

Next Level Faith: Stepping Out of the Comfort Zone

Sermon Introduction: The Streaming Subscription Faith

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to watch a show on autoplay? You just sit there. You don't have to move. You don't have to think. The next episode just starts playing, and you consume it without any effort at all.

Too many of us treat our relationship with God exactly like a streaming subscription. We show up to youth group, we sit in the seat, we listen to the music, and we let the message wash over us. We log in on Wednesdays or Sundays, and we log out the second we walk out the door. We are consumers, not participants.

But God is not looking for subscribers. He is looking for disciples. He is not calling you to a comfortable, convenient, surface-level religion. He is calling you to a Next Level Faith.

If your faith is only based on your parents' rules, your youth pastor's energy, or the emotional high of a summer camp, it will crumble the moment you face real-world pressure, stress, or temptation. A Next Level Faith is a faith that belongs to you. It is a faith that stands firm when you are the only Christian in your classroom, locker room, or friend group.

1. The Call to Level Up

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to a young leader named Timothy. Timothy was facing a massive amount of pressure. He was young, people were looking down on him, and the culture around him was completely wild. Look at what Paul tells him:

1 Timothy 4:12 (KJV)

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

Notice what Paul does not say. He does not say, "Hey Timothy, you're just a kid. Take it easy. Sit in the back. Wait until you're older to do something big for God."

Instead, he tells him to set the standard.

- "In word and conversation": How you talk and live.
- "In charity and spirit": How you love people and the attitude you carry.
- "In faith and purity": How deeply you trust God and how clean you keep

your heart.

Level 1 faith says, "I'll do just enough to get by."

Next Level Faith says, "I want to be an example of what a follower of Jesus Christ actually looks like."

2. The Biblical Anchor: Stepping Off the Boat

To understand what Next Level Faith looks like in action, we have to look at a stormy night on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were in a boat, miles from land, tossed around by massive waves.

Matthew 14:25-27 (KJV)

"And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

Imagine the scene. It is pitch black. The wind is howling. The waves are crashing over the sides. Suddenly, they see a figure walking on top of the water. They are absolutely terrified. But then Jesus speaks and tells them to have courage.

Now look at Peter's response:

Matthew 14:28-29 (KJV)

"And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus."

The Two Types of Faith in the Storm:

1. The Boat Dwellers (Level 1 Faith): There were twelve disciples in that boat. Eleven of them stayed exactly where they were. They stayed behind the safety of the wooden rails. They were close to Jesus, they could hear Jesus, but they missed the miracle because they refused to leave their comfort zone.

2. The Water Walker (Next Level Faith): Peter realized that the safest place to be in a storm is not in a wooden boat—it is right next to Jesus, even if that means standing on top of a raging sea. He took a risk. He swung his legs over the edge of the boat, let go of the railing, and stepped onto the water.

What Happens When We Falter?

Some people criticize Peter because of what happened next:

Matthew 14:30-31 (KJV)

"But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Yes, Peter doubted. Yes, Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. But do not miss this: Peter sank further than the other eleven ever flew. He experienced the supernatural power of God because he had the courage to step out. And the moment he started to sink, Jesus didn't let him drown. Jesus immediately caught him.

Next Level Faith does not mean you are perfect. It does not mean you never doubt or never get scared. It means that even when you are terrified, you still choose to step out of the boat because you trust the voice of Jesus more than the roar of the storm.

3. The Ultimate Example: Stephen's Uncompromising Faith

If you want to see what Next Level Faith looks like when it is tested by extreme fire, you have to look at a young man in the early church named Stephen.

Stephen didn't start out as a famous preacher or an apostle. In Acts chapter 6, the church needed people to help handle a very basic, practical problem: distributing food to widows. Stephen volunteered. He started by serving tables. But because he gave 100% to God, his faith quickly leveled up.

Acts 6:8 (KJV)

"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Stephen wasn't just getting by; he was full of faith and power. But when you start living on the next level, the enemy notices. Angry, religious leaders who hated Jesus confronted Stephen. They brought fake charges against him, arrested him, and dragged him before a powerful council.

Look at what happened when they looked at his face while he was under attack:

Acts 6:15 (KJV)

"And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

When people push you, mock your belief, or try to cancel you for your faith, what do they see on your face? Do they see anger? Fear? Retaliation? Or do they see the peace of a Next Level Faith?

Stephen didn't back down. Standing before the most powerful people in the city, he preached a bold, uncompromising message about Jesus. He didn't water it down to save his skin. He spoke the absolute truth. The crowd grew so furious that they began to grind their teeth at him in rage.

But watch where Stephen's eyes were fixed during the ultimate storm of his life:

Acts 7:55-56 (KJV)

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

The crowd snapped. They dragged Stephen out of the city and began to throw heavy stones at him to kill him. As the stones were crushing his body, Stephen showed us what the absolute highest peak of Next Level Faith looks like:

Acts 7:59-60 (KJV)

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Why Stephen's Story Matters for You:

- He chose to serve, not just sit: He didn't wait for a title. He served tables, and God used him to shake a city. Next level faith starts with a servant's heart.
- He cared more about God's approval than survival: Stephen knew that his life belonged to Jesus. He didn't compromise his words just to fit in or stay safe.
- He forgave his enemies: In his final breaths, he prayed for the very people throwing stones at him. Level 1 faith hates those who hurt us. Next Level Faith prays for them.

4. How to Move to the Next Level

You do not get to Stephen's level of faith by accident. You get there through intentional, daily choices. Here are two practical ways to upgrade your faith right now:

A. Change Your Filter

You cannot live a next level life if you are constantly consuming low-level content.

Romans 12:2 (KJV)

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

The world is constantly trying to squeeze you into its mold. It tells you how to dress, how to act, what to value, and how to find your identity. If your mind is only filled with social media feeds, secular music, and culture's opinions, your faith will stay stagnant.

- The Action Step: Guard your mind. Take a 3-day social media fast. Replace that screen time with reading the Word of God. Let His truth renew your mind.

B. Upgrade Your Prayer Life

Level 1 prayer is robotic. It's the quick prayer before dinner or the "God, help me pass this test I didn't study for" prayer.

Jeremiah 29:13 (KJV)

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

Next Level Faith requires raw, unfiltered honesty with God. It happens when you close your bedroom door, get on your knees, and tell God exactly what you are struggling with. Tell Him about your anxieties. Tell Him about your doubts. Cry out to Him with all your heart, because that is where real intimacy with God is built.

Conclusion & Call to Action

The boat is comfortable, but the boat is limited. If you stay in the boat, you will only ever see what human strength can do. But if you step out like Peter, and stand strong like Stephen, you will see what God's power can do.

When Stephen died, a young man named Saul was standing there, holding the coats of the killers, watching everything. Stephen's fierce, next-level faith planted a seed in Saul's heart that eventually led to him becoming the Apostle Paul—the man who wrote half the New Testament. Your next level faith has the power to change the people watching you.

Jesus is standing today, looking at your life, and He is issuing a simple, one-word invitation: "Come."

He isn't asking for you to have it all figured out. He isn't asking for perfection. He is asking for your availability and your trust. Will you stay hidden in the boat with the crowd, or will you step out into a Next Level Faith?

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