’re hearing in our hearts.