



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Start the Day with God

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Mark 1:35-39

Clint Pressley

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." ³⁹ And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

(Pastor prays)

There is not a person sitting in this room this morning who does not have some kind of demands or expectations in their life. Some of you have so many expectations, so many demands on you and you are running at such a pace, and carrying such pressure, that it might not be sustainable for you. And when that kind of pressure is on you, something inevitably suffers. What suffers when you get busy? What do you put down so that you can pick something else up? How are you making it work? And can you honestly say that you have an ongoing healthy, growing day-to-day relationship with God?

We are on the front end of the Gospel of Mark, and as Christians, there are certain very specific things that we actually believe about Jesus. One in particular we believe that He is our substitute. As Christians, we believe that we are born with a sinful nature. Adam and Eve, our first parents, we got it from them. Adam, the very first man fell into sin. He and his wife Eve did, and we have inherited that and we continually fall into sin. To be saved, there

needed to be a perfect man, the second Adam named Jesus, to be our substitute. That is to say, He is the perfect God-man. He lived on Earth, fulfilling all of God's laws, in a way that we were intended to, to be in fellowship with God. Jesus, as the second Adam, was in complete and total, perfect, fellowship with God the Father. But that's not all He did. As Christians, we believe that He goes to the cross and there at the cross, what He does is receive the wages of our sin. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. Jesus dies on the cross to take the punishment that we deserve because of our sin against God. He does that as our substitute. That is one of the basic Christian beliefs about Jesus: He is our substitute.

We believe that He is our mediator. Then on the third day after He died, God raised Him from the dead. And when God raised Him from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, and there in Heaven He sits at the right hand of God, and He mediates, He intercedes for us. We believe that He has a threefold office. This is just the basic Christian belief that He is Prophet, Priest and King. When He speaks, it is true and we obey. And that as priests, He has interceded for us and given us access to God the father. As King, we yield our lives to obey Him. We believe that He is the only savior and that there's only one way for men and women to actually have fellowship with God. That is through faith in what Christ has done for us.

We believe that He is Lord. We believe that part of being a Christian means you actually yield yourself to what has been revealed to us as the will of God in Christ. But on top of all of those things that we believe about Jesus, we also believe that He is our example. And today, I want us to learn something from His life that every single one of us needs.

Let's take it in context in. Let's go back to the passage. It follows a long night. In verse 29 - 34, you know the story. They were at the synagogue and Jesus casts out a demon there. People start hearing about it and go to Peter's house. Peter's mother-in-law is sick and Jesus heals her. And then after the sun goes down on the Sabbath day, people start showing up at Peter's house. There is a yard full of people. Luke says that Jesus healed all of them. Who knows how long that took? You ever have people at your house and you are

ready to go to bed? You are sending every signal. You're giving all the body language. If you've got kids, you've bathed them again so maybe they'll get the message. You put the kids in bed.

Who knows how long the people stayed in the yard because Jesus is healing everybody. It was a late night. And in this passage, what we see is Jesus sacrificing sleep. I mean, if anybody deserves to sleep late the day after this long night, it was Jesus. So here we get a rare glimpse into the private, spiritual life of Jesus as He has fellowship with the Father to get ready for the day ahead.

Now, if a sinless Jesus needed to set aside time alone with God the father, then certainly you and I do as well. Brothers and sisters, I want you to be spiritually strong. I want you to be Biblically informed. I want you to be fully prepared for everything that waits on you each day you get up. We live in a terrible world. But God has put us here as true ambassadors for the name of Jesus. And if we're going to live in this world and be fully equipped, that comes from life with Jesus. And today I want to convince you that...

Life with Jesus is the Life We Need

And if you are not daily walking with Jesus, this is for you. What do we need? We need two things. I've got two points today. The first point has six or seven sub points, but it's only one point. Here it is number #1, the first point.

You need time with God

You need that time with God. After a long night, people are staying around and they need Jesus to do something emotionally draining. What does Jesus do? Let me read it to you, verse 35. *³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

Now, there are some times when there is a move of the spirit, when God does something unusual in a group of people. Maybe you've watched what's happening in Wilmore, Kentucky, at Asbury Christian College. I'm not sure how to describe it, except to say there's something unusual happening there.

We pray that God does that in our gathering and in our lives. But God has also given us Sundays. God has also given us a beautiful example of how we can be strong in the Lord each day. What then do we need to do based on this passage? Now I'm getting ready to give some things from the text that I believe you've got to do. Here's the first.

You have got to act

You've got to put it in gear. You've got to stop wishing and get into action. I get that from verse 35. Verse 35 has four verbs, and all of them are action verbs. All of them are imperatives. The text says He rose, He departed, He went. I'm asking you this morning to set a goal for this week, a real goal that you will actually have genuine fellowship with God. That you now will make a decisive step. Stop dreaming about it, wishing it will happen. It will not. You have to make it happen, doing what makes it happen. God has given you a mind. He's given you a heart. He's given you a willpower. I'm asking you this morning to set them on Christ and stop making excuses of why you're not growing. Would you this morning right now, as I'm talking, would you commit? Do you commit to grow right now? You've got to act. You've got to do. I'll give you another thought from verse 35.

You've got to be disciplined

When I say disciplined, I mean the spiritual discipline. There are other parts of your life where you're exercising genuine self-control, that you're making real decisions, sticking by them and you're doing what you say you're going to do. Verse 35 tells us that Jesus is rising very early in the morning. Now you're going to hate what I'm getting ready to say. If you're not a morning person, you're going to hate it, but let me just say it anyway. And I don't want to be legalistic but morning is best. Was that legalistic? I didn't mean for it to be. It is best to start your day with the Lord. It is best to wake up and understand that you have certain things you will have to face this day. Many of them are difficult, some of them will try your emotions, and you want to be able to put those pressures before the Lord to ask God for help. Open your Bible for a few chapters and just read and gain strength for your soul from the Bible. In

the morning, set the tone for the day so that when you walk out of that fellowship with God, you can go in the strength of the Lord. The joy of the Lord is your strength, so that regardless of what you will face, you're able to face it.

Andrew Bonar compiled the memoirs and remains of Robert Murray-M'Cheyne. We use the M'Cheyne reading plan in this church. We know about it because of Andrew Bonar, a great Scottish preacher of another age, who had three things to say. He looked at this passage and he said, "Don't speak to another person before you speak to Jesus." I would just add, don't speak to another person before you have a cup of coffee and speak to Jesus. The second thing he said was "Don't do anything with your hands until you've been on your knees before God." Don't work before you pray. And then the third thing he said was, "Don't read the paper before you read the Bible." Now, most of us don't get a newspaper, so I would just change that to say, don't look at the news on your iPad or phone or on the computer. Don't turn the television or go to Facebook or check Twitter before you read the Bible. What did D.L. Moody say? He said that you need to see the face of God before you see the face of man. What did King David say in Psalm 5:3? His prayer was *O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch. I lay my request before you and wait with expectation.*

Now look, there is no law. That's why I'm not being legalistic. There is no law. We just have an example. There's no law that you can't spend time with God in the evening. If that really is the only way you can open God's word, and maybe at the end of the day, you can look back on the day and you ask God to help you sort out or think through what you've been through that day. Maybe God will empower you to pick up the pieces of that day. But in the morning, you can ask for power. You can be prepared but it does take discipline. Most of you have some sort of self-control. Most of you have discipline. You are disciplined about those things that you love. The Bible says in Proverbs 25 that a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. Why don't you ask God? Maybe you don't feel like you have

much self-control. Ask God to give you a desire for discipline and then the will to take the steps to make it happen. Ask God, maybe even while I'm preaching right now. You realize that you have not spent time with God. Ask God, right now, to change you. There are things we've got to do. What else have we got to do? I'll give you another one to consider.

You have got to plan

You've got to make a plan. It's not going to happen by accident. The text says "rising very early in the morning." Rising very early in the morning while it was still dark. That doesn't happen by accident. Look, a lot of you have such busy lives. With all that you have going on, some of you have to get up so early for work. Or you work such late hours. Or you've got to get the kids ready for school when you get up. All of those can be good things, but all of those good things can become obstacles to the great thing. So instead of saying, "Well, I can't because of this," let's find a way. Let's find time before the action starts. Can you imagine that night, Jesus went to bed and at some point, but while the sun had not come up yet, He gets up and quietly tiptoes out of the house. You have to make a plan for that. What are you planning for in your life? Look, with your busy schedule, with all that you have to do, and because of the intense demands on your emotions and your time and your mental capacity, you need the nourishing power of God's word. You need your soul fed. You have lots of people pulling at you, just taking from you. And you need God to replenish you by His word and His spirit. You need the healing power of God's grace in your heart and soul. Some of you work in environments that just seem to take the spiritual life out of you and you need time with God's word and His spirit filling you and healing you. You need God's word for the day's events so you have got to plan for that. Where are you going to go? Where are you going to sit? Have your Bible ready and set that time off in your plan. I'll give you another one to consider. What have you got to do? It seems basic but it's true.

You have to get up

You have to get up. Jesus didn't sit up on His elbow in the bed. He was rising very early in the morning after a long, exhausting night. He actually physically got up out of bed. Look, truthfully, sometimes that's the very first victory of the day, getting up. And some of you won a victory this morning and you came to church. It's the very first victory of the day, just getting up. Now I know you like the snooze button. Everybody likes the snooze button, but the snooze button is a soul killer. Did you know that every time you hit the snooze button, an angel loses its wings? Get ahold of yourself. I know people who set their alarm 10 minutes early so they can hit the snooze button and sleep a little longer. All I'm saying is there needs to come a time where there's a shift, a time where you learn that you love the time with Jesus more than you love to sleep. And to somebody who works so hard, that sleep is really important. But there just comes a time when you just need to ask God to give that to you. Where you just need that 30 minutes with Jesus more than you need the 30 minutes of sleep. There's a press in our society to find balance in life. But balance is an illusion. Only people on Instagram have balance. We don't have balance. We're trying to pursue holiness and godliness and knowing the Lord Jesus and being spiritually strong. The writer of proverbs says in Proverbs 24:33-34, "*A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,*"³⁴ *and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.* Look, I don't want you spiritually poor. I don't want you rested physically and spiritually empty. I want you to be spiritually fed and strong and ready. You've got to get up. There is something else in verse 35.

You have to focus

You've got to focus.³⁵ *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place.* That could be a wilderness place. He went somewhere where nobody else was, where He could be by Himself and undisturbed. The greatest temptation I have when it comes to my time with the Lord and devotion is what's going on my phone. I would just invite you to use another version of the Bible than what's on your phone. Put your phone aside and get your Bible that's not your phone. To the

best of your ability, find a way for a little bit of time where you can be completely inaccessible. That's hard to do. But find maybe half an hour or so, so you can just feast on few chapters of the Bible. A time where you can read the Bible a little bit and think about what you read. A time to have a genuine fellowship with God because of what Christ has done for you. It's almost impossible to do if you're not able to focus. If the sun has come up and the world has started and the kids are up, if the TV is on. I would even say if you are driving into work and listening to the Dwell app, spend the time. I like the fighter verses. I can memorize scripture on my phone. I can listen to the Bible. It's not the same. Driving in Charlotte in the traffic listening to the Bible, you might need to do that just to keep you from cussing. But I don't know that I would count that as my time with the Lord because you can't really focus. You can hear it and it's extra. It's a good thing to do. But is that really the time you have focused your attention to hear and absorb and digest and think and to listen? It's a good thing to do but that is not really focused time with God. The model of Jesus for us is that He found a desolate place where He could not be disturbed. Nobody else was around. It was Him and God. What do you do when you get there and have this focused time?

You have got to pray

You've got to pray. This is where I think most Christians are weak. We forget to actually pray. Three times in the Book of Mark, we find Jesus alone with God praying. We have Him here in Chapter 1, then in Chapter 6 before He walks on the water and they think He's a ghost. And then over in Mark 14 in the garden, when He's pouring Himself out to God.

When you pray, what do you do? I would just give a couple of suggestions. A lot of you are familiar with the acronym Acts. A C T S. If you're not, you might want to write it down. ACTS is a good structure for praying: A is for adoration. It's a good way to start to pray by expressing your love to God; that you love Him for who He is. You love His holiness, His purity, His goodness and His grace. Start off with adoration and then from adoration to go into Confession. To confess your own shortcomings and sins and things you are aware of then, don't just stop with confessing your sins. Confess the

good grace of God given to you at the cross. Confess the forgiveness and the adoption that you have as a child of God.

And then thank God. The T is for thank. Thank God for His goodness in your life for His provision for the things that He's given you, even for the hard times. Thank Him that in His sovereign hand, He's brought you through something hard to discipline you.

And then the S is for supplication. Supplication, that is to ask God to do something, to intervene. You ask God to save someone you love or to heal someone in need or to give you strength for the next day. You ask Him for something, and if you do that, there's time spent in prayer. Another way to pray is to just do the concentric circle. Start with the human beings in your house and pray for them and for yourself. And if you don't have anybody but you in that place, then that's a short time of prayer. You pray for yourself and then get that circle out a little wider to your friends and family, the people you work with and include your church. Pray for me and keep going around in circles, expanding ever widening. Or if you have some time, get a notebook and write down your prayers. If you don't have the time to actually write out your prayers like you would a letter, you can maybe write down a name and put the circumstance. Or if you don't want to put that in print, put an asterisk. So you will remember that. Pray for those names and you'll have a record of that, and you could go back years from now and look how God has worked. All I'm saying is to pray, to ask God, to tell God, to confess to God, to praise God and to thank God. You've got to pray.

I'll give you another one that I think you need to do.

You have got to say no

You've got to say no. Go with me there to the passage. Let's see what's happening. You know that Jesus is going out to the solitary place and prayed. In verse 36 there is a pick up in the action. ³⁶ *And Simon and those who were with him searched for him.* Simon, that's Peter, and those who are with Him, they are not called disciples yet, Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. That's an aggressive word. At some point, Simon woke up

and maybe found out Jesus is not here anymore. Now it's been really something. Everybody in all of Capernaum has heard about Jesus. People from around the county are coming in from Galilee. His popularity has skyrocketed, so Simon gets up. He tells James and John, "you go to the synagogue. Somebody run to the market to see if you can find Jesus." Everybody is looking for Him in verse 36. They found Him and they said, *"Everyone is looking for you."* The crowds are there, the urgency is high and a lot of them have very real needs. They need to be healed. Simon is saying, you need to get back to these people. The momentum is unbelievable. If you don't get back, we're gonna miss our chance. There is the fear of missing out. My day starts early, mostly because the people I work with start early, and if I'm not careful I will get distracted. Because there may be a conversation going on in texts, and I want to know what they're saying. And yet I've not spent any time with God. They have the fear of missing opportunities, missing conversations. To carve out time with God, something needs to either be put aside or scheduled differently or postponed. I'll tell you why I'm pressing on this so hard. It's because you and I are in genuine, spiritual warfare. You have been adopted as a child of God and enlisted in the army of God, an army that fights spiritual warfare. And for you to fight correctly, you've got to be well-fed and fully equipped. And some of you are trying to live from Sunday to Sunday. But we need life with Jesus. We need time with God. I want to give you one more very brief point. We need time with God and I'll end with this. Number 2.

We need clear Gospel focus

So in verse 35, Jesus went off to a solitary place, verse 36. Simon and His friends are looking for Him. In verse 37-39. They found him. ³⁶ *And Simon and those who were with him searched for him,* ³⁷ *and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."* ³⁸ *And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."* ³⁹ *And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.* They've not yet understood. They find Jesus and they say, "look, everybody's waiting back in the yard. Your popularity has

skyrocketed. All around Galilee, they know what you can do. People are coming to be healed.” And Jesus in verse 38 says, “that’s not why I’m here.” Not the crowd. Not the spectacular. Not the popularity. Not even the healing.

See what it says verse 38, that’s not why I came out. Let’s go to the next town so that I can preach. That’s why I came out. I think we need to watch out for what’s popular. We need to be careful of what is popular and persuasive. I think Mark Dever said it really well. And we’ve seen this in our own society. We see it in the culture we live in, right? Now what is popular? What is popular can become normal. And what is normal eventually becomes right. What is popular can become normal. What is normal then will be seen as right. Look, when we become so sensitive to those around us, we become actually insensitive to God. Then we miss the whole point of why we are here. And in verse 38 Jesus gives the very first course correction for the early group of disciples. Look again at what He says in verse 38. Let us go to the next towns that I may preach there for that is why I came out. I came to proclaim the saving message of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. I came to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is here in the person of Jesus. That Jesus Himself came to actually reveal the message of salvation. That is in faith alone through Christ alone. The Gospel, which is about Him and for Him, is being preached by Him. You know, years later, the apostle Paul sums it up for us. In Colossians 1:15-20. This is what Paul says about Jesus. ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

That’s what I want you to have. The reconciling peace of God that comes through Jesus Christ. I want you to have the daily strong fellowship,

nourishing your soul on His word, pouring out your soul in prayer. I want you to have life with Jesus. Because life of Jesus is the life we need. To have that, we need time with God and we need to have clear Gospel focus.

In a church this size, with this many people, I know there are men and women here who today need to commit to spending time with God. I've told you how to do it. The simple opening of the Bible, reading and praying and trusting that God will use that today.

(Pastor prays)