

# Deeper Dive: FaceTime with Jesus

## *Mark 1:35 — The Presence that Transforms*

### 1. Context: The Rhythm of Jesus' Ministry in Mark 1

Mark's Gospel moves fast. By the end of the first chapter, Jesus has been baptized (vv. 9–11), tempted (vv. 12–13), called disciples (vv. 16–20), preached (v. 21), cast out demons (v. 25), healed the sick (v. 34), and drawn crowds so large that the city could hardly contain them.

And then, right in the middle of the momentum, comes verse 35:

*“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.”*

It's a moment of quiet defiance against the tyranny of busyness.

N.T. Wright writes,

*“When everyone else was demanding more of Him, Jesus went away. Not because He didn't care, but because He cared too deeply. He could only be about His Father's work if He spent time in His Father's presence.”* (*Mark for Everyone*, p. 18)

Mark presents a rhythm woven through the life of Jesus:

**Ministry → Solitude → Renewal → Mission.**

He withdraws after success (Mark 1:35), after exhaustion (Mark 6:46), and before suffering (Mark 14:32–42). Each time, prayer is not escape but engagement — a return to the source of power, wisdom, and identity.

Michael Gorman calls this rhythm *“cruciform participation.”*

*“Prayer is not a retreat from mission but the means of remaining aligned with the self-emptying love of the Father.”* (*Cruciformity*, p. 102)

### 2. Linguistic Study: The Meaning of “Face”: Presence and Relationship

The sermon title *FaceTime with Jesus* captures a beautiful biblical truth: the “face” of God is a metaphor for His **presence**.

#### Old Testament Background

The Hebrew word פָּנִים (*panim*) literally means *face*, but it's often used to mean *presence* or *before*. When the psalmist says, “Seek His face always” (Ps. 105:4), it's not about seeing God's features — it's about *being with Him*.

- **Exodus 33:11:** “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”
- **Numbers 6:24–26:** “The LORD make His face shine upon you...”
- **Psalms 27:8:** “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”

In each case, *face* = *nearness, relationship, relational favor*.

Christopher J.H. Wright describes this as “the covenantal presence of God — a nearness that defines Israel's identity.” (*Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 212)

## New Testament Echoes

In Greek, the word πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*) carries the same relational tone — it literally means *face* or *person*, and implies presence.

- **2 Corinthians 4:6:** “God... has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”
- **2 Corinthians 3:18:** “We all, with unveiled faces, contemplate the Lord's glory and are being transformed into His image.”

The progression is stunning:

In the Old Testament, the face of God was sought.

In the Gospels, the face of God is **revealed in Jesus**.

In the Church, the face of Christ shines **through His people**.

## 3. Intertextual Connections: Meeting God Face to Face

Throughout Scripture, moments of divine encounter happen “face to face”, each one revealing more of God's character and His desire for intimacy.

### a. Exodus 33:7-11 Moses and the Tent of Meeting

“The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”

The Tent of Meeting was a *solitary place* where Moses left the camp's chaos to commune with God. Mark 1:35 deliberately echoes this imagery: Jesus leaves the house, goes to a solitary place, and speaks with the Father.

Like Moses, Jesus models **intercessory friendship** — prayer not as formality, but as friendship.

As Beale notes in *The Temple and the Church's Mission*,

“God’s presence in the tent was a foretaste of the temple — and in Christ, the temple presence has become mobile, personal, and relational.” (p. 187)

### **b. 1 Kings 19:9-13 Elijah and the Whisper**

Elijah, burned out and afraid, hides in a cave until God’s gentle whisper restores him. Jesus’ early morning solitude carries the same spiritual DNA — silence that heals, quiet that clarifies.

Henri Nouwen wrote,

“Without solitude, it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside time to be with God and listen.”  
(*The Way of the Heart*, p. 13)

### **c. Psalm 27:8-9 “Your Face, LORD, Do I Seek.”**

David’s prayer captures the posture Jesus demonstrates: longing for God’s presence as the greatest good. Jesus’ pattern of early morning prayer is not duty but desire — an answer to that same prayer.

### **d. The New Covenant Fulfillment: Jesus as the Meeting Place**

In John 1:14, we are told the Word “tabernacled” among us. Jesus *is* the Tent of Meeting — the new temple presence of God. To have “FaceTime with Jesus” is to come to the One who now mediates that same relational presence in human form.

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” *John 14:9*

## **4. The Discipline of Solitude and Silence**

Mark says Jesus went to a *solitary place*: in Greek, *erēmon topon*, literally *a deserted place*. The same word is used for “wilderness.”

The wilderness is where Jesus was tempted (Mark 1:12–13). Now it becomes where He prays. The space of testing becomes the space of communion.

Dallas Willard wrote,

“Solitude frees us from the compulsions of the world so that we can be genuinely present to God.”  
(*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 160)

Michael Gorman connects this solitude to **cruciform formation**, ie, prayer that reshapes us into Christ’s likeness through self-emptying trust:

“The prayer life of Jesus is the cruciform life in miniature — an enacted dependence that mirrors His obedience even unto death.” (*Cruciformity*, p. 115)

## 5. Beholding and Becoming: The Transformational Gaze

When Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that we “contemplate the Lord’s glory and are being transformed,” he’s describing what happens in prayerful attention — **we become what we behold**.

The Greek word *katoptrizō* (κατοπτρίζω) means “to reflect as in a mirror” or “to gaze upon.” It implies both seeing and being seen — a mutual recognition that changes the one who looks.

As N.T. Wright says,

“The act of looking to God is itself transforming, because you become like what you worship.” (*Paul: A Biography*, p. 291)

This is what happens in prayer: To behold His face is to be remade in His likeness.

## 6. From Temple to Table to Heart: The Expanding Presence of God

G.K. Beale traces a sweeping story through Scripture — from God’s presence dwelling in the **Garden**, to the **Temple**, to **Christ**, to the **Church**, to the **New Creation**.

“The entire story of the Bible is about God’s presence expanding until it fills the whole earth.” (*The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, p. 391)

When Jesus prays in Mark 1:35, He embodies the true and mobile temple presence of God. And through the Holy Spirit, that same presence now dwells in believers (1 Cor. 3:16). Every time we pray, the holy space of meeting is reopened — not in a building, but in the heart.

## 7. Modern Reflection: Recovering Sacred Attention

The phrase *FaceTime with Jesus* hits differently in our age of screens. We spend hours connecting through glowing rectangles but still hunger for real presence. Silence feels unproductive, but in God’s kingdom, it’s the soil where intimacy grows.

John Mark Comer warns,

“We are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion.”  
(*The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p. 42)

To seek His face in the modern world is an act of resistance — to turn from constant noise and offer our attention as worship. Faithfulness in prayer isn't about mastering words; it's about mastering attention.

James K.A. Smith reminds us,

“You are what you love, and you love what you give your attention to.”  
(*You Are What You Love*, p. 23)

## 8. Reflection and Practice

### Suggested Readings:

- Psalm 27 – “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”
- Exodus 33 – Moses' friendship with God.
- John 15 – Abiding in Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 3 – Transformed by beholding.

### Spiritual Practice:

Try a *10-Minute Stillness Challenge*: set a timer, silence your phone, and simply be still before God. Don't talk, just attend. End by praying Numbers 6:24-26 slowly.

### Summary

Mark 1:35 is more than a verse about prayer — it's a window into the heart of Jesus.

In a world of hurry, He sought stillness.

In the noise of success, He sought silence.

In the demands of ministry, He sought the Father's face.

To follow Jesus is to share that rhythm: to withdraw in order to return, to listen in order to act, to behold in order to become.

“The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.” *Numbers 6:25*