

# **A Simple Guide to Walking on Water: God is For You**

*By Bobby Schuller*

I want to begin today talking about faith and the series is called “A Simple Guide to Walking on Water.” That’s what God wants you to do. God wants you to do as amazing and crazy things as walking on the water sounds. The greatest change agent in the world today, I believe, is the church. I believe the church is where great things can happen because this is the heart of people in America and around the world.

So I want you to know that God wants you to do things that are bigger than you think you can do. If you are sufficient for the task, it’s not big enough for God. You need goals and dreams that are even bigger than the ones you have right now. And you need to have the faith to believe, the audacity to believe that God will give you what you’re asking for, and you do. You have faith, and your faith is being released and you’re using your faith to see a different world. People need faithful people like you to live by faith. If faith is trust and faith means trusting that God will be faithful to us, how can we have faith in God if we don’t believe God is for us?

And in answer to that question today, I want to say God is for you. God is for you. We want to invalidate God’s love for us by saying well my

behavior hasn't been very good lately. Can I say that a parent doesn't stop loving their child when they start messing up? God doesn't stop loving you or stop being for you when you mess up.

And certainly, if you're not a good person, if you're an evil person, if you're doing bad things to others, if you're harming others, God hates the things you're doing, but God's still for you. Can we get that straight? That God is completely on your side. That as long as you're alive, God still believes in you and so do I. With the time you have left in this world, it is never too late, to not only turn your life around and become a Jesus-kind-of-person, but it's never too late to become a world changer. And you're on your deathbed. I believe in a God who can use someone on his or her deathbed to change the world. Do you? We want to see, over the next few weeks, our faith expand to believe that regardless of our circumstance, that God is a powerful enough God to use weak, suffering, imperfect people to make a huge difference in the world for his kingdom. That's who I am and that's who you are. God can use people like you and me to make a difference in the world. Broken trees still bear fruit. Did you know that? And God can use you, even in your brokenness and sometimes because of your brokenness to make a big difference in the world. God is going to use some of the things that you may be so ashamed of, so embarrassed by, they become your greatest strength to

make a difference for others. Your trial is going to become your testimony, I think.

And in order to endure the suffering of life, the sickness, the challenges that we face, we have to trust that God's power is big enough to overcome the challenges that we're facing. That he's given us everything we need to do what we need to do to thrive in and succeed in life.

We have not only to believe in God, we have to believe God is for us and he is. He is faithful to his covenant. God is for you. I remember when I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, so I guess that would have made me ten, eleven years old, and I had this teacher. I was going to a religious Christian school and this teacher was talking to us about a loving God. And she started with this: it was something about Noah's Ark. She said 'well you know the world was flooded at one time, so when God destroys the earth next time, he's going to do it with fire.' And this is how she begins with a little story to a bunch of ten year olds. We think, okay. So God's going to destroy the whole earth with fire. I'm interested. This sounds cool. You know ten-year-old boy. And then she says 'you don't want to go to hell, do you?' I was like no. Good point. And she said 'if you don't want to go to hell, you need to make sure that every time you sin that you confess that sin or you'll go to hell.' Wait, what? So like not only do we have to

like receive Jesus, but every time you sin or make a mistake, you have to sort of like account for it, and then you have to ask for forgiveness.

But let's say like you're Mother Teresa. You've had the most amazing life. You've changed the world, and you're having a rough day. And you're driving and somebody cuts you off and you flip the person off and then a big truck hits you and you die. Do you go to hell? I mean this is what I'm thinking. I'm thinking it doesn't matter how good your life is. What I'm hearing from this woman is that if you sin and don't confess it, you're going to hell.

So all day I'm like every time I'm doing a little mistake, I'm like finding someone, I need to tell someone that I took that kids ball and I didn't share. I'm such a jerk. And I actually was scared. And I talked to my mom about this and she was like 'Bobby, that's dumb. Don't worry.'

And the reason I begin with that story is there is a lot of bad theology in the church, and many of us have heard things like this. You probably didn't hear that exact thing, but you've heard things where it kind of sounds like God is doing whatever he can to keep us away from heaven, or to keep us from succeeding, or even things like well God's going to let us into heaven but this life is really going to stink. And he

doesn't care about this current life we're living. And all of these things really are mistakes, if you read the Bible.

If you read the Bible, in my opinion, you see a loving God, you see a world that's torn, where bad things happen, but not a God who likes those things. The premise for Christianity is that Jesus shows us what God is like. Does Jesus make people sick? No. He heals them. Jesus is the fullness of the word of God. He is the word of God. If you want to know the Bible, look at Jesus. He is living out the Bible perfectly. All of Jesus' opinions completely line up with what the Bible says. And Jesus does not make someone sick if they sin, and then say get your behavior right, I'll be back in three or four weeks, I'll heal that, maybe, if you confess your sins. Right? You don't see that behavior. In fact, the people that act that way are the people that Jesus is always saying are going to hell. Religious leaders like me! It's the religious leaders, the ones that are creating all of these new barriers between God and people, and of course, they became the moderators of those barriers. So you come to me in my priestly pastoral form, and if you behave right I might let you see God and talk to God, or I might let you in the house of God. But see that's so contrary to the gospel of grace. And this is, by the way, what makes the Christian religion unique is that we're not what we do; that we're, by default, children of God. So the kingdom of God is upside down in Christianity.

What Jesus teaches us is not that we get everything right and then God loves us, but rather the other way around. As broken, messed up, hurting, addicted people, God loves us and, out of that love, we do great things. The more we experience the joy, the hope and the faith that is in God, the more we do what is good. So that legalism has no part of Christianity. If you read, especially the epistles of St. Paul, you will find very quickly that there is no place for legalism in the church. And there is a big difference. People are supposed to be moral and to be good, but God does not love you more for good behavior. And this is the big mistake that so many churches make. God loves you just as you are, not as you should be, because nobody is as they should be. Can we get that straight?

So that's why it's so important, when we talk about faith, to establish the fact that God is for you. Nobody wants you to go to heaven more than God does. Nobody wants you to have a thriving, full, happy life more than God does. He's your Dad. He's a perfect loving Dad. If you ask most parents what they want for their children, three things, they would say: I want them to be wealthy. I want them to be beautiful. I want them to be happy. Which of the three will they pick? Yes, right? If I want my children to be sick, or healthy, which one will they pick? Huh? Healthy, yes. You think God's different? You think God's a bad dad, you

think he's evil? You see, God wants the best for you. And the really stinky thing about the place that we're in is we're in this odd in-between in which God is working to fulfill his kingdom on earth, and it's already been won in the cross and resurrection, but not yet. And that's what we say in theology.

And faith is this – that in the end, the good is going to far outweigh the bad. That in the end, we are going to look back and say that makes sense. But part of faith is understanding that right now there is going to be some confusion. But the one thing you should never, ever be confused about is this: God is for you. He is for you. He's not abandoned you. He believes in you. If you have faith, even in the midst of your sin and your mistakes and flaws and everything you don't have and all of your scarcity and insufficiency, God's best is ahead for you. God is so pleased by faith. Faith pleases God. That's what the scriptures say, and I believe it. I have seen it.

So God is on your side. So stop being a shameful person. Stop saying things like if people only knew this about me, they wouldn't love me. Or God is disappointed in me, or etc. You are doing better than you think, by the way. And the Lord sees it, and he's so proud of you. He really is. And I want to say to everybody who just went God's not proud of me, he is proud of you. You know I'm proud of my kids even though

they haven't accomplished anything, can I say that? I'm so proud of my children. I love my kids so much. They haven't really done anything. They're six and four.

So I want to say and that's so important. This is the gospel of grace. This is a sermon, by the way, this is my first sermon what I'm about to tell you. I preached this when I was 17 years old, and I preached it for about five years, and it's basically the gospel. And it's a reformed gospel. It's the gospel based on covenant, not trying harder. Do you know what a covenant is? It's God's promise to you. It's God's promise that he's the one that's doing the work. It's God's promise that as long as you don't give up, things are going to be alright. Actually, it's God's promise that even if you do give up, things are going to be alright cause God's not going to let you give up. Cause he's a good dad, and he loves you.

Luke chapter 13, Hannah read it this morning. I'm going to try to bring you back. Imagine being in the first century, so think sandy floors, and adobe buildings, and hot Israel, and big religious gowns, and poor people, and sick people, and sinners who are outside, super, great religious people who are inside and these very clear lines of in and out. And this rabbi, Jesus, who is now being called a prophet, that sort of looks like the people that are on the outside, but is the best at being like the people on the inside. In other words, he's one of the most respected,

admired rabbis, yet he's also one of the most hated rabbis, and everybody knows who Jesus is. He's become super famous, actually not because of his teaching and mainly because of his miracle working, because he's gathering people. I don't think his sermons are drawing people, in fact, very often it seems like Jesus is sort of preaching to get people to go away. People are coming to Jesus because if they get close enough to him, he'll just heal them. Some people, they get close enough to him and they're healed. I'd want to see that, wouldn't you? Even if I was an atheist, I'd want to check that out. That sounds awesome.

So Jesus is drawing thousands of people, he's super famous, and the Jewish community doesn't really know what to do with him because he's challenging their norms. Believe it or not, the current religious environment is not old school; it's new school for the time. There is this new view of rabbinic Judaism of putting a hedge around the law. So it would be saying something like well I don't want to break the Sabbath and I'm not sure if spitting is breaking the Sabbath, so I'm just not going to spit. And then not spitting becomes a new law. Right? That's a real one, by the way.

And Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. So in the synagogue, it's very much like a church. In fact preaching, Christian preaching comes out of the Jewish tradition. Preaching was established to Judaism as

teaching the word of God. And so Christians are still like rabbis in this way. And all the people are gathered. Very often the people are separated. Sometimes the women are in one place and the men are in the other, but everybody can see each other. And they're in the synagogue, not the temple, and Jesus is preaching. So he's this famous guest preacher that has gathered. The local pastor of this little synagogue is really stoked because Jesus came. But now all of a sudden; it would be as if I had a guest pastor and this guest pastor is like 'your pastor, Bobby Schuller, is a big hypocrite.' I'd start squirming in my chair and say amen!

So here's Jesus, he's teaching in the synagogue, and he's teaching to everybody there, and we don't know what he's saying, but I believe he's talking about the kingdom of God because he always does. And I think he's talking about people being healthy and thriving because what happens is in response to his teaching, there's this woman who stands up whose been bent over like this, crippled, for 18 years. And she decides she's going to come to Jesus. And so what probably happens is she even walks into the area she's not supposed to walk, like the men's area, even though she's maybe elevated or on the outside. And does something, she sort of walks right up to Jesus to be healed. And everybody's watching, what's going to happen? She's breaking all of these cultural taboos. Right in the middle of his sermon, she walks up to him to get healed. And what does he do? He says you are free. And she stands up.

How do the religious people respond? Joy? Well the appropriate response would be kingdom of God is here! Whoa! What just happened? That's amazing! I mean these are people that would have known her. People don't leave town, right? So everybody would have seen this woman bent over for 18 years. People should have gotten up and screamed; revival should have broken out, right? What happens? So the local pastor, the Bobby Schuller of their church, I would never do this, of course. The president of the synagogue says 'excuse me.' So here is Jesus standing here teaching, right, and then the president kind of stands in front of Jesus. He doesn't even talk to Jesus. He turns and talks to everybody else. He's like 'everyone, everyone, it's the Sabbath, all right? There are six days in the week. Jesus is going to be around for a while, so please nobody else come forward to get healed. All right? We're trying to have a church service and we want to be appropriate here. It's the Sabbath and it's not right to heal on the Sabbath, so you come back tomorrow. Come back tomorrow.'

What does Jesus say? They don't even look at Jesus, right? They didn't have the courage to do that. Jesus looks at him and he says 'you hypocrite.' He says 'you take your donkey to water on the Sabbath.' The scriptures, or I think it's the mission, there's something writings, tradition in Judaism, that you can take a donkey to water on the

Sabbath. Why? Because Jews have, and appropriately so, a dignity for animals. Even though you eat animals, there is a right and a wrong way, a humane way to care for and eat animals. And you actually see that in Israel today. It's amazing. One man told me they play classical music and massage their cows when they milk them and they get more milk. I thought that was awesome.

So there's this love for animals, right? So he says 'you hypocrites, you have allowed donkeys to have water on the Sabbath, but this woman who has been crippled for 18 years and is a daughter of Abraham must wait?' And it says that the leaders in the synagogue were humiliated, as they should be. What is Jesus saying? He's saying God is for you. I just want to pause here for a minute cause I'm not done talking about the story, but how many of you, and don't raise your hands because they might actually be here, and I might be one of them. I hope I'm not. How many of you have been abused by religious leaders? And have gotten something woven into your soul, maybe in your head you don't believe it, but in your heart you still kind of think well maybe God hates me, and maybe God is rooting against me. Maybe God's disappointed with me. Maybe I need to keep advocating for God and maybe finally he'll be on my side. Maybe you have been treated by a religious leader the way this religious leader treated this woman. You are no better in fact you're worse than a donkey: 'you need to get in line. Follow the rules.' Some of

us have heard those things in our life, and we have this tremendous weight around our neck that until I get in line and I follow the rules, until I'm like an A-minus on my Jesus report card, until I get that, God's not really going to be for me.

We don't believe that in Christianity. Anybody who taught you that is false. We believe in this thing called grace and it's wonderful. Let me tell you more about it in a minute, but I want you to know God is for you. God is for you, God is for you. Even though, even though, even though, God is for you. He is for you. He is for you. Have faith. You can trust in a God who believes in you.

So, it's so important. So Jesus says this is what humiliates them is this line right here: this daughter of Abraham. This daughter of Abraham. You know what he's saying when he says this daughter of Abraham? He's is appealing to covenant. In Judaism when you talk about Abraham, you're talking about covenant. You're talking about a promise made between our great ancestor Abraham and God. There is this ancient promise made that you will be my people and I will be your God. There is this ancient promise that you will be the head and not the tail. You will be many. You will be blessed and you will be a blessing to the world. In other words, she's special because she's in covenant with God. Do you know you're in covenant with God? If you have put on

Christ Jesus, you have also put on the covenant. And I want to explain what that means.

I need two men wearing jackets. I'm going to start with Ed Arnold just because he's my favorite. Come on Ed, will you stand up please? And one other man from this side of the room with a jacket. Anyone will do. Right here, okay. Thank you, sir. All right everybody tell them your name. Everybody knows your name, but tell them your name.

ED: Ed Arnold.

BS: Ed Arnold. Welcome. What's your name, sir?

JP: Jesse.

BS: Jesse. And what's your last name?

JP: Pidor.

BS: Okay, Jesse Pidor. Okay, unbutton your jackets, guys. I know we're in church. Oh, you already did it, you're relaxed. Cause he's a sports guy. All right Jesse.

So in Judaism, and not just in Judaism, but in the ancient Near East, there's this thing called a covenant. And very often in tribes, you'd have tribal leaders, usually two, not old men, but two older men, strong men, leaders, two men that are respected and loved in the community. The chiefs of a tribe, right? And every tribe usually had their thing, you know what I mean? They had a thing that they did. Two of the most common were warrior tribes and farmer tribes, all right? So, we're going to make you the farmer, okay?

ED: Okay.

BS: And you're going to be the warrior, all right, Jesse?

JP: Okay.

BS: And these are two tribes that live in a very dangerous, uncivilized world. Maybe they have a little town with a little wall around it, but in general the tribesmen and women feel that they're in danger. So this tribe leader has a family and a tribe of soldiers. They're warriors. From birth, they train and they fight, but they're hungry all the time because they're terrible farmers. Right? And this man, they have a bunch of really great bakers and farmers and they can grow anything on any kind of ground. And the two tribal leaders realize they can solve each

other's problem by becoming one tribe. And the way they become one tribe is through covenant.

And so what would happen is they would make a promise and Chief Jesse would say to Chief Ed, 'Chief Ed, we are going to defend you. Our warriors will fight to our last breath to make sure you and your farms are safe. Every last one of us will die before you receive a scratch on your head. If I break this covenant, look at this pool of blood because that is what should be upon me and my household for all generations.' This is heavy stuff.

Chief Ed says to Chief Jesse, 'Chief Jesse, you will be fed. We will do everything we can to make sure your warriors have everything they need to eat and to be sustained. No matter what, if we have to give you the very flesh from our bones, we will so that you will not die.' And then they make this promise, and then take your jackets off. I hope you're about the same size. Don't do fat guy and a little coat like Chris Farley. No, switch jackets. All right? Put them on. There we go. And this is symbolic. You see what happened here? The coat like a coat of many colors is a symbol of honor. Now pace back and forth. So you guys will pace back and forth, like this.

And as they talk, they say, 'I will defend you. I will feed you. I will defend you. I will feed you. I will care for you. You will be okay, I promise.' Right? All right, great, that's enough. And now switch jackets back and everybody give them a hand, thank you, guys. Appreciate you. That's sweet. Two really good men who have been a part of this church for a long time. Love you guys.

So this is what God did with Abraham. Did the same thing. And you know what God is saying to Abraham? He's saying I am your God, you are my people. You will be blessed. The nations will be blessed by you. You'll be the head and not the tail. You'll be above and not beneath. The fruit of your womb will be blessed. The fruit of your land will be blessed. Your baskets will be full. This is what God is saying. So God and Abraham are making covenant with one another, a promise that they will be there for one another. And of course, this is so important when it comes to the cross of Jesus Christ because Christ becomes the sacrificial lamb of a new covenant in which all people are woven into the same promise with Jesus Christ.

The best part that hits on this is Galatians chapter 3:26. Jesus says, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free.

There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." You're a daughter of Abraham. You're a son of Abraham. You are an heir according to the promise. God will be faithful to his covenant to you. God keeps his promises and we have to be people of faith who trust and rely and know that God is true, that he will be faithful to this promise, and he will.

And so I just want to say this. Have faith in the goodness of God. And I'm only a third of the way through my sermon, but I've run out of time. And there's going to give me lots of good content for next week. It'll have you wanting to come back for more. But if you hear one thing it's hear this – you can trust that God is for you, and he is. That this covenant that was made between Abraham and God was made with you. And guess what – your half of the covenant was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. That's the really good news. Isn't that good news? The good news is that God is for you, and that he will never give up on you. You keep trusting in him and your days are very, very bright. Let go of all of that religious baggage that you might be carrying. And maybe you're new to the faith, but you still have the stuff from your past that you're carrying from your parents or from some other person. It's time to let it go. Christianity is all about a fresh start. Faith is all about believing that I can do with Jesus Christ what I cannot do on my own and that great things are ahead for

you. Great things are ahead for you. You have faith. People need people like you. Keep releasing your faith and know that God will do great things in your life.

And maybe you're watching today and you're not a Christian. Maybe you say well I haven't put on Christ, or that's not for me because I haven't become a believer. Today's the day! Today's the day. And so I'm going to ask that everybody watching on television, and everybody here in this church; the scriptures say if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, you'll be saved. We're going to do that right now, okay? I don't care that we're running late. I want people to get saved, all right?

So we're going to do that together, and I'm going to ask that everybody pray this with me, and if you're watching on television, pray this with me. Close your eyes; maybe hold your hands like this, kind of a way of opening your body to the good things of the Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus, be the Lord of my life. I repent of my sin. I've made so many mistakes. And yet you love me. Thank you for your grace. I love you, God. Make me a new creation. Mark my name in the Lamb's book of life. Teach me how to be a good person. And teach me how to always lean in your love. In Jesus' name, amen.