

A Simple Guide to Walking on Water: Risk

By Bobby Schuller

Well today, we are continuing our conversation on faith. Our series is called “A Simple Guide to Walking on Water.” And I just know that whatever it is that you’re facing in life, you need faith. Today I want to talk about one, yes, that you don’t have to worry, that things are going to be okay, and more than anything, to not just settle for whatever you currently have, but to dream and to think bigger. That faith is not just praying for what you need, it’s praying for what you want. Faith is saying that maybe this is what I have right now, but God has something bigger.

So if you hear anything I say today, it’s this: take a risk for God. Take a risk for God. And it is a risk because you might fail, but even if you fail, it’s one step closer to victory. I know that for every victory there are ten failures. I know for every time I have won or succeeded in something, it’s because I’ve failed a bunch of times first and decided to get back up.

And many of you have come here today and you feel beaten down, you feel bruised, you feel like I can’t go another day, I say to you get back up, you’re so close to the finish line, you’re so close to the victory, and become the kind of person that can take a risk. In fact, I want to just say this over you, and I believe it. You are a risk taker. You are a brave

person. You are no longer crippled by fear! You do not allow worries to keep you from achieving what God has called you to achieve. No longer will fear hold you down and direct your decisions. Your decisions will be directed by faith. You are resilient. You are not the kind of person that stays down. All of us get knocked down, but you're the kind of person that keeps getting back up and I'm proud of you. I'm so proud of you.

So today, I want to encourage you to walk by faith and become the kind of person whose vision is framed by what God wants. That I'm going to do things that are big enough to say only God could do something that awesome, that amazing. I am going to take a risk for the Lord.

You know very often when we get comfortable in life I am convinced God likes to take us to scary places. God doesn't like us being all that comfortable. He doesn't like it when we get stuck in the ruts. When I was a kid, I had a big fear of water, and that's a problem growing up in the summer, especially here in Southern California. And I remember once I was at the beach with my parents and a couple of my friends. And the waves were particularly big that day, and I was maybe eight or nine years old. I was still a kid. But I saw all my other friends going out in the water and they were swimming and they were having a good time, and they were getting beat up by the waves. And I was just sitting going oh that's interesting. And my dad goes, go out there and

play with them. And I said oh that's, you know, I'm all right. And my dad's like, "Well they're having fun without you. They're asking you to go out there. Go out and play with them." I'm like, "Dad, I'm fine." He goes, "You're scared of those waves, aren't you?" It's like, "I am not scared of those humongous waves."

And without a word, this makes my dad sound like such a jerk. He's not, he's a sweet guy. Without a word, he was working out then, too. I want to say he was 36 and his biceps were like huge. He reaches over and like just with one arm grabs me like this, and slowly, which is torture. Like as soon as he comes close, I try to get up to get away because I know what's going to happen and just with one slow arm, just takes me like this and starts walking towards the water. Like Goliath or something, and I'm going, "NOOOOOO, gosh, NOOOOO!" I'm totally like this is not an exaggeration, full on screaming, clawing, I'm trying to go for his eyes. He's holding me like this.

And these waves, at the time, I felt like they were ten feet high. They were probably a foot. But anyway, he's taking me into the water, and he's like all right, here's what you got to do. Here comes a big one. You have to dip under water when it comes. And I'm like, "NOOOOOO please, NOOOOO," and then the wave comes and he, just like some kind of a superman, takes me right into the wave. And I just get nailed by this

wave. And he goes, "All right, are you okay?" I'm like, "No, I hate you!" And he goes, "Okay, here comes another one." And this keeps happening over and over, until finally he's like, "Just watch; this is what you do," and he just walked me through it and he stayed with me, holding me with this big, big arm. So, this big, burly man, he just said, "We're going to stay here until you're not afraid of these waves anymore." And that's exactly what happened. And by the time we finished, I was not THAT afraid of waves anymore. But it helped.

And this is an analogy, I think, to what God does in his fatherliness. It's important that we don't align a gender to God because God's not a man, as the scriptures teach us, but there is definitely this fatherliness to God where he will challenge and push and bring us into places that we're not always comfortable going so that we can grow. There is something about a nagging fear, like a looming fear that you never have to face that in its own way is very painful. You know?

And so I think that God does this. And what I want to say to you is this: Maybe you're feeling dragged into the ocean, maybe you're feeling dragged into the waves, but God is teaching you how to be the kind of person to abide rough waters. You don't feel strong enough now to endure what you're going through, but you are. God is showing you and proving to you that you don't have to be afraid of waves. That you have

everything you need to endure the storm. You do. You have it. You have everything you need to endure the storm. And God is not the kind of God that throws you into the ocean; he walks in with you. He carries you. He makes sure that you feel those everlasting arms when those waves are coming. Do you feel them?

You know, it was not long after that, and I was I think ten, so maybe a couple years later, we were in Hawaii on a family vacation and we were going to go surfing. And I had to face the waves again. And this time I was like, "Okay, Dad, we're going to do it." We're in Honolulu; it was just like an episode out of Gidget. Is that right? Gidget? Yes, that's right. Anyway, and I was Gidget. I was a wimp again. And we went out into the water, and again here come these waves and my dad's with me and he says, "Okay, here come the waves. We're going to teach you how to surf." We'd done these things called outrigger canoes where you paddle the boat and the boat catches you and it's like you're surfing and he taught me this to show me the principle of surfing. And again, I was just a coward and I'm telling my dad, "I can't do this, I can't do this." He says, "You can do this. You can do this. All you have to do is paddle and stand up. It's that easy."

And he's like, "Look at that guy over there." And I go, "He's a pro! He is a pro surfer. He does this all the time." And my dad goes, "Hey, hey

guy!” This guy turned and says, “Yes, what’s up?” Dad says, “Are you a pro surfer?” He goes, “No, man, I’m from Ohio.” So finally, again, I learned to surf and I faced this fear. I think I told you guys this story before, but I come home and my stepmom Donna says, “How did it go today? Did you learn how to surf?” And I looked at her and I said, “I’ve changed.” This was like this big fear. I’d finally conquered waves.

And I just want to say, being a dad now and having kids, I know why and I know God does these kinds of things in our lives. It’s enough to make you angry sometimes. To say, “Why am I going through all of this?” I want to be careful that, if you’re facing a sickness, God didn’t make you sick. If you’re facing abject poverty, God did not make you poor. But I want to convince you that whatever challenge it is that you’re going through, God is not going to let you sink, he’s not going to leave you alone, and not only is he going to be with you as you get out, he’s going to show you that you’re just the kind of person that can get through this.

See, that’s the amazing thing, too. I think sometimes we think that God is always going to just carry us out of it, but I think, like a dad or like a coach, sometimes God trains us to be the kind of person that can just get out of it. Maybe not. Maybe what you’re going through, you can’t get out of. No matter what you’re going through, you are not alone and I

want you to know it's going to be okay. And you can live with faith for today, and you can keep taking risks, and you can keep doing great things for God, and you'll thrive.

I remember we were recently with our son Cohen with some friends in the central valley, and we were looking at this koi pond. Out of nowhere, we're like looking at these koi fish. The water's about six feet deep, and my son just runs and jumps full on into the koi pond. I don't know what he was thinking. He's four years old, and instantly he looked shocked because he fell into the water and he was totally under the water just kind of floating. And all of us were stunned, like what just happened? He jumped into this murky water. I felt terrible for our hosts who were like, "Oh no, what happened?" I reached in without even thinking and I pulled him out. Why? I'd never let my son sink, right?

God's not going to let you sink. Can I just say that? It doesn't matter how stupid you've been. See, we think this is all my fault! This is all my fault. It might be; it probably is. But that's the great thing about the God we serve. God is not a retributive - is that a word? Is that a word retributive? But I'm not saying it right? Retributive? God doesn't believe in retribution.

No, listen, God's not going to let you sink. Whatever it is you're going through, he's not. It doesn't matter how dumb you've been, all the mistakes you've made, if you say help me Lord, he's going to help you. He's your dad. He loves you. Live by faith. He's on your side. Don't worry; it'll be okay.

The scripture reading today was a famous one about actually walking on water, and it was the passage about Peter walking on water. If you've been to this church at all, you know this, that in Judaism, especially in the first century, when Jesus said, "Follow me," to follow a rabbi didn't mean to just go where the rabbi goes; it meant to do what the rabbi does. If you were called to be a disciple of a rabbi, you were being trained to be a rabbi yourself. You can actually see this today in Orthodox Judaism. If you go to Jerusalem, you will actually see an older rabbi and a bunch of younger boys in their teens following behind him, doing everything that he does.

And in Jesus' day, to follow a rabbi meant to do everything the rabbi does. So if the rabbi writes left handed, you need to learn to write left handed. If the rabbi tells jokes, you need to start telling jokes. They would literally, if there would be footprints in the sand, they would step sometimes in the actual footprints of their rabbi. So they were trying to become clones of the rabbi that they were following.

And this is the most important thing to note – that for rabbis in Jesus' day disciples were intended to do all the things the rabbi did. And the reason this matters is you start to see in the gospels these young men who are following Jesus, all of a sudden are called to do some pretty crazy things, like in Luke 9 and 10. He tells them to just go out and start healing people and don't take anything with you. He just says go heal them. And he gives them all these instructions: go cast out demons, go do all this stuff. And they go and do it and they come back and he says were you successful? He says, "Lord, even the demons bow in your name!" So they begin to do through the story all these amazing things.

Well, this story of Peter walking on water is just that. It's Peter responding to the idea that disciples are supposed to do what rabbis do. So it was after the "feeding of the five thousand" famous story, Jesus says, 'I'm going to dismiss everyone now that they've eaten, and I want you to go out on the boat and I'll meet you out there.' I don't know if he says that, but this is certainly what's going to happen. So they go out on the boat, Jesus dismisses everyone, and he goes up on the mountain to pray, and now it's nighttime and the wind is blowing.

It's so important to understand what water means for Jews in the first century, too. For many people back then, there's a mystic quality to

water because wherever you find water, you find life. But there is also a scary thing about water. When there were big bodies of water, they believed, some, that it was actually a gateway to hell. In fact, many people back then, not only couldn't swim, but didn't swim because they were afraid of the Leviathan, which was essentially like the Loch Ness Monster, we'll just shoot straight, okay? That there is some kind of Loch Ness Monster in the Sea of Galilee. And that when this sort of monster demon thing gets angry, it starts to swirl up weather and the water.

So there's this big looming fear. It's very likely most of these guys, I know it seems crazy because they're fishermen, but there's a good chance that they couldn't swim. In fact, I'm willing to bet they couldn't swim. And there was a spiritual dimension that they believed that this big body of water was a gateway to hell.

And so they're out on the boat. And Jesus is up on the hill and the storm starts swirling. And the wind starts blowing. And it says they're not able to get back to shore. They're trying to get back, but the wind is pushing their boat away from the shore. It's nighttime. So they're already freaked out, right? And all of a sudden, here comes Jesus on the water walking. And they see him and at first they get totally terrified. They think it's a ghost or a spirit or something, and they're about to lose their

minds. And Jesus says, “Oh, it’s me, guys, hey. I’m just walking on water.”

So they see this miracle, they see Jesus and one of his most famous miracles, walking on water. They all see it, they all write about it, and then, in a way, the more amazing thing happens. Peter says to Jesus, “Lord, ask me to come out to you and I will.” And Jesus says, “Come.” Now here’s the amazing thing: Peter gets out of the boat and he begins to walk on water to Jesus one step at a time. It’s dark. The wind is blowing. The rain is coming down. His friends behind him are watching. What would it feel like, by the way, to get out and start walking on water towards Jesus? I wonder.

And so he’s walking and he begins to doubt. He begins to get afraid and he takes his eyes off Christ. He begins to put them on the waves and he begins to sink. And I picture him sinking slowly, like he’s sinking into Jell-O instead of water, I don’t know. And the story says that Jesus reaches down and he grabs him, and the scripture says, “Jesus says to him, ‘Why did you doubt?’” Why did you doubt? Do you know what he means there when he’s saying why did you doubt? He’s saying why did you doubt that you could do what I can do? That’s exactly right. Everybody that studies this scripture, that reads the scripture, this is the right way to read this text. Not, “Why did you doubt?” It’s “Why did you

doubt that you could walk on water just like me? I've called you. I said come. If I ask you to do something, I'm going to give you everything you need to accomplish it, even if it means walking on water."

Can I just tell you, after leading this church for three years, I completely believe that. With all of the challenges, spiritual challenges, the health challenges, the financial challenges that we faced, this church is a miracle. And many of the things that you guys have gone through, many of the things, many of you are living testimonies to this fact. That if God says come, walk on water, he's going to give you the shoes you need to walk on water. He's just going to give you what you need to stay afloat. This is faith.

So if God says come, take a risk. Get out of the boat. You can do the things Jesus did. He says that, not me. In fact, he says in John chapter 14, "Greater things than these will you do because I'm going to my father." I believe that.

So why do you doubt? Why do you doubt? I grow very concerned that it seems like the more religious somebody is, the less risk they like to take. That does not make any sense to me. I find that when Jesus makes people religious, when Jesus makes people follow him, he is constantly challenging them to do things that are even terrifying, like get

out and walk on water even though you think water is a window to hell and you can't swim. Lord, save me.

Listen, I want to just affirm in you that you have done great things in your life, even if you don't think you have. But you're going to do even greater things. And I don't care how sick you are, how old you are, how young you are, how uneducated you are, all of the things that you've used to discredit yourself, I want you to have faith and believe that God can still do great things in your life.

So, I'm asking you to train your fear into faith by taking a risk for God today. By taking a risk. If you've been knocked down, I want to ask you, have faith and get back up because great things are in store for you. You only lose when you decide not to get back up again.

Faith is trust. Very simply, faith is trusting God. You have faith in stuff all the time. Most of you, if not all of you, had faith in that pew when you sat down on it. Right? You weren't afraid that the pew was going to break. But sometimes pews break! Right? Maybe you had an extra slice of apple pie last night. And listen, chairs break. But most people don't look at a chair before they sit in it. When you get to a red light, or a green light, you have faith that somebody's not going to run the other light and hit you. But sometimes chairs break. And sometimes

people run lights. And when that happens, it is hard sometimes to get the faith back that you need to drive safely and sit safely. But in the end, you know it's the right thing to do.

I want to tell you that maybe there's been a time where you feel like you took a risk or you did something, and the chair broke or whatever. Something happened and maybe you're in this place where you're not sure. God is saying to you, today, to keep trusting. Keep trusting. It's going to be okay. You've made it this far; you're going to get even farther.

You need faith to get to your next milestone. You need it. You can't be the kind of person God has called you to be without having faith. I forget who said this, but something like "Stop tiptoeing through life only to arrive safely at death." Okay? We try to be safe but we're all going to die. Something is going to happen to all of us, but when we get to heaven, we want to have an account that the life we lived mattered. And I just want to say to you that faith pleases God. God is able to factor for dumb moves. If you take a risk and it was dumb, God still factors for that. I feel like he just covers for that. I think he would rather you be dumb and risky than safe and not risky and smart. I actually believe that. Look, I believe in wisdom, I absolutely do, but I also believe in faith.

Jesus says something – Father, praise be to you that you haven't revealed these things to the wise and the learned, but you revealed them to little children. There is something about how we always feel like we need to do it on our own strength, our own wisdom, our own smarts. Sometimes God's just telling you to just go. Just do something. Take a risk for me. And I think even if it wasn't the smartest thing, I still think God's going to factor and he's going to get you through it and you're going to learn something from it. So take a risk. You need to be a risk taker, you need to be a person of faith to get where you need to go. God's not going to force you to go where you need to go. Sometimes you're going to have to face your fears. Sometimes you're going to have to take a risk.

Recently we went to Holland with my sister Brittney, and this is a perfect story. My sister Brittney is terrified of flying. Terrified. And in fact, it had been years and years since she'd been on a plane and she'd never been to Europe, and I invited her to go with us on our Holland tour. And finally, she had to face the music. So she got her tickets, she got a passport, and she said for like days before the flight she couldn't sleep. But she decided I'm going to get on that plane, and I don't care if I scream, if I pass out. She had a couple glasses of wine before she took off. But she got on that plane. She got on that plane and she got to Holland and she saw old windmills, and she ate gouda cheese and

Stroopwafels, and saw all these handsome blonde men that were taller than 6' 5". Listen – this is a perfect analogy for all of us. I'm so proud of my sister because so much of the human experience is doing things like that.

Many of you, you're afraid to go to rehab. Some of you, you're afraid to start dating again. Some of you, you're so embarrassed about your divorce. Some of you, this is maybe your first time back in church, or maybe you're watching on TV and you were so hurt by religion, you think I could never be plugged into a church again. Take a risk. Take a risk. Some of you have been wearing a mask for a long time and pretending to be somebody that you are not. I want to encourage you to be authentic, be genuine, take a risk in faith, and watch as you become a happier, fuller person.

And I just want to finish with this. I've been talking a lot about surfing, and I actually had a rough day a couple weeks ago. It was just hard. And so I felt like the Lord called me to the ocean. So I went to the ocean and it was getting darker, it was twilight, and there were these waves. And I put on some gym shorts because I didn't have swim trunks. And I just walked out into the water to swim. And the water was warm for California, still cool, but I began to just pray. And I was swimming out in the water remembering as a teenager, in college, all the times I went

surfing, and all the fun I'd had, and I began to body surf. I did lose my trunks one time. It was okay. Just put them right back on.

But I remember just floating out there in the water and I remember thinking about God's grace. And that living through life is a lot like surfing on grace. You know grace doesn't mean mercy. You know that, right? Grace doesn't mean mercy. Grace means an overflow of God's favor, power, and love. But we've limited it to grace means forgiveness. It's so much more than that. Jesus received grace when he was baptized, not for the forgiveness of sins, but for the empowerment to do what God had called him to do; to do what the Father had called him to do. Jesus was God.

And so many of us living life is like surfing on grace. When surfers are out on the water, they're always looking for a wave. And they're always looking for a big wave. And you miss it all the time. Sometimes you're too far out, or sometimes you're too far in but there's always another wave. And sometimes you wipe out, but that just means you weren't ready. You didn't go fast enough, or you're not trained enough. But most importantly, the thing you learn when you're surfing is that even if there aren't waves, you're still enjoying it because there's something about the gentle rhythm of waves coming in and out that lifts

you and drops you; the company of people; the refreshing nature of water itself.

And so many of you, you're in life and you've completely wiped out and I just want to say to you it's okay. Another wave is coming. And know that even as you're just sitting and resting in the water, that grace is sustaining you. Grace is holding you. That whether or not you're surfing or not, like water, this sustaining nature that no matter where you are, you're not alone. God is holding you and it will be okay.

Some of you have failed miserably recently in some area of your life. And I just want to say to you that just because you've failed doesn't mean you're a failure; it just means you haven't succeeded yet. It's going to be okay. And I want to encourage you to become the kind of person that lives in faith; that never quits, and never gives up. God is calling you to do great things for him, so be vulnerable, take a risk, and be the kind of person that God has called you to be. In Jesus' name, amen.