WHEN JESUS WITHDREW

Biblical examples of rest, solitude, and healthy boundaries

Compiled by Jim Ritchie, MD



But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.
—Luke 5:16

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Why This Resource?

Jesus demonstrated a wonderful balance in how He used limited time and a finite body to meet overwhelming demands.

Sometimes Jesus healed entire villages. Sometimes He changed his plans to accommodate others. A few times He healed individuals on the Sabbath. If, in trying to be Christlike, we focus only on those occasions, we could conclude that we should always work and are justified in neglecting Sabbath rest.

But the Gospels also provide contrasting examples of how Jesus prioritized time away from work. He routinely observed Sabbath. He withdrew from crowds and even from His disciples. At times, He even sent the crowds away, despite their many needs. Through these practices, He maintained His most important relationship with the Father.

The passages below offer a biblical perspective on rest, respect for our God-given limitations, and prioritizing our relationship with the Lord.

Notes: Multiple Gospel accounts of the same event are grouped together in a single entry. Most entries summarize the events. Scripture quotations are from the NASB.



Jesus sent the crowds away or left them

Matt 8:18, Mark 4:35-6, Luke 8:22 – When He saw the crowd, he gave orders to go to the other side of the sea (and calmed the sea en route).

Matt 14:22, Mark 6:45, John 6:19 – After feeding the 5,000, sent the disciples in a boat, sent the crowds away, and went up a mountain by Himself to pray. Subsequently came to the disciples walking on the water.

Matt 14:39, Mark 8:9-10 – After feeding the 4,000, sent the crowds away, got in a boat, and came to Magdan (Mark says Dalmenutha).

Mark 1:38, Luke 4:42 – When Peter said the crowd was seeking him (Luke says the crowds were there with Peter), Jesus instead left to go to other places.

Mark 8:13 – The Pharisees asked for a sign. He refused, got in a boat, and went to the other side of the lake.

Jesus went away by Himself

Matt 4:1, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1 – After his baptism, went into the wilderness to be tempted.

Mark 1:35 – Left in the early morning to go to a secluded place to pray.

Luke 5:15-16 – Large crowds were coming, but Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness to pray.

Luke 6:12 – He went off to the mountain and spent the whole night praying, then came back and chose the 12.

Matt 4:12, Mark 6:31 – When He heard John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee.

Matt 14:13, John 6:1 – After hearing about John's death, He withdrew in a boat by Himself to a secluded place. (The crowds followed, and He fed the 5,000.)

John 6:15 – When He perceived the crowds were coming to make Him king by force, He withdrew to the mountain by Himself alone.

Jesus took the disciples away

Matt 10:17 – Jesus took the 12 disciples aside by themselves.

Matt 24:3 – As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately.

Mark 3:13 – Jesus went up a mountain and summoned those whom He wanted. He appointed the 12.

Mark 4:34 – He explained the parables privately with His own disciples.

Mark 9:30 – He went through Galilee, did not want anyone to know, and was teaching His disciples.

Mark 10:10 – After teaching the crowds, He was back in the house, teaching the disciples privately.

Mark 10:32 – He was on a journey to Jerusalem.

Matt 26:20, Mark 14:17, Luke 22:14 – He came with the 12 to Passover (the Last Supper).

Luke 9:10 – When the disciples returned from their missions, He took them and withdrew to Bethsaida.

Luke 9:18 – He was praying alone; His disciples were with Him.

Luke 18:31 – He took the 12 aside to predict His death.

Jesus took the Three (Peter, James, and John) away

Matt 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28 – He took them up a mountain (the Transfiguration).

Matt 26:36, Mark 14:33, Luke 22:39,41 – He withdrew to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane with them.

Mark 5:37 – He entered Jairus's house and allowed no one to accompany Him except the Three.

Mark 13:3 – On Mount of Olives, the Three and Andrew questioned Him privately.



Jesus separated himself from the crowd in a boat

Matt 13:2, Mark 3:9, Luke 5:3 – He separated Himself to preach.

Mark 4:1 – He preached from a boat to distance Himself (different event from 3:9).

Jesus went into a house when the crowd was present and couldn't enter

(Luke 12:1 says the crowds were "many thousands.")

Matt 8:14 - He came into Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law.

Matt 13:36 – After preaching, He left the crowds and went into the house.

Mark 7:17 – After preaching, He left the crowd and entered the house.

Mark 14:3 – In Bethany, He was at the table of Simon the Leper.

Luke 7:36 – A Pharisee asked Jesus to dine with him, and He entered his house and did so.

Luke 11:37 – He had lunch with a Pharisee.

Luke 13:10 – He was teaching in the synagogue.

Luke 14:1 – He ate in the house of the leader of the Pharisees.

Luke19:5 – He ate at Zaccheus's house.

Other similar events

John 11:6 – Lazarus was sick, but Jesus stayed two days where He was.

Matt 13:53 – After finishing parables, He departed from there.

Matt 15:1 – He left [Gennasaret] and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Mark 7:27 – In Tyre, He entered a house and wanted no one to know of it.

Matt 15:29, Mark 7:31 – He departed Tyre and Sidon to the Sea of Galilee and went up the mountain. Crowds came to Him there.

Matt 16:4 – He "left them and went away" to the other side of the sea.

Matt 19:1 – He departed Galilee and went to Judea and Trans-Jordan, and large crowds followed Him.

Matt 19:15 – After preaching and healing and laying hands on children, He departed from there.

Matt 20:29 – He left Jericho, and a large crowd followed.

Matt 21:17, Mark 11:11 – After the Triumphal Entry and turning the tables, He "left them and went out of the city to Bethany."

Mark 11:18, Luke 21:37-8 – He taught at the temple every day, and the people got up early to come to Him. When evening came, He and the disciples would go out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives.
*John 12:36 says, "He went away and hid Himself from them." (He had performed many signs before them.)

Mark 1:45 – He could no longer publicly enter a city and stayed in unpopulated areas; people came to Him.

Mark 3:7 – He withdrew to the sea. Crowds followed.

Mark 3:31-5, Luke 8:19-21 – His mother and brothers came and called Him, and He did not go. (apparently)

Mark 5:21 – (After Gerasa and the Decapolis), He crossed again to the other side of the sea.

Mark 6:1 – He left and went to Nazareth.

Luke 2:43 – At age twelve, He stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Luke 9:1-6 – He sent the 12 out, giving them power and authority (and He didn't accompany).

John 4:3 – When the Pharisees had heard that He (His disciples) were baptizing more than John, He left Judea for Galilee.

John 4:40 – The Samaritans asked Him to stay with them. He stayed two days, then left for Galilee.

John 5:3 – At the pool of Bethesda, "a multitude of …sick, blind, lame and withered"; Jesus healed one.
*Verse 13 says Jesus slipped away while there was a crowd at that place.

John 7:11 – The Jews were seeking Him.
*Verse 14 says He went to the Temple to teach.

John 8:1 – He went to the Mount of Olives, and early in the morning, He returned to the temple and people came and He taught them.

Jesus escaped those who were wishing Him harm

John 8:50 – After saying “Before Abraham was born, I am,” they picked up stones to stone Him, but He hid Himself and went out of the temple.

Luke 4:30 – In Nazareth, the crowd took Him to throw Him off a cliff, but, passing through their midst, He went His way.

John 7:10 – He went to the Feast secretly (Jews were seeking to kill Him).

John 7:30 – They sought to seize Him, but no man laid his hand on Him.

John 10:39 – They were seeking to seize Him, but He eluded their grasp and went away beyond the Jordan and stayed there.

John 11:54 – Because the Jewish authorities planned together to kill Him, He no longer continued to walk publicly but went away near the wilderness into the city of Ephraim.

Until He didn’t choose to escape

John 18:1 – After the High Priestly Prayer, He went with the disciples to the Garden, where He was arrested. When Judas came, He did not evade him.
*See also Matt. 26:53 – He could have summoned 12 legions of angels.

After the Resurrection

Matt 28:10 – After the resurrection, He left them to meet again in Galilee.

Mark 16:12, Luke 24:31 – After the resurrection, He appeared to only two disciples and vanished when they recognized Him (Road to Emmaus).

John 20:17 – After the resurrection, He appeared to Mary Magdalene – “Stop clinging to Me and go to My brethren and tell them.” Later, He came to the disciples in rooms and also in Galilee.

1 Cor 15:6 – He appeared to over 500 after His resurrection.



Jesus and the Disciples and Apostles Observed Sabbath

Note: It is unclear whether every reference to teaching in synagogue occurred on the Sabbath, but an association is implied in several verses.

Luke 4:15-6 – And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and **as was His custom**, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. (Very beginning of His ministry years, after temptation, and read from Isaiah 61.)

Matthew 4:23 – Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. (After calling Andrew, Peter, James and John, and before the Sermon on the Mount.)

Luke 4:31, Mark 1:21 – And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and He was teaching them **on the Sabbath**; 32 and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority. 33 **In the synagogue** there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice. (First time in Capernaum, healed Peter's mother-in-law on this Sabbath.)

Mark 1:39 – And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. (After leaving Capernaum, after healing Peter's mother-in-law.)

Luke 4:44 – So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. (After leaving Capernaum after healing Peter's mother in law, but now proceeding into Judea.)

Matt 12:9-13, Mark 3:1, Luke 6:6 – He entered again **into a synagogue**; and a man was there whose hand was withered. They were watching Him to see if He would heal him **on the Sabbath**.

Mark 6:2 – (in Nazareth) **When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue;** and the many listeners were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?

Matthew 9:35 – Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.

Luke 13:10 – And He was teaching in **one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.** (Healed woman bent double)

Luke 14:1 – It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. 2 And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. (Sabbath meal, appropriate Sabbath activity.)

John 6:59 – These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. (Eat My flesh and drink My blood; I am the bread of life.)

John 18:20 – Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.”

Acts 9:2 – And asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Those belonging to the Way were apparently going to synagogue.)

Acts 9:19-20 – Now for several days [Saul] was with the disciples who were at Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Acts 13:5 – (First Missionary Journey) When [Barnabas and Saul] reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

Acts 13:14 – But going on from Perga, [Paul and his companions] arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and **on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue** and sat down.

Acts 13:42-34 – [After Antioch sermon in the synagogue] Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be **spoken to them the next Sabbath**. 43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord.

Acts 14:1 – In Iconium,[Paul and companions] entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

Acts 16:13 – And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. 14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening.

Acts 17:1-2 – Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And **according to Paul's custom**, he went to them, and for **three Sabbaths reasoned with them** from the Scriptures.

Acts 17:10 – The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Acts 17:17 – So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

Acts 18:4 – And [Paul] was reasoning in the synagogue (in Corinth) every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Acts 18:19 – They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Acts 18:26 – And [Apollos] began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.

Acts 19:8 – And [Paul] entered the synagogue (in Ephesus) and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

