



#6 The First Refocus | Pastor Joe Wittwer | July 19, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

After Jesus called his first followers, He rolled up His sleeves and went to work. He taught in the synagogue at Capernaum, freed people who were oppressed by the devil, and healed the sick. He must have gone to bed exhausted. **Mark 1:35-39** reveals what happened next: *“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!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.”* After staying up late into the night helping people, Jesus got up early the next morning and went off by himself to pray. He refocused on God. And when Simon and the other disciples came looking for him to take him back to town, Jesus had other plans. He refocused on His mission.

1. Get refocused on God.

a. Jesus prayed. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus got up early and went off by Himself to pray. He had emptied himself the night before giving of Himself to people, and now it was time to get alone with God and be refilled. It’s useful to note that we see Him behave similarly in the middle of His ministry. Jesus sent the disciples out on a preaching tour, and while they were gone, Jesus’ cousin and friend John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod. When the disciples returned from their tour, Jesus must have been weary from grief and the disciples weary from their mission. But they were besieged with crowds. So Jesus said, *“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest”* (**Mark 6:31**). They got into a boat and sailed away to remote place, but the crowds figured out where they were going and were there waiting for them there. But rather than sending them away, Jesus had compassion on them and taught them. And at the end of that long day, He took a little boy’s meal and multiplied it to feed the whole crowd! Finally, he told the disciples to get into the boat while He dismissed the crowd. Then He went away alone to pray. Notice that He didn’t write prayer off as a lost opportunity. He *made* the opportunity just as soon as pressing ministry matters were settled. Likewise, at the end of His ministry, **Mark 14:32-42** records that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Facing death on the cross, Jesus once again got alone and prayed. **Luke 5:16** tells us *“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”* He needed quiet communion with God. If Jesus, the sinless Son of God, needed to pray, how much more do we? Often we pray best when we do what Jesus did right from the beginning: get away from distractions.

b. Jesus lived in humble dependence on His Father. The fact that Jesus prayed suggests He depended on God, and this dependence is the way He wants us to live. Jesus prayed to get His bearings and fresh direction. He asked God what He wanted for today. All of us want to be successful; however, when we succeed, it’s easy to become proud and take too much of the credit ourselves. If we’re not careful, success can derail us. **2 Chronicles 26:5 & 15-16** records that *“King Uzziah sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success. . . . His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful. But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.”* This disorientation and downfall is why it’s significant that Jesus followed up his successful day first day of ministry by slipping away to pray alone.

c. Jesus lived with rhythm. There is a beautiful rhythm or balance in the life of Jesus. He was surrounded by people clamoring for His help, but He never seems rushed or busy. He had

time and energy for people—and for God. Our leader lived with a rhythm of give and receive, public and private, being with crowds and being alone, teaching and prayer, engagement and withdrawal. He stayed up late into the night helping people, and then He went off alone to be refilled and refreshed. To follow the leader, we need to learn the same. We need to live with balance and rhythm, and not let ourselves get caught up in a rat-race where we find ourselves perpetually depleted and exhausted. Here are some suggestions: First, observe the weekly the rhythm of the Sabbath. Every seventh day, stop working, rest and worship God. Jesus thought it was important to get up early and leave the house and pray. Second, observe a daily rhythm of time with God. Daily time with God isn't commanded in the Bible, but it's modeled by Jesus. Before He stood before men and spoke, He knelt before God and listened. We should make time in our day to pray, to ponder the Scripture, to listen to God, to be still, and to worship.

2. Get refocused on your mission. When the disciples woke up the next morning after that first day of ministry, a crowd had gathered at the door. But Jesus was gone. When the disciples found Him, Peter told Jesus the crowd was back. **Mark 1:38-39** records Jesus' stunning answer: *"Let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."* So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons." The people tried to keep Jesus from leaving, but Jesus was focused. **Luke 4:43** fleshes out Jesus' purpose: *"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."* Jesus had a clear sense of mission: to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God. He didn't let other people's agendas derail or distract Him. It's easy for Christians to be pulled off course and lose sight of their mission. We can be distracted by good things and well-intentioned people. To stay focused on God's purposes, we must do what Jesus did: regularly meet with God, and let Him refocus us on our mission.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. If Jesus, who was perfect, needed to take special care to be with God and pray, what does that say to us as His followers? What helps remind you of your need to be close to God?
2. We have lots of great technologies and incredible opportunities these days that foster an "interruption-driven" life (for example, cell calls, texting, emails, many entertainments, social and ministry opportunities, etc.). How can these things distract you from God, and what's the most distracting for you?
3. What helps you refocus on God, and how can you restore some of the key rhythms in your life? When and where are you best able to give your undivided attention to God *daily*?
4. What's the difference between solitude and loneliness? How comfortable and successful are you with seeking solitude? What helps you focus on God during solitude? How comfortable are you in silence, and what experiences have you had being still before God? If you're particularly good at such stillness, what did it take to develop that discipline?
5. We have some clear purposes as Christians and as a church: **Love**—God & People; **Win**—Find, Tell, Bring; **Grow**—Meet, Seek, Serve, Give, and Share; and **Send**—new leaders and churches. What are some ways you participate in these various calls? [Leaders: samples are fine—an exhaustive coverage of these things in each person's life could go on forever. ☺]

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- If you haven't taken up the 40/40 challenge, there's no time like the present!
- Reflect on your daily quiet time and consider if it has the kind of rhythm Jesus modeled.
- For resources, go to www.lifecenter.net for the Bible-reading plan and Joe's journaling blog.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for providing what we need and reminding us of our dependence on Him.
- Find ways to get away and pray in solitude often. Pray what's on your mind, and turn it back to God so He can help you refocus. Ask Him to lead your heart.
- Pray that God would help orient you towards how He would have *you* carry out the fundamental Christian purposes we describe at Life Center as **Love, Win, Grow** and **Send**.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during your discussion.