

Stop, I Want to Get Off

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

Some time ago, I asked the women who were attending a weekend conference where I was speaking to write on a 3x5 card why they had come and what it was they were hoping God would do in their lives through the weekend. “Where does God find you as we start this weekend?” I asked.

Later, as I read the responses to my question, I was amazed at how many of them sounded alike. Here is a sampling of what those women expressed:

I feel I’m out of control sometimes with so many pressures.

I face too much stress and responsibility.

I feel like I’m torn in all directions. I want God to show me how to manage my different “hats” of teacher, mother, wife, and daughter successfully, and still have time for church work and “me.”

I need to stop worrying about everything. I try not to and I know I shouldn’t, but my worries that I conjure up even disturb my sleep and dreams.

I’ve given myself up to service for about twenty-four months, and I feel a need to slow myself down and renew myself, but life gets real hectic.

With a new baby, I need to find the Lord’s peace and rest—physically and emotionally.

I often get busy and find my day gone without having done the things I most wanted to do.

I am a single person by divorce, and I really am tired.

I’ve left a whirlwind at home and need a renewed spirit to face all that these coming weeks will hold.

I want to slow down. I feel as if I’m on a speeding treadmill, and if I try to jump off I will stumble and fall.

I need help with my frazzled, frenzied state.

My busyness has robbed me of my joy.

Do you find yourself relating to any of these feelings? I find these kinds of responses are increasingly common among the people I meet. Why do we live such hectic, harried lives? Is this what God intended for us? Does He understand? And can we actually get off that “speeding treadmill” without hurting ourselves (and others) in the process?

Busy Days

The first chapter of the gospel of Mark gives us a glimpse into a day in the life of the Lord Jesus. In some respects, this particular day was not unlike many of the days that you and I experience.

We pick up the account in verse 21:

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes (Mark 1:21–22).

If you’ve ever taught a Sunday school class, led a small group, or taught a Bible study, you know that you don’t just get up before a group and teach the Word of God with power and effectiveness, apart from a lot of time spent in preparation—not just preparation of the notes and the material, but preparation of your heart and life.

My friends can tell you that whenever I am preparing to speak, I go through intense “labor pains.” I agonize to determine what it is that the Lord wants me to teach; I wrestle with the passages involved, seeking to understand what the Scripture really means; I labor to put the material together in a form that is understandable and meaningful to the listener.

Throughout the process, I ask the Holy Spirit to search my own heart and to show me where I don’t measure up to the truth I am about to proclaim. Before opening my mouth to speak, I spend time in prayer, pleading with God for a fresh anointing of His Spirit on my life and my lips and interceding for those who will hear the message.

Then, while I’m actually teaching, there is more energy expended—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I am intensely focused, never letting up from my goal—for the truth to penetrate every heart and for every individual to say “yes” to God about any issue He is addressing in their life.

When I have finished speaking, the battle is still not over—that is when the enemy often seeks to discourage me with feelings of inadequacy or to tempt me with seeking the praise of men for my ministry.

So when I read that Jesus began this particular day by teaching in the synagogue, I know this was not just a casual effort on His part. The people listened attentively to Him because they could tell this was not your normal, run-of-the-mill Sabbath message. Unlike the preachers they were accustomed to hearing, Jesus spoke with authority and power. We know that in order for this to be possible, He had spent concentrated time with His heavenly Father in preparation. As He ministered, He was being expended on behalf of others.

Confronting Evil

This was just the beginning of Jesus' day—His work was not nearly over. Before He even had a chance to finish His message, there was an interruption in the service. Let's continue reading in Mark 1:

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (vv. 23–27).

Here we see Jesus engaged in a battle between heaven and hell. Obviously, this was not some casual, relaxed encounter with the enemy. This was all-out warfare.

Now, I have never exorcised a demon. And in the course of an average day, you and I are not likely to have audible or visible encounters with demons. But God's Word teaches that we are in the midst of a battle against "principalities and powers"—that at this very moment there is a cosmic warfare being waged between heaven and hell. And sometimes God sends us right into the frontlines of that battle. Many of the people we encounter and deal with on a daily basis are in the midst of an intense spiritual battle for their soul, and sometimes we get caught in the crossfire.

In the course of being a mate, a parent, a friend, an employee, you will find yourself in the midst of difficult, strenuous, demanding situations, where you have to be alert to the schemes of Satan and skilled in using the sword of the Spirit to fight off his attacks. There

is a natural drain that is a part of being God's servant in these situations. Jesus experienced those moments of intense confrontation with the powers of darkness.

As a result of this encounter with the demonized man, the Scripture tells us that "his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee" (v. 28). Try to imagine how that must have "complicated" Jesus' life. All of a sudden, everyone wanted Him to come speak at their synagogue or banquet, everyone wanted to interview Him for their publication, everyone wanted Him to heal their sick and cast out their demons. Later in this passage, we learn that the time finally came when Jesus couldn't even stay in the cities but had to find quiet, remote places where the crowds couldn't find Him in order to get time alone with His Father.

Perhaps you have had the experience of ministering to someone in need—lending a listening ear to a discouraged friend, helping out in your child's Sunday school department, preparing a meal for a family in a crisis, ministering to a friend's troubled teenager, offering biblical counsel to a couple with a shaky marriage. Then the word spreads that you are available to help people in need—and all of a sudden, your phone is ringing off the hook with people wanting you to help.

Everybody Needs Me!

Well, the service at the synagogue is finally over, and we feel a sense of relief when we read the next verse: "And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John" (v. 29).

Whew! Jesus has spent hours giving out and expending Himself for others. Finally He has a chance to get away with His friends, away from all the needy people. He gets to go home, kick up His feet, open up a good book, and relax—maybe even take a nap. Right? Wrong!

Read on: "Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her" (v. 30). Jesus is finally out of the public eye, back in the safe haven of a friend's home, and even there, someone needs Him.

Do you ever feel that there is no time, no place where you can totally escape the demands of other people? If it's not the people at work, it's your mate; if it's not your mate, it's your children; if it's not your children, it's the neighbor's children; if it's not someone else's children, it's your in-laws; if it's not your in-laws, it's . . .

But as we would expect, the serving heart of Jesus comes out and He makes Himself available to meet the need: "And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them" (v. 31).

Finally, Jesus can close the door and settle in for a nice quiet evening alone with his friends. . . . “Martha, go see who’s knocking at the door!”

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door (vv. 32–33).

Remember, this is still the same day—He started early that morning, teaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick, and now, the whole city is lined up at His door wanting help.

Do you ever feel like the whole town is gathered at your door? Maybe as a mother, it’s your bathroom door, and you’re just trying to get three minutes alone without having to answer any questions—but somebody’s knocking on the door, the doorbell is ringing, the phone is ringing, the oven timer is buzzing, your three children seem like thirty-three, you feel like half the world is sick, and everybody needs you, all at the same time. You panic: “There’s just not enough of me to go around!”

And [Jesus] healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons (v. 34).

How Did He Do It?

You wonder, *How did He do it? How did Jesus keep meeting the needs of so many people, without falling apart Himself?*

We know Jesus was God. But He was also a man—He got tired, He got hungry, He knew what it was to have crowds pressing around Him all the time. But He kept right on letting the crowds into His life. He kept on teaching, healing, confronting the powers of hell—and never a cross or impatient word.

He never seemed hurried or harried or overwhelmed with all there was to do in a day. Why not? How did He handle all the stress, strain, and responsibility without “losing it”?

I believe verse 35 gives us the key—not only to Jesus’ life but also to your life and mine, whatever our specific responsibilities and circumstances may be. That verse begins, “And rising very early in the morning . . .”

I don’t know about you, but when I’ve had a long, draining day like the one we just read about, I know exactly what I want to do very early the next morning. *Nothing—except sleep!*

Now, there's nothing wrong with sleeping when our bodies need it. But Jesus knew there was something He needed that next morning, even more desperately than His body needed sleep. He had poured Himself out for countless needy individuals, and His spirit needed to be replenished. He knew it would never happen once the crowd woke up, so what did He do?

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed.

He got up! The Scripture says that Jesus was tempted in every point as we are; so I have no doubt that Jesus was tempted to sleep in. But He made a choice to say "no" to His body and "yes" to His Father. He got up. Then He "went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed" (v. 35).

Why was this morning tryst with His Father so crucial to Jesus' earthly ministry among us?

Jesus knew that any power or ability He had to minister to others was due to the fact that He was "one with the Father." He knew it was essential for Him to stay connected to His Father, for that was His Source of life, of joy, of power, of peace, of fruitfulness. He had no other purpose for being on this earth than to do the will of His Father. So He had no higher priority than to abide in intimate, unbroken fellowship with His Father, so that He might fulfill His Father's will.

For Jesus, time alone with God was not an option. It was not something He tacked on to an overcrowded schedule. It was His lifeline to the Father. It was not something He could do without. It was the highest priority of His life—more important than being with His disciples, more important than preaching the gospel, more important than responding to the demands and needs of the crowds, more important than anything else.

The gospel of Luke tells us that "he would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (Luke 5:16). This was the pattern of His life. This is where He got His "marching orders" for the day. This is where He discovered the will of God for His life. This is where He got renewed and restored when virtue had gone out of Him as He ministered to the crowds. This is where He gained the resources to do battle against Satan—and win! This is where He stepped back from the corruption, clutter, and clamor of life on this earth and was given the ability to see the world from God's point of view. This is where He received grace to love the unlovable and power to do the impossible.

And this is precisely where you and I so often miss out on all that God has for us. Unlike Jesus, we attempt to live life in our own energy. We think we can keep giving out without getting replenished. Then, wearied and weakened by the demands of life and ministry, we become impatient and annoyed with the very ones God has sent us to serve. Rather than exhibiting a gracious, calm, joyous spirit, we become uptight, "frazzled, frenzied"

men and women, resenting, rather than welcoming, the people and opportunities that God brings into our lives.

Is it really possible for us to manifest the same spirit as Jesus did when facing pressure? That all depends on whether we are willing make the same choice He made, to adopt His number one priority as the number one priority of our lives:

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed (Mark 1:35).