

I love that as a church we're seeking to take God's love into the world. My hope/prayer is that everyone of us who are able, and over the age of 12, will seek to engage others outside of our mission field of PTC at least once every 3 yrs. So let encourage you to continue to pray, give, and to go to share the love of Christ w/ others. So whether God has called you across the street or around the world, my prayer is that we will all be ready and willing to say 'yes' to His calling.

As we continue to pray for how God might be leading us to engage in Thailand, there's a new opportunity on the horizon for anyone interested. Today, immediately following our 2<sup>nd</sup> service, there'll be a **Nicaragua Information Meeting** in rm. 503. Additional meeting will be held on November 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> at the same time and location. The date of the trip are **April 2-10** as we'll continue our partnership w/ **Chosen Children** and Guillermo Morales.

For the past 7 weeks we've been discussing who **Jesus is** based on His personal encounters w/ people during His earthly ministry. We've learned Jesus is **GENEROUS**, that He's **MERCY**, that He's **HEALER**, that He's **POWER**, that He's **LIFE**, and that He's **WORTHY**. Today, as we close this series, we're going to see that Jesus is **PRESENT**.

*Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves b/c the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" When they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Matthew 14:22-33*

This story picks up on one of the most demanding days in the life of Jesus. It begins w/ the news John the Baptist has been beheaded, and quickly moves to the crowds wanting to have Jesus teach/heal them. By late afternoon, over 5,000 people have gathered in a remote area on the shores Galilee and there's nothing to eat but (2) sardines and (5) hotdog buns. And of course, Jesus miraculously feeds the crowd.

Shortly after the crowd disperses, Jesus takes a time-out and sends the disciples ahead by boat across the Sea of Galilee. While at sea, a pop up storm takes the disciples by surprise and they're frantic w/ fear and Jesus is nowhere to be found.

**Don't miss what has just happened – b/c it's a powerful lesson we can't afford to miss. Where were the disciples? In a boat, in a violent storm, trapped on the Sea of Galilee? Why were they there? B/c they had obeyed Jesus!**

**made** – (*anagkazen*) means to compel, urge, insist, or force. The point is the disciples did as they were told. They followed His will for them. And things didn't look so good.

**Have you ever been there? Have you ever found yourself in a potentially devastating situation in the center of God's will b/c you followed God's lead? And you wonder – WHY?**

**I must confess I've found myself in such a situation** – and I was pretty frustrated w/ God. I was pastoring a church where all hell broke loose even though I was seeking heaven w/ all my heart. I thought I was in God's will and yet God wasn't handling the situation in a way I found comforting. I must confess my faith was being shaken as my life was being stirred. And I asked "WHY" more than once. I questioned if God cared. I questioned if He was present. And when we lost nearly everything important to us by earthly standards, I questioned my faith and His faithfulness.

Honestly, I've never hurt so deeply, nor questioned God so intensely. *I have no doubt this is what the disciples experienced that night on the Sea of Galilee.*

**Can I tell you what I learned?** I learned being in God's will doesn't make you immune from people who are living outside God's will. I learned God often does His best, most necessary, work in the midst of storms. I learned God's presence, power, and promises are sweeter and more appreciated in the storm than in times of calm.

The reason God allows us to encounter storms in the center of His will is to reveal His person to us, to deepen our convictions for Him, to strengthen our faith in Him, and to develop our character for His glory. He allows such opportunities to express His faithfulness and to take us to a deeper level of dependence on Him. Is it fun? NOPE! Is it painful? Usually! But is it necessary? Absolutely!

**Lesson:** In your storms, you can **fight** the storm or you can **find** the Savior. BUT... the more you fight – the longer you will linger; but once you submit, the storm usually subsides.

**I Jesus is Present even when I cannot SEE Him**

Often in the Christian life, we can find ourselves in moments where we can neither see God at work nor hear His voice of direction.

All we know is the last word He spoke brought about our current situation. If things are going well by our estimation, we usually don't say much; but if things are not going according to OUR plans, we usually find ourselves asking for direction or questioning God's leading.

Whether you sense God is beside you or off in the distance – I can assure you He knows right where you are. He knows exactly what you need or don't need; and He is waiting to move at the precise moment you need Him most.

*You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar w/ all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand on me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. Ps. 139:1-12*

I'm reminded of the story of the (2) men who set out to rob a house. As they entered the house and started collecting items, they suddenly heard a voice say, "*Jesus is watching.*" Of course they freaked! But since there was no movement, after a minute, they started collecting items again. Then it happened again. "Jesus is watching!" As chills coursed their bodies, one of the robbers poked his head around to discover the voice was coming from a parrot. Relieved, the 1<sup>st</sup> robber said, "We're in the clear, it's just a bird." The bird squawked a finally time, "Jesus is watching... sick'em Jesus!" And a huge, growling dog emerged to take a bite out of crime.

Jesus isn't waiting to take a bite out of crime, but even when we can't see Jesus present; He's promises He is watching over us – *He'll never leave you or forsake you.*

## II Jesus is Present in when Life is STORMY

Whenever I think about facing storms, I think of *James 1*.

*Consider it all joy, when you encounter various trials, knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* James 1:2-3

A few years ago I taught this text in a series on James. Let me re-teach this critical lesson. James tells us to **EXPECT** Trials, **ENJOY** trials, and **ENGAGE** trials.



## A EXPECT Trials/Storms

*Consider it joy, whenever you encounter trials...*

whenever (*hotan*) not IF (*possibility*) but WHEN (*inevitability*) – **meaning trials are unavoidable.** We're all going to experience storms and times of testing.

**Why? B/c trials put your faith to the fire.** You can't just say I believe; you have to exercise your beliefs and apply them to the challenges of life to confirm they're not just words. **Trials test our faith to see if our faith works.**

encounter (*peripipto*) to 'fall into.' **Meaning trials/storms are unpredictable.** Used of the robber in the Good Samaritan parable. He was unexpectedly attacked and never saw it coming. Trials can come at any time from any direction. **So the question isn't how can I avoid them, but how can I learn and grow from them?**

## B ENJOY Trials/Storms

*Consider it all joy, when you encounter various trials, knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-3*

consider (*hegeomai*) *imp.* To make a choice to enjoy.

James didn't say we had to be happy about them but we are to recognize that God is at work in them to draw us closer and into better alignment w/ Him.

**endurance** (*hupomone*) *hupo* – underneath; *mone* – to abide or align. Trials are intended to bring us under God's influence and into alignment w/ his will and Word so that we will be mature and complete – more like Jesus.

## C ENGAGE Trials

Then in *James 1:4-5*, we learn we must engage trials by engaging God by seeking His counsel thru His Word and thru the H.S. by trusting it enough to apply it to our lives.

**Meaning:** God give us storms/trials to complete us and to give us an undivided soul aligned w/ His heart/will.

## III Jesus is Present when Life is SCARY

We learn from Mark's account of this event that this wasn't just a few waves and a slight wind, but a significant storm that caused the disciples to fear for their lives – and they're all on their own w/ Jesus nowhere to be found.

Have you ever been rocked by fear? The effects of fear can be utterly terrifying. Fear ushers paralysis! It ransacks hope! It imprisons dreams! It strangles life! Fear is a cruel master.



Fear stifles our thinking and actions. It creates indecisiveness resulting in stagnation. I've known talented people who procrastinate indefinitely rather than risk failure. Lost opportunities cause the erosion of confidence, and the downward spiral begins. *Charles Stanley*

I've always liked the story about the country preacher who used to visit a widow in his church named Mrs. Jones. He liked to visit her around lunchtime b/c she had a vegetable garden and loved to cook fresh vegetables for her pastor. One day he arrived for lunch, knocked on the door, but Ms. Jones didn't answer. Perplexed b/c her back door was open and food was cooking on the stove, the pastor walked around to her garden and called for her a few times w/ no response. Knowing her sense of humor, he left his card on her door w/ a note: "Dear Ms. Jones, Read Revelation 3:20." It reads, "Behold I stand at the door and knock and if anyone will hear my voice I will come in and eat w/ them." What the preacher didn't know was about the time he showed up, Ms. Jones was getting out of the bathtub, and she was embarrassed to answer the door, so she hid until he left. So after reading the pastor's card, she wrote him a note and left it on his desk the next Sunday. It read, "Dear Pastor, I got your card. Read Genesis 3:10." "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid b/c I was naked, so I hid myself."

I love that story not only b/c it's cute, but b/c it reminds us of the reality of FEAR.

Did you know ***Genesis 3:10*** is the 1<sup>st</sup> reference of fear in the Bible? Before Adam/Eve sinned, they had never experienced fear. But after their sin they experienced fear. And ever since, fear has become a real part of the human existence.

It's scary how fear drives us. If you've paid any attention to the news and this next political cycle, fear is the driving force of the agenda. And it's no wonder; there are a lot of scary things going on in our world. From poverty, to crime, disease and terror – we're always facing some threat.

The **National Institute for Mental Health** – there are now over 300 cataloged phobias/fears. Here are the Top 10:

- 10 Fear of Thunder/Lightning
- 9 Fear of Open Spaces
- 8 Fear of Confined Spaces
- 7 Fear of Flying
- 6 Fear of Heights/Falling (it's really the sudden stop)
- 5 Fear of Spiders/Insects
- 4 Fear of Snakes
- 3 Fear of Terrorism
- 2 Fear of Death
- 1 Fear of Public Speaking

Jerry Seinfeld jokes that when you consider more people fear public speaking than death, it means that at a funeral a person would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy!

We learn in this story we can do 1 of 2 things in moments of fear – **we can fear the storm or we can turn to the Savior.** We can trust in ourselves and white-knuckle the boat; or we can step out of the boat and into a faith that walks on water.

*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity (fear), but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.* 2 Timothy 1:7

One commentator explained that fear overtakes too many people b/c people lack the internal **POWER** to fight and overcome, b/c they lack the internal **PASSION** to endure and care, and b/c they lack the internal **PRINCIPLE** to remain sharp and consistent.

But notice that thru the H.S., God gives us His dynamic power, His passionate *agape* love, and His prioritized discipline to overcome the problem of fear. As believers, we possess these marvelous endowments: **POWER** to be effective in His service; **PASSION** to have the right attitude toward Him and others; and **PRINCIPLE** to focus our lives to live His will. **We just have to be willing to let go of the boat and step out in faith.**

#### IV Jesus is Present when I Feel like I'm **SINKING**

As our friend Peter got out of the boat and onto the water, so long as He focused on the Savior, he walked. But the moment he looked at the storm – he sank like a rock.

The trick to faith walking is keeping your eyes focused on Jesus. Simple...Right? Not exactly.

It's tempting to glance at the situation, instead of at the Savior – but we can never forget that it was God who called us into the storm – and God who will see us thru the storm.

To be sure, **Peter often gets a bad rap for sinking**, yet to this day, to my knowledge – b/c he got out of the boat and onto the water, he's the only created man to have ever walked on water. While the other guys held onto the side of the boat, Peter held onto Jesus – teaching us that it's far safer to be on the water w/ Jesus than in the boat w/out Him.

**Point** – Jesus is always present – and His presence must be the ambition of our soul. If it is – then we'll begin to see and experience His miraculous presence unlike ever before.

I told you earlier about one of the greatest faith storms I ever experienced. In the midst of the storm, I realize now that I began to sink the moment I took my eyes off of Jesus and placed them on the storm. What I have come to recognize is that I would've never been prepared to pastor this church had it not been for the faith storm I experienced earlier in my ministry. I would've neither had the humility or patience to handle the situation. God used a terrific storm for my good and for His glory – and in the process, my family learned the power and presence of God in an amazing way.