



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Help! I'm at My Wits' End God's Hope for the Hurting Mark 6:7–13, 30–32

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I invite you to open to the Gospel of Mark with me this morning. I have a feeling that if you were one of those 125 volunteers for VBS this last week, you might really relate with our passage this morning. We will be looking at what the disciples had going on in their lives. Jesus had been doing a lot of ministry and His disciples had gone with Him. They had been observing what Jesus had done. But now, as we'll see, Jesus is going to send them out on their own to do ministry. We'll wrap up our study today by seeing what they report and how Jesus responded to them.



Let's turn to Mark 6:7–13. Then we're going to jump down to verse 30 to read a couple verses there.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

Jesus sent His disciples out, then He gathered them back together. His response to them was, “Let's go take a break.” That's why I'm thinking, especially VBS volunteers last week, you may be giving an “amen” to Jesus' response. It was a busy week with lots of fruitful ministry.

We read in verses 12 and 13 that the disciples had gone out and did what Jesus sent them to do. They preached the gospel. They healed people. They cast out demons. And now they're back with Him bringing their ministry report, but instead of just patting them on the back and congratulating them, Jesus says, “It's time to take a break.” We are also sent out to do ministry. It might be going on a mission trip somewhere else in the country or around the world. Or we might be sent as missionaries in our jobs or neighborhoods or even within our church. Each one of us are called to minister somewhere.

As we continue in our series called “Help!”, we want to recognize that with the demands of life, sometimes we find ourselves at our wits' end. You might be thinking when you read our text, “The disciples didn't seem like they were at their wits' end.” And maybe they weren't. But I believe Jesus' response gives us a little insight if we're finding ourselves in the midst of a struggle, either working out of it, learning some things from our Savior, or avoiding burnout altogether.

Before we get to His response, I want us to recognize that Jesus realized in this circumstance that His disciples couldn't go on indefinitely. They couldn't keep up that pace. We read that “*many were coming and going,*” and the disciples “*had no leisure even to eat.*” It's important for us to realize that life can demand a lot of us. For example, we know what it's like to overdraw our checking account, or the consequence of living on credit for too long. Those funds are going to come due; you do owe for those things. But

sometimes we don't think this way when it comes to our time and energy, so I'm going to address the matter of feeling at our wits' end from the perspective of burnout, that thing that can happen when we take on too many activities. It's like we've "overdrafted" ourselves a little and we're facing the consequences. I believe Jesus' response will help us when this happens.

Accept the facts

First, there are a couple facts we need to consider that are based in our text today. If we don't accept these, we'll find ourselves struggling in this battle and maybe slipping more and more into a place of burnout.

You have a commission: work is not the enemy (Mark 6:7)

First, we need to realize that work is not the enemy. We have been given a commission. Often we find ourselves at our wits' end and we're running on empty. Maybe some of you are feeling like that this morning after a full week of VBS. You were here doing a lot of things you don't normally do and you're tired today. Maybe some of you have even been feeling this for a while. When this burnout feeling comes, we can almost create a false enemy in our minds. We can look at our work, or our commitments, or even our ministry, and think, "If only I didn't have all that going on, then I would feel better." We begin to see work as our enemy. But that's not the enemy.

If you go back to Genesis 1, before the fall, God created humanity to be workers. He created us to work. God told Adam to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion over it. Before the fall, we were given responsibilities over this earth.

Two chapters later, we see the fall and the consequences that came with it. That's where the pain, toil, sweat and hardship came in. At the end of a long week's work, we can think, "I'm exhausted!" That's the result of the fall. Yet just because work can wear us out, or ministry can wear us out, it doesn't mean those things are bad. We were created to do those things. Yet when sin entered the equation, it made work something it wasn't intended to be. The problem isn't work—the problem is sin. So rather than saying, "If I just didn't have to do _____," we need to look to the Lord for our strength. We should not throw out the good blessings that come with the responsibilities we have.

You have a capacity: there will always be more need than you can handle (verse 31)

The second truth we need to remember is that we have a certain capacity. Yes, we should work. Work is a gift and a blessing. But our capacity to work is limited. Often we find ourselves in burnout because we drive right past that capacity, thinking we can take more on. When this happens, we can end up looking at the people around us and comparing ourselves to them. There's always someone else out there who can handle more than we can. There are people who get involved in a lot of things and who seem to be doing all of them really well.

So our thought is, "If they can handle this, why can't I? So, sure, I'll help here. I'll volunteer there." But then we can quickly realize that we're having a harder time than the other person. We need to realize that each one of us has a different capacity. Not all of us are created the same. God has given each of us different gifts, different passions and different callings. We need to be careful when we compare ourselves with others. But despite our varying capacities, all of us live with some kind of limitations.

First, all of us are bound by time. Each one of us has only 24 hours in our day. So when we ask ourselves how we can do more, the question is really how to best utilize those 24 hours. Within those 24 hours, we need to sleep, eat, be with our family and do our work. There's a lot that has to go into those hours. We need to consider how we steward what we've been given. When we're at work or doing our ministry, we need to find a way to give 100% of ourselves to our tasks.

Secondly, we're all bound by space. No one is both here this morning and also somewhere else. You might be somewhere else mentally, but you're physically right here. None of us can be in two places at once. We can't be at work and at home taking a nap. We can't be here at church and at home on the couch. We have to learn how to be limited by space.

Third, we are all bound by need. All of us have basic physical needs. I don't care how strong you are, how diligent you are or how productive you are. You have physical needs. If you neglect sleep for a week, you're not going to do well. If you don't eat, drink or breathe, you won't make it. We have to live with these needs.

As we'll see in our text, the disciples were in a place where they had been stretched in each of those three ways. Verses 31–32 tell us, *"For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves."* They needed food and they needed to be in a different place. They couldn't keep going, so Jesus told them they needed to get away.

As we look at these capacities, I want to be careful to say that our limitations are not something bad. God created us with certain capacities so we don't think more highly of ourselves than we should. If we start thinking we can do everything by ourselves, it's as though we think we can be like God. Our limitations remind us that we're finite creatures, but they also remind us that there's a God Who is greater and stronger and has no limitations.

When we realize there's always more need than we can handle, what are we to do? There's always a ministry that needs more help. There's always someone asking us to help them. But how do we live within our capacities when there is so much more that needs to be done? This can bother us, especially when no one around us seems to be stepping up and meeting those needs. We think, "If no one else is doing this, I'll do it." But the next thing you know you're involved in 18 things and you can't keep them all straight. Then you wonder what just happened.

Let's think about Moses. There came a point in Moses' ministry when he was trying to judge the entire congregation of Israel. All day long they would bring their disputes to him and it became overwhelming. So his father-in-law came to him and told him this wasn't good. Moses replied, "They just keep coming to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me to decide which person's position is right, especially in light of God's laws." Was Moses doing something wrong? No. He was doing something very good. Was the ministry the disciples were doing wrong? No. The problem was they had taken on too much.

We can often end up in the same situation. We might be doing a lot of good things, even having very fruitful ministry, but we've taken on more than we can handle. When we do this, things start to slip. Our tank begins to run on Empty. We just can't keep up with everything. It's so important to stop and recognize we need to hold these two truths in tension. If we forget that work is good, we'll end up being unproductive as a result. We won't be doing anything for the glory of God. We'll sit around and enjoy being lazy.

On the other hand, we can take on too much and also be less than productive. So we need to balance between the two. Work is good, but we also have limits. We need to understand our personal capacity.

Address disaster.

With these things in mind, let's go back to our story to find some principles that can help us when we find ourselves beginning to burn out.

Rely (Mark 6:8–9)

First, we need to learn the value of what it means to rely. In verse seven we read, *"And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two."* I think it's interesting that Jesus did this. Culturally speaking, we're different. We think someone can handle a task by themselves. But in their day, it took two or three witnesses to validate a claim.

So if Jesus had sent them out as individuals to call people to repentance, cast out demons and heal people, people might look at that one person and think, "Who's this whacko who's teaching all these things? These are strange ideas." But when there were two witnesses, their message became more credible. People would pay more attention to two people. Also built into those partnerships were things like companionship and the ability to support one another. They shared the load of ministry, without taking it all on themselves.

We know how life is. Some days are good and we feel encouraged. Other days, not so much. That's when it's helpful to have people around us who can say, "Hey, don't give up. Keep going." I think Jesus is telling us there's value in relying on one another. So who are the people in your life whom you're able to rely on? Who supports and encourages you on those tough days? Who can help you keep things in perspective? Who's there to remind you of what is true and what God is doing?

Most of all, I believe Jesus was teaching His disciples to trust in Him. Verse eight says, *"He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts."* Now, those among us who are going on missions trips don't know this yet, but they don't get to take anything with them either. Just kidding. But why would Jesus say this? Is it so they would be

miserable in their ministry? Did He mean that when we accept a call to ministry, we're also accepting a call to poverty? "I've got to have nothing if I'm going to serve Jesus?"

Or do you think maybe Jesus is trying to teach His disciples, "You need to rely on Me for everything; don't take any money with you; don't take food with you; don't take any stuff"? That meant for every meal they would eat, they would stop and realize, "This is from the Lord."

This is a valuable thing for us to learn in our own lives—and it's an ongoing process, isn't it? As we go throughout our lives, we need to learn to trust God for everything. Jesus was teaching the disciples a lesson that is so valuable in any sort of ministry, specifically, that they needed Him. Often we can neglect this truth in our own lives. We'll get so busy with something that we don't think about God.

I was talking to someone who has kids on three different baseball teams. That sounds stressful all by itself. Life can pull us in many different directions and we can forget what it means to rely on God. In everything—even in what we're going to eat for lunch today—we need to stop and realize, "This too is from God." We need Him for every aspect of our lives. We need to learn the value of relying on others, but most importantly, we need to realize the value of relying on God—day in and day out.

Regroup (Mark 6:30)

Second, we need to see the value of regrouping. In verse 30 we see that after the disciples had gone out and done all this ministry, they synced up their Google calendars. "We're going to meet next Thursday at the local restaurant to talk about the ministry we've done." No. They came back, met with Jesus and talked about they had experienced. There's a value in coming back together. As research will show, when you feel you're in a place of burnout, you start to disconnect. You just can't handle everything, so you begin to step back from your commitments and from your relationships with the people in your life.

The disciples regrouped. They chose to involve themselves with other believers who were also in the trenches with them. But most importantly, it says they "*returned to Jesus.*" I'm telling you, brothers and sisters, if we fail to do this, it will become a burdensome load to carry. Regroup with your Savior.

I'm not talking about those hour-long times when you turn off your phone and get away from the kids. I'm talking about the little conversations you have with the Lord as you're going throughout your day. "Lord, I'm here at work and here's what I've got on my plate. You've put this before me, so help me do it. Give me wisdom. Give me patience. Give me grace."

Maybe this morning you taught a Sunday School class. You showed up to your class exhausted from last week, so you didn't know if you would have patience to get through it. "Lord, I'm teaching these little kids and You know I don't have what it takes. Please give me the strength and patience to love them so I can be what You've called me to be."

I don't know what that looks like in your life. It's waking up in the morning with the kids crying. It's walking into work. Whatever it is, talk with the Lord about your day. What does regrouping look like for you? Is it something you only do on Sunday mornings, once a week? Twice a week because you're in a small group? Is it just a morning thing? Or is it ongoing throughout the day? Let me encourage you to make regrouping with your Savior something that's vital to your life.

Rest (Mark 6:31–32)

Third, we need to rest. You'll notice that Jesus' response to the disciples was, "*Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.*" Now, I tried to put myself in the disciples' circumstance here. They had just been through a time of fruitful ministry, so you might think this would be the time to dig in. You might think Jesus would say, "You've just scraped the surface; now let's go deeper. You've got a little momentum; let's keep this thing going. We don't want to lose this." But instead, Jesus says, "Let's leave and go rest."

Rest is such an important part of our lives because we are limited. Have you ever thought about the fact that we have to sleep every night? I think from a theological standpoint, it's really interesting. The fact that you need to take a nap this afternoon and need to go to bed tonight ought to teach you something about yourself. We all need to be rejuvenated. We need to rest and reset. We need to sleep.

But we serve a God Who doesn't need to sleep. He's the God Who's limitless in His power. That tells us something so fascinating about who we are and Who God is. I love that Jesus says, "Guys, come take a break and rest." I think it shows that God understands our limitations.

He will put stuff on your plate; maybe He's put a ton on your plate. But He also understands you need to sleep. You need the rest; that's real life. You can go, go, go, but you need to stop. In our culture today, where we've begun to define our value and success based on how many people need us or how busy our schedules are, what an important thing rest is.

When is the last time somebody asked you, "How are you doing?" and you answered, "I'm so busy." Hasn't that kind of become the standard? "I'm so busy." If you said, "I'm feeling good—I've got a little free time," people would think, "What's wrong with you? Shouldn't you be doing something else?" No, it's okay to take a rest.

Now, this might be the first time you've ever heard a pastor stand in front of you and say, "Take a nap this afternoon." I'm surprised there weren't more amens, but I'll leave that on the table. In all seriousness, I love how Psalm 127:2 says, *"It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for [God] gives to his beloved sleep."*

If you're feeling burned out, or on your way to feeling burned out, are you resting? Or are you just going, going, going? I hate to break it to you, but you're not the Energizer bunny. Stop and take a rest. Make sure you're getting enough sleep at night. This is practical stuff, guys, and it's right here in the Scriptures!

Rejoin (Mark 6:33–44)

Finally, verse 33 says, *"Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them."* All these people were coming and going. In other words, the picture here is there was lots of ministry to be done. There was more preaching, more evangelism, more healings, more casting out of demons. There were needs everywhere, all around them. Jesus said, "Let's get away," so they get in a boat and start sailing off into the sea. But as they go, the people see them. "Hey, there they go!"

Can you imagine this? These crowds with all these needs followed them around the shore and actually beat them to where they were going. The disciples get in the boat to go to a desolate place and rest, but when they get there, the people are already there. They did have some time away from the crowd, but then it was time to keep serving.

And we need to have some rest—it's important in our lives. Especially if you're burning out, now is the time to take a step back and rest. But it's so important that we then look for opportunities to rejoin. We need to get back in the saddle, back to what we were doing, back to the ministry. Maybe it will be something new, or maybe it will be the same thing we were doing before. Maybe it's only part of what we were doing before, but it's something.

As the disciples came near all the crowds who had come to meet them, that's when Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000. Can you imagine this? The disciples pull their boat up to the shore and see all those people. "Forget about it. I'm out of here." They get back in the boat and sail off somewhere else. But what an opportunity they had in front of them!

When we step back into things, perhaps God will use us in new ways we never experienced before. Maybe we'll see God work in greater ways than ever before. In order for that to happen, we have to get back in the game. We have to be willing to accept the opportunities God puts before us. We can't stay in rest mode forever. It's really easy to get comfy there. Instead, we need to look for a chance to step back in. "Lord, what do You have for me? What are You calling me to do?"

I understand the struggle you can face, especially if you've been burned out or you're burning out now. The last thing you want to think about is adding something to your plate, committing to something else. You're thinking, "I don't want to step back into anything, because I did burn out and I don't want to do that again. I'm just going to sit back and do nothing. I just want to show up, but I don't want to do anything. I don't want God to put anything on my plate. I hardly even want to go to work in the morning. I just want to do nothing." I'm telling you right now, you're going to find a whole different kind of loneliness, a whole different kind of emptiness, than when your tank is just running on empty. We were designed to work. We were designed to do ministry, as God's people, to take the gospel, to go and make disciples of all nations. That includes right here. So get involved.

Ask the Lord, “How have You equipped me? What passions have You given me to use for You? I want to use the tools You’ve given me for Your glory.” The only way this will happen is if you get back in the game. Don’t just sit on the sidelines and be the fan who cheers others on. Sometimes you need to get in the game yourself. Say to the Lord, “Teach me. Train me, then let’s go.”

But be wise about it. If you were doing 18 things before and you burned out, that doesn’t mean stepping back into 18 different things. That might mean you step back into one or two. You’ve learned that you have limited capacities, but you’ve also learned that God has created you to work.

Burnout is a real thing. I think we’re going to start seeing it affect us more and more. Maybe you haven’t had that experience yet, but you know someone who has. Maybe you know someone who’s there right now. I think the greatest lesson we can learn from this passage is to see how Jesus interacted with His disciples. It’s clear that we need everything from Him.

If you’re burning out right now, perhaps the last thing you want to hear is, “Look to the Lord.” You’re like, “Duh, I know that.” But it is so true. If He’s a limitless God, isn’t He the One we should look to? Isn’t this the place we should go for direction? If we’re living outside our means, shouldn’t we hear God saying, “Here’s where you’re overstepping a little bit. Here’s where I want you to be.”

Whether you’re serving in children’s ministry, students’ ministry, small groups, local outreach—whatever it is for you—ask Him, “Lord, is this where You want me to be? If so, then equip me. I’m trusting and relying on You.” But if you depart from Him, what’s going to happen? You’ll do nothing. You’re going to dry up like a dead branch. Stay connected to our Savior.

I’m going to close with the prophet Isaiah. He said in Isaiah 40:28–31:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

I trust, brothers and sisters, that God will equip you for the work He has called you to—not more, not less. So yes, go to Him, trust in Him and He will renew your strength.