

*Where we start . . .*

It's been said that "there are no atheists in foxholes." What do you think that means?

What is the connection between your times of fear or anxiety and your life of prayer?

*What we read . . .*

As you think about your own responses to Jesus when you are facing challenging or frightening times, turn and read Mark 4:35-41. There you will find the twelve confronting their own fears and crying out to Jesus.

If you had been in the boat with the twelve, what do you imagine yourself doing? How would you have responded?

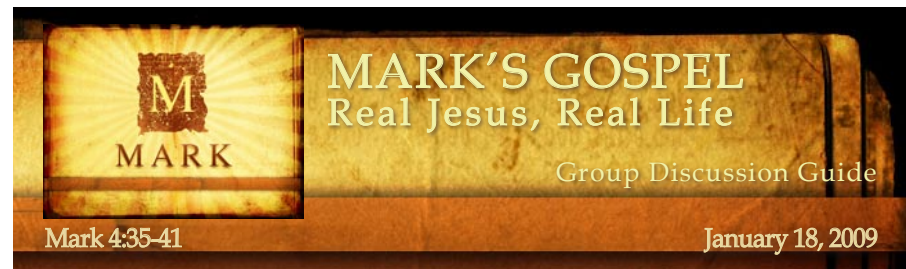
What do you think of Jesus' reply to the twelve after the storm has been stilled? How do you understand His mild rebuke?

Clearly, Jesus anticipated that they should have had some measure of faith; more than they displayed. Looking back over what Jesus had been teaching them (earlier in chapter 4), can you discern any reason that warrants Jesus' concern for their lack of faith?

*Why this matters . . .*

In one sense, the disciples' experience in the boat is a "lab" to help them own what Jesus had been teaching them. They would have fared better in the lab experience if only they had . . .

If that is true for them, then you will live better in the challenging times you face if only you would . . .



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*Diving in . . .*

Most of us have lived it out; when we have faced trying, difficult, or frightening times, we have turned to Jesus in prayer. Fear can be a powerful inducement to call on Jesus for help. And that is exactly what the disciples do when they find themselves in a boat with Jesus in the midst of a fierce storm. He's sleeping, so they call out to Him and awaken Him. They must have thought He could be of some help. But He rebukes them for their apparent lack of faith! What was wrong? Shouldn't we call on Jesus in times of need? Certainly! It wasn't that they turned to Him . . . it was what they were thinking in turning to Him that gives rise to Jesus' rebuke.

*Discussing . . .*

It is broadly understood to be common knowledge; when things are going tough, most people find a way to pray. That's what the old adage, "there are no atheists in fox holes" seeks to convey. Things may well get bad enough that even the person who never prays is driven to pray because of fear or trouble or danger.

Hopefully, your people don't only pray when times are hard. But the truth is that difficulties often drive us to prayer in ways that good times don't. And because of that, it seems reasonable to conclude that calling on the Lord when we are facing danger or trouble makes real good sense. (In fact, God tells us to do just that in Psalm 50:15!) That's what makes our passage this week so challenging.

You see, the disciples end up in trouble; they are fearing for their lives. And there is Jesus, asleep in the rear of the boat. So, they call out to Him for help. And He helps them . . . but He also gently rebukes them for the smallness of their faith!

Here's the problem for most of us. We think (with good Biblical warrant), that calling on Jesus when we are facing trouble is a good thing. But Jesus rebukes the disciples for doing it. And unless we understand what is going on we might end up either concluding: 1) we shouldn't be coming to Jesus for help when we are under it; 2) we probably don't have "real" faith because if the *Twelve* didn't have much faith, how can we think *we* do; or 3) we are so clueless about prayer that we should just give it up all together! Hopefully, looking closely at what we are told in Mark 4:35-41 will provide us another option for how to understand what is going on when the disciples call out to Jesus, in fear, in the boat.

As you walk through the passage, don't be afraid to really imagine what it must have been like to be in the boat. Don't read merely as disinterested spectators; you won't likely get the "feel" of what happened that way.

Ultimately, the disciples woke Jesus because they thought He could do something to help. It isn't likely that they anticipated that He could cause the storm to cease; they hadn't seen Him do anything of that magnitude yet and they were quite taken aback when that very thing happened. But they wouldn't have woken Him if they thought He would be absolutely useless. (Perhaps they thought He might have a better strategy for bailing!)

But what do we make of Jesus' rebuke? Wasn't it *right* for them to wake Him? *Shouldn't they have called on Him?* From what we know from the rest of Scripture, turning to Jesus in times of need *is* the right thing to do. The weakness of their faith is seen in something other than their turning to Him. And, that weakness is reflected in what they said to Him.

Notice how they awaken Him; they question *whether He cares*. This may be one of the critical components in the smallness of their faith.

Faith, biblically speaking, is so much more than simply affirming the right things about Jesus. Faith is about personal trust; real reliance. To believe in Jesus is to really trust. Certainly that reliance might be tied to how we perceive His identity; but another critical component is whether or not we really accept and know that He cares. (After all, the demons have Jesus' identity right, but they do not taste or know His love for them . . . and they don't *believe in Him* in the way the Bible typically speaks of believing. They don't have *faith* in Jesus, although they can affirm the truth about Him.)

Jesus tells us (elsewhere, Matthew 15:18) that what comes out of the mouth is a reflection of what is in the heart. So, here, when the disciples speak, they give us a window into their own hearts and the state of their own faith. And what do we see? They question whether Jesus cares.

That really does seem to be the crux of the issue for so many followers of Jesus. When we are facing tough or challenging times, when things are not going the way we think they should, it isn't that we doubt that Jesus is strong enough or powerful enough to do something; we aren't having questions about whether He is God or not. What really stirs in us is this haunting doubt about *whether He really cares for me* or not.

Knowing that He cares doesn't necessarily mean that things will ultimately turn out for me the way I want; Jesus' love doesn't always result in my preferred future coming to pass. But if I doubt His care, I will find it nearly impossible to rest in Him and cling to Him and rely on Him and look to Him in the midst of my difficulties and fears.

Jesus' track record with the twelve is growing. Looking back over what Mark has told us, we can see how good and gracious and kind and caring and compassionate Jesus is. Certainly He does care for them. And the struggle they are having is rooted in their forgetfulness . . . they have lost sight of what they have already seen . . . Jesus really does care!