

JESUS OVER CREATION

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 14:22-33

CONTEXT

Jesus's popularity surged when He miraculously fed over five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. Unsurprisingly, the crowds wanted more of Jesus. To experience some much needed silence and solitude in the wake of John the Baptist's death, Jesus dismissed the crowds and retreated to a mountain by Himself after having sent His disciples on a boat across the Sea of Galilee. What happened next led the disciples to fear and then worship Jesus as the Son of God.

KEY CONCEPT

Because Jesus can do all things, we don't need to be afraid when following in His steps by faith.

As you examine Matthew 14:22-33:

- Recognize that when trouble arrives, we need not fear because Jesus is with us.
- Focus on Jesus as being worthy of your faith and being the source of your salvation from sin and death.



TIMELINE

Jesus Teaches with Many
Parables (Matthew 13:1-53)

SESSION STUDY: Jesus Walks
on Water (Matthew 14:22-33)

Jesus Raises Lazarus from
the Dead (John 11:1-44)

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand
(Matthew 14:13-21)

Jesus Heals in Gentile Regions
(Matthew 15:21-31)

Daily Readings

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|---|--|
| ☐ Day 1: Matthew 14:22-36 | ☐ Day 4: Luke 14:15-24 |
| ☐ Day 2: Mark 6:45-56 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 14:25-35 |
| ☐ Day 3: Luke 14:1-14 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 46 |



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

WITH JESUS, WE NEED NOT FEAR (MATTHEW 14:22-27).

Underline the reasons the disciples were afraid.

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Well into the night, he was there alone. **24** Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. **25** Jesus came toward them walking on the sea very early in the morning. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said, and they cried out in fear. **27** Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus sent His disciples ahead of Him to the other side of the sea. For the next several hours, Jesus prayed alone on a mountain while His disciples made their trip without Him. Several details are necessary to keep in mind for the following narrative.

First, the disciples’ boat “was already some distance from land” (v. 24). John’s Gospel states the disciples had “rowed about three or four miles” (John 6:19). The Sea of Galilee is seven-and-a-half miles wide, so being some distance from land placed them in the middle of the sea.

LEADER NOTE: In the ancient world, the seas were not a neutral non-entity. Bodies of water were seen as antagonists bent on destruction. Seas often were described as “chaos” and synonymous with the sea monsters (leviathan, behemoth, dragons) that resided within them. Bodies of water were the embodiment of rebellion and death. Perhaps ancient people understood the sea this way because of their inability to control it. Therefore, Jesus’s walking on the seas was all the more shocking, as we will see. It showed He was the One who could control the waters of chaos (recall Gen. 1:1-13).

Second, the disciples were some distance from land while “well into the night” (Matt. 14:23), and Jesus came to the disciples “very early in the morning” (v. 25). This would have been between three and six in the morning. So the disciples were rowing in the dark and dead of night.

Third, the disciples’ boat was “battered by the waves, because the wind was against them” (v. 24). The Sea of Galilee is below sea level, surrounded by steep hills and mountains. This combination of geographic features causes rapid wind shifts and violent weather. With no land nearby, these conditions alone could have been terrifying.



What circumstances can cause you to experience fear?

Notes

In this “perfect storm” of fear, the disciples saw someone walking on the water. While we read this story knowing exactly who was walking on the sea, the disciples did not yet fully grasp Jesus’s identity, so “they were terrified” (v. 26). Since no human can walk on water, they thought they were seeing a ghost. To address their fears, Jesus responded simply: “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” (v. 27).

Why could Jesus tell the disciples to not be afraid?

LEADER NOTE: Matthew pointed out something about Jesus that the Old Testament made clear about God: He has power over the sea and the waves. The disciples had already witnessed this when Jesus calmed the storm (Matt. 8:27; cf. Pss. 65:7; 89:8-9; 107:28-30). Job, commenting on the power and perfection of God, said: “He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8). Jesus does what only God can do.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT: God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

Prior to Jesus’s crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the disciples could experience and enjoy Jesus’s presence only in person because they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, who would be with them always. Now, despite whatever circumstances we face, as Christians we have the Holy Spirit with us at all times, so Jesus, God the Son, is with us always, “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Jesus’s divine presence in our lives should remove our fear.

WITH FAITH FOCUSED ON JESUS, WE CAN WALK AS HE WALKED (MATTHEW 14:28-33).

Underline the reasons Peter began to sink under the waves.

28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter answered him, “command me to come to you on the water.” **29** He said, “Come.” And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. **30** But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me!” **31** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” **32** When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

After seeing what they thought was a ghost and hearing Jesus’s voice, Peter did the unthinkable—he himself dared to walk on water. Remember: Mere mortals cannot walk on water; that’s God’s prerogative alone. But Peter was ready and willing if the faint shadow he saw on the water was in fact Jesus.

What Jesus did next not only displayed the power of His presence but also the power of His voice. At the command of Jesus, Peter stepped out of the boat. Peter could have done this for no one else. Only Jesus has the authority to demand faithful obedience.

And notice the direction Peter walked—directly “toward Jesus” (v. 29). His gaze was fixed on Jesus. Peter understood he could not walk on water by himself. This miracle was a result of Jesus’s power over creation, and Peter had faith in Jesus’s power over creation.

What does faith in Jesus look like for you today?

LEADER NOTE: Biblical faith is not less than mere belief, but it certainly is more than just belief. Faith begins with the intellect. We must believe certain truths about Jesus, including His existence, His full divinity and humanity, and His saving work on the cross. What we know about Jesus grows trust in our hearts. Trust means we are confident in who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Our belief and trust in Jesus finally lead to action. Faith becomes an act of the will in which we surrender ourselves to Jesus and His commands.

Key Concept: Because Jesus can do all things, we don't need to be afraid when following in His steps by faith.

CHRIST CONNECTION

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Jesus's divinity makes Him all-powerful, able to do all things. He invites us to live by faith in His power.

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Notes

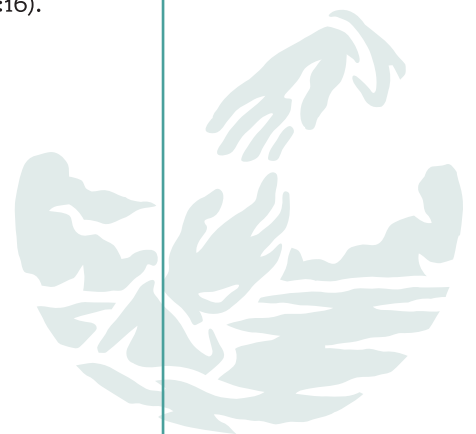
With his eyes on Jesus, Peter's steps stayed on the surface of the billowing sea. But what caught Peter's attention next weakened his faith. He saw "the strength of the wind" and "was afraid" (v. 30). Peter's faith immediately turned to fear because he took his eyes off the source of his faith. In response to Peter's cry for help, Jesus wasted no time reaching out His hand, once again doing what only God can do: "Reach down from on high; rescue me from deep water" (Ps. 144:7). Jesus used His divine power not only to allow Peter to walk on water but also to save him from the water.

LEADER NOTE: Don't miss what Jesus didn't do. Jesus had the power to calm the winds and waves, but when He reached Peter and the other disciples, the wind was still raging. Jesus invited Peter to walk on the water in the middle of the surging waves. He still did not calm the wind. When Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink, Jesus saved him. But He still didn't calm the wind. Jesus's presence and even His salvation does not mean the absence of forces against us, but in the midst of those forces, Jesus can save.

We might assume Peter had zero faith, given his sinking outcome, but Jesus didn't say that. Peter's faith wasn't bankrupt. "Little faith" is not the same as no faith (Matt. 14:31). Peter's response of "Lord, save me!" (v. 30) was similar to that of the man who cried to Jesus in Mark's Gospel: "I do believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

After Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind finally ceased, and then the disciples "worshiped [Jesus] and said, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Matt. 14:33). Their confession foreshadowed the later confession of Simon Peter the doubter: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16).

What are some ways we can grow in our faith in Jesus?



ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As your group arrives, ask: “When have you felt overwhelmed by a situation until someone stronger or more experienced came to help you?” Prepare to share a story from your own life to get the interaction started.

TRANSITION: It can be such a relief when you are feeling overwhelmed to receive help from someone stronger or more experienced. Today we will see how Jesus’s power and presence give us confidence to follow Him by faith—without fear.

CONTEXT

RECALL: Remember the crowd following Jesus wherever He went, even when Jesus was trying to be alone to grieve and pray? He wasn’t angry or frustrated with them; instead, He was moved by compassion and healed their diseases and miraculously fed more than five thousand people. But then Jesus sent His disciples ahead of Him by boat while He stayed behind to dismiss the crowd and to pray. The disciples pushed out onto the Sea of Galilee at night, and once again they faced wind and waves against them. They were exhausted and far from shore. And this time, Jesus wasn’t in the boat with them.

RECAP

ASK: What was one key idea that stood out to you as you prepared this week?

SAY: As you read from Matthew 14 this week, you encountered a moment of fear and exhaustion for the disciples when Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Naturally, they were terrified, but He said, “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” (Matt. 14:27).

TRANSITION: While we think of the setting of the story—a boat in the middle of a large lake with the wind beating against it—let’s work through the passage together, focusing on Jesus’s power over creation. Think about how His presence strengthens our faith and removes our fear as we follow Him.



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Key Concept: Because Jesus can do all things, we don't need to be afraid when following in His steps by faith.

GROUP ACTIVITY

CASE STUDY: Direct your group to page 64 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a case study experience titled “From Fear to Faith.” Recreate the chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s responses as they interact with the Scriptures.

Notes

From Fear to Faith

Case Study: Read Matthew 14:22-33. Consider Simon Peter’s responses to his situation, how you might respond, and what we learn.

FEAR (vv. 24-26)	FAITH (vv. 27-29)	FOCUS (vv. 30-31)
WHAT SHOULD WE LEARN FROM PETER AND THE DISCIPLES’ RESPONSE TO JESUS (vv. 27,32-33)?		

READ: Invite two volunteers to read aloud Matthew 14:22-27 and 28-33.

INSTRUCT: Divide participants into three groups and assign each group either Fear, Faith, or Focus. Instruct the small groups to reread their assigned verses and to write down in their PSG how Peter responded to the situation.

REGROUP: After a few minutes, regroup and invite a representative from each group to present their findings. As they report, record their responses in the chart on the board. Encourage participants to write these observations in their PSG.

REFLECT: Ask the group to reflect individually on what they would have done if they were Simon Peter. Lead your group to think through how fear arises, how faith responds, and how focus on Jesus changes everything, writing down personal responses in the Fear, Faith, and Focus sections in the PSG.

Notes

ENGAGE: Ask follow-up questions such as: “What triggered Peter’s fear? What are some triggers for our own fears? What does Peter’s first step onto the water teach us about faith? What are some ways God might be calling us to have faith and “step out of the boat”? How does Jesus’s response to Peter’s sinking encourage you in your own struggles with faith and doubt?”

DIG: Jesus met His followers at every stage—fearful, bold, distracted, sinking—and offered His presence, peace, and power. For the final section of the activity, with the last row, ask: “What should we learn from Peter and the disciples’ response to Jesus (vv. 27,32-33)? How does seeing the movement from fear to faith to focus help you understand your own walk with Jesus?”

DEBRIEF

Where do you most identify yourself right now—fear, faith, or focus—and why?

How does Jesus’s response to Peter give you peace of mind during hardship?

SUMMARIZE

Keeping our focus on Jesus through this passage, we see that Jesus prayed, and then He came to the disciples in their trouble, strengthened their faith by showing His power, and saved Peter when his faith faltered. Peter walked on water not because he was strong but because Jesus empowered him to do what only Jesus can do. *(Pass out copies of **Pack Item 7: Jesus and Water** and mention how Jesus’s sovereignty as God the Son was displayed through His interactions with water.)* Even when Peter’s focus shifted and fear rose, Jesus was nearer and more faithful than Peter realized. Following Jesus doesn’t mean we will avoid trials and difficulties, but it does mean we never face them alone.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 65). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week’s study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: What we believe about Jesus is essential to our faith. Jesus’s identity determines how much we should believe in and trust Him. Thankfully we can know who Jesus is because of the faithful witness of the Gospels, which offer us a clear and compelling picture of Jesus’s identity as fully human and fully divine.

How does this story help you grasp the deity and humanity of Jesus?



HEART: We can intellectually assent to something about Jesus but not allow that information to affect how we live. It is often during the trials of life that we can truly assess our heart-level trust of Jesus. Nevertheless, we



should regularly check our hearts as we are able with God's Word and God's Spirit to identify what might be preventing us from trusting in Jesus more fully.

Looking at the trials in your life, what barriers to faith and obedience are keeping you from following Jesus more closely?



HANDS: Faith is often proven in action. Peter demonstrated faith in Jesus when he stepped out of the boat. Our faith also will require us to do something with it. Intellectual beliefs and heart-level trust translates to living faith lived out in real time. But this is also when faith gets difficult. Yet we don't need to be afraid because Jesus, the Son of God, has come near to us and He is always with us.

What might God be calling you to do with your faith and focus on Jesus?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Spend time this week meditating on Matthew 14:27. Write it out in your own words and pray it over any area of your life in which fear has been growing.
- Identify a situation in which you sense Jesus calling you to trust Him more boldly. Share that with a trusted friend or group member and ask them to pray with you as you take a step of faith.
- Set aside intentional time for prayer, following Jesus's own example in this passage. Ask God to strengthen your focus on Christ rather than on the wind and waves around you.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 65 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 46:1-3 with your group. Thank God that He is our refuge, and pray that your group will run to Him in times of trouble.

Notes

