



Introduction



Welcome to our Talking Faith bible study series.

We live in an ever more secular society, and we can no longer assume our friends and family have an inherited, residual faith. Many of those we hang out with, work alongside and share life with have very little experience of the Christian faith beyond what they see on Eastenders or read about on internet pages they stumble across.

Hopefully this series will encourage you to be bolder in sharing faith and equip you to listen, share and live as a faithful disciple of Jesus.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Felton', is centered on the page.

Revd Geoff Felton, Moderator



Session 1: It all begins with God

In a more secular culture, we have to realise many of the old ways of growing church are no longer applicable. People no longer simply walk into a church because it's their tradition. The church needs to find ways to express faith publicly so faith in Christ is not seen as a leisure time activity for the spiritual amongst us but as an essential part of a holistic life.

In this first conversation we consider our motives for talking faith. Why should we bother talking faith? Is there a time when we should stop talking and just listen?



'I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else'
– C.S.Lewis



Who first talked faith to you?
Why do you think they talked faith to you?
Looking back, how does that make you feel?



1 John 4:7-21

We begin our series by turning to God.

John's call to the church is to love, not because we are told to but because as followers of Christ, we have experienced the love of God as expressed through his son Jesus v14-16. This stands in radical opposition to the order of John's day when obedience was expected to be shown to the Emperor who wielded power over his subjects.



How have you experienced God's love in your life?
What difference has it made to your life to know you are loved by God?

John begins this chapter by instructing the church to love and then he expands on that by explaining the reason why (v7).



If our actions reflect our love is that enough or do you think we should let people know why we do what we do?

Theologians suggest John was 'overwhelmed' by God's love. His writing this letter reflects what he has encountered. John talks faith by writing a letter to his colleagues.



What is your motive for talking faith? Is it because you are overwhelmed by God's love or is there another reason e.g., wanting to see the church grow, compassion towards those around you?

If someone asked you to explain what difference being a Christian has made to your life how would you answer? Try using language that is not overtly religious jargon.



Ask God to give you opportunities to talk faith this week with those around you.

Congratulations, by taking part in this conversation you have talked faith! It's not as difficult as it may seem!



Thank you, Lord, that you are the creator and sustainer of life.
We praise you that in your creation you call us to be messengers of the good news that you are the god of love, hope and forgiveness.
Give us opportunities this week to talk faith and help others discover the life-giving freedom only Christ can bring.
Fill us with courage and wisdom, joy and hope that all that we do may point to Jesus Christ the hope of the world.
In His name we pray.
Amen.

Session 2: How Do We Talk Faith?

Historically there has been a polarisation within the church between churches that do justice and churches who do evangelism.

When we explore the life of Jesus and the early church, we see an intertwining of the two.

There are ways to talk faith that sometimes feel little more than a recruitment drive to a voluntary organisation that's vying for new members so the rotas can be filled, or the work paid for.



"We must neither confuse evangelism with doing justice, nor separate them from one another."

– Tim Keller

In our reading today we find a different way of talking faith. A way that opens possibilities of life and freedom.



Have you ever felt pressured into buying something you really didn't need?
How did that feel?



1 Peter 3:13-22

Cast your mind back to the last session. Remember we began with God? This passage in 1 Peter talks of our response to God.

In Peter's letter there is much talk of persecution and staying the course. Peter reminds us in v18 that Jesus knows about our suffering because Christ too suffered.

Peter says in v15 to revere Christ as Lord. This was a big statement for the early church as there was an expectation they would bow to Caesar as Lord. This simple statement was a countercultural, revolutionary act.



What does it mean for you to revere Christ as Lord?

Holding Christ as Lord meant a lot for the early church, and it could lead to persecution. Despite this Peter speaks of the early church as being people of hope (v15). There appears to be a tension here, a persecuted people but a people of hope.



How does Peter explain this tension? It might help to look at v17ff.

Living in this tension Peter encourages the early church to articulate their faith and answer the questions they may face (v15). Look at the use of his language in v15 not only does he commend the church to answer those with questions he instructs the church to do it gently and respectfully.



What might it look like for you to answer someone gently and respectfully with regard to faith?

Why is it so important to answer gently and respectfully?

What if we don't know 'the answers'? How should we respond?

Who do we go to if we have questions we struggle with?

Notice in v16 Peter speaks of our actions. He ties words and deeds together by telling the church to live well.



In v13-14 we see the results of doing good. What are they and how do they relate to talking faith?



Have you had opportunity to talk faith in the past week?
Share with those with your group now.



Loving God, we thank you that Jesus has defeated death and is risen.
May we live as people of hope who seek to live well and point to Christ.
Give us wisdom to listen and courage to speak that we may honour your name in all we say and do.
In the name of your son Jesus Christ.
Amen

Session 3: Encountering Jesus

Today we explore an encounter in the gospel of John.

The encounter is life changing and happens between a woman who was a social outcast, whose name we are not told, and Jesus.

The encounter is a surprise on all sorts of levels. Jesus, a male Jew, speaking with a female Samaritan was not the done thing in Jesus' day. But the conversation continues, and we are drawn into that conversation by John.



The Samaritan woman was unforgiven, just like a lot of women in the world. But then she encountered Jesus.'

- Beth Moore



What is the biggest surprise you have ever had?



John 4:1-42

Despite the culture of the day and the perceived wrongs that had been done by this woman Jesus recognised her humanity.



What can read into this passage about who Jesus calls to follow him?

The woman was deeply knowledgeable about faith. She knew about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans (v9), she knew about the Old Testament (v12, 20), she knew about worship (v19) and she was expecting the Messiah (v25).



In society today what expectations do we put on what people know about the Christian faith?
Does what people know matter?

There's a trajectory in this story that leads to the transformation of the woman as she spends time in Jesus' presence.



How does she change in this passage?
How does her change, change those around her?

V42 says 'we know that this man is the Saviour of the world.'



What does it mean that Jesus is the Saviour of the world?
What difference does salvation make to the woman at the well?
What difference does it make to you?

The woman was so amazed by her encounter she went back and told others that she'd met the Messiah.



Think of a time you talked to someone about Jesus.
How did the conversation go?
How did it feel?



This week spend time with Jesus in prayer. Ask questions and be inquisitive in your prayer life.



Thank you, Lord, that Jesus is the Saviour of the world.
Thank you that in him there is life and unending streams of living water.
We pray that we may encounter you day by day in our prayer lives in the lives of those around us and in your written word, the Bible.
Forgive us when we write people off and open our eyes to see that you don't dismiss people, but you give us all a second chance.
May we be changed by our encounter with you and may we live for your glory.
In the name of Christ, we pray.

Session 4: When We Get It Wrong

One of the biggest stumbling blocks I come across from Christians about talking faith is fear of failure. 'What if I say the wrong thing', 'What if I get the answer wrong', 'What if what I say puts people off'? All of these are good reasons for us to remain silent rather than talk faith.

In our Bible passages today, we met Peter who got things wrong but whose reasons for talking faith were greater than his reasons for remaining silent.



To be loved but not known is superficial. To be known but not loved is our nightmare. Only Jesus knows us to the bottom and loves us to the sky.

– Tim Keller



What is your greatest fear about talking faith with friends and family?



Luke 22:54-62

In the above bible readings, we encounter Peter. One of Jesus' most written about followers. He was enthusiastic, brash, compassionate and loyal, yet despite declaring his unending loyalty to Jesus in the face of conflict he denied him and pretended not to know him.



Do you think our personality matters when it comes to talking faith?

Why do you think Peter denied Jesus?

How do you think Peter felt about his denial?

We read in verse 62 of Peter's response once he realised what he had done.



What was it that made Peter weep?

Have you ever regretted something you've done? Have you given it over to God?



Luke 22:54-62

All four of the gospels record Peter's denial of Jesus. Only John rounds off the episode with the image we have in chapter 21.

The disciples are eating breakfast with Jesus on the beach. Jesus has risen from the dead (Yes that's right ... risen from the dead) and a conversation ensues.

Despite getting things wrong. Despite wrestling with his own sense of failure and despite feeling like an untrustworthy companion there is still hope for Peter.

Jesus asks Peter three times 'Do you love me'. Peter replies in slightly different ways each time. Each time Jesus tells Peter to look after the followers of Jesus, the early church if you like.

The encounter finishes with Jesus words to Peter in v19 'Follow me!'



What do you think this encounter tells us about Jesus' relationship with his followers?

Peter was not only forgiven, but he was also reinstated. What can we learn from that? This passage shows us the risen Jesus still chooses to use us with all our faults and failings. Despite our shortcomings Jesus calls us to follow him.



How does knowing Jesus still cares and chooses to call us affect our approach to talking faith?



Lord God thank you that despite our fears and failings you call us to follow you. Thank you that we don't need to be perfect before you call us. Thank you that forgiveness is always possible and that you call us to forgive as we have been forgiven. May we take the message of forgiveness and love into the world with humility and love. Fill us with your spirit and equip us to be your people. We pray this in the name of Christ. Amen.