



underthefigtree

WILD PLACES COWARDLY

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

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You may not know Charles Blondin but in his day he was most famous! He was famed for performing the wildest of acts: Blondin was one of the greatest tightrope-walkers in the history of the world. One of his supreme feats was walking across the great Niagara Gorge carved over the centuries by the Niagara Falls. He did so on a tightrope that was 11,000' long and 160' above the thunderous waters of the Falls. He would accomplish this amazing feat a number of times, each time with a different theatric variation: blindfolded, on stilts, carrying a man on his back. Blondin even sat down midway across, and with the water crashing below, took a few eggs and made an omelet! Unbelievable!

One day, his feat was pushing a wheel barrow back and forth on the tightrope across the divide to the cheers of the huge crowd gathered. The crowd went wild as Blondin maneuvered the wheel barrow before them. When the cheers quieted Blondin asked a question: "How many of you believe that I could put a person in this wheel barrow and push him across the tight rope?" Everybody cheered, applauded and believed! Then he asked for a volunteer, the crowd fell silent; a ride in that wheel barrow across the falls was just too wild of a thing to do! Then, after several moments one man stepped out of the crowd, volunteered and got into the wheel barrow.

There is a difference between the crowd and the man in the wheel barrow. In regards to Jesus – where are you, in the crowd or in the wheel barrow? In this lesson we encounter the disciples, who after months of walking with, listening to, and learning from Jesus, they are confronted with a choice; with Jesus or...

“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4

THE TEXT

Before you watch this session take a moment and read the following passages:

Ezekiel 33:30-33

Mark 4:33-40

Revelation 21:6-8

Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18

THE TEACHING

Watch the video, “Cowardly.” If time allows, we recommend that you (or your group) review the vocabulary words and background details below before continuing with the talking points.

THE VOCABULARY

Miem Chaim – “living water.” Hebrew idiom for flowing water that is moved “by the finger of God” such as rain, streams, rivers, water flowing through an aqueduct. The moment water is scooped by cup or pail it ceases to be “living water”

Epistates – Greek: Master, Commander, a person of high status. Luke is the only New Testament writer to use this term and does so 7 times.

Didaskalos – Greek: Teacher, Instructor. Jesus is called teacher over 40 times in the gospels

Rabbi – Hebrew: literally “my honored one, my great one.” Jesus is referred to as Rabbi 16 times in the gospels.

Phobos – Greek: “to be afraid.” Many English words are derived from this root; “-phobia” is a common addendum to describe types of fears. i.e. claustrophobia

Deilos – Greek: “to act cowardly.” One Greek lexicon defines it as “one who always runs, or one who runs away at nothing.”

Cowardly – English: “lacking courage; contemptibly timid.”

Shema – Hebrew: “to hear, to obey” Also Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Jesus adds Leviticus 19:18 as recorded in Mark 12:29-31. Traditionally this text was recited at least 3 times a day; early morning, noontime, and evening. It was considered a great blessing that at the time of death the last words spoken were the reciting of the Shema.



THE BACKGROUND

The story of Jesus asleep in the boat while the disciples were wrestling to stay afloat is recorded in Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25. When comparing each Gospel account you learn that each writer places the story in a somewhat different context and paints its own unique portrait of who Jesus is and the gospel message he presented. For Matthew the story occurs right after a discussion of the cost of following Jesus and the nature of his Lordship. Matthew has the disciples rousing Jesus in the midst of the storm: *"Lord, save us!"* Luke's telling of the same story follows Jesus teaching of being lamps on a lampstand and providing light so all may see; followed by recognizing/seeing who Jesus' true family is; *"...those who hear God's word and put it into practice."* In Luke, when the disciples wake up Jesus in the midst of the storm, they call him: *"Master"*, in Greek: *"epistates"*.

In our lesson George focuses on Mark's telling of the story. As he mentioned in the video, Mark sets the calming of the sea after exhausting hours of teaching by Jesus. At the conclusion of all Jesus' teaching Mark tells us that Jesus, *"did not say anything to them (the crowd) without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything."* Mark 4:34. Then follows the story of the storm of testing; testing whether the disciples had indeed, really heard and owned Jesus' teachings as the Words of Life.



THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 George begins by talking about the storm being a picture of “chaos” – a wild place. Take a few moments and consider that metaphor, what are some examples of chaos or storms people face today? Would you be willing to share about some storms or times of chaos you’ve faced personally? At any point, did it seem as if Jesus was “asleep at the wheel?”
- 2 If you hadn’t yet, please read Mark 4:35-41; and review the definition of “deilos” in the vocabulary above and its use in Revelation 21:6-8. George argues in his teaching that this was a wild place not only for the disciples but for Jesus as reflected by his choice of words to the disciples. “Why are you cowardly?” George teaches that calling them “cowardly” reflected Jesus’ disappointment and must have stung the disciples. Do you agree and if so how do you suppose the word “coward” would have struck the disciples? What are some feelings that word evokes? Is there a difference between being “afraid” and being “cowardly”? Have there been times in your walk with Christ that perhaps your responses might have been described as cowardly?
- 3 Read 1 Peter 3:14-15. According to Mark, Jesus was asleep at the stern, “asleep at the wheel.” Is it significant that Jesus chose to sleep at the stern? Was there ever a point during the storm that was it intimidating to Jesus? If the disciples’ passion is to be like Jesus where ought their focus ought to have been?
- 4 Reflect on the disciples’ response to the calmed storm: “Terrified they asked each other ‘Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!’” Mark 4:41. What had the disciples learned about their Teacher? Interestingly, following this story in Mark, Jesus continues to be referred to as “Teacher” but also, following this story, as “Rabbi”. Review the definitions and discuss the difference between these two terms. Which is He to you?
- 5 In the video, George emphasizes the deeper meanings of “Shema” – hearing. Not just the ability to hear sounds, but hearing as movement from hearing to understanding to embracing to life change; in a word: obedience. In what way did the disciples give evidence that they had not “shema/hear” in the storm? How is it possible that they “hear” all Jesus’ teachings but not connect his words into their current life experience? Jesus teaches: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” Luke 12:48. How accountable are we to God for all the blessings He has entrusted us with?
- 6 Read Mark 4:16-17. How does this portion of the parable relate to our story? Jesus suffered facing hardship, the abandonment of and denial of his followers, the lies of the jealous and corrupt Sanhedrin, the abuse of brutish Romans and the torment of the cross; yet at no point did he turn away. He could have called 12 legions of angels to his service; but no! Read Romans 5:1-5, how important is it that we not lose trust in God when in wild places? Consider how can we deepen our roots in Christ so that when stormy and difficult times come, we can fully trust our sovereign God?

THE TASK

Here are some challenges for you as you take this lesson with you into the days and weeks ahead:

- When Jesus uses the harsh word “cowardly,” there is a righteous rebuke and disappointment in his tone. Take time to meditate and journal about a time when you may have acted “cowardly” in your faith, and how God may have been testing you. Write about how your life has been shaped by that experience and write a prayer of confession to God, asking him to use that experience to grow closer to him.
- Target one area of weakness, sin, or temptation in your life that may jeopardize full hearing and understanding of God’s intent for you to have a remarkable life. Reflect on how you may move from just hearing to full “Shema” of a life-change. Write down some definitive steps you might take towards change in this area of weakness. If, and when comfortable, share this with the group or with an accountability partner.
- When things are going well in our lives, and we experience “sunny” days, it is these bright moments when it is critical to prepare for trials that may come so when the storm and chaos comes, you will be ready to face anything. As a group, or in your own time of reflection, have some fun putting together a “survival kit” of ways we should be constantly preparing, even on these sunny days, for stormy days that may come our way.
- In your personal time of Bible reading, read Mark 4:15-20, and reflect on the parallels it makes with our story today. What is the significance of Mark placing this teaching of Jesus right before the storm hits?
- A suggestion: quietly listen to the song, “Jesus, Draw Me Ever Nearer” by Margaret Becker and Keith Getty. Make this song your prayer as you reflect on this week’s lesson. Visit www.underthefigtree.org where you can hear George recite the Shema in Hebrew and English. Many of our trip Alumni are blessed by including the Shema in their daily devotions.