

# “Strong from Start to Finish” // Matthew 14:22–33 // *Staying Faith #1*

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## Introduction:

Last week we finished part 1 of the *SENT* series through Acts, and we are going to be taking a little break and **start a new mini-series** called *Staying Faith*, in which we’re going to talk about how to finish things that we start in faith. (and, of course, I’ll finish the *SENT* series, I just wanted to break it up a little bit).

We **all have the experience** of starting things with enthusiasm and then petering out along the way, right? I did a **basic Google** search on “things we start well but don’t finish” (and I thought my computer was going to have a heart seizure by how many things the search turned back—142 million articles). Here are a few of them:

- *Diets*. How many in the midst of a lapsed diet right now?
- *Workout plans*
- *Med school*
- *College*
- *Navy Seal training*. (always one of my regrets)
- *Running a marathon* (The highest percentage of people to dropout of a marathon is at mile 18—they don’t know why it’s that mile... I think that’s your **body saying**, “*This is a bad idea*”). They say the **key in training** for a marathon is to run to 13 miles one direction and not take any money or your cell phone with you.
- *Reading a book*
- *Writing a book*
- *Trying to sign up at healthcare.gov*.

- *Watching the Lord of the Rings trilogy*. 40% of you—that’s the greatest movie series ever. 60%: Could this movie be any longer? How many endings?
- *Getting all the way through the mini-series LOST*. (Never have I been so captivated by the beginning of a series; or so weary, bewildered, and disappointed by the ending. By that last season I was like, “*Would everyone please die, so this can be over?*”)

In the life of faith, we have the experience of starting something but not finishing, too.

- Maybe you resolved to **read the Bible through** in a year, or **memorize Scripture**
- Or to **give up a destructive** or sinful habit
- **To be generous**—to start tithing or giving sacrificially...
- I know **church planters who volunteered** to go overseas but are having trouble now staying with it now... **even right now**, as you listen to this podcast, you’ve been thinking about quitting.
- Or **maybe a girl who resolved** to stop dating guys who aren’t spiritual leaders but she’s gotten lonely and is wavering in her resolve to wait for the man who is a gift from God

So I want to talk about staying faith... **The kind of faith that not only makes the commitment—but sees it through.**

- Jesus told a story about **2 brothers**... With which one was he more pleased? **Not the one who made the promise**, but the one who saw it through.
- So it is with us. **Write this down: It’s not just making the decision that counts with God, it’s seeing it through.**

## All-In

We’re going to apply this a lot of different ways, but **one specific application** I have for our church is in our commitment to go All-In with the mission of God.

If you're new here, "All-In" is how we approach our mission.

- **We believe** our mission as a church is to win people to Jesus, train them up and send them out.
- **FAMILIES; NEIGHBORS; WORLD**
- **LAST YEAR** we went all-in: **season in which** a lot of people got involved in **small groups** for the first time; got **plugged into ministries**; started to **serve our community**; took **first mission trip**

Well, during this time we sensed **that God wanted us to expand** our capacity to reach those groups. That meant **expanding our facilities, building better ministries, and devoting even more money** to the poor in our community and lost around the planet.

Our **2-year goal was \$26 million**. But when it was all said and done, our gifts and projected giving for these two years came in at the **astounding \$36 million**.

- We've had a great year, and we're **on track to take in about \$14 million** (which is 50% more than we took in the last year!— **haven't grown** by 50%), which is amazing.
- **For those of you who were here last year**, I want this to be a time of renewal, where we refocus our eyes on where Jesus is taking us and what he asking from us. This is like the half-time speech.
- **For the more than 1000 of you who were not here last year**, this can serve as an introduction to where we are going as a church and an invitation for you to **get onboard**. To **ask questions**. To **learn** about the mission. **Not halftime for you**—you just got drafted on to the team!

Now, just to be clear—**that is not the only application** of this series: we're going to talk about staying faith in a lot of other areas—but our commitment to *All-In* is one I will take **some time** to highlight every week.

## Matthew 14:22-33 (ESV)

In Matthew 14 we have a rather **infamous story of a man who faltered** in his faith: Peter.

- (Peter has been the **main human character** we've been following in Acts, which made this really interesting to me.)
- **Everybody loves Peter**, because I think we see a lot of ourselves in him.
  - He's a man **big on promises**, but short, sometimes, on execution.
  - **His aspirations** are often loftier than his accomplishments

"Peter," btw, was **not his real name**. That was a **nickname** Jesus gave him that meant **"rock."**<sup>1</sup> **Simon** was his real name. Think of him as **two different people** trapped in the same body.

- Right before the crucifixion, Peter says, **"I'll never deny you**, even if everyone else does." **That's the Peter part of him**. Yet that same night, he denies Christ 3 times. That's Simon.
- Peter in Acts 2 is the **first one to declare that God has included Gentiles** in the gospel. That's Peter, the rock. But later he refuses to each with Gentiles because he's scared of what the Jews will say and Paul has to call him out. Simon.
- **Today, you'll see a story** in which he says, "Jesus, if that's you, I'll walk on water to you." He is the only one to show that kind of courage. That's Peter. Then right in the middle of it he gets scared and starts to sink (that's Simon).
- Peter's got a **faith side** to him, and a fear side. (When I was a kid McDonald's had a burger called the **McDLT**... hot side hot, cold side cold. Burger innovation.) Peter's like that. He's got a hot side and a cold side. No lukewarm.
- **I think we're all like that**. You ever feel like you should have two names? I think I need one name that means **rock** and another that means **pansy**.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:42

**VERSE 22:** (Jesus had just fed the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish... and...) [22] Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. [23] And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, [24] but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

***He sent the disciples into a storm.***

Have you **ever heard the line:** *“The safest place to be is in the will of God?”* That’s true, in a sense, but sometimes people confuse that to mean that everywhere God sends you is **safe, easy**, like a walk through a **rose garden**.

Here, they **obeyed the direct command Jesus and ended up in a storm** as the result.

And **you need to understand** this so when storms hit you, you don’t assume you’re out of the will of God. **Certain storms are part of the will of God for you**, because God is not just doing something **for you**, he’s doing something **in you**.

- **Acts 20:22–23**, Paul says, *“22 And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships await me.”*
- Paul understood that these trials to which he is referring were **part of the will of God** for him.
- So **when you make a decision in faith** and it gets difficult, don’t be surprised. **A. You have an enemy** that immediately goes to war against you... and **B. God is trying to test your resolve and depend your faith**
- **The biggest thing God is doing in your life is teaching you to trust him, so faith usually leads you through difficulty, not around it.**

- **Isaiah 43:2–3**, “When you **pass through the waters**, I will be with you; and **through the rivers**, they will not overwhelm you. When you **walk through the fire**, you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the **Lord your God**, the **Holy One** of Israel, your **Savior.**”
- I would want my Savior to take me **around the waters**, or to a bridge over the waters. But God takes me through the waters to show me his **grace is deeper than the water**; his **presence stronger** than the fire. He wants me to be able to trust him in any situation.

**Faith leads you not through difficulty, not around it**

[25] And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them (which means about **4 am**, which means they had been battling this storm for about 6 hours... **you know what that means**, Jesus did not come immediately—he let them fight the storm for most of the night before he came!)<sup>2</sup>, walking on the sea. [26] But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” (I chose this passage because it is Halloween) and they cried out in fear. [27] But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

OK, so let’s talk about this for a little bit.

- He **doesn’t come immediately**. And then when he does come, he comes **strolling by at a distance** so close they can see him and hear him (which, in the midst of the storm, had to be close!)
- But **does he come** right up to them and hop in the boat and say, **“It’s OK, I’m here to save you!”**? No. **Mark 6:48**, a parallel account of this, adds: “He meant to pass by them.” How odd! They’re struggling for their lives... “I’ll see you on the other side.”
- To get his help, they have to call out.

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew 8–15*, 439.

- QUICK LESSON: **Never overlook human initiative in gaining the help of God as you struggle. HE'S THERE TO HELP BUT YOU GOT TO ASK...**
- And I love this... **they don't even cry out in faith**, they cry out in fear. Which is *bad* faith. But JESUS answers them. **Do you know what that shows you?** God is a **compassionate father** who responds to his children when they call upon him. *"...Call upon me in the day of trouble, he says, I will deliver you, and you will glorify me."*<sup>3</sup>

[28] And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." [29] He said, "Come."

Notice, **Jesus did not fix the disciples' problem** by making the storms go away. He just gave Peter another command. "Come."

- **You're in difficulty?** Maybe you should **Stop asking God for to fix the situation, and start asking him what his command is.** **NOTHING WRONG** with asking him to fix the solution, BUT FIRST ask him what his command is!
- Stop demanding and start listening!

So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. [30] But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." (There is a time for **long prayers** and a time for short ones. When you're sinking in the waves, short prayers will suffice.)

[31] Jesus immediately reached out his hand (he's always close, in difficulty) and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

**Why is this story in there?** You should always ask that.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 50:15

- **This story is not in there to inspire us to actually walk on water.** (In Acts, when Paul is in a shipwreck, it never occurs to Paul to get out of the boat and start strolling to shore.)
- This story is to show us **how to continue what we start in faith.**<sup>4</sup> Because that's going to be one of the biggest problems for Christians.

So here's the lesson:

**(A) Initial faith is not enough. We need staying faith.**

When Jesus said to Peter at the end, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" he is not talking about the **intensity** of Peter's faith, but its **duration**.

Peter's **faith, when it started, was very strong** (he was the only one who got out of the boat). It just didn't last long.

*Initial faith is not enough, we need sustaining faith...*

**(B) We find staying faith at the same place we found initial faith.**

**Where did Peter's initial faith come from?** 2 places:

1. **A vision of Jesus.**
  - Vs. [27] **But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."** when Jesus says, "Take heart, it is I," in Greek that is **ego eimi**. "I am." Which was the name of God. "Don't be afraid; I am."
  - **Peter saw that the Great "I am"** was standing on top of everything that terrified him.
2. Jesus' command.
  - Peter figured that it was more important to obey Jesus' command than to focus on the circumstances.

<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, 191.

- The Great I AM is on top of those waves, what he is said is larger than the waves rising up against me.
- He focused not on **what he had walk through, but whom he was walking to.**

Write this down: **Peter is not so much walking on water as he is walking on the promises of God; he's not so much standing on the waves as he is standing on the character of Jesus.**

It was **when he took his eyes** off of those 2 things that he started to sink. **Vs. [30] But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out...**

*Focus on the WORD and you'll walk on water. Focus on the waves and you'll wallow in weakness.*

*You see, let me give you...*

### A little secret to this passage

The **point of this passage** is not to demonstrate **the greatness or weakness of Peter's faith**. The point is to demonstrate the greatness of God's grace.

When I was reading the **parallel accounts...** I noticed that **Mark's account didn't mention the part about Peter** getting out the boat sinking, only about Jesus coming to them on top of the waves. Well, **Mark was Peter's traveling companion**, and scholars tell us the Gospel of Mark are essentially Peter's preaching notes... at first I thought, **Peter doesn't want us to know** about his wavering faith. Ashamed. But I think **there's a different reason**: Peter doesn't want the focus on him at all!

BECAUSE This story is **not about Peter's faith; it's about Jesus' faithfulness**. Peter wants us to know...

- **That he is always close.**

- **When you call out to him**, even if it's in fear for from a lack of faith, he helps. **Ps 94:18, "When I said, 'My foot is slipping,' your steadfast love, O Lord, supported me."**
  - Our God is a God who will always be there to **catch us, pick us back up, and lift us on top of the waves.**
- So when you waver, **PUT YOUR EYES** back on him.
- This story **doesn't give you an example to emulate**, but a Savior to trust.
- **A friend of mine says**, **"In this story, Peter may have failed at what he set out to do, but Jesus succeeded in proving exactly what he wanted to prove."**<sup>5</sup> That he is always trustworthy.
- **HOW MUCH MORE** should we see this on this side of the cross? There we see Jesus **not only came to us in the storm**, he took into himself the storm of God's wrath; **he not only walked on top of the waves**, but soared over sin and death in the resurrection; **not only did he lift us up on top of the waves**, he filled with the power of resurrection life; and I know that **if he reached all the way down to hell** to rescue me from my sin, I know he'll help me when I stumble. **if he reached out to save me when I was his enemy**, certainly he's reach out to help me now that I'm his son.
- You see, I'LL SAY IT AGAIN: **ultimately, GOD'S PURPOSE in the Christian life** is to teach you to trust him.
  - **In Peter's first letter to the church, 1 Peter**, he writes to Christians going through their own storms and he says this: **1 Peter 1:6, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials [STORMS], so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."**

<sup>5</sup> Steven Furtick, "Why Does Our Faith Fail?" Matthew 14:22-33

## Take the next step

So initial faith is not enough; you need staying faith, and staying faith comes from the same place as initial faith.

So where does this leave us? **You're in the midst of difficulties in the decisions of faith that you have made.** You started out well but now you're faltering.

**Put your eyes and ears back on the things you were looking at when you first made the decision.** You **believed Jesus was trustworthy** and you took a dare on him. You **obeyed his command.** And **now things have gotten difficult.** That **does not mean** that **Jesus has left** you or that you **made a wrong decision.** He is **testing** your resolve and trying to deepen your trust in him.

- **Re-embrace his character, re-hear the command, and take the next step.**

Think of **Peter's faith in the FIRST STEP** (*describe*). Isn't that the exact same kind of faith he needed for the next step?

- **Every step is the same act of faith.**
  - **We don't experience faith** so much by sitting around and dreaming up grand dreams, but by **taking the next step.**
  - The expression of faith **is a step**, not a dream.
  - **Getting to the end of your life and feeling like you walked on water** is the result of a lifetime of small, faithful steps.
  - **Isn't that what you want from your life?** Your family, your ministry...?
  - **"It's never the dreams your dream; it's the (little) decisions you make."**

TAKE THAT STEP OF FAITH!

- *It's the small step **forgiving** the person.*
- ***Reclaiming God's forgiveness** of you and getting up again in the morning to struggle another day against the sin. **Prov 24:16***
- *Being willing to **put up with scorn** one more day as you try to be a faithful witness for Jesus to the people to whom he has sent you*

- *Getting back to the **assignment***
- ***Trusting God** again with your **finances**, so you can be generous. **Embracing sacrifice** again.*
- *Being willing to **press on without a boyfriend** as you wait for the one that is a choice from God.*

**The expression of faith is the step. SO Take the next step.**

- **Maybe the "next step" for you is the first step.**
  - If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat!
  - Read a book recently: *"There is only one line in life you can control and it's not the **finish line**, it's the **starting line**."*<sup>6</sup>
  - The **author** says: "Every big finish began with a small start."
  - **Jesus is close, and compassionate**, and he doesn't come to criticize—you start walking in faith and he'll help you!

## All-In: CARD

*I've told you an application of this is All-In.*

All-In funds everything we do.

- **In the last year:**
  - **We launched a Chapel Hill campus;**
  - **new Raleigh campus** and other campuses as the Holy Spirit leads us.
- We've **expanded a few of our campuses**—they were filled to overflowing, and we have more to do
- **Find permanent space** for some of our mobile campuses
- And we want to **give away more money** than we ever had—Summit our goal is to give away **6 million** over the space of 2 years **OUTSIDE** of our church to **specific projects** to bless the poor in our community and reach the lost around our world!
  - Domestic churches: 4500/3500
  - Almost 75% of our 179 (131) serve in UPG's

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<sup>6</sup> Jon Acuff, *Start*

HALFTIME!

### So, here's my word to the two groups:

- For those of you who were here last year and made a commitment, at the end of this series, I'm going to ask you to **officially renew it**. To **refocus** your eyes on the Jesus you trusted when you made the first commitment, and to **re-heed** his command. **You believed he was trustworthy** and worthy, and so you made the commitment. So, refocus on him and renew it.
  - Some of you, **maybe God has increased you financially**, and you should up that commitment. It's not a sacrifice anymore.
  - Or maybe, you're in a **different place spiritually**. He's increased your faith.
  - Or maybe you've had **unfortunate change...** we want to know that too.
  - **2 THINGS WHEN YOU LEAVE: CARDS.**
  - **Nov. 23–24**
- Others of you are new here... and you are **hearing about this for the first time**. **If God has called you here**, and you feel like this is your church now, I want to urge you to go all in with us pursuing the mission of Jesus here!
  - Again, **you'll get the same card** today when you leave, and you could use it to make a 1<sup>st</sup> time commitment.
  - You don't turn it in today, but I'd love for you to take it before the Holy Spirit and pray about it for the next month and we'll turn it in at the end.

### 3 Caveats:

#### (1) I don't want any of you, new or old, to feel pressure.

- You saw this last time: the great offerings of the Bible were always freewill.
  - When Moses and David took up stuff to build the Temple they said, "Whoever freely intends in their heart to give..."

- Paul said in 2 Corinthians: "God loves only cheerful (hilarious) givers." **Can I tell you why God only loves cheerful givers? (Important)**
  - **Because God has no needs.**
    - **5 loaves** and 2 fish
    - **Cyrus**
    - **Fish** with 100K in mouth.
- **If God had needs**, maybe he'd want you to give for whatever reason, as long as he got your money!
- But because he has no needs, he only wants cheerful givers, **because he wants to work on your heart**. He wants you to live a life of worship, joy and to leverage your life as a sacrifice for the world as he leveraged his for you.
- We said it this way: **"Generosity is not something he wants from you, but for you."**
- We saw last week in Acts: when the early church leaders talked about generosity, there was never compulsion.
  - Ananias.
  - So don't give unless it is your heart's desire.

#### (2) If you're cynical

- ... I always say this: **give somewhere else**. I'd rather you learn to be generous and give somewhere to the kingdom of God.
- **Take space**: I'd invite you to "get to know this place." We try to be very transparent. We'll show you where all this money is going and what we spend it on.
- And if you don't like it, I'd encourage you to **find a place you do believe in** and invest there.
- Now, I realize that **some of you might hear that and use that as an excuse** to never really give... if you've been here for a while you **need to figure out if this is the church** God's led you to, and if so, go all-in.

## (Music)

**(3)** Lastly... *Some pastors are **ashamed** to ever talk about money or present the needs and call people to sacrifice. I am not. Let me tell you why:*

- **Jesus talked about money more than any other single subject...**  
Nothing shows what you love and trust like what you do you're your money. When you cut through all the religious verbage we use, what we love and trust in is shown by what we do with our money. Regardless of what we say or think about ourselves, until it affects this area, it's just words. It's all **FAKE**.
- **I really believe in this mission.**
  - I believe the world is lost without Jesus. Only Savior.
  - In WW2 women went around the country raising money to help fund the war effort... they weren't ashamed of it. They loved their husbands and believed in the mission and wanted them to be provided for!
  - How much more! I believe in it, and I'm committed to it; and I am trying to get everyone—my children, you, to join me.

## Prayer:

Bow your head... see vision of Jesus. What command is the Holy Spirit giving you? If you're in a difficulty, might you say, "Lord, what is your command?" **Peter's prayer.**

**Samuel's prayer:** Speak, Lord, your servant hears."