

LIFE Group Leader Handout

March 24, 2019

“From Fear To Faith”

Pastor Joe Garofalo

Scripture—Mark 6:45-52; Matt 14:26-33

“**45** Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. **46** And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. **47** And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. **48** And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night [g] he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, **49** but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, **50** for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” **51** And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, **52** for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”

Main Idea—

God can use our greatest fear to bring about a greater faith.

The disciples were being tossed about in the boat from the storm and were terrified. Jesus changed all that with one sentence: “Don’t be afraid— it is I.” In Matthew’s account of the incident, Peter asked Jesus to command him to step out of the boat and come to Him.

Three Observations

1. Whatever you focus on gets bigger. In Peter’s case, the difference between focusing on Jesus verses the storm (Psalm 69:1-2).
2. Obedience trumps any storm (Psalm 112:1).
3. The Lord’s power is just as great in the calm as in the storm.

Application—

What about this idea that obedience trumps the storm? Can you recall a time when your obedience gave you a peace that transcended your circumstances?

Stepping out of the boat—is there a faith declaration you’d like to share (A storm you’re battling? A fear you’re facing? A step of faith you need to take?)

Be a Model of Authenticity

By Reid Smith

Authenticity is key to success as a small-group leader. It nourishes true community and builds healthy relationships. Here are some practices that will help you model the kind of transparency that will create the best conditions for biblical community to grow.

1. When you ask a personal question, be ready to answer first. Plan to share more personally toward the beginning of your group's discussion time. This will encourage more open communication throughout your time together. Think through your personal responses. So as you review discussion questions before your group's gathering, imagine how you would answer each one honestly.

2. Communicate truth and your personal response to it. It's good leadership to tell your group if and why you agree with a biblical principle that's being taught, but you should also share the challenges you face in living out your faith. For example, "It's so important to have a devotional time each day, but there are seasons when I struggle with this. Lately, I've let other things take priority in my life and I want this to change. Please pray for me." Though some might view this as vulnerability that reveals weakness, the opposite is true. Here's what it really shows:

- *A truth.* Spending time with God each day is important to our spiritual growth.
- *You're human.* Nobody is perfect and does what is right all the time.
- *You want what God wants.* Developing your relationship with the Lord is of utmost importance.
- *You need help like everyone else to respond in faith.* We need God and community for life transformation.

3. Conversations about God's amazing grace and our dependency on Christ have a way of encouraging authenticity. The more your group's discussion is focused on the person of Jesus Christ, the more willing people will be to tell the truth about who they are and where they're at in their relationship with God and others. Point people to Christ and express how we are all equally in need of grace. Leveling the playing field and equalizing our need for grace releases realness in your group members.

4. When you get something wrong, acknowledge it openly. Be real without being hard on yourself. With a smile on your face, simply share what you thought, that you learned differently, and you're glad that you did!

5. Forgiveness nourishes authentic relationships. We don't hold onto grudges; they hold onto us. Grudges and unwillingness to forgive others—whether they're part of our small group or not—erect barriers in relationships and make authenticity more difficult. In other words, a lack of forgiveness will produce a lack of authenticity. It is imperative for us to be right with people if we want to be real with others.

6. Employ the "Socratic Virtues" in your group facilitation. These would include the following:

- *Listening.* When people feel like they're being heard, they want to share.
- *Patience.* People who tend to be shy will need more time to open up. When they experience love expressed as patience, they will participate—in time.
- *Perseverance.* Like patience, perseverance is an expression of love. When people know you'll go the distance with them, they'll go deeper in dialogue.
- *Trusting one's doubts.* If you feel like you're holding back in what you're sharing, prayerfully discern if it's something God wants you to tell others, and go with your gut. If it seems like something is missing in what another person is sharing, carefully weigh if you should call it out in the group by asking questions or if you should talk with the person outside the group; either action can help to build authenticity.
- *Talking frankly.* People believe you're being real when you talk frankly with them. Honest input from the heart of a person you know cares about you is a treasure that transforms the relationship.
- *Postponing one's judgment.* Always be an advocate for the people who share, especially when they're being transparent. This doesn't mean you're always for their point of view, but that you are always for them. Give people time to share their heart and don't be quick to draw conclusions. People will not feel safe enough to share their heart if they feel rushed or judged. You want to really hear them so you can understand their heart.
- *Be willing to revise your opinion and respect other points of view.* Your willingness to change your opinion demonstrates a flexibility and openness in your communication style, which invites people into discussion. Most people do not enjoy debating and arguing points and opinion. They enjoy talking with somebody who respects the insights of others and really listens to them.