

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

Fruit of The Spirit Series: Self Control

Matthew 14: 22-33

Galatians 5:22-26

I Can Walk on Water! Maybe? A discussion of self-control

Ed Stallworth

Whether you believe the story of Jesus walking on water to be historical or parable, simply put yourself in it. Feel the salty air of the sea, the dust of the sand, the warmth of the sun, and all the emotions that took place. Try to live the story in your minds.

Jesus had just finished feeding 5000 people and needed time to be alone after a very busy and hectic day. So in the late afternoon, he sent the disciples on their way and told them that he would catch up with them later. It was an awkward moment considering the celebration that just took place. Nonetheless, the disciples agreed believing Jesus was going to catch up with them in the port city on the other side of the sea.

So the disciples set off in the choppy waters and Jesus stayed behind so that he could be alone and pray. As night entered the world, the boat carrying the disciples was far from land and was being tossed by the turbulent waters and high winds. The disciples, who had experienced fisherman amongst them, were very anxious of the conditions and made shifts for some to rest while others monitored the boat and the waters. But no one really took a rest. It was too frightening. Even though this came after a great day, their

leader, the one whom they followed, was not with them. The disciples were scared, confused, and alone in the abusive sea.

Even the next morning, when the sun's light is just entering the horizon, the waters and the wind have not let up and the disciples' hope is fading. The weary disciples are wondering if they are going to make it. Suddenly, one of the disciples looks behind the boat and yells for the others to come and look. They can only make out a silhouette but they are sure they were seeing someone walking on the water behind them. They become scared thinking that the end of their lives has come. But then the silhouette speaks and says, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." The disciples wonder, is it really Jesus? Is he really walking on water?

Peter, taking control and ignoring the waves that were terrifying him before, challenges the silhouette saying, "If it is you, then have me walk on water." Jesus invites him to do so and Peter starts to walk. Suddenly, Peter notices the waves crashing into him and he begins to sink asking Jesus to help. Jesus reaches out, saves him, and says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Here is the issue; Peter believed in God, otherwise he would have called for the disciples to rescue him. Peter's doubt was not in Jesus. His doubt was in himself. He had the self-control to walk on water until he let his fears of the waves that were crashing against him take control of him. I do not mean self-control in the sense of thinking about what we say or watching what we eat. This story is not about Peter reigning in his reckless desires. This is about Peter finding sense of control in himself. He was not being directed by another person or outside force but taking personal control of his actions. How many people sink in life because they let the waves of the world control them? How

many of us let our jobs control our lives. How many of us allow what others think about us control our lives? What about addiction or keeping up with the Joneses? These are acts of giving up self-control. Waves of fear, dissension, power, greed, strife, and anger can, and often do, take power. Too many, including ourselves, forfeit self-control despite the message Jesus brought of freedom from things that threaten our self-control. Self-control is not simply an act of restraint. Self-control is an embracing of this freedom. Self-control is being able to walk on water.

Without it, the other fruits of the spirits will be nothing more than nice thoughts that happen every once in awhile. The call of Jesus is greater than that. True fruit of the spirit can only be genuine when it stems from self-control. For example, being kind to someone out of fear is not true kindness. Being generous out of obligation is not true generosity. For these things to be genuine, self-control is essential.

This topic of self-control will end our summer series: The Fruits of the Spirit. I know that many of you have been challenged and inspired by these worship services. Because of all the youth trips that had been scheduled, I have only able to hear a few of the sermons from Russ and Amy. I was not here for the sermons preached by Chad or Mandy. I have missed hearing all of their wise words. I have missed the opportunities to worship and fellowship with many of you. But I want to tell you, even though I was not here to learn about the fruits of the spirit, I have been out with our youth experiencing the fruits of the spirit. I watched our youth live them out in Nashville, Tennessee, St. Augustine, Florida, and Toronto, Ontario. I saw our youth take control. I saw our youth walking on water.

I experienced generosity as our middle school students gave their own packed lunches to homeless people in the streets of downtown Nashville and sat with them to hear stories of struggle, hope, and faith last June. That same week, other youth gave joy to people living at a rehabilitation center for some homeless men by playing a simple game of dominoes. Because our middle school youth were bearing the fruits of generosity and joy, the mission trip was more than just helping some people and coming home. Instead, the trip connected our youth with relationships that will last their entire lives even though they may never meet these people ever again. Ask them about people like Corneluis, Alabama, or Emma, our city guide, who were people we connected with. I saw our youth walking on water.

I witnessed our youth bearing the fruits of love and faithfulness as we fellowshiped with one another through worship, discussion, and fun in St. Augustine, Florida. As a youth group of predominately middle school students, we sang karaoke to the “Back Street Boys,” an infamously popular boy band, with choreography and costume in front of 300 Unidiversity participants whose median age was considerably older than ours. As silly as it all was, understand what great feat took place. As a youth group, we gave each other support and encouragement. Because it is a group that is so tightly connected with love and faithfulness to each other, we were not embarrassed or tentative. Instead, we were bold and daring. I saw our youth walking on water.

I watched our high school youth practice the fruit of kindness as they served the poor at a Franciscan ministry known as St. Francis’ Table in Toronto. They served in a restaurant-style soup kitchen as wait staff, bus people, dishwashers, potato peelers, and food servers. They worked hard and took this ministry with tenacious seriousness. When

a break in serving food came, our youth did not stop serving, instead, they served by sitting with the customers and talking to them. The customers enjoyed our southern accents and warm weather culture and our youth gained insight into the real lives of the poor and hurting. They heard their stories, jokes, hopes, and struggles. It was in those moments of bearing the fruits of kindness that the fruits of gentleness also came through. Our high school youth, with all that goes on in their lives to find meaning and purpose, meekly sat and fellowshiped with people that our society is too quick to ignore and learned from them. I saw our youth walking on water.

All three of these trips: Nashville, St. Augustine, and Toronto, helped youth know the fruit of peace. These weeks took our youth away from the normal grind of life and allowed them to experience the spirit of God. Youth learned that we are shaped by God by being the hands and feet of God. They learned this by serving others outside the youth group as well as each other within the youth group. Despite the crashing waves of horrid sleeping conditions, unfamiliar foods, sharing with people in poverty, and an aggressive schedule, our youth experienced the Kingdom of God. Our youth walked on water. They experienced most of the fruits of the spirit. These weeks brought a snapshot of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and gentleness. However, these are only snapshots of what should be.

I do not think it is a stretch to say that all of us here have experienced snapshots of the fruits of the spirit. Maybe some of us have not experienced all of them but every individual here has experienced some of them. A parent watching their child do something special is a snapshot of joy. Telling your vows to your spouse in your wedding is a snapshot of faithfulness. Giving of yourself to benefit another and expecting nothing

in return is a snapshot of generosity. These are just a few examples that I could think of but the list is long. Whether you were the giver or the recipient, when was the last time you experienced the fruits of the spirit? When was the last time you shared the fruits of the spirit to another? When was the last time you walked on water?

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and gentleness should be commonplace but they are not. They should happen more times than just on mission trips, whether it is a youth trip or this upcoming trip for the church and the habitat project. They should happen more times than on Sunday mornings. They should be more than just snapshots that happen here and there. Self-control is the act of making the other fruits of the spirit commonplace in our lives. Self-control is not just restraint from a vice but the discipline and common practice of virtue. Self-control is what it takes to be able to get out and walk on water. Mission trips, Sunday morning worship, retreats, and the like can only inspire self-control, it is up to you as individuals to actually practice it.

When I was a child, my parents made me take piano lessons. I thought that was the worst thing in the world because it took away from my time to play with my friends. I would go to my teacher's house for one hour a week and she would teach me certain things to play. The teacher would then give me assignments to practice the piano at home. I was often frustrated and angry because it took me forever to follow the assignments and I would too often want to do other things. After awhile, my parents stopped making me go to piano lessons and at the time I was thrilled. Playing the piano was too difficult for me to learn- not because I did not have the ability but because I did

not have the drive to even try. I now wished that I had continued to play. To this day, I have a hard time following hymns or reading notes on a scale.

The fruits of the spirit are very much like learning to play the piano. All of us have the ability to follow the call it demands. It is simply a matter of self-control to decide to practice. There are times when practicing the fruits will be difficult but the results will be great.

Self-control is making the fruits of the spirit a habit in our everyday lives. It is a habit despite the difficulties, or waves, that crash around us. Whether the issues are current hot topics such as the upcoming election, the situation in Iraq, capital punishment or gay marriages, the fruits of the spirit must be practiced and we cannot be deterred by those waves that will try to sink us. Changes must be made and we are called to take control and make those changes. Political views as well as any other social views cannot be based on personal gain or prejudice, but based on the fruits of the spirit. If the issues are personal relationships with a spouse, parents, friend, or child, the fruits of the spirit must be practiced and we cannot be deterred by those waves that try to sink us. If changes need to be made, then we are called to take control and make those changes. Self-control is not being passive to the issues of the world or to the issues of our lives. It is being active agent for changing the world as we know it. In other words, we cannot stay on the boat as the other disciples did; instead, we must take a bold stand and do as Peter did, we must walk on water. This holds true for us as individuals as well as for the church as a whole. The church cannot be controlled by anything other than by the fruits of the spirit. Park Road Baptist is called to walk on water.

And when you feel that the waves have overwhelmed you and you start to lose control and you start to sink like Peter did. Or when you are too frightened to take another step as you are walking on water. Turn to your faith in a God that is bigger and stronger than those waves. Turn to your faith in a spirit that is loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, generous, faithful, and gentle. The church is only an arm's length away waiting to pull you up. And when you are back on your feet, take control and start to walk again.

Pastoral Prayer:

Holy God, We come to you in celebration of the fruits of the spirit. I pray that all of us know to give love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and gentleness. And Lord, I pray that we have the self-control to be committed to bear these fruits as individuals and as a church. Amen