

Discipleship Skills

BOLDNESS: LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST WITH COURAGE

The work of making disciples for Jesus Christ is the great mission Jesus has given all His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It should be considered a great privilege for any disciple to take part in fulfilling this mission. While helping people follow Jesus can be easy when they are receptive to His message, it can cause apprehension and pose challenges when they are not. It will be necessary, then, to develop the characteristic of boldness so that you say and do whatever needs to be said and done to help others follow Jesus. Consider, therefore, some Scriptures to help you learn to be bold and courageous in your gospel work.

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

Paul urged Timothy to be diligent in preaching God's word. After all, God is going to judge everyone, including both the one who needs to hear the gospel and the one who should deliver it. Recognizing this impending judgment and the seriousness of souls being saved, the word of God must be preached diligently to correct error, rebuke sinful behavior, and encourage people to pursue truth and righteousness. While this can be easy work whenever God's word is "in season" (i.e., when it is popular and people want to hear it), it can be challenging whenever it is "out of season" (i.e., when it is not popular and people do not want to hear it). Sadly, there are many times when what God's word teaches is not what people want to hear. This can be true for those who have never become disciples of Christ as well as for those who have! In fact, many will simply find someone who will tell them what they want to hear instead of what God's word actually teaches (e.g., God's truth about salvation, the church, worship, morality, divorce and remarriage, etc.). Yet, your responsibility to preach the truth never changes!

MATTHEW 10:26-39

Jesus told His apostles that preaching the gospel would not always be easy (John 15:18-21). Following Him and inviting others to do the same can bring rejection, hostility, and persecution. Therefore, courageous boldness that does and says whatever

following Jesus requires is needed to accomplish the mission Jesus gives. If you focus on the effects living for and preaching God's word will have on your physical life, there may be many times you will not do and teach what it says. So, Jesus teaches that His followers must not fear people who can harm the body more than they fear God, who can cast soul and body into Hell (Revelation 21:8)! And they must not value any earthly relationship above their relationship with Him (Luke 14:26)!

ACTS 4:5-22

After Peter and John had healed a man who had been unable to walk (Acts 3:1-10), they preached the gospel to many in Jerusalem (Acts 3:11-26), and many obeyed (Acts 4:1-4). This angered the Jewish leaders (who had previously put Jesus to death). Yet, when Peter and John were brought before them for questioning, they would not back down from speaking the truth about the salvation available through Jesus! Despite being threatened by the highest Jewish court (which had previously condemned Jesus to death, Matthew 26:57-68), Peter and John would not stop speaking those things they knew to be true! Most Christians today will never be interrogated by a national council for preaching the gospel. Nevertheless, believers frequently encounter other forms of pressure (e.g., from coworkers, classmates, family members, friends, neighbors, strangers, etc.). In such moments, the disciple will decide whether to remain faithful to Christ or retreat from the truth. Courageous boldness means choosing faithfulness even when obedience may bring difficulty or disapproval.

ACTS 4:23-31

The threats Peter and John experienced were the first in a line of persecutions and threats they would experience (along with the other apostles) in preaching the gospel. Now, after refusing to back down, they asked God for boldness – not to remove all danger! Then they continued to preach God's word with boldness! Notice that courage is not simply about how we respond in the moments we face pressure. It also involves how we respond afterward. Whenever fear threatens to silence us, our prayers should echo the apostles' request that God help us continue speaking His word with courage (Ephesians 6:19–20).

ACTS 18:1-11

Corinth was widely known for its moral corruption. Yet the gospel was powerfully transforming lives in that city

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11)! Still, there were obstacles. Many Jews were resisting the gospel and causing problems for Paul in the work there. Then, there would undoubtedly be difficulties involved in preaching righteousness and helping to lead people to be righteous in a place filled with such unrighteousness. The Lord's message to Paul should remind all gospel workers today that standing boldly for Christ does not mean that you will not feel any kind of fear or apprehension about the consequences of your work. Instead, it means that you will not let those feelings control what you do and say (Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-14)! It means that your focus will be on how Christ can work through you (Matthew 5:13-16; Romans 1:16)!

1 CORINTHIANS 4:14-21

When Paul later wrote to the church in Corinth, there were many problems that had come to his attention. However, in giving them instruction on such matters, he was not trying to shame them. Instead, his boldness was intended to help them follow Jesus as one who was deeply concerned about their spiritual wellbeing. Still, some were mocking Paul as if he were afraid to come and deal with these matters in person. He made it clear, though, that he would come if it was according to God's will – and he would deal with things however forcibly or gently would be necessary. In this, we see that courageous boldness is not simply speaking forcefully. True courage means saying and doing whatever is necessary to help people follow Christ. Sometimes that requires strong correction. At other times, it requires patience, compassion, and gentleness (Jude 1:22–23). The guiding motive must always be love and a sincere desire to help others grow spiritually.

CONCLUSION

Preaching God's word and trying to help others apply it to their lives is a work that is full of obstacles and challenges. Yet, the gospel worker must be courageous enough to boldly stand for Christ regardless of dangers or consequences. You must fear God above all earthly consequences and value a relationship with Christ above everyone else. You must refuse to stop or compromise in preaching and living according to God's word to please someone else. Then, you must be careful not to allow boldness to become a way that harms people with the gospel. Instead, you must only ever say and do that which helps people find and follow Jesus Christ!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be bold?

What must you seek to accomplish through preaching God's word?

What does it mean for God's word to be "in season" or "out of season," and how must you respond in each situation?

How can fear threaten the way you do gospel work?

What forms of pressure might you encounter in preaching the gospel?

How can the circumstances of your culture create pressure in preaching the gospel?

How will boldness respond to dangers or threats of earthly consequences?

How should boldness respond to different circumstances in different ways?

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