

life groups study guide

gone fishin' :: fishing gear



LIFE GROUPS
doing life together

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance"
Franklin D. Roosevelt

In Life Groups, kids, youth and adults study God's Word together and discuss the issues and challenges of life.

What Are We So Afraid Of?

Top 10 things people fear the most.....

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|---------------|-----------------------|
| 10. Dogs | 5. Water |
| 9. Loneliness | 4. Financial problems |
| 8. Flying | 3. Insects |
| 7. Death | 2. Heights |
| 6. Sickness | 1. Public speaking |

I marvel that, from going through that list, that it seems some people would rather die than give a speech. I have read about people that pass out, get sudden attacks of laryngitis, nausea, even require oxygen and medical treatment – all because they have to give a speech. There is something extremely intimidating that dwells in the opinions of others.

I used to wear the fact that I really didn't care what others thought of me as some sort of badge of honor. I was one of those "I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do, and let the chips fall where they may" kind of guys. And then, at some point, it happened – like I suspect it happened to a lot of us – I sort of grew out of my rebellious streak and the attitude that it brought along with it.

I came across an article written to real estate agents about the fear of making follow-up calls that I thought was pretty appropriate to the topic of sharing our faith. Here's an excerpt:

I have actually had agents tell me the reason they do not make more phone calls to follow-up with clients is they are afraid of pushing them away by being too annoying, potentially causing them to tell them they are not interested any more.

Now, considering that a generous portion of an agent's job on a day-to-day basis is lead generation, doesn't this seem counter-intuitive?

A roofer can not be afraid of heights. A surgeon can not be afraid of blood. A pilot can not be afraid to fly. And...a real estate agent can not be afraid of making follow-up calls.

It doesn't take an artist to connect the dots here, right? Look at the reasoning in that first paragraph. Good night, that sounds like that could be me were I to be asked why I don't share my faith with more boldness. And to paraphrase the second paragraph: "Now, considering that the whole thrust of Christ's call on our lives as Christians is to go and make disciples, doesn't this seem counter-intuitive?" We can add to the list on the last paragraph that "and a Christian cannot be afraid of sharing their faith."

Q :: What scares you? Not about sharing your faith - just in general... Are your fears rational or irrational?

Q :: What might be some reasons that so many Christians do not share their faith?

Q :: Can you think of any unconventional ways to share your faith that may not be as intimidating?

Admittedly, I have some misgivings about that last question. It sounds like it could be interpreted as “How can we play it safe while sharing our faith?” And while that is not my intent, I think that’s where a lot of Christians go. Pastor Tony Evans rails on Christians who are always playing it safe when sharing their faith. He says we talk about God, and about “being blessed” and other such phrases and topics that can be safely slipped into practically ANY conversation without so much as a single eyebrow getting raised - but we shy away from saying “Jesus”, because we know what happens when we say that, right?

Really, if we’re honest, we know that playing it safe will not get the job done.

I’ve gathered some pretty provocative quotes that I’d like to throw out and get our reactions to:

“The greatest threat to Christianity is Christians trying to sneak into heaven without ever sharing their faith.”
— unknown

Q :: How could Christians not sharing their faith be the greatest threat to Christianity?

“Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that!”
— Charles Spurgeon

Q :: Super-strong statement from someone often referred to as the Prince of Preachers! Do you think that our desire to see others come to Christ is any kind of barometer for our own spiritual condition?

“But in your hearts set apart 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 (NIV)

Q :: Fantastic verse - It operates under an assumption though: that there is visible evidence of something in you that is producing a hope that others do not know - yet is so compelling, that they *must* know about it. If we aren’t getting asked about it, then there’s a problem. Do you think the problem is a matter of not being prepared to give the answer, or one not living with a visible expression of a compelling hope?

Q :: The verse says to be prepared to answer when asked – but what do you do if no one “asks”?

“Fear is nothing more than a feeling. You feel hot. You feel cold. You feel hungry. You feel afraid. Fear can never kill you.”
— Joel Grey as ‘Chiun’ in Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins

“Sometimes we think of fear as an emotion, but we need to realize that fear is actually a spirit.”
— Joyce Meyer Battlefield of the Mind Devotional

Q :: Which of these do you agree with? Is fear a feeling, or a spirit.

Q :: Is our response to fear different depending on which definition we are prone to land on?

Risk Assessment

Read Acts 5:17-32

This is only a single example (and it is a powerful one), but Scripture is filled with stories of risk-takers – both in the old and new testaments. Abram packing up and moving when he didn’t even know where he was going. The same man later tying up his son and

raising the knife to slay him before being stopped by an angel – because God told him to. The apostle Paul, who risked life and limb at nearly every turn to bring the news about Jesus to the Gentiles. We could obviously go on and on.

Americans, however, are becoming risk-phobic. We want a guarantee about everything before we risk anything. We are, for all intents and purposes, addicted to comfort. I find it encouraging though that the sort of boldness I'm prone to admire in our biblical heroes did not always come naturally – it needed a supernatural jump start.

Read Acts 4:23-31

You flat-out do not get the boldness exhibited in Acts 5 without the prayer for it in Acts 4. I especially like verse 29 in chapter 4. It's as if they are all too familiar with their own capacity to be driven backwards by fear. So they ask God to consider the threats against them – and in light of them, enable them to speak with boldness. The implication is that without the enabling of God, they recognize that they cannot do what needs to be done here – the threats will generate fear that will hinder their boldness. They have a complete realization of their own inability – and a complete reliance on God to make what needs to happen, happen. We too must move to a greater dependence on God's Spirit than on ourselves.

Another good quote for your consideration:

“The cause of the weakness of your Christian life is that you want to work it out partly, and then have God help you. That cannot be. You must come to be utterly helpless to let God work. He will work gloriously.”
— Andrew Murray

Q :: How is it that we can become “utterly helpless” that God will be able to work?

This is certainly a principle we see borne out in Scripture as well:

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-9

Read 2 Chronicles 14:11

Both instances show a fundamental shift to full reliance on God. This, of course, does not absolve us from making efforts ourselves. God does not say he will bring the whole world to us to make disciples of - we are told to “go”. But somewhere between our simple act of obedience in making ourselves available to “go” and being able to share our faith there has to be a recognition of the fact that it is not our words or powers of persuasion that will bring a harvest, but only a realization that it is God alone who draws others to Himself and we are powerless outside of a great movement of His Spirit to make this happen.

And what of fear? It is not my belief that the element of fear will magically disappear - especially since I believe it is an agent and effective tool of our enemy, and one it will certainly not abandon. Joyce Meyer says that we need to learn to “do it afraid.” The implication is that the absence of fear is not a requirement for doing what we need to do.

I recently attended a Christian camp with my family and signed up for an even called the “Leap of Faith” – a fun little thing where I was to leap off the edge of a 60-ish foot high ledge and grab a trapeze that was about 10 feet away. The first thought that came to my mind as I stepped to the edge and looked out at my target was “I really don't think I can jump that far.” My gut instinct was not one of implicit trust in the ropes I was tied into or the person giving me instructions and telling me that no matter what, he had me covered. No - my gut reaction was fear. I made the leap - but I can assure you, I “did it afraid”.

Conclusion:

At the same camp we had a chapel service both morning and night, with two wonderful speakers bringing us incredibly challenging messages. At the risk of going into quote-overload, I want to share just two more from Brian Rudicell, who spoke to us in the morning services.

“You cannot grow by playing it safe and being comfortable.”

and, similarly:

“You cannot know God by giving / serving / or loving at a comfortable level.”

The time to push ourselves out on the ledge of our own comfort zone is now. There is too much at stake. I echo the words of Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay when responding to data showing that the number of baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention fell another 5% in 2010 – continuing downward trends:

“I pray that all of us will see the urgency of the moment. We must make the Great Commission the heart of all we do and say. As we look upon fields white unto harvest, we should be ever aware that it is critical that we proclaim Christ to our neighbors and those we come in contact with on a daily basis,” he added. “It is critical for our churches to not just get people in the door, but to also train them and disciple them in how to share their faith.”

Amen – may this be our prayer as well as we ask God for the boldness we need.