



WEEK 2 GROUP GUIDE | MESSAGE BY ANDREW MATRONE

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

What is the most adventurous thing you have tried that did not go well?

SHARE

Welcome to our new series entitled, "Gather Round."

We have all heard that story that we can't shake. The story that had us at the edge of our seats, that broke our hearts, that warmed our hearts, that made us laugh from the deepest part of our stomach, the one that hit us at the deepest part of our core until tears leaked out. Stories teach us, inspire us, warn us, and ultimately speak to us. The stories in the Bible are not only compelling to listen to, they are filled with the power of the Lord, and the resurrecting grace that is offered freely to every single one of us.

As we walk through this series, we will hear stories that we have read many times, and ones that we might not have deemed as significant enough for a retelling. Despite the familiarity of the story, there is always room to ask God, "What are you trying to communicate to me through this story?" Let us walk closely with the characters in the story, listen to their words, their hearts, their struggles, and their triumphs. Each story brings us back to the realization that we have an all-powerful, all knowing, and ever loving Father that desperately wants us to let Him be the hero of our own story.

In the message this week, Andrew asked each of us to examine our relationship with God. He asked us to not only look at our relationship, but more specifically the fruit of that relationship. Andrew talked about the nature of our relationship with Jesus, and how prevalent of a role are we playing. For some of us, without even realizing it, we have chosen control and safety over faith. We have slid back into routines, patterns, relationships, and made choices that we think will insure our safety. But, as we gather round and look to the authoritative word of God, the Bible, we read countless accounts of individuals living out their relationship with the Lord with faith-filled abandonment and a ruthless trust in God's promises.

The Lord has never offered or promised a safe and comfortable life to those who follow Him. So why is it, as Christians, we often desire to create that life with Him? When did we decide that comfort was more important than living out a bold and faith-filled life that only God could dream up? For some, we may read these biblical accounts and somehow convince ourselves that we could never trust God like that. We falsely assume that we could never get to that level, so why try? We look in the mirror and see every fault and remember every failure. Sadly, we think that God is looking to use stronger, better, more important people. If you are believing that today, that is a lie of the enemy. God's promises are for all of us, and if we are willing to trust Him, we can experience "life to the fullest" (John 10:10).

So how do we go about giving up control and reconciling the fears, comforts, doubts and control with the lives we read about in the Bible and the anything but normal God we love?

What area(s) in your life right now, do you feel you are playing it safe?

When you think about taking a risk and stepping out in faith, what is the inner battle that you deal with?

GROW

Isn't it scary to think that the safeguards we have worked so hard to build and keep standing could actually be the very things that are keeping us from living in the true freedom that the Lord desires for us? We struggle to build bars around us that we believe will protect the things we cling to and keep us comfortable, when in reality we have become slaves to those things and we find we are living behind bars in a prison we have built for ourselves. God desires to free you of that this very day, but we need to make a choice.

Ultimately, this struggle of faith can be reduced down to choosing to be the person who God desires us to be or to trust that we know better than God about how life should work for us. As Andrew pointed out in the message, nowhere in the Bible will you find safety and comfort to be a Kingdom priority on this earth when it comes to following Christ. You might have to make a big choice today or it might be a series of multiple small choices. Regardless, it might be time to choose to trust God in the midst of the storm.

In Matthew chapter 14, we read about an encounter with Jesus in which Peter boldly stepped off the boat and found himself smack-dab in the middle of a solo faith-walk on water. He was faced with a choice to play it safe, or believe in the supernatural. We read this story in Matthew 14 and in the beginning of the chapter, the disciples had just witnessed Jesus feed the 5,000. Then Jesus sent the disciples to travel ahead in the boat while He retreated to the mountain to pray alone.

Let's read Matthew 14:23-28

Craig Blomberg, in *The New American Commentary* notes how terrifying this encounter with Jesus was in the midst of the night:

With the night and the storm, the entire scene certainly created a horrifying spectacle with preternatural overtones. In v. 27 Jesus calls to his disciples to "take courage" (the same verb translated "take heart" in 9:2, 22). Cranfield notes: "If it is a result of obedience to Christ's command that the church or the individual Christian is in a situation of danger or distress, then there is no need to fear." "It is I" reads, more

literally, *I am*. This is not bad grammar but a conscious echo of the divine name of Yahweh, as in Exod 3:14. Though still somewhat veiled, this is perhaps Jesus' clearest self-revelation of his divinity to date.

Imagine this, the disciples had probably just come off a "spiritual high," because they had just witnessed one of the greatest miracles in the Bible, when Jesus fed 5,000 people with a mere five loaves of bread and two fish. Let's be honest, that can't even feed the Duggar family, so can you imagine the awe among the crowd to watch Jesus do such a miracle. The disciples went from the sheer panic of not having enough food to the stark realization that Jesus provided more than they even needed! Fast forward not even 24 hours later, and they had completely forgotten the sheer power that Jesus is capable of, and they once again allow themselves to fall back into fear. Jesus calls to them in the storm and identifies himself as "I AM" and offers peace for their quivering souls by telling them to not be afraid. Peter is the only one who calls back wanting to know if it is really Jesus.

What makes Peter different from the other disciples?

Have you been tempted to not follow through with something you felt the Lord was calling you to, because you were not sure it was going to work out well?

Put yourself in the boat. Which one of these statements is most true of you?

- *I fear what my friends will think of me if I trust Jesus and fail.*
- *I fear the storm around me more than I trust the voice on the water.*
- *I am afraid that Jesus will not be strong enough to rescue me in the storm.*
- *I am willing to walk out on the water and know God is strong enough.*
- *I believe that Jesus is who He says He is, but I just am too afraid to get out of the boat; I need a guarantee.*

MOVE

In this week's message, Andrew talked about the fact that we all desire to have guarantees in life. But, with a guarantee, there is no room for faith. There is no room for trust to grow and in the end, no real relationship. Now, what we can be completely assured of...is that the voice of God that calls in the midst of the storm can be trusted. What we cannot be certain of is the exact results of our steps of faith.

Read Matthew 14:29-36

Imagine the mind games Peter must have experienced that night, being a fisherman on the water all his life, he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that only boats sit atop water, not people. Contrary to all his understanding and doubt, the thing that made him step out onto the water was trusting Jesus, standing on top of the water who beckoned him to "come." Peter was merely going to where Jesus was already waiting for him. Peter truly believed in that moment that it was safer to be with Jesus in the storm, than in that big fishing boat with all his friends.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.

Why did Peter begin to sink?

Even though Peter began to sink, what did he experience that the other disciples didn't?

How did Peter's act of faith effect his friends in the boat?

What boat do you believe you are in today, that Jesus might be calling you out of and toward Him? (i.e., *wrong relationships, career change, addiction, bitterness, comfort etc.*)

How can we pray for you?

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other about the labels and false identities that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO.

When you go through the storm, God can be trusted:

Matthew 14:31

"You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt me?"