

Notes on 2 Timothy 1:7 Evangelism - Building up our core

Andy has been inspiring us with ways forward in evangelism. Whatever evangelism we want to be involved in, one thing is certain folk see us before they see Jesus which makes us all witnesses to Jesus. We are all engaged in evangelism - the only choice we have is whether we are good or poor witnesses. Good witnesses work with the Holy Spirit to build up our core. Our core is who we really are - the sum total of our attitudes, emotions, disposition, actions and of course beliefs - the person we become as we wrestle with the everyday.

Wrestling with everyday living can drag Christians down, drain our enthusiasm, lead us in wrong directions. Worst of all it can make us timid about living out a Christian life, or, talking about Jesus.

Stuff sneaks in but Paul's advice to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:7) contains sound advice. "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." Working with the Holy Spirit we received when we first commit our lives to Jesus is how we develop our core.

What is power? For some folk their core can be seen at 20 feet. Andy showed a couple of weeks ago that true power comes from the cross. Andy drew out the power of the cross, God's wisdom, love, redemption, reconciliation, but most of all our new creation. We are part of an incredible true story to tell others because we have our own experience of the cross' impact on our lives and can use our experience to introduce folk to Jesus. So what does this power give us to offer others? Hope.

We can show folk that God accepts them - warts and all. They don't have to try and be like others. Their core being all about conforming - they have to fit in. Andy mention the concept of sinless society - moving away from the simple definitions of sin to the power of shame driving how others view them. It can blind folk to a thirst to be accepted. We can offer them hope - instead of the drive to confirm through the Holy Spirit they can experience the freedom of transformation. Transformation turned fishermen and tax collectors into evangelists and church planters. Turned Paul, the early church's greatest enemy into its greatest evangelist and missionary.

We can show folk there are better priorities. Their core becomes themselves - they are the centre of their universe, they are self made men and women, they did it. We offer them an alternative - it's why they do something that's important and that with Jesus they can change - be Jesus made not self made.

With the Holy Spirit's help we can gently alert folk falling into the danger of "Not seeing the Saviour for the religion". Some folk's core is a thirst for doing. They need to be continually doing something for the church. They get so absorbed in doing for the church that they miss the person they are doing it for. With the Holy Spirit's help we can draw them back to the basics "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 NIVUK

There are things we can do to build up the power of the Holy Spirit in our core so we can do more. The Holy Spirit is the only power that meets God's requirements. He's the only power that comes from the cross.

We gain power when we take up the protection offered by His armour (see Ephesians 6:10-17). Total protection - mind, standards, emotions, a shield against attack, the power of His Word and the Holy Spirit.

We gain power when we intentionally make ourselves open to change working with the Holy Spirit to develop healthy habits (fruit). (see Galatians 5:22-23, 2 Peter 1:5-8). As the Holy Spirit develops

these fruit, we stop being timid and folk start to notice and be curious - perhaps enough to ask us how or why.

We gain power by not being complacent - we want to be more like Jesus today than we were yesterday. With the Holy Spirit at our core we walk the talk.

The Holy Spirit helps us to love others. At the beginning of May Andy asked what you made of God's love? Did your breath catch? Did your spirit soar? Did your mind boggle? Sadly most of us take it for granted yet love is God's core - and how! God is love and that has a consequence. First get our relationship with God right. Then see others as God sees them. Then live it out daily. Andy showed how this compelled Paul and how remarkable it was. Do we feel that same compulsion? What can help us?

To love as God does we need to engage more with Jesus which means from time to time we need to know ourselves better before we can help others see their need for Jesus. Andy reminded us of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman. Jesus helped her to examine herself before she saw Jesus for who He is. Her reaction? To run to her town telling everyone to meet Jesus - everyday evangelism. We all need to learn from those "if only" moments or the times we blurt out without thinking. The Holy Spirit will help us progress towards loving others. How do we stack up against the yardstick of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 heard at so many weddings. Above all else, when expressed, folk will see our core, and, love will underpin our relationships and actions we take with others.

To love as Jesus does we need to believe God can use us - warts and all. It means recognising the skills, talents and wisdom God has given us and being prepared to use them. There's no place for false modesty - fan them into flame as Paul tells Timothy. As we become passionate about Christ's love for us and those around us, we start actively looking for ways and opportunities of being Jesus' hands and feet.

To love as Jesus does, love has to become our way of life. We don't jump in at every opportunity to talk about Jesus - that's not natural conversation - that's badgering perhaps even bullying. When something special happens (remember the Samaritan woman's reaction) we can't help chatting about it because it's important to us - kids, grandkids, football, even decorating the house - so why not God? The Holy Spirit helps us become comfortable talking naturally about God, Jesus and church around a coffee table or in a pub or a cafe - everyday evangelism.

To love as Jesus does we live in the present. We understand it's no use relying on what we did yesterday - that's history. We realise it's no use waiting for tomorrow - that might never happen. To love as Jesus does we need to be practical. We concentrate on what we can do now - even if it's only little things. Do you remember the 70 Acts of Service for the Queen's Jubilee that Andy shared - straightforward, practical little acts of love for others. A kind supportive word or email, or card or Zoom call or phonecall just keeping in touch. Lockdown restrictions taught us how little things can be so welcomed by the receiver and help them feel valued, not forgotten. We love others by responding to their times of crisis. Sometimes it's knee jerk reaction to a need and getting immediately involved - perhaps pastorally with an individual or filling in gaps in the community with things like food banks, debts advice, toddler groups.

The Holy Spirit helps us develop self discipline or good habits. Left to our own devices given the pressures of modern life it's so easy to develop poor habits. Folk will tell you how they seem to jump from one crisis to another. What a relief it can be for them to know God doesn't take crises away but He is there helping them to get through them.

It's a human frailty to be distracted. We can remind folk we always have choices - perhaps with examples from your own life - and the difference it makes having God in your corner.

On the other hand, it's all too easy for folk to get bogged down in the routine - those mundane things that can take over our lives leaving no room for God. The difference it can make showing them how valuable they are to God (see 1 Peter 2:9).

Don't know about you but I need the Holy Spirit to help fine tune self discipline. Mastering good habits is hard. You may be like me - you can identify good habits but having the commitment to stick at it is hard. The busyness in modern life doesn't help.

Setting aside time for God (James 4:8) can be so so hard to do. You set aside time and you end fighting interruptions and distractions. You plan to focus on the silence, or listen to music, perhaps appreciating His creation, perhaps trying to actively listen. Then the phone rings, the kids come in or suddenly there's something on tv. Making sure we put the things of God at the top of our priorities is the greatest grower of our core.

When I'm praying I need to remember God is interested in every aspect of my life - there are no "out of bounds" areas. God's shoulders are big enough to take anything I or you can throw at Him. Prayer should be our very breath - always aware of God with us, constantly sharing our thoughts with Him. So easy to say so hard to do!

When reading the Bible do we wrestle with the difficult parts or are you like me and tempted to duck them. I don't strive enough to get beneath the surface to see what God is saying to me - turning the Bible from a book to God's Word

How about worship - is it just turning up to a service and joining in? Worship is all the different ways we express our awe of God - that realisation that can happen any time anywhere - that sudden connection to God's presence that draws out feelings of adoration

Working with the Holy Spirit on the building blocks of our core is the basis of effective Christian lifestyles, enabling us to love as Jesus does and supports more powerful evangelism. We don't have to earn these things - we have to develop them.

So what's at our core? Remember, folk see us before they see Jesus so once we are known as Christians we all become involved in evangelism and our choice is limited to whether we are good or poor witnesses. Are we committed to engaging more deeply with Jesus putting in the time developing good practices. With a bit of realistic self assessment we have to avoid the traps of poor lifestyles and habits, and seek instead to develop Christ-like lifestyles built upon good habits. Andy is laying out the drivers for evangelism, are we ready and equipping ourselves by developing our core with the Holy Spirit?

Questions

1. Which type(s) of evangelism have you experienced and what was your reaction.
2. Do you agree that who you are at your core underpins all evangelism? Share your views.
3. How have you worked with the Holy Spirit to avoid timidity in your Christian life?
4. What works for you in developing the power of the Holy Spirit?
5. What works for you in learning to love others? How have you shown your love for others in crisis? How have you supported others eg through the pandemic? Share your experience of the little things and any impact they've had
6. What challenges do you face in developing good habits? In particular how do you set aside time for God - share your experiences.