

Help For the Tongue-Tied

I Peter 3:15

I want to begin by being candid with you today.
 I don't like to be put on the spot.
 I never have and I never will.
 I never liked being called on in class to answer a question. The heart starts pounding and you wonder if others can see the palpitations through your shirt. You start sweating. The room grows dark and everything starts closing in on you. You hope for the rapture or a big hole to open up and swallow you. All of a sudden you're put on the spot and if you get it wrong others will laugh at you and make fun of you. Being asked a question where everyone is looking right at you makes it feel like there was a giant pimple on my forehead that everyone was staring at. It's a horrible feeling.

It was in 6th grade on a field trip to the planetarium. The presenter was asking questions and one of the kids in the class raised his hand and answered the question. I don't remember the question but I remember his answer because we all laughed. Even though it was the right answer, it came out wrong. He said "tentiaper" instead of temperature. It didn't matter. I didn't want to be that guy.

You may remember how the media attacked Dan Quayle for misspelling of tomato.

Fear of the wrong answer.
 Fear of saying it wrong.
 Fear of being labeled.
 Fear of not knowing what to say or just so afraid you don't say anything.
 Fear of being tongue-tied.

It can be that way with our faith as well. We're afraid of sharing our faith, especially with total strangers because we might just get the president of the local atheist's club or the cynical skeptic both of which are armed with all the questions that make us

run away with our tails tucked between our legs.

Is it possible to overcome the fear of being tongue-tied or feeling like you don't have all the answers to questions you may be asked? You don't have to look very far to see that there are hurting and broken people everywhere.

The lady in the checkout line next to you is struggling with keeping her marriage together. The couple in the doctor's office waiting room are there to get the results from recent testing for cancer screening.

The man working next to you on the line doesn't know it, but at the end of the day he'll be called into the office and told that his job is ending because there are necessary cutbacks to the business.

The man or woman driving down the highway beside your car just left the hospital where their spouse just passed away.

People in the next town over just lost everything to a hurricane or a tornado or flooding or whatever natural disaster just hit them.

People are looking for answers in times of crisis.

I remember walking through the breakroom just after hearing the news about the attack on the World Trade Centers. A couple of engineers were sitting at a table discussing the horrific event. As I passed their table one of them asked me about my thoughts saying she was always curious to know what a religious person had to say in times like these.

People are looking for answers, some are even considering Christ. Is He real? Is He worth pursuing? It is even possible as we share the truth about grace that some may even trust Christ as Savior.

As we engage with others about the gospel here are seven questions or statements that generally surface during those conversations.

Why is there evil and suffering? That's what my friend wanted to know in the break room. Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion humans invent to satisfy their security needs. To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God didn't make sense with natural disasters and human evil. And let's face it, no matter how much conclusive and iron-clad evidence

we can give to some people, they won't believe because they choose not to believe.

What about all the contradictions in the Bible? Omission doesn't mean contradiction and neither does differing accounts mean a contradiction.

What about those who never hear about Jesus? You mean to say that they'll go to hell? C. S. Lewis said if a person is so concerned about others not hearing the gospel, get yourself saved and go tell them.

How can Jesus be the only way to God? That seems quite intolerant and narrow. What about all these other religions? Are they wrong?

Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch? Didn't Karl Marx call religion the opiate of the masses? Someone said, "If Christianity is a psychological crutch, then Jesus Christ came because there was an epidemic of broken legs."

I could never take the blind leap of faith that believing in Christ requires. Yet they fail to realize that they exercise faith every day. We have faith that gravity will hold. We have faith in aerodynamics when we fly in a plane. The compelling evidence of Jesus bids us to have faith in Him.

It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. You may have heard that you can be sincere, but sincerely wrong. You can sincerely believe that the Tigers will win the World Series this year and be sincerely wrong. You can be sincere that leisure suits will make a comeback and be sincerely wrong.

Francis Schaffer said that he would rather believe the Bible to be completely right and die only to find out he was wrong and that there were many ways to heaven than to believe there were many ways to heaven and die only to find out that there was only one way. A lot of people are sincere in their religion and will die sincerely wrong.

Many skeptics and atheists like my friend are looking for an argument, an opportunity to debate not because they are sincerely looking for answers but only to further beat Christianity to a religious

pulp and give them additional reasons to ignore the claims of the Bible. Peter gives us one overarching principle that will help us answer even the most hardened skeptic.

Last week we glanced at verse 15 and considered the need to have a passion for real confidence. Today I want to come back to that verse and those three points I quickly mentioned last week. What we discover from this verse will help us in talking about our faith.

It's a matter of our heart.

It's a matter of our hope.

It's a matter of our humility.

I. IT'S A MATTER OF OUR HEART – v. 15a

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”

The Philip's Translation puts it this way: “simply concentrate on being completely devoted to Christ in your hearts.”

The Message: “Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master.”

Let's take a minute and look back at verse 14 to understand the context of what Peter is saying in v. 15. Verse 14-15 is our response during suffering.

A. Our Response During Suffering – v. 14

Bear in mind that the infamous Nero was stretching out his hand in antagonistic ways to punish Christians for their claims of following another king. Suffering for being a Christian had begun then and would continue with little respite up to our day and yes even until Christ returns.

Yet the edict is the same regardless of the time in which Christians live – whether in Peter's day or in our day. Speaking to Christians about those who were doing the persecuting, Peter writes: “Don't fear what they fear; don't be frightened.” Or don't be intimidated by them.

Turn back to Isaiah 8 where we get some context to why Peter said what he did as he quotes from this passage.

King Ahaz of Judah had been approached by both the kings of Syria and Israel to join them in fighting their enemies. He declined their request. The kings of Syria and Israel decided to attack Judah because of his decision. King Ahaz decided to bolster his army through an alliance with Assyria to defeat Israel and Syria. Isaiah warned him not to make an alliance, but King Ahaz ignored him and made a pact with them. We pick up the story at verse 11 when God speaks to Isaiah.

Isaiah 8:11-17

God was telling Isaiah not to be afraid of what man could do, he needed to fear and trust God, which leads us quite nicely into the next point about our reverence for the Savior.

B. Our Reverence For The Savior

Peter's message plays off the message of God to Isaiah.

Isaiah 8:13-14a "The Lord Almighty is the One you are to regard as holy, He is the One you are to fear, He is the One you are to dread, and He will be a sanctuary."

I Peter 3:15a "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord."

In order not to be fearful in times of suffering or distress or trial, you need to set apart Christ as Lord. The KJV uses the word sanctify. That doesn't mean we make Christ more holy than He already is. You can't improve on being perfect.

This is a call to complete commitment to follow Christ, to make Him Lord of your life, King of your heart, first place in everything.

It was the same thing God was telling Isaiah. The way to reverence God or make Him holy is to fear Him instead of fearing what man can do to you. Now fearing or dreading God does not mean we are to be gripped by fear with Him as Lord. That seems to imply that we should cower from Him instead of come to Him out of love and trust and obedience. The clue is found in the promise He gives to Isaiah that He would be a sanctuary for the prophet. A sanctuary is a place to feel safe and at peace. God would have been displeased with Isaiah for fearing

the same thing as the people of Judah. Instead trust Him and be in awe of Him. Reverence Him.

That's the message Peter conveyed to his audience. If you put Christ first in your heart then you won't fear.

The promise is further strengthened when we consider verses like Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not; for I am with you. Be not dismayed; for I am your God. I will strengthen you: yea, I will help you, yea, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness."

The great 19th century preacher Alexander MacLaren once said "Only he who can say, 'The Lord is the strength of my life' can go on to say, 'Of whom shall I be afraid?'"

John Philips says that when Christ is set apart in the heart the coward is made brave.

If we fear men, we distrust God. If we reverence God, we have nothing to fear. When Christ is not first place in our heart, we give all kinds of room for fear to invade and render us immobile. Fearing God is the way to reverence Christ in the heart.

So have you set your heart on Christ as Lord? Or are you displeasing Him because of your unbelief? I Corinthians 1:10 "On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us."

II Peter 1:3-4 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

When Christ is set apart in our heart and has first place it then becomes a matter of our hope.

II. IT'S A MATTER OF OUR HOPE – v. 15b

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the

hope that you have.”

The Message: “Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are”

Again, in the context Peter is talking about when you suffer, even though you did nothing wrong. How we live in spite of suffering becomes the invitation by which others will ask you about your faith.

First of all our anticipation is expected.

A. Our Anticipation Is Expected

We are told to be ready or to be prepared. But how does this exhortation fit with the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:17-20?

Matthew 10:17-20

Luke 21:14-15 “But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”

That’s what happened to Stephen before he was stoned. Acts 6:9b-10 “These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.”

If you’re like me, you’re saying to yourself that’s exactly what you want. I listen to guys like Ravi Zacharias and am amazed at how easily it seems they are able to unpack a question, get to the heart of the issue and refute the would be antagonist.

Peter says that we are to always be ready for when an opportunity comes up to share our faith about why we believe and live the way we do even in times of suffering. But what it also means is that the message we share and the life we live need to match. Those who raise questions about faith may be turned off because many Christians haven’t acted like Christ.

We are not only to anticipate the questions, we need to live consistent with what the Bible teaches so that others will notice and ask why. Being ready then is twofold. On one hand it means living a godly life which we saw from last week’s message and on the

other hand having an answer ready when asked, which brings us to our next point.

B. Our Answer Is Engaging

Greek scholar A. T. Robertson writes that we are to be “ready with a spoken defense of the inward hope. This attitude calls for an intelligent grasp of the hope and skill in presenting it.”

In school, if you don’t study for a test you won’t do well.

In the city of Athens during this era, every citizen was expected to be able to join in the discussion of state affairs.

A word stands out here. It is the word “answer”. In the Greek it is apologian from which we get our English word apology, not in the sense of being sorry for something we did. The word was used in a courtroom setting for those giving a defense. We use it in apologetics which is simply defined as the defense of the Christian faith, or give an answer.

When you suffer in different ways through trials and persecution and you choose to display a godly character where Christ is central in your life and faith, others are watching and wanting to know how you can remain so positive. It is in that moment when they ask that you should be ready with a defense of the gospel, with an answer.

This does not mean that you have to be a theologian or Bible scholar. All it means is that you can simply walk them through why you believe and act the way you do because of your faith in Christ and how you came to have faith in Christ. But I also want to suggest that being ready or prepared means that we at least know our way around the Bible. Paul told Timothy that he should study to be an approved worker of God who accurately handled the Word of truth (II Timothy 2:15).

Some take the words of Jesus quoted earlier from Luke 21 to mean that you don’t have to read or study the Bible because the Holy Spirit will give you what you need to say at just the right time. How do we get ready if Jesus says don’t worry about what you are going to say? The clue is found

in what Peter says regarding the relationship to being ready and what he just said. John Piper helps us understand. There is no verb in the phrase “be ready” or “be prepared”. In the Greek it literally reads “Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts ready always to make a case...for your hope.” Piper concludes “that there is a close connection between reverencing Christ in your heart and always being ready to make a case for your hope.”

If we haven't first revered Christ in the heart then we cannot or will not be ready with an answer.

In a survey conducted by George Barna his research revealed that 61% of today's 20 somethings who at one time had been churched during their teen years are now spiritually disengaged – not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying. In his book *Already Gone* written in conjunction with Britt Beemer, founder of America's Research Group, Ken Ham writes that the issue of this mass exodus is due to the inability of these teens to adequately defend their faith. After interviewing 1,000 students who had been a part of fundamental churches but left after High school or college, they found through the data that many students left *the church because they were told what to believe about the Bible and how to believe but were never told why they needed to believe*. After all the number crunching they “strongly advocate that Christians and the Church everywhere begin to defend the Word.” Ken Ham adds though that just defending the faith isn't enough. There must be a strong commitment to living the Word. We must be authentic in how we live and that's the message that Peter issued over 2,000 years ago.

Practicing godly character in the middle of suffering will engage folks who are honestly looking for the reason why we believe what we believe. Be ready with an answer to defend the hope you have in your faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter should know because in just a couple of months' time he went from being a denier of the faith to a defender of it.

As I consider our passage, some important verses come to mind.

In Matthew 28:19-20 we are told to go and teach the gospel remembering our Lord's promise that He is with us all the time in our going. That's part of the preparing, remembering that it's His message and we are just the messenger but also remembering the promise that He is with us in our going.

Acts 1:8 essentially tells us that we will witness in the power of the Holy Spirit as we go.

From Romans 1:16 we read that we don't need to be ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation, not in anything I say. Paul said in I Thessalonians 1:5 that the gospel came with power and with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. Then in I Corinthians 2:4-5 he said that his preaching was in the power of the Holy Spirit so that their faith would rest not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

We shouldn't only be prepared to answer about our hope; part of the preparation should include prayer. Pray for clarity as you share. Pray for wisdom and discernment as people ask that you would understand their questions and that you would have a good grasp of God's Word. Pray for opportunities, but don't rush out and look for places and ways to suffer just show you can demonstrate godly character with the view of opening up dialogue for people who are watching. Opportunities are everywhere as we see from our passage.

C. Our Audience Is Everywhere

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone.”

The loner at school or in the office
 The heavily tattooed biker guy
 The corporate executive
 The overstressed neighbor lady
 The recently unemployed father of 4
 The agnostic doctor

Billy Hanks, Jr. reminds us that they are everywhere through the lyrics he wrote in 1967:
 Lonely eyes, I see them in the subway,
 Burdened by the worries of the day;
 Men at leisure, but they're so unhappy,

Tired of foolish roles they try to play.
Lonely people do I see,
Lonely people haunt my memory.

Abundant life He came to truly give man,
But so few His gift of grace receive.
Lonely people live in every city,
Men who face a dark and lonely grave.
Lonely faces do I see,
Lonely voices calling out to me.

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Do we see them where we shop?
Do we see them in our neighborhoods?
Do we see them at work?
Do we see them in our schools?
Do we see them where ever we go?
Do we give them an opportunity to ask?

We have seen the why, the what, the when and we could even assume the where. Let's conclude with the how. Peter tells us very matter-of-factly. It's a matter of our humility.

III. IT'S A MATTER OF OUR HUMILITY – v. 15c

We already have the message, now it's just a matter of deliver.

I knew a guy who was saved while in college. His roommate was a Christian with a rather unorthodox approach to witnessing. He would approach someone, light a match and stick it under their nose and tell them to turn or burn.

We aren't to be obnoxious or argumentative or rude. We shouldn't get angry or defensive or accusatory. We shouldn't be combative or condemnatory. We shouldn't be a know it all. II Timothy 2:24-26 "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."

The goal isn't to win an argument. The goal is to

lead a person to Christ.

Peter gives us two guiding principles that complement our godly character. They are manifestations of humility and the attributes by which we share our faith..

"Do this with gentleness and respect."
The Message: "Always with the utmost courtesy."

- A. We Are To Be Cordial (gentle)
- B. We Are To Be Considerate (respectful)

Ephesians 4:15 tells us to speak the truth in love.

And from the Old Testament wisdom of Solomon Proverbs 15:1 says that "A soft answer turns away wrath."

Colossians 4:6 exhorts us to always speak with grace.

If we want people to listen to the reason for the hope we have in Christ, our defense must be firm and uncompromising but it must be with a gentle and respectful spirit. Jesus is our example who never backed down when confronted about His message, but He always told the truth in love with a gentle and respectful spirit.

Let's bear in mind as we share about the hope we have that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17) So be ready with an answer from God's Word because people need the Lord.

"People Need The Lord" –Steve Green

Everyday they pass me by,
I can see it in their eyes.
Empty people filled with care,
Headed who knows where?

On they go through private pain,
Living fear to fear.
Laughter hides their silent cries,
Only Jesus hears.
People need the Lord, people need the Lord.
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door.
People need the Lord, people need the Lord.
When will we realize, people need the Lord?

We are called to take His light
To a world where wrong seems right.
What could be too great a cost
For sharing Life with one who's lost?

Through His love our hearts can feel
All the grief they bear.
They must hear the Words of Life
Only we can share.

People need the Lord, people need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door.
People need the Lord, people need the Lord.
When will we realize that we must give our lives,
For peo-ple need the Lord.

People need the Lord.

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Are you making Christ first place in your heart?
Are you living a life that invites others to ask you
about the hope you have in Christ?
Are you speaking in humility?
Do we see all those around us who need the Lord?