

Step Out!

Have you ever done something risky? Larry Walters of Los Angeles did. Larry's boyhood dream was to fly. But fate conspired to keep him from his dream. He joined the Air Force, but his poor eyesight disqualified him from the job of pilot. After he was discharged from the military, he sat in his backyard watching jets fly overhead. And then he decided to step out!

He hatched his scheme while sitting outside in his extremely comfortable Sears lawnchair. He purchased 45 weather balloons from an Army-Navy surplus store, tied them to his tethered lawnchair and filled the 4' diameter balloons with helium. Then he strapped himself into his lawnchair with some sandwiches, Miller Lite, and a pellet gun. He figured he would pop a few of the many balloons when it was time to descend. Larry's plan was to sever the anchor and lazily float up to a height of about 30 feet above his back yard, where he would enjoy a few hours of flight before coming back down. But things didn't work out quite as Larry planned.

When his friends cut the cord anchoring the lawnchair to his Jeep, he did not float lazily up to 30 feet. Instead, he streaked into the LA sky as if shot from a cannon, pulled by the lift of 42 helium balloons holding 33 cubic feet of helium each. He didn't level off at 100 feet, nor did he level off at 1000 feet. After climbing and climbing, he leveled off at 16,000 feet. At that height he felt he couldn't risk shooting any of the balloons, lest he unbalance the load and really find himself in trouble. So he stayed there, drifting cold and frightened with his beer and sandwiches, for more than 14 hours. He crossed the primary approach corridor of LAX, where Trans World Airlines and Delta Airlines pilots radioed in reports of the strange sight.

Eventually Larry gathered the nerve to shoot a few balloons, and slowly descended. The hanging tethers tangled and caught in a power line, blacking out a Long Beach neighborhood for 20 minutes. Larry climbed to safety, where he was arrested by waiting members of the LAPD. As he was led away in handcuffs, a reporter dispatched to cover the daring rescue asked him why he had done it. Larry replied nonchalantly, "A man can't just sit around."

Larry's efforts won him a \$1,500 FAA fine, a prize from the Bonehead Club of Dallas, the altitude record for gas-filled clustered balloons, and an Honorable Mention from the Darwin Awards, a website dedicated to honoring "those who improve our gene pool by removing themselves from it in really stupid ways."

- Life is sometimes a whole lot like Larry's lawnchair: (1) It can be exhilarating and frightening at the same time, (2) We can get in a whole lot of trouble when we are bored, (3) Most of our problems are created by the stupidity of the guy piloting the lawnchair!
- After hearing a few stories like Larry's, the temptation is to become a pew potato and never venture outside our comfort zone. But the Bible is full of stories of ordinary people who took extraordinary risks. Some of them failed miserably; some of them succeeded miraculously. And most remarkable of all, here's the story of one man who failed successfully!
- **Matthew 14:22-33 (KJV)** And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.
- Peter certainly didn't mind being on boats; he had been a fisherman all of his life! He had been in storms too, but this was a storm that "tossed" their ship. The Greek word means "tortured" or "tormented." This storm was a lengthy one; it went from evening until the fourth watch of the night. It's now 3:00 a.m. and the disciples aren't worried anymore about getting to the other side of the Sea of Galilee – they just want to stay alive! And then, the impossible happens ...
- Suddenly, one of them notices someone walking toward them – on the water! They were convinced it was a ghost and cried out in terror. How could they have failed to know it was Jesus? Maybe because they were like us, and we often fail to recognize His presence when we are in a storm!

- What in the world was Jesus up to, taking a stroll across the lake at 3:00 in the morning? Why wasn't He in the boat with His disciples where He belonged? Mark's gospel gives us a clue ...
- **Mark 6:48 (KJV)** And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.
- Jesus intended to "pass by them" – why? The word is "parerchomai" and it is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to times when God made striking and temporary appearances to an individual for the purpose of communicating a message. (The theologians call this a "theophany.")
- **MOSES: Exodus 33:22 (KJV)** And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:
- **ELIJAH: 1 Kings 19:11a (KJV)** And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by ...
- There is a pattern in these stories; in each case, God had to get someone's attention because He was going to call them to do something extraordinary. So when Jesus intended to pass by the disciples on the water, He was not HIDING from them, He was REVEALING Himself to them! After all, only Jehovah can walk on water! And He was visiting them in water-walking flesh!
- **Job 9:8 (KJV)** Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.
- What can we learn from their experience? JESUS COMES TO US WHEN LEAST EXPECTED! If you're not looking for Him, you might just miss Him! Twelve disciples were in that boat, but only one decided to step out and meet Jesus on the waves. Peter recognized that Jesus was present, even in the middle of his storm.
- Notice that Peter is a lot different than Larry and his lawnchair! He doesn't just plunge into the water; first he says "If it is you, command me to come to you on the water." We're not talking about foolish impulses, but radical faith. However, radical faith does sometimes seem foolish to the natural mind. It would be tough enough to try to walk on water when the sea was calm; this storm was frightening the trained professionals that were struggling to keep the boat afloat.
- Jesus is inviting Peter to go on the adventure of his life, but to do it he has to get out of his comfort zone. The boat is safe, secure and comfortable; the water is rough, dark and cold. If he gets out of the boat, there's a good chance he will sink. But if he doesn't get out of the boat, there's a 100% chance he will never walk on the water!
- There is more to life than sitting in the boat! You were made for something more than just avoiding failure; you were made to leave your comfort zone behind and join God's great adventure! Here's the question of the day: WHAT'S YOUR BOAT?
- Your boat is your security blanket. Your boat is whatever you are tempted to put your trust in when life gets stormy! Your boat is what keeps you so comfortable that you don't want to give it up even when it keeps you from joining Jesus on the waves. How do you identify your boat? Your fear will tell you! What is it that you are afraid of leaving behind to step out on faith?
- Your boat could be your career, a relationship, or even secret sin. In what area of your life are you shrinking back from trusting God? Your fear will tell you what that boat is, and leaving it may be the hardest thing you ever do!
- One of the major reasons we are afraid to leave the boat this time is because of what happened last time – either to ourselves or someone else. We identify with Peter, because we've tried before, suddenly seen the boisterous wind, and plummeted like a stone toward the bottom. And we're scared or embarrassed or reluctant to go through it all again.
- But here's the secret you've just got to learn – life is stormy anyway, and there is no guarantee that sitting in the boat is going to be any safer! Everything is risky – if you're looking for absolute safety, you chose the wrong species!
- You can stay home in bed, but that may make you one of the half million people who require emergency room treatment each year for injuries sustained while falling out of bed. Eileen Guder wrote ...
- You can live on bland food so as to avoid an ulcer, drink no tea, coffee or other stimulants in the name of health, go to bed early, stay away from night life, avoid all controversial subjects so as never to give offense, mind your own business, avoid involvement in other people's problems, spend money only on necessities and save all you can. You can still break your neck in the bath tub, and it will serve you right.

- You may not like it, but the choice to be a disciple of Jesus is a choice to face your fear head on. The decision to become a Christian or to grow as a Christian always involves a choice between risk and comfort. To be a follower of Jesus, you must renounce comfort as the ultimate value of your life.
- Millions of people in churches today want the comfort associated with religion, but they don't want the risk and challenge that actually go along with following Jesus ... or reaching a generation for Him.
- Just as comfort becomes a habit, stepping out on faith can become a habit too. It's not that the fear or discomfort for the old nature goes away, it's just that you get used to living with it!
- BUT WHAT IF I SINK? After all, Peter tried walking on the water and he failed! Did he really? Let's take another look at that!
- Peter's doubts may have been bigger than his faith; he may have taken his eyes off Jesus and looked at the wind; he may have sunk into the waves ... but there were eleven bigger failures sitting in the boat watching him. They failed quietly, privately, silently. Their failure went unnoticed and uncriticized.
- Every church member has a choice to make. You can sit in the boat and point out everything that's wrong, everything that's doomed to fail, everything that's not working. But you're the one in the boat! Only Peter knew the exhilaration of trying something that he was not capable of doing on his own, then being empowered by God to actually accomplish it!
- Once you walk on the water, you never forget it! The worst failure is not to sink in the waves; after all, Jesus will be there to lift you up because He's the one who commanded you to step out. The worst failure is to never get out of the boat!
- We tend to seek a world of comfort. We try to construct manageable lives with some security and predictability to maintain the illusion that we are in control. Just then, Jesus passes by and shakes everything up. And His call to get out of the boat involves storms, fear, and tasks that are far too big for us. But there is no other way to grow in your relationship with God except to STEP OUT!
- **Hebrews 11:6 (KJV)** But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.