**Are You a Pressure Cooker?**

***By Kris Swiatocho***

When I was a kid, I would visit my grandmothers regularly. I have many memories of her cooking everything from fried chicken to dumplings, chocolate cake, and my favorite, pumpkin pie. She also, from time to time, would cook beans or collards in a pressure cooker. As a kid, I had no idea why she needed to do that; however, I remember she would adjust the valve occasionally, letting out some of the steam that the food had built up. Once I grew up, I learned that putting food in a pressure cooker allows you to cook the food quicker and control the cooking speed. Grandma told me, “Kris, don’t walk too close to the stove; the steam is hot and can burn you.” Wow, that’s a lot of pressure.

As leaders, we are all under various kinds of stress, from people not following through in their commitment to serve, inconsistent attendance, not doing the work or doing it wrong, bad attitudes, not being flexible, selfishness, and personal drama. Then, when we add our personal struggles into the mix, it can sometimes be difficult to keep the pressure under control. But to be a good leader, a great leader, we have to learn how to stay calm. We have to learn not to allow the craziness of this world, our work, our ministries, and people to distract us from the ultimate goal God has given us. So how do you stay calm?

1. **Pray, asking God to help you identify the areas of your life that cause the most stress and work on reducing them.** If it’s a person, what do you need to confront them about in love? Do you need to move them to a different area? Do you need to take some responsibility away or adjust their existing workload? If it’s in the job or ministry, what areas raise your blood pressure that need to be changed? Is it a lack of organization, deadlines that are not realistic, or unrealistic expectations from those over you? If it’s something personal, do you need to take a break, step back, or reduce your workload? What is God telling you?

*Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*
2. **When you do get thrown into the fire, stop to breathe and allow the Lord to show you every part of the situation.** You are the leader, and people are looking to you to figure out a solution. You help keep the waters calm. It’s important that you see the situation from every angle, offering solutions. It’s your role to adjust the pressure on the lid so things don’t get worse.

*Isaiah 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*
3. **Walk away if need be until you can think more clearly**. Let people know you will be back at a particular time or set up a meeting in a different location, etc. Allow time for God to talk to you about the next steps. Do you need to involve others in the discussion, gather materials, video, etc?

*1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*
4. **Remember, most situations that happen are about control.** People are worried about the economy, their jobs, their families, whether they will get married one day, their health, etc. And often, tempers rise when they are experiencing fear. What a great time to be the one who helps calm them down, sharing God’s perspective on the situation, using your own life, and showing how He has helped you get through uncertain times. How does loving God and loving others look like to you at this time?

*2 Timothy 1:7 For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*

1. **And if the lid explodes off anyway, apologize and learn from it.** Learn your triggers. Remember that when you haven’t had enough rest, eat well, said “no” to some things, worked too much, etc., it leaves you vulnerable. So when the pressure builds, it’s hard to stay calm. Take care of yourself so you can help take care of others and lead well.

*James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

One of the sayings you see in the UK is written on T-shirts and posters, and everything in between is “Stay Calm…and Carry On”—a great and truthful motto.

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