

SESSION 7: MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL

'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"'
Isaiah 52:7

Key Question:	How might I be a messenger of the Gospel on my frontline?
Aims of the Session:	To grow in confidence and intentionality in sharing the good news of Jesus with those on our frontlines.
Core Text:	1 Peter 3:15-16
Materials Required:	Paper for exercise in pairs, large sheet of paper and pens for prayer

Thinking Back (5 mins)

In the last session we looked at being a Mouthpiece for Truth and Justice

- Did the last session change the way you saw things on your frontline?
- Did anyone in the group have an opportunity to speak up in a particular situation?

Pre-Film Discussion (5 mins)

Today, we're looking at being a Messenger of the Gospel – sharing about Jesus with our words.

- How does the word 'evangelism' make you feel?





PLAY FILM to end - approx. 9 mins

Questions to Discuss after the Film (10 mins)

Mark began by making three key points:

- 1) God wants people saved
 - 2) It is God who saves people, not us
 - 3) We have some role in this, however small
- How much does your own thinking and practice reflect these three statements?
 - Do they change your view of evangelism at all?
 - What do you find encouraging about the story of Anita and Renata? And what do you find challenging?

Exercise in Pairs (20 mins)

Who in particular on your frontline might God be prompting you to reach out to? Take a few moments to pray and once you have identified someone, reflect on the following questions. Once you've jotted down some thoughts, talk them through with the person next to you.

- How would you describe this person generally?
- What do you think is important to this person?
- What do you think they believe about God?

- What specific things could you do to bless this person practically?
- What specific things could you do to aid their spiritual development?

- What might you do:
 - o In the next two weeks?
 - o In the coming months?



Praying Forwards (10 mins)

Praying for our frontline friends to come to know Jesus is something we need to commit to doing over the long-term. It will be easier to persevere in prayer if we get into the pattern of doing it together as a group as well as in our own personal prayers.

- Using a large sheet of paper, ask each group member to write the names of one or two people they want to commit to praying for.
- Take some time to pray for one another and those whose names are written down. You might like to pray specifically for the person your discussion partner told you about earlier.
- Keep the piece of paper in a safe place, and make a commitment to take some time to revisit it in some of your future sessions together. Be prepared to ask each other how these friends are doing, whether you have seen God at work in their lives and what opportunities you have had to talk with them intentionally.



Takeaway Activity: Bible Reflection - 1 Peter 3:13-16 (10 mins)

This letter was written to a group of churches spread throughout the region that today we call Turkey. Although the churches may not have been suffering 'official' persecution from the state, they were facing all kinds of opposition as they sought to live for Christ on their 'frontlines'. Peter knew that these men, women and children were really up against it and so he wrote to them. But the content of his letter is not just about 'hanging on in there'; rather he encourages them to courageously continue to do good knowing that it would provoke people to ask questions. Not everyone would react well to their responses, but, importantly, some would.

- Imagine you were a Christian back then, facing persecution and opposition. How might you be tempted to respond?
- The broader sweep of 1 Peter makes it clear that verbal witness is intrinsically linked to the witness of our actions. People will be provoked to ask questions when they see our good deeds (see especially 1 Peter 2:11-12). What might you learn from this?
- In verse 15, what do you think Peter means by 'always be prepared...'? How might you make sure that you too are 'prepared'?
- Look at verses 15 and 16. In what manner are we encouraged to share the gospel? Why do you think the way we share the gospel matters so much?





FRUITFULNESS ON THE FRONTLINE.

SESSION TRANSCRIPTS



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Have you ever played that travel game where someone says a word and you have to say the first thing that pops into your head.

So someone says: "Cameron."

And you say "Diaz." if you are a lover of films and gorgeous smiles. (What you say if you are into politics depends, I suppose, on who you vote for and how you think things are going.)

Someone says: Carlsberg.

And you say "Probably the best lager in the world."

Someone says Jesus, and you say saviour, lord, friend, brave, kind, shepherd.

Someone says 'evangelism' and you say... Well, what would you say?

Evangelism is a knotty subject for lots of us and it's pretty easy to get caught up in all kinds of negative emotions about it, but whatever your frontline you can be confident of three things:

1. God wants people saved;
2. It's God who saves people – not you, not your eloquence, not your perfectly prepared responses to tough questions. God saves people... and thirdly;
3. You have a role in this – however small.

Yes, as we've seen there are all kinds of ways we demonstrate the difference Jesus makes in our lives but the people on your frontline also need to hear who made the difference to you and who is the only one who can make an eternal difference to them.

How can you be a messenger of the Gospel on your frontline?

Of course, every frontline is different, the dynamics are different, the people are different but you do have some things going for you – you are there, you have time on your side, and as Liverpool fans sing it, you will never walk alone. God is with you.

So instead of worrying too much about all the difficulties, instead of being concerned that you are responsible for the evangelisation of your entire gym, your entire street, the whole of the NHS, the city of Bradford... though who knows how God may work through you. Let's begin by thinking about whether there's a particular person whom God might be wanting you to reach out to – in however small a way.

Maybe someone comes to mind, ask God, you might be surprised... you might be horrified... "Of all the people, on all the frontlines, it had to be her... Oh Lord..."

Still, once you have a sense of who is on God's heart for you, you have a place to begin.



You can pray, you can ask others to pray, you can ask God to help you develop a relationship where you can be open with one another. You can think about what interests them, what particular concerns they might have, or what particular questions they might have, or which of your Christian friends they might really get on with.

You can begin. And having begun you can persevere.

Of course, part of being serious about wanting to see someone come to know Jesus is getting ready to share the good news with them... being prepared, as the apostle Peter puts it, "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)

Notice Peter doesn't say be prepared to answer any and every difficult question someone might lob at you, he just says, "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." In other words, "Why do you follow Jesus?"

And I don't think Peter meant be ready to drop some pre-packaged formulaic summary of the Gospel into the conversation. I think he meant be prepared to answer the question in a way that's natural for you and appropriate to the person asking you. Jesus, after all, doesn't talk to the uneducated woman at the well in Samaria in the middle of the day in the same way as He talks to the rabbi Nicodemus in Jerusalem in the middle of the night. So be prepared and help one another be prepared.

Still, being a messenger of the Gospel is more than the direct communication of salvation through Christ.

We can be a messenger of the Gospel by bringing Gospel perspectives on the issues people bring up in conversation.

What perspective might we offer, for example, on a sporting injustice, a situation in a soap opera, or an issue in the news?

What wisdom can we offer about the girlfriend they're really not very sure about, the child who is being difficult, or their worry over a parent. People are craving for wisdom for their lives, and God's built a lot of wisdom into you already through your life experience, your bible reading, through teachers and preachers and through the people in your group. People don't have to agree with you - it's just your point of view but a grain of truth is more valuable than a ton of chaff.

Another way we can be a messenger for the Gospel is by testifying to Jesus' impact on our lives.

Richard was working in an office and he'd become a Christian but didn't say anything about it to any of his colleagues. After about six months, a woman came up to him and said: "You know something's really changed about you and I've been trying to work out what it is. And I've finally figured it out: You've become a vegetarian."

That's what you call an opportunity.

Or maybe someone says something like:

"I just do not understand how you can be so calm in your situation. I would've murdered him."

It reminds me of that moment in the West Wing when U.S President Jed Bartlett is talking about the pressure he's under and he says:



“The only thing you can really do in this job is pray. You can try coffee but I find prayer works.”

So there are a variety of ways to speak Gospel truth and therefore a variety of ways to prepare ourselves to do so.

And though you may be praying for a particular person you never quite know when God might open up an opportunity or who that might be with. Here’s a true story:

Anita worked in a pretty big office and as she walked the corridors between departments she’d smile at people she knew and smile at people she didn’t know, as you do.

People would smile back, and occasionally someone would say hello. Renata was one of those unknown colleagues. Week by week, month by month Anita and Renata would pass by smiling at each other and occasionally saying hello. They never stopped to chat because they had work to do and people to meet, whose names they did know.. And so time passed, in little hellos and small smiles.

Then at the end of an ordinary working day Anita was walking to her car and there was Renata coming towards her. And Renata stopped and they began to talk. Renata told Anita that her child was extremely ill with serious eczema and asthma that just wouldn’t go away and she told her also that she wanted to leave her husband. Anita listened and asked her if she could pray for her and if her homegroup could pray for her child. And then she got a Bible out of the box of Bibles that she had in the boot of her car. She gave Renata a Bible.

Then Anita prays, and her homegroup prays.

And actually Renata’s child gets a whole lot better and she doesn’t leave her husband but she grows closer to him, and she grows closer to Christ and then later she joins a church.

Of course, Anita was ready in all kinds of ways, she knew what to ask, she had a box of Bibles in her boot and she had a home group that she could turn to for prayer; but what was the trigger for that remarkable encounter? Well, the trigger was a smile in a corridor. Just a smile in a corridor.

And what of God’s hand in all of this?

Well, God so loved Renata that at her point of despair she just happened to be in the same part of the car park as the person that God had strategically placed in that workplace to serve his purposes... just as, two and half thousand years before, God had strategically placed Queen Esther in the imperial palace to serve his purposes.

God loves the world.

God loves the people on your frontline.

When someone says the word ‘evangelism’, what do you think of?

Parties in heaven. Angels rejoicing. A smile on the Father’s face.

The Lord be with you this week.

