

# Dealing With Distractions

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Matthew 14:22-33 | Pastor John Wagler, *Lead Pastor, Hill City Church*

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## **MAIN POINT**

Our focus starts with what we determine is most important.

## **INTRODUCTION**

When you are afraid you might fail at something, how do you tend to respond?  
Do you tend to dig your heels in and try harder? Or do you bow out?

In what area of your life do you most fear failure? Why?

We tend to approach the prospect of failure in one of two ways, either we work really hard in an attempt to ensure success, or we choose not to try at all in order to avoid failure altogether because of our insecurities and fear.

Both of these approaches neglect the most crucial component in overcoming fear: faith. Working hard to ensure success demonstrates a lack of faith because no matter how hard we try, we cannot ensure that we will avoid failure. We must acknowledge that our every success is ultimately due to the blessing of the Lord and not from our own doing. Refusing to try at all demonstrates a lack of faith because it lets human weakness distract us from relying on God. Common areas of distractions are: 1) stories we tell ourselves, 2) stories others tell us, 3) lack of boundaries, and 4) fear. In this week's study, we will see that God is less concerned with our success than He is with our faithfulness.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

**READ [MATTHEW 14:22-33](#).**

Why do you think none of the other disciples got out of the boat?

Have you ever had a religious experience that while profound at the time, did not produce lasting change? Why do you think that was the case?

Matthew's walking on water account follows immediately after Jesus' feeding the 5,000 ([Matthew 14:13-21](#)). After the leftovers were collected, Jesus gathered the disciples into a boat and sent them ahead of Him. The disciples, however, soon lost sight of Jesus' miraculous power as they found themselves immobilized by a storm and neglected to look to Jesus for deliverance.

What was Peter risking by getting out of the boat?

What has your relationship with Christ cost you?

What do you think about Peter in this story? Can you relate to him? How?

Where was Peter's focus when he began to sink ([v. 30](#))?

Peter's faithful walk didn't last long. The second his focus shifted from Jesus to the reality of his circumstance, he lost trust and began to sink, so he cried out to Jesus to save him. And that's exactly what Jesus did. Jesus reached out His hand and caught hold of Peter. Although Jesus did question Peter about his lack of faith, He still got him back into the boat. In that moment, the storm swirling around them calmed (along with the disciples' anxiety): "Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, 'Truly You are the Son of God!'" ([Matthew 14:33](#)).

**In what areas of your life do you feel like you are sinking?  
Where is your focus in that area...yourself or Jesus?**

**When Peter begins to sink, he cries out, "Lord, save me."  
What does such a response recognize about Jesus?**

Though Peter allowed his external circumstances to cloud his faith in Jesus such that he began to sink, when he feels himself sinking, he said the exact right thing. He knew that only Christ could save him and cried out to Him for mercy. We honor the Lord when we cry out to Him for mercy like Peter, because in such moments we recognize that we cannot save ourselves, and we throw ourselves completely upon the grace and mercy of God.

**What situations or circumstances are you currently facing in which you need to cry out, "Lord, save me" or even, "Lord, save me from myself"?**

**What might Jesus have been trying to teach His disciples with His question in verse 31?**

Jesus' question in verse 31 is rhetorical. He isn't curious as to why Peter doubted but rather challenging Peter to trust Him more. Jesus not only catches Peter physically but challenges him spiritually. That is what God does in the lives of believers when they begin to sink. He rescues us so that He can restore us. He saves us so that He can grow us.

**How can we learn to trust Jesus more?  
What actions show that we trust Jesus in all circumstances?**

**How did the disciples respond to what happened ([v. 33](#))? Why?**

The disciples were learning. For the first time, they addressed Jesus as the Son of God. They responded to a glorious display of God's grace by worshiping Jesus.

## **APPLICATION**

**What story are you writing in your head right now? Who is the author? You, Someone or something else or Jesus?**

**Where has Jesus asked you to have courage but you've been too distracted to respond?**

**If we can't remember the last time you've had to "take courage" to follow Jesus, what does that say about the vibrancy of our faith?**

## **PRAYER**

Finish your time together in prayer. Pray specifically for the situations mentioned in the Application section of today's study. Pray that God would remind your group this week of His unchanging character and that you would choose faith and trust in Him, rather than fear and anxiety produced from self.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **MATTHEW 14:22-33**

**14:22-23.** It was already evening when the people were fed. Jesus had not yet had His time of solitude for which He had come to this secluded spot. As soon as the miraculous feeding was completed (immediately), Jesus ordered His disciples back into the boat to precede Him to their next destination.

Few people went up on the hilly terrain overlooking the lake. Nothing grew there and the roads used lower-lying routes. So Jesus was assured of solitude up on a mountainside above the site of the feeding. He used this solitude for conversation with his Father. This was a frequent practice for Jesus, but, because He was so popular and so much in demand, privacy was rare for Him. Jesus must have had to work hard at protecting time to pray.

**14:24.** The disciples were having some difficulty making the five-mile journey that cut across the northern tip of the lake from Bethsaida toward Gennesaret. They were fighting contrary winds, which implies they were having to row. Not only were they having to row into the wind, but they were also being buffeted by high waves. Violent storms could descend on the Sea of Galilee without warning. Apparently the disciples did not fear for their lives this time. But the going was far from easy, and there was some degree of danger. By now they had rowed a considerable distance from land.

**14:25-26.** According to Jewish time, the day begins at sunset (about 6:00 p.m.). The Jews divided the twelve-hour night into three watches, but the Gospel writers used the Roman custom of four three-hour watches—6 to 9 p.m., 9 p.m. to midnight, midnight to 3 a.m., and 3 to 6 a.m. It was during this last period, in the dark hours before dawn—after the disciples had battled the waves and Jesus had prayed through the night—that Jesus decided it was time to catch up with His disciples by walking across the tossing sea.

The disciples had no reason to expect Him to come across the water. In fact, they had no reason to believe such a thing could be done (except to extrapolate from the power they saw in Jesus' other miracles, an unlikely prospect given their immaturity). So, naturally they were terrified and gave voice to their fear in two ways. First, they gave each other the only explanation that made sense in light of their prior experience: It's a ghost! They could not imagine anyone or anything with physical form walking across water. Second, they cried out in fear. They had been through a long, busy day and an even longer, torturous night on the stormy water. Fatigue, combined with superstition and lack of faith-filled insight, set them up for a response of pure terror when they saw Jesus.

**14:27.** Jesus, the compassionate and patient teacher, immediately spoke three statements of comfort and encouragement: (1) "Take courage," (2) "It is I," and (3) "Don't be afraid." This may not have been a rebuke but an effort to comfort the disciples. Jesus knew their faith was still in its infancy. Still, He would issue a rebuke to Peter in 14:31.

**14:28-29.** Peter's statement to the Lord took the form of a first-class condition (a construction in the original language that assumes the truth of the condition). Peter was at least beginning to be convinced that the figure on the waves was indeed Jesus, and he was beginning to be convinced that he and the other disciples could do some incredible things in His power. Was Peter running a bit of an experiment here? Probably so, but the realities of the moment—wind, water, waves—still overwhelmed him. This seems consistent with his impulsive enthusiasm.

Peter is to be commended for his belief that Jesus could make him walk on water, but his confidence was that of a baby just learning to walk. Twice in Matthew, the hypocrites would ask for a sign to back up Jesus' claims ([12:38-45](#); [16:1-4](#)). Both times Jesus denied them, because He knew they would not believe Him even if He provided the sign. He had not come to put on impressive shows in an attempt to create faith where none existed. However, faith did exist in Peter, although it was small. Jesus, like a patient parent teaching a baby to walk, allowed Peter this demonstration of His power to nurture Peter's faith to the next level of maturity. He commanded Peter, "Come." Both Peter and the water obeyed the Messiah-King, and Peter walked toward Jesus on the water.

**14:30-31.** What Peter could see with his physical eyes (the violent, stormy sea) became larger in his mind than what can be seen only through the "eyes" of a faith-filled heart. There is a healthy, respectful fear we need to have before the Lord ([Prov. 1:7](#)), but the fear we feel toward anything that seems bigger than the Lord is a sign of small faith. Peter's underdeveloped faith feared the storm more than the Lord, so the Lord allowed him to sink into a dark, angry sea.

In that moment of terror, Peter called out with the most basic expression of faith possible: "Lord, save me!" The Messiah answered Peter's cry immediately by reaching out and grabbing him. Then Jesus said, "You of little faith ... why did you doubt?" The issue here was not the amount of Peter's faith, but Peter's culpability. The smallest faith in the right object is effective. Jesus was chiding Peter, not his faith. The problem was that his faith was supplanted by doubt. In all this time, even Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, had not learned to trust the king fully.

Jesus had also used the phrase "you of little faith" to address the disciples when He calmed the storm in [8:23-27](#) (also in [6:30](#); [16:8](#); [Luke 12:28](#)). Two important tests of faith for Jesus' disciples have now happened on a stormy sea. Given the awe with which most cultures view the power of nature, Jesus knew that if they could see Him as greater than nature, they would be closer to mature faith.

**14:32-33.** God had evidently sent a storm primarily for this test, for the wind stopped as soon as Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat. This a sign of Jesus' authority, and it indicated the lesson was over. Now they could proceed without difficulty to their destination.

This was one in a series of events in Matthew that brought the disciples to a greater understanding of Jesus than they had ever had before. Their response was to "worship" Jesus. This was more than the respect of a student for a teacher. The word implies awe and adoration. "Truly you are the Son of God" was their confession. In that moment, there was no doubt in their minds, although doubt would return to plague them several times before their faith was fully grown. This storm experience was great encouragement for the followers of a king who had been rejected by the leaders of Israel. Jesus was the king!