



Go
Ahead

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I once took a team of 17 college aged students to Portland, Oregon on a week-long service trip. One day, the mission we worked with loaded up our backpacks with water bottles and granola bars and sent us out with a, "Go ahead, hit the streets!" As I walked around, I started to wonder... What is this granola bar going to do? Will it sustain those who have lost everything? Will it nourish hope into the hopeless? The dealers looked at us like, "Why are you standing on my corner?" The homeless looked at us like, "Don't make me your charity." And I started looking at God like, "Really? You are going to drop me off on the streets with people missing teeth, scratching their flesh off from meth, shooting up heroin like it's an afterschool snack, pimps pimping, and you are going to hand me a granola bar and tell me to go out and do something extraordinary in your name?"

Maybe this is how Jesus' disciples felt too. Maybe this is how they still feel. We are told that God wants to use us in extraordinary ways in the world and that it be possible and we feel like I did that day: unequipped, unsure, unconfident, insecure, scared, doubtful. And yet there I was wandering the streets of P-Town looking for God to do something extraordinary.

Read

²²Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

²⁸"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

²⁹"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" ³²And 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."

*³⁴When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. ³⁵And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him ³⁶and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed. **Matthew 14:22-36***



This collision between Jesus and Peter invites us to understand that the extraordinary is right outside the place we sit and it's ours for the taking. It's interesting because Jesus had just fed 5,000 hangry people with two loaves of bread and some sardines. (For an in depth study about this, check out our *Yes, You Bible study*). It was an incredible sight to see and the people went mad. They were like the paparazzi on crack. They wanted to force Jesus to be king and Jesus will not be forced into our political demands. We can't buy Him off. We can't impress Him with our earthly titles or sway Him with the promise of followers. Jesus will only be king the way He wants to be king.

The crowd pressed into Jesus so He insisted the disciples get into a boat and "go ahead."¹ You have to wonder, what did Jesus know the disciples would experience by journeying ahead without Him? I would imagine they might have wanted to stay with the crowd and see how all this excitement plays out. But Jesus asks them to go ahead and they do.

Reflect

When God asks you to move away from the crowd, do you listen?

What would have been hard about leaving this scene to hop in a boat and set out from shore?

Jesus gets the crowd to dismiss, which is potentially a miracle in and of itself. Then He famously goes up to a mountainside by Himself to pray. Sometimes the best thing we can do when we are surrounded by people who want to make us something we're not, is to get away and be with our Father.



What sticks out to you about the idea that this crowd was trying to force Jesus to be how they wanted Him to be and His first move was to get away and be with God?

How do you feel like sometimes people pressure you to be something you don't feel called to be?

How often do you turn to the Father to be reminded of who He has called you to be when the crowds are pressing in?

The easiest thing in the world to be is *you*.
The most difficult thing to be is *what other people* want
you to be. Don't let them put *you* in that position. - Leo Buscaglia

*When the crowds press into Jesus,
He presses into the Father.*



You and I are often pressed by the crowds, by cultural expectations of what a woman, a wife, a mom should be, by social media, by what our body, our house, our social life should look like, by familial expectations, fulfilling long held generational roles, by friends and bosses and neighbors and... and it all gets to be too much. You and I cannot be all things to all people. You and I cannot be what Instagram wants us to be at the same time as what our boss wants us to be at the same time as what our kids hope we will be at the same time as what our eating disorder wants us to be. The pressure of everyone's expectations has the great ability to create anxiety, fear, worry, settling, and giving in. We can lose a clear sense of who God has called us to be. And the best thing we can do when the pressure is starting to be too much is to sit with our Father, the One who made us, the One who calls us, the One who destines our life. He knows exactly who we are called to be. So when we forget, He will remind us.

Reflect

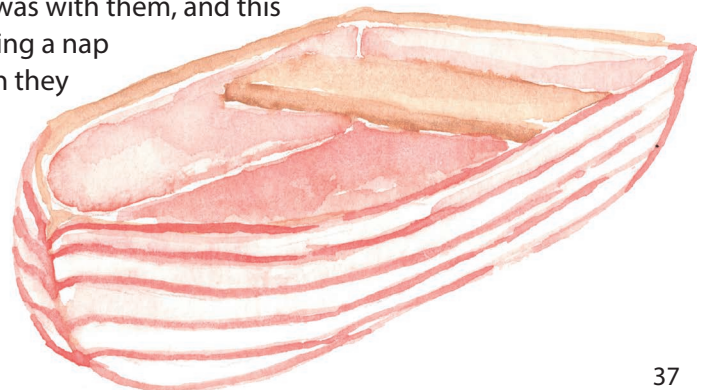
What are some pressures getting to you lately?

How do you see other people's expectations on your life getting in the way of the extraordinary God wants to do in your life?

How can you build time into your life to get away with the Father?

When you do get away with the Father, who do you often hear Him calling you to be?

While Jesus was spending time with the Father, His disciples were travelling in a boat. At one point the boat was 3-4 miles out,² surrounded by strong winds and high waves. These guys had been in a storm like this before, but last time Jesus was with them, and this time He wasn't. Last time, Jesus was annoyingly taking a nap while they all peed their pants, terrified. That's when they woke Jesus up and He told the wind and the waves what to do and they obeyed Him. But this time, they are being tormented by a storm and the One who bosses the wind and waves around is nowhere to be seen.



² Blomberg, C. (1992). Matthew (Vol. 22, p. 234). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Reflect

If Jesus is all-knowing, why would He send His disciples right into the middle of a storm?

Would you conclude that this storm was God's will?

What do you tend to infer from being in the middle of difficult circumstances?

Warren Wiersbe, a theologian, wrote, “The storm came because they were in the will of God and not (like Jonah) out of the will of God. Did Jesus know that the storm was coming? Certainly! Did He deliberately direct them into the storm? Yes! They were safer in the storm in God’s will than on land with the crowds out of God’s will. We must never judge our security on the basis of circumstances alone.”³

Wow, what a challenge! Most of us judge our security based on our circumstances. If Jesus sent them ahead, knowing they would face this storm, we can assume, contrary to the cheap faith we have been sold, that being in God’s will does not always assure “smooth sailing.”

Reflect

Why do we assume being in God’s will looks like smooth sailing?

What might God have for these men to learn, gain or witness by allowing them to experience this storm?

Have you learned, gained or witnessed something from experiencing a storm that you can look back upon and be grateful for?

The disciples were exhausted from battling the elements all night and around 4 a.m.,⁴ they saw what looked like a ghost. They started crying out in fear. The Bible says “... *Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.*” Apparently Jesus didn’t have his own raft. These guys come unglued and Jesus says, “*Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.*” This expression, “It is I,” was often used by God in the Old Testament when He revealed Himself.⁵ Based on what these guys in the storm heard and saw, they had to wonder if Jesus was actually God in their midst.

God was known to pull off miracles with water. God used Moses to part the Red Sea to set His people free. God wanted to confront an unbelieving nation who had put their faith in Baal, the rain god, so He gave Elijah the ability to declare a drought and a downpour showing them who’s actually boss over the rain. God stopped the flow of the Jordan River so that His people would know He was with them. God heard the Israelites complaining of thirst in the desert, wishing to go back to slavery, so God used Moses to call water out of a rock. God saw Jonah running from the call on his life, so He moved His Divine chess pieces. As Jonah got tossed out of a boat, a whale opened its mouth at the right place at the right time to serve as a time out until Jonah could get to a place to say yes to also being at the right place at the right time.

There are so many miracles where God shows He has limitless power over water and Jesus demonstrated the same. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding two thousand years ago, which some of you still praise Him for. Jesus healed a man born blind with His own spit and mud. Jesus could see through water to know where to catch fish. He demonstrated this crazy ability with Peter one time when he was experiencing some seriously disappointing fishing. Jesus told Peter exactly where to put his nets and the boat became so full of fish it almost sank. Jesus did this again after He beat death like a boss and then showed up to Peter and the guys to say, “Heyo! I’m back.” They were out on a boat frustrated because they couldn’t catch a darn thing. Jesus directed their poles and they bagged 153 bad boys. And here Jesus was defying gravity and walking on the very waves they feared. I love that

*Jesus has the power
to tread on the very
thing we fear.*

4, 5 Morris, L. (1992). The Gospel according to Matthew (p. 382). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

I love what Wiersbe suggests, "Why did Jesus walk on the water? To show His disciples that the very thing they feared (the sea) was only a staircase for Him to come to them..."⁶ I love the idea that Jesus will literally walk on the very thing that frightens you to get to you.

What if He could trod on your hypothetical worries and the obstacles to your dreams? What if He could trod on your sense of inadequacy and the big list of things you think you lack? What if He could trod over the brokenness you think threatens your greatness? What if all those things are just His pathway to get you to do something extraordinary?

*Jesus will walk to you
by way of a storm.
That's how much
He desires to be
with you and me.*



To dive deeper into how God demonstrates His power over water, read:

Exodus 14:21-22 & 7:1-7, 1 Kings 18, Joshua 3:14-17 & 4:18,
Jonah 1, John 2:7-10 & 9:1-12, & 21:4-6, Luke 5:4-6.

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 1, p. 52). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Reflect



What is the very thing, or things, you fear right now in your life?

What if God had the power to trod upon the things you fear?

If God has displayed such limitless power, do you believe the same power is accessible for you or has it somehow expired?

Peter wants to do what Jesus is doing so he boldly yells, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." I'll tell you what, if you asked me to say a word so you could walk on water, I would say it, just to watch you try. Peter wasn't looking for the ghostlike figure to say the word "come." Peter was looking to hear Jesus' voice.

Reflect

What is interesting to you about the idea that Peter wanted to hear Jesus' voice rather than just the word "come"?

Have you ever sensed you were hearing God's voice tell you to go on ahead? What did that look like?

When you know God is beckoning you forward, does it give you more confidence to do something you might otherwise question?



You and I want to participate in the extraordinary and so often it's right outside the boat we sit in, just like it was for Peter. And so often the greatest move we can make to experience it is to first believe it is possible. I remember moving from a "how in the world" mentality on the streets of Portland to a posture of faith. I wanted to lead those young college students into an experience where they could truly believe God could use them to bless, impact and change someone's life, because I knew if they could see it to be true, it would change the trajectory of how they chose to live the rest of their lives. But I had to believe it first before I could lead them to believe it. So I looked for God to move. I looked for God to guide. I looked for God to tell us to go right or to go left. I looked for God to show us it be possible that we could experience what could only be Him. I looked for God's "go ahead."

And right there on the Portland street corner watching for God's move, we saw a woman pushing a grocery cart down the middle of a busy road, head on into traffic. And wouldn't you know it, as we stood on a corner unsure where to walk next, this woman's cart came unglued. At first a sweater fell off her cart and then another one and then the whole cart tipped over with everything spilling out. We ran over to help her and she was reluctant to let us pick up her stuff. But she let Matt, one of the students on our team, help. He looked at the wheel that had malfunctioned because a shoestring got caught in it. Standing in what felt like her closet, I asked if we could help put it all back in the tarp. She said no. I asked, "What is your name?"

"April."

April was 40-something, intelligent, kind and strikingly beautiful. I asked her where she was from. She started telling a deeply sad story about coming to Portland with a husband, kids, career and a house. And it's all gone. She didn't even have a picture of her kids to account for any of it. As she started opening up, we started repacking her things. This guy Jimmy, who we knew from feeding him at the mission that whole week, rode by on his bike. We hollered, "Jiimmmmmmyyy!" He stopped and we let him in on what was up with April's cart. He didn't have a pocket knife but he had a key to slice the shoestring and a cigarette to burn it off. Collectively, we fixed the cart!

April was headed to relocate under a bridge. It felt like the Spirit had ordained this moment so we asked if we could help her move. After declining a few times, she finally said yes. We hauled a tarp and pushed a grocery cart through the streets of Portland to her new home and she said goodbye. We said, "God bless you. You take care, April," and painfully walked away, disappointed. What good did that really do? What did that teach the students? How was fixing April's cart extraordinary?

A few nights later we were off the beaten path, handing out sandwiches to people and inviting them to a ministry called Night Strike that offers the 15,000 homeless people in metro Portland hot meals, free haircuts and shaves, a place to have their feet washed or get their clothes and sleeping bags replaced. As we were walking away from a sea of people, over to our left we heard a woman's voice yelling toward us. I looked over and it was April! She stood up excitedly in front of her friends to talk to us. We walked over and she was full of joy, much different than what we saw in her a few days before. She said, and I kid you not, "The other day I was going to do something really destructive... I... I was going to stand on the tracks and let a train end all this and you guys inspired me." I couldn't believe it. The extraordinary was possible. It was right outside of my doubt. Then she went on to say, "I want to get baptized and start going to church!"

It is amazing what God can do with water and a granola bar, but even more, with the belief that the extraordinary is possible. And all we have to do is look for God's go ahead. Sometimes it is right outside of a boat. Sometimes it's on a street corner and sometimes it's in your very own house. All I know is that God has extraordinary moments waiting for all of us, but we first must believe they are there.



Reflect

What stands out to you about the Portland story, about this team walking the streets, being sent out waiting and wondering how they were going to pull anything great off?

Do you think this team would have experienced what they did with April had they not been looking for an opportunity for God to use them?

When you think about April, how many “Aprils” do you think are right in front of us but we miss them because we aren’t on a “service trip” being challenged to look for them, but instead we are busy with the places we have to go and the things we have to do?



What strikes you about April's description of how this team impacted her life and the supplies they carried with them to go "do" something impactful?

How do you think you can begin leaning into believing the extraordinary is possible right near where you are, and how can you begin looking for it?

Notice no one else in that boat was looking to hear Jesus' "go ahead." Peter had an audacity about him, but he also had wisdom. He wasn't going to try something without God's vote of confidence. He wasn't going to step out and take a risk without God's invitation. He wasn't going to let his bold ideas be greater than a yes from God. So He asked to hear God's "go ahead." You and I can do the same. We can ask God to speak into our big, audacious, bold hopes and when we hear His yes we can have the courage to step out and do what we are certain feels impossible. And when we do, we begin to see that with Him, it is quite possible because God does the extraordinary with the very ordinary.



Respond

God who holds all power, God who speaks to the wind and the waves and they obey, God who can walk on water, I come before you today and ask that you would speak into my life. I am sitting in a boat and the big, bold, audacious dreams for my life are begging for your invitation, your guidance, your yes. Will you be the One who guides when I step out, when I risk, when I defy my own limits? I trust that you will meet me as you did Peter and when you give me the go ahead, I will move.

Amen.

