

Stepping Up and Stepping Out

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Good, that's good. Okay, just checking you're awake. Let me put this up a little bit.

I'm afraid I've grown. Good morning, everybody. It's just amazing to see you this morning. I feel like the weather, my parents are in town and they're enjoying summer weather. You know, in England, we never experienced the sunshine. So it's kind of, I'm showing them what the sun really does exist. So it's been great. If you've, we've had a few of these booklets downstairs. It's not enough for everyone because there are online copies as well. So if you haven't got a printed copy, go online. You can see some of what God's been doing this year through the church. And it's just been, just exciting thing to see what God's up to. Today, we're going to take a little break from the Faith and Work series. And I'm just going to give you a little bit of what I think is a theme that I think God wants us to think about and to be going through this year as we seek Him and we seek His face this year. Because I don't know about you, but this year has been one of those crazy years, both in the life of the church and in many different ways. You know, we've had, we had to move from the community center. We have to move from Cyberport. The Millers have left. There's been a lot of craziness over this year all at once. And it's been busy as well. Personally, it's been busy. I've been busy with a lot of different things. And Hong Kong is kind of like that, isn't it? It's kind of a busy, busy place. But one thing I've noticed in myself this year is I can be very busy. I can be busy doing a ton of things even for God. But you know, busyness doesn't mean that I'm necessarily growing spiritually. Do you know that? I can be doing great, excellent, godly things, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm growing in my relationship with Christ. Busyness doesn't equal godliness.

Busyness doesn't automatically equal obedience. And this year, I think, one of the questions for us as a church is not how much more activity can we cram into our calendars. It's actually how much do I want to grow in my faith to know God and to love Him and to be more like Him in my life? How much do I want Jesus more than anything else? That's the question. And so I want to take just a few minutes this morning just to kind of look at this story of Peter to give us, and Jesus walking on the water, and give us just a couple of things that I think it tells us about what it can look like to begin to grow in faith with Christ, okay? So have your bulletin open. We're kind of going to skim through it, and I'll bring out just a couple of things of where we think we want to go just over this next few months. Matthew 14, Jesus has been busy, very busy, kind of Hong Kong kind of busy, you know? He's been healing, teaching, ministering to all kinds of people, and Jesus has just been trying to get a break. He's been trying to get away on holiday somewhere. He's gone over to the other side of the lake to get a little kind of staycation, and then what's happened is all these people have just arrived, and He's had to spend the whole day again teaching and feeding 5,000 people, which is pretty exhausting, and at the end of the day, basically, He's exhausted, disciples exhausted, they escape, and Jesus says to the disciples, okay, now you guys go over to the other side of the lake, get a break over there. I'm going off to have a bit of me time, you know, put my feet up, watch a bit of TV. No, no, He doesn't say that. He goes off to a desolate place to pray.

Do you notice that? He goes to pray. Do you know how long He prays? He prays all night. Basically, it says He prays until the fourth watch of the night, which is actually between 3 and 6 a.m., okay? That's pretty intense prayer from the whole evening. He's praying, and then Jesus kind of looks out over the lake, and He sees that His disciples are in the midst of this storm, and they're being battered by the wind, and they're just not getting anywhere. So, Jesus walks out to the disciples, and the disciples are just scared stiff. They're like, who is this? Is this a ghost coming towards us?

And Jesus says to them, take heart, or it actually means take courage. It's me. I'm here. Peter, don't be afraid. I'm with you. Don't be afraid. Do you notice then what Peter's response is?

[5 : 19] Peter then says, if it's you, okay, so he's not quite sure, but in the Greek, it says, since it might be you, I want to know, so call me, command me to come out of the safety of this boat onto the water, because Peter wants to imitate Jesus. Peter, if Jesus is doing it, Peter wants to be doing it.

Peter wants to do what he sees his master and his Lord doing, but he knows it's impossible. So, he says, Jesus, you've got to call me because I can't just get out of this boat.

You've got to call me. What does Peter do? Well, Jesus says to him, okay, come. Peter then gets out of the boat and does what in a million years I don't think he could possibly have imagined, right?

He actually starts walking on the water, and he doesn't have armbands or floats to hold him. And he sees the power of Jesus as he keeps his eyes fixed on Jesus, and he walks towards him.

It's beautiful, right? Wouldn't you like to do that? Maybe. Practice in your bath tonight. I'm sure you won't get anywhere.

[6 : 45] But we could just kind of stop the story there. But the story doesn't kind of end with Peter the hero, you know, kind of walking on. It's like, wow, Peter, what an amazing job you did.

The story goes, and I love this part, because I can just really relate to this bit. Peter, eyes fixed on Jesus, walking on the water. All the other disciples must think, wow, what a great guy.

Suddenly, he sees the wind, verse 30, and he panics. He's like, what am I doing? Am I nuts? And I can imagine what the rest of the disciples were looking as they saw him.

They kind of, Peter walking confidently, and suddenly, straight down into the water. Because his perception has changed.

You see, the crazy thing is the wind was always there. The wind was always there. His circumstances hadn't changed. It was just his perception changed.

[7 : 45] You see, when he had his eyes fixed on Jesus, the wind was nowhere near as significant in his life as when he saw, was when he started looking at the wind. You see, and as he starts looking at the circumstances around him, seeing the waves that come up, because you can't actually see wind.

You can just see the effects of the wind. He sinks, and he's going, Jesus, save me. And he's dropping down into the water. Jesus reaches down this strong hand, grips him with an unshakable grip, picks him up, waves crashing all around him, and says, there, there, it's okay.

No problem, Peter. No, he doesn't. Do you get what he said? He leads him back to the boat, and he lovingly rebukes Peter, saying, you of little faith, why did you doubt?

Now, he's not saying, stupid Peter, I only got to level three on your faith. You know, if you'd been level 10, you'd have made it. He's not saying that. You see, because Jesus later on says, if you have just a mustard seed of faith, you can move mountains.

You just need a mustard seed. What he's saying here is, he's saying, that word doubt means divided in two. He said, you started looking in two directions.

[9 : 06] You stopped looking at me, but you also started looking at the waves. And when you start looking in two directions, do you know what? You forget who I am. You forget.

And he says to Peter, listen, you should be looking at me, because don't you see who I am? Don't you know who I am? When you look at your circumstances, rather than looking to me, we forget just who Jesus truly is.

And I think even as we're thinking about, I just think about all the things that go on in life and go on in the craziness of Hong Kong.

And it's so easy, isn't it, to get just distracted by our circumstances, by all the stuff we're trying to fix in our lives. All the things that are going on in the craziness of life.

And even as a church, we've been going through this kind of period where it may feel like, for some of you, it may feel like the wind is hitting us. For some of us, it doesn't feel like that.

[10 : 12] But some of us feel the wind in both personal circumstances, in all the aspects of our lives. And sometimes it can feel difficult.

Sometimes it can feel real. But Jesus comes to us and says, don't you know that I'm here with you? Don't you know? Take heart, it's me.

Whatever's going on in your life, if you're afraid, I'm your peace. If you're lonely, I'm your friend. If you are worried and anxious or concerned, if there are things which are holding you down in your life, I am the source of strength, I am the source of comfort, I am the source of joy, I am the source of peace, whatever is going on in your life, whatever circumstances are happening to you, do you know who I am?

Do you know who I am? I'm with you. I'm with you. And it's amazing because as Peter goes back in the boat, his shaky faith has grown because actually he's seen something of the power of Jesus, right?

He's seen something. And Peter gets back in the boat. Peter's looking a little bit wet, but Jesus is looking awesome, right? And isn't that what the Christian life is all about?

[11 : 38] That we don't necessarily look great, but we make Jesus look awesome. That when we see the power of God at work in our lives, whatever is going on, we focus on him and we see he comes through when we fix our eyes on him.

And so the question for us as a church, as Watermark, we've always said we always want to be used by God to help people take the next step on their spiritual journey, and this to be for the glory of God.

And the question for us is, do I want Jesus? Or will I be looking in two directions?

Do I really want Jesus in our life? As a church, do we really want Jesus? Or do we simply just want circumstances to change in our lives?

Do we simply want to go back to being comfortable with whatever we're used to in our lives? And so I think there are two things this story shows me and shows us as a church and shows each one of us on our individual journeys with him.

[12 : 45] There are two things that this shows us. The first thing is how do we get to actually want Jesus? One is there is hungry prayer, okay?

Hungry prayer. Look at Jesus. Jesus, in his busyness, why does he need to pray? Did you ever think about that?

Jesus is God, okay? He's kind of pretty good at doing miracles. He can just click his fingers and stuff happens. You know, he can put food on the table, pay his bills.

He can get it all just like that. He doesn't have to do anything. Why does he pray? You see, even in his busyness, he finds time to pray.

And do you know how he makes time in his busyness? Do you see what he does? He actually takes time out of sleep even. You see, he fasts from his sleep because he wants his father that much.

[13 : 46] He wants that relationship with his father because he knows that's the only source that I can go to. That's the only place that I can run to which is really going to give me the power, the strength, the peace, the joy, the hope that I really crave in my life.

That's where we need to look. And if Jesus, though he's God, runs to his father in desperation, knowing that he can only do, he can do nothing apart from God, do you not think that we might have to do the same?

Are we better than Jesus in that? And so one of the things we want to do as a church over the next month is we want to start at a time where we fast and pray.

Now, we have never done this before as a church. Some of you may be thinking, man, that sounds just weird. I don't know how many of you have ever fasted. Okay?

One or two people. But do you know, actually, in the history of the church, it is actually abnormal not to fast. Did you know that? Do you know the early Christians, Wednesday and Friday were fast days.

[15 : 08] There was regular fasting. Why? Because people knew that there was something about we need to rely on God for everything. Jesus, when he goes into the wilderness, he fasts.

You know, after he's baptized, he goes into the wilderness. He fasts for 40 days. We're not going to fast for 40 days. It's okay. At least I'm not, because I'm going to waste away. But 40 days, he's there.

He's tempted by the devil. And he's hungry. And the devil comes along and says, turn some stones into food, because you know you can do it. And Jesus, I mean, that's tempting when you're hungry.

You know, cheeseburger. You know, that's tempting. But he says, man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word of God, every word that comes from the mouth of God.

What he's saying is, food sustains us. But ultimately, it's God who sustains me. It's God who, in fasting and praying, Jesus is saying, I need you, Father, more than I need food.

[16 : 24] I need you, I need you, more than I need food. That's what he's saying. When the tiredness comes, you know, Jesus fasts from sleep.

He's saying, I need you more than I need my sleep at this moment. When the tiredness comes, when the hanger pangs come, Jesus is saying, this is how much I want my Father.

I want you more. I want you more. I want you more. Someone once said, fasting is the physical action that comes at the end of the sentence, God, I need you.

Now, in Hong Kong, we're very self-sufficient. You know, we say, God, I need you when my world collapses. Otherwise, I'm fairly okay.

Right? Oh, God, I quite like my comfort, you know. The thought of being uncomfortable just sounds a little bit, you know. The thought of being hungry.

[17 : 26] The thought of being, doing anything which requires sacrifice sounds awkward, doesn't it? Except, if you remember, we do that for the things we really want.

For the promotion, the money we want, the kids we want to get in a certain school. Then we'll be very uncomfortable. We'll do, we'll stay up all night. We'll do whatever it takes to get what we want.

And the challenge for us as a church is, do we want Jesus enough to be willing to set aside time to pray and to seek him and to run to him? Okay?

So what we're going to do, and what we want to call and challenge us as a church to do, starting in a couple of weeks, is to set aside some times where we will take one meal of the week, and we will fast in that meal.

Or maybe some of you can't do that. Maybe there'll be other ways for sleeping for an hour less. Or something which will cause us to say, not I'm just going to give that up, but I'm going to use that time to pray.

[18 : 37] And we'll put on Facebook and we'll put on some other things, some tools and aids to help us. But one of the amazing things is when God's people start to pray, then God shows up.

And the very things that we were craving originally, the peace, the joy, that life, he actually begins to provide. And that's when it gets exciting following Jesus.

Because then he looks awesome when he begins to provide. And it's not about us. You know, we're looking for, we're seeking a new senior pastor as a church.

Do you realize it's impossible to find anybody who's going to be the right person unless we pray? So are we praying for that? Are we praying?

You know, we need to pray for God to provide in that area. We need to pray for our own hearts to go from kind of medium cool with Jesus to go to hot.

[19 : 40] That's what's called revival in the Bible. When people's hearts get changed and we start wanting Jesus more than anything else. Do you know, in Scotland in the 1950s, two old ladies, they were 82 and 84, one was called Peggy, I can't remember the name of the other one.

But they suddenly saw that they needed to come to God and pray. And so they did. And they called the pastor and said, hey, every Tuesday night we want you to pray.

And the pastor was like, I'm not going to, like, these were kind of feisty ladies. These were strong ladies. And they came out and they went out to just start praying every Tuesday night. Prayed, prayed, prayed, prayed, prayed.

At the end of a year, I think it was about a year, a guy turns up, starts preaching outside the church. They open the gates.

A hundred people are waiting outside the church who just turned up because they were like, we know we need God. In two years, 22,000 people on that island, pretty much the whole island got saved.

[20 : 47] It's called the Hebridean revival. You go to Korea, the same thing happened at the beginning of the 20th century. Because people started saying, God, we need you. And when they started saying, God, we need you, suddenly hundreds and hundreds of people turned to Christ.

Who knows what God can do if we take the time as a church to seek Him and pray. So that's the first challenge. We need to pray and we'll be fasting and we'll be sending out in the next couple of weeks some of the things of how we're going to do that.

Okay? Second thing is stepping out. You see, you've got Jesus and you've got Peter here. God sometimes gives seasons of stability and comfort.

But God never wants to leave us safe in the boat. Do you get that? You don't grow to be an athlete by sitting on the sofa. Right? Some of you know that. Growing Christians don't grow by sitting in church just listening to sermons.

Did you know that? You need to use the food that you're being given. And what happens is, like Peter, when they see Jesus, that Jesus is with us, and they call out and say, okay, Jesus, call me to come to you.

[22 : 06] Call me to step out. Show me how you want me to step out. When God's people start to pray that, start stepping out of the boat, they hear God's voice saying, okay, step out.

And then when we respond, you see the power of Jesus, like Peter did. So how do we want to step out? There's a lot of different ways I think we can talk about.

One of the big dreams that we would want to do, we're in a venue at the moment where we are at 80% capacity pretty well every week. You know, statistics show, and we have been for a while, statistics show that you cannot grow as a church unless you start looking beyond that.

We know that we cannot increase more people in this place. Our prayer is that we might be able to start a second service. We have a new community center. We have new opportunities.

We don't want to be a cruise ship, but a lifeboat. We want to be called to reach out to the lost. But the thing is, we're not at that point yet.

[23 : 17] We can't do that today, but we want to be able to do that tomorrow. So where is it going to take us to get there? This year is not a year just for us to stay in the boat, stay comfortable.

It's a year for us to step out and to say, God, where are you calling me? Let me give you one example of how I think God has been working in this in the life of our church.

We've been praying for a venue for a long time as a church. And on this journey, God has brought us to Ebenezer.

He's brought us here for this next season of our journey. Cyberport hasn't welcomed us back yet. Right? So we're here.

But we're talking to the principal of the school. And you know this school is a school for the visually impaired, right? And we saw this as just an amazing charity. That's an amazing organization just helping many, many people in this area.

[24 : 17] And the banner, which is missing, it's ironic that it's missing. Because that should never be missing from the church, right?

It should never be missing. And so the elders asked Ebenezer, how can we partner with you in any way? And they said, 11th of December. 11th of December, we have an open day and a fundraiser where we blindfold people, do people on a blindfold walk.

And we'll take, there'll be guide dogs and things. And it's a great way for people just to understand what it's like to be blind. And so we were like, and you can't use the venue normally on that day in the same way.

We're like, what do we do? But it seemed like God was opening up an opportunity. So we start praying, okay, what do we do? God, what do we do? And so the vice principal comes to us and says, okay, let's arrange some stuff together.

And how about you guys? Would you like to do something on the open day? And it's like, yeah, like what kind of thing? Oh, you know, you do songs and a message, that kind of thing. And we're like, do you mean like a Christian message?

[25 : 26] Like the gospel? And he's like, yeah, that sounds great. Like how many times do you ever have a charity at their fundraiser inviting you to share the gospel?

But this is a great opportunity. 11th of December, we're going to do something we've never done before. We're not going to have normal service. We're going to have the opportunity to go and join them on the walk.

Invite your non-Christian friends to come. Let it be something where we raise some sponsorship to help them. Invite your friends to come. And afterwards, we're going to just share the gospel with people.

What a great way that God does what you would never even think of doing. God is at work. That's exciting. So will you step out of the vote and invite your friends and get involved?

There are so many other things that we as a church need. But God needs us to call out to him first and then to open our eyes to see where are the needs?

[26 : 29] Where are you calling me to? It's not just to get more busy. Listen, we would like to start an alpha course this year. We would like to, we lack a natural forum for non-Christians and new Christians to come and discuss the faith.

We want to be able to do that. But we need people to step up and help with that. To say, yeah, I hear the call of God. I want to step up and get involved in that.

I'll provide food. I'll help lead a group. I'll bring people. I've never done it before. But Jesus, you're with me. Would you help me? With our new community center, we would love to start a play group to reach out to families which are here.

Because there are so many opportunities there to reach people for the gospel. But we need people who are willing to say, hey, I'm willing to step out and be involved. At the moment, with the women's ministry and the men's ministry, we have gaps where we need to be stepping up and seeing the needs for loving people around us, supporting each other around us so that we're truly a community involved in each other's lives.

So if you see a need, maybe God is calling you to be the one. Don't look around and just say, oh, they're going to do it. Somebody else is going to do it. This is a year where we say, I'll step out.

[27 : 45] God, what is it you're calling me to do? I'll step out and do what you call me to do. Because when we see this, when we see that we come to God first and say, God, we want you more than anything else, then he begins to open our eyes to see where he wants to use us.

Not in a 50,000 different ways, but maybe in one way. And when we begin to do that as a church, when we get desperate for him, then God shows up.

And when God shows up, it's exciting. It's exciting to follow and walk with Jesus and we will grow in our faith. And we will look back at the end of the year and say, look what God has done.

And he will get the glory. So let's pray.