

Up Time: Downtime is Uptime if it's God's Time

Mark 6: 30-56

30 The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told Him all they had done and taught. 31 Then Jesus said, "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile." He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat.

32 So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone. 33 But many people recognized them and saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and got there ahead of them. 34 Jesus saw a huge crowd as He stepped from the boat, and He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things. 35 Late in the afternoon His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. 36 Send the crowds away so they can go to the nearby farms and villages and buy something to eat."

37 But Jesus said, "You feed them." "With what?" they asked. "We'd have to work for months to earn enough money to buy food for all these people!" 38 "How much bread do you have?" he asked. "Go and find out."

They came back and reported, "We have 5 loaves of bread and two fish." 39 Then Jesus told the disciples to have the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of fifty or a hundred.

41 Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, He kept giving the bread to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. He also divided the fish for everyone to share. 42 They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterwards, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftover bread and fish. 44 A total of 5,000 men and their families were fed.

45 Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that His disciples get back into the boat and head across the lake to Bethsaida, while He sent the people home. 46 After telling everyone good-bye, he went up into the hills by Himself to pray. 47 Late that night, the disciples were in their boat in the middle of the lake, and Jesus was alone on land. 48 He saw that they were in serious trouble, rowing hard and struggling against the wind and waves. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. He intended to go past them, 49 but when they saw Him walking on the water they cried out in terror, thinking he was a ghost. 50 They were all terrified when they saw Him.

But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage! I am here!" 51 Then he climbed into the boat, and the wind stopped. They were totally amazed, 52 for they still didn't understand the significance of the miracle of the loaves. Their hearts were too hard to take it in.

53 After they had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret. They brought the boat to shore 54 and climbed out. The people recognized Jesus at once, 55 and they ran throughout the whole area, carrying sick people on mats to wherever they heard He was. 56 Wherever He went—in villages, cities, or the countryside—they brought the sick out to the marketplaces. They begged Him to let the sick touch at least the fringe of His robe, and all who touched Him were healed!

It's been a long time now since we marked the celebration of Easter on the church's calendar. The time is not too distant from the seasons of Advent and Christmas. They are coming quickly. It seems that the hot, humid days of summer are the time of year we set aside not only to get a break from school or take a vacation from our job, but also as a time when we take a little "time off" from God. I have to admit that my time on sabbatical was not as "spiritual" as I would have liked! And I could preach a whole sermon on proper rest. How many of us have returned from vacation needing more rest than when we left?

The fluidity of summertime schedules means that more families are out of town, and Sunday morning attendance is all over the place. A few weeks ago it was going to be 92 at 8 in the morning so I expected a small crowd and we had 50 people. We have had Sundays in the past year in the mid 20's for attendance. Discipleship group and Bible study go dormant for three months. During the Summer. It's a bad time of year to schedule important meetings or to make any great future-shaping decisions. Everyone, it seems, loves Summer break, a change, a chance for a little well-deserved "personal time." Of course, this is mainly driven by children and young adults in College. Outside of this past Sabbatical Summer I rarely feel like my schedule changes much except for having more evenings free.

If we are perfectly honest with ourselves, however, we have to admit that we have already segmented our lives into "God's time" vs. the "rest of our lives." So much of our days evaporate into grocery shopping, staff meetings, budget-crunching, commuter traffic snarls, refereeing sibling squabbles, "environmental science" (a.k.a. housecleaning and yard work), writing reports, keeping coworkers informed, keeping bosses informed, filing reports, preparing meals and preparing for tomorrow's onslaught, that we struggle to "find time" for God. At best, we schedule a half-hour of Bible study here, a half-hour of prayer there, maybe some devotional reading, and a scant 60 minutes of "worship" ...once a week. [NOTE 1]

The problem with this attitude is that we really can't segment life into "God times" vs. "god-less times." As Christ-followers we should not find time for God. We should find God's time in all our time. If we are truly "in Christ," then Christ's Spirit fills us at every moment of our day. In everything we do, we must be finding God and serving God. Christians don't take "time off" from being Christians any more than our hearts can take "time off" from beating. On a sticky July day, we are as fully immersed in God's time as we are singing "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve or proclaiming "Christ is risen" on Easter morning. I talk about retiring in five years. But I will never retire from making disciples who make disciples. I will never retire from playing worship music and preaching from time to time. This is a phrase that makes me want to cry when I hear it. "I served my time. It's time for someone else to do ministry, to share the gospel and make disciples. I praise God that I don't hear that in Doster. But in my previous church in Northwest Grand Rapids I heard it a lot. I defy any of you to show me any place in the New Testament where someone "retired" or stopped sharing the gospel before they died. You won't find it, ... because it's not there. **[NOTE 2]**

Sometimes we find great wisdom in the comics section of the newspaper:

"Beetle Bailey" by Mort Walker

(Frame 1) -- Beetle and Sarge driving down highway see mountain carved with "You will pass this way but once." Sarge says, "What does that mean, Beetle?"

(Frame 2) -- Beetle says, "It means we only get one shot at life on Earth, so don't screw it up."

(Frame 3) -- Sarge says, "Too bad you didn't pass that sign sooner."

In his book *Breakfast at the Victory*, James Carse writes, "The highest achievement of the spiritual life is within the full embrace of the ordinary. Our appetite for the big experience -- sudden insight, daring vision, heart-stopping ecstasy -- is what hides the true way from us." It is the extraordinary in the ordinary that can become prayer. In the Buddhist tradition there is an expression, "Chop wood; carry water," which is a way of saying that spiritual meaning can be found in the smallest, most ordinary functions of the day (As noted in R. Scott Colglazier, *Finding Faith That Makes Sense* [St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996], 79).

What daily tasks of yours correspond to a "chop wood; carry water" mindset or spiritset?

-- Can you recognize God's time while participating in a tense, humorless confrontation between coworkers?

-- Can you recognize God's time while answering the same question for the 10th time in a class full of fifth graders?

-- Can you recognize God's time while attempting to prepare dinner, hold a meeting on the phone, keep the baby from slamming fingers in the door, and supervise a homework session?

-- Can you recognize God's time while trying valiantly to find the bottom on

your "In" box? Trying to go through the 10,000 unread emails?

-- Can you recognize God's time while you are logged on?

-- Can you recognize God's time while stretching out in the hot summer sun?

At first glance, it may appear that today's gospel text depicts Jesus advocating a kind of "time off" from doing God's mission for his disciples. The "apostles" had returned from their mission (Mark 6:7-13) bubbling over with enthusiasm, anxious to tell Jesus all they had "done and taught"(v.30). In the midst of all this hubbub, of all the comings and goings, Jesus suggests that the disciples "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while"(v.31). **[NOTE 3]**

But the words and actions of today's text convey two messages -- two halves that combine to create one whole truth. First, Jesus does remind the disciples that they must allow time for recharging their spiritual batteries and resting their physical bodies. Second, however, this text demonstrates that even our "time off" is God's time. The scene in verse 33 suggests that despite departing from their old environment and responsibilities, Jesus and his disciples were still fully immersed in God's time. We cannot possibly be satisfied with anything less--each day, each hour, each moment in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit--than to walk with God.--Theologian H. C. G. Moule

From this biblical perspective, it is clear that sometimes we do have to take care of the self, so that we can then continue to do God's work with renewed energy and improved vision. But allowing our engines to idle for a while is different from completely shutting down all our systems. If we are genuinely "not making time for God," but rather seeing all time as God's time, we should be prepared to be surprised by God even when we are at rest.

The disciples thought they were escaping to a "deserted place" with Jesus. Instead, they had a short, restful boat trip and then witnessed the miracles of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, feeding the 5,000 and the divine Christ walking on water. Which experience do you think left the disciples more rested and refreshed in spirit? God was present both in their time of rest and in their "revving-up." It is so important to make all of time God's time. Listen to this example: Criminologist Byron Johnson of Lamar University in Texas complains that government will endorse everything from pet therapy to acupuncture for prisoners, but you'd better not mention God. As an example, U. S. News & World Report, in its cover article on "The Faith Factor," illustrated the degree of government paranoia about religion by citing the sad case of Detroit's Joy of Jesus ministry. Here was a social program that offered job training along with Bible lessons, prayer and faith-centered discussions about the problems of life. Michigan officials, impressed with the ministry's success ratio, offered state funding with one condition -- give up the prayers and Bible study. The ministry reluctantly agreed.

The result? Where once the program had placed 60 percent of its students in

jobs, the program's success rate after state backing began to approach zero. Eventually the ministry returned the state money and got back to its original mission. -- U. S. News & World Report, 121, September 9, 1996, 46-53.

Have you ever just settled down with a cup of coffee, a favorite snack and a your remote, all ready to enjoy a little down time -- only to have a small visitor show up who has both the munchies and a favorite story he or she wants read? Which leaves you feeling more rested and refreshed: a half-hour with the TV or a half-hour with a snuggly child perched on your lap?

Ever been so tired that all you wanted to do was sit and zone out in front of the television? Too beat even to concentrate, you don't watch anything but spend all your time channel surfing from one video image to another. After about a half-hour of this, you're so exhausted all you can do is stagger off to bed. [NOTE 4]

For Christians who live always fully immersed in "God's time," moments of rest and relaxation don't constitute "downtime." Rather this is "uptime," the time we take to refresh our spirits and breathe in more deeply the presence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Are you busy scheduling your vacation plans this Fall? Don't just find time for God. If you are living a life of discipleship and faith, God is already in all the time you have. Fall is not the time to "wind down." It is our special time to "rev-up" our engines for the challenges ahead.

"Downtime" is "uptime" if it's God's time

Sermon Notes for Up Time: Downtime is Uptime if it's God's Time
Based on Mark 6:30-56 and given in Doster on September 14, 2025

- I. As Christ-followers we shouldn't be trying to find time for God. We should find God's time in all of our time!
- II. We are never released from our call to go and make disciples and teach them to follow Jesus or from loving the Lord our God with everything and our neighbor as ourselves.
- III. We all need times to recharge. But we should make our time off, our time to recharge, God's time! We should be seeking to make all our time ...God's time!
- IV. For Christ-followers who live always fully immersed in "God's Time" moments of rest and relaxation aren't down time, they are up time, up to, with and connected to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What is one thing you will do different today, this week, to make all your time, God's time?