



Time to Go Back Already?

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Every August I hear the same refrain: *"Where did summer go?"* One day we are enjoying vacations, family gatherings, mission trips, conferences, and a slower pace. The next day classrooms are opening, worship schedules are returning to full speed, meetings are filling the calendar, and ministry once again seems to move at breakneck speed.

Church workers know this rhythm well. Whether you serve as a pastor, teacher, musician, administrator, or in another ministry role, August often feels like someone suddenly pressed the fast-forward button.

Mark's Gospel understands that feeling. More than forty times Mark tells us something happened "immediately," "at once," or "without delay." Yet Jesus never appears rushed or overwhelmed. His urgency is grounded in purpose rather than pressure.

There is a difference between living with God's purpose and living under the pressure to do everything for everyone. I often see church workers wrestling with this tension. We carry many stories about who we believe we must be. We also experience different "parts" of ourselves pulling in different directions. One part wants to faithfully serve. Another wants everyone to be happy. Another worries about making mistakes. Another simply longs for rest.

The good news is that Jesus meets every part of us with grace. We do not have to silence our fears or pretend they do not exist. We can acknowledge them honestly while allowing Christ to remind us that our identity is rooted not in performance but in God's promise made in Baptism: we are beloved children of God.

As Fall begins, I invite you to reflect on what the Gospel of Mark can teach us.

A New Beginning: Mark 1:1–15

Mark doesn't begin with lengthy introductions. He begins with action because God's work is already underway before anyone recognizes it. As August begins, many church workers unknowingly rehearse stories like:

- *"I have to get everything right."*
- *"People expect me to have all the answers."*
- *"This year has to be better than last year."*

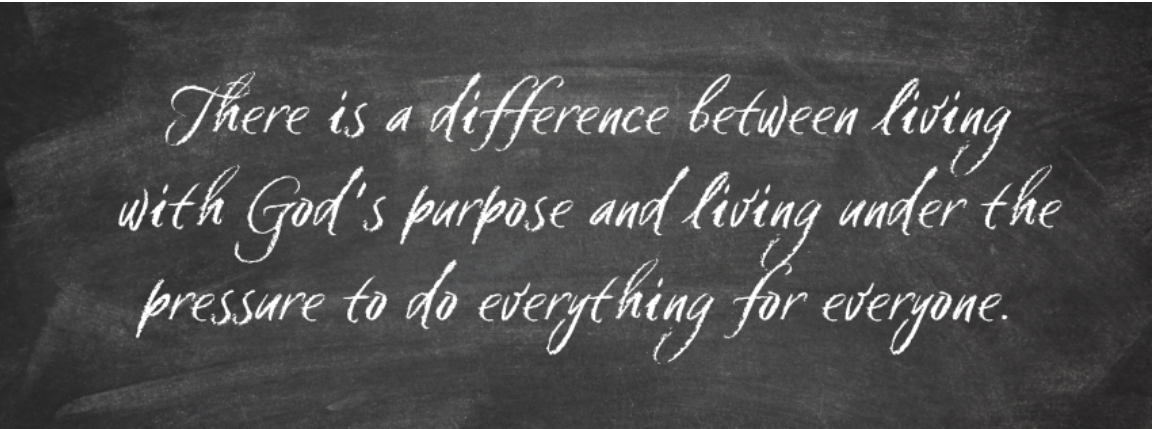
The Gospel tells a different story. The true story begins with God's initiative, not ours. Before we accomplish anything, Christ has already come near. Before we make our plans, God is already at work.

Questions to Ponder

- What story am I carrying into this new ministry season?
- Which story comes from fear rather than faith?
- How has God already been working before I arrived?

Exercise

Take ten quiet minutes this week. Write two short paragraphs. In the first, describe the story your anxious or pressured part tells about the coming year. In the second, rewrite that story through the promises of Scripture. Begin each sentence with, *"Because Christ has already come near..."* Notice how the narrative changes when God's grace becomes the central character.



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Back to School Blessing: Mark 1:16–28

Jesus calls ordinary fishermen. They are ordinary people who become extraordinary disciples because Jesus calls them. Many church workers quietly wonder if they are enough. Jesus does not wait until the disciples feel ready. He simply says, "Follow me."

Questions to Ponder

- Which part of me feels inadequate right now?
- What would it hear if Jesus called it by name?
- Where is Christ inviting me to trust his calling more than my confidence?

Exercise

Imagine your worried part sitting beside Jesus on a lakeshore. Write a brief conversation between them. Allow Jesus to respond with compassion rather than criticism. End by writing one sentence describing how your perspective changed after hearing Christ's invitation.

Restoring What Is Broken: Mark 1:29–45

Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law and then continues ministering long into the evening. Yet before dawn he withdraws to pray. Many church workers have strong caretaker parts that instinctively place everyone else's needs first. While these parts often arise from love, they can also become overwhelmed if they never receive care themselves. Rest is not the opposite of ministry. Rest is part of faithful ministry.

Questions to Ponder

- What part of me struggles to stop working?
- When do I confuse being busy with being faithful?
- What restores my relationship with God rather than simply distracting me?

Exercise

Draw three circles labeled **God**, **Others**, and **Self**. Prayerfully reflect on how your emotional, spiritual, and physical energy has been invested over the past month. Ask yourself whether these circles reflect healthy stewardship. Choose one restorative practice to intentionally schedule this week.

Making Room for Faith: Mark 2:1–12

The friends carrying the paralytic refuse to let obstacles prevent them from bringing someone to Jesus. They literally make room where none appears to exist. Today's obstacles often look different. Meetings. Emails. Text messages. Lesson plans. Budgets. Administrative deadlines. When productivity becomes our identity, there is little room left for wonder, prayer, or listening.

Questions to Ponder

- What currently occupies most of my mental space?
- What story is shaping my daily decisions?
- Where could I intentionally create room for Christ this week?

Exercise

Review your calendar for the coming week. Circle every commitment that nourishes your relationship with God and every commitment that primarily serves others. Is there protected space simply to be with Christ? If not, schedule fifteen uninterrupted minutes of prayer or Scripture reading before scheduling anything else.

Prayer for Church Workers

"Dear God, thank you for calling these workers to serve in our church. As a new school year begins, please fill them with your wisdom, joy, and peace. Give them strong patience for the days they feel tired, and open doors for them to plant seeds of your love in every heart. Protect their health, guide their words, and bless the time they spend with our students. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Upcoming Events

October 10 – We Care 5K at St Stephens Lutheran Church in Longwood, FL. Participate with us in person OR virtually on your own. No matter how you complete your 5K, you will be making a difference! <https://runsignup.com/Race/FL/Longwood/LCSWeCare5k>

Host an LCS Sunday! We would love to visit your church to talk about mental health and the services we offer. Email laura@lcsfl.com to get a Sunday set up.

If you or someone you know is in need of a safe place to change their story or if you would like to give back to Lutheran Counseling Services, visit lcsfl.com to learn more.