



LEADER GUIDE

THE SIGN OF HIS PRESENCE

BIG IDEA: In Jesus's presence, we have no need to fear.

DATE: Sunday, February 8 and Wednesday, February 11, 2026

SCRIPTURE: John 6:16-21

OPENING QUESTION

Sunday Groups: Today is Super Sunday! Enjoy breakfast and fellowship time with your group. Super Bowl Trivia is provided on the website as well for Sunday and Wednesday groups.

Have you ever witnessed something that took your brain a few minutes to catch up to what your eyes were seeing? *What happened? What was that experience like?*

You probably felt disbelief and even fear because it was something so out of the ordinary. In today's lesson we will read about a time the disciples experienced something like that. It is the fifth sign – when Jesus walks on the water. I imagine when they saw Jesus, they couldn't believe their eyes! They were already in a state of panic from rowing through the big storm when they saw what looked like a ghost.

SETTING THE STAGE

Today's passage occurs right after the feeding of the five thousand. The disciples had just seen Jesus provide for their ordinary physical needs. But now Jesus will show them how He can also provide for their "out of the ordinary" needs by calming their fears with His presence.

SCRIPTURE READING

John 6:16-21 (CSB)

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. Darkness had already set in, but Jesus had not yet come to them.¹⁸ A high wind arose, and the sea began to churn.¹⁹ After they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He was coming near the boat, and they were afraid.²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I. Don't be afraid."²¹ Then they were willing to take him on board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading.

DISCUSSION

READ JOHN 6:16-21

As you discuss the following questions, add any insights you learned from reading the commentary below.

The disciples had a long day with the crowds and probably left later than normal to get to Capernaum. They had already been rowing for miles and were ready to get to shore for some rest. How does our physical exhaustion affect our spiritual condition?

Perhaps this is why the disciples did not recognize Jesus at first. Our circumstances and physical state can also make it hard for us to recognize Jesus and see that He is present. We fix our eyes on the fear and lose sight of Jesus.

What are things people turn to for comfort (good or bad) when they hit a “storm” in their life and worry takes over?

What do you notice about verse 21? What other miraculous thing happens? *As soon as Jesus entered the boat, it arrived at the shore. The presence of Jesus immediately ended their terrifying boat ride. Share from the commentary how different Bible scholars interpret this verse.*

What were some things you were afraid of growing up? Who or what could calm your fears?

Scripture is full of assurances for us not to be afraid because of God’s presence - both in the Old and New Testaments. *Enlist four people to read these verses out loud to the group.*

- “Haven’t I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).
- “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).
- “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment” (2 Timothy 1:7).
- “Therefore, we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6).

What are some things that happen to us physically and emotionally when we experience fear? *(heart racing, panic attack, avoidance, fight, flight or freeze, etc.)*

How does Jesus’s presence calm your spirit amid fear? What are some practical things we can do when faced with paralyzing fear? *Worry and worship cannot be done at the same time so spend time worshipping; recite verses you have memorized (the ones above are a good place to start); phone a friend and ask for immediate prayer support; speaking our fears out loud and inviting Jesus into them will calm us.*

RESPONSE

In Jesus’ presence, we have no need to fear. Worry is really us saying to God, ‘I don’t trust You can or will provide what I need.’ But the truth is He is all powerful and we can trust Him. Think of a fear

you are facing right now. Picture yourself in the boat –right in the middle of the storm. Now picture Jesus walking on the stormy water towards you, getting in that boat of fear with you. Allow His presence to calm your fears and get you through.

READING PLAN

2/8 – Isaiah 52; 2/9 – Isaiah 53; 2/10 – Isaiah 54; 2/11 – Isaiah 55; 2/12 – Isaiah 56; 2/13 – Luke 22; 2/14 – Acts 8

COMMENTARY

JOHN 6:16-18

The disciples encountered high winds on the water, but Jesus was not there with them.

Context: After a long day and a busy period that included the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus retired to a mountain by Himself.

When evening came (v. 16). The Jews reckoned their lives by the sun. The day began at dawn with the rising of the sun, and evening came when the sun set. Very little could be done in the evening in ancient times. Jesus, His disciples, and the crowds were in a deserted place, so it would've been very difficult to find lamps or torches sufficient to engage in another teaching session. Additionally, the demands of the day no doubt gave reason for Jesus and the disciples to seek rest that evening in preparation for further ministry the following day.

Boat (v. 17). Two fishermen discovered the “ancient Galilee Boat” in the muddy shore of the Sea of Galilee in a drought in 1986. Radiocarbon dating indicated the remains to be from 100 BC to AD 100. The boat is approximately twenty-seven feet long and seven and one-half feet wide. This discovery gives a better understanding of the typical Galilean fishing boat in the first century, though we don’t actually know particulars about the boat John mentioned in his account.

Capernaum (v. 17). The city was on the northwestern tip of the Sea of Galilee and served as the hub of Jesus’s ministry for a time. There are three mountain regions around the Sea of Galilee, so it’s unclear where Jesus was teaching and where the feeding of the five thousand took place. John said the disciples were determined to return to Capernaum that night, but Jesus was not with them. After a long day of dealing with the crowds and administering a meal, they were, no doubt, ready for a place to sleep.

Darkness had already set in (v. 17). The apostles’ departure apparently was later than normal. Even though several of the disciples were experienced fisherman and navigators, darkness could be a major obstacle on the water. If the sky was cloudy, they would have experienced navigation problems even before the storm arose and compounded their plight. Though they were familiar with this part of the sea, the wind and waves that followed probably meant they were lost since the stars, typically used for navigation, were likely obscured, leaving them no point of reference.

Not yet come to them (v. 17). Matthew’s account adds that Jesus sent the disciples away so He could dismiss the crowds and remain on the mountain to pray. Perhaps reluctantly, the disciples left Jesus. They might have even rushed to the boat, knowing a storm was coming and believing

they could be home before it struck. But whatever the case, the event was a springboard for another miraculous event.

High wind (v. 18). This event is told also by Matthew and Mark. Matthew recorded that the boat was "battered by the waves, because the wind was against them" (Matt. 14:24). Mark observed that the men were "straining at the oars" (Mark 6:48). These experienced boatmen were challenged at the ferocity of the sudden storm.

Began to churn (v. 18). Not only was the wind against the disciples, but the picture is that of an angry sea erupting from the depths and attacking them with fury. Since Jesus knew beforehand how He planned to feed the multitude and only asked about food in order to test Philip, we surmise Jesus knew the storm was coming, or allowed it to come, to set the stage for another miraculous and faith-building event that show His divinity.

JOHN 6:19-20

When Jesus came to the disciples, He told them not to be afraid.

They saw Jesus walking on the sea (v. 19). Mark recorded that Jesus, from His mountain retreat, saw the plight of His disciples and determined to come to them. Just as He knew the hunger of the multitudes, He knew the threat to the disciples. Jesus came to assure these men His power was greater than the untamed wind and angry sea. He was attentive to their need and came to them in a memorable way. We can likewise be assured of Jesus's concern in the needs we face. He's promised to be with us in the storms of life.

Afraid (v. 19). The Greek verb is based on the noun *phobos*, the source for our word *phobia* or fear. Psychology has identified hundreds of phobias, and most of us struggle with one or more. Phobias are grouped into five distinct categories: animals, natural environment, medical injury or bloodshed, specific situations (such as flying) and the broad category of "other," such as the fear of loud noises or drowning. Thus, the disciples could have experienced at least two categories of fear: "nature" – the wind and waves, and "other" – the loud and boisterous wind and the real possibility of drowning in the storm.

Interestingly, though, this fear arose when they saw Jesus walking on the water! Matthew adds, "'It's a ghost!' they said, and they cried out in fear" (Matt. 14:26). The disciples seemed not to recognize Jesus at first. Certainly, they'd never seen a man travel on water as on dry land. They feared this was an impostor from the spirit world.

"It is I" (v. 20). Jesus readily identified Himself to the disciples. Jesus elsewhere identified Himself as "the good shepherd" and observed, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me" (10:11, 27). The disciples were among the sheep in the fold of their Good Shepherd. They heard the familiar and reassuring voice of Jesus calling to them above the storm and were prepared to follow Him.

Don't be afraid (v. 20). Fear is a common human emotion. It is what we do with fear that can cause problems. Scripture exhorts us hundreds of times not to give in to our fears. The Lord has promised to be near us in our fears and to give us strength in trying circumstances. In the storms of life, we hear the voice of our Good Shepherd: "It is I. Don't be afraid."

JOHN 6:21

Jesus immediately brought the disciples to the other side.

They were willing to take him on board (v. 21). John added that the disciples gladly welcomed Jesus aboard their boat. They had initially feared Him, thinking He was a ghost. But His voice and His actions toward Peter had convinced them of His identity. Thus, they invited Him to bring His calming influence to their fearful circumstance.

At once (v. 21). The Greek word, *eutheos*, meaning “quickly” or “without delay,” and related words are used over seven dozen times in the New Testament. John said nothing further regarding the storm but indicated that immediately when Jesus stepped on board the boat, it was at the shore where they were heading. Once again, the disciples saw the miraculous power of God in the actions of Jesus. That day was filled with wonder.

Bible scholars differ on their understanding of the significance of the last part of verse 21. Some see in these words a second miracle of the evening. First, Jesus had walked on the surface of the lake to reach the boat, it and all its occupants *at once* were transported to their intended destination.

Others see not a miracle of transportation but an example of the effect of the presence of Jesus – despite the long night and strenuous effort required to battle the strong winds and churning sea, once Jesus had come aboard and was present with them, it was as if the remainder of their journey passed without their noticing.

The disciples’ reaction. Matthew explained the reaction of the shaken disciples at the moment Jesus brought peace in the storm: “Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’” (Matt. 14:33). How could they believe any less after what they’d heard and seen that day and night? The power of God was evident when the wind and waves were subject to His authority. Even the sea was stilled and transformed into a pathway for Jesus to come to them in their need. Our human fears may not dissipate at once, but we have the assurance our Savior will come to us at once and partner with us in the midst of our fears whether we sense His presence or not. The command not to fear is an imperative for modern disciples of Christ who live in a challenging world.

LifeWay: Bible Studies for Life, “All Signs Point to Jesus,” Spring 2025.