

Facing Reality With Faith

A New You For A New Year - Part 5

Matthew 8:23-27

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Last week I talked with you about how it's not too late to set some goals for change in this New Year. Just maybe you've been trying to do that and you've already discovered it isn't easy. It takes some effort and some discipline. The reality is: it's going to be a little more difficult than you thought it was going to be. What do you do when reality hits? That's what I want to talk with you about today. When reality sets in, what do you do? When your goals aren't happening as fast as you want, when the weight isn't coming off as fast as you would like, when you've failed to spend time with the Lord six out of seven mornings this week, what do you do? What do you do when you feel like you've take one step forward toward your goal and two steps back?

Well, you've got two choices in the face of reality. You can either stress out in the face of reality or you can choose to have faith. You can choose to worry or you can choose to trust God. The Bible tells us "***Don't worry about anything...***" (Philippians 4:6) Why? Because worry will steal from you the life that God wants you to have. Worry will keep you from experiencing the peace and joy that God wants you to have.

We all experience anxiety in different ways and to varying degrees. Here's a list psychologists have put together that are indicators of anxiety.

1. Do you tend to blow up problems, making them bigger than they really are?
2. Do you easily get upset and annoyed by the small stuff?
3. Do you feel insecure about your future?
4. Do you feel out of touch with God?
5. Are you naturally critical?
6. Do you have physical symptoms when you think about problems, like headaches or backaches or does your stomach churn?
7. Do you find it hard to accept defeat?
8. Do you feel tired and burned out?
9. Do you find loose ends difficult to handle?
10. Are you extremely time conscious?
11. Do you constantly rehash past events?

Those are all indicators of anxiety and worry in your life. Most of us can see ourselves somewhere in that. If you have three or more of these going on, you're at risk from the negative effects of worry.

One of the problems with worry is that it serves a purpose at times. It reminds us to do things. It keeps us motivated. But it also keeps us from living the life God wants us to live. It keeps us from experiencing the joy God wants us to experience. If we are going to get beyond

our worry and our anxiety, we are going to have to face the reality that is causing us to worry. We're not going to eliminate worry from our lives by pretending everything is ok when it's not.

THE FIRST THING YOU'VE GOT TO DO IS FACE REALITY behind the worry. You're not going to get past your anxiety by avoiding reality. In the passage we read together it says, *"Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples. Suddenly, a terrible storm came up, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping."* (Matthew 8:23-24) Here they are, in a little boat, on a big lake with a huge storm, and Jesus is asleep. This is a picture of reality causing anxiety and worry. Let's look at what the disciples went through and as we do, keep in mind that the boat represents your life.

The disciples are out on the water with Jesus. Everything is calm and wonderful. Jesus is getting some much needed rest after pouring himself out healing and teaching crowds of people. Then all of the sudden, out of nowhere, comes a terrible storm that threatens to send them all to a watery grave. Isn't that the way life is? You can be sailing along, enjoying the ride, and all of the sudden, out of nowhere a terrible storm comes up. Those **unexpected problems** come out of nowhere and threaten to undo you. Those terrible storms come unexpected and unannounced, and even unwarranted at times. But they still come. That's what causes us to worry. That's what keeps us awake at night, worrying about what's coming. But that's not the kind of life God wants us to have. God wants to teach us to have faith. He wants to teach us to trust him through the storms. He wants us to learn that he is bigger than any storm and he can take us through any storm we face. The disciples had to face **the reality of the unexpected storm** before they could learn to have faith, and so must we.

Second, they had to face the reality of the overwhelming circumstances. The waves were getting higher and higher. The wind was getting stronger and stronger. The lightning was getting closer and closer. They couldn't control the boat any longer. The power of the storm was overwhelming. That's when you realize the power of evil in the world. That's when you realize you can't control the storm and you don't have the strength to endure it on your own.

Third, they had to face the reality of inadequate resources. Their boat was too small to weather the terrible storm they were experiencing. The waves were washing over the sides and into the boat. They were sinking. The limitations of their boat and their own strength were evident. They were going down. You and I face the reality of inadequate resources, too. We have financial limitations. We have physical limitations, intellectual limitations, emotional limitations; time and space limitations. Our resources are inadequate to control the storms of life.

The fourth reality the disciples had to face was that Jesus was sleeping. That's **the reality of feeling alone**. Jesus had just ministered to thousands of people and he's completely exhausted. He's sleeping through their struggle, and they think he's completely unaware of what they are experiencing. Can you imagine what they were saying to one another? "How can he sleep through this? Somebody wake him up. And Peter says, "I'm not waking him up. He might ask me to walk on the water again and you know how that turned out." They were feeling

alone in their struggle. Seeing the reality of their situation, they reached out to Jesus, thinking surely this man who turned water into wine, who healed the sick, who cast out demons, who silenced the Pharisees, who made the blind to see and the lame walk, and fed the five thousand, just maybe he could do something to save them. So they woke him up. They believed in him enough to wake him up. That brings us to the second thing.

THE SECOND THING YOU'VE GOT TO DO ONCE YOU FACE REALITY IS CHOOSE TO HAVE FAITH. That's right, faith is a choice. The disciples chose to have faith in Jesus. They had enough faith to think that maybe Jesus could do something to save them. We read, *"The disciples went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Lord save us! We're going to drown!' And Jesus answered, 'Why are you afraid? You have so little faith.' Then he stood up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly all was calm. The disciples just sat there in awe. 'Who is this?' they asked themselves. 'Even the wind and the waves obey him!'"* (Matt. 8:25-27) They chose faith. Faith is a choice. Even when our faith is small, it can summons the Lord to calm the storm we are facing.

There are FOUR things you do to choose faith in the midst of the reality of any storm. **THE FIRST THING YOU DO IS ASK FOR HELP.** The disciples had tried to weather the storm on their own but it was more than they could deal with on their own and so they had to wake Jesus and ask for help. We don't like to ask for help. Our pride gets in the way. We don't like to admit we need help. Another thing that gets in the way is our past experiences. We think: we made it though storms in the past, we'll make it through this one on our own. But then we realize, this storm is different, and we need some help. We're sinking fast.

Maybe you've reached out for help in the past only to have that person betray you in some way. Perhaps they betrayed your trust by telling others about your struggle or by holding it over you that they helped you. That's not the way it is with God. God never betrays our confidence. And God doesn't help us through the storms so he can control us. He's not that great godfather in the sky. His love is unconditional.

The Bible tells us, *"Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all that he has done."* (Phil. 4:6) We are to live our lives out of a sense of gratitude toward God, not out of a sense of obligation.

THE SECOND THING YOU MUST DO IS: QUESTION YOUR FEARS. When the disciples woke Jesus he asked, *"Why are you so afraid?"* They were probably thinking, "Really, Jesus? Look around! We're sinking!" Jesus knew what was going on. He knew that situation was a teachable moment and He wanted to teach the disciples to question their fears. Jesus knows that our worries grows out of our fears. If you are worrying about something, there's a fear behind it. If you are worrying about something, there's a reason, there's some fear creating that anxiety. Jesus was asking them to question their fears and he asks us to question our fears as well. We often think that our fears are the final authority until we question them. Then we realize they're not. God is the final authority. His Word is what is going to last, not my fears.

God commanded Joshua, ***"Don't ever be afraid or discouraged! I am the Lord your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go."*** (Joshua 1:9) This command is repeated over and over in the Bible, from Abraham to Zechariah. People like Isaac and Jacob and Hagar and Rachel and Jehoshaphat, God said, "Do not be afraid." He said it to all the great people of faith, like Moses and Joshua and Gideon and Elijah and David and Solomon and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel. In the New Testament he said it to Peter, and Paul and Mary. He said it to the shepherds and to Salome and to Jairus. Why does God tell them all, "Don't be afraid?" Because they were afraid and their fear was holding them back from being all that God planned for them to be. So God said, "Don't be afraid."

God said this to all the great people of the Bible because they had to get beyond their fear before they could be the people God planned for them to be - people who accomplished great things for God. They had to learn to face their fear with faith. As a church, you all are going to have to face your fears before you can be the church God wants you to be. Jesus said to his disciples, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid."*** (John 14:27) The peace Jesus offers is not fragile like the peace the world offers. It is a peace that passes all understanding because it isn't dependent on us or our circumstances. It is dependent on the God who created and sustains all that is. If you want to get beyond your fears, you must question them. And that takes faith, so...

THE THIRD THING YOU MUST DO IS: INCREASE YOUR FAITH. Once the disciples woke Jesus up and told him their fears, he said, ***"You of little faith, why are you so afraid?"*** (Matt. 8:26) Friends, we let our fears control us because we lack the faith we need to see beyond them. I'm not telling you that if you worry you lack faith. But Jesus is. We all have fears. Fears can be healthy. They can keep us from doing stupid things. But they can also keep us from doing good things. They can keep us from growing, individually and as a church. But if we ask for help and question our fears, God will grow our faith. It is in the storms of life that our faith has the opportunity to grow the most.

It's important to remember that the disciples had a good reason to worry. Many of them were fishermen and they knew the danger involved in going out on the sea. Jesus wasn't asking them to ignore their fears but to look to him to provide what they needed. Worry takes us in the wrong direction. God wants us to move away from our fears to the place of faith. He doesn't want us to grow our fears through worrying but to grow our faith through trusting him to provide whatever it is you need. Jesus said, ***"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. And yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry...."*** (Matthew 6:30)

How do we increase our faith in the midst of overwhelming circumstances? By looking beyond them to what God can do through them. The storms in our lives are opportunities for God to show us what he can do — opportunities for God to demonstrate his power.

THE FOURTH THING YOU MUST DO IS: EMBRACE THE TRUTH THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL. There is nothing he can't do. When the disciples thought they were going to drown to death, Jesus said, "Be still" and the storm ceased. It says, "*The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'*" (Matthew 8:27) Here are the disciples. They are worried about what's going to happen to them and they've got God in their boat. Here you are. You're worried about what's going to happen to you. You've got God in your boat! He is the one through whom all things were created and he is the one through whom all things hold together. God is in control, even when we don't realize it. Having faith enables us to recognize that God is in control. The Bible says, "*Everything in heaven and earth is yours, O Lord. We adore you for you are the One who is in control of everything.*" (1st Chronicles 29:11)

Does God always work like I want him to work? Absolutely not. Do I always understand how God works in the midst of my problems? Nope. Do I understand why God does what he does? Why he helps one person and passes over another? Nope. I have no idea. But I do know that when we trust him with our problems, and cry out to him in faith, we see him at work in us and through us and even in the midst of the problems we face.