

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

WEEK # 3

IGNITE!



Re-Discovering the
Christian

Passionate
Life

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Matthew 14:25-29a (NIV)

What do you dream of?

As familiar as many of us may be with this story, I wonder about a lot of the untold aspects of it. One of the biggest is, why would Peter want to walk on water? But that may not be such a big question really, after all he had grown up on the water. A fisherman who was most probably the son of a fisherman, the basis of his life and livelihood was built upon the water. He had swam in it, fished in it, bathed in it, and played in it. But one thing that he could never do was walk on it, until the chance presented itself.

Ever look back in regret for something you didn't do when you had the chance? Have you ever played the game "If only I had..."? We make decisions in our lives every day and probably have regrets for some of them just as often. Don't let the opportunity to obey God pass you by and then lead you to regrets for the opportunity you missed. I have talked with many a person who looked back and wished they had said something to a friend or family member about their life and how God loved them, but would no longer have the chance. Obedience is never convenient, but always fulfilling. And it leads to a life of no regrets, no wishes for what could have been, no unfulfilled potential.

What has God laid on your heart that you are putting off doing? Why not go do it now? Don't wait any longer.

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

Matthew 14:28-29 (NIV)

“But what happens if????”

It's one thing to talk a good game; it's another to play it. It's easy to ask to walk on water; it's another to take that first step out of the boat. Jesus said “Come,” and suddenly the options became limited: To obey and demonstrate the trust and faith Peter had in Jesus, or to step back and say, “I trust you, but that's okay.”

When the number of people who claim a faith in Christ are considered, it is a massive amount of the population of our country. But when you look at our culture and the things that happen, including the things that these so-called Christians do, it seems that there are a whole lot of people who haven't taken that first step into transformed obedience. Our fear of being different, of upsetting people, of making a mistake, or not doing something well freezes our faith into a glacial movement that doesn't change our own lives let alone the world.

1 John 4 tells us that perfect love drives out all fear and so too should it end our fears that incapacitate us from the life God desires.

What is it that you fear most about obeying God? Why do you feel that way?

Pretend you aren't afraid and try doing that thing today, then write out the result so you can remember how God worked through it.

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“Come,” “Go,” it seems Jesus uses these words a lot. He told Peter to come, He calls on all those who are weak and heavy laden to come unto Him, and commissions all of us to go into all the world. There is a whole lot of coming and going in the Christian faith. Whether we are coming to Jesus or going on His behalf to the world, we always have to leave something behind. That is often the most difficult part of obeying God. It may be a sin we have grown so accustomed to that it is intertwined into the very fabric of our lives as we know it. It may be a friend that we have such strong ties to that it's almost impossible to imagine life without them involved. It may be a routine or way of life that we feel very comfortable in and have no desire to change. All of these are the cemeteries of many souls who just won't leave behind the thing, the people, the environment that strangles their faith and binds their obedience. Saying goodbye is never easy, but it is a part of growth and growing up that is necessary at some time or another.

What is there that you are struggling to leave behind in your relationship with God? Why has it grown to become more valuable than God's desires and commands? Why is your fear of change greater than your faith in God?

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Matthew 14:29-31 (NIV)

Ever see the wind?

The fact that the scriptures tell us that Peter saw the wind fascinates me a little. It is really impossible to “see” the wind, which Jesus himself says in John 3, but you can see the affects of the wind. When the trees whip their branches back and forth, as hats fly off the heads of men as they walk, and pieces of paper dance a dance of wind whipped dips and twirls, we see how the wind affects the world around us. Where did Peter see the wind? Was it in the whipping sounds of Jesus’ clothes as the wind whirled past Him as He walked on the water? Was it on the foam-topped waves as they splashed their way against the boat? Was it the struggle the boat waged against the wind as the disciples scurried to keep headed shoreward? Whatever or wherever Peter looked and saw the wind, it set fear aflame in his heart. Traditionally we would say that he took his eyes off Jesus and that gave birth to the fear that staggered his faith walk.

Where your point of focus is makes a huge difference. What you choose to concentrate on will set the path of your life more than any other thing. We will naturally move to where we are focused whether driving, walking or living. So it begs the question:

What are you focused on in life? What is the thing that is your highest priority in life and how could you or anyone else tell? To get an honest evaluation, ask some people. It may surprise, shock, and frighten you to hear what others see as your chief priority by the way you live.

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Matthew 14:29-31 (NIV)

Failure is like that 500 pound gorilla in the room that we hate to acknowledge, but we know is there. Making the attempt and failing is embarrassing, debilitating, exhausting, and deflating. Whether it be asking someone for a date and being rejected, trying out for a team or solo and not making it, or trying to do the right thing and messing it all up, we hate the idea of failure. Even as we placate our emotions with the understanding that Edison failed so many times to create the light bulb and every great success has failure in their background, the realization that we are prone to fail hits us in the stomach with a sickening thud and creates a rationalization that we shouldn’t even try.

Peter failed in his first “faith-walk.” He tried and for a time did the impossible, but then his doubts and fears overwhelmed him and he sunk into the depths. The encouragement is that, even though (just as Peter did) we will fail as we stretch our spiritual muscles, Jesus will be there to catch us just as He did Peter. Jesus will catch you! He will walk with you and help you through the greatest times of failure and lift you up.

When was the last time you failed when you attempted to do something for God?

How did God move through the failure you experienced?

What have you not tried or done recently for the Lord that you didn’t make the effort because of a fear of not succeeding like you wanted?

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Matthew 14:32-33 (NIV)

Worship can be inspired from many things; the glow of a winter sunset, the brightness of a summer day that heightens the colors of creation, the warmth of a newborn's body held against your chest, the swell of music rising to a crescendo, the sudden understanding of wisdom from God's word, the squeal of brakes that help you narrowly avoid a crash, the thoughts inspired by a quiet night of star gazing. These are all times or events that may stir the embers of worship in our souls. When we encounter a facet of God's character and how He has intersected His grace into our lives it creates a desire to honor Him.

For the disciples, in this passage, their worship is inspired by the overwhelming things they had witnessed in a few short hours; 5,000 men and their families fed miraculously, Jesus walking through a storm on the water, Peter's brief stroll on those same troubled waters, Jesus' rescue, and the sudden calming of the storm that had delayed them on a routine boat trip across the top of the Sea of Galilee. They had seen the miraculous and how could they not worship Him.

The possibility of seeing God do the implausible or impossible is increased anytime we obey the One who has redeemed us. The more we obey, the more God can work through us and in us to bring Himself glory. Your obedience can actually inspire worship. As people see what you do for God they can see not only a heart given over to One who is worthy, but they will also have the chance to see God move through your offering of submission to His will.

Think of a time when you were inspired to praise God through the obedience of another.

What in your life and obedience could inspire others to worship God?

This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1 John 5:2-5 (NIV)

Love for God = obeying His commands.

It is possible to obey God and not love Him. That is the whole point of Jesus' parable of the goats and the sheep in Matthew 25:31-46. There were those who were doing things that honored God and that He desired people to do, but they are condemned in the final judgment because they never "knew" God. They had obeyed Him and tried to serve Him, but they never really knew Him or loved Him.

Our workplace may give us the best environment to understand this. We do things at work because we have to, because it's required, or because we are told to, but that doesn't inspire a love or concern for our employers or co-workers. We are doing what we feel like we have to do, to get what we want—security, a paycheck, or a livelihood. Many are the people who have never come to love God even though they serve Him. Yet God's love equation is for love to produce obedience, to motivate our action.

So what is your motivation?

Do you love God? To really love Him means that you go beyond the appreciation for what He has done, go beyond the "duty" to serve Him, go beyond the rituals to please Him and instead you get to know Him. Before your love produces action, it must be genuine.

Do you love God?

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