

From Anxiety to Faith

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1st in a three-week series

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1 Corinthians 13:11–13 (CEB)

¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child, think like a child. But now that I have become a man, I've put an end to childish things. ¹² Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known. ¹³ Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love.

Psalms 107:28–30 (CEB)

²⁸ So they cried out to the LORD in their distress,
and God brought them out safe from their desperate circumstances.

²⁹ God quieted the storm to a whisper;
the sea's waves were hushed.

³⁰ So they rejoiced because the waves had calmed down;
then God led them to the harbor they were hoping for.

Matthew 8:23–27 (CEB)

²³ When Jesus got into a boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ A huge storm arose on the lake so that waves were sloshing over the boat. But Jesus was asleep. ²⁵ They came and woke him, saying, "Lord, rescue us! We're going to drown!"

²⁶ He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you people of weak faith?" Then he got up and gave orders to the winds and the lake, and there was a great calm.

²⁷ The people were amazed and said, "What kind of person is this? Even the winds and the lake obey him!"

Moving from fear to faith requires true transformation.

Even if you don't have children at home, the start of a new school year seems more like a new year than does January 1. Summer is winding down, routines are kicking in, the Cowboys are playing . . . the grind begins again. But it need not be a grind, replete with overloaded calendars and ever-expanding to-do lists. Long ago, the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome: "Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature" (Romans 12:2). The key to what we are calling, *Mind over Grind*, is to seek, to pray for, and to work toward such transformation, so that anxiety gives way to faith, despair is overwhelmed by hope, and self-interest is supplanted by love.

A Sudden Storm

Matthew tells us a simple yet profound story about fear and anxiety. Jesus has taken some of his disciples on a voyage across the Sea of Galilee, headed for the Gentile lands on the eastern shore. The voyage will take a while, so, not surprisingly, Jesus decides to nap and soon falls asleep. Sudden and violent storms are common on the Sea of Galilee and such a storm quickly engulfs the small craft. The disciples see the boat filling with water and they frantically rush to awaken Jesus, fearing that they may die in the storm. Jesus wakes up, rebukes the storm, and calm returns to the sea. Jesus is disturbed by his disciples' fear, asking them "Why are you afraid, you people of weak faith?" He knows that fear, not doubt, is the opposite of faith. The disciples were afraid of the storm, but now they are even more afraid! After all, they had just witnessed a power greater than the storm. What did they just witness? "What kind of person is this?" they ask. Who is this man that even storms obey?

Why are you afraid?

Fear and amazement at Jesus' actions wasn't new to the disciples, nor anyone else who followed him around. Once, Jesus had gone out with them to fish in the Sea of Galilee

(Luke 5:1-11) after they had spent a disappointing night on the lake. Jesus instructed them to lower their nets – and the nets were filled to the point of breaking. There were so many fish that the boat threatened to sink under the weight. The disciples were “amazed,” but Jesus told them “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” Peter must have had some inkling of what was going on, for after the miracle he fell at Jesus’ knees saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

One of the most common questions in my classes is, “Why do the disciples have so much trouble seeing who Jesus is? . . . why don’t they “get it?” There is no fully satisfying answer. Fred Craddock rightly notes that “They had been with Jesus long enough to have adequate ground for trust in God and in Jesus’ access to God’s power.” Yet, they lost confidence and panicked. They were overcome by anxiety because in their own minds and hearts, they were following someone who they still saw as no more than a wise, and very human, teacher. So, it shouldn’t surprise us that the disciples seemed to be more frightened by Jesus’ command of the sea than they were by the storm itself. After all, who could really do such a thing? Even though ancient people ascribed command of the elements to kings and wise men, in all the ancient Roman, Greek, and Jewish traditions there is no mention of someone who actually did it. But Jesus did. The disciples saw it for themselves.

What kind of person is this?

The Jews were desert people, not seafarers. As R. Alan Culpepper notes, in the Old Testament the sea was a place of danger. He writes, “Thus, declarations of God’s power over the sea, which often recalled the Exodus, were acclamations of God’s power to preserve and protect. . . By stilling the wind and the waves by his word of command, therefore, Jesus does what in the OT God alone could do. The story is an epiphany, a manifestation of Jesus’ divine power and identity.”

In Psalm 107, the psalmist praises God for deliverance from stormy seas, confident that God’s people could always rest secure in God’s arms. This doesn’t mean that bad things won’t happen to us. Paul was once shipwrecked in a storm, ending up on a deserted beach (Acts 27:9-44)! Nonetheless, Paul stayed confident that God’s purposes would not be thwarted, that nothing could separate him, or us, from “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord,” and that “all things work together for good for those who love God” (see Romans 28-39).

I could go on and on with this. But often, the problem is that we say these things about God, about Jesus, we tell the stories, we recite the right words, but deep down . . . deep, deep down . . . we don’t really embrace what we say and profess. The disciples in these stories are struggling to understand the identity of Jesus. But we know the full revelation of Jesus. We know the cross. We know the empty tomb. We don’t have to guess. We know – but do we really.

We claim to know these things, but what Jesus has accomplished is so profound, so creation-altering that the only proper response is to offer ourselves, our entire beings, as a living sacrifice, for God has demonstrated that he is worthy of nothing less. We can never stay as we once were. Our commitment to Christ demands nothing less than our transformation, the complete and utter renewing of our minds such that our *thoughts*, *values*, and *actions* are conformed to the ways of God. As Paul wrote,

“Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is – what is good and pleasing and mature” (Romans 12:2).

This transformation is the key to moving past the fears and anxieties that threaten to overwhelm. We must come to see the world and ourselves differently, to be rewired so that we think and act in God’s way. So that we trust the Good News in all its fullness and, thus, trust Jesus with all we are and will be. And in this work of transformation we

are not alone, for the Holy Spirit, strengthens and encourages us every step along the path. Thanks be to God!

Daily Bible Readings

This week: Deliverance from fear and worse.

Monday, Psalm 107 God delivers his people!

Tuesday, Jonah 1:1-16 God throws a storm at Jonah to block his flight from God.

Wednesday, Mark 4:35-41 Mark's telling of the story

Thursday, Luke 8:22-25 Luke's telling of the story. How do the three accounts differ?

Friday, Acts 27:9-44 Paul's storm at sea and shipwreck

Saturday, Acts 27:13-44 Paul's ship to Rome is wrecked in a storm. Why do you think Luke provides such a lengthy and detailed account?

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Beginning August 20, a new series: *Jesus Behaving Badly*

Coming in October 2018: A cruise to Israel with Scott & Patti

For more information go to www.scottengle.org