

Series: Hidden Life

March 11, 2018

Title: Bread in the Desert

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Text: Mark 4:35-41

Hitting the Wall

Runner's worst nightmare:

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She woke up that morning ready to run the race of her life. Waiting for the starting gun with the thousands of other runners, she pictured the next 26 miles, fine-tuning her race strategy. This could be – no, *would be* – the day she ran the greatest race of her life!

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And then at mile 20 it happened. Her energy level crashed through the floor. Without warning, her feet felt like they had turned to lead. She had nothing left. She was living the marathoner's worst nightmare: She had just "hit the wall," "bonked," "blown up." Race over.

"Hitting the wall" is a well-known phenomenon for long distance runners and cyclists. It happens when an athlete's reserves of glycogen become severely depleted. Glycogen is a form of sugar that the body stores in muscles and the liver. Long distance athletes depend upon this stored sugar to keep going, but after 2 hours of intense exercise, this energy reserve can run out, causing the athlete to become hypoglycemic. And when that happens, you bonk.

The cure for hitting the wall or bonking requires two things: food and rest. Get more sugar stored up in your liver and muscles and you're good to go.

Exhaustion:

Robert Quinn says that when we are on a journey of transformation, we face pitfalls that can blow up our race.

- The first is the pitfall of ***Illusion***. Think of the runner who dashes out to the front of the pack with illusions of coming in first, only to get reeled in by the other runners half way through the race.
- The second is the pitfall of ***Panic***. To win a race, you have to know when to make your move. You may stay back in the pack for much of the race, saving your strength. But there comes a point in the race when it's "now or never." Hesitate, and you lose. You've got to take the risk of putting all of your energy into the race right now and hope you have enough left for the finish line!
- The third pitfall is that of ***Exhaustion***. Exhaustion stalks us especially when we've experienced a breakthrough and are functioning on a whole new level. We feel lots of energy and enthusiasm. Things are finally clicking. If we just keep pushing, we'll conquer the world! Then, all of a sudden, we hit the wall and come to a crashing stop.

Hitting the Wall:

Jesus' disciples were in danger of doing just that when they came back from an extended two person mission to the village of Galilee. He sent them on their way with specific instructions to travel light!

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Mark 6:8-9 NIV

These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt."

These were "Exodus Journey" instructions. On the night of the Exodus, God commanded the Israelites to eat their last meal in Egypt in a very special way:

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Exodus 12:11 NIV

"This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover."

So out the disciples went, two by two, doing the same work Jesus had been doing: announcing the arrival of God's Kingdom, healing the sick, and casting out evil spirits. In their journey they were totally dependent upon God to guide their way and meet their needs. It was a New Exodus journey.

And when they finally came back to Jesus, the crowds were bigger than ever (testimony to the success of their mission!), and Jesus could see they needed a much deserved rest:

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Mark 6:31 NIV amended

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a desert place and get some rest."

On Empty

A failed retreat?

Mark tells us that they got in a boat and went to "a desert place" where they could be by themselves. But not before the locals caught wind of their plan:

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Mark 6:33 NIV

But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Which raises the question: Did Jesus fail in his mission to give His disciples some much needed rest? After all, it seems that they jumped from the frying pan into the fire. And I can only imagine how their hearts must have sunk when they saw a gigantic welcoming committee waiting for them as they came ashore.

So much for a quiet time in a desert place.

Two responses:

The needy crowd evoked two very different responses from Jesus and His disciples:

- Mark tells us that Jesus felt a deep compassion for them because they were like “sheep without a shepherd.” (Mark 6:34) So, He began teaching them about God’s coming Kingdom.
- The disciples had a very different response:

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Mark 6:35-36 NIV amended

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a desert place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

Here are the classic signs of spiritual and emotional burnout. The disciples have nothing left to give. Instead, they want to just send the crowd of men, women and children away. Let them fend for themselves. If they’re hungry, well, that’s their problem. They should have thought about that before they ran off to chase down Jesus!

Again, we face the question: Did Jesus fail in His mission to give His disciples some much needed rest?

On Empty

And what Jesus does next would seem to only make things worse! He turns the problem back to them:

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Mark 6:37 NIV

But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They are, of course, incredulous. They answer by saying, “You want *us* to go buy food for this mob? Don’t you remember, you were the one who told us to go out with no money in our pockets. Get real!”

Jesus responds by asking not what they don’t have, but what they *do* have.

[Slide 10]*Mark 6:38 NIV**"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."*

What a question! These guys are already coming unglued, and then Jesus asks them to go inventory the pantry? But Jesus, of course, knows exactly what He's doing. He is helping the disciples see that they don't have *anything* for this situation – not physically, not spiritually, not emotionally. They aren't going to fix this.

But there is one other option!

Bread in the Desert**New Exodus:**

The other option is to see this whole adventure as part of a brand new Exodus journey. Remember the command that the disciples go out on mission with one set of clothes, sandals and a walking stick? This was Exodus equipment for an Exodus Journey. This is the only way that God's Kingdom would ever come.

That is why Jesus' next command is to have the massive crowd sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties. This arrangement recalled the ordering of the Israelite camp in the desert. Mark tells us that they sat down on the "green grass." God had promised that when He brought His people on their New Exodus, He would turn the desert into a lush garden.

And so the stage was set for Jesus to make a desert place filled with hungry people a place of refreshment and rest.

Feed the 5000:

With the crowd seated and the five loaves and two fish in His hand, Jesus prayed a prayer of thanks to His Father and began breaking the loaves and dividing the fish. Mark tells us:

[Slide 11]*Mark 6:41b-43 NIV*

Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up 12 basketsful of broken pieces of bread and fish.

Just as God had provided manna in the desert for Israel on the Exodus Journey, now He provided a feast of bread and fish for a renewed Israel on their New Exodus Journey. Even the leftovers tell the same story: 12 baskets of food representing the 12 tribes of Israel – an Israel newly formed in the desert under the leadership of a new Moses.

Bread in the Desert:

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Jesus is calling you and me to take that same New Exodus Journey. When we step out in faith to follow Him, we soon discover that the world is even more broken and needy than we ever knew. No matter how hard we work or fervently we pray, we will always be surrounded by an endless sea of needy people.

And when we look inside, we will see that we are *just as needy as everyone else*. We can't ever feed the crowd. We're lucky if we have 5 saltines and a couple of anchovies. But all Jesus asks of us is that we put our tiny resources in His hands. And when we do, we find that He meets our every need, and blesses a needy world at the same time.