

## 09 Above the Circumstances: What to Do When You are Sinking

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A friend sent me a quote this week from pastor and teacher Chuck Swindoll: *"Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't the Christian life to be lived above the circumstances?"*

It really got me thinking so I'd like to dissect this a bit for this weeks blog.

The verse that immediately came to mind was when Peter walked on water with Jesus.

"Above the circumstances" doesn't mean unaffected by the storm. It means **anchored** despite it.

It doesn't mean Christians don't struggle, don't falter, don't sometimes look at the waves instead of Jesus.

It means that when we do – and we will – Jesus doesn't let us drown.

### Peter's Moment

The story is one most of us know: Peter walking on water but then sinking (Matthew 14:22–33).

The disciples are in a boat. A storm is raging. Jesus comes walking on the water toward them. They think He's a ghost.

Peter says: *"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."*

Jesus says: *"Come."*

And Peter – a fisherman who knew better than anyone what storms could do, what the safety of the boat meant, that if you got out of the boat – you die – **stepped out of the boat.**

That took faith. Incredible, boat-leaving, storm-defying faith.

But then: *"When he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'"*

Peter had enough faith to step out.

But not enough to stay out.

The circumstances – the wind, the waves, the impossibility of what he was doing – became bigger than the miracle happening right in front of him.

And he sank.

## **When Circumstances Become Too Great**

Here's what we miss about Peter's story: **The storm didn't stop when Jesus called him out of the boat.**

The waves were still crashing. The wind was still howling. The circumstances were still overwhelming.

But Peter walked anyway. Until he looked at them instead of at Jesus.

Too often as Christians, we do the same thing.

We step out in faith – believing God for healing, for restoration, for breakthrough, for freedom.

And then the circumstances hit. The diagnosis gets worse. The relationship falls apart. The addiction pulls harder. The walls feel higher. Whatever it is you're going through.

**And we take our eyes off Jesus and look at the storm instead.**

Not because our faith was fake. But because the circumstances became too great to ignore.

## **The Castle in the Storm**

In my book, I talk about the castle we build to protect ourselves from pain. And here is what I've learned: **The castle doesn't just protect you from people. It protects you from circumstances too (but a false sense of protection because that is what the castle tends to do).**

When life gets overwhelming, we retreat.

**The Tower:** We watch the storm from a distance instead of walking through it with Jesus. Isolation feels safer than trust.

**The Moat:** We create distance – from God, from people, from hope – because getting close means risking more disappointment when circumstances don't change.

**The Walls:** We build defenses against the next wave, the next crisis, the next overwhelming moment. We tell ourselves we're being wise. But we're just sinking back into the boat.

**The Assault:** The unexpected attacks – cancer, death, loss, betrayal – test whether our renovation is real. Do we run to the Rock, or do we rebuild the fortress?

When Peter started sinking, he had a choice: try to swim back to the boat on his own, or cry out "Lord, save me!"

**He chose Jesus.**

And immediately – not eventually, not after Peter proved himself worthy, not after the storm stopped – **immediately**, Jesus reached out and caught him.

## My Own Sinking Moment

At 28, I was about to lose Dawn for the second time.

I'd broken up with her once already. Same pattern. Same fear. Same excuse: "We're too different."

But it was a lie. The truth? I was terrified.

Terrified she'd see the real me and leave. Terrified I'd give her my heart and she'd break it. Terrified the vow I'd made at 16 – "I'll never let a woman control me" – would come true and I'd lose myself in the relationship.

The circumstances were overwhelming: my past failures, my fear, the vow that had controlled me for over a decade.

I had two choices: stay in the boat (keep the walls up, manage the relationship from a distance, protect myself) or step out (break the vow, surrender to God, trust Jesus in the storm).

Stepping out felt impossible. The waves were too big. The wind was too strong. Every circumstance said: "Don't do it. You'll sink. You've already failed twice."

But I stepped out anyway.

I renounced the vow. I went to counseling. I put Dawn on the altar like Abraham put Isaac – surrendering her completely to God, trusting that **even if He said "no," He was still good.**

And the circumstances didn't immediately calm. The fear didn't vanish. The storm kept raging.

But I kept my eyes on Jesus. And He held me.

Two years later, I married Dawn. Not because the circumstances got easier. There were still other storms. But because I learned to live **anchored** in Jesus despite them.

## What "Above the Circumstances" Actually Means

Jesus told His disciples: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

"Notice: trouble is guaranteed. Overcoming is also guaranteed – **but not through your effort. Through Jesus, who already did the work.**"

"Above the circumstances" doesn't mean you won't face storms. It means **the storm doesn't have the final word.**

**You will face overwhelming circumstances.** That's life in a fallen world.

**You will sometimes take your eyes off Jesus and look at the waves.** That's human.

**You will start to sink.** We all do.

But here's the promise: **Jesus doesn't let you drown** - not in the ultimate sense, not eternally.

Does that mean He always calms the physical storm? No. My dad drowned in cancer despite our prayers. Your loved one may have drowned in illness, addiction, or tragedy. The storm took their body, but if they belonged to Christ, Jesus held their soul. They made it to the other shore.

And for you - the one left in the storm, grieving, gasping for air under waves of loss - Jesus doesn't abandon you to drown in despair. Peter sinking wasn't about physical death. It was about losing hope, losing faith, losing sight of who holds you even when the waves crash over your head.

**Jesus holds you through the grief. He keeps your head above the water of losing faith entirely.**

Even when the worst happens, you don't drown in hopelessness. Because He's right there, hand extended, pulling you up when you cry out "Lord, save me!"

Peter didn't walk all the way to Jesus without stumbling. He started strong, faltered, and sank.

But Jesus was right there. Immediately. Hand extended.

That's living above the circumstances. Not floating untouched. But anchored to the One who won't let you go under.

## **The Four Lessons from Peter**

### **1. He had faith to step out, but not to stay out.**

And that's okay. Faith isn't a one-time decision. It's a moment-by-moment choice to keep your eyes on Jesus even when the waves are screaming for your attention.

### **2. He took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the storm.**

We all do this. The diagnosis feels bigger than God's power. The addiction feels stronger than His grace. The broken relationship feels more real than His promise to restore.

But the storm was always there. It didn't get bigger. Peter just started looking at it instead of at Jesus.

### **3. Jesus didn't let him drown even when faith faltered.**

This is the hope. You don't have to have perfect faith. You just have to cry out: "Lord, save me!"

Jesus reaches immediately. Not after you prove you deserve it. Immediately.

### **4. The miracle wasn't just walking on water – it was Jesus being there in the storm.**

We focus on the wrong miracle. We think the victory is walking above the circumstances without getting wet.

But the real miracle? **Jesus was in the storm with him.** And when Peter sank, Jesus was close enough to catch him.

That's the Christian life above the circumstances. **Not immunity. Proximity.**

## **How to Step Back Out When You've Already Sunk**

Maybe you're reading this and thinking: "I already stepped out once. I already failed. I already sank. How do I try again?"

Here's what I've learned:

### **1. Admit you took your eyes off Jesus.**

Don't pretend you didn't. Don't spiritualize your sinking. Peter didn't say "I was testing the water's buoyancy." He said: "Lord, save me!"

Own it. You looked at the storm. You let circumstances overwhelm you. You sank.

### **2. Cry out anyway.**

Even from underwater. Even while sinking. Even when you feel foolish for stepping out in the first place.

"Lord, save me" is enough. Always enough.

### **3. Let Jesus pull you up.**

Don't try to swim on your own. Don't rebuild the castle to protect yourself from ever sinking again. Let Him reach out His hand and pull you up.

### **4. Get back out of the boat.**

This is the hardest part. Because now you know what sinking feels like. Now the fear is real, not theoretical.

But Jesus is still saying: "Come."

The storm is still raging. The circumstances are still overwhelming. But He's still standing on the water, hand extended, saying: "Come. Keep your eyes on me. I won't let you drown."

### **5. Remember: The goal isn't perfect faith. It's persistent trust.**

Peter's faith faltered. But he didn't stay in the boat the rest of his life. He kept following Jesus. Kept stepping out. Kept trusting.

And Jesus kept catching him.

## **Living Anchored**

I'm in my mid-50s now. I've been married to Dawn for over 25 years. And I still have sinking moments.

Circumstances still overwhelm. Fears still rise. Storms still rage.

But I've learned: **The Christian life above the circumstances isn't about never struggling. It's about staying anchored to Jesus when you do.**

The tower still tempts me to watch from a distance instead of walking through the storm.

The moat still whispers that creating space is safer than staying close.

The walls still offer false protection from the next wave.

But I've learned to keep my eyes on Jesus. Not perfectly. Not always. But more often than not.

And when I start to sink – because I do – I know He's right there. Hand extended. Ready to pull me up.

**That's living above the circumstances. Anchored. Not unaffected, but held.**

## **The Invitation Still Stands**

Jesus is still saying: "Come."

The storm is still raging around you. The circumstances are still overwhelming. The waves are still crashing.

But He's standing on the water, defying every law of nature, every limitation of circumstance, every reason you have to stay in the boat.

And He's saying: "Come. Keep your eyes on me. I won't let you drown."

You might falter. You probably will.

But He won't let go.

That's the Christian life above the circumstances.

Not floating untouched.

But anchored. Held. Saved.

Step out of the boat.

And when you start to sink – cry out.

He's right there.

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**If you're in crisis:**

- Christian Faith–Based Resources: <https://mentalhealthhotline.org/christian-faith-resources/> or call 1–866–903–3787 (24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (call or text)

**You matter. Your life matters. Please stay.**

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**William James Meyer is the author of "Do You Live in a Castle? Breaking Free from the Walls That Hold You Hostage." He writes from a Christian perspective as someone who's learning to keep his eyes on Jesus even when the waves are screaming for attention. He's still learning.**

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