



# The Disciple as Refuge

by | **Chris Folmsbee & Doug Jones**

## Chris Reflects

I can remember only once when I was without shelter during a time of threatening conditions.

I was on a canoe trip in the Algonquin Forest some 200 miles north of Toronto with some students and adults from our youth ministry. We were days into our trip, paddling in the middle of one of the largest lakes in the region, when suddenly we were slammed with the most violent thunderstorm I've ever experienced.

The sunny, 80-degree day turned miserably cold (a 40-degree drop during only 30 minutes). We went from our sleeves rolled up and catching some rays to seeing our breath when we exhaled, furiously paddling to the shore.

The storm was at once beautiful and scary. Lightning struck the lake and spread over the water like a blanket of electricity. The lighting was so close you could taste it, and the thunder was so loud you couldn't hear the person next to you scream as the next bolt seemed to appear just feet away. The rain turned to hail the size of golf balls, and for about 30 minutes I tasted fear like never before.

I was huddling shoulder to shoulder with the others on the shoreline of this massive lake with trees that were hundreds of years old, trying to stay calm, warm, and hopeful; yet I thought, *This might be the day I die*. It was the first and only time I've been without a place of refuge in the face of danger.

The storm did subside and the trip continued—after we all stopped shaking.

## Doug Chimes In

The disciples had a similar experience. In Luke 8:22-25, we read that Jesus and the disciples were crossing a lake, and after Jesus retired for a nap on the deck of the boat, a cataclysmic storm blew in. The storm reduced seasoned, salty fisherman to weeping, fearful landlubbers, desperately seeking refuge.

You know the details: Jesus sleeps, the disciples fear for their lives, they wake Jesus and tell him to prepare to die. Jesus calms the fury outside the boat and asks his followers, "Where is your faith?" (Meaning, "Why do you fear and fret? I've been with you in the boat the entire time!")

Jesus is our refuge. From the beginning of time through the whole *Story of God*, we hear the refrain, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (Psalm 91:2). Jesus' invitation adds a further exclamation point to this reality: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

*Yoked*: Joined together, connected, partnered; we've been invited to bind our lives to God. Just as the disciples weren't alone in their distressing situation, we are not alone. When we face difficulties, death, tragedy, and hardship, we have a refuge, a person to whom we can cling—the Lord of the Universe. Jesus invites us to find our rest, our hope, our peace yoked to him.

## Chris Continues

Jesus' mere presence amid others with great needs was a refuge. His attentiveness, compassion, and willingness to enter others' lives made Jesus more than present; it made him an active participant.

I have a refuge. Others are not so fortunate. For them life is a constant fight for survival, a constant disappointment, an accident waiting to happen. They're looking desperately to escape.

Do you know what aching, puzzled, angry, hopeless people need? They need those who've yoked themselves to Jesus, the refuge, so they can receive his help, relief, and comfort. People need us—the church—to be a people

formed by God's story and mission to provide a path of escape, an exit from pain, a respite from wandering, and a shield from what assails.

## Doug Concludes

As we cling to God our Refuge, we become an extension of God's sheltering love and shielding peace. We become a part of God's plan to restore the brokenness within our world.

As youth workers, how do we help our students embrace this picture of the disciple as refuge? A few suggestions to get us started:

- We need to ask: In our ministry environment have we fostered openness, encouraged honesty, and clearly communicated that people need not suffer alone? Do our students view the youth ministry as a place of refuge?
- Are we teaching our students to rely on Jesus? We need to explore and discuss with our students what that looks like as we come upon those who are hurting and in need of hope.
- As we think about our ministry seasons, we need to account for some down time. Amid the busyness of an active ministry, we also need time for students to rest in God and find in God a reliable refuge.
- Youth workers must model listening—i.e., "being there." We must be bound to God, our refuge, so that students experience what we're calling them to become.

## Closing Prayer

*May God our hope and refuge be encountered and experienced as God's people open their lives to listen to, care for, embrace, and enter the lives of those who hurt, despair, and quietly suffer. Amen.*



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