

Rest in Christ

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There's a lot coming at us these days: new restrictions; heated political debates, economic decline. Often we don't know *how* to handle what the world throws at us, so we just *react*: a political headline and we reel, new restrictions we despair, someone hurts us we withdraw. No stranger to frantic life, NY pastor John Starke says, *A reactionary life acts in response to what happens rather than out of our inner lives*. Jesus shows us a life not of frantic reaction but of *enriched communion*. He bore the weight of the world, and yet he had ballast. How? Let's look at Jesus' *pattern* of spiritual rest, his purpose for rest, and the power of rest.

Pattern

In the Gospel of Luke we see Jesus withdrawing *frequently*. A few examples: *And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place* (4:42); *In these days he went out to the mountain to pray* (6:12); *But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray* (5:16). Jesus **withdrew**: from work, from crowds, from the world. In chapter 4, the sun is finally setting after a long day of laying his hands on "all who had any sick" healing them, from the diseased to demon-possessed (41), *and then he departs into a desolate place*. Jesus withdrew from need, from urgent work. So urgent the work sought him out in his rest! Entire cities and the oppressed were in need of his attention, *and Jesus withdrew*. He did *not* react. He refused to be a pinball, bounced here and there by the pins and levers of the world around him. Instead, he followed the Father and withdrew. How about you? Are you following the Father into spiritual rest or are you more like a pinball batted back and forth? Why do we find it so difficult to withdraw? One reason is that we live in a *knowledge economy*. In a KE what you know determines who you are. So, turning off the information stream can feel like a threat to our existence. What if I'm not up to date? What if I miss a release, a headline, a like? But our reluctance to withdraw goes even deeper into a false belief: If I am no longer fully informed, then I am no longer in control. We mistake knowledge for power. The more I know the more control I have. Our kid gets sick: instead of praying we go to WebMD. A friend is struggling: we recommend an article instead of interceding. And when there's *a lot* coming at us, we thirst for even more knowledge to give us a greater sense of control. We see this when you ask people how they are coping with

COVID, and they respond by describing the latest case count, what other countries are doing, political implications, but *not* how they feel, what they're praying for, where they are finding hope. *In the KE we cope with informational knowledge and a false sense of control* (no wonder there's underlying sadness) *but in the Kingdom economy we thrive in intimate knowledge and a sense of God's control and immensity.* It is the immensity and intimacy of God's presence that relieves and refreshes us, not a better handle on stats and data. Jesus shows us the way into intimate knowledge is to withdraw, retreat, step out of the information flow and into the intimate presence of God. To live by communion not reaction. *What does it look like to withdraw?*

Purpose

Jesus had two broad purposes. First, to **rest**. We saw earlier that Jesus withdrew to a desolate place *after a demanding day of ministry.* He withdrew because he was tired. Can we say that about the Son of God? Well, Luke draws attention to the limitations of his humanity noting Jesus' hunger (9), fatigue (8:23), tears (19:41), groans. So while Jesus was fully God; he was also fully human. He got tired, hungry, and tearful, which means he can identify with our fatigue, our tears, our limitations *and does not condemn us for it.* Rather, the heart of Christ is to bring us into a place of rest. Where did Jesus go? To a *desolate* place. Why didn't he choose a comfortable place? Well, the word desolate means: solitary, isolated, sometimes desert or wilderness. A desolate place is not a place with no comfort but a place with no people, no noise. It is *quiet*, silence. Stay at home parents are shouting amens right now. A place where you can be alone, solitude. Introverts whisper internal amens. A desolate place was a place of solitude and silence. A place we can hear. But hearing God's voice in a busy, KE is like trying to hear a friend over the band at a concert. If you really want to hear, not just nod your head, you have to step outside and withdraw to a quieter place. If we want to live out of intimate knowledge not informational knowledge, then we have to withdraw to a quiet place. Now, some groups make too much of solitude and silence as if they're an end in themselves or possess mystical power. But Ordinary Prof of Moral Theology Joseph Capizzi says, *Silence is a kind of fertile space that allows the seed of the Word to grow, and that without it our thinking becomes barren.* Reactionary. Not enriched by the life and presence of God. So Jesus didn't go to desolate places *mainly* for

silence & solitude. He went because they're a fertile place for the seed of fellowship with his Father to be watered, nourished, to bloom. Which brings us to the second reason Jesus withdrew, not only to rest but to **pray**, [But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray \(5:16\); In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God \(6:12\)](#) In both these verses the word pray is in the middle voice, which implies personal benefit for the pray-er, undertones of personal renewal. This kind of prayer is personal enjoyment of God's presence. It is slowing down to relish friendship with God, to take in his wonder, his beauty, his promises, his person. God wants to fellowship with you. I've been dating my wife for over 20 years, and over the years I've come to appreciate a good date. A good date isn't a great movie or a 5 star restaurant. It is leaning in and conversing deeply, following one another's words back and forth, lingering in one another's presence. Asking questions, expressing longings, affirming growth, simply delighting in one another's presence. God wants to delight in you, to renew and refresh you, chase away that sadness. But to experience it we have to step into that fertile place where the seed of the Word can grow and communion can take place. In her book *Soul Care in African American Practice*, Barbara Peacock says, [Entering God's rest is a call to come away with all aspects of ourselves in the sweet assurance of his presence](#). How do we bring all aspects of ourselves into prayer? That means 1. **being not doing**. Sit silently without a phone or a book and ask God to speak. You may be fancy. That's typical. Wait it out. Go for a walk and thank God for what you see. Say what comes to mind to the Lord. 2. **communing not accomplishing**. 1. Don't think in terms of accomplishing something or emerging with some big insight. Relax, receive, enjoy. When I started doing this I felt like I had to emerge with something to justify the time. No need to justify; Jesus just wants to fellowship with you. Speak to him as you would a friend, offload burdens, share dreams. Intimate knowledge not informational knowledge. Being not doing, communing not accomplishing.

Power

Now, what if you've neglected Christ? What if you've lived reacting to the world around you instead out of communion with God? Remember the word desolate can also be translated *wilderness*? It's used that way in Luke 3, where Jesus enters the wilderness like Israel for 40 days (3:4; 4:1). There he relives Israel's **wilderness** wanderings and temptations. *But*

instead of repeating her failures, Jesus triumphs at every turn. He overcomes sin and temptation, on our behalf, to give us forgiveness and communion. So even if you've failed, Jesus has secured a pardon for your pandering to the headlines. Even if you've lived in despair and bitterness, Jesus extends mercy and forgiveness. In fact, the night before his crucifixion he withdraws again to the Mt. of **Olives** to pray, where he confesses in weakness, if possible let this cup pass from me, but then he says not my will but your will be done, and he is strengthened drawing power from fellowship with God *to lay his life down for us*. The next day he is crucified for our sins and raised for our life. Jesus relied on intimate knowledge not informational knowledge. Communion is power. Prayer is power. Rest brings Power into our lives. Jesus turned the wilderness a fertile place. And he longs to meet us there, to refresh us with his immense and intimate presence. To remind us his victory is our victory; his power is our power; his track record is our track record. Before we lift a finger to do anything for him, he has done everything for us. So, come and see knowledge isn't power; *Christ* is power. Let's live not by reaction but communion withdrawing frequently into spiritual rest.