

**IF YOU WANT TO
WALK ON WATER
YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THE
BOAT**

Session Four:
Facing Our Challenges,
Conquering Our Fears

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It is hard enough to get out of the boat when the wind is calm and the water's smooth. But in life that is rarely the case. Sooner or later the storm strikes – in your marriage, work, ministry, finances, or health. It is in the act of facing the storm that you discover what lies inside you and decide what lies before you... Storms have a way of teaching what nothing else can.

John Ortberg

Questions to Think About

1. What are your expectations when you launch into a new adventure with God? What role do obstacles and challenges play in your walk with God?
2. What is God's most common command in the Bible?
3. What are the benefits of being fearful? In what ways is fear detrimental?

Sermon Reflection

1. In what ways can you relate to the experience of Joseph – expecting that the worst was over only to find out that an even greater challenge was just ahead? How do such situations affect your trust in God?
2. What are your observations regarding our vulnerability to temptation when our lives don't turn out as we had planned?
3. What three qualities did Joseph demonstrate through his life that are common to all people who not only survive but grow through difficult challenges?

Large Group Exploration

Good News or Bad News, Keep on Walking

Many of us are familiar with the Old Testament story of Joseph, which reveals the ups and downs of a young man's life. Let's explore aspects of Joseph's story, taking note of how he kept choosing to walk with God no matter what storms came his way.

1. According to Genesis 37:11, what created division between seventeen-year old Joseph and his brothers?
2. How did Joseph's brothers resolve their problem with him? [see Genesis 37:31-34]
3. Genesis 39:1-20 reveals what happened to Joseph following his arrival in Egypt.
 - a. What positive things happened to Joseph?
 - b. What storm threatened to destroy everything Joseph had worked to accomplish?
4. Because of the lies of Potiphar's wife, Joseph was in prison for years. Genesis 39:20-41:14 reveals what happened to him during that time.
 - a. How do we know that Joseph continued to walk with God even while he was unjustly imprisoned? [see Genesis 39:20-23]
 - b. In time, two of Pharaoh's officials – his baker and his cupbearer – were imprisoned and placed under Joseph's care. What did Joseph notice about them one day? What does this reveal about how Joseph was handling this storm in his life? [see Genesis 40:1-7]

- c. Both of the officials had dreams they did not understand. Because Joseph knew that interpretations of dreams come from God, he told the officials what their respective dreams meant. What did he ask the cupbearer in return, and what was the result? [see Genesis 40:9-15,23]
- d. After the cupbearer was released, two years passed before he remembered Joseph. Imagine, for a moment, how you would responded if you had been Joseph. How might these circumstances have affected your walk with God? Read Genesis 41:14-16, then describe the status of Joseph's walk with God.

The Resilience Factor

People who not only survive but grow through difficult situations have three qualities in common:

- They take action, seeking to reassert some command over their destiny rather than viewing themselves as helpless victims.
- They have a larger-than-usual capacity for what might be called moral courage – for refusing to betray their values.
- They find meaning and purpose in their suffering.

Small Group Exploration

Choose Trust, Not Fear

Let's look again at Peter's water-walking experience and then consider other passages of Scripture that will encourage us to choose to trust God and depend on him to lead us through life's storms.

1. When Peter first got out of the boat and saw the wind, he became afraid, starting to sink, then cried out to Jesus to save him. How did Jesus respond to Peter's cry for help? [see Matthew 14:31]
2. Most of us aren't literally stepping out of boats and walking on water during fierce storms, but we face other kinds of wind. What kinds of wind can cause us to become afraid, lose faith, and doubt?
3. In the Bible we find 366 commands from God not to be afraid. These are not empty, wishful-thinking commands; they are backed by the power, character, and love of God, What do the following verses reveal about choosing to trust God rather than fearing the challenges we face?

- a. Psalm 23:4

 - b. Psalm 27:1

 - c. Isaiah 43:1-4

 - d. Hebrews 13:5-6
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4. Many people whose stories are recorded in the Bible chose to take a step of faith and trusted God to be with them through difficult situations rather than to succumb to fear and give up. Read the following passages and describe how the individuals involved trusted God and took action in the face of great risk,
- a. Daniel 1:1-15

 - b. B. Exodus 1:22-2:10

The High Price of Fear

Fear motivates us to take action and remove ourselves from whatever is threatening us. Fear readies our body to flee, hide, or fight. Fear can help protect us from harm. When fear rather than trust becomes our solution to difficult situations, however, fear exacts a devastatingly high price. Consider the following drawbacks of fear:

- Fear can strike when it is not helpful or wanted.
- Fear can be paralyzing instead of motivating.
- Fear can cease to be sporadic and become habitual worry.
- Fear threatens to keep us from trusting and obeying God.
- Fear that causes us to avoid a difficult situation instead of facing it head on and taking action kills personal growth. When we take the easy way out, we feel badly about ourselves because we learn that we can't cope with life's greatest challenges.
- Living in fear keeps us from experiencing our God-given potential.
- Living in fear destroys our joy and robs us of life's delights.
- Living in fear causes us to focus on the negative.
- Living in fear creates a loss of intimacy between us and other people. We become afraid to say what we think or feel, afraid of the pain of conflict.
- Living in fear causes us to believe that God can't, or won't, take care of us.
- Fear limits hopes, dreams, and callings.

Group Discussion

1. Consider your life thus far and share times when God may have allowed you to face storms in order to teach you to step out of the boat and trust him. Describe what happened.
2. What else do you think God wants us to learn about him when things in life don't go as planned?
3. Joseph was resilient and found meaning and purpose in his life, even when the challenges just kept coming. What can we do to maintain our focus on God and keep on walking when storms engulf us?
4. John Ortberg writes, "Growth happens when you seek or exert control where you are able to rather than giving up in difficult circumstances. It happens when you decide to be wholly faithful in a situation that you do not like and cannot understand. It happens when you discover that, somehow, you are not alone. As he was with Joseph, the Lord is also with you."

What encouragement does this offer you? Why?

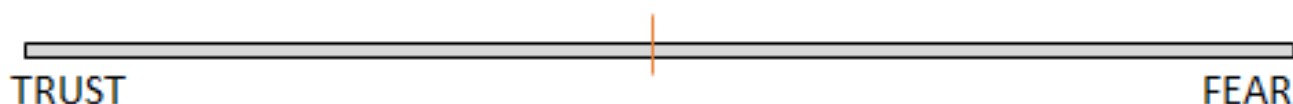
Personal Journey: To Do Now

1. Have difficult storms in your life caused you to become more resilient, or more fearful?
 - a. What has been the result of your resilience or fear?
 - b. In what ways are you satisfied or dissatisfied with that result?
2. When you are confronted by threatening storms, what kind of temptations do you face?
 - a. In what areas are you most vulnerable to temptation?
 - b. How do you respond to those temptations?
3. Identify the areas in which you would like to step out in faith and trust God. What steps might you begin taking to accomplish this?
4. What benefits might you receive if you were to step out of your comfort zone?

Personal Journey: To Do On Your Own

God longs for us to trust him, to water-walk in faith and grow to love him more. He wants to replace our fear with faith. But if he is to work effectively in our lives, we have to face our fears honestly. Set aside some time to do the following exercises.

1. Rate your normal response to the storms of life on this trust-fear continuum:



2. In what ways has fear limited your growth in relationship to God? In relationship to other aspects of life?
3. Think about who God is and how he has revealed himself to you in the past. How does what you have experienced with him already help you step out of the boat?
4. List anything in your life that causes you to feel fearful and describe the ways in which that fear has affected your life. Then identify steps you can take to begin trusting God more and start water-walking.
[see next page.]

What I Fear	How that Fear Has Affected My Life	Steps of Trust I Can Take

5. Choose one of the fears you have described above and take the chance to “feel the fear and do it anyway.”