



*Louise George*

The inspiration for these devotionals came in two ways. First, we've been agonizing over the destructive path that three young ladies have taken. For a while we've managed to keep them on the perimeter of our hearts, not knowing how to love through the behavior that so disturbs us. God, however, isn't content for us to settle for less than full-out love, and I've had to admit that I don't know how to love fully and completely, not just these girls, but all whose lives are so radically different than mine. I've come to understand that if I don't figure out how to obey those two great commandments, nothing else much matters.

The second inspiration is the song "Oceans," by Hillsong. My heart resonates with the prayer, "Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders." You can Google the title to either see the lyrics or listen to it.

Gil and I are living with a sense of expectancy as we wait for God's direction during this next post-retirement phase of our lives.

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 14:25-33*

Not being a confident swimmer, I'm most secure in a pool where I can swim to either side and reach the bottom should I need to push off. I am terrified at the thought of swimming in a lake.

The story of Peter walking on water fascinates me.

I'm fascinated because it's hard to imagine doing what Peter did. It seems like a childish and impulsive act. Kids do that. They see someone else doing something that seems easy and fun, and they beg, "Let me do that!"

Peter and other disciples were in a boat on a lake in a storm, struggling against the waves to get to shore, when a man appeared alongside them. They were scared. The brain couldn't logically believe a real man was standing on water. It was an apparition—a ghost! When they realized it was Jesus, and their heart rates had slowed, Peter asked to do what Jesus was doing. "Lord," Peter called out, (still not sure it wasn't a ghost), "if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."

The child in Peter forgot what's not possible. He forgot logic. Peter the child simply assumes in that moment that with Jesus' permission he can do it too.

The child in me sees Jesus also, and this child pushes the rational grown-up aside and calls out to Jesus: I want to come to you to deeper water where my feet don't touch bottom, where I can't see the edges. Let me walk on water with you. Let me do what I can't do without you.

*SONG: Nothing Is Impossible*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, help me to approach you with child-like trust and confidence.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:5-6*

Yesterday I told you that the story of Peter walking on water fascinates me. It also horrifies me. The fascination is because the child in me sees Jesus and longs to get out of the perceived safety of my boat and do what Jesus is doing: walk on the storm's raging waves. But the grown-up, self-sufficient, rational person is horrified at what Peter is asking.

Everybody knows that humans can't walk on water. Maybe Jesus can, we reason, but people can't. So why is Peter even asking? The wind was blowing, the waves were tossing the boat around. It was hard enough to keep the boat upright, what chance did he think he had *outside* of it?

The truth is, while I believe that God is powerful and mighty and bigger and stronger than anything my little brain can imagine, I'd much prefer he got into the boat with me than to trust him to keep me safe in that deep water. It shames me to admit that had I been there, I'd probably have stayed in the boat. I couldn't have done what Peter did.

And yet, I sense Jesus beckoning to me. I hear him calling out to me. "Come," he says. "Come with me to a place where your trust in me knows no limits, where you can stand without firm ground under you. Come away from your own self-imposed borders. Let me take you to a place where you will need to trust me completely with your life. Come to deeper waters."

*SONG: Jesus Calls Us [O'er the Tumult]*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, I hear you calling all of us to step into deeper levels of trust in you.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: John 14:9-13*

Boats are remarkable. Whether it's a little row boat or a freighter, a raft or an aircraft carrier, they all have the same function. They are designed to float on water. Peter, the fisherman, understood boats, and experience had taught him that one minute the sea of Galilee could be calm and the next minute a storm could be raging. Normally, it's a relatively safe place, though frightening to be tossed about in a boat in a storm. Being *outside* the boat is unthinkable.

Yet, in spite of the winds, Peter wanted to get out of the boat and Jesus invited him to do so. He simply said, "Come." "Come now."

We're told in Mark 6:48, "He (Jesus) saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them." It seems likely that Peter had an oar in hand, helping to control the boat. And yet when he saw Jesus, neither the oar nor controlling the boat were on his mind. He wanted to do what Jesus was doing. He turned his back on what was familiar and dared for a moment to think outside the boat!

Like Peter, I hear Jesus inviting me to come. He is encouraging me to leave the familiarity of my boat, calling me to trust him more than I've ever done. Yes, I see the waves. What lies ahead is uncertain, but Jesus is compelling me to go deeper, to the place where my trust is so complete that obedience follows unquestioningly.

*SONG: I Am Thine, O Lord*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, you long for us to know you so well that we joyfully obey. Thank you for giving me the courage to do that.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 12:1-3*

Learning to trust God has been a major theme of my spiritual journey. Looking back over the years I see markers of those times when I'd run out of ideas and options and dared to trust God for the answer. I've grown from those experiences, and it has become easier to trust God. Still, he challenges me to trust him more, to let go of what I think is best, or what I want to happen. Little by little I am learning to simply let God choose, without my input. God does not fail. Each time he has gone beyond what I could have dreamed.

It's tempting to believe that this degree of trust is good enough, but it's as if I am standing here on the edge of the boat, and hearing Jesus' voice calling me to come. I sense there is more to learn, more to experience. And I know I need to choose: will I do what makes sense and stay in the boat, or will I dare to step out of the boat into deeper water than I've ever experienced?

There's no doubt Jesus will climb into the boat with me if I am afraid, and he might even ask me, like Peter, "Why did you doubt?" But I know he is aching for me to step out and walk away from the boat, to walk on water to a place where survival depends on keeping my eyes above the waves. I won't be alone; he is there. He's just ahead, showing the way to obedience that requires greater trust.

*SONG: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, I so want to keep my eyes on you and not the waves.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: Mark 12:28-34*

There's no turning back now. Jesus' call to deeper water is too insistent for me to be content in the confines of my self-styled raft. So I take the first step up out of the boat, lifting my feet up away from the tangible safety of a wooden plank. And then down, down I step to the wet, unsupported surface of the water. I'm not certain it will hold me, but I can hear Jesus' voice calling me to come. To come to the great unknown where my feet may fail. But unless I take that step, that first step of obedience, I can't reach him.

I've been called, you see, to deeper waters of obedience than I've ever known. In the face of dissension and the hurt and pain of ravaged lives, I've been called to do two things.

One is to love the Lord my God with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind. The other is to love my neighbor as myself.

"Of course," you say. "We're all asked to do that."

"Yes," I answer "we are." But I've mostly done it from the safety of the boat. I've mostly loved God as best I knew how, but now he's asking me to love him with an obedience that seems impossible. The water's too deep, and the waves too high. But Jesus promised to hold my hand and teach me how to love the Father as he did. He will teach me what it looks like to fully obey and in doing so, to fully love God. And my neighbor.

*SONG: I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you for challenging me to be totally obedient to you.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: John 14:23-31*

I can feel the waves beneath me but I remind myself that I am safe. Jesus is with me. I am not alone. I cannot do this alone.

“There are two things I ask of you,” Jesus reminds me. “One is to love my Father with all of your heart, soul and strength. Only here’s the caveat: the only way to love him is to obey him. To do what he says. And to do that you have to believe that Father knows best. You have to trust him.”

“And the second thing is this, and although it’s separate, it is actually a part of the first. I ask you to love your neighbor as yourself.”

That seems easy enough. After all, I’ve been making an effort to do that for years. Sometimes better than other times.

At once I realize that I’ve mostly loved others from the safety of the boat. I’ve loved well the people who were most like me. I’ve even loved a few messy ones, but was glad enough to pass them along to someone else. Mostly though, I suddenly realize, I avoid taking some people into my boat. It is too difficult with them aboard.

Now I understand why God has called me to deeper water, to walk on water where I’ve previously sunk. I’ve been called to learn to love people thoroughly and completely the way Jesus does. He loves his father and does only what his Father says. His love, like mine, is expressed through obedience.

*SONG: They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: It’s humbling, Father, to be asked to love others for your sake. And even more humbling to know I can’t do it without you.*

—Louise George

*BIBLE READING: 1 John 3:16-18*

I don't have to go beyond Facebook to understand why I am now in deep water with Jesus. There are three young women on our pages who have strong connections to us. I even claim to love them. These three women post repulsive, sickening garbage. It's so offensive I want to unfriend these girls, but Jesus asked me to leave my comfortable boat and go with him to this dark place where these girls live. I can't unfriend them because Jesus wants me to daily see their misery, and every time I am repulsed, I am reminded how much God loves them, and how valuable they are to him.

How to truly love these girls is beyond me. What does it look like for me to love them unconditionally? I don't know how to stand up in this ocean of ugliness, but Jesus reminds me that I accepted his invitation to come to a place where I could only trust him and learn from him and not lean on my own inadequate intelligence.

I'm overwhelmed by the size of this ocean of hurt, and how far away from land I am. But I've chosen to walk with Jesus on water to learn to truly love people—every person—who crosses my path. I desperately want to learn to love unconditionally, and let God choose the ones he wants to love through me. There are plenty to choose from because many people disgust me, annoy me, believe drastically differently than I, and even offend me.

And yet, I desperately want to love like I've never loved before.

*SONG: How Deep the Father's Love for Us*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I confess that I don't know how to love unlovable people. I need your help!*

—Louise George