

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 4

STRETCHED THIN
RECLAIMING WITHOUT QUITTING
MATTHEW 8:23-27
10/16/2016



MAIN POINT

Trials do not illustrate wrong direction; trials merely remind us Who need to lean into when the storm comes.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What's one of the biggest decisions you've ever had to make in life?

Once you committed to a decision, what are some things that you were afraid of? What difficulties did you have to face?

Life is full of important and difficult decisions. Young adults go to college and try to choose a career path. They have to figure out how to pay for college, and they hope that the major they choose will help them find good employment when they graduate.

We have to decide what companies to work for, whether or not to strike out on our own and open a business. We have to make decisions about marriage and money and what house to buy. All of these decisions bring anxiety, and sometimes after we make a decision, we worry that we have made the wrong one and must start over. In today's lesson, we will see that quitting is not always the right choice. Even though it may be a stormy season of life, it doesn't mean we made a bad choice to begin with.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 8:23-25.

Why do you think Jesus and the disciples got into the boat in the first place?

What do you think of Jesus being asleep in the middle of the storm? Do you think that the disciples' fear was warranted?

Jesus and the disciples got into the boat to continue Jesus' ministry. Jesus wanted to preach to people in the villages on the other side of the sea, so sailing across was their only option. When things get difficult, we need to remember why we got into difficulty. The choice to get into the boat was correct, the motivation was good, and sometimes we simply have to sail through the storm.

Because Jesus was asleep, the disciples assumed that He didn't know about their predicament. Sometimes, it may feel like Jesus is unaware of the trouble we are having, and we do not sin by taking our situation to Him in prayer. Jesus didn't rebuke the disciples for waking Him up; He rebuked them that their fear was overwhelming their faith.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 8:26.

Why were the disciples afraid? Why should they have been more confident?

Why do you think Jesus calmed the storm?

The disciples were afraid that they were going to drown, but if their faith had been stronger, they would not have been so frightened. They were with Jesus, who they knew was the Son of God. How could the Son of God drown before His mission was complete? That doesn't mean they shouldn't have asked for Jesus' help, but it does mean that they could have been less afraid.

Jesus calmed the storm to show the disciples who He is. Jesus has power over all creation, including the winds and waves. When we make a big decision that will affect the trajectory of our lives, such as a job or marriage or an investment, we need to remember that Jesus is ultimately in charge of our lives. We may have trials as we seek to serve Him in all we do, but we can be confident that He will be with us. Jesus will see us through the storms of life. Notice here that Jesus didn't yell for the disciples to turn the boat around and go back—He didn't say they made a mistake in getting in the boat. He made a way to get them across, He showed Himself strong in the midst of a storm, and He increased the disciples' faith in the process.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 8:27.

What was the result of going through the storm with Jesus?

Why might a storm at sea have been of particular impact to the disciples?

The disciples learned the power of Christ because of this unexpected storm. Some of the disciples were fishermen. They knew the sea, and they knew enough to be afraid of the stormy waves. Surely the fear of a terrible storm was always a fear every fisherman in that day had. Jesus showed Himself stronger than the storm they feared—Jesus met them in a very personal way.

We all have our fears as we go through life. Fear of failure, fear of finances, fear of not being a good spouse or parent. Storms come to us in life in all of these things, but we can trust Jesus in our circumstances, and we can have the faith that He will see us through the storm.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How would presenting our plans and schedules to the Lord help us in case of later difficulty?

What are some stresses and worries with which we need the Lord's help? How can our small group help with these as well?

How do we know when we need a life course correction? How can we help one another if our life requires a course correction?

PRAY

In a time of group prayer, ask the Father to help those who are making big decisions in life. Pray that the Father will help us encourage those who are experiencing storms in life right now, and ask Him to intervene and give them the peace to get through the trial. Pray that the Father will grant us perseverance so we may continue to work for Him in all we do without fear.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 8:23-27

8:23–25 Verse 23 resumes the story line of v. 18. The words “disciples” and “followed” link back with v. 21 and vv. 19 and 22, respectively. The two dialogues with the would-be disciples and the stilling of the storm narrative belong together. True disciples do model appropriate detachment from home and family, which in this case involves physical separation for a time. As commonly happened, a sudden squall arises on the Sea of Galilee. Matthew, however, calls the storm a *seismos* (literally, earthquake), a term used for apocalyptic upheavals (cf. 24:7; 27:54; 28:2), often with preternatural overtones. This seems to be no ordinary storm but one in which Satan is attacking. The boat is in danger of being swamped, and lives are at risk. Amazingly, Jesus remains so calm that he continues to sleep. The disciples rouse him and beg for help. “Save” and perish (“drown”) refer first of all to the disciples’ physical lives, but by Matthew’s time they have become the standard terms for spiritual salvation and destruction. Matthew may well intend a double entendre here.

8:26 Despite their acknowledgment of dependence on him and use of the address “Lord” (v. 25, a positive title for Jesus throughout Matthew), Jesus rebukes their “little faith.” Matthew places Jesus’ rebuke before the miracle, while Mark reverses the sequence (Mark 4:40). Yet even though Matthew’s narrative reads more naturally, it is hard to believe that he is trying to present the disciples in a more positive light. “Little faith” simply stresses their lack of faith; it scarcely improves on Mark’s “no faith.” The “rebuke” of the elements employs the same term (*epitima*) used elsewhere in exorcism stories (Mark 1:25; 9:25; Luke 4:41). Jesus demonstrates power over the destructive forces of nature, which remain under the devil’s sway. As with his healings, Jesus’ “cure” takes effect immediately.

8:27 Astoundingly, Jesus has demonstrated the identical sovereignty over wind and waves attributed to Yahweh in the Old Testament (cf. Jonah 1–2; Pss 104:7; 107:23–32). Such power can do far more than just heal sickness. Miracles over “nature” remain much rarer in Jewish and Christian history. Quite understandably, the disciples wonder aloud about the identity of the man, bringing the narrative to its Christological climax. Jesus’ nature miracles in general (and rescue miracles in particular) should lead men and women to worship. The disciples’ fear (Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25), which could imply terror and/or awe, is entirely compatible with their amazement here.

Contemporary applications of this miracle almost universally “demythologize” the narrative (deriving a naturalistic lesson from a supernatural event), so that it becomes a lesson about Jesus “stilling the storms” of our lives. Matthew did not likely have such an application in mind. There are implications for discipleship here, to be sure; we must turn to Jesus as the one to trust in all circumstances of life. But the focus of this passage remains squarely Christological—on who Christ is, not on what he will do for us. One who has this kind of power can be no less than God himself, worthy of worship, irrespective of when and how he chooses to use that power in our lives. Sometimes he leaves storms unstilled for good and godly ends (cf. 2 Cor 12:7–8).