

“Would Jesus Carry a Pager?”

Mark 6:30-34; 53-56

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Would Jesus carry a pager? If Mark had his way, I think he would. Jesus was a busy man in Mark, always on the go. Mark recorded fewer words of Jesus than the other gospel writers did because he preferred to portray Jesus as a man of action.

One reason for this was because people sought Jesus' help with their problems and he was moved with compassion when he saw them. The sixth chapter of Mark is a good example of this. The two largest crowds that surrounded Jesus are seen in this chapter and both are filled with needy people.

Today's text, however, highlights not only the needs of the masses, but the needs of Jesus and his disciples. While Jesus certainly had compassion upon those in the crowd that were like sheep without a shepherd, he also had compassion upon his disciples that returned from their first missionary journey needing rest. He knew they had been so busy that they had not taken time to eat properly. So what did he do? He invited them to follow him to a secluded place where they could eat and rest.

Why do you think Mark included this in his text? Evidently there was an important lesson he wanted to share with his readers that were in great demand and under stress. What was it?

Caregivers must take care of themselves.

There is a tendency on the part of people that help others to neglect their own needs. This is true for parents, children of aging parents, those that take care of sick relatives, and those in the helping professions, such as social workers, counselors, ministers, teachers, doctors and nurses.

Why are caregivers so vulnerable? The needs of others are overwhelming and most caregivers feel guilty if they take time for themselves.

Let's return to the text. A careful reading of the last half of Mark 6 reveals the tension Jesus felt to take care of his personal needs and the needs of those around him. Twice he tried to get rest and both times he was interrupted.

After the disciples returned from their first missionary journey, Jesus sensed that they needed rest. Their mission had been successful but draining. Even as they shared their reports with Jesus, people continued to come to them asking for help.

As a result, Jesus invited the disciples to follow him to a secluded place where they could eat and rest. When they arrived, though, thousands of needy people surrounded them. Jesus could not ignore them, but spent the rest of the day teaching and feeding them.

As soon as the people were fed, Jesus made his disciples get in a boat and row to the other side of the lake, presumably to get away from the crowds so they could rest. He went alone on the hillside to pray. However, his prayer time was interrupted when he looked down and saw that a storm had suddenly descended upon the lake, threatening the disciples' safety. So what did Jesus do? He left his place of prayer and rescued the disciples.

After the storm subsided and they landed on the other side of the lake, what happened? Were they finally able to rest? Hardly. People from all the surrounding villages came to them seeking help for their ailments, even carrying those too sick to walk. It appeared that those who could not rest because of their illnesses and endless pursuit for help would not let anyone else rest. To say the least, the needs were overwhelming and Jesus and his disciples were overwhelmed.

Have you ever felt like this? Sure you have. All of us have at times, and this may be one of those times for you. You are trying to help so many people that you are endangering your own health.

What do you do? You take time for yourself. You recognize that the best way you can help others is to live a healthy, balanced life where you feed your own spirit and take care of your physical and emotional needs.

If you are traveling on a plane with a child and the plane experiences difficulty, what is the first thing you are to do when the oxygen masks descend? You are to place the mask on yourself and then assist your child. Why? You cannot offer help very long if you are deprived of oxygen. You will either faint or die, leaving your child helpless.

I know this is easier said than done. When you have people pulling and tugging you in many directions, it is hard to think about your own needs. Perhaps the Psalmist had this in mind when he wrote, “He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul” Psalm 23:2-3a.

I’ve never really thought about the imperative David used, “He **makes** me lie down.” I see this in a whole new light now, don’t you?

In William Willimon reflections about our need to take care of ourselves, he writes, “We stress other commands of Jesus to love the poor, feed the hungry, bind up one another’s wounds and bear one another’s burdens. Why not equally stress this command of Jesus to get rest? In my experience, it is the sincere, dedicated, earnest disciples who are the worst about taking care of themselves. They don’t mean to, I’m sure, but in their busyness and ceaseless activity, they give the impression that it is up to them to do good or it won’t get done. It is up to them to fix the world or it won’t get fixed. It is up to them to meet all needs or they won’t be met. Behind our busyness is the blasphemous belief that we are the saviors of the world. Well, we are not God and we do not run the world.”

This hits every caregiver between the eyes. We find it hard to believe that God can work without us and are confident others cannot live without our constant attention. Caregivers must guard against adopting a “messiah complex.”

Do you know which of the Ten Commandments is the longest? Surely it is the one about honoring God or parents. Perhaps it is the one about honesty or adultery. No, it is not. It is the one about honoring the Sabbath.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” Exodus 20:8-11.

We are not “Energizer Bunnies.” Our batteries run down and need recharging. Our spirits must be replenished. To deny this is deadly.

Phillip Melancthon, the great Reformation theologian, once said to Martin Luther, “This day you and I will discuss the governance of the universe.” What Luther said in response was unexpected. “This day you and I will go fishing and leave the governance of the universe to God.”

Village workers were asked to carry heavy equipment on their backs to a remote outpost. After several days of difficult travel, the workers refused to pick up their packs and go any further. They sat by the side of the trail ignoring the shouts of the leader of the expedition. Finally, the leader asked why they were unwilling to go. One of the workers replied, “Sir, we are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies.”

Perhaps you need to reunite your body and soul. I encourage you to decide how this can happen in your life and begin this week. Make it a priority and ask for Jesus’ help. I assure you that he will help you as he did his disciples.

Would Jesus carry a pager? Probably, but he would know when to turn it off.