

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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IF YOU WANT TO
WALK ON
WATER
YOU'VE GOT TO
GET OUT OF THE
BOAT

What's Water-Walking?

SESSION ONE

There is something — Someone — inside us who tells us there is more to life than sitting in the boat. You were made for something more. . . . There is something inside you that wants to walk on the water — to leave the comfort of routine existence and abandon yourself to the high adventure of following God.

—John Ortberg

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What kinds of things do you trust in, especially when life gets stormy, that help you feel comfortable and secure rather than fearful? Be honest!
2. Explain why you do or do not believe that God calls everyone who follows him to step out in faith and do something extraordinary. What does “stepping out in faith” look like?
3. How would you define failure?
4. Thus far in life, what has been your experience with failure ? What has failure kept you from doing? What has failure done for you?

VIDEO OBSERVATIONS

Images of a balloon ride

Following Jesus: choosing between comfort and growth

Did Peter fail—or succeed?

Discovering the power of Jesus

VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

1. When John Ortberg and his wife took their hot-air balloon ride, the competence of their pilot became very important to them. Why is it so important for us to know the competence and trustworthiness of whoever pilots our lives?
2. Jesus invited Peter to step out of the boat and walk with him—to do something Peter could not do on his own—and Peter couldn't resist the opportunity. Jesus is still looking for people who love and trust him enough to step out of the boat. What do you find intriguing about stepping out of the boat?
3. What are your thoughts on John Ortberg's comments about failure, particularly that failure has more to do with the way we view the outcome of an event than what actually happened?

LARGE GROUP EXPLORATION

An Adventure in the Dark

Let's take a closer look at what happened when Jesus revealed himself to his disciples as they sailed across the stormy Sea of Galilee, because that event matters a great deal to us today. We too have the opportunity to walk with Jesus in places we wouldn't dream of going on our own. Like each of the disciples, we must choose how we will respond to God. Will we sit in the boat, like the eleven disciples? Or will we, like Peter, leave the security of the boat and give God the opportunity to use us in extraordinary ways?

1. When Jesus told the disciples to sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee without him, they obeyed. But what happened as they sailed? (See Matthew 14:22–26; Mark 6:45–50.)
2. What did Jesus say to them, and why is this significant today? (See Matthew 14:27.)

3. From Peter's perspective, recap what happened after Jesus told the disciples who he was. What is significant about Peter's response to Jesus? (See Matthew 14:28–32.)

4. What impact did this event have on the disciples? (See Matthew 14:33; Mark 6:51.)

5. What impact do you think this event had on Peter?

Who Deserves the Credit?

It's not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena . . . who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of great achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. So that his place will never be with those cold timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Highlights from the History of Water-Walking

For a very long time God has been in the business of inviting people to be water-walkers. Here are a few examples to consider:

Person	Water-Walking Invitation	The Result
Abraham	Sacrifice his son Isaac. (See Genesis 22.)	God honored Abraham's faith and provided a ram for the sacrifice.
Moses	Lead the Israelites out of Egypt, which meant crossing the Red Sea with the Egyptian army in hot pursuit. (See Exodus 3:7–10 and chapter 14.)	God parted the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land, then drowned the Egyptian army.
Joshua	Lead the Israelites across the flooded Jordan River with the ark of the covenant carried by the priests at the front of the people. (See Joshua 3.)	As soon as the priests' feet touched the water of the Jordan River, it stopped flowing and the people crossed on dry land.
Joshua	Instead of going into battle, the Israelites were to march around the walled city of Jericho with the ark of the covenant for six days, then march around the city seven times on the seventh day and blow horns and shout when the trumpet sounded. (See Joshua 6.)	God made the wall of Jericho fall down so that the Israelites could overtake the city—the first key barrier to entering the Promised Land.

Twelve spies	Believe that despite the frightening obstacles in Canaan, God would be faithful to give the Israelites the Promised Land and all of its goodness. (See Numbers 13–14.)	Ten of them refused to believe God and his promises and perished in the wilderness.
Rich young ruler	Give up his material possessions and follow Jesus. (See Matthew 19:16–22.)	He refused and went away saddened. We do not know what took place in his life.

SMALL GROUP EXPLORATION

Topic A

Where Do We Place Our Trust When We Are Afraid?

God knows how fearful we are, and he sometimes uses uncomfortable, real-world challenges to cause us to choose where we will place our trust. John Ortberg explains it this way: “The decision to grow [spiritually] always involves a choice between risk and comfort. This means that to be a follower of Jesus you must renounce comfort as the ultimate value of your life.” Let’s explore what God says about fear and choosing where we place our trust.

1. What happens when we place our trust in “boats” of our own making instead of placing our trust in God? (See Psalm 49:1–13.)

2. What did David realize about finding security in God rather than in things? (See Psalm 20:6–7; 118:6–9.)

3. What do the following verses reveal about God?
 - a. Psalm 18:1–3

b. Psalm 56:3–4

c. Jeremiah 17:7–8

4. What has God said to his people over and over again, and why do you think he repeated it? (See Genesis 15:1; 21:17; Joshua 8:1; Daniel 10:12.)

Topic B

What Happened When These People Got Out of Their Boats?

The Bible records the stories of many people who had to choose whether to trust God and step out in faith. Let's explore what happened to two men who, like Peter, decided to trust God and leave behind the security, comfort, and safety they had tried to provide for themselves.

Moses

1. What happened when Moses—the adopted son of the Pharaoh's daughter—took matters into his own hands

when he saw an Israelite being mistreated by an Egyptian? (See Exodus 2:10–15; 3:1.)

2. How did God appear to Moses, and what did he want Moses to do? (See Exodus 3:1–4, 9–10.)
3. How did Moses respond when God presented the invitation to step out of the boat? (See Exodus 3:11–13; 4:13.)
4. Finally Moses took the plunge and returned to Egypt to urge Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. What happened as a result of God's power and the shepherd's water-walking obedience? (See Exodus 12:31–37.)

Gideon

5. Where was Gideon trying to find comfort and safety when God approached him? (See Judges 6:11.)

6. Gideon was afraid to take the challenge the angel of the Lord presented to him. How did God respond to his fears? (See Judges 6:12–18; 7:9–15.)

7. How did God use this “insignificant” farmer who finally decided to obey and trust him? (See Judges 7:16–24.)

The Pluses of Water-Walking

It is the only way to real growth.

It is the way true faith develops.

It is the alternative to boredom and stagnation.

It is part of discovering and obeying our calling.

The water is where Jesus is!

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Fear of failure is one reason many of us don't step out of the boat. Some people view Peter's walk on the water as a failure, but John Ortberg points out that there were eleven bigger failures sitting in the boat. In what ways does our perception of failure affect our willingness to start water-walking?

Think about It

Failure is not an event, but rather a *judgment* about an event. Failure is not something that happens to us or a label we attach to things. It is a way we think about outcomes.

— John Ortberg

2. How much does our view of God's character and competence influence the degree to which we are willing to trust him and, in faith, to accept his calling and take risks?

3. Would you agree that sometimes the "boats" we create—whatever gives us an illusion of control, whatever or whomever (besides God) we are tempted to put our trust in when life is stormy—might actually be more dangerous than water-walking with Jesus? Why or why not?

4. If we keep choosing not to step out of our boats, what happens to us? To people around us? To our relationship with God?

PERSONAL JOURNEY: To Do Now

1. In *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*, John Ortberg writes, "I believe that there is some aspect of your life in which God is calling you to walk with and to him, and that when we say yes to his calling, it sets in motion a divine dynamic far beyond merely human power." In what ways might God be calling you to get out of your "boat" and step out in faith?
2. Usually anyone who begins water-walking has to face personal fear. What deep fears keep you from really walking with and obeying God, from stepping out in faith and with his help doing what you could never do on your own? List fears that are specific to the calling you wrote down for question 1.

3. Looking back on your life so far, when have you said no to God's call? When have you said yes? Why? What happened as a result of those choices?

4. Which small or large steps can you begin taking this week to get out of your boat a little each day?

PERSONAL JOURNEY: TO DO ON YOUR OWN

You've learned a few basics about water-walking and have been encouraged to think about your choices, your boats, and the opportunity to water-walk. It's easy to seek comfort and create boats, isn't it? That's why so many people choose that path. But God is calling you, as he calls every believer, to put your faith in him and start getting out of your boat a little more each day.

Set aside some quiet time to think about the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers, and nobody needs to know your responses, unless you choose to discuss them with someone. What's important is that you take time to reflect on some issues that you explored today, issues that may cause you to become uncomfortable or even a bit angry—at yourself, God, or someone else. By their nature, some of the boats people create are pretty ugly and secretive. Remember, though, that God loves you just the way you are. Whenever you are willing to get out of the boat, he is ready to help you do things you could never accomplish on your own. One of the first steps in the process of water-walking is assessing honestly where you are right now—and where you want to be.

1. Look back on your life. When have you stepped up to the plate, to use a baseball analogy, and tried to hit the ball? When have you refused to get out of the dugout when your name was called? Why? How have those decisions influenced your life—for better or worse?

2. Are you excited about your relationship with God right now? Is it dynamic and growing, or pretty stale? Why? How might what you've learned about water-walking start making a difference in your relationship with God?

3. Do you think you are a risk taker or a comfort seeker? Why? Write out some ways in which you have taken risks in your walk with God and ways you have deliberately chosen to seek comfort rather than take the risk of what God was calling you to do.

4. Ask God to make your heart and mind open to what he wants to reveal to you through this study and to give you the courage to face whatever issues come up in the remaining sessions.