

Week beginning:  
Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024



**ENTER** God's presence

**Psalm 3:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> Lord, how many are my foes!  
How many rise up against me!

<sup>2</sup> Many are saying of me,  
“God will not deliver him.”

<sup>3</sup> But you, Lord, are a shield around me,  
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

<sup>4</sup> I call out to the Lord,  
and he answers me from his holy mountain.

<sup>5</sup> I lie down and sleep;  
I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.

<sup>6</sup> I will not fear though tens of thousands  
assail me on every side.

- **Pray:** Heavenly Father our lives are full of different sources of pressure and stress, and yet, as so many psalmists wrote, you are our refuge and our strength, our comfort in times of need. So we come to you in the midst of the pressures and stress of life and ask that you would speak to each of our hearts through your word as we read it together now, in Jesus name, Amen

Worship series:  
**Pressure Points**  
#3 – Social Pressure



**VERSE** for the week

“These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are merely human rules.”

**Key Verses: Mark 7:6b-7**

*Full Text: Mark 7:1-23*



**SHARE** life together

1. **What are your highs and lows for this past week?**
2. **When have you felt pressure to act or behave a certain way because of the social setting you have been in?**
3. **When was the last time you felt uncomfortable or unwelcome because of your faith or beliefs?**



**LISTEN** attentively

The pressure to conform or to fit in, is all around us. We are constantly bombarded with expectations about who we should be, how we should look, what we should do, what we should possess and how we should act. The pressure of being pulled



**REMEMBER** this week

**The God who unites us in His son, is bigger than anything threatening to divide us!**

in a thousand different directions can lead to stress, anxiety and a sense of emptiness and loneliness. Instead of drawing us together, the net result of all these competing forces is to set us in opposition to the very people we aimed to be a part of. Jesus comes into us from outside of our brokenness to restore us from the inside out and when that happens a positive, life-giving force is unleashed on the world which brings gospel transformation that is authentic, inclusive, and life giving.

Read Mark 7:1-23 [HERE](#) or in your own Bible.

4. **Try to summarise this text in your own words.**
5. **What verse/concept/teaching in this reading caught your attention and what was challenging/confronting/comforting about it for you?**
6. **Have you ever heard someone say something about Christianity or Jesus, that just didn't sound right? Where do you think they formed that opinion?**
7. **Have you ever encountered rules in a church that just didn't seem to make any sense? What were they, and did you find out why those rules existed?**



Rules are supposed to be something that help bind and unite a community. They are supposed to help groups of people live in harmony with one another. For all our rules and laws, we see all around us today, a society that seems to want to organise and categorise people into groups. These groups can be formed around any number of categories, but usually result in people taking up an 'us' and 'them' mentality. In this kind of environment, the pressure to be part of the 'us' can be really significant because the way people treat the 'them' group is becoming increasingly ugly and sometimes violent. The Pharisees wanted to exclude Jesus and his disciples from their group because of their behaviour and attitude towards the purification laws which the Pharisees vigorously upheld.

8. **When have you felt judged by people either outside of the church, or perhaps even from within the Church, because of something you have said or done? Did that judgement and possibly correction draw you back into community or drive you out of it?**

Unfortunately, it is often the case that rules and laws which start out with noble purpose and intent often end up being used by people in power to manipulate and exert control over others. For example, most of us would agree that we should slow our vehicles down when driving through school zones, none of us want to see children get hurt on their way to or from school. However, I know someone who was stopped by police in Tasmania for speeding in a school zone... on a bicycle. That seems to be taking things a bit far. In the same way, the Pharisees had taken the laws which God had given to Moses, laws designed to help people live in unity with God and with one another, and changed and adapted them over time to the point where they no longer served the purpose for which they were given.

9. **How do you feel about rules changing over time? Can you imagine a situation where rules given at one time may have been right and helpful, but now no longer serve the purpose for which they were intended? Can you give an example?**



#### **MAKE IT REAL:**

The pressure that we feel from the culture and societies in which we live can be very real and sometimes very difficult to recognise and bear up under. The pressure to be 'accepting' while at the same time excluding those who are not as accepting as you, is an insidious world view that appears very dominant in

our society today. And while it aims for acceptance, it actually promotes division and discord in community. Jesus was not against acceptance, in fact, Jesus' death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for **all** people is the most inclusive and accepting act of love ever performed by anyone in human history. Jesus is the only way people can be drawn together and made one because it is only 'in him' that the law loses its power to condemn and separate us from God, and from each other.

10. **What are some ways that you have experienced being united with others 'in Christ'?**
11. **In verse 14 of the reading it says, "Jesus called the crowd to himself and said..." How is your life something that draws or calls people to Jesus?**
12. **Take a moment to reflect on what rules or traditions that Jesus might be calling you or your church to reconsider to better enable you to call and draw people to himself?**

All the social activism, restitution, protesting, or cancelling of people and culture in the world is incapable of redeeming humanity. Only in Jesus can we be redeemed and restored both to God and to one another.

[Plan your weekly devotions](#) or [download the Church Central app](#) for the daily [LifeWay Devotions](#)



## **PRAY** intentionally

- **Praise the Father**, for His concern for protecting and guiding life and human flourishing with rules and guidelines.
- **Thank Jesus** for offering himself in our place to fulfil the Law on our behalf so it no longer condemns or divides us.
- **Ask the Holy Spirit** to give you wisdom and confidence to know when and how to call people to Jesus.
- Pray for LifeWay, particularly for workers for the harvest to support Danny and Michelle at LifeWay Westside and for the plans that God has for the future of his church and people in the Illawarra .
- Pray for the LCA as the 2024 National Synod begins and the church discerns the many issues presented
- For those who are feeling the pressure of society and culture on their faith and journey as disciples of Jesus, that they would be strengthened and encouraged as they continue to call and draw others to Jesus .



## **BLESS** one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross on their forehead or on the palm of their hand as you say...

**[Name], Jesus loves and accepts you. Amen.**