

## TAKE YOUR NEXT STEP

By Bob Young

Walking on the water toward his disciples, Jesus said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:27-32).

Do not belittle Peter for his doubt; at least he was willing to try. To try and fail is better than staying in the boat, warm and content. Two chapters later, Peter is the first to confess Christ's Deity, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). Jesus blessed Peter for his reply.

Then, with fresh confidence, Peter begins to rebuke Jesus and the Lord says, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Peter made his share of mistakes. But his willingness to try should catch our attention.

People of faith do not mature as disciples of Jesus simply by gaining more knowledge. Biblical knowledge must be mixed with obedience. Knowledge and obedience must be coupled with changed hearts. Maturity means growing in knowledge, skills or actions, and desire. Together these will help you take the next step in your Christian life and ministry.

Each person is at a different place in the journey. New believers must find fellowship, learn to share, and be equipped as disciples. Believers who have begun the discipleship journey must learn leadership skills to assist others. Wherever you are on the journey, you must identify and take the next step. The famous Chinese maxim holds true: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." What is the next step you need to take?

Thinking in general terms, taking the next step is essential to growing in faith. Without committing to moving forward -- taking the next step -- it is impossible to mature in Christ.

For some, the next step is growing in knowledge. Part of being prepared is acquiring knowledge. Some examples of the knowledge that disciples need include Bible knowledge, spiritual insight, equipping knowledge, and relationship knowledge.

For others, the next step is developing skills sets and habits related to the Christian life. The actions of the Christian life are not automatic—they must be learned and developed.

For others who have begun the Christian walk, hearts must be sharpened. Our desires and will must be developed and controlled.

While each Christian must commit to take the next step, moving forward is easier in a group. The church must be a place of encouragement. The church must be a non-judgmental, non-critical environment. The church must be a place where trying and failing is an expected, natural part of growth process. The church is a place where falling and failing are normal. People grow faster when they are affirmed, supported, and encouraged.

Knowledge must lead to obedience. Knowledge is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is action, "each member doing its own work" (Eph. 4:16). Continued action is difficult without changed hearts.

Many people are not clear about the next step. Churches often fail to define clearly the next step. What are the expectations of discipleship? Churches that have the largest percentage of members involved have a clear path to spiritual growth—

Knowledge

Personal faith development

Relationship development

Actions consistent with gifts

Personal ministry

Each Christian a leader within the personal sphere of influence

What is the next step that you need to take?