

Small Group Guide

"Storms" -- Signs Series, Week 6

Based on John 6:16-21

OVERVIEW

In this message, Pastor Todd explored what we can learn from the storms of life by examining Jesus walking on water in John 6. Drawing from this miraculous sign as well as passages from Psalms, Jonah, Acts, and the letters of Paul and Peter, the sermon identified three purposes God has for the storms we face: to change our direction, to bring correction, and to work for our perfection.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Storms can change our direction. Sometimes God allows difficulty to redirect us away from lesser things -- the comfort of the crowd, misplaced expectations, or a diminished view of who Jesus truly is. The disciples were sent into the storm so they would not follow the crowd's shallow understanding of Jesus as a political king. God uses storms to bring us into deeper fellowship and clearer vision.

2. Storms can bring correction. Like Jonah, we sometimes run in the opposite direction of what God has called us to do -- often because of pride, prejudice, or fear. When we are living at odds with God's purposes, He may allow us to experience the natural consequences of our choices as a loving act of discipline, not punishment. His goal is always to bring us back into alignment with His will.

3. Storms can work for our perfection. The same language of "5,000" appears both when Jesus feeds the crowd and when the early church grows in Acts 4 -- and in both cases, a storm follows immediately. God uses trials to refine our faith, deepen our trust, and prepare us to carry the gospel further than we could in comfort. The disciples who survived the storm on the Sea of Galilee became the men who endured persecution without flinching.

OPENING QUESTION

Take a few minutes to get comfortable before diving into the material. Go around the group and answer this:

- Think of a storm -- literal or figurative -- that you remember vividly. What was your first instinct when it hit?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Section 1 -- Storms That Change Our Direction

1. Pastor Todd pointed out that the crowd wanted to make Jesus a political king, and the disciples were tempted toward the same thinking. In what ways do we today reduce Jesus to something smaller or more convenient than who He truly is?
2. He observed that "the crowd got fish, but the disciples got fellowship." What does it look like in your own life to pursue intimacy with Jesus rather than simply the blessings He provides?
3. Has there been a time when a storm redirected you toward something better than where you were headed? What did that redirection look like, and how did you recognize it in hindsight?
4. Psalm 107:23-28 describes God sending storms so that sailors would cry out to Him. Does it change the way you view a difficult season to consider that God may have allowed it specifically to draw you closer to Him? Why or why not?

Section 2 -- Storms That Bring Correction

5. Pastor Todd was honest that all of us carry some form of prejudice or bias -- the same kind that kept Jonah from obeying God. What are some of the blind spots or biases that might keep us from following where God is leading?
6. Jonah knew exactly what God wanted him to do and ran the other way anyway. What is the difference between drifting off course gradually and making a deliberate choice to go in the opposite direction? How does God respond to each?
7. The sermon noted that we often make an idol out of comfort in the Western church. Do you agree with that assessment? How does the pursuit of comfort sometimes work against what God is doing in and through us?
8. Hebrews tells us that God disciplines those He loves because He is a good Father. How do you personally distinguish between a storm that is a consequence of your own choices and one that is simply a trial God has allowed? Does that distinction change how you respond?

Section 3 -- Storms That Work for Our Perfection

9. The disciples had been rowing for up to nine hours, had only made it halfway across the lake, and were rowing directly into a headwind. Pastor Todd asked if anyone feels like they have been rowing against a headwind for a long time without making progress. If you are comfortable sharing, what does that feel like in your current season?
10. When Jesus came to the disciples on the water, He said, "Do not be afraid. I am here." The phrase "I am" connects directly to God's name revealed to Moses at the burning bush. What does it mean to you personally that the one who spoke the universe into existence is the same one who shows up in your storm and says, "I am here"?
11. In 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul describes present troubles as "small and won't last very long" while also producing "a glory that vastly outweighs them." That can feel dismissive when you are in the middle of suffering. How do you hold both truths together -- the reality of your pain and the eternal perspective Paul is describing?
12. Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:6-7 that trials test and purify faith the way fire purifies gold, and that this refined faith will bring praise and glory and honor when Christ is revealed. What would it look like for your group to actually encourage one another in the middle of a storm rather than simply trying to help each other get out of it as quickly as possible?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a few quiet minutes individually before sharing with the group. Consider the following:

- Which of the three purposes for storms -- direction, correction, or perfection -- feels most relevant to your life right now?
- Is there an area where you sense God may be trying to redirect you, correct you, or refine you through what you are currently walking through?
- What is one specific way you have been resisting that process?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This week, choose at least one of the following:

1. **Identify the storm.** Write down the most significant difficulty you are currently facing. Then, honestly ask yourself which of the three purposes might apply -- direction, correction, or perfection. Pray and ask God to give you clarity and a willing heart to receive what He is doing.
2. **Pray the hard prayer.** Pastor Todd led the congregation in singing "Bring on the Waves" as an act of surrender. This week, find a quiet moment and pray a prayer of genuine surrender over your storm. Tell God that you trust His purpose even when you cannot see the other side.

3. **Confess and realign.** If you sense that your storm may involve correction -- that like Jonah you have been running from something God has called you to -- take a concrete step toward obedience this week. That might mean a conversation you have been avoiding, a habit you need to break, a relationship you need to repair, or a call you need to answer.
4. **Encourage someone else in their storm.** Think of someone in your life who is in the middle of a difficult season. Reach out to them this week -- not to fix the problem or offer easy answers, but simply to remind them that God is present and that He is faithful to complete what He has started.
5. **Memorize a storm verse.** Choose one of the following passages and commit it to memory this week as an anchor for your faith:
 - Philippians 1:6
 - 2 Corinthians 4:17
 - John 16:33
 - 1 Peter 1:6-7

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together by praying specifically for each person in the group who is currently in a storm. Allow group members to share briefly what they are walking through, and then have someone pray over the group, asking God to make His presence known, to accomplish His purpose in each storm, and to give everyone the faith to trust Him in the middle of it.

You may also close with the words Pastor Todd prayed over the congregation:

"Lord, I pray that we would find a place of gratitude for the storms. That we would not shy away from them, but that we would sing, 'Bring on the waves. I am loved by the one who anchors me. I am not afraid because I walk with the King of victory. I will trust in you.' In Jesus' name, amen."

LOOKING AHEAD

Next week, continue in the Signs series in the Gospel of John. As you go into the week, carry this truth with you: the same Jesus who stepped out of the storm and into the boat is the same Jesus who is with you in whatever you are facing. When He steps in, John tells us, immediately they arrived at their destination. Trust the process. Trust the One who anchors you.