



Discussion Guide

Date: 6/21/2026

Sermon Title: Why is trusting God so hard?

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we come before You today carrying both faith and fear, confidence and uncertainty. Like the disciples on the stormy sea, we often find ourselves overwhelmed by the winds and waves of life. Open our hearts and minds as we study Your Word. Teach us to trust You more deeply, to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus, and to follow wherever You lead. When we are afraid, remind us that You are present. When we begin to sink beneath doubt, reach out Your hand and lift us up. May our conversation today strengthen our faith, encourage one another, and help us grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

OPENING QUESTIONS: (Choose one to start with)

1. Share a time when you had to trust someone completely. What made trust difficult or easy?
2. What is something people commonly worry about today that makes trusting God challenging?

SETTING THE SCENE:

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus sends the disciples ahead by boat while he prays alone on the mountain. A storm rises. IN the darkest watch of night, Jesus comes to them walking on the sea—something scripture says only God can do (Job 9:8; Psalm 77:19). His greeting in vs. 27, “Take heart, it is I, “ echoes God’s own name “I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Only Matthew tells us what Peter did next. The scene ends with the first time the disciples confess: “Truly you are the Son of God.” vs. 33.

DIGGING INTO Matthew 23-33: Read Matthew 23-33 and use questions for conversation or reflection.

1. As you read, imagine yourself in the boat with the disciples. What sights, sounds, emotions, and fears might you experience? What details stand out to you most in this passage?
2. Why do you think Jesus went up the mountain alone to pray before coming to the disciples?
3. Why were the disciples terrified when they saw Jesus walking on the water? Earlier in Matthew chapter 8 Jesus calms the storm. What is different in this story?
4. What do Jesus' first words, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid," reveal about God's character? The “it is I” statement is similar to OT where God says, “I Am”. What is the significance of this?
5. Why do you think Peter asked Jesus to command him to come onto the water?
6. What does Peter's willingness to step out of the boat teach us about faith?

Peter's Experience

1. At what point does Peter begin to sink?
2. What changed between the moment Peter stepped out of the boat and the moment he began sinking?
3. How do fear and faith interact in Peter's experience?
4. What do you notice about Jesus' response to Peter when he cries out for help?

Digging Deeper

1. What "storms" do people face today that challenge their trust in God?
2. What "winds" or distractions most often take your eyes off Jesus?
3. Have you ever experienced a time when you felt God calling you to step out of your comfort zone? What happened?
4. Why is it often easier to trust God in theory than in practice?
5. The storm never ceases until Peter is back in the boat. What does this teach us about how God is with us in the storms of life?
6. What does this passage teach us about doubt? Is doubt the opposite of faith?

Methodist Theology Connection:

In the baptismal liturgy of the United Methodist Church, we proclaim: "The Holy Spirit works within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ." Water often symbolizes both danger and new life throughout scripture. In this story, the water represents uncertainty and fear, yet Christ demonstrates His authority over it.

1. What does it mean to remain faithful when life feels uncertain?
2. How can the church help people trust God during difficult seasons?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Pastor Allison points out that our faith grows through failure? In the beginning of the sermon, she explains the concept of 'muscle failure' in physical training to help you understand spiritual growth, and where have you experienced your faith being stretched to the breaking point?
2. The text says that the boat was being "tortured" by the waves. This
3. The disciples were ordered by Jesus to cross the sea in the night in a storm. Often in life do we have to face storms in life?
4. The sermon points out that Peter asked Jesus to call him out onto the water rather than asking Jesus to calm the storm. What does this reveal about the nature of faith and our relationship with Christ in the midst of difficulty?
5. The disciples were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do, yet they still encountered the storm. How does this challenge the assumption that obedience to God guarantees smooth circumstances?
6. Pastor Allison read the Message version of this story that Jesus immediately caught Peter and asked, 'faint heart, what got into you?' rather than rebuking him. How does this change your perception of how Jesus responds to our failures?
7. The sermon suggests that the equation is 'faith and doubt plus action equals growth' rather than 'faith plus action equals success.' How does this reframe your understanding of doubt in the Christian journey?



8. Note that not only Peter's faith grows, but also all the disciples in the boat worship Christ at the end of this story. Why do you think all the disciples worshiped Christ after Peter's apparent failure, rather than after a successful walk on water? What does this teach us about the purpose of our struggles?

FINAL REFLECTIONS:

1. What 'boat' might God be calling you to step out of right now, even though the waves around you seem overwhelming and dangerous?
2. When have you felt like the waves were 'torturing' you in your life, and how did you experience Jesus taking the shortest path to reach you in that struggle?
3. How does our culture's emphasis on meritocracy and earning success conflict with the gospel message that our faith grows through failure and dependence on Christ?
4. What practical action can you take this week to keep your eyes focused on Jesus?
5. Who in your life may need encouragement to trust God in the midst of a storm?
6. How can this group support one another in growing deeper trust in Christ?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, you are the One who comes to us in the middle of every storm. When fear overwhelms us, remind us of Your presence. When we become distracted by the winds and waves around us, help us fix our eyes upon You. Give us courage to step out in faith when You call. Strengthen us when doubt arises. Lift us up when we begin to sink. Teach us to trust not in our own strength, but in Your unfailing grace. As we leave this gathering, help us walk faithfully wherever You lead, knowing that You are always near. May our lives bear witness to Your love, Your power, and Your peace. In the name of Jesus Christ, who calms every storm and holds us securely in His hand. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Identify Your Wave: Journal about what "waves" are currently making you feel overwhelmed. Write a prayer asking Jesus to come to you in the shortest path possible. Share with one trusted person about what you're struggling with.
2. Step Out of the Boat by identifying one small way you can act on something you sense God calling you toward. Don't worry about whether you'll "succeed"—focus on taking the step. Plan to report back to the group about what happened (including any "sinking" moments!)

3. Practice Immediate "Crying Out" when you feel yourself beginning to "sink" this week (in fear, doubt, anxiety), immediately cry out to Jesus. Notice how quickly He responds (it may not always be the way you expect). Keep a log of these moments and God's responses.
4. Celebrate Someone Else's "Failure" by reaching out to someone who recently took a risk in faith that didn't go as planned. Encourage them by pointing out how their courage blessed you or others. Help them see the growth that came from their willingness to step out.