

# HOLDING THE LINE

A Five-Part Men's Bible Study

## Session 4 — When Faith Requires Action

Main Passage: Exodus 14:10–16

Supporting Scripture: James 2:14–18; Joshua 3:7–17; Proverbs 3:5–6; Hebrews 11:6–8; Luke 6:46–49

Main Idea:

Faith trusts God with the outcome, but faith still moves when God says move. There comes a point when praying, planning, and waiting can become excuses for avoiding the step of obedience already in front of us.

## OPENING

Last session we talked about rest.

We learned to separate two things:

Mine to carry.

God's to carry.

My actions belong to me.

The outcome belongs to God.

My integrity belongs to me.

Other people's opinions don't.

My obedience belongs to me.

Tomorrow belongs to God.

That distinction matters.

But there's a danger on the other side.

Sometimes we say:

"I'm giving it to God."

When what we actually mean is:

"I'm afraid to do anything."

We can spiritualize hesitation.

"I'm waiting on God."

"I'm praying about it."

"I'm looking for confirmation."

"I just don't have peace about it."

Sometimes those statements are completely legitimate.

There are absolutely times when God tells us to wait.

But sometimes we already know what needs to happen.

We just don't want to do it.

The conversation needs to happen.

The apology needs to be made.

The application needs to be submitted.

The habit needs to stop.

The phone call needs to be made.

The boundary needs to be established.

The first step needs to be taken.

And we're still praying:

"God, what should I do?"

Sometimes God's answer is:

I've already told you.

Move.

## **1. ISRAEL REACHES THE WATER**

Read Exodus 14:10–12.

Israel has finally left Egypt.

After generations of slavery, Pharaoh has let them go.

Then Pharaoh changes his mind.

His army comes after them.

Now Israel has a problem.

Behind them:

Pharaoh's army.

In front of them:

The Red Sea.

There is nowhere obvious to go.

And the people panic.

They tell Moses:

"Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?"

Fear changes perspective quickly.

A short time earlier they were celebrating freedom.

Now they're talking about going back.

That's what fear does.

Fear makes slavery look safer than uncertainty.

Egypt was terrible.

But Egypt was familiar.

Sometimes men stay in bad situations because at least they understand them.

A miserable job.

A destructive habit.

An unhealthy relationship.

A pattern of anger.

An addiction.  
A life that isn't working.  
We know something needs to change.  
But change requires walking toward something we cannot completely see yet.  
So we stay in Egypt.  
Not because Egypt is good.  
Because Egypt is familiar.

## **2. FEAR ALWAYS HAS A REASON**

We should look honestly at Israel's situation.  
They weren't imagining Pharaoh's army.  
It was real.  
There were chariots coming.  
The sea really was in front of them.  
Their fear came from a real threat.  
Sometimes Christians talk about fear as though every fear is irrational.  
It isn't.  
Sometimes there really is something to be afraid of.  
You can lose money.  
The relationship might not work out.  
The conversation might go badly.  
The diagnosis might be serious.  
The business could fail.  
Someone may reject you.  
You may make the wrong decision.  
Faith does not require us to pretend the danger isn't real.  
It requires us to recognize that the danger isn't the only thing that's real.  
Pharaoh's army was real.  
The Red Sea was real.  
But God was real too.  
Faith doesn't deny the circumstances in front of us.  
Faith puts those circumstances in their proper place.  
Fear acknowledges the threat.  
Faith remembers who stands above it.  
Courage isn't the absence of fear.  
Courage is deciding that something else matters more than the fear.

## **3. STAND STILL**

Read Exodus 14:13–14.

Moses tells the people:

“Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD...”

Then:

“The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”

That sounds exactly like Session 3.

Trust God.

Stop trying to control everything.

Let God fight.

And that's true.

But then something interesting happens.

#### **4. NOW MOVE**

Read Exodus 14:15–16.

God says to Moses:

“Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.”

Think about that.

One verse earlier:

Stand still.

Now:

Go forward.

Those aren't contradictions.

They're two parts of faith.

Stand still in your trust.

Move forward in your obedience.

God would handle what only God could handle.

Israel still had to walk.

That's the distinction we've been building throughout this study.

There are things God does.

There are things we do.

You cannot part the Red Sea.

But when God opens the way:

You can walk through it.

#### **5. SOMETIMES PRAYER BECOMES PROCRASTINATION**

Prayer is essential.

Jesus prayed.

The apostles prayed.

Scripture repeatedly commands us to pray.

But there are moments when we use prayer language to avoid obedience.

Imagine somebody praying:

"God, should I forgive him?"

You already have your answer.

"God, should I tell the truth?"

You already know.

"God, should I stop sleeping with someone I'm not married to?"

You don't need another sign.

"God, should I apologize for what I did?"

You probably don't need forty more days of prayer.

Sometimes we ask God to reveal His will when Scripture has already revealed it.

We're hoping He'll give us a different answer.

There are also situations where Scripture doesn't give us a specific command.

Which job?

Which house?

Which opportunity?

Which direction?

Then we pray.

Seek wisdom.

Talk to wise people.

Consider the facts.

And eventually:

Make a decision.

At some point faith has to leave the prayer room and walk toward the water.

## **6. YOU MAY NOT SEE THE WHOLE PATH**

One reason we hesitate is because we want certainty.

We want God to show us:

Step 1.

Step 2.

Step 3.

Step 4.

Step 5.

And preferably what happens at Step 17.

Then we'll obey Step 1.

But that's often not how God works.

Look at Abraham.

Hebrews 11:8 says:

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed..."

Then:

“...and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

Abraham received enough information to obey.

Not enough information to control.

There's a difference.

Sometimes God gives us enough light for the next step.

And we stand there demanding floodlights for the next ten miles.

Faith says:

I know enough to take the next step.

## **7. THE WATER DOESN'T ALWAYS MOVE FIRST**

There's another great example in Joshua 3.

Years after the Red Sea, Israel faces another body of water.

The Jordan River.

But this time something is different.

Read Joshua 3:13–17.

The priests carrying the Ark have to step toward the water.

Verse 15 tells us their feet actually reach the edge of the water.

Then the river stops.

Sometimes we're waiting for God to part the water before we'll move.

And God is waiting for us to get our feet wet.

We say:

“God, show me this will work and then I'll do it.”

Sometimes God says:

Do what I told you, and trust Me with what happens next.

That's faith.

## **8. FAITH WITHOUT ACTION IS JUST TALK**

Read James 2:14–18.

James says:

“Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

Then:

“Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”

James isn't teaching that we earn salvation by doing enough good things.

He's saying genuine faith produces something.

It moves.

It changes behavior.

If I say:

“I trust God.”

But refuse to obey Him when obedience becomes uncomfortable, what exactly does my trust mean?

Faith isn't simply believing that God exists.

Faith means trusting Him enough to act on what He says.

## **9. ACTION DOES NOT MEAN RECKLESSNESS**

We need balance here.

Faith isn't stupidity.

Faith isn't making reckless decisions and expecting God to clean them up.

Faith isn't ignoring wise counsel.

Faith isn't refusing preparation.

And faith isn't saying:

"God told me"

every time we want something.

Proverbs repeatedly praises wisdom, counsel, planning, and prudence.

Biblical faith isn't:

Don't think. Just jump.

It's:

Trust God enough to obey.

Sometimes obedience requires careful preparation.

Noah didn't just believe there would be a flood.

He built an ark.

That took planning.

Materials.

Labor.

Time.

Faith and preparation aren't enemies.

Sometimes preparation is the act of faith.

## **10. STOP WAITING FOR PERFECT CONDITIONS**

There's another trap men fall into.

We'll act when:

I have more money.

I have more time.

The kids are older.

Work slows down.

I'm less tired.

I know more.

I'm in better shape.

Everything lines up.

Then I'll start.

But perfect conditions rarely arrive.

Eventually, you realize you've spent five years preparing to begin something that required one uncomfortable first step.

There are times when waiting is wisdom.

There are also times when waiting is fear wearing a respectable shirt.

You need enough honesty to know the difference.

## **11. SOMETIMES THE ACTION IS SMALL**

When we hear "faith requires action," we imagine something enormous.

Quit your job.

Sell everything.

Move across the country.

Start a ministry.

Maybe.

But most acts of faith are much smaller.

Make the phone call.

Tell the truth.

Apologize.

Forgive.

Ask for help.

Make the appointment.

Put the bottle down.

Delete the number.

Turn the computer off.

Go home.

Open the Bible.

Take your wife somewhere and listen to her.

Tell your son you're proud of him.

Tell another man you're struggling.

Show up at church.

Write the first page.

Take the first step.

Faithfulness usually isn't one enormous decision.

It's a thousand smaller decisions made in the same direction.

## **12. YOU CONTROL THE STEP, NOT THE OUTCOME**

This brings us directly back to Session 3.

Mine to carry:

Obedience.

God's to carry:

Outcome.

Maybe you apologize and the person doesn't forgive you.

You still obeyed.

Maybe you tell the truth and it costs you something.

You still obeyed.

Maybe you take the opportunity and it doesn't work.

That doesn't automatically mean you were wrong to try.

Maybe you set a necessary boundary and someone gets angry.

Their anger doesn't automatically make the boundary wrong.

We often judge obedience by outcomes.

God looks at faithfulness.

You don't control everything that happens after you step forward.

You control whether you take the step.

### **13. FAITH MAY REQUIRE YOU TO GET YOUR FEET WET**

Somewhere in your life right now, there may be water in front of you.

You've prayed about it.

You've thought about it.

You've talked about it.

You've worried about it.

You've analyzed it.

Maybe you've been waiting for God to make the decision easier.

But perhaps the next step isn't more information.

Maybe it's obedience.

You don't need to know everything.

You don't need to control the outcome.

You don't need the entire road map.

You need enough faith to do the next thing God has put in front of you.

Get your feet wet.

### **DISCUSSION**

Take your time with these.

1. Where in your life are you currently waiting on something?

2. Is God actually telling you to wait—or are you afraid to move?

Be honest.

3. Have you ever used “I'm praying about it” when you already knew what you needed to do?

4. What makes uncertainty so uncomfortable for us?

5. Where are you asking God for the entire plan when He's already shown you the next step?
6. What familiar situation are you tempted to remain in simply because change is uncertain?

Remember:

Fear can make Egypt look safer than freedom.

7. What is one action you know Scripture already requires from you that you've been delaying?
8. Are you waiting for God to change something that may require action from you first?
9. What outcome are you afraid of if you obey?

Then separate the two:

Is that outcome yours to control?

And finally:

What would obedience look like if you stopped requiring God to guarantee the outcome first?

## **SCRIPTURE TO CARRY THIS WEEK**

Exodus 14:15

"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."

James 2:18

"I will shew thee my faith by my works."

Hebrews 11:8

Abraham:

"Obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Three simple ideas:

Trust.

Obey.

Move.

## **WEEKLY CHALLENGE — TAKE THE NEXT STEP**

Identify one thing you've been delaying.

Not ten.

One.

Write it down.

Then ask:

1. What am I waiting for?
2. Has God already given me enough information to take the next step?
3. What am I afraid will happen if I do?
4. Does that outcome belong to me—or to God?

Then identify the smallest concrete act of obedience available.

Make the call.

Send the message.

Schedule the appointment.

Have the conversation.  
Apologize.  
Ask for help.  
Set the boundary.  
Start the project.  
Stop the behavior.  
Whatever the step is:  
Take it this week.  
Don't demand certainty before obedience.  
Do what belongs to you.  
Trust God with what belongs to Him.

## **CLOSING THOUGHT**

There is a time to rest.  
There is a time to wait.  
There is a time to be still and know that He is God.  
But there is also a time when God says:  
Go forward.  
You may be afraid.  
Move anyway.  
You may not understand everything.  
Move anyway.  
You may not know what happens next.  
Move anyway.  
Not recklessly.  
Not arrogantly.  
Not because you control the outcome.  
But because you've prayed.  
You've listened.  
You've prepared.  
And you know the next right thing.  
God doesn't require you to part the sea.  
That's His job.  
Your job is to walk when He opens the way.  
Sometimes faith stands still.  
Sometimes faith rests.  
And sometimes faith gets its feet wet.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Father,

Thank You for being patient with us.

Sometimes we run ahead of You.

Sometimes we try to control things that belong completely in Your hands.

And sometimes we stand still long after You've told us to move.

Give us wisdom to know the difference.

When You tell us to wait, give us patience.

When You tell us to rest, give us trust.

And when You tell us to move, give us courage.

Show each of us the places where fear has disguised itself as wisdom.

Show us where procrastination has disguised itself as prayer.

Show us where we're demanding certainty when You've already given us enough light for the next step.

We don't ask You to show us the entire road.

Give us enough faith for today.

Enough courage for the next conversation.

The next decision.

The next step.

Help us remember what belongs to us and what belongs to You.

Our obedience belongs to us.

The outcome belongs to You.

So when You say stand, help us stand.

When You say rest, help us rest.

And when You say go forward—

Give us the courage to move.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **NEXT SESSION**

### **Session 5 — Real Obedience Has a Cost**

Taking the first step is one thing. Continuing to obey when following God begins costing us something is another.