

Trials & Testing – You Can’t Escape!

(appropriate for Mid Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, January 2022

Other youth bible studies by Michael Daily available at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

Read **Mark 4:35-41** (parallel passages on this event can be found in **Luke 8:22-25** and **Matthew 8:18-27**).

Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening came, He said to them, “Let us go over to the other side.” ³⁶ **Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.** ³⁷ **And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.** ³⁸ **Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”** ³⁹ **And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.** ⁴⁰ **And He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”** ⁴¹ **They became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”**

evening: *the period from sunset or the evening meal to bedtime*

This event occurred sometime in the evening after sunset. But the experience of “evening” in the ancient world was very different from what it is today. Today, we are surrounded by electric lights at night. We have lights on our boats and lights on the far shore we are trying to get to and flashlights with us. But in the ancient world these lights did not exist. There might be a small fire here and there but that’s about it. The passage in Luke 8 that describes this event calls the storm a “squall”.

squall: *a sudden violent wind often with rain or snow (Luke 8:23)*

So, the disciples are on a boat, after sunset, in the middle of a severe storm. Stormy skies are typically cloudy so there isn’t much light. No electric lights, no fires (because of the severe wind and possibly rain), and no moonlight (because of the clouds). And the Sea of Galilee is about 8 miles across and 140 feet deep.

So, there they are in the middle of a very large, deep lake, trying to row across 8 miles of water in the dark, with virtually no light to see by or to help them orient themselves. The wind is blowing extremely hard and their boat is starting to fill with water. Remember that some of these men, at least four of them, were expert fishermen. They were very experienced at handling a boat on this particular lake. But even these experienced men were panicking because their boat was filling with water and they were about to sink and, most likely, drown. Was this a fun experience they were having? No. Their lives were in immediate danger!

Could this event have been avoided? Yes. If they had started earlier or after the storm was over they could have avoided the storm. Why did they start across the lake when they did? Because Jesus asked them to.

Did Jesus know that leaving at that time would put the boat right in the middle of the lake at night when the storm hit? Yes, He is omniscient. Since Jesus knew when the storm would hit and He is the one that told them when to start across the lake, what conclusion can we make from this? Its clear that Jesus intentionally sent the disciples into this storm! Why would Jesus do that?

James 1:2-5

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

trial: *a test of faith, patience, or stamina through subjection to suffering or temptation*
testing: *an ordeal required as proof of conformity with a set of beliefs*
ordeal: *a severe trial or experience*

Remember, Jesus only had a few years to build these men into the men of faith that would “upset the world” after He left the Earth and who would become people who would rather die than stop proclaiming Christ.

(Acts 17:6)

When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also;

So this event and others like it were intended to grow the faith and endurance of these men so they could become complete, mature Christians (i.e. perfect – James 1:4).

Does this surprise you? We know that we will experience trials and testing in this life but does it surprise you to know that God intentionally sends us into trials and testing that could have otherwise been avoided?

(Proverbs 17:3)

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests hearts.

Is there a way to minimize the amount of trials and testing we have to go through?

If you look for lists of things people want out of life they include things like happiness, money, health, safety, security, good relationships with others, meaning, purpose, power and influence, and nice possessions. But none of the lists I’ve seen include things like overcoming temptation, enduring fiery ordeals, or responding well to testing. Yet the Bible tells us that a big part of the reason Christians remain on the Earth is to develop their faith and character, primarily through trials and testing!

Romans 5:3-4

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

tribulation: *distress or suffering resulting from oppression or persecution; a trying experience*

(Ephesians 4:13)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

God’s plan is to mature us to the full stature of Christ’s character.

I Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

God’s plan also includes fully developing our faith which is more valuable in eternity than gold is on Earth.

I Peter 4:12-16

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶ but if *anyone* suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

Notice in this passage that there are two things mentioned as sources of testing. One source is being reviled or persecuted for zealous obedience to Christ.

II Timothy 3:12

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

The other source of testing is suffering as a result of sinning (i.e. murder, stealing, evil doing, meddling, etc.).

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

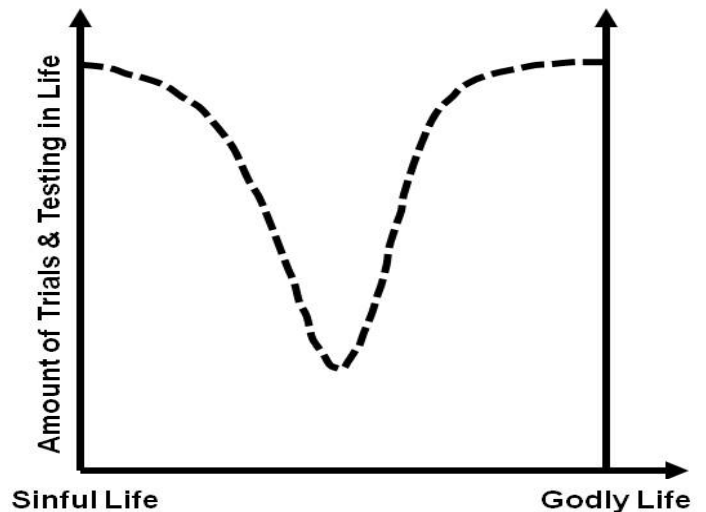
But what if we were to split the difference? What if we decide to avoid obvious sin but also to not be too zealous in obeying Christ? You know, we could be good people but we don't have to do extreme things like read the Bible everyday, or share the gospel, or object to popular things that the Bible says are wrong. Perhaps this approach would minimize the amount of trials and testing we would have to experience in life!

We are going to look at this question tonight because there are some Christians who, either consciously or unconsciously, have decided to take this approach.

If I were to make a notional graph of trials and testing, some people would picture it as shown on the right.

Is there a place in the middle where we can minimize the amount of trials and testing we experience in this life?

Actually, the Bible addresses this situation. Being in the middle is referred to in the Bible as being "lukewarm".



Revelation 3:15-19

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

zeal: *strong feeling of interest and enthusiasm that makes someone very determined to do something*

The word "zealous" has a bad reputation. Satan wants us to think being zealous means "too much" or "overdoing it" or "going too far". Go ahead and go to church, sit in the pew, listen to the pastor, and be a good person. But there's no need to overdo it, reading the Bible everyday, memorizing the Bridge Illustration, that's a little extreme don't you think? But zealous just means to have strong interest, enthusiasm, and determination to do something. In this case obeying God. God says that's good. You can't overdo it when it comes to obeying God!

Notice what happens with the lukewarm in verses 18 and 19. God doesn't leave them alone. Rather, He takes intentional action to discipline the lukewarm and refine them with fire. In other words, God intentionally brings trials and testing into the life of the lukewarm Christian in order to discipline them and get them to start growing again in their faith and character.

(Hebrews 12:6-10)

For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

When Israel rebelled against God at the edge of the Promised Land God disciplined them by having the nation travel in circles in the desert for 40 years before trying again with their children.

(Deuteronomy 8:2)

You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

God also disciplined Christians who were profaning the Lord's Supper with weakness, sickness, and death.

(I Corinthians 11:27-32)

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

key point: *no matter which of the three paths you take you will experience the “right amount” of testing.*

Why? Because God's goal for the development of your faith and character doesn't change and getting there requires the right amount of testing regardless of what the source of the testing is.

Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

The testing might be a result of your own sin, it might be a result of trying to live a godly life, or it might be specially arranged by God to test those who are trying hard to avoid testing (i.e. the lukewarm).

Isaiah 48:10-11

“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

When a Christian lives a lukewarm life it profanes God's reputation and He will take action to correct the situation. Even though the disciples on the boat were not being lukewarm, God still intentionally sent them into a life threatening storm to grow their faith. More so, He will intentionally send testing in the form of discipline into the life of the lukewarm Christian.

profane: *to treat something sacred with abuse, irreverence, or contempt*

(Zechariah 13:9)

“And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ And they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

In all three cases God provides the right amount of pain and the right amount of grace so that His goal of perfecting us is accomplished. He ensures that testing due to our sin or godliness is not too much.

I Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

II Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

(II Corinthians 8:1-3)

Now, brethren, we *wish* to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,

(Psalm 27:1-3)

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread? ² When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell. ³ Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In *spite of* this I shall be confident.

And He ensures that we are not tested too little for the testing to be effective.

Psalm 119:71-72

It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes. ⁷² The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver *pieces*.

Job 23:10

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Psalm 66:10-12

For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. ¹¹ You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins. ¹² You made men ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water, Yet You brought us out into a *place of* abundance.

Therefore, there is no path that leads to less trials and testing than any other path. The path we choose determines the types of testing but not the amount or intensity since the amount and intensity is determined by God in order to mature us.

The best path to take is zealous obedience

All three paths (sinful, lukewarm, obedient) result in the right amount of testing and trials that will bear useful fruit in the lives of Christians but the path of zealous obedience has the additional benefits of eternal rewards, knowing God more intimately, and being used by God to bear fruit in the lives of others. There is no benefit in choosing the other two paths.

II Timothy 1:7-8

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,

(Jeremiah 17:5-8)

Thus says the LORD, “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD. ⁶“For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant. ⁷“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. ⁸“For he will be like a tree planted by the water, That extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit.

One Example of Testing

One of the promises God makes to us is to put seeking His kingdom and His righteous as our first priority in life ahead of all other things. But if I am afraid of the future I may stop putting God first and put other things first, thinking they will give me a better future. But God promises that if we put Him and His Kingdom first He will give us the other things that everyone else worries about. And this is something we will be tested on.

Matthew 6:31-33

Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

I became a Christian my freshman year of college. I didn’t know if I would be able to do college work. Maybe I would fail. Maybe I would not graduate or have a low GPA. It could affect the rest of my life! A few months after becoming a Christian I was studying for a calculus test one afternoon. The test was the next morning and that evening was also the night my Bible study group met. So I decided to do what everyone does. Skip Bible study and study for the calculus test. But as I was studying a thought came into my head, “Which one is going to be most important 100 years from now, the calculus test or knowing God better by studying the Bible?” So, I closed my calculus book and went to Bible study. After the Bible study was over I came back to my room and studied for the test. Notice my decision was not God or calculus. It was God first, then calculus. I lived this principle out for the years I was in college and was heavily involved in Christian ministry during that time. And God kept His promise. I graduated with a good GPA and was able to go to work at a first class company. Along the way I noticed many other Christian students dropping out of ministry or church because they “had to study”. I don’t think they ended up doing as well in life.

Matthew 6:33 (AMP)

But first *and* most importantly seek (aim at, strive after) His kingdom and His righteousness [His way of doing and being right—the attitude and character of God], and all these things will be given to you also.

This doesn’t mean we don’t work hard (that’s a command from God also) it’s a matter of priority. Not God or school, God first, then school. And God first, then career.

Later in life I was tested on this again. After 35 years of working at my company for an average of 40 hours a week, my job suddenly required me to work 7 days a week. I had to stop going to church or being involved in Christian ministry. I felt that I was no longer able to put God first. So, after a few months of this, even though I was not ready to retire, I quit my job so that I could put God first again and I trusted Him to give me another job that would allow me to put Him first. A few months later God gave me a new job with normal work hours, much less stress, and that allowed me to maintain the same income I had previously. And the new job was literally right across the street from my previous company so nothing else in my life had to change. So, God’s promises work whether you are 18 or much older than 18.

Conclusion

We can be fearless in obeying God and relying on His promises. We will be tested no matter what path we take and, because of God’s grace and His commitment to our development, the testing will never be too much for us to handle, nor too little to be effective. Therefore, fearless, zealous obedience to His Word is the best way to live life.

Appendix - Jesus Walking on the Water

Another event occurred after the one with the boat in the storm mentioned in this study. This later event also involved the disciples on the Sea of Galilee at night, in a boat, in a storm. But this time it was not after sunset, it was the fourth watch of the night which was between 3:00am and 6:00am (total darkness). They had been rowing for about nine hours but were not making progress because the strong wind was against them. And this time Jesus was not on the boat with them. Instead, He came walking toward them on the surface of the water. Jesus was clearly testing them again with a stronger test than the first one in order to continue growing their faith. The result from this event was that the disciples, for the first time, called Jesus the "Son of God" and, for the first time, worshipped Him.

Mark 6:45-52

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. 46 After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. 47 When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. 48 Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. 49 But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." 51 Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, 52 for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

John 6:16-21

Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ and after getting into a boat, they *started to cross* the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea *began* to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Trials & Testing – You Can't Escape!*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Luke 8:22-25, Matthew 8:18-27, Mark 4:35-41*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *James 1:2-5, Acts 17:6*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 17:3, Romans 5:3-4, Ephesians 4:13*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Trials & Testing – You Can't Escape!*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Peter 1:6-7, I Peter 4:12-16*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Timothy 3:12, Galatians 6:7-8, Revelation 3:15-19*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 12:6-10*

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JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Trials & Testing – You Can't Escape!*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Deuteronomy 8:2, I Corinthians 11:27-32*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Philippians 1:6, Isaiah 48:10-11, Zechariah 13:9*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 10:13, II Corinthians 9:8*

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JEREMIAH 15:16

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Corinthians 8:1-3*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalms 27:1-3*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalms 119:71-72, Job 23:10, Psalm 66:10-12*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Timothy 1:7-8*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Jeremiah 17:5-8, Matthew 6:31-33*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Mark 6:45-52, Matthew 14:22-33, John 6:16-21*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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