



Fear and Faith

Stonecroft Evangelism Tools



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Stonecroft
10561 Barkley, Suite 500
Overland Park, KS 66212
800.525.8627

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Scared to Share

Things have gone poorly in the past when I've tried to share my faith. I'm scared to do it again.

Making mistakes is part of life and faith. Though it can be painful at the time, mistakes are opportunities to learn, grow, and try something different. Share about a time when you've made a mistake. Did you go back and learn how to do things differently? What did you do? How did you feel afterwards?

If you've ever had a spiritual conversation go poorly, it can feel scary to try and engage someone again. Thankfully our mistakes (or even perceived mistakes!) don't limit what God can do in and through us. In Ephesians, Paul writes to the church about how believers can have confidence sharing Jesus no matter what.

Read: Ephesians 3:7-21

By God's grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.

Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.

God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence. So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love

of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Reflect:

In what ways does Paul describe having power?

What does this passage tell us is the basis of confidence?

In what ways can love surpass knowledge?

In what ways does Paul describe how the inner being is strengthened? How would this change your view of yourself in light of God's mission to tell others about Him?

Prayer challenge:

Paul writes in his prayer that believers will power together to be filled with the love of Christ. Confess the places where you feel disappointed or ashamed of mistakes you've made or felt like you've made sharing your faith. Pray that you would be rooted and established in His love for you. Pray that this love would compel you to share Him with others and that you would be strengthened in community.

Awkward

Talking about Jesus will make things awkward with my friend.

We have all had awkward moments in life. A piece of broccoli stuck in your teeth that you don't notice until long after you've eaten lunch. Your dress accidentally tucked into your tights as you walk out of a restaurant bathroom. Making a joke or comment to a friend that you later found out hurt their feelings. We often wonder, Why didn't anyone say anything?! When something is wrong, it can feel awkward to point it out, or embarrassing to have someone point it out to you! Yet when we don't say anything, we do others a disservice by pretending things are fine. And that makes things much more awkward or painful in the future.

Read: Acts 17:16-34

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, "What's this babbling trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?" Others said, "He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods."

Then they took him to the high council of the city. "Come and tell us about this new teaching," they said. "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about." (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: "Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: 'To an Unknown God.' This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about.

"He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath

to everything, and he satisfies every need. From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

“His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ And since this is true, we shouldn’t think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

“God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”

When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, “We want to hear more about this later.” That ended Paul’s discussion with them, but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Reflect:

What do you notice about the attitude Paul has about the city and people of Athens?
What does he do in response to his feelings?

It can often feel uncomfortable to talk to people who hold different beliefs for fear of seeming intolerant of their beliefs. Read the definitions of Stoics and Epicureans below and talk about how their beliefs differed from Paul’s Christian beliefs.

Stoics: *believed in a detached way of living in the world, seeking happiness in serene detachment in the uncertainty of life. They believed in self-denial as a way of moral living.*

Epicureans: *denied life after death and found that the material world was all one could experience. They sought extravagant pleasure and lived by the philosophy of “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we’ll die.”*

Reflect:

What do you notice about how Paul engages the people he speaks with? What are some ways he describes the way God views the world?

How does he find common ground with people who have different beliefs from him?

How do people respond to Paul's message?

Paul observes and spends time getting to know the culture. He enters their world and shows concern for them. Paul even uses language that levels the playing field. He speaks to them not as someone who is far above them, but uses words that convey our need as humans for our great God.

Read Acts 17 again:

“His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ And since this is true, we shouldn’t think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

Paul is clear God calls people everywhere to repent. Some people accept and believe, some want to learn more, and still others scoff. Yet in Paul's example we can be encouraged that some will believe! We can also take comfort that our role is to share Jesus faithfully, and that not everyone will respond.

Prayer challenge

Pray that God would increase your concern for people living without Jesus. Pray that God would give you compassion to enter their world and learn ways to help them connect to the message of the gospel. Pray that he would give you humility and grace to talk about what it means to repent from sin to turn and follow Jesus.

Beyond Stereotypes

I don't want to seem intolerant or judgmental—I'm ashamed to say I'm a Christian sometimes.

People place a lot of negative stereotypes on Christians. In their book, *UnChristian*, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons report research about people ages 16-29. The statistics indicate Christians are perceived as boring, anti-homosexual, hypocritical, and sheltered. That seems like really bad news!

It's scary to feel lumped in with a group of people who are supposed to represent Jesus but seem to do more harm than help. The fear of being perceived poorly can hold us back from even reaching out in the first place. It feels shameful and embarrassing to see people roll their eyes when you mention going to church or being a Christian. Though people might have negative perceptions or bad experiences with Christians, you don't have to be another stereotype.

Read: Acts 8: 26-40

As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."

Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The man replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.
And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

He was humiliated and received no justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.

In ancient times, a eunuch was a man who was castrated or born with a physical deformity to his genitals. Eunuchs were often valued as court officers and people who were trusted officials to rulers because they provided no threat of sexual advances to the rulers’ wives. The eunuch in this passage would have been excluded from worship in the temple because of his asexuality and because of his ethnicity as an Ethiopian. Despite this, he is seeking God, trying to understand Scripture.

Reflect

What do you notice about why Phillip goes to the desert? What do you think he felt leaving his church to go to the desert? What do you think some of his fears were?

What is the eunuch doing when Phillip approaches him? What does this tell you about his level of spiritual interest?

How does Phillip connect with the eunuch?

What is the result of their time studying Scripture together?

Phillip focuses on Jesus rather than the differences between him and the eunuch. Phillip meets him in the midst of his longings and questions to know God. Phillip breaks the stereotypes of religious people because he is willing to go to the place where the eunuch was and to spend time listening to his questions. As a result, the eunuch is baptized and becomes a Christian.

Prayer challenge

What would it mean for you to be in places where someone who has been hurt or marginalized by Christians would invite you to “come and sit”? Pray that Jesus would help you to focus on them rather than the differences and that you would have the willingness to go to these people and places.

No doesn't mean Never

What do I do if someone says no to talking about Jesus?

When was the last time you told someone no? It could be something simple like turning down a volunteer opportunity, or something big like turning down a job offer. What did you worry about in telling the other person no? What went into your decision to say no?

Read: Acts 9:1-22

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right

now. I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again.”

“But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name.”

But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.”

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength.

Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God!”

All who heard him were amazed. “Isn’t this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem?” they asked. “And didn’t he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?”

Saul’s preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn’t refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Reflect

How is Saul described in the first two verses? What happens to him in the midst of persecuting Jesus’ followers?

How does Ananias respond to God? What would have been some fears when he went to find Saul?

Describe what happens after Ananias finds Saul. How does he approach him? What happens to Saul?

Many times we think that if someone says “no” to an invitation to church, to talk about their spiritual beliefs or Jesus, or to begin following him, that it’s an end to the conversation or even the relationship. In reality “no” gives us a clearer picture of how to care for our friends. A “no” can become a way we can learn about their fears, their roadblocks to saying yes, and where they are spiritually. A no to an invitation can become a yes to a deeper relationship. So, how do you go beyond “no”?

Prayer challenge

How was Saul’s life changed because Ananias obeyed God?

Pray that God would give you the courage to prayerfully persevere in inviting people to personally encounter Jesus. Pray that God would show up in powerful ways to your friend to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah.

Start Somewhere

I don't know where to start a spiritual conversation.

Describe a movie, T.V. show, or real life example where a guy tries to ask a girl for a date but has no idea how to start the conversation. What does he do? How does he approach the subject? What is the result? In starting spiritual conversations we can feel a little like the guy asking the girl for a first date—we know what we want to say, we know how we want them to respond but we're not sure where to start. As a result we can often make things uncomfortable because *we're* uncomfortable!

Read: John 4:1-30

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

“Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me this water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to get water.”

“Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her.

“I don’t have a husband,” the woman replied.

Jesus said, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!”

“Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?”

Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus told her, “I AM the Messiah!”

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?” The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

Reflect

What do you notice about how Jesus begins a conversation with the Samaritan woman?

Why is the woman surprised Jesus is talking with her? What would have been some reasons that would have made their interaction uncomfortable?

How does this turn into a spiritual conversation?

What is the result of her conversation with Jesus?

What conversation skills can you learn from Jesus? How did He make the woman feel comfortable? How did He get her to open up?

Jesus crosses gender, ethnic, and social boundaries to talk with this woman about her spiritual life. The questions He asks her and the statements He makes during their conversation are intriguing and even a little jarring. In turn the woman returns to her town to tell others about her encounter with Jesus. Read John 4:39-42 to find out how the woman told her own story. He shares His life with her in practical ways (He needs water) and spiritual ways (I am the Messiah!). Many times we can connect with people in the same way—practical situations can lead to deeper spiritual conversations when we're willing to open up our lives to others.

Prayer challenge

What are ways you can practically serve people in your community? What kinds of things would build a deeper relationship with them? Pray that Jesus would help you to figure out where to serve and connect with the people in your life in practical and spiritual ways. Pray that you would have the courage to ask for help and share your own life with them as well.

Making it Stick

How can I have the faith that God will use me to help others begin a relationship with Him?

Using sticky notes, write the names of friends, neighbors, family and others in your life who don't have a relationship with Jesus. Take each of the sticky notes that your group has written on and place them all together on a poster board so the sticky notes are together. As a group, take a moment in silence to look at all the names written on the sticky notes. Think about the lives that these names represent—their hopes, fears, challenges. Imagine what it is like for them to live without Jesus in the midst of all of these things.

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Reflect

In what ways have you been grateful for God's love in the past week? Describe specific ways that you've felt loved by God and His people in the past weeks or months.

How have you felt strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit? If you haven't felt that recently, think of a time when you did feel strengthened by the Holy Spirit. How did you feel? What helped you to rely on that strength?

Have each person make a list of three ways that you've experienced Jesus dwelling with you during this past week. Spend some time as a group thanking Jesus that He dwells within us, that He has given us everything we need to speak and demonstrate His love.

Prayer challenge

Turn towards the cluster of sticky notes you've put on the wall as a group. Touch the pieces and pray for the people they represent. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the same love Jesus has for these lost friends. Rest in the confidence that *"...God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and Jesus Christ through all generations forever and ever! Amen."* (Ephesians 3:20b-21) Pray that this would be true for you, your group and the people you seek to share Jesus with. Thank Jesus for the ways He will do more than we ask for or imagine in the lives of our friends!

What's Next?

Stonecroft offers easy-to-use small group evangelism tools to move along this journey to sharing your faith, sharing Jesus Christ.

Included on our website, stonecroft.org/home/evangelism-tools, are these resources:

Answering Difficult Questions

Sharing the Gospel Through Your Story

Starting a Faith Conversation

Community Discovery Through Prayer

Facilitating a Stonecroft Small Group

Contact us at connections@stonecroft.org or call 800.525.8627 to learn more.