

WITNESS

Home Group Series

August - October 2017



*FGA MELBOURNE
LEADER'S GUIDE*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	3
SESSION 1: LIVE	6
SESSION 2: SHOW UP	9
SESSION 3: RELATE	13
SESSION 4: RISK	16
APPENDIX I: 2017 MOVE IN FAITH	19
APPENDIX II: FIVE CORE VALUES OF FGAM	20

OVERVIEW

Series passage: *“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is Good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”* Psalm 34:8 (ESV)

INVITE OTHERS TO TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD

INTRODUCTION TO THE "WITNESS" SERIES

Australia is in a post-Christian era which means that people are often closed to the gospel. But in reality, they still desperately need the Lord. As followers of Jesus, on the other hand, we have been commanded by Christ to be his witnesses. The key to witnessing is to understand how God wants us to reach this generation in a way they can receive the Good News. The easiest way to do that is to live authentically with Christ and with others, and boldly grab opportunities to share his goodness with those who are yet to meet Him. In this way, we can invite them to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8).

The Witness Home Group Series gives us four keys explaining how we can fulfil Jesus’ command to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 28:18-20). Witnessing is not just a task for gifted evangelists, philosophers or debaters who are able to argue their point well, or only for preachers who can clearly present the gospel to the masses. It should be our very own lifestyle flowing from genuine relationship with God, lived out in a way that others can see the reality of God’s love and power. This should be apparent in both our family life and outworking in a church community. By making ourselves available those who don’t know Christ and intentionally becoming involved in their lives, we can more easily bridge the risky and often uncomfortable gap to share the truth about God.

God has entrusted His story to each one of us. Let’s make it our aim to use this series to align our hearts with God’s heartbeat for humanity.

Rationale and linkage to 2017 Anchor Verse

FGAM’s theme for 2017 is “Move In FAITH”. A description of this theme can be found in Appendix I. The anchor verse for this year is taken from Acts 1:8 *“...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (ESV).

The Witness series is a practical series aimed to eliminate the daunting feeling and burden often associated with witnessing. We need to reveal to others the practical reality of God working in our own life to be a way that draws others into the Kingdom so that too can taste and see that the Lord is good.

MAIN POINTS

This Witness series describes four steps to being a witness for Christ in a way that blesses people and expands the Kingdom of God.

To make it easier to follow, each of the four keys to witnessing has working title, as shown in the following table. This series comprises four sessions which will run in Home Groups from August to October, 2017.

Video Title (Length)	Main Point	Session Passage
Introduction	Series overview/ promo	
Leader's Video	Tips for leading the series well	
Session 1: Live	Go deep with God. Get swept up in God's great love and know your own relationship with him.	Matthew 13:44
Session 2: Show Up	Live openly and transparently before others so they can see a difference.	Romans 14:17
Session 3: Relate	Engage in other people's lives, listen and be involved.	1 Corinthians 12:12-21
Session 4: Risk	Trust God by leaving the familiar and stepping into the unfamiliar	1 Peter 2:5; 1 Chronicles 7:11-21

FORMAT

The suggested format for the series is similar to previous home group series. The components common to most Home Group session are:

- Worship or Opening Prayer
- Testimonies or sharing about things that have happened recently
- Introduction to the Session (session leader)
- Witness Session Video by Chris Ong
- Read Key Scripture
- Main Point
- Discuss one or more of the Questions
- Read and respond to the Application
- Pray for needs /Closing prayer
- Fellowship

ONE BLESS ONE

Part of the Application is a section that helps us to shift from an inward to an outward focus is highlighted as "One bless-one". This is included to assist us to become intentional about creating opportunities to put in the practice what we have learnt during the session. This should be done sometime between Home Group meetings, for example. Perhaps, during the testimony time in the following session you can share how this worked out for the group.

Keywords: Gospel • Eternity • Witness • Authenticity • Kingdom Culture

F.A.I.T.H. emphasis: Faithful to the Mission



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The accompanying the "Witness" MP4 videos (on a USB stick) are available from the church office. Also, video streaming, and copies of the Leader's Guide and Member's Notes are available for download at <http://fgam.org.au/media/homegroup-materials>. If you are unable to access the files or need assistance with printing notes, please let us know by contacting Megan Griffith (0422 284 404, megan.griffith@fgam.org.au) or Ps. YC Goh (0425 799 576, yc.goh@fgam.org.au).

The Witness series will be augmented by:

- The Witness preaching series at FGA Sunday Services for 3 weeks, 10-24 September, 2017. Sermons will be available online in video (<http://fgam.org.au/media/video-sermons>) or audio (<http://fgam.org.au/media/audio-sermons>) format or via the FGAM App (available for free download for Android/Tablet or iPhone/iPad).
- Leaders Podcast on Sessions covering Live, Show Up, Relate and Risk by Ps. Chris Ong and the FGA Staff team are available at <http://fgam.org.au/media/leadership-podcast>.
- Leaders Podcast on our year Move in Faith by Ps. Chris Ong and the FGA Staff team is available at <http://fgam.org.au/media/leadership-podcast>.

Recommended Reading

- The summary of FGAM's vision for 2017 to "Move in FAITH" is attached in Appendix I
- The core values of FGAM as expressed in the F.A.I.T.H acronym are provided in Appendix II.
- "This Invitational Life" by Steve Carter, 2016 (subtitle: Risking yourself to align with God's heartbeat for humanity).

Session 1: Live

Live deep with God

Key passage: “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.” Acts 2:1-2 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples (and us) that we are to be witnesses. We are currently living in the end parts of that verse (i.e. Witnesses “to the ends of the earth”). Witnessing for Christ can be and should be a natural extension of our relationship with God, lived out.

This series provides four simple keys to make a life of witness in reach of every believer. You don’t have to be good at debating, apologetics, or even know your Bible very well. Rather the keys are to:

1. Foster a genuine relationship with God
2. Live that out in a way others can see the living God working in your life, as well as in your church community.
3. Be willing to be involved in other people’s lives.
4. Risk stepping out and sharing the gospel with others.

In this series, we hope you will be encouraged to put down your barriers and inhibitions about witnessing and come along the journey of a fresh look at being a witness that is Faithful to the Mission.

In this session, we will discuss living out an authentic deep walk with God

A. VIDEO SUMMARY (Session 1 video, 5:14 minutes)

The video summary for Session 1 on “Live” includes:

- Australia is in a post-Christian era but people still need the Lord.
- We are commanded by Christ to be his witnesses.
- The best way to share Christ is to share with others what God is doing in our own lives.
- Authentic Christianity is allowing God to move our lives.
- The early church allowed the Spirit to move powerfully and they were powerful witnesses (Acts 2:1-2).
- Let us reflect on how God moves in our lives and invite him to do more.
- The next step is to share that with others.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Acts 2:1-2)

Background to the passage:

This passage describes the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the lead up, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would be sent as a gift from the Father just before he ascended into heaven (50 days prior to Pentecost). The believers had been since gathering daily to worship and pray together. As they had positioned themselves to seek God, it was this day that God acted doing something unprecedented in pouring out his Holy Spirit and releasing the gift of speaking in languages never learnt or spoken by these people before. The church was birthed and the rest, as they say, is history. The key point it was God moving in them, that gave them power and a story to tell (become a witness).

C. MAIN POINT

Our main goal in witnessing is to invite people to “taste and see the Lord is good”

When someone shares of their experience at a good restaurant or recommends a particular product that they have found to work for them, their story can be very persuasive. You have seen the positive effect it had on their lives and it lures you to try it for yourself. This principle is not very different to witnessing for Christ. It is out of our personal experience of walking with God that we can testify to his goodness and we can naturally share and invite others to taste and see how good he is.

In the key passage for today, we see the key to how people with no money, education or particular influence became powerful witnesses for God. It was God who initiated the encounter in this group of believers, by pouring out his Holy Spirit. Just as it was promised in Acts 1:8, “...and you will be my witnesses...”. They were not witnesses to religion, but witnesses to a living God. Their ability to witness was directly in response to God’s action in their lives. We are commanded by Jesus to do likewise.

Authentic life with God is one where we find joy and fulfilment and a deep sense of purpose. Is that present in your own life? Perhaps it is time to take this first crucial step to invite God to move more in your own life, before you can be an authentic witness of his goodness.

God has entrusted his story to each one of us. Let’s make it our aim to use this series to allow God to align our hearts with His heartbeat for humanity.

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you hear or read about the command to be witnesses for Jesus, what do you think this means? How does it make you feel? Take time with this question as it will help your Home Group understand each other and their current views on witnessing.

Answer Guide: This question is a bit of an ice-breaker as it gives people an opportunity to discuss how they currently view the whole topic of witnessing. In the discussion, encourage people to share both their intellectual understanding and also their emotional responses. Many people understand the command, but feel burdened, guilty and afraid of feeling awkward or being rejected by people, and therefore dump it in the “too hard basket”. This Witness Series is a wonderful opportunity for people to understand that everyone is called to be a witness and everyone can do it, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

2. What are some of the ways you connect with God in your daily life? How do you feel the Holy Spirit guiding you?

Answer Guide: God relates to us in a number of ways. Just like we have different love languages, God speaks to us through different ways and means. For example, we can feel his physical touch, experience his love or people, hear his words through the Bible to our hearts in a relational. Some relate to God intellectually as his gives them ideas or speaks new perspectives or knowledge. Some connect with God through service or being helped by others is a provision from God. Some connect through soaking in his presence or contemplative times. Others may see God speak to them through the beauty of creation, and some purely through worship by song or music.

If we are open, the Holy Spirit guides us all the time. He gives us wisdom, strength, divine appointments, etc. The reason for these examples is to demonstrate that it is not the method by which God relates to us

that is important, what is important is that we are able to recognise his voice. It is an authentic relationship with God and being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit that is the first step to being an effective witness.

3. What are some of the ways that we block God out? How can we intentionally allow the Holy Spirit to be more active in our lives?

Answer Guide: This question is to challenge the group to look at some of the ways we block God out. This can be often through business, distraction, not having consistent time with God, or even holding onto offense or keeping sin in our lives.

For the second part of the question, maybe allow some time for reflection, allowing God to speak to people and show them what is one thing they can do to allow God more into their lives. It could be an issue of surrender, an issue of confession, maybe just trusting God for a situation that they are deeply concerned about. By allowing God more into our lives, and going deep with God, it will have a natural flow on empowering us to be better witnesses for his Kingdom.

E. APPLICATION

Reflect back on your answer for Discussion Question #3. Choose one aspect to take action on to allow God more into your life. Pray and prayer of commitment ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to live out your relationship with him in a fresh way.

One Bless One

As you interact with God this week, share it with someone else. They don't have to be a non-believer, just take the opportunity to encourage them by sharing what God has done for you.

F. LOOKING FORWARD

In the next session, we will look at living openly and transparently before others.

Session 2: Show Up

Live openly and transparently before others

Key passage: *"Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight."*

Ephesians 1:4-8 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

The first step in being a witness for God, that we looked at last week, is having a genuine relationship with God and being dynamically led by the Holy Spirit. As we will see this session, the next step is to live out your relationship in a way that others can see the reality of God working in your life. In our culture, living openly and transparently is often not the case. Sadly, we can easily form a fixed idea of what our Christian (religious) life should look like, and we are very good at portraying that image to those around us, whether it is true or not. The usual components include a regular quiet time with God, a romantic and productive relationship with our spouse, always feeling, hope-filled, joyful and bubbly. While these things are not wrong, they are often overly idealistic and fail to reflect the reality of the struggles in life we all face. We can't be true to ourselves, the Lord, or others if we are witnesses to a lifestyle that we never live up to. We need to reset and get real with each other. At the same time, the Church needs to be a safe place where we can honestly share our struggles (even in our relationship with God) and have people to encourage us without judgement, and pray and contend with us for God's breakthrough.

If we can be real about where we are at and let God move in us, even in our brokenness, such authentic Christianity on display will be the fertile ground for the Holy Spirit to move and draw others to Himself. It will sow hope in their hearts that they can also come to God in their brokenness so that he will move in their lives too. Its only through encounters with God they can "taste and see that God is good." Remember, everyone is called to be a witness.

Courage is as simple and profound as being yourself before God and others.

A. VIDEO SUMMARY (Session 2 video, 7:43 minutes)

This second session video "Show Up" encourages us to live transparently before others. The main points are

- We need to be open in relationships.
- Ephesians 1:4-8 where God's intention is for us has always to be his children.
- God makes us perfect, not our actions.
- Christians' life is exposed in our imperfections but we're fully accepted as we are.
- Chris Ong's personal testimony on vulnerability.
- A witness is one where we share our real life with those who do not know Christ.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Background to the passage:

The book of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul approximately 10 years after his dramatic conversion to Christ (Acts 9). After that, Paul spread the gospel around south Asia (present day Turkey) and parts of Greece and Macedonia. This resulted in hundreds of new churches being planted, including the church at Ephesus, the recipients of this letter. Paul's missionary work came at a high personal cost, resulting in considerable persecution and years of imprisonment (Eph 3:1, 4:1; 6:20). Eventually Paul was martyred.

While in captivity, Paul writes this letter that focuses on the incredible riches we have in Christ, particularly as it relates to our new identity and what we will be after Christ returns. In Christ Jesus we are saints, chosen, adopted, lavished with love, redeemed, forgiven, made alive, growing, brought near to God, built and sharers of his promises.

This passage praises God for his marvellous grace which brings us from the state we are in now to one of perfection. This is why we do not need to be ashamed of who we are because God has destined us for something so much more.

C. MAIN POINT

*Having a private authentic walk with God is not enough to be a witness,
we must live openly.*

As we read today's scripture passage, "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4), it reminds us that God has destined us for perfection. Perhaps this is why perfection is something we all strive for. If we are honest, however, we can often feel frustrated and discouraged about our own brokenness, mistakes, even to the point of feeling helpless at times. Because of this godly desire (and in a sense holy expectation) to be perfect, we are tempted to take the shortcut by pretending perfection when it isn't really there. Why? Often it is with the aim of being accepted and win respect from others, or to feel secure in our sense of identity. Sometimes it is to keep others at a distance from what is really going on inside.

Reality is often very different. Living in this broken world, added to our own sin and self-centred lifestyles shows we are far from perfect. Jesus knew this, which is why he often challenged the religious people and community leaders to be honest about their spiritual state (e.g. the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Luke 18:9-14).

Think again. It is ONLY by the amazing grace of God that we will be presented spotless and blameless before him. One of the ways God's grace becomes more active that in our lives is when we live openly before others. Being honest about our struggles, combined with prayer and wise counsel, can bring true freedom and the sanctification that we are looking for.

Today's session is all about living open lives before others, so that they can see God move in key moments our lives, and then God can use us to show his goodness to others.

Massevot (stones) are key moments in your life that are there to point towards God

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is openness and transparency important to the Kingdom of God?

Answer Guide: This question is quite a personal one and maybe intimidating for some people. Given our environment (our culture is pre-disposed to privacy and face), it's likely that your home group will suggest that it's not wise to be "too open" and that vulnerability can leave you open to attack. Please do take time to acknowledge the truth behind that, and that it's important for us to be wise in how we open up to people.

Nevertheless, genuine witnessing is NOT regurgitating last Sunday's sermon, or simply memorising the four spiritual laws. A witness is a real-life testimony of something that the person has seen or experienced. This involves the sharing of your life cannot be done without openness.

I find the best way to start, is by picking friends/family etc. that already have trusted relationships, and then practicing being open and transparent with them.

By sharing one that you are struggling with now it is putting genuine Christianity into the spotlight and hopefully it will reveal through practice the benefit of being open with aspects of our faith and lives which are not perfect.

Please note that depending on the generation and the incumbent culture, authenticity and openness may be a difficult topic. It's crucial that you take your home group on an exploration of openness and transparency – even if your final answer is highly qualified, nuanced and full of caveats ... there still needs to be areas we are willing to open up if we are going to effectively be a living testimony (witness) for God.

2. How can God use some of the broken/less showy areas of our lives to show his goodness?

Answer Guide: Often we think it is our perfect lives that brings glory to God. In reality this can make being a Christian seem unattainable to the majority, as they struggle in the everyday problems. We need to realise it is not our perfection that brings glory to God, but it is how God moves in our lives to change us and our circumstances which is a powerful witness to others.

Spend time exploring scenarios where things we don't regularly see as "classic" testimonies can be effective for the kingdom of God. King David and the Psalms are a great example of how we can point to God even in our sad/broken times. For example:

- God's presence in the everyday chores of life (shopping, cooking, serving the family etc.)
- Personal struggles/failures or family/life issues (divorce, business failure etc.)

3. OPTIONAL: Work on some "stones" that are markers for your life for when God showed up.

Answer Guide: If you have time, talk about the concept of Massevot, or how the Jews would use stones to symbolise key moments in their life. People would then come up and ask them "What was this?" and they would have an opportunity to tell them of God's glory and provision. All of us need to consciously set up these stones in our lives, so that we remember what God has done. Maybe go around and see if you can develop some "stones".

Perhaps ask a few to share how they have been encouraged by other's testimonies. This could be within the group, or at church or outside of FGA. It is all about how God uses people's genuine life stories to encourage us to have faith in him and his promises.

E. APPLICATION

Break up into twos or threes. Take time for each person to share about one thing they are struggling with now and pray for each other. Pray for God's grace and power to be released into each situation so that you can be witnesses to others of his goodness.

Pray for people who you know need the Lord. Pray for divine appointments.

One Bless One

Before the next home group session take the opportunity to share with someone who doesn't know Christ a time you were struggling and God came through for you.

F. LOOKING FORWARD

Next session we will look at how to relate well with people who don't know God.

Session 3: Relate

Engage in other people's lives - listen and be involved

Key passage: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Matthew 25:35-36 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

Being involved in other people's lives is costly. It takes our energy, time and emotional strength to be there for others. If you are a manager or involved in discipling or helping others you will know this very well. Be encouraged, you are imitating Christ, just as we are called to do. Part of discipleship is to help others to do likewise (1 Cor. 11:1).

Discipleship is helping people grow in their experience of God and in their knowledge and obedience to the Lord. The first step is giving this life with Jesus a go. It is a nice theory but yet to be proven. We invite God to be part of our lives. The second step is where we actively battle with God in the complexity of life's struggles. We can go through the refiner's fire, but what we find is good soil for discipleship as the concept of being a disciple is put into practice. If you press in your walk with God will become something precious and sacred as you discover God in new ways. The third stage is living out your life knowing how good God is. It is no longer Christian clichés but your life will point others to the life of Jesus. Whatever stage you are at now God is inviting you to grow.

Your time, energy and cost spent into other people's lives is an investment into the Kingdom of God and you will reap eternal rewards.

A. VIDEO SUMMARY (Session 3 video, 7:34 minutes)

This third video session covers relationships. Here are the key points:

- How seriously do we take the Great Commission to be a witness?
- If we are serious in our faith it requires us to take the Gospel out
- The next step is an invitation to a world that desperately needs God, which is troublesome and costly.
- Paying the price now is an investment in our future.
- 2 Kings 7:3-16 – Story of the four lepers in the midst of war
- The good news is not just for us, but it's for us to share
- Two keys to being a good witness
 - 1. Learn to Listen
 - 2. Get involved

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Matthew 25:31-46)

Background to the passage:

The key passage is a excerpt from a longer Sermon that Jesus spoke on the Mount of Olives about the signs of the times and the Final Judgement (Matt chapters 24 and 25). This section is where Jesus describes the time when he will judge humanity after the second coming (v. 31).

C. MAIN POINT

How will we share the good news with others?

Before we start the discussion, read Matthew 28:18-20 aloud. Ask yourselves, how seriously do we take the Great Commission? In the first two sessions, we focussed on our own walk and lives. This session we need to take the command to GO and to use all that we have to live for God. People desperately need God, and we have the answer in Christ. Today's key passage from Matthew 25:35-26, reminds us that when we go in his name we are doing things for others as if they were Jesus himself. If we are struggling to find motivation to reach out, or lay our own life down, draw inspiration from Christ who is the one who gave up all for us. Hebrews 12:2, reminds us to look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. To endure patiently the things that happen, knowing that that we have not sacrifice to the point of shedding our blood as he did for us.

The best way to witness is through building relationship with others. This is where discipleship begins. We can use our influence in their lives, but importantly we must listen and relate to them. Making a space in our hearts for their needs and their silent cries.

The second step is to get involved. Just as Jesus was involved in so many people's lives, we need to be prepared to be involved in other's lives too. Being involved doesn't mean forcing your ways or opinions onto others, but seeing how you can practically help them at their place of need. We need to use discernment and be led by the Holy Spirit.

The key steps to being fruitfully involved in others' lives is to listen, care and relate well. The second step is to become involved.

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can we do to relate better with others who aren't Christian?

Answer Guide: Take time to talk about how we create space to listen, care and relate to other people (who aren't our church friends and family). Some suggestions include:

- *taking time out for meals or coffee to just listen and catch up with people you don't often see*
- *making the first move in being friendly*
- *asking questions about issues or ideologies/positions that you don't fully understand*
- *make time to go to shared events e.g. School functions, work get-togethers etc.*

This is to get us to think of the things that we do in our lives that is for the gospel. Some people may be doing nothing others may be doing a lot. This is not meant to be an opportunity for people to be shamed or to boast in their achievements, but it needs to be brought up so we can be honest with each other about where we are at. Being honest is the first step to seeing what changes we can make in our lives to become more Christ oriented.

2. How can you, the church and God help those in need? What tangible ways can you be involved in someone else's life? (it might be helpful to think of common scenarios, or existing scenarios)

Answer Guide: It's worthwhile for your Home Group to talk about some of the areas where we can be a real blessing to our friends, co-workers and community (both locally and abroad). We need to have a good understanding of how we can help those around us. So often, we don't get involved in another person's life because we mentally say to ourselves, "oh well, what can I do?".

Spend some time talking through actual situations faced by your home group or common scenarios. For example:

- a new migrant
- recent unemployment
- relationship breakup
- financial or medical trouble

3. OPTIONAL: What is tough about sharing the Gospel?

Answer Guide: Encourage people to share of their experiences in sharing the gospel with others. How have they done that in the past, what works and doesn't work. What has helped them to overcome the psychological or emotional barriers to being a witness. It might also be a good time to address some of the tricky questions and barriers your home group faces when they try to reach others with the gospel.

E. APPLICATION

If you were challenged by today's session. Confess to God where you are at. If needed, ask for forgiveness for not being intentional about sharing the gospel according to Jesus' command. Recommit your life to him and ask him to be alert to needs around you and opportunities to share about God's goodness. He loves to answer this prayer.

One Bless One

WWJD became a global catchphrase at the end of last century, challenging us to stop and think in the situation what would Jesus do. This time, let's take it a step further. The next time someone is sharing their problems with you ask what would I do if this person were Jesus?

F. LOOKING FORWARD

Next, in the next session, we look at the role between risk-taking and advancing the gospel.

Session 4: Risk

Trust God by leaving the familiar and stepping into the unfamiliar

Key passage: *"For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."* 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

Hopefully through studying the past three sessions you have been learning that being a witness is more than just telling someone about Christ. The people in Acts lived by these principles:

1. LIVE – Get swept up in God’s great love, and go deep with Jesus.
2. SHOW UP – live an open and transparent life that demands an explanation.
3. RELATE – be interested in other peoples’ lives by listening and getting involved.

This final session is part of sharing the gospel is about RISK – trusting God by leaving the familiar and stepping into the unfamiliar. Following the example of the early church. There are some of us who love to be with people but never want to talk about Jesus. We are afraid that if we bring the topic up people will shy away from us, or we may be labelled as pushy or “one of those” and be rejected. We avoid God’s redemption story to avoid awkwardness or separation. However, think about it, are we really friends with someone if we are unable to talk about what matters most to us?

Witnessing is incredibly powerful as it is the Holy Spirit that ultimately draws people to him. Our responsibility is to be available, bold and courageous to be sensitive to the Spirit’s leading. Let us not get stuck in the familiar as the Israelites did, we don’t need God in that place. As God had a far bigger and better dream for the Jews so he does for us. Let us move on with God. We will be surprised how God can use us.

When we get the chance to partner with God in what matters most to him we recognise what a privilege it is.

A. SESSION VIDEOS (Session 4 video, 6:08 minutes)

This video speaks of the necessity of RISK for the gospel to go out.

- Being a witness means you are living out your life in front of people as a witness. It is something people can see and taste.
- Much of the impact in the book of Acts occurred because they went out.
- 2 Cor 1:8-11
- Safety and blessing are not the ultimate goal for a Christian.
- How are you using your safety and blessing for the kingdom of God? Safety allows us to go to dangerous places.

- The Greek word for witness is martyr because so often the early witnesses for Christ paid the ultimate price.
- Are you willing to step out and take a risk to see the gospel go out?

B. SCRIPTURE READING (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Acts 1:8)

Background to the passage

The Corinthian passage is an excerpt of the second letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth and also to all the people leaving in Greece (v.1), to live holy and righteous lives. Interestingly Paul starts this letter saying how God is the source of all comfort and just as we are called to bring comfort to others. He then goes on to provide an example from his own experience, mentioning some of the things he suffered and endured for the sake of Christ. Paul took great risk, and was highly rewarded. The more complete list of what the types of things that Paul endured for Christ can be found in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33. Despite all this, Paul still boasts in his weaknesses, proving that Christ is the one making him strong.

Today, let this passage speak to us about the level of risk we take and how we can be challenged to rely on Christ's strength to take greater risks for him. As we share in the greater challenges be encouraged that greater rewards await.

C. MAIN POINT

Safety and blessing are not the ultimate goals of a good Christian life. It is only by risking it all we'll discover what God is truly like.

We naturally want to stick to the things we know and trust in. There is something that feels so safe about the familiar. Our risk adverse society applauds this as "wisdom". Moving out of our comfort zone takes a deliberate choice. Paul and Barnabas seemed to know it was their privilege to share the gospel. Being the most extreme risk takers in the New Testament, they left their known environment and were sent out in the power of the Spirit (e.g. Acts 13).

God, also, has taken incredible risks to make the gospel accessible to us, even to the point of having Jesus die for us without the assurance that we would recognise or even acknowledge what he has done. Throughout the biblical narrative we see men and women trusting God by leaving their comfort zones and responding to God's risky call. When we step out it forces us to look upwards rather than inwards for strength. We then have the privilege to experience the thrill and unspeakable satisfaction in the knowledge that comes with obeying the Lord and seeing him touch others. That sense of God's pleasure as his grace is poured out through us cannot be put into words. The reward of risk taking is not just for the Kingdom, or for the people we seek to reach, but it is one of the most rapid ways to bring transformation in our own lives. Let us not stay safe, within our comfort zone, rather let us use the safety and blessing God has given us and risk for God.

When you commit to living intentionally for the gospel, you are saying yes to experiencing the Kingdom of God operating through you to transform other peoples' lives for ever.

God calls all of us believers to risk ourselves to align with his heartbeat for humanity.

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What risks to you currently take in any aspect of your life? Why do you take those risks?

Answer Guide: This is a general question aimed to see that we take risks in many areas of our lives. We take risks with the choices we make such as who we marry, where we live, how we invest, what course or career we pursue etc. We take these risks because we believe that we will be rewarded by doing so, through better quality of life, whether that be a financial reward or related to personal satisfaction or quality of life. We take risks all the time. Taking risks for the sake of the Gospel should be a strong motivator. Not just because we were commanded to go, but also because the Bible speaks of many of the rewards we will get by doing so (e.g. 1 Cor 15:58, Col 3:23-24, Gal 6:9, Matt 25:21, 1 Cor 2:9).

2. What are some of the risks you've taken for the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Answer Guide: This is really drilling down to what level of risk we take in sharing the Gospel with others. All of us fall somewhere on the spectrum between fear and courage, playing it safe and taking a risk. Use this question to consider how to first become aware of the opportunities all around us and then step out to fully engage with others. When we are not intentional about it, rarely happens. We need to pray and seek God over the next couple of weeks asking him who he has put in our lives or lead us to meet people that need to hear about his love and plan for their lives.

If the discussion is quiet, maybe spend time drilling down into the kinds of risks that one might take if they wanted to enthusiastically share the gospel.

3. OPTIONAL: What can your home group do to close off the witness series and take a risk with your friends and family for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Answer Guide: It might be good to end the Witness series with a Home Group project. Something that your home group members can do to invite their friends along to. It doesn't need to be an evangelistic rally or sermon per se. In most cases, it could just be an opportunity for you to relate openly and develop avenues for involvement in other people's lives: to listen, learn and become involved.

E. APPLICATION

Ask God to show you specific faces of people to pray for, who need to hear about what a life with Jesus could be like. Share the names with the group and pray together. Not only commit to pray for them, but make it a point within the next month to reach out to them and apply the principles taught in this series. Also ask God to lead you to places and people where you can apply the teaching by being transparent and taking risks reaching out to people.

One Bless One

Read through and then pray this prayer from your heart

"Father would you use me to be a witness? Would you give me your heart and your eyes? Please allow me to have conversations that will encourage people to keep searching for you. In Jesus's name, Amen."

APPENDIX I

MOVE IN FAITH

2017 – THE YEAR FOR FGAM TO MOVE IN FAITH

Ask yourself, which is easier? Finding out about the Christian FAITH, or living it out? Figuring out what to do, or doing it? If you're like most people, it's always easier to know what to do. Putting it into action requires so much more on our part.

This year we look at the book of Acts (short for Acts of the Apostles). It is the account of how the church started and how it spread from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then to all the world. What's amazing isn't the strategy they used, or the teachings in the book. For most of the book, it's ordinary (often simple) people who just testified about their own experience with God. They were "witnesses".

Being a witness (someone who testifies) requires a FAITH that is not dead. Jesus had a vision for his household of FAITH, and it was one that reached out, empowered by the Holy Spirit! He saw his church taking risks, doing adventurous things, moving in the supernatural ... changing the world. Thankfully, we have the Holy Spirit, who is our counsellor and helper. He makes our daily walk come alive!

For 2017, our theme is "MOVE IN FAITH" and as we spend the year focused on evangelism and being "Faithful to the Mission".

Each year our anchor scripture and our theme for the year is developed through both a personal time of prayer and reflection as Senior Pastor, as well as input from a wide range of godly counsel in our Senior Leadership Team.

For 2017, our theme will be "MOVE IN FAITH" and we will spend the year focused on Evangelism and being "Faithful to the Mission". This Witness home group series seeks to look at how we build our lives for the cause of the King so that we see God's kingdom manifest in every area of our lives.

APPENDIX II

FIVE CORE VALUES OF FGAM

Evangelistic • Apostolic • Pastoral • Teaching • Prophetic

The five core values of FGAM have been broken down into the 5-letter acronym for F.A.I.T.H.

FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION (F):

Faithful has been chosen as opposed to Excellence (which we used to have in our values statement). Excellence is not up there as part of our vision for how to serve because in order for things to be excellent, you have to devote all your resources to it and everything drops on the side to make that one thing excellent. A lot of people nowadays are pursuing excellence (six sigma, zero tolerance through a whole bunch of excellence processes) but the thing is ... a lot of guys die on the way to excellence. Excellence is a bit of commodity everyone is pushing for it in spurts and with very tightly defined boundaries.

Faithful is the new spectacular. As for me I just want to be a faithful pastor and if I can really be honest with you now, when I was younger, I wanted to be an excellent pastor but now I have seen so many guys fall and I just want to be the real thing I want to finish my days serving the Lord and be a faithful pastor to the mission that God has for me and I want to be a faithful husband, a faithful father and I tell you with today lack of loyalty, faithful is the new spectacular. It is spectacular to find the guy who will serve the lord with joy, it is spectacular to find the person with one wife the whole time and his family survived the whole thing. I was just thinking faithful to the mission for me and excellent also has this problem of our own achievement and if I have done excellent it is my own doing, faithfulness removes that away so I sow the seeds, I water it and God brings the excellence so we are not saying let's be terrible and I think faithfulness reaps excellence whereas I think you can short cut a lot of things and get excellence, in today world there are a lot of shortcuts to get excellence and I am not keen on these so that is off for us and you are going to hear us talk about that a lot from us but I am giving you the short version.

ACTIVE AND PERSONALLY INVOLVED (A):

Active sits against conceptual. How are we going to serve the Lord, what does serving look like? What is the vision when you close your eyes – serving is being faithful is it serving every day or serving the lord but not being active because today we live in a generation that is big on intentions and ideas – let's solve world poverty and go for a rock concert and that's about it, we buy all these brands, promote love, climb the highest mountain for you on my T-shirt, they big on their ideas but they are not doing it. I have just finished a book called, "Love Does". For us it has to be active or the word that we discussed is incarnate it has to be involved us in the flesh and so if we are serving then not just pay money for someone to serve the Lord, we don't want that e.g. P&W team can't pay people to come and play for us or pay a missionary so we are doing the stuff but not active in it.

INTIMATE RELATIONALLY (I):

I is intimate. We are going to do our relationship intimately. We tossed between using the word intimate and the word love. Love is a more technically appropriate word to use, however, the problem with the word Love in this day and age is that I can say "I can love my coffee, I love my car, I love all kinds of things". It is really hard and for it to be the distinctive of FGA. For it means that Ps. Quentin is going to

get involved with your children life, finding out their grades/home life. It's like being an interfering parent all over the place almost like an Asian way to be a lot more intimate with the relationship. So how are we going to serve? We are going to serve intimately which involves getting to know people, understanding the differences between each of us and the kind of conflict that comes with a close-knit relationship. Intimate sits against clean and neat. That is why there will be a lot not dead set written down yet will be some but not a lot to allow the intimacy to occur which is quite a Hebrew way.

TEACHABLE IN DISCIPLESHIP (T):

How are we going to serve? With a teachable spirit. That is the entire discipleship model we are also going to have the orientation of teaching – I catch myself how often how I get irritated with my kids for not learning things fast enough or I get irritated with some people that I teach the computers but I have to understand that people are learning – I have practiced a thousand times but my kids are learning to control their emotions, growing up and learning how to build their characters to tell the truth so a few times they will lie, throw tantrums but if we remember how we serve is in this whole model of teaching and being teachable as discipleship then we account for all those things – part of it was inspired by people that had inspired me. As for intimate, Roger has inspired me during the holiday we go together and for teachable Quentin and his team has really inspired me for that as Quentin takes these really young guys in their raw format and Quentin has the patience to teach them, disciple and groom them and then they graduated into our main ministry. A lot of our ministries are powered by people that come out of the pipeline of other ministries. That is a good model for us to have a teaching teachable discipling type model. Teachable sits against Expert. We are always a learner, there usually an expert service model so when you talk about serving- you always go and get the expert but what I want is to get the learners.

HOLY AND SET APART FOR GOD (H):

Holy (H) used to be something that was judged based on appearance or outside so e.g. he is a holy person, he does not smoke and drink, does not do this or that etc... holiness for us from the biblical meaning means set apart (in purpose). A good analogy for holy is water. Water can be used for all kind of things. You can wash your car, your dog can drink it, you can wash your dirty boots, you can bathe with your water, you can swim in it or boat ride on the water but then water in the temple of God becomes holy water. It looks exactly the same and I reckon the molecular composition is exactly the same as water used for watering your garden. God can use things solely for his purposes. Holy is there for us so that when we go off and do normal things we remember that its purposes are for God - so that God's name get glorified. If anyone looks at our activities, it looks like a dance competition and looks like water. Holy water. We make sure that people knows its purposes and our lives are like that too. That means as Christians, Raymond, you should look like an accountant except that you are a holy accountant because everything in your life exists for the purpose of God. That is the concept of Holy. So, the holy for purpose sits opposed to looking holy. I think in our past we have a whole bunch of things that just look holy so people serve to look holy which is what we don't want.

NOTES: