

Building Boats That Float
Genesis 6:9-22

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According to an e-mail making the rounds these days, everything you need to know about life you can learn from Noah. Among his most important lessons are these: 1) Don't miss the boat. 2) We are all in the same boat. 3) In troubled times, travel in pairs. 4) When you are stressed out, float awhile. 5) Remember, the ark was built by amateurs and the Titanic by professionals.

No character in the Bible gets more present-day attention than Noah. This great-grandson of Enoch and grandson of Methuselah, has present-day water parks named after him and the Quick Bird Satellite looking for his ark. Everybody knows the story of Noah. Could we learn from Noah how to build a boat for ourselves that will float us through the floods of time? That is the question that I would like to pose with you today.

There are some things that this Old Testament hero did that you and I could well do in our time. First of all, Noah walked with God. Verse 9: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time and he walked with God." That is a pretty good epitaph! He walked with God.

There is an old joke about an atheistic jogger who found himself at the pearly gates upon death and he asked St. Peter, "How can I get in this place?" St. Peter replied, "Name the name of God's son and you will have eternal life." Could it be Andy?" said the jogger. "Why would you say Andy?" asked St. Peter. "I don't really know," said the jogger. "I just know when I pass by the neighborhood church on Sunday morning they are forever singing, "Andy" walks with me, "Andy" talks with me, "Andy" tells me I am his own."

Noah walked with God. When you walk with somebody you get to know the person. Joys are doubled and sorrows are shared. It has been said that people who live together for a long time begin to look alike. My wife is praying that is not true! I do know they think alike. I know they can predict each other's behavior without saying a word and read each other's mind without entering a conversation. It comes through walking with one another.

The key to a spiritual life is to live in such a way that you only want to be where God is. When you develop this kind of relationship with God, you discover that there is never a burden that he does not carry, never a sorrow that he does not share. Whether the days may be sunny or dreary, God is always there.

Noah walked with God. When everybody else was walking alone, chasing their own desires, following their own dreams, doing their own thing, Noah walked with God.

Lee Strobel opens his book, The Case for Faith, by describing an interview he had with Charles Templeton. A half-century ago Billy Graham and Charles Templeton were traveling the world preaching the Good News of the Gospel together. Many people thought Charles Templeton was the better preacher of the two. Then Templeton began to doubt his faith. He distanced himself from Graham and then he distanced himself from God. He became an agnostic and wrote a book entitled, Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith. Strobel says, "As I sat in his penthouse living room listening to his arguments against God, I said to him, "Mr. Templeton, is there anything you miss about your faith?" The 83 year old Alzheimer-stricken Charles Templeton, with a tear in his eye replied, "I miss my friendship with Jesus Christ."

Noah walked with God and you can, too. Don't let the cares of the world, the pressures of the day, the doubts of your faith, the success of the hour, keep you from that intimate, daily relationship with your Lord. Noah walked with God.

Noah was willing to follow instructions. Verses 14–16: And God said, "So make yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it. The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark within 18 inches of the top. Put a door on the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks." Isn't it interesting how detailed this building plan really was? Have you any feel for the ship we have just described? This is 1 1/2 football fields long. When my grandson first walked into this Sanctuary, we walked hand-in-hand down to the front. He took one look at this expansive space and looked up to me and he said, "Poppy, this is your big boat!"

From the mouths of children come sermons. Do you realize that the ark was about four stories high? Do you know how high this Sanctuary is? Four stories. Do you realize that the footprint of this Sanctuary, including the Narthex, is about 33,000 square feet, give or take a little? Do you know that the footprint of the ark was about 33,000 square feet give or take a little? Can you imagine getting that building permit? Can you fathom the whining of the neighbors? Can you imagine what it was like for this man, however they counted in Genesis, to hammer away at something for 100 years? Could it float? Verse 22 says, "Noah did everything just as God commanded."

Following instructions has never been one of my strong suits. I would much rather do it myself than to follow somebody else's instructions. When our boys were little we bought a swing set with *some assembly required*. Some of you have been there! In typical fashion, I immediately tore open the box, threw away the instruction sheet, and proceeded to put the thing together. Six hours later with darkness settling in, I still had way too many pieces. Furthermore, our young son kept saying, "Daddy, are you done yet, are you done yet?" More often than not, I have ignored God's plan and tried to piece my life together on my own. Far too slowly I am learning all I really need to do in life is follow. Just follow.

God's blueprints of life have been clearly drawn. Dare I build my life by them even though they seem inconvenient and sometimes impossible? The key to Noah's fate was that he was willing to follow instructions. I understand that our world needs great leaders but let me tell you, as a Christian, we need to be great followers of the way. Noah knew how to follow instructions.

There is something else about this Old Testament hero. He endured the floods. Noah's ark was no pleasure cruise. It was a floating zoo. I do not know what you do with this story, but sometimes I find myself asking questions. Did the animals fight like cats and dogs? Did the donkeys bray and the coyotes howl at night? Did these eight relatives really get along with one another or did they fight like normal relatives do? Imagine the work involved. As an old farm boy, I begin to wonder who cleaned the stables, milked the cows, and fed the chickens day after day after day? Could anybody have stood the stink inside had it not been for the flood outside?

Lewis Smedes says in one of his books, "life is messy." Indeed it is. Every parent knows that when they change a diaper. When families fight, spouses flee, and children suffer. Life is messy. When evil comes, terrorists strike and death arrives, life is messy. When jobs end and hope fails and despair dawns, life gets messy. What I need to tell you today from this ancient story is that when life gets messy, don't abandon the ship. There is a flood out there. You need to stay inside.

Jewish author, Elie Wiesel, tells the parable about a man in a boat. The man is not alone although he acts as if he were. One night without warning, the man decides to cut a hole under his seat. Other people on the boat are totally alarmed. "What on earth are you doing? You are going to destroy us all!" The man replied, "What I am doing is none of your business. I paid my fare. This is my seat and I can do as I please. Leave me alone." Elie Wiesel concludes his parable with this comment, "What a fanatic will not accept, but you and I cannot forget, is that we are all in the same boat". As long as we are on the same boat, our survival depends upon our cooperation, our consideration, and our community. Don't jump ship in a flood! Ride it out. This thing lasted for a year and several days, but Noah stayed there for the whole time.

Noah walked with God. Noah knew how to follow directions. Noah was willing to endure the floods. Now, one more lesson from this old story. Noah celebrated the rainbow. The rains stop, the skies clear, the floods rescind and after a year and 10 days and 4 doves, Noah flings open the door of the ark and steps back on earth. In our imagination we would have Noah stepping from his extended cruise onto a velvet carpet of lush green grass with vegetation waiting for harvest. In reality, he steps from an ark into a barren land with bloated corpses and rotting plants. Have you ever tried to sweep up after a flood? It is a mess. Here, in this God-forsaken place called Earth, Noah builds an altar and worships God, celebrating the fact that he is alive.

By the grace of God and the righteousness of one man, humanity is redeemed for all time. Never underestimate the power of one faithful person. As Bonaro Overstreet wrote:

You say the little efforts that I make
Will do no good. They never will prevail
To tip the hovering scale
where injustice hangs in the balance.
I don't think, I ever thought they would
But I am prejudiced beyond debate
In favor of my right to choose which side
Shall find the stubborn ounces of my weight.

One man saved humanity. The Lord, smelling the sweet aroma of Noah's acts of worship says, "Never again will life be cut off by the waters of a flood. I set my rainbow in the sky as a sign of my covenant between me and the earth. No wonder Longfellow wrote, "My heart leaps when I behold a rainbow in the sky."

Over in Wilmore, Kentucky, every year ten to twelve thousand people from all across the country gather for a Christian rock festival entitled *Icthus*. One year my youth minister happened to check the weather forecast and conveniently got sick, so I volunteered to go. I need to say to you that hard rock music is not my favorite form of entertainment. Furthermore, it had rained for the entire week and it was pouring down by the weekend. The concert was all outside. The tents flooded and the bus was muddied. In fact, I wrecked it. I ran it into the side of somebody's car before it was all over. The fastest way to move was just to dive head first and slide in the mud, which you regularly did in an involuntary way! That was the scene for the *Icthus* rock festival. Finally, late Saturday afternoon, the mud-covered teenagers and adults assembled on a hillside for Holy Communion. As if it had been orchestrated, just as the bread was broken and the cup was offered, bright sunlight flashed through the sky and a rainbow made an arch across the horizon. I will never forget it as long as I live.

Every time I am tempted to bury my face in the mud, I
remember the rainbow. Every time I have blown it again, feeling myself
unforgivable, I remember the rainbow. Every time I am tempted to take the cash
and let the credit go, I
remember the rainbow.

*God, of the rainbow, God of the cross,
God of the empty grave,
How does the creature say Grace
How does the creature say Thanks*

Oh Lord, my God. May I be as faithful and as thankful as Noah!

