

Session 1 - Overcoming our Fears in Evangelism

“Do not fear their threats, do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.” (1 Peter 3:14-15)

“You were taught... to put off your old self... to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self; created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Introduction and Overview of this Session

This session is based on the first two chapters (p9-33) of ‘Intentional’ by Paul Williams. If you haven’t already read those chapters then please do that now before continuing...

The aim of this session is to help us do what Peter urges his readers to do when he says “Do not fear their threats, do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.” Peter is quoting from Isaiah 8:12 and the next verse goes on to say;

*“The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,
he is the one you are to fear,
he is the one you are to dread...”*

To use the language of Ephesians 4, Peter wants us to put off our old fears of people that inhibit our evangelism. He wants us to replace those fears by putting on the fear of the LORD. He wants us to revere/ set apart/ honour Christ as Lord in our hearts. These are all different ways of saying that he wants us to fear and live for Christ above everything else. We will only gladly speak for Christ when we fear/revere him above everyone and everything else.

All this sounds great, but how do we do it? Peter identifies that the battle ground is our hearts (v15). We need to let God’s word address the fears, worries and idols of our hearts and then replace these fears with a greater fear and reverence of Christ. That is what this session is all about.

There are three parts to this session;

- 1. **We need to listen to our fears in evangelism so that we can expose the idols of our hearts that lie beneath our fears.** We need to honestly identify the different things that we love more than Christ that we fear losing if we were to share the gospel. This may not be easy, but it is essential if we are to put off our old fears and put on and grow in our new reverent fear of Christ.*
- 2. **We then need to have our hearts and minds renewed by the truth of God’s word.** We need to let God’s word remind us who God is, who we are and who our friends/ colleagues family are.*
- 3. **We need to pray.** This needs to not just be token prayer but real heartfelt prayer. We need God’s Spirit to be at work in us if real heart change is going to happen and so we must cry out to God to change our hearts and fears. Similarly we are completely dependent on God to change the hearts and minds of those we are seeking to share the gospel with. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we’re told that “The god of this age has blinded*

the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ...” In response to this our job is to preach Jesus Christ as Lord (v5). Thankfully our job is not to open people’s blind eyes. That would be impossible for us. Instead our job is to preach Christ, it is God who opens blind eyes - “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (v6). God has graciously and miraculously opened our blind eyes as we heard the gospel of Christ and so we must pray that he will do the same for others as we share Christ with them.

Starter - The Fear Factor

Paul Williams sums up the experience of fear that many of us have when it comes to evangelism. To introduce the idea of fear read from “Since then, I’ve experienced fear many times...” (p14) to “It’s a strange thing, but it seems I’m not alone.” (top of p15.)

Then ask the following questions;

- 1. Can you think of times when you have felt like this?**
- 2. What were you afraid of?**

The aim of these questions is to get us talking honestly about something that we all struggle with - fear. There would be no point learning some evangelistic techniques if we don’t address the fear that so often holds us back from opening our mouths. Before we think about what to say when we open our mouths we need to overcome the fear in our hearts.

To help people open up it might be helpful if you go first by sharing an example from your own experience where you were afraid. Hopefully sharing our fears will help us to see that this is something that we all struggle with. Equally you might want to discuss these questions in smaller groups to help people open up.

Part 1 - Exposing our Fears and Idols

Having talked about our fears we then need to expose what lies beneath our fears. In his book ‘Honest Evangelism’ Rico Tice shares a personal story that helps us begin to think about what might be lying beneath our fears. He tells of his regret that he didn’t speak to his grandmother despite the fact that she had no faith in Christ. He writes;

“Why didn’t I tell her about Christ? I’ve come to realise that I was afraid of what she’d say, and I was afraid of what my family would say, because I knew they’d think it was inappropriate and unhelpful. I was afraid.

I loved my grandmother, and she loved me, but the hard truth is that I loved myself more than her. I wanted my family to think well of me more than I wanted her to

think of Christ as her Saviour. That's why I didn't speak to her. I loved myself more than I loved her and more than I loved my Lord.

And that means that my family's respect and having an easy time in life had become idols to me. There has to be something in our hearts that we make the most important thing in life, and to which we sacrifice other things to have or to keep it. If that something isn't God, then it's an idol. Idols can be good things, that God gave us to enjoy; the problem comes when we elevate them to divine status - when we love them more, and think we need them more, than him.

And when it comes down to it, the hard truth was that I wanted my family to respect me more than I wanted to bring Jesus glory or see my grandmother saved. It was my idol - a good thing elevated into a divine thing - and I was so afraid of losing it that I kept my mouth shut."¹

It can be easy to spot the idols of our culture but much harder to spot the idols of our own hearts. The idols of our hearts drive our desires, fears, longings and behaviour. To help us expose our idols that stop us evangelising we need to go back to our fears and think about the following questions;

Think back to a time when fear stopped you from sharing the gospel.

- 1. What were you afraid of losing? What were you not prepared to sacrifice?**
- 2. In that moment what did you want most of all?**

These questions are designed to help us probe our hearts and expose the good things that we have elevated and put in God's place. We are often not aware that we are doing this which is why we need to stop and examine ourselves. These questions are perhaps particularly personal so you might decide to split your group into smaller groups of 2s or 3s to discuss this question.

Having discussed these questions we are then in a place to actually name and confess our idols...

- 3. What was your idol?**

Part 2 - Growing in the Fear of the Lord

Having identified our fears and the idols that drive them we now need to replace those fears with a right and reverent fear of the Lord. We will only stop fearing rejection and a loss of our reputation when we truly revere Christ in our hearts.

(For a good summary of what it means to fear the Lord you can re-read p17-19 in 'Intentional' by Paul Williams.)

In Ephesians 4 Paul tells us that the key to changing our behaviour is the renewing of our minds with the truth of God's word. To help us do this we're going to revisit Romans

¹ Honest Evangelism by Rico Tice (The Good Book Company, 2014.)

1:16-32 and Romans 3:21-26 which will have been preached on the previous two Sundays.

As we re-read tRomans 1:16-32 and 3:21-26 we need to ask the following questions;

1. What do these passages remind us about God? In what ways do they help us to fear God/ revere Christ?

Here are just some of the things we learn about God in these passages;

He has the power to save anyone through the gospel (1:16)

He is rightly angry with humanity because of our wickedness (1:18, 1:24-32)

He's the creator God who has made his eternal power and divinity known through his creation (1:19-20.)

He rightly deserves to be worshipped (1:21)

He is glorious (3:23)

He is incredibly loving - he gave his Son as a sacrifice of atonement for us when we were his enemies (3:25)

He is righteous and patient and just (3:25)

This begins to show us something of God's majesty. It begins to show us why we should fear and worship him above anything and everything else. We constantly need to be reminded of these truths so that our hearts will be changed to love and serve Christ above all.

2. What do these passages remind us about ourselves?

We rightly deserve God's wrath because like everyone else we suppressed the truth and worship idols (1:18-32)

Like everyone else we sin and fall short of the glory of God (3:23)

We have been justified freely entirely by grace (3:24)

We are amazingly loved by God - as seen by his giving of his Son for us (3:26)

All this goes to show us the great debt of gratitude that we owe to God. It shows us how loved we are and how much he has done for us.

3. What do these passages remind us about the people we're afraid to share the gospel with?

Without going into details they show us the perilous position that everyone without Christ is in. Even the nicest non-Christian has fallen short of God's glory and is under his wrath. In answer to the 5th question this should begin to stir up the compassion of Christ in us. The more we are convinced by God's holiness and his righteous anger at sin the more desperate we will be for people to hear the gospel.

4. What do these passages remind us about the gospel?

These passages remind us both of the content of the gospel (3:23-26) but also the power of the gospel (1:16-17) and the scope of the gospel (that it is for absolutely everyone to receive by faith (1:17 and 3:24.)) These passages should hopefully begin to give us a

greater confidence in the gospel that it really is what our friends need and it really can make a powerful difference in their lives.

5. How do these passages being to stir up Christ's compassion for the world in us?
See the comments under question 3.

These two passages are full of lots of truth so don't worry if you don't get everything from these passages. You might decide to split your group in 2. Half the group could look at one passage and then the other half could look at the other passage before both groups share what they've learnt.

Part 3 - Praying for Our Fears and Our Friends

As we noted in the introduction to this session prayer is absolutely vital if there is to be any real change in us or the people we want to share the gospel with. As you plan and prepare this session please make sure that you leave plenty of time to pray for each other and those we are wanting to share the gospel with in the coming weeks. Whether you pray as one big group or split up into smaller groups is up to you.

Pray for;

- Our fears and idols in evangelism. It is right that we spend time confessing our sin and asking for God's help to revere Christ as Lord.
- Our friends, family neighbours and colleagues who we want to speak to or invite to an event. Encourage the group to actually share names and situations so that we can be better informed as we pray for each other throughout the week.
- Pray for the different events that will be taking place. Pray for the organisation and speakers.