

**"God's Plan"**  
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**Mark 1:29-39**

Things happen quickly in the gospel according to Mark. This is still Chapter 1 of Mark's gospel, and Jesus has called his disciples, he cast out a demon from a man in the Synagogue, and now he's gone to Simon's house.

Simon's mother-in-law had a fever. Immediately Jesus took her by the hand and raised her up and she is healed and ready to serve.

The word instantly spread that Jesus can and does heal, and so there was a line up out the door, people needing healing, people needing to be set free from evil. All kinds of people are lined up out the door, all in need of a touch, a word, the new life that Jesus brought.

Finally, the crowd was finished. It must have been incredible for the disciples to see person after person healed. They all must have been exhausted.

I imagine they all slept like rocks after such an exciting and amazing day. But Jesus got up early, before everyone else, while it was still dark, before the crowds, before the needs pressed in, and he went off to a secluded place.

Do all of you have a secluded place, away from the pressures and noise and needs and demands of others?

I know folks who close themselves in the bathroom. Some folks will go for a walk, others have a place at home where they can close a door and find some peace.

The more you try to love others – the more you need time alone with God for prayer.

Jesus needed time alone with his Father. To prepare for the demands that were ahead of him, to be able to bring life to others. Jesus needed time alone with his Father.

How much time do you need? Max Lucado, a pastor I respect, says 4 minutes every day. I don't know if that's enough. How much time does any relationship need? It's certainly a good place to start.

Prayer, connecting in intimate relationship with God, strengthens us and invites us to speak honestly to God our Creator, our Father, our Rock, our healer, and helps us to hear God's good plan for us.

The important thing is that we are plugged into God and God's agenda, and God's priorities. The mission we are serving is God's, not our own. So frequently, daily, we need to seek God, and God's plans.

Loving people sounds like a great idea and we all say yes, we should love people, and yes, we do love people. But then people show up and they want things from us. People are frustrating, annoying, and difficult. Loving many of them isn't easy!

And then there's the problem of exactly how to go about loving them. My kids want things, if I love them do I give them everything they ask for? I don't think so.

I can be nice to people, smile at them, be pleasant, but is that enough? If someone is hungry, it could be argued that I wasn't being very loving unless I actually gave them food.

If a person asks for money from me, and I'm pretty sure she's going to take the money and buy drugs that might kill her, maybe giving money in that case is not being loving. It gets complicated fast.

And then there's my attitude. Because when I help people, genuinely invest myself in others, try to do my best to care and help, I find myself getting tired and resentful fairly quickly, because the needs don't end.

How do I give enough help to really be helpful – and not enabling, or creating co-dependence? How do I love over the long haul and not become resentful or bitter, or cynical?

How do I love freely? Love that needs to be thanked or loved that needs a return on the investment isn't love. How do I learn to love, that shows the love of God, that isn't manipulative or about my compulsive needs?

Jesus shows us. He withdrew from the crowds, and away from his disciples to listen for the voice of God. And when the disciples found him he was **not** ready to do what everyone wanted him to do.

Jesus' primary ministry was not around healing broken bodies and curing diseases. The help he gave, the love he showed, wasn't primarily about the immediate problem. When Jesus did heal, the word that is used is "healing salvation."

The love Jesus brought to people showed the power of God, it says to us that we are beloved of God, we are blessed, our lives have meaning, and we are free to live in Christ and He in us.

That is what our help, our loving others is ultimately to do. We are to bring others into the relationship we have with Jesus. That their lives might not just be helped, but healed, not just finding relief in that moment, but brought to wholeness and they might receive the abundant life that comes not from us, but from Jesus alone.

The last thing I want to note is the challenge Jesus, and all of us, face to continue **God's** path.

Every time the elders, the session of the church meet we pray for all of you, and we pray that we would serve Christ's mission. We pray that we would serve the body of Christ, all of you, well and faithfully.

We pray for God's direction in all the decisions we are called to make because it is easy to lose sight of what **God** is calling us to do.

It's easy to get distracted from our mission by good things that are not God's things, that are not part of ***our*** mission.

Jesus withdrew from the noise and the pressure and the crowds, and even his closest friends, and listened to his Father, and fixed His eyes again on what God was calling Him to do.

Today you are being given a package, and the question it contains is what do you believe God is calling you to do as far as your giving to Calvin church in 2024?

How is God calling you to respond? How is God challenging you? I would encourage you to go to a quiet place with God and ask God that question and discuss it together with God in prayer.

We are all called to love God and our neighbors. We are all called to serve the world God loves in some way, using the gifts we are given.

The way we know what that should look like today, how we should love, how we should give, and the way we will have the *strength*, the *wisdom*, to follow where God leads us, is in that time with our eyes fixed on God in prayer, in quiet, in worship.

Thanks be to God.