

## Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

**rfour.org**

**Year 4: Session 8** – Peter

**Class 22: Matthew 14:22-33** – Peter Sinks

### CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Focus a little bit on how “focus” is difficult
- Highlight how sea and storms are a symbol of chaos
- Wrap up with “we fill ourselves with what we focus on”

### Materials needed:

1. Video clip (available on rfour.org) from *The Office* (the American-version TV show)
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. For the demonstration
  - A glass bowl or other container that can hold water and allows for good visibility
  - Water to put into the glass bowl / clear container
  - At least one, but preferably two, of those plastic eggs that can be opened from the middle, like these
    - i. Note: These can be difficult to find when not during Easter season. During the off-season, I was able to find them at a dollar store as storage devices for “silly putty”



## THE LESSON

### OPENING PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle and each of us will answer.

- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here's this week's question:* If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

## INTRO

- We start a new session of stories today.
- The stories in this session will be about the disciple, Peter
- First, we'll look at two stories about Peter while he's a disciple, and then we'll look at the Peter in the story of Pentecost.
- What's helpful about Peter is that he's ... normal. He's average.
  - He says silly things when he shouldn't say anything (just like in the Transfiguration story)
  - He's enthusiastic. When Jesus asks him, "Who do you think I am" Peter says "The messiah!"
  - But, as we saw in the story we read where he has his vision, he *can* learn things, too
- In this session, then, hopefully we'll learn some of what Peter learned
- For instance, one of the things Peter had to learn was how to prioritize and focus on God
- Which is not an easy thing to do – if only because focus is a difficult thing to learn in and of itself
- Especially when there is a lot of stress involved
- Stress sometimes makes us lose track of what's important
- Stress sometimes makes us stop trusting
- Stress sometimes makes us do things we normally wouldn't do
- To help us think about how stress can cause us to make mistakes and act oddly, let's watch the following video clip from the TV show, *The Office*
- A couple things to keep in mind
  - 1. The two characters are on a sales trip and giving out gift baskets – once things take a turn for the worse, the driver is trying to get in the back seat to save the gift basket
  - 2. Watch the driver's eyes (in the mirror). You'll see that he eventually stops looking at the road

## WATCH MOVIE CLIP

### ASK / TELL

- Just before the car goes in the water, the situation is pretty chaotic – there's an argument and the driver is feeling a little lost. In that chaotic, stressful situation, who/what does the driver pay attention to? (the GPS voice)
  - Right – not his eyes or his passenger but the GPS
- After the car goes into the water, what is the passenger's priority? (To save the driver)
- Does the driver seem to want to be saved? (nope. At that point, he's concerned about the gift baskets in the back seat)
- Afterwards, what is the driver referring to when he says, "Good. That's what's important" (being ok)
- What does the passenger then say is also important? (car insurance)
- This was meant to be a silly scene to help us think about how chaotic, stressful situations can make us lose focus, make bad decisions, and then end up in (hot) water – so to speak.
- And, it's exactly what we see happen to Peter in today's scripture story.

### TELL / TRANSITION to SCRIPTURE

- Today's story takes place during Jesus' ministry

- And though the story will also explain what happens, I want to more clearly set the scene of the story for you:
  - The story begins in the evening, but the bulk of the story takes place at night. What we might forget is that at nighttime, especially when it's cloudy, it is very dark because (remember) there are no electric lights (on the boat or on shore) and if there are clouds, then there would be little available light from the stars and moon
  - The disciples are in a small boat, about the size of two couches pushed together end-to-end (give or take a few feet). The boat is probably about as wide as three couches side-to-side.
  - The Sea of Galilee is really a lake. But it's decent-sized body of water. It's about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide (depending on where you measure). The waves in the story are probably somewhere between two to 5 feet high and since it's a shallow lake, the waves would be choppy, not swells. This means the waves are mostly close together, and when they hit the boat, they cause lots of spray. And though the boat probably isn't in danger of breaking or flipping over, it's still a scary and miserable experience.
- In all of this, Peter does quite an amazing thing...and then does a very normal thing
- Let's see what happens

**READ Matthew 14:22-33** (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

22Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be

afraid." 28Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

**ASK**

- Verse 22 – Where does Jesus send his disciples? (off in a boat to the other side of the lake)
- Verse 23 – And what does Jesus do? (goes up a mountain to pray)
- What other stories have we heard "go up and mountain and pray"? (Moses and the 10 commandments, Transfiguration, and – a bit of stretch – Peter going up to his roof to pray)
- Verse 24 – What happens while Jesus is praying? (his disciples find themselves in a rough sea)
- Verse 25 – How does Jesus reconnect with his disciples? (he walks on water to get to them)
- Verse 26 – What are the disciples thoughts about Jesus walking on water? (They are terrified and think he's a ghost)
- Verse 27 – What is Jesus' response to their fear? (tells them to "not be afraid")
- Verse 28 – What does Peter then say? (Hey Jesus, if that's really you, let me walk on water too!)
- Does Jesus agree to Peter's request? (Yes)
- Does it work - does Peter walk on water? (It's not super-clear, but yes, he's successful at walking on water before he sinks)
- What happens as Peter is walking on water? What does he notice? (strong wind)
- What happens to Peter directly after he notices the strong wind? (he sinks into the water)
- Verse 31 – How does Peter get out of the water? (Jesus pulls him out)

- And what does Jesus say to Peter? (You of little faith, why did you doubt?)

## TELL

- First – even though none of us said “walking on water” would be our superhero power, it certainly sounds like a superhero power, doesn’t it?
- But what’s interesting is that Jesus isn’t the only one who can do it. Peter could do it too. Which means, it is not a superpower
- So, good for Peter for wanting to do and then being able to do, if even for a brief moment, what his teacher was doing. That is Peter being a very good student!
- But then, Peter stops being a good student.
- Peter stops being a good student because he’s in a chaotic, stressful situation and it makes him lose his focus and priority
- Peter *was* doing well because he was focused on his teacher, Jesus, and was listening to Jesus
- But then, once Peter started to pay attention to the chaotic, stressful situation, he shifted his focus (the story says that he “noticed the strong wind and became afraid” and then sank right into that chaotic, stressful situation.
- But the reason Jesus does not sink into that chaotic, stressful situation is because he was praying earlier. He was spending time paying attention to God.
- And because of that that time in prayer, Jesus is able to remain clear-headed during that chaotic, stressful situation.
- Which is why, when Peter re-shifts his attention to Jesus and asks for help, Jesus is there and able to help.

## EXPLAIN DEMONSTRATION

- So, not only can chaotic, stressful situations distract us and cause us to make mistakes, they can also get *inside* of us
- For a good example, think about things you like that you pay attention to, say, certain music or sports – when you do that, then your mind is filled with lots of information about that music or that sports stuff, right? We’ll know the lyrics, the names of the bands that play that music, we know the players of the sport, and types of equipment they use, etc.
- Today’s story is saying the same thing: If we pay attention to the chaos during a chaotic situation, we get filled with it.
- And what happens when we’re filled with chaos? Well, we’re going to do a VERY simple demonstration to help us think about this.

## DO DEMONSTRATION

- I have here a plastic Easter egg
- And I have a bowl of water
- What do you think will happen if I take this egg, that’s filled with air and put it in the water – do you think it’ll float or sink? (float! Sink!)
- Ok—now that your opinions are voiced, let’s find out
- [*put it in the water and watch it float*]
- Very good! Now, what do you think will happen if I completely fill the egg with water and seal it back up and then put it in the water. Will it sink or float? (sink! Float!)
- [*put it in the water and watch it ... settle at the surface*]

## TELL

- I like this demonstration because it really helps us to visualize what happened with Peter
- First, he was like this plastic Easter egg – filled with air. He was focused on Jesus and filled with the same thing that kept Jesus clear-headed during a chaotic, stressful situation
- But then Peter started paying attention to the chaos (an easy thing to do), and that shift in focus allowed the chaos to seep into Peter – which is why in the story, he doesn't sink to the bottom of the sea, but settles into the chaotic, stressful situation
- But then, because Peter asks for help, he's turning his attention back to Jesus and is able to get back out of the chaotic, stressful situation
- One of the themes we'll repeat during these Peter session is that if it can happen to Peter, it can happen to us too. And that's good news!
- In today's story, the same way Jesus stayed above the chaotic, stressful situation was also available to Peter, and if it was available to Peter, even if it took a few tries for him to get it and understand it, then that means it is available for us too, even if it takes us a few tries for us to get it and understand it.

## CLOSING PRAYER