

# PILATE UNDER PRESSURE

by Meridith Lane Thomas and Carol Duerksen

## KEY VERSE:

But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified, and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.

(Luke 23:23-24)

## FAITH STORY:

Luke 23:1-25

## FAITH FOCUS:

Jesus is taken before Pilate after being questioned by the council of the assembly of the elders of the people, including chief priests and scribes. The assembly (also known as the Sanhedrin) told Pilate of their accusations against Jesus but Pilate was reluctant to pass judgment, and questioned Jesus instead. When Pilate was unable to find anything in Jesus' responses that make him out to be a criminal and he realizes that Jesus is a Galilean, under Herod's jurisdiction, he sends Jesus to Herod. Herod is at a festival in Jerusalem. He is glad to hear that Jesus, the miracle-worker, is being sent to him but he also isn't able to find any fault in Jesus, and sends him back to Pilate. Pilate tells the chief priests, elders and people gathered that neither he nor Herod have found Jesus guilty, and offers to flog Jesus to please the persistent crowd, but the people aren't satisfied. They demanded that Barabbas be released instead, and loudly demanded the crucifixion of Jesus. Seeing that the people would not be appeased and the situation was getting out of control, Pilate granted the demands of the people, freeing Barabbas and handing Jesus over to them.

## SESSION GOAL:

Students will learn about Pilate's compromise and think about times in their lives when it is tempting to cave into the pressure that others place on them.

## SESSION OBJECTIVES:

### By the end of this session, the students will:

- Study how Pilate gave in to the demand so the people who brought Jesus before him.
- Identify pressures that have, or could, cause them to compromise what they believe to be right.
- Think about areas in which they feel they need to stop compromising.

## MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for everyone
- 2 Optional for Focus activity: Michael Jackson's song, "Scream."
- 3 Balloons—at least two per person
- 4 Chalk board or dry erase board and marker
- 5 Paper and pencils

## SESSION OUTLINE

### FOCUS: (5–7 minutes)

**Optional:** Play the song “Scream” by Michael Jackson. Ask students to name pressures in their lives that can build up to the point where they just want to scream!

Hand out balloons and ask students to blow them up to the point that they burst. Can they do it? Is it scary to blow it up to the popping point?

### CONNECT: (5–7 minutes)

**Say:** *We all have pressures that build up in our lives. There’s the pressure of the media, trying to tell us everything from what type of shoes we need to be a good athlete to what our body should look like to be attractive to the opposite sex. The media tries to tell us what we have to have and how we have to look in order to be valuable, respected and well-liked. Then there’s the pressure of people around us—they also give us strong signals on how we should look and act. People can influence us either positively toward healthy choices or negatively toward decisions that can hurt us. For some of us, parents add pressures—they want us to be successful in everything. Sometimes all of these pressures can build up to the point where you just want to scream, or run away, or escape into alcohol or drugs or sex. Sometimes the pressures push people into decisions that have long-term, bad consequences.*

Ask students to help you make a list of the pressures kids their age face, some of the ways that they deal with them, and some of the possible results of the pressures.

### EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–15 minutes)

Divide into four groups and make sure each student has a Bible. Assign the following passages to the groups:

- 1 Luke 23:1-5
- 2 Luke 23:6-12
- 3 Luke 23:13-16
- 4 Luke 23:18-25

Write these questions on the chalkboard and ask groups to discuss them:

- What are the pressures working against Pilate in your verses? How does he respond?
- What are the pressures working on Jesus? How does he respond?
- Who seems to have the most control in your passage—Pilate, Herod, Jesus or the people?
- Do you think Pilate would have condemned Jesus to death if it hadn’t been for the pressure of the people?

Bring the groups together to share their responses.

**APPLY: (10–15 minutes)**

**Say:** *Pilate did not want to release Jesus to be crucified, but the pressure of the people was so huge that he gave in. Whether or not you ever find yourself in a situation where you are being pushed to take another person's life, you do face pressures every day that affect your life and the lives of others. It can be as simple as the words you use that can kill another person's spirit—and that isn't very simple at all, is it?*

Hand out paper and pencils. Ask students to draw a line from the top of the page to the bottom. At the top of the line, ask them to write down the time they get up on a school day, and at the bottom, write down the time they usually go to bed. Then ask them to work their way down the line, writing down the things that they face that weigh them down, push in on their lives, shove them one way or another as you talk them through their day: (Pause after each phrase for them to think and make notes.)

What's the first thing that might stress you in the morning?

*As you get dressed?*

*Eat breakfast?*

*Go to school (ride, drive, walk).*

*Arrive at school?*

*Go to your locker?*

*Meet your friends?*

*Morning classes?*

*Lunch break?*

*Afternoon classes?*

*Sports, music, or other practice?*

*Coming home?*

*Chatting online with friends?*

*Time with your family?*

*Homework?*

*As you prepare for bed?*

Invite students to add anything to the line that brings pressure into their day that you might not have mentioned.

**RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)**

Hand out the balloons to the students and ask them to blow them up but NOT to the point of bursting. Ask each student to write their name on their balloon and IF THEY WANT TO, they can also write down a pressure in their life for which they would like someone to pray for them. Exchange balloons so that everyone has someone else's balloon. Ask students to take the balloon home and place it somewhere they'll see it every day and be reminded to pray

for the person who's name is on their balloon. They may either pray for the specific situation listed on the balloon or for the person in general and whatever pressures he/she faces in their life.

### **INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:**

When Jesus was brought to Pilate the first time, Pilate could not find him guilty of any crime. But the people were insistent, and when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him to Herod because Herod ruled over Galilee. Pilate was probably relieved to send the irrational crowd somewhere else, but his relief didn't last long. When Herod didn't convict Jesus, the chief priests and scribes brought him back to Pilate.

Pressured by the people who wanted Jesus killed, Pilate decided to try a compromise. He would flog Jesus. Beat him badly. Surely that would satiate the crowd's hunger for violence.

But they responded by saying they wanted Barabbas freed and Jesus crucified. Pilate tried one more time—one more compromise, one more offer to have Jesus flogged and then released. But the crowd "urgently demanded with loud shouts that he should be crucified, and their voices prevailed."

Pilate gave in. He didn't want to. It went against his better judgment. And while we may wonder if he really had a choice in the matter (how do you balance Pilate's free will with the fact that Jesus had to die?), we do know this: We all give in to pressures when we don't want to and when it goes against our better judgment. We do it because others are, because our "bad judgment" is momentarily stronger than our better judgment, because it just seems easier to give in. We do have a choice.

Use this lesson to help your students think about those choices.