

As a kid, I always hated being told, “Do as I say, not as I do.” It sounded so hypocritical! It wasn’t until I was an adult that I could see the flipside to such advice – that *even though* it was hypocritical, it could still be rightly motivated and it could still be true! “Don’t worry so much!” is still good advice, even if it comes from a worrywart. “Don’t work so hard!” is still good advice, even if it comes from a workaholic. “Eat right! Exercise! Get a good night’s sleep!” – that’s good advice regardless. And especially as a pastor I came to realize that there would be precious little I could preach on if I had to have it mastered first! So to those of you who have sat through my sermons thinking, “You don’t always do that,” all I can say is, “*That’s true!*” And guess what? That will also be true for what I’m going to preach on today. But what matters is that it’s still good advice, right? And what matters more, is that it’s still God’s Word. So let me just say in advance: If you feel convicted by what you are about to hear, know that I feel convicted, too – but the message is still worth taking to heart even so.

And now that I’ve got your attention, what am I going to preach on today? Relaxing. Unwinding. Taking sufficient time out to rest.

I see those grins! “Rest” is not my strong suit, I know. But I’ll tell you, when I moved here from Los Angeles, I really thought it would be easier to do here. Small town. Slower pace. Less going on. Boy, did I get that wrong! If anything, folks here are busier – especially our young families. Why that is, I can’t say for sure, but I think one reason is simply because it’s possible. Unlike L.A., you don’t have the long commutes and heavy traffic. Some activities are less expensive. And you don’t have as many competing for spots on teams. So it’s possible to have kids do several different sports, and do music, and do Scouts – or ballet or Taekwondo or swimming lessons or who-knows-what-else. It’s possible! Of course, all this busyness requires trade-offs. Often, “family time” is little more than the time you all spend in the car driving to and from activities. Often, a “family dinner” is just hitting the drive-through at MacDonald’s as you rush from one kid’s game to the next. And, of course, there no such thing as a full “day off.” At least, not once a week. No, mostly there’s just working at work, then working at home, working at games, working as a volunteer – working, working, working! But the thing is, this busyness is possible. All too possible! In fact, here in the Tri-cities it’s practically become the norm.

So what’s my point? Let me be clear: I’m not saying these various activities are wrong. They may well be positive, worthwhile, and fun. What I am saying, though, is that there can be too much of a good thing. We need balance. It’s not healthy to keep going non-stop. Mentally it’s not healthy; physically, spiritually, relationally it’s not healthy. We need to take sufficient time out to rest. And for those who are thinking, “You don’t set a very good example,” I’ll grant you that. But we still need to take sufficient time out to rest even so.

Besides, if you want a good example, you don't need me. Take a look at Jesus in our text! As Mark paints the scene, the disciples have just gotten back from a mission trip and are telling Jesus all about what they've done. So does Jesus tell them, "That's fine, but you are wasting time! Get back out there and work, work, work!"? No, He says just the opposite! He sees how tired they are. He sees that they've been **"coming and going, and" have "had no leisure even to eat."** So the Lord says, **"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."** And that's what they set off to do.

Now, Mark doesn't tell us any more than that. The disciples just go along without making a peep. But that doesn't mean they aren't thinking anything. And especially if they are "responsible" types, as many of us are, it's easy to imagine some unspoken objections: *I can't afford to take time out to rest! There's too much to do! Think of all the people who need me! How can I justify saying "no" to them just so I can sit around doing nothing?*

Do these objections sound familiar? Sure. And do they sound reasonable? Sure. At least, until we examine them more carefully. Then it's a whole different story. I mean, you don't have to be Jesus to shoot down these objections. With a little thought, anyone can. Even the disciples – which may be why Mark doesn't tell us any more than he does. If the disciples do have objections, maybe they examine them further, consider some counter-arguments, and figure out on their own why Jesus wants them to get some rest even so.

For instance, if they object, *"I can't afford to take time out,"* they've got to know there's a counter-argument why they can't afford not to. Call it the "design" argument: we are not designed to keep going non-stop; we need rest. After all, the body can only take so much. If we push ourselves too hard, it's like pushing a machine too hard. Overuse a machine, and eventually we'll burn it out. Do the same to our bodies, and we'll burn ourselves out. And we're a lot harder to fix! That's why God commands us to take one day off each week as a "sabbath" – literally, a "stop day." He could have made this optional, but knowing our workaholic tendencies, God made it a command: "You will take a day off! For your own good!" Without proper rest, we don't do as well, and we don't get as much done as we'd like to think. When we're tired, we take longer to do normal things. When we're worn out, we get less done. It has to do with our design. Now, the disciples know this, so however much they have to do, maybe this helps them figure out for themselves why Jesus wants them to get some rest even so.

Likewise, if the disciples object, *"People need me,"* they have to know there's an argument against that, too. Call it the *"not much use"* argument – as in: when we are worn out, we're not much use to the people who need us. I don't know what examples the disciples would think of, but I can think of many cases where people have gotten so wrapped up in taking care of someone else that they didn't

take care of themselves, and when they got worn out they weren't much use to the people they're trying to help.

For instance, I think of a sweet, old Norwegian lady named Dagmar. She and her husband, Elroy, were quite a pair. Elroy was big and tall. Dagmar was very tiny. Yet when Elroy got sick, Dagmar insisted on doing everything for him. Everything! She wouldn't let anyone help, not even her daughter, and she certainly wasn't going to put him in a nursing home. So, as you can imagine, all this work took quite a toll on Dagmar. In fact, she got so worn out I was afraid I'd be burying her first. Then, one day it finally happened. Elroy fell out of bed, and Dagmar couldn't help him get up. Had to call 911. Plus he was hurt. Not badly, but enough that he did have to go into a nursing home. Dagmar was so upset about that! But guess what? It worked out fine. The nurses supplied the physical care. Dagmar supplied the T.L.C. For Elroy, it was a much better situation, and for Dagmar it was, too. In time, she even admitted as much – and that she couldn't be much use to Elroy if she let herself get worn out.

So that's the second argument: the *"not much use"* argument. And in our text, the disciples probably think of this, too. So, however much they feel people need them, maybe this helps them figure out for themselves why Jesus wants them to get some rest even so.

Then, last but not least, maybe the disciples feel guilty about going off and just "doing nothing." If so, they have to know that here, too, there is a counter-argument – and a very important one: that "resting" is not the same as "doing nothing."

We sometimes feel like that, but think about it this way. When a patient is in the hospital resting after an operation, would we say that they're just goofing off, "doing nothing"? Of course not! The patient is healing. The patient is recuperating. "Resting" serves a positive purpose. In fact, we all know what can happen if the patient doesn't take sufficient time out to rest. The wear-and-tear on them can make things worse. They can suffer a set-back – ironically, a set-back that can require them to take even more time out. So "resting" is necessary. Far from "doing nothing," it is time well spent.

And the same goes for "resting" in general. When we take time out, we're not "doing nothing." We're investing the time for a positive purpose – to refresh the body, recharge the spirit, and replenish our emotional resources. You know, God did not create us to be human "doings." He created us to be human "beings." Sometimes we need to just "be."

And let me add, sometimes we need to just "be" without feeling guilty about it! I know that's easier said than done, but it's important. I mean, when we're constantly "doing, doing, doing," isn't that when our emotions wear thin? Isn't that when we're more likely to snap at people, say things we wish we hadn't?

When we're constantly "doing, doing, doing," isn't that when our attitude takes a nose dive? Isn't that when we lose track of what really matters? And isn't that when our "judgment" may not be the best? Truth be told, we need time to just catch our breath! We need time to just label our thoughts! We need time to look at our lives, savor our blessings, get in touch with where we've been, where we are, where we're headed; even fantasize about where we might go "someday." On a regular basis, we need time to just "be!" Just "be" without feeling guilty about what's not getting done. Just "be," and consider it time well spent!

For it really is, you know. We're more productive when we don't constantly drive ourselves to keep "doing, doing, doing," and we're less likely to make costly mistakes that require "re-doing." Plus, that's part of what makes a life worth living. A healthy life requires rest, not just constant activity. A balanced life requires time where we give ourselves permission to just "be." Take it from one who has learned this truth the hard way. More to the point, take it from Jesus Himself, whose own example shows the importance of taking time out to rest.

Today's Gospel may not be very dramatic, but it contains wisdom worth taking to heart. And as Jesus calls the disciples away from the hectic busyness of their lives, He calls us to care for ourselves in the same way. Take time out to refresh our bodies. Take time out to recharge our spirits. Take time out to replenish our emotional resources. Yes, we can come up with all kinds of reasons why we can't afford to take time out to rest. But Jesus knows all our reasons, and He calls us to do it even so. As to the disciples, so He says to us, "**Come away...by yourselves and rest a while.**" Amen.