

The Rest/Run Cycle

Mark 6:30-46

September 29, 2019

Please read Mark 6:30-46 before reading this transcript.

This is week #3 in our sermon series on Spiritual Training. Today we are going to focus on the Rest/Run Cycle. The intense pace of many of our schedules often causes us to just run and run and run, rarely stopping to rest. In fact, we often run until we get well beyond a healthy threshold; often to the point of becoming burned out. Then, and only then, do we rest. Today we're going to talk about the "Rest/Run Cycle." Let's begin by defining what we mean by rest and run. **Rest** means to stop strenuous or stressful activity.¹ It's simply taking a break from the demands of life. This time for rest is intended to refresh us and refill our tanks; our mental/emotional/physical tanks. Rest includes things like a good nap, a personal quiet time with God, or listening to some good music while drinking our favorite beverage.² Things like that. **Run** means to work toward a goal. For our purposes today, we don't mean literal running. Let's think of it more broadly, as working toward producing results. This includes things like works goals, relationship goals, spiritual goals, etc.³

When we consider how Jesus stewarded His life, during His earthly ministry, there was an ebb and flow to it; sometimes resting and sometimes running. It's helpful to note how hard He and His disciples worked. One author points out that Jesus sometimes labored to the point of physical exhaustion. In fact, we read about a time when Jesus was SO tired, that He was sleeping in the back of the boat, during a huge storm on the Sea of Galilee. Mark 4:37-38 records, "A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping..." Jesus was fully human. He knew firsthand the physical exhaustion that is brought on by working hard. It's also helpful to note how, in the course of His life, Jesus set aside time for intentional rest. For refueling and solitude. Consider Jesus' words that we just read in Mark 6:31, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Today we are continuing to think about our Spiritual Training. As we are "becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together," "what can we learn from our Savior when it comes to our hectic lives?"⁴ We're going to talk about this today. Today's passage begins in the middle of a very busy time for Jesus and His apostles. Mark 6:30 says, "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught." This is referring back to Mark 6:7, when Jesus sent out the Twelve in groups of 2, to do all kinds of ministry from town to town. But just because they had come back to Jesus, to REPORT on their ministry, didn't mean that the ministry was done. In fact, the ministry needs continued to pour in. We read in Mark 6:31, "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." When it comes to our hectic lives, we need to learn that...

1) Consistent rest helps us to pace our running. Jesus recognized that the intense pace at which His apostles were running was taking its toll. He could see that they needed rest from the constant demands that surrounded them. (Do you ever feel this in your life?) They needed not only physical rest, but also mental and emotional rest. Jesus knew that the apostles were only human. So He invites them to come with Him to a quiet place where they can take a break. Mark 6:32 continues, "So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place." Finally, Jesus and His disciples got away for some MUCH-needed rest. At least, they THOUGHT that they had gotten away. Verses 33-34 go on to tell us, "But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion

¹ See Google.

² It can even include vacation. However, as one author notes: "One of the supreme ironies of modern life is that we are worn out from leisure. The end of summer illustrates this phenomenon.... When we're worn out from what should refresh us, the gospel offers hope for burned-out disciples like us." Dr. Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer, "Stewarding Our Schedules" article in Tabletalk magazine, August 2019, p. 42.

³ Here's a key thing to understand about the Rest/Run cycle: BOTH resting/running fall under the same umbrella of good stewardship. Stewardship means honoring God with our time/talent/treasure.

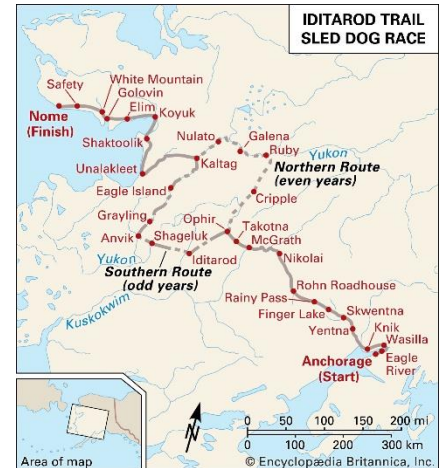
⁴ Dr. Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer, "Stewarding Our Schedules" article in Tabletalk magazine, August 2019, p. 42.

on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”⁵

Therefore, despite a concerted effort by Jesus to take His apostles to a quiet place for some rest, it just didn't happen. This time at least. Jesus then goes on, not only to teach the crowds many things, but also to challenge His apostles to feed them. This is where we find the famous account of the Feeding of the 5,000. The irony here, of course, is that back in verse 31, we learned that the apostles hadn't even had time to eat themselves. Now, Jesus tells them to feed the crowd. And, with His help, they miraculously do just that. It's worth noting what happens AFTER this miracle. Verses 45-46 tell us, "Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray." After yet another busy day, Jesus takes time away from the hustle and bustle of life to be alone and to pray. Not just to rest physically, but also to recharge in the solitude of His Heavenly Father's presence. That's the point of rest after all. Rest isn't just about trying to get a good night's sleep; it's about recharging our spiritual batteries, so that we can keep a strong, sustainable pace throughout the years that the Lord gives us. So, we could add this to our earlier definition of rest. **Rest** means to stop strenuous or stressful activity, in order to get recharged. This could be called "purposeful rest."

I got the idea for today's sermon title, "The Rest/Run Cycle," from one of the podcasts that I listen to. It's by a guy named, "Brian Buffini."⁶ Listening to this podcast, caused me to think about a lesson that we can all learn from the Iditarod Race.^{7 8 9} The Iditarod sled-dog race follows a treacherous route from Anchorage, Alaska all the way up to Nome, Alaska. Mushers must navigate through over 1,000 miles of mountains, forests, rivers, and tundra in temperatures that plummet well-below-zero.¹⁰ The first Iditarod Race was in 1973. The winner took 20 days to travel these 1,000 some-odd miles (20d, 00h, 49m 41s). More recently, the fastest time on record was set in 2017. The winner took just 8 days to travel some 1,000 miles (8d, 03h, 40m, 13s).¹¹

From 20 days, down to 8 days: historically, the times are progressively getting faster and faster. Certain factors contribute to this, including the enhanced breeding and training of the dogs, the enhanced diet and nutrition for the dogs, and the enhanced technology of things like GPS navigation.¹² Many things have changed over the



⁵ One of Jesus primary roles in His earthly ministry was teaching and He was often called "Teacher." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 2017-2018.

⁶ You can listen to episode # -33 "The Rest-Run Cycle" at <https://www.thebrianbuffinishow.com/?s=rest+run>

⁷ "Pound for pound, the sled dog is the most powerful draft animal on earth, and a team of twenty dogs averaging perhaps 75 pounds each can easily match a team of horses weighing more than twice as much. As a matter of interest, one dog has pulled more than half a ton in the canine equivalent of a tractor pull. As late as the 1960's Yup'ik Eskimos of Nelson Island moved much of their town, including entire houses, to a new site two dozen miles away with hundred-dog teams. Dogs are faster than horses over the long haul, capable of maintaining average speeds of eight to twelve miles an hour for hundreds of miles (including rest stops), and can exceed twenty miles an hour or more on shorter sprints. Even better, dogs can be fed from the land with moose, fish, or caribou in the winter, while horses or oxen require expensive hay or grain. Moreover, heavy draft animals cannot use the snowpacked winter trails." <https://iditarod.com/about/booms-and-busts/>

⁸ "In early 1925... a diphtheria epidemic (one of several devastating epidemics to sweep Alaska in the first part of the century) threatened isolated, icebound Nome. The nearest serum was in Anchorage and the first thought was to fly it to Nome. However, the only pilot in the Territory considered capable of braving the unpredictable weather was Carl Ben Eielson, who was on a trip in the Lower 48 and was not available. Instead, a Pony Express-type relay of dog teams was quickly organized. The serum was loaded on the newly completed Alaska Railroad and rushed to Nenana, where the first musher took it westward down the frozen Tanana River to the Yukon. Every village along the route offered its best team and driver for its leg to speed the serum toward Nome. The critical leg across the treacherous Norton Sound ice from Shaktoolik to Golovin was taken by Leonhard Seppala, the territory's premier musher, and his lead dog Togo. Gunnar Kaasen drove the final two legs into Nome behind his lead dog Balto, through a blizzard hurling 80 mph winds. The serum arrived in time to prevent the epidemic and save hundreds of lives. The 20 mushers had covered almost 700 miles in little more than 127 hours (about six days) in temperatures that rarely rose above 40° below zero and winds sometimes strong enough to blow over dogs and sleds. The serum run received worldwide press coverage and the mushers received special gold medals. A statue of Balto, one of the heroic lead dogs, was erected a year later in New York's Central Park."

⁹ Many of us have probably seen the Disney movie *Balto*. Balto is a cartoon version of the real-life sled dog hero, who championed the way for his team to get lifesaving medicine to the children in Nome Alaska. "Leonhard Seppala (Suh PAA lah) ... most famous Alaskan musher who ran the longest and most dangerous stretch of the 1925, 674-mile diphtheria serum run from Nenana to Nome, which saved hundreds of lives."

<https://iditarod.com/race/2019/mushers/96-Martin-Buser/>

¹⁰ If you've ever watched TV shows like the "Deadliest Catch," you're familiar with the intense weather patterns of the Bering Sea, which lies on the west edge of Alaska.

¹¹ By Mitch Seavey. Mitch is the father of the youngest musher to win, Dallas Seavey. <https://iditarod.com/about/champions-records/>

¹² <https://cr4.globalspec.com/blogentry/29335/Technology-of-the-Iditarod-Trail-Dog-Sled-Race>

years of Iditarod racing. However, one key factor stands out above all others: the rest/run cycle. In order to win, the mushers have to drive their dogs hard, but they also need to make sure that their dogs get plenty of rest DURING the race. This race is over 1,000 miles after all; it is NOT a sprint! Many of the dogs actually end up dropping out during the race. They are dropped off at various check points if they aren't able to finish the race. Tragically, some actually die from being pushed too hard. But, what the record-winning, seasoned mushers have learned over the years, is that it's essential to give their dogs just the right balance of running and resting. In other words, pace matters. Not too fast, not too slow. Plan for enough rest, but not too much rest. Run hard and long, but not too hard and not too long. That is at least, if you want to win. As one writer notes, "Rushing on...can exhaust a team to the point of losing."¹³ In other words, proper rest helps the team run a better race.

What's the point of all this? I mean, Alaska sounds beautiful, but not too many of us race sled dogs! The point of this is to challenge us to think about how we can set a sustainable pace in this life. A pace that allows us to spiritually thrive. Rest is about recharging our batteries as human beings. It's about setting a sustainable pace so that we can live a full, abundant life for God. So that we can enjoy the Christian life, so that we can worship God with energy, so that we can make the greatest impact possible for the Kingdom of God.

Rest is not just about recharging though; it is ALSO about refocusing. When it comes to our hectic lives, we need to learn that...

2) Consistent rest helps us to aim our running. The account in Mark 6 is not the only time that He records a busy season of life and ministry. From the very beginning, the pace of ministry was intense. And it would only grow in intensity throughout Jesus' life.¹⁴ Back in Mark 1, verses 14-34 record that the Kingdom of God was being preached w/ authority: repent and believe the good news! Whole towns were gathering. People were being healed. Demons were being driven out. In the midst of these exciting and fast-paced events, the disciples came looking for Jesus. Consider what we read in Mark 1:35-37, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"¹⁵ It's interesting to note that the Holy Spirit led the Gospel-writer to record this for us. There were times when Jesus needed to get away from the crowds and the hustle and bustle of life's demands. Rather than constant running, we find Jesus taking time to rest.¹⁶ He found a solitary place and prayed. You see, Jesus was fully human, just like His disciples. And He knew His need for rest and His need to stay in close communion with his Heavenly Father. As it turns out, this time of prayer and solitude helped Jesus stay focused on His mission. In Mark 1:38, Jesus tells them, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. THAT IS WHY I HAVE COME." Jesus says this AFTER His time of prayer. In other words, this time of rest and solitude, helped Jesus to aim His running. He didn't get knocked off course by the busyness and success that they were experiencing. He stayed focused on accomplishing God's will and not what people wanted. So, we could expand our earlier definition even one step further. **Rest** means to stop strenuous or stressful activity, in order to get recharged AND refocused.

How about you and me? Have life's demands gotten so frantic and so out of control that we have lost our connection with our Heavenly Father? Are we just running and running and running, with no real aim or focus? If so, we need to get away to a solitary place and pray.

I was thinking about this last week, when I went to WI for a day. I took some time away by myself, to simply rest and refocus, which I am slowly getting better at. I did a little fishing on a small lake about 4 hours from here. I caught a few, kept one rather plump bass and ate it, along with some delicious fried potatoes! But what really got me thinking about rest, was the rowboat that I was using. At one point, I was on the far side of the lake. I had been using a trolling motor to get around but I

¹³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/2013/03/04/iditarod-past-champions-start-alaska-race/1961957/>

¹⁴ In fact, later on Jesus tries to slow the flood of His popularity. For example, see Matthew 9:29-31 and Mark 7:24.

¹⁵ In stark contrast to Jesus, the disciples were caught up in the busyness of the demanding public. "Jesus, we've been looking all over for you! What are you doing way out here where no one can find you?"

¹⁶ Consider Matthew 11:28-30 and 1 John 5:3.

decided that a little upper body workout would do me some good. So, I turned the trolling motor off and started rowing. Now maybe you're wondering, "how does rowing a boat relate to resting?" Isn't that actually the opposite of rest? Well, not exactly. You see, what I realized about rowing a boat, is that it requires just the right balance of rowing/resting. When you row a boat, you are face backwards, away from your goal. So you can't see where you are going. Every once and a while, you need to stop and look over your shoulder, to make sure you are headed in the right direction.¹⁷ Now, professional and Olympic rowing teams often have a person who sits in the boat and faces forward to help steer and direct the team. This keeps them on course.¹⁸ But I was rowing alone. And if you just keep rowing and rowing and rowing, without ever looking over your shoulder, you eventually end up going the wrong direction. In fact, if you aren't aiming at the right goal, it really doesn't matter how strong of a rower you are.

One strategy I tried, involved looking over my shoulder to make sure I was aiming in the right direction. Then, I would find a fixed point on the shore behind me, to help me line myself up. However, even when I kept the back of the boat lined up with that fixed point, I tended to slowly drift off course. I came to realize that the wind was working against me; it was subtly nudging me to one side. So, I still needed to look over my shoulder occasionally and reset my course, to reset that fixed point.¹⁹ Here's the point: one of the key benefits of a good rest/run cycle is that it helps us to stay on course in this life. It ensures that we consistently steer our efforts in the right direction.²⁰

This month we've been talking about putting better things on our PLATE. Not just continuing to add more and more things to our plate, but making sure that the right things are on our plate. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, one of the things you need on your plate, is rest; rest that both recharges AND refocuses you. Every day we have opportunities to rest, to get 6-8 hours of sleep. To wake up each morning and begin with our quiet time with God. Every week we have opportunities to rest, to enjoy 1-2 days off of work. To come to church, to make time for spiritual growth and training, for involvement in a weekly small group, or whatever else it might be. In other words, one reason that we need to consistently rest from all of our running, is that it helps us to reassess our progress. It gives us regular opportunities to readjust BEFORE we get too far off course. The Apostle Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 9:26, "Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air."²¹ So we need to see rest as a tool that helps us avoid running aimlessly in this life. This is why Jesus kept such close tabs with his Heavenly Father. It's why Mark 6:46 mentions that Jesus "...went up on a mountainside to pray."

Today, I am challenging each one of us to take aim in the race that we are running; to be aligned with God's priorities. If we are truly committed to spiritual fitness, to training ourselves to be godly, then we need to establish a healthy cycle of resting/running. If Jesus followed a Rest/Run Cycle, then so should we. If He felt the human need for times of rest and solitude and getting away for prayer, then we shouldn't hesitate to build these things into our own personal schedules. Part of being a fully devoted follower of Jesus means that He is the Lord of our schedules. As one author puts it, "We need to commit and recommit our time to Jesus" because "the demands of a busy life can diminish our faith..."²² **Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as we are "becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together," let's embrace a God-honoring Rest/Run cycle.**

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on September 29, 2019 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

¹⁷ For those who are familiar with the Dragon Boat races, those boats have a person running a steering tiller at the back.

¹⁸ Learn more at <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-does-a-coxswain-in-rowing-do-2016-8>

¹⁹ Another thing that was working against me was that my rowing strokes were not consistently even. I just don't do a lot of rowing and the boat I was using had suffered some wear and tear so the oars were a little "wonky."

²⁰ It also protects us from experiencing diminishing returns on the opportunities that God has given us to steward our lives for His glory.

²¹ Consider the advice Moses receives in Exodus 18:13-26.

²² "...[ultimately] our days don't belong to us... They belong to God.... So this week, let's "give" our schedules to Jesus [after all] (they belong to Him already." Dr. Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer, "Stewarding Our Schedules" article in Tabletalk magazine, August 2019, p. 42.