

BRMC Small Group Study: John 6:16-21

Leaders' Guide

Please note that the suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study. Feel free to adapt the questions for your group.

Leader's Notes:

You would notice that the study format is different. We will be changing the question categories to include Observation, Interpretation, and Application questions. We hope that this would help to provide more organisation to the study.

Context:

In the previous study, we have just seen Jesus provide food for the five thousand who have come to hear him. We studied how that passage reflected the Exodus in the Old Testament where God fed the Israelites.

In today's study, we continue the theme of the Passover as we see how Jesus reflects again the Exodus story. This story of Jesus walking on water also appears in Mark 6:45–52 and Matthew 14:22–32.

Lesson Objectives:

1. To see how Jesus is God through this miracle.
2. To understand the purpose of this miracle.

Observation

1. What are some key features of this passage? Note the time where this occurred, the place, and the sequence of events.

- *Distance across northern end of Sea of Galilee is about 5 miles (about 8km). So for Jesus to walk across the water, he would have to walk quite far since they were somewhere in the middle. Some have said that perhaps Jesus was walking on some objects like a sand bar or rocks below the sea. This might be true if it was near shore but they were a distance from it. Jesus was walking on the rough waters and it was dark. It wasn't a still evening.*

- *Some have suggested that the words *epi tēs thalassēs*, which the NIV translates as 'on the water', should be translated as 'by the side of the sea'. This is grammatically possible, but not appropriate in the context, for there is nothing terrifying about seeing a person walking 'by the side of the sea'.*

- *The Sea of Tiberias or Galilee is in a valley surrounded by hills that allow winds to enter and stir up the waters. The sea can get rough. Today, even modern boats are told to remain docked when the sea gets rough.*

- *Note the second miracle of Jesus moving the boat "immediately". We will be addressing this in a question below.*

2. Read Mark 6:45–52 and Matthew 14:22–32. Compare the difference between the accounts.

- *Peter walks on water in Matthew.*

- *The Mark and Matthew accounts mention the wind ceasing when Jesus got on board.*

- *Matthew also says that the disciples confess Jesus to be the “Son of God” after they witnessed the miracle.*

- *In all accounts, Jesus says “It is I. Do not be afraid”.*

Interpretation

3. What were Jesus’ words in this passage and why did he say them?

- *“It is I, do not be afraid.” This is similar to the story of the burning bush. He identified himself with the words *egō eimi* (‘I am’ which is God’s name in Exodus 3:14, where “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”]), which in at least one other place in this Gospel carry connotations of divinity. God always introduces himself and reassures his people. Jesus was saying here that he is God.*

- *The Gospel of John is known for the 7 “I am” statements which demonstrate who Jesus is.*

I am the bread of Life (John 6:35)

I am the light of the World (John 8:12)

I am the Gate (John 10:9)

I am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11)

I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25-26)

I am the Way the Truth and the Life (John 14:6)

I am the Vine (John 15:5)

Here in John 6:20, John was beginning his arguments to establish Jesus’ identity as God.

4. Seeing that the feeding of the five thousand was an allusion to Moses and his feeding of the Israelites, why do you think the author chose to tell the story of walking on water here?

- *Following the sign of feeding the five thousand and how it is related to Moses, here we see Jesus walking on water like the Israelites walking through the sea.*

- *Jesus in this story is portrayed in the same God of the Old Testament, who brings his people from a stormy sea to a safe haven.*

- *This story and the previous together combine to form a reflection on the Passover.*

5. Why did the author mention darkness (v.17)?

- *This passage begins with a note concerning evening or darkness. This is not just a statement about the time of day, but it is also theologically important. Darkness describes not only the setting but also the disciples’ theological blindness. This is especially true in this Gospel as John makes many allusions to Jesus being the light (John 8:12).*

- *In a similar way, we are also in “darkness” on a stormy sea. We need Jesus to enter our lives to bring us to safety.*

6. What was the second miracle mentioned in this passage? Why was it important?

- *Having established that the boat was in the middle of the lake (“When they had rowed about three or four miles” [v.19]), appearing “immediately” at the shore could be seen as a miracle.*

- *While the other gospels do not mention this, John uses this to continue his emphasis of the Exodus where God brings his people across the Red Sea to the safe haven.*

Application

7. With the understanding of John's deliberate use of "darkness" as a metaphor of spiritual blindness, what are some moments or areas of darkness in your life?

8. Has there been times when we've left Jesus out in the water? What would taking Jesus into the boat look like for you and your small group?

- *Remember that it was the group of disciples who received Jesus onto the boat, and not just one individual.*