

SERMON MARK 1 A SOLITARY PLACE

February 8, 2026

This morning's scripture text is taken from the Gospel of Mark. Mark is believed to be the first gospel written, and if you have read it, you realize that things happen fast in Mark; he is a man of few words. For example, in the first chapter, he moves from the baptism of Jesus to the temptation in the wilderness to the calling of His disciples in just twenty short verses. In the story this morning, Jesus has gone to Capernaum and taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The Bible tells us that He taught with such authority that the people were amazed. During the service, Jesus is confronted by a man with an evil spirit which He casts out to the amazement of the people.

In Mark's bang-bang style, Jesus and His disciples leave the synagogue and go to Simon Peter's house where they find Peter's mother-in-law in bed with a fever. Jesus took her hand and she was immediately healed and prepared a meal for the disciples. That evening after sunset, the town's people brought all their sick to Jesus to be healed. Mark tells us that the whole town gathered around Jesus.

I give you this background so that you can see how busy Jesus was and the demands that were being placed on Him early in His ministry. How did Jesus handle this stress and the constant demands placed on His time? What was His secret? I believe that one of the answers for Him and for us today is found in our text this morning from the first chapter of Mark, verses 35 through 39.

Read Mark 1:35-39

A woman accompanied her husband to see a doctor for a check-up. After his check-up, the doctor asked to speak with the wife alone. He told her: "Your husband is suffering from a very severe stress disorder. Unless you can do several things to reduce his stress, he will not live long. Here's what you need to do to help him recover. First, each morning fix him a healthy breakfast, for lunch a nutritious meal, and for dinner something special. Second, be pleasant at all times, don't burden him with chores, and don't tell him your problems; that will only stress him more. If you do this for fourteen months, your husband will recover." On the way home, the husband asked his wife what the doctor had said. She turned to him and sadly said: "I'm sorry, Honey, but he said you don't have long to live."

Now that's one way to handle stress. However, I think that there are better ways to deal with stress and how to balance our limited time. Jesus had to face similar problems, and of course, so do we in this hectic world that we live in. In our text this morning, Jesus gives us a model for handling the pressures and demands of our daily lives.

When verse 35 rolls around, we find that Jesus was able deal with all the pressure because He had cultivated a daily quiet time. Jesus carved out time each day in His busy schedule to be alone with God in prayer and to have His batteries recharged, so to speak. As we read this passage and others in the Gospels, we find that Jesus made it a habit to rise before dawn and go pray in a deserted place. He always found a time and a place to be alone with God. He made this a priority in His daily life; He always put God first.

It is in the “alone times” with God that we can reflect on all that is happening in our lives. It is in these “alone times” with God that we can allow God to help us sort out the priorities of our daily life. If we are to properly deal with the demands and pressure in our lives, then we must spend time alone with God. It is in a quiet time of prayer, before the alarm clock goes off, the radio blasts, and the phone starts ringing, that we can get our daily marching orders from God.

In prayer, we can receive a daily road map from God enabling us to stay focused on those things that are really important; on those things that Jesus wants us to accomplish. In addition, Jesus will also tell us those things that we don’t need to do. It is better to focus on using our God given gifts than trying to be a “jack-of-all-trades,” and master of none.

When we start each day with prayer, we can stand the pressure because our spiritual batteries have been recharged. The following sayings may help clarify this:

1. A lot of kneeling will keep you in good standing.
2. He who kneels before God can stand before anyone.
3. The shortest distance between a problem and a solution is the distance between your knees and the floor.
4. The measure of any Christian is their prayer life.
5. Finally, life is fragile, handle with prayer.

Jesus knew very well that He could not live without God; that if He was going to be constantly giving of Himself, then He must make it a habit to refill His spiritual tank daily. You cannot continually give of yourself to others without taking time to recharge your batteries. We live in a world where we are constantly recharging our cellphones and tablets.

Thus, doesn’t it make logical sense that our spiritual life also needs to be recharged, and that is exactly what a daily quiet time in prayer does.

In the events leading up to this morning’s text, we see a huge expenditure of energy by Jesus. Here in a solitary place, we discover His secret for the creation and renewal of energy. Behind the public ministry when the whole city was gathered at His doorstep, was the private solitude of prayer. While the rest of the city slept, Jesus prayed. Jesus knew that He could not live without a time of prayer.

Verse 35 gives us a glimpse of what throughout Jesus’ life here on earth was a great priority for Him, the renewal of life through a quiet time of prayer. For Jesus, it was not just a time out for

prayer, but it was a time to gather His thoughts; to understand His Father's will for His life; and to renew Himself both physically and spiritually.

This secret of sustained life is also available to us if we would just take the time. There can be no fulfillment in life without this solitary place with God. While public worship is essential to our spiritual life, each of us must also spend time alone each day in prayer with the Lord. As noted in our scripture text this morning, even Jesus needed time alone with His Father. He set the example for us. Thus, if Jesus needed time alone with God how much more do we need this?

Let's review some of the critical elements of this model that Jesus gives us in this passage. First, look at the time when Jesus prayed. It was in the morning, the morning after the Sabbath day. Jesus did not just pray during the one hour of worship on Sunday morning; He spent time alone with God each and every day. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote: "He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day."

Second, it was early; I mean really early, it was still dark, before sunrise. While others were still asleep in their beds, Jesus was praying. Now I realize that some people are not morning people. There are some of you, like my wife Judy, who are more willing to stay up for breakfast than get up for it. The point is that we should each find the best time each day for spiritual renewal when our bodies and mind are the most fresh and awake. We must choose a time when we are most alert and ready to listen to God. For some of us this is not late at night when we become zombies and cannot stay awake. But for the night-owls, it is the perfect time. The exact time is not as important as the actual practice of taking time to be alone with God.

Third, as we have discussed earlier, it was in a solitary place. Of course, the word "solitary" implies alone, free from external noises and distractions. Jesus frequently prayed alone separating Himself from every earthly distraction. We need to select a quiet place: a room or corner in our home, in the yard or garden or somewhere else, where we can regularly meet alone with God. For example, I go to my office each morning before Judy gets up and before I turn the computer on.

It should be noted that Jesus prayed briefly when He was in a crowd. He prayed a little longer when He was with His disciples, and He prayed all night when He was alone. Today, many people tend to reverse this approach. Now we could spend hours and days talking about prayer and its power. But in the time we have remaining, let's discuss two common questions on prayer.

First, what do I say? I don't know the right words. The elders of a certain church came up a young man after worship to criticize some of the theology and words that he had used when he prayed earlier during the morning worship service. After they had bombarded him with one negative comment after another, he turned to them and asked: "Are you gentlemen finished? I just have one thing to say: when I prayed, I wasn't talking to you." Don't worry about the words; just say what is on your heart. Talk to God like you are talking to a friend over coffee.

God is more pleased with the time that you spend with Him than with the quality or quantity of the words. If you can't pray like you want to, pray as you can; God knows what you mean; what's in your heart.

The next question that some people have is how can God possibly hear my prayers when so many other people are praying at the same time? Because we have trouble concentrating on more than one thing at a time, we also think that God is so limited. We tend to deny God the power to do things we can't do. We are like the man who, never having seen the ocean, finally goes to the beach one day, and running down to the edge of the water, scoops up a few drops and holds them in his hands.

"At last," he says, "I have made the ocean mine! I hold the ocean in my hands, it is mine!" True, at that moment he does have some of the ocean, but at that same moment a thousand other people on other shores may be reaching down and claiming a hand full of the ocean for themselves. The world's millions could come down to the beach and reach out their hands to be filled with sea water. They could take as much as they wanted, as much as they needed, and still the ocean would remain unchanged. Its mightiness and power would be the same although it had supplied the needs of every single person standing with out-stretched hands along its many shores. So, it is with God. He can be everywhere at once, heeding the prayers of all who call out in the name of Jesus Christ. There is no limit to God; He makes today's internet and smartphones look like the telegraph of the 1880's or the Pony Express.

Prayer is like riding a bicycle. You can only learn it by doing it; not just thinking about doing it. If you truly make the effort, you will begin to experience God's presence in your life. In Jeremiah 29:13, God said: "When you search for me, you will find me; if you search with all your heart."

Several years ago, I attended a workshop conducted by Herb Miller on church growth. There was one segment on the "Secret to Abundant Living" that intrigued me. Herb noted that many people feel that they should pray, but few know how. He provided seven steps that if used for fifteen minutes each day for fourteen consecutive days would enable you to experience God's peace, joy, and power in a way that you have never known before.

As Jesus did, we need to make it a habit of finding a quiet place where we can relax and not be interrupted. So, I encourage you to set aside at least fifteen minutes each day and begin by reading a chapter from the Bible or use a devotional guide like the *Upper Room or Daily Bread*. During this time, listen to what God is saying to you by following these seven steps listed in the bulletin insert:

1. Close your eyes and give thanks for three personal blessings of which you are especially conscious today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from a sense of your own self-sufficiency.
2. Ask God to help three other people you feel need God's help today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from self-centeredness.

3. Ask God to forgive your specific mistakes and sins from the last 24 hours and give you the strength to forgive others.
4. Ask God to help one person whom you find it hard to like. Ask God to give that person insights into his or her personal problems and ask for power to let God's love flow through you to him or her.
5. Ask for insights into your personal problems.
6. Ask for help in achieving your personal goals.
7. Conclude by listening intently for three minutes to what God may say to you.

Please take this bulletin insert home and place it in your Bible or somewhere you can easily find it and make a personal commitment to try this for fourteen days. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, handled the demands of life through the daily practice of finding a solitary place to be alone with His Father. If a daily quiet time was necessary for Jesus, how much more must it be necessary for us? Make a commitment right now to find your solitary place today and everyday! Amen

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