

SESSION 10



STEPS TO SUCCESS

Introduction

We are on a mission. We have a job to do. In the previous sessions we have examined the term evangelism and explored some of the 'wrong definitions' of the word and the consequent dangers of the deception that is rife in the Church. Now that we are clear and that our eyes are opened to the stealth attacks of the Great Deceiver we must fully embrace the mission before us. There are many amazing endeavours open to us in this world, some more attainable than others: climb Mount Everest, sail the world in a canoe, swim across the Atlantic, scale the Great Wall of China Jesus offered a mighty challenge when He commanded, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news.' Surely this should be the greatest endeavour of all Christians; to be part of the task of taking the Gospel to the 7 billion people who live on this planet. Unthinkable? Unattainable? Impossible? Or is it that, if every Christian took seriously the call of Jesus on their life to take part in His Great Commission, this world could be evangelised in almost no time at all.

Focus

Why are Christians so challenged when it comes to taking part in evangelism? Remember, we are facing a spiritual battle. We are in a spiritual war. We have an enemy, the devil. We have opposition to our endeavour. The devil wants, more than anything else, to keep this world in darkness so that they never hear or understand about Jesus Christ and God's purpose for each one of us. His first aim is to ensure that Christians are ineffective in the battle. That means taking us out of the picture by whatever means possible. A few of his favourite tactics are 'fear of man', gossip, disunity, slander, crisis of confidence and discomfort (John 10:10; Romans 7:23). Do you recognise any of these in your own life?

Thankfully we are not alone in this problem. Scripture highlights an all-encompassing 'solution':

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.'

Proverbs 3:5–6

If we can only take this verse like daily medicine straight into our hearts we can draw on the strength of our God. He is always with us in this battle. He will 'never leave us nor forsake us' (Hebrews 13:5), and He promises us that He will give us the strength to face whatever we come up against in the battle (1 Corinthians 10:13). It is a great comfort to know that God is more powerful than anything else we come up against in this life (1 John 4:4). Yes, we face a tough task in the wake of a powerful enemy but, praise the Lord, we have an omnipotent Commander to lead us in this battle. The Lord is our strength and it takes only the raising of His voice to break the bow and shatter the spear (Psalm 46:9).

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; He lifts His voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Psalm 46: 1–7

This war has raged since time on earth began and our history books and the Bible itself testify to it in many a thrilling story. It's the stuff of great movies: good versus evil, with a storyline comprising love, hate, war, action, intrigue, sacrifice and triumph, apparently against the odds. This is the Bible: ultimate good and unthinkable evil. The story of One Man who travelled into another world to win back the one He loves. That man is Jesus and He loves us so much that He came to earth and died on a cross so that the beloved would be saved (John 3:16).

Writing to the Philippians, Paul highlights the sacrificial humility of serving one another because of Christ. It's a high calling, but he states:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:5-8

This is the One we live for. This is the One who commissioned His followers, to 'Go'. This is our amazing endeavour: To 'Go' and tell the whole world about the One who we love; the One who we love, 'because He first loved us' (1 John 4:19). Share the Gospel with the whole world: our purpose, our priority, our privilege and ultimate passion. Amen!

Discussion

1. When you read Philippians 2:5–8 what emotions stir up inside you?
2. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10:13. Can you look back at any of your own experience and testify to the truth of this passage? What comfort can we take from this in the battle?
3. There will always be tough times in the battle. During these episodes it is important to remember the promises of God towards us. Read Psalm 18:2. Research and make note of three or more promises that you can turn to when you feel discouraged.

Bible Parallel

Read: 2 Timothy 4:1–8

Paul's parting words to Timothy are a window to his heart. He affords 'preaching the word' as the main responsibility. As far as Paul is concerned, his ultimate charge lies in the establishment of God's kingdom, His judgment and the certainty of His return. This legacy is the baton passed on to Timothy, simply to 'preach the word'. He also gives the reason for doing so – because there will be a time when many people will not want to hear the right doctrine of the Word which serves to convict concerning sin, rebuke, instruct, encourage and challenge. Rather, they are distracted by religious novelties and choose to hear only what suits them.

This remains our challenge. Stick to preaching the word when it's favourable and when it's unfavourable. The core message of the Gospel must never be diluted. Nor should the proclaiming of the Word be substituted with other things.

The criterion of success that Paul used to measure his life was whether he had kept the faith. The two pictures of a fight and a race illustrate what is involved in doing exactly this. But there is more. Gaze ahead in anticipation of a crown of righteousness waiting as a reward for a faithful and righteous life lived in the promise of Christ's appearing. An essential element of persevering in this way is setting our hearts on Christ's return and on the glorious prize made available to all His followers.

Further discussion and personal contemplation

What is involved in 'keeping the faith'? Can you relate your own faith and action in terms of a fight or a race? As soldiers engaging in spiritual battle, consider the nature of faith itself and the weapons of faith that can be employed in battle.