

STANDING FIRM

A SERIES ON FAITH AND COURAGE FOR GOD

- Lesson 1 Power Under Pressure
- Lesson 2 Slay the Doubt
- Lesson 3 Overcoming Waves
- Lesson 4 Anxious No More

Written and contributed by Generation Congregation, the youth group of Taytay First Church of the Nazarene.

Edited by Dick Eugenio.

SDMI Philippines-Micronesia Field

Lesson 1

POWER UNDER PRESSURE

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

– 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

WELCOME

Ask your members how their week has been. What pressures did they encounter this week (social, financial, relational, etc.)?

WORSHIP

Read Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24 together, then pray.

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you

when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book

before one of them came to be.

17 *How precious to me are your thoughts, God!*

How vast is the sum of them!

18 *Were I to count them,*

*they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.*

23 *Search me, God, and know my heart;*

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 *See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

WORD

HOOK: Have you ever bought something just because of its good packaging but got disappointed about the content? Share your experience to the group.

BOOK: Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-10.

The Potter-and-clay relationship is a very good metaphor to describe humanity's relationship with God. In their books in the Old Testament, Jeremiah and Isaiah called God as the Potter who patiently molds the clay—humans—as the dirty, stubborn clay. Apostle Paul used the same term to describe humans in the passage that we've just read. *But what makes humans similar to a clay jar?*

- We are very ordinary
- We are temporary

- We are highly breakable
- We are shaped and molded
- Our value is dependent on what's inside us

Today, we will dig deeper on what God's power can do to us as earthen vessels.

1. Pressure

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed. . .”

There are a lot of things that cause pressure in our daily life. Whether one is a teenager, a young adult or a parent, we experience moments of failure, frustration and trouble. And in these moments, we can't help but question God sometimes. “Why? Why does it have to me, Lord? Why is this happening to me?” We lose our cool and we can't think wisely. We feel desperate and yearn to get out of our negative situation immediately.

Sometimes, this pressure comes from our own family – parents' expectations, sibling rivalry, or just the urge to become the pride of the family. It can also come from your very own friends in the form of peer pressure and our desire to belong and be accepted. Our studies or career can also take so much from us that it starts to consume us as if they're the only thing that matter. We feel pressured to be excellent and to stay on top but sacrifice our relationships in the process. Lastly, we may experience great pressure even from our local church – when we lose confidence in our leaders or feel like our ministry involvement is requiring too much from us.

But pressure can also do something **beautiful** within us:

- It reveals who we truly are
- It builds our character
- It teaches us to depend on God
- It sets us up for great miracles and victories

Pressure comes from different aspects of our lives. But as long as we are rooted in the Truth, we are given the peace which transcends all understanding. Christianity does not promise a hassle-free life but gives us the assurance of God's providence in this journey.

2. Purpose

“perplexed, but not in despair. . .”

To be perplexed means to be confused, while to despair means the complete loss of hope. This means that people who do not know their purpose are more easily prone to be consumed by life's pressures and give up. Without a sense of purpose, there can only be emptiness. And when we feel empty inside, we try to fill it up with worldly things, which results in us only creating more space for worries, confusions, depression and anxiety. It is important to seek our God-given purpose above everything else. Because when we do so:

- No matter how inconvenient things are, we will be willing to endure
- There is peace and joy in the midst of the storm

- We will experience fruitfulness
- God reveals Himself to us

3. Power

“struck down but not destroyed. . .”

With all the pressures we are experiencing and without a sense of purpose, we are sure to fail if we rely on our own strength. There is no such thing as a super Christian. We do not gain power by being experienced but because of the One in us and with us. The very fact that we are still alive is one proof that God’s grace has been sustaining us all along. This is all God’s doing. He is able. Whenever tempted to give up on life, we must remember that Jesus defeated death to give us life. Even more, God is always enveloping us with His power: *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us”* (2 Corinthians 4:7).

LOOK: What are the most depressing pressures that we regularly face in life?

TOOK: What do you think has to be done for you to be able to experience more of God’s power in your life?

WORKS

Give the members a few minutes to pray on their own to ask God for strength to endure whatever they are going through right now. Then close the group in prayer.

(This lesson is based on Ms. Faye Ann Medina's sermon at Generation Congregation service on 25 September 2018).

Lesson 2

SLAY THE DOUBT

“David said to the Philistine, ‘You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied’.”

– 1 Samuel 17:45

WELCOME

Engage in conversation about experiences of the group members which are related to doubt. Did they doubt something throughout the week? Why did they doubt?

WORSHIP

Sing Mosaic MSC’s song “Tremble,” or read Psalm 121 together, then lead in pray.

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
- 2 My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;
- 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
6 the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;
8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

WORD

HOOK: Recall a moment in your life when you are bullied.
How did you overcome?

BOOK: Read 1 Samuel 17.

From time to time, we face bullies in our lives just like Goliath to David. It can take a form of a stranger, a peer or even a family member. It can also take a form of a challenge, an examination, or a big trouble. But there is one kind of bully that we might not be aware of. It is something that we cannot see because it is hidden. The worst bully that comes from within is doubt.

For today's lesson, we will talk about three kinds of people that the enemy uses to cause doubt in us and we will see how David handled every situation.

1. Eliab, the Accuser

*When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? **I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is;** you came down only to watch the battle" (1 Samuel 17:28)*

Eliab's reaction upon seeing David in the battlefield seems overboard. David was just asking an Israelite soldier what was going on and his brother accused him of being wicked and conceited. But instead of retaliating, David simply said "Now what have I done? Can't I even speak?" and turned away. In life, whether at church, school or our workplace, we will meet people who seem to find enjoyment in criticizing others or making accusations about other people. And sometimes, they can even be the people who are dear to us and who are supposed to help us.

We need to understand that there might be people who are just telling us things out of genuine concern, but there are also those who are just being used by the enemy. We need to learn how to be discerning. And when you encounter these kind of people, learn from David and do the same. **TURN AWAY.** We must turn away from people who are intoxicating our minds. We must turn away from things that are not helping us get closer to God. Whatever it is that drags us down, we need to turn away from it. Whatever God is asking us to do right now, we just need to start.

2. Saul, the De-motivator

Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are **only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth**” (1 Samuel 17:33)

Here, Saul was attacking David’s physical features, questioning his capability. He even made a comparison of their experience and skill. But this also did not shake David’s resolve to fight the giant. David recalled his past experiences and remembered about how the Lord has enabled him to kill lions and bears. He knew that he can also do the same with this Goliath.

God does not look at our age. He can use anyone, young and old, as long as we are willing. He enables those who obey his calling. And most importantly, David was true to himself. “I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine” (1 Sam 17:39-40). He did not pretend to be somebody else. He used what he’s comfortable with. He used what was in his hands. He didn’t wait until he can use the armor before he faced Goliath.

Maybe God is calling us to do something. Or maybe we have already started obeying His call but we are getting disheartened because of different factors. We must not not give up. If God says we can, then we definitely can!

3. Goliath, the Impossible

He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!” (1 Samuel 17:43-44)

Goliath was big trouble. He really was someone to fear. No matter how we look at it, David had no chance against him. The whole Israelite army could not stand against him. But David knew something that the others didn’t. He knew how to fight these kinds of battle and that is with the Lord. *David said to the Philistine, ‘You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but **I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.**’*”

When faced with the impossible, we must not forget that we have a God with whom nothing is impossible. We need to stop fighting our battles alone. We will never win on our own. We need to step relying on our skills, experience, knowledge and all the bragging rights we’ve collected all our lives.

The God who made David win against Goliath is the same God we are serving. He is the same God who calls us to do something we think impossible. He is the same God who will enable us to do things we never imagine we could accomplish. And He is the same God who will go before us and fight with us until the end. Now, it’s time to slay those doubts. We need to have the confidence of heart like that of David: *“This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel”* (1 Samuel 17:46).

LOOK: What has been the enemy accusing you that affects your obedience to God? What's in your hand right now? How are you using it?

TOOK: What do you have to start doing as an application of this message?

WORKS

Facing our Goliaths is no joke. But the good thing is we also have a support group whom we can share our fears and burdens with. Affirm each other by saying something positive to the person to your right. Then close the group in prayer.

(This lesson is based on Ms. Michelle Santiago's sermon at Generation Congregation service on 28 October 2018).

Lesson 3

SLAY THE DOUBT

When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

– Matthew 14:26-27

WELCOME AND WORSHIP

Do a thanksgiving chain. Allow each member to express their one thanksgiving each. The group may do several rounds. Lead the group in prayer.

WORD

HOOK: Do you have some kind of phobia? What are you most afraid of (e.g. spiders, rodents, snakes, heights, crowd)?

BOOK: Read Matthew 14:22-33.

We all have our share of fears. Some of us are afraid of heights while some are afraid of the dark. Some are afraid of the crowd while some are afraid to be alone. Fear is a feeling brought by perceived danger or threat. It can be a result of a traumatic event in the past or an unpleasant experience we had growing

up. Fear is common to humanity. As a student, we fear failing and not graduating. As a wife, we fear not living up to the expectations of our husband. As a mentor, we fear not being able to make a leader out of our disciples. The list can go on.

For today's lesson, we will discover how to overcome the waves in our lives in the form of fears by looking into the story in Matthew 14:22-33. The author narrates Peter's attempt to walk on water and how Jesus calms the storm.

1. Step Out in Faith

“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 (Matthew 14:28-30).

When Peter said, “Lord, if it is you,” the Greek words used could also be translated to “Lord, since it is you” which signifies his faith in Jesus. Peter had the courage to step out of the boat because it was Jesus. Being a follower does not exempt us from experiencing storms. Whether we live for ourselves or for Christ, storms will come our way because we live in an imperfect world. Some storms are caused by disobedience while some come because of our obedience.

One thing is clear: we cannot walk on water if we stay on the boat. We cannot grow in faith if we're not willing to step out into the deep. Peter could have stayed comfortable and secure inside the boat. Maybe the boat won't sink but he won't walk

on water either. A person can't be in the boat and out of the boat at the same time – a choice must be made.

2. Eyes Fixed on 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 14:30-31).

First, we need to recognize the Lord and stay focused. Fear and faith cannot be in the same boat. Fear blinds the eyes about the presence of the Lord. As faith increases, fear decreases; it shouldn't be the other way around. Peter began sinking only when he stopped fixing his eyes on Jesus.

When we say fixed, it must be permanent. It can't be based on emotions or conditions. The sad reality is that we get easily distracted. Pretending we're all good and brave won't sustain us. Jesus is the 'Author and Finisher' of faith (Hebrews 12:2). It is only Him who can increase our faith. And even if we sink a little, Jesus is ready to rescue and will not let us drown.

We can ask: “Why did Jesus have to walk on the water?” It is to show His disciples that the very thing they feared – the raging, seething sea – was merely a set of steps for Him to come to them. Remember, God doesn't intend the waves to be above us. He wants us above the waves.

3. Jesus Calms the Storm

“And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down” (Matthew 14:32)

If walking on water was not enough spectacle, Jesus climbed into the boat unharmed, as if saying, “Look, these waters don’t affect me but I can affect it.” There is no storm so big that Jesus cannot calm. When He won’t calm the storm around, He will calm the storm inside. All it takes is our obedience to experience God’s power that enables to walk on water. These are Scripture of promise we can hold on to:

“You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them” (Psalm 89:9)

“He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed” (Psalm 107:29)

“The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea” (Psalm 93:4)

Jesus doesn’t want us in the water; He wants us on it. Truly we can overcome any wave when we step out in faith, fix our eyes on Jesus and rely on Him to calm the storms.

LOOK: What are the storms that you are facing at the moment? Would you say that they are brought about by obedience or disobedience?

TOOK: In what ways can you deepen your relationship with God so that in every storm you will experience His peace?

WORKS

Don't let this lesson end with mere words. God has given us each other to face storms together. Ask the group for *practical* ways to help each other to get through the storms they are facing right now. Be really intentional and seek ways to help. Then close the group in prayer.

(This lesson is based on Rev. Jordan Escusa's sermon at Generation Congregation service on 21 October 2018).

Lesson 4

ANXIOUS NO MORE

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
– *Philippians 4:6*

WELCOME WORSHIP

The player has to say “Praise you, Jesus”, extending the last syllable for as long as he/she can. The player who can extend the last syllable the longest is the winner.

WORSHIP

Read or recite (if memorized) Psalm 23 together. Then lead the group in prayer.

¹ *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

³ *he refreshes my soul.*

*He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.*

⁴ *Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,*

*for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

WORD

HOOK: Have you ever feel suffocated to the point of fainting? What did you do? Share your experience to the group.

BOOK: Read Philippians 4:6.

What a tragedy it would be to wake up one day and find out there's no enough air for everybody! We need air in order to live. We can last a couple of days without food or water but if it's the air that's gone, we're doomed! Isn't it good to know that we have a faithful God who takes care of our everyday needs?

But when there's so much going on in the world we start getting anxious and fail to see God's provisions. In the midst of trials, we lose sight of the very hand of God at work in our circumstances. We are consumed and crippled by anxiety. This

lesson will hopefully remind us that God's love, power and provision are as endless and abundant as the air we breathe.

1. Stop Being Anxious

1 Peter 5:7 says it clearly, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*” Let us take note that this is not a request but a command with a promise. God is telling us to give Him all our cares. We need to lift up to Him our messed up relationships, our unpaid bills, our unreasonable bosses, our irritating neighbors or our failing health. He cares for every part of our life!

Anxiety and depression are quite common nowadays. This is heartbreaking. We are not experts on this matter but what we do know is that we have to fight it before it gets the best of us. No one else can decide for ourselves. We have to decide that we want to stop being anxious. We also have to open up. We do not keep to ourselves. God has given us a community to help us through hard times. We must not lose faith in the gift of accountability just because of a previous betrayal. There are still people who cares. And if all else fails, we must not forget that we have a God who never fails.

2. Take Everything in Prayer

“...by prayer and petition...”

Are we dealing with our problems prayerfully or do we prefer to escape and live in a false reality? A study conducted by San

Diego University concluded that electronic gadgets have become our means of escaping reality: “There is compelling evidence that the devices we’ve placed in our young people’s hands are having profound effects on their lives—and making them seriously unhappy. The more time teens spend looking at screens, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression.” No amount of screen time can drown our fears, doubts, and worries.

Most often than not, we seek comfort in social media instead of communing with God in prayer. We also lose touch of genuine interaction and communication when we are so engrossed in Facebook and other apps. We find ourselves comparing our lives with the highlights of others. We unconsciously look for sympathy by voicing out our problems through our posts. We are all guilty. Social media may not be the sole culprit in our diminishing time to talk with God but it has greatly affected it. Let this be a challenge to all of us to log out of our mobile devices and log in to God’s presence more frequently.

3. Jesus Calms the Storm

“...with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

In whatever circumstance, we must make worship our default response. Research now tells us that giving thanks is good for our mental, physical and relational health: (1) it increases happiness and decreases depression; (2) it gives you better sleep; and (3) it lowers stress levels.

Gratitude can also reduce levels of stress hormones (cortisol) by 23%! Chronic high levels of cortisol are linked with increased risk of depression and mental illness. But when we take time to express gratitude, stress levels lower and keep us healthy! Having a grateful attitude is far wiser than spending our lives worrying about things that we cannot control. Let God be God and do what only He can do. We must be like the psalmist who wrote, *“I bless God every chance I get; my lungs expand with his praise. I live and breathe God; if things aren’t going well, hear this and be happy”* (Psalm 34:1-2).

LOOK: What are you anxious about right now? Are you having moments of depression lately? What kind of help do you think you need?

TOOK: God’s Word is meant to comfort, correct and rebuke us. How will this message impact your life from now on?

WORKS

Before closing this session in prayer, do a thanksgiving chain for as many round as you see fit as a way to de-stress.

(This lesson is based on Rev. Jordan Escusa’s sermon at Generation Congregation service on 08 September 2018).