

# More Lessons *in* Discipleship



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 14:22–33; Mark 4:36–41; 6:51, 52; Luke 8:25; 24:37; John 6:19.*

**Memory Text:** “But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid’ ” (*Matthew 14:27*).

Jesus selected His disciples so that they could be with Him and could learn from Him. Apparently, they were not as sharp and quick-witted as one would expect. How much different are we? Some of us have been walking with God for several years, and we still do not understand fully what the demands of discipleship are. As in the natural world, so it is in the spiritual. Growth is essential for life. Every day should bring some growth in depth, width, or height. What preparation of soil and nutrients are you making to assure growth and success in discipleship?

This week's lesson will look at more examples from the Word of God that can help us understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

**The Week at a Glance:** Why were the disciples of Christ often full of fear? What can we learn from Jesus' warnings about the leaven of the Pharisees? How do we respond to those who purposely close their hearts to our witness?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 15.*

## Lessons at Sea

By the time of the events in Mark 4, the disciples had already been with Jesus for a while. How much they must have learned at the foot of the Master.

**Read** Mark 4:36–41. What is so revealing about their words to Him in verse 38? How often do we find ourselves having a similar response in frightful times?

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It is so easy for us to do the same thing, to wonder, when tragedy and problems strike, if God cares at all. The irony, of course, is that Jesus was right there the whole time. He was the One who first told them to take the boat across to begin with. This storm did not take Him by surprise, and neither do our trials.

**What** significance (if any) can be found in the fact that the disciples, not the storm, woke Jesus?

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Notice the element of fear in the disciples all through the account. They feared the storm; and then, after the storm was calmed, they seemed to fear Jesus. The manifestation of such power was impressive, of course, but one would have thought by now that, after their time with Christ, they would have known that they had nothing to fear from Him. On the contrary, this power should have been a source of great hope and comfort to them, because by now they should have known the character of the One who possessed all that power. This account shows that these men still had a lot to learn about what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

**When was the last time you wondered if the Lord cared about you and your situation, whatever it was? What lessons did you learn from that trial that you could use next time you face a trial or tragedy?**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

▶ **Key Texts:** *Matthew 14:27, Mark 6:45–52*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Discuss how God through Christ has conquered anything truly worth fearing.

**Feel:** Nurture a desire to make our faith central in our lives.

**Do:** Trust God to deliver us in times of trial.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Faith at Sea**

**A** What lesson had the disciples failed to learn before the storm?

**B** What did it mean that their hearts were hardened with unbelief?

**C** We often think we'd have stronger faith if we could witness the spectacular miracles Jesus performed during His earthly ministry. Yet, the same Peter who walked on water toward Jesus later denied he even knew Him. What does that say?

**II. Feel: Safety in the Midst of the Storm**

**A** What prompts Jesus to come to His disciples' aid? What does that reveal about His watch care?

**B** What assurance does Jesus' power over the sea give us that He is able to save us out of any predicament?

**III. Do: Trust in God**

**A** Imagine how Jesus must have looked to His disciples—His pale robe glowing eerily in the dark—never mind that He was walking on water. No wonder they thought He was a ghost. How can we avoid mistaking God's help for something that could hurt us, as the disciples first did?

**B** Jesus did not warn His disciples about the storm. Instead, He sent them across the water. How have trials strengthened your faith?

▶ **Summary:** We are totally dependent on God to keep us safe.

## Lessons at Sea (Continued)

If you think about it, the sea is a good place to learn lessons about discipleship. After all, though as humans we are totally dependent upon God for everything (*see Job 12:10, Dan. 5:23, Acts 17:28*), it is not so easy to forget it when you are out on the water, where what is beneath your feet will not hold you up but will swallow you instead. Perhaps that is why the Lord chose to use the sea to teach His disciples a few more lessons about faith, the key element for any successful discipleship.

Following a successful missionary tour (*Mark 6:6–13*), the feeding of the five thousand, and their first encounter on the lake, the disciples finally should have been catching on. The evening after the feeding of the five thousand, another storm overtook them on the lake, this time without Jesus in the boat with them.

**Read** Matthew 14:22, 33 and Mark 6:45–52. What are the numerous mistakes the disciples made in these two accounts?

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Though one account omits the story of Peter walking on the water, one point both make is that those who witnessed what happened were duly impressed. Some openly called Jesus the Son of God; in Mark's account, they were amazed beyond measure about what they had experienced. It was one thing to be able to get the weather to obey Him, but to have the power to walk on water, especially during a storm? Truly they had been witnesses to the power of God in ways that few people have ever seen.

**Read** Mark 6:51, 52. What point do you think Mark was making about faith and belief? What lessons might there be for us in that point?

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## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

You may have heard the saying (attributed to various authors), “The only thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history.” What is true of world history is also true of personal history. As our author points out in this lesson’s introduction, even those who walked with Jesus and observed Him face to face often learned their lessons in discipleship the hard way—by making mistakes.

Though Jesus gave them marvelous instruction in His sermons and teachings, when faced with difficult situations they still lost heart and made wrong choices. Rather than avoiding failures, they had to be corrected in the midst of them.


Encourage your class with the thought that throughout Scripture, those who were closest to God experienced some remarkable failures in discipleship. From those failures came lessons that led to more faithful discipleship. That’s encouraging, because all of us are painfully aware of our failures! In fact, the argument can be made that human beings learn better and faster from failure than we do from instruction. A good teacher says, “It is better to try and make mistakes than not try at all.” In following Jesus we will sometimes fail. That’s why we are offered forgiveness!

### ► **STEP 2—Explore!**

## **Bible Commentary**

### **I. Lessons at Sea** (*Read Mark 4:35–41.*)

The most interesting phrase is verse 38: “ ‘Don’t you care if we drown?’ ” (*NIV*). What appears to annoy them is Jesus’ calmness. Only if He also were falling apart would they believe He cared for them! It is not an infrequent dynamic between human beings. “On the human level, we often act like the disciples. We expect others to share our panic or distress. If they seem detached from the situation, we accuse them of not caring about our suffering. Panic reactions can divide us from others who might help us as they can cause us to doubt God’s love for us.”—*The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VIII, p. 581. It is often those who remain calm who are equipped to

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## The Leaven of the Pharisees

**Read** Matthew 16:1–12 and then answer the following questions:

1. What evidence do we have that the leaders who came to Jesus were not sincere in their question? After all, what is wrong with having a sign from heaven? Is the Bible not full of signs from heaven? What point should we as disciples take from what is happening here? See earlier chapters in Matthew; see also Luke 16:29–31.

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2. Look carefully at Jesus' words to the Sadducees and the Pharisees. What is the principle behind the specific warning to them (*Matt. 23:23*)?

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3. Read Jesus' words to the disciples in Matthew 16:8–11. What point is Jesus making to them? Why do we find it so easy to do the same thing; that is, to forget the great things God has done before our eyes?

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What a contrast between the Bread of Life and the leaven of the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and yet how easy it is to get them confused. All disciples of Christ need to be aware that belief, or following traditions, or *defending* the faith are not always the same as being a disciple of Christ. How easy, once we get established, even comfortable, in what we believe, or in how we worship, or in how we practice our faith, to let these things become ends in and of themselves, instead of a means to an end. That end, of course, is to be a faithful disciple of Christ, doing His will and revealing His love and His character to the world.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

provide the most help—as Jesus demonstrates.

## II. Lessons at Sea (continued) (Read Mark 6:45–56.)

We sometimes suppose that if we could see frequent miracles, we would fear for nothing. The experience of the disciples proves otherwise. “If miracles alone create faith, the disciples have witnessed more than enough for their faith to be strong.”—*The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VIII, p. 604. In the face of a fearful event, their faith in Jesus’ power, built up through seeing and experiencing numerous miracles, evaporated. In light of this text, help your class to examine their own faith in crises.

**Consider This:** Have you ever asked questions like the disciples’: “Lord, why don’t You care about me?” “Where are You when I need You?” How have such faith crises been resolved in your experience?

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## III. The Leaven of the Pharisees (Read Matthew 16:1–12.)

To understand this text fully, it is important to note the confusion about Jesus’ use of leaven (yeast) as a metaphor. In Jewish faith, yeast, because of the way a small bit of “starter” would permeate a whole batch of dough, symbolized sin’s corruption. Although yeast was used in Jewish baking, it could not be offered as a sacrifice to God (*Exod. 23:18, Lev. 6:17*) and was removed from the home during Passover (*Exod. 12:34–39*).

One might almost suppose the disciples preferred to mishear Jesus. There was a tendency in Judaism (as among Christians) to prefer simple, physical compliance over a deep change of attitude; that is, it is much easier to give up yeast in your food than to examine your feelings toward commonly accepted religious thought.

**Consider This:** Do you think we Adventists run the risk of making this same mistake? Might we substitute simple compliance (keeping the

## Lessons From Fear

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear”  
(1 John 4:18).

Perhaps you have noticed something through the course of this study, and that is how often the disciples were afraid. All through the Gospels, we find time and again the disciples in various situations, and time and again the Bible records them as being afraid.

**What** was it in these various situations that caused them to fear?  
*Matt. 14:27; 17:6, 7; Mark 10:32; Luke 8:25; 24:37; John 6:19.*  
**What** can we learn from their experiences?

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**Read** Mark 9:30–32. What made them fearful here? What important point can we take away from this example?

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What is so sad about this case is that they were fearing the one thing that offered them the greatest hope they could possibly have: salvation through the atoning death of Jesus on their behalf. They feared what they did not understand; they feared what they did not want to hear. Had they understood what the Cross was all about, they would not have feared. Hence, it was their ignorance that kept them fearful.

As disciples, as followers of Christ, we should, of all people, have the least to fear. The same Jesus who could walk on water during a storm, who could bring healing to a paralytic, who could feed five thousand with just a few loaves of bread, is the same Jesus who revealed His love to us by dying on the cross as our Substitute. Sure, sin is real, the devil is real, hell will be real, and we need to be aware of the dangers to our souls (*Matt. 10:28*), but in the end, as disciples, as long as we cling to the reality of God’s love as revealed in Christ, we should learn to live within the hope and comfort of God’s amazing love for, and grace toward, us.



*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

Sabbath, eating correctly) for a deeper, more substantial change of heart?

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**IV. Lessons From Fear**

**Consider This:** What are the greatest fears of our times? How do our fears compare with the actual dangers? (For example, people are far more likely to be killed in a car accident than by terrorists; but people rarely fear a car ride but do fear terrorism.) How can our faith put our fears in perspective?

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**V. Discipleship and Witness**


As an answer to the Thomas Nagel quote in the lesson, you might share this line from English essayist Joseph Addison, “To be an atheist requires an infinitely greater measure of faith than to receive all the great truths which atheism would deny.”

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

**Class Activities and Discussion:**

**1. Lessons From Failure**

Since much of this week’s lesson involves lessons learned from failure,

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## Discipleship and Witness

“I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that.”  
 —Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 130.

**Look** at the above quote. As disciples, what is to be our attitude toward someone like that? Which Bible texts come to mind as you think about this person? Write out the texts.

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**Now** that you have written down the texts, take the time to go over them. Does a particular theme come through? Are your texts those of compassion, judgment, sorrow, or retribution? Or something else? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

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An inseparable part of what it means to be a disciple is, of course, witnessing. All through the Gospels, we see Jesus preparing His disciples to lead others to salvation. Some folk believed quite readily; others seemed determined to reject Jesus no matter what.

No question, as disciples of Christ, as we witness, we will come across all types, including those who, perhaps not as honestly as the man quoted above, will nevertheless reflect the same kind of attitude.

How do we respond to these people? Anger? Love? A feeling of personal failure? All or none of the above?

What can we learn from the life and teachings of Jesus that will help us, as disciples of Jesus, to deal with those who are determined to close their hearts and minds? At what point, if ever, does our responsibility toward them end?

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

share with your class a situation in your life where you learned a lesson from failure that you hadn't been able to learn in other ways. Invite class members to share their own examples. Discuss with your class the value of making mistakes as an effective method of learning, as well as the dangers of learning things "the hard way."

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## 2. Praying for God's Presence

The disciples were constantly with Jesus—yet, during difficult times they felt fearful and alone. How much more so for the members of your class! Use this activity for the encouragement of your class members.

- Ask each class member to partner with someone next to him or her.
- Share with the partner one situation in your life where you are in need of the assurance of God's comforting presence right now. Keep it brief!
- The partner must listen carefully to be sure he or she understands the need.
- Your partner will pray a short (one or two sentence) prayer for you.
- Do the same, reversing roles.

## ► STEP 4—Apply!

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, a character named Little-Faith from the town of Sincere is set upon and robbed by three brothers: Faint-Heart, Mistrust, and Guilt. They turn tail when they "suppose that one Great-Grace was in the way." Great-Grace is the king's champion, says the narrator. But he adds, "All the King's subjects are not his champions; nor can they, when tried, do such feats of war as he."

Like the disciples, we may not always have strong faith. We are not necessarily spiritual champions. But our weak faith is met by God's great grace, and it is that which brings us safely to the Celestial City.

**Further Study:** Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 415–417, 426–441, 746–750; Ellen G. White, “Peace be Still,” pp. 333–341; “A Night on the Lake,” pp. 377–382; “The Foreshadowing of the Cross,” pp. 410–418; “He Was Transfigured,” pp. 419–425; “The Walk to Emmaus,” pp. 795–801, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Sower Went Forth to Sow,” p. 40, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Light Through Darkness,” pp. 349–350, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Although Peter had been long with the Master, he had a very imperfect conception of the plan of salvation. He did not desire to see the cross in the work of Christ; but it was through the cross that life and hope were to come to dying men.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 7, 1891.

“God’s children are not to be subject to feelings and emotions. When they fluctuate between hope and fear, the heart of Christ is hurt; for He has given them unmistakable evidence of His love. He wants them to be established, strengthened, and settled in the most holy faith. He wants them to do the work He has given them; then their hearts will become in His hands as sacred harps, every chord of which will send forth praise and thanksgiving to the One sent by God to take away the sins of the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 518, 519.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the things that you fear? How can you learn to overcome those fears? On the other hand, are there things that we should rightly fear? Be prepared to discuss your answers in class on Sabbath.
- 2 What are ways we can become modern-day Sadducees and Pharisees? Why is that easier than we think? How are these attitudes manifested in the church today? Also, what are the steps that one takes in going from being a disciple to being a Pharisee? Are they easier than going from being a Pharisee to a disciple? Be prepared to discuss your thoughts in class.
- 3 What would you classify as the leaven of the Sadducees and Pharisees in the church today?
- 4 As a class, talk about the attitude of the man expressed in Thursday’s lesson. In what ways are the principles of the attitude manifested in us, even as Christians? Are there things about our faith or doctrines that we shut our minds to because we simply do not want to believe them? Could it be that we have a hard time learning the lessons the Lord wants to teach us because we do not want to learn them?