



God with Us

 illuminate

Episode seven

Episode seven
Walking on Water



How to use these studies

The study in front of you now is adapted from the 2014 Illuminate material. It is designed to be used by youth & young adult groups, small groups, or families to journey together through the Gospel story over the course of a year.

Illuminate Camp is based on a practice of 'storying', recapturing the stories behind the Bible texts we have heard so many times. It is an inherently community-based practice, involving reading the narratives together and participating in discussion as a group. The aim is to hear the stories as if it was the first time; to try and put aside the years of knowledge you have accumulated and hear them fresh.

To get the most out of these studies, we recommend the following process:

- Get a group of friends to journey through these stories together. These studies are also ideal for family groups. (While it is possible to do these studies solo, we cannot oversell how much better they will be if you do them as a group)
- As a group, read aloud the original Bible texts, based on the references below.
- As a group, read aloud the Illuminate re-write.
 - ◊ As you hear the story, make notes of things that stand out to you and questions that you have.
- If possible, read the original texts again, perhaps in a different translation.
- Discuss the stories as a group. Use the supplied questions as a guide, but don't be afraid to follow the discussion. Explore the stories wildly, asking every question that comes to mind.
- Pray together. Included in each study is a small Experience station that can be used as a guide for prayer and reflection, either as a group or individually.

We hope that you find this material as encouraging and stimulating as we did on camp. If you were on camp to hear these stories, we hope you find something new this time through. The Gospel stories are rich and complex, and no two times reading them are ever the same.





Episode 7: Walking on Water

Intro

This is my favourite story in the Bible. Peter is my favourite character, and this story is a perfect encapsulation of why I love him.

Here is a man who has been following Jesus for quite some time, who has seen miraculous signs ranging from the small—Jesus knowing his name before he spoke—to the massive—Jesus healing a paralysed man—and who wants, more than anything else in the world, to be like Jesus.

When a Rabbi accepted a disciple, that's what they were saying: "I believe you can do what I do." Peter, now given the opportunity to follow a Rabbi, wants nothing more than to live up to that expectation. He wants to be like Jesus, to walk like him, to talk like him, and to be able to be a part of God's world like he is. He wants this so badly that he's willing to step out into a storm and walk on water, because that's what he sees his mentor doing.

Peter is, at all times, the perfect imperfect disciple; trying so very hard, and getting things wrong as often as he gets things right. But he never loses that love, that unfailing desire to be like Jesus, even in his darkest moments—which are still to come.

In this story, even amongst all the uncertainty and doubt in his mind, Peter not only had the courage to step out when he was called, but the courage to ask to be called in the first place.

Access a video version of this introduction at vic.youthvision.org.au/GodWithUs



Bible References

Matthew 14:22-33



Story

Jesus spoke to his disciples as they walked out of a Galilean town.

“Take the boat and head south across the lake. Wait for me on the other side. I will catch up with you after I have spent some time in prayer.”

The disciples nodded. Peter led them down the banks of the lake to where they had moored the boat. They climbed in and, between Peter, Andrew, James and John, they put out onto the water.

A stiff breeze was blowing through the sails, so they made good time. But suddenly, the wind changed direction. It pushed the sails against the mast, and tore through the simple rigging of the fishing ship. The surface of the lake became ever more choppy.

“It’s getting rough,” John muttered into his beard, low enough that the less sea-confident disciples wouldn’t hear him.

“I don’t like the look of those clouds,” Andrew agreed.

Peter, one hand wrapped around the sail boom, walked steadily along the deck. “We push on,” he told them. “We’ve all seen worse.”

Just as he said this, lightning lanced across the sky and the heavens opened, dumping their contents directly atop the boat.

The heavy rain continued long into the night. The wind howled ferociously. It didn’t take long for the fishermen to agree that they should be pulling back to shore, but every time they tried to change tack, the wind swept them the opposite direction.

Then a shout went up from the aft of the boat. Peter, hauling on a rope and trying desperately to get it tied down, paused what he was doing and stared. Out in the distance, there was a man walking over the waves, as nonchalantly as if he was walking along a market street. The huge waves seemed to part in front of his feet, leaving the sea smooth and solid-looking. It almost seemed as if anyone could step as the man stepped, and they would stand on the glass-like water.

“Don’t be afraid!” The man’s voice carried easily along his path of calm ocean. The men in the boat recognised it instantly. Peter dropped the rope. He stared at Jesus standing on the glassy water.

“Lord,” he shouted back with lungs used to projecting his voice over water, “if it really is you, let me come to you on the water.”

“Come,” Jesus invited.

Peter hoisted himself up on the gunwale and dangled his legs over the water. The other disciples waited with bated breath to see what would happen next.

Peter lowered himself slowly onto the water. Some would have expected themselves to slip beneath the water around the boat, but in that moment Peter’s mind was filled with everything he had seen and heard with Jesus. He thought about a catch of fish when it should have been impossible to catch a thing; he thought about a man who had never walked now dancing into town. And when his feet hit the surface of the water and stayed there, he wasn’t even surprised.



He took a few tentative steps towards Jesus, eyes fixed on the Rabbi. But, after a moment, he began to notice again the size of the waves around them. He heard the rumble of thunder, felt the rain beating on his shoulders. He looked down, and between his feet saw the endless chasm of nothingness that stretched on infinitely onwards. Something in him quavered. Jesus could do many things, yes, but this? There had to be a limit to his power. And here, standing above death, nothingness, and oblivion, Peter had found it.

The water gave way beneath him and Peter vanished silently beneath the waves.

Cold salty water filled his nose, rushed into his mouth, stung his eyes. The blackness reached up, wrapped itself around his ankles, and dragged him downwards. The cold sapped him of energy, of movement. He relaxed and let himself fall. There was nothing to be done.

Then Peter felt something seize the back of his cloak. He stopped, suspended between death below and whatever held him from above. In that pause, his eyes went wide. His arms shot up and grasped the arm that held him. He kicked his legs and fought through cold cramped muscles to push himself back up. He followed the pull up to the surface.

His head burst into the cold, rainy night air. But the sodden arm that held him didn't stop until his knelt, coughing, on the surface of the water once more. Only then did Jesus let go of Peter's robe and hammer him rhythmically on the back, forcing the water out of the fisherman's lungs.

"Oh you of little faith," Jesus said, his soft voice for Peter's ears only. "Why did you doubt?"

Peter coughed once more and pulled the sodden hair from his eyes. He sat on his heels and looked at his hands. "You are a man of God, lord," he said to Jesus. "You have powers I can't fathom. You have knowledge of things I can never know. We think... we know you are the Messiah."

Jesus remained silent.

"But who am I, lord? I'm a sinner. A fisherman. If you expect anything from me, lord, you're wrong. What do I know? What can I do? I am not the man to stand beside the Messiah, to fight your battles and win your wars."

Jesus silently pulled Peter to his feet. "Simon, you clearly know less than you realise." Jesus smiled. "We have barely begun. When the real work starts, you will be exactly who I need to fight my battles, to win my wars. You'll stand with me right until the bitter end, Simon Peter. I promise you this."

Peter wiped the rain off his cheeks. "I will, lord," he said. "Because you are the Son of God."





Questions

- Which part of the story stood out to you? What made that stand out?
- Who did you relate to in the story? What was it about them you related to?
- Is there anything about this story that you hadn't considered before?
- Can you imagine what it would be like to walk on water? How did Peter feel when he was standing on the waves?
- Have you ever felt like you've found a limit to God's power?
- What can God calling us look like today?
- Have you ever felt God's call to do something? If not, have you ever asked God to be called?
- Have you ever felt God calling you into something scary or difficult?
- What are the boats that can keep us from stepping out in faith?
- Have you ever felt doubt that you could be a part of God's story?

If you were a camper on Illuminate...

- What do you remember about hearing this story on camp?
- Compare that to your response hearing it now. How is your reaction different? Did you notice the same things? New things?

Experience

You will need:

- A CD player or iPod speaker
- A rainstorm ambiance track

Gather together as a group to pray. Turn off as many of the lights as you can, and play the storm track in the background, as loud as you are able. As you listen to the sound of the storm, reflect on the following (either printed out for participants to read, or spoken by the group leader):

In Jesus' time and culture, large bodies of water like Lake Galilee were considered dangerous, evil places. The ancient Jews likely had an image of Hell that looked like a stormy sea rather than a place of fire.

Peter was stepping out of his boat into his culture's worst nightmare. He demonstrated amazing courage to put himself in this position.

God can often call us into difficult circumstances, places we are uncomfortable with, people we wouldn't normally associate with. It takes courage to follow God's call.

Pray to God to give you courage to follow his call. If your group or members of your group have not experienced God's call, pray to God asking him to call you into new parts of his mission.



Developed by Youth Vision Victoria & Tasmania and the Illuminate team.

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