

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.

3. What were you afraid of losing? What were you not prepared to sacrifice?

4. 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...

5. 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 Romans 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.

Session 2 - Opening Our Mouths in Evangelism

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...” (1 Peter 3:15)

Introduction and Overview

Peter tells us that we should be prepared to answer people when they ask us about our hope as Christians. This means that we need to spend time thinking about how we might answer some of the big questions that people have about Christianity. Often evangelism is so scary because we don't know what to say or we are scared that we will say the wrong thing. The aim of tonight's session is to learn a few basic principles for answering people's questions and then to spend time practising answering these questions in the safety of a home group environment.

Every conversation is unique and we can never predict how a conversation will go, but if we have spent some time thinking about how we might answer people's questions then we will be better prepared should these questions arise in conversation.

The principles that Paul Williams is encouraging us to follow are not guaranteed silver bullets (there is no such thing in evangelism!) Instead they're godly, biblical principles for us to apply in our own way.

I suggest that you give as much time as possible to practicing the principles and to prayer. Don't spend too much time explaining and discussing the principles because people can read about these in the book. Although there are 3 principles in the book I suggest that we spend most of our time practising the 1st principle 'Take People to Jesus' as the other two principles are harder to prepare for because of the uniqueness of every conversation.

Understanding The Principles

There are 3 key principles in the book;

Principle #1 - Take People to Jesus

On p41 there is a quote from John Stott that sums up this principle. You might want to begin by reading this quote. You can also point people to the Figure 1 on p46 which attempts to depict this approach. Then you can ask;

1. **“What do you think are some of the good things about this approach?”**

As Paul Williams says on p42 the gospel is about Jesus. He is the one person that everyone needs to know about. He is the way we can know God and have eternal life so we want to be talking about him. Paul also makes the point that by answering a question from the lips of Jesus it means that if people don't like our answer then there problem is really with Jesus and not with us. By starting with Jesus it also makes it more natural for us to continue referring to Jesus as the conversation goes on.

Figure 2 on p49 depicts what many of us often do. Instead of going to Jesus to answer the question we go to archaeological or historical evidence or we try to give a philosophical answer. Paul Williams gives an example of this on p56. When someone asked him 'How do you know that God exists?' Paul's answer was to point to nature.

2. What is good about this approach to answering people's questions?

There are many good things about this answer and the approach. He's answering the question rather than dodging it. He's giving a short simple answer rather than a long and complex answer. He's also giving an answer that is biblical (Psalm 19 and Romans 1:20.)

3. What might be some of the problems with this approach?

As Paul acknowledges in the book the problem with an answer that focuses on nature and creation is that it will probably lead the conversation towards the origins of the universe and the big bang and a discussion of Genesis instead of moving the conversation towards Jesus. This isn't a disaster but it also isn't the best use of the opportunity. If the conversation moves towards the origins of the universe then Christians can quickly feel out of their depth especially if we're talking with someone who has a particular interest in science. Another problem is that "having started down that track, it felt like an unnatural crunching of the gears to then try and talk about Jesus."²

Principle #2 Take the Initiative with a question

When someone asks us a question about our faith it can put us on the defensive. We can often feel like we are not allowed to ask them a question in response. We need to remember that this is a conversation and not an interrogation. In an interrogation only one person is allowed to ask questions and the other person must answer. In a conversation both people can ask each other questions.

² Intentional by Paul Williams, p49.

4. What do you think are some of the advantages of asking questions? What makes a good question?

Questions can help us to clarify and understand the question that we are being asked and the motives and thoughts behind the question. Responding with a question shows that we care and that we're interested in the person's question. Questions also slow down the conversation. They give you time to think, they stop you from talking endlessly (this can be a problem for some of us.) Paul Williams also makes the point that by asking questions we are also imitating the Lord Jesus (see p47-48.)

A good question is one that is going to encourage the conversation to flow. It's also going to be a question that helps the conversation move towards Jesus and his death and resurrection.

Principle #3 Take them to the Cross

It's always good to remember our aim in an evangelistic conversation. As Paul Williams says "My aim is not to enlarge their general knowledge. I want to show them their need of Christ."³ This may not always be easy to do but it's important that we are clear on our desired destination. We want to naturally but purposefully move the conversation towards the speaking about Jesus and explaining his death and resurrection if possible.

³ p48.

Practicing the Principles

We want to give as much time in the session to practising the principle of answering people's questions by taking people to Jesus. In the book Paul Williams gives examples of how to answer some of the common questions people have by going to Jesus. I will leave it up to you which questions you decide to have a go at answering. Whichever questions you choose I suggest you follow the following pattern;

- 1. How could you answer this question from the life or the lips of Jesus?** (Do this all together as a group.)
- 2. How might you try and move the conversation on towards the cross?** (Again do this all together.)
- 3. In 2s or 3s have a go at answering the question in your own words.** (Give each person 2 or 3 minutes to give an answer and then swap over.)

In chapters 8-9 of the book Paul gives examples of answering the following questions;

How do you know God exists?

You get to heaven by being good, don't you?

What about other religions?

Hasn't science disproved Christianity?

You can either use his suggested passages or you and your group might be able to think of others that you can use. That is absolutely fine, the important thing is that we're trying to take people to Jesus as we answer the question.

Other big questions that you might want to try and answer include;

- How can we be sure that there's life after death? (This would be a nice easy question to start with because it quickly gets us to the resurrection of Jesus.)*
- Why does God send people to hell?*
- If there is a God then why is there so much suffering in the world?*
- If God is there, then why doesn't he make himself clearer by doing a miracle?*

Paul Williams has written another book for Christianity Explored called, "If you could ask God one Question?" In that book he gives some examples of how you could answer these questions by pointing people to Jesus. There is a copy on the church bookstall or you can borrow my copy.

As I say it is entirely up to you which questions you have a go at answering. Similarly it is entirely up to you how many you practice answering. Just make sure that you leave plenty of time for prayer at the end.

Prayer

As with last week it is really important that we give a good amount of time to prayer. Learning an evangelistic approach is good but it will produce no fruit unless God is at work. Spend time praying for ourselves as we continue to practice and prepare to answer questions. Pray especially that we would have opportunities in the coming weeks to answer people's questions and point people to Jesus.